

Looking Good, Feeling Good, Doing Good?
Exploring Aesthetic, Affective, Subjective, and Symbolic Dimensions of
Women's Clothing Consumption in Relation to Environmental and Social Sustainability

By

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ABSTRACT

This interdisciplinary project examines individual clothing experiences situated in social-ecological webs of practice. I analyze issues in apparel consumption (e.g. acquisition, use, maintenance, disposal) as they relate to (e.g. hinder, facilitate, are irrelevant to) environmental and social sustainability. The framework developed offers a systems perspective grounded in in-depth interviews with nineteen women in the Midwest; material culture analysis of garments; and fieldwork in homes (e.g. wardrobes, laundering spaces).

Three core issues framed women's clothing experiences: (1) negotiating multi-sensory experiences with personal and social tastes; (2) balancing goals of quality, deals, and convenience; and (3) perceiving garment stories as distant or intertwined with personal experiences. I explore themes of appearance and identity, context and habits, and trivialization and domesticization of clothing. Through these frames, four strands of embodied experience emerge:

- Multi-sensory aesthetic pleasures
- Affective experiences
- Subjective understandings
- Socially-situated symbolic meanings

These are pivotal intimate dimensions of experience and, thus, potential sites of intervention.

This dissertation contributes to sustainability initiatives by providing a model that visualizes embodied aesthetic, affective, subjective, and symbolic dimensions of individually-scaled clothing practices as critical factors that reciprocally constitute each other and systems structures. My Web of Practice model allows us to zoom in and out between macro and micro contexts to show where sustainability initiatives can occur. Initiatives attending to (e.g.

recognizing, respecting, redirecting, reinforcing) strands of meaning along thematic issues can help craft ethical, ecological, meaningful, and engaging clothing practices.

Stakeholders (e.g. individuals, apparel industry professionals, cultural mediators, educators, policymakers) and opportunities exist across systems levels:

- All stakeholders working to reshape norms
- Individuals engaging in environmentally, socially sensitive behaviors that support wellbeing
- Apparel industry designing for meaningful, mindful engagement with clothing
- All stakeholders advocating for technological, educational, economic, or legislative infrastructure on family, community, or international scales that enable sustainable practices
- All stakeholders working to make visible interdependencies

In addition to access points listed, I suggest that creating dialogue across disciplines (e.g. sustainable design, embodiment theory, human ecology) and focusing on meaning and connections (e.g. material culture, aesthetics, feminist care ethics) can help build sustainable clothing systems.

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PART I

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Peek into a woman's wardrobe, and what hidden worlds are layered between garments? What past and future lives are temporarily suspended on hangers? What ghosts lurk amongst the fabrics and in the empty spaces? These silences, heavy with environmental and social injustices yet buoyant with aesthetic and symbolic meaning, make up the invisible dark matter that permeates our relationships with our clothes.

Although an individual woman's wardrobe is a small collection of discrete, graspable objects, it is also a constellation of interwoven practices, stories, and meanings that are enmeshed within a larger universe of social structures, cultural contexts, institutions, and interpersonal relationships—what I have termed a “Web of Practice” (see chapter five). The universe is not a stable, fixed entity. Rather, it has shifting topographies and expanding and shrinking geometries, which allow it to be reconfigured to create a structure supportive of sustainable practice. In this dissertation, I focus on the individual's clothing consumption practices (a cluster of acquisition, use, storage, maintenance, and disposal behaviors and objects). Centering on the individual is useful to examine how women's experiences with their clothing relate to (e.g. facilitate, complicate, or are irrelevant to) the environmental and social sustainability of those practices, thus illuminating perceived or actual barriers and opportunities to sustainable practice.

Embroiled in a culture of consumerism, we face a global glut of clothing that perpetuates unfulfilled needs and hinders the wellbeing of producers and consumers. Although clothes are cheap and plentiful for U.S. consumers, the production, sale, consumption, and disposal has

global environmental, economic, and social costs. Clothing production and consumption demands intensive inputs of raw materials, energy, water, toxic chemicals, and human labor while simultaneously producing dangerous outputs of chemical-saturated water, air, and waste. Examining how and why unsustainable consumption persists advances sustainability dialogues.

I conducted an exploratory, interpretive, interview-based study. Based on conversations with women around their closets, I examined practices through three frames: 1) bodies, fit, and style; 2) quality, tastes, and resources; and 3) distance, meaning, and making. Through unpacking multiple issues that women grappled with in everyday clothing practices, my journey led me to different, yet intertwined, dimensions. In the microworld of women's sensations and interpersonal relations, four strands emerged: multisensory aesthetic pleasures, affective experiences, subjective understandings, and socially-situated symbolic meanings. These strands intertwine around embodied experience to create threads of practice which reciprocally constitute each other and macrosystems structures. We can attend to (e.g. recognize, respect, redirect, or reinforce) these threads through implementing initiatives at various systems levels to craft meaningful, engaging experiences and sustainable systems. I synthesize a Web of Practice model that visually translates interdisciplinary perspectives to show where we can implement initiatives in relation to thematic issues so that we can actualize change.

Background

Confronting and Defining Sustainability

People working and living in diverse disciplines and contexts are increasingly turning their attention to environmental, social, cultural, and economic problems that threaten the

sustainability of the human population, as well as non-human life and ecosystems. Large, international associations and small, local organizations are coming together to solve the challenges to a sustainable future.¹ International, national, and local summits and legislations struggle to slow or reverse climate change through programs, practices, and policies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, conserve energy, and convert to renewable energy sources. For instance, the United Nation's summits in Kyoto, Japan (1997); Copenhagen, Denmark (2009); and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2012) sought to establish global solutions and international cooperation to protect the planet and the prosperity of human populations, but have faced resistance from national governments.² The United States House of Representatives passed the American Clean Energy and Security Act in 2009. Although the Senate did not pass the bill, it was "the first time either house of Congress had approved a bill meant to curb the heat-trapping gases scientists have linked to climate change."³ Local officials and communities are instituting changes in their districts.⁴ These initiatives represent the struggles to achieve widespread, long-lasting change, despite the mounting evidence for action. However, they demonstrate the prevalence and perceived relevance of addressing these ongoing crises on global and local fronts.

¹ Paul Hawken, *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Social Movement in History Is Restoring Grace, Justice, and Beauty to the World* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007); "Wiser.org: The Social Network for Sustainability," accessed June 3, 2013, <http://www.wiser.org/>; Bill McKibben, *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet* (New York: Macmillan, 2010); "350.org," accessed June 3, 2013, <http://350.org/>.

² "Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform," accessed June 3, 2013, <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>; "UN Says Copenhagen Deal 'a Start'," *BBC*, December 19, 2009, sec. Science & Environment, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8422133.stm>; John Celock, "Agenda 21 Vote: Missouri House Bans U.N. Sustainability Program," *Huffington Post*, April 8, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/08/agenda-21-vote-missouri_n_3040436.html.

³ "American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009 (2009; 111th Congress H.R. 2454) - GovTrack.us," accessed June 3, 2013, <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/111/hr2454#overview>; "House Passes Bill to Address Threat of Climate Change - NYTimes.com," accessed June 3, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/27/us/politics/27climate.html?_r=2&hp&.

⁴ "Governors' Global Climate Summit Backs Treaty With Teeth," accessed June 3, 2013, <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/oct2009/2009-10-02-094.asp>; Sarah James and Torbjörn Lahti, *The Natural Step for Communities: How Cities and Towns Can Change to Sustainable Practices* (Gabriola, BC: New Society Publishers, 2004).

As the initiatives listed above make clear, the topic of sustainability can incorporate many systems—from environmental resource use and degradation to economic viability to community development. Sustainability goals can be tackled on many systems levels—from the macro scale of international governmental structures and policies to local grassroots activism to individual behaviors. Because of the multiplicity of perspectives and applications, a broad, holistic definition of sustainability is needed. As suggested by much of the literature, sustainability encompasses three core systems: environmental or ecological, economic, and social or cultural systems (see figure 1.1).⁵ In turn, each of these systems can be explored through a multitude of individual conditions or factors (see table 1.1).⁶

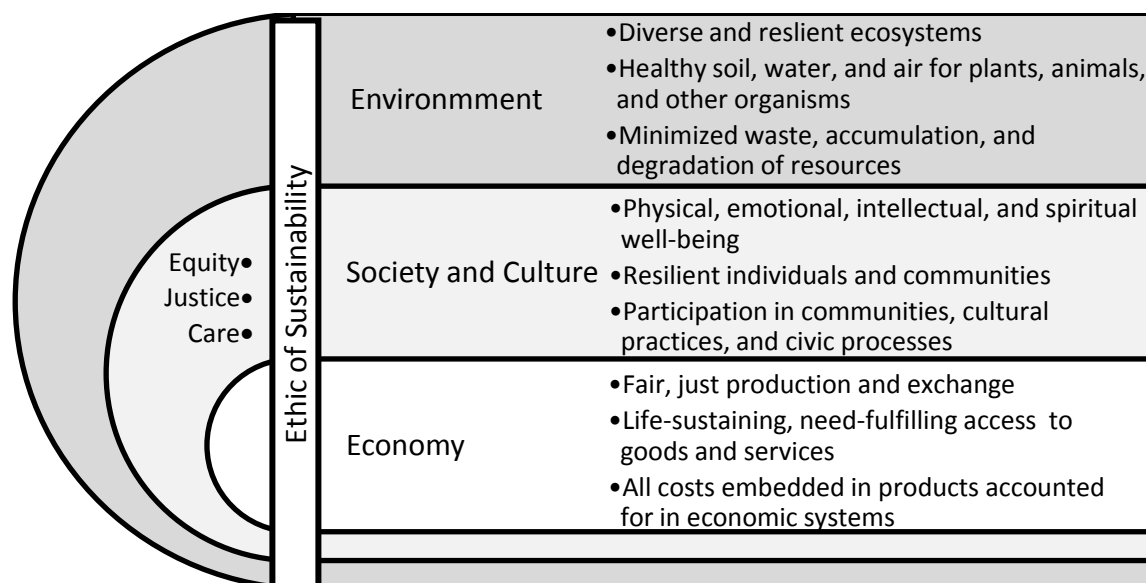


Figure 1.1. Conditions for Systems Supporting Sustainability

⁵ Tim Jackson, “Readings in Sustainable Consumption,” in *The Earthscan Reader in Sustainable Consumption*, ed. Tim Jackson (London: Earthscan, 2006), 1–23; Simon Dresner, *The Principles of Sustainability* (London: Earthscan, 2002).

⁶ For resources listing many different aspects of sustainability conditions and initiatives, see Hawken, *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Social Movement in History Is Restoring Grace, Justice, and Beauty to the World*; Alex Steffen, ed., *Worldchanging: A User’s Guide for the 21st Century* (New York: Abrams, 2008); Sustainable World Sourcebook, *Sustainable World Sourcebook: Critical Issues, Viable Solutions, Resources for Action: The Essential Guidebook for the Concerned Citizen* (Berkeley: Sustainable World Coalition, 2010); Bruce Mau, *Massive Change* (London: Phaidon, 2004); Alastair Fuad-Luke, *Design Activism: Beautiful Strangeness for a Sustainable World* (London: Earthscan, 2009).

Table 1.1. Example conditions related to sustainability of environmental, economic, and social systems

Environmental Conditions	Economic Conditions	Social Conditions
Local and distant terrestrial ecosystems	Employee labor conditions	Levels of, interactions with, and distribution of power
Animals	Remuneration	Production workers
Plants	Building safety	Designers
Fungi	Worker safety	Managers
Organisms	Agency and voice	Entrepreneurs
Soil	Child labor	Consumers
Biodiversity	Forced labor	Local and national governments
Resiliency	Cost of goods	Wellbeing, need
Local and distant water ecosystems	Reflects multiple “costs” or triple bottom line	satisfaction, and happiness
Surface water	Trade	Of producers, consumers, families, communities, etc.
Groundwater	Local	Engagement
Inland water	National	Meaning
Coastal and marine water	International	Values
Eutrophication	Quotas	See table 1.2. Matrix of Needs and Satisfiers
Acidification	Tariffs	Health and safety
Plants	Subsidies	Toxic chemicals
Animals	Equitable	Dangerous machines and infrastructure
Organisms	Balanced	Workers and communities
Biodiversity	Regulations	Vulnerable populations
Resiliency	Voluntary	Human rights
Local and distant air quality	Industry	Social justice
Smog	Government	Political freedom
Particulates	Class disparities	Peace and security
Chemicals	Income inequalities	Food sovereignty
Global effects	Poverty	Education
Climate changing greenhouse gases	Access to goods and services	Indigenous rights
Ozone depletion	Business organization and structure	Cultural heritage
Sea ice melt	Economic systems and policies	Arts
Precipitation changes	Infrastructure capabilities	Neighborhoods and communities
Pollution and waste build-up		Built environment
Resource degradation		Globalization
Animal welfare		Population

We need to embrace a definition that grapples with the complex, dynamic system of interlocking environmental, social, and economic dimensions. As environmental historian Ellis describes, rather than seeking out a single solution to fix a single root cause, scholars and

activists can instead direct combined efforts to “[provide] a fuller assessment of the related, complex, and multiple origins of the diverse environmental problems that we face.”⁷ Alongside this systems definition is an ethic that challenges interconnected injustices that have emerged from current production and consumption practices. Policies and actions need to respect the resources of these multiple systems, maintain stability, and meet present needs while protecting the ability to meet future needs.

Various scholars have offered slightly different descriptions of each of these dimensions and their relation to each other. For example, in triple-bottom-line accounting systems, economic systems can refer primarily to business’s financial viability and not necessarily larger trade and economic structures. Other scholars have suggested various ways to visualize how the interactions and interdependencies by showing these systems as parallel, supporting, or nested.⁸ Sustainable consumption introduces additional considerations, which will be discussed below. Nevertheless, the grounding in systems thinking is foundational, emphasizing the importance of maintaining healthy, resilient, and diverse ecosystems that can support vibrant communities and fair economies over time. Additionally, systems thinking directs our attention to interactive relational feedback loops, goals and objectives, and dynamic processes. Furthermore, this perspective provides a modeling system through which changes in micro components as well as macro structures can alter the trajectory of the system.⁹

⁷ Jeffrey C. Ellis, “On the Search for a Root Cause: Essentialist Tendencies in Environmental Discourse,” in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), 267.

⁸ Timothy F. Slaper and Tanya J. Hall, “The Triple Bottom Line: What Is It and How Does It Work?,” *Indiana Business Review* 86, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 4–8; Marion Glaser, “The Social Dimension in Ecosystem Management: Strengths and Weaknesses of Human-nature Mind Maps,” *Human Ecology Review* 13, no. 2 (2006): 122; N. R. G. Stanger, “Moving ‘Eco’ Back into Socio-ecological Models: A Proposal to Reorient Ecological Literacy into Human Developmental Models and School Systems,” *Human Ecology Review* 18, no. 2 (2011): 167–173.

⁹ Donella Meadows, *Thinking in Systems: A Primer* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2008); Donella H. Meadows, Jorgen Randers, and Dennis L. Meadows, *The Limits to Growth: The 30-year Update* (White

We should not perceive the categorical divisions as an indication of discrete, separate issues. Instead, the issues fluidly interpenetrate. Because of this research project's grounding in the meanings around individual clothing consumption practices, the social dimension of system is particularly important to examine. Guided by a sustainability ethic, consumption can promote individual and social wellbeing with fewer resources by synergistically satisfying human needs, such as those established by Max-Neef et al. in their work on human-scale development. In Max-Neef et al.'s model, needs are identified as a non-hierarchical matrix that connect psychological and social dimensions, including such as subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, idleness, creation, identity, and freedom. Needs can be satisfied, partially or pseudo-satisfied, inhibited, or violated or destroyed through being (personal or collective attributes), having (institutions, norms, mechanisms, tools), doing (personal or collective actions), and interacting (locations and settings) (see table 1.2). Here, the emphasis is not on how material objects themselves satisfy needs, but how human engagement with objects, other people, and their environments can satisfy needs, or potentially inhibit needs. This matrix helps us visualize how we can synergistically satisfy needs, so that one satisfier helps us meet multiple needs. Thus, it reinforces the importance of looking at sustainability and behavior as a system, rather than on a piecemeal basis.¹⁰

River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2004); John Peet, "Systems and Ethics: Thinking About Human Needs and Sustainability for the Next Millennium," in *17th International Conference of the System Dynamics Society, Wellington, New Zealand, 1999*, <http://www.systemdynamics.org/conferences/1999/PAPERS/PARA195.PDF>; Carl Folke, "Resilience: The Emergence of a Perspective for Social-ecological Systems Analyses," *Global Environmental Change* 16, no. 3 (August 2006): 253–267.

¹⁰ Manfred A. Max-Neef, Antonio Elizalde, and Martín Hopenhayn, *Human Scale Development: Conception, Application and Further Reflections* (New York: The Apex Press, 1991); Jack Manno, "Commoditization: Consumption Efficiency and an Economy of Care and Connection," in *Confronting Consumption*, ed. Thomas Princen, Michael Maniates, and Ken Conca (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 67–100.

Table 1.2. Matrix of needs and satisfiers

Need Category	Satisfier Category			
	Being	Having	Doing	Interacting
Subsistence	Physical health, equilibrium, sense of humor, adaptability	Food, shelter, work	Feed, procreate, rest, work	Living environments, social setting
Protection	Care, adaptability, autonomy, equilibrium, solidarity	Insurance systems, savings, social security, health systems, rights, family, work	Cooperate, prevent, plan, take care of, cure, help	Living space, social environment, dwelling
Affection	Self-esteem, solidarity, respect, tolerance, generosity, receptiveness, passion, determination, sensuality, sense of humor	Friendships, family, partnerships, relationships with nature	Make love, caress, express emotions, share, take care of, cultivate, appreciate	Privacy, intimacy, home, space of togetherness
Understanding	Critical conscience, receptiveness, curiosity, astonishment, discipline, intuition, rationality	Literature, teachers, method, educational policies, communication policies	Investigate, study, experiment, educate, analyze, meditate	Settings of formative interaction, schools, universities, academies, groups, communities, family
Participation	Adaptability, receptiveness, solidarity, willingness, determination, dedication, respect, passion, sense of humor	Rights, responsibilities, duties, privileges, work	Become affiliated, cooperate, propose, share, dissent, obey, interact, agree on, express opinions	Settings of participative action, parties, associations, churches, communities, neighborhoods, family
Idleness	Curiosity, receptiveness, imagination, recklessness, sense of humor, tranquility, sensuality	Games, spectacles, clubs, parties, peace of mind	Daydream, brood, dram, recall old times, give way to fantasies, remember, relax, have fun, play	Privacy, intimacy, spaces of closeness, free time, surroundings, landscapes

Source: Manfred A. Max-Neef, Antonio Elizalde, and Martín Hopenhayn, *Human Scale Development: Conception, Application and Further Reflections* (New York: The Apex Press, 1991).

Table 1.2. Matrix of needs and satisfiers, continued

Need Category	Satisfier Category			
	Being	Having	Doing	Interacting
Creation	Passion, determination, intuition, imagination, boldness, rationality, autonomy, inventiveness, curiosity	Abilities, skills, method, work	Work, invent, build, design,, compose, interpret	Productive and feedback settings, workshops, cultural groups, audiences, spaces for expression, temporal freedom
Identity	Sense of belonging, consistency, differentiation, self-esteem, assertiveness	Symbols, language, religion, habits, customs, reference groups, sexuality, values, norms, historical memory, work	Commit oneself, integrate oneself, confront, decide on, get to know oneself, recognize oneself, actualize oneself, grow	Social rhythms, everyday settings, settings which one belongs to, maturation stages
Freedom	Autonomy, self-esteem, determination, passion, assertiveness, open mindedness, boldness, rebelliousness, tolerance	Equal rights	Dissent, choose, be different from, run risks, develop awareness, commit oneself, disobey	Temporal/spatial plasticity

Source: Manfred A. Max-Neef, Antonio Elizalde, and Martín Hopenhayn, *Human Scale Development: Conception, Application and Further Reflections* (New York: The Apex Press, 1991).

Establishing easily measurable factors of subjectively experienced individual wellbeing, social dynamics, or cultural vibrancies, especially to use in guiding governmental or industry policies, is a growing field. For instance, the United Nations is using the Kingdom of Bhutan's Gross National Happiness index (in contrast to the economic measure of Gross Domestic Product) as a model for sustainable development.¹¹ Material prosperity may be a necessary but insufficient condition for happiness, which is further challenged by environmental degradations

¹¹ "Gross National Happiness Commission - The Planning Commission of Bhutan, Development for Happiness," accessed June 3, 2013, <http://www.gnhc.gov.bt/>; Annie Kelly Thimphu and Bhutan, "Gross National Happiness in Bhutan: The Big Idea from a Tiny State That Could Change the World," *The Guardian*, December 1, 2012, sec. World News, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/dec/01/bhutan-wealth-happiness-counts>.

and economic inequities.¹² Psychological and social wellbeing, particularly when cultivated using mindfulness practice, can complement ecological wellbeing.¹³

Just as we need to define sustainability as it emerges over multiple systems, we also need to confront (un)sustainability as it emerges over product lifecycles. While commodity chains are often depicted as independent, linear movements of goods, they are in fact complex, fluid, multi-directional, and interconnected webs (see figure 1.2). Additionally, each of the system's components is situated in historical, cultural contexts; has its own sub-cycles; and links to other cycles in different geographic places, product industries, trade systems, local economies, and individual lives. Rather than presenting stages, such as production and consumption, as distinct binaries, this network acknowledges interdependencies.

¹² Tim Kasser, *The High Price of Materialism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003); Jackson, "Readings in Sustainable Consumption."

¹³ Kirk Warren Brown and Tim Kasser, "Are Psychological and Ecological Well-being Compatible? The Role of Values, Mindfulness, and Lifestyle," *Social Indicators Research* 74, no. 2 (November 1, 2005): 349–368; Jeffrey Jacob, Emily Jovic, and Merlin B. Brinkerhoff, "Personal and Planetary Well-Being: Mindfulness Meditation, Pro-Environmental Behavior and Personal Quality of Life in a Survey from the Social Justice and Ecological Sustainability Movement," *Social Indicators Research* 93, no. 2 (September 1, 2009): 275–294; David M. Carter, "Recognizing the Role of Positive Emotions in Fostering Environmentally Responsible Behaviors," *Ecopsychology* 3, no. 1 (March 2011): 65–69; Tim Kasser, "Psychological Need Satisfaction, Personal Well-Being, and Ecological Sustainability," *Ecopsychology* 1, no. 4 (December 2009): 175–180; Kirk Warren Brown et al., "When What One Has Is Enough: Mindfulness, Financial Desire Discrepancy, and Subjective Well-being," *Journal of Research in Personality* 43, no. 5 (October 2009): 727–736.

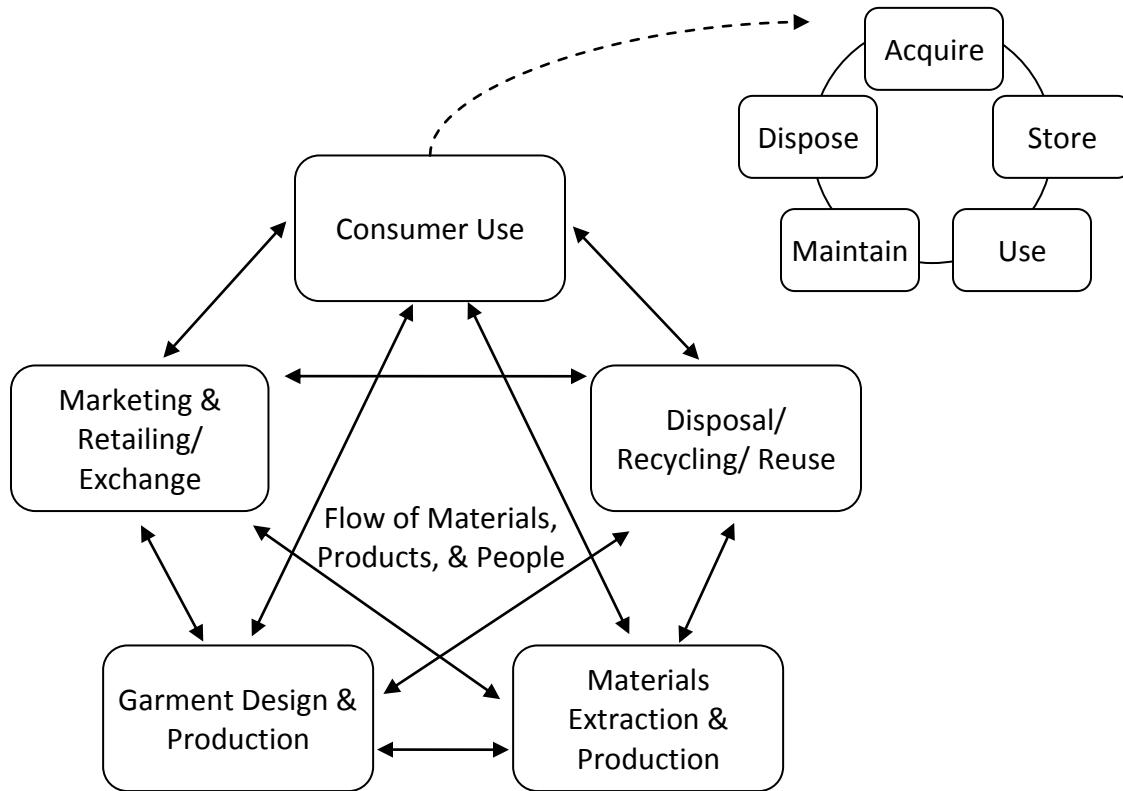


Figure 1.2. Diagram of clothing lifecycle components, interconnections, and consumer sub-cycle

To hint at the complexity and breadth of product lifecycles, table 1.3 catalogs some of the many components that are at play in the lifecycle stages. Each is a point of intervention, an opportunity for re-orienting the lifecycle. Even though current practices often resemble a chain that dead-ends at disposal, there are opportunities to interrupt this chain, develop new links across the web, and close the loop.¹⁴

¹⁴ Kate Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Design Journeys* (London: Earthscan, 2008); William McDonough and Michael Braungart, *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things* (New York: North Point Press, 2002); Serge Tichkiewitch, E Westkämper, and Jörg Niemann, *Design of Sustainable Product Life Cycles* (Berlin: Springer, 2009); Annie Leonard, *The Story of Stuff: How Our Obsession with Stuff Is Trashing the Planet, Our Communities, and Our Health And a Vision for Change* (New York: Free Press, 2010); Susan Kaiser, "Mixing Metaphors in the Fiber, Textile, and Apparel Complex: Moving Toward a More Sustainable Fashion," in *Sustainable Fashion: Why Now? A Conversation About Issues, Practices, and Possibilities*, ed. Janet Hethorn and Connie Ulasewicz (New York: Fairchild Books, 2008), 139–164; Fuad-Luke, *Design Activism*.

Table 1.3. Example components in each lifecycle stage that impact sustainability of clothing lifecycle

Materials Extraction & Production	Garment Design & Production	Marketing & Retailing/ Exchange
<p>Fiber</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural (agriculture) Man-made cellulosic (agriculture and chemical processing) Man-made synthetic (drilling, extraction, and processing) <p>Other materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plastics Metals Foils Dyes Printing inks Bleaches Finishes <p>Components</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yarn Fabric Thread Buttons Zippers Interfacings Labels Finishing treatments <p>Machinery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fiber processing Spinning Weaving Knitting Other fabric constructions Dyeing Printing Finishing Lubricants Sizing Cleaning and maintenance <p>Facilities operations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Electricity Plumbing Lighting Climate control 	<p>Design facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fabric and components (see previous column) Garment Branding and advertising (see next column) <p>Pattern-making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drafting Draping Proto-typing Samples <p>Fabric cutting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Laying out on yardage Fabric use and waste <p>Sewing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Piecework Garment work <p>Other construction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Labels Embellishments Techniques Materials <p>Construction materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thread Adhesives <p>Garment treatments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dyeing Washing Finishing <p>Machinery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cutting Sewing Dyeing Washing Cleaning and maintenance <p>Facilities operations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Electricity Plumbing Lighting Climate control 	<p>Packaging</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large shipments Individual items Overwrap Shape retention devices <p>Tags and labels</p> <p>Materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corrugated cardboard Cardboards and paperboards Paper and tissue Plastic Styrofoam <p>Advertising campaigns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visual and mental clutter Insecurity and self-esteem <p>Media</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Television Internet Radio Billboards Magazines Newspapers Electric signs <p>Information technology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Servers Point-of-sale equipment Also serves other stages <p>Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warehouses Retail stores Parking lots Individual consumer shipments <p>Facilities operations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Electricity Plumbing Lighting Climate control

Table 1.3. Example components for each lifecycle stage that impact sustainability of clothing lifecycle, continued

Consumer Use	Disposal/ Recycling/ Reuse	Transportation and Distribution
Acquisition	Place in lifecycle	Transportation for each
First cycle	Pre-consumer	Material used
Second cycle	Post-consumer	Component made
Gift	Consumer disposal	Final product
Donation	Re-use in home	Component, material, or other
Purchase	Re-use in wardrobe	products used in production,
Rent	Friends and family	design, retail, marketing,
Swap or borrow	Heirlooms	consumption, and disposal (see
Cost	Re-sell consignment	previous columns)
Sale	Re-sell internet services	Movement of people
Use/Wear	Donate	Worker's transportation to
Occasion	Second-hand stores	job
Place	Religious non-profit	Consumer transportation to
Frequency	Secular non-profit	facilities
Storage	For-profit	Movement of products between
Space	International Re-sale	Source and next factory for
Location	Collectors	assemblage
Organization	Processors and sorters	Warehouses
Hangers	Middle-men	Stores
Closets	Small/local sellers	Warehouses and individuals
Dressers	Recycling	Returns and exchanges
Hampers	Industrial applications	Donations
Maintenance	Rag stock	Waste processors
Locations in/outside of home	Consumer goods (lower grade)	Recycling processors/sellers
Laundering services	Consumer goods (same or	Vehicles
How often worn before wash	higher grade)	Airplanes
Load size/sorting	End of life disposal	Ships
Water temperature	Incinerate	Trucks
Detergents	Landfill	Trains
Fabric softeners	Facilities operations	Shipping containers
Bleaches	Sorting	Fuel used
Machine washing	Processing	Maintenance of
Hand washing	Retail	Greenhouse gas emissions
Dry cleaning	Machinery used	Other pollution (e.g. ballast
Machine drying		water)
Line or flat drying		Storage of
Ironing or steaming		Infrastructure supporting transportation
Altering		Highways
Small mending (e.g. button)		Local roads
Large repairs (e.g. darning)		Rail lines
Machinery		Airports
Water efficiency		Docks
Energy efficiency		
Dampness sensors		

Surveying the range of processes and materials necessary at each stage demonstrates how complex and large the problem of sustainability can be. To address sustainability for product systems holistically, we need to account for all the inputs and outputs at each lifecycle stage: inputs of time, money, energy, water, chemicals, labor, raw materials, and other resources; outputs of wastewater, solid waste, emission to air, and products; and any impacts on human welfare. While some environmental, economic, and social dimensions may seem far removed from particular practices and components, clothing and sustainability are holistic systems that are necessarily bound up with each other.

Within the lifecycle, consumption contributes substantially to the total impact on local and global scales. Current U.S. consumption practices deplete unsustainable amounts of resources, unnecessarily harm ecological systems, and demonstrate minimal concern for the welfare of millions of global citizens. For example, the Worldwatch Institute 2004 *State of the World Report* demonstrates the urgent need and often simple solutions to addressing the sustainability of consumption.¹⁵ Leonard's accessible website and video "The Story of Stuff" explores consumption patterns by exposing how current purchasing and disposal patterns nested in a linear production model, are unsustainable; they are dangerous to human and environmental health, fail to replenish natural resources, violate human rights, and perpetuate a needs-inhibiting work-spend cycle.¹⁶

¹⁵ Worldwatch Institute, *State of the World 2004: A Worldwatch Institute Report on Progress Toward a Sustainable Society: Special Focus: The Consumer Society* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004).

¹⁶ Leonard, *Story of Stuff*, 2010; Annie Leonard, "Story of Stuff," Story of Stuff Project, accessed December 6, 2009, <http://www.storyofstuff.org/movies-all/story-of-stuff/>; Juliet Schor, *The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don't Need* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1999).

Examining the Sustainability of Clothing Systems

The Western fashion industry and clothing practices have historically had varying degrees of positive and negative effects on environmental, social, cultural, and economic systems. Past clothing practices may have been sustainable without being consciously directed as such. For example, the burgeoning fashion practices of the European Middle Ages valued cloth as material and social capital. Although the elite consumed cloth conspicuously through their flowing, layered garments and tapestry-lined walls, they also maintained, preserved, and passed down these highly-valued objects. On the other hand, today's technology has democratized access to fashion while fast-paced style changes have fostered a sense of disposability of clothing—both on unprecedented scales.¹⁷

Today's production, consumption, and disposal of textiles and clothing penetrate almost every facet of sustainability listed in table 1.1, testifying to the significant impact the global apparel industry has on the world's environment and peoples. Although this project emphasizes the consumption stage, it is important to trace the environmental and social impacts of the different stages that comprise the total lifecycle system. Though focused on the UK, the 2006 University of Cambridge-based Institute for Manufacturing report provides a useful, generalizable summary of the most significant issues in clothing production and consumption systems: fossil fuel use and climate change, toxic chemical use in fiber and fabric production, high waste levels from production and consumption, high water usage in production and consumption, dangerous working conditions, employment of children, low wages, lack of worker

¹⁷ For a discussion of the sustainability of Western dress from a historical perspective, see Linda Welters, "The Fashion of Sustainability," in *Sustainable Fashion: Why Now? A Conversation About Issues, Practices, and Possibilities*, ed. Janet Hethorn and Connie Ulasewicz (New York: Fairchild Books, 2008), 7–29.

protections, and inability to monitor effectively these various practices.¹⁸ Consumer demand and use exacerbates these problems, especially in relation to the speed, scale, and designs of produced garments.

The global apparel industry impacts the environment at every stage in a product's lifecycle. Even procuring raw materials for fabrics presents many challenges. For instance, natural fibers are often labor- and resource-intensive. In particular, cotton requires vast amounts of water to grow. More than 700 gallons of water (or 15 bathtubs worth) of water are used to grow the cotton in a t-shirt.¹⁹ Additionally, conventional cotton agriculture heavily uses nutrient-cycling disruptive fertilizers and toxic pesticides. For every pound of cotton harvested, producers apply almost one third of a pound of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides.²⁰ The impact of the cotton industry is especially noteworthy given its widespread use in apparel. According to a 2010 Cotton Incorporated Retail Monitor™ survey of apparel sold in the United States, 75% of men's apparel and 40% of women's apparel are made solely with cotton, while 10% of men's apparel

¹⁸ For reports on the environmental and social effects of clothing consumption, see Allwood et al., *Well Dressed? The Present and Future Sustainability of Clothing and Textiles in the United Kingdom* (Cambridge: Institute for Manufacturing, University of Cambridge, 2006), http://www.ifm.eng.cam.ac.uk/sustainability/projects/mass/UK_textiles.pdf (accessed 21 November 2009); Barbara Giesen, *Ethical Clothing: New Awareness or Fading Fashion Trend?* (Saarbrücken, Germany: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008). For projects highlighting design solutions, see Sandy Black, *Eco-Chic: The Fashion Paradox* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2008); Kate Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Design Journeys* (London: Earthscan, 2008); Janet Hethorn and Connie Ulasewicz, eds., *Sustainable Fashion: Why Now? A Conversation about Issues, Practices, and Possibilities* (New York: Fairchild Books, 2008); and Leslie Hoffman, ed., *FutureFashion: White Papers*, Earth Pledge Series on Sustainable Development (New York: Earth Pledge, 2007).

¹⁹ "The Hidden Water We Use - National Geographic," *National Geographic*, accessed June 4, 2013, <http://environment.nationalgeographic.com/environment/freshwater/embedded-water/>; H&M, *H&M Conscious Actions Sustainability Report 2012* (Stockholm, Sweden: H&M, 2012), http://about.hm.com/content/dam/hm/about/documents/en/CSR/reports/Conscious%20Actions%20Sustainability%20Report%202012_en.pdf.

²⁰ "Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) | Protecting People and Planet," accessed July 28, 2013, <http://ejfoundation.org/cotton>; Worldwatch Institute, *State of the World 2004: A Worldwatch Institute Report on Progress Toward a Sustainable Society: Special Focus: The Consumer Society*; Leonard, "Story of Stuff."

and 28% of women's apparel are made with a cotton blend.²¹ On the other hand, petroleum-based synthetic fibers, another primary fiber component in clothing, draw on the world's finite reserves of fossil fuels. Drilling, transport, and extensive processing may pollute the nearby environment with heavy metals and carcinogenic chemicals. Compounded with fiber production, dyeing, finishing, and other processing introduce other dangerous heavy metals and chemicals into the workers' bodies, finished products, and wastewater. These materials, used to create seasonal color palettes or easy-care finishes, are known carcinogens and neurotoxins for humans and wildlife.²²

Environmental degradation interconnects with human rights violations. The Environmental Justice Foundation's "White Gold: The True Cost of Cotton Campaign" exposes exploitation of ecological and human resources in cotton production in Uzbekistan and other developing countries. Their campaigns illuminate how the irrigation for cotton has drained rivers leading to the Aral Sea, reduced the sea's water volume by 80%, and led to the desertification of the once fertile surrounding areas. The desecration of farmland forces local populations, including children, to work in cotton production at low wages, because they can no longer successfully farm the now arid land or fish the dried sea. Moreover, the toxic pesticides and fertilizers used in conventional cotton production are hazardous for the agricultural workers.

²¹ Cotton Incorporated, "Women's Wear Is Focus of Textile Research," *Fiber Management Update*, September 2011.

²² Worldwatch Institute, *State of the World 2004: A Worldwatch Institute Report on Progress Toward a Sustainable Society: Special Focus: The Consumer Society*; Barbara Giesen, *Ethical Clothing: New Awareness of Fading Fashion Trend?* (Saarbrücken, Germany: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008); Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles*; Keith Slater, *Environmental Impact of Textiles: Production, Processes and Protection* (Cambridge; Boca Raton, FL: Woodhead Pub.; Textile Institute; CRC, 2003); *Dirty Laundry: Unravelling the Corporate Connections to Toxic Water Pollution in China* (Amsterdam: Greenpeace International, 2011), <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/Global/international/publications/toxics/Water%202011/dirty-laundry-report.pdf>; *Dirty Laundry 2: Unravelling the Toxic Trail from Pipes to Products* (Amsterdam: Greenpeace International, 2011), <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/Global/international/publications/toxics/Water%202011/dirty-laundry-report-2.pdf>.

In the mid-1990s, the popular press and social justice organizations brought to light much of the egregious human rights violations of clothing production facilities. For example, both Klein's *No Logo* and Ross's *No Sweat* describe how sweatshop workers are forced (sometimes by economic, social, and political circumstances and sometimes by kidnapping and enslavement) into working excessive hours for sub-living wages in unhealthy and dangerous conditions.²³ Many social justice groups continue to highlight ongoing problems within the global apparel industry. For example, Clean Clothes Campaign, an alliance of organizations in European countries, works with partners in exporting countries to monitor and publicize labor issues in the apparel industry. The association launches awareness and action campaigns and pursues legislative solutions to ensure socially just apparel production.²⁴ University student groups also engage with school licensing committees by demanding protections for workers who make apparel and products with university logos.²⁵

The examples mentioned above only begin to scratch the surface of environmental and social impacts of clothing production. The current levels of clothing consumption—in terms of who is consuming and how much they are consuming—are also harming people and the environment. Many of the issues in consumption cannot be separated from how the garment was produced and will eventually be disposed.

One of the major issues in the consumption lifecycle is the increasing quantity and speed of clothing consumption, and consequently that of production and disposal as well. The price of clothing is decreasing while the total amount spent on clothes is increasing, indicating that the

²³ Naomi Klein, *No Space, No Jobs, No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* (New York: Picador, 2000); Andrew Ross, ed., *No Sweat: Fashion, Free Trade, and the Rights of Garment Workers* (New York: Verso, 1997).

²⁴ "Clean Clothes Campaign," accessed July 28, 2013, <http://www.cleanclothes.org/>.

²⁵ For one example of a student organization, see the University of Wisconsin-Madison organization, "Student Labor Action Coalition - Madison WI - Home," accessed July 28, 2013, <http://slacu.com/>.

quantity of goods consumed continues to rise.²⁶ The speed of fashion changes and clothing production is also increasing. For example, a 2002 report on the global H&M clothing retail chain indicated that they managed 680 stores, sold 400 million garments a year, and had a design to store floor turn-around of 12 weeks. Two years later, H&M reported managing 1700 stores, sold 500 million garments, and had a production turn-around time of only 3 weeks. To keep stores well-stocked with the latest styles in response to high consumer demand as monitored through information technology systems, H&M delivers goods at least once every day to every store.²⁷ As Leonard wryly notes of their clothes, “They are not made to last. Trendiness, combined with ridiculously low prices, is the secret to H&M’s success.”²⁸ Improvements in technology and information management facilitate fast, cheap fashion, but there are many environmental and social costs not accounted for in purchase price. For example, the electronic equipment that supports the global apparel industry relies on potentially destructive mining and hazardous disposal of heavy metals. The cross-oceanic shipping of fabrics and finished products guzzles fossil fuels and pollutes waterways with ballast.²⁹

Economic, social, and political circumstances—and American consumer demand for cheap clothing—result in hazardous working conditions, low wages, elevated stress, job insecurity, and minimal to no labor protections for often female garment workers.³⁰ One hundred years after the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union pivotal activism and the infamous

²⁶ Julian M. Allwood et al., *Well Dressed? The Present and Future Sustainability of Clothing and Textiles in the United Kingdom* (Cambridge: Institute for Manufacturing, 2006).

²⁷ Grace Kunz and Myrna B. Garner, *Going Global: The Textile and Apparel Industry* (New York: Fairchild Publications, 2006).

²⁸ Leonard, *Story of Stuff*, 2010, 116.

²⁹ Welters, “The Fashion of Sustainability.”

³⁰ Ross, *No Sweat: Fashion, Free Trade, and the Rights of Garment Workers*; Gordon Laird, *The Price of a Bargain: The Quest for Cheap and the Death of Globalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); David Bosshart, *Cheap: The Real Cost of the Global Trend for Bargains, Discounts & Customer Choice* (London: Kogan Page, 2006); Ellen Israel Rosen, *Making Sweatshops: The Globalization of the U.S. Apparel Industry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, hundreds of often young and/or female garment workers continue to die in fires and building collapses.³¹ Even with information campaigns and activist efforts, garment factory tragedies occur on a regular basis. The demand for access to cheap clothes drives down wages and working conditions.³²

The social impacts of increased consumption also contribute to the creation of a materialistic-driven consumer society that fosters insecurity and low-self esteem, while promoting fashionable clothes as the antidote. This critique of clothing consumption has a long history, including Veblen's classic indictment of consumption and emulation, *Theory of the Leisure Class*.³³ Jackson, outlines environmental challenges we face, such as increasing population and global climate change, while also addressing the lack of wellbeing due to economic, environmental, and social costs. Economist Schor has examined cultural contexts and individual behaviors that perpetuate a work-spend cycle. Studies have demonstrated that increasing consumption does not proportionally or infinitely increase happiness or wellbeing.³⁴ Additionally, studies have documented negative effects that the fashion and beauty industry, advertising, and popular culture, has on self-esteem, body-image, sense of identity, and peer

³¹ Jim Yardley, "Report on Bangladesh Building Collapse Finds Widespread Blame," *The New York Times*, May 22, 2013, sec. World / Asia Pacific, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/23/world/asia/report-on-bangladesh-building-collapse-finds-widespread-blame.html>; "Dhaka Collapse Toll Passes 1,000," *BBC*, May 10, 2013, sec. Asia, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-22476774>; Vikas Bajaj, "Bangladesh Fire Kills More Than 100 and Injures Many," *The New York Times*, November 25, 2012, sec. World / Asia Pacific, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/26/world/asia/bangladesh-fire-kills-more-than-100-and-injures-many.html>; Sandy Hobbs, Jim MacKechnie, and Michael Lavalette, *Child Labour: A World History Companion* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1999); Albert Marrin, *Flesh & Blood So Cheap: The Triangle Fire and Its Legacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011).

³² Welters, "The Fashion of Sustainability."

³³ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Modern Library Paperback Edition (New York: The Modern Library, 2001).

³⁴ Tim Jackson, "The Challenge of Sustainable Lifestyles," in *State of the World 2008: A Worldwatch Institute Report on Progress Toward a Sustainable Society: Special Focus: Innovations for a Sustainable Economy*, ed. Gary T. Gardner, Thomas Prugh, and Starke (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 45–60; Schor, *The Overspent American*; Brown and Kasser, "Are Psychological and Ecological Well-being Compatible?"; Derek Bok, *The Politics of Happiness: What Government Can Learn from the New Research on Well-being* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); Kasser, *The High Price of Materialism*.

relations.³⁵ Indeed, despite explicit dissatisfaction from fashion and women's magazine readers concerning digital manipulation of photographs and use of very thin models, this editorial practice persists.³⁶

Another important dimension in clothing consumption that often goes unnoticed is the environmental impact of laundering and clothing maintenance. While dry cleaning's use of carcinogenic, toxic perchloroethylene may be one of the most visible villains in the clothing care industry—endangering dry cleaning employees, owners of garments, as well as air quality and water ecosystems—it is far from alone. Laundering impact relates to not only a garment's fiber, type, and use but also the machines, processes, and products used in cleaning. Contributions to the total lifecycle's impact are due to water temperature, efficiency of washing and drying machines, degree of wetness when removed from machines, type and quantity of laundry detergent, treatments or bleaches, frequency of wear before washing, and ironing. While each of these components may seem small on its own, when compounded together over a garment's lifetime on the global scale of consumption, their impacts are large. A shirt made from natural

³⁵ Helga Dittmar, *Consumer Culture, Identity and Well-being: The Search for the "Good Life" and the "Body Perfect"* (New York: Psychology Press, 2008); Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, Tenth Anniversary Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (New York: Random House, 1997); Philip N. Myers and Frank A. Biocca, "The Elastic Body Image: The Effect of Television Advertising and Programming on Body Image Distortions in Young Women," *Journal of Communication* 42, no. 3 (1992): 108–133; Dirk Smeesters, Thomas Mussweiler, and Naomi Mandel, "The Effects of Thin and Heavy Media Images on Overweight and Underweight Consumers: Social Comparison Processes and Behavioral Implications," *Journal of Consumer Research* 36, no. 6 (April 1, 2010): 930–949; Shelly Grabe, L. Monique, and Janet Shibley Hyde, "The Role of the Media in Body Image Concerns Among Women: A Meta-analysis of Experimental and Correlational Studies," *Psychological Bulletin* 134, no. 3 (2008): 460–476.

³⁶ S. Reaves et al., "If Looks Could Kill: Digital Manipulation of Fashion Models," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 19, no. 1 (2004): 56–71; Andrea Palatnik and Amanda Holpuch, "Girls Petition for Teen Vogue to Put an End to Airbrushed Photos," *The Guardian*, sec. Fashion, accessed June 4, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/fashion/us-news-blog/2012/jul/11/teen-girls-ask-teen-vogue-end-photoshopped-photos>; "Teen Crusaders Taking on Teen Vogue Over Models," *ABC News Blogs*, accessed June 4, 2013, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/entertainment/2012/07/teen-crusaders-taking-on-teen-vogue-over-models/>.

fibers may require even more energy and resources through increased water temperatures, drying heat, and drying time, or through dry-cleaning.³⁷

Lifecycle assessments (LCAs) of clothing products consistently reveal that the consumer use of a garment contributes significantly to the majority of environmental impacts.³⁸ An LCA of a pleated polyester trousers revealed that consumer use accounted for more than 75% of energy use, 26% of which was from using hot water in a washing machine and 27% from using a machine dryer. A Levi-Strauss sponsored LCA for a pair of denim jeans reveals that switching to a side-loading washer, cold water, line-drying, and washing from once a week to once a month can lower carbon dioxide emissions and energy and water use by 20% to 50% over the garment's life, depending on starting behaviors.³⁹ Not accounted for are the production, wastewater systems, and life of the washing machines and dryers themselves. For example, renting high-end washing machines could save 180kg of steel by extending the number of washing cycles ten-fold, thus reducing the production and disposal of lower-end machines.⁴⁰

³⁷ Giesen, *Ethical Clothing: New Awareness of Fading Fashion Trend?*; Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles*; Allwood et al., *Well Dressed?*.

³⁸ "Life Cycle of a Jean | Levi Strauss & Co.," accessed June 4, 2013, <http://www.levistrauss.com/sustainability/product/life-cycle-jean>; H&M, *H&M Conscious Actions Sustainability Report 2012*; Franklin Associates, *Resource and Environmental Profile Analysis of a Manufactured Apparel Product: Woman's Knit Polyester Blouse* (Washington, DC: American Fiber Manufacturers Associations, 1993); Michael Collins and Simon Aumônier, *Streamlined Life Cycle Assessment of Two Marks & Spencer Plc Apparel Products* (Oxford: Environmental Resources Management, February 2002), <http://researchingsustainability.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/streamlined-lca-of-2-marks-spencer-pls-apparel-products.pdf>; Adrian Chapman, *Mistra Future Fashion: Review of Life Cycle Assessments of Clothing* (Buckinghamshire, England: Oakdene Hollins Research & Consulting, July 2010), http://www.oakdenehollins.co.uk/media/232/2010_mistra_review_of_life_cycle_assessments_of_clothing.pdf.

³⁹ "Life Cycle of a Jean | Levi Strauss & Co."

⁴⁰ "Should We Be Owning Our Washing Machines?," *BBC*, March 18, 2013, sec. Science & Environment, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-21804935>; Hannah Hislop and Julie Hill, *Reinventing the Wheel: a Circular Economy for Resource Security* (London: Green Alliance, October 2011), http://www.green-alliance.org.uk/reinventing_the_wheel/; *Towards the Circular Economy Vol. 1: Economic and Business Rationale for an Accelerated Transition* (Isle of Wight, United Kingdom: Ellen MacArthur Foundation, January 2012), <https://emf-packs.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/Towards%20the%20Circular%20Economy%20vol%201/Ellen%20MacArthur%20Foundation%20Towards%20the%20Circular%20Economy%20vol.1.pdf>.

Laundering has extensive impacts on water ecosystems. An LCA of a polyester blouse shows that consumer use accounted for 96% of waterborne effluents if measured by Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD) (See figure 1.3). An increase in BOD indicates high levels of bacteria decomposing plant matter that reduce availability of dissolved oxygen in the water necessary for other aquatic plant and animal life. Eutrophication results from nitrates and phosphates in fertilizers used in cotton agriculture and the latter often in laundry detergents. Moreover, laundering polyester and acrylic sheds microplastic debris that contaminates marine habitats and is consumed by fish and other marine life, potentially disrupting organism and ecosystems.⁴¹ Alternatively, gray water recycling systems could reduce household water consumption.

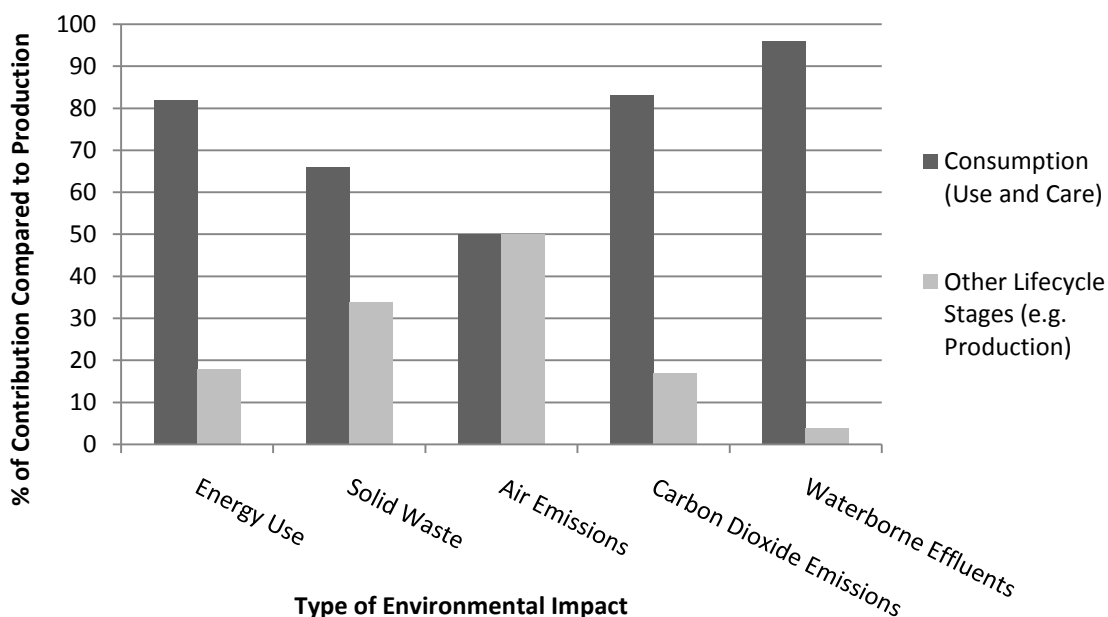


Figure 1.3. Lifecycle analysis of polyester blouse showing percent of contribution to impacts
 Source: Data adapted from Franklin Associates, *Resource and Environmental Profile Analysis of a Manufactured Apparel Product: Woman's Knit Polyester Blouse* (Washington, DC: American Fiber Manufacturers Associations, 1993).

⁴¹Anthony Browne, "Accumulation of Microplastic on Shorelines World Wide: Sources and Sinks," *Environmental Science and Technology* 45, no. 21 (2011): 9175–8179; A.L. Lusher, M. McHugh, and R.C. Thompson, "Occurrence of Microplastics in the Gastrointestinal Tract of Pelagic and Demersal Fish from the English Channel," *Marine Pollution Bulletin* 67, no. 1–2 (February 15, 2013): 94–99.

The increased consumption of clothing and short fashion cycles has another byproduct—increased disposal of clothes and larger amounts of waste in production. Many used garments and textile scraps from production end up in landfills. According to a study on clothing disposal in the United Kingdom, the combined waste from clothing and textiles is about 2.35 million tons. Of this waste, 13% goes to material recovery, 13% to incineration, and 74% to landfill.⁴² Garments made from either natural or synthetic fibers offer sustainable disposal options: natural fibers are biodegradable and synthetic fibers are recyclable. Disposing of products in landfills breaks potentially sustainable cycles. However, many neighborhoods do not have curbside recycling for textiles, few stores or companies offer take-back programs for used clothing, relatively few people compost at home, and mixed fiber garments cannot be easily composted. While clothes sent to the landfill have environmental costs, shipping clothes to various charity shops, storage facilities, or international resale sites has its own issues, as demonstrated by energy and resource consumption. Moreover, donating and reselling clothes may have complicated social implications. Donated clothes may raise money for charities or affect clothing industries in countries receiving used clothing shipments for resale.⁴³

Striving for Sustainable Solutions in Clothing

Because of the complex interconnections between stages, processes, and materials, it is difficult to establish definitive, explicit proposals of an entirely sustainable clothing system. For instance, disposable clothes are not inherently unsustainable. If underwear produced from biodegradable fibers in an energy-efficient, water-efficient, toxic-free method were disposed of

⁴² Allwood et al., *Well Dressed?*, 16.

⁴³ Allwood et al., *Well Dressed?*; Karen Tranberg Hansen, *Salaula: The World of Secondhand Clothing and Zambia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

in a compost pile, it might be more sustainable than a reusable cotton pair lasting several years that is washed after every wearing in warm water and dried in an electric dryer supplied by a coal power plant.⁴⁴ Because there are so many options for each lifecycle stage, sustainability can be thought of as a multi-dimensional matrix.

Although it is difficult to say what a truly sustainable clothing system would be like, many working on sustainability issues consistently suggest that several key dimensions would most likely be present: solving problems on systems-levels, using natural resources efficiently, following biomimicry design principles, providing transparent access to information, respecting and honoring the environment and people, promoting whole-person wellbeing, building communities, and broadly defining value.⁴⁵ Each of these elements may play out in very different ways for different lifecycle stages and components within those stages. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Many aesthetic styles may be possible, though there may be guiding design principles.⁴⁶ Depending on the local context—the needs and resources of a specific group in a particular place—sustainable clothing consumption will manifest differently as well.⁴⁷ The diversity of needs, resources, and solutions may very well be a strength of sustainable clothing,

⁴⁴ Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles*.

⁴⁵ Ibid.; Kate Fletcher and Lynda Grose, *Fashion and Sustainability: Design for Change* (London: Laurence King Publishers, 2012); Gwilt Alison and Timo Rissanen, eds., *Shaping Sustainable Fashion: Changing the Way We Make and Use Clothes* (London: Earth Pledge, 2011); Leslie Hoffman, ed., *FutureFashion: White Pages* (New York: Earth Pledge, 2007); Jonathan Chapman, *Emotionally Durable Design: Objects, Experiences, and Empathy* (London: Earthscan, 2005); Fuad-Luke, *Design Activism*; Jonathan Chapman and Nick Gant, eds., *Designers, Visionaries and Other Stories: A Collection of Sustainable Design Essays* (London: Earthscan, 2007); McDonough and Braungart, *Cradle to Cradle*; Mau, *Massive Change*; Sven Ehmann, Stephan Bohle, and Robert Klanten, eds., *Cause and Effect: Visualizing Sustainability* (Berlin: Die Gestalten Verlag, 2012); Anne Chick, *Design for Sustainable Change: How Design and Designers Can Drive the Sustainability Agenda* (Lausanne, Switzerland; La Vergne, TN: Ava Pub.; Distributed in the USA by Ingram Publisher Services, 2011).

⁴⁶ Lance Hosey, *The Shape of Green: Aesthetics, Ecology, and Design* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2012).

⁴⁷ Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles*; Janet Hethorn and Connie Ulasewicz, eds., *Sustainable Fashion: Why Now? A Conversation About Issues, Practices, and Possibilities* (New York: Fairchild Books, 2008); Hoffman, *FutureFashion*; Allwood et al., *Well Dressed?*

as diversity is a key characteristic of healthy ecosystems.⁴⁸ There are many designers and engineers actively seeking solutions to create more sustainable products, spaces, and systems—by addressing various stages in product lifecycles, modifying different components of organizational operations, or seeking to influence consumer behavior. In each solution, consumers need to be actively engaged, willing to participate, or open to evolving values and tastes for the ultimate success and completion of a healthy, sustainable clothing lifecycle.

Architect McDonough and chemist Braungart developed the “cradle to cradle” concept as a cyclical approach to design that sees all products as closed loops—from cradle to cradle rather than cradle to grave. One element of “cradle to cradle” design is the biomimicry principle; specifically, they re-envisioned nature’s model for nutrient cycling and sustainability in product and building design. The authors describe how designers must conceive of materials as nutrients—ways to nurture our lives and planet. We create both biological nutrients (organic material that can safely be returned to nature) and technological nutrients (often synthetic compounds that can be recycled). The bio- and techno-spheres should not compete with each other. Rather designers must approach them as symbiotic systems in which neither is inherently better. The authors argue that technology provides us with amazing products, tools, and capabilities. Instead of rejecting technology, designers need to keep technical nutrients separate from biological nutrients in order to maintain the integrity of each so that they keep each in a closed loop of reuse, just as nature does. Ultimately, successful and sustainable solutions need to use the biological and technical nutrients to nurture human life without harming, and preferably improving, natural life. Products and practices need to account for the people who are at the heart

⁴⁸ Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles*; McDonough and Braungart, *Cradle to Cradle*.

of the lifecycles—they need to improve the quality of life of users and workers through aesthetic pleasure, healthy spaces, advanced technology, and sophisticated craftsmanship.⁴⁹

Clothing designers and manufacturers are continuously innovating new production and distribution systems to alleviate their ecological footprint and protect workers. Independent designers craft handmade or small-scale manufactured lines using ecologically-sensitive materials. Other designers experiment with non-conventional fibers, like bamboo and hemp, that may have reduced environmental impacts because of lower water and pesticide usage.⁵⁰ Large-scale apparel companies are committing to selling products made of recycled, recyclable materials. Patagonia, an outdoor clothing company, has established the Common Threads Garment Recycling Program. Not only does Patagonia produce many of its garments from recycled fibers, but consumers can also return these items to be recycled into new clothes—embodying the “cradle to cradle” approach. Moreover, their website provides extensive information about who made the products, where, and how, including the ecological impact of production and transportation.⁵¹ Another systems-level approach is American Apparel’s vertical integration mills. By directly controlling the working conditions of all employees in processing fiber into yarn, fabric, and garments and selling those products, they ensure economic and social equity. However, they do not explicitly monitor the environmental impacts of fiber production.⁵²

While American Apparel reduces their use of subcontractors and offshore production, some retailers try to improve auditing and increase sourcing of sustainable materials. For

⁴⁹ McDonough and Braungart, *Cradle to Cradle*.

⁵⁰ Sandy Black, *Eco-chic: The Fashion Paradox* (London: Black Dog, 2008); Sass Brown, *Eco Fashion* (London: Laurence King, 2010); Alison and Rissanen, *Shaping Sustainable Fashion*.

⁵¹ “Patagonia - Environmentalism, Environmental Activism: Campaigns, Essays, Environmental Grants, Conservation Alliance, 1% For the Planet,” accessed July 28, 2013, <http://www.patagonia.com/us/environmentalism>.

⁵² “American Apparel | Fashionable Basics. Sweatshop Free. Made in USA.,” accessed July 22, 2013, <http://www.americanapparel.net/aboutus/verticalint/>.

instance, UK retailer Marks & Spencer (M&S) introduced the Plan A campaign—because a Plan B is not an option for either the company or the planet. M&S structured Plan A to address sustainability through a 100-point plan based on five pillars: climate change, waste, sustainable raw materials, fair partner, and health. One notable project is M&S’s partnership with Sri Lanka Apparel’s campaign *Garments without Guilt*. M&S funded the design and construction of an environmentally sustainable factory in which workers produce a signature Plan A lingerie line, including organic cotton undergarments. The plant’s environmental benefits are impressive—a cool roof reflecting sunshine, solar panels, rainwater harvesting, and evaporative cooling instead of air conditioning. The company consciously considered the employee’s wellbeing—all employees have views of the outside palm trees, lake, and mountains. Workers in teams rotate tasks to prevent boredom and overuse injuries. Employees receive higher than average wages in addition to a benefits package complete with social security contributions, free health services, transportation allowances, and free meals.⁵³ This particular initiative illustrates how we can design buildings and products to synergistically benefit the environment, businesses, and people.

Others confront pattern-making as a tool to create aesthetically innovative and zero-waste designs. For example, seamless knitting technology allows garments to be produced without any waste fabric. This can be used for functional items like sports bras and underwear, but also for casual to formal wear, and accessories. Miyake’s A-POC line pushes the aesthetic and technical possibilities of knitwear: a tube of knitted cloth can be cut into pre-determined shapes, resulting in a collection of seamless garment pieces. Black expands on how this process has the potential to reduce fabric waste (though not eliminate), minimize energy and resources on finishing and

⁵³ Liz Jones, “As M&S Goes Eco with Its Lingerie, Our Fashion Director Checks Out Their Green New Factory in Sri Lanka,” *Mail Online*, accessed July 28, 2013, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1084266/As-M-S-goes-eco-lingerie-fashion-director-checks-green-new-factory-Sri-Lanka.html>.

sewing, and reduce inventory stock.⁵⁴ Additionally, designers are employing digital printing and sophisticated design thinking to develop zero-waste patterns. Zero-waste patterns use the entire width of fabric from selvedge to selvedge in a garment.⁵⁵ Until this practice is widespread, other companies recycle current factory waste from fabric cutting into new products, including apparel and bags.⁵⁶

To reduce laundering impacts, others design products that modify the cleaning needs of their clothing lines. Technical, nature-inspired stain-resistant finishes reduce the need to clean garments. These employ biomimicry principles or innovative use of nano-technology. Alternatively, some have created garments that incorporate dirt, stains, wear, and use into an evolving design.⁵⁷ Large and small apparel companies also actively encourage reduced laundering, and as the Levi's website explains on how to care for their jeans, "on the rare occasions they're washed," consumers should use cold water and line dry.⁵⁸

Designing and producing environmentally and socially responsible products is only one component of a healthy planet. Consumers play a pivotal role in the success of these various solutions—it is through their acceptance of unconventional fibers and designs or participation in market exchanges or fabric recycling programs that complete the sustainable lifecycle.

⁵⁴ Sandy Black, *Knitwear in Fashion* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002); Sandy Black, *The New Knitting: Fashion, Interiors, Accessories, Jewelry, Artworks: Contemporary Design Which Utilizes Knitting as a Fundamental Element* (London: London College of Fashion, 2000).

⁵⁵ Hethorn and Ulasewicz, *Sustainable Fashion: Why Now?*; Alison and Rissanen, *Shaping Sustainable Fashion*; Holly McQuillan, "About," accessed June 7, 2013, <http://hollymcquillan.com/about/>.

⁵⁶ "LOOPTWORKS Home | 100% Upcycled Clothing Uniquely Created from Excess," accessed June 7, 2013, <http://www.looptworks.com/>; "American | Recycled | SustainU," accessed June 7, 2013, <http://www.sustainuclimbing.com/american-recycled-apparel/>.

⁵⁷ Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles*; Hoffman, *FutureFashion*.

⁵⁸ "Garment Care - Levi.com," accessed June 7, 2013, <http://us.levi.com/shop/index.jsp?categoryId=18816936>; "Wash Cool Hang Dry | Rapanui Clothing," *Rapanui Clothing*, accessed June 7, 2013, <http://www.rapanuiclothing.com/blog/wash-cool-hang-dry.html>; Hilary Osborne, "M&S Promotes Cooler Clothes Wash," *The Guardian*, April 23, 2007, sec. Business, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2007/apr/23/retail.marksspencer>; "Marks & Spencer: Plan A - What We're Doing - Climate Change - Stories," accessed June 7, 2013, <http://plana.marksandspencer.com/we-are-doing/climate-change/stories/35/>.

Understanding the consumer's perspective on clothing consumption, then, continues to be important in developing sustainable solutions. However, the field has had difficulty pinning down a definition. Much of the diversity in definitions results from the many ways different disciplines and theoretical frameworks have defined sustainability, as well as from complex attitudes towards consumption.⁵⁹ However, the United Nations Environment Programme provides a comprehensive and practical definition:

Sustainable consumption is an umbrella term that brings together a number of key issues, such as meeting needs, enhancing quality of life, improving efficiency, minimizing waste, taking a lifecycle perspective, and taking into account the equity dimension; integrating these component parts is the central question of how to provide the same or better services to meet the basic requirements of life and the aspiration for improvement, for both current and future generations, while continually reducing environmental damage and the risk to human health.⁶⁰

Other definitions of sustainable consumption combine the above elements with emotional and symbolic meaning; definitions emphasize how consumption can “enhance quality of life.” We as humans create meaningful relationships with objects through practices such as social rituals of gift giving, expressions of individual personality or group belonging, or personal or collective remembrances of past events. For instance, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton argue that everyday objects are a primary tool through which people make meaning in their lives.⁶¹ Miller supports a similar thesis that “humanity and social relations can only develop through the medium of objectification... As with all culture, material culture is contradictory in its consequences for humanity, but this should not detract from its centrality to the very

⁵⁹ Jackson, “Readings in Sustainable Consumption”; Marsha A. Dickson and Molly Eckman, “Social Responsibility: The Concept as Defined by Apparel and Textile Scholars,” *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 24, no. 3 (July 2006): 178–191.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Jackson, “Readings in Sustainable Consumption,” 5.

⁶¹ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

possibility of our humanity.”⁶² Understanding what meanings we are deriving from our daily acts of consumption is vital to our efforts to create sustainable lifestyles. Building this knowledge will help us incorporate sustainable choices, practices, and objects into the larger meaning systems of our material culture.

Several authors writing on sustainable design illuminate facets that shape and give meaning to our interactions with objects. For instance, Chapman re-imagines our experiences with objects based on empathy in what he calls “emotionally durable design.” We engage with objects because we see them as autonomous, able to be cherished and made special, able to give us feedback on how we use it, offering multiple opportunities for play, and embodying multilayered complexities. Discarded objects are “failed relationships” between users and objects.⁶³ The design group David Report explores similar themes in its special issue on sustainability. Designed objects need to facilitate emotional connections, capture aesthetic interest, be skillfully constructed of quality materials, and tell an authentic story.⁶⁴ As the authors of the New American Dream website describe, “Good design can help reduce the need to use advertising to spin the meaning a product needs to be something other than disposable... [To] design a ‘Velveteen Rabbit,’ something that is loved until it comes alive” is the ultimate sustainable consumption experience.⁶⁵ These authors and designers emphasize the emotional connections, aesthetic appreciation, and embodied experience of using objects that give meaning to our consumption. In this sense, cultivating a material culture of clothing that simultaneously

⁶² Daniel Miller, “The Poverty of Morality,” in *The Earthscan Reader in Sustainable Consumption*, ed. Tim Jackson (London: Earthscan, 2006), 222–235.

⁶³ Chapman, *Emotionally Durable Design*.

⁶⁴ David Carlson, Claes Foxerus, and Jennifer Leonard, *David Report: The Sustainable Wheel* (Falsterbo, Sweden: David Report, December 2007), <http://davidreport.com/the-report/issue-8-2007-sustain-design/>.

⁶⁵ New American Dream, “Beyond Consumption,” New American Dream <http://www.newdream.org/consumption/beyond.php> (accessed 6 December 2009).

promotes wellbeing of consumers and also the wellbeing of others and the environment will engender more holistic sustainable clothing practice. The meanings around designed objects are at the crux of our interactions, behaviors, and values. Therefore, it is important to consider dimensions of the individual's experience of clothing as we try to promote sustainable choices.

Purpose of Study

Objectives

My primary objective in this study is to explore how the meanings people experience around their clothing practices relate to the perceived or actual sustainability of those practices. My study focuses on how consumers make sense of and find meaning in clothing. I unravel the complexities that women face when evaluating the sustainability of their clothing practices. I investigate the women's perspectives on these issues. Rather than measuring the exact impact of their choices, I contextualize the sustainability of their behaviors using my understanding of the various dimensions and potential environmental, economic, and social effects of their behaviors.

I examine contours of everyday clothing consumption and how they manifest as sustainable or not. This objective parallels Dowling and Power's research "to read 'against the grain,' identify fissures in the ordinary and taken for granted and perhaps open up new possibilities for change... to elaborate aspects of domestic practice that may illuminate household sustainability in unintended ways."⁶⁶ By understanding meanings around objects, and

⁶⁶ Robyn Dowling and Emma Power, "Beyond McMansions and Green Homes: Thinking Household Sustainability through Materialities of Homeyness," in *Material Geographies of Household Sustainability*, ed. Ruth Lane and Andrew Gorman Murray (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2011), 75–88.

how meanings promote or challenge environmental or social impacts, we can understand how to cultivate a sustainable material culture that improves the wellbeing of people and environments.

A complementary objective of this study is to look at consumer practices holistically. Rather than narrowing in on purchasing or disposal behavior patterns, I broaden my data collection and discussion to multiple components of clothing practices: acquisition, use, storage, maintenance, and disposal. As introduced above, sustainability connects to each stage in a product's lifecycle. Moreover, meanings emerge not from objects themselves, but from our varied interactions and engagements with them. Therefore, one purpose of this study is to document and analyze how the invisible, behind-closed-doors actions of storage, maintenance, and disposal contribute to women's intimate relationships with their clothes—to flesh out “the everyday, non-market, hidden, domestic, and identity-forming aspects of fashion—that exist beyond green branding, but are critical to a more substantial, alternative ethics of fashion consumption.”⁶⁷ This holistic approach also allows me to consider how different issues emerge variously as barriers or opportunities to sustainable practice.

Overarching these descriptive and analytic research goals is an objective to consider how an interdisciplinary perspective, particularly one that includes material culture and dress theory, can contribute to the larger discussion of creating and promoting more sustainable clothing practices. This project is fundamentally concerned with our relationships with objects and how those relationships evolve. Grappling with embodied aesthetic, affective, subjective, and symbolic dimensions through multiple perspectives builds on the field's efforts to “[develop] our

⁶⁷ Chris Gibson and Elyse Stanes, “Is Green the New Black? Exploring Ethical Fashion Consumption,” in *Ethical Consumption: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Tania Lewis and Emily Potter (New York: Routledge, 2011), 169–185.

inter-, multi-, and even *post*-disciplinary research capacities in order to deal with the complexities, dynamism and general messiness of the interrelational features of sustainability.”⁶⁸

By integrating material culture and dress theory; perspectives from anthropology, sociology, psychology, and philosophy; and research on sustainability into my analysis of this project’s case studies, I intend to demonstrate how opening the conversation to include embodied aesthetic, affective, subjective, and symbolic dimensions of consumer experiences can enhance sustainability initiatives. This gives us a fuller, richer picture of the consumption stage, the social dimensions of wellbeing within that stage, and the relationships between various dimensions of sustainability.

Research Questions

I pursued the following questions using case studies of Midwestern, adult women’s clothing practices. The questions below include descriptive “what” elements and analytical “how” and “why” elements. I consider environmental, economic, and social dimensions of sustainability; multiple stages of clothing consumption (acquisition, use, maintenance, storage, and disposal); and various categories or types of garments.

1. What are the women’s clothing practices?
2. What do the women see in their clothing practices as sustainable and unsustainable?
Why do they see it as such?
3. What meanings and issues do the women experience with clothing practices and objects?

⁶⁸ Julian Agyeman, “Foreword: Joined-up Research,” in *Researching Sustainability: A Guide to Social Science Methods, Practice, and Engagement*, ed. Alex Franklin and Paul Blyton (London: Earthscan, 2011), xviii.

4. How do different elements of practices and garments contribute to the meanings and issues around clothing and why?
5. How do meanings and issues the women cultivate in clothing practices relate to (e.g. promote, challenge, are irrelevant to) perceived and actual sustainability of those experiences?
6. How might our understanding of meanings and issues around clothing contribute to a broader discussion of creating more sustainable clothing practices?

Significance and Scholarly Contribution

My questions are significant because they seek to uncover how meanings of clothing objects and practices relate to perceived and actual sustainability of those practices. Our relationships with material and immaterial dimensions of environmental conditions and social relations are in flux. As outlined above, we are facing environmental and social changes on a global scale. Given the world's rapidly expanding and shifting material cultures, it is important to look at how we negotiate clothing use with contemporary issues. My study bridges the gap between anthropological-oriented studies of material culture and everyday practices and recent examinations of sustainable consumption. It contributes to the existing literature by combining a focus on sustainability with ethnographic observations of and interviews with people about their clothing practices. These practices are bound up with not only dress's meanings, but also its sustainability. Therefore, it is important to understand how people make sense of the multiple dimensions of clothing practice.

Although there are numerous proscriptive and prescriptive guides for consumers to live more sustainably or to dress ethically, they do not reveal what the interactions with clothing

objects and processes mean. Through concrete examples and thoughtful reflections, my research offers a way to go beyond survey data and gray literature, to obtain nuanced and detailed pictures of how people live out complex, interconnecting, and occasionally contradictory issues. This research into the embodied aesthetic, affective, subjective, and symbolic dimensions of clothing unravels barriers and opportunities that are often invisible or trivialized, especially in contrast to rationalization and individualization of behaviors.⁶⁹ By understanding the fluid relationship between clothing consumption processes and perceptions of sustainability, this project enhances our understanding of the ways we can foster rich, meaningful experiences with clothing that support the wellbeing of our planet and ourselves.

My study makes a significant contribution to material culture, dress scholarship, and sustainability studies, because I explicitly collect and analyze meanings of clothing in concert with information on the associated practices and the individual's reflections on those issues. Rather than chronicling the environmental and social impacts of each lifecycle stage, I connect meanings of the consumption lifecycle to the sustainability of the lifecycle. In particular, this study is further significant to the existing scholarship because it weaves together threads of the social side of sustainability with the socially-situated symbolic meanings of clothing. Instead of examining the exploitation of garment workers (which is itself an important objective), I instead frame the challenges through the consumers' experiences, while acknowledging how entangled systems of production and consumption are.⁷⁰ This project, then, uses the social experiences of

⁶⁹ Elizabeth Shove, "Beyond the ABC: Climate Change Policy and Theories of Social Change," *Environment and Planning A* 42, no. 6 (2010): 1273–1285; Michael Maniates, "Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World?," in *Confronting Consumption*, ed. Thomas Princen, Michael Maniates, and Ken Conca (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 43–66; K. Hobson, "Competing Discourses of Sustainable Consumption: Does the 'Rationalisation of Lifestyles' Make Sense?," *Environmental Politics* 11, no. 2 (June 2002): 95–120.

⁷⁰ Ben Fine and Ellen Leopold, *The World of Consumption* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

consumers as a pivot point, highlighting how individual and social wellbeing of consumers might alter systemic conditions that reproduce unethical production practices.

These approaches—material culture and sustainable consumption studies—exist independently in the literature, but my study brings them together to see how they can inform each other and create a more productive dialogue to accelerate and facilitate sustainable clothing practices. Several scholars have pointed to this gap in the literature, arguing for an exploration of our relationship with clothing, other objects, and consumption practices.⁷¹ Through in-depth case studies, my project fleshes out the intimate details and intricate meanings that play a critical role in the reproduction of unsustainable or sustainable practices. In this way, this project addresses the problematic gap in sustainability research identified by environmental social scientist

Agyeman:

It is not the *science* of sustainability that is limiting the development of more sustainable communities, rather it is the *social science*. We know scientifically and technically how to be far more sustainable in terms of energy supply, usage and our carbon footprint, transportation, agriculture, housing etc... Figuring out *why* we're not doing it when we have good science, and more importantly *how* we could and should be doing it is squarely in the domain of social science... Purely information- or knowledge-based campaigns will not work. We need to engage with emotions, with dominant cultural values and sources of human identity.⁷²

The nuanced analysis of everyday relationships with clothes through this multi-threaded model takes on the “challenge of sustainability” in its grappling with some of the “diverse socio-

⁷¹Gibson and Stanes, “Is Green the New Black?”; Miller, “The Poverty of Morality”; Thomas Princen, Michael Maniates, and Ken Conca, eds., *Confronting Consumption* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); Dowling and Power, “Beyond McMansions and Green Homes: Thinking Household Sustainability through Materialities of Homeyness”; Sharon Zukin, *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Kate Soper, Martin H. Ryle, and Lyn Thomas, eds., *The Politics and Pleasures of Consuming Differently* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

⁷²Agyeman, “Foreword: Joined-up Research,” xvii.

cultural, economic, and moral imperatives that are rendered overt when we recognize our homes [and our closets] for the utter conceptual mess that they are.”⁷³

This project reminds us, as scholars and as consumers, to critically appreciate the intimate experiences with clothing. Furthermore, my analysis and conclusions unpack individual practice and situate it within larger systems. This micro level investigation with a systems-model approach provides designers, product developers, marketers, retailers, policymakers, and other professionals with guideposts related to what consumers find relevant and resonant. By following nuanced threads of practice, this research can help designers and others to facilitate and encourage clothing practices that not only respect the environment and makers, but also potentially improve the quality of life of the users.

Scope and Limitations

In order to probe women’s stories in-depth, I established several delimitations for this research project. First, I designed this project to focus on the consumer perspective on their experiences with clothing. I limited my discussion with participants primarily to visible apparel worn on the body, such as shirts, pants, and dresses. I did not specifically ask about outer or intimate apparel, footwear, or accessories, although participants did occasionally bring up these categories.

Within the consumer category, I investigated individual consumption practices and not household consumption patterns. Aside from establishing background and discussing the perceived sustainability of practices, I did not examine production of clothes, advertising or

⁷³ Louise Crabtree, “Discussion: Watch Where That Went—We May Need It Later: Reflections on Material Flows in and through the Home,” in *Material Geographies of Household Sustainability*, ed. Ruth Lane and Andrew Gorman Murray (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2011), 129.

marketing to which the study's participants were exposed, or what happened specifically to their clothes after they disposed of them. As much as I designed this project to consider multiple stages within the consumption lifecycle, I excluded analysis of people's experiences in current design, production, and disposal industries. Nevertheless, my analysis of the consumer's perspectives illuminates how intertwined these various systems are in lived experiences. I integrate "speculative examples"⁷⁴ from the sustainable design literature and my own analysis to explore how clothing design, production, retail, service, care, and disposal practices could address women's concerns in more sustainable ways. These discussions depend on clothing production and consumption systems working together, because neither the producer nor consumer can bear the full weight of sustainable practices.

I designed this project as an exploratory case study examining meanings between clothing and sustainability. I did not test models or hypotheses or establish statistical correlation between particular variables. Instead, I interviewed a small number (19) of women, which allowed me to probe fully each participant's thoughts, opinions, and feelings about her individual clothing practices, observe different clothing practices, and document stories about several of her garments. Although the number of participants was small, the data gleaned from each participant was rich.

I focused on adult women consumers. I initially limited the participants to women aged 25 to 54. I later broadened that age range to include women slightly older and younger (24-70) based on the responses I was receiving to my participation queries. Although members of this adult population may have been in different life stages, they were distinct from younger and

⁷⁴ Douglas B. Holt, "Constructing Sustainable Consumption: From Ethical Values to the Cultural Transformation of Unsustainable Markets," in *Communication, Consumers, and Citizens: Revisiting the Politics of Consumption*, ed. Dhavan V. Shah et al., *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* v. 644 (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2012), 236–255.

older markets. Women aged 25 to 54 are the primary segment in the apparel market and will be active consumers for 20 to 50 more years. I did not include teenagers because they have many distinct characteristics in their practices and tastes. Rather than sampling participants to achieve statistical representativeness for each age segment, my project examines the general phenomenon of meanings of clothing, which occurs over a range of ages.

I limited this project to women residing in Madison, Wisconsin and the surrounding area. Although this was a sample of convenience, American consumers also have one of the highest ecological footprints. Some of these demographic characteristics of this sample may have a large effect on clothing practices. Members of different socioeconomic classes may participate in clothing practices out of necessity, such as purchasing of second-hand clothes, while members of other groups may choose to purchase used items despite the ability or social expectation to follow other purchasing behaviors. Different occupations may require different wardrobes. Different ethnic groups or sub-cultures may cultivate different tastes and meaning systems. Even though this demographic data necessarily frames my data, I did not explicitly control for these variables. Additional factors shaping results include less fashion-forward and more liberal characteristics of a Midwestern city and its surrounding communities. As suggested by my participants, living in the Midwestern United States permits a degree of casualness and minimal trend-following that affected results—but could also offer models for sustainable practice, in which the “third coast” could be the leader of sustainable fashion.

I did not scientifically measure the environmental, economic, and social impacts of clothing behaviors in my analysis. Instead, I researched and established clothing consumption behaviors and general scales to assess their sustainability (see Appendix 9). Clothing systems and lifecycles are very complex, with multiple variables at different stages affecting the

sustainability of practices. My approach grounds my conclusions in the lived context. Although the results are not generalizable, they contribute to ongoing efforts to learn more about sustainable consumption from the user's perspective, as well as the emotional, aesthetic, and metaphorical dimensions of those experiences.

Definitions

Sustainability—At minimum, sustainability refers to the “ability to meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.” In other words, sustainability is “a dynamic process which enables all people to realize their potential and improve their quality of life in ways which simultaneously protect and enhance the earth's life support systems.”⁷⁵ I use the term to refer to the all of the associated dimensions on various global, local, and regional scales that comprise sustainability (see figure 1.1): environmental (protecting ecosystems and resources), economic (ensuring economic systems benefit all and can support themselves), social (promoting human wellbeing), and cultural (respecting and protecting human cultural diversity).⁷⁶ I also use the terms environmental, ethical, responsible, and just to refer to sustainable practices.

Consumption—Throughout this project consumption, consumer behavior, or practices refers to any behavior at any stage in the consumption process of an individual end user. These stages include searching for, purchasing, making, using, storing, evaluating, maintaining, modifying, reusing, and disposing of products and services.

⁷⁵ UK Forum for the Future quoted in Sally Jeanrenaud and W. M. Adams, *Transition to Sustainability: Towards a Humane and Diverse World* (Gland, Switzerland: International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, 2008), 10.

⁷⁶ Hawken, *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Social Movement in History Is Restoring Grace, Justice, and Beauty to the World*.

Sustainable Consumption—I use the term to mean consumption that supports or fosters the ability of “all people to realize their potential and improve their quality of life in ways which simultaneously protect and enhance the earth’s life support systems.” Sustainable consumption does not necessarily mean less consumption, but rather smarter, more strategic consumption that achieves the benefits of goods and services without undue harm. While I refer to different consumer clothing practices as sustainable, many of these will not be entirely sustainable at all of the possible levels. Instead, they may be partially environmentally or socially sustainable while striving for greater sustainability.

Dress—Roach-Higgins and Eicher define “dress” comprehensively and clearly in their essay “Dress and Identity.” Dress encompasses the varied practices covered by “appearance, clothing, ornament, adornment, and cosmetics.” The body is at the center of this classification system; every part of the body and sensory mechanism is subject to modification and supplementation.⁷⁷ While I am not necessarily using their specific categories in my analysis, I use their definition to acknowledge the breadth of objects and practices involved in dress.

Clothing—Eicher and Roach-Higgins have four categories for “Body Supplements” outside of “Body Modification:” enclosures, attachments to body, attachments to body enclosures, and hand-held objects. I use clothing to refer to the first category of enclosures. These items are worn on the body and can be wrapped, suspended, or pre-shaped configurations of material. Some examples of clothing articles I include are tops, sweaters, dresses, skirts, pants, and shorts. Although footwear, intimate apparel, and outerwear are also considered clothing in Eicher and Roach-Higgins’s definition, I focused on visible, everyday wear. I did not explicitly

⁷⁷ Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins and Eicher, Joanne B., “Dress and Identity,” in *Dress and Identity*, ed. Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins, Kim K. P Johnson, and Joanne B. Eicher (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1995), 7–18.

study consumer's meanings around non-clothing body modification or supplements, such as cosmetics, accessories, jewelry, or bags. I use the terms garment, apparel, clothing, and clothes as comparable, interchangeable terms to describe non-body modifications and non-accessory items.

Clothing Systems—To identify the systems aspect of the apparel product category, I use the terms lifecycle, production and/or consumption systems, and garment story. These terms refer to the products and practices that occur pre-, during, and post-consumption, as well as the intersections between these lifecycle stages (see figure 1.2).

Clothing Practices—I use the term clothing practices and behaviors to refer to any part of the entire clothing consumption process. In her seminal 1969 essay, Winakor discusses the process of clothing consumption as encompassing acquisition, inventory, and discard. I have broken her inventory stage into use, inventory, and maintenance.⁷⁸ I use the term clothing practices to refer broadly to both the processes of each stage and also the literal and symbolic functions of the clothing.

Clothing Practices: Acquisition—Acquisition includes any activity involving the appraisal of, purchasing, or production of objects for one's own use, in addition to the reception of gifts. These items may be new or previously used. While most items acquired will be for the owner's extended use, some may be temporary loans.

Clothing Practices: Use/Wear—The category of use refers to active wearing of clothing. Active use or wearing includes the multifaceted embodied experience of the wearer. There are many potential uses of clothing—from casual leisurewear to business attire, to

⁷⁸ Geiel Winakor, "The Process of Clothing Consumption," *Journal of Home Economics* 61, no. 8 (1969): 629–634.

occasional dress, to workout wear. The use of clothing also incorporates the decision process of selecting items from one's wardrobe to wear.

Clothing Practices: Inventory/Storage—Storage refers to how the owner stores clothing when not being worn. This can refer to clothing that the owner sees on a daily basis for the entire year or seasonally. This may also refer to clothing not considered part of the active wardrobe, i.e., clothing that may be stored separately or not seen as options for regular wear.

Clothing Practices: Maintenance—Maintenance refers to the daily and occasional tasks completed by the owner to keep clothes in usable condition. This may include home or commercial laundering, drying, pressing, and dry cleaning in addition to mending or altering clothing articles.

Clothing Practices: Disposal—Disposal incorporates both the selection process of what and when to discard clothing as well as the disposal action. Disposal options range from throwing away in regular garbage, reusing as rags, exchanging with others, selling in consignment shops, or donating to profit or non-profit second-hand clothing stores.

Sustainable Clothing Systems—If clothing is entirely sustainable, the production, consumption, and post-consumption must each be sustainable. This includes the energy and resources used, any energy or material waste, effect on ecosystems, the working conditions, the physical and emotional welfare of people, the company's role in the community, and other environmental, social, or economic issues at each stage in the lifecycle. Different processes include sourcing of fiber, design of textiles, production of textiles, production of other materials such as threads and buttons, applications of finishes or other treatments, production of garments, distribution and transport of components and garments (between any of these stages), packaging for distribution and selling, marketing of products within industry and to consumers, operations

of warehouses and retail locations, consumer use (including the stages defined above), second life of products as consumer products (used clothing markets), final removal of textiles and other components from consumer use (such as composting, reusing in other products, or recycling as opposed to putting in a landfill). Most current practices will not be entirely sustainable. However, my results highlight components of clothing consumption practices that could foster or a sustainable clothing system, as well as explore dimensions that emerge as barriers.

Organization of Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into two parts. Part I introduces the project, establishes background information on challenges to sustainable consumption, and describes the research design. The following literature review chapter outlines research in the field of consumer behavior and dress and material culture studies. The final chapter in Part I describes the interview and object-based research design of the study, as well as discusses qualitative methods in dress and material culture research.

Part II presents descriptive results, analytical discussion, and conclusions based on the interview data. First, I introduce the participants in the project, offering a brief summary of their clothing practices and attitudes towards sustainability. This descriptive chapter answers the first two research questions about women's clothing practices. Then, I preview the interdisciplinary Web of Practice model that encapsulates the results of the study and that situates individual consumption in a broader systems perspective. The following three chapters, answering research questions about women's meanings and issues around clothing, analyze practices through three frames in which distinct, but intertwining, themes surface. The first of these, found in chapter six, interprets how women balance embodied and multi-sensory experiences of wearing clothes

given social contexts and changes over time. Chapter seven explores how women negotiate multiple quality evaluations that are situated in physical condition and social context alongside individual goals, cultural norms, and industry infrastructure related to time, money, and skills. The last discussion chapter reflects on how women perceive how garment stories beyond their immediate experience are distanced or intertwined with personal stories, meanings, connections, and relationships. The final chapter offers a brief overview of the project and its findings. It elaborates on the Web of Practice model through a series of suggested strategies for sustainable clothing practice synthesized from previous chapters, thus answering the final research question about how to use meanings to enhance sustainability conversations. The suggestions attend to the embodied aesthetic, affective, subjective, and symbolic threads of practice along the many thematic axes examined in the preceding chapters.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This review categorizes the literature into three primary categories. The initial two sections establish the state of scholarship addressing the problems and opportunities of sustainable consumption. The first of these reviews relevant research in consumer behavior in general or non-clothing practices. The other focuses on research specifically on sustainable practices of clothing. The former establishes the larger context for my research, while the latter provides a more in-depth look at the product category I studied. The third section surveys key works on meanings of objects and dress that guided the framing of my research questions. In Part II, I synthesize additional interdisciplinary theoretical tools that I used in my analysis.

Consumer Behavior and Sustainability

There have been many studies researching sustainability in relation to consumption. Researchers in various disciplines, such as environmental psychology, sociology, human ecology, marketing, consumer behavior, and textile and apparel studies have conducted research into sustainable consumption. Researchers have used both qualitative and quantitative methods—from in-depth interviews and focus groups to value assessment scales and natural experiments—to understand why consumers do or do not engage in sustainable consumption.

Research has often focused on either environmental or social dimensions of sustainability, although I synthesize these dimensions in my approach, rather than the interconnections between these dimensions. Beginning in the 1970s with the rise of

environmental awareness in mainstream American culture, consumer science research has sought to explain when and why consumers do or do not pursue environmentally responsible behavior.¹ In the 1990s, with the increasing exposure of sweatshop labor conditions of major clothing brands, such as Nike, researchers began investigating people's awareness of and attitudes toward socially responsible consumption practices.² Research reveals that the disconnect between these two areas is not just a symptom of scholarly approaches, but also corresponds to separation of issues from some consumers' perspectives. For instance, when asking people for a definition of sustainable development, some respondents did not connect environmental, social, and economic aspects in their answers.³ While there are many consumer behavior research studies that do not explicitly link social and environmental concerns, scholars are increasingly connecting these two elements of sustainability—either by studying both within a single research study or by presenting issues together in a book or anthology.⁴ As stated in the preceding chapter, my project continues efforts to fill these gaps.

Within both qualitative and quantitative studies, researchers have sought to explain the variables that affect sustainable consumption. I will discuss different studies in which scholars have attempted to isolate several variables, such as knowledge, values, attitudes, beliefs, and

¹ Terry Newholm and Deirdre Shaw, "Editorial: Studying the Ethical Consumer: A Review of Research," *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 6, no. 5 (2007): 253–270; Sara M. Butler and Sally Francis, "The Effects of Environmental Attitudes on Apparel Purchasing Behavior," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 15, no. 2 (1997): 76–85.

² For a literature review on the rise of social responsibility specifically within the clothing and textiles field, see Marsha A. Dickson and Molly Eckman, "Social Responsibility: The Concept as Defined by Apparel and Textile Scholars," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 24, no. 3 (July 2006): 178–191.

³ Catherine Rousseau and Christian Bontinckx, "Testing Propositions Towards Sustainable Consumption Among Consumers," in *Sustainable Consumption, Ecology, and Fair Trade*, ed. Edwin Zaccāi (London: Routledge, 2007), 73–90.

⁴ For an example of this synthesis, see Ruth Lane and Andrew Gorman Murray, eds., *Material Geographies of Household Sustainability* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2011); Tania Lewis and Emily Potter, eds., *Ethical Consumption: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Edwin Zaccāi, ed., *Sustainable Consumption, Ecology, and Fair Trade* (London: Routledge, 2007); Tim Jackson, ed., *The Earthscan Reader in Sustainable Consumption* (London: Earthscan, 2006); Thomas Princen, Michael Maniates, and Ken Conca, eds., *Confronting Consumption* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

norms. However, studies consistently find gaps between stated beliefs and actual behaviors. Scholars have sought to address these contradictions by combining variables into single theoretical models, such as values-beliefs-norms or attitude-behavior-context. Researchers have also examined the role identity construction plays in sustainable consumption choices, leaving room to address these concerns from holistic, material culture and practiced-based approaches explored in Part II.

Despite the ever-increasing complexity of information, consumers have increasing exposure to and access to information. Even though they have the opportunity to make informed decisions, they are not taking advantage of using that information. Several studies have determined that access to and awareness of information does not necessarily lead to behaviors in line with that information. For instance, in 2004 Carrigan et al. conducted interviews with older consumers (over 50) who acknowledged that they were aware of social and environmental breaches of companies, yet did not regularly consider that information in their purchases. Instead, the participants prioritized price and quality as determining factors for their purchases. However, the respondents did suggest that labels at the point of sale and improved reliability of information about products and companies would facilitate their ability to choose sustainable options.⁵ Their article reveals that consumers do not consistently behave in line with knowledge and attitudes, and often are not as informed as marketers expect.⁶ Newholm and Shaw confirmed in 2007 that consumers are unlikely ever to be fully informed about the environmental and social

⁵ Marylyn Carrigan, Isabelle Szmigin, and Joanne Wright, "Shopping for a Better World? An Interpretative Study of the Potential for Ethical Consumption Within the Older Market," *Journal of Consumer Marketing* 21, no. 6 (2004): 401–417.

⁶ Marylyn Carrigan and Ahmad Atalla, "The Myth of the Ethical Consumer: Do Ethics Matter in Purchase Behavior?," *Journal of Consumer Marketing* 18, no. 7 (2001): 560–577.

conditions of products and services.⁷ This research suggests that it is not just individual information processing and value activation, but attitudes, perceptions of, and the actual conditions of many contextual factors and social norms. On the other hand, Goleman argues that it is possible to perform lifecycle assessments on products and to communicate that information to consumers.⁸ Although providing more information to consumers in an easy, efficient manner may be important, it is not clear that consumers would prioritize that information, given that consumers are not using the information they currently have. Cherrier suggests that too much information can overwhelm, burden, and paralyze one's efforts to consume sustainably.⁹

Based on a recent review of research on ethical consumption, Newholm and Shaw argue that it is not sufficient to explore ethical consumption as a rational, information-based decision-making processes; that approach cannot explain the meaning behind consumer behaviors.¹⁰ My research also finds this information gap across participants and provides additional perspectives on how to address it. Potential approaches de-emphasize consumer individual choice (that often takes for granted a nonexistent rational agent) based on knowing environmental or social implications.¹¹ By further studying how consumers are making sense of their interactions with clothes, this project highlights salient aspects to help avoid overwhelming consumers with vast quantities of complex information and craft meaningful product experiences.

⁷ Newholm and Shaw, "Editorial: Studying the Ethical Consumer: A Review of Research."

⁸ Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: How Knowing the Hidden Impacts of What We Buy Can Change Everything* (New York: Broadway Books, 2009).

⁹ H el ene Cherrier, "Ethical Consumption Practices: Co-production of Self-expression and Social Recognition," *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 6, no. 5 (2007): 321–335.

¹⁰ Newholm and Shaw, "Editorial: Studying the Ethical Consumer: A Review of Research."

¹¹ Douglas B. Holt, "Constructing Sustainable Consumption: From Ethical Values to the Cultural Transformation of Unsustainable Markets," in *Communication, Consumers, and Citizens: Revisiting the Politics of Consumption*, ed. Dhavan V. Shah et al., *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* v. 644 (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2012), 236–255.

Carrigan and Atalla's research with focus groups on ethical purchase behavior provides further evidence that "consumers are passive ethical shoppers rather than active consumer ethicists."¹² Although their study did not focus on any single product or service, the authors interpreted participants' comments on style, image, fashion, convenience, and price as indicative of a willingness to participate in less than ethical consumption for clothing. On the other hand, participants did not emphasize those elements as much for food choices; they were more likely to buy environmentally or socially responsibly produced food. These results suggest that it is important to examine sustainable practices in individual product categories. Carrigan and Attalla conclude by urging companies and marketers to facilitate ethical consumption rather than relying on consumers to pursue initiate and sustain ethical choices. While the authors suggest several barriers for the marketers to address—such as lack of interest, time pressures, misguided intentions, and lack of information—their study also suggests that marketers could benefit from increased understanding of what meaning consumers are deriving from their consumption. Marketers can then enhance those elements in future campaigns.¹³

Because of these trends toward disregarding knowledge, this project's qualitative examination of consumers' beliefs, motivations, and explanations for their sustainable or unsustainable behaviors contributes information and perspectives that future marketers and designers can use to increase sustainable consumption. My research helps unpack the intersections of individual practices and the context in which these practices occur to examine how consumers are both actively and passively making choices based on complex, dynamic non-

¹² Carrigan and Atalla, "The Myth of Ethical Consumer," 568.

¹³ Carrigan and Atalla, "The Myth of Ethical Consumer."

environmental and social justice factors.¹⁴ My findings confirm the suggestions that the apparel industry needs to play a role in engaging consumers in “active ethical consumption,” pushing us to consider both internal and external factors for enabling sustainable consumption.

There have been several studies across disciplines—from marketing to consumer behavior to psychology—to determine internal variables that correlate with or explain sustainable consumption. Using the Schwartz Value Scale (SVS), demographic information, and data on the frequency of fair trade purchases, Doran found that certain values correlated with fair trade consumption while demographic information did not. Loyal and intermittent fair trade buyers ranked Universalism, Benevolence, and Self-Direction values as most important. She conjectures that universal and benevolence values connect concern for nature and human welfare, which would justify fair trade purchases. She also proposes that fair trade consumers rank self-direction as a significant value because ethnic-inspired products may show a willingness to break from the mainstream and relate to Curious, Creative, Independent, and Freedom values.¹⁵ Although the study demonstrates the importance of values as they relate to purchase decisions, it does not explore the many other factors, specific categories of products, or different stages of consumption. Rather than testing the correlation of specific values with behavior, my project qualitatively explores experiences and attitudes women prioritized in clothing practices and why—suggesting that both self and other-oriented relationship-centered

¹⁴ Elizabeth Shove, Mika Pantzar, and Matt Watson, *The Dynamics of Social Practice: Everyday Life and How It Changes* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012); Roberta Sassatelli, *Consumer Culture: History, Theory and Politics* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2007); Kersty Hobson, “Thinking Habits into Action: The Role of Knowledge and Process in Questioning Household Consumption Practices,” *Local Environment* 8, no. 1 (2003): 95–112; Tim Jackson, “Consuming Paradise? Towards a Social and Cultural Psychology of Sustainable Consumption,” in *The Earthscan Reader in Sustainable Consumption*, ed. Tim Jackson (London: Earthscan, 2006), 367–395; Princen, Maniates, and Conca, *Confronting Consumption*; Lane and Murray, *Material Geographies of Household Sustainability*.

¹⁵ Caroline Josephine Doran, “The Role of Personal Values in Fair Trade Consumption,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 84 (2009): 549–563.

meanings are at play across practices. So the questions emerge: How do we cultivate values that support responsible, ethical consumption? How do we make ethical consumption relevant or the norm for consumers with different values?

Stern et al.'s work advances the theories explaining environmentally significant behavior through focusing on internal values. According to value-belief-norm theory (VBN), generalized, stable values influence environmentally-specific beliefs, which then activate pro-environmental personal norms, which result in environmentally-significant behavior. In developing VBN theory, the researchers tested six theoretical models explaining environmental behavior: values, beliefs, norms, cultural biases, post-materialist values, and spiritual or religious worldviews. They found that personal norms directly affect behavior while values and beliefs indirectly affect other components. They also found that degree of significance varied depending on which environmental behaviors they were analyzing.¹⁶

Even though Stern et al. claim that VBN successfully predicts environmental behavior, they acknowledge that each component is influenced by variables not addressed in the theory. The authors propose that other social-psychological theories may contribute additional understanding. They suggest further research into both identity construction as well as the context of action that may impede or foster behavior.¹⁷ This combined approach offers a starting point for this project from which to understand holistically why people engage in various clothing practices and how they make sense of their experiences.

¹⁶ Paul C. Stern et al., "A Value-Belief-Norm Theory of Support for Social Movements: The Case of Environmentalism," *Human Ecology Review* 6, no. 2 (1999): 81–97; Paul C. Stern, "Toward a Coherent Theory of Environmentally Significant Behavior," *Journal of Social Issues* 56, no. 3 (2000): 407–424.

¹⁷ Stern et al., "A Value-Belief-Norm Theory of Support for Social Movements: The Case of Environmentalism"; Johanna Moisander and Sinikka Pesonen, "Narratives of Sustainable Ways of Living: Constructing the Self and the Other as a Green Consumer," *Management Decision* 40, no. 4 (2002): 329–342; John Connolly and Andrea Prothero, "Green Consumption: Life Politics, Risk, and Contradictions," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 8, no. 1 (2008): 117–145.

Stern's work is also important because it emphasizes a range of environmentally-significant behavior: private-sphere environmentalism as individual and household consumption in contrast to activism, other public behaviors, and individual behaviors within groups. Even within the private-sphere category, however, individuals approach various behaviors differently.¹⁸ Because of these variations across the motivations toward and effects of behaviors, goods, and services, isolating clothing practices will contribute to how we understand the constellation of consumer choices. My research confirms that there are consumption changes in individual practices, but it also points to dimensions of apparel industry, social norms, economic systems, etc. that could change to enable sustainable clothing practices in the private sphere. Moreover, individuals may need to take on more public-activist roles in addition to their role as consumer.

Stern further identifies two types of environmentally-significant behavior: impact- and intent-oriented. Impact-oriented behavior emphasizes the effects of behavior, that is, how the consumption behavior alters the availability of resources or the structure of ecosystems. Intent-oriented behavior emphasizes the consumer's purpose or goal, that is, how he or she intends to benefit or not harm the environment. Intentions may or may not correspond to the actual impacts of the consumer's behavior. Research on this dimension seeks to understand the beliefs and motives underlying behavior, and may offer insights into how consumers craft meaningful experiences and why they believe those practices are sustainable or not.¹⁹ My study bridges these categories by considering possible social or environmental effects of people's behaviors through the frame of consumers' qualitative, subjective experiences.

¹⁸ Stern, "Toward a Coherent Theory of Environmentally Significant Behavior."

¹⁹ Ibid.

The studies reviewed thus far have been skirting around context. Guagnano et al. developed the attitude-behavior-context model (ABC) to predict the gap between expressed attitude and behavior. In mapping the relative strengths and valences of an attitude and context, the model explains when the sustainable behavior will occur.

- If the context is positive or neutral, one is more likely to see behavior regardless of attitude
- When there are lower strengths of attitude, context will exert more influence and be more predictive of whether behavior will occur
- When there are greater strengths of attitude, context will exert less influence and be less predictive of whether behavior will occur
- When there are lower strengths of context, attitude will exert more influence and be more predictive of whether behavior will occur
- When there are greater strengths of context, attitude will exert less influence and be less predictive of whether behavior will occur
- If attitude and context are close to balancing each other out, there needs to be less adjustment of one (or both) to change behavior
- If attitude and context are far from balancing each other out, there needs to be more adjustment of one (or both) to change behavior

In Guagnano et al.'s study on curbside recycling, when the context was favorable (available curbside bins), people with and without pro-environmental values both recycled more. When discussing context, both Stern et al. and Guagnano et al., mention that this can refer to *actual* or *perceived* elements.²⁰ Changing the actual external conditions or perception of them can affect beliefs and awareness (and attitude formation) and the likelihood of sustainable behavior. This study considers how internal variables interact with external elements. Through focusing on individuals' relationships with clothes, I am able to consider the contextual elements that the participants identify as salient to their behaviors. Increased understanding of the consumer

²⁰ Gregory A. Guagnano, "Influences on Attitude-Behavior Relationships: A Natural Experiment with Curbside Recycling," *Environment and Behavior* 27 (1995): 699–718; Stern et al., "A Value-Belief-Norm Theory of Support for Social Movements: The Case of Environmentalism."

perspective can contribute to reshaping the context of clothing practices—such as modifying apparel design to emphasize sustainable elements that consumers identify as resonant.

ABC gives us a model to understand the relationship between attitude and context, and community-based social marketing gives us a toolbox to address it. Bridging internal psychological dimensions and external contextual factors, McKenzie-Mohr and Smith's work on using community-based social marketing to encourage sustainable consumption describe studies in which participants who received extensive instruction on a behavior, such as energy or water efficiency, did not change their behaviors. Even the author describes his own infractions against what he knew to be best for the environment, such as choosing to taxi to work instead of bicycle. Many of their suggestions to address these behavior gaps emphasize external barriers, such as access, availability, convenience, and incentives.²¹ My research on consumer perceptions of benefits and barriers, integrated with an understanding of what meanings the consumers are creating around their clothing practices, documents consumer perceptions within the clothing category to address these behavior gaps.

Although I did not research branding specifically, it emerged as an important external variable in participants' relationships with garments. In Nicholls and Lee's study of ten to thirteen-year-olds, the preteens emphasized the importance of strong conventional brands and the lack of brand image for fair trade products. Respondents suggested that it was both easier and socially preferable to purchase conventionally branded products, despite awareness of the social consequences of choosing non-fair trade products. The authors suggest that, in addition to providing information, strengthening fair trade brands could foster sustainable consumption

²¹ Doug McKenzie-Mohr and William Smith, *Fostering Sustainable Behavior: An Introduction to Community-based Social Marketing* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 1999).

choices. Some of their suggestions include emphasizing the connection between producer and consumer, quality, exclusivity, and uniqueness.²² Through exploring adult women consumers' values and beliefs about sustainable clothing, I also found that branding issues and these proposed solutions might be meaningful in their clothing practices and worthwhile to promote.

Zepeda and Deal integrate VBN and ABC models into their qualitative research of organic and local food consumption that integrates consumers' perspectives, labor and business practices, and environmental effects of food systems.²³ Zepeda and Deal find both theories to be relevant in understanding sustainable consumption, but they also suggest some gaps, demonstrating the continued need to investigate through qualitative interviewing why consumers choose to engage in sustainable behaviors. The authors introduce several other components to theorize more comprehensively why consumers choose local and organic foods: knowledge (K), information seeking (IS), habit (H), and demographics (D). Compiling these elements, the authors propose VBN-ABC-D-KISH, or "Alphabet Theory," as a way to consider holistically the multifaceted and interrelated dimensions of people's participation in sustainable consumption.²⁴

Both attitude and context are important factors in clothing consumption—from environmental and social justice values to aesthetics and style concerns, asserting self-identity, operating within fashion norms, and maintaining garments. In my research, I asked participants about their attitudes towards clothing practices and objects as well as the contexts in which they enact them—such as disadvantages and advantages of clothing maintenance. Even though I did

²²Alex Nicholls and Nick Lee, "Purchase Decision-making in Fair Trade and the Ethical Purchase 'Gap:' 'Is There a Fair Trade Twix?'," *Journal of Strategic Marketing* 14, no. 4 (December 2006): 369–386; Nathaniel Dafydd Beard, "The Branding of Ethical Fashion and the Consumer: A Luxury Niche or Mass-market Reality?," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 12, no. 4 (2008): 447–468; Carrigan, Szmigin, and Wright, "Shopping for a Better World?"

²³ Lydia Zepeda and David Deal, "Organic and Local Food Consumer Behavior: Alphabet Theory," *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 33, no. 6 (November 2009): 697–705.

²⁴ Ibid.

not explicitly test Zepeda and Deal's theory, I strove to analyze my qualitative interview and observation data from a holistic perspective. Paralleling feedback loops outlined in their model, social practice theory further unpacks the multidirectional influence of habits, behaviors, attitude, and context and consumers' perception of them. Social practice theory examines "links between elements of practice", "loosely bundled patterns of practices", and integrated and codependent systems of practices. Shove et al. have grouped elements under three overarching categories: materials (e.g. things, infrastructure, technologies, materials that make up things, the body), competences (e.g. skills, abstract and practical knowledge, techniques), and meanings (e.g. symbolic meanings, ideas, beliefs, attitudes, emotions).²⁵ My analysis confirms the importance of considering attitudes in relation to context and in particular both conscious perceptions and taken-for-granted dimensions of context.

Given that so many studies have identified gaps between knowledge, values, beliefs, and attitudes compared against behaviors, some researchers have studied how consumers make sense of the disjuncture. Szmigin et al. explain how the trade-offs consumers make between environmental and social concerns with variables such as price, quality, aesthetics, or social interactions create cognitive dissonance in which the consumer's behavior violates his or her self-concept. Respondents demonstrated flexibility in accommodating these discrepancies, balancing their needs and desires with sustainability interests.²⁶ I focused on how a small sample of women make sense of similar complexities specifically in their clothing consumption—in

²⁵ Shove, Pantzar, and Watson, *The Dynamics of Social Practice*; Alan Warde, "Consumption and Theories of Practice," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 5, no. 2 (2005): 131–153; Elizabeth Shove, *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience: The Social Organization of Normality* (Oxford: Berg, 2003).

²⁶ Isabelle Szmigin, Marylyn Carrigan, and Morven G. McEachern, "The Conscious Consumer: Taking a Flexible Approach to Ethical Behavior," *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 33, no. 2 (2009): 224–231.

terms of the environmental and social impacts, consistency across stages in the consumption process, as well as meanings they derive from these experiences.

Cherrier characterizes these discrepancies and contradictions as a condition of postmodern ethics: “In a constantly changing and unpredictable world, postmodern ethics, rather than being fixed and predetermined, become plural and nonlinear.”²⁷ Although postmodern ethics involve active participants creating their own moral landscapes and lifestyles, Cherrier argues that ethical consumption is not a solely individualistic endeavor. Social distinction and collective identity also influence behaviors. Several projects reiterate the importance of moving beyond individualized forms of consumption—which often manifests in solitary acts of shopping, or laundering and mending. They encourage creating spaces and actions that foster explicit, public opportunities for sustainable consumption.²⁸

Although I did not examine a particular social movement or group, my analysis confirms the significance of social relationships and interactions in consumption practices. Moreover, clothing marks a blurred and permeable boundary between private, intimate consumption and public expression. By examining the private acts of selecting and maintaining clothes alongside the public act of wearing clothes, I unravel individual and social aspects of sustainable consumption within a specific product category and explore an alternative ethics of care to guide clothing practices. Because clothing becomes a part of embodied self, consumers’ distant, abstracted or close, intimate relationship to their apparel’s production becomes a constructive component of sustainable practices.

²⁷ Cherrier, “Ethical Consumption Practices: Co-production of Self-expression and Social Recognition,” 321.

²⁸ William Low and Eileen Davenport, “To Boldly Go... Exploring Ethical Space to Repoliticise Ethical Consumption and Fair Trade,” *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 6, no. 5 (2007): 336–348; Neill McKee et al., eds., *Involving People, Evolving Behaviour* (Penang, Malaysia; New York: Southbound Sdn Bhd; United Nations Children’s Fund, 2000); Jackson, *The Earthscan Reader in Sustainable Consumption*; Alastair Fuad-Luke, *Design Activism: Beautiful Strangeness for a Sustainable World* (London: Earthscan, 2009).

Clothing Practices and Sustainability

Textile and apparel scholars, designers, and companies are increasingly turning their attention to sustainability issues—ranging from social issues such as sweatshop labor and fair trade to environmental issues such as the recycling of textiles and use of organic versus conventional cotton. As documented in the preceding chapter, there have been a flurry of lifecycle assessment reports and ethical-oriented clothing lines over the past decade. There are three strands, or gaps, in the existing literature, that I sought to address in this project. (1) The majority of these studies have isolated either social responsibility or environmental issues, rather than integrating them as a single issue. (2) Research projects have focused their attention primarily on the acquisition stage in clothing consumption, with some attention to disposal practices. There are reports suggesting changes in use and maintenance in addition to shopping and disposal patterns. Nevertheless, relatively few quantitative or qualitative research studies consider sustainability issues in relation to how people are use or maintain clothes. 3) Despite the strong body of literature within dress studies on the meanings of dress, the field is now increasingly working to bring those stories into sustainability conversations.²⁹

²⁹ For reports on the environmental and social effects of various stages in clothing consumption and actions consumers can take to alleviate them, see Julian M. Allwood et al., *Well Dressed? The Present and Future Sustainability of Clothing and Textiles in the United Kingdom* (Cambridge: Institute for Manufacturing, 2006); Michael Collins and Simon Aumônier, *Streamlined Life Cycle Assessment of Two Marks & Spencer Plc Apparel Products* (Oxford: Environmental Resources Management, February 2002), <http://researchingsustainability.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/streamlined-lca-of-2-marks-spencer-pls-apparel-products.pdf>. For popular non-fiction reports on the apparel industry, see Elizabeth L. Cline, *Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion* (Penguin, 2012); Lucy Siegle, *To Die For: Is Fashion Wearing Out the World?* (London: Fourth Estate, 2011). For popular non-fiction guidebooks on clothing consumption, see Tamsin Blanchard, *Green Is the New Black: How to Change the World with Style* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2007); Sophie Uliano, *Gorgeously Green: 8 Simple Steps to an Earth-friendly Life* (New York: Collins, 2008), <http://www.gorgeouslygreen.com/>; Christie Matheson, *Green Chic: Saving the Earth in Style* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2008).

There has been an influx of both textbooks and anthologies published on sustainability topics.³⁰ Many of these newer publications are glossy designer-centric samplers, highlighting the innovative design, production, and marketing of sustainable products and minimally mentioning consumer experiences with the new products or fashion systems.³¹ Recent academically-oriented book length publications, often in anthology format, allow authors to address both environmental and social issues through historical analyses of fashion to marketing strategies to technological developments.³² These texts represent a significant movement in the clothing design and apparel industry, but they are outside the main thrust of my study, and in this section I concentrate on research into consumer behavior and perspectives.

Numerous studies examine clothing purchasing behavior in relation to awareness of and attitudes towards conditions of clothing production, notably sweatshops versus fair trade. Several studies I review here—which use various methods such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, survey analysis, Thematic Apperception Tests (TAT), and questionnaires—present very similar findings centered on several key issues: (1) access to and awareness of information, (2) effect of information, and (3) importance of other internal and (4) external contextual factors. As other consumer behavior studies not focused on clothing suggest, these too demonstrate that consumers are often unaware of or disregard information about the environmental or social

³⁰ Marsha A. Dickson, Suzanne Loker, and Molly Eckman, *Social Responsibility in the Global Apparel Industry* (New York: Fairchild Books, 2009); V. Ann Paulins and Julie L. Hillery, *Ethics in the Fashion Industry* (New York: Fairchild Books, 2009).

³¹ Sandy Black, *Eco-chic: The Fashion Paradox* (London: Black Dog, 2008); Sass Brown, *Eco Fashion* (London: Laurence King, 2010); Christine Anna Bierhals, *Fashion: Prêt-à-porter, Haute Couture, Street Wear, Casual, Green Designed* (Ludwigsburg, Germany: Avedition, 2008); Safia Minney, *Naked Fashion: The New Sustainable Fashion Revolution* (Oxford: New Internationalist Publications Ltd, 2011).

³² Janet Hethorn and Connie Ulasewicz, eds., *Sustainable Fashion: Why Now? A Conversation About Issues, Practices, and Possibilities* (New York: Fairchild Books, 2008); Kate Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Design Journeys* (London: Earthscan, 2008); Kate Fletcher and Lynda Grose, *Fashion and Sustainability: Design for Change* (London: Laurence King Publishers, 2012); Gwilt Alison and Timo Rissanen, eds., *Shaping Sustainable Fashion: Changing the Way We Make and Use Clothes* (London: Earth Pledge, 2011).

consequences of products and behaviors. Instead, consumers prioritize financial, social, physical, and aesthetic issues over production issues.

Joergens conducted two focus groups in Europe with respondents in their early twenties about their awareness of issues, effect of information, beliefs, and attitudes towards ethical fashion, and clothing purchasing behavior. Although her definition of ethical fashion included both environmental and social components, the respondents themselves minimized the environmental issues. Joergens's findings reveal, "When it comes to fashion purchase, the majority of consumers are more interested in their own personal fashion needs than the needs of others... It is assumed that consumers only care about certain kind of ethical issues and in particular to the ones which influence the consumer directly."³³ Instead of basing decisions on social or environmental effects that may not directly or immediately benefit or harm the consumer, consumers value fashion, style, and cost among other factors. Indeed, studies suggest that consumers select organic cotton not because it is good for the planet or workers, but because it may protect the health of the wearer, a finding that my research corroborates.³⁴

By showing respondents an image of a woman in a store examining a garment with a "No Sweat" information label, Rudell elicited responses that illustrate a complex reaction to information about garments at the point of purchase. Respondents stated the woman in the picture was probably confused or skeptical of the label and needed to consider other elements such as cost, style, or brand over the "No Sweat" label information. Rudell suggests that although consumers tended to state positive attitudes and intentions to buy socially responsible

³³ Catrin Joergens, "Ethical Fashion: Myth or Future Trend?," *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* 10, no. 3 (2006): 369.

³⁴ Joergens, "Ethical Fashion"; Gwendolyn Hustvedt and Marsha A. Dickson, "Consumer Likelihood of Purchasing Organic Cotton Apparel: Influence of Attitudes and Self-identity," *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* 13, no. 1 (2009): 49–65.

(i.e. sweatshop-free or fair trade) apparel, a qualitative analysis revealed much more complex negotiations amongst needs, desires, attitudes, information, and the object itself.³⁵ My research documents similar processes revealing subtleties about embodied experiences, multiple goals, and connections to production. I add to Rudell's findings by including post-acquisition practices.

Through in-depth interviews, Valor also explores the rich and nuanced negotiations consumers engage in when purchasing clothing. She explains how consumers use neutralization strategies, as described in cognitive dissonance theory, to explain why they disregarded information or prioritized other factors. For instance, by stressing conflicting identities, respondents explained that ethical purchases were not viable if they challenged their social or individual identity. Additionally, respondents would minimize their control in the situation by denying availability of products. Valor demonstrates the utility of the neutralization strategies and cognitive dissonance theory to explain the justifications for a single behavior, rather than predict behavior.³⁶

People attach different meanings to these different activities and the selected clothes. For example, people wear clothes for different occasions—such as to work or out to go out with friends. The symbolic social meaning tied to appearance in these different situations is highly relevant when consumers are purchasing clothes. Furthermore, people use clothing to express and construct their self-identities, both as members of social groups and as unique individuals. Because people want to physically and emotionally look and feel good in garments, consumers prioritize the physical characteristics of clothing artifacts—such as fit, comfort, appropriateness

³⁵ Frederica Rudell, "Shopping with a Social Conscience: Consumer Attitudes Toward Sweatshop Labor," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 24, no. 4 (October 2006): 282–296.

³⁶ Carmen Valor, "The Influence of Information About Labour Abuses on Consumer Choice of Clothes: A Grounded Theory Approach," *Journal of Marketing Management* 23, no. 7–8 (2007): 675–695.

for situation, style, and colors—instead of invisible, intangible production conditions.³⁷ Research shows how women use these factors strategically when purchasing clothing marketed as socially responsible. They do not accept any garment that may have been ethically produced or traded. My research confirms the importance of these variables across practices and for consumers with different attitudes towards clothing and sustainability.

Shaw et al.'s study on the impact of clothing production conditions on purchases yields important insights into consumers' relationships with clothing, primarily in the purchase stage. The authors conducted semi-structured interviews with 262 respondents who had expressed a high level of intention to avoid sweatshop clothing. They identify three main impediments to buying sweatshop-free clothing: 1) access to ethical clothing especially in desired styles, 2) lack of information regarding sweatshop use of most brands or retailers, and 3) the price of ethically produced clothing. The results indicate that external contextual variables create an attitude-behavior gap. The respondents' answers provide insight into how consumers feel about their clothing practices. For example, some are willing to invest time into researching companies while others select from easily accessible shops. People also have various uses for clothes—such as work or leisurewear—for which consumers expect certain styles.³⁸ My study builds on this holistic understanding how consumers make meaning from their engagement with clothing artifacts. Using open-ended interviews with fewer respondents, I examine other clothing practices as a whole system alongside a broader sustainability definition.

³⁷ Marsha A. Dickson and Mary A. Littrell, "Socially Responsible Behaviour: Values and Attitudes of the Alternative Trading Organisation Consumer," *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* 1, no. 1 (1996): 50–69; Soyoung Kim, Mary A. Littrell, and Jennifer L. Paff Ogle, "The Relative Importance of Social Responsibility as a Predictor of Purchase Intentions for Clothing," *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* 3, no. 3 (1999): 207–218; Joergens, "Ethical Fashion"; Rudell, "Shopping with a Social Conscience"; Valor, "The Influence of Information About Labour Abuses on Consumer Choice of Clothes: A Grounded Theory Approach."

³⁸ Deirdre Shaw et al., "Fashion Victim: The Impact of Fair Trade Concerns on Clothing Choice," *Journal of Strategic Marketing* 14, no. 4 (December 2006): 427–440.

Dickson and Littrell compared three groups of consumers to further elucidate attitudes and purchase evaluative criteria for fair trade products from alternative trading organizations (ATOs). ATOs refer to usually non-profit organizations that import handcrafted clothing and other items with the purpose of helping the poor through providing employment. The authors explore the differences between those who purchase clothing from ATOs, those who purchase other products from ATOs, and those who do not purchase products from ATOs by comparing these consumers using questionnaires that measured purchase behavior, personal values, and clothing evaluative criteria. The perception of quality is the most discriminating variable between the groups. On the other hand, the researchers find little difference in the personal values of the different consumer groups.³⁹ This study is significant because it emphasizes that the attitudes people have toward *objects* is the one of the most significant factors in their sustainable clothing choices. My project builds on this finding by further probing how consumers interpret and engage with material characteristics of clothing artifacts, in addition to how they make meaning around them.

Dickson and Littrell's other work on consumers of ethnic apparel focused more narrowly on identifying what qualities of clothing consumers found most desirable. Questionnaires measured criteria across a broad range of apparel characteristics—including ethnic styles, creativity, uniqueness, dramatic looks, variety, currently fashionable, colors, surface embellishment, fabrics, quality, durability, sizes, and fit. The authors isolate two key market segments with distinct aesthetic preferences: "Creative Ethnic" group prefer dramatic looks through ethnic styling, and "Plain and Simple" prefer dark colors in neutral or blue colors with

³⁹ Marsha A. Dickson and Mary A. Littrell, "Consumers of Clothing from Alternative Trading Organizations: Societal Attitudes and Purchase Evaluative Criteria," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 15, no. 1 (1997): 20–33.

little embellishment. These consumers vary in their aesthetic tastes but are similar in their personal values and attitudes towards ATOs. Another fashion marketing study confirms that use of clothing as a marker of unique individuality is one of the most significant predictors of supporting and purchasing from ATOs.⁴⁰ Therefore, this research reinforces the importance of aesthetically engaging with clothing artifacts. Although I did not seek out discrete consumer segments based on aesthetic preferences, I elaborate on these findings by exploring how aesthetic experiences and other clothing criteria presented both challenges and opportunities to the sustainability of clothing practices.

Charbonneau offers a distinctive approach to investigating socially responsible clothing purchasing by conducting focus groups with women who buy and wear secondhand clothes. Charbonneau's data reveals how consumers integrate environmental and social aspects of sustainability into multiple stages of clothing practices—such as use, maintenance, and disposal. The resulting overlap in environmental and social concerns and consequences signify the natural, organic connection between the two in sustainable clothing practices.⁴¹ Because these can be so intimately connected to each other—in production and consumption processes as well as from the consumer's perspective—my study focuses on both these elements. My research allowed participants to demonstrate which issues are most important to them, revealing the subtle intersections and departures of these issues in beliefs and practice.

Charbonneau describes why the women respondents enjoyed shopping experiences: the thrill of hunting down bargains, nostalgia for childhood memories, feeling good about choosing

⁴⁰ Marsha A. Dickson and Mary A. Littrell, "Consumers of Ethnic Apparel from Alternative Trading Organizations: A Multifaceted Marketed," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 16, no. 1 (1998): 1–10; Mary A. Littrell, Jennifer L. Paff Ogle, and Soyoung Kim, "Marketing Ethnic Apparel: Single or Multiple Consumer Segments?," *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* 3, no. 1 (1999): 31–43.

⁴¹ Jill Skinner Charbonneau, "Social Responsibility and Women's Acquisition of Secondhand Clothing" (Colorado State University, 2008).

environmentally conscientious behavior, and the joy of discovering unique items. Although the behavior was environmentally responsible in that it reused and extended the lifecycle of garments, participants did not always underscore that dimension as the most important. Many other factors were at play. Charbonneau also identifies that a strong motivation in acquiring secondhand clothing is a demand for quality and uniqueness, which my research confirms. Instead of external factors being barriers, as we have seen in numerous other studies, they promote sustainable behavior. This corresponds with research on consumers of clothing from ATOs. In both acquisition circumstances—ATOs and secondhand stores—consumers stress the importance of aesthetic and other characteristics of the object.⁴²

Much of these findings are limited to consumer perspectives on purchase behavior. This is a significant gap in the literature because of the environmental and social impact care and disposal has. Sustainably-produced products will not necessarily be sustainably consumed. Conversely, consumers may be able to cultivate sustainable practices with clothing artifacts even if they were not sustainably produced. For example, an organic cotton t-shirt that is washed in hot water and machine dried after every wear and then thrown away at the end of the season has significant impacts compared to a shirt washed after every other wear, line-dried, worn until holey, recycled into rags, and then composted. However, the latter example is not as visible, or marketable, as the former. My research helps illuminate themes and issues in use and care practices that shape overall sustainability patterns.

There are only a handful of studies explicitly examining clothing disposal behaviors. Even though they do not explore the interconnections to sustainability in the other stages in

⁴² Dickson and Littrell, “Consumers of Ethnic Apparel from Alternative Trading Organizations: A Multifaceted Marketed”; Littrell, Ogle, and Kim, “Marketing Ethnic Apparel: Single or Multiple Consumer Segments?”.

clothing consumption, they offer some insight into this component of sustainable clothing consumption. Domina and Koch's 1999 study used surveys to measure why consumers disposed of textiles products (including but not limited to clothing) and the frequency, type, and site of disposal. They found that donating to Salvation Army, passing down to others, and using as rags were the most common actions; selling through consignment shops and garage sales, donating to religious organizations, and modifying and reusing textiles were less common. The authors offer some potential explanations for these practices. For example, respondents employed in professional occupations were less likely to sell items in garage sales or modify them because they may value leisure time and activities differently than others do. The primary decision to recycle textiles through these options was to avoid wasting the product.⁴³ My study adds to our understanding of how consumers select items for different disposal options and how these choices are bound up with attitudes, context, taste, and embodiment.

Ha-Brookshire and Hodges's 2009 qualitative investigation of clothing disposal actions hints at the complex relationships consumers have with clothing. For example, when evaluating garments for donations, consumers weigh the object's current condition and sentimental value. One significant finding suggests that concern for social and environmental issues did not motivate clothing donation. On the contrary, the authors suggest clothing donation may facilitate unsustainable clothing consumption by creating space for acquiring new clothes before others are physically worn out.⁴⁴ Their findings reinforce the interconnectedness of the different stages in the clothing consumption process. By studying consumer practices together, my research

⁴³ Tanya Domina and Kathryn Koch, "Consumer Reuse and Recycling of Post-consumer Textile Waste," *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* 3, no. 4 (1999): 346–359; Susan Strasser, *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1999); Gay Hawkins, *The Ethics of Waste: How We Relate to Rubbish* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

⁴⁴ Jung E. Ha-Brookshire and Nancy N. Hodges, "Socially Responsible Consumer Behavior? Exploring Used Clothing Donation Behavior," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 27, no. 3 (July 2009): 179–196.

contributes perspectives on how a range of issues—from identity negotiations to logistical space issues—intersects with practices.

Meanings of Dress and Material Culture

This project begins with a sensitivity to the meanings encoded in and experienced through dress. My research questions and analysis build on dress and material culture scholarship that explain relationships with and meanings invested in clothing and other artifacts.⁴⁵ At the literature's core are a number of key ideas about how people use objects to know and experience the world, others, and ourselves. I identified four themes that correspond with my research objectives:

- Dress as a means to cultivate and communicate personal and social identity
- Dress as a physical extension of the self
- Dress as expression of aesthetics and creativity
- Dress as a way to physically and metaphorically forge connections with makers

Dress is a highly communicative medium. The colors, silhouette, and style of a dressed body are one of the first things we visually perceive about a person. In their seminal work in the field of dress studies, Roach-Higgins and Eicher explain how dress visibly communicates many different aspects our multiple identities. Roach-Higgins and Eicher explain concisely how people create identities through a lifetime of socializing interactions, and dress functions as a key medium through which this identity formation occurs. Moreover, dressed bodies intimately affect social interactions, partially because perception of dressed bodies precedes verbal

⁴⁵ Although my research examined clothing as a specific subset of dress and material culture, I do not distinguish in this literature review the meanings of material culture, dress, and clothing. Instead, I discuss meanings of dress as a whole, drawing on resources from dress and material culture studies and identify distinctions where appropriate.

interactions.⁴⁶ Current work ethnographic, oral history, and cultural studies work illustrate the nuanced, subjective, and emotionally powerful encounters with dress.⁴⁷

In her thoughtful ethnography of women's decision-making process on what to wear, Woodward explores both the fluidity of identity as well as the discrete moments in which identity is constructed. Depending on personality, mood, situation, and other factors, women select clothes to present a certain image. This process of identity formation occurs during selection of clothes in the private, intimate spaces of one's bedroom as well as the presentation of one's self in a public, social setting.⁴⁸ Her work provides important context for my study because I examine a range of clothing practices (acquisition through disposal), some of which occur in the non-visible, private spaces of the home. These intimate "wardrobe moments" are closely related to the sustainability of clothing consumption overall.⁴⁹ Additionally, through enacting (or failing to enact) their principles in their clothing practices, they inscribe the activities with meaning and in turn their actions help solidify their identity.⁵⁰

Depending on the context, people have different identities. Clothing plays a pivotal role in negotiating this fluid process, as people take on, remove, and layer identities through the

⁴⁶ Joanne B. Eicher, Sandra Lee Evenson, and Hazel A. Lutz, *The Visible Self: Global Perspectives on Dress, Culture, and Society*, 3rd ed. (New York: Fairchild Publications, 2008); Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins and Eicher, Joanne B., "Dress and Identity," in *Dress and Identity*, ed. Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins, Kim K. P Johnson, and Joanne B. Eicher (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1995), 7–18; Susan B Kaiser, *The Social Psychology of Clothing: Symbolic Appearances in Context* (New York: Macmillan, 1985); Fred Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁴⁷ Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchell, *Not Just Any Dress: Narratives of Memory, Body, and Identity* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004); Eileen Green, Alison Guy, and Maura Banim, eds., *Through the Wardrobe: Women's Relationships with Their Clothes* (Oxford: Berg, 2001); Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson, eds., *Body Dressing* (New York: Berg, 2001); Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 1997); Efrat Tseëlon, *The Masque of Femininity: The Presentation of Woman in Everyday Life* (London: SAGE, 1995).

⁴⁸ Sophie Woodward, *Why Women Wear What They Wear* (Oxford: Berg, 2007).

⁴⁹ Saulo B. Cwerner, "Clothes at Rest: Elements for a Sociology of the Wardrobe," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 5, no. 1 (2001): 79–92.

⁵⁰ Susan B. Kaiser, Richard H. Nagasawa, and Sandra S. Hutton, "Construction of an SI Theory of Fashion: Part 1. Ambivalence and Change," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 13, no. 3 (June 1, 1995): 172–183.

process of dressing. Featherstone, in his analysis of consumerism and post-modern culture, explores our society's use of consumer goods as a playful way to create our multiple identities. He also highlights the aestheticization of everyday life, which parallels the masquerade or carnival.⁵¹ While many dress scholars do not use the term costume because it evokes “out-of-everyday” experiences, the term does suggest the art of donning different identities in our everyday social practices.⁵² Play—in both the public performance of dress and the private involvement with clothing objects—demonstrates an interesting tension with sustainability. For example, the indulgence in a plethora of clothing items to enact these rituals of changing identities may challenge an ideal for simplicity as a sustainable lifestyle. On the other hand, fostering pleasurable, expressive clothing practices can create a meaningful engagement with consumer goods. My research helps uncover how women negotiate their multiple identities, interests in sustainability, and clothing practices.

Dress is an important way people show membership in larger social order as well as smaller sub-groups. Each social institution has implicit and explicit dress norms. Through adhering to or breaking these expectations, people assert their identity and place in the social system. Individuals may be a part of smaller, sustainable interest groups that have their own nuanced norms for dressing. Dress itself can also express various belief systems that guide individual or group values and behaviors.⁵³ However, people who are concerned with sustainability issues in their lifestyle choices may or may not be using dress to cultivate or

⁵¹ Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, 2nd ed (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2007); Virginia Postrel, *The Substance of Style: How the Rise of Aesthetic Value Is Remaking Commerce, Culture, and Consciousness* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003); Beverly Gordon, *The Saturated World: Aesthetic Meaning, Intimate Objects, Women's Lives, 1890-1940* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006).

⁵² Roach-Higgins and Eicher, Joanne B., “Dress and Identity,” 10.

⁵³ Jane E. Workman and Beth W. Freeburg, *Dress and Society* (New York: Fairchild Books, 2009); David Muggleton, *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style* (Oxford: Berg, 2000); Dick Hebdige, *Subculture, The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979).

communicate that particular aspect of their identity. Furthermore, existing literature has not fully explored how expressions of their identity as environmentally or socially conscientious individuals through their clothing choices may not actually be visible through what objects people wear or how they wear them. People can cultivate their identity as environmentally and socially conscientious through buying less articles of clothes, thoughtfully caring for them, and recycling them when worn—none of which is immediately perceptible through their otherwise highly visible clothing choices. My research bridges these conversations about environmental attitudes into non-visible clothing care practices.

Whether it be an identity in terms of individual distinctiveness, group belonging, religious affiliation, or political allegiances, there is a complex social system in which these identities are shaped. One particularly evocative case study demonstrates the interconnections of clothing and intra- and interpersonal relationships: one elderly woman's efforts to find a place for a waistcoat. Norris traces the lifecycle of women's clothing in middle-class India: acquisition, use, reuse, storage, and discarding. Each stage connects women to different social networks and conceptions of self, particularly through the cultural power of gift exchange activities. "The desire for new clothes and the wear and tear of older garments are interlocking facets of the web of ties that bind people through such continuous gifting and wearing, wrapping each other in cloths that entangle them in networks of social relations."⁵⁴ Social relationships and cloth are tenuous, fragile entities that both need continual maintenance, care, renewal, and replacement. Disposing of clothes also connects a woman to others. A woman must negotiate social hierarchies in deciding whether to reuse cloth, to keep wealth in the family, to share with

⁵⁴ Lucy Norris, "Shedding Skins: The Materiality of Divestment in India," *Journal of Material Culture* 9, no. 1 (2004): 69.

domestic servants, to trade for goods (where cloth is sold to Indian poor or Western markets), or to destroy it in order to obtain metals. This case study, and others on circulation of clothing within families, illustrates how women encode clothing with meaning differently at different stages in the object's lifecycle.⁵⁵ By examining a select number of individuals' experiences with clothes across a range of behaviors, I identify themes that resonate as they emerge in different contexts.

Dress can also physically extend one's self into the material realm. Through his ethnographic research of consumers, Belk identifies one of the deep meanings of objects: "We regard objects as part of ourselves."⁵⁶ Miller's comparison of Trinidadian, Indian, and European clothing practices further argues that far from being superficial coverings, changing our clothes changes identities, and even cultural understandings of identity: "The concept of the person, the sense of the self, the experience of being an individual, are radically different at different times and places... Clothing plays a considerable and active part in constituting the particular experience of the self, in determining what the self is."⁵⁷ Miller asserts that ethnographic investigations, "immers[ing] ourselves in the minutia of the intimate," are pivotal to understanding not only our relationships with objects, but also with each other and ourselves.⁵⁸

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton examine how people use objects to order our experience of the world, stabilize our sense of who we are, and present those identities to others. They contrast "terminal" and "instrumental" materialism to explain how people make meaning

⁵⁵ Lucy Norris, *Recycling Indian Clothing: Global Contexts of Reuse and Value* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); Nicky Gregson and Vikki Beale, "Wardrobe Matter: The Sorting, Displacement and Circulation of Women's Clothing," *Geoforum* 35, no. 6 (November 2004): 689–700; Peter Corrigan, "Gender and the Gift: The Case of the Family Clothing Economy," *Sociology* 23, no. 4 (November 1989): 513–534.

⁵⁶ Russell Belk, "Possessions and the Extended Self," *Journal of Consumer Research* 15, no. 2 (September 1988): 139.

⁵⁷ Daniel Miller, *Stuff* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 40.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

from material culture. They define “terminal materialism” as “a habit of consumption [that] can become an end in itself, feeding on its autonomous necessity to possess more things, to control more status, to use more energy. Consumption for the sake of consumption.”⁵⁹ This definition closely parallels the phenomenon Veblen termed “conspicuous consumption” and De Graaf et al. “affluenza.”⁶⁰ This describes a relationship with objects in which people own things merely to possess them or to display their ability to possess them. The authors assert that our society relies heavily on objects as status symbols, that objects have become empty signifiers, and that “terminal materialism” is a cyclical process that leads to negative, hollow, and debilitating social structures. However, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton argue that there concurrently exists an alternative relationship with objects: “instrumental materialism” is the use of objects to serve larger, meaningful goals outside of objects themselves. Their study documented a viable, productive, and beneficial alternative to the “terminal materialism” otherwise seen in our culture.

Many other authors investigating the meaning of material culture demonstrate ways people invest meaning into objects beyond possession for possession’s sake. For example, Gordon deconstructs the many, varied ways souvenirs function as signs of extra-ordinary experiences—such as mnemonic mementoes, playful inversions of social norms, and literal or metaphorical connectors to a place or event.⁶¹ Ames illustrates how parlor organs reinforced broader cultural values and roles, encouraged self-actualization, and fostered social

⁵⁹ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 230–231; Tim Kasser, *The High Price of Materialism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

⁶⁰ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Modern Library Paperback Edition (New York: The Modern Library, 2001); John De Graaf, David Wann, and Thomas H. Naylor, *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2005).

⁶¹ Beverly Gordon, “The Souvenir: Messenger of the Extraordinary,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 20, no. 3 (Winter 1986): 135–146.

relationships.⁶² Marcus explains how the form of a house, and by extension things inside of it, are used to represent the self as an individual as well as a broader conceptual understanding of social order.⁶³ Similarly, several projects explore how items on display in the private space of the home construct and represent their owner's identity and negotiate social relations in the liminal private/social spaces.⁶⁴ Proposing a metaphorical link between vessels of water and vessels of meaning, Martin describes how ceramics embody complex cultural meaning—from intimate, domestic relationships to international trade and politics.⁶⁵ Pink explores in particular how sensory engagements with objects in the home, interpreted through memories, social codes, and individual tastes, are used by individuals to create subjective gendered understandings of self.⁶⁶ I similarly entered otherwise private, domestic spaces and explored otherwise unarticulated, but socially-coded and individually-meaningful objects, spaces, and practices.

This intense attachment to objects is especially powerful when it applies to clothes, for they act as extensions of our skin and bodies. Dress scholars have explored the deep meaning embedded in clothing as an extension of the physical, sensory body. In her seminal text from 2000, *The Fashioned Body*, Entwistle describes dress as a “situated bodily practice.” This term

⁶² Kenneth L Ames, *Death in the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

⁶³ Clare Cooper Marcus, *House as Mirror of Self: Exploring Deeper Meanings of Home* (Berkeley: Conari Press, 1995).

⁶⁴ Rachel Hurdley, “Dismantling Mantelpieces: Narrating Identities and Materializing Culture in the Home,” *Sociology* 40, no. 4 (August 2006): 717–733; Ian Woodward, “Domestic Objects and the Taste Epiphany: a Resource for Consumption Methodology,” *Journal of Material Culture* 6, no. 2 (2001): 115–136; Annemarie Money, “Material Culture and the Living Room: The Appropriation and Use of Goods in Everyday Life,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 7, no. 3 (2007): 355–377; Louise Crewe, Nicky Gregson, and Alan Metcalfe, “The Screen and the Drum: On Form, Function, Fit, and Failure in Contemporary Home Consumption,” *Design and Culture* 1, no. 3 (2009): 307–328.

⁶⁵ Ann Smart Martin, “Magical, Mythical, Practical, and Sublime: The Meanings and Uses of Ceramics in America,” *Ceramics in America* 1 (2001): 29–46.

⁶⁶ Sarah Pink, *Home Truths: Gender, Domestic Objects and Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2004).

draws attention to both the role of the body and the cultural context of dress practices.⁶⁷ According to Entwistle, “Dress is an embodied practice, a situated bodily practice that is embedded within the social world and fundamental to the microsocial order... Individuals/ subjects are active in their engagement with the social and that dress is thus actively produced through routine practices directed towards the body.”⁶⁸ Entwistle reaffirms that the body is a cultural construct, while also being a real, physical entity. Drawing on the work of a wide variety of cultural and social theorists, including Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu, she examines how many theorists often treat the body as an abstract, disembodied entity. Simultaneously building on and critiquing social theory, Entwistle emphasizes lived, experiential practices over textual, discursive analysis. Dress is more than non-verbal, symbolic communication. It is a physical, embodied interaction between the wearer, objects, and others.⁶⁹ By talking with and observing women, I gained some access to these lived, embodied realities. Rather than separate their values and attitudes from their embodied behaviors, I grounded my research in their physical experiences with clothing objects, combined with their reflections on those experiences.

The connections between the self, the body, and dress are relevant to my study because women who are interested in sustainability have the opportunity to relate intimately to their concerns by putting their body and public self at stake. Moreover, wearing, shopping, storing, caring for, and disposing clothes all require physical, emotional, and intellectual engagement

⁶⁷ Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress, and Modern Social Theory* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000).

⁶⁸ Joanne Entwistle, “Fashion and the Fleshy Body: Dress as Embodied Practice,” *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 4, no. 3 (September 2000): 325.

⁶⁹ Entwistle, “Fashion and the Fleshy Body”; Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins, Kim K. P. Johnson, and Joanne B. Eicher, eds., *Dress and Identity* (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1995); Kaiser, *The Social Psychology of Clothing: Symbolic Appearances in Context*.

with the object. The body, dressed in sustainable or unsustainable objects, enacts interests and values.

Aesthetic pleasure is another powerful component of dress experiences. People may choose to express creatively their own personalities and aesthetic tastes, participate in wearing fashionable styles, or enjoy the multi-sensorial experience of wearing and moving in clothes. Rader and Jessup's work on aesthetic value in common life provides a foundation for a common, underlying, connecting principle of aesthetic value and its relation to other human values is especially relevant in our everyday embodied experiences with dress. Although their Interest-Relationship-Object (I-R-O) formula may seem mechanical for the fluid, nuanced process of aesthetic experiences, it functions effectively as shorthand for the complex subjective relationship between an individual's or collective's interests and phenomena. The I-R-O formula emphasizes how aesthetic value emerges only from the interaction with, connection to, or relationship between interests and objects. "The subjective and the objective components exist in interlocking relation."⁷⁰ Although we may attribute value to the object, value emerges only out of the intersection of components. Rader and Jessup's explanation is relevant because it establishes that meaning materializes only through our perception or cognition of objects/experiences. It is the space between materiality and the body, object and practice, individual and context that meanings emerge. This emphasis on perceptions and intersections is also significant given the dominance of these themes in explanations of sustainable consumption. My research examined how people engaged with the objects in multiple contexts in order to explore the spaces between people and the world that surrounds them.

⁷⁰ Melvin Rader and Bertram Jessup, *Art and Human Values* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1976), 14.

Although not specifically discussing dress, Rybczynski argues that ornament, embellishment, decoration, and adornment are fundamental ways that people create meaning and aesthetic pleasure in their environment, activities, and relationships. Rybczynski describes how ornament improves quality of life by creating visual and physical pleasure. Ornament dynamically interacts with form, affecting how we perceive space and objects. People experience delight, enjoyment, and satisfaction in response to combinations and variations of images, colors, textures, shapes, pattern, and proportions among other design elements. He further ties decoration to play. Playful design delights the senses, stimulates the mind, and offers opportunities for joy and humor. The process of adding and perceiving ornament imbues objects and activities with meaning and significance. Investing energy and creativity, pleasure and symbolism into objects enriches our intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic experiences.⁷¹ While not all clothing may be highly embellished, my study confirms the act of dress and adorning one's body with various materials, shapes, and sensual elements evokes the aesthetic pleasure Rybczynski describes.

There is a growing body of literature exploring these embodied aesthetic encounters in everyday experiences, dress practices, and material culture.⁷² Because of the association with the quotidian and compounded by the often multi-sensory and embodied qualities, they have often been associated with women and non-Western cultures, and consequently marginalized.⁷³

⁷¹ Witold Rybczynski, "Homo Ornarens," in *Designed for Delight: Alternative Aspects of Twentieth-century Decorative Arts*, ed. Martin Eidelberg (Paris; Montreal: Flammarion; Montreal Museum of Decorative Arts, 1997), 35–41.

⁷² Thomas Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (Buffalo, NY: Broadview Press, 2012); Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (London: Routledge, 2011); Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

⁷³ Beverly Gordon, "Intimacy and Objects: A Proxemic Analysis of Gender-based Response to the Material World," in *The Material Culture of Gender, the Gender of Material Culture*, ed. Katherine A. Martinez and Kenneth L.

Feminist scholars in turn have critically recast these dimensions as tools for subjective understandings and engagement with political and cultural circumstances.⁷⁴ Gordon articulates the significance of aesthetics in women's domestic amusements in the early twentieth century. She identifies several key themes that extend to contemporary dress practices: stimulation of multiple senses and embodied experiences, playfulness, expressiveness, creativity, and community.⁷⁵ Postrel defends the rise of aesthetics in contemporary design. She argues that promoting opportunities to experience aesthetically well-designed objects improves the quality of life of all.⁷⁶

Various scholarship highlights the sensual aspect of aesthetic experiences with dress. Suggesting the sensual communicative power of early 20th century dresses themselves, Lebing describes how the aural rhythmic ambiance created by rustling satins, swishing chiffon, hissing silks, clapping fringe, and tinkling beads was essential to women's experience with clothing.⁷⁷ The recent anthology *Dress Sense* collects several examples of practices that embrace the aesthetic and emotional dimensions of experiencing dress.⁷⁸ While none of these works explicitly addresses sustainability related to aesthetics, they lay the foundation for explaining clothing choices as a function of aesthetic value. Because embodied aesthetic pleasure is a key component

Ames (Winterthur, DE: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1997), 237–252; Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden, and Ruth Phillips, eds., *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2006).

⁷⁴ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Kathy Davis, ed., *Embodied Practices: Feminist Perspectives on the Body* (London: Sage, 1997); Katharine G. Young, *Bodylore* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995).

⁷⁵ Gordon, *The Saturated World: Aesthetic Meaning, Intimate Objects, Women's Lives, 1890-1940*.

⁷⁶ Postrel, *The Substance of Style: How the Rise of Aesthetic Value Is Remaking Commerce, Culture, and Consciousness*.

⁷⁷ Wendy Lebing, "'The Rustle of Her Dress': The Sounds of Late 19th and Early 20th Century Clothing," *Dress* 11, no. 1985 (n.d.): 90–101.

⁷⁸ Victoria L. Rovine, "Handmade Textiles: Global Markets and Authenticity," in *Dress Sense: Emotional and Sensory Experiences of the Body and Clothes*, ed. Donald Clay Johnson and Helen Bradley Foster (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 133–143.

of material culture and contemporary design, my project contributes this significant perspective on how women negotiate aesthetics with sustainability.

The aesthetic and emotional experience of clothes does more than express one's own creativity and taste. Individuals may explicitly or implicitly forge connections to others through objects. This can be by aligning one's style with a group one belongs to, as discussed above. Connections can be with family members or friends from which clothing objects were received as heirlooms or gifts. Norris's essay on a woman's experience disposing of a garment elaborates on how, through clothing's aesthetic properties and connection to the body, it connects people to each other. Clothing is a second skin, a porous border between a woman and the world. A woman uses this skin to connect to others, but she can "shed the skin" to create herself anew. It has the power to physically and personally change the wearer and subsequent users. Not only do people actively use and transform objects, but objects also play a pivotal role in crafting people's identity and manifesting social relationships. Norris explains how the material properties of clothing—its softness, versatility, monetary value (in metals), intimacy with the body, domestic connotations, as well as its fragility and ephemerality—make possible "the renewal and self-creation through sacrifice and destruction. Objects and people are continuously on the move, and the relationships between them are fluid and dynamic."⁷⁹

Alternatively, wearers may be attempting to connect themselves to the makers of the garments. Given the labor necessary to produce clothes and the social issues challenging the sustainability of the current clothing industry, connecting to the maker(s) may be a viable way of negotiating sustainability concerns with clothing practices. Consumers may choose to pursue this by making their own clothes, purchasing handmade clothing, or being conscious of and learning

⁷⁹ Norris, "Shedding Skins," 69.

about people involved in clothing production. This behavior may suggest an explicit awareness of the maker, their body, and the process of production. However, this association is not always clearly embodied in clothing practices. The wearer of the garment honors or commodifies the maker's time and labor in different ways. Clothing practices may encode relations between the body of the wearer and maker through the intersection of production and consumption, exposing or masking of the making or maker, exclusivity, and displaying one's value of their own or other's time. Clothing is a physical manifestation of the seamstress's own bodily practices, a commodity that is then represented through the bodily practices of the wearer. Entwistle argues that dress scholars need to look at the juncture of clothing production and consumption.⁸⁰ I did not examine the producer's perspectives in this project, though this is another dimension around which scholars and activists are increasingly opening conversations.⁸¹

This visceral link between the maker and the wearer through cloth and craft adds to the complexity of how people use dress to cultivate meaning as a sustainable clothing practice.

Grimes and Milgram note the growth of the fair trade market and how it is

Built on an elite consumer ideology that contrasts manufactured, mass-produced, modern objects with handmade, authentic, local crafts...The incorporation of craft and art traditions in the world market during the second half of the twentieth century marked a time in which goods were no longer consumed just as necessities but as luxuries that accommodate the ever-changing wants, tastes, and styles of modern consumer culture.⁸²

⁸⁰ Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*; Joanne Entwistle, *The Aesthetic Economy of Fashion: Markets and Value in Clothing and Modelling* (Oxford: Berg, 2009).

⁸¹ Jane Lou Collins, *Threads: Gender, Labor, and Power in the Global Apparel Industry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Angela Hale and Jane Wills, eds., *Threads of Labour: Garment Industry Supply Chains from the Workers' Perspective* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005); Naila Kabeer, *The Power to Choose: Bangladeshi Women and Labour Market Decisions in London and Dhaka* (London: VERSO, 2000); Ellen Israel Rosen, *Making Sweatshops: The Globalization of the U.S. Apparel Industry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

⁸² Kimberly M. Grimes and B. Lynne Milgram, "Introduction: Facing the Challenges of Artisan Production in the Global Market," in *Artisans and Cooperatives: Developing Alternate Trade for the Global Economy*, ed. Kimberly M. Grimes and B. Lynne Milgram (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2000), 8–9.

While Grimes and Milgram situate this phenomenon within the recent past, luxury goods and their international trade have a long history. For example, the finely patterned, hand printed and dyed cottons of India were an important trade item in the eighteenth century between Europe, Indonesia, and India. These varying social, political, economic, and technological contexts affect both the macro-system of social dress practices and also the intimate micro-scale of women's clothing choices. For instance, while the trade in textiles in the eighteenth and nineteenth century helped spur new technologies to mimic styles, designs, and products, today handcrafted items are marketed in opposition to industrially produced items. Today, stores explicitly appeal to consumers looking for something distinctive from mass-produced items: "There is another impetus at work here: nostalgia for the one-off, different, not entirely perfect item. For something real."⁸³ The objects, and by extension the owners, are connected to the "real" physical world, a direct bond with the material conditions of existence, representative of the lived experiences of the maker.

Scholars have explored how when people seek out fair trade or handmade clothing, they may be looking for an alternative to what they perceive as the unsustainable fashion industry.⁸⁴ In contrast to the dominated body of the garment industry worker, the Western middle- to upper-class consumer imagines the handcrafted, fair trade scarf or skirt as being produced by an artisan

⁸³ Jane Audas, "Christmas Shopping: A Handful of Retailers Are Bucking the Trend for Global Superstores," *Selvedge: The Fabric of Your Life*, December 2005.

⁸⁴ Timothy J. Scrase, "Fair Trade in Cyberspace: The Commodification of Poverty and the Marketing of Handicrafts on the Internet," in *Ethical Consumption: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Tania Lewis and Emily Potter (New York: Routledge, 2011), 71–84; Gautier Pirotte, "Consumption as a Solidarity-based Commitment: The Case of Oxfam Worldshops' Customers," in *Sustainable Consumption, Ecology, and Fair Trade*, ed. Edwin Zaccai (London: Routledge, 2007), 127–143; Dickson and Littrell, "Consumers of Ethnic Apparel from Alternative Trading Organizations: A Multifaceted Marketed"; Kimberly M. Grimes and B. Lynne Milgram, eds., *Artisans and Cooperatives: Developing Alternate Trade for the Global Economy* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2000).

who is in control of the production and receives most of the profits from the sale.⁸⁵ In her discussion of nineteenth century lacework, Elaine Freedgood comments: “The process of reification stalls out in these representations as the commodity gets anchored to parts of the people involved in its production: the hands of lacemakers... Disconnected hands, in fact, allow middle-class readers to imagine women hand-workers in the prettiest possible terms.”⁸⁶ These analyses help reveal how clothing recontextualized from its origin into the lives of American consumers may become innocuous, aestheticized luxuries, symbolic bonds with the makers, or tools of political resistance.

Making one’s own garments is another way women negotiate their values and clothing needs; it directly involves one’s own hands in creating the garment that will shape their identity. Control over one’s own time and labor is important in performing and subsequently presenting one’s identity and expressing a shared, mutual relationship with another person.⁸⁷ Parkins delves into these issues in contemporary knitting: “Practices like knitting represent an alternative temporality, defined against the acceleration of other areas of life; they “hook into the rhythms and practices of everyday life” which can be redeployed as means of self-formation.”⁸⁸ While constructing one’s own garments is a method with which to demonstrate control one’s body, time, labor, and image, seeking out other handcrafted items is another way of control over

⁸⁵ Elyse Demaray, Melody Keim-Shenk, and Mary A. Littrell, “Representations of Tradition in Latin American Boundary Textile Art,” in *The Latin American Fashion Reader*, ed. Regina A. Root (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 142–162.

⁸⁶ Elaine Freedgood, “Fine Fingers: Victorian Handmade Lace and Utopian Consumption,” *Victorian Studies* 45, no. 4 (Summer 2003): 643.

⁸⁷ Joanne Turney, *The Culture of Knitting* (Oxford ; New York: Berg, 2009); Barbara Burman, ed., *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking* (Oxford: Berg, 1999); Joyce Starr Johnson and Laurel E. Wilson, “‘It Says You Really Care’: Motivational Factors of Contemporary Female Handcrafters,” *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 23, no. 2 (2005): 115–130; Alla Myzelev, “Whip Your Hobby into Shape: Knitting, Feminism and Construction of Gender,” *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* 7, no. 2 (July 2009): 148–163.

⁸⁸ Wendy Parkins, “Celebrity Knitting and the Temporality of Postmodernity,” *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 8, no. 4 (November 2004): 432.

another person's body. The power relationships are often ambiguous and contradictory; they come to the forefront when examining consumers' concerns with labor and human rights. Due to the complexity and opacity of the production system, consumers may not explicitly think about only some of the many players at stake, such as the workers who run the industrial equipment, the designers and chemists behind the textile production, or the farmers raising the animals or crops.

The multiple levels involved in crafting items illustrate how involved holistically understanding of clothing practices can be—from both the consumer and researcher's perspective. Clothing creates an interesting focal point of these intersections as the products produced have an intimate relationship with the body of the wearer. Freedgood clarifies this labyrinth of encoded meanings: “The occasional production and purchase of ‘hand-made’ goods affords much-needed relief from the alienation, reification, and fetishism from which we both suffer and benefit because of our inescapable participation in commodity exchange. We fetishize hands for a moment instead of commodities, as if these hands could save us.”⁸⁹ Examining how and why consumers cultivate meanings, attitudes, or connections to makers of clothing or to their own embodied interaction with garments is vital to understanding issues of sustainability, especially the social dimensions. My study expands and elaborates on this literature by framing these dimensions that are most relevant to consumers in their lived, daily practices within sustainability issues.

Each of these dimensions discussed in the field of dress and material culture studies may or may not be salient for women when negotiating sustainability. My project grapples with this complex confluence of factors. Women must negotiate American culture's prioritization of the

⁸⁹ Freedgood, “Fine Fingers,” 644.

fashion system, their personal social networks' own taste cultures, their own aesthetic preferences, as well as their own bodies and sensory experiences along with environmental and social values. These components come into play at each stage of clothing consumption—during shopping, wearing, maintaining, and disposing of clothes. Experiencing and making meaning in any context is a multifaceted process. Material culture as experienced in different consumer contexts—like another region, culture, store type, and lifecycle stage—will result in nuanced, situated, and complex understandings of objects and one's relationship with them.

Consumption can be a method of constructing meaning and sentiment. Glassie comments that the user can become the maker: "Suppose that the consumer, in using the object in a creative act, remakes it... Use becomes creation as consumers alter objects. And use becomes creation when objects become parts of objects, when the physical context becomes a creative composition."⁹⁰ While Glassie limits the richness of experiences and meanings by focusing solely on literal, physical change, we can apply the concept to altering objects through changing the way we think and feel about them. We need not only change the physical context, but we can also alter the intellectual, emotional, or cultural context in which object is, or has been, situated. Objects encode meaning both through their physical construction and through the ways we interact with them. We transform commodities into possessions encoded with personal significance. Design makes meaning. Manufacturing makes meaning. Consuming makes meaning. Each stage of clothing practice presents its own nuanced set of circumstances, types of interactions, and dimensions of meaning. Scholars have explored how complex meanings arise from these ongoing interactions with objects (from household goods to spaces in the home, gifts,

⁹⁰ Henry Glassie, *Material Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 81, 82.

and clothing) from shopping⁹¹ to exchange,⁹² maintenance,⁹³ collecting,⁹⁴ storing,⁹⁵ and ridding.⁹⁶ However, we must understand how the consumer is making sense of these factors given her larger value systems. This project examines multiple contexts of apparel consumption in order to uncover how consumers are making meaning at each of these stages and in relationship to the sustainability of those stages.

Material culture studies assert that objects embody information, beliefs, attitudes, emotions that cannot be expressed through words, and “thoughts and actions that resist verbal formulation.”⁹⁷ Often, objects communicate sentiments that people cannot easily articulate into words. Tzortzis’s article about souvenirs illustrates this point as well: “Sometimes not just the knowledge, but the feeling that you have is easier to translate into an object than into writing.”⁹⁸

As poetry conveys sentiments and ideas beyond expository prose, objects have a syntax that

⁹¹ Daniel Miller, *The Dialectics of Shopping* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Thomas Hine, *I Want That! How We All Became Shoppers* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002).

⁹² James Carrier, “The Rituals of Christmas Giving,” in *Unwrapping Christmas*, ed. Daniel Miller (Oxford: Clarendon University Press, 1993), 55–64; Corrigan, “Gender and the Gift: The Case of the Family Clothing Economy”; Norris, *Recycling Indian Clothing*.

⁹³ Nicky Gregson, Alan Metcalfe, and Louise Crewe, “Practices of Object Maintenance and Repair: How Consumers Attend to Consumer Objects Within the Home,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 9, no. 2 (2009): 248–272; Matthew Watson and Elizabeth Shove, “Product, Competence, Project, Practice: DIY and the Dynamics of Craft Consumption,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 8, no. 1 (2008): 69–89; Crewe, Gregson, and Metcalfe, “The Screen and the Drum: On Form, Function, Fit, and Failure in Contemporary Home Consumption”; Pink, *Home Truths*.

⁹⁴ Russell Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Marybeth C. Stalp and Theresa M. Winge, “My Collection Is Bigger Than Yours: Tales from the Handcrafter’s Stash,” *Home Cultures* 5, no. 3 (2008): 197–218; Marybeth C. Stalp, “Hiding the (Fabric) Stash: Collecting, Hoarding, and Hiding Strategies of Contemporary US Quilters,” *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* 4, no. 1 (2006): 104–125; Brenda Danet and Tamar Katriel, “No Two Alike: Play and Aesthetics in Collecting,” *Play and Culture* 2 (1989): 27–32.

⁹⁵ Maura Banim and Alison Guy, “Dis/continued Selves: Why Do Women Keep Clothes They No Longer Wear?,” in *Through the Wardrobe: Women’s Relationships with Their Clothes*, ed. Eileen Green, Alison Guy, and Maura Banim (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2001), 203–219; Elizabeth Bye and Ellen McKinney, “Sizing up the Wardrobe—Why We Keep Clothes That Do Not Fit,” *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 11, no. 4 (December 1, 2007): 483–498; Cwerner, “Clothes at Rest: Elements for a Sociology of the Wardrobe.”

⁹⁶ Norris, “Shedding Skins”; Gregson and Beale, “Wardrobe Matter”; Nicky Gregson, Alan Metcalfe, and Louise Crewe, “Identity, Mobility, and the Throwaway Society,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25, no. 4 (2007): 682–700; Hawkins, *The Ethics of Waste*.

⁹⁷ Glassie, *Material Culture*, 46; Jules D. Prown, “Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture and Method,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 17, no. 1 (1982): 1–17; Thomas Schlereth, “Material Culture and Cultural Research,” in *Material Culture: A Research Guide*, ed. Thomas Schlereth (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1985), 2–13.

⁹⁸ Andrea Tzortzis, “At the Gift Shop: Souvenirs of Buchenwald,” *New York Times*, September 15, 2004.

captures experiences and emotions that people might not be able to communicate through words. Danet and Katriel's discussion of collecting and play explores how through objects users create an evocative, poetic grammar.⁹⁹ While some consumers may have specifically defined and consciously articulated values and interests in sustainability, some may not have articulated beliefs in terms of clothing. By probing into experiences through interviewing, observation, and object analysis, this study strives to capture a holistic understanding of people's often unarticulated engagement with garments.

Clothes are tangible, durable components of an otherwise fluid, immaterial social practice, but they are also continually changing organic entities. Clothes bear marks of use, which may affect how one feels towards it. The marks become symbols of associations or continuity or a reason to dispose the item. Collections of clothes themselves grow and change as the owners' values, interests, and needs evolve. While I did not conduct a longitudinal study to examine these effects of time and change, my project contributes to this understanding of a material culture in flux—both in the women's individual lives and as a society changing its understanding of sustainable consumption.

⁹⁹ Danet and Katriel, "No Two Alike: Play and Aesthetics in Collecting."

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

In order to capture the nuances of meaning that consumers experience, I used the following qualitative methods: semi-structured, in-depth interviews, observations, and material culture object studies. Below, I review selected methods and why they were appropriate. I then discuss how I selected participants and how I collected and analyzed the data. I discuss participant characteristics in chapter four, where I introduce my participants.

Research Method Overview

I was asking women to open up the intimate and private sides of an otherwise very public form of consumption. I did this in order to understand their experiences, identify patterns of meanings and key thematic issues, and explain why these are significant to sustainability issues.¹ Qualitative methods match the objectives of this research project well. As Denzin and Lincoln argue in their introduction to a qualitative research handbook, qualitative research helps answer exploratory “how” and “why” questions about people’s construction of everyday life activities and associated meanings.² Patton further explains, “The advantages of qualitative portrayals of holistic settings and impacts are that greater attention can be given to nuance, setting, interdependencies, complexities, idiosyncrasies, and context...and its own particular meaning

¹ Jung E. Ha-Brookshire and Nancy N. Hodges, “Socially Responsible Consumer Behavior? Exploring Used Clothing Donation Behavior,” *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 27, no. 3 (July 2009): 179–196; Craig J. Thompson, “Interpreting Consumers: a Hermeneutical Framework for Deriving Marketing Insights from the Texts of Consumers’ Consumption Stories,” *Journal of Marketing Research* 34, no. 4 (November 1997): 438–455.

² Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, “Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research,” in *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2003), 1–45.

and its own constellation of relationships emerging from and related to the context within which it occurs.”³

The researcher is directly involved in constructing qualitative data through unavoidable theory-laden lenses. Theories and standpoints shape the questions we ask, the issues that interest us, the methods we pursue, and the resulting analyses. Indeed, several qualitative researchers have argued that researchers need to take a stance in their approach to data collection and analysis, to simultaneously create empathy and remain neutral.⁴ I worked toward cultivating “empathetic neutrality” in order to foster rapport with the research participants, encourage them to be forthright with their ideas, and be open and nonjudgmental of them.⁵ Although I approached the interviews with an open ear, my prepared questions necessarily guided the conversations.⁶ Moreover, I used three qualitative approaches to triangulate my findings. This allowed me to see emerging patterns or inconsistencies and bring to my analysis the rich nuances of people’s clothing practices.⁷

I conducted individual, in-depth, semi-structured, formal interviews using open-ended questions. I chose interviews over focus groups because I wanted to explore fully the breadth and

³ Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2002), 60.

⁴ Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (October 1, 1988): 575–599; Joey Sprague, *Feminist Methodologies for Critical Researchers: Bridging Differences* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005).

⁵ Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*.

⁶ Andrea Fontana and Yvonna S. Frey, “The Interview: From Neutral Stance to Political Involvement,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2000), 695–727; Michael V. Angrosino, “Recontextualizing Observation: Ethnography, Pedagogy, and the Prospects for a Progressive Political Agenda,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000), 729–746.

⁷ Denzin and Lincoln, “Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research”; Fontana and Frey, “The Interview: From Neutral Stance to Political Involvement”; Robert E. Stake, “Qualitative Case Studies,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000), 443–466.

depth of the participants' practices.⁸ Semi-structured, formal interviews allowed me to delve deeply into the particular circumstances of individuals and their meaning systems while providing some consistency in my data collection. I was able to narrow in on the details of particular case studies, explore the intimate details of ordinary, everyday consumption, and analyze these topics through the guiding issue of sustainability.⁹

I developed an interview guide that operationalized my research questions (see Appendix 7). I asked each woman to describe her practices and experiences—touching on each clothing consumption stage—and reflect on the meanings of her clothes. I also pursued questions about their interests in and knowledge of sustainability issues—both environmental and social. I also asked them to reflect on how sustainability and clothing issues related to each other. I designed the range of questions in the interview guide to get women to share specific experiences and objects; opinions; feelings; thoughts on others' practices; and reflections on their sustainability interests, clothing, and behaviors. This approach follows the interview matrix model of “levels of abstraction:” sensory dimensions, behaviors and experiences, opinions and values, feelings and emotions, knowledge, and theorizing and reflection.¹⁰

Although I used an interview question guide, I deviated from it given the interview dynamics. Depending on each woman's experiences, I pursued different topics in more or less depth, though I did try to touch on each consumption stage or interview topic with every participant. My research used an emergent design approach, which allowed for the greatest flexibility. This allowed me to pursue ideas and concepts introduced by the research participants themselves and through my progressing analysis. This is a distinctive characteristic of qualitative

⁸ Fontana and Frey, “The Interview: From Neutral Stance to Political Involvement.”

⁹ Stake, “Qualitative Case Studies.”

¹⁰ Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*.

methods.¹¹ Nevertheless, I placed some constraints on the research data collection and analysis. The core principles of my project—meanings of practices, relationships with objects, and sustainability issues—guided my decisions to pursue emerging themes and patterns in the data. My questions, as delineated in chapter one, defined parameters and limits, but the nature of the method allowed shifts in analysis in response to the data collected.

I complemented the interviews with observational fieldwork and informal conversations. I consider my time conducting interviews and other observations as part of “fieldwork.” The field sites were participants’ homes. Because I was not conducting a traditional ethnography in which I live with respondents for an extended time, the fieldwork consisted of scheduled visits. This method fits with larger trends in anthropological and sociological fieldwork. Pink situates her own ethnography of gender in the home in a similar context: “Such studies of modern western individuals in familiar places focus on intimate rather than public spheres of life, and exchange long-term participant observation for interviewing, conversation, and new types of collaboration with informants.”¹² During the second interview home visit, I asked participants to “perform” or walk me through various acts, such as doing laundry, in situ. Although I did not necessarily see participants in a truly naturalistic moment, the data collected about spaces, resources, individual or household routines, sensory dimensions, and behaviors yielded insight into meanings and sustainability of practices.

Through interviews, field notes, and photographs, I documented the material culture of women’s clothing. Thick description, as outlined by anthropologist Geertz, requires close observation and presentation of the physical qualities of an event or experience combined with

¹¹ Ibid.; Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2006).

¹² Sarah Pink, *Home Truths: Gender, Domestic Objects and Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 25.

an interpretive approach that contextualizes the material manifestations within their cultural framework.¹³ I studied routine, taken-for-granted practices, observing practices and probing participants in situ helped elicit otherwise unstated dimensions, including multi-sensory elements. This fieldwork provided important, but typically invisible and unexamined, data on what practices are and what meanings people cultivate.

The third component of my research design drew on material culture methods. While interviewing is a vital method to learn from individuals about their stories and beliefs, much is left silent. Objects often carry the weight of this unspoken meaning. While the interactions, meanings, and values people construct around clothes are essential aspects of material culture studies, the objects are a constant and powerful element in these encounters. Therefore, it was not only important to investigate the cognitive, emotional, and aesthetic experiences of people through interviews, but it was also beneficial to examine the material objects with which people interacted.¹⁴ Material culture methods focus on the primacy of the object; researchers must observe and engage with the object, describe it in a rich evocative narrative. While some material culture methods emphasize the object and its use over supplementary information from external sources, I followed approaches that integrate these different kinds of information into a holistic understanding of the material culture of clothing sustainability as experienced by consumers.¹⁵

¹³ Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*, ed. Robert M. Emerson, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2008), 55–75.

¹⁴ Ian Hodder, "The Interpretation of Documents and Material Culture," in *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2003), 155–175.

¹⁵ Kenneth Haltman, "Introduction," in *American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture*, ed. Jules D. Prown and Kenneth Haltman (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000), 1–27; Jules D. Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture and Method," *Winterthur Portfolio* 17, no. 1 (1982): 1–17; Ann Smart Martin, "Magical, Mythical, Practical, and Sublime: The Meanings and Uses of Ceramics in America," *Ceramics in America* 1 (2001): 29–46.

During the home visit, I asked women to show me a range of clothing uses/types (e.g. clothes for work, going out, leisure, or working out). Through observation of the garments and interviews with the owners, I gathered information about the garment appearance, age, production, use, and value (see table 3.5). These object stories helped answer my research questions by providing concrete examples of how women negotiate clothing practices and attitudes, interests, and resources. By focusing on garments, I further grounded my results and analysis in their lives, in which interactions with objects are a central component. Incorporating selected object descriptions and owner's stories about them into my interview and observations helped create a robust, holistic picture of situated clothing practices and meanings that illuminated emotional and physical dimensions of sustainability issues.

Each of my methodological approaches contributed different and complementary information and perspectives to my research questions. Figure 3.1 maps my project's questions and the corresponding methods, each of which contributed data that I used in answering each research question. By asking people for concrete examples, watching their behaviors, asking them to reflect on those behaviors, and discussing specific objects, I gathered data on what the women's clothing practices are, the sustainability of those practices, and the women's perceptions of the sustainability of those practices. Similarly, by asking people for specific narratives of meanings, observing behaviors, asking them to reflect on their practices and meanings, and discussing specific objects, I gathered data on what the meanings and issues women experience with clothing are, what aspects of clothing objects and practices those issues relate to, and how those issues relate to sustainability. Through my analysis, I offer potential, exploratory applications for designers, marketers, researchers, and material culture theory.

My grounded theory analysis helped answer my how and why research questions. I used this method to find in the data what meanings and issues are most salient in women's clothing practices, how women incorporate different aspects of clothing practices and objects into those issues, and how those issues relate to sustainability. I looked for patterns and contrasts across the range of interest levels sampled. I contextualized themes within an analysis of the practices from which the meanings emerged.¹⁶ I then used the specific narratives, behavior actions, and object stories to illuminate specific meanings and issues as they related to sustainability.

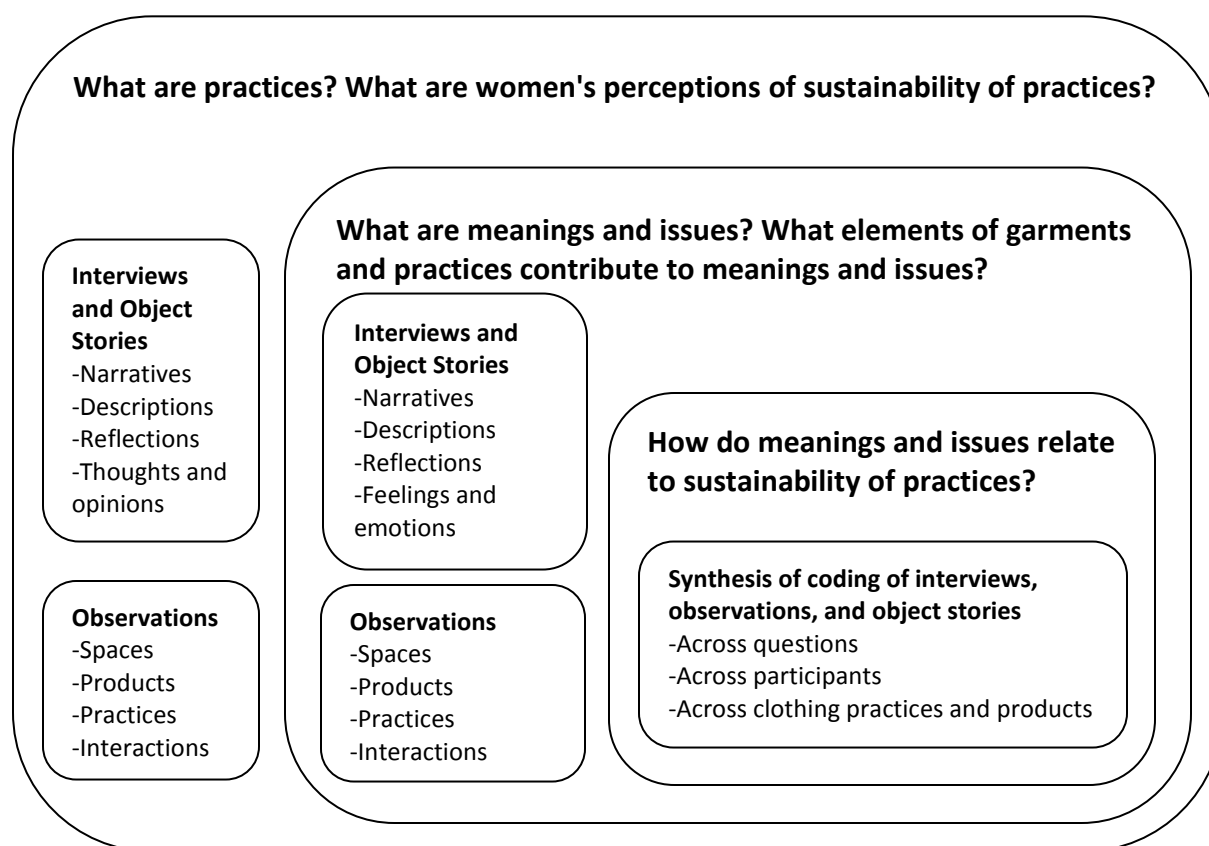


Figure 3.1. Operationalization of research questions and methods

¹⁶ Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1967); Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*; Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009); Lyn Richards, *Handling Qualitative Data: A Practical Guide* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2005).

I recruited participants, conducted interviews, and performed preliminary data analysis between September 2010 and January 2012. I conducted a pilot study in spring 2009 in which I interviewed six women interested in environmental and social issues. We discussed various aspects about their clothing experiences. I identified preliminary trends and issues, such as interest levels in clothing and the role of aesthetics, that helped shape my research questions as well as led to changes in my interview guide. Although I did not include observation or object analysis in the pilot study, I had previous experience in material culture research that informs these methods. In compliance with university protocol and research ethics, my research project was approved by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Social Sciences Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research (see Appendix 2).

Qualitative Methods in Dress and Material Culture

There is a rich history of both qualitative and quantitative method-based research in dress and material culture studies, some of which I reviewed above. However, because my research questions seek how and why answers in a still relatively new and evolving field of sustainable clothing consumption, qualitative methods are the most suitable. In this section, I review key case studies and models in material culture studies, dress scholarship, and consumer behavior. The selected literature reveals the intersecting and overlapping methods and themes with which these various disciplines have been grappling. My study builds on this literature through its use of similar methods addressing the meanings embodied in objects and our interactions with them.

The Consumer Behavior Odyssey project, led by Russell Belk, was seminal in its field research of consumer behavior. Using interviews, ethnographic observation, and photographic prompts, the research team elicited thoughtful responses from research participants on what

objects meant to them. The researchers grounded the project's theoretical models for the meanings of objects in conversations about many different object types in a variety of fieldwork sites, ranging from private homes to public fairs, across the United States over an extended time.¹⁷ Geertz's proposal of "thick description" as a way of "inscribing culture" is a significant contribution to ethnographic methods used in consumer studies. This method of "inscribing culture," that is translating or transforming elusive meaning into words through creating fixed accounts of ephemeral events, captures the textured details of practices and cultivates empathetic understanding with the subjects. These methods emphasize interpretation over explanation and prediction, symbolic meaning over function. Another element of these methods is to weave between and explore the relationships between experience-near (lived experiences of the subjects) and experience-distant (theories and questions of the anthropologist) perspectives and concepts throughout the simultaneously occurring data collection and data analysis processes.¹⁸ Through these processes, researchers capture the subjective experience of individuals and cultural practices, while also being able to frame it in larger discourses. I build on this seminal work by continuing to look at what objects mean to people through naturalistic inquiry. I delved into the nuances and details of clothing practices—establishing a holistic, textured account based on spaces, objects, practices, thoughts, beliefs, emotions, aesthetic appreciations, and multisensory experiences—but also sought to find larger thematic connections across cases.

While the Consumer Behavior Odyssey project was significant in integrating interview and ethnographic fieldwork in consumer studies, Daniel Miller's work has been foundational in

¹⁷ Melanie Wallendorf, Russell Belk, and Debora Heisley, "Deep Meaning in Possessions: The Paper," *Advances in Consumer Research* 15 (1988): 528–530; Russell Belk, ed., *Highways and Buyways: Naturalistic Research from the Consumer Behavior Odyssey* (Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research, 1991).

¹⁸ Geertz, "Thick Description."

promoting anthropological approaches within the field of material culture studies. Through various case studies of his own and in edited anthologies, Miller demonstrates how ethnographic observation and interviews have the power to penetrate the meanings people construct around objects and spaces.¹⁹ Miller has applied this approach to various cultural practices, including Western consumption practices. Based on his project on shopping on London streets, Miller argues, “We are faced with an ever more intimate world of people consuming in highly private lives that are not revealed by focus groups or questionnaires. Anthropology remains invasive, insisting on becoming intimate without our intimacy and knowing the private lives of peoples and commodities.”²⁰ By asking women to not only speak with me candidly about their interests in sustainability and clothing, but also allow me into their homes, see their private wardrobe spaces, and share their routine care and maintenance of clothes, I gained some, albeit limited, perspective into otherwise invisible and private domestic practices.

Qualitative methods are especially useful in examining what happens in the home after objects are purchased. In his article proposing practice theory as a theoretical model for understanding consumption, Warde describes how consumption is inherently bound up with a diverse range of practices and interactions with objects that are embedded in daily life.²¹ Cwerner argues a similar point specifically about clothing. He defines “wardrobe practices” as practices around clothing that is at rest and not being worn on the body—including ordering and organizing, individualizing, caring for and cleaning, and imagining. Cwerner states, “These

¹⁹ Daniel Miller, ed., *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies* (London: Routledge, 1995); Daniel Miller, ed., *Home Possessions: Material Culture Behind Closed Doors* (Oxford: Berg, 2001); Mukulika Banerjee and Daniel Miller, *The Sari* (Oxford: Berg, 2003).

²⁰ Daniel Miller, *The Dialectics of Shopping* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 204.

²¹ Alan Warde, “Consumption and Theories of Practice,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 5, no. 2 (2005): 131–153; Elizabeth Shove, Mika Pantzar, and Matt Watson, *The Dynamics of Social Practice: Everyday Life and How It Changes* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012).

wardrobe practices are part and parcel of the process whereby clothes come to signify particular meanings... Dress theory must incorporate an understanding of whatever happens in the intimate spaces of the bedroom.”²² Therefore, studying how people select, wear, store, clean, and dispose of clothes unpacks complex and significant themes in how they value clothing. In order to have access to this information, it is useful to not only talk to people about their interactions with objects, but also see them at work.

In her discussion of housework as a practice, in which habits of clothing storage, care, and maintenance often fall, Levin argues that folklore methods can help uncover the social relations, cultural meanings, and aesthetic dimensions that the work embodies. The actions, processes, and objects that we use in caring for objects and homes are essential components of our material culture. Levin suggests that through folklore methods and sensitively attending to how women do housework, we can understand housework as a tool through which people negotiate larger social and political issues.²³ These methods in particular help researchers access the nuance of intimate minutia, the silences and unarticulated qualities, and social and political understandings of everyday life. Her argument easily extends to how women might use maintaining clothing collections as a way to negotiate interests in and impacts on environmental and social issues.

Reading object stories is a foundational method in material culture studies. As reviewed above, Rader and Jessup’s Interest-Relationship-Object model encourages us to investigate the individual’s interests, the objects themselves, as well as the intersection of the two. Material

²² Saulo B. Cwerner, “Clothes at Rest: Elements for a Sociology of the Wardrobe,” *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 5, no. 1 (2001): 90.

²³ Judith Levin, “Why Folklorists Should Study Housework,” in *Feminist Theory and the Study of Folklore*, ed. Susan T. Hollis, M. Jane Young, and Linda Pershing (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 285–296; Joan Newlon Radner, ed., *Feminist Messages: Coding in Women’s Folk Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

culture scholars such as Haltman, Prown, and Martin have established methods for object analysis that emphasize holistic, physical engagement with objects.²⁴ These methods prioritize examining objects, because through their materiality they embody meanings and values. Martin eloquently describes the primacy of their physicality: “Material objects matter because they are complex, symbolic bundles of social, cultural, and individual meanings fused onto something we can touch, see, and own.”²⁵ Even though the objects are not cognitive, conscious actors, they are key characters in the relationship. For instance, Roux and Korchia’s study about secondhand clothing revealed that the physical qualities of a garment in addition to its history affected symbolic meanings, and then how those meanings affected their sense of self. Without attending to what the objects were (e.g., underwear or an inherited hand knit sweater), their study would not have been as successful in uncovering how and why people felt the way they did.²⁶

Several studies, as reviewed in the preceding literature review, used mixed-methods to investigate how people make household objects meaningful through shopping for and maintaining, cleaning, repairing, and disposing. These studies combine in-depth interviews and ethnographic observation with object case studies to access intimate dimensions of social and psychological lives. Researchers focus portions of their interviews on specific objects and incorporate in their analysis the object’s appearance, origin, history, use, and associations or attachments the owner describes to reveal core narratives owners construct for themselves.²⁷ This

²⁴ Haltman, “Introduction”; Prown, “Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture and Method”; Martin, “Magical, Mythical, Practical, and Sublime.”

²⁵ Ann Smart Martin, “Makers, Buyers, and Users: Consumerism as a Material Culture Framework,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 28, no. 2/3 (Summer-Autumn 1993): 141.

²⁶ Dominique Roux and Michaël Korchia, “Am I What I Wear? An Exploratory Study of Symbolic Meanings Associated with Secondhand Clothing,” *Advances in Consumer Research* 33, no. 1 (2006): 29–35.

²⁷ Rachel Hurdley, “Dismantling Mantelpieces: Narrating Identities and Materializing Culture in the Home,” *Sociology* 40, no. 4 (August 2006): 717–733; Annemarie Money, “Material Culture and the Living Room: The Appropriation and Use of Goods in Everyday Life,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 7, no. 3 (2007): 355–377; Nicky

mixed-methodology probes deeply into the intersection of practices and objects, meanings, and materialities, core dimensions of social practice theory mentioned above.²⁸ I built my research around these and other methodological models in order to focus on unraveling meanings around a specific object and practice in the home, but also on the body, and how environmentalism and social justice concerns are or are not present in those narratives.

A few projects have investigated in a single study the acquisition and use of clothes combined with object case studies. Guy and Banim collected data from interviews and diaries explored various dimensions around clothing practices. The authors conducted the “wardrobe interviews” in the women’s homes while looking through their clothing collections.²⁹ As evinced in their and my own research, having tangible objects present yielded rich narratives connected to specific objects. Object descriptions alone would not have been substantial. However, the physical descriptions contextualize and enrich the accompanying narratives. In her analysis of why women wear what they wear, Woodward uses ethnographic observation and thoroughly documented wardrobe inventories. Woodward’s work makes a compelling case for including object analysis alongside interviewing methods: “In analyses of contemporary clothing, when there is access to images and verbal accounts, it is as if the clothing ceases to exist as a material object. In contrast, my research aims to reconcile this understanding of the materiality of clothing

Gregson, Alan Metcalfe, and Louise Crewe, “Practices of Object Maintenance and Repair: How Consumers Attend to Consumer Objects Within the Home,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 9, no. 2 (2009): 248–272; Louise Crewe, Nicky Gregson, and Alan Metcalfe, “The Screen and the Drum: On Form, Function, Fit, and Failure in Contemporary Home Consumption,” *Design and Culture* 1, no. 3 (2009): 307–328; Robyn Dowling and Emma Power, “Beyond McMansions and Green Homes: Thinking Household Sustainability through Materialities of Homeyness,” in *Material Geographies of Household Sustainability*, ed. Ruth Lane and Andrew Gorman Murray (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2011), 75–88; Ian Woodward, “Domestic Objects and the Taste Epiphany: a Resource for Consumption Methodology,” *Journal of Material Culture* 6, no. 2 (2001): 115–136.

²⁸ Warde, “Consumption and Theories of Practice”; Shove, Pantzar, and Watson, *The Dynamics of Social Practice*.

²⁹ Alison Guy and Maura Banim, “Personal Collections: Women’s Clothing Use and Identity,” *Journal of Gender Studies* 9, no. 3 (2000): 313–327; Maura Banim and Alison Guy, “Dis/continued Selves: Why Do Women Keep Clothes They No Longer Wear?,” in *Through the Wardrobe: Women’s Relationships with Their Clothes*, ed. Eileen Green, Alison Guy, and Maura Banim (Oxford ; New York: Berg, 2001), 203–219.

with the focus upon practices of wearing within wider relational and social contexts.”³⁰ These object studies became real through her “hanging out” with the women socially and in their homes. Although I did not “hang out” with women as they were selecting items to wear, being in their wardrobe spaces (and laundering spaces) was a key methodological tool to hear their stories, witness their interactions, and feel the qualities they spoke about.

Various feminist theoretical reflections on qualitative methods are particularly relevant to dress and material culture research. My project concerns many issues raised by feminist methodologies, from attending to the political implication of daily life, illuminating the frequently invisible ordinary—and often feminized—practices, and considering the situated subjectivity of the researcher and participants. A key contribution of feminist scholarship is the acknowledgment, and indeed strategic use, of situated subjective positions of the researcher and research participant. Haraway’s significant work on objectivity in science astutely examines the debate between totalizing knowledge and relativism. In their stead, she proposes situated knowledges as foundations for objectivity:

The alternative to relativism is not totalization and single vision, which is always finally the unmarked category whose power depends on systematic narrowing and obscuring. The alternative to relativism is partial, locatable, critical knowledges... I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims.³¹

By identifying these knowledges’ “extreme localization, of the intimately personal and individualized body,”³² Haraway brings into the conversation the many macro and micro forces that combine to create the dynamic, fluid webs in which individuals are situated. Rather than devolve into an endless, recursive debate of relativism and access to knowledge, researchers can

³⁰ Sophie Woodward, *Why Women Wear What They Wear* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 33.

³¹ Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 584, 589.

³² *Ibid.*, 588.

push themselves to recognize power differentials, to explore what information, insight, or connections partialities and differences might provide. The researcher can explore her own subjectivity as part of the research process itself.³³ For example, in explaining her feminist methodology, Femenías writes, “I could not get over my feelings. Which then led me to realize: I should not. For me, ethnography had emotional shadings and nuances, moments of empathy when strangers became friends... when I felt my identity shift.”³⁴ Using this approach, Femenías effectively builds research questions and theoretical analyses from insights and doubts that emerged from her emotional experiences, making those experiences work toward theoretical advancement and sensitive understandings. Similarly, Sprague synthesizes feminist theory and standpoint methodologies to argue that researchers should examine differences, partialities, intersections, and divergences as a way of not only looking at the whole picture, but also as a way of asking questions of it, and probing one’s own place in it. Part of this process includes both recognizing one’s own identity in relation to others and what borders are crossed and what elements of context one is highlighting or omitting.³⁵ This process necessarily becomes bound up in fieldwork and writing, techniques I integrated in my research through field notes on my conversations with women and reflections on my own practices and positions. Moreover, based on the stories women told me, the concept of situated subjectivities became a critical cornerstone in my understanding of how we can understand and move forward sustainability discourse around clothing practices.

³³ Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon, eds., *Women Writing Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); M. Jane Young and Kay Turner, “Challenging the Canon: Folklore Theory Reconsidered from Feminist Perspectives,” in *Feminist Theory and the Study of Folklore*, ed. Susan T. Hollis, M. Jane Young, and Linda Pershing (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 9–28; Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

³⁴ Blenda Femenías, *Gender and the Boundaries of Dress in Contemporary Peru* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 72.

³⁵ Sprague, *Feminist Methodologies for Critical Researchers: Bridging Differences*.

At stake in research encounters is power—economic, political, social, and cultural. Feminist scholars raise these questions starting from a gendered perspective, but expand out to include questions of ethnicity and class and other dimensions of identity and social positions.³⁶ In many ways, my research methods did not engage with one of the key power inequities that underscore clothing relations—the relations between apparel consumers, industry professionals, and agricultural and garment workers, as well as others affected in communities or the very environment itself. While cognizant of these relations and structures that supported the clothing practices I was studying, my conversations focused on their perceptions, reflections, and feelings about their position in these systems. Attending to relationships of power between researcher and participant becomes a very practical and logistical issue, but also socially meaningful, when managing relations in the field.³⁷ Reflections on these issues in feminist scholarship provides guidance on balancing sensitivity toward those studied with looking for explanations, patterns, thematic understandings.

Another major debate addressed by feminist scholarship is the absence of women's practices as topics examined in anthropology and folklore. Some women's activities are dismissed outright as not worthy of study. Levin analyzes how housework rarely entered folklore research. Yocum describes how studying women's interpersonal relations are highly dependent on the fieldwork location; women who are silent in public live out rich, vocal lives in their

³⁶ Behar and Gordon, *Women Writing Culture*; Jane Lou Collins, *Threads: Gender, Labor, and Power in the Global Apparel Industry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

³⁷ Behar and Gordon, *Women Writing Culture*; Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

private homes.³⁸ It becomes important to find an “explicitly feminine environment for the fieldwork encounter,” such as the kitchen table,³⁹ or in my case the bedroom closet.

This may be less of a concern in textile and apparel studies, where studies of women’s practices dominate. On the other hand, there are also longstanding debates about the academic legitimacy of clothing and fashion studies, particularly in its relation to women.⁴⁰ This project is situated within anthropology and folklore’s expanding emphasis on women’s practices, exploring intimate interior lives, and the active construction of identity and meaning.⁴¹ However, there is still much more to explore. For instance, I used these qualitative tools to explore various dimensions of clothing associated with housework—maintenance, storage, laundering, and disposal practices—that have been less explored in current research, but which feminist folklorists have identified as an important field of study. Additionally, the critique highlights that because cultural experiences are not universal, it is important to look at these many diverse perspectives, and pay attention to how those are shaped by gender, class, ethnicity, etc.

Through my fieldwork methods of in-depth interviews and observations, I strove to foster sensitivity to the holistic context and respect for the women’s unique points of view. By asking individuals to allow me to observe and interview them about their behaviors and analyze their wardrobes, I asked them to open up the intimate and private sides of an otherwise very

³⁸ Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments*; Levin, “Why Folklorists Should Study Housework”; Margaret R. Yocom, “Woman to Woman: Fieldwork and the Private Sphere,” in *Women’s Folklore, Women’s Culture*, ed. Rosan A. Jordan and Susan J. Kalčik (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 45–53.

³⁹ Barbara Tedlock, “Works and Wives: On the Sexual Division of Textual Labor,” in *Women Writing Culture*, ed. Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 279, 280.

⁴⁰ Lou Taylor, *The Study of Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); Lou Taylor, *Establishing Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

⁴¹ Pravina Shukla, *The Grace of Four Moons: Dress, Adornment, and the Art of the Body in Modern India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008); Woodward, *Why Women Wear What They Wear*; Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchell, *Not Just Any Dress: Narratives of Memory, Body, and Identity* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004); Eileen Green, Alison Guy, and Maura Banim, eds., *Through the Wardrobe: Women’s Relationships with Their Clothes* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

public form of consumption. To respect them, I worked to be sensitive to their thoughts, emotions, choices, and tastes. Alternatively, I was also sensitive to silences, asking what is being left unsaid, what is being omitted? In this way, my research addresses the gaps in the scholarly literature, while attending to the gaps in everyday experiences.

Selecting Research Participants

I selected 19 research participants from women aged 24 to 70 who live in the greater Madison, WI area. My initial plan was to interview 15 to 20 women at least two times, but remain open to including fewer or more participants depending upon when I felt had gathered sufficiently rich cases, saw new characteristics in the relevant patterns, and reached “theoretical saturation.”⁴² Because I spent several hours interviewing, observing, and interacting with each participant, a small sample allowed me to delve deeply into each person’s practices.

Women are the primary purchasers of clothing. According the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, expenditures on women’s apparel typically account for the largest share of all apparel purchases (see figure 3.2). Although consumers under the age of 25 spent the largest percentage of their income on clothes, they accounted for the smallest share of total expenditures on apparel (see figure 3.3). Overall, consumers aged 25 to 64 accounted for the largest shares of apparel consumption. These data do not distinguish between male and female consumers, but the largest expenditures were on women’s apparel (see figure 3.4). Because this group spends the most on clothes, they are an important market to understand in terms of directing future change in the apparel industry.

⁴² Glaser and Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*; Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*; Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*.

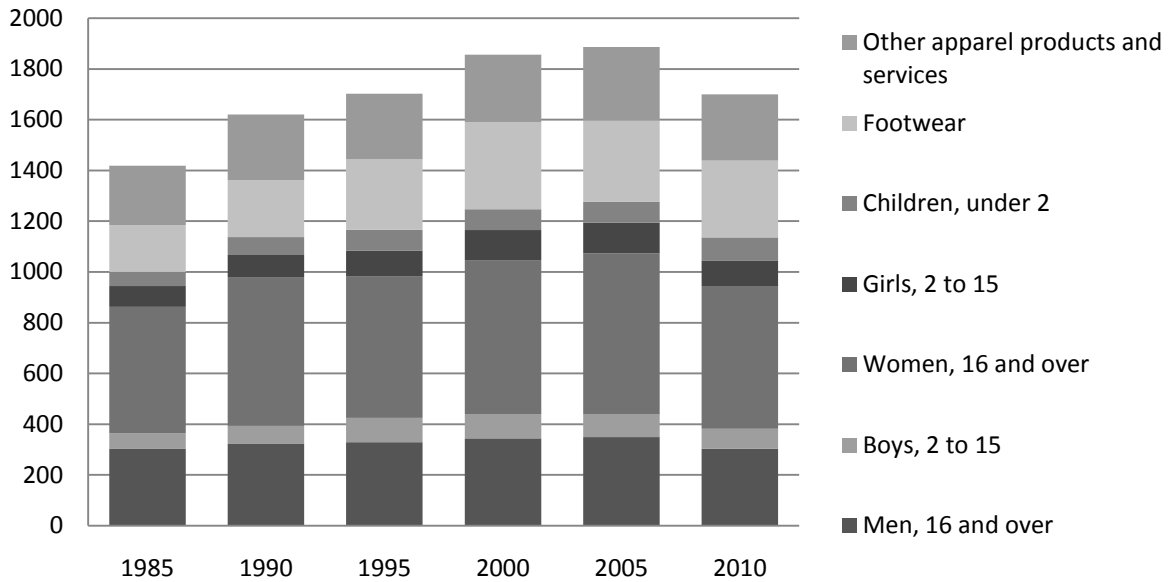


Figure 3.2. Average annual expenditures on apparel, footwear, and related products and services, per household, 1985–2010

Source: Data adapted from "Fashion: BLS Spotlight on Statistics," accessed June 8, 2013, <http://www.bls.gov/spotlight/2012/fashion/>.

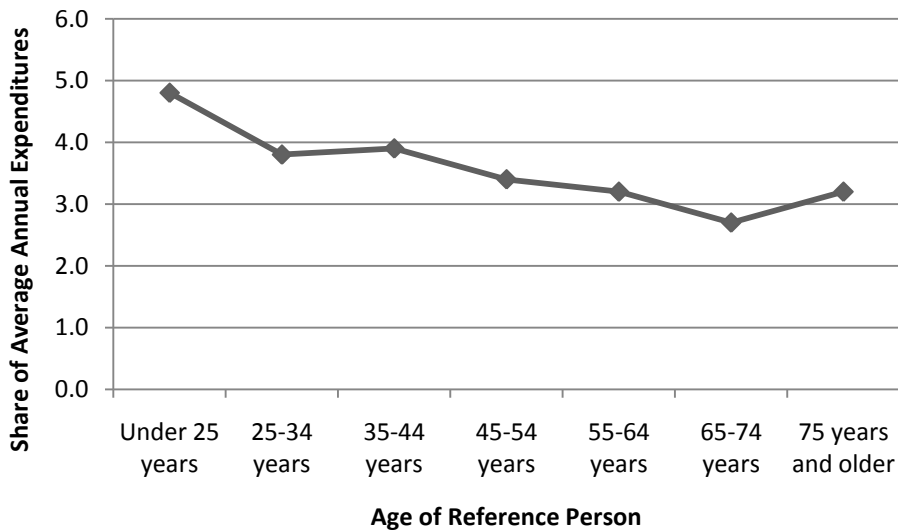


Figure 3.3. Share of average annual expenditures spent on apparel according to age, Consumer Expenditure Survey, 2011

Source: Data adapted from "Consumer Expenditure Survey's Expenditure Shares," accessed June 8, 2013, <http://www.bls.gov/cex/csxshare.htm>.

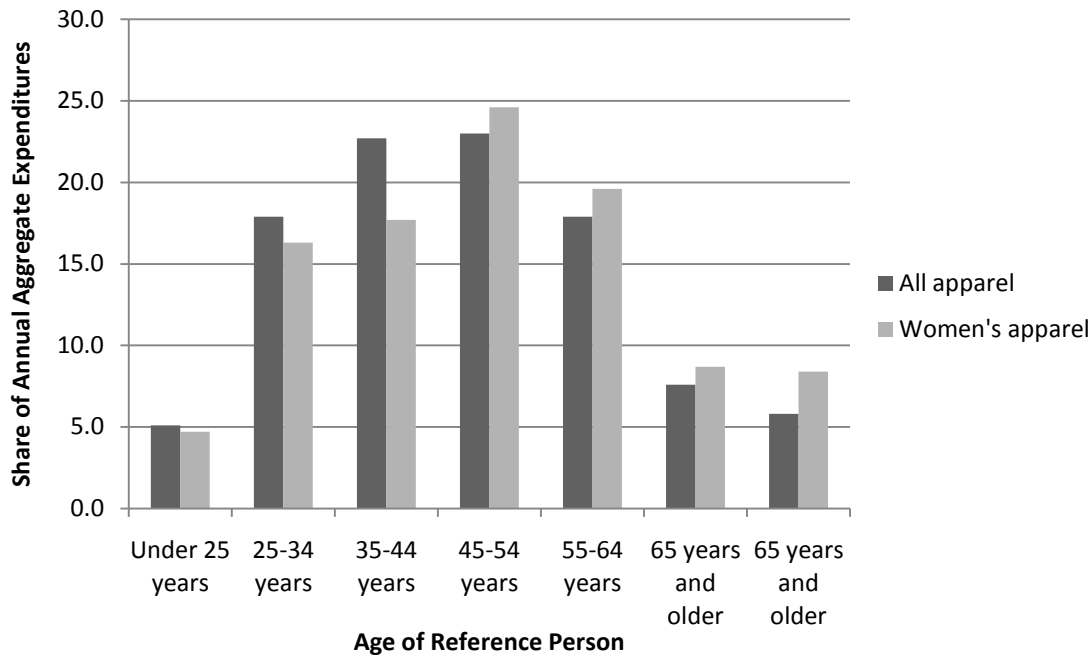


Figure 3.4. Share of annual aggregate expenditures spent on apparel according to age, Consumer Expenditure Survey, 2011

Source: Data adapted from "Consumer Expenditure Survey's Aggregate Expenditure Shares," accessed June 8, 2013, <http://www.bls.gov/cex/csxashar.htm>.

Because I selected my participants from women living in the Madison, Wisconsin area, my study may over-represent white, middle class individuals (see table 3.1). These demographics are relevant for apparel consumption. For example, those with incomes larger than \$50,000/year account for nearly half of the U.S. population, but approximately 70% of all women's clothing purchases. Even though college educated persons account for only 30% of the population, they account for nearly half of all women's clothing purchases (see figure 3.5). In his report on cognitive knowledge and processing in environmental consumption, Wagner explains how qualitative studies cannot always explicitly control for all demographic variables, and instead favor a purposive sampling frame: "Even when the under- or over-representation of certain socio-demographic variables in the samples is known, the cognitive patterns found should not be

projected to a larger, socio-demographically profiled population.”⁴³ Although results are not generalizable to the entire U.S. population, I believe the exploratory and interpretative insights gleaned from this project will contribute to the larger discussion of sustainability and meanings of clothing. Indeed, my results illuminate the need to bear in mind the nuanced subjective positions, and not impose one-size-fits-all solutions. We must strategically consider individual women’s needs, their family and household issues, their personal social networks, and the social and cultural landscape in which they live.

Table 3.1. Demographics of Madison and Dane County, Wisconsin

	Participants	Madison, WI	Dane County, WI	United States
White persons, not Hispanic, percent, 2010	89.5	75.7	81.5	63.4
Black persons, percent, 2010	0	7.3	5.3	13.1
Asian persons, percent, 2010	10.5	7.4	5.0	5.0
Bachelor’s degree or higher, percent of persons age 25+, 2007-2011	84.2	52.9	45.4	28.2
Median household income, 2007-2011	50,000-75,000	54,093	61,913	52,762
2012 Presidential election, Democratic candidate percent of vote	N/A	N/A	71.0	51.1

Source: Data adapted from United States Census Bureau, “State and County QuickFacts,” accessed June 9, 2013, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html>; “Elections & Voting Statistics | Government Accountability Board,” accessed June 9, 2013, <http://gab.wi.gov/elections-voting/statistics>; and Federal Elections Commission, “2012presgeresults,” accessed June 9, 2013, <http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2012/2012presgeresults.pdf>.

⁴³ Sigmund A. Wagner, *Understanding Green Consumer Behavior: A Qualitative Cognitive Approach* (London: Routledge, 1997), 73.

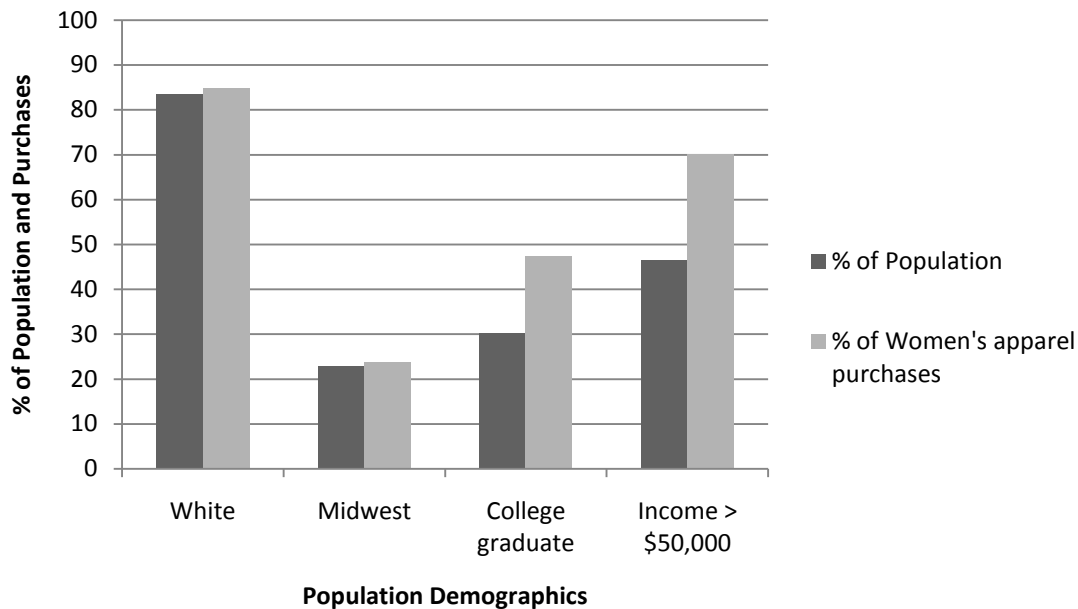


Figure 3.5. Share of annual aggregate expenditures spent on women's apparel in relation to percent of population, Consumer Expenditure Survey, 2011

Source: Data adapted from "Consumer Expenditure Survey's Aggregate Expenditure Shares."

For my case studies, I used several qualitative sampling strategies—including criterion, variation, and theoretical.⁴⁴ I used the principle of maximum variation for two primary criteria: attitudes toward sustainability (environmental and social) issues and interest levels in clothing appearance and style. Patton explains the merits of maximum variation selection: it “yields two kinds of findings: (1) high-quality, detailed descriptions of each case, which are useful for documenting uniquenesses, and (2) important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity.”⁴⁵ By using qualitative data behaviors and meanings of a few individuals, I sought to reveal patterns in how meanings of clothes related to sustainability as well as examine each case as a contextualized experience, rather than as numeric data abstracted from lived reality.

⁴⁴ Glaser and Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*; Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*.

⁴⁵ Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 235.

Because interest in style or clothes appeared as a significant theme in a pilot study, I used theoretical sampling. In order to include a variety of behaviors and interests, and thus a rich data set, I sought out people with low, non-specified and high, self-identified interests for clothing and sustainability issues. With this sampling strategy, I hoped to gain a range of data sets that tapped into various experiences with sustainability and clothing. I was not seeking to identify causes or statistical correlations between interest levels and meanings. Instead, the participants offered cases that have a variety of behavior patterns and interests that yielded substantial data through which I analyzed how adult women's clothing meanings relate to the perceived and actual sustainability of their clothing behaviors.⁴⁶

The initial proposed number of participants were not hard and fast rules, but rather guidelines for finding a range of accounts. I have indicated in parentheses the actual number of women with whom I conducted two interviews.

Table 3.2. Purposive sampling frame, projected and actual number of participants

	None to Low Interest in Sustainability	Moderate to High Interest in Sustainability	Total
None to Low Interest in Clothing/Style	4-5 (3)	4-5 (4)	8-10 (7)
Moderate to High Interest in Clothing/Style	4-5 (6)	4-5 (6)	8-10 (12)
Total Number	8-10 (9)	8-10 (10)	16-20 (19)

I selected participants using a screening questionnaire that I posted on a university-hosted survey site or that I provided in hard copy if requested. The screening survey included four components: New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) scale, (see Appendix 3) a scale assessing attitudes

⁴⁶ Carmen Valor, "The Influence of Information About Labour Abuses on Consumer Choice of Clothes: A Grounded Theory Approach," *Journal of Marketing Management* 23, no. 7-8 (2007): 675-695.

toward social justice and economic issues (SOC) (see Appendix 4), the Creekmore clothing interest scale (APP and EXP) (see Appendix 5), and the Social Desirability Scale (see Appendix 6).⁴⁷ The NEP scale offers a way to assess the participants' tendency toward a more holistic mindset embracing a balance between human needs and environmental quality, rather than the conventional mindset prioritizing individualistic, materialistic human desires and control over nature. Additionally, I developed a fifteen-question scale similar in format to the NEP. The survey asked respondents to rank their agreement with various statements about social justice, buying decisions, and economic policy issues. Like the NEP scale, several of the statements were written to be reverse-scored. I calculated the mean of these to get their sustainability attitude score (SUS). Because the Creekmore Clothing Interest Scale is a long instrument, I selected two sub-sections that seemed most relevant to finding women with a high interest in clothing and style: "concern with appearance" (APP) and "enhancement of individuality" (EXP) which I also calculated the mean of to get their clothing attitude score (CLO).

I also included in the screening survey an accepted abridged version of the Social Desirability Scale (see Appendix 6). This scale assesses how likely a person is to provide information that is conventionally socially desirable (what someone assumes the other wants to hear) rather than information that accurately reflects how they behave or think. I used this data to assess if a respondent's other survey scores about clothing interest and sustainability attitudes may be more of a representation of what the woman thinks is the preferred answer rather than

⁴⁷ Paul C. Stern, Thomas Dietz, and Gregory A. Guagnano, "The New Ecological Paradigm in Social-Psychological Context," *Environment and Behavior* 27, no. 6 (November 1, 1995): 723–743; Lois M. Gurel and Lee Gurel, "Clothing Interest: Conceptualization and Measurement," *Home Economics Research Journal* 7, no. 5 (May 1979): 274–282; Lois M. Gurel and Eunice Deemer, "Construct Validity of Creekmore's Clothing Questionnaire," *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal* 4, no. 1 (1975): 42–47; Donald G. Fischer and Carol Fick, "Measuring Social Desirability: Short Forms of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale," *Educational and Psychological Measurement* 53, no. 2 (June 1, 1993): 417–424.

how she actually feels. Based on previous uses of the scale, I accepted responses from the low to middle range, rather than only at the low end. Scores in the middle range are within the norm and do not indicate an excessive tendency to give socially desirable answers. Given the nature of research—including a substantial interview and observation component—I was able to check and triangulate the data, though I realize I could not verify or test my participants' claims to their beliefs or behaviors.

I located participants using several strategies. For the sustainability high-interest group, I primarily found women through local interest groups that have a mission relevant to fair trade, environmentalism, and sustainability. I also contacted several groups or online forums that did not have a sustainability-focused interest in attempts to diversify my participant pool. These included women's groups, business organizations, parent teacher organizations, local churches, craft groups, and online community groups. Some groups had email listservs through which I was able to send queries of interest. With other groups, I contacted a president or other official listed on a website and requested permission to send out a query to group members. I also contacted local business owners to see if any of their customers may have an interest in taking my survey. Requests to managers of local chain, department, and discount stores to see if I could speak to their customers or distribute cards or surveys were rejected as against store policy. Altogether, I contacted over sixty groups and individuals for references, not including the women I interviewed who I also asked for referrals.

In emails and telephone messages, I introduced myself and my project, how I found the contact information for the person I was contacting, why I was contacting their group, a brief description of the project, what participation would involve, and a link to my online survey (see Appendix 1). I also used the snowball or word-of-mouth method to have access to a larger pool

of potential candidates. However, the people that the women referred tended to share similar attitudes, so that was a less than fruitful mode of diversifying my case studies. One of my greatest challenges was tapping into a diverse sample, such as lower-income and low sustainability attitude groups. I do not know how many people saw my queries, but my survey was taken 188 times. Some groups and individuals let me know they would forward my request, others declined to forward, and others did not respond. I later learned that at least one participant heard about my study from a group that had not directly responded to my request.

Although I tried to select a range of participants within these parameters, I needed to find individuals who were willing to speak to me about their private clothing behaviors and spend several hours with me. This was another significant challenge I faced. Eleven of the thirty women I interviewed were unavailable for a second interview. Some women told me they did not have the time, other women never responded to phone messages or emails, and at least one woman told me she did not feel comfortable with me visiting her home. Thus, participants included those who were willing and had (or made) the time, which also may have shaped my results.

All together, 126 surveys were completed and 62 surveys were started online but incomplete. Of the completed surveys, eleven did not have contact information for follow-up. Based on survey scores, I contacted 52 women. Although I sought to select participants who demonstrated a range of interests and attitudes, the range of scores was not as diverse as I had hoped—in either the clothing or sustainability scale. I found more women who demonstrated higher interest levels in sustainability. I did not meet with any women who purchased clothes at “fast fashion” stores, e.g. H&M or Forever 21. Unfortunately, my attempt to recruit women in these stores and at local malls was unsuccessful due to store policy; my word-of-mouth network

did not yield many potential participants, either. Thus, my case studies were limited to women who showed higher on pro-sustainability attitudes. The lack of especially low sustainability scores may have been participants pre-selecting themselves out of participation due to the nature of my research. Two participants who scored on the low end of sustainability surveys withdrew after the first interview. In many ways, I was excited to have as many participants as I did who expressed minimal interest in clothes and sustainability concerns participate in a research project on those topics.

Based on responses I was receiving, I established low, middle, and high ranges for sustainability and clothing categories(see table 3.3). Based on the average of the two sub-survey scores, I assigned each survey taker to one of my four categories (High Sustainability/High Clothing or HS/HC, High Sustainability/Low Clothing or HS/LC, Low Sustainability/High Clothing or LS/HC, and Low Sustainability/Low Clothing or LS/LC) or a middle category (M).

Table 3.3. Sustainability and clothing attitudes survey score ranges

	APP, EXP, CLO	SOC, NEP, SUS
High	Above 60%	Above 80%
Middle	40% to 60%	60% to 80%
Low	Below 40%	Below 60%

I did contact women who scored outside these ranges depending on age, number of potential candidates for each category, sub-scores, or comments made on the survey. For instance, within the clothing category, most women scored higher on the “concern with appearance” section than on the “enhancement of individuality.” If a woman averaged to a middle-range clothing attitude score, but had a higher “enhancement of individuality” score, I

categorized her as a “high clothing attitude.” Table 3.4 and figure 3.6 outline mean survey scores for survey takers and participants.

Included in my screening questionnaire was the Social Desirability Scale. I did interview one woman who scored in the high (9-13) range. Because her sustainability attitude scores were already on the low end and given the lack of these low responses, I decided to try probing more deeply into her responses during the interview process.

Once I interviewed the women, I collected additional demographic data. Because I only collected demographic data from the women I interviewed, I discuss that information in chapter five as I introduce the participants.

Table 3.4. Sustainability and clothing survey mean scores and standard deviation for all survey takers, n= 126, and for participants interviewed twice, n=19

MEAN	APP	EXP	CLO	SOC	NEP	SUS
Survey Mean	54.4%	33.8%	44.1%	81.8%	73.5%	77.6%
SD	17.5	19.8	16.3	13.6	17.7	14.3
HS/HC Mean	62.8%	48.8%	55.8%	90.0%	78.4%	84.2%
SD	10.0	9.7	7.1	4.1	7.6	2.9
HS/LC Mean	47.1%	8.1%	27.6%	95.9%	92.5%	94.2%
SD	7.4	4.8	4.6	2.5	4.5	3.5
LS/HC Mean	75.0%	50.4%	62.7%	68.9%	62.2%	65.6%
SD	16.2	17.2	15.4	8.4	13.2	7.9
LS/LC Mean	42.2%	8.3%	25.3%	63.3%	38.9%	51.1%
SD	11.4	10.1	10.7	27.1	23.2	24.5

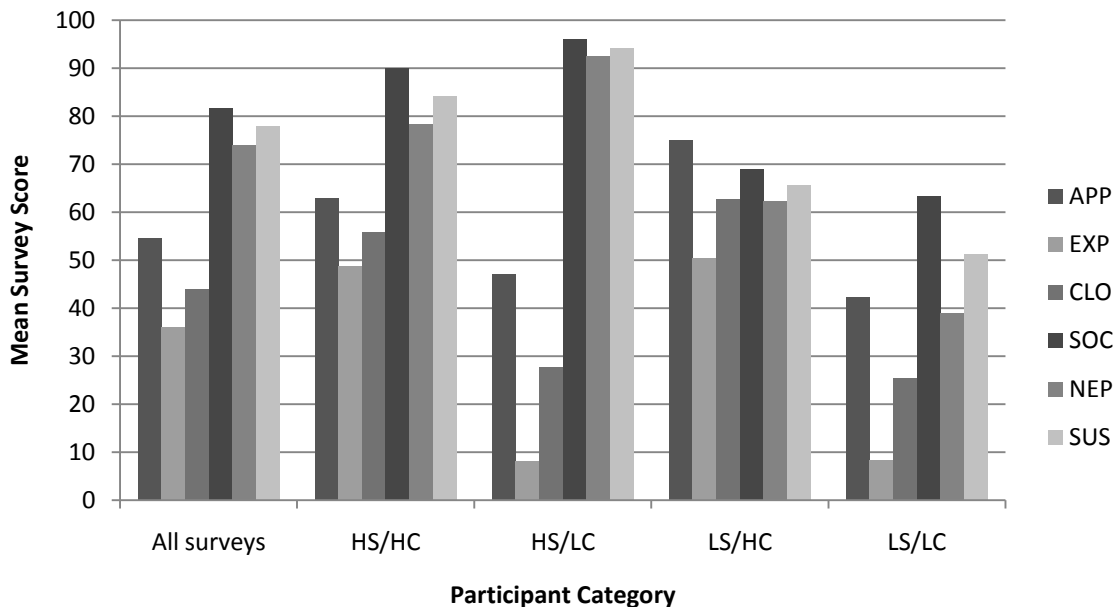


Figure 3.6. Sustainability and clothing survey mean scores for all survey takers and for participants interviewed twice by category

Collecting and Analyzing Data

As indicated, I conducted two formal, semi-structured interviews with nineteen women. With the participant's permission, I audio recorded the interviews. I personally transcribed the recorded interviews. I used the transcription process as an opportunity for "listening twice" for "how responses are structured, hearing where the explanation is difficult, feeling the form in which content is presented."⁴⁸ In my transcriptions, I did not "clean up" the spoken word; I included repeated words, nonverbal utterances, and notations for pauses. I listened for how these moments of hesitation, doubt, uncertainty, or insecurity hinted at deeper threads of meaning.⁴⁹ Each interview was approximately two to three hours long, though four were three to four hours.

⁴⁸ Garey quoted in Cameron Lynne MacDonald, *Shadow Mothers: Nannies, Au Pairs, and the Micropolitics of Mothering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 212.

⁴⁹ Marjorie L. DeVault, *Liberating Method: Feminism and Social Research* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999); Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack, "Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses," in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, ed. Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (New York: Routledge, 1991).

During each initial interview, I followed the general structure of the interview guide discussed earlier. During the course of the interview, topics sometimes arose out of order. Additionally, I modified questions based on what we are discussing and probed with unwritten prompts.

Sometimes, we ran out of scheduled time and were not able to discuss some of the topics in the interview guide. I transferred these questions to an interview guide for our follow-up meeting so we could address them later. Furthermore, because my data analysis occurred simultaneously with my data collection, following an emergent design approach discussed above, I added and adjusted my interview guide slightly during my research period. For example, some women mentioned struggling between the perceived virtue of frugality with the desire to buy clothes. I began to ask others to reflect on this experience, which helped illuminate how they made sense and created value from their clothing purchases.

At the beginning of each initial interview, I collected from each participant some basic demographic information, such as age, race/ethnicity, occupation, and education (see Appendix 4). I did not use this information to screen for participants. Throughout the process, I assured the women that their stories would remain anonymous, as outlined in the consent form approved by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Social & Behavioral Science Institutional Review Board (see Appendix 2).

The first interviews, often in public spaces such as cafes, allowed me to establish rapport and demonstrate my respect and interest in participants' experiences. Establishing rapport and trust was important for our subsequent interactions. After or during this initial interview, participants would need to allow me access to their home and closets. I hoped to make the participants as comfortable as possible with this process by explaining to them that their practices are important to study, but that their participation is voluntary and they could decline to

participate at any time. I hoped my professional demeanor and enthusiasm for the project would increase the likelihood of participation. In order to ensure my safety as a researcher, at each stage in this process, I carried a telephone and kept someone notified of where I was and how long I anticipated being there. Several participants told me that they did the same with their family when meeting with me.

Initially, I had considered shopping with women. To narrow the project's scope and simplify logistics, I focused my data collection to practices within the home. Nevertheless, we did discuss shopping choices in general and when discussing specific garments. Moreover, many women did not shop on a regular schedule creating additional scheduling constraints. While I believe that additional fieldwork—including inventorying wardrobes, shopping with women, selecting clothes to wear, or sorting clothes for donation—would have provided some additional corroboration and insights, the in-home interviews referencing specific garments and spaces laid a substantial foundation for analysis.

Depending on time constraints and participant's willingness, some observations were more in-depth, while others were more informal, visual checks. With some women (Zoey, Felicity, Tina, and Jessica), I was able to schedule an interview for a time when she would be doing her laundry. Others only walked me through her laundry routine. Similarly, only some women (Camilla, Zoey, Jessica, Lizzie, and Bernadette) had piles of clothes waiting for donation that they showed me. In my field notes, I recorded information about the spaces, the products used, organization of space and objects, and any social relationship dynamics that seemed relevant to behaviors. With permission, I photographed spaces in which they performed these clothing practices, such as their closet or laundry facilities. Although I had prepared questions for follow-up and had interview guides specific for objects, during these observations, I also

informally asked questions about their choices. Discussions covered basic factual content to more probing questions on why or how something is done (see Appendix 7). Even if the initial interview was in the woman's home, to avoid an overly long first interview and have a chance to prepare follow-up questions, I scheduled a second home visit interview.

During the home visit interview, I asked women about their clothes while in front of their closets and dressers. I asked each participant to show me garments that she uses for different activities, such as clothes for work, going out, leisure, working out, or special occasions. Although I intended initially to talk about three garments specifically with each woman, we usually ended up talking about many more, usually several dozen, across a range of garment categories and uses. Our discussions ranged in level of detail and depth. Many women pulled out a variety of garments to help answer questions—sometimes at my prompting and sometimes on their own. Indeed, watching women flip through the clothes hanging in their closet yielded information and patterns that might not otherwise have been elicited with direct questions about only three garments.

Table 3.5, based on Martin's material culture methodology, lists types of information about garments we discussed. Often, information in these categories was missing, unknown, or unavailable. However, the lack of knowledge of where it was made or lack of memory when obtained provided perspective onto women's level of engagement with their garments. Object stories were interwoven into the interviews and conversations around the closet. Participants' narratives about garments revealed what elements of the item or their relationship with it that was most resonant or compelling for them. I would then probe about dimensions that were prominent or absent, such as particular aesthetic qualities, the way it was made, or sentimental attachment.

Table 3.5. Object stories: information gathered about garments

APPEAR- ANCE	TIME	SPACE	TECH- NOLOGY	USE	VALUE	AESTH- ETICS
Evidence of maker	How old is it	Who made it	What are materials	What is it used for	Is it common or unique	What is attractive
Has it been damaged or repaired	How long has owner had	What was trade system	How was it made	Is there a ritualized use	How much did it cost	What is not attractive
What does it look like		How did owner acquire it		What is pleasing/unpleasing to owner	Is it expensive now	Complex or simple design or construction

Source: Adapted from Ann Smart Martin, "Magical, Mythical, Practical, and Sublime: The Meanings and Uses of Ceramics in America," *Ceramics in America* 1 (2001) 29-46.

I used a heuristic model of grounded theory coding and memoing to analyze interview and observation data. This model allows researchers to attend closely to the lived experiences and stories. Rather than reading for pre-established categories, I responded to their words and actions.⁵⁰ For this dissertation, I focused on the 19 women interviewed twice. I did not incorporate examples of participants interviewed only once, though insights and ideas developed while interviewing them informed subsequent interviews. During the transcription process, I made both notes within the document and extended comments in separate memos. In addition to these notations, I open coded three transcripts line-by-line to describe what each comment may signify. Open coding forces researchers to ask questions about the data and their own engagement with it. Some guidelines for open coding that I followed include defining actions, looking for assumptions, drawing out implicit actions and meanings, condensing significance of comments, comparing data, and identifying gaps in the data. This process and resulting codes helped answer my questions by identifying practices, meanings, and relationships between practices and meanings. Through comparing codes across subjects, I identified patterns as well

⁵⁰ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*; Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*; Glaser and Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*.

as outliers. Contrasting stories encouraged me to understand why a particular case was different, leading to more developed, productive analyses.⁵¹

I integrated object stories with grounded theory codes, concepts, and categories. By using the garments as data, I paid attention to what dimensions the owner said were salient. Moreover, my field notes and photographs provided me with further corroborating information. I used my field notes to work through information and ideas about the physical space, social contexts, and other personal circumstances that framed the women's dress practices. Grounded theory and feminist methodologies emphasize this reflexive, ongoing aspect of data analysis. My field notes were often the start of my data analysis as I reflected on what was most engaging, interesting, or notable. Through analyzing these different groups of data and different cases within each data type, I also made an effort to illuminate what was left unsaid or what women insisted on saying about usually unarticulated dress practices, acknowledging and building on their lived experiences.

As I refined my coding, I developed focused codes, from which I built categories, concepts, and themes that referred to significant elements in women's experiences. This was a fluid process occurring throughout the research process. I used several tools to help me refine my codes. Writing memos alongside diagramming and concept mapping helped me figure out connections and relations both between the categories and to sustainability issues. In addition, I also physically arranged my codes from open coding, field notes, and preliminary memos to determine what the major categories were. I collated my comments, notes, and codes into a list that I printed and then cut into strips. I then physically sorted these into piles around a room, sorting them into categories, shuffling them around as I asked of each code and category what is

⁵¹ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*.

this an example of or what is the underlying issue or meaning at stake. This hands-on activity allowed me to visually grasp my emerging analysis as a whole and materially engage with these otherwise intangible pieces of the puzzle.

I used the grounded theory method of memoing, in which I delineated concepts, charted examples, and mapped relationships, which guided both my data collection and analysis. Grounded theory techniques served as a flexible, yet structured map to follow—a map on which I forged my own individual path that explored the nuanced web of concepts embedded in my data. In my field notes and memos, I reflected on various dimensions on the research process, including data analysis, methodological choices, theory development, personal subjectivity, and sometimes my own clothing practices. Through writing about my research process and data, I tried to document the subjective nature of qualitative research.

I also considered the environmental, economic, and social impact of women's clothing practices in order to establish how the identified themes might be promoting, challenging, simplifying, complicating, or are irrelevant to the actual sustainability of the associated practices. As stated above, I did not conduct a scientific audit of their clothing practices. However, based on my research, I established a heuristic scale with which to assess the impacts of the behavior on which I am collecting data. My scales are a general frame through which I discuss sustainability of practices. Even though a thorough scientific audit was not possible for this study, my assessments anchor my analyses of meanings onto the actual practices and their potential impacts.

Throughout the research process, I used the spreadsheet software Microsoft Excel to keep track of data collection and record survey scores. Additionally, I used the spreadsheet software to

help “see the whole” by creating matrices to organize emerging codes, themes, and examples.⁵² I found it particularly useful to color code cells based on the behavior, reflection, or theme’s relationship to sustainability. For example, pink indicated a potentially harmful impact or relationship to environmental or social issues, green indicated a potentially positive impact, and yellow indicated a neutral or complex interaction. Toward the end of analysis, I used NVivo database software to manage coded transcripts. This software allowed me to tag segments of text with one or more analytic themes or descriptive categories. This aided in collating examples of different themes during the analysis and write-up.

Reflecting on Researcher Positionality

In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument of data collection. Interviewing and observation are inherently subjective. The researcher is necessarily involved in the data creation, which changes based on the researcher’s ongoing response to data. In order to control for these factors it is necessary to document the process closely. In addition to documenting information about the respondent, their practices, homes, and garments, I made notes on my experience as interviewer and researcher, reflecting on my strengths, weaknesses, and personal biases as well as any interpretations and reactions that emerged in the process. Soon after most research encounters, I recorded my thoughts on how the interview went, how I could have remained more open to the interview, or if I found myself applying assumptions.

I feel it is important to disclose my personal interest and stake in this topic. In my personal life, I have my own tensions between an interest in clothing and sustainability concerns. I find clothing a delightful, expressive, and creative activity. I do not read fashion magazines or

⁵² Richards, *Handling Qualitative Data: A Practical Guide*.

follow fashion trends or designers, but I was able to recognize nearly all the specific brands and stores mentioned. I enjoy reading and looking at clothing catalogs, but was inspired to cancel all of them after a participant told me she had. I endeavor to have a sustainable lifestyle (eating locally and seasonally, biking or busing, line drying clothes—even in the winter on a indoor rack which I invested in during the research, attending city and neighborhood meetings, and attempting to reduce the amount of clothing I buy), but I realize I could do more. While this stance may have helped build rapport with some women, I did not volunteer my experiences. Some asked me about my clothing tastes or research hypotheses, but we did not discuss it until the end of the interview. When asked about the latter, I honestly told participants that I was listening for what was most important to *them*.

Given the subject matter on clothing, how I dressed myself for interviews may also have been a factor in the research interviews. I attempted to reach a middle ground in which I dressed in business casual attire, what I imagined as “neutral” but was inflected with meaning. My “interview uniform” consisted of neutral-colored slacks and a dark colored knit top or sweater (which is atypical from my preferred style of colors and skirts). For the second interview, I modified my look slightly, if at all, to align more closely with hers, such as by dressing more casually in jeans. I even bought a new pair of “interview slacks;” as women insisted on looking clean and neat, I became self-conscious of the wear on my pant cuffs. My dressed, embodied experiences as a researcher are shared by others who have noticed and/or changed dress during fieldwork.⁵³ Moreover, how I dressed myself made me aware of particularities in participants’ (or my own) dress—the absence of skirts, which I have long enjoyed wearing; the prevalence of

⁵³ Shukla, *The Grace of Four Moons*; Woodward, *Why Women Wear What They Wear*; Femenías, *Gender and the Boundaries of Dress in Contemporary Peru*.

make-up, which I rarely wear; the ubiquity of simple, plain jewelry as part of daily wear, in contrast to my occasional wear of bright, chunky jewelry. I became increasingly aware of how women used these dressing strategies to fit in and feel comfortable with themselves and others.

Through my preliminary research, I have learned about the sustainability and unsustainability of various clothing products and practices. At this point in my research, it was not my goal to educate the women about these matters. Instead, I wanted to respect their knowledge and thoughts. Through cultivating a neutral stance and working to check my own assumptions during interviews, I strove not to assume information or perspectives that the respondent may have. I would ask a woman if she could tell me more about what she knows or like about a topic that, even though I had heard of what she was discussing. Unfortunately, there were also times that I tacitly shared knowledge or missed opportunities to explore a topic further. For example, as a white, educated, middle-class woman myself, I shared some experiences with my participants, and did not probe the complexities of class and ethnicity as in-depth. However, I sought to remain neutral in interviews; not assume knowledge, attitudes, or experiences that the women may or may not have; and realized that the experiences of this demographic offers only one dimension of a complex, multi-faceted systems.

While I remained focused on my research questions, I wanted to allow the open-ended nature of my questions and method to yield whatever results were important in the lives of the women I interviewed. Nevertheless, surprises and nuances emerged. For example, the idea of home economics and an ethics of care that builds from self to family, object to others, emerged from my interviews. I endeavored to maintain a reflective stance on my data collection and analysis to ensure that I listened to the respondent's voices and did not impose my own concerns.

PART II

CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCING PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR PRACTICES

Introducing the Participants

In order to situate the following analysis, I review participants' demographics. I outline general observations on their clothing behaviors. I then introduce the nineteen participants according to the attitude category into which I grouped them. Within groups, individuals are in no particular order. I describe their clothing practices, attitudes and related behaviors concerning environmental and social issues, and any comments on their clothing practices in relation to these issues. To protect anonymity, I have provided pseudonyms and modified some details. In this and the following chapters, I have bolded interview quotes to highlight participants' voices.

Reviewing Participants' Demographic Data

Table 4.1 provides aggregate information about participants and tables 4.2 and 4.3 provide data on individual participants. Participants were almost entirely white, non-Hispanics. Almost half of the women were under forty, and just over half were older than forty. Not every age range was represented in each category. The distribution of age ranges across samples is interesting, although not statistically significant. Five of the twelve participants grouped under high clothing were in their thirties; all the women in their twenties fell under the low sustainability attitude.

I spoke with women in various stages of their lives and household configurations. Approximately one-third of the women I spoke with were single and living alone. These women spanned the age and sample categories. Nearly half of participants were either raising or had

raised a daughter. This parenting status became relevant to my project; when asked to consider what social issues were they concerned about many mentioned issues related to raising daughters or the clothing experiences they share with their daughter. All of the women I interviewed who did not live alone, lived with a male partner.

My case studies skewed toward women with higher levels of education. However, those who had a bachelor's or advanced degree were split between low and high sustainability attitude categories. My participants included a range of household incomes, but tended toward middle and upper ranges. The two participants who reported incomes below \$25,000 were single women living alone. Most participants described not being deeply affected or hurt by the economic recession generally or in their clothing consumption behaviors particularly. This is not to suggest that women did not consider cost alongside personal or family finances in their purchase or use decisions; indeed, some women wrestled with budgeting for clothes. However, my sample did not reveal an acute response to the current economic climate.

Three-quarters of the women I spoke with had some sort of job outside of the home. Two women were unemployed at the time of the first interview, but by the second interview, they had secured office work. Three were graduate students or soon-to-be-graduate students, but each had jobs in addition to their student status. Two women were retired (one of these women remained active in non-profit organizations). Rosa identified her occupation as "woman"; she actively sustained her family through growing crops and raising animals, in addition to doing some commissioned sewing.

Table 4.1. Participants' aggregate demographic information according to attitude category (n=19)

Demographic	Total # (% of total)	HS/HC (n=6)	HS/LC (n=4)	LS/HC (n=6)	LS/LC (n=3)
Age					
Range	24-70				
Mean	43				
20-29	3 (16%)	0	0	1	2
30-39	6 (32%)	4	1	1	0
40-49	2 (11%)	1	1	0	0
50-59	5 (26%)	1	0	3	1
60-69	2 (11%)	0	2	0	0
70+	1 (5%)	0	0	1	0
Ethnicity					
White	17 (89%)	5	4	5	3
Asian American	2 (11%)	1	0	1	0
Household size					
1 (no children)	6 (32%)	2	1	1	2
1 (children not at home)	1 (5%)	0	0	1	0
2 (no children)	4 (21%)	2	0	2	0
2 (children not at home)	2 (11%)	0	1	0	1
3 or more (children at home)	6 (32%)	2	2	2	0
Highest education					
Some college	3 (16%)	2	0	1	0
Bachelors	6 (32%)	3	1	1	1
Advanced	10 (53%)	1	3	4	2
Annual household income					
Less than \$25,000	2 (11%)	1	0	0	1
\$25,000-\$50,000	5 (26%)	1	1	3	0
\$50,000-\$75,000	6 (32%)	2	2	1	1
\$75,000-\$100,000	1 (11%)	0	0	1	0
Over \$100,000	4 (21%)	2	1	1	0
Undisclosed	1 (11%)	0	0	0	1
Textile makers					
Yes	9 (47%)	3	0	5	1
No	10 (53%)	3	4	1	2

Table 4.2 Participants' individual demographic information

Name	Age	Ethnicity	Household size	Children, children at home	Textile maker
High Sustainability/High Clothing Attitude Category (HS/HC)					
Lizzie	30-39	White	3	1, 1	Yes
Eunice	30-39	White	1	0	No
Sandra	50-59	White	1	0	No
Niki	40-49	White	4	2, 2	Yes
Tara	30-39	White	2	0	Yes
Felicity	30-39	Asian American	2	0	Yes
High Sustainability/Low Clothing Attitude Category (HS/LC)					
Helen	60-69	White	1	0	No
Tina	30-39	White	4	1, 1	No
Megan	40-49	White	3	2, 2	No
Gretchen	60-69	White	2	2, 0	No
Low Sustainability/High Clothing Attitude Category (LS/HC)					
Bernadette	70-79	White	1	4, 0	Yes
Wendy	20-29	White	2	0	Yes
Camilla	30-39	White	2	0	Yes
Rosa	50-59	Asian American	5	3, 3	Yes
Rachel	50-59	White	4	2, 2	Yes
Melanie	50-59	White	1	0	No
Low Sustainability/Low Clothing Attitude Category (LS/LC)					
Louise	50-59	White	2	2, 0	No
Zoey	20-29	White	1	0	Yes
Jessica	20-29	White	1	0	No

Table 4.2. Participants' individual demographic information, cont.

Name	Household income	Education	Occupation
High Sustainability/High Clothing Attitude Category (HS/HC)			
Lizzie	Above \$100,000	Bachelors	Educator
Eunice	Less than \$25,000	Bachelors	Health care
Sandra	\$50,000-\$75,000	Advanced degree	Research director
Niki	Over \$100,000	Some college	Retail
Tara	\$25,000-\$50,000	Some college	Homemaker
Felicity	\$50,000-\$75,000	Bachelors	Project manager
High Sustainability/Low Clothing Attitude Category (HS/LC)			
Helen	\$25,000-\$50,000	Advanced degree	Consultant
Tina	\$50,000-\$75,000	Advanced degree	Administrative assistant
Megan	\$50,000-\$75,000	Advanced degree	Scientist
Gretchen	Over \$100,000	Bachelors	Retired (administration)
Low Sustainability/High Clothing Attitude Category (LS/HC)			
Bernadette	\$25,000-\$50,000	Bachelors	Retired (health care)
Wendy	\$25,000-\$50,000	Bachelors	Educator and student
Camilla	\$75,000-\$100,000	Advanced degree	Student (health care)
Rosa	\$50,000-\$75,000	Advanced degree	Woman (previous work in arts)
Rachel	Over \$100,000	Advanced degree	Real estate agent
Melanie	\$25,000-\$50,000	Some college	Administrator (service)
Low Sustainability/Low Clothing Attitude Category (LS/LC)			
Louise	\$25,000-\$50,000	Advanced degree	Administrator
Zoey	Less than \$25,000	Advanced degree	Unemployed
Jessica	Undisclosed	Bachelors	Sales

Table 4.3. Participants' scores on screening questionnaire by individual and combined scales

Name	Sustainability			Clothing		
	SOC	NEP	Mean	APP	EXP	Mean
High Sustainability/High Clothing Attitude Category (HS/HC)						
Lizzie	93%	82%	88%	65%	40%	53%
Eunice	83%	87%	85%	68%	58%	63%
Sandra	92%	67%	79%	73%	38%	56%
Niki	87%	85%	86%	55%	48%	51%
Tara	92%	73%	83%	68%	63%	65%
Felicity	93%	77%	85%	47%	48%	47%
High Sustainability/Low Clothing Attitude Category (HS/LC)						
Helen	97%	97%	97%	58%	5%	32%
Tina	92%	85%	88%	43%	10%	27%
Megan	97%	95%	95%	48%	15%	32%
Gretchen	99%	97%	97%	38%	2.5%	20%
Low Sustainability/High Clothing Attitude Category (LS/HC)						
Bernadette	72%	38%	55%	50%	40%	45%
Wendy	78%	77%	78%	82%	73%	77%
Camilla	80%	63%	72%	88%	63%	75%
Rosa	58%	75%	67%	98%	60%	79%
Rachel	65%	67%	66%	68%	48%	58%
Melanie	60%	53%	57%	63%	20%	42%
Low Sustainability/Low Clothing Attitude Category (LS/LC)						
Louise	82%	40%	61%	33%	0%	17%
Zoey	83%	67%	75%	35%	2.5%	19%
Jessica	25%	10%	18%	58%	23%	40%

Reviewing Participants' Clothing Practices and Sustainability Issues

In this section, I comment on women's clothing practices and attitudes. I then analyze major themes identified during coding in the following three chapters. The information discussed in this dissertation is self-reported, although I was able to partially observe and confirm some of what they said during home visits. As suggested by Guagnano's ABC theory, social marketing

principles, and other ethnographic approaches to design, it is important to consider what users perceives to be barriers or facilitators of behavior.¹

The women I interviewed presented a limited range of clothing practices. While fashion market forces often influenced their clothing choices subtly (e.g. shaping what clothes and colors are available in stores for a particular season), none of my participants actively followed fast-fashion. A couple of women would occasionally stop in at one of the fast fashion mall stores, such as H & M, and buy one or two pieces, but none of them regularly visited these stores. Similarly, none of the participants purchased designer apparel.² This may be because of the age group, geographic location, or other factors. Nonetheless, my study does offer insight into routine clothing choices. About half of the women I spoke with shopped at secondhand stores for their clothing; two-thirds of these women were in the high-sustainability attitude category. Three participants sourced their clothes primarily secondhand. Otherwise, participants shopped for new clothes at various chain, discount, and department stores in-stores or online.

More than half of the women I interviewed (ten out of nineteen) were involved in textile crafts in some way. Although I do not have specific statistics on how many women are engaged in textile crafts, some may think this is a relatively high percentage for my small sample. However, I was not sampling for representation here, but rather richness of cases. These women's reflections on making, as well as those of women who distanced themselves from textile crafting practices, yielded rich data for my third analytical chapter on meaning and

¹ Gregory A. Guagnano, "Influences on Attitude-Behavior Relationships: A Natural Experiment with Curbside Recycling," *Environment and Behavior* 27 (1995): 699–718; B. Frame and B. Newton, "Promoting Sustainability through Social Marketing: Examples from New Zealand," *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 31, no. 6 (2007): 571–581; Prasad Boradkar, *Designing Things: A Critical Introduction to the Culture of Objects* (Oxford: Berg, 2010); Kate Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Design Journeys* (London: Earthscan, 2008).

² Three of the participants with whom I conducted initial interviews but was unable to schedule follow-up interviews did purchase designer apparel, including jeans, jackets, shoes, and evening wear.

making. Helen was an expert mender, who particularly relished darning. While this a textile skill that most women did not do, Helen also explicitly mentioned that she was not a textile maker. Because of her self-identification, I have categorized her as not a maker, despite her practical skills. Many items made were additional fashion or accessory items, and were not necessarily everyday, standard pieces of their wardrobes. Of the remaining nine non-textile maker participants, two had purchased supplies for, but had not yet begun, sewing and knitting projects. All but one woman who was involved in textile crafts was identified with the High Clothing attitude. The women with the highest scores in the high clothing category (Wendy, Camilla, and Rosa) were involved in making or designing clothes in some way.

Although I did not discuss in-depth with my participants their underwear, other undergarments, hosiery, shoes, or other accessories, comments and narratives about these elements revealed themes relevant to women's experiences with clothes and the relationship to sustainability. For example, even though I did not ask every woman where she bought her underwear, several women would mention the importance of washing underwear after every wearing or not sourcing underwear from or donating it to secondhand stores.

Laundry practices varied along two axes—whose garments were laundered and what garments were being laundered. Women who did family laundry washed loads more frequently, often mixing their own garments with family members' or household textiles. Single women and women whose household members did laundry separately waited longer and did less sorting of loads (with the exception of Melanie). Everyone's primary sorting category was color, with exceptions for delicates, including sweaters. Six participants dry cleaned items, two of whom did so more frequently for their suiting. Primary reasons for not dry cleaning were the expense and hassle. Thirteen participants machine-dried most of their clothes, but would line or flat dry

selected items (e.g. lingerie or sweaters); two line-dried whole loads some of the time (Eunice and Sandra), and four line-dried most of the clothes most of the time (Niki, Megan, Gretchen, and Rosa). Women would wash an item that was obviously stained. While standards and comfort levels varied between women, the general consensus for when something needs washing was as follows.

- Wash the following items after a single wearing
 - Underwear (may or may not include bras)
 - Socks
 - Shirts and camisoles that directly touch the skin
 - Items worn while sweating or in the summer
- Wash the following items after two or more wearings
 - Bras
 - Sweaters
 - Bottoms in general, including jeans, pants, and skirts
 - Suits
 - Jackets
 - Items worn for only a couple hours
 - Items worn in the winter

The number of wearings beyond one was often only two, but was sometimes up to ten. One respondent talked about wearing the same pair of jeans for one or two weeks before washing them. Others talked about only washing a sweater once a season, but the number of wearings within that season varied. Items not washed after the first wearing were often left to air out in between wearings, with the stated intention to extend the garment's life. Women varied in their preference for laundry detergents. A few women consciously chose laundry detergent sold as eco-friendly. Nine women used scent and dye-free varieties to avoid irritation, but three women really enjoyed scented products. Women ironed clothing to ensure a professional appearance, but most women did not particularly like ironing. Wendy and Camilla regularly ironed as part of their sewing and sales practices.

Participants said they would do basic mending (Jessica and sometimes Sandra enlisted their mom's help), with some mending a garment right away and others letting a pile accumulate (if never repaired, it may be transferred to a pile to be donated). This included replacing buttons, fixing a separated seam, or the quick closing of a small hole. Most women did not do alterations or tailoring (even skilled seamstresses Rosa, Camilla, and Bernadette tended to make new garments rather than modify existing garments), though a few (Eunice, Melanie, Sandra, and Louise) had paid for that service or asked mothers for help, especially for hemming pants and altering dresses. Basic mending did not include darning holes or repairing tears. Only one woman, Helen, darned holes and reinforced thinning areas on socks or other garments. Rather, holes and tears were often criteria for throwing away a garment. Megan described a well-loved jacket repaired by a family member, but this was an exceptional item.

In addition to asking about clothing practices, I also asked women about issues related to the environment or social elements that they were interested in or concerned about. These discussions varied quite a bit. Common topics included fossil fuel use, energy conservation, chemical pollution, water quality, animal welfare, sweatshop labor, trust that U.S. regulations protect environment and workers, and the impact of fashion industry on girls. Women were interested in a particular issue or two, but were not always active in promoting policies or behaviors aligned with that issue.

Aside from criticizing fashion and media's sexualization of girls, using clothing to enhance one's sexuality did not regularly come up in conversations. Niki referred to one sleeveless, knee-length, low-v-neck dress in a drapey knit fabric as what her husband called her "**sexy dress.**" A couple other stories from Eunice and Zoey described how dressing and presenting themselves confidently, but not particularly revealing, elicited unwanted comments.

This is clearly a ripe topic in the field of dress and culture studies, but I do not delve in-depth into it given my project's data and scope.

A few women (Lizzie, Eunice, Helen, Tara, and Gretchen) mentioned how it was hard to separate issues relating to the environment and people, because they were interconnected. They could see how a ripple effect from their lifestyle choices could affect ecosystems, communities, and individuals in other places. This is not to say that in the interview they were able to trace a complete garment lifecycle and all of its potential impacts, but rather that they made connections. Indeed, what many women commented on was the difficulty in making these connections or tracing the lifecycle. Some of these women also critiqued options that did not address issues on the systems-level. For instance, Zoey explained why she did not purchase organic-labeled products: because organic has a narrow definition regarding production and may not be sustainable overall, it was not worth spending additional money on an organic option.

One element that came up was the importance of buying products or stores with local or U.S. ties. Much of the reasoning behind this was economic—to improve the quality of life of your community through supporting jobs and keeping money flow local. On a related note, other women (Bernadette, Rosa, Helen, and Lizzie) brought up the idea of self-sufficiency—taking care of yourself and your family—as an issue that we need to address as a society. Balancing individual and community concerns and having infrastructure to support that balance was also an issue.

One topic came up that I could not have anticipated, but which engaged participants were political conversations and actions around labor rights and other social justice policies. During the middle of my data collection process in February and March 2011, the state of Wisconsin had an intense period of very public political debates. The legislation that sparked the debates and

protests touched on many issues, most notably being the de facto dissolution of public employee unions, but also included changes to policy administration and funding cuts to education, environmental regulations, and public health assistance programs. This legislation and the intense month-long protest engaged a diverse population, sparking interest and action in people who were not previously involved in politics or civic activism.³

At least nine participants (Lizzie, Eunice, Sandra, Gretchen, Megan, Wendy, Zoey, Louise, and Camilla) engaged in protests against the proposed legislation. Although the protests did not directly affect my analysis, the prominence of this event in the community and participants' lives (from organizing events to donating supplies and spending nights in the capitol building), made it an important dimension of their personal experiences with issues I was asking them to reflect on. Participants who had previously been uninterested or unengaged in labor activism, all of a sudden had a very personal stake in issues they had otherwise seen as distant, abstract, or irrelevant. Several spoke about how the protests' null effect on the legislation left them disillusioned or exhausted to engage in future political causes. Contrastingly, at least one woman was inspired and increasingly tuned into issues in ways she had not done before. For instance, Louise, who I had put in the low sustainability group primarily because of her low NEP scores, rallied for unions and was concerned with the economic impacts of the legislation on people she knew, protested for the first time, and began attending events hosted by local liberal organizations. I feel Louise's testimony, among others, underlines the fact that we cannot simply approach these complex problems of production and consumption through a single lens of ecological or social dimensions. Moreover, these beliefs, values, and behaviors dynamically

³Jason Stein and Patrick Marley, *More Than They Bargained For: Scott Walker, Unions, and the Fight for Wisconsin* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013); John Nichols, *Uprising: How Wisconsin Renewed the Politics of Protest, from Madison to Wall Street* (Nation Books, 2012).

change over time and in response to social and political events. Nevertheless, despite the increased awareness of labor issues in their personal lives and local communities, participants did not explicitly connect labor issues to their clothing practices or apparel industry.

Despite women's stated desire to own quality items and less of them, overall most women in my study had many clothes, even when they asserted they did not. Although I did not conduct itemized inventories of their wardrobes, I noted that all women had at least one closet and one dresser, while at least a quarter had more than this. Women's closet sizes ranged from a couple feet across to walk-ins. In addition, women often had occasional wear, off-season clothes, wrong-sizes, or over-garments stored elsewhere in the home, such as storage bins in the basement or in spare closets. Moreover, what was not in their closets was not necessarily even counted in women's own representations of their clothing inventory. Rachel proudly claimed to her friends that all of her clothes fit in her one, well-organized closet. Left uncounted were the undergarments, t-shirts, and other lounge apparel folded in the dresser and seasonal apparel stored elsewhere. Even so, her main, active wardrobe was readily accessible in the one closet and her friends were duly impressed that she managed with that supposedly small collection. Rachel's wardrobe was not especially large or small compared to others in my study, but she felt it was less than many others in her peer group. It seemed that women's perceptions of how many clothes other women own or how frequently other women acquire and discard the latest fashion tended to soften their evaluations of their own behaviors. When asked, women usually described their clothing consumption impact or wardrobe size as "**in the middle.**"

Just a few women (Lizzie, Niki, Gretchen, Helen, and Megan) regularly considered environmental impact or labor conditions when buying clothing. They emphasized selecting organic, recycled, or secondhand materials. Overall, participants mentioned that they were

frustrated with available options, even if they wanted to consider those factors in their choices. They did not think information about garments and their production was available, they did not think products made in the United States were available, and they thought that U.S. made or ecologically sensitive materials would be too expensive. It was not clear that they had explicitly looked for these products. When participants mentioned garment workers, they made general, abstract claims, such as **“Oh yeah, sweatshops. I don’t buy clothes made in sweatshops”** or **“I try to buy clothes made in the US,”**⁴ despite also demonstrating that they did not research or check apparel for these criteria.

In contrast to a popular image of consumers throwing bags of last-season clothes away every season, women in my study described a more selective process. Seven participants had at least one container of clothes that they were planning to donate, verifying that participants were discarding a dozen or more garments. They described this occurring one to two times a year, or less. Everyone said they donated clothes that no longer fit them stylistically or physically to a secondhand store or individuals they knew. If an item was stained, torn, or had a hole, participants did not donate it, thinking if the item was not something they thought somebody would want, and they would just throw it away. However, Eunice donated expensive jeans thinking someone might patch them and Rachel let someone else make the final decision to throw something away. The knowledge that darning or reinforcing fabric was not a typical behavior leads me to believe that participants were not wearing out clothes as much as they presumed. Participants also thought they were in the middle in terms of whether their clothing practices had a positive or negative impact on people and the planet. Unfortunately, if they saw

⁴ When garment production did come up, there was an overwhelming tendency to associate non-U.S. production with labor abuses and U.S. production with safe, regulated practices.

themselves as already doing “what they can,” there was not necessarily motivation to change or improve habits. Even when they knew or suspected their choices were not optimal, they did not seek out more environmentally or socially responsible choices. For example, most women realized line drying was less energy intensive than a machine, but still machine-dried their clothes.

Despite limited ability to assess participants’ practices through audits and tracking over time, I have interpreted participants’ practices based on information established in preceding chapters and within the context of the group (see tables 4.4 and 4.5). The categorizations are fuzzy and subjective; there were certainly exceptions to these general assessments. However, rough trends emerge from my interpretations. For example, the seven participants who overall had more sustainable practices, according to this categorization, were distributed across the HS/HC, HS/LC, and LS/HC categories. The five participants who had the least sustainable practices were all in the LS categories, but there were several participants in the HS categories who had higher assessments. Furthermore, participants were neither all bad nor all good, and shifted between impact levels depending on the activity or garment type. Contextualized within conversations with women, I saw practices that tended to be more sustainable were not always motivated by sustainability-oriented goals or values. Instead, caring or being interested in particular dimensions shaped behaviors and relationships with specific garments and the wardrobe as a whole. The following chapters work to unpack these nuances as they emerged in women’s practices.

Table 4.4. Assessments of sustainability of participants' practices by negative impact

Name	Acquisition	Wear/Use	Laundering/ Maintenance	Disposal	Symbolic Investment	Total
High Sustainability/High Clothing Attitude Category (HS/HC)						
Lizzie	Lower	Middle	Higher	Middle	Lower	7
Eunice	Middle	Lower	Middle	Higher	Middle	10
Sandra	Middle	Higher	Middle	Higher	Middle	12
Niki	Lower	Middle	Lower	Higher	Middle	9
Tara	Middle	Middle	Higher	Higher	Lower	12
Felicity	Middle	Higher	Middle	Middle	Lower	10
High Sustainability/Low Clothing Attitude Category (HS/LC)						
Helen	Lower	Lower	Higher	Lower	Middle	6
Tina	Middle	Middle	Higher	Middle	Higher	12
Megan	Lower	Higher	Lower	Middle	Higher	9
Gretchen	Higher	Lower	Lower	Lower	Higher	9
Low Sustainability/High Clothing Attitude Category (LS/HC)						
Bernadette	Higher	Higher	Higher	Higher	Middle	14
Wendy	Lower	Higher	Higher	Lower	Lower	9
Camilla	Higher	Higher	Higher	Middle	Middle	13
Rosa	Lower	Middle	Lower	Higher	Lower	8
Rachel	Middle	Middle	Higher	Middle	Middle	11
Melanie	Higher	Middle	Higher	Higher	Middle	13
Low Sustainability/High Clothing Attitude Category (LS/HC)						
Louise	Higher	Higher	Higher	Middle	Higher	14
Zoey	Middle	Middle	Higher	Middle	Middle	11
Jessica	Higher	Higher	Higher	Middle	Higher	14

Table 4.5. General criteria for assessing sustainability of practices by negative impact

	Higher (3)	Middle (2)	Lower (1)
Acquisition	Mostly new apparel	Mix of new and secondhand , selective purchases	Mostly secondhand or sustainable brands, selective purchases
Wear/Use	Many unworn items	Some unworn items	Few unworn items
Laundering/Maintenance -assumes machine wash most loads	Mostly warm water, Machine dry, More frequent, smaller	Warm or cold water, Line dries some loads	Mostly cold water, Line dries most loads, Less frequent, larger
Disposal -assumes donate poor fit	Throws away worn or torn items	Reuses or recycles worn as leisurewear or rags	Recycles, reuses, and repairs
Symbolic investment	Invests or receives less well-being	Invests or receives some well-being	Invests or receives significant well-being

Meeting the Participants

Women in the High Sustainability/High Clothing Category

Lizzie

Lizzie expressed concern with her presentation of self in her work setting, but was otherwise prioritized comfort, function, coverage—especially concerning movement in her work environment and her active lifestyle. While not particularly experimental in her clothing choices, she did appreciate a certain amount of playful humor in her casual wear. Lizzie was an active consumer of secondhand clothes and other products. She obtained her clothes primarily from thrift stores, including the discounted store where clothing is sold by the pound, and enjoyed salvaging items on the curb that others have thrown out. She was happy to donate clothing items back to the local thrift stores, especially since her initial financial investment was small. Lizzie and her family washed dark and colored clothes in cold water, but they washed some items in hot and dry in the dryer due to a family member's allergy concerns. She would do minor mending and tackled basic modification or tailoring.

Lizzie's scores on the environmental and social attitude scales averaged 87.5%. She had incorporated some concerns with energy and consumption into her home and other consumption choices, especially food. While primary motivators for secondhand consumption included low prices and discovering unique items, she was conscious of the importance of reducing waste through reuse. Lizzie was particularly engaged with applied creative projects—ranging from home and garden do-it-yourself projects to welding to textile crafts, approaching worn or stained clothes or others' castoff clothes as raw material for future projects. She shared her playful

enthusiasm and adventurous approach to spinning, knitting, and sewing with her mother, sister, and daughter.

When asked to reflect on her own clothing practices, Lizzie realized that she did not always make the most environmentally or socially responsible choices—such as line drying clothes—but gave herself credit for that which she has done or is interested in doing—such as wanting to set up a grey water system for her laundry. Lizzie consciously chose not to participate in first cycle consumption, and felt guilty when she did. By reducing her consumption, not participating in the first cycle, and resisting the fashion industry, Lizzie intentionally subverted a growth-driven consumer culture founded on planned obsolescence. She disengaged from brand and image oriented status symbols, while simultaneously strategically drawing on style looks for her work wardrobe. She also used others' waste—from clothing to magazines to metal scrap—often making money off it through selling through online marketplaces. While not conspicuously modest, she did not endorse what she saw as over-sexualized style for her or her daughter.

Eunice

Eunice had recently made a move towards a more voluntary simplicity-oriented lifestyle. She changed jobs resulting in a lower income, downshifted her spending habits, and stopped buying as many clothes. Eunice enjoyed clothes and curating her wardrobe, but with less income she had become more selective of what earned her financial investment and a place in her closet. Often she invested in brand name products that she saw as higher quality that met her desired needs. Eunice was also particular about what clothes she kept in her closet. She only had a few special occasion or expensive garments that no longer fit her, and donated items that she felt were not right for her at that moment. While this approach kept her wardrobe smaller and more

manageable, weight and activity changes may have caused her to buy items similar to those that she previously had donated. Eunice admired others who have made the commitment to reduce their belongings, but still struggled with the desire to have certain items or felt limited by a small wardrobe. While she tried to shop at secondhand stores to save money, she was frustrated not to find professional attire in her size and style. Although she would rather not wear a visibly mended garment for aesthetic sensibilities and social image, she was willing to pay for minor alterations or repairs or donate things that needed mending.

Eunice expressed a long-standing interest in ecology and conservation issues. She volunteered with local groups active in environmental or ecological issues, and applied for graduate school in a related field in the time between my interviews with her. Eunice took the lead in addressing environmental issues. She did not settle for changing individual behaviors, but addressed those in positions of political or institutional power with suggestions to approve infrastructure to facilitate environmentally-responsible behaviors. Eunice had also been experimenting with other environmental practices, including line drying her clothes. She was pleased to track her loads and count how much money she was saving from not using the coin-operated laundry. While much of Eunice's energy was focused on environmental concerns, her lower income had given her a new perspective on financial struggles and income inequality as an impediment to making environmentally-optimal choices.

Although Eunice's interests in ecology did not explicitly extend to her clothing choices, her interest in voluntary simplicity and reduced consumption connected the interests and practices. She wanted fewer things that would meet her needs that would last. Eunice's frustration with infrastructure extended to the clothing industry. She expected the garments she buys to withstand wear and laundering and was upset when they did not. While some people may

encourage the consumer to make wiser decisions, Eunice expected industry to take responsibility for product performance.

Sandra

Even though Sandra scored relatively high on the concern for appearance and relatively low on the enhancement of individuality sub-sections of the clothing attitude scale, it was clear from watching Sandra talk me through her wardrobe that she put time, energy, and attention into not only looking presentable but also looking good. When she spoke about combining colors or coordinating accessories with outfits, she became animated. Sandra sourced these items from a variety of places—department stores, higher end retail shops, secondhand stores, her sisters, and even clothes she had stored at her parent’s home for a couple decades. When Sandra bought items new, they were usually on sale. Working in a professional office, Sandra enjoyed wearing skirts and skirt suits. Because she did not want to pay the high costs associated with dry cleaning her suits or trouble with washing sweaters, she wore them multiple times before cleaning them, though she laundered many other items after one wearing. Sandra’s recent weight loss also affected her interactions with her clothes. Sandra tended to hang on to clothes for a long time even though they did not fit her or she no longer wore them, including some pieces from her childhood and a jacket she made (and hated making) in high school; in jest, she identified herself as somewhat of a hoarder. Although she did not do much mending herself, she would ask her mother to help with a range of tasks.

While Sandra engaged in many behaviors that many would consider eco-friendly—buying secondhand clothing, walking instead of driving, buying local or organic food, line drying her laundry spring through autumn—her main passions and concerns fell under social

justice. She believed one of the most egregious problems facing the country is income inequality and disempowering or disengaging people from civic life. Sandra was very active in addressing these issues through volunteer work with various organizations and boards. Sandra emphasized the human dimensions of these issues as she sought to build relationships with people in her community. Indeed, she felt it was more important to know your farmer than to support a large-scale organic factory farm. She took what she called a more “**thinking**” approach to solving problems, rather than doing, yet she felt the work she does planning, organizing, strategizing, and communicating was one of many jobs to be done in promoting an issue or building a movement.

When considering the social and environmental impact of clothing practices, Sandra saw her own choices as somewhat in the middle, slightly better than the average American. Although environmental reasons were not the primary reason she bought secondhand, she valued the waste reduction or energy conservation as an added benefit. Sandra was frustrated by the lack of options and information necessary to make the decisions she felt would be optimal. For example, there was not always an option in the desired style or store to buy an American-made or union-made garment, signals that the labor conditions were fair. Despite her interest in local food systems, however, there was not the same drive to support local clothing systems. Although she expressed interest in passing during our conversation in local clothing sources, she had not pursued this in her own clothing options outside of shopping at a locally-run secondhand store.

Niki

Cycling through a professional career, a pregnant body, and being a mother while having a job, Niki had various clothing lives over the years. Previous office employment on the East

Coast required power suits, panty hose, and pumps. Part-time retail work and full-time motherhood in the Midwest required practical, easy to wash, work-to-home clothes. A pregnancy along the way shifted her body shape and size enough to also necessitate a shift in wardrobe. Even though she no longer needed to dress professionally, Niki still liked playing with styles, though she did it on her own terms. Watching television programs *Project Runway* or *What Not to Wear* and flipping through an occasional fashion magazine in a waiting room gave her a chance to assess current trends, picking and choosing what works for her and her lifestyle. Niki also enjoyed knitting mostly accessories or other novelty items, but tended to put off routine mending or ironing. Niki was interested in outdoor activities and this came across in her clothing choices as she chose outdoor or athletic apparel brands that also sell stylish, lifestyle clothes. Although she primarily bought her clothes new, many of the brands she purchased are those that also consciously address environmental issues in some way, like in the use of organic cotton or recycled polyester. Moreover, she tried to maintain a one in, one out rule.

Niki's awareness in environmental issues originated with a friend expressing concern over pesticides on produce. This grew to a general concern of food production and health and eventually other materials production, like cotton and polyester, and was strengthened by raising children. Niki's role as a parent also factored into her awareness of labor practices and her described instinct to avoid child labor. She trusted that certain brands monitored these practices. Niki's actions in sustainability focused primarily on choices she was able to make as an individual consumer. She believed in the power of each individual to make a difference or to influence others' behaviors that add up to a larger impact.

Given her awareness of outdoor and athletic wear companies that specialize in environmentally-conscious fabric, Niki felt good about many of the clothing purchases she made,

though she expressed frustration at the lack of lower cost items for children's wear. She was willing to pay a little more for ethically-produced items for herself, but realized it is a balancing act and knows she has made non-optimal choices. By choosing to pay a little more for these products, she was challenging what she sees as a race—driven by both producers and consumers—to the lowest price regardless of any other consequences. Niki also felt good about her washing machine's low energy and water consumption and taking the time to hang her clothes on a rack or hangers to dry, though other family members tended to throw their clothes in the dryer.

Tara

Despite ongoing struggles to find clothes to fit her body, Tara's interest in clothing was wide-reaching from the inside out, although this did not manifest outwardly in trendy looks. Rather, she read fashion history, spun her own yarn for knitting, was teaching herself to weave, and hoped to learn to sew. Tara had knit sweaters for herself and her husband, but she considered herself to still be learning to create the yarn to make exactly what she wants. Otherwise, her clothing acquisition was dominated by finding clothes to fit her hourglass figure, so that fit took precedence over most other criteria she otherwise wanted to consider—from cost to fabric to style. Tara explained that she considered commissioning bespoke garments but was concerned about the costs—adding up the cost of labor with the costs of a good enough quality fabric worth the sizeable labor cost and accounting for potential size changes—and questioned whether the financial investment would be worth it.

Tara was sensitive to the complex interactions between environmental and social impacts of various industries. She took a very analytical, reasoned approach to the complex web of issues

surrounding the lifecycles of products, such as food or garments. She was frustrated by the screening survey questions, because it was hard for her to consider one slice of the picture, when the question's answer may depend on considering other factors. Tara also emphasized the discrepancy between a business's stated interests (e.g. usually selling products and making a profit) and the consumer's interests (e.g. usually health and wellbeing). She interpreted the consumer to be at a disadvantage, partially through the systemic lack of information available, ubiquitous marketing claims, and disengagement from or acceptance of marketing claims.

When discussing the sustainability of clothing production and use, she thoughtfully reflected on the many dimensions of fiber and fabric production from environmental impacts of pesticide use to skilled labor of pattern making. She was frustrated that ethical choices were not available for her body shape or seemed cost and time prohibitive, so she bought apparel that worked for her regardless of the garment's history. Although Tara's clothing choices were not explicitly environmentally-motivated, her textile crafting skills promoted a nuanced understanding of fabric and fiber production. Making gave Tara a sense of control of the garment. Although the learning process produced some waste, it created several positive impacts. Her use of materials was not the most environmentally efficient, but her crafting both encouraged a respect for materials and labor and also fostered her personal and social wellbeing because it enabled her to satisfy learning and curiosity, participate in communities, and build relationships.

Felicity

Felicity had a very playful and eclectic approach to clothes. Her clothing sources ranged from handmade to big box stores, discount secondhand shops, and the sale racks at higher end

retail shops. Felicity's clothing styles also were diverse, ranging from practical jeans and t-shirts to fun and feminine skirts. She liked things to be unique, and many of the garments she showed me had distinctive design elements. She did not feel beholden to trends or fashion changes, but she thought it was fun to read and playfully critique fashion magazines or get project ideas from craft magazines. She was also comfortable wearing clothes, especially jeans and sweaters, many times before washing. Because she knitted many of her sweaters, she was careful with hand washing them. Knowledge gained from making clothes also encouraged her to exercise her judgment whether something needed to be dry cleaned as suggested by the label; for example, she will hand wash a store-bought cashmere top because it would not be felted but would dry clean a down coat to avoid matting the feathers.

Felicity did not score exceptionally high on the NEP scale, though there were a couple of issues she followed. For example, when trying to pinpoint her interest in overfishing and our society's depletion of fish species and interference with ecosystems, she mentioned that she had lived on the west coast and was friends with people who were interested in food issues. She read books and watched documentaries about the topic and even carried a wallet-sized card with fish consumption guidelines. While Felicity thought that organic products, including cotton, were better for the environment or that it was important to receive a fair wage, she was leery of marketing claims or labels on products about these issues. She reflected that she could be more conscious in her consumption choices, but also excused her choices by pointing out how the potentially better environmentally or socially responsible choice was not ideal or perfect.

She recognized these imbalances, contradictions, and conflicts within her own choices. While we discussed them together, she explained that these were not always topics at the forefront of her everyday decisions. Even though Felicity liked clothes, she did not necessarily

want to invest a lot of money into each specific garment. She enjoyed the process, however, of hunting for bargains, which sometimes led her to secondhand markets but also to discounted, mass-manufactured products. Felicity derived a lot of pleasure from making, selecting, wearing, and reading about clothes, but she saw these activities as a guilty pleasure, thinking that she could be reading more intellectual materials or pursuing other activities instead, and so there was a balancing act between meeting individual needs and fulfilling civic roles. While her washing habits were somewhat resource efficient (excluding her dryer use), she did not necessarily make the connections that they were. Indeed, at the end of our first interview, she asked, “**What does laundry have to do with it?**”

Women in the High Sustainability/Low Clothing Category

Helen

Helen worked from home and had a relatively casual and informal style, though not sloppy or ratty. She wanted to look presentable and well-groomed. She wore colors and cuts she found comfortable and practical. When she needed to attend a formal event, at first she felt challenged to dress up from the clothes she owned but was surprised that she actually had fun piecing together different garments to create a dressier look that still matched her style. This was not only about aesthetic creativity, but also satisfaction in self-sufficiency and avoiding buying things. Helen used to primarily shop at a higher end women’s clothing store and through a couple catalog companies. As her attitudes and interests in environmental and social issues grew, however, she started to reduce her consumption overall, making do with what she had and shopping first at secondhand stores when looking for a specific apparel item. She continued to occasionally purchase new clothes from a retailer branded as quality business casual apparel.

Helen was much attuned to sustainability issues on environmental and social levels. Although she recognized that she knew more details about some environmental topics, she consistently discussed the importance of looking at these dimensions as “**all of a single cloth.**” It is also interesting to note that despite many of her action tasks emphasizing environmental issues—such as waste reduction or fossil fuel conservation—her goals prioritized social dimensions—to redefine abundance, success, and fulfillment and move away from cultural drive to accumulate more stuff. She volunteered with and consulted for various interest groups that take this approach. While she recognized the importance of reducing individual consumption, she also felt strongly that we need strong, healthy, and economically vibrant local communities that support sustainable behaviors—from community kitchens to skill learning workshops, from local producers to local businesses. Her enthusiasm and energy she devoted to building networks that can help make this possible was evident as she shared her stories.

Helen was very conscious about applying these principles to her daily behaviors. “**The way I would, would think about and shop for clothing, has everything to do with what the rest of my life is, is about. What, what gives meaning and purpose to my life? Everything. I’m very ideological.**” She rarely shopped for clothing; adapted the clothing she owned for different needs; mended, darned, and repaired clothing wear; used a high-efficiency washing machine; used eco-laundry soap; and occasionally dried clothes on racks in her home. She did store clothes she infrequently wore, a few of which had sentimental attachment, but she tried to return other unused items to the secondhand market.

Tina

Tina described her interest in clothes as “**minimal.**” She dressed neatly and casually, jeans and t-shirts and fleeces for everyday wear and slacks with a blouse or knit top for work. Even though she did not particularly like shopping for clothes—and often shopped from low to mid-range retail stores she knew she liked—she thought it was fun to sometimes check out secondhand shops with coworkers or swap clothes with female friends at clothing exchange parties.

Tina’s interests in environmental and social issues centered on protecting vulnerable populations, such as animals and children. Where adults can speak for themselves, Tina believed that it is the responsibility of adults to serve as guardians for otherwise voiceless populations. Although she was not currently active in volunteering, she regularly donated to selected groups that advocate on behalf of these issues. Having worked for a waste management company in the past, Tina learned about the waste stream and saw on tours American habits of overconsumption. She made an effort to use cloth diapers to reduce solid waste of disposable diapers and liked to hang those outside when she could because of the disinfecting power of sunlight. She realized that infrastructure could help facilitate some waste reduction, such as curbside recycling and composting collections. On the other hand, she also realized it was important for individuals to be “**good consumers**” and exercise “**good product stewardship**” to reduce waste.

Clothing was a straightforward affair for Tina. She mostly purchased modest, reasonably stylish clothes that fit, but occasionally splurged on a fun novelty shirt, secondhand bargain, or high quality staple garment. Mostly she talked about balancing environmental impacts and other lifestyle choices. She had heard about problems with sweatshops and unfair labor practices, but realized that she did not know what the conditions of production are for most things she buys and

does not make efforts to research that information. Because of her interest in animal welfare, Tina limited purchases the leather and wool products, but has made exceptions. She did not buy inexpensive, trendy leather shoes, but rather invested money in expensive leather or wool shoes she believed were high quality and would last a long time. She thought it is worth it to have shoes resoled, would mend basic wear in clothes, and would wear jeans with holes if not immodestly located (e.g. in the crotch area), but would not necessarily patch items, because she did not consider herself a domestically-oriented person.

Megan

Despite her lower clothing interest scores, Megan described herself as very interested in clothes. She was not interested in fashion, however, and indeed proclaimed that she was almost never comfortable with current trends (but may warm up to them as she got used to them). Rather, she was interested in clothes because it was an important and visible way not only to present herself to others, but also to come to terms with own identity and body. She described ongoing struggles to accept her body and feel comfortable clothes, and how these feelings permeated her everyday choices—both when she was dressing in the morning and throughout the day. She mostly purchased clothes secondhand or less often on sale at discount or department stores. She shopped mostly with work in mind, and adapted those business casual garments to more informal wear as those items wore out. She also enjoyed wearing what she termed “**hippie**” styled clothes, like tie-dyes, on the weekends or other fun occasions. While she knew how to mend and had a relative who was an expert mender—transforming a disintegrating coat into what looked brand new—the pile of clothes to be repaired often remained untended due to other family obligations.

Megan was very concerned about the state of the global environment, social inequality, and the future of the planet and people. She easily listed a litany of environmental crises—global climate change, population growth, water pollution and quality, soil health, nuclear waste, fossil fuel consumption, etc. Just as easily, she discussed concerns over social issues—local economies, children’s health, mental health, women’s rights, international peace, income inequality, etc. Indeed, she was concerned that human’s exploitation of nature and each other is so acute that **“we’re gonna end up screwing ourselves. I think we already have.”** She felt deeply discouraged about our potential to change and reverse course. On the other hand, she had not given up entirely and continued to try to tackle these issues in her daily behaviors.

Megan realized that much of what she could do and chose to do was a balancing act. She was very conscious about her family finances and struggled to meet her family’s needs and wants by buying things second-hand, shopping at discount stores, and generally fewer things. Although she did not buy many clothes, she tended to hang on to them; sometimes actively extending their life through re-using, other times imagining the potential of clothes otherwise at rest in her closet. On higher-priced items, such as appliances or cars, she investigated to try to find the most efficient and highest quality product at the price she could afford. Recently, she invested in an energy-efficient washing machine, which she liked because it conserves water and energy, though she regretted occasionally washing loads twice if she forgot about them in the washer. However, Megan line-dried her clothes outside almost always, even in the winter, partially for energy conservation, but also because she loved the smell and being outside.

Gretchen

Gretchen wore a standard uniform of denim, khaki, or navy pants or shorts with a t-shirt. If she had to dress up, she switched to a blouse or a sweater and on rare occasions a denim or knit dress. She acquired most of her clothes from a retail store whose products she expected to be of high quality and fit her body. When she had tried other companies, most notably a local store marketing fairly produced and organic apparel, she noticed a difference in fabric quality, wear patterns, and garment cuts. On the other hand, she sourced her t-shirts from travels, museums, and other shops, often selecting ones with graphics or slogans that expressed her interests or political messages. Gretchen also mentioned incorporating spiritual elements into her dress practices. Although subtle and not always consistently applied, her attention to using colors or carrying significant items reminds us that women engage with clothing on a symbolic level outside of fashion norms in ways that can enhance their spiritual well-being.

While Gretchen had been politically engaged since her twenties, she was becoming disillusioned with our “**broken political system.**” Additionally, Gretchen’s awareness and work for environmental issues had substantially grown over the past few years. A few of the major concerns she saw facing our society are climate change, fossil fuel use, food sovereignty, soil health, water conservation, and local economies. She was now working with groups to enact solutions on local community levels. Although Gretchen felt that environmental issues were at the top of her priority list, she also discussed the need to tackle cultural norms as a system rather than piecemeal fixes in order to avoid creating one problem when solving another problem.

Gretchen had experimented with sourcing union-, American-, or environmentally sensitive-made clothing, but had not found these garments to fit her body as consistently as the standard retail outlet. Even though she knew conventional cotton is extremely polluting and

garment production may be exploitive, she believed that good options were just not available, even though she would be willing to pay a little more for these products, given her household's income. She acknowledged her prejudices against buying clothes secondhand (she saw it as a sign of a lower class), but was very diligent about directing used products to different donation sites that put items to good use. Gretchen felt good about her clothing practices post-acquisition. She washed her clothes in a high-efficiency washer to reduce water and energy use, loved being outside when hanging her clothes out but hung them in the basement in inclement weather, and wore clothes until worn through to reduce her overall consumption of new products.

Women in the Low Sustainability/High Clothing Category

Bernadette

Bernadette was my oldest participant. Much of our conversations were spent discussing how she saw changes in her own and others' clothing practices—often for what she saw as for the worse! Bernadette preferred a tailored, polished style, thinking it shows respect for oneself and others. However, as she has aged she has become more casual and informal, sometimes spending days at home in her sleepwear. When she went out, she made an effort to dress up and enjoyed shopping for new dresses or outfits, despite having a full closet and multiple dressers. Bernadette used to make her own clothes, but now bought garments, mostly on sale or as souvenirs when she traveled.

Bernadette was minimally active in politics, civics, or other interest groups. She used to participate in a woman's civic group, but mostly for social reasons. In terms of sustainability issues, she mentioned supporting public transportation, self-sufficiency, and supporting good jobs through choices. Her support was not motivated by concern for the environment. Instead,

she felt more strongly about the social institutions these engendered. For example, public transportation facilitated access to different communities and promoted healthy lifestyles. She thought people, especially given problems with unemployment, should learn self-sufficiency skills such as gardening and food preservations, to ensure that they can take care of themselves and their families. Moreover, she believed it was important to maintain connections to family and cultural heritage.

Environmental concerns were not at the forefront of Bernadette's clothing choices. While she said that she did not want to buy garments made using sweatshop labor, she did not verify or check on this information, but instead relied on media to alert her to issues or uses the production location as an indicator of production conditions. She did not select items based on where they were made, either. Bernadette used to make a lot of her own clothes, but this was not to avoid supporting sweatshop labor; rather, it gave her control over her choices, saved money, and made her feel good, especially when she made clothes for family members. On the other hand, despite having the requisite skills, Bernadette hated mending because it was boring and uninteresting compared to making something new; she would put something aside where it would sit until she got around to donating it.

Wendy

Wendy had one of the top three scores on the clothing interest survey. Wendy experienced a lot of aesthetic pleasure and creative joy in her clothing choices. She was an avid collector and wearer of vintage clothing, and enjoyed the thrill of the hunt as she scoured thrift stores for vintage gems. Wendy did not sew her own garments but had refashioned and modified existing garments to add unique design elements. Wendy turned her passion for clothes hunting

and modification into a small clothing resale business, to which she devoted much of her spare time building her inventory, preparing garments for sale, and connecting with potential buyers.

Wendy did not have particularly conservative or skeptical views of environmental or social justice issues, but she did not prioritize those issues in her daily life. For example, she accepted that there is global climate change and an oil crisis, but used her car as her primary mode of transportation. She read some popular non-fiction accounts of the food industry and considered local and organic options, though she felt unable to choose those options consistently because of the financial costs. Overall, she also critiqued American's tendencies to throwaway otherwise good products. She recycled many products, partially because it was easy, convenient, and as she said, "**Because everyone recycles? I don't know, it seems like the thing to do.**"

Although she was not especially involved in politics and indeed was rather disillusioned with politician's efforts to address environmental issues, the Wisconsin political protests around the Act 10 legislation did raise her awareness generally to labor issues in her own and friends' lives.

Like most women, Wendy's clothing choices showed a mix of positive and negative impacts. She extended the life of clothes, reused and repurposed clothes, bought secondhand, and kept clothes for a long time. Wendy drove around and shopped a lot, washed often, and used home dry cleaning products. Wendy never really thought about the environmental impact of her laundering practices, and realized during our conversation that there could be potential drawbacks to the frequency of her washing and the treatments she used. On the other hand, Wendy was quite thoughtful about her general relationship with clothing. While some of this related to her overall aesthetic and creative engagement with clothes and other collectible items, Wendy's experience with vintage clothing led her to learn more about fashion history, think about garments' previous lives, reuse otherwise cast off resources, and treat them as lifelong

investments in her own wardrobe. Additionally, Wendy made it a point to talk about social community surrounding vintage clothes. She cultivated business relationships and close friendships specifically through clothing practices. While not all of her clothing practices used resources efficiently, they laid a foundation for meeting social and individual needs.

Camilla

Camilla has gone through a few wardrobe phases and talked substantially about how she was currently adapting her wardrobe to her liminal role as a graduate student and emerging professional. She contrasted her quest to find professional but stylish casual clothes with the undergraduate t-shirt and jean uniform. Like many women, she mentioned accommodating weight gain, size changes, or shape changes as a primary reason for acquiring new clothes. She also liked shopping for new clothes with fun but tasteful embellishments. She wanted to express some of her personality, but she also wanted to fit into professional settings. Camilla tended to shop at a few higher-end women's apparel retail stores. While she was happy to pay full price for something she really liked, she also shopped sales and outlet stores. She donated things that are still "nice" but a little worn or the wrong size, but did not buy secondhand clothes; if an item was a lower priced item, she felt it was probably not worth her time to maintain it, so she donated it instead. Camilla was an accomplished and creative costumer, but she did not sew clothes for everyday wear. Designing and constructing costumes was a fun, creative, and experimental process, but sewing everyday clothes was not as interesting.

Camilla thought of her views on environmental and social issues as being relatively moderate, sometimes leaning towards conservative politics and sometimes towards liberal. At the crux of many of her attitudes, however, was the value of individual responsibility and

freedom. Using examples from issues from reproductive rights to gun ownership rights, Camilla's attitudes seemed to suggest that it might be more important to protect an individual's rights than whether or not they made the most environmentally or socially just choices. That said, Camilla did think that people and corporations should be responsible and accountable for their choices. For example, people should not be needlessly wasteful or callously dump toxic chemicals into a river. Camilla talked about how sometimes infrastructure can allow for choice but still facilitate one option—such as by providing curbside recycling. However, setting up guidelines for what is responsible or holding corporations accountable can sometimes be an ambiguous, complex, and potentially conflicting process.

Camilla did not prioritize environmental concerns or social justice issues in her clothing choices. Although some of her laundry habits conserved energy and water—wearing garments multiple times and using a high-efficiency washing machine—the motivation was primarily convenience rather than conservation. While she realized clothing production could be harmful to the environment or use sweatshop labor, fit and style were at the top of her criteria. She trusted that companies behaved responsibly, especially those operating in the United States or other developed nations where there are laws and regulations in place to reduce environmental harm and human exploitation. She voted with her dollar to support or boycott brands, primarily when media publicized specific information about a particular brand or product.

Rosa

Rosa had a unique clothing narrative to share, because she made all of her own clothes and most of her family's clothes, too—from underwear to outerwear. Learning from her mother and apprenticing in costume shops, she refined her skills over the years, learned to make

different garments, and developed her own sense of style. Rosa consistently talked about the aesthetic pleasure and satisfaction she derived from not only the making process, but also the experience of wearing clothes that feel good against her skin, comfortable on her body, and functional for the tasks at hand. In addition to sewing, Rosa also spun yarn, knit, and wove. Each project offered a different creative and intellectual challenge; all increased her control over her creations.

Rosa's survey scores were on the low end, although she had a homesteading lifestyle some would associate with individuals with strong pro-sustainability attitudes. Rosa and her family moved from the east coast to the Midwest where she ran a small farm and raised livestock for her own family's sustenance. Struggling to articulate thoughts on specific sustainability issues, she said she tried "**not to make a mess.**" She felt she did what she could, and while she sought solutions to various issues, she continued with some activities she suspected contribute to the mess—such as driving a car. What was most important to Rosa, however, was health and nutrition, taking care of herself and her family, and taking action as an individual rather than complaining about an issue. Rosa also felt strongly about building economic and personal relationships within one's local community.

Rosa was insistent that she did not make her own clothes to reduce environmental impact or avoid supporting unfair labor practices. She appreciated the quality and longevity of the items she makes. She did not want the money she spends on materials to go to waste, but seemed less concerned with the time spent. She was critical of fabric and garments available in chain stores and retail shops. Rosa's laundering habits, while also low impact—she used a high-efficiency washer, mild soaps, and line-dried almost all her laundry—were also not consciously chosen for

environmental reasons, but rather were a way of extending the lifecycle of the products and caring for her family.

Rachel

Rachel had a background in fashion marketing, but worked primarily in real estate. She had always loved clothes, but did not follow trends. However, Rachel acknowledged that she used to be more aware of and followed fashion as well as spent more time “**sport shopping**” when she was younger before she had children. More recently, she valued looking sharp, professional, put-together, and well-groomed. She was one of the “**fancy moms**” according to her daughter because of her efforts to coordinate and dress professionally. Whether she was shopping at luxury store, a discount store, outlet sale, or a secondhand shop she was always looking for a bargain. The amount she was willing to pay for a garment depended on its original price, but she rarely paid the original full price. Rachel also enjoyed knitting. The projects she shared with me included mostly cardigans for herself, but she also made items for family and friends. It was a fun, portable activity that she invested time into and built social activities around. She produced unique garments that enhanced her wardrobe.

Rachel tended to be conservative in her attitudes towards environmental and social issues, describing herself as a cynic. Rachel did not prioritize the potential environmental impact of a behavior in her daily choices, but she also did not think she was, or that people should be, needlessly wasteful in their consumption or energy use. In addition, she thought the economic incentive is not always sufficient to justify adopting a certain behavior even though there may be environmental benefits. Rachel also tended to be skeptical of the usefulness of unions. Like most people, she did not want to support child or sweatshop labor, but saw unionization as a limitation

on economic development and business growth. Although she liked to shop for “**deals**,” she was willing to pay more when shopping at a local store because of the economic value to the community and good customer service. Overall, Rachel tended to consider economic impact before environmental impact or other social justice issues.

Environmental and social concerns were not at the forefront of Rachel’s clothing decisions. While driven by cost, Rachel was also thinking about the quality of the garments and suitability for different activities, such as clothes appropriate for work or casual-at-home wear. While she looked for quality apparel for work, she had lower standards for fun pieces or casual wear. In addition, sometimes the appeal of a deal led to purchases that went unworn. Rachel also preferred to buy clothes that were machine washable, though she dry-cleaned her jackets after multiple wearings. Although she considered herself bad at taking care of clothes—not getting to mending, forgetting to empty pockets, or staining clothes—she was exceptionally careful with her hand knit sweaters. In order to maintain their shape and prevent felting, she hand washed and blocked them only once a season. Additionally, Rachel recently had to move a parent into a new home, which caused her to reflect on how much stuff she was accumulating in her own home.

Melanie

Melanie had always liked dressing up, and she bemoaned the increasing casualness of people’s clothing choices. Melanie had a lot of fun combining colors and accessories. However, Melanie wore plus-sizes and was frustrated with the available clothing in her size and the prices she felt she had no choice in paying. Melanie paid money for others to alter her clothes to get a better fit, though. Moreover, Melanie worked in administration, but sometimes had to work offsite and was concerned about wearing her dressier or nicer clothes to work. Melanie

purchased most of her clothes at chain or discount stores, but she also enjoyed collecting vintage clothing, accessories, and household items. Much of the items she collected she stored in various parts of her home, though some of it was on a display at different times, and she wore some of the accessories.

Melanie's concerns focused on a couple of main points. Melanie was very concerned with how products and processes, especially those that use synthetic chemicals, affected her and others' health. While she talked about different chemicals' impact on the environment, she consistently brought the issue back to how it affected people's health. Also tied to health was the safety of food. Melanie trusted that products or food made in the U.S. are safe because of laws and regulations, but found it hard to verify this information on most food products. In this sense, Melanie also felt powerless in the face of companies and government agencies holding the power in economic transactions. She felt that companies, unions, and individuals were increasingly selfish and motivated by money and could not easily be held accountable to behave responsibly or fairly. That said, she thought businesses were supposed to make a profit, so it was hard to establish what the right balance should be. Despite criticizing a money-centric model, she also seemed concerned about wasting her money on low quality products, rather than wasting other natural resources.

Collecting vintage clothes enhanced Melanie's appreciation for quality fabric and construction. Comparing against vintage clothes or even past experiences, Melanie was critical of the fabric, construction, longevity, and durability of garments manufactured today. However, she described feeling powerless to do anything and bought what was sold in the stores. Although Melanie expressed the desire to purchase American-made products—to support the U.S. economy and jobs—and to buy quality and not quantity—to get the most value for her dollar—

fit and style were the predominant factors in typical clothing purchases. Even though Melanie washed many clothes after one wearing and did frequent small loads, she felt her laundry habits did not have adverse affects, because she did not use additional chemicals.

Women in the Low Sustainability/Low Clothing Category

Louise

For someone not interested in clothes, Louise actually thought and cared about clothing quite a bit. Louise may not have been interested in following trends or accessorizing outfits, but she did want things to look and feel good, presentable, and well-groomed. Unfortunately, Louise often felt frustrated and disappointed when shopping because she too felt her options for plus-sized clothing were extremely limited. Because she thought there were so few options available for her, she often bought something if it fit her and looked good, rather than if she needed it or really liked it. Louise had many clothes in her closet and dresser, as well as packed away in storage. Some no longer fit her and some held on to for an event. In response to the passing of a friend, she had recently begun to confront her clothing inventory and pare it down. While there were bags slated for donation, they had not yet made it out the door.

Louise seemed aware of and thought about different environmental and social issues, although she did not always act on them. For example, she had heard about problems with sweatshops and child labor in overseas factories, and would like to support American-made products. However, information on production was not readily visible, American-made products were not regularly available, and American-made products were perceived as more expensive than she wanted to pay. Louise investigated some products, such as the chemicals used in processing shoes, in response to a concern about a skin rash. Indeed, chemical pollution was a

prominent issue for Louise. She was generally concerned about who was regulating this, but trusted the U.S. has better standards than other countries. Overall, Louise felt that Americans tended to be very wasteful and self-centered in their consumption choices. She proposed that education could make a difference.

Louise's concern for chemicals extended into her laundering practices. She rinsed her loads twice, but used detergent sparingly. She also tended to wash clothes after only one wearing. In thinking about the impact on the environment, Louise continued the thread of chemical concern in her wash and in the processing of fabrics, imagining polluted rivers in India—after all **“it's in somebody's backyard.”** Louise enjoyed genealogy, history, and collecting both contemporary and antique photographs, figurines, jewelry, and other objects, though not clothing. Louise also really enjoyed watching shows and reading magazines about design. She was inquisitive and curious, and she had an appreciation for objects and clothing as historical artifacts or as art. However, there was the balancing act of when the collection was a positive or negative experience. While Louise admired and respected design and making skills and would do minor mending, she had not tried making her own clothes or doing other craft projects.

Zoey

Zoey took a practical approach to her clothing. She looked for clothes that were functional for specific activities she was involved in—from casual wear to athletic apparel to professional dress. Mostly she bought new apparel, but sometimes checked secondhand shops for athletic wear. She tended to find the selection at secondhand shops not as easy to navigate or able to fulfill her specific needs. Zoey was also very careful with her money, so that her clothing

purchases were mostly planned and budgeted. This helped her direct her money to things she felt she needed or would improve her enjoyment of an activity. Zoey also did not have very strong interest in fashion or trends. On the other hand, she consciously used specific garments to connect to a specific places, times in her life, and sense of self. Rather than being attached to clothing in general, she assigned a few things talismanic power and wore them strategically to harness that power. For example, she wore a sports team's jersey during a game or souvenirs to capture the good feelings of the trip.

Although Zoey scored relatively low on the NEP survey, she was concerned with ecological conservation issues. She asserted that nature should be valued for its own sake and that we should respect its diversity and complexity. Zoey recognized that nature functioned as a system. She talked about how our interactions with nature should protect and maintain the quality of an ecosystem, and not just address a single issue. For example, she saw organic processes often as insufficient solutions, and usually did not think organic labels were worth supporting with her dollars. Although she was not especially active in supporting these causes, she did become involved in the labor protests against the Act 10 legislation. She ultimately felt frustrated and disillusioned with the political response.

Although she primarily purchased new clothes, she was not regularly buying many new items. Zoey had heard about problems with sweatshop labor in the apparel industry, assumed that at least some of the clothes she bought were produced under poor conditions, but did not consider those factors when making purchases. Indeed, Zoey consciously articulated that if an issue was not immediately visible at the point of decision or action, she would not remember to consider it. Because she was budget conscious, cost ended up being a primary factor for consumption choices instead. However, for lower priced items where an organic or local product

was not significantly more than a conventional product, she sometimes chose the organic, local product. Zoey was also a self-taught knitter, but primarily pursued it as a creatively challenging process. She approached basic mending projects intuitively. However, she also said she would not know where to start if she had to fix a hole or tear.

Jessica

Jessica had a clothing interest score on the high end of the low range, and this was evident in her clothing practices. Jessica did not follow fashion trends religiously but she did enjoy looking at women's and fashion magazines occasionally. Jessica also tended to shop relatively frequently, mostly at women's retail apparel chain and online stores. Although Jessica felt that she was conscious of her financial budget since she recently started living independently, she was also buying new clothes regularly. Jessica had just started a new job, so she thought she was shopping a little more to augment her professional wardrobe.

Jessica explained that her philosophy was primarily capitalist. Many of her examples of judging the quality of life were economic metrics, from money earned at a job to the ability to buy products. Although she recognized that there was not always a "**level playing field**" because of different national standards and regulations, she believed lower wages paid in developing countries were a function of the free market that she endorsed. While Jessica felt people should be responsible with resources and not wasteful, she was also skeptical of many environmental claims about human's negative impact on the environment. For example, she thought that climate change was a hoax and organic labels were a marketing ploy to increase sales. Jessica believed that human creativity and nature's ability to adapt offers infinite opportunities.

Jessica had many clothes. She knew it, but had mixed feelings about it.

Jessica: My mom always picks on me about this. Um, where [pauses] it's like, she's like how many shirts do you need to have to feel like secure? ... Like how many do you really actually need to like feel happy and um, I don't know, it's just very weird, it's like I just *accumulate* things and I feel like, if for some reason if I give them away, that something *bad* is going to happen and I might *need* them.

As she talked about her clothes, it seemed that she purchased some primarily because she paid a discounted price. She saw many of her purchases in a positive light, though, because she felt she was supporting jobs all along the supply chain. However, she did acknowledge that she was not seeking out information about whether those jobs are in exploitive conditions. Jessica also did little to no mending herself. On the other hand, she asked her mom to help repair items. Even though she as unsure if a tear in one garment could even be fixed, she still thought it worth it to ask her mom. Jessica's mother used cloth rags, and even gave Jessica a starter pile when she moved into her new home. Jessica added holey and worn clothes to this pile, which she used regularly. Jessica also felt her laundry habits were responsible in terms of resource use—she wore garments multiple times, washed full loads, used cold water for half of her washes, and dry cleaned only a few products. However, she dried most of her clothes in the dryer and used several different scented laundry products.

CHAPTER 5

FRAMING THE DISCUSSION:

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY WEB OF PRACTICE MODEL:

THREADS OF MEANING IN INDIVIDUAL CLOTHING PRACTICES

Introducing the Web of Practice Model

Before I delve into the thematic frames I identified as most salient in women's clothing practices and sustainability issues, I preview the interdisciplinary model I synthesized to encapsulate my findings. The framework provides a global context and a magnified core, allowing us to zoom in and out between holistic understandings and intimate experiences. The model visualizes individually-scaled experiences—in particular embodied aesthetic, affective, subjective, and symbolic dimensions of clothing practices—as critical factors that affect and are affected by systems structures. Attending to (e.g. recognizing, respecting, redirecting, or reinforcing) these strands of meaning can help craft meaningful and sustainable practices. This model visually translates theories to show us where we can implement initiatives in relation to thematic issues so that we can actualize change.

At the heart of this investigation is the individual consumer and her relationships with the material culture of clothing. I analyze these phenomena through three frames in the following chapters. However, what also emerged from my conversations with women and the scholarly literature was a “web of practice” (see figure 5.1).¹ Women told stories of their families, friends, and workplaces. They reflected on experiences with apparel production, marketing, and sales. In

¹ “Web” captures the graphic image of interlacing threads of meaning across systems levels, and “practice” captures the dynamic patterns of activity that theories explored below help to unpack.

this universe, which builds on social ecological models of human development, behavior change, and social practice, the micro level of the individual consumer is embedded in meso, exo, macro, eco, and chrono systems (see figure 5.1). Each of these systems is comprised of individuals, communities, behaviors, physical environments, individually and socially held values, policies, and informal or formal organizations. Elements in various systems levels create opportunities by enabling sustainable behaviors and present barriers by impeding sustainable behaviors and encouraging unsustainable practices.²

The centric nesting of these systems does not imply a static or one-way direction of influence. Rather, consumption occurs within dynamic systems across which information, objects, people, and values flow. Using the Social Ecological Model as a foundation, the web visualizes the individual anchored in larger social contexts, yet simultaneously engaged with these contexts. Individuals reflexively engage with their circumstances, while also enacting routine, taken-for-granted patterns of behavior.³ In addition, human systems necessarily operate

² Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979); Urie Bronfenbrenner, "Ecological Models of Human Development," in *Readings on the Development of Children*, ed. Mary Gauvain and Michael Cole, 4th edition (New York: Worth Publishing, 2004), 3–8; Marion Glaser, "The Social Dimension in Ecosystem Management: Strengths and Weaknesses of Human-nature Mind Maps," *Human Ecology Review* 13, no. 2 (2006): 122; Daniel Stokols, "Translating Social Ecological Theory into Guidelines for Community Health Promotion," *American Journal of Health Promotion* 10, no. 4 (April 1996): 282–298; Kenneth R. McLeroy et al., "An Ecological Perspective on Health Promotion Programs," *Health Education & Behavior* 15, no. 4 (December 1, 1988): 351–377; Neill McKee et al., eds., *Involving People, Evolving Behaviour* (Penang, Malaysia; New York: Southbound Sdn Bhd; United Nations Children's Fund, 2000); N. R. G. Stanger, "Moving 'Eco' Back into Socio-ecological Models: A Proposal to Reorient Ecological Literacy into Human Developmental Models and School Systems," *Human Ecology Review* 18, no. 2 (2011): 167–173; Elizabeth Shove, Mika Pantzar, and Matt Watson, *The Dynamics of Social Practice: Everyday Life and How It Changes* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012); Elizabeth Shove, *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience: The Social Organization of Normality* (Oxford: Berg, 2003); Alan Warde, "Consumption and Theories of Practice," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 5, no. 2 (2005): 131–153; Jane Kolodinsky, "A Systems Approach to Food Future Proofs the Home Economics Profession," in *Creating Home Economics Futures: The Next 100 Years*, ed. Donna Pendergast, Sue L.T. McGregor, and Kaija Turkki (Bowen Hills: Australia Academic Press, 2012), 157–169.

³ Shove, *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience*; Roberta Sassatelli, *Consumer Culture: History, Theory and Politics* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2007); Grant David McCracken, *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Daniel

within the boundaries, resources, and services provided by ecological systems, and human systems should nurture the integrity of ecological systems.⁴

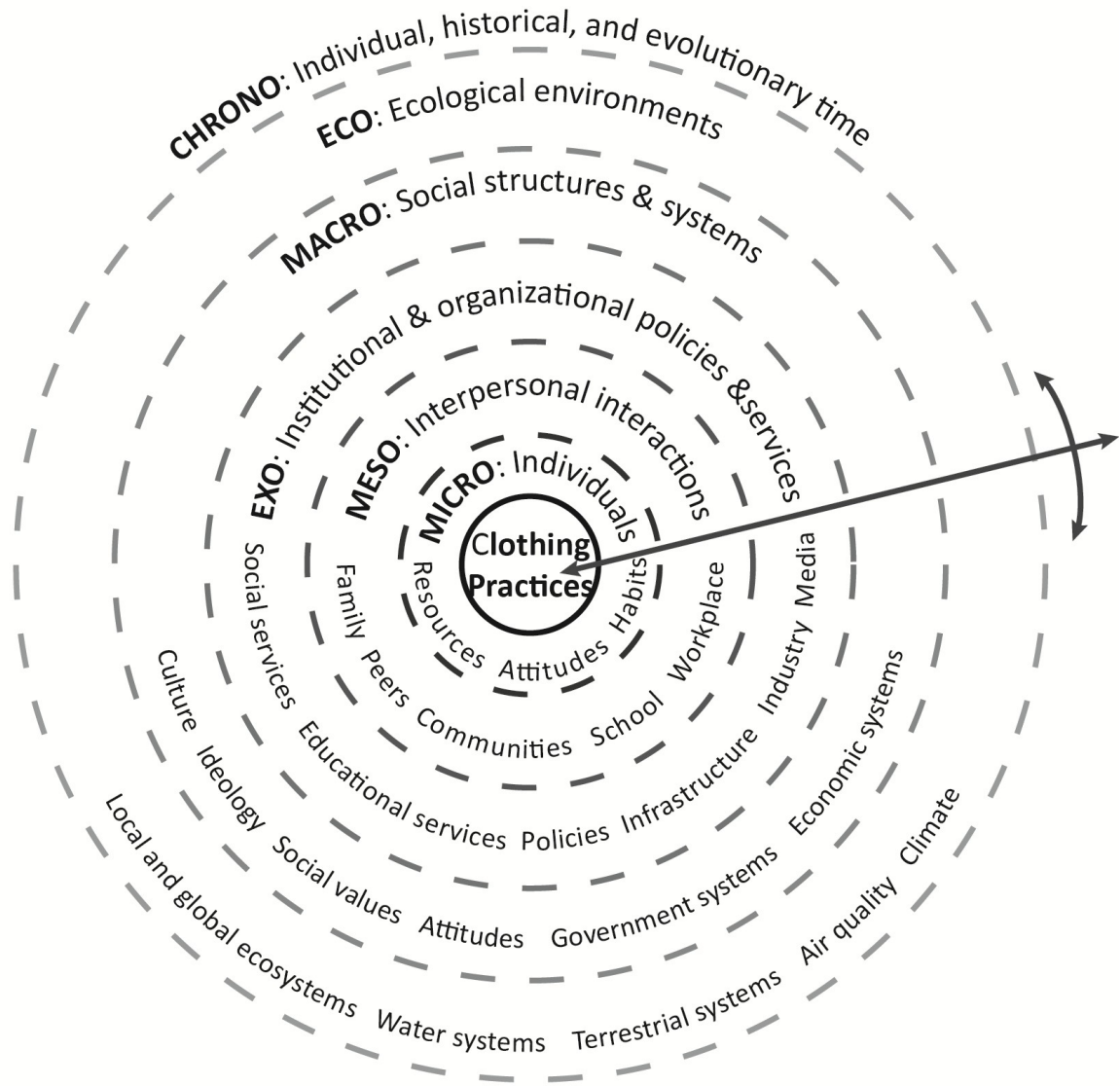


Figure 5.1. Scaffold of Web of Practice: systems universe adapted from Social Ecological Model
 Source: Figure adapted from Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979)

Miller, *Stuff* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010); Norman K. Denzin, *Symbolic Interactionism and Cultural Studies: The Politics of Interpretation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

⁴ Donella Meadows, *Thinking in Systems: A Primer* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2008); Donella H. Meadows, Jorgen Randers, and Dennis L. Meadows, *The Limits to Growth: The 30-year Update* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2004); Stanger, “Moving ‘Eco’ Back into Socio-ecological Models.”

In chapter one, I described the clothing lifecycle. Rather than being separate from these systems, the lifecycle components are building blocks and networks of the structure itself (see figure 5.2). The garments with which women interact in daily practices are not rooted in any one systems level, but are comprised of materials from many different settings, move between settings, settling in the wardrobe before moving on again. They are the electrons orbiting around the structure, jumping between levels, absorbing and emitting psychic and physical energy.

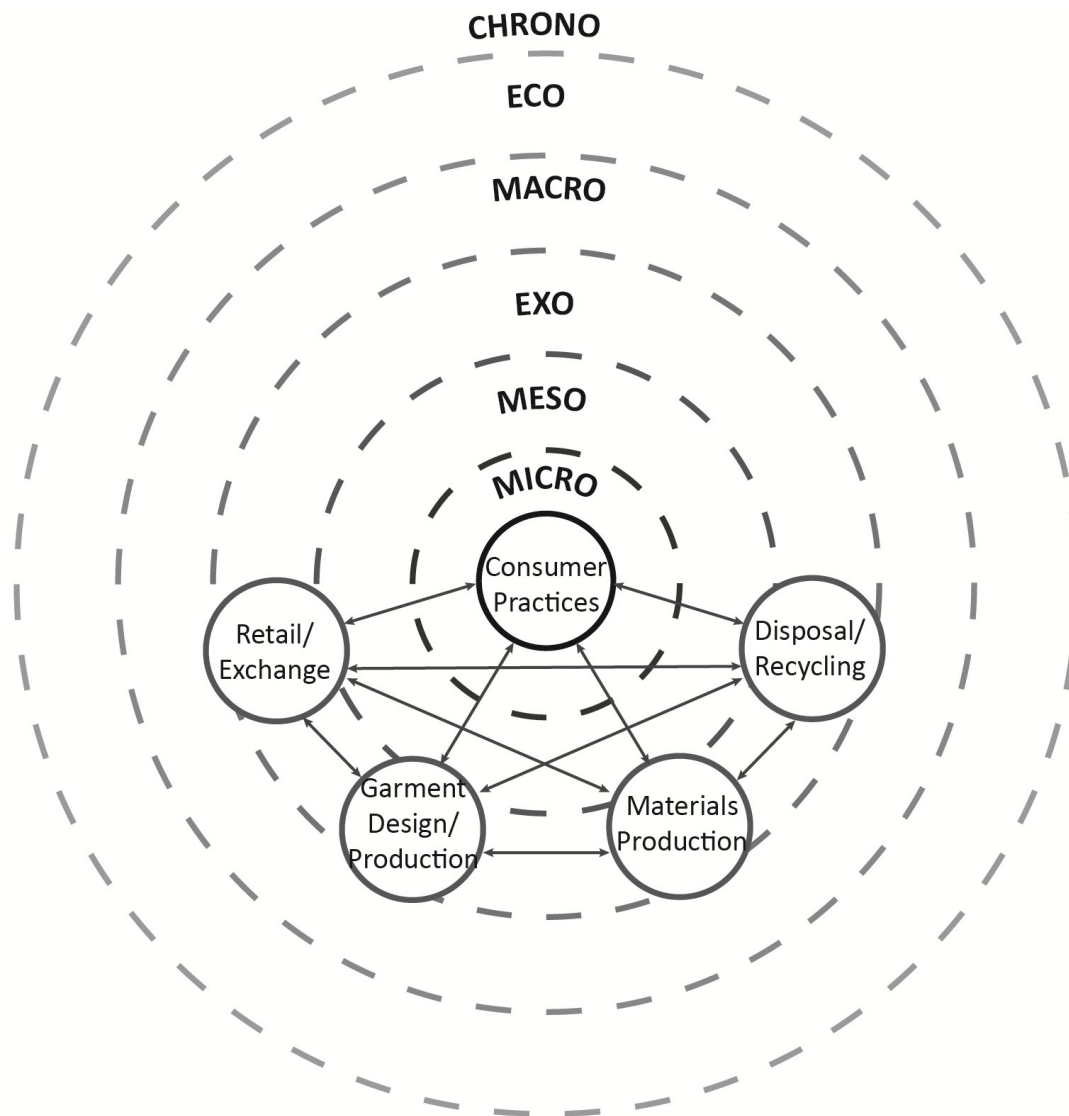


Figure 5.2. Clothing lifecycle situated in systems universe

Although each segment of the lifecycle has its own intricate composition and universe around it, this investigation explores the consumer use stage at the micro, individual level. There are many elements experienced on the micro level that shape patterns of practice and meanings (see figure 5.3), some of which were discussed in the preceding literature review. Practices and meanings emerge differently given particular manifestations and combinations of factors in individual consumer's lives, as well as their interactions with contextual variables from other systems levels within and outside of the clothing lifecycle.

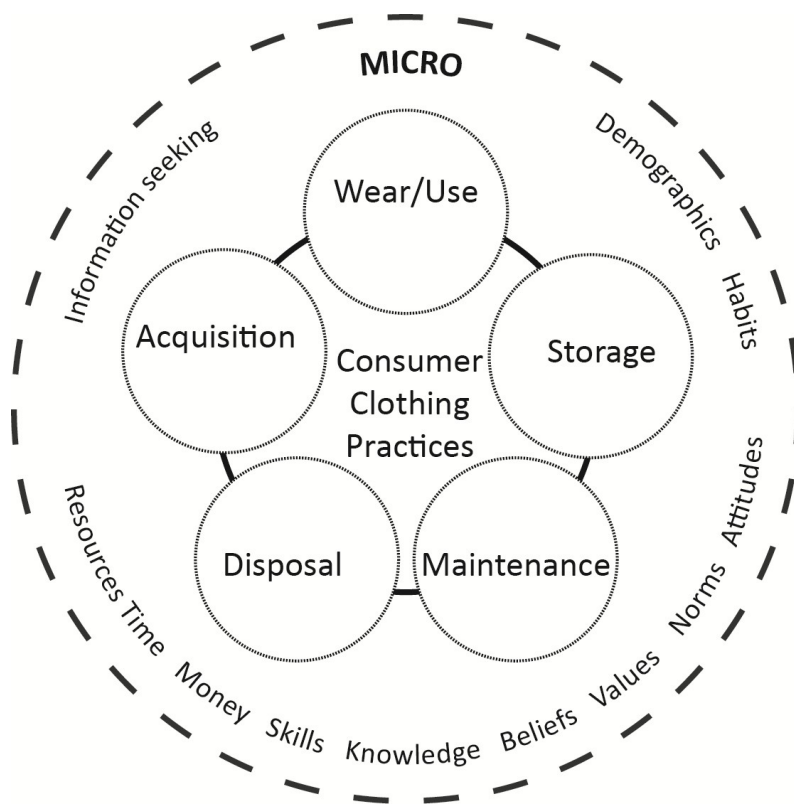


Figure 5.3. Center of the investigation: consumer clothing practices sub-cycle

Through my conversations with women, I identified thematic issues with which they grappled (see figure 5.5). The following three chapters analyze these issues—ranging from physical and psychological comfort to quality, time, and money; trivialization and

domesticization of clothing; and consumer empowerment and product stewardship. Delving further into women's negotiations with these themes, I found four strands circulating throughout: multi-sensory aesthetic pleasures, affective experiences, subjective understandings, and socially-situated meanings (see figure 5.4 and table 5.1).

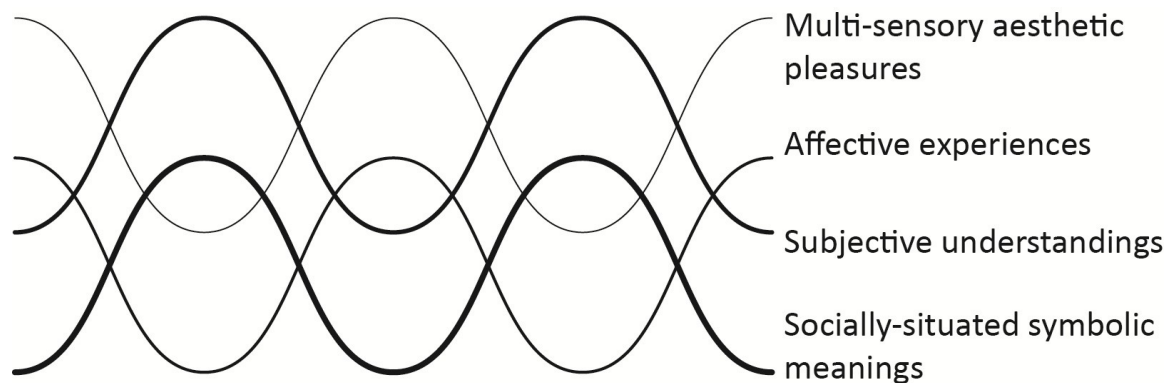


Figure 5.4. Mutually constituting threads of practice: aesthetic, affective, subjective, symbolic strands plied around embodied core

Table 5.1. Defining aesthetic, affective, subjective, symbolic strands of threads of practice

Strand	Definition
Multi-sensory aesthetic pleasures	Multi-sensory, embodied, and affectively-charged qualities of experiences through which people engage with and make meaning in everyday practice
Affective experiences	Physiologically, psychologically, and sociologically experienced feelings, affections, and emotions inflecting aesthetic experiences that constitute subjectivity and meanings
Subjective understandings	Situated, localized, embodied knowledges and performances through which people assert agency and mutually construct system dynamics
Socially-situated symbolic meanings	Reciprocally shaped meanings at the intersection of people, behaviors, objects, and settings situated in systems and made meaningful through aesthetic and affective qualities

Although I delineate these dimensions as separate strands in this analysis, they are in fact not independent or hierarchical. The definitions are intentionally recursive, reciprocally constituting each other and the whole. Moreover, they exhibit “bounded reflexivity;”⁵ the strands are bounded by but reflexively shape and transform the systems in which they occur (from the physiology of the human body to cultural beliefs). Like a Klein bottle, they are the surface that turns in on itself to become itself; a surface which has no boundary, no edges where it stops or begins; a surface which has no orientation, no left or right, or up and down; a surface which has no other side, is not superficial, but four-dimensional.⁶

These strands entwined around the embodied nature of their relationships with clothes to form threads of practice. Women’s relationships with their clothes, then, cannot be pinned down or reduced to any one of these dimensions, but are rather always multi-dimensional and situated in physical, social, political, cultural, and relational circumstances. Materializing through the thematic issues explored in the following three chapters, these plied threads interlace with each other and across systems levels to create a dynamic web (see figures 5.4 and 5.5). As actors within these systems and as researchers studying these systems, we can trace thematic issues in clothing consumption across them to understand how we balance and move between the individual and the group, objects and their context, the improvised and standardized, and static scaffolds and dynamic flows.

⁵ Roberta Sassatelli, “Self and Body,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, ed. Frank Trentmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 646.

⁶ Jeffrey R. Weeks, *The Shape of Space: How to Visualize Surfaces and Three-dimensional Manifolds* (New York: Marcel Dekker, Inc., 1985). Grosz builds on Lacan’s metaphor of a Möbius strip to navigate the mind/body relationship. Based on my previous exposure to topography, I considered a Klein bottle as a more appropriate “container” for my four-dimensional description. Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

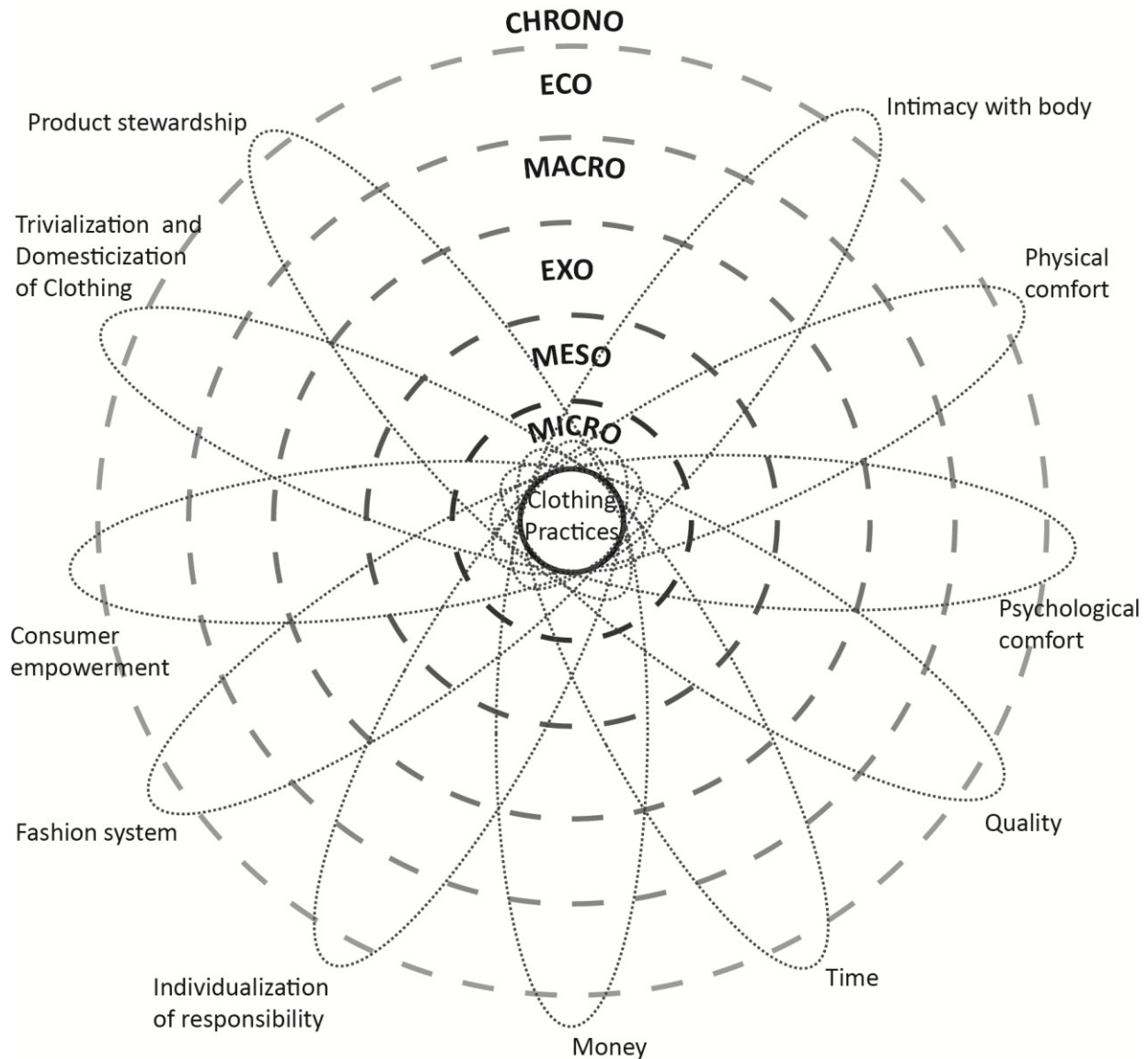


Figure 5.5. Web of Practice model: multi-stranded thematic threads enmeshed in consumer clothing practice and interweaving across systems levels

The symbolic, expressive meanings that emerge across these systems could be seen as fragmented, disjointed, fetishized, each meaning a glaring cultural facet, reflecting in a different direction from a hard crystallized structure. On the contrary, these meanings are fuzzy, wooly overlapping strands, interlacing with other meanings across systems, and spun into a blurry impression. While this particular nested model may not visually capture the multiplicity of

nuanced meanings within each and across systems, it maps out one version of connections on which we can locate sites of intervention, initiatives that reshape the landscape to support sustainable patterns of behavior on the micro to macro settings.

Each initiative or proposed change affects not only the environment, society, and economy, but also individual well-being. In particular, initiatives, programs, policies, or behaviors are necessarily entangled with the four strands of consumer's relationships with clothing: aesthetic satisfaction, affective experiences, socially-situated meanings, and subjective understandings, all plied around an embodied core. I argue that is important to not only acknowledge that the conditions along the thematic threads intimately relate to these individual, interpersonal, and cultural dimensions of clothing consumption, but also that addressing these elements is essential for successful sustainable initiatives.

As revealed in the following chapters, the material and social environments, system components, and consumer practices that create this web currently supports a mix of sustainable and unsustainable clothing practices. If we are to address environmental and ethical challenges, we can seek to create systems conditions in any level that enable (e.g. motivate, facilitate, and maintain) sustainable behaviors and options. This model illustrates sites for change, points of intervention on a range of system components that attend to these intimate experiences. This helps us effectively harness systems strategies to attend to intimate dimensions in crafting meaningful, sustainable experiences. In particular, we can target conditions to address the following themes I have identified as salient for sustainable clothing consumption. By doing so, we can reconfigure the structure of the web to support sustainable clothing production and consumption systems that work together to nurture healthy and resilient economies, societies, and individuals involved throughout the lifecycle. Additionally, researchers and policymakers

have argued that making changes on the outer ring, while requiring more resources to initiate, may create more widespread and/or lasting change.⁷ Finally, this web can only survive if it respects and maintains healthy and diverse ecological systems and considers impacts over the long-term.

Synthesizing Interdisciplinary Perspectives

The Web of Practice model I introduce here translates models and theories that connect individual behaviors, interpersonal dimensions, and social-cultural phenomena in a cohesive, graspable framework. In addition to scholarship on consumer behavior, dress, and material culture discussed in the preceding literature review, I pull in threads from sociology, psychology, philosophy, and gender studies. This interdisciplinary strategy allows us to navigate the range of meanings and issues that emerged in women's stories about their experiences with and perceptions of different systems in which they are situated, as well as their own intimate, embodied encounters.⁸

⁷ Stokols, "Translating Social Ecological Theory into Guidelines for Community Health Promotion"; McLeroy et al., "An Ecological Perspective on Health Promotion Programs"; *Footprints to Health-community Case Study: Using the Social Ecological Model in Intervention Planning* (Madison, WI: Department of Health Services, Wisconsin Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity Program, 2009), <http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/physical-activity/Resources/Initiatives/Footprints/Case%20Study%20SEM%202-26-09.pdf>; M. G. Ory, P. J. Jordan, and T. Bazzarre, "The Behavior Change Consortium: Setting the Stage for a New Century of Health Behavior-change Research," *Health Education Research* 17, no. 5 (October 1, 2002): 500–511; Elizabeth Shove, "Beyond the ABC: Climate Change Policy and Theories of Social Change," *Environment and Planning A* 42, no. 6 (2010): 1273–1285; McKee et al., *Involving People, Evolving Behaviour*.

⁸ Lou Taylor, *The Study of Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); Sophie Woodward, *Why Women Wear What They Wear* (Oxford: Berg, 2007); Annette Lynch and Mitchell D. Strauss, *Changing Fashion: A Critical Introduction to Trend Analysis and Meaning*, Dress, Body, Culture (Oxford: Berg, 2007); Daniel Miller, ed., *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies* (London: Routledge, 1995); Sassatelli, *Consumer Culture*; Chris Tilley, *Handbook of Material Culture* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2006); Ann Smart Martin and J. Ritchie Garrison, eds., *American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field* (Winterthur, Del.: Knoxville, Tenn.: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum; Distributed by University of Tennessee Press, 1997).

Human ecology was one of the core disciplines my results led me to use as a tool in situating these dimensions. As stated in chapter one, my project is fundamentally concerned with our relationships with material culture. The Social Ecological Models used in human ecology and allied discipline home economics are also fundamentally concerned with humans and their relationship to material, social, and environmental contexts. The discipline has been historically involved in teaching consumer skills, cultivating aesthetic sensibilities, and framing interdependencies of environmental and social systems.⁹ Current scholars are working explicitly to connect the discipline to sustainability and wellbeing through policy initiatives, education and research, and increasingly the sensory dimensions of everyday tastes.¹⁰ Nevertheless, human ecology is generally absent from the discussion in sustainable consumption literature.

Although I based the visualization on social-ecological models from the field of human ecology, I also sought to capture core themes that consistently come up across disciplines referenced in this project: The body is “the very ‘stuff’ of subjectivity,”¹¹ but the subject “neither precedes nor follows the process... but emerges only within the matrix” of processes on and through the body.¹² People affect and are affected by social, cultural, economic, etc. contexts in which they are situated. They are active agents and passive subjects. Subjects and settings are not

⁹ Megan Elias, *Stir It Up: Home Economics in American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Carolyn M. Goldstein, *Creating Consumers: Home Economists in Twentieth-century America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Sarah Stage and Virginia Bramble Vincenti, *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

¹⁰ Kolodinsky, “A Systems Approach to Food Future Proofs the Home Economics Profession”; Sylvia Lorek and Stefan Wahlen, “Sustainable Consumption through an Environmental Lens: Challenges and Opportunities for Home Economics,” in *Creating Home Economics Futures: The Next 100 Years*, ed. Donna Pendergast, Sue L.T. McGregor, and Kaija Turkki (Bowen Hills: Australia Academic Press, 2012), 170–181; Donna Pendergast, “From the Margins: Globalization with (out) Home Economics,” *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 27, no. 4 (September 2003): 331–334; Paulette P. Hill and Catherine Solheim, “Home Economists as Environmentalists: Setting a Research Agenda,” in *Cross Cultural Approaches to Home Management*, ed. Rosemarie von Schweitzer (New York: Westview Press, 1993), 51–64.

¹¹ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, ix.

¹² Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Psychology Press, 1993), 7.

static, but are continuously constituted through ongoing reciprocal and relational performances and practices; meanings occur in the spaces between.

There are multiple existing models grappling with these concerns. For example, although Bourdieu's work on distinction and social capital has its own particular nuances, strengths, and weaknesses, his model of the habitus, a "structured and structuring structure," offers a scaffold for a broader understanding of practice; the "conditions of existence" that create "systems of schemes" which are then internalized to reproduce those conditions of existence also describe the concentric model pictured here.¹³ Alternatively, sociologist Crossley, in his work on "reflexive embodiment," critiques Bourdieu's lack of sensitivity to active, deliberative agency, and proposes a model that situates individuals in relational contexts that they create through their reflexive engagement.¹⁴ These theoretical positions are relevant to sustainable consumption because they remind us that consumers are neither locked-in nor in complete control. As Hilton wryly notes, "Neither too much nor too little can be expected from [consumers]... The engagement with consumption is not something that is done entirely passively... but neither is it done entirely consciously."¹⁵ Rather than applying any particular model from the top down, I sought to make room for multiple views and participants' voices.

¹³ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984); Sassatelli, *Consumer Culture*.

¹⁴ Nick Crossley, "The Networked Body and the Question of Reflexivity," in *Body/Embodiment: Symbolic Interaction and the Sociology of the Body*, ed. Dennis D. Waskul and Phillip Vannini (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 21–33.

¹⁵ Matthew Hilton, "The Banality of Consumption," in *Citizenship and Consumption*, ed. Kate Soper and Frank Trentmann, *Consumption and Public Life* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 100, 101; Douglas B. Holt, "Constructing Sustainable Consumption: From Ethical Values to the Cultural Transformation of Unsustainable Markets," in *Communication, Consumers, and Citizens: Revisiting the Politics of Consumption*, ed. Dhavan V. Shah et al., *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* v. 644 (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2012), 236–255; Daniel Miller, "Consumption as the Vanguard of History: A Polemic by Way of an Introduction," in *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies*, ed. Daniel Miller (London: Routledge, 1995), 1–57; Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2007).

Symbolic interactionism is another useful model that apparel scholars use to address gaps in micro and macro theories and to describe how individuals negotiate meaning in and through ambivalent postmodern dress practices.¹⁶ While it seeks to explain the why of fashion change, it also demands “attention to the ‘*how*’”¹⁷ through “careful and detailed research,”¹⁸ which my study contributes. Various sociological theories of taste, distinction, status, communication, and meaning, including symbolic interactionism, have explained why we dress the way we do, but there is a tendency 1) to emphasize the visual and language-parallels, as opposed to the sensory and the nonverbalized aspects, and 2) to not fully examine the intersubjectivities and how affective and aesthetic experiential dimensions inform the meanings that emerge.¹⁹ My project unravels nonverbalized and intimate, yet interpersonal, dynamics of practice.

Additionally, performance theories in sociology, anthropology, and folklore attend to the subjective and active presentation of self given personal and physical dimensions, social circumstances, and cultural meanings.²⁰ I bring in feminist scholarship that refines and reformulates these theories to include sensitivity to gendered bodies and identities, and the affective and aesthetic qualities that constitute and are constituted by these interpersonal

¹⁶ Susan B. Kaiser, Richard H. Nagasawa, and Sandra S. Hutton, “Construction of an SI Theory of Fashion: Part 1. Ambivalence and Change,” *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 13, no. 3 (June 1, 1995): 172–183; Susan B. Kaiser, *The Social Psychology of Clothing: Symbolic Appearances in Context* (New York: Macmillan, 1985); Denzin, *Symbolic Interactionism and Cultural Studies*.

¹⁷ Richard H. Nagasawa, Susan B. Kaiser, and Sandra S. Hutton, “Construction of an SI Theory of Fashion: Part 3. Context of Explanation,” *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 14, no. 1 (1996): 61.

¹⁸ Crossley, “The Networked Body and the Question of Reflexivity,” 32.

¹⁹ Sassatelli, *Consumer Culture*; Brenda Farnell, *Dynamic Embodiment for Social Theory: “I Move Therefore I Am”* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Patricia Sawin, “Performance at the Nexus of Gender, Power, and Desire: Reconsidering Bauman’s ‘Verbal Art’ from the Perspective of Gendered Subjectivity as Performance,” *Journal of American Folklore* 115, no. 455 (Winter 2002): 28–61.

²⁰ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959); Richard Bauman, “Verbal Art as Performance,” *American Anthropologist* 77, no. 2 (1975): 290–311; Jon P. Mitchell, “Performance,” in *Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. Chris Tilley (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2006), 384–401.

subjectivities.²¹ I also draw on postmodern theorists' emphasis on the fragmented, fluid, reflexive, and interrelated dimensions of identity and culture to elucidate the dynamic nature of the individual in these relational contexts.²²

In acknowledging that affective, emotional dimensions are tied up with embodied aesthetic experiences, I draw on psychological theories and philosophical work on aesthetics and emotion. These disciplines similarly ground affective and aesthetic experiences in the body and their contribution to meanings. For instance, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological work provides a foundation for discussing the "primacy of perception."²³ Feminist and vernacular aesthetic theories contribute considerations of embodied, sensory pleasures and also the ordinary and routine.²⁴ Others integrate cognitive science work with cultural studies to examine how physiological affective responses contribute to symbolic meaning but perceptions and processing are simultaneously shaped by social relations and meaning.²⁵

²¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Sawin, "Performance at the Nexus of Gender, Power, and Desire: Reconsidering Bauman's 'Verbal Art' from the Perspective of Gendered Subjectivity as Performance"; Hilde S. Hein and Carolyn Korsmeyer, eds., *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Liz Linthicum, "Integrative Practice: Oral History, Dress and Disability Studies," *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 4 (December 21, 2006): 309–318; Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*; Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (October 1, 1988): 575–599.

²² Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*; Virginia Postrel, *The Substance of Style: How the Rise of Aesthetic Value Is Remaking Commerce, Culture, and Consciousness* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003); Miller, *Stuff*.

²³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, Reprint, Routledge Classics (New York: Routledge, 2002); Julian Thomas, "Phenomenology and Material Culture," in *Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. Chris Tilley (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2006), 43–59.

²⁴ Hein and Korsmeyer, *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective*; Bettina Papenburg and Marta Zarzycka, eds., *Carnal Aesthetics: Transgressive Imagery and Feminist Politics* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013); Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Thomas Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (Buffalo, NY: Broadview Press, 2012); Beverly Gordon, *The Saturated World: Aesthetic Meaning, Intimate Objects, Women's Lives, 1890-1940* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006).

²⁵ Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds., *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Margaret Wetherell, *Affect and Emotion: A New Social Science Understanding* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2012); Eugénie Shinkle, "Uneasy Bodies: Affect, Embodied Perception, and Contemporary Fashion Photography," in *Carnal Aesthetics: Transgressive Imagery and Feminist Politics*, ed. Bettina Papenburg and Marta Zarzycka, International Library of Visual Culture 3 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 73–88; Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

Bringing together these analytical threads helps capture the nuances of these necessarily personal, intimate experiences lived in relational contexts. Sustainability is not something that can be pinpointed in one specific instance of a garment's production or consumption. Indeed, the challenge of sustainability is in confronting lived practice as qualitatively experienced and reproduced by consumers in meaning- and materials-rich contexts.²⁶ Although this project does not probe all of the systems components which ultimately are at play in women's practices, my model points to existing frameworks through which we can further examine how practice entwines with other component components. At the risk of overemphasizing the individual experience at the expense of systems interconnections or experiences of other persons in the lifecycle (e.g. garment workers), this study highlights strands of the individual experience that often go unnoticed, taken-for-granted, devalued, or trivialized. I argue that because these strands permeate everyday experiences, sustainability initiatives targeting multiple systems levels can productively use these strands as sites of intervention, pivots of change. Because of the dynamic nuances of these subjective positions within complex system interactions, there is no one-size-fits-all solution to create sustainable practice. Instead, I suggest that sustainability-focused systems conditions can recognize, respect, redirect, or reinforce embodied aesthetic pleasure, affective experiences, socially-situated meanings, and subjective understandings.

²⁶ Elizabeth Shove, "Comfort and Convenience," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, ed. Frank Trentmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 289–306; Ruth Lane and Andrew Gorman Murray, eds., *Material Geographies of Household Sustainability* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2011); Michael Maniates, "Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World?," in *Confronting Consumption*, ed. Thomas Princen, Michael Maniates, and Ken Conca (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 43–66.

CHAPTER 6

**FINDING THE RIGHT FIT: BALANCING PERSONAL TASTES,
SOCIAL NORMS, AND CHANGING CONTEXTS**

Introduction

One woman, two looks. The first—a red, knee-length geometric-print shirt dress with three-quarter length sleeves; bold, chunky jewelry and coordinating wide belt; pale orange kitten heels; and hair loosely pulled back. The second—a plain knee-length, short-sleeve, purple sheath; skin-toned pumps; a waist-long gold chain; and straight, shoulder-length hair. The first—the “high-fat look.” The second—the “no-fat look.” Both examples from best-selling *How to Never Look Fat Again*, a typical dress advice manual instructing women how to control their curves and manage their bodies, while also dressing for one’s age, personality, and occasion.¹ U.S. women consumers routinely face these messages explicitly spelled-out in “style bibles,” editorials, and make-over television programs; implicitly suggested in advertisements, catalogs, and media; and manifested in everyday encounters with other women (“I wouldn’t wear that at my age!”).²

But what if a woman preferred the playful, eclectic, and busy look that supposedly makes

¹ Charla Krupp, *How to Never Look Fat Again: Over 1,000 Ways to Dress thinner—Without Dieting* (New York: Springboard, 2010); Leah Feldon, *Does This Make Me Look Fat? The Definitive Rules for Dressing Thin for Every Height, Size, and Shape* (New York: Villard Books, 2000); Trinny Woodall, Susannah Constantine, and Robin Matthews, *What Not to Wear: For Every Occasion* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2004); Kim France and Andrea Linett, *The Lucky Guide to Mastering Any Style: How to Wear Iconic Looks and Make Them Your Own* (New York: Melcher Media, Inc., 2008); Clinton Kelly and Stacy London, *Dress Your Best: The Complete Guide To Finding The Style That’s Right For Your Body* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2005).

² Ingun Grimstad Klepp, “Slimming Lines,” *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 15, no. 4 (December 1, 2011): 451–480; Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, Tenth Anniversary Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Martin Roberts, “The Fashion Police: Governing the Self in What Not to Wear,” in *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, ed. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 227–248; Helga Dittmar, *Consumer Culture, Identity and Well-being: The Search for the “Good Life” and the “Body Perfect”* (New York: Psychology Press, 2008).

her look fat, a fashion and social faux pas? What if she thought drawing attention to wide hips was cute or sexy? There may be room for personal tastes in the increasingly fluid, democratic world of style. However, there is also room for anxiety, fear, and embarrassment; for overstepping acceptable boundaries for one's weight, age, or class; for experimentation, trial, and error; and for expensive fashion mistakes.³ At whose (e.g. agricultural and garment workers) and what (e.g. environmental degradation and waste accumulation) expense are choices being made?

In this chapter, I argue that women's struggles with finding clothes that fit their bodies, multi-sensory aesthetic tastes, and individual and social identities—as they change over time and situations—contribute to unsustainable behavior, at the expense of the environment, garment workers, and consumer well-being. Women's experiences with their bodies are inherently personal and intimate, yet also publically displayed, socially situated, and culturally constructed; it takes work to craft one's identity through dress.⁴ By grappling with these particular issues in our efforts to cultivate sustainable products and systems, we confront some of the underlying, systemic challenges to environmentally and socially responsible consumption. While I do not probe the depth of literature on body image shaming and racial, ethnic, gender, or sexuality stereotypes,

³ Alison Clarke and Daniel Miller, "Fashion and Anxiety," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 6, no. 2 (2002): 191–214; Annie Grove-White, "No Rules, Only Choices? Repositioning the Self Within the Fashion System in Relation to Expertise and Meaning: A Case Study of Colour and Image Consultancy," *Journal of Material Culture* 6, no. 2 (2001): 193–211; A. Boulton and R. Jerrard, "Ambivalence, and Its Relation to Fashion and the Body," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 4, no. 3 (2000): 301–321; Susan B. Kaiser, Richard H. Nagasawa, and Sandra S. Hutton, "Construction of an SI Theory of Fashion: Part 1. Ambivalence and Change," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 13, no. 3 (June 1, 1995): 172–183.

⁴ Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins, Kim K. P. Johnson, and Joanne B. Eicher, eds., *Dress and Identity* (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1995); Efrat Tse'lon, *The Masque of Femininity: The Presentation of Woman in Everyday Life* (London: SAGE, 1995); Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 1997); Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress, and Modern Social Theory* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000); Sophie Woodward, *Why Women Wear What They Wear* (Oxford: Berg, 2007); Kathy Davis, ed., *Embodied Practices: Feminist Perspectives on the Body* (London: Sage, 1997); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Katharine G. Young, *Bodylore* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995).

these issues point to some of the social costs of the apparel industry and contemporary culture. Alongside these social stigmas, however, are everyday practices of women, expressing aesthetic tastes, managing bodies, and asserting agency in cultivating a clothing look that works for them and their lifestyles. Examining these tensions directs our attention to how they are bound up with environmental and social costs.

As established in the literature review, there is an attitude and knowledge-behavior gap.⁵ This chapter offers additional insight into that gap by focusing on how aesthetic tastes and symbolic meanings converge on the body through ongoing interactions with clothing. In the first section, I examine the complex role the body and senses played in not only women's relationships with their clothes but also the sustainability of their practices. Building on themes from the first section, I argue in "Responding to Cycles" that "natural" and "cultural" cycles or changes (given that our response to "natural" changes are culturally-shaped) presented challenges for women in their current clothing consumption practices. On the other hand, sustainable-inspired garment designs, production, maintenance, and disposal options can offer solutions to help women manage these changes. This discussion fleshes out consumers' "wishes, needs, values, desires, aesthetic concept, and emotions," so that, as textile designer and researcher Niinimäki asserts, they can

⁵ Hye-Shin Kim and Mary Lynn Damhorst, "Environmental Concern and Apparel Consumption," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 16, no. 3 (1998): 126–133; Soyoung Kim, Mary A. Littrell, and Jennifer L. Paff Ogle, "The Relative Importance of Social Responsibility as a Predictor of Purchase Intentions for Clothing," *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* 3, no. 3 (1999): 207–218; Marsha A. Dickson, "Personal Values, Beliefs, and Attitudes Relating to Intentions to Purchase Apparel from Socially Responsible Businesses," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 18, no. 1 (2000): 19–30; Deirdre Shaw et al., "Fashion Victim: The Impact of Fair Trade Concerns on Clothing Choice," *Journal of Strategic Marketing* 14, no. 4 (December 2006): 427–440; Catrin Joergens, "Ethical Fashion: Myth or Future Trend?," *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* 10, no. 3 (2006): 360–371; Carmen Valor, "The Influence of Information About Labour Abuses on Consumer Choice of Clothes: A Grounded Theory Approach," *Journal of Marketing Management* 23, no. 7–8 (2007): 675–695; Soyeon Shim, "Environmentalism and Consumers' Clothing Disposal Patterns: An Exploratory Study," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 13, no. 1 (January 1, 1995): 38–48; H. M. Joung and H. Park-Poaps, "Factors Motivating and Influencing Clothing Disposal Behaviours," *International Journal of Consumer Studies* (2011).

“become a key starting point for eco-clothing design. At the end of such a design process it is thus possible to deepen consumers’ product attachment and at the same time add value to the product through sustainability.”⁶

Living in Dressed Bodies

In this section, I argue that the physical interactions and sensory perceptions that mediate our encounters with dress and others are important issues for sustainable clothing consumption. Women in my study considered their bodies and sensory preferences not only when selecting clothes, but also throughout the day as they managed the fabric on their body. Women described these experiences as a struggle with specific garments, their closet as a whole, and even the apparel industry. Combined with care practices to maintain wardrobes, emotional and embodied experiences and expectations contributed to resource-intensive consumption patterns. However, by striving to develop products and systems that facilitate satisfactory experiences, we can address key contextual barriers to sustainable consumption.

I explore sensory and bodily experiences before moving on to garment and identity interactions for three primary reasons. By moving from the micro to the macro, I ground the discussion in concrete experiences of individual’s relationships with material artifacts. While embodied and sensory experiences shape many facets of our lives, my research leads me to believe it is particularly important when looking at sustainability concerns of clothing practices. For example, when recycling clothing through secondhand markets, one has to consider body shape and size, as well as aesthetic preferences or functional needs. These concerns are not a priority in

⁶ Kirsi Niinimäki, “Eco-clothing, Consumer Identity and Ideology,” *Sustainable Development* 18, no. 3 (2010): 151.

recycling many other materials, such as paper or glass.⁷ Moreover, the embodied reality of dress practices is not consistently explored in research on clothing recycling behavior, even though it intimately affects the success of garment re-use programs.⁸ Thus, this chapter suggests that embodied interactions with objects could potentially serve as a starting point for analyzing and developing sustainable design, production, and consumption systems across product industries.⁹

This section also addresses women's stated desires for comfortable, functional clothes. Function and comfort relate directly to both bodily experiences and socially-situated, lived contexts. By framing themes through sensory perception, I do not intend to suggest that the macro and micro, the social and the individual, the cultural and the physical, can be separated or that one precedes the other. Indeed, they always reflexively inform each other. My discussion focuses on how women manage smell, touch and texture, and senses of their bodies in efforts to have functional, comfortable clothing experiences.¹⁰

Sensing Dress

Olfaction is a particularly intimate sensory experience of dressed bodies that affected clothing selection (e.g. based on fiber), clothing use (e.g. wear patterns based on smell), and

⁷ Individual practices of recycling non-clothing items may be an embodied experience, because people carry materials to a receptacle, push bins to a curb, or smell food residues. Municipalities also may need to ensure that people are physically able to easily recycle cans (whether that is on the curb at home or in strategically placed receptacles while away from home). These same contextual issues apply to the success of garment recycling, and, the interaction of the recycled material with the body is comparatively more salient in clothing practices. When recycling came up in interviews, women mentioned the convenience of recycling non-textile materials, but did not mention sensory interactions with those materials.

⁸ For an example in which these themes are not addressed, see Constanza Bianchi and Grete Birtwistle, "Consumer Clothing Disposal Behaviour: A Comparative Study," *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 36, no. 3 (May 2012): 335–341.

⁹ Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*; Joanne Entwistle, *The Aesthetic Economy of Fashion: Markets and Value in Clothing and Modelling* (Oxford: Berg, 2009).

¹⁰ Other sensations, such as sound, may be relevant in specific contexts, but I focus on sense brought up most frequently in interviews. I discuss thermal perception as it relates to dressing for weather in "Responding to Cycles."

clothing care (e.g. laundering to remove and/or apply smell). Historically and cross-culturally, there are many examples of dress practices in which scent is an important dimension of dressed bodies.¹¹ Moreover, smell has been identified by neuroscientists as having a powerful connection to processing emotions.¹² In order to find ways to encourage responsible clothing purchases and minimize resource consumption, we need to understand how aesthetic desires and social norms of minimal body odor and/or perfumed clothes affected their clothing choices.

Shove reviews how laundering clothes has historically been associated with ridding the clothing of contaminants from both the environment and the body, as well as signifying culturally desirable traits of propriety, decency, and morality through the ability to keep up appearances. Although deodorizing clothes through laundering may have previously been a way to manage odor that was associated with danger and disease, Shove explains that clothing care is less about actually cleaning and more about “freshening up” clothes to meet social conventions about identity and status through olfactory performances.¹³ Addressing tastes and norms through practice or products are important pieces of moving toward sustainable consumption.

The women in my study had various expectations about which level or kind of odor they

¹¹ Victoria L. Rovine, “Handmade Textiles: Global Markets and Authenticity,” in *Dress Sense: Emotional and Sensory Experiences of the Body and Clothes*, ed. Donald Clay Johnson and Helen Bradley Foster (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 133–143; Katia Johansen, “Perfumed Textiles” (paper presented at the Textile Society of America 11th Biennial Symposium: Textiles as Cultural Expressions, Honolulu, HI, September 2008), <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/104>; Elizabeth Shove, *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience: The Social Organization of Normality* (Oxford: Berg, 2003); Constance Classen, David Howes, and Anthony Synnott, eds., *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

¹² Stephan Hamann, “Nosing in on the Emotional Brain,” *Nature Neuroscience* 6, no. 2 (February 2003): 106–108; Jean-P. Royet et al., “fMRI of Emotional Responses to Odors: Influence of Hedonic Valence and Judgment, Handedness, and Gender,” *NeuroImage* 20 (728–713): 2003; Charles Spence, “Making Sense of Touch: A Multisensory Approach,” in *The Power of Touch: Handling Objects in Museum and Heritage Contexts*, ed. Elizabeth Pye (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2007), 45–61.

¹³ Shove, *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience*; Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Sarah Pink, *Home Truths: Gender, Domestic Objects and Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2004); Thomas Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (Buffalo, NY: Broadview Press, 2012); Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

preferred or found comfortable. Most had some sort of olfactory preference that steered away from body odor, which they perceived as unpleasant, and toward either scentless or scented clothes. Women's varying scent preferences did not necessarily correlate to women's attitudes towards sustainability concerns. For example, Eunice, Camilla, and Jessica enjoyed pronounced scents on their clothes, often applied through laundry products such as detergent, fabric softener, and dryer sheets.¹⁴ Contrastingly, Lizzie, Niki, and Louise avoided strong odors of any kind, and would notice these smells on others' clothes. Lizzie and Niki were consciously concerned about environmental issues, while Louise was not. Those who preferred scentless garments usually disliked and avoided what they perceived as artificial or chemical smells. Anxieties about fabric touching the skin revealed how interconnected these intimate experiences are in embodied dress practices. Although these women were aware of harmful chemicals, they described laundering practices primarily through sensory preferences, and less through concern about environmental or health impacts. Whether this was because sensory aesthetics was fundamentally more important than pro-environmental values, or because the direct, physical sensation provided a more immediate, tangible frame of reference, was not possible to deduce from my interviews. Nevertheless, these patterns in how women talk through their choices reaffirm the primacy of smell in aesthetic, affective, and cultural meanings. Thus, the micro experience of, macro attitudes toward, and products in the exo infrastructure are fronts for sustainable clothing change.

Olfactory management extended throughout clothing consumption from wearing clothes to laundering and disposing of them. The absence of body odor or the application of perfumed scent on a garment indicated whether an item was clean.

¹⁴ While applying scents to the body itself through perfumes, soaps, lotions, and other products is another example of dress practices, I am focusing on how smells manifest in garment use specifically.

Melanie: This is terrible, but I, I just keep track of the sniff. [laughs] Sniff your clothes to make sure they smell good... I'm very conscious about body odor, so. [laughs]... I don't want my, you know. You just got to make sure your clothes still smell clean if you've worn them more than once.

Maintaining a pleasant smell or avoiding body odor helped them feel comfortable, particularly in professional situations. Her reflexive and active engagement in monitoring odor and laundry illustrates Crossley's interactionist model of "reflexive embodiment."¹⁵ Melanie's self-consciousness demonstrates that smell and cleanliness are important for presenting the self in social situation, and consumers actively engage with this process. Participants' concerns also convey how odor is culturally and morally coded; symbolic meaning is tied to affective appraisals of pleasurability.¹⁶ Clothing conveys identity, status, capabilities, and values through multiple sensory modalities, which work together to communicate ideas of cleanliness, comfort, and social acceptance.¹⁷

While sweat originates from the body and soils from the environment, women identified the garment itself as problematic.

Lizzie: There's certain shirts that when I wear 'em, I smell more. [laughs] Like it doesn't wick away moisture and it just kinda keeps it there and then I don't like the way I smell.

The material object exacerbates and holds on to the odor. Moreover, women established different categories of garments in their odor/body/cleanliness appraisals. Whether or not clothes actually smelled more, women believed they needed to wash them (with the exception of jeans and heavier

¹⁵ Nick Crossley, "The Networked Body and the Question of Reflexivity," in *Body/Embodiment: Symbolic Interaction and the Sociology of the Body*, ed. Dennis D. Waskul and Phillip Vannini (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 21–33.

¹⁶ Gale Peter Largey and David Rodney Watson, "The Sociology of Odors," in *Dress and Identity*, ed. Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins, Kim K. P. Johnson, and Joanne B. Eicher (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1995), 313–324; Royet et al., "fMRI of Emotional Responses to Odors: Influence of Hedonic Valence and Judgment, Handedness, and Gender"; Pink, *Home Truths*.

¹⁷ Shove, *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience*; Douglas, *Purity and Danger*.

wool or woolen-like sweaters) more frequently because of bodily contact and the potential for smell. For example, Felicity confessed to wearing a pair of jeans for a week or more before washing them, but insisted on washing tops worn without an under layer after each wearing.

Felicity: I mean, honestly, I probably could wear shirts more than once. Um, I feel like they get smellier, but usually most of the time, unless I've been like exercising or something. I don't really get that sweaty. Um. [pauses] I guess I feel like because they're in contact with like your armpits and upper body sweat, then they'll get kind of stinkier than pants.

Despite acknowledging that her shirts are probably not especially dirty, the threat of upper body sweat pushes her to tackle odors before they occur. Pants, protected from the body by underwear and generally lacking in body odor, did not warrant similar preemptive action. Therefore, in considering sustainable consumption, we need to consider how the material objects—and our multi-sensory interactions with them—are points of intervention. In addition to transforming to more ecological sensitive practice, we must consider what products would support or successfully integrate into sustainable practices—whether that is washing with cold water or not washing as frequently.

Managing concerns about body odor and preference for scented clothes could either decrease or increase the sustainability of clothing practices. Washing clothes (primarily undergarments and shirts) after only one wearing increased water, energy, and other resource use. In contrast, hanging up clothes to “air out” between wearings as a way to reduce smells (and maintain texture and appearance) reduced the frequency of laundering. Women used this strategy especially for items that needed hand-washing or dry-cleaning. The convenience of machine-washing and -drying, in that sense, increased resource use, while the potential economic and labor costs, decreased resource use. Using scented laundry products increased water, energy,

and other resource use; added to the accumulation of products; and also increased pollution of waterways. Aesthetically preferring or expressing concern for perfume- and dye-free soap avoided some of those pitfalls. The relationship between cleanliness and smell affects resource consumption through laundering is more complicated: sometimes women washed garments more frequently because garments were seen as needing to be freshened, deodorized, or preemptively deodorized, while other times women washed garments less frequently because garments were not perceived as in need of freshening. This pattern manifested almost exclusively in the dichotomies of under/outer layers and upper/lower body.

Even though smell is neurologically, emotionally, culturally, and morally significant, we as a society and as individuals can ask ourselves: How can we satisfy these tastes in a sustainable manner? For example, because smell is a marker for when to wash or dispose of something, how can we either create fabrics that do not acquire body odor or scent textiles without toxic chemicals or additional resource use? My case study points towards existing strategies, such as women's minimizing garment contact with skin by providing barriers (e.g. underwear or undershirt) or washing some fibers (e.g. wool) less frequently that have a natural tendency not to acquire body odors. Following this layering approach, outer garments show less wear, thus extending their life; undergarments may wear faster, but because they are unseen, it is more acceptable. This does not require new technologies or new purchases, but shifts in habits, or potential modifications in design to facilitate layering.

If we cannot meet sensory norms without harming the environment or people, how might we overcome aversion to body odor or revise perceptions of cleanliness? Shove points to material, technological, infrastructural, and individual challenges, structures that continue to support these

cultural codes and material practices.

The ingredients—the fabric, the detergents, the conditioners and the machines—with which people work and around which they make “their ways” of washing are not innocent materials... Producers and manufacturers are together involved in pushing notions of sensation and smell in one direction, coping with anxieties about allergies in another, and constructing new concepts of what washing is all about... This suggests the existence of two parallel forms of integration: one associated with the whirling together of the laundry as a system of systems and one that happens on the ground as people construct their own ways of doing things.¹⁸

Although Shove describes micro and macro as parallel forms, this chapter shows how the aesthetic, affective, and symbolic dimensions bridge these levels. Despite the complexity of these intersecting attitudes, objects, and practices, they are sites for sustainable interventions.

By re-imagining our reactions to, preferences for, and evaluations of aromas and cleanliness, women might be more comfortable washing their clothes less frequently and using fewer products in the laundering process. This is not mutually exclusive from using olfactory stimulation as a source of pleasure. Changing social norms or aesthetic preferences to accept body odor on clothing or not identify cleanliness by artificial scents is no small task. However, these norms have changed before and have been cultivated in part through product marketing.¹⁹ Shifting norms and behaviors could potentially reduce toxicity and pollution, degradation of resources, waste and accumulation, and resource use.

Norms about bodily contamination and disgust suggest the need for alternative strategies to manage used garments currently directed into the waste stream.²⁰ In decisions of whether to donate

¹⁸ Shove, *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience*, 157.

¹⁹ Lesley Johnson, *Sentenced to Everyday Life: Feminism and the Housewife* (Oxford: Berg, 2004); Jessamyn Neuhaus, *Housework and Housewives in Modern American Advertising: Married to the Mop* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Carolyn M. Goldstein, *Creating Consumers: Home Economists in Twentieth-century America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

²⁰ Dominique Roux and Michaël Korchia, “Am I What I Wear? An Exploratory Study of Symbolic Meanings Associated with Secondhand Clothing,” *Advances in Consumer Research* 33, no. 1 (2006): 29–35.

clothes to second hand stores or throw them in the trash, undergarments elicited visceral reactions. Most women felt uncomfortable or squeamish about both donating their worn undergarments and purchasing previously owned undergarments. Growing up with sisters, whose clothes were mixed up in the laundry, Jessica viewed undergarments as sufficiently clean once laundered. She described that various roommates were not as comfortable with her willingness to use underwear as cleaning rags around the home. Instead, they threw underwear into the trash.

Somatic sensations of touch and pressure also emerged in my interviews as an important dimension in women's clothing practices. They wanted to maximize the pleasurable sensations while accommodating those they found less pleasant, but required to meet function or context. Women used this sensory assessment tool throughout clothing consumption. Despite some variation, participants generally preferred smooth or soft fabrics that felt pleasant and draped well; they disliked itchy or clinging fabrics.²¹ Women associated clothing's texture—the visual appearance as well as the physical sensations of different textures—with different garment category or uses. Sensory research has established that we integrate visual and tactile cues in perception, which allows us to discriminate between textures based on appearance.²² Texture helped fulfill a garment's function and helped a woman feel physically comfortable given the context. For example, Rosa and Tara mentioned how wrinkled fabric could make a dress seem more casual.

Rosa: Wrinkles can be *cute* in, in the right setting. So, I didn't iron this linen dress. You know. It's, I think sometimes when you iron something, it's too formal, for the occasion. Um. [pauses] So, wrinkles can be, so you can wear a more formal dress if it has wrinkles in an informal setting.

²¹ Marilyn DeLong, Juanjuan Wu, and Juyeon Park, "Tactile Response and Shifting Touch Preference," *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* 10, no. 1 (2012): 44–59.

²² Spence, "Making Sense of Touch: A Multisensory Approach."

Considered within Kaiser et al.'s symbolic interactionist model, they were using the “symbolic ambiguity” of wrinkled fabric to expand their wardrobes, potentially reducing the need to own multiple garments, each of which manifests vast resource expenditures.²³ Accepting wrinkled cloth as an appropriate style also freed her from ironing, an energy- and water- consuming chore, which many women found to be a waste of time because of the inevitable and often quick re-wrinkling of fabric during wear. On the other hand, some women wished to maintain a pressed, or in Rachel's words “**clean, neat, tidy,**” appearance, at least for particular fabrics or uses, such as for work. These everyday aesthetic encounters were morally wrought. They were not merely performing a professional identity, but also demonstrating relations of respect for others and of care for family. Niki controlled the visual representation of how she cared for herself and her family through managing fabric.²⁴

Niki: Most of the time I don't really care... Otherwise, and that's kind of how I, I look at it and go. Hmm. Shouldn't be caught dead in that, and in that case, I'll iron it. [laughs] Or I would be embarrassed if someone saw my child wearing that dress, then it should be ironed.

Women's evaluations of wrinkled versus smooth fabric were shaped by socially-situated understandings of intended use as well as their own personal comfort level and aesthetic preferences.

Women used various tools to determine evaluate texture, from assumptions about particular fibers that caused certain skin sensations (e.g. wool with itchiness or synthetics with clinginess) to handling garments in a store. However, women described how these strategies were not always sufficient and discovered undesirable sensations during wear or post-laundrying.

²³ Kaiser, Nagasawa, and Hutton, “Construction of An SI Theory of Fashion.”

²⁴ Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender*.

Research suggests that sensory dominance changes across product lifecycle, so that vision is important at point-of-purchase and touch during use.²⁵ Through use, sweaters pilled, knits lost their shape, and shirts accumulated odors. After a few wearings, the garment did not offer the same experience compared to when it was new. Camilla compared two tops that were similar in style and color—one was from a higher-end retail store and one was from a lower-end department store.

Camilla: **Like, it’s, I mean like, it, it, f-, it doesn’t feel good... It [higher-end shirt] hangs better. It feels better... It feels smoother, nicer... I like that shirt more.**

Camilla reached her conclusion after she had purchased, worn, and laundered both tops. Despite being an accomplished seamstress, she did not anticipate from her original assessment of the less expensive fabric that it would be significantly less pleasant feeling. These affective experiences contributed to how successful she felt in presenting a desired professional appearance. Moreover, she struggled to articulate what exactly *did* feel better about the one shirt. Although textures mattered to women, they not only lacked a language to describe these experiences but also learned touching garments was not always a reliable method to gauge continued performance.

Unsatisfying sensory experiences emerged as a common thread across women’s stories of “failed relationships.”²⁶ Because a garment no longer matched its original quality, women were likely to dispose of it even though it was still technically wearable. There are several ways to approach these issues in relation to sustainability concerns. If garments maintained their appearance and performance through use, women might wear or keep them longer. This could potentially reduce or slow resource consumption. Lizzie described how she avoided post-purchase quality change by buying clothes second hand. The garments were likely to have been washed, so

²⁵ Spence, “Making Sense of Touch: A Multisensory Approach.”

²⁶ Jonathan Chapman, *Emotionally Durable Design: Objects, Experiences, and Empathy* (London: Earthscan, 2005).

that any shrinkage or wear issues were more likely to be evident. Although Lizzie's strategy was an effective use of the existing clothing glut, it may not be sustainable to rely on continued production and disposal of low-quality garments. Cultivating consumers' or designers' haptic skills through education or awareness might be another strategy. Alternatively, we could consider adjusting our expectations and norms to embrace changes in physical qualities and multi-sensory interactions that result from wear. Indeed, we may consider marketing these changes as an attractive quality.²⁷ For instance, Megan described how soft and comfortable an old t-shirt had become through repeated wearing, but she felt compelled to throw it in the garbage when she thought it had too many holes.

Women consciously controlled fabric texture through laundering practices to create particular aesthetic experience or symbolic meanings. For example, many women used liquid softener because it made their clothes feel softer and reduced wrinkling. Women also held various perceptions of how line versus machine drying affected clothing texture in relation to their preferences for soft, unwrinkled, and static-free clothing vs. stiff, crunchy, or wrinkled fabric.

Niki: If I can air dry everything, I will. The thing about cotton, is that when you air dry it can feel a little stiff. So I'll usually run that through the dryer for a little bit... I can do it for the first fifteen minutes and then hang it up *or* sometimes, if I forgot and I hung it up and it's kinda crunchy. If I just put in the dryer with a damp washcloth or something for ten minutes, it comes out okay.

Niki's statement illustrates how, given her pro-environmental values, she had developed strategies to balance energy conservation, comfort concerns, aesthetic preferences, and social meanings for multiple family members.

²⁷ Delong, Wu, and Park, "Tactile Response and Shifting Touch Preference"; Katherine Townsend, "The Denim Garment as Canvas: Exploring the Notion of Wear as a Fashion and Textile Narrative," *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* 9, no. 1 (March 2011): 90–107; Gwilt Alison and Timo Rissanen, eds., *Shaping Sustainable Fashion: Changing the Way We Make and Use Clothes* (London: Earth Pledge, 2011).

Different laundry practices for regulating texture affected sustainability in a range of ways. Softening fabrics with machine dryers, fabric softeners, or dryer sheets increased resource use and pollution. Purchasing clothes with wrinkle-free finishes or having items dry-cleaned (and professionally pressed) increased use of toxic chemicals. Wearing fabrics that do not need ironing to be wrinkle-free (such as knits), taking clothes promptly out of the dryer, shaking before hanging to dry on a line, or accepting—and even enjoying—the wrinkles reduced energy and resource consumption. Managing texture is a constellation of preferences, behaviors, social meanings, and other lifecycle stages. In some ways, these dynamic interconnections complicate the relationship to sustainability. Nevertheless, they offer us a wealth of potential points of intervention, such as individual tastes, laundering habits, and social norms.

Using tactile and olfactory sensations as evaluative tools, some women aestheticized natural fibers. Despite the prevalence of natural fiber preference in their narratives, women did not regularly check fiber content and wore synthetic fibers. Understanding the appeal of the desirability of naturalness then may be one way to push broader dialogues about our attitudes toward and experiences (or lack of experiences) with nature and the environments.²⁸ Specifically, women commonly praised cotton as a preferred fiber because of its naturalness, breathability, texture, drape, durability, and lack of static cling.²⁹ On the other hand, a downside of cotton was its tendency to wrinkle. Participants consistently associated positive qualities with fibers, rather than

²⁸ Juliet Schor, *The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don't Need* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1999); Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2008).

²⁹ While my small sample did not test for the impact of Cotton, Incorporated efforts to increase market share of cotton products in response to declining sales in the face of increased synthetic textiles post WWII, it is worth pointing out that many of these qualities match characteristics pushed in its marketing, particularly the ongoing “Fabric of Our Lives” campaign. See <http://www.marketplace.org/topics/business/making-cotton-fabric-our-lives>. Indeed, we can look to the success of such campaigns as a way to consider how to promote sustainable apparel that appeals to ideals of aesthetic pleasure, comfort, and function.

fabric structures, indicating how perceptions of garment performance and aesthetic preference might be misunderstandings of the material properties. These perceptions become relevant when proposing different fibers for sustainable clothing options so that we can understand how and why women purchase, wear, and take care of different fibers or fabric structures.

Even though my data does not suggest that one group preferred a certain sensory quality or another group did their laundry using certain products, my analysis encourages us to consider these variables as dimensions of experience that women engage with throughout their daily clothing experiences. We cannot dismiss them out of hand as not being a legitimate need. Rather, we must reckon with how to accommodate these various tastes, multi-sensory perceptions, and embodied experiences as we seek out or promote sustainable clothing. Despite the lack of simple, straightforward, one-size-fits-all solutions, potential sustainable clothing designs or practices that address sensory and embodied experiences can help women meet aesthetic tastes and social norms or help re-imagine objectives that are more in line with sustainability goals.

Addressing the Body

In addition to the conventional senses, the body as a whole is central to our experience of dress, and by extension to our perception and understanding of the world.³⁰ Women elaborated on how clothes fit, accommodated, constrained, or flattered the body. Throughout my interviews, women described how they constantly considered the following questions: Is this covering the

³⁰ Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*; Rovine, “Handmade Textiles: Global Markets and Authenticity”; Roberta Sassatelli, “Self and Body,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, ed. Frank Trentmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 633–652; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, Reprint, Routledge Classics (New York: Routledge, 2002); Johnson, *Sentenced to Everyday Life*; Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

parts of my body I want it to cover or that social norms (for age, body shape, job, situation, etc.) suggest I cover? Will it continue to cover those body parts if I move this way or that way, reach up or lean over, sit down or kneel? Will it allow me to move easily without excessively constraining my body? Although social norms affect what women perceive as acceptable and desirable to reveal or conceal, women played an active role in managing their individual embodied experiences, preferences, and comfort levels.³¹ Creating systems and garments that help women assert their agency in managing these issues in their daily lives might help them feel positive and at ease in clothes, rather than anxious and at war with them, resulting in more durable relationships.

Challenges with fitting the body related to failed relationships with clothing, resulting in less frequent wear, frustration when wearing, or disposal before used up. Breast, waist, and hip measurements, ratios between the three, and the curved three-dimensional shapes of the body all affected how women felt clothing did or did not fit the body. They noticed how clothing would be tight around one body part but loose somewhere else, how a shirt might pull across the chest but billow over the waist, or how a pair of pants would be tight across the hips but gape at the back of the waist. While I did not compare men and women's experiences in my study, it was clear from the way women talked about their bodies that their female gendered bodies—as experienced through material and symbolic aspects of apparel—were an issue.³² Tara contrasted her struggles to find clothes that fit her chest-waist-hip dimensions, regardless of whether she liked the style, to

³¹ Boulwood and Jerrard, “Ambivalence, and Its Relation to Fashion and the Body”; John Harvey, “Showing and Hiding: Equivocation in the Relations of Body and Dress,” *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 11, no. 1 (2007): 65–94; Ingun Grimstad Klepp and Ardis Storm-Mathisen, “Reading Fashion as Age: Teenage Girls’ and Grown Women’s Accounts of Clothing as Body and Social Status,” *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 9, no. 3 (2005): 323–342; Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson, eds., *Body Dressing* (New York: Berg, 2001); Pravina Shukla, *The Grace of Four Moons: Dress, Adornment, and the Art of the Body in Modern India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

³² Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Psychology Press, 1993).

her husband's primary decision of what color he wanted a shirt to be.

When I heard women say they wanted clothes to be comfortable and functional, they were insisting that clothes should cover, fit, and feel right on *their* bodies. Mass-manufacturing standardized sizing challenged sustainable clothing practices. Narratives reiterated a perceived lack of choices in their wardrobes and in the industry to satisfy their needs. Their sense of power and agency in the apparel system was deeply inflected by their body's material qualities.³³ By providing meaningful choices and facilitating agency, sustainable apparel options might help increase women's likelihood to choose those.³⁴ For example, apparel design or service strategies, such as adjustable components or built-in options for tailoring, that accommodate these concerns could help improve women's relationship with her clothes.³⁵ Additionally, researchers continue to collect human body measurements to create more nuanced garment sizing.³⁶

Talking through their challenges to find clothes that fit their bodies illuminated how and why their clothing practices failed to be environmentally or socially responsible. Women felt forced to spend time going from store to store searching out clothes that fit. Moreover, an option found at one point in time was not always available later. Women found garments that fit their bodies, but not their sense of style, or vice versa. Women ended up owning multiple versions of a

³³ Kim K. P. Johnson and Sharron J. Lennon, eds., *Appearance and Power* (Oxford: Berg, 1999); Kathy Davis, "Embodiment Theory: Beyond Modernist and Postmodernist Readings of the Body," in *Embodied Practices: Feminist Perspectives on the Body*, ed. Kathy Davis (London: Sage, 1997), 1–23.

³⁴ Arlen C. Moller, Richard M. Ryan, and Edward L. Deci, "Self-Determination Theory and Public Policy: Improving the Quality of Consumer Decisions Without Using Coercion," *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 104–116.

³⁵ Alison and Rissanen, *Shaping Sustainable Fashion*; Janet Hethorn, "Consideration of Consumer Desire," in *Sustainable Fashion: Why Now? A Conversation About Issues, Practices, and Possibilities*, ed. Janet Hethorn and Connie Ulasewicz (New York: Fairchild Books, 2008), 53–76.

³⁶ Hwa Kyung Song and Susan P. Ashdown, "Development of Automated Custom-Made Pants Driven by Body Shape," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 30, no. 4 (October 1, 2012): 315–329; Tammy R. Kinley, "Size Variation in Women's Pants," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 21, no. 1 (January 1, 2003): 19–31; Jintu Fan, Winnie Scherer, and L. Hunter, *Clothing Appearance and Fit: Science and Technology* (Cambridge; Boca Raton, FL: Woodhead Pub.; Textile Institute; CRC, 2004).

garment, even though none was ideal. For example, Jessica described how she had more than a dozen jeans, each of which had a different fit. The less she liked how a pair fit, the less she wore it. Not only did women fail to incorporate environmental or labor concerns into their choices, but they also often ended up purchasing clothes that either remained unworn or were disposed of, thus contributing to environmental and social problems seen in the apparel industry and the global overflow of secondhand clothes.³⁷

While women directed some of this frustration toward individual garments, they also criticized the apparel industry's attempts (or lack of attempts) to produce clothing for different body sizes and shapes. Several women suggested that apparel companies are designing clothes for a perfect or ideal body rather than *real* bodies such as their own.

Lizzie: Clothes aren't made for real people. [laughs] ... They're made to look good on, on the rack, or on a model, and it's not real, realistic.

These affective, subjectively experienced relations with the market focused on the highly visible extreme youthful, thin, androgynous models used in fashion illustrations, runway shows, photography, and marketing instead of considering how mass-retailers are grading patterns for an averaged, middle-of-the-market body shape. However, historical and contemporary research on pattern sizing reveals that creating patterns on more narrow measurement combinations can create more satisfactory fits.³⁸ Those fits are also judged based on contemporary aesthetic ideals. These issues crystallized when shopping. For example, women needed to judge whether a size would fit

³⁷ Rachel Colls, "'Looking Alright, Feeling Alright': Emotions, Sizing and the Geographies of Women's Experiences of Clothing Consumption," *Social & Cultural Geography* 5, no. 4 (December 2004): 583–596; Dittmar, *Consumer Culture, Identity and Well-being: The Search for the "Good Life" and the "Body Perfect"*; Elizabeth Bye and Ellen McKinney, "Sizing up the Wardrobe—Why We Keep Clothes That Do Not Fit," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 11, no. 4 (December 1, 2007): 483–498; Clarke and Miller, "Fashion and Anxiety."

³⁸ Song and Ashdown, "Development of Automated Custom-Made Pants Driven by Body Shape"; Fan, Scherer, and Hunter, *Clothing Appearance and Fit*; Goldstein, *Creating Consumers*.

their bodies' curve ratios (sometimes even getting out a tape measure) and how their body would transform what the style looked like based on its appearance on a model, catalog page, computer screen, hanger, or display rack. Megan described this negative, visceral dressing room reaction as she confronted how a garment changed on her body.

Megan: **I tried this really pretty sheer blouse. It was super sheer and you would have to wear something under it, and it had like a lacey design, um, on, on the fabric. It was so pretty on the hanger. And I put it on. And I went *no!* Not on me!**

Other research has documented similar affective experiences. In her research, Colls described how a woman was “compartmentalizing the spaces of her body” that do not fit the garment, “‘feeling alright’ about herself because the clothes would fit her body,” and looking for “flaws in [herself] in relation to an unattainable and unachievable image of beauty and bodily size.”³⁹

Another important dimension of living in dressed bodies is women’s desire to flatter the figure, or achieve the look of a body type perpetuated by an industry they were ironically critiquing. Women’s clothing narratives illustrated a normalized, internalized broader cultural ideal for tall, slender, and “toned” (sleek muscles without visible fat, but not excessively muscular) bodies. Through heavily manipulated images, articles pushing body projects such as fad diets, and popular media’s negative portrayal of overweight individuals, American culture glorifies this slender ideal and perpetuates harmful stereotypes of people, especially women, with other body sizes and shapes.⁴⁰ Across the interests, ages, and body shapes, women “flattered the figure”

³⁹ Colls, “‘Looking Alright, Feeling Alright’,” 590, 591; Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*.

⁴⁰ Klepp, “Slimming Lines”; Dittmar, *Consumer Culture, Identity and Well-being: The Search for the “Good Life” and the “Body Perfect”*; Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*; Roberta Sassatelli, *Fitness Culture: Gyms and the Commercialisation of Discipline and Fun* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). Although women were not always able themselves to pinpoint where they developed their aesthetic ideal, common

through managing a delicate balance of revealing and concealing body parts, highlighting and masking curves, slimming and smoothing fleshy bumps, and lengthening lines.⁴¹ Garments themselves played an essential role in women's efforts to regulate bodies—playing parts from a threatening foe to a comforting friend. They had the power to embarrass a woman or help her feel more confident. The dynamic interplay between bodies and garments speaks to the pressures women face to embody a culture's aesthetic and social ideals.⁴²

While participants were critical of popular media's portrayal of women and felt immune to its pressure, their effort to maintain a slim figure through clothing belied the influence of cultural body ideal. In our first interview, Lizzie challenged the norms intellectually, arguing that suggestions in popular magazines and other media on how to disguise or mask body parts assumed that there was something *wrong* with those body parts.

Lizzie: **You're supposed to always try to lengthen your body and try to smooth out things... I remember spending so much time as a teenager reading articles about this, you know if your hips are wide this is how to make them look thinner, and I'm like, but there's nothing wrong with wide, you know, if you're healthy, there's nothing wrong with that.**

In our second interview, she showed me a favorite pair of pants whose wide, flat waistband, fluid drape, and lack of bulky pockets “flattered her figure,” that is, smoothed and slimmed out curves. Wearing these pants, she felt comfortable and confident in her workplace. Even though Lizzie may not have consciously been “**fixing**” her own body, her preferences paralleled the ideal of

influences included maternal advice, store displays, fashion magazines, and television programs from design competitions to makeovers.

⁴¹ Other body management regimes, such as diet, exercise, and plastic surgery, were outside the scope of this study. Nevertheless, several women brought up past and current efforts to manage their weight. Tara most explicitly challenged ideas of weight management and instead framed her body image through its capabilities. No one brought up plastic surgery.

⁴² Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*; Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender*; Tseñlon, *The Masque of Femininity*.

slimming, clean lines, which she had previously critiqued. On the other hand, women were not passive recipients of media messages. For example, Lizzie's pants covered enough of her body that allowed her to move freely, while the red color added a playful punch to a work wardrobe that otherwise did not match her personality.⁴³ Lizzie's nuanced dress practices illustrate how women used individual sensations and social norms to guide how their bodies should look and feel.

Internalization of body norms and aesthetic values are not an obvious metric of socially responsible consumption. However, scholars have established that idealized and sexualized female bodies can negatively affect women's self-identity and society as a whole.⁴⁴ Several women (Megan, Lizzie, Eunice, and Tina) brought up independently the negative impact the fashion industry and popular media's representation of female bodies can have on women in American society. An apparel industry that creates an aesthetic system that negatively affects well-being is not meeting the objectives of a sustainable system. Acknowledging the body in theory and in women's individual practices demands that we bring the body and cultural treatments of it into the sustainability discourse, which rarely occurs.⁴⁵ Clothing production and consumption cannot be reduced to data on water consumed, pesticides applied, resources extracted, wages, or working

⁴³ Johnson and Lennon, *Appearance and Power*.

⁴⁴ Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*; Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (New York: Random House, 1997); Hayley K. Dohnt and Marika Tiggemann, "Body Image Concerns in Young Girls: The Role of Peers and Media Prior to Adolescence," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 35, no. 2 (April 1, 2006): 135–145; Dittmar, *Consumer Culture, Identity and Well-being: The Search for the "Good Life" and the "Body Perfect"*; Sarah Grogan, *Body Image: Understanding Body Dissatisfaction in Men, Women, and Children* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2008); Dohnt and Tiggemann, "Body Image Concerns in Young Girls"; Philip N. Myers and Frank A. Biocca, "The Elastic Body Image: The Effect of Television Advertising and Programming on Body Image Distortions in Young Women," *Journal of Communication* 42, no. 3 (1992): 108–133. While I did not observe this direct effect during my interviews, the literature has substantiated this claim for many individual women and its influence on the culture as a whole. A few women I spoke with struggled with weight changes and feeling good about their bodies, and some of these, successfully lost and kept off a substantial amount of weight. Most women, however, seemed to suggest a relatively positive or at least neutral acceptance of their body. However, I did not probe this topic extensively in interviews, and so individual women may have had additional issues we did not discuss.

⁴⁵ For an exception, see Safia Minney, *Naked Fashion: The New Sustainable Fashion Revolution* (Oxford: New Internationalist Publications Ltd, 2011).

conditions, despite those being vital metrics. Clothing systems are inherently bound up with aesthetic value systems that affect individual and social well-being and with which consumers must grapple in their everyday embodied dress practices. As Entwistle describes, the apparel industry is “about *aesthetics*, not simply new clothes... Hence, when we talk about fashionable dress we need to bear in mind not only the production of actual garments, but the production of aesthetic value around such garments.”⁴⁶

We can integrate this theme with sustainability dialogues. Supporting individual physical and mental health—and a culture that fosters these dimensions of well-being, within or outside of the dominant aesthetic and taste regimes—is important in gauging the sustainability of clothing practices. Perhaps we need to reshape our aesthetic values to be more welcoming, respectful, and open toward multiple body types, or we may consider alternative design and strategies to help women meet these goals with less resources or effort. There has been and continues to be pressure—from individual consumers, academics, popular media, and governments—against the fashion industry and popular culture to adjust representations of women to help cultivate a more welcoming or accepting attitude towards a diverse range of bodies (in terms of size, age, gender, ethnicity, etc.) and to de-sexualize female images in popular media.⁴⁷ Designers and retailers may have particular economic or aesthetic agendas, but these can be balanced with consumers’ agendas

⁴⁶ Entwistle, *The Aesthetic Economy of Fashion*, 9.

⁴⁷ Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1898); Andrea Palatnik and Amanda Holpuch, “Girls Petition for Teen Vogue to Put an End to Airbrushed Photos,” *The Guardian*, sec. Fashion, accessed June 4, 2013,

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/fashion/us-news-blog/2012/jul/11/teen-girls-ask-teen-vogue-end-photoshopped-photos;>
 “Teen Crusaders Taking on Teen Vogue Over Models,” *ABC News Blogs*, accessed June 4, 2013,

[http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/entertainment/2012/07/teen-crusaders-taking-on-teen-vogue-over-models/;](http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/entertainment/2012/07/teen-crusaders-taking-on-teen-vogue-over-models/) Samantha Critchell, “Vogue Bans Models Who Are Too Skinny, Underage,” *TODAY.com*, accessed July 18, 2013,

[http://www.today.com/id/47286154/ns/today-today_style/t/vogue-bans-models-who-are-too-skinny-underage/;](http://www.today.com/id/47286154/ns/today-today_style/t/vogue-bans-models-who-are-too-skinny-underage/)

“Spanish Fashion Show Rejects Too-skinny Models,” *MSNBC.com*, accessed July 18, 2013,

[http://www.nbcnews.com/id/14748549/ns/world_news-europe/t/spanish-fashion-show-rejects-too-skinny-models/.](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/14748549/ns/world_news-europe/t/spanish-fashion-show-rejects-too-skinny-models/)

and environmental and social interests to achieve a sustainable apparel system. Alternative design and production strategies, such as mass-customization, are increasingly becoming viable due to technological advancements.⁴⁸

Alternatively, empowering women to seek clothing solutions outside the conventional apparel industry could become part of sustainable clothing systems. For instance, we could continue advocating for, making visible, and supporting infrastructure for local tailoring services, small-scale designers and artisans, or community clothing swaps, all of which simultaneously strengthen local economies and create community connections. Refashioning secondhand clothing could reduce new resource extraction and enhance materials knowledge and self-sufficiency skills. While some of these alternatives are available now, women told me that they did not see these as cost-effective or even existing options. For example, a few participants explained that clothing in their size would not be available secondhand, or would be too frustrating to find. Instead, participants seemed overwhelmed, burdened, and trapped in the available apparel options. Therefore, we need to create an economic climate and social structure in which these initiatives are seen as viable alternatives for service-providers to pursue and for consumers to select.

Women's varying tastes and preferences did not explicitly correlate to a woman's attitudes towards sustainability, a woman's interest in clothing, or the associated practices' environmental or social impacts. The relationship between the sensory and embodied aspects of comfort did not explicitly positively or negatively affect the sustainability of those practices. However, consideration of the different concerns women face does offer us important platforms from which

⁴⁸ Frances Ross, "Leveraging Niche Fashion Markets through Mass-customization, Co-design, Style Advice, and New Technology: A Study of Gay Aesthetics and Website Design," *Fashion Practice: The Journal of Design, Creative Process & the Fashion Industry* 2, no. 2 (November 2010): 175–198; Alison and Rissanen, *Shaping Sustainable Fashion*; Kate Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Design Journeys* (London: Earthscan, 2008).

to examine potential sustainable clothing options. Preferences for coverage and comfort, accommodations for body shapes and sizes, and efforts to flatter the figure also did not inherently promote or hinder sustainable clothing practices. Nor does there seem to be a single, one-size-fits-all solution or garment design that will be sustainable and will fit all women's bodies, tastes, and contexts.⁴⁹ Rather, *how* we satisfy these needs and desires determines the impact on the environment and social justice.

Styling the Self

“Styling the Self” refers to two components of the clothing experience: styles of garments themselves and styles as used by women in everyday activities. How women dress their body shapes and is shaped by how they use those dressed bodies to create identities in lived practices and contexts. Garments are stylized, designed objects. Women play and experiment with, regulate and manage these styles as they mix and match staples and trends in order to present socially appropriate images in different contexts. In the previous section, I discussed the more proximate senses of touch, smell, and the body itself, and not the more distant sense of vision. While these sensory modalities are interconnected, I have chosen to separate them here to help illustrate the ways women discuss the different aesthetic experiences. Women's discussions of how things felt on the body suggested relatively intimate experiences. In contrast, their descriptions of stylistic aspects such as color, embellishments, and outfit compositions suggested a more public, social, or outwardly expression of creativity, personality, and identity. Ultimately, “Styling the Self” blends

⁴⁹ One might argue that wrapped garments, such as the sari, in contrast to Western European and North American culture's use of tailored garments, are a one-size-fits all solution that *can* accommodate women's bodies. This would require shifts in aesthetics and social dress codes, which reaffirms the importance of considering taste. This raises the question of whether to change the underlying aesthetic norms or seek out solutions that fit in with the current system.

symbolic interaction theories of meaning and identity management, inflects it with aesthetic dimensions, and grounds it in material encounters with the body and sense. It emphasizes that individual tastes, aesthetic pleasure, and social contexts and norms, rooted in subjectively-experienced and socially situated physical and material practices and objects can inform and shape future sustainable design and behavior options.

Aesthetic value, as manifested in multi-sensory and embodied encounters and demonstrated by the numerous examples throughout this chapter, was important to participants in this study, as well as to the apparel system as a whole in contemporary American culture.⁵⁰ By arguing that aesthetics or creative expression are important, I am not claiming that all women were especially motivated in their clothing practices to “enhance their individuality” through fashion. Indeed, most women did not score extremely high on that section of the Creekmore Clothing Survey. On the other hand, all participants were concerned in one way or another with the style of their clothing as it represented them visually to others.

Most wore apparel from low- to high-end specialty and department stores (even when purchased secondhand). No one I interviewed twice wore primarily designer brands or regularly dressed in ethnic or folk dress (though Wendy, Eunice, Gretchen, Helen, Rosa, and Zoey showed me one or two pieces in one of these categories). My sample was relatively homogeneous in terms of socio-economic class and shared exposure to and preference for similar apparel styles available in stores and visible in popular media today, what some have termed “international cosmopolitan

⁵⁰ Entwistle, *The Aesthetic Economy of Fashion*; Virginia Postrel, *The Substance of Style: How the Rise of Aesthetic Value Is Remaking Commerce, Culture, and Consciousness* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003); Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2007); Roberta Sassatelli, *Consumer Culture: History, Theory and Politics* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2007).

fashion” (e.g. slacks, jeans, skirts, knit tops, woven blouses, sweaters, blazers, etc.).⁵¹

Color mattered to women—aesthetically and practically. Color grabbed one’s attention at a point of purchase and dominated decisions about what to wear. Although color preferences can vary substantially across individuals, culture, time, place, and even garment categories, I am not analyzing what different colors symbolize in contemporary U.S. clothing practices.⁵² Instead, I emphasize that personal aesthetic and social significance of color contributed to a woman’s relationships with her clothes.

Some women had very strong individual color preferences, while others trusted popular color guidelines. For example, some (Wendy and Niki) would make a special effort to find a garment in their favorite color. Some (Lizzie and Eunice) purchased blacks, grays, browns, blues—colors they described as being neutral, basic, and easy to match to neutral and non-neutral colors alike when building outfits. Some (Melanie, Sandra, and Felicity) played and experimented with multiple hues or bright colors. Two older women in my sample, Gretchen and Helen, neither of whom were strongly interested in clothing, described “**having their colors done**” some years ago. The color system they described was one that assigned a woman to a particular season and each season had a particular color palette. The rubric was a sort of shorthand they could use in place of an individually cultivated style. The system helped them learn which colors not only flattered their skin coloring the best, but also made them feel most comfortable. Other scholars have similarly suggested that this system freed women from having to make color choices, or,

⁵¹ Margaret Maynard, *Dress and Globalisation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Eicher, Joanne B., “International Cosmopolitan Fashion,” in *Dress and Identity*, ed. Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins, Kim K. P. Johnson, and Joanne B. Eicher (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1995), 461–462.

⁵² Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *The Color Revolution* (Cambridge, MA; Washington, DC: MIT Press; in association with Lemelson Center, Smithsonian Institution, 2012); John Gage, *Colour and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

paradoxically, allowed them the freedom to play with color.⁵³ Despite self-identifying as *not* interested in clothes, both Helen and Gretchen asserted individual tastes over the seasonal color system on which they otherwise generally relied.

A few women mentioned key items in the wardrobe in bold, intense colors that would add flair to an outfit. Melanie critiqued my interview outfit of a dark sweater and grey slacks by suggesting, “**You need something to pop on that outfit. Like red or pink or aqua!**”⁵⁴ Although I focused on garments in my interview questions, women suggested that distinctive, colorful items could be shoes or accessories. Eunice described how an extra splash of color might add an extraordinary, playful, delightful, and pleasurable element to her outfit and to her life.⁵⁵

Eunice: I think everyone should have a pair of red shoes... I remember [my coworkers] calling them my *ruby* slippers. So. Have some element of like feeling more confident, or a little bit [pauses] magic. Like something good might happen in these shoes. [laughs]⁵⁶

Previous scholars have explored red shoes in relation to sexuality and fetishism. My findings aligned with Webster’s analysis that they were “a potent symbol of the self and self-making, of integration, connection, and transformation.”⁵⁷ While Webster grounds her analysis in cultural myths of desire, envy, transformation, and enchantment, my data emphasizes that the materiality of these objects—in the context of other objects in a woman’s own and other women’s wardrobes—were key factors in their symbolic meaning, aesthetic value, and affective pleasure.

⁵³ Clarke and Miller, “Fashion and Anxiety”; Grove-White, “No Rules, Only Choices? Repositioning the Self Within the Fashion System in Relation to Expertise and Meaning: A Case Study of Colour and Image Consultancy.”

⁵⁴ To my follow-up interview with Melanie, I wore a very similar outfit, but consciously wore my red patent leather clogs for that added pop.

⁵⁵ Beverly Gordon, *The Saturated World: Aesthetic Meaning, Intimate Objects, Women’s Lives, 1890-1940* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006).

⁵⁶ One day, when I ran into Eunice around town while wearing my red patent leather clogs with a red, pink, and green floral print skirt when I said hello. As she explained, she was too distracted by enjoying looking at my shoes and skirt that she did not notice it was me!

⁵⁷ Elaine Webster, “Red Shoes: Linking Fashion and Myth,” *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* 7, no. 2 (July 1, 2009): 167.

Although color preferences were not consistently associated with any particular sustainability attitude or clothing interest, strategically using garments or accessories in specific colors was one way to maximize use of a wardrobe. Key items, such as red shoes, reinvigorated outfits or transformed them from casual to formal wear. Overall, women's aesthetic criteria trumped concern or awareness about textile coloring environmental or health impacts.

Because coloring processes tend to be extremely water-intensive, waste-generating, and toxic, we need to find ways to manage this impact on either the consumption or production side. There is not even a consensus amongst textile and apparel scholars about the environmental impact of natural versus synthetic dyes.⁵⁸ Consumers do not readily have access to this information, but purchasing of new products most likely has negative impacts. Although I point to how this aesthetic issue challenges the sustainability of those practices, I am not suggesting that we dismiss aesthetics as a criterion. Instead, I argue that *because* color serves an integral role in women's clothing choices and the larger apparel industry, it is important for textile scientists, designers, manufacturers, and consumers to continue to work towards developing, selecting, and purchasing clothing that has been colored using safe and sustainable techniques.

Other dimensions of clothing design emphasized in garment stories were embellishments, novelty patterns, and distinctive design details. They often selected garments with these features to feel distinct, unique, and stylish. There was great variation both across women's tastes and also within an individual's tastes. Despite the vast quantity of apparel available to women, they described frustrations finding particular styles in their size or avoiding styles if a look was

⁵⁸ Leslie Hoffman, ed., *FutureFashion: White Pages* (New York: Earth Pledge, 2007); Keith Slater, *Environmental Impact of Textiles: Production, Processes and Protection* (Cambridge; Boca Raton, FL: Woodhead Pub.; Textile Institute; CRC, 2003).

currently in fashion. Although some critics of contemporary consumer culture might argue that we have too many overly stylized options, contributing to fragmented, superficial identities and social relations, style is not in itself harmful. Rather, as discussed in chapter two, is an important part of creative expression and social dynamics.⁵⁹ While this argument might seem obvious to some material culture scholars or designers, I raise this issue specifically in the context of sustainability to highlight that the aesthetic values apparel embodies may continue to be an important part of alternatives. Indeed, sustainability-oriented designers are increasingly advocating for an ecological design ethic and aesthetic.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, this does not excuse designers, producers, or consumers from not being responsible for the environmental and social costs of these aesthetic choices. Bridging these conversations with consumer desires and systems dynamics is the next step in moving their work forward.

There are options to achieve desired styles while avoiding some environmental and social costs, as well as frustrations, associated with the fashion industry. For example, clothes could be refashioned post-purchase by adding embellishments, reshaping the silhouette, or re-dyeing.⁶¹ Rachel described doing this once for gifts, but not for everyday apparel. Lizzie modified secondhand garments particularly because their low cost made her comfortable with taking risks. On the other hand, Eunice was nervous about successfully and safely dyeing garments at home and

⁵⁹ Postrel, *The Substance of Style: How the Rise of Aesthetic Value Is Remaking Commerce, Culture, and Consciousness*; Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*; Daniel Miller, *Stuff* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).

⁶⁰ Lance Hosey, *The Shape of Green: Aesthetics, Ecology, and Design* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2012); Alastair Fuad-Luke, *Design Activism: Beautiful Strangeness for a Sustainable World* (London: Earthscan, 2009); Stuart Walker, *The Spirit of Design: Objects, Environment, and Meaning* (New York: Earthscan, 2011); Chapman, *Emotionally Durable Design*.

⁶¹ Annika Sanders and Kerry Seager, *Junky Styling: Wardrobe Surgery* (London: A & C Black Publishers Limited, 2009); Marisa Lynch, *New Dress a Day: The Ultimate DIY Guide to Creating Fashion Dos from Thrift-store Don'ts* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2012); Carrie Blaydes and Nicole Smith, *Fashion DIY: 30 Ways to Craft Your Own Style* (New York: Sixth & Spring Books, 2007); Jayne Emerson, *New from Old: How to Transform and Customize Your Clothes* (Buffalo, NY: Firefly Books Inc., 2006).

wondered if these services were available commercially. Popularizing these projects in mainstream media and word-of-mouth is one approach, but these tailoring services might be integrated into retail environments, thus increasing the visibility and accessibility of these options.⁶² Promoting these types of services in our current apparel industry could help women adapt existing wardrobe items into styles in line with personal or fashionable tastes.

Most participants did not like the style that visible mending, patching, or repairs created. Women associated this look with unprofessional and lower class identities. If a garment had a hole, tear, thinning fabric, or other significant wear, some women would throw the garment in the garbage, assuming no one would want to wear (or fix) it. Most women assumed these repairs were unfixable or that any repair would result in an undesired visibly mended area, seemingly unaware that mending, patching, and darning can be invisible. Very small holes that could be closed up with just a stitch or two were the extent of what types of holes seemed viable for repairing, with just a couple women (Camilla and Gretchen) showing me examples of those mending projects, and only for clothes that would then be informal, leisure wear. Helen's careful darning was an outlier in my sample, but aligned with her more rigorous, conscientious consumption and conservation practices. Helen restricted the thinning, faded, visibly mended dress to at-home use, but she would wear shirts with repaired cuffs and collars as normal. Although Lizzie, an avid do-it-yourself project person, had purchased clothes from a thrift store with the intention of restyling it, this was an exception in her wardrobe. Lizzie was generally interested in environmental issues, yet her descriptions of recycling, refashioning, and salvaging a range of materials—from scrap metal to

⁶² Yolanda Wikiel, "Old Clothing Gets a Second Life | RealSimple.com," accessed July 19, 2013, <http://www.realsimple.com/beauty-fashion/clothing/tailoring-transformations-0000000015292/index.html>; "Shop Women's Designer Fashion Dresses, Tops | Size 0-36W & Custom Clothes | eShakti," accessed July 19, 2013, <http://www.eshakti.com/>; "Wendy Tremayne," accessed July 19, 2013, <http://www.swaporamarama.org/>; Sandy Gordon, "Design Transforms Shopping Experience" (master's thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2013).

magazines to textiles—demonstrates how non-environmental and non-clothing values encouraged sustainable clothing practices.

Mending directly relates to sustainability because it extends garment lives. Increasing knowledge of invisible mending, acceptance of mended garments, transforming repaired clothes to acceptable norms, and even expanding the aesthetic appeal of mending are strategies that would address women's experiences with worn garments. A few women (Lizzie, Eunice, and Gretchen) were familiar with local shoe and leather repair shops.⁶³ More exposure to these possibilities or skills in popular media, schools, or marketing could increase the acceptance of doing these repairs oneself or perhaps paying for someone else's service. In my follow-up interview with Helen, she reflected on how she might start darning in public to make the process of these otherwise invisible repairs visible. Additionally, other designers are currently promoting innovative ways to design garments so that mending blends in with the original aesthetic or techniques to make mending *more* visible by transforming the needlework into fun, clever, and sophisticated embellishments. Some host pop-up clinics and workshops to teach invisible and creative mending and alteration techniques in a fun, social environment.⁶⁴

⁶³ "British Invisible Mending Service Ltd, London," accessed July 19, 2013, <http://www.invisiblemending.co.uk/>; "Denim Repair - Denim Doctor - Repair Jeans - Denim Therapy NYC," accessed July 19, 2013, <http://denimtherapy.com/>.

⁶⁴ Alison and Rissanen, *Shaping Sustainable Fashion*; "Tomofholland | The Visible Mending Programme: Making and Re-making," accessed July 19, 2013, <http://tomofholland.com/>; Jessamyn Hatcher, "Human-Textile Wellness Initiative | An Action Research Lab That Documents People's Relationships to Their Clothing," accessed April 15, 2013, <http://humantextilewellness.wordpress.com/>; "Creative Mending Can Give New Life, Personality to Favourite Old Clothes," *The Huffington Post*, accessed April 24, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2012/06/26/creative-mending-can-give_n_1627709.html; "Blog | Karen Barbé | Textileria: Creative Mending – Part 1," accessed July 19, 2013, <http://blog.karenbarbe.com/2011/03/creative-mending-part-1.html>; Kristin M. Roach, *Mend It Better* (North Adams, MA: Storey Pub, 2012); Henrietta Thompson and Neal Whittington, *Remake It Clothes: The Essential Guide to Resourceful Fashion with over 500 Tricks, Tips and Inspirational Designs* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2012). One woman who did not participate in follow-up interviews mentioned making repairs visible, but this was not to improve the garment's aesthetics, but rather to discourage the owner from wearing those in public. This reinforces how mended areas are frowned upon. Contrastingly, various subculture styles or trends have embraced worn, distressed aesthetics.

Participants were conscious of how styles were appropriate or inappropriate for their bodies in terms of their shape, size, and age, given particular social occasions, interpersonal relations, or other contexts.⁶⁵ They actively engaged with popular media to determine what was right for them. Women laughed at what they interpreted as outrageous trends, appreciated creative designs, and selectively appropriated preferred, suitable styles. When looking through their closets and dressers with them, I could see that such items were not the foundation of their wardrobes. However, the fact that all of the women who volunteered for a research project about clothes were not especially interested in *following* trends, but instead seemed more interested in *managing* trends, suggests that managing style on the gendered and aged body is a powerful factor in women's clothing consumption and point of consideration for sustainable clothing practices.⁶⁶

Overall, women tended to wear more relaxed jeans and knit shirts for leisurewear and dressier slacks and tops for professional wear. While some women described how some garments were able to be either casual or professional, a common strategy was to buy clothes that were suitable for their particular workplace, and then rotate those clothes to casual wear. With the exception of Wendy and Sandra, most women relegated skirts to formal wear. Some women contrasted feeling less pressure and more at ease dressing less formally or trendy in the Midwest compared to other regions, where they used to live or have seen other women dress more in on-trend, in-season, and high-fashion garments regardless of their age. Given research on fashion capitals that focus on European, American, and Asian centers, and the history of Americanization

These associations also play a part in popularizing the mended look. Dick Hebdige, *Subculture, The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979).

⁶⁵ Race and ethnicity are clearly other components of bodies that affect how women dress and move through the world. However, most of my participants identified as White/Caucasian, with the exception of two Asian-Americans, so I do not discuss this topic here.

⁶⁶ Sophie Woodward, "The Myth of Street Style," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 13, no. 1 (March 1, 2009): 83–102.

of fashion by East and West Coast designers and lifestyles, alongside cultural nuances of Midwestern living, this is not a surprising finding.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, it highlights how larger cultural settings and geographic contexts situate the micro practices of individual consumers—and suggests that geographic practices could offer alternatives, in which the “third coast” could be the leader of sustainable fashion.

Garments do not exist in isolation in women’s wardrobes. Participants mixed and matched individual pieces to create clothing compositions. Although many women did not necessarily consciously think of their dressing as an aesthetic process, from interviews with and observations of women in front of their clothes, I saw how they carefully considered color, fabric, design details, cut, as well as other style features as they assembled outfits and ultimately wore them on their body.

On the other hand, participants described anxieties about how they felt expected to mix up what they wore, especially contrasted with what they understood to be men’s less creatively demanding wardrobe choices.

Louise: **Men have suits, and they can wear the same thing every day, they don’t have to worry about it, yeah. That would be nice! ... I’ve been raised that women don’t do that... If you have like monthly meetings, and you have to think, now, did I wear that shirt to the same, you know. It’s like I don’t, I haven’t kept track of it, and I kind of wonder, like now did I wear that? I don’t want to wear it every time I show up, you know. [laughs]**

Louise recognized that the gendered expectations depended on one’s cultural context, but she did not feel that she had the power to change or go against these social norms. Like Louise, Eunice wavered between embracing the ease of the basic business outfit she called her “**uniform**” and

⁶⁷ Christopher Breward and David Gilbert, eds., *Fashion’s World Cities* (Oxford: Berg, 2006); Linda Welters and Patricia A. Cunningham, eds., *Twentieth-Century American Fashion* (Oxford: Berg, 2005).

feeling pressured to have more garments to rotate throughout the week and month. Mixing and matching was a strategy women described employing to avoid repeat wearings; key items could appear different if part of different garment combinations. Eunice described doing this with specific work clothes (to avoid her “uniform” look) and Bernadette explained how she strategically packed separates for a trip to Europe. Some women, such as Sandra, genuinely enjoyed composing ensembles, and so dressing brought creative pleasure into her day.

My research indicates women’s wardrobes are not manifestation of mindless trend following, but rather are responses to gendered social norms, cultural codes, and personal expressions. Women found ways to dress that worked with their lifestyle and interests.⁶⁸ However, the anxieties around these dressing strategies, cultural codes, and personal tastes capture what dress scholars and sociologists have identified as the tension around creating a professional, yet personal, and almost always gendered, ethnic, and classed identity. In turn, these ambivalences are key factors in women developing desired relationships or self-image.⁶⁹ Thus, this pressure led them not only to accumulate more garments, but also to spend time and energy working at their wardrobe regardless of whether that was a desired activity. Nevertheless, in order to achieve sustainable clothing practices, we do not need to prescribe specific dressing strategies. Rather, we can strive to build our wardrobes and use them efficiently to satisfy physical, psychological, emotional, and social needs.

Some industry options that have been proposed to address women’s desire or perceived need for variety in their wardrobe are swapping, sharing, or renting programs. Because clothing is

⁶⁸ Woodward, “The Myth of Street Style”; Eileen Green, Alison Guy, and Maura Banim, eds., *Through the Wardrobe: Women’s Relationships with Their Clothes* (Oxford: Berg, 2001); Johnson and Lennon, *Appearance and Power*.

⁶⁹ Kaiser, Nagasawa, and Hutton, “Construction of An SI Theory of Fashion”; Clarke and Miller, “Fashion and Anxiety”; Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender*.

shared across users, these programs may allow women to cultivate aesthetic pleasure and play with clothes while minimizing overall resource use.⁷⁰ However, pressures for variety occurred on short-term time frames and daily “wardrobe moments,” so they may not be conducive to swapping or renting.⁷¹ Women went shopping when they felt frustrated or tired of their options, so that informal or irregular clothing swaps might not be perceived as useful. Regularly accessible programs (e.g. secondhand stores, regularly occurring swaps, or always-available online swaps) could help address these perceived challenges, although other hurdles about sharing clothes may need to be overcome (e.g. bodily contamination and association with lower socioeconomic classes).⁷² The pressure for variety is not always motivated by individual tastes and pleasures, but also a desire to fit in. Therefore, we can interrogate this perceived pattern, such as maintaining large inventories, to reveal how underlying issues systematically undermine the ability to meet other needs or responsibly use resources.

Styling the self through individual garments and dressing strategies given personal tastes and social norms was an effort to find the right fit. Sometimes women were successful, but often they were not. Instead, they often amassed wardrobes littered with clothes that never quite felt physically or stylistically right for them and their bodies. Women struggled with simultaneously too many and not enough choices.⁷³ Although there is not a simple or direct way to use this thematic concern to create sustainable clothing, it does not mean that it cannot play an important part in the overall sustainability of clothing practices. While some design or business models have

⁷⁰ Lucy Siegle, *To Die For: Is Fashion Wearing Out the World?* (London: Fourth Estate, 2011); Rachel Botsman and Roo Rogers, *What's Mine Is Yours: The Rise of Collaborative Consumption* (New York: Harper Business, 2010).

⁷¹ Saulo B. Cwerner, “Clothes at Rest: Elements for a Sociology of the Wardrobe,” *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 5, no. 1 (2001): 79–92; Woodward, *Why Women Wear What They Wear*.

⁷² Roux and Korchia, “Am I What I Wear?”

⁷³ Barry Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less* (New York: Ecco, 2004).

been proposed here and in the literature, I suggest that we must analyze underlying issues women face to find ways that holistically and symbiotically address the intersections of tastes, norms, and industry. We need to balance satisfying women's needs and desires to have clothing that both fits them physically and aesthetically; providing an avenue for sensory pleasure, creative expression, and positive self-identity; and being ethically and ecologically sensitively manufactured.

Responding to Cycles

Women's clothing experiences do not exist in static, stagnant contexts. Weather, lives, bodies, and fashions change. These cycles influence not only what women's physical, aesthetic, and social clothing needs are, but also women's ability to meet those needs. Weather changes day to day and season to season, influencing women's options for comfortable dressing. Bodies and lives change with time and life events, leading women to wear different sizes and styles. Fashions move in and out of style, shaping what one can buy or think is appropriate to wear. We must confront these cycles in daily clothing choices and in developing the wardrobe over time. Even though these patterns of change occur in different, disparate categories, I emphasize that there are continuous, recurring patterns of change to which women are always responding.

While the term "responding" may seem weak in relation to the agency women assert in clothing practices, it captures how women narrated stories about change. They were not in positions of power to change systems, options, or issues with which they were dealing. Moreover, these were often "natural" cycles, rhythms of body, time, and weather. Women were *responding* to cycles that were happening outside of their control. Sociological practice theories, as used by Shove and Warde and built on work of Bourdieu, can further help elucidate the rhythms of these

routines.⁷⁴ In unpacking these otherwise ordinary, invisible, seemingly innocuous responses, we can see how change is built into practice. As Wahlen argues, these types of analyses “support the idea that consumption is taking place in constantly changing routine practices framed by changing external conditions” and that “exploring routine practices and their chances as well as obstructions for sustainable development” is a productive way to move research forward.⁷⁵

Changing Weather/Seasons

Even though popular media often feature women wearing garments that do not seem ideal for the weather, most women in the Midwestern area in which this study took place, where there are four distinct seasons with relatively strong winters and summers, dressed to some degree for the weather. The seasons also affected how women stored or laundered clothes. Even though the weather did not determine all of women’s choices, nature and the environment were implicit agents in their narratives.

Thermal comfort was one of the primary motivations when dressing for the weather. Actual physical sensations and imagined thermal experiences shaped what women wore, how they shopped, and how they interacted with their wardrobe throughout the year. Participants integrated temperature-regulating approaches into their regular styles through fiber and fabric choices, garment configurations, and layering. Moreover, embodied experiences in built environments play a pivotal role in thermal experiences. For example, Shove describes a government-led campaign around dressing in work places and climate control in buildings:

⁷⁴ Shove, *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience*; Elizabeth Shove, Mika Pantzar, and Matt Watson, *The Dynamics of Social Practice: Everyday Life and How It Changes* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012); Alan Warde, “Consumption and Theories of Practice,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 5, no. 2 (2005): 131–153.

⁷⁵ Stefan Wahlen, “The Routinely Forgotten Routine Character of Domestic Practices,” *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 35, no. 5 (September 2011): 512.

In what might be the first sign of a significantly different comfort regime, the Japanese government decided not heat or cool its own buildings between 20 and 28 degrees C and encouraged staff to adjust their clothing instead. This idea, marketed under the name of Cool Biz, has been picked up by the United Nations, which cut back on air conditioning and simultaneously relaxed diplomatic dress code, and by the prime minister of Bangladesh who “ordered male government employees to stop wearing suits, jackets, and ties to save electricity.”⁷⁶

Dressing for thermal comfort plays an essential role not only in establishing clothing or “comfort regimes,” but also for saving energy and reducing climate change. Governments, businesses, apparel industry, and individuals worked together on these initiatives, demonstrating how sustainable clothing initiatives can successfully bridge micro and macro systems.

Several times when I asked women when they bought new clothes, they said at the start of a season. This external stimulus bridged transitions of both natural and fashion seasons. While I was not able to pinpoint exactly how much of this was due to fashion seasons’ alignment with climate seasons, based on how women talked about what they were buying, the weather seemed to be important to some degree. Although women’s narratives suggested that the season change made them aware of a need, defining need was a slippery slope. They had sweaters, but they were frustrated, bored, or otherwise dissatisfied with the diversity, quantity, or quality of their options (especially since they may also be simultaneously discarding options they have not worn recently). Seasonal changes provided a seemingly “natural” and appropriate time to confront one’s wardrobe and take stock of what was actually being worn. However, this often led to both increased purchases and discards. Some women (Megan, Rachel, and Eunice) associated the fall season with back-to-school shopping—either acquiring new clothes as a child or shopping with their children now. Indeed, several busy moms explained that they found time to shop for clothes when out

⁷⁶ Elizabeth Shove, “Comfort and Convenience,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, ed. Frank Trentmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 296.

shopping for their children, demonstrating how women's individual clothing behaviors are intimately bound up with family practices and rhythms of everyday life.

Storing clothes for the off-season and its accompanying wardrobe reviews shaped what women bought, kept, used, disposed of, stored, and visibly saw as options (and potentially wore on a regular basis). Most decisions to store off-season items were due to limited space. Available closet and dresser space, in general, influenced how many clothes women owned. Camilla described how she was able to acquire more clothes since she moved into a larger home.

Although I did not discern a distinctive relationship between sustainability and these practices as a whole, seasonal transitions were key moments when women assessed fit, condition, and style of their existing clothes, as well as if they thought they would wear an item in the upcoming season or if they had not worn an item at all in the season that just passed.⁷⁷ Aside from these seasonal transitions, women selected clothes for donation or disposal on a case-by-case basis, when in the mood, or frustrated with their options while dressing. Women also described disposing of clothes when the space was becoming too full or when garments were overflowing off shelves. Women's confrontations with their wardrobes encourage us to critically reflect on an apparel production and consumption system that promotes purchasing new garments that are ultimately unsatisfactory.

We can change how we react to the seasonal changes. For instance, instead of the norm being to purchase new clothes at a seasonal change, it could be to repair or modify existing garments. Even though no one in my study demonstrated these reactions to seasonal changes, we can still critically examine and imagine alternatives to the normalization of seasons' associations

⁷⁷ Nicky Gregson and Vikki Beale, "Wardrobe Matter: The Sorting, Displacement and Circulation of Women's Clothing," *Geoforum* 35, no. 6 (November 2004): 689–700.

with shopping and new garments. This project establishes ground from which to develop such ideas or provide support for existing initiatives. Moreover, these patterns are bound up with production and retail cycles.⁷⁸ These interconnections remind us that our economic systems are rooted in, depend on, and have costs for the natural world. Examining how our choices are tied up with ecological cycles can help bridge the ideas that 1) natural processes shape our clothing practices, and 2) our clothing practices shape natural processes.

Weather patterns also played a significant role in women's clothing care practices, most notably drying methods.⁷⁹ Sunny, mild to warm temperatures and preferably breezy conditions increased the likelihood of some women drying their clothes outside on a line. Five of the six women who line-dried whole wash loads (two of whom did so primarily in warmer months) scored in the high-sustainability attitude sample group. Only Megan line-dried clothes outside in the winter, but Niki, Gretchen, and Rosa line-dried throughout the year inside. Limiting eco-friendly activities to pleasant, mild weather was not exclusively applied to clothing care. For example, Gretchen, Felicity, and Eunice described being fair weather bicyclists, too.

Felicity: There's a lot of times that I'd rather drive, but, um, [pauses] I guess it's just a matter of, [laughs] sort of convenience and how nice it is out.

Despite the inconvenience, Megan persisted in hanging her clothes outside in the winter, but she found herself using the dryer when she felt busy, expressing disappointment in herself for using the dryer. She mentioned that she did not always own a dryer, thus demonstrating how technological and domestic infrastructure shapes what options are even available. However,

⁷⁸ Entwistle, *The Aesthetic Economy of Fashion*; Kaiser, Nagasawa, and Hutton, "Construction of An SI Theory of Fashion"; Sassatelli, *Consumer Culture*.

⁷⁹ Most women mentioned washing clothes more frequently in the summer compared to the winter. Women felt that shirts clothes worn in the summer tended to get sweatier and smellier, and thus needed to be washed after every wear. Women tended to layer sweaters over other shirts in the winter, so that they washed sweaters infrequently, sometimes only once a season.

consumers are not locked-in to using machines and habits. Rather than doing laundry when it was convenient in her work schedule, Sandra washed clothes according to the weather, specifically on days that were warm, sunny, or breezy enough to dry clothes outside (spring through autumn).⁸⁰

Since line-drying can significantly reduce energy and resource use, it is helpful to consider participants' motivations and habits to help us understand how to promote the behavior. Women recounted many benefits of the physical process of line-drying. They enjoyed the sensory stimuli of nature: enjoying being outdoors, feeling the sun and breeze, and hearing the birds. Indeed, Megan described this time outside and reliance on nature's resources as "**spiritual.**" Others mentioned how satisfying it was to let nature do the work, to know that one is conserving energy, and to save money. Others appreciated how line-drying affected the garments themselves: the disinfecting power of the sun, gentleness for the clothes, extending product life, and fresh air scent. In terms of line- or flat-drying indoors, Niki described how the clothes humidified the air, which was a worthwhile benefit especially in the winter. On the other hand, perceived barriers included the lack of convenience, the time it took to hang items, worries over privacy or security, concerns with the space a drying rack would take up inside, and concerns about allergens.

Looking over these lists, we can see behaviors that are predicated on the availability of running water, electricity, and domestic technologies based on pricing systems that may not account for environmental impacts. Additionally, historians have examined how cultural, technological, and architectural changes pushed these behaviors backstage—behind cupboards, into basements—making invisible, marginalizing, deprofessionalizing, and individualizing

⁸⁰ Despite Sandra's relatively consistent and concerted effort to avoid dryers for many months of the year, she also had a fair number of professional apparel items dry cleaned, thus demonstrating the complex and often contradictory behaviors and motivations in women's consumption.

them.⁸¹ Each of these macro and micro axes—culture, technology, architecture, weather, seasons, and work schedules—can serve as axes for future sustainable development. Considering these factors gives us some clues as to how to tackle this challenge on an individual (through addressing women’s concerns) and collective level (through reassessing our understandings of convenience), as we exist in and relate to dimensions of the natural world.

Changing Bodies/Lives

We live in bodies that age and change over time. Lives evolve. We grow up. We may work inside or outside the home, often both. We may have children—altering both our bodies and our lives. Women in my study told me stories about these complex and varied transitions. Throughout, women’s relationships with clothing remained constantly present yet continuously changing.⁸² These dynamic, evolving embodied experiences presented challenges to women’s sustained use of garments, yet various design or production and consumption systems could help women dress successfully throughout these changes.

The individual experience of physical changes varied greatly, from long-standing struggles with weight to acceptance of post-pregnancy hips. These changes were often natural consequences of growth, bodily experiences (such as puberty or pregnancy), or aging. Women gained and lost

⁸¹Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959); Rudi Laermans and Carine Meulders, “The Domestication of Laundering,” in *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space*, ed. Irene Cieraad (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 118–129; Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982); Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981); Johnson, *Sentenced to Everyday Life*; Goldstein, *Creating Consumers*.

⁸²Joy M. Kozar, “Older Women’s Attitudes Toward Aging, Appearance Changes, and Clothing,” in *Meanings of Dress*, ed. Mary Lynn Damhorst, Kimberly A. Miller-Spillman, and Susan O. Michelman, 2nd edition (New York: Fairchild Publications, 2005), 359–363; Klepp and Storm-Mathisen, “Reading Fashion as Age: Teenage Girls’ and Grown Women’s Accounts of Clothing as Body and Social Status”; Green, Guy, and Banim, *Through the Wardrobe*; Gregson and Beale, “Wardrobe Matter.”

weight—daily, weekly, seasonally, and yearly—but usually increasing with age. Weight shifted around, so that bodies not only changed size, but also changed shape. The absolute size of breasts, waists, and hips or the ratio between these body parts changed.⁸³ Women actively managed and regulated their bodies, and half of the participants talked about how they have wrestled with weight management. Overall, women’s descriptions evoked a sense of resignation in the aging body, and almost never positive enthusiasm.

Changes in body size or shape as women aged resulted in buying new clothes.⁸⁴ Thus, size changes were related to increased consumption, resource use, and most likely exploitive labor practices rampant in the industry. Sustainable clothing options, therefore, would optimally address these shape-shifting needs to help extend a garment’s usable life in a woman’s wardrobe. For example, Sandra’s purchasing practices demonstrate a successful use of secondhand markets that reduced economic and resource expenditures. When she was losing weight, she started shopping at secondhand stores for the various sizes she went through. Once she reached a stable weight, she continued to enjoy getting a bargain at secondhand stores. Her motivation for participating in this ecological sensitive acquisition practice was not environmental but rather to accommodate body changes and then to save money (she also liked shopping for deals at retail stores).

During my interviews, I observed at least two inventory management processes responding to body changes. One strategy was to periodically clear out of the wardrobe clothes that no longer fit, regardless of future or past body fluctuations. The other system involved storing clothes that no longer fit usually in out-of-the-way or less visible locations, sometimes at the end of a closet or in

⁸³ Kozar, “Older Women’s Attitudes Toward Aging, Appearance Changes, and Clothing.”

⁸⁴ When women did mention altering clothes, which was infrequent, it was to achieve specific fits, such as hemming pants or adjusting fabric around the bust, when first purchasing an item and not to accommodate body changes.

boxes in the basement. Ranging from expensive formal wear to dress slacks to casual sweaters, these garment were often marked as special due to their cost, quality, uniqueness, and style.

Narratives of keeping clothes that no longer fit revealed how clothing acted as extensions of multiple identities—including past and imagined selves, pre- and post-pregnancy bodies and lives. Alternatively, acquiring new apparel in a new size was a way to materialize a new identity.⁸⁵

Camilla: **So some of those clothes, don't fit me right now. But, you know, since they're not far off I've kept some of the nicer things with the hopes that if I lose that twenty pounds again, I'll have this to wear... If I do lose that weight again, I'll be so proud and happy I'll wanna buy new clothes anyhow.**

In some ways, clearing unworn, ill-fitting clothes out of the wardrobe improved the quality of engagement with one's clothes. For instance, Eunice and Niki's attention to individual objects was evident as they narrated stories about them. A couple of participants (Sandra and Niki) could point to specific clothes they currently wore that were from a previous weight stage, while others (Melanie, Louise, and Bernadette) only pointed me to the bins of clothes that remained unworn for years, but kept just in case. For Eunice, who described herself as someone who changed sizes regularly, this may have increased over the long-term the amount of clothes purchased, total resource consumption, energy use, and product accumulation in the second hand market (which may or may not be fully utilized before entering the waste stream), and thus decreasing the sustainability of the practice. However, without a longitudinal analysis, it is difficult to compare the success or sustainability of these practices overall.

⁸⁵ Bye and McKinney, "Sizing up the Wardrobe—Why We Keep Clothes That Do Not Fit"; Maura Banim and Alison Guy, "Dis/continued Selves: Why Do Women Keep Clothes They No Longer Wear?," in *Through the Wardrobe: Women's Relationships with Their Clothes*, ed. Eileen Green, Alison Guy, and Maura Banim (Oxford ; New York: Berg, 2001), 203–219; Alison Guy and Maura Banim, "Personal Collections: Women's Clothing Use and Identity," *Journal of Gender Studies* 9, no. 3 (2000): 313–327; Gregson and Beale, "Wardrobe Matter"; Nicky Gregson, Alan Metcalfe, and Louise Crewe, "Identity, Mobility, and the Throwaway Society," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25, no. 4 (2007): 682–700.

Overall, the inventory management process instigated by body size changes did not appear to be directly associated with sustainability-related attitudes or sustainable and unsustainable impacts, with the exception that changes in sizes tended to increase resource consumption through increased purchases. Nevertheless, it provides additional evidence for my argument that clothing practices do not stop at the point of purchase; we need to examine how practices and products evolve over time through use. Moreover, because dress practices involve the intimate intersection of bodies and garments, we need to consider if proposed production and consumption systems are not only sustainable in terms of environmental or labor issues, but also viable in accounting for these fluid, dynamic embodied realities.

While I cannot offer any specific conclusions regarding the optimal, most sustainable strategy from my data, I hope my analysis of these women's experiences shows us that we need to figure out system-wide and individual-based methods for accommodating body size changes and corresponding acquisition and disposal behaviors. For example, the Keep and Share project sells ready-made knitwear and knitting kits that put these principles into practice, creating apparel that can accommodate various sizes.⁸⁶ Garments are designed for "sharing" with users across ages, genders, and sizes, or "keeping" to accommodate an individual's fluctuations. This clothing generally may be looser fitting, and not to everyone's personal or current social tastes. We might also consider ways to promote modifications and alterations for size, through building skills or promoting services. Accommodating alterations also may shape garment design and construction. One strategy in sustainable design is to build in mechanisms that will adapt to different sizes or body shapes. These can be as varied from discrete incorporations of elastic and buckles to

⁸⁶ "Home | Keep & Share," accessed July 19, 2013, <http://www.keepandshare.co.uk/>.

mechanical fabric folding and pinning.⁸⁷ Material artifacts can have larger seam allowances, built in surplus fabric, or flat seams.⁸⁸ Providing built-in opportunities in garment design, encouraging re-styling, building businesses that provide services or training, or building infrastructure into retail/resale environments can provide opportunities that further extend the life of a garment, maximize value of resource and labor, and potentially create opportunities for style changes. These strategies bridge micro experiences and macro infrastructure, as well as attend to the aesthetic, affective, and symbolic aspects explored here.

Another pattern of change across narratives was the lifecycle path outlined below:

- Teenager paying careful attention to trends
- Young adult following fashion with disposable income and time
- Adult balancing life and work making clothes fit into her schedule and interests
- Retired adult removed from work and social dress codes sidelining fashion

While fashion innovators have been identified as more likely to express individuality, desire fun and variety, and be sensation seekers, others have also linked trend following and fashion innovation with younger consumers.⁸⁹ Several women (Lizzie, Niki, Megan, Tina, and Camilla) explicitly described trend-following as appropriate only for teenagers, but not adults. Niki made this point by contrasting her practices with moms who wore trendy fashions or kept up with the latest designer bags. Once working (inside or outside the home), managing a household, pursuing a range of interests, and sometimes raising children, they spent less time shopping for clothes.

Shopping for clothes became a routine, chore-like task, rather than a leisurely event. However,

⁸⁷ Hethorn, "Consideration of Consumer Desire"; Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles*.

⁸⁸ Alison and Rissanen, *Shaping Sustainable Fashion*.

⁸⁹ Nancy Stanforth, "Fashion Innovators, Sensation Seekers, and Clothing Individualists," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 81 (1995): 1203–1210; Louise R. Morgan and Grete Birtwistle, "An Investigation of Young Fashion Consumers' Disposal Habits," *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 33, no. 2 (March 2009): 190–198; Klepp and Storm-Mathisen, "Reading Fashion as Age: Teenage Girls' and Grown Women's Accounts of Clothing as Body and Social Status."

Rachel, Zoey, Eunice, and Louise described using clothes shopping as an activity specifically done when visiting with friends and family.⁹⁰

As they aged and settled into their identities, work, and family lives, they used clothing more as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. To the extent that they liked fashion, looked at upcoming trends in magazines, or watched makeover shows, they did so to help them craft a style that worked for *their* bodies, lifestyles, and relationships.⁹¹ Although this did not necessarily correlate with sustainable practices, women were modeling a behavior that we can encourage. We can encourage women to critically evaluate who they are, what their needs are, balance clothing needs with other needs, and how best to fulfill them—while giving them responsibly produced options to do so; creating a welcoming, accepting society of individual differences; and cultivating an ethics of care that extends decision-making processes to include people and the planet.⁹²

Although my research did not reveal a consistent relationship between women's life and body changes and the sustainability of those experiences, my analysis illuminates how these issues were intimate factors in how women bought new clothes, managed their inventory, or disposed of older garments, which often increased their environmental footprint. How women responded to these cycles appeared to vary based on individual interests in clothes and other lifestyle concerns, but overall they occurred within the conventional, and unsustainable, apparel industry of purchasing new (and occasionally secondhand clothes) and discarding old (rather than repairing)

⁹⁰ Kristina Bäckström, "Shopping as Leisure: An Exploration of Manifoltness and Dynamics in Consumers Shopping Experiences," *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 18, no. 3 (May 2011): 200–209.

⁹¹ Green, Guy, and Banim, *Through the Wardrobe*; Gregson, Metcalfe, and Crewe, "Identity, Mobility, and the Throwaway Society"; Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchell, *Not Just Any Dress: Narratives of Memory, Body, and Identity* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

⁹² Anna Lisa Peterson, *Everyday Ethics and Social Change: The Education of Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

garments. On one hand, some might counter that consumers need to stop purchasing new clothes and start modifying/repairing existing clothes, as suggested in many popular “eco” or “green living” consumer guides.⁹³ However, if we consciously consider embodied life changes in conversations about sustainable clothing, we can move beyond individual advice to imagine ways designers and retailers can create apparel designs and production/consumption systems that can help women manage changes through acquisition and disposal choices that extend garment lives, use fewer resources, and value the work of making and maintaining garments.

Changing Fashion Seasons/Trends

Instead of examining practices of fashion innovators, who play key roles in leading new styles but make up only 2.5 % of the population, I explore how practices of fashion “followers” or “majority adopters” responded to the different scales and rhythms of the fashion system in order to meet their physical, aesthetic, and social needs and desires.⁹⁴ By considering the various possible theories for why fashion changes in conjunction with this empirical study of how women wrestle with these issues, we can better understand why clothing practices diverge from or move toward sustainability. Because the fashion and clothing diffusion and adoption process weaves together styles and meaning, aesthetics and values, individuals and systems, fashion cycles offer both challenges and opportunities for sustainable consumption.

⁹³ Lori Bongiorno, *Green, Greener, Greenest: A Practical Guide to Making Eco-smart Choices a Part of Your Life* (New York: Perigee, 2008); Josh Dorfman, *The Lazy Environmentalist: Your Guide to Easy, Stylish, Green Living* (New York: Stewart, Tabori, & Chang, 2007); Nancy Conner, *Living Green: The Missing Manual* (Sebastopol, CA: O’Reilly Media, Inc., 2009).

⁹⁴ Morgan and Birtwistle, “An Investigation of Young Fashion Consumers’ Disposal Habits”; Woodward, “The Myth of Street Style.”

Lynch and Strauss's comprehensive survey walks through several disciplinary approaches, from psychological theories of sexuality to cultural theories of symbolic communication, sociological theories of conspicuous consumption, and performance theories of gender identity, among others to identify four main trends: novelty and variety, identity as an individual and group member, status markers, and human tendency to observe and copy behaviors.⁹⁵ Building on Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption and Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, Kawamura describes how the modern Western fashion system emphasizes status and distinction as primary symbolic meanings. However, Kaiser et al., offer an alternative and more satisfying model that engages consumers in a dialectic exchange of negotiation.⁹⁶ Clothing choices include ongoing, active processes of negotiation of many factors (e.g. personal histories and age, interpersonal relationships, current work and personal lives, social position, aesthetic tastes, popular media representations of fashion, current fashion and styles, physical garments, as well as creative drives to make look one's own) while situated in a social contexts (e.g. values fashion change, promotes new styles as distinctive, takes ideas from the catwalk to the street).⁹⁷

Despite major strides in the discipline, the dismissal of fashion and style not only as a field for legitimate academic study but also as an opportunity for constructive social change persists.⁹⁸ While some may see fashion as frivolous, how we dress ourselves, fashionably or not, clearly matters. However, they portrayed their own clothing choices as more sensible, practical, and

⁹⁵ Annette Lynch and Mitchell D. Strauss, *Changing Fashion: A Critical Introduction to Trend Analysis and Meaning*, Dress, Body, Culture (Oxford: Berg, 2007).

⁹⁶ Kaiser, Nagasawa, and Hutton, "Construction of An SI Theory of Fashion."

⁹⁷ Lynch and Strauss, *Changing Fashion*; Lois M. Gurel and Lee Gurel, "Clothing Interest: Conceptualization and Measurement," *Home Economics Research Journal* 7, no. 5 (May 1979): 274–282; Woodward, "The Myth of Street Style"; Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender*; Tseëlon, *The Masque of Femininity*.

⁹⁸ Lou Taylor, *The Study of Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); Lou Taylor, *Establishing Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Karen Hanson, "Dressing Down Dressing Up—The Philosophic Fear of Fashion," *Hypatia* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 107–121.

rational compared to those they imagine as dedicated to pursuing fashion, including their younger selves. In some ways, their attitudes might seem to perpetuate negative stereotypes of clothing as frivolous and irrational. The consistent concern and care for appearance belies the significance on individual and industrial levels. Thus, we can harness anxiety over fashion's seemingly superficial nature to probe what clothes mean to us as individuals and to the environment and labor through which they are materialized.

Overall, participants did not believe they adhered to seasonal changes in fashion's color or print palettes, although their choices were likely determined by what was currently available.⁹⁹ For instance, Niki, who works part-time in retail, described how it is important to buy coordinating garments at the same time because the right shade of a particular hue may not be available in later seasons. Niki even kept in storage a patterned skirt while she waited for a matching shade of blue to return to fashion. Rachel's description of maintaining a pumpkin-colored jacket in her closet suggested an effort to transcend fashion tastes and instead embrace her own aesthetic preference. Primarily wearing this jacket in the autumn, she prioritized nature's seasonal colors over fashion's.

The pace of fashion changes swing from very fast, with new styles circulating every couple of weeks, to very slow, with one look spanning a couple of years to a couple of decades. Sometimes changes cycle through so quickly that they return within a few years.¹⁰⁰ Even though fast fashion receives substantial media attention,¹⁰¹ none of the women I spoke with consistently followed fast fashion trends. For instance, Rachel could pinpoint one trendy fashion sweater that she had purchased at a fast fashion retailer that had remained unworn since she had purchased it at

⁹⁹ Blaszczyk, *The Color Revolution*.

¹⁰⁰ Lynch and Strauss, *Changing Fashion*; Fred Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹⁰¹ Siegle, *To Die For*; Elizabeth L. Cline, *Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion* (New York: Penguin, 2012).

an end-of-the-season sale. In this sense, she liked the trendy sweater enough to buy it, but did not worry that it might be past its fashion peak by the time she wore it. Woodward also found in her ethnography of street style that although all those interviewed wore at least one mass retailer item, wears integrated a wide variety of garment styles of various origins.¹⁰²

Although participants were comfortable changing fashions at a slower pace than the industry moved, they were anxious about falling behind.¹⁰³ Participants did not want to wear apparel that marked them as out-of-step with the current fashion norms, unless they were cultivating a vintage look.¹⁰⁴ Jessica wore a hand-me-down suit from her mother that made her look out-of-date enough to make her feel uncomfortable and prompted people at a new workplace to doubt her competence.¹⁰⁵ However, she has since worn the jacket and skirt as separates, blending them with contemporary items to mask their out-of-datedness.¹⁰⁶

Camilla: I saw a lot of suits with shoulder pads. [laughs] Big ones... These were fifty, sixty year old women. So, with their power suits, leftover from the eighties. Big, big shoulder pads...

Maggie: Do you think that's something that you will feel comfortable wearing in maybe twenty years when other people do have large shoulder pads again?

Camilla: Uh, if the style changes, I will buy whatever is currently fashionable. Unless it's just ridiculous...But most, most older professional people, don't follow trends like that anyhow, so they tend to have more classic looks. But yeah, I would buy a suit that was more current to not look [pauses] dated.

Camilla's experience shows us that some women *do* wear clothes that others notice as being

¹⁰² Woodward, "The Myth of Street Style."

¹⁰³ Clarke and Miller, "Fashion and Anxiety"; Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*; Kaiser, Nagasawa, and Hutton, "Construction of An SI Theory of Fashion."

¹⁰⁴ Alexandra Palmer and Hazel Clark, *Old Clothes, New Looks: Second Hand Fashion* (Oxford: Berg, 2005).

¹⁰⁵ Johnson and Lennon, *Appearance and Power*.

¹⁰⁶ Woodward, "The Myth of Street Style." For a discussion of how people integrated furniture and household items of various origins into their family style and everyday life, see Ruth Lane and Andrew Gorman Murray, eds., *Material Geographies of Household Sustainability* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2011).

out-of-date. Rather than harshly criticizing them, she interpreted their self-presentation as acceptably professional, albeit while laughing warmly at their old-fashioned suits. Women face a double-bind: they are negatively associated with following fashion, but also are expected to participate in it in order to be successful.¹⁰⁷ Despite Camilla's self-reflexive, mocking tone, she seemed to enjoy collecting clothes that were stylish and expressive. Her story reminds us that women were active participants in the fashion process, critically evaluating fashion trends and selectively endorsing the styles they find attractive and suitable.

One particular garment strategy balancing out faster fashion cycles was women's desire for "classics" and "staples" that would be stylish and presentable over multiple fashion seasons and possibly in various circumstances. These items helped women use their wardrobes strategically to bridge the gap between large and small, slow and fast shifts in styles. Staples and classics, by maintaining consistent characteristics despite fashion being susceptible to larger changes over long periods of time, helped women stabilize their identities and wardrobes.¹⁰⁸ On the other hand, it was not possible to identify whether women's personal needs or tastes had changed because of or exclusive of general shifts in collective tastes or fashion cycles. Eunice and Wendy described how some stores consistently offered a specific garment, such as "the classic tee" or "the perfect tee" with a specific cut in relatively standard colorways. More often, however, women described feeling frustrated with the unavailability of designs to which they had grown accustomed, because apparel companies had discontinued a style or changed cuts, fabrics, color, or other elements.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Johnson and Lennon, *Appearance and Power*.

¹⁰⁸ Green, Guy, and Banim, *Through the Wardrobe*; Grove-White, "No Rules, Only Choices? Repositioning the Self Within the Fashion System in Relation to Expertise and Meaning: A Case Study of Colour and Image Consultancy"; Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*.

¹⁰⁹ Indeed, I have anecdotally noticed a similar trend in online reviews: people complain that a fabric or cut has changed and no longer fits them or holds up as well or people request change to fit one's body or to add more colors.

Women strategically responded to this disjuncture between cycles and use in various ways—buying multiples, keeping clothes despite visible wear, not wearing clothes to make them last, or purchasing garments secondhand. For instance, Zoey bought a replacement shirt for only a slightly worn one; she liked it so much that she anticipated wearing the original purchase out. Eunice’s attachment to products manifested in her disappointment in not finding replacements in the current marketplace.

Eunice: I have favorites, where I don’t want to get rid of them, even though I should. You know. Be harder than to let go. If it’s something I don’t feel I could replace, like something, like I, I’ve had that with shoes. Where I felt they were perfect *shoes* or whatever and they go with everything and they’re, they’re just done. And I’m sad because I can’t get *exactly* the same thing.

Through the second hand market, women accessed previous fashion trends that matched their body type and personal tastes better than what was currently in fashion. Despite cultivating specific acquisition and wearing strategies, women’s skills (or lack of skills) in mending and maintaining favorite or “classic” garments, combined with fashion’s limiting options, impacted what they wore and disposed of.¹¹⁰

Women in my study were aware that they did not have pristine practices in terms of environmental and social impact. However, they interpreted their personal, tempered engagement with trends as a positive, or at least not negative, quality. Certainly, their decision to wear garments for several years is more sustainable than if they wore it for only one season. Moreover, extended use engendered a positive relationship between women and their clothes; women described

¹¹⁰ Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice*; Nicky Gregson, Alan Metcalfe, and Louise Crewe, “Practices of Object Maintenance and Repair: How Consumers Attend to Consumer Objects Within the Home,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 9, no. 2 (2009): 248–272; Lucy Norris, “Shedding Skins: The Materiality of Divestment in India,” *Journal of Material Culture* 9, no. 1 (2004): 59–71.

“**favorites**” that they enjoyed wearing and met their needs.¹¹¹ In their subjective understandings of their actions and position in industry, they felt that they were making somewhat sustainable choices. Moreover, they also critiqued, but felt powerless to change, the apparel industry through individual consumption; they did not seem to consider collective actions.

Seamstresses in my study demonstrated how skills helped them manage some of these issues within the fashion system. Camilla described how she purchased a currently popular garment style with the intention of using its pattern to create duplicates (in better quality fabric). Rosa custom-drafted patterns just for her body and tastes. Although these particular behaviors were outliers in my sample, the approach to individualization within fashion norms need not be. Not everyone has to sew all their clothes or draft patterns. While no one in my study purchased from businesses offering mass-customized apparel, it is increasingly becoming more viable due to technological advancements.¹¹² Skirting the time- and labor-intensive custom tailoring process, women could custom order garments specified to their measurements and/or preferences for fabric, color, necklines, sleeve-lengths, skirt and pants silhouettes, lengths, and inseams.¹¹³ Consumers would get a garment that fits their body and aesthetics, that they would want to wear for a long time, and that they would not have to worry about not being able to replace.

Through individually and collectively creating a culture that decreases pressure to follow trends and instead encourages women to wear styles for extend periods of time, we could maximize garment life, reduce resource and energy use for producing clothes, promote long-term financial (and perhaps emotional) investment in clothes, and decrease pressure on garment

¹¹¹ Chapman, *Emotionally Durable Design*; Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles*.

¹¹² This is an excellent of example of innovative use of technology in design and manufacturing processes can enhance consumer experiences and sustainable behaviors.

¹¹³ “Shop Women’s Designer Fashion Dresses, Tops | Size 0-36W & Custom Clothes | eShakti”; Ross, “Leveraging Niche Fashion Markets.”

workers to produce more clothes at increasing speeds. Promoting these behaviors and attitudes, however, may require changes to design, manufacturing, and retail structures whose economic success currently depend on regular style cycles, mass-production with quick turnarounds, and discount pricing.¹¹⁴ Another modification to the global apparel industry that addresses issues participants faced could include slowing down the speed and frequency of fashion changes to meet (or further extend) women's current use patterns. This could reduce unworn stock, minimize strain on manufacturing, promote production quality (versus quantity and speed), and keep apparel in rotation for longer before being discarded or donated.

Updating and renewing styles are not mutually exclusive from these propositions. Women also described how they add accessories or combine items differently to create a new look using garments they have had in their wardrobe for several years. We can also find innovative ways to design garments themselves as more adaptable to change (in terms of size and style) or to restyle existing products to include change. We might need to introduce and maintain infrastructure to support that adaptability. In some ways, a service-oriented industry may be less resource intensive, and more locally centered than a manufacturing industry.¹¹⁵ Fashion and popular media can incorporate messages of longevity, slowness, adaptability, style diversity, and restyling while de-emphasizing newness, change, and in-season trends. Through their expressed needs and actual behaviors, women have shown us that these directions are ripe for exploration.

Change is an important issue women grapple with in their clothing choices, and therefore

¹¹⁴ David Bosshart, *Cheap: The Real Cost of the Global Trend for Bargains, Discounts & Customer Choice* (London: Kogan Page, 2006); Gordon Laird, *The Price of a Bargain: The Quest for Cheap and the Death of Globalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Ellen Ruppel Shell, *Cheap: The High Cost of Discount Culture* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009); Cline, *Overdressed*.

¹¹⁵ Carleton B. Christensen, "What Is so Sustainable About Services?," *Design Philosophy Papers* 3–4 (2007); Linda Welters, "The Fashion of Sustainability," in *Sustainable Fashion: Why Now? A Conversation About Issues, Practices, and Possibilities*, ed. Janet Hethorn and Connie Ulasewicz (New York: Fairchild Books, 2008), 7–29.

needs to be considered in discussing sustainability of those practices. Just as we need diversified, multiple solutions to address the range of circumstances in which women are situated, we also need dynamic solutions that can accommodate and adapt to change. While we cannot change that our bodies, lives, or weather changes (although science is pushing these limits), we can change how fashion changes, and we can change how we respond to change. Soper similarly “invites us to think about how we might secure innovation and a non-cyclical mode of existence without social and ecological exploitation; and thus to consider what alternative sources of self-realization and collective belonging might substitute for those currently so reliant upon the acquisition of new style commodities.”¹¹⁶ Through their tangible concreteness and malleable fluidity, garments materialized identities, social relations, and their processes of change.

Conclusion

Women’s clothing practices are necessarily experienced through bodies and senses that are culturally coded. The social and cultural contexts of women’s experiences framed their clothing choices at every stage in the process. Unpacking women’s aesthetic and affective experiences within subjective and symbolic practices illuminates how these dimensions fostered and challenged sustainable choices, hindered and promoted unsustainable choices. Although there were stories of anxiety as women struggled to meet social norms, there were also stories of pleasure and creativity. Cultivating aesthetic and embodied experiences, while attending to cultural codes, offers an opportunity to build meaningful, sustainable clothing practices.

Moreover, clothing practices were in a constant state of flux—adapting to natural cycles of

¹¹⁶ Kate Soper, “Dress Needs: Reflections on the Clothed Body, Selfhood, and Consumption,” in *Body Dressing*, ed. Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson (New York: Berg, 2001), 30.

weather and aging or negotiating cultural cycles of fashion changes and social mores. Thus, these flows of change offer opportunities for intervention—through changes in both micro routines of individual consumption behaviors and the macro and exo systems of design, production, marketing, and retail systems. Gregson and Beale allude to the power that tapping into systems of change (of the body, garments, life, meaning, etc.) in their analysis of intimate clothing spaces:

Wardrobes become less the possessions of individuals and more temporary, transitory, spatial junctures, holding places in the lives of things. Moreover, they also become spaces which facilitate exits, which are therefore as much about passages, flows, and divestment as they are about accumulated memorials and mementos.¹¹⁷

Redirecting these flows onto a more sustainable trajectory, then, involves respecting their aesthetic, affective, subjective, and symbolic undercurrents, and examining the industrial and social headwaters that intermingle with them. Although Gregson and Beale's analysis is of spaces, this discussion further grounds these fluid, dynamic exchanges in embodied and sensory experiences. Through tackling the intersections of these systems together, with sensitivity to the material interfaces of designed garments and our intimately embodied, socially-situated interactions with them, we have an enhanced approach to designing and implementing successful, sustainable clothing practices.

¹¹⁷ Gregson and Beale, "Wardrobe Matter," 699.

CHAPTER 7

**DEMANDING MORE FROM CLOTHES FOR LESS:
NEGOTIATING SYSTEMS OF TASTES, VALUES, AND PRACTICES
THROUGH TIME, MONEY, AND SKILLS**

Introduction

“Stop buying crap!” exclaimed a textile designer during a recent lecture on her organic fabric design company.¹

“(1) Visit your local thrift store and buy one item to wear. (2) Buy a reusable shopping tote. (3) Buy a reusable water bottle and coffee cup. (4) Buy an organic t-shirt.” These are steps for being “gorgeously green.”²

Consumers in the United States are bombarded with messages of what to buy and what not to buy. Almost always the messages are to buy something, rather than nothing. Even consumer advice guides aimed specifically at green, ecological, ethical, or sustainable living are saturated with messages of buying—but presumably buying “better,” better produced, better for the environment, better for the workers, better quality. But is buying another t-shirt, even if it is organic or has been used before, really better? What do these investments mean to consumers?

This chapter raises the question of what women were willing to invest in their clothes (e.g. time, money, and skills), why or why not, and how that challenged or perpetuated unsustainable norms in individual behaviors, as well as apparel design and industry practice. What goals or

¹ Harmony Susalla, “Organic Cotton: The Journey Is the Prize” (lecture, Wright Design Series, Monona Terrace, Madison, WI, March 29, 2012).

² Sophie Uliano, *Gorgeously Green: 8 Simple Steps to an Earth-friendly Life* (New York: Collins, 2008), <http://www.gorgeouslygreen.com/>.

interests were women expressing or striving to achieve in their practices? What resources did they see as enabling or inhibiting? By framing practices in these terms, I am not arguing that individuals rationally, systematically pursued goals. Rather, desires and needs conflated. Emotional attachments and appearance management overlapped.³ The aesthetic, affective, subjective, and symbolic dimensions experienced around achieving manifested in their practices, which mutually shaped attitudes toward money, time, and skills. These four dimensions also inform and are informed by the material and social environments of macro, exo, and meso systems. This process is fluid, dynamic, permeable, and subject to shifts. Thus, we can harness elements of the process (e.g. goals, dimensions of experience, and contextual elements) to enable sustainable goals and practices.

Obtaining quality apparel was a primary goal, but was a multidimensional, contextualized, and subjective one. Participants often sidelined this goal in favor of getting a deal or preferring convenience. Sometimes, they were able to fulfill latter goals while also obtaining a sufficient, acceptable level of quality. These patterns of getting a deal or preferring convenience were enabled by women's qualitative experience in material and social contexts. These contexts facilitated what were often unsustainable practices. Nevertheless, participants also chose to invest in clothes to meet quality or values. In this sense, demanding more from clothes for less—along the lines of meeting tastes, values, and quality expectations—can manifest as different patterns: (1) more stuff with less quality (or time, money, and skills expenditures) and (2) more satisfaction with more

³ Elizabeth Shove and Gordon Walker, "CAUTION! Transitions Ahead: Politics, Practice, and Sustainable Transition Management," *Environment and Planning A* 39, no. 4 (2007): 763–770; K. Hobson, "Competing Discourses of Sustainable Consumption: Does the 'Rationalisation of Lifestyles' Make Sense?," *Environmental Politics* 11, no. 2 (June 2002): 95–120; Russell W. Belk, Güliz Ger, and S. Askegaard, "The Missing Streetcar Named Desire," in *The Why of Consumption: Contemporary Perspectives on Consumer Motives, Goals, and Desires*, ed. S. Ratneshwar, David Glen Mick, and Cynthia Huffman (New York: Routledge, 2000), 98–119.

quality (or possibly more time, money, and skills expenditures).⁴ Subjective understandings and symbolic meanings around time, money, and skills discouraged spending or investing more of those resources into fewer, higher quality items, despite simultaneously expressed interest in that higher quality. Research has suggested that these practices in contemporary U.S. culture challenges the well-being of (1) individual consumers, (2) social institutions, (3) the environment, and (4) individuals and communities involved in producing the goods that feed that market.⁵ Therefore, it is important to grapple with aesthetic, affective, subjective, and symbolic aspects around time, money, and skills in everyday, taken-for-granted practices

Evaluating Degrees of Quality

Overwhelmingly, participants expressed a desire and expectation for apparel of a decent quality that does not diminish over use and laundering. Given the poor durability of fast fashion and contemporary mass-produced apparel (with some products designed to physically last less than ten wearings)⁶ alongside an emphasis on durable, quality products in sustainable design and consumption,⁷ we find ourselves confronting a tension between micro experiences and macro material and social contexts. Moreover, buying, maintaining, and culling for quality was a

⁴ Jack Manno, "Commoditization: Consumption Efficiency and an Economy of Care and Connection," in *Confronting Consumption*, ed. Thomas Princen, Michael Maniates, and Ken Conca (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 67–100.

⁵ Juliet Schor, *The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don't Need* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1999); Annie Leonard, *The Story of Stuff: How Our Obsession with Stuff Is Trashing the Planet, Our Communities, and Our Health And a Vision for Change* (New York: Free Press, 2010); Tim Kasser, *The High Price of Materialism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003); Leaf Van Boven, "Experientialism, Materialism, and the Pursuit of Happiness," *Review of General Psychology* 9, no. 2 (2005): 132–142; Elinor Ochs and Tamar Kremer-Sadlik, eds., *Fast-Forward Family: Home, Work, and Relationships in Middle-Class America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); David Bosshart, *Cheap: The Real Cost of the Global Trend for Bargains, Discounts & Customer Choice* (London: Kogan Page, 2006). See chapter one for a discussion of the challenges of the current apparel industry in particular.

⁶ G. Birtwistle and C.M. Moore, "Fashion Clothing – Where Does It All End Up?," *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management* 35, no. 3 (2007): 210–216; Leonard, *Story of Stuff*.

⁷ Kate Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Design Journeys* (London: Earthscan, 2008); Jonathan Chapman, *Emotionally Durable Design: Objects, Experiences, and Empathy* (London: Earthscan, 2005).

complex, multi-faceted, subjective, nuanced process.⁸ Examining these patterns in-depth can better inform conversations about sustainable clothing.

My findings support previous studies suggesting quality perceptions and expectations are multidimensional, interrelated, and affectively and aesthetically meaningful.⁹ Participants commonly referenced three criteria categories of characteristics when describing how they evaluated garment quality (see Table 7.1). First, garment appraisals were not especially articulated, explicit, or technical; more sensory, embodied, and visual; and a result of ongoing interactions with garments. Conceptions of quality were further framed through aesthetic preferences, subjective and social norms, and lifestyle fit (the primary issues discussed in the previous chapter).¹⁰ Finally, participants' use of purchase information outside of garment properties to evaluate quality, such as brand and price, expands our understanding of the variables shaping women's engagement with sustainable or unsustainable products and practices to include meso, exo, and macro systems contexts. Within these categories, women evaluated their experiences with products along three primary axes: durability, pleasurability, and functionality.

⁸ While research on technically assessing quality in textile science is large, I focus on how women in my study evaluated quality, developed strategies to obtain and maintain various degrees of it, and managed quality changes.

⁹ M. E. Swinker and J. D. Hines, "Understanding Consumers' Perception of Clothing Quality: A Multidimensional Approach," *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 30, no. 2 (2006): 218–223; Heidi P. Scheller and Grace I. Kunz, "Toward a Grounded Theory of Apparel Product Quality," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 16, no. 2 (March 1, 1998): 57–67; Helena M. De Klerk and StephnaLubbe, "Female Consumers' Evaluation of Apparel Quality: Exploring the Importance of Aesthetics," *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* 12, no. 1 (February 29, 2008): 36–50.

¹⁰ Some studies categorize the first two categories as intrinsic/formal and performance/behavioral properties. I argue that even intrinsic/formal properties are necessarily evaluated through use over time and vice versa. However the extrinsic category here is similar to other studies. Swinker and Hines, "Understanding Consumers' Perception of Clothing Quality"; Klerk and Lubbe, "Female Consumers' Evaluation of Apparel Quality."

Table 7.1. List of commonly referenced criteria used in evaluating quality

Physical Criteria and Changes	Style and Experience	External Factors
Fabric	Aesthetics	Purchase information
Colorfastness (fading, graying, bleeding)	Color options and selection	Hierarchy of secondhand or discount stores
Fiber	Style options and selection	Store or brand associations
Texture	Design details	Original cost
Clinginess	Look of mending	Relative cost to similar products
Hand	Style lasting multiple fashion seasons	Production information
Thickness/thinness	Fit	Hand vs. machine
Weight	How well fits or meets expectation of how should fit	Custom vs. mass
Pills	Changes in fit after laundering	Production location
Snags	Feeling against skin	Country laws and regulations
Stains	Level of assessment	Knowledge and skills
Dimensional stability	Individual garment	Personal past experience
Components and construction	Wardrobe categories	Friends/family recommendations
Functionality	Wardrobe as a whole	Media coverage
Materials (metal, plastic, elastic)	Wardrobe over time	Visual vs. physical inspection
Component attachment		Comparisons
Seam allowances		To original quality
Seam tensions		To quality of similar or similarly priced items
Loose threads		To quality of vintage garments
Finishing		
Stitching appearance		
Care needs		
Stain issues		
Care treatment		
Repair-ability		

Quality perceptions are important in sustainable clothing consumption for several reasons. For example, garments that have high physical or stylistic quality will not need to be replaced as frequently due to physical wear or style changes. Cultivating products and practices which allow for or encourage re-purposing, repairing, restyling, etc. garments as their quality deteriorates can extend a garment's life.¹¹ These strategies interrupt the short-life, short-use cycle that contributes

¹¹ Marilyn DeLong, Juanjuan Wu, and Juyeon Park, "Tactile Response and Shifting Touch Preference," *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* 10, no. 1 (2012): 44–59; Gwilt Alison and Timo Rissanen, eds., *Shaping Sustainable Fashion: Changing the Way We Make and Use Clothes* (London: Earth Pledge, 2011); Chapman, *Emotionally Durable Design*; Manno, "Commoditization."

to a global glut of clothing, consumes vast quantities of resources, and challenges wellbeing. However, the above proposals' success depends on consumers adopting practices. Wrestling with participants' underlying concerns—as well as addressing the design, manufacture, and use of material objects—is important in cultivating sustainable consumption.

Interrogating the Physical Object

The finding that women use physical properties as quality determinants is not new. Indeed, the textile and apparel industry regularly develops and administers tests related to these different properties and establishes acceptable tolerances for performance depending on a garment's price point or use.¹² However, participants did not formally, systematically, or rigorously examine materials and construction or other objectively measured technical qualities. Rather, participants' evaluations emerged as more direct, spontaneous, visceral responses grounded in subjectively experienced multi-sensory perceptions. Exploring their assessment process helps us understand how women interrogated garments through multi-sensory and embodied perceptions over time. This provides a more nuanced framework on which to develop design strategies or consumer advice to promote sustainable clothing production and consumption.

The women I spoke with were overwhelmingly concerned with colorfastness as a marker of quality. Colorfastness relates to sustainability, because colorfast textiles signify that dyes are not polluting municipal or individual sewage. However, there is no guarantee that they were produced without dangerous mordants, harmful finishes, or unregulated wastewater. Efforts to maintain color quality also affected the sustainability of the clothing practice. For particular

¹² For examples, see Woodhead Publishing and the Textile Institute and standards organizations American Society for Testing and Materials and American Association of Textile Chemists and Colorists.

categories, many participants proactively managed color loss through washing in cold water. Others prioritized concerns over cleanliness and chose to wash clothes in warm water. In this sense, convincing women that cold water preserves clothing condition *and* successfully cleans clothes is important to encourage environmentally responsible practices.¹³

Overall, close inspection of the garment—let alone production or environmental impact—was not high on the pre-purchase checklist. This confirms research that tells us consumers rank construction details lower than fit, cost, and style.¹⁴ Furthermore, most women did not appear to demand extremely high quality construction. With the exception of Rosa who made her own clothes, no one seemed dissatisfied with quickly mass-manufactured, serged seams instead of carefully hand-tailored French seams. Eunice inspected sweater necklines closely before committing to a purchase, and even selected a different version from the one she originally picked up because she thought the stitching looked better. Nevertheless, she was choosing between garments extremely similar to each other and others in the marketplace. Improving components, construction, as well as fabric's initial condition and performance over time, so that the choice of higher quality garments was a viable, accessible market option could be a part of a sustainable clothing system that bridges individuals, garments, and industry.

Participants tended to associate natural fibers with higher quality. Participants offered several criticisms of synthetic fibers: they stained easier, clung to the body, smelled unpleasant, pilled, and even were poisonous to one's skin. One woman's moniker for them, "**fakey fakey**," captured negative perceptions of non-natural fibers as low quality, "inauthentic" imitations, and

¹³ Andrew Martin and Elisabeth Rosenthal, "Cold-Water Detergents Get a Cold Shoulder - NYTimes.com," accessed July 19, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/17/business/cold-water-detergents-get-a-chilly-reception.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>.

¹⁴ Swinker and Hines, "Understanding Consumers' Perception of Clothing Quality."

natural fibers as the high quality, authentic standard. Schor further unpacks this coded message:

“Natural fibers and materials symbolically obliterate the connection to assembly lines and factories. By being “natural,” they are symbolically *not* man-made...to avoid being too mass-market.”¹⁵ Natural fibers are luxury items that can communicate social status or provide aesthetic pleasure, especially in contrast to the increasing accessibility of synthetic fibers.¹⁶

Despite abstractly critiquing synthetic fibers, participants later praised specific garments made with synthetic fibers as good quality. While women used fiber as a relatively straightforward unit of analysis, other factors, such as yarn type, fabric structure, or finishes, also contributed to a fabric’s performance.¹⁷ The *idea* of fiber played a significant role in their idea of quality, but the *feeling* of the fabric played a more significant role when appraising specific objects. Regardless of which fiber is more sustainable, companies can maximize or overcome symbolic associations.¹⁸

Women consistently evaluated apparel quality through sensory engagement with fabric. They stroked for texture, handled for drape, and held for weight. They interacted with the garment from the first touch in a store to daily use and care. Participants appeared to lack both a language to describe these sensations as well as expertise about construction and finishing to evaluate quality technically. “**You can just feel it**” was a shared sentiment. Like many subjective assessments, this

¹⁵ Schor, *The Overspent American*, 58–59.

¹⁶ Ruth P. Rubinstein, *Dress Codes: Meanings and Messages in American Culture* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995); Thomas Hine, *Populuxe* (New York: Knopf, 1986); Alladi Venkatesh et al., “The Aesthetics of Luxury Fashion, Body and Identity Formation,” *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 20, no. 4 (October 2010): 459–470.

¹⁷ While my research cannot confirm why fiber is emphasized, it is interesting to note that fiber is the only one of these variables that regularly appears on garment labels. Unless a woman closely analyzes a garment’s fabric structure, which was rare, only fiber information is known. My personal experience as a teaching assistant for a textile science course anecdotally confirms the phenomenon of conflating fabric property variables. Students struggled to keep track of the various factors contributing to textile performance and routinely failed to draw distinctions between fiber type and fabric structure when talking about textiles.

¹⁸ Although my study did not explicitly examine marketing, we might consider how the cotton industry itself has carefully cultivated this positive association through its aggressive and pervasive direct campaigning to consumers, partially in response to their market share lost to synthetic fibers.

description of “knowing when you see it” has become a sort of catchall phrase when considering complex, subjective, qualitative experiences based on often-unarticulated principles or preferences. With textiles and clothing, we do not just *see* it; we *feel* it with our hands and bodies. Indeed, women’s attention to, but struggle to articulate, how things feel illustrates how touch has been marginalized and trivialized despite its significance.¹⁹ Increasing education so that consumers have better tools with which to evaluate quality might be one approach we could deploy in order to help women choose high-quality garments. In addition, culturally embracing, rather than trivializing, embodied and sensory knowledge could strengthen women’s and designers’ confident and skilled application of them.

Maintaining texture and fit were two important criteria that women assessed through their senses, bodies, and skills to determine clothing’s durability and longevity over time. When garments pilled, snagged, shrunk, stretched out, changed proportions, stained easily, or otherwise exhibited unappealing visual or physical changes, women reassessed them as lower quality. They questioned whether to continue to wear a garment and for what purpose, to donate it, or to throw it away (if they thought no one else would be willing to wear it). For example, Rachel pulled several cashmere sweaters from her closet and contrasted the drastically different quality despite the nominally identical fiber. The sweater from a high-end retailer purchased twenty years ago was faring pretty well, especially compared to the now pilled and stretched sweater purchased from a big-box chain only a few years ago. Although she still wore the former sweater to work, she had

¹⁹ Joann Peck and Jennifer Wiggins, “It Just Feels Good: Customers’ Affective Response to Touch and Its Influence on Persuasion,” *Journal of Marketing* 70, no. 4 (October 2006): 56–69; DeLong, Wu, and Park, “Tactile Response and Shifting Touch Preference”; Beverly Gordon, “Intimacy and Objects: A Proxemic Analysis of Gender-based Response to the Material World,” in *The Material Culture of Gender, the Gender of Material Culture*, ed. Katherine A. Martinez and Kenneth L. Ames (Winterthur, DE: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1997), 237–252; Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden, and Ruth Phillips, eds., *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2006); Karen Hanson, “Dressing Down Dressing Up—The Philosophic Fear of Fashion,” *Hypatia* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 107–121.

since demoted the other to weekend, at-home wear. The real contrast materialized when Rachel selected a cashmere sweater that her mother wore sixty-years ago. This piece was in pristine condition. No pills. Sturdy fabric. As Rachel exclaimed, **“Look at how gorgeous it is!”**

Participants strategized laundering practices based on their perception of how likely a garment would shrink or stretch. Sometimes they chose sustainable behaviors not for environmental reasons, but because they felt compelled to given the lack of quality or integrity in the apparel industry. In other words, unsustainable design could lead to sustainable care.

Melanie: I do hang a lot of my clothes because going through the dryer takes the life out of ‘em or alters the way they fit you.

Alternatively, a high-performing garment is one that can withstand unsustainable care.

Louise: It’s not gonna pill up. I think, this material tends not to. And um, I don’t know, it just doesn’t pucker up, and comes out of the dryer nice... The cut. The feel. The fabric... An old standby. A good standby. Washes good.

They did not base their assessment on clearly defined, objective metrics. On the contrary, their experiences revealed vague, viscerally experienced, subjective criteria dependent on symbolic meanings they wanted the garment to convey when worn and how it fit in their lifestyle.

These examples reveal complexities and contradictions. One of the criteria for Louise’s **“perfect shirt,”** being able to wash it using warm water and throw it in the dryer, is a resource-intensive laundering option. In contrast, Rachel’s loving and conscientious care for her hand-knit sweaters (hand washing with cold water and flat drying) used less water, soap, and energy. From casually throwing the garment into automatic laundry machines to intimately, physically, and routinely engaging body and hands with the garment, these strategies to maintain physical quality reveal how desired routines of convenience and exceptional practices of mindful care fall across the sustainability spectrum. Attending to behaviors may not be necessary for

sustainable behaviors, but can be a useful tool in cultivating them.²⁰

It is important to consider how women managed quality through laundering practices because of their environmental impacts. Washing clothes in cold water and line drying to preserve their condition was more environmentally sensitive than washing in warm or hot, machine drying, or dry cleaning. Washing less frequently tended to minimize wear from laundering, reduced additional time or effort expenditures (especially if it was an item that a woman thought needed dry-cleaning or hand-washing), and used less environmental resources (though this was not often an explicit motivation). In this sense, we could encourage women to do what they currently do for select items.²¹ Niki narrated a story where she did just that with a friend.

Niki: She was like, “Oh that’s probably gonna have to go to the dry cleaners.” And I said, well *why*? And she said, “Well, I’ve worn it. And I think it smells a little.” And I said you know, what if you just hang it on a hanger and let it air out, you might find it’s okay tomorrow. And the next time I saw her, she said, “Hey thanks for saving me six dollars” or whatever. And I said what are you talking about? And she said, “I didn’t have to take that little cardigan to the dry cleaner.” I went, Yay!

Women also showed me examples of garments they had loved to pieces, made threadbare and holey. Megan’s description of finally throwing away a worn t-shirt conveyed a sense of loss and regret as she wistfully recounted its multi-decade age and tattered fabric. Stories of a well-worn garment revealed a history of pleasurable and satisfying engagements. Megan criticized garments that started out thin as being poor quality, but her much-loved shirt thinned through use

²⁰ Don Slater, “The Ethics of Routine: Consciousness, Tedium, and Value,” in *Time, Consumption and Everyday Life*, ed. Elizabeth Shove, Frank Trentmann, and Richard Wilk (Oxford: Berg, 2009), 217–230; Wendy Parkins and Geoffrey Craig, *Slow Living* (Oxford: Berg, 2006); Elise L. Amel, Christie M. Manning, and Britain A. Scott, “Mindfulness and Sustainable Behavior: Pondering Attention and Awareness as Means for Increasing Green Behavior,” *Ecopsychology* 1, no. 1 (March 2009): 14–25.

²¹ Doug McKenzie-Mohr and William Smith, *Fostering Sustainable Behavior: An Introduction to Community-based Social Marketing* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 1999); Anna Lisa Peterson, *Everyday Ethics and Social Change: The Education of Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Stefan Wahlen, “The Routinely Forgotten Routine Character of Domestic Practices,” *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 35, no. 5 (September 2011): 507–513.

provided high quality experience (even if transferred to a less formal use, such as sleepwear).

Megan: **That’s a criticism I have of current trends is that everything is so, right now, it’s flimsy, it’s *thin*, it’s *cheap*, and it’s cheap, cheap, like, cheap to make and it’s not warm to wear. It doesn’t last.**

These fashion items convey status through style and appearance and not through patina, or physical changes in materiality. McCracken explains, contemporary commodities “begin very quickly to show their age more convincingly than their status.”²² On the other hand, industry heavily invests resources into mimicking patina, signifying its symbolic meaning not just to individuals, but also as social markers.²³ Designing and marketing for patina instead of style is one strategy to influence women’s purchasing and wearing patterns. Creative marketing could extend this process to include interactive features for women to track or monitor the life of their shirt. These potential initiatives encourage wearers to “occupy time [with garments] more attentively.”²⁴

The stories also show that relationships with physical quality is at the heart of women’s experiences. While companies name their shirt “the perfect” or “the essential,” this label is earned through repeated wearings and launderings. A perfect shirt is one that lives with a woman. Helen’s darning of her own favorite dress in an attempt “**just to keep it going, keep it alive**” reminds us of the garment’s lifecycle and women’s responsibilities and roles in caring for that life—and how it can enhance her own. Designing and producing a garment that meets a woman’s view of quality, wears and washes well over the years, and becomes a part of a woman’s life is ultimately a sustainable practice: garment lifecycles are maximized and women’s well-being is supported.

²² Grant David McCracken, *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 43.

²³ Philomena Keet, “Making New Vintage Jeans in Japan: Relocating Authenticity,” *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* 9, no. 1 (March 1, 2011): 44–61; Alexandra Palmer and Hazel Clark, *Old Clothes, New Looks: Second Hand Fashion* (Oxford: Berg, 2005); Daniel Miller, “Buying Time,” in *Time, Consumption and Everyday Life*, ed. Elizabeth Shove, Frank Trentmann, and Richard Wilk (Oxford: Berg, 2009), 157–169; McCracken, *Culture and Consumption*.

²⁴ Parkins and Craig, *Slow Living*, 3.

Considering Style

High quality garments were those with the right style. While quality evaluations were rooted in a garment's physical dimensions, they were framed through women's tastes, social expectations, anticipated and actual use, and lifestyle concerns. Participants' ongoing evaluations and negotiations demonstrate that designed objects were used and treated differently depending on not only how they changed physically, but also how individual or broader social contexts changed (e.g. a garment was no longer liked or fell out of fashion). Thus, quality was inseparable from its socially-situated use—as an aesthetic object, as a social uniform, and as one of many material practices in one's life. Hobson has argued that consumers feel frustrated and disrespected when sustainability initiatives fail to consider their subjective experiences of these complex constellations of symbolic meanings.²⁵

Participants evaluated aesthetics and appropriate use through a number of criteria filtered through individual tastes, contextualized within social norms and perceptions of the fashion industry, and applied to the perceived existing options. Gretchen's interpretation of color availability in an outlet store demonstrated these intersecting frames.

Gretchen: I go to the outlet store, and the *colors* of clothing are—things that they have there are a little bit weird colors. They have a better selection in the catalog, and if I cared enough I would look in the catalog. But I do like to try the clothes on.

Although the physical quality of goods from both sources were the same, Gretchen consciously identified a difference in aesthetic quality based not only her personal preferences, but also how she understood the outlet marketing system to work. Eunice applied similar logic to seemingly unpopular colors donated to secondhand stores. Even though most participants did not consciously

²⁵ Hobson, "Competing Discourses of Sustainable Consumption."

or explicitly follow fashion trends, they were conscious of this phenomenon as they dressed for various situations. That said, they were also willing to break these seasonal color trends for personal tastes.

Color changes also affected a garment's ability to meet socially and personally acceptable quality standards. For instance, Melanie explained why she needed to replace a pair of faded jeans: The higher aesthetic quality of the new darker color pair made them work-appropriate. Melanie emphasized style, not construction or materials. Despite the color loss, Melanie purchased her new pair from the same discount retailer. They were the right look, right fit, and right price—and a good-enough physical quality. In contrast, other research has documented practices in which the marker of quality of jeans was that they were intentionally broken in, which individualized rather than professionalized the look.²⁶ These contrasting examples illuminate how divergent aesthetic and symbolic meanings of style complicate even a single garment's potential for sustainable use.

Color aesthetics is an important issue for sustainability because it ties directly to fashion cycles and seasonal color palettes, which are increasingly speeding up. Alternatively, a more flexible, longer-term model of colorways or mass customization could expand color possibilities: colors could remain available for purchase over several years. These strategies would directly oppose marketing and sales strategies of planned obsolescence, which several women in my study directly criticized. Approaching the intersection of industry and individual behaviors from a different perspective, we can interrogate whether broader, underlying emphasis on individual expression and identity management in consumer culture unnecessarily increases resource demands, clothing purchases, and the speed through which clothing circulates in one's

²⁶ Peter S. Beagle and Baron Wolman, *American Denim: A New Folk Art* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1975); Sophie Woodward, *Why Women Wear What They Wear* (Oxford: Berg, 2007).

wardrobes.²⁷ By posing these questions, I am not suggesting that everyone needs to wear the same uniform. Instead, I use these reflections to demonstrate that sustainable clothing discourses need to consider broader cultural meanings, social practices, and industry policies that reflexively shape individual practices in different populations and situations.²⁸

One criterion for assessing stylistic or aesthetic quality was longevity, that is, how long would a style be wearable, along both aesthetic and physical axes. These long-lasting garments functioned as “**core pieces**,” “**classics**,” or “**staples**.” Moreover, there were different kinds of classics and staples: outerwear classics and staples (e.g. blazers or dress slacks) tended to be high physical and aesthetic quality, while layering pieces (e.g. white t-shirts) were lower quality and disposable. Both uniquely styled or interestingly embellished items and more generic or “classic” pieces were aesthetically desirable, often within an individual woman’s wardrobe; not one design approach was regularly more “sustainable” in a woman’s wardrobe.²⁹ Although seemingly contradictory, both categories had in common the women’s belief that they could wear them over

²⁷ Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2007); Kate Soper, “Dress Needs: Reflections on the Clothed Body, Selfhood, and Consumption,” in *Body Dressing*, ed. Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson (New York: Berg, 2001), 13–32; Alison Clarke and Daniel Miller, “Fashion and Anxiety,” *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 6, no. 2 (2002): 191–214; Anthony Elliott and Charles C. Lemert, *The New Individualism: The Emotional Costs of Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

²⁸ Elizabeth Shove, “Beyond the ABC: Climate Change Policy and Theories of Social Change,” *Environment and Planning A* 42, no. 6 (2010): 1273–1285; Kersty Hobson, “Environmental Politics, Green Governmentality and the Possibility of a ‘Creative Grammar’ for Domestic Sustainable Consumption,” in *Material Geographies of Household Sustainability*, ed. Ruth Lane and Andrew Gorman Murray (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2011), 193–210; Tania Lewis and Emily Potter, “Introducing Ethical Consumption,” in *Ethical Consumption: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Tania Lewis and Emily Potter (New York: Routledge, 2011), 3–23; Tim Jackson, “Readings in Sustainable Consumption,” in *The Earthscan Reader in Sustainable Consumption*, ed. Tim Jackson (London: Earthscan, 2006), 1–23.

²⁹ Scholars have described two different approaches to style preferences of clothing from ATOs, but I found that women often had both these kinds of styles in their wardrobe, so that these style distinctions were not as clear for individual preferences. Instead, style preferences emerged for different garment categories (e.g. plain slacks versus fun sweaters) or for intended use (e.g. business casual versus evening out). Marsha A. Dickson and Mary A. Littrell, “Consumers of Ethnic Apparel from Alternative Trading Organizations: A Multifaceted Marketed,” *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 16, no. 1 (1998): 1–10; Mary A. Littrell, Jennifer L. Paff Ogle, and Soyoung Kim, “Marketing Ethnic Apparel: Single or Multiple Consumer Segments?,” *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* 3, no. 1 (1999): 31–43.

multiple seasons—either because they were special, unique, and personally expressive, or were average, nondescript, and could blend in (with their existing wardrobe, with new styles, and with other people’s styles).

Participants linked an informal/formal style spectrum to the quality spectrum. For example, Camilla, Jessica, and Zoey described how they were deliberately adjusting their wardrobes away from loose-fitting t-shirts and jeans worn during their high school or undergraduate years (perceived as lower aesthetic and physical quality) and selecting instead more tailored apparel, fitted shirts, slacks, or skirts (perceived as higher quality). Through modifying their apparel’s formality and quality, they strategically asserted a professional, responsible, and mature status.

Camilla: **Standard undergrad gear. Jeans and t-shirts, whatever was comfortable and easy, not terribly expensive... Now that I’m a grad student, I’m back to only buying a couple nice pieces here and there, but I try to not buy [pauses] not nice things, you know, sloppy t-shirts, and stuff like that, because it’s just not gonna serve me well... If you’re wearing something that just makes you look like a bum, that’s not gonna help you advance.**

By selecting higher quality clothes, a woman showed that she valued herself, her peers, and her relationships in various social contexts. Through the quality of their clothing, the women controlled their behavior and other’s perception of them in relationships and interactions.³⁰

Women described various ways of maintaining, managing, and responding to changes in aesthetically-interpreted quality. In many ways, these paralleled and overlapped with strategies used with respect to physical quality. Items requiring special care to maintain their fabric properties or structure also fell higher in the aesthetic or style category. These included formal wear, evening clothes, or professional attire; these apparel categories tended to have more

³⁰ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959); Kim K. P. Johnson and Sharron J Lennon, eds., *Appearance and Power* (Oxford: Berg, 1999); Rubinstein, *Dress Codes*.

materials or construction sensitive to laundering. Gretchen and Camilla showed me how they were more lax with items they categorized at the lower end of the formality and style spectrum, quick stitch-ups of holes in t-shirts. Moreover, Eunice avoided more major mending projects because she believed it would lower the aesthetic quality, even while reinforcing the physical condition. Thus, reframing aesthetic norms, expanding awareness of invisible or creative mending possibilities, providing educational or service opportunities, or even pricing new garments versus garment services differently all become potentially strategies for sustainable consumption that incorporate intersecting individual, social, and industry practices.

Clothing moved up, down, and across matrices of use. These cases counter stereotypes of disposable clothing. Participants' strategic responses to style changes illustrate that clothes could last for years to decades with minimal care and that women did not need all of their clothes to always be in the best, most stylish condition.

Louise: I used to wear [three printed knit turtlenecks] to work in the nineties, but I still have 'em and I still wear 'em and they still fit, and they're comfortable. Terribly ugly now... I wouldn't wear 'em to work, now.

What started as high quality, professional, moderately stylish knit work apparel twenty-years ago were now casual shirts to wear at home. Even though the cotton-polyester fabric showed slight fading and pilling, it was stain free, sturdy, and holding up well.

Wendy's vintage wardrobe was the strongest example of seeking out long-lasting, highly aesthetically appealing clothes on the secondhand market (other women practiced it more moderately or selectively). Rather than thinking forward from current designs in an effort to designate the high aesthetic quality garments as staples and classics, Wendy looked backward to styles that have been sustained through the years, even if just in a niche market. For women who wore a fair number of secondhand clothes (Wendy, Lizzie, and Felicity), these items, though often

originally from mass-market or chain retailers, were celebrated as authentic and unique. They facilitated the performance of a playful identity.³¹ These dynamics demonstrate the importance of (1) the social and material environments in which practice is situated, (2) the creative agency of individuals within these systems, (3) the fluid interplay between the two so that neither are locked-in, and (4) the garments' materiality and life story as key dimensions in practices.

Given that participants viewed the styles that fit their tastes and social needs as a quality variable, how are we to make sense of advice to buy quality garments or “to not buy crap”? Certainly, asking women to purchase unappealing clothes are unlikely to be successful. But will desired or appropriate styles be sustainably produced or sustainably maintained? The answers to these questions depend on establishing or changing broader systems of practice—from the industry's production of physically and stylistically durable goods, to society's continued acceptance of longer-lasting, often-labeled classic styles, and to individual's willingness to invest in these garments at the point-of-purchase or during care. Underlining these practices is a larger attitude toward clothing as a visible sign of status and identity. Also, business models built around small profit margins on large quantities of goods may also need to shift if fewer, higher quality units are sold. By unpacking some of the aesthetic and symbolic elements of clothing, my study reveals the complexities in consumers' practices in which they negotiated with these abstract concepts and material artifacts, and which sustainable design must grapple in moving forward.

³¹ Palmer and Clark, *Old Clothes, New Looks: Second Hand Fashion*; Jill Skinner Charbonneau, “Social Responsibility and Women's Acquisition of Secondhand Clothing” (Colorado State University, 2008); Louise Crewe and Nicky Gregson, *Second-hand Cultures* (Oxford: Berg, 2003); Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*.

Interpreting through External Factors

Participants regularly referred to information external to the object—from purchase experience to production information, reference groups, popular media, and garment comparisons. Such information helped women evaluate a particular garment’s quality and also shaped general attitudes, although associations were not always grounded in fact or borne out in practice. Purchase information outside of the garment properties itself shaped both abstract ideas about quality and particular relationships with specific garments. By considering participants’ application of this information, we expand our understanding of women’s engagement with sustainable or unsustainable products and practices. Therefore, we need to be aware of these social and material meso, exo, and macro systems when advocating sustainable apparel initiatives.

Women held pre-existing ideas about quality based on production location, but did not regularly make decisions based on those ideas. They tended to assume that clothing produced in certain countries—most notably China, but also other Asian countries—were lower quality.³² When women examined their clothes with me, it was apparent that quality differences were not due to country of production, but rather the physical and aesthetic criteria reviewed above. Moreover, it was as if they were looking at the tag for the first time and we were discovering the origin of the garment together.

Camilla: I guess I try and buy clothes that I know are made in America as much as I can, but sometimes you can never really tell. Like I’m sure my jeans are made in Pakistan... I think a lot of the stuff at the stores that I like are mostly made in America, at least from a lot of the tags that I’ve seen. But, I don’t always look at a tag first to see where it’s made.

³² Kitty G. Dickerson, “Relative Importance of Country of Origin as an Attribute in Apparel Choices,” *Journal of Consumer Studies & Home Economics* 11, no. 4 (1987): 333–343; Janet L. Khachaturian and Michelle A. Morganosky, “Quality Perceptions by Country of Origin,” *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management* 18, no. 5 (October 1990): 21.

Similarly, Melanie seemed genuinely surprised when we looked at the tags of several garments she had worn recently and discovered two were labeled as made in the U.S.

Women assessed garment quality through production method, with “authentic,” handmade items garnering more respect, though not always resulting in acquisition. This raises the question of what do we recognize as handmade.³³ Production details of clothes tend to be invisible. Much more tangible are women’s direct experiences in buying, making, and wearing clothing. How might we make the production, its impacts on the planet and human lives, more visible to end users—without fetishizing products or the people behind them? Much handwork still goes into clothing production. While not individually cutting pattern pieces or hand-stitching garments together, the often-female garment workers still deftly feed cloth under the sewing foot under the correct tension, at the right speed, at the correct marks and distance, and with smooth curves.

Tara’s own textile skills reinforced her deep respect for expertise and labor in apparel production.

Tara: Yes, machinery and tools make it easier and faster to fit clothes— but it’s still very, very hand-labor intensive.

Despite her sensitivity and knowledge, Tara generally purchased mass-manufactured apparel and supplemented her wardrobe with a few hand-made sweaters. In contrast, Rosa described her decision to make all of her own clothes, part of a wider self-sufficient lifestyle and identity, not out of concern for garment workers, and not merely by appealing to not only physical and aesthetic quality, but also in care for her family.³⁴

³³ Elaine Freedgood, “Fine Fingers: Victorian Handmade Lace and Utopian Consumption,” *Victorian Studies* 45, no. 4 (Summer 2003): 625–646; Victoria L. Rovine, “Handmade Textiles: Global Markets and Authenticity,” in *Dress Sense: Emotional and Sensory Experiences of the Body and Clothes*, ed. Donald Clay Johnson and Helen Bradley Foster (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 133–143.

³⁴ Joyce Starr Johnson and Laurel E. Wilson, “‘It Says You Really Care’: Motivational Factors of Contemporary Female Handcrafters,” *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 23, no. 2 (2005): 115–130; Barbara Burman, ed., *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking* (Oxford: Berg, 1999).

Brands were an integral part of some women's garment narratives; the brand functioned as shorthand for physical and stylistic quality.³⁵ For example, Eunice identified garments and their quality by the brand rather than visual or physical descriptions. Rachel and Gretchen, on opposite ends of the style and sustainability interest spectra, built their wardrobes around the same brand. Based on years of experience, they had both grown to trust and rely on that brand to deliver predictable quality, fit, and style. Felicity described how her experiences with garments from big-box stores challenged stereotypes of disposability; she owned garments from there that did last.³⁶ In the secondhand market, a used garment's brand helped women evaluate the quality of the garment. For example, several women described how seeing a shirt in a thrift store from a brand or department store that she perceived as good quality bolstered her purchase confidence.

Sandra: Department stores you know, most of them, aren't going to have really inferior products. You know, and if something is coming from Liz Claiborne or something like that, they usually have, you know, pretty good, uh, it, pretty good quality, but it's, and then maybe, I mean I'm not an expert on any of this.

Despite her interest in clothing and diverse shopping experience, Sandra rejected denied expertise. Instead, she used brand and store associations to support her assessments as she navigated secondhand markets. Associating quality with brands eased anxieties and increased confidence in their decisions. Participants created individual, emotionally-underscored relationships with the brands based on the quality they perceived and which the company marketed.³⁷

³⁵ Leslie L. Davis, "Effects of Physical Quality and Brand Labeling on Perceptions of Clothing Quality," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 61, no. 2 (October 1985): 671–677. In all but a few cases where participants (Lizzie, Niki, Gretchen, and Wendy) mentioned particularly environmentally-branded companies, brands were almost divorced from any sustainability perceptions or behaviors.

³⁶ Nicky Gregson, Alan Metcalfe, and Louise Crewe, "Identity, Mobility, and the Throwaway Society," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25, no. 4 (2007): 682–700.

³⁷ H. J. Schau, A. M. Muniz Jr., and E. J. Arnould, "How Brand Community Practices Create Value," *Journal of Marketing* 73, no. 5 (2009): 30–51; Isabelle Szmigin, Marylyn Carrigan, and Deirdre O'Loughlin, "Integrating Ethical

Women's narratives established rankings of secondhand sources based on what type and quality of clothing available. For instance, participants selling something that had initially cost more were more willing to go to additional efforts to sell in a venue they thought would sell at a higher price point. Similarly, as buyers, women looked to these venues for places where they would expect higher-end items. Consignment shops and online marketplaces then tended to have higher quality items for sale than were available at garage sales or free on the curb.³⁸ Participants' tendencies to favor specific secondhand stores, believing that one store tended to have better stock than others, illustrated how personal and social associations around the labor and physical site of secondhand consumption affected perceptions of goods available.³⁹ Given regular appeals in the sustainability literature to purchase used apparel, continuing to unpack these ideas could shape future marketing.

Jessica, Tina, Sandra, and Lizzie described positive experiences with exchanges between friends and family. Tina described how satisfied she had been with scoring pants from a higher-end clothing retailer and comfortable shoes at a clothing swap party. She regularly wore both several years later. Directly exchanging with someone a woman closely or casually knew evoked an element of trust or respect for that person's taste. Knowing that the person dresses well or takes care of her clothes increased a woman's confidence in the clothing she was receiving.⁴⁰ Non-retail exchanges offered an alternative secondhand system in which relationships mattered

Brands into Our Consumption Lives," *Journal of Brand Management* 14, no. 5 (May 2007): 396–409; Clarke and Miller, "Fashion and Anxiety."

³⁸ When women sourced high quality items free or extremely inexpensively, it was a rare but special exception that kept them on the lookout. Fleura Bardhi and Eric J. Arnould, "Thrift Shopping: Combining Utilitarian Thrift and Hedonic Treat Benefits," *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 4, no. 4 (2005): 223–233; Charbonneau, "Social Responsibility and Women's Acquisition of Secondhand Clothing."

³⁹ Crewe and Gregson, *Second-hand Cultures*; Nicky Gregson and Vikki Beale, "Wardrobe Matter: The Sorting, Displacement and Circulation of Women's Clothing," *Geoforum* 35, no. 6 (November 2004): 689–700.

⁴⁰ Women's preference for directly giving or receiving from friends and was especially important in exchanging and donating non-clothing items, which were less limited by size and taste matters.

more than price or brand, while simultaneously providing pleasurable, social experiences.⁴¹

Women's narratives grouped various factors: production location, manufacturing method, purchase place, and original cost. This constellation of variables as perpetuated a downward spiral of quality. For example, Melanie implicitly suggested that changes away from U.S. manufacturing locations have led to decreased quality despite increases in prices for otherwise trusted brands.

Melanie: It was all American-made. And they had a *quality* product. They had a *name*... That may not be true today. Because General Electric is having a lot of things made, outsourced in other countries... And I think that's true of a lot of brands. The brands that we've come to know, especially, my generation and before me, we'd grown up with, and come to know as they're high quality or the best. It's no longer true. They become junk.

This is compounded by the fact that garments are often assembled from components sourced from multiple countries. Ha-Brookshire found that if country-of-parts, -origin, and -manufacture were labeled separately, U.S. consumers are likely to rank production with some U.S. connection as higher quality, but would be less likely to purchase if associated with a higher price.⁴² The energy and concern in Melanie's voice made palpable how this issue resonated for her. Although Melanie did not explicitly mention clothing in this example, she brought in multiple categories to strengthen her point that this is a pervasive problem.

Information about the object mostly affected purchase decisions (if at all) or generalized assessments of apparel quality; these factors were not as relevant for laundering or maintenance behaviors. However, this external information did sometimes come into play in decisions about whether to keep or how to dispose of clothes not frequently worn. My findings confirm previous

⁴¹ Gregson and Beale, "Wardrobe Matter"; Peter Corrigan, "Gender and the Gift: The Case of the Family Clothing Economy," *Sociology* 23, no. 4 (November 1989): 513–534; Woodward, *Why Women Wear What They Wear*; John L. Lastovicka and Karen V. Fernandez, "Three Paths to Disposition: The Movement of Meaningful Possessions to Strangers," *Journal of Consumer Research* 31, no. 4 (March 1, 2005): 813–823.

⁴² Jung E. Ha-Brookshire, "Country of Parts, Country of Manufacturing, and Country of Origin: Consumer Purchase Preferences and the Impact of Perceived Prices," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 30, no. 1 (January 2012): 19–34.

studies that suggest women considered the original price of the garment when keeping or disposing of it.⁴³ Discarding a higher-priced garment would be a waste of their money. However, keeping it resulted in the waste of materials as they lay unused.

One possible way to address the multidimensional narratives around quality is to tackle issues simultaneously—encourage women to value their clothes by designing clothes that accommodate their embodied needs (and ideally synergistically satisfy other human needs as well). For example, because women judging quality based on fit ties into their frustrations with fit, we can start to address clothing challenges by investing in systems of clothing production and consumption that result in clothes that meet women’s embodied needs. What could a system that focuses on clothes that feel good—either providing sensory experiences or fitting the body well—look like or bring to the table? Might a local, service-oriented, skills-based, co-production system be able to meet women’s needs and operate sustainably? Sustainable clothing initiatives can pursue these systems-levels initiatives to attend to these micro experiences.

Accounting for Values

Although I framed sustainability as a multi-dimensional system, my research interests and questions prioritized environmental and social dimensions. My interviews indicated, however, how much money mattered. Perceptions of and attitudes toward money, time, and convenience wove in and out of their stories and affected their practices. Participants sought to get the best value in the available marketplace. They wanted the highest return (determined through meeting

⁴³ Maura Banim and Alison Guy, “Dis/continued Selves: Why Do Women Keep Clothes They No Longer Wear?,” in *Through the Wardrobe: Women’s Relationships with Their Clothes*, ed. Eileen Green, Alison Guy, and Maura Banim (Oxford ; New York: Berg, 2001), 203–219; Elizabeth Bye and Ellen McKinney, “Sizing up the Wardrobe—Why We Keep Clothes That Do Not Fit,” *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 11, no. 4 (December 1, 2007): 483–498.

tastes, needs, norms, and quality levels) for the least investment of resources. At the same time, I also heard stories of spending or incorporating time, money, skills, or pro-sustainability values into clothing choices. Throughout their various experiences, frustrations with the apparel industry or larger social problems lurked near the surface. Although participants engaged with these issues primarily on individual levels, it became clear that individual choices fit within larger economic, social, or environmental frameworks.

Value is burdened by many definitions and uses. Scholars from a variety of fields struggle to articulate these differences.⁴⁴ For example, design scholar Boradkar outlines a taxonomy of value: financial/economic, aesthetic, functional/utilitarian, brand, emotional, historical, environmental, social, cultural, political, and symbolic.⁴⁵ Combined, a “web of significance” emerges around our relationships with material culture and each other.⁴⁶ Additionally, neoliberal ideologies and policies in U.S. culture perpetuate the conflation between economic value and other forms of values, and in particular the monetization of culture.⁴⁷ I use the term deliberately to draw attention to how these uses are blurred, obscured, or hidden in participants’ everyday practice.

Accounting for how participants make sense of these values is important for unpacking when and why they actualized different goals, given social and material contexts in which they were situated. Up to this point, I have referenced many values outlined by Boradkar, as well as

⁴⁴ David Graeber, *Toward An Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Cynthia Ann Werner and Duran Bell, eds., *Values and Valuables: From the Sacred to the Symbolic* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2004); Daniel Miller, “The Uses of Value,” *Geoforum* 39, no. 3 (May 2008): 1122–1132. I primarily speak of values around material culture and not abstract human values as identified by Shalom H. Schwartz and Wolfgang Bilsky, “Toward a Universal Psychological Structure of Human Values,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 53, no. 3 (1987): 550–562.

⁴⁵ Prasad Boradkar, *Designing Things: A Critical Introduction to the Culture of Objects* (Oxford: Berg, 2010).

⁴⁶ Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*, ed. Robert M. Emerson, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2008), 55–75.

⁴⁷ Miller, “The Uses of Value”; Lendol Calder, “Saving and Spending,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, ed. Frank Trentmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 348–375; Noam Chomsky, *Profit over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999).

pro-sustainability values. In this section, I bring into the conversation participants' reflections on economic value. I also point to neoliberal values as a part of macro cultural context and its mutual coproduction of exo and meso settings. Rarely explicitly endorsed by participants (with the exception of Rachel, Melanie, and Jessica in their views on the free market and labor practices), neoliberal values nevertheless underscored practices. Neoliberalism is also a term used in many disciplines, most notably political economy, and has its own historical, cultural context shaped by industrialization and globalization. By using this term, I refer to beliefs, values, or structures that support the following phenomena: (1) utilitarian, maximizing, rationalizing, self-interested, self-disciplined, and autonomous individuals and (2) individualized, privatized, de-politicized, commoditized, monetized, and market-centric choice, responsibility, and systems.⁴⁸ Bound up with these systems are norms about how we value time and money in relation to labor and care of the producer and consumer. Nevertheless, there are also ruptures in these patterns: moments and routines of resistance to the markets, investments in clothes. Examining these alongside efforts to get a deal or avoid inconvenience points to a foundation of existing practices, values, and relationships with clothes on which to build sustainable clothing systems.

Two particular theoretical approaches introduced in the preceding literature review inform my interpretation of my sample case studies: Zepeda and Deal's alphabet theory and Shove et al.'s social practice theory (see table 7.2). Alphabet Theory helps us consider how specific variables might be key factors in individual women's choices. Social practice theory helps us unpack habits

⁴⁸ Chomsky, *Profit over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order*; Wendy Lerner, "Neo-liberalism: Policy, Ideology, Governmentality," *Studies in Political Economy* 63 (Autumn 2000): 5–25; Julie Guthman, "Thinking Inside the Neoliberal Box: The Micro-politics of Agro-food Philanthropy," *Geoforum* 39, no. 3 (May 2008): 1241–1253; Michael Gard, "Neoliberalism, the 'Obesity Epidemic' and the Challenge to Theory," in *Ethical Consumption: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Tania Lewis and Emily Potter (New York: Routledge, 2011), 71–84; Manno, "Commoditization"; William M. Sullivan, "The Politics of Meaning as a Challenge to Neocapitalism," *Tikkun*, May 1996; Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

that shape choices, analyze the “connective tissue that holds them together,” and look beyond individual choices to systemic structures that reproduce practices.⁴⁹ Together, they remind us that changes in practice can begin through changing goals, actual conditions or elements, perceptions of conditions or elements, as well as how or what supports or challenges the connections between elements.

Table 7.2. Elements of practice and contextual factors

Internal Factors	External factors	Elements of practice
Values and beliefs	Availability of products	Materials (e.g. body, things, infrastructure, technologies)
Attitudes	Cost of products	Competences (e.g. abstract or practical knowledge, skills)
Knowledge	(e.g. price, convenience)	Meanings (e.g. symbolic, ideas beliefs, attitudes, emotions)
Information seeking	Availability of information	Links between elements
Habits		
Available resources (e.g. time, money, skills)		

Source: Data adapted from Lydia Zepeda and David Deal, “Organic and Local Food Consumer Behavior: Alphabet Theory,” *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 33, no. 6 (November 2009): 697–705; Elizabeth Shove, Mika Pantzar, and Matt Watson, *The Dynamics of Social Practice: Everyday Life and How It Changes* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012)

Getting a Deal and Preferring Convenience

As indicated, throughout their clothing stories participants emphasized money and time through their goals of getting a deal or preferring convenience. The pressure to use time and money efficiently stressed immediate financial, monetization of time and values, and commoditization of services.⁵⁰ Reisch reviews the challenges that emerge when time and money are conflated:

It means that the faster something moves through the system the better it is. Efficiency and profitability are tied to speed. It also means that any unused time is seen as money wasted, hence the development of the *non-stop society* and a raft of time compression strategies in the corporate world of work to reduce production time, e.g. “just-in-time production.”

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Shove, Mika Pantzar, and Matt Watson, *The Dynamics of Social Practice: Everyday Life and How It Changes* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 2.

⁵⁰ Michael Maniates, “Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World?,” in *Confronting Consumption*, ed. Thomas Princen, Michael Maniates, and Ken Conca (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 43–66; Miller, “The Uses of Value.”

Here, social costs are ultimately externalized to workers and their families... Highly accelerated and intensified consumption patterns are passed on to the natural environment.⁵¹

Although these attitudes and behaviors around time and money have steep consequences for social and environmental well-being, they also present opportunities of empowerment and control for women consumers. Despite the constraint of the system, individuals make meaning. Unraveling these nuances will help us understand better, then, how to encourage ideas of a “new wealth of time” to help achieve “guiding principles of modernity—personal liberty, individualism, authenticity, self-fulfillment, happiness.”⁵²

Overall, although women wanted clothes that fit well, felt good, and were priced right, they seemed to behave so that the highest priority to minimize the money and time spent, followed by meeting clothing needs and wants, and trailed by aligning with pro-sustainability values. Women’s *perceptions* of the elements of practice and various contextual variables—such as the apparel industry, access to skills and knowledge about clothing, and their available time and money—manifested in behaviors and habits that prioritized unsatisfactory, less expensive product purchases over potentially more satisfactory, more time intensive maintenance services (see table 7.3). The practices were not exclusive to any of the sample groups. Stories of triumph, skill, and/or luck circulated through many shopping narratives. Women across all sample categories described feeling satisfied, accomplished, or successful when they got a financial bargain on a garment, including paying as little as possible for it, or paying substantially less for a garment that would

⁵¹ Lucia A. Reisch, “Time and Wealth: The Role of Time and Temporalities for Sustainable Patterns of Consumption,” *Time & Society* 10, no. 2–3 (September 1, 2001): 370–371; Oriel Sullivan, “Busyness, Status Distinction and Consumption Strategies of the Income Rich, Time Poor,” *Time & Society* 17, no. 1 (March 1, 2008): 5–26; Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work* (New York: H. Holt, 2001); John De Graaf, ed., *Take Back Your Time: Fighting Overwork and Time Poverty in America* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2003).

⁵² Reisch, “Time and Wealth,” 380; Juliet B. Schor, *True Wealth: How and Why Millions of Americans Are Creating a Time-Rich, Ecologically Light, Small-Scale, High-Satisfaction Economy* (New York: Penguin, 2011).

otherwise cost much more. To illustrate, Rachel framed her garment stories through the deals she scored, but the bargains were relative to the garment's physical and stylistic quality.⁵³ At a fast fashion retail store, she paid four dollars for a trendy sweater that might normally sell for twenty. But at a consignment shop, she paid forty dollars for a classic, formal sweater that might normally sell there for two hundred dollars. Money as a constraint was not the primary factor. Maximizing "value" while minimizing money spent was the measure for success. Moreover, she used her time thrift shopping as a leisure activity with her family, thus doubling the efficiency.

Despite potential bargains in the secondhand market, participants across the sustainability spectrum (Eunice, Niki, Melanie, Louise, and Zoey) perceived it as inconvenient, not worth the time or work to get the right clothes—due to physical quality, stylistic quality, available sizes, etc. In these cases, participants valued time, effort, and the right clothes more than saving money. Moreover, these narratives captured participants' critical reflexive engagement with not only the marketplace but also their own skill in navigating that marketplace, as it relates specifically to the body.⁵⁴

⁵³ Bardhi and Arnould, "Thrift Shopping"; Charbonneau, "Social Responsibility and Women's Acquisition of Secondhand Clothing."

⁵⁴ Nick Crossley, "The Networked Body and the Question of Reflexivity," in *Body/Embodiment: Symbolic Interaction and the Sociology of the Body*, ed. Dennis D. Waskul and Phillip Vannini (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 21–33.

Table 7.3. Clothing consumption practices around getting a deal and preferring convenience

Acquisition	Use/Wear	Maintenance	Disposal
Buying new instead of maintaining condition	Not wearing multiple times before washing	Not servicing for condition upkeep	Donating unwanted clothes seen as wearable
Buying multiple garments to get right fit or style instead of altering	Being concerned about repeat wearings Perceiving “uniforms” as negative	Integrating individual laundry with family laundry Machine drying clothes instead of on line or flat	Throwing away unwanted clothes that seem unwearable, usually due hole or tear rather than overall threadbare
Buying new products instead of making from new or repurposed materials	Not altering for fit Not altering or modifying for right style	Not seeking out mending services	Allocating donations to particular people depending on appropriateness— doing this less for clothing
Buying new instead of renting, leasing, or borrowing clothes	Extending lifecycle through repurposing instead of also through maintenance	Not knowing skills for mending clothes	Not investigating second cycle of donated products
Buying low quality that anticipate not lasting for years	Not seeking out alteration services	Not having confidence in skills for mending clothes	Not seeking out recycling or repurposing options for clothing seen as unwearable
Following fashion and lifestyle media	Not knowing skills for altering clothes	Not enjoying skills for mending clothes (and accompanying attitude that this should be enjoyable)	
Reacting to sustainability stories (not seeking them out)	Not having confidence in skills for altering clothes	Putting off maintenance because too time consuming or not enjoyable	Not knowing about second cycles of products’ global circulation
Not looking at clothing labels or hangtags	Not enjoying skills for altering clothes (and accompanying attitude that this should be enjoyable)	Bemoaning loss of skills in younger populations	Not knowing about textile recycling options
Not knowing about rental, leasing, borrowing options		Critiquing own laundry skills	

Overall, women wanted the quickest, most convenient way to keep their clothes clean that would also maintain their condition. They were not happy to have to care specially for low quality apparel. It was bothersome and a sign of frustration with available products. Moreover, having to specially care for high quality items was not ideal either—hand washing or dry cleaning often

required additional time or money—but there was a sense that women thought it was probably worth the investment because the garment (or intended use) was special or deserving in some way. What women desired and appreciated the most was ease of care—the ability to wash, dry, and wear without ironing. Consideration of the ways women qualitatively experience and respond to the laundering needs of their clothes, offers points of intervention in promoting sustainable consumption across clothing lifecycles.

Getting a deal or spending less money was evaluated on an individualized, short-term scale—easy, quick gratifications. In turn, these attitudes and practices obstructed considerations for longer-term resource impacts and extended garment-person relationships. This compression of time in relation to biological or ecological time alludes to “a clash of different time scales” that exacerbates environmental exploitation.⁵⁵ For example, buying new socks or underwear when a hole appears might be more convenient, less time-consuming, and less demanding of individual resources up front than darning. In the long term, the high-commoditized act of replacing rather than the low-commoditized act of repairing costs more money, materials, and energy.⁵⁶ However, these resources are often distant and abstracted from individual experiences.⁵⁷ Feedback loops of impacts are lacking or invisible.⁵⁸

Comparing clothing behaviors to other lifestyle practices further demonstrated how important context was in influencing behaviors. Even though some women strongly held

⁵⁵ Reisch, “Time and Wealth”; N. R. G. Stanger, “Moving ‘Eco’ Back into Socio-ecological Models: A Proposal to Reorient Ecological Literacy into Human Developmental Models and School Systems,” *Human Ecology Review* 18, no. 2 (2011): 167–173.

⁵⁶ Manno, “Commoditization.”

⁵⁷ Thomas Princen, “Distancing: Consumption and the Severing of Feedback,” in *Confronting Consumption*, ed. Thomas Princen, Michael Maniates, and Ken Conca (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 103–132.

⁵⁸ Donella Meadows, *Thinking in Systems: A Primer* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2008); Christie M. Manning, *The Psychology of Sustainable Behavior: Tips for Empowering People to Take Environmentally Positive Action* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, September 2009).

pro-sustainability attitudes, negative or neutral context factors impeded the activation of these values in clothing behaviors. Simultaneously, positive contextual factors facilitated their participation in other pro-sustainability, non-clothing behaviors. For instance, even though Eunice felt constrained by her budget to buy clothes, she saw her free time as a resource to spend advocating for various other environmental causes. She did not see this free time well spent on scouring secondhand markets for apparel. The availability and perceived affordability of local, organic produce facilitated Helen, Zoey, and Camilla's participation in sustainable food systems, but they did not seek out a parallel local apparel market (although Helen patronized local secondhand retailers). Furthermore, even women who had lower sustainability attitudes engaged in some of these behaviors, such as participating in community supported agriculture shares, because the context, such as easily accessible pick-up sites and insurance-provided rebates, supported it (often by decreasing cost and maximizing convenience).⁵⁹

Using the Alphabet Theory, we can frame this unfolding in terms of the relationship between attitude and context given women's tastes, knowledge, etc. They perceived a multitude of contextual variables as barriers to sustainable behavior: costs, product availability, time availability, store proximity, and lower-socioeconomic associations (in terms of secondhand clothing). Instead of acquiring and maintaining high quality, responsibly produced, recycled or organic, tailored-to-fit apparel, participants generally purchased lower quality, less physically satisfying, or less responsibly produced apparel. Perceptions perpetuated behaviors that favor lower cost, quicker options. Alternatively, in terms of links between elements of practice, ideas

⁵⁹ Gregory A. Guagnano, "Influences on Attitude-Behavior Relationships: A Natural Experiment with Curbside Recycling," *Environment and Behavior* 27 (1995): 699–718; Lydia Zepeda and David Deal, "Organic and Local Food Consumer Behavior: Alphabet Theory," *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 33, no. 6 (November 2009): 697–705.

about time and money contributed to why women tried to save money or time and influenced why they thought those values were worth pursuing and upholding.

In addition, we can look at the attitude-context relationship in these cases as enabling non-sustainable behaviors. In his analysis of the water bottled market, Holt contrasts the “ethical values paradigm” (abstract individually held values that supposedly guide behavior) with “market constructionist paradigm” (ideologies that “channel desires and identities through consumer choices and actions.”).⁶⁰ Contextual variables in the market (e.g. regular sales, discount offers, coupon promotions, and low-priced products in a relatively product-driven, commoditized, and de-personalized marketplace) facilitated pro-neoliberal behaviors, because they emphasized individualized, monetized, maximizing, market-centric behaviors. For instance, participants across the sustainability spectrum explained particular choices through the success of their ability to get a deal or achieve convenience: the sense of achievement that they scored something at a low price, found a good sale, used a coupon, and got free shipping. While at least three women in the low-sustainability category (Rachel, Melanie, and Jessica) explicitly endorsed capitalist-driven values, I was unable to pinpoint for other participants whether these contextual variables were activating individually-held values (that could be simultaneously held alongside pro-sustainability values) or cultural norms (i.e. contextual variables).

Part of the reproduction of these practices could be connected to the symbolic meaning and emotional experiences women described with different encounters with the apparel industry, as well as specific garments. Participants generally felt frustrated as they struggled against their

⁶⁰ Douglas B. Holt, “Constructing Sustainable Consumption: From Ethical Values to the Cultural Transformation of Unsustainable Markets,” in *Communication, Consumers, and Citizens: Revisiting the Politics of Consumption*, ed. Dhavan V. Shah et al., *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* v. 644 (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2012), 240.

perceptions of contextual factors, but getting a bargain on a clothing purchase felt satisfying. In this sense, the negative emotions impede sustaining environmentally sensitive, socially just, or individually satisfying practices. The positively-experienced pleasures of shopping experiences, compliments on shopping skills and taste, and social communities reinforced these behaviors. Additionally, these “smart-shopper feelings” might actually be “distracting consumers from other attributes,” so that deals and bargains might decrease overall consumer satisfaction and needs fulfillment. Consumers may be trading off immediate benefits for distant, long-term benefits.⁶¹ Ultimately, this reaffirms that apparel consumption is not merely a rational, cognitive process, but one shaped by subjective identities and embodied affective responses.⁶² However, positive emotions promoted resource-intensive practices (e.g. buying new garments rather than repairing old) and exploitive labor practices (e.g. endorsing race-to-the-bottom production methods).

Buying a new product from a familiar retailer was the default habit. Servicing or altering garments beyond minor repairs was outside the norm. Participants did not seem to value the garment enough to spend additional time or money on it. Consequently, participants did not actively seek out alternative options—whether that was sustainably produced clothing, custom or alteration services (with the exception of repairing expensive items, such as leather shoes or a down coat), or skill-building opportunities—and convinced themselves these options would be too

⁶¹ Robert M. Schindler, “The Excitement of Getting a Bargain: Some Hypotheses Concerning the Origins and Effects of Smart-Shopper Feelings,” *Advances in Consumer Research* 16, no. 1 (January 1989): 447–453; Richard P. Bagozzi et al., “The Role of Emotions in Goal-directed Behavior,” in *The Why of Consumption: Contemporary Perspectives on Consumer Motives, Goals, and Desires*, ed. S. Ratneshwar, David Glen Mick, and Cynthia Huffman (New York: Routledge, 2000), 36–58; Barry J. Babin, William R. Darden, and Mitch Griffin, “Work And/OR Fun: Measuring Hedonic and Utilitarian Shopping Value,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 20, no. 4 (March 1994): 644–656; Morris B. Holbrook and Elizabeth C. Hirschman, “The Experiential Aspects of Consumption: Consumer Fantasies, Feelings, and Fun,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 9, no. 2 (September 1982): 132–140; Calder, “Saving and Spending.”

⁶² Margaret Wetherell, *Affect and Emotion: A New Social Science Understanding* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2012); Terry Newholm and Deirdre Shaw, “Editorial: Studying the Ethical Consumer: A Review of Research,” *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 6, no. 5 (2007): 253–270.

expensive or too time-intensive to be accessible or worthwhile.

Buying products instead of servicing them has long been documented in conjunction with planned obsolescence. Participants themselves critiqued fashion and other product industries for this design and merchandising approach. While some may see planned obsolescence (through either style or condition) as a strategy to sustain a business's economic livelihood, this is not economically or socially viable for consumers.⁶³ Despite their critiques of planned obsolescence, participants' practices often upheld cycles of dissatisfaction, natural resource depletion, and unchecked labor practices. Breaking this cycle may require breaking any point in the feedback loop or may require a systemic overhaul.

Money, time, and inconvenience as constraints were not entirely the prime factors in reproducing a practice; other significant factors appeared to be individual habits, exo infrastructural support, and macro norms.⁶⁴ Even actions that required spending little time or money investment were not taken. For instance, women seemed to rarely look at labels to see if a garment was made in a country they suspected of permitting sweatshop labor.⁶⁵ Although my analysis does not offer guaranteed solutions, it points to a number of points for intervention for both individual and social change. Alternatively, inverting women's evaluations of consumption, where voluntary simplicity habits are the norm or most desirable, could subsequently shape what choices women make.⁶⁶

Women's perceptions of the way they should spend their time and money perpetuated

⁶³ Schor, *The Overspent American*; John De Graaf, David Wann, and Thomas H. Naylor, *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2005); Robert H. Frank, *Falling Behind: How Rising Inequality Harms the Middle Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Leonard, *Story of Stuff*.

⁶⁴ Elizabeth Shove, *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience: The Social Organization of Normality* (Oxford: Berg, 2003); Holt, "Constructing Sustainable Consumption."

⁶⁵ The exception to this tendency was when participants checked the care label to confirm that their initial laundering was suitable, mostly so that they would not ruin a new shirt before they got their value out of it.

⁶⁶ Manning, *The Psychology of Sustainable Behavior*.

typically less sustainable consumption practices. Competences of acquisition (skills around shopping sales and finding bargains) appeared stronger, more satisfying, and more encouraged by product-oriented apparel industry. While they were not necessarily “**sport shopping**” as older adults, their previous life experiences and generational observations point to the role of age, life position, and peer relations in developing clothing consumption behaviors, particularly those centered around buying clothes. Conversely, competences of maintenance (skills around mending and darning) garnered less individual interest, less social support, and different symbolic meanings (e.g. associations with lower socio-economic classes, “crafty” personalities, or domestic roles). Through years of experiences as teenagers or mothers, women honed their shopping skills. In contrast, textiles skills were something unknown, deferred, unexercised, or performed or rejected as a hobby. Participants’ reluctance to engage in these practices may also have been an effort to resist a domestic identity.⁶⁷

Tina: I don’t really like doing that sort of thing, you know. It’s [pauses] a little more domestic stuff [laughs] than I’m interested in doing.

Despite these dismissals, Louise and Melanie, who both scored lower on sustainability concerns but had very different approaches to clothes, respected and were impressed by other women’s textile skills, but lacked confidence in their ability to engage in creative practices. Women framed their critiques of their own skills not only as an individual flaw, but also as a symptom of harried modern life and loss of traditional domestic skills. While this nostalgia may romanticize otherwise hard labor and endless clothing care tasks, it also points to the disconnect from clothing production and maintenance. Encouraging women to drastically increase or pick up hand-washing, line drying, ironing, darning and mending is not necessarily the best practice for

⁶⁷ Susan S. Lanser, “Burning Dinners: Feminist Subversions of Domesticity,” in *Feminist Messages: Coding in Women’s Folk Culture*, ed. Joan NewlonRadner (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 36–53.

everyone. After all, these third shift tasks of unpaid, unrecognized domestic labor are unsustainable in their current state; they persist in burdening women more than men in today's culture, despite conveniences of machines and permanent-press finishes. Some of these unpaid domestic skills have shifted into expanded shopping behaviors. Instead of maintaining products, we are acquiring products.⁶⁸ Readjusting these household responsibilities to respect women's career or lifestyle choices, while also providing more accessible opportunities to learn or hire out garment servicing, are strategies for addressing the sustainability of clothing consumption as a system that functions as part of women's lives. Even though this is rooted in individuals making different choices for themselves and potentially their families, it is also grounded in social mores and values about gender, work, and leisure. Reimagining a different work-life balance that allows people to have rewarding careers while also providing enough time and/or energy for domestic care (that would ideally occur in equitable households whether that is romantic partnerships, families, or co-operative living arrangements) is one avenue, then, through which we can address the impact of clothing through its lifecycle.⁶⁹

The symbolic association made between secondhand clothing and lower socio-economic classes came to the forefront in some women's (Gretchen, Bernadette, Camilla, Eunice) behaviors. This association was enough to preclude secondhand purchases, despite the lower costs. At the same time, these women did acknowledge that those in need deserved a minimum quality level.

⁶⁸ Tony Chapman, *Gender and Domestic Life: Changing Practices in Families and Households* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Hochschild, *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*; Ann Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974); Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982); Rudi Laermans and Carine Meulders, "The Domestication of Laundering," in *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space*, ed. Irene Cieraad (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 118–129.

⁶⁹ Chapman, *Gender and Domestic Life*; Lanser, "Burning Dinners"; Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981); Schor, *True Wealth*; Shannon Hayes, *Radical Homemakers: Reclaiming Domesticity from a Consumer Culture* (Richmondville, NY: Left to Write Press, 2010).

Therefore, they did not want to donate especially worn clothes, often explaining their rationale, “**If I wouldn’t wear it, nobody would want to wear it.**” Moreover, several women described seeing themselves in the role as a giver, and not as a recipient, of aid. For example, Eunice explained that she did not want to be taking away options from those who might *need* inexpensive, secondhand clothes. Even though Eunice was struggling financially herself, her explanation expressed discomfort with seeing herself as someone who might *have* to purchase secondhand clothes. Gretchen eagerly described her systematic processing of clothing and household goods for giving to those in need, but rejected being a recipient.

Gretchen: It’s uh, snobbery. Socio-economic snobbery. Poor people wear that kind of stuff. I’ll admit it.

Self-reflexively noting her admission, Gretchen contrasted her self-aware biases with attitudes of other women who fail to confront silent, unarticulated class stereotypes. The symbolic meaning of context and the subjective positioning of oneself in that context were pivotal components of decisions not to take advantage of certain bargains.

Women’s discarding behaviors also illustrated the importance of convenience—and the range of positive or negative contextual factors that cultivated the perception of convenience. Almost all women I spoke with mentioned recycling paper, plastic, metal, and glass as an easy, accessible, and normal practice.⁷⁰ However, local municipalities did not collect textiles for recycling, so worn and torn garments ended up in the trash. Although some clothing donation centers process textiles for recycling, women often assumed clothes donated would be sold in the

⁷⁰ Tanya Domina and Kathryn Koch, “Consumer Reuse and Recycling of Post-consumer Textile Waste,” *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* 3, no. 4 (1999): 346–359; Constanza Bianchi and Grete Birtwistle, “Consumer Clothing Disposal Behaviour: A Comparative Study,” *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 36, no. 3 (May 2012): 335–341; H. M. Joung and H. Park-Poaps, “Factors Motivating and Influencing Clothing Disposal Behaviours,” *International Journal of Consumer Studies* (2011); Soyeon Shim, “Environmentalism and Consumers’ Clothing Disposal Patterns: An Exploratory Study,” *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 13, no. 1 (January 1, 1995): 38–48.

store where they were donated, rather than shipped overseas. The lack of favorable conditions for easy textile recycling contributed to women's decisions to throw away. On the other hand, if a garment was deemed suitable for donation, many women described positive contextual and attitude factors. It was easy to donate. Locations were near women's homes or commuting routes; they did not have to go out of their way. Time and convenience mattered, but were not always sufficient to explain a behavior. As explored earlier, concerns with intimacy and hygiene made women hesitant to donate, recycle, or reuse undergarments. Moreover, women not only reported receiving financial benefits through taking advantage of tax credits, but some described reaping emotional benefits through serving others. Financial policies and emotional experiences strengthened donation practices.

In terms of sustainability, we can ask ourselves what are the environmental or social costs that uphold these objectives to save money and maximize convenience? Manno has examined how high-commodity products—favoring higher speed, larger scale, and abstracted or de-personalized relationships—often create environmentally degrading and socially unjust practices.

Low-commodity products—consuming more time, being more service-oriented, and cultivating interpersonal relationships—can promote more environmentally sensitive and socially equitable practices.⁷¹ Manno contrasts “consumption efficiency” with “production efficiency.”

Consumption efficiency measures success through “the level of social welfare and personal satisfaction obtained per unit of energy and materials consumed... The big challenge is how to live well without undermining the natural systems on which we fundamentally depend. The solution lies in getting more with less, not more stuff but more satisfaction, not quantity but quality.”⁷²

⁷¹ Manno, “Commoditization.”

⁷² *Ibid.*, 67.

Contrastingly, production efficiency focuses on production and monetary costs, so that “investments keep spurring production without considering the overall efficiency of how the product is ultimately consumed. In fact, for the producer, the less consumption efficiency the better, the result being ever-increasing consumption and ever-increasing dependency on the producer.”⁷³ Graaf et al. have described a society afflicted with “affluenza,” striving for production rather than consumption efficiency. In a society suffering from this disease, the drive to get more stuff and better deals, perpetuates unhappiness, overwork, overconsumption, materialism, excessive waste, environmental degradation, social inequality, and broken communities.⁷⁴

Alternatively, historians Hunter and Yates propose that positive concepts of thrift could support individual, social, and environmental thriving.⁷⁵ Moreover, some voluntary simplicity practices, such as exercising frugality and self-sufficient homemaking, save money but also might involve more or different ways of spending time.⁷⁶ The history of home economics also presents similar tensions between efficiency, thrift, strategic consumption, and self-sufficiency that could variously be interpreted as supporting sustainable or unsustainable practices.⁷⁷ Calder’s review of histories of saving and spending further unpacks ideas of a producer ethic emphasizing restraint, thrift, work, and scarcity against a consumer ethic of emphasizing release, indulgence, fun, and abundance.⁷⁸ My results reinforce these overlapping contradictions: how constraint and

⁷³ Ibid., 67–68.

⁷⁴ De Graaf, Wann, and Naylor, *Affluenza*; Schor, *True Wealth*; Leonard, *Story of Stuff*.

⁷⁵ James Davison Hunter and Joshua J. Yates, eds., *Thrift and Thriving in America: Capitalism and Moral Order from the Puritans to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁷⁶ Schor, *True Wealth*; Hayes, *Radical Homemakers*.

⁷⁷ Megan Elias, *Stir It Up: Home Economics in American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Carolyn M. Goldstein, *Creating Consumers: Home Economists in Twentieth-century America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

⁷⁸ Calder, “Saving and Spending.”

indulgence were simultaneously expressed through bargains, overall purchasing patterns, and perceived needs; how thrift could be used to justify splurges; and how we work to spend rather than to save.⁷⁹

Paralleling norms of thrift were those of waste. When asked to compare their own choices to other women in America, women in my study assumed they were in the middle, and that many others excessively wasted money and clothes, and just did not care. They consistently associated wastefulness as something that was itself naturally bad, but they had trouble articulating why. By heightening people's mindfulness of a perspective or belief they already hold, especially if we simultaneously work to establish contextual factors that facilitate thrift and care, we could encourage potentially sustainable clothing choices.⁸⁰ Additionally, Louise's comment that her proximity to an area landfill regularly reminds her of waste highlights the importance of making materials and energy waste visible as an effective tool in reducing consumption.⁸¹

Women in my study variously demonstrated these varied attitudes towards thrift and resource use. For example, Bernadette's ideas of thrift, frugality, and self-sufficiency grounded in her family's stories of resilience and self-reliance over the decades were her model for dealing with current economic and social problems.

Bernadette: Well, because of the way the, the government is screwing around with everything. [laughs] You know, and we have our problems when you don't get the, produce that you need, or freezes the oranges... Everything gets really high priced. And there's so many people that don't have jobs, like right now... There's ways to be self-sufficient... I think it's gonna come to that, eventually. With the stupid people running the stupid government. [laughs]

⁷⁹ Bardhi and Arnould, "Thrift Shopping"; Schor, *The Overspent American*.

⁸⁰ Schor, *True Wealth*; Parkins and Craig, *Slow Living*; Peterson, *Everyday Ethics and Social Change*; Gay Hawkins, *The Ethics of Waste: How We Relate to Rubbish* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

⁸¹ Manning, *The Psychology of Sustainable Behavior*; McKenzie-Mohr and Smith, *Fostering Sustainable Behavior*; Jennifer Clapp, "The Distancing of Waste: Overconsumption in a Global Economy," in *Confronting Consumption*, ed. Thomas Princen, Michael Maniates, and Ken Conca (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 155–176.

So I think everybody is, it's their duty to learn how to take care of themselves and *know* what to do when it, when this, this, or this happens. You know, you got to have a plan. And you need to know, to make your clothes, and you can fix your food, so that you got it all year round... Women should know how to sew and take care of their kids, you know. Um, you can save an awful lot of money by doing, dressing them, w-from stuff you make, you know.

Even while Bernadette chastened individuals, and in particular women, to be frugal and self-sufficient, she situated the need for those practices within governmental policies (e.g. “**stupid people running the government**”), economic cycles (e.g. “**nobody’s got a job**”), and weather patterns (e.g. “**freezes the oranges**”). Yet, her values and interpretation did not always engender sustainable practices, and instead seemed more in line with “affluenza.” She took advantage of multiple sales and coupons on a sweater and pants outfit (despite having a large number of such items already). She “**just couldn’t believe**” getting such a good deal, so she “**was all excited about that.**” No one in my sample lived pristine, off-the-grid, self-sufficient, voluntary simplicity lifestyles. Even Rosa, who produced much of her own food, sewed her and her family’s clothes, and limited purchases of products, drove and flew to larger cities and indulged in fabric purchases—although these did appear to synergistically satisfy multiple needs. Neither did participants always mindlessly consume whatever popular media and stores were selling at the time.⁸² Their struggles and contradictions demonstrate how getting a deal and preferring convenience supported unsustainable consumption behaviors. Nevertheless, through reframing or reimagining various elements of practice, similar behaviors might be strategically used to advance consumption, rather than production, efficiency.

⁸² Matthew Hilton, “The Banality of Consumption,” in *Citizenship and Consumption*, ed. Kate Soper and Frank Trentmann, Consumption and Public Life (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 87–103; Daniel Miller, ed., *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies* (London: Routledge, 1995).

Investing in Clothes

As seen in the first half of this chapter, there were certain garment categories in which women invested more time, attention, and special care treatment based on garment materials, construction, or intended use. For example, suit jackets and lingerie required special care. In order to maintain their quality, they needed to be cared for in a way that would not damage the intricate construction, structural support (e.g. padding, interfacing, wiring, etc.), sensitive materials (e.g. silk, wool, elastics, etc.). Knit tops or woven blouses required special care specific to the intended use, such as work or special occasion. Sometimes this resulted in sustainable laundering (e.g. wash in cold water and line dry), but also in dry cleaning (especially with wool suits), suggesting that material objects are at the core of care practices. Participants protected garments' quality and ability to contribute to her situated social identity.

Jessica: **There are certain clothes like things that I have that are *nicer* and I want to make sure I like preserve the quality of the *color*, I usually just wash in cold, like regardless of whether it says it can be washed in warm, just because I don't want to risk like losing any of the quality... Like when I'm washing like, um, like my work clothes.**

Even though my research did not center around shoes, bags, and other accessories, some women described how they served as strategic components of their wardrobe. Moreover, there seemed to be a greater commitment to these goods and willingness to invest at the point-of-purchase and over the long term. Eunice's justification for expensive purchases weaves together assessments of materiality and quality, (e.g. durability, practicality, color, style, fit, and comfort), resource and skills negotiations (e.g. initial cost, value over time, and managing mistakes), and attachments and preferences (e.g. emotional connections and aesthetic pleasures).⁸³

⁸³ In contrast to Eunice's behavior, there is a popular perception of women who are shoe or bag horses in the sense that they frequently purchased many of these accessories (either high- or low-end versions). The popular stereotype of fast

Eunice: I'd rather have fewer high quality items versus lots of stuff. So I've gotten like a lot of compliments on my purse for example. This was something I got at a Coach outlet. ... I love it... I bought it because it's all leather, and it will *last*... It holds my computer, like I'm pretty practical with what I pick.

But those red shoes, where I feel like they're kind of, they're cute. And [pauses] they're [pauses] but they're comfortable. They'll stick around, and I'll go through great efforts to maintain them, like, you know take them to the store and get new soles. There's certain things like that, where I'm always *seeking* those core things that, that will be [pauses] really nice [pauses] And that, like they might be kind of fun, but they're classic.

Eunice's long-term relationship with her bag and others' talk of favorites revealed alternatives to the ever-changing, impractical shoes and bags that exemplify the speed and fickleness of an unsustainable fast fashion system.

Women expected higher quality items, for which they were often paying higher prices, to have similarly been invested with thoughtful design, careful production, and quality materials. Even though Camilla willingly paid what she thought was a substantial sum for a blouse with a particularly becoming style, she critiqued its construction and added an additional closure device. She was satisfied with her quick fix, but asserted that the shirt could have fit and draped better if constructed with a more thoughtful (as well as additional time and material investment) construction approach. Moreover, the potential for using the blouse not only as a garment but also as a template on which to base future sewing projects made the expense worth it to her, despite its material shortcomings.

One object category in which women *did* invest additional time and labor resources, but did not seem to especially mind (in contrast to the hassle and expense of dry cleaning) was

fashion and unsustainable clothing is a fashionista keeping up with the latest "it" bag or shoe. No one in my sample demonstrated these behaviors. Instead, amongst the primarily practical, functional, comfortable, and appropriately-styled driven, Midwestern women I spoke with, shoes could be fun and stylish but could just as easily be comfortable and practical (and sometimes both!).

hand-made items. Rachel expressed a lack of faith or trust in dry cleaners to handle and ensure the quality and safety and care of her hand knit sweaters. This willingness to care for these homemade items related to several factors: time women invested in making them, knowledge about materials and construction, the garment's uniqueness, and materials used requiring gentler care.

Several women (Rosa, Lizzie, Wendy, Melanie, and Jessica) with high clothing interest scores did alter or customize some garments. For example, Melanie showed me several dresses that she had paid to have altered. These exceptions support consumption models that explain behavior as a result of the interplay between attitudes and context. Nevertheless, because these examples are exceptions, they also demonstrate how strong context can be across clothing consumption stages.⁸⁴ Framed in this perspective, we see that how women relate to, use, and value their time and money function as key factors in clothing consumption choices, often overshadowing even clothing-specific concerns.

Women were willing to spend time line drying because it protected the physical condition of their clothes, and hence extend their financial investment. Despite the extra time line drying took, women prioritized the garment itself as well as money invested in the garment. For instance, although Eunice first started line drying when she heard of environmental impacts of dryers, she also started a log to track how much money she was saving by not having to use a coin-operated dryer for each load. Saving money, in spite of spending more time, reinforced sustainable behaviors. Eunice felt she had more time than money to spend. This countered income-rich, time-poor lifestyles that perpetuate commodity production and consumption and negatively impact wellbeing.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Guagnano, "Influences on Attitude-Behavior Relationships."

⁸⁵ De Graaf, Wann, and Naylor, *Affluenza*; De Graaf, *Take Back Your Time*; Schor, *The Overspent American*.

A few women line dried not only to benefit the environment, but also *to be in* the environment.

Megan: I also feel a lot of satisfaction that I'm letting nature do the work. Instead of using fossil fuels. Or any other energy sources. I just let the wind and the sun do it... That's my religion. If being tied to the earth, even though I live in town and I live in a house that insulates me from the outside, it's just sort of like one way I can stay in touch with nature.

Despite her strong values and positive experiences, Megan sometimes used the machine dryer. She described how during recent harsh weather and stressful personal changes in her life she resorted to the automatic dryer instead.

Megan: I just took the easy route, um, more times than hanging out. But I was ashamed about it, and I felt really bad because I just think it's environmentally like so inexcusable that everyone uses dryers. [laughs] So, I judge myself pretty harshly for that ... Once in a while it tempts me. [laughs]

A confluence of changing contexts, guilt, and personal benefits encouraged Megan to return to line drying habits. Convenience is easier and more desirable, but line drying is *worth* it. However, it is not only worth it because she conserves natural resources, but also because she gains emotional well-being from experiencing natural resources. She was investing in experiences, and not in products or her pocketbook.⁸⁶ These examples of sustainable living as pleasurable, and not necessarily sacrificial or burdensome, are examples of what a growing number of scholars term “alternative hedonism: “Such experiences are the gift of nature, incurring no financial expense... It is essentially spiritual oriented, leaves nature unharmed, does not disturb ecological balance, and

⁸⁶ Van Boven, “Experientialism, Materialism, and the Pursuit of Happiness.”; Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2008); Paul Cloke and Owain Jones, “Grounding Ethical Mindfulness For/in Nature: Trees in Their Places,” *Ethics, Place & Environment* 6, no. 3 (2003): 195–213.

is not obsessed with the relentless acquisition of novelty and luxury.”⁸⁷

Women were also willing to spend higher amounts of money on new automatic washing machines. Women with strong environmental values, such as Niki, Megan, and Gretchen, emphasized the water and energy conservation operations and gentler treatment of the clothes as particularly strong motivators for the investment. Megan, for whom this was a substantial initial financial investment, weighed the initial cost carefully by looking to long-term savings as well as the overall impact her family would have on the environment. Camilla, who did not express strong environmental values, chose a high-efficiency washer because of its effectiveness based on her mother’s experience and the potential to save money. Thus, cost savings was appealing to all participants, indicating the normalization of economic thrift.⁸⁸ Eunice and Zoey modeled sustainable washing in that they mixed colors in loads to a certain degree and line dried items to avoid paying for additional loads in coin-operated machines. On the other hand, Melanie, who owned her own appliances, had well water supply, and had less immediate financial feedback, could do larger loads by combining loads or doing small loads by hand in a sink, but would first need anxiety about low-quality color bleeding assuaged.

The overwhelming tendency to use machines for laundry highlights how other infrastructure, product design and manufacturing, and household budgets intersect with clothing practices. Even Rosa, a particularly self-sufficient homesteader, preferred to use her automatic washer over hand washing. Indoor plumbing, constantly available power, and the overriding affordability—despite unaccounted costs to ground and surface water systems, fossil fuel usage,

⁸⁷ Marius de Geus, “Sustainable Hedonism: The Pleasures of Living Within Environmental Limits,” in *The Politics and Pleasures of Consuming Differently*, ed. Kate Soper, Martin H. Ryle, and Lyn Thomas (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 124.

⁸⁸ Calder, “Saving and Spending”; Hunter and Yates, *Thrift and Thriving in America: Capitalism and Moral Order from the Puritans to the Present*.

etc.—of these modern luxuries supported these practices. By pointing to these larger forces, I am not suggesting that we do away with these technologies. Rather, I am highlighting how interdependent women’s behaviors are with larger systems.⁸⁹ For instance, Lizzie and Gretchen considered installing grey water systems to their home but were (1) unsure if it was worth it given the expense and (2) were concerned about municipal regulations. This examples highlights how accommodating, changing, or improving these systems is a point of intervention for transitioning to sustainable practice.

Minimizing time and money expenditures did not always come out on top in women’s decisions. Women did “invest” time, money, and other emotional, intellectual, or creative energies into their clothing garments and practices. Even when participants invested in pro-environmental or social behaviors and brands, satisfying goals of aesthetic and physical quality and needs-fulfilling experiences and garments were key dimensions of those investments. For example, Niki expressed strong pro-sustainable attitudes and was interested in style. Even though she could purchase a less expensive or more fashionable t-shirt more easily at Target or boutique store, she bought the organic cotton shirt from a company with a commitment to environmental stewardship. Through buying from and working at an outdoor apparel company, she was aware of many clothing brands that sold clothing in athletic and casual styles and supported pro-environmental (and occasionally pro-social justice) values (through manufacturing processes and/or charitable giving).⁹⁰ In addition, she was on the higher end of the income scale; she was comfortable and willing to pay up to \$100 for garments, compared to other participants who felt that \$50 was expensive. Rather than seeing a lack of sustainable or affordable sustainable options,

⁸⁹ Shove, *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience*; Laermans and Meulders, “The Domestication of Laundering.”

⁹⁰ For discussion of these activities, see Mara Einstein, *Compassion, Inc.: How Corporate America Blurs the Line Between What We Buy, Who We Are, and Those We Help* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

she saw a surfeit of stylish options that had some degree of sustainable production being sold for a fair price.

Contrastingly, secondhand shoppers, such as Felicity, Lizzie, or Megan, spent more time, rather than money, searching for hidden treasures—these unique finds engendered aesthetic pleasure *and* satisfied pro-environmental values. Granted, they also valued the deals they got on their thrift store finds. For instance, Lizzie saw the secondhand market as offering a multitude of options for various clothing needs and styles at lower prices. Although Lizzie described developing secondhand clothing shopping habits during periods of financial hardship, she continued to pursue this behavior enthusiastically even when her household income increased. She also believed that the context of the secondhand market provided additional benefits and pleasures—from finding alternative apparel cuts compared against the current styles to mixing with diverse members of the community, avoiding commercialized culture messages, and encouraging playful risk-taking.⁹¹ Despite differences in their rationalizations and experiences, participants were simultaneously finding ways to enhance clothing experiences, meet their clothing needs, and actualize pro-sustainable attitudes.

On the other hand, Eunice and Tara were similarly interested in clothing compared to Lizzie and Niki described above. However, Eunice perceived her financial constraints as limiting her ability to satisfy her clothing needs and meet her environmental values with individual purchases. Tara perceived the lack of apparel designed to fit her hourglass measurements as a significant barrier in her clothing behaviors. Their stories expressed a *desire* to invest in clothing, but emphasized the frustrations and disappointments experienced in their economic or embodied

⁹¹ Micael-Lee Johnstone and Denise M. Conroy, “Dressing for the Thrill: An Exploration of Why Women Dress up to Go Shopping,” *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 4, no. 4 (2005): 234–245; Charbonneau, “Social Responsibility and Women’s Acquisition of Secondhand Clothing.”

subjectivities.⁹² These stories help us parse out under what combinations of circumstances women feel empowered or impeded to meet their clothing and sustainability standards. Overall, women struggled to find clothes to fit their body and their budget, and different contexts posed different challenges or opportunities. Their narrative framings reminds us how cultural norms, such as preferences for variety and expectations for readily accessible options shape women's interactions with retail practices.

The stories described above demonstrate that sustainable clothing options *are* available (positive external context) at a variety of price points (positive to neutral personal capabilities) and in a variety of styles (positive clothing-specific context). Despite these *actual* conditions, women's *perceptions* of the context—as either not available, too expensive, not in the right styles, not in the right sizes, as off-putting if used, too time consuming to find if used, etc.—constrained their behaviors.⁹³ Therefore, accounting for individual women's perceptions and cultural norms surrounding these contextual factors is a key issue in addressing the sustainability of clothing consumption. For example, changing women's perceptions of the availability and affordability of apparel options can expand their options to satisfy clothing needs and enhance embodied and sensory experiences. Likewise, changing women's perceptions of how their time and money is most optimally spent can not only expand their clothing options, but also broaden what clothing products and practices are accessible given their resources and lifestyles.

Alternative options to the default buying new mass-produced apparel were available to participants. While these practices, and the associated products, have the potential to be a part of

⁹² Rachel Colls, “‘Looking Alright, Feeling Alright’: Emotions, Sizing and the Geographies of Women’s Experiences of Clothing Consumption,” *Social & Cultural Geography* 5, no. 4 (December 2004): 583–596; Wetherell, *Affect and Emotion*.

⁹³ Guagnano, “Influences on Attitude-Behavior Relationships”; Paul C. Stern et al., “A Value-Belief-Norm Theory of Support for Social Movements: The Case of Environmentalism,” *Human Ecology Review* 6, no. 2 (1999): 81–97; Zepeda and Deal, “Organic and Local Food Consumer Behavior: Alphabet Theory.”

sustainable clothing system, they did not always require women to put environmental or social justice values first. For example, Rosa clearly articulated reasons for taking the time to make and paying higher prices for fine quality materials and garments that had nothing to do with environmental or labor issues. She articulated how custom-making garments allows her and her family to wear better fitting, better feeling, better quality, and longer lasting clothes. She could appreciate the difference in construction, hand, and texture, among many other textile and apparel properties. Rosa had made the change to constructing her own garments some time ago and had since cultivated her own personal aesthetic, developing basic pattern templates customized to her body and taste. Benefits outweighed the costs not only for consumers, but also potentially for the environment and society. Though some options may cost more time or money initially or at key points in the lifecycle (e.g. mending a tear), they contributed positively to women's experiences, while reducing resource consumption, supporting local service providers, and offering opportunities for personal creativity (through style or skills).

Challenging materialism (or more specifically, “terminal materialism”) as a social practice does not signify a disavowal of material culture.⁹⁴ On the contrary, clothing mattered and contributed to meaning-making. For instance, several participants (Eunice, Niki, Helen, Rachel) described seeking out quality apparel, especially to minimize the number of garments owned. They prided themselves on making do with less; they felt in control of and enjoyed creatively using their wardrobe. How women related to their wardrobe as a whole also illustrated that it is important not just to look at individual purchases. For instance, even though Eunice purchased garments from high-end, non-ethical specialty apparel stores, she strategically selected garments

⁹⁴ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Russell Belk, “Possessions and the Extended Self,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 15, no. 2 (September 1988): 139–168.

to fill specific wardrobe holes, needs, or wants. Alternatively, even though Wendy had two closets full of clothes, she cultivated a web of friendships around her clothing consumption, creatively expressed herself through dress, and sensitively respected the stories those items embodied.⁹⁵

Women investing in long-term garment relationships, in which they kept and regularly used clothes for an especially long time (longer than five or ten years) seemed to be the exception. For example, Rachel exclaimed how amazing it was how she has had a shirt for more than twenty years. Most women seemed to have at least a few pieces that they had for a substantially longer time than the rest, where quality had withstood regular wear. That said, some items that women kept in their wardrobes substantially longer than others *did* show wear. Many of these were relegated to different uses, as mentioned previously. But that did not mean that the attachment or value was any less. Wearing a shirt for tooling around the home or sleeping in or casual wear may be lower on the use hierarchy than clothes worn to work or special occasions, but can be extremely pleasurable. Consumer and material culture scholars have noted how this patina of wear can increase the value for clothes and other products. We can foster this appreciation of wear, as long as garments are actually wearing well, and designed to wear well.⁹⁶

Increasing the availability of socially and environmentally responsible, high quality apparel may increase the positive contextual factors, while simultaneously introducing financial hindrances to purchasing them. Because this may affect the cost, we need to consider when and why women would be willing to and actually buy clothes that will last longer than a season because they are better quality. Slowing down, interrupting habitual purchasing behavior, increasing their mending or servicing, and extending the lifecycle of their clothes could potentially

⁹⁵ Palmer and Clark, *Old Clothes, New Looks: Second Hand Fashion*; Crewe and Gregson, *Second-hand Cultures*.

⁹⁶McCracken, *Culture and Consumption*; Chapman, *Emotionally Durable Design*; Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles*; Schor, *True Wealth*.

be achieved through encouraging women to pursue their interests in quality apparel that could fill their needs over time. Several scholars have suggested that this slowed down production cycle is more sustainable business model—for economies, environment, societies, and individuals.⁹⁷ This discussion provides additional evidence for how it may be incorporated into existing clothing practices to achieve a more sustainable consumption system.

Conclusion

In-depth exploration of women's qualitative experiences reveal competing goals and values—from obtaining quality apparel to saving money and preferring convenience. Each of these goals was bound up with values of garments and broader social codes. While designers, manufacturers, and retail buyers regularly juggle many dimensions of clothing production and properties (not even mentioning trade or tariff issues), women's narratives of quality can be a part of the broader dialogue about sustainability, for apparel industry professionals as well as users. Women's behaviors and narratives already point to sustainable opportunities that we can further promote or enhance to continue moving toward sustainable practices and minimize harmful impacts.

Nevertheless, women regularly pursued deals and convenience, conflating time and money. Patterns of practice that minimized time and money expenses rather than maximizing other values demonstrates the significance of attitudes towards time and money, bargains and convenience, efficiency and ease, that permeate practices. Even when some women acted out on environmental values in other parts of their lives, this did not consistently also occur in their

⁹⁷Parkins and Craig, *Slow Living*; Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles*; Alison and Rissanen, *Shaping Sustainable Fashion*; “Alabama Chanin,” *Alabama Chanin*, accessed June 7, 2013, <http://alabamachanin.com>.

clothing behaviors. Instead, their interest levels, personal capabilities, and less supportive, positive context deterred their participation in sustainable clothing options.

Although my research questions and methods focused on individual women's practices, the stories I heard pointed to issues intersecting with and extending beyond individual choices. Instead, these practices—buying in to a dominant economic narrative, choosing self-fulfilling or pro-sustainable options, and criticizing the apparel industry—intersect with larger economic, political, and industry practices. For example, because women evaluated quality during everyday practices, quality was bound up with participants' attitudes toward and perceptions of time, leisure, and work, as well as apparel design, manufacturing, and retail. Considering these intersections within the context of sustainability and clothing concerns helps illuminate points of intervention.

Women's stories point our attention toward structures, practices, or even value systems that are present but neglected, underemphasized, or undeveloped. As Niinimäki asserts,

The production side needs to treat the consumer with higher respect in the future and see him/her as one of the stakeholders... Designers have to find new ways to ensure that consumer commitment, wishes, needs, values, desires, aesthetic concept, and emotions become a key starting point for eco-clothing design... to deepen consumers' product attachment and at the same time add value to the product through sustainability.⁹⁸

What might be absent in current practices that if re-imagined, cultivated, or nurtured could promote sustainable clothing systems? In addition to attributing these behaviors to (and potentially change through) individual choices, we can also consider what infrastructural elements, government and industry policies, and design and production practices support non-sustainable clothing consumption practices. For example, what aspects of practice and individual choices strengthen particular competences (e.g. shopping versus mending)? Or what trade, tariff, and

⁹⁸ Kirsi Niinimäki, "Eco-clothing, Consumer Identity and Ideology," *Sustainable Development* 18, no. 3 (2010): 161.

subsidy policies encourage non-organic cotton agriculture or exploitive labor conditions that perpetuate inexpensive t-shirts? Looking at this whole picture helps us understand how individual practices and broader social norms intersect—sometimes reinforcing unsustainable patterns and sometimes illuminating ruptures in which sustainable practices could flourish.

CHAPTER 8

FOLLOWING THE THREADS:

TRACING PATTERNS OF MEANING FROM SELF TO OTHER

Introduction

A forest is a complex ecosystem made up of many organisms competing for nutrients, sunlight, and resources. The fittest of these organisms survive, working to maximize the success of their own survival regardless of others' ability. This is what we see on the surface as saplings surrounding a parent tree struggle to receive sunlight through the forest canopy. But what if we change our perspective, look at the forest from a different level, and consider other forms of relationships? When we open our senses to otherwise invisible connections, organizations, and flows, we see a forest not made of discrete, individual organisms working only for their own self-interest. Instead, we see a network of interconnected organisms and fungi supporting and nurturing the wellbeing of each other as well as the forest as a whole system.¹ How and why do we see systems as competitive, distant, or disconnected rather than supportive, close, and interdependent?

As suggested by the above example from forest ecology, reframing our analysis of sustainable consumption to explore the connections and disconnections directs our attention to and open our analysis to include threads meaning not immediately apparent. In the case of clothing consumption, these threads emerge as embodied aesthetic, affective, and symbolic meanings. The openings move dialogue and behavior further toward a more sustainable trajectory that respects the dimensions that support our own and others' wellbeing. These dimensions, in particular the

¹ Erna Buffie, "What Plants Talk About," *Nature* (PBS, April 3, 2013).

meanings of material culture, are often, though not entirely, absent from the literature.² By following the threads from participants' perceived individual experiences to the broader clothing lifecycle and its impacts on the environment and others' wellbeing, their narratives and practices suggest alternative models of production/consumption, materialism, and ethics of care.

This chapter addresses Barnett et al.'s identification of consumers "first, as creative appropriators of commodities involved in identity-formation; second, as interpellated subjects of neoliberalism and/or strategies of de-fetishization; or, third, as attached to commodities in deeply ingrained, affectively charged ways."³ Rather than develop an alternative model based on practical reason, what they term a "grammar of responsibility," I synthesize these approaches through probing the qualitative, embodied encounters with clothing practices to enhance our understanding of how consumers make sense and make meaning of their position, agency, and actions in these systems. The first section, "Unraveling Garment Stories," argues that in the face of a complex, invisible, opaque, distant, abstract, and intangible clothing system, participants felt challenged to access or chose not to pay attention to garment stories. Instead, they selectively attended to the limited segments of garment stories to which they directly related, thus exacerbating the disconnect between participants and their impacts on the environment and others' welfare. "Materializing Meaning and Crafting Connections" shifts focus from highlighting challenges to illuminating existing opportunities. The materiality of and embodied interactions

² For examples of scholars building thinking through these theories in disparate disciplinary explorations of sustainable consumption, see Kate Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Design Journeys* (London: Earthscan, 2008); Kirsi Niinimäki, "Eco-clothing, Consumer Identity and Ideology," *Sustainable Development* 18, no. 3 (2010): 150–162; Isabelle Szmigin, Marylyn Carrigan, and Deirdre O'Loughlin, "Integrating Ethical Brands into Our Consumption Lives," *Journal of Brand Management* 14, no. 5 (May 2007): 396–409; Ruth Lane and Andrew Gorman Murray, eds., *Material Geographies of Household Sustainability* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2011); Elizabeth Shove, *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience: The Social Organization of Normality* (Oxford: Berg, 2003).

³ Clive Barnett et al., *Globalizing Responsibility: The Political Rationalities of Ethical Consumption* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 113.

with garments offer tangible anchors for enhancing individual wellbeing, forging relationships, and promoting investments and values in the environment and social welfare. As material objects, garments have agency in helping us manifest, create, and reflect meaning and relationships within a user's direct experience and an expanded circle that includes environment, workers, and society.

Unraveling Garment Stories

As we examined the lifecycle of garments in the preliminary sections of this work, we confronted a complex web of intersecting, continuously moving parts (see figures 1.2, 5.1-5.3). Stories of garment lifecycles include the inception during the design stage through the materials and garment production. Ideas and materials crisscross the globe multiple times. U.S. consumers acquire garments through crafting, gifting, and purchasing. Once in a woman's wardrobe, the garment lifecycle then centers around the microsystem of use, storage, and laundering. Women then either send garment to landfills or donate garments to one of many secondhand clothing retail shops or charity organizations. From there, garments may circulate in the same neighborhood, be shipped across the country or overseas where local sellers and consumers select, transform, wear, or reject them. At stake throughout these stories encapsulated in a garment's lifecycle are healthy and resilient ecosystems, fair and just economic transactions, and individual and community livelihoods, now and in the future. Despite the high stakes in individual and institutional choices, many of the women in my study tended to deliberately avoid or to not face regularly or these stories behind "their entanglement in complex networks of commodification and accumulation" woven into their clothing.⁴

Despite being active agents in garment stories—particularly during the consumption stage

⁴ Ibid., 2.

of selecting, purchasing, making, wearing, storing, laundering, sharing, donating, and/or disposing—participants did not consistently or consciously consider their agency in the whole garment lifecycle. Rather, the primary dimensions of a garment lifecycle participants tended to follow were those they had a direct interaction with or interest in, such as a material's health impacts or the financial cost, as explored previously. Women made connections when it mattered to their immediate physical, social, symbolic, or aesthetic interests as subjectively experienced in their position in micro to macro contexts. Otherwise, they perceived their actions as disconnected and disengaged from other lifecycle systems, as well as the accompanying environmental, economic, and social dimensions.⁵

These disconnects revealed not just what some may characterize as an individual's ignorance or indifference, but rather systemic challenges of invisibility and impenetrability. In many ways, the system is structured to obstruct unraveling garment stories through the lack of openly transparent, easily accessible, and widely disseminated information on production or disposal. For instance, even the requirement for garment labels to identify country of manufacture leaves out basic geographic information about country of origin or production for fiber, fabric, or components, let alone conditions of production.⁶ Moreover, participants' stories about their position in this system were affectively-charged: they felt overwhelmed, frustrated, confused, and powerless.⁷ They felt locked-in to their practices and did not consistently recognize their actual or

⁵ These gaps, silences, and personalized/individualized perspectives characterized by interviews with participants as a whole and also in response to direct questions about their's and industry's environmental or social impacts.

⁶ Jung E. Ha-Brookshire, "Country of Parts, Country of Manufacturing, and Country of Origin: Consumer Purchase Preferences and the Impact of Perceived Prices," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 30, no. 1 (January 2012): 19–34.

⁷ Marylyn Carrigan and Ahmad Atalla, "The Myth of the Ethical Consumer: Do Ethics Matter in Purchase Behavior?," *Journal of Consumer Marketing* 18, no. 7 (2001): 560–577; Terry Newholm and Deirdre Shaw, "Editorial: Studying the Ethical Consumer: A Review of Research," *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 6, no. 5 (2007): 253–270; Patrik Aspers, "Labelling Fashion Markets," *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 32, no. 6 (November 2008): 633–638.

potential agency, and so implicitly financially endorsed or directed garments into certain lifecycle trajectories.

Given the information-behavior gap demonstrated in this project and other research, a valid question presents itself: Would unraveling garment stories make a difference in behaviors? Would the answer to this question be different if it was not only expanding knowledge, but also expanding involvement or engagement with a garment story? Various researchers, designers, and activists promote the following strategies: reading these stories through mindful attention, valuing materials and labor, transparently disclosing production and consumption effects, and creating visible accountability for producers and consumers.⁸ How might increasing opportunities for engaging with garment stories overlap with existing practices, expand what processes we value (e.g. rekindling respect for craft and labor), who we respect and care for (e.g. illuminating the interdependencies between garment workers and purchasers), and what we invest our time and money into (e.g. waiting to purchase or make fewer items that are of high quality and offer personal connections)? Reading garment stories, while being vigilant not to fetishize or objectify those who have contributed to the garment, offers us a way to notice and value the resources and labor, ecological and social dynamics that these garments embody.

Distancing Self from Garment Story

My study provides many examples of women's individual failure to unravel garment stories, let alone incorporate these details into their tastes and behaviors. Women's descriptions of

⁸ Jonathan Chapman and Nick Gant, eds., *Designers, Visionaries and Other Stories: A Collection of Sustainable Design Essays* (London: Earthscan, 2007); Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles*; C. J. Thompson and G. Coskuner-Balli, "Enchanting Ethical Consumerism: The Case of Community Supported Agriculture," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 7, no. 3 (November 2007): 275–303; Wendy Parkins and Geoffrey Craig, *Slow Living* (Oxford: Berg, 2006); Christie M. Manning, *The Psychology of Sustainable Behavior: Tips for Empowering People to Take Environmentally Positive Action* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, September 2009).

and allusions to the complicated industry revealed how daunting, discouraging, and demoralizing the thought of tackling the issues could be. Instead of tackling this wicked problem head on, women used their own shortcuts to establish beliefs about the garments they were purchasing. I point out these perspectives not to excuse individuals from all responsibility in their decisions not to research garment stories, apply that knowledge, and more heavily weigh pro-sustainability attitudes in their choices. This is also not to dismiss the handful of women who sought out secondhand or ethically produced clothing. Rather, these patterns illuminate how a failure to engage with object narratives occurs on a larger scale—both across people and across the lifecycle.

Participants' descriptions of shopping did not regularly include investigations into a garment's materials, production processes, or production labor conditions. Instead, they described how they evaluated how well the garment would succeed in the consumption-stage of its life story—that is look good, feel good, and be affordable. Women also often did not trace out the impacts from behaviors occurring in the home—such as the environmental impact of machine washing or drying or following up on the life of clothes after donation.⁹

During our conversations, several factors at the forefront of women's narratives contributed to the opacity of garment stories: their *perception* of the industry's complexity as a whole, the time it would take to pursue alternatives, and the availability of information or options. One driving factor was the separation from production or processing of materials and products. This separation manifested along three primary axes—geographic, social, and technological. Contributing to the impenetrability of this system is the ever-increasing movement of information and products across the globe. Moreover, the social, political, and economic realities of fiber

⁹ A couple women were aware of the global secondhand apparel trade, but the most common belief was that clothes were sold at the store to which they were donated. Several women anticipated seeing their donations in stock later at that store or worn by someone else in the community.

producers, garment workers, and other materials processors across the globe are complex amalgamations of local concerns and international policies.¹⁰ Despite the persistence of skilled hand labor in garment construction, technological advancements in production and information systems, which create an ever-increasing quantity of clothing at ever-increasing speeds, are often far removed from people's everyday interactions with clothing as consumers. In the U.S., this is exacerbated by outsourcing of apparel manufacturing jobs, so that having a personal connection to the garment industry is increasingly scarce.¹¹ However, even broad national patriotism can be seen in participants' favorable attitudes and stated desire to invest in, if not regularly purchasing, U.S.-made apparel.¹² Continued distancing from the clothing lifecycle further severs women from reasons to actualize desires to invest in, engage with, and cultivate meaning from their clothing practices and the natural elements and people that also contribute to the garment story.¹³

Clothing practices in the domestic environment were also often invisible. Rather than the system impeding awareness of processes and impacts through distance, complexity, or abstraction, it did so through intimacy, familiarity, and ubiquity. Products and practices disappear into the contours of everyday life. In some ways, the act of being interviewed in front of their closet and washing machines drew their attention to their clothing consumption. As we transitioned from

¹⁰ Although my research emphasizes consumer perspectives on consumption products and practices, we could similarly frame this alienation from garment stories from the producer perspectives. For examples, see Pietra Rivoli, *The Travels of a T-shirt in the Global Economy: An Economist Examines the Markets, Power, and Politics of World Trade* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2005); Angela Hale and Jane Wills, eds., *Threads of Labour: Garment Industry Supply Chains from the Workers' Perspective* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005); Naomi Klein, *No Space, No Jobs, No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* (New York: Picador, 2000).

¹¹ Jane Lou Collins, *Threads: Gender, Labor, and Power in the Global Apparel Industry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

¹² Ha-Brookshire, "Country of Parts, Country of Manufacturing, and Country of Origin"; M. Wall and L. A. Heslop, "Consumer Attitudes Towards the Quality of Domestic and Imported Apparel and Footwear*," *Journal of Consumer Studies & Home Economics* 13, no. 4 (1989): 337–358.

¹³ Thomas Princen, "Distancing: Consumption and the Severing of Feedback," in *Confronting Consumption*, ed. Thomas Princen, Michael Maniates, and Ken Conca (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 103–132; Jack Manno, "Commoditization: Consumption Efficiency and an Economy of Care and Connection," in *Confronting Consumption*, ed. Thomas Princen, Michael Maniates, and Ken Conca (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 67–100.

talking about her clothes to actually looking at her clothes, Eunice remarked, “**Now, we’re discovering that I underestimate what I buy. Cause, um, these are new, too. [laughs]**”

Impacts from otherwise intimate consumption practices, such as washing clothes or weeding the wardrobe, were also distanced and abstracted from everyday activities and immediate concerns. For example, participants did not mention the use of fossil fuels in their preference for hot water for laundry. Rather, whether or not garments felt, smelled, looked, or otherwise *seemed* clean were the most relevant dimensions. Certainly, energy use—but not climate change impacts—was apparent in utility bills. Minimizing household financial expenditures motivated efforts to cut down on number of wash or dry cycles. This was related more closely to the narrow household system rather than larger ecological systems.¹⁴ Moreover, it depended on the impact being visible and tangible through utility bills.

Women did not readily talk about the garment story outside of their direct consumption experiences, until I asked them explicitly to reflect on environmental or social impacts of their choices. This suggested that environmental or social impacts were not necessarily core elements of their perceptions of garment stories. Overall, participants had a casual knowledge—from previous news reports they had heard, books they had read, or received via another informal information network—of garment production conditions or insights into other lifecycle stages. Almost everyone exclaimed with some degree of resignation that their clothes were probably made in China or a developing Asian country, and probably in sweatshop conditions, though several they also reflected on how little they knew about what those conditions might be and if they were acceptable given the local country’s customs.

¹⁴ Lane and Murray, *Material Geographies of Household Sustainability*; Alice Grønhøj and John Thøgersen, “Feedback on Household Electricity Consumption: Learning and Social Influence Processes,” *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 35 (2011): 138–145.

More often, though, answers circulated around immediate experiences or personal interests. Tina was especially concerned about animal rights issues, for example, and she deliberated extensively on whether to wear animal fibers. Lizzie's interest in local water quality issues and follow-up investigation into household gray water systems illustrated a relatively uncommon environmental awareness of water use in laundering. Contrastingly, Rachel described her lack of support for unionization as a method to redress labor issues by drawing on personal negative experience with union labor contracts and employees. From a different perspective, participants' extrapolated out to larger social issues around clothing in American popular culture related to fashion industry marketing, which were social issues that more affected their practices. While women in my study did not always take political action on these issues, they did consume clothing according to how they perceived these issues—such as Eunice's "dressing to impress" or Susan's avoiding women's magazines as a way of resisting fashion's treatment of female bodies. As argued by sustainability advocates, context matters, but especially so if it is personally relevant. Building on issues and stories that are personally relevant is a key strategy in sustainable behavior promotion.¹⁵ Nevertheless, even when women were turned on to labor rights activism during protests around state legislation, they were not actively connecting personal stakes to other labor concerns. This phenomenon emphasized the gulf between their experiences as consumers from those of producers.

By considering what remained unsaid in participants' narratives, we can see the invisibility and inaccessibility of the industry creep into the silences. My pushing for reflection on these issues further revealed assumptions regarding lack of availability, insecurity about information, and

¹⁵ Manning, *The Psychology of Sustainable Behavior*; Doug McKenzie-Mohr and William Smith, *Fostering Sustainable Behavior: An Introduction to Community-based Social Marketing* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 1999).

struggles with skills as women worked to articulate their responses. While increasing knowledge about garment lifecycles does not necessarily increase the likelihood of considering that knowledge when making clothing choices, the alienation from production and other stages reveals systemic separation from the garment production and by extension the environmental and social impacts of the industry.

Some people may fault individuals' lack of research and informed decision-making as possible demonstrations of indifference to or ignorance of issues, but, as explored in the previous chapter, accounting for tastes, values, and behaviors is a dynamic process that always occurs in context. When people are distanced from the people, places, and processes that comprise the bulk of the clothing lifecycle system, research has suggested that it is difficult to expect individuals to account for those issues occurring in extremely complex, multifaceted, and often impenetrable systems.¹⁶ Criticisms of their failure to pursue these concerns may seem valid, but women's clothing narratives also revealed tensions and struggles with the resources they thought they had available. Their perceptions of the systems (and the gaps within their knowledge) suggest points of intervention. By addressing larger contextual industry-wide issues alongside individual behaviors, we can find places to increase the interaction and reduce the distance between the people and practices involved in consumption, production, and disposal.

Reading Self into Garment Story

Despite the challenges to accessing garment stories and taking advantage of roles within them, there are ruptures, tears, or openings in the system through which women engage with such

¹⁶ Thomas Princen, Michael Maniates, and Ken Conca, eds., *Confronting Consumption* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); H el ene Cherrier, "Ethical Consumption Practices: Co-production of Self-expression and Social Recognition," *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 6, no. 5 (2007): 321–335.

stories. These existing and potential opportunities materialized through participants' affective, aesthetic, and symbolic dimensions of their subjective positions. These findings, then, support arguments to sensitively attend to these qualitative elements situating in meaningful and emotional relationships. This attention needs to be cultivated in both individual consumer campaigns and larger policy initiatives.¹⁷

Participants placed the brand at the center of garment stories. The brand or store of origin (even if a secondhand store) was immediately visible or directly known from experience. As we stood in front of closets, women would trace the garment's story back often to the brand or store as the beginning of the garment's story. It is an the initial, immediate, and tangible link and the last origin point that was directly relevant to their experience, as opposed to other points of origin of the fiber, fabric, garment, etc. In terms of the relevancy for women's own consumption, women perceived brands as communicating taste and social position to others. Moreover, brands also acted as an indicator of the quality of both the garment and sometimes of the conditions of production.

Other studies have also identified “that there is an urgent need further unpack the symbolic, affective, and aesthetic dimensions of ethical brands to develop Fair Trade brands that combine strong brand knowledge and positive brand images to bridge the ethical purchase gap.”¹⁸ Several participants (Lizzie, Niki, Gretchen, and Wendy) named specific brands known for pro-environmental or—social activities and products to demonstrate their attempts to actualize

¹⁷ Elizabeth Shove, “Comfort and Convenience,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, ed. Frank Trentmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 289–306; K. Hobson, “Competing Discourses of Sustainable Consumption: Does the ‘Rationalisation of Lifestyles’ Make Sense?,” *Environmental Politics* 11, no. 2 (June 2002): 95–120; Szmigin, Carrigan, and O’Loughlin, “Integrating Ethical Brands into Our Consumption Lives”; Michael Maniates, “Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World?,” in *Confronting Consumption*, ed. Thomas Princen, Michael Maniates, and Ken Conca (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 43–66.

¹⁸ Alex Nicholls and Nick Lee, “Purchase Decision-making in Fair Trade and the Ethical Purchase ‘Gap’: ‘Is There a Fair Trade Twix?’,” *Journal of Strategic Marketing* 14, no. 4 (December 2006): 369; Carrigan and Atalla, “The Myth of Ethical Consumer”; Szmigin, Carrigan, and O’Loughlin, “Integrating Ethical Brands into Our Consumption Lives.”

their values. My interviews illustrate how participants built from existing brand images and strategically adopted them into their own life worlds. For example, participants consciously used brands to cultivate particular identities to fulfill certain perceived social roles or expectations, such as an authority figure, professional spokesperson, or a stylish environmentalist. My project's efforts to connect perspectives of how women use brands in their clothing practices contributes to the call for learning more "about the reciprocal arrangement between the brand and the consumer" and "a deeper understanding of the values that drive choice and that can build the brand appropriately."¹⁹

Another particular site where industry and the consumer intersected, and that women used to interpret clothing stories, was garment pricing.²⁰ Industry and consumers use price as shorthand for various values, including status, image, taste, or quality, but rarely environmental or social issues. Some women seemed more price conscious than others in their clothing deals, but most women were eager to get the best value for the lowest price. Contrastingly, Niki paid higher prices for eco-friendly or union-made garments. While this project is not explicitly about retailing and marketing, the patterns of the brand both as an anchor for women's garment stories and as a subject of their skepticism regarding ethical claims pushes us to consider the role of the brand as a tool for conveying sustainability-related information. My study also reminds us, however, that brands and prices *are* devices women use to "know" garment stories or track their origin. Thus, branding and pricing play a critical, if ambivalent, role in efforts to construct sustainable clothing systems.

Despite using brands and price as anchors for their stories about clothing items, women were also critical or skeptical of branding and marketing efforts, particularly those claims about

¹⁹ Szmigin, Carrigan, and O'Loughlin, "Integrating Ethical Brands into Our Consumption Lives," 408.

²⁰ Gwendolyn Hustvedt and John C. Bernard, "Effects of Social Responsibility Labelling and Brand on Willingness to Pay for Apparel," *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 34, no. 6 (2010): 619–626; Ha-Brookshire, "Country of Parts, Country of Manufacturing, and Country of Origin."

environmental or social responsibility. In contrast to Niki's confidence, several women across the sustainability attitude spectrum expressed skepticism about the justification for higher prices for organic or fair trade marketed products. The added-value or accuracy of those marketing claims was not apparent. For example, both Felicity (a high score) and Jessica (a low score) expressed doubt over whether fair trade or organic claims were more than a marketing ploy or made any substantial difference compared to non-organic or fair trade products. The consistent pattern, identified in this project and others, of mistrust, confusion, and lack of follow-up research around branding and marketing claims signify these as key points of interaction to be addressed when increasing consumer support.²¹ In contrast, transparently providing specific information about a specific product about how much money was going to who could offer purchasers direct access to more information about the system.²² Moreover, transparent accounting offers that also takes into account what some call the "triple bottom line" could provide financial metrics for the environmental damages and social welfare impacts otherwise absent from the dialog.²³ However, the challenge would remain to make this information available and meaningful to consumers.

Women were not completely oblivious or entirely uninterested in the clothing industry. For example, both Niki and Louise—women who scored on opposite ends of the sustainability and clothing attitude surveys—both enjoyed the design competition on reality television program *Project Runway*.

²¹ Carrigan and Atalla, "The Myth of Ethical Consumer"; John Connolly and Andrea Prothero, "Green Consumption: Life Politics, Risk, and Contradictions," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 8, no. 1 (2008): 117–145.

²² Karen H. Hyllegard et al., "Socially Responsible Labeling The Impact of Hang Tags on Consumers' Attitudes and Patronage Intentions Toward an Apparel Brand," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 30, no. 1 (January 2012): 51–66; Scott B. Follows and David Jobber, "Environmentally Responsible Purchase Behaviour: a Test of a Consumer Model," *European Journal of Marketing* 34, no. 5/6 (June 2000): 723–746; Mara Einstein, *Compassion, Inc.: How Corporate America Blurs the Line Between What We Buy, Who We Are, and Those We Help* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

²³ Timothy F. Slaper and Tanya J. Hall, "The Triple Bottom Line: What Is It and How Does It Work?," *Indiana Business Review* 86, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 4–8.

- Louise:** The idea that someone has to think of an idea, buy the material, sew it, and put it on the runway. I mean that is *phenomenal*. And, uh, my mom and I would watch it. We live in different towns. We would watch it and compare on TV and, I just thought that's the greatest show. I mean, that, that is so admirable to be able to do that, to design something and it's *awesome*.
- Niki:** If you like clothing at all, to see, how you know, what goes into putting a garment together is really interesting... And there was a gal who was very interested in using very *natural* materials, and I, you know, *personally*, appreciate that.

While both women were drawn to the dramatic narratives around the various characters that were presented by the show's editors, they also demonstrated similar interests in learning *about* the clothing lifecycle. They *wanted* to know more about garment designs. They admired the skills and talent. They supported particular environmentally-focused design choices. However, this show presents a narrow view of the process; it focuses on the designers' personality and on designing and prototyping stages. Using popular media platforms such as these to highlight industry practices and their social and environmental impacts, as well as connect them explicitly to individual practices, is another strategy that reaches a wide audience and taps into existing practices and interests, which may not even depend on pro-sustainability values.

Numerous popular non-fiction books and documentaries attempt to unravel garment stories.²⁴ The books' common premise of garments' mysterious origins or unknown afterlives that must be tracked down reaffirms the complexity and opacity of clothing stories. A few books frame their narratives specifically to expose environmental damages and human rights violations

²⁴ Kelsey Timmerman, *Where Am I Wearing? A Global Tour to the Countries, Factories, and People That Make Our Clothes* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2009); Joe Bennett, *Where Underpants Come from: From Checkout to Cotton Field: Travels through the New China and into the New Global Economy* (New York: Overlook Press, 2009); Rivoli, *The Travels of a T-shirt in the Global Economy*; Rachel Louise Snyder, *Fugitive Denim: A Moving Story of People and Pants in the Borderless World of Global Trade* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008); Shantha Bloeman, *T-Shirt Travels: A Documentary on Second Hand Clothes in Africa*, Documentary (Filmmakers Library, 2001); Hanna Rose Shell and Vanessa Bertozzi, *Secondhand (Pepe)*, Documentary (Fabrik Films, 2006).

wrought by the clothing production and consumption.²⁵ These object narratives and industry exposés ultimately come together as character stories. People—not the products the authors set out to examine—are at the heart of each story. This attention to people certainly could be explained as a dramatic strategy to capture and sustain the reader’s interest. However, acknowledging character stories and social relations highlights the importance of personal connections as a method to garner interest in an otherwise complex processes.²⁶

One book proposes an “inexact science of finding out where your clothes were produced,” which tells readers themselves travel to China, or another appropriate country, make contact with factory owners, and meet garment workers.²⁷ Although the author draws on the powerful embodied and material experience of overcoming distance by being in a place and forming direct, personal relationships, by suggesting one needs to literally know and meet people, it also underestimates the power of imaginative and emotional experiences that objects channel. Rather than antagonistically confront or curiously question factory owners and garment workers in person, others have suggested embracing enchantment, educating desire, and generously acknowledging the work of others on which we depend.²⁸ Even in otherwise routine clothing consumption behaviors documented here, we see the potential for cultivating relationships and connections.

Although participants did not discuss these particular books, they function as some of the most accessible ways women could potentially follow garment stories. For example, when pressed

²⁵ Lucy Siegle, *To Die For: Is Fashion Wearing Out the World?* (London: Fourth Estate, 2011); Elizabeth L. Cline, *Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion* (Penguin, 2012).

²⁶ Manning, *The Psychology of Sustainable Behavior*; Anna Lisa Peterson, *Everyday Ethics and Social Change: The Education of Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

²⁷ Timmerman, *Where Am I Wearing?*.

²⁸ Princen, “Distancing”; Princen, Maniates, and Conca, *Confronting Consumption*; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli, “Enchanting Ethical Consumerism”; Parkins and Craig, *Slow Living*; Peterson, *Everyday Ethics and Social Change*.

about particular environmental issues that concern her, Felicity responded that she had read at least one book about the fishing industry depleting ocean stock when she lived in a coastal city. She even carried a wallet card that offered guidance on sustainable fish consumption choices. In this particular example, attitudes, geography, and organizational support presented favorable conditions that helped Felicity choose sustainable options. Nevertheless, Felicity also recognized that sometimes the best choices were not available; she confessed that she sometimes put her personal preference above the recommendations. Taste and availability shaped her practices as much as attitudes, thus reinforcing the behavior gap pattern established in the literature.²⁹

Therefore, this kind of publication, combined with other user-friendly campaigns, could be useful, but may not be sufficient, to tap into stories and revealing alternative, more sustainable choices.

Women described how life events—moving, aging, or a loved one passing— interrupted the inertia of daily life and compelled them to confront their wardrobe. Rachel and Louise recently dealt with the belongings of a friend or family member who had recently died, and Bernadette, the oldest participant in my study, had cleared out several bags of clothes when her visiting daughter encouraged her to (leaving still very full closets and dressers!). If they were moving, women were also encouraged to face the accumulation of goods in their closets. However, their explanations did not apparently connect this build up of goods to the environmental and social costs embodied in the piles of garments or other products waiting to be donated or disposed of.

Instead, the most salient costs they described included the psychological stress of being overwhelmed by objects or potentially causing undue stress for loved ones. Previous research has

²⁹ Gregory A. Guagnano, "Influences on Attitude-Behavior Relationships: A Natural Experiment with Curbside Recycling," *Environment and Behavior* 27 (1995): 699–718; Lydia Zepeda and David Deal, "Organic and Local Food Consumer Behavior: Alphabet Theory," *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 33, no. 6 (November 2009): 697–705; Catrin Joergens, "Ethical Fashion: Myth or Future Trend?," *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* 10, no. 3 (2006): 360–371; Carmen Valor, "The Influence of Information About Labour Abuses on Consumer Choice of Clothes: A Grounded Theory Approach," *Journal of Marketing Management* 23, no. 7–8 (2007): 675–695.

documented that “mothers whose narratives say that the home feels messy, cluttered, or unfinished actually show elevated depressed mood as the day progresses, based on cortisol readings and self-reports.”³⁰ By confronting their garments, they freed themselves from clutter, took control of possessions (which they did so through organizing their clothes or even installing new closet systems), and spared loved ones from having to clear out even more items when they pass. Directly dealing with garments in the home was a way participants controlled their sense of self as well as expressed concern for others. Although women were not necessarily expressing concern for garment workers that created the clothes by which they now felt burdened, they did demonstrate care for women with whom they had personal relationships, whose experiences they could anticipate and empathize. Moreover, wardrobes became sites of aesthetic pleasure. Keeping things tidy, wrinkle-free, or organized, women were stewards of their clothes and spaces in which they lived.³¹ Women performed identities not only through the public presentation of self, but also through constructing the backstage spaces where those presentations were cultivated.³² By recognizing the importance of relationships, empathy, and positive emotional and aesthetic experiences within clothing consumption cycles, we can consider these dimensions of experiences as potential strategies in sustainable clothing practices.³³

The intimacy and privacy of domestic clothing practices presented additional challenges in terms of sustainability. Research has shown that the visibility of actions can encourage us to meet

³⁰ Jeanne E. Arnold, “Mountains of Things,” in *Fast-Forward Family: Home, Work, and Relationships in Middle-Class America*, ed. Elinor Ochs and Tamar Kremer-Sadlik (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 73.

³¹ Nicky Gregson, Alan Metcalfe, and Louise Crewe, “Identity, Mobility, and the Throwaway Society,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25, no. 4 (2007): 682–700; Saulo B. Cwerner, “Clothes at Rest: Elements for a Sociology of the Wardrobe,” *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 5, no. 1 (2001): 79–92; Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Thomas Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (Buffalo, NY: Broadview Press, 2012).

³² Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959).

³³ Peterson, *Everyday Ethics and Social Change*; Parkins and Craig, *Slow Living*; Connolly and Prothero, “Green Consumption: Life Politics, Risk, and Contradictions”; Niinimäki, “Eco-clothing, Consumer Identity and Ideology.”

a socially desirable, and optimally sustainable, standard of behavior, but many clothing practices are *not* visible.³⁴ When I asked women in my study how they think their clothing consumption—purchases to laundering to disposal—compared to other women’s’ in terms of practice or impacts, a shared sentiment was: **“I don’t know how it compares. I don’t know what other women do.”** This isolation from others, separation from public spaces, deprofessionalization into domestic spaces, and even marginalization within homes is itself historically shaped cultural and technological phenomenon. Compounding these dimensions is the historical cultural association with women, and in particular housewives, as performers of these tasks, as well as values of time, leisure, and work discussed in the previous chapter.³⁵ Resistance to this skilled knowledge of laundering or mending might be an example of what Lanser has described as “feminist subversions of domesticity.”³⁶ Reclaiming these domestic acts, without romanticizing and while asserting equality, become additional projects at play in sustainability initiatives.³⁷

Clothing on the body is visible, but closets and laundry rooms are not. Women’s expectations to look and smell clean, be presentable, and not wear outfits repeatedly presented a visible front that required regular laundering and a varied wardrobe. As discussed in preceding chapters, the social anxiety of what was sensible to others was made apparent as women self-consciously confessed that they sniffed their clothes to check if they could wear them again

³⁴ Manning, *The Psychology of Sustainable Behavior*; McKenzie-Mohr and Smith, *Fostering Sustainable Behavior*.

³⁵ Ann Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974); Susan Strasser, *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1999); Rudi Laermans and Carine Meulders, “The Domestication of Laundering,” in *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space*, ed. Irene Cieraad (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 118–129; Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

³⁶ Susan S. Lanser, “Burning Dinners: Feminist Subversions of Domesticity,” in *Feminist Messages: Coding in Women’s Folk Culture*, ed. Joan Newlon Radner (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 36–53.

³⁷ Shannon Hayes, *Radical Homemakers: Reclaiming Domesticity from a Consumer Culture* (Richmondville, NY: Left to Write Press, 2010); Kelly Coyne, *Making It: Radical Home Ec for a Post-consumer World* (Emmaus, PA: Rodale, 2010).

before washing, laughed at themselves, and apprehensively asked me what other people do. Although they expressed concern about social acceptability of this practice, it was in fact a more sustainable option compared to washing after every wearing. Women also seemed self-conscious as they showed me their wardrobe, explaining that they wanted to clean it up but did not have a chance. These were otherwise private or intimate spaces, often bedrooms, but also backyards, bathrooms, and basements. Relegating these practices to private spaces and times challenges our ability to hold each other and ourselves accountable for our actions. Opening these practices to everyday conversations, acknowledging the domestic systems and work (often performed by women) on which our publicly-perceptible clothing practices depends may be one step in transforming the practices.

In response to these themes, we can also turn to research advocating mindfulness as a strategy for sustainable lifestyles. Scholars have proposed mindful practice both in conscientious consumption practices and in everyday life tasks. Research suggests that this strategy may not only increase wellbeing, but may also increase awareness of practices and their impacts.³⁸ The slow food, slow living, and increasingly slow fashion movements build on these mindful practices of cultivating attention for, acknowledging the natural and human resources in, and relishing the aesthetic pleasures of everyday practices and material culture.³⁹ The home already acts as a place where caring relationships are central, and may serve as an anchor from which to expand and enrich consciously cultivated caring relationships to people, animals, and natural environments

³⁸ Jeffrey Jacob, Emily Jovic, and Merlin B. Brinkerhoff, "Personal and Planetary Well-Being: Mindfulness Meditation, Pro-Environmental Behavior and Personal Quality of Life in a Survey from the Social Justice and Ecological Sustainability Movement," *Social Indicators Research* 93, no. 2 (September 1, 2009): 275–294; Shauna L. Shapiro et al., "Cultivating Mindfulness: Effects on Well-being," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 64, no. 7 (2008): 840–862.

³⁹ Slow Food, *Slow Food Almanac*, English ed (Bra (Cn), Italy: Slow Food Editore, 2008); Parkins and Craig, *Slow Living*; Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles*.

outside the home.⁴⁰

From a different perspective, tapping into the types of personal connections, creating relationships of respect and admiration, and providing opportunities for transparency in the design through sourcing and manufacturing process are strategies that build on interest in clothing, design, and style, but manifest as accessible character stories. Projects documenting the resurgence in crafting and making often center around artisan profiles.⁴¹ Focusing on local or independent designers may be a way to get women interested in a local or ethical garment line, to think about the materials and processes invested into those products.⁴² A few women (Lizzie, Tara, Helen, Rachel, Melanie, Louise, and Zoey) asserted that they would *like* to purchase from local designers, artisans, or makers, but that they just do not know of any options to do so (or at least in basic, foundational pieces such as t-shirts and jeans rather than quirky skirts). Wendy's experience with a local craft community reinforces the value of this approach. By emphasizing and telling the story of local or independent designers or artisans, women may have a chance to learn about and invest more in the garment—and the person.⁴³ After all, following and becoming attached to particular designers on *Project Runway* contestants' designs and stories captured and inspired women's interest.

⁴⁰ Held, *The Ethics of Care*; Peterson, *Everyday Ethics and Social Change*.

⁴¹ Faythe Levine and Courtney Heimerl, *Handmade Nation: The Rise of DIY, Art, Craft, and Design* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008); Jennifer Causey, *Brooklyn Makers: Food, Design, Craft, and Other Scenes from the Tactile Life* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2013).

⁴² Joyce Lovelace, "The Craft of Design," *American Craft*, January 2013.

⁴³ This is not necessarily the same as current large retailers collaborating with high-end designers, which have occasionally induced purchase frenzies with shoppers scooping up popular versions of catwalk fashions at low to moderate prices. For examples, see Maysa Rawi, "Oh La Lanvin! Consumer Frenzy as Shoppers Queue Overnight for H&M Designer Collaboration," *Mail Online*, accessed July 22, 2013, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1332325/Oh-la-Lanvin-Consumer-frenzy-shoppers-queue-overnight-H-M-designer-collaboration.html>; Deborah Arthurs, "Sold Out AGAIN? H&M Strike Gold Once More with Marni Collection Shoppers Say Is the Essence of the Brand," *Mail Online*, accessed July 22, 2013, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2111995/H-M-Marni-collection-H-M-strike-gold-designer-collaboration.html>.

Women were also occasionally critical of their interest in clothing, belying another obstacle to expanding clothing lifecycle knowledge. Felicity and Niki described looking at fashion magazines or watching fashion television shows as their “**guilty pleasures**,” something a “**serious mom oughta not be doing**,” a fluff interest, and a distraction from more serious political and social issues. What is missing from women’s narratives, and broader social dialogues around clothing, is an explicit connection of clothing matters to those political and social issues. However, making these connections may contradict some women’s escapist or pleasure-driven use of these media.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, as stories of sweatshop abuses and environmental degradation remind us, exploitation and destruction underpin our pleasures. Although various research projects have explored how individuals simultaneously hold contradictory information and values, other research has suggested how we can use our existing interests to push action.⁴⁵

Communicating garment stories, increasing access, gaining trust, and convincing people that clothing is worth their time and/or money might seem challenging and daunting, but one that is possible to tackle. Scholars, artists, designers, activists are leading the way: Selling at local maker or craft fairs. Connecting with boutique stores to larger companies to distribute their products. Exhibiting creative and socially provocative designs at community galleries. Roaming the streets with mobile mending carts. Hosting pop-up craft and repair clinics. Documenting individual oral histories. Modeling alternative practices practiced in other time periods,

⁴⁴ Morris B. Holbrook and Elizabeth C. Hirschman, “The Experiential Aspects of Consumption: Consumer Fantasies, Feelings, and Fun,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 9, no. 2 (September 1982): 132–140.

⁴⁵ Andreas Chatzidakis, Sally Hibbert, and Andrew P. Smith, “Why People Don’t Take Their Concerns About Fair Trade to the Supermarket: The Role of Neutralisation,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 74 (2007): 89–100; Isabelle Szmigin, Marylyn Carrigan, and Morven G. McEachern, “The Conscious Consumer: Taking a Flexible Approach to Ethical Behavior,” *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 33, no. 2 (2009): 224–231; Szmigin, Carrigan, and O’Loughlin, “Integrating Ethical Brands into Our Consumption Lives”; Peterson, *Everyday Ethics and Social Change*.

geographic areas, cultures, or subcultures.⁴⁶ Women in my study did not always explicitly or conscientiously approach their garments through the frame I have discussed in this section, that is, attempt to unravel the stories behind their garments. Neither did women participate in all of the above strategies. On the other hand, a few women framed their stories to me as missives to designers. They had a lot to say back to the clothing industry about style and quality, and I was their conduit. In this sense, participating in my research project was an attempt on their part to engage with the clothing industry. Finding additional ways to offer these exchanges, as described above, in addition to economic feedback through purchases, could address this eagerly expressed desire to have their subjective experiences heard. Nevertheless, their practices offer an alternative starting point—grounded in personal meanings and relationships around clothing—for accessing and investing in the stories of their garments, and the people and places contributing to these stories.

Materializing Meaning and Crafting Connections

In this section, I explore the materiality of products as embodying meanings that emerge from intersections across the lifecycle. In particular, I focus on practices in which people physically, materially engage with garments. This spans a spectrum from designing to constructing, modifying, altering, or mending. Although the term “craft” is subject to its own history of disciplined skills to amateur hobbies, I use the term loosely alongside “making” to

⁴⁶ Levine and Heimerl, *Handmade Nation*; Causey, *Brooklyn Makers*; “Tomofholland | The Visible Mending Programme: Making and Re-making,” accessed July 19, 2013, <http://tomofholland.com/>; Jessamyn Hatcher, “Human-Textile Wellness Initiative | An Action Research Lab That Documents People’s Relationships to Their Clothing,” accessed April 15, 2013, <http://humantextilewellness.wordpress.com/>; Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles*.

capture a wider conception of individual's involvement with their clothes.⁴⁷ Moreover, creatively engaging with clothes can also include curating wardrobes and composing outfits.⁴⁸ I draw making into the dialogue as a way not only to embody or reflect meaning and social relations, but also to create or cultivate them

Consumers' lack of conscious recognition and value of clothing is a major concern in cultivating sustainable clothing consumption. In some ways, this phenomena mirrors academic debates about fashion as a trivial matter versus a serious theoretical topic. Many in the field of dress studies have wrestled with critics and argued for the discipline's validity. Despite its egregious harm to the environment and social justice and its foundational contributions to individual and social identities, the stories in my study belie the persistence of clothing's marginalization. In this sense, a productive way to move forward is not only to address the context of clothing consumption by making more sustainable options more accessible, but also to address our attitudes towards clothing and each other.

I highlight threads of meaning already at stake in women's clothing tastes and choices. Exploring these meanings through participants' stories, I show how clothing garments and our embodied, multi-sensory interactions with material objects offer tangible anchors for these otherwise elusive and invisible connections. Recognizing, reimagining, and reconnecting clothing's meanings, connections, and value to our own identities, interpersonal relations, and broader social contexts is a strategy that we can then use to address multiple challenges to sustainability. From individual consumer practices through political and trade agreements to

⁴⁷ Glenn Adamson, *Thinking through Craft* (Oxford: Berg, 2007).

⁴⁸ Henry Glassie, *Material Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). This contrasts Campbell's distinction of a craft consumer as someone who is involved in design through production of an object. Colin Campbell, "The Craft Consumer: Culture, Craft, and Consumption in a Postmodern Society," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 5, no. 1 (2005): 23–42.

marketing standards, we can acknowledge the needs-fulfillment, relationship support, aesthetic pleasure, symbolic meaning, and emotional connections that clothing consumption engenders.

Empowering Everyday Aesthetic Experiences

The rewards of aesthetics and creativity bear discussion because of their potential contribution to sustainable consumption practices. As discussed in the literature review, aesthetics can be considered a value in everyday life. Moreover, consumption practices can be viewed as a form of production. We create garments anew literally, by making and modifying them, or symbolically, by assembling outfits and attaching meaning. Folklore scholar Glassie describes, “Suppose that the consumer, in using the object in a creative act, remakes it... Use becomes creation as consumers alter objects. And use becomes creation when objects become parts of objects, when the physical context becomes a creative composition.”⁴⁹ Physically engaging with clothing through making or mending garments, in addition to curating and composing wardrobes, can synergistically satisfy multiple human-needs as identified by Max-Neef’s work on sustainable human development.⁵⁰

Seemingly disconnected from the global problems of climate change or sweatshop labor, creative expression and aesthetic expression might seem like a luxury for consumers of richer nations.⁵¹ However, hooks argues against oppressive, commercially-controlled, advertising-driven conceptions of beauty that she sees as prevalent in the United States and contrasts it with a more empowering, “healing and life-sustaining beauty” practiced by the “global nonwhite poor.”

⁴⁹ Glassie, *Material Culture*, 81, 82.

⁵⁰ Manfred A. Max-Neef, Antonio Elizalde, and Martín Hopenhayn, *Human Scale Development: Conception, Application and Further Reflections* (New York: The Apex Press, 1991); Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles*.

⁵¹ Joanne Turney, *The Culture of Knitting* (Oxford ; New York: Berg, 2009); Timothy J. Scrase, “Fair Trade in Cyberspace: The Commodification of Poverty and the Marketing of Handicrafts on the Internet,” in *Ethical Consumption: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Tania Lewis and Emily Potter (New York: Routledge, 2011), 71–84.

Females in white supremacist patriarchal society are socialized to consume in an unmindful manner, encouraged to value goods, especially luxury goods, over our wellbeing and safety... Learning to see and appreciate the presence of beauty is an act of resistance in a culture of domination that recognizes the production of a pervasive feeling of lack, both materially and spiritually, is a useful colonizing strategy... We need to theorize the meaning of beauty in our lives so that... we can create a balanced, harmonious life where we know the joy of collective, progressive struggle, where the presence of beauty uplifts and renews the spirit.⁵²

For hooks, aesthetics must be incorporated into daily life in order to create a fair, just, and worthwhile world. Similarly, Lorde connects deeply embodied affective experiences with poetic and aesthetic practices as a tool of resistance and empowerment: “For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, and then into more tangible action.”⁵³ While hooks and Lorde approach aesthetic empowerment from particular feminist perspectives, others working in a range of disciplines are increasingly developing a language for everyday aesthetics through which people sensually and spiritually engage with the world around them to create meaning.⁵⁴

There has been much historical and philosophical work exploring how women have critically developed aesthetic, creative, and making practices, thus cementing the significant role aesthetics and creativity has in meaningful and sustainable clothing practices.⁵⁵ These scholarly

⁵² bell hooks, “Beauty Laid Bare,” in *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism*, ed. Rebecca Walker (New York: Anchor Books, 1995), 164.

⁵³ Audre Lorde, “Poetry Is Not a Luxury,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays & Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), 37.

⁵⁴ Beverly Gordon, *Textiles: The Whole Story: Uses, Meanings, Significance* (London: Thames & Hudson, Limited, 2011); Henry John Drewal, “Senses in Understandings of Art,” *African Arts* 38, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 1,4,6,88,96; Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary*; Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*; Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

⁵⁵ Beverly Gordon, “Intimacy and Objects: A Proxemic Analysis of Gender-based Response to the Material World,” in *The Material Culture of Gender, the Gender of Material Culture*, ed. Katherine A. Martinez and Kenneth L. Ames (Winterthur, DE: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1997), 237–252; Hilde S. Hein and Carolyn Korsmeyer, eds., *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Lesley Johnson, *Sentenced to Everyday Life: Feminism and the Housewife* (Oxford: Berg, 2004).

discussions draw attention to the political nature of a range of often gendered-female and domesticized aesthetic practices. Although hooks does mention environmental issues, her critical analysis of economic and social structures parallels current sustainability literature reviewed earlier. Similar to how women in my study did not consciously consider meanings from their clothing practices, women did not explicitly discuss their aesthetic and creative clothing practices as political acts of resistance. Design matters, but participants—and perhaps the wider cultural framework—does not consistently acknowledge its significance. Instead, it is treated as a superficial gloss.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, aesthetics, laden with political, cultural, and economic significance, matters to sustainability, even though this dimension is sometimes invisible to the women who engage with them.

The ordinariness, mundaneness, and domesticity of everyday clothing practices discouraged further engagement with clothing construction or maintenance, which can be a challenge for sustainable clothing consumption. Despite Rachel's sophisticated knowledge of clothing construction, for example, she was not interested in applying it or doing clothing chores, unless it was for her hand knit sweaters. Camilla did not want to apply her design and sewing skills to everyday clothes, as opposed to what she considered more interesting, original, dramatic costumes. However, as alluded to above, celebrating the beauty in the everyday and the creative potential of routine acts could transform our consumption into meaningful practice.

How might clothing and our relationships with it be valued differently if we acknowledged that tidy, neat, clean, and feeling good, right, or nice—as well as the opposite states of messy, dirty, or disordered—were valid deep aesthetic pleasures?⁵⁷ How might we care for and act as

⁵⁶ Daniel Miller, *Stuff* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).

⁵⁷ Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary*; Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*.

stewards over these objects and experiences? As Lanser suggests, “perhaps domestic work can become neutralized both in folklore and in social practice as sometimes necessary, sometimes pleasurable, and sometimes onerous work worthy of respectable status and, when performed for wages, respectable reward.”⁵⁸ Mindfulness strategies could counteract the terminal materialism contributing to unhealthy and unsustainable consumption.⁵⁹ In her essay on feminist aesthetics, Donovan argues that domestic objects and “moments of being” function as “art that is embedded in the everyday, that are infused with personal and local history” and “by virtue of [their] aesthetic character provide a political critique of the reified world of commodity exchange.”⁶⁰ Harnessing these “moments of being” and the art of the everyday moves us closer to appreciating objects themselves, confronting their impacts, and building individual and social wellbeing.

This critical reflection on everyday acts of consumption, including making and mending, does not automatically coincide with what some may see as “green” or “eco-friendly” products or consumption. However, my conversations with women encourage us to look beyond the individual choices and “green” products reinforced in marketing and policy proposals.⁶¹ Taking control of and investing meaning into clothing choices could engender a context amiable to care and concern, reflection and recognition, choices that extend out from our own wellbeing to that of people and the planet as a whole.

⁵⁸ Lanser, “Burning Dinners,” 50; Hayes, *Radical Homemakers*.

⁵⁹ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Juliet Schor, *The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don't Need* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1999); Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles*; Annie Leonard, *The Story of Stuff: How Our Obsession with Stuff Is Trashing the Planet, Our Communities, and Our Health And a Vision for Change* (New York: Free Press, 2010); John De Graaf, David Wann, and Thomas H. Naylor, *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2005).

⁶⁰ Josephine Donovan, “Everyday Use and Moments of Being: Toward a Nondominative Aesthetic,” in *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Hilde S. Hein and Carolyn Korsmeyer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 64, 53.

⁶¹ Elizabeth Shove, “Beyond the ABC: Climate Change Policy and Theories of Social Change,” *Environment and Planning A* 42, no. 6 (2010): 1273–1285; Hobson, “Competing Discourses of Sustainable Consumption.”

Weaving Connections

In the lives of my study's participants, garments, other artifacts, and multi-sensory interactions with them anchored individual identity and social relations. Reciprocal relational meanings are core dimensions of clothing practices. As such, they need to be part of sustainability dialogues.⁶² Moreover, they could provide a solid foundation from which to build relationships of respect for the integrity of not only garments worth investing care in to maintain (the dimension with which the wearer has the most direct experience), but also the human labor and natural resources out of which the garments were created.

When asked directly about meaningful or emotionally significant clothes, women did not regularly draw on narratives of everyday practice, but instead looked to garments from special events, childhood, or to other object categories altogether. At first, Eunice contrasted how non-clothing objects carried explicit symbolic meaning; clothing functioned primarily for utility.

Eunice: I do have things that are more just um, [pauses] I don't know decoration. But, even those items, usually have some meaning to me... So even that, that [pauses] thing that might be a knick-knack to some people, or decoration. To me, it was like a reminder of something that I wanted to kind of think about.

Maggie: Do you think you have any clothes like that, that sort of have that—

Eunice: Symbolic meaning? Not really, um. [pauses] No, I mean, more, more function.

Although Eunice articulated at different points in the interviews that clothing affected how she acts and how others perceive her, she did not consciously attach symbolic value to her apparel. Instead, she framed her dress stories as accounts of function. Yet, as we continued to talk, she began to acknowledge explicitly that some of her clothes *do* have special, symbolic meaning.

Eunice: I do have, yeah, I guess there's some, certain things where I want them to look nice forever, but they're just really [pauses] I think they're like *me*, you know.

⁶² Niinimäki, "Eco-clothing, Consumer Identity and Ideology."

Through her apparel, she created her identity. Certain garments represented her, gave her comfort, helped her be the person she wanted to be and do the things she wants to do. Her clothing played an essential role in how she crafted her sense of self and social relationships, even if she did not consciously see this as symbolically or emotionally significant.

Participants' place in life also shaped their relationships with clothing, including what their practices were and what meanings emerged from them. For example, because it was portable and easier to pick up when attending her children's different activities, Rachel took up the fiber-based craft of knitting rather than clay pottery work.⁶³ Rachel also described how over the years she changed how she spends her time and money. Crafting in this life stage helped her connect socially to her friends and materially to her garments. Rosa's more extensive behavior changes over the years also connected craft, clothes, and motherhood; when she began making all of her children's clothes, she realized she could make clothes for herself and her husband as well.

Additionally, mothers (Lizzie, Niki, Bernadette, and Rachel) teaching their children about clothing care—about laundering, purchasing, mending, repairing, and even making clothes—signaled the intimate relationships of care and creativity that circulated around clothing skills in the home. Alternatively, Jessica, a recent university graduate, primarily relied on her mother's skills for repairs. She did not have any interest in learning these skills herself, but felt she might once she had children of her own.

Jessica: **I think it might be one of those things, maybe like in a different stage in my life, where like maybe if I had kids or something I would want to learn how to do that. Because in case like *they* have like minor, like tears, and damage to their clothes. Like I wouldn't wanna be like spending money like, you know, left and right, because they ripped a pair of jeans.**

Economic concerns, home management, and family care were Jessica's imagined motivations for

⁶³ Turney, *The Culture of Knitting*.

learning and applying textile skills. In this sense, current clothing practices, including making and mending, were rooted in family relationships, and not necessarily dependent on an independent interest in the activity. Caring for clothes was a way to care for one's family. Peterson further argues how sharing sustainable everyday practices with one's family cannot only be positive for the environment, but also for bringing pleasure and deepening affection between family members.⁶⁴ Additionally, in her role as a mother and/or homemaker, a woman has some opportunities to create cultures of care, product stewardship, and respect in addition to or instead of cultures of thrift and efficiency.⁶⁵

Clothing played a pivotal role in establishing, reflecting, and engaging communities of belonging in the lives of the women in my study. Wendy was particularly articulate about how her clothing collecting and selling had contributed greatly to her wellbeing.

Wendy: **Maybe this is a little off tangent, but, um, there seems to be a real community aspect to the clothing behaviors that I engage in. Because um, I tend to buy things from individuals or smaller local sources or flea markets or where I'm, have a more personal relationship. Um. And then I sell them in very social environments... There's *no* similar experience to like the large scale retail world. Um. So. To me, that's very, *that* world is kind of impersonal... When I walk into any kind of chain big business retail environment there's sometimes kind of a faux atmosphere of that. Where like, you know people are selling things to you and they're trying to be nice. Um, but you don't really feel like you have a connection to that.**

Although she did not explicitly connect these themes to sustainability (and indeed suggested that they were “**a tangent**”), her experience integrated many positive elements across the environmental, economic, and social dimensions of sustainability outlined earlier. She and her peers actively extended the life of garments; engaged in local, fair economic exchanges; enhanced

⁶⁴ Peterson, *Everyday Ethics and Social Change*.

⁶⁵ Daniel Miller, “Consumption as the Vanguard of History: A Polemic by Way of an Introduction,” in *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies*, ed. Daniel Miller (London: Routledge, 1995), 1–57; Johnson, *Sentenced to Everyday Life*; Hayes, *Radical Homemakers*; Emily Matchar, *Homeward Bound: Why Women Are Embracing the New Domesticity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013).

individual wellbeing through synergistically satisfying multiple needs; and cultivated a tight-knit community that was inclusive and respectful of other practices.

Vintage apparel items created a tangible core around which this community blossomed. The physical, aesthetic, and historical dimensions of the garments themselves nourished the community.⁶⁶ Members cared for the clothes—quite literally as demonstrated by Wendy’s conscientious washing, pressing, and mending—and for each other. Wendy questioned the social experience’s relevancy, but she insisted on sharing this more emotional component because of its importance in her clothing practices. Despite the significance of building social ties through material culture, these socially-focused dimensions and material foundations are often underestimated in the face of environmental impacts.

Other women’s description of non-conventional, non-retail acquisition practices, particularly clothes sharing and swapping, also reaffirmed social connections, so that their ideas of quality obtained from these sources (as discussed in the previous chapter) mutually constructed the relationships. For instance, Tina spoke with delight about the clothes-sharing parties she attended with friends, and she connected garments in her wardrobes to those social experiences. Similarly, Sandra and Jessica shared clothing with their sisters, who they included as origin points (rather than or in addition to the garment’s brand) as they narrated garment stories.⁶⁷ Alternatively, the garments and other objects Lizzie and Helen selected out of other’s discarded trash did not connect them to specific individuals. Instead, the objects symbolized their participation in communities of practice that embrace sharing and minimizing waste. Although Lizzie and Helen’s deliberately

⁶⁶ Alexandra Palmer and Hazel Clark, *Old Clothes, New Looks: Second Hand Fashion* (Oxford: Berg, 2005); Louise Crewe and Nicky Gregson, *Second-hand Cultures* (Oxford: Berg, 2003).

⁶⁷ Peter Corrigan, “Gender and the Gift: The Case of the Family Clothing Economy,” *Sociology* 23, no. 4 (November 1989): 513–534; Nicky Gregson and Vikki Beale, “Wardrobe Matter: The Sorting, Displacement and Circulation of Women’s Clothing,” *Geoforum* 35, no. 6 (November 2004): 689–700.

manifested their values, pro-environmental values were not always the most significant component of these behaviors. Theirs and others' stories of communities, friends, and family reaffirmed the importance of the social relations that the objects and their exchange embody.

Sharing and swapping practices are relevant to sustainable consumption for several reasons. The practices extend the life of clothes, thus potentially reducing the buildup of material waste in landfills. Additionally, they provide tangible threads of connections among individuals.⁶⁸ Many of these relations are between particular people, but this was not always the case in my study. Lizzie and Helen's practices demonstrated how relationships, interest, and care could extend out to broader communities. Wendy's practices show how this applied to imagined, historical stories. While some have been formalized and institutionalized into large-scale events,⁶⁹ others continue to occur on more intimate, informal, familial levels.

Women described how garments reminded them of the places, people, and events that were associated with their purchase or use. For example, Bernadette narrated her international travels to me through describing the clothing she purchased to wear for the trip and the items she purchased while traveling. When asked why she purchased particular objects in particular cities, she explained how the material or craft was a specialty of the area. While this certainly could be explained simply as a tourist marketing success story, her desire to have a memento of not only her experience but a tangible manifestation of the particular qualities related to specific places

⁶⁸ Gregson, Metcalfe, and Crewe, "Identity, Mobility, and the Throwaway Society"; Gregson and Beale, "Wardrobe Matter"; Rachel Botsman and Roo Rogers, *What's Mine Is Yours: The Rise of Collaborative Consumption* (New York: Harper Business, 2010). Although secondhand consumption challenges the otherwise rampant disposability seen in garment industry and clothing consumption, providing alternative garment life trajectories, some studies have suggested that the secondhand market reinforces overconsumption by providing a feel-good outlet for clothes no longer wanted. Jung E. Ha-Brookshire and Nancy N. Hodges, "Socially Responsible Consumer Behavior? Exploring Used Clothing Donation Behavior," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 27, no. 3 (July 2009): 179–196.

⁶⁹ "Wendy Tremayne," accessed July 19, 2013, <http://www.swaporamarama.org/>; "Naked Lady Party - Getcrafty.com," accessed July 22, 2013, http://www.getcrafty.com/home_nakedlady.php; "Clothing Swap - Be Good. Be Green. Be Glam!," accessed July 22, 2013, <http://www.clothingswap.com/>.

demonstrates how materialized meanings matter.⁷⁰ Additionally, her garments served as markers of life events. When pointing out a dress in her closet, she confirmed her story that she wore it to her son's wedding by showing me the photograph of the wedding party, as well. Although she was not likely to wear the garment again, and the photo was already on display, she persisted in holding on to the garment. This dress was clearly an example of how objects are "symbolic bundles of social, cultural, and individual meanings fused onto something we can see, touch, and own."⁷¹ Moreover, through positive associations women tapped into the symbolic power that clothing embodied. For example, Zoey's favorite souvenir accessory was a staple in her test-taking outfit, infused with a totemic power of positive memories, friendships, and identity.⁷² The *physical* link that a garment provided was a key reason women kept it and/or wore it.

Not just any garments became meaningful totems of self-identity, family and friends, social roles, places and events, and even imagined histories. Participants across all attitude categories described specific, special objects that performed these functions. For instance, Zoey and Jessica, two women low on both attitude scales, described specific clothing items that symbolized moments in their life that they felt were important. This is not something that can be sold. It is something that needs to be experienced in a context of life, experience, family, friendship, self. The above examples show how meaning-imbued garments are not easily disposed of, as other less meaningful items might be, but that does not mean women regularly wore the

⁷⁰ Beverly Gordon, "The Souvenir: Messenger of the Extraordinary," *Journal of Popular Culture* 20, no. 3 (Winter 1986): 135–146.

⁷¹ Ann Smart Martin, "Makers, Buyers, and Users: Consumerism as a Material Culture Framework," *Winterthur Portfolio* 28, no. 2/3 (Summer-Autumn 1993): 141.

⁷² Melanie Wallendorf, Russell Belk, and Debora Heisley, "Deep Meaning in Possessions: The Paper," *Advances in Consumer Research* 15 (1988): 528–530; Gordon, "The Souvenir."

special garments.⁷³ In this sense, without integrating these symbolic and emotional connections into everyday practices, their potential to enhance clothing consumption, and hence sustainable practices, decreased. While design can play a pivotal role in creating objects that might serve these multiple functions or might hold meanings, or connect across lifecycle stages, people, and places, consumer's interactions with objects matter. Therefore, sustainable, meaningful clothing consumption can begin at multiple points in the lifecycle and be integrated throughout everyday use and care.

Examining failed relationships with garments offers an alternative perspective to the scholarship aligning sustainable consumption with physically and emotionally durable design.⁷⁴ Finding ways to fill these needs through clothing (and the relationships, activities, and experiences of which clothing practices can be a part) could minimize an individual's clothing negative environmental and social impacts. Part of this responsibility lies with consumers' efforts to engage deeply with their clothing and practices, and we see a range of engagement levels across categories even in this study's small sample. Part of the responsibility lies with the industry in providing products physically and aesthetically worth the consumer's investment.⁷⁵ A sustainable clothing system also depends on industry producing and consumers purchasing apparel that has not already negatively impacted others and the environment through its production.

We can examine how a failure to materialize meaning manifests in the overall lack of attention to the ways clothing sitting for sale in the store, languishing in individual closets, and dropped off at the donation center embodies unrecognized, unaccounted for natural resources and

⁷³ Maura Banim and Alison Guy, "Dis/continued Selves: Why Do Women Keep Clothes They No Longer Wear?," in *Through the Wardrobe: Women's Relationships with Their Clothes*, ed. Eileen Green, Alison Guy, and Maura Banim (Oxford ; New York: Berg, 2001), 203–219.

⁷⁴ Jonathan Chapman, *Emotionally Durable Design: Objects, Experiences, and Empathy* (London: Earthscan, 2005).

⁷⁵ Niinimäki, "Eco-clothing, Consumer Identity and Ideology."

human labor. This failure to notice materialized connections parallels the challenges to unravel garment stories explored earlier. Here, I emphasize that material qualities of clothing—from fiber to construction—might be used strategically to help unravel those stories and develop particular relationships. Material culture theory provides a solid foundation for studying how to track stories through materiality.⁷⁶ Some clothing retailers are already attempting to market their product based on garments' material stories. For example, American Apparel promotes its vertically integrated production facilities that offer fair wages and other benefits to workers. Patagonia's website features the "Footprint Chronicles" that outlines the geographic, environmental, and social dimensions of select products.⁷⁷ These strategies ground symbolic meanings and values in tangible, physical properties and practices. A few women (Lizzie, Niki, and Wendy) mentioned these companies' efforts as appealing and something they supported, at least in theory, and occasionally in practice. Connecting the materiality of production with the materiality of meaning in consumption is a strategy that could be used to build sustainable practices; it integrates garment stories, individuals and industry, products and practices, knowledge and affect.

Fair trade and alternative trading organizations also personalize social justice stories through objects. Despite my recruiting at a local fair trade store, I did not find purchases of fair trade products to be prevalent in the practices of my participants. Previous scholarship has explored the clothing choices of women who regularly purchase clothing from fair trade or

⁷⁶ Ann Smart Martin, "Magical, Mythical, Practical, and Sublime: The Meanings and Uses of Ceramics in America," *Ceramics in America* 1 (2001): 29–46; Jules D. Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture and Method," *Winterthur Portfolio* 17, no. 1 (1982): 1–17; Chris Tilley, *Handbook of Material Culture* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2006).

⁷⁷ "American Apparel | Fashionable Basics. Sweatshop Free. Made in USA.," accessed July 22, 2013, <http://www.americanapparel.net/aboutus/verticalint/>; "The Footprint Chronicles: Our Supply Chain," accessed July 22, 2013, <http://www.patagonia.com/us/footprint/>.

alternative trade organizations.⁷⁸ Stores and organizations specifically market a variety of products—including home decor items, kitchen and food serving items, food, jewelry, home textiles, and some clothing—through their close connection to the artisans or craftspeople making them.⁷⁹ Often appealing to global or ethnically-inspired aesthetic tastes and activist consumers, this is a niche market that, in its current design and product offerings, may not necessarily be adopted by a large percentage of women or may not be the best model for mainstream consumption. Indeed, my interviews revealed that there is a population for which these styled products might serve as playful accessories or special gift items, but not as regular wardrobe staples. These market models, though, do offer one avenue for exposing garment stories by connecting to garment workers, highlighting craft processes, and disclosing systems of production and marketing. However, there is also the danger of romanticizing or fetishizing artisans.

Aside from incorporating these stories into brand images, marketing campaigns, product hangtags, or organizational missions, how might design encode these narratives into the garments themselves? Bernadette's souvenirs told the story of a place through the connection to a particular area's environment, industry, or history. Increasingly, architectural and product designers, are considering ways to reveal otherwise invisible infrastructure and materialize environmental and human costs. My findings support strengthening the visibility, growing the popularity, and expanding the reach (from information about production to consumption and disposal) of their

⁷⁸ Marsha A. Dickson and Mary A. Littrell, "Consumers of Clothing from Alternative Trading Organizations: Societal Attitudes and Purchase Evaluative Criteria," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 15, no. 1 (1997): 20–33; Marsha A. Dickson and Mary A. Littrell, "Consumers of Ethnic Apparel from Alternative Trading Organizations: A Multifaceted Marketed," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 16, no. 1 (1998): 1–10; Scrase, "Fair Trade in Cyberspace"; Kimberly M. Grimes and B. Lynne Milgram, eds., *Artisans and Cooperatives: Developing Alternate Trade for the Global Economy* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2000).

⁷⁹ "Marketplace Handwork of India," accessed July 22, 2013, <http://www.marketplaceindia.com/>; "Global Mamas," accessed July 22, 2013, <http://www.globalmamas.org/default.aspx?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1>; "Fair Trade Gifts, Home Decor, Jewelry, Chocolate and More: SERRV," accessed July 22, 2013, <http://www.serrv.org/>; "Fair Trade Handmade Gifts & Crafts from International Artisans - Ten Thousand Villages," accessed July 22, 2013, <http://www.tenthousandvillages.com/>.

programs.⁸⁰ Through embedding these stories into garments, designers and marketers could encourage us to realize that we bear those weights on our bodies and in our wardrobes.

Making Meaning

In this section, I probe how attending to the making processes can creatively address concerns that I identified in my analysis. Making engages deeply with the materiality of clothing through the embodied experience of the many individuals involved in the process. Additionally, it relates to the design, fit with the wearer's body and personality, and quality issues I explored as relevant for women in my study and which need to be grappled with in consideration of sustainable consumption. Crafting or making can serve as particularly productive practices through which to engage meanings, cultivate relationships, and attend to interconnections between wearers with their garments' materiality and origin, as well as clothing information and skills. "Re-establishing a sense of connection, in process and products," as design scholar Walker argues, is "a way of creating more environmental, socially responsible, and meaningful objects."⁸¹ Moreover, these practices build practical and emotional skills for a "sustainable literacy" for confronting the many challenges our society faces.⁸² My research builds on Gauntlett's work on creativity and craft, in which he argues:

Making is connecting because you have to connect things together (materials, ideas, or both) to make something new; ... because acts of creativity usually involve, at some point, a social dimension and connect us with other people; and... because through making things

⁸⁰ Stuart Walker, *The Spirit of Design: Objects, Environment, and Meaning* (New York: Earthscan, 2011); Alastair Fuad-Luke, *Design Activism: Beautiful Strangeness for a Sustainable World* (London: Earthscan, 2009); Anne Chick, *Design for Sustainable Change: How Design and Designers Can Drive the Sustainability Agenda* (Lausanne, Switzerland; La Vergne, TN: Ava Pub.; Distributed in the USA by Ingram Publisher Services, 2011).

⁸¹ Stuart Walker, "The Manifestation of Meaning: A Discussion of the Environmental, Social, and Spiritual Aspects of Product Design," *The Design Journal* 2, no. 2 (1999): 2.

⁸² Arran Stibbe, *The Handbook of Sustainability Literacy: Skills for a Changing World* (Totnes, UK: Green Books, 2009).

and sharing them in the world, we increase our engagement and connection with our social and physical environments.⁸³

Eleven of the nineteen women I spoke with engaged in textile making or mending practices (and two more were interested in knitting or sewing). They expressed a range of motivations and purposes: maintain mundane articles of clothing, design extravagant costumes, partake in portable creative hobbies, challenge themselves creatively and intellectually, and craft unique gifts. Apparel scholar Schofield-Tomschin traces the history of motivations in home sewing—from economy to quality, fit, creativity, and leisure—revealing how important social-psychological benefits have become in crafting activities. Johnson and Wilson’s study of textile crafts confirm these results, emphasizing the role of emotional connections and self-identity.⁸⁴ By examining these practices, and the narratives that wound through them, I argue that engaging with clothing through making or mending practices epitomizes potentially rich opportunities for confronting many challenges that hinder sustainable clothing consumption.

Knitting was a particularly well-represented craft in my study (practiced by eight participants), more popular than spinning, weaving, or sewing. The practice is often described by knitters themselves, in scholarly analyses, and by marketers as a calming, meditative practice, a way of slowing the harried pace of modern life. Knitting affects the movement and speed of the body’s processes: “We slow down as we knit. Our breathing and heart rate drop and knitters who’ve been at it a while experience a trancelike state that provides the same benefits as other

⁸³ David Gauntlett, *Making Is Connecting: The Social Meaning of Creativity from DIY and Knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2011), 2.

⁸⁴ Sherry Schofield-Tomschin, “Home Sewing: Motivational Changes in the Twentieth Century,” in *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking*, ed. Barbara Burman (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 97–110; Joyce Starr Johnson and Laurel E. Wilson, “‘It Says You Really Care’: Motivational Factors of Contemporary Female Handcrafters,” *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 23, no. 2 (2005): 115–130.

forms of meditation.”⁸⁵ The knitter can take control of the schedule by knitting at opportune moments; Rachel even did this during our interview. As Parkins elaborates, “Practices like knitting represent an alternative temporality, defined against the acceleration of other areas of life; they “hook into the rhythms and practices of everyday life” which can be redeployed as means of self-formation.”⁸⁶ However, expanding out from the particular experience of mindful, rhythmic knitting to daily life continues to be a challenge for cultivating conscientious consumption.⁸⁷

Engaging with textile crafts was a primary activity around which stories of social solidarity emerged. Lizzie not only spoke genuinely about the pleasure she experienced playing with textiles and clothing, but also described how satisfying and fun it was to share these delights with her mother and sister on textile crafting-themed vacations. Continuing this intergenerational bonding, Lizzie assisted her daughter through realizing her vision for a Halloween costume and actively encouraged her to continue her interest in crafting costumes. Tara traced her learning as a process of developing questions and challenges for which she sought guidance from experts at local fiber and yarn stores. Following these threads across the country and casting new nets as she relocated to the Midwest, Tara described how each of her mentors and the associated stores, farms, or groups were rooted in communities of practice and particular geographies. Her narrative of learning to knit demonstrated themes of social connections, friendships, and community.

In addition to people and practices, apparel products were key players in the processes of making meaning. Objects women made were markers of their belonging in this interest group. For example, Felicity narrated the story of multiple sweaters she had made. One day she wore a

⁸⁵ Wendy Parkins, “Celebrity Knitting and the Temporality of Postmodernity,” *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 8, no. 4 (November 2004): 435–436.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 432.

⁸⁷ Parkins and Craig, *Slow Living*; Elise L. Amel, Christie M. Manning, and Britain A. Scott, “Mindfulness and Sustainable Behavior: Pondering Attention and Awareness as Means for Increasing Green Behavior,” *Ecopsychology* 1, no. 1 (March 2009): 14–25.

sweater knit from a particular pattern, and an unknown woman complimented it, referring to the pattern by name.⁸⁸ As this was relatively early in Felicity's knitting practices, she described it as a serendipitous moment of social camaraderie. The connection continued, however, when that woman was in the knitting group Felicity attended that same night for the first time. Here, we see the social connection, the making process, and the crafted garments all as key agents of meaning, symbiotically and synergistically working together to fulfill various human needs, enhance wellbeing, and create symbolically and materially meaningful clothing practices.

Making can build knowledge about the environmental impacts, labor conditions, and the many costs that go into producing goods. Tara's in-depth knowledge and reflection about textile and apparel construction was intertwined with her sensitivity to the material and labor resources embedded in garments. No one specific garment in her wardrobe encoded this meaning or understanding. Rather, it was her intimate and close interactions, experienced over several years, and built from the fiber and yarn up to fabric. Both Rachel and Lizzie also cited learning about knitting or other making as a source for their knowledge about not only fiber properties but also the production process and its environmental impact. These stories demonstrate how women can connect intellectually, emotionally, and physically through making practices to garment lifecycles. These embodied perspectives were not consistently translated into purchasing decisions. However, they show how and where women were unraveling garment stories, tracing impacts, and valuing materials and labor, all of which are issues at the forefront of sustainable consumption. Crafting is important because of the embodied, engaged, in-depth, and intimate knowledge it engenders, rather than distant, abstract factors that sink into invisibility or irrelevancy.

⁸⁸ When she showed me the sweater, I also was able to identify the pattern and source—one which I have marked that I would like to make but have not yet actually knit.

As individual actions, these women's crafting projects may not be considered conventionally sustainable. The particular materials used or quantity of garments were not entirely environmentally, socially, or economically sustainable on a large scale, but their attitudes and embodied values laid a foundation for a sustainable material culture of clothing.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, these stories show how both crafting as a practice and garments as material objects contributed to an instrumental materialism. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton have argued that these types of relationships with objects, and the types of relationships objects engender with others, are ultimately more positive and sustainable on social and economic scales.⁹⁰ Crafting garments fulfills individual creative and social human needs.⁹¹ Moreover, engagement through crafting enhanced the value of the crafted garments as evinced by the pleasure of wearing them (or seeing a loved one wear one) and care in maintaining them. In this story then, we see hints of experiences that Chapman calls "emotionally durable" and what Schor describes as "plentitude."⁹² If combined with environmentally and socially-responsible produced materials, these approaches could do much to enhance the sustainability of clothing consumption.

I am not suggesting that everyone needs to make all of their own clothes. Some women willingly chose this path. Others, due to various economic and social circumstances, as well as attitudes toward time and leisure, had limited ability or interest in participating. Rosa articulated that when confronted with other people's criticism of her decision to make all her own and most of her family's clothes as a drastic choice, she recognized that she made a choice to do so; she connecting and care to her family through an enjoyable, aesthetically-enriching process. She also

⁸⁹ Turney, *The Culture of Knitting*; Adamson, *Thinking through Craft*.

⁹⁰ Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things*.

⁹¹ Gauntlett, *Making Is Connecting*.

⁹² Chapman, *Emotionally Durable Design*; Juliet B. Schor, *True Wealth: How and Why Millions of Americans Are Creating a Time-Rich, Ecologically Light, Small-Scale, High-Satisfaction Economy* (New York: Penguin, 2011).

suggested that other people made choices *not* to make their clothes or participate in other activities they may see as positive, desirable, or sustainable. Certainly, others may retort that many people do not have the choice to participate in pro-sustainable behaviors due to time, money, or other constraining circumstances, and they offer this challenge with good reason. However, as suggested throughout this section, there are many ways to creatively engage with clothing, physically attend to their design and construction, and lovingly maintain their quality, which *are* accessible.

I am not suggesting that this approach on its own is a panacea for unsustainable clothing consumption. For instance, despite Felicity's awareness of and interest in some environmental and social justice issues as well as regularly sewing and knitting garments, she owned more clothes than she routinely wore and purchased more materials than she kept up with in crafting.⁹³ However, her playful and skillful crafting filled needs related to affection, leisure, creation, and identity. Similarly, Tara was highly conscious of textile construction—from fiber to yarn, weave, and knit structures—and was interested in learning more about sewing. However, the challenges of body shape, money, time, unpleasantness of shopping, and potentially large price tag on a custom-made garment deterred her from feeling that she was able to apply her understanding of and sensitivity to labor and resources in everyday clothing purchases.

Several women (Eunice, Niki, Helen, Megan, Bernadette, Melanie, and Louise), critiqued what they perceived as the loss of basic home economics education and textile-specific skills to participate in these making mending practices. Their explanations for their concern reaffirmed the argument above that sewing training, skills, and practice yields knowledge that improves one's ability to make clothing choices, select quality products, modify them for improved fit, and

⁹³ Marybeth C. Stalp, "Hiding the (Fabric) Stash: Collecting, Hoarding, and Hiding Strategies of Contemporary US Quilters," *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* 4, no. 1 (2006): 104–125; Marybeth C. Stalp and Theresa M. Winge, "My Collection Is Bigger Than Yours: Tales from the Handcrafter's Stash," *Home Cultures* 5, no. 3 (2008): 197–218.

maintain them over time. Moreover, we can consider home economics as a discipline through which we might build and perpetuate systems of sustainable practice.⁹⁴

Melanie: I don't know if you've noticed because of the lack of home ec and ladies not sewing anymore. ... So I hear some of these older ladies and they say these terms or they talk about a certain type of fabric and I'm thinking to myself, what is that? You know. They, and they know their fabrics. They know fabric. And it's from, their experiences *sewing*... That's something that's been lost along the way. Yeah, so that's too bad.

Melanie bemoaned not only a loss of skills to individuals, but also a loss of resources for the community, resources through which she described cultivating friendships as she solicited tailoring and repair services. While in some ways Melanie's anxiety about the future and idealization of “**her ladies**” could be interpreted as nostalgia for a romanticized past, it could also be viewed as a respect for the knowledge and skills sewing and other home economics training conferred. Moreover, Melanie's social critique might also be read as a renewed interest in the local, self-sufficiency, and resiliency for which Helen advocated.⁹⁵

Another system that could enhance meaningful relationships and objects—and bridge production and consumption practices—is co-design or co-production, in which clothing designers, producers, and consumers work together to create customized products. Consumers can engage in the process without necessarily being the maker. This may occur between two or more individuals; within informal, organized, or commercial context; and through close or distant collaboration.⁹⁶ Women regularly gifted, and Rosa and Wendy sold, their crafted items, thus forging direct connections between producers and consumers.⁹⁷ Melanie described having

⁹⁴ Jane Kolodinsky, “A Systems Approach to Food Future Proofs the Home Economics Profession,” in *Creating Home Economics Futures: The Next 100 Years*, ed. Donna Pendergast, Sue L.T. McGregor, and Kaija Turkki (Bowen Hills: Australia Academic Press, 2012), 157–169.

⁹⁵ Hayes, *Radical Homemakers*; Matchar, *Homeward Bound*; Causey, *Brooklyn Makers*.

⁹⁶ Fuad-Luke, *Design Activism*; Gauntlett, *Making Is Connecting*.

⁹⁷ Johnson and Wilson, “‘It Says You Really Care’: Motivational Factors of Contemporary Female Handcrafters.”

relationships with particular tailors who would repair and alter garments for her. Although this latter relationship was not with a “producer” in the most exact terms, it was an example of connections between skilled textile workers and the recipients of their craft. Across these women’s experiences, friendships and networks flourished through the intersections of multiple people interacting with the materiality of objects. On the other hand, my interviews highlighted the some of the challenges around cultivating a closely integrated network of producers and consumers. Several women in my study mentioned their perceived lack of local clothing producers. Basic jeans and t-shirts or business-appropriate slacks and dress shirts were what women expressed the most interest in, but which they perceived as absent or imagined as expensive in local artisan markets.

While some sustainability advocates, including at least one of my participants, argue for the importance of local self-sufficient communities, producer-consumer connections also has the potential to flourish across countries and oceans, facilitated in particular by the Internet.⁹⁸ On one hand, multinational clothing apparel companies have harnessed the processing capabilities of information technology and instant communication not only to expand the scope of their operations but also to create targeted design, production, and distribution operations. On the other hand, this information technology revolution can also manifest in more user-driven, and ultimately material, adaptations of information technology. During our first interview, Rachel was working on a sweater that she had downloaded for free, read reviews of, and adopted modifications to the design—all through the interactive website. She creatively, critically, and socially engaged with people, designs, and objects through online social networking, which she then implemented into material practice that she participated in during an embodied interpersonal encounter.

⁹⁸ Gauntlett, *Making Is Connecting*; Botsman and Rogers, *What’s Mine Is Yours*.

Helen was one of a couple women with whom I spoke who was active in supporting pro-sustainability causes and consciously tied a variety of themes together—from social to environmental justice and participation in production to consumption. Although she primarily repaired, rather than created, clothing, she articulated a vision for weaving together generations, domestic practices, and community groups.

Helen: I've heard young goth women with all their piercings and everything, sit there knitting... these women who are kinda like the most, um, out of the mainstream in the way they present themselves in the world are, are doing the most committed forms of, of resiliency and sustainability skills. [pauses] ... Looking at community preparedness and resilience. At the most local level... And with guilds. And with harvest kitchens. And with gardens, community gardens and neighborhood gardens, and, and the *whole* sewing, knitting, that, all of that, would be integral to it.

Alternatively, Bernadette, another older participant who was on the opposite ends of the clothing and sustainability interest spectrum, argued for the value of these skills and networks, but did not frame these textile and life skills through sustainability themes. For her, they were embodiments of virtues such as thrift and self-reliance. Even though Helen's activist spirit was an outlier compared to many other women in my study, we need not dismiss her perspectives. Indeed, her expansive and inclusive vision that incorporated clothing and making practices in which she was not otherwise interested speaks to the power of how these fields—sustainability, clothing, and making—can work together by appealing to a broad range of people with different skills and interests. Helen's words and actions can be the seeds we plant for engaging with clothing as creative and community acts. As hooks and other feminist scholars argue, we can push ourselves to consciously cultivate and recognize the political potential of these crafting and aesthetic impulses that women in my study both engaged in and expressed desire for. Through connecting political and civic discourses with psychological research on mindfulness in lifestyle choices and

consumption practices, we pave a way forward for sustainable clothing relationships.

In demonstrating the possibilities of American women consumers connecting to the often-female garment workers, I do not intend to fetishize those who are exploited in the clothing lifecycle. For instance, it is not necessarily as simple as drawing similarities between one's experiences in home economics class and a garment worker in a sweatshop.⁹⁹ I also do not intend to romanticize the often physically hard, sexist, and exploitive domestic labor of textile and clothing practices. However, we need not let this historical or cultural association deter new, revised appropriations of these practices. Instead, we can push the dialogue forward by exploring how clothing construction, care, and connections can be integrated creatively, equitably, and sustainably into economically and emotionally balanced consumption practices.¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

Although my research focused on individual clothing practices, their narratives emphasized how family stories (including parent/child and sibling relationships and home management practices) intertwined with clothing practices. For example, interviews illustrated the reciprocal impact teenage daughter's clothing consumption had on their interests and behaviors. As they sought to instill in their daughters healthy self-esteem, their own interest in fashion revitalized. These entanglements also manifested in the narratives of women's relationships with their mothers, daughters sisters, and female friends through whom they learned their clothing tastes and care habits. Extending from particular relationships, women expressed care for their family through caring for their clothes and teaching to children how to care for their clothes.

⁹⁹ Rivoli, *The Travels of a T-shirt in the Global Economy*.

¹⁰⁰ For a discussion of individuals who are building on self-reliance and skills particularly in domestic activities and spaces, see Hayes, *Radical Homemakers*.

Women received care from their family as they learned basic life skills such as laundering or how to present oneself professionally and confidently.

These family stories are relevant to sustainable clothing consumption, because they point toward care as a foundational ethic that is already shaping consumption. If clothing is a part of how women participate in caring relationships, then we can build on, extend, branch out, and deepen principles of care in clothing acquisition, use, maintenance, and disposal behaviors. Rather than seeking to convince women to make consumption choices based on neoliberal values of financial self-interest or on comparatively abstracted values of justice, we can work as individuals and as a society to make consumption choices based on empathy, sensitivity, and relationships.¹⁰¹ While the examples here illustrate these caring relationships within domestic practices, these principles can shape other actions and choices. For instance, when Louise was concerned about the dyes in her shoes irritating her skin, she might have also extended that concern for the harm those dyes might cause to workers in and environment near the dye house.

Niki: **How do I know they're not using, you know, some twelve year-old kid? I *have* a twelve-year-old kid. You know, I take those kinds of things very personally.**

The opacity and/or ubiquity of these production practices challenged her decision to make the most empathetic choice, but the personal connection to imagined workers mattered to her.

Clothing and crafting's power of immediacy, relevancy, and relationships speaks to the importance of considering a feminist ethics of care as an important contribution to the dialogue between material culture and sustainability. Care ethics has at its core conventionally gendered-female domestic and intimate practices and relationships. However, it is not limited to women, family spaces, individual relationships, or routines; it can expand out to include care for

¹⁰¹ Held, *The Ethics of Care*.

animals and materials, labor and artisans, among other factors at stake in clothing's lifecycle.¹⁰²

Although none of my participants explicitly stated they practice care ethics or morality, their ways of describing how they cared for their families, friends, homes, as well as garments and other objects with which they had particular relationships paralleled care ethics discourse.

The intersection of clothing lifecycle stages, in particular production and consumption, in participants' current practices, contribute to some of the challenges of inaccessible garment stories. However, attending to and actually engaging in making—by providing opportunities to forge meaningful relationships with clothing objects and the practices, processes, resources, places, and people affected throughout—can be a potentially rewarding practice through which to cultivate more self- and socially-sustaining experiences within alternative models of producer/production and consumer/consumption. Making clothing choices based not only on how clothing production and disposal impacts the environmental and social issues, but also on how clothing practices synergistically fulfill human needs could be a strategy that can begin to holistically transform our current unsustainable clothing consumption into an integrated sustainable clothing system. Through mindful engagement with clothing we can foster, as hooks describes, “healing and life-sustaining” clothing practices and value the creativity, labor, and materials embodied in the garment, whether that is ours or another's.

¹⁰² Ibid.; Selma Sevenhuijsen, *Citizenship and the Ethics of Care: Feminist Considerations on Justice, Morality, and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1998); Peterson, *Everyday Ethics and Social Change*.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

Through investigating the intimate scale of women's lives and choices, I identify and interpret issues in women's clothing consumption (e.g. acquisition, use, maintenance, and disposal) as they relate to (e.g. hinder, facilitate, or are irrelevant to) environmental and social sustainability. I argue that four strands (multi-sensory aesthetic pleasures, affective experiences, subjective understandings, and socially-situated symbolic meanings) entwine around embodied relationships with clothes. These are key strands in clothing practices and potential sites of intervention for sustainable initiatives. In order to achieve ethical, ecological individual clothing consumption, my findings suggest that it is important to attend to the lived body in relational contexts through systems strategies. To address these dimensions, I identify approaches for different stakeholders (individuals, apparel industry professionals, cultural mediators, educators, policymakers) of clothing systems that bridge micro to macro scales:

- All stakeholders reshaping cultural norms
- Individuals engaging in environmentally and socially sensitive consumption behaviors that support wellbeing
- Apparel designers designing for meaningful, playful, and mindful engagement with clothing
- All stakeholders creating and advocating for infrastructure that supports sustainable options
- All stakeholders finding ways to make visible the interdependencies of systems

It may seem paradoxical to deal with micro level issues of sensory experiences or personal aesthetic tastes through some of these larger frames. However, as outlined in the Web

of Practice model described in chapter five, individual behaviors are situated within complex, dynamic systems. Addressing the sustainability of these practices demands that we zoom in and out between the micro and the macro, the individual and the social, the object and the context. Therefore, my results point not only to how relevant the embodied, sensory dimensions of subjective, affective dress experiences are in women's practices, but also to how tied up these issues are in systems of production and cultural norms. When we try to tackle unsustainable consumption, we should consider how we might strategically use systems components to attend to intimate, individual, and interpersonal dimensions of clothing consumption to create opportunities for meaningful, fulfilling practices.

In order to address the nuanced issues that I explore in this project, I suggest we consider aesthetics, care ethics, and human ecology alongside material culture theory. Through unpacking the individual and relational, the intimate and the interpersonal, these models build on women's existing practice but move behavior and meanings toward systems-perspectives of ethical and ecological practices. These disciplines are not consistently included in discussions of sustainable consumption. However, I propose that synthesizing these models into systems thinking approaches, and centering them on our engagements with material objects and design, will help us unravel the intersecting elements of practices and move discourse on sustainability forward.

Research Overview

Although various scholars and designers have been wrestling with sustainable clothing design, production, and consumption over the past couple of decades, there is a shortage of stories about women's relationships with clothing throughout the consumption process in

relationship to sustainability. In order to include these perspectives in the conversation, I answered descriptive and analytic questions through an exploratory, interview-based study.

1. What are the women's clothing practices?
2. What do the women see in their clothing practices as sustainable and unsustainable?
Why do they see it as such?
3. What meanings do the women experience with clothing practices and objects?
4. How do elements of practices and garments contribute to meanings and why?
5. How do the meanings the women cultivate around their clothing experiences relate to (e.g. promote, challenge, or are irrelevant to) the sustainability of those experiences?
6. How might our understanding of the women's meanings around clothing contribute to a broader discussion of creating more sustainable clothing practices?

I interviewed nineteen women who exhibited a range of attitudes towards clothing and sustainability. I asked them about how and why they purchased and made apparel, laundered and took care of their clothes, and disposed of and donated certain garments. Participants described these practices to me in the abstract, showed me their closets and dressers, walked me through their laundry routines, and narrated stories about various garments. The women I spoke with ranged from recent college graduates to returning students, retirees, new mothers, mothers of teenage daughters, to professional women with and without children. In answering the first two research questions, I describe practices in chapter four. As I worked to answer the following questions, I identified thematic patterns, such as concerns about bodies and identities, time and money, and relationships and meaning. Nevertheless, diverse tastes and social needs also suggest the need for sustainable solutions tailored for various aesthetic markets and lived experiences.

I synthesized an interdisciplinary, systems-perspective model that encapsulates the results of the study (see figures 5.1-5.5) and answers the final research question. The Web of Practice model visualizes the nuanced dimensions of individually-scaled experiences—in particular the embodied aesthetic, affective, subjective, and symbolic dimensions of clothing practices—as critical factors that mutually constitute systems structures. This model identifies places and directions for achieving change through initiatives across a range of system components that attend to these intimate experiences. This study offers an examination of how the micro dimensions of embodied, material encounters with clothing are important for the sustainability and structure of micro to macro systems. For example, it directs attention from balancing gendered expectations and roles to caring in family and household relationships to working within neoliberal value and economic systems. By framing multiple components in a graspable whole, it helps us think through seeming dichotomies of production/consumption systems, visible/invisible networks, intimate/distant connections and impacts, public/private displays, and individual/social solutions. This helps us effectively harness systems strategies to attend to (e.g. recognize, respect, redirect, reinforce) these strands to craft meaningful, sustainable practices.

Each discussion chapter emphasizes particular concerns women faced in their clothing practices (see table 9.1). Through these frames, I discuss how socially-situated, embodied interactions with clothing are pivotal factors in women's experiences. I explore how the participants' concerns related to the sustainability of those practices, contextualizing them within environmental impacts, social justice issues, and sustainable design strategies. In each chapter, I explore specific themes relevant to the frame (see table 9.2), although these sub-themes permeate across the discussions. These themes do not only manifest during acquisition; they also intensify

during clothing use, care, and disposal. Moreover, four strands of practice—multi-sensory aesthetic pleasures, affective experiences, subjective understandings, and socially-situated symbolic meanings—entwined around embodied experience with material culture of clothing.

Table 9.1 Frames used to explore women’s clothing consumption

	Description
Frame 1 (Chapter 6)	How women balance embodied and multi-sensory experiences of wearing clothes given personal tastes, social contexts, and changes over time
Frame 2 (Chapter 7)	How women negotiate multiple quality evaluations that are situated in physical conditions and social contexts alongside individual goals, cultural norms, and industry infrastructure related to time, money, and skills
Frame 3 (Chapter 8)	How women perceive how garment stories beyond their immediate experience are distanced or intertwined with personal stories, meanings, connections, and relationships

Table 9.2. Themes underlying analysis

Intimacy with body: cleanliness and odor
Physical comfort: textures and fit
Psychological comfort: appearance and identity
Quality
Time
Money
Individualization of responsibility
Fashion system
Consumer empowerment in production/consumption systems
Trivialization and domesticization of fashion, clothing, and textile skills
Valuing materials and product stewardship

The chapters' overarching frames provide different entry points into the conversation. Here, I will briefly review the main findings of each chapter as they answer the two primary analytical research questions: (1) how issues women experience in clothing practices relate to the sustainability of their practices and (2) how considering those issues can contribute to a broader discussion of creating more sustainable clothing practices.

In "Finding the Right Fit: Balancing Personal Tastes and Social Norms," I explore how two main phenomena relate to sustainability: (1) women styling their identity through multi-sensory, embodied encounters with garments and (2) women responding to patterns of life, weather, and fashion changes. These are grounded in participants' material encounters with their garments, and build on Entwistle's theory of fashion as situated, embodied practices.¹ My findings show that women's struggles with finding clothes that fit their bodies, multi-sensory aesthetic tastes, and individual and social identities as they change over time and situations—contribute to underlying, systemic challenges to environmentally and socially responsible consumption. For example, Camilla's disappointment in the fading and poor fit of a department store shirt and Jessica's large collection of jeans that did not fit quite right reveal how the apparel options participants perceived as available to them increased consumption and decreased satisfaction. Contrastingly, Eunice invested in maintaining her favorite pair of red shoes because they fit her feet—and her personality—just right. My examination of these experiences deepens the conversation about how to create products and practices that will satisfy, rather than hinder, women's attempts to balance personal tastes and social norms in environmentally and socially

¹ Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress, and Modern Social Theory* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000).

responsible ways. Therefore, I suggest that directly engaging with expressive and embodied aesthetics is an essential component in sustainable design, production, and consumption.

In “Demanding More from Clothes for Less: Negotiating Systems of Tastes, Values, and Practices through Time, Money, and Skills,” I unpack habits and factors that contribute to their ongoing reproduction. Two models frame my analysis: Zepeda and Deal’s Alphabet Theory and Shove et al.’s social practice theory (see table 7.2).² Through analyzing the intersections of various elements and contextual factors, I demonstrate that women wrestle not only with clothing-specific concerns, but also with subjective, contextualized quality evaluations alongside actual and perceived availability of time, money, and skills. For example, Rachel spent time looking for deals on apparel of varying quality. She might wear a discount retailer’s sweater that had pilled drastically at home, a specialty retailer’s sweater that had pilled somewhat to work. At the same time, she recognized that neither matched the pristine physical quality of a classically-styled vintage sweater. I argue that choosing quality is not a simple, direct individual choice. Instead, my findings demonstrate that individual perceptions and behaviors overlap with larger social and industrial practices to reproduce unsustainable clothing behaviors.

- Quality definitions subjectively based on embodied and socially-situated frames
- Ideas about time and money manifesting in preferences for deals, bargains, and convenience
- Apparel industry products and infrastructure reproducing lower physical quality at lower price points
- Larger neoliberal values and economic systems reinforcing current unsustainable clothing production and consumption

² Lydia Zepeda and David Deal, “Organic and Local Food Consumer Behavior: Alphabet Theory,” *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 33, no. 6 (November 2009): 697–705; Elizabeth Shove, Mika Pantzar, and Matt Watson, *The Dynamics of Social Practice: Everyday Life and How It Changes* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012).

Each of these dimensions has its own history in American consumer culture, which point to ways these habits have evolved and can potentially move toward and support sustainable patterns of practice. Therefore, consumers, designers, producers, retailers, journalists, and policymakers, among others, need to grapple with the above themes in order to re-imagine apparel design and reshape consumer habits.

In the final thematic chapter, “Following the Threads: Tracing Patterns of Meaning from Self to Other,” I contrast examples of distance, disconnect, and disempowerment against stories of intimacy, attachment, and affection. My findings show that women (1) feel alienated from the lifecycle of garments pre- and post-consumption, despite their “entanglement” in those lives and (2) create a meanings through aesthetic responses, use, craft, and relationships. My framing of these opposing patterns parallels Barnett et al.’s positioning of two dominant approaches in sustainable consumption research: “attending to the consequences of extended networks of production and distribution that people are entangled in” and “[acknowledging] the ways in which consumption offers people opportunities to determine the type of selves and the type of relationships.”³ Where Barnett et al. explore the role of practical reasoning, I probe the role of materiality, the power of aesthetics, and the materialization of relationships in women’s clothing consumption. My findings show that meaningful and sustainable clothing practices are challenged by the participant’s described distance from garment lifecycles. For example, participants consistently expressed frustration with their lack of information about and ability to influence the apparel industry design and practice. Contrastingly, Rosa felt empowered to create garments for herself and family. Although meaningful experiences are not always consciously

³ Clive Barnett et al., *Globalizing Responsibility: The Political Rationalities of Ethical Consumption* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 2-3.

recognized, or even entirely sustainable, we can build from existing personal garment stories to strengthen networks of care and stewardship of the object and environment, of the self and others. In the face of an otherwise invisible and abstract system, I argue that the socially-situated, embodied interactions with clothing offer tangible anchors for promoting investments in and care for individual wellbeing, relationships, ecological resources, and social welfare.

Contributions and Implications

This dissertation contributes to sustainability initiatives by providing a model that visualizes embodied aesthetic, affective, subjective, and symbolic dimensions of individually-scaled clothing practices as critical factors that reciprocally constitute each other and systems structures. My Web of Practice model allows us to zoom in and out between macro and micro contexts to show where sustainability initiatives can occur. Initiatives attending to (e.g. recognizing, respecting, redirecting, reinforcing) strands of meaning along thematic issues can help craft ethical, ecological, meaningful, and engaging clothing practices. First, I elaborate on the significance of these different perspectives and propose creating dialogue across disciplines (e.g. sustainable design, embodiment theory, human ecology) and focusing on meaning and connections (e.g. material culture, aesthetics, feminist care ethics). I then elaborate on potential initiatives in relation to the Web of Practice model.

My project's sensitivity to lived practice with garments adds to sustainability literature by emphasizing that it is important to address embodied and multi-sensory, aesthetic and emotional, individual and interpersonal dimensions of clothing practice in sustainable consumption initiatives. Moreover, my analysis of the nuanced minutiae of women's clothing tastes and

choices reveals how many openings there are for change. Analysis of women's clothing experiences within larger social contexts is a well-established practice in the field of dress studies.⁴ Additionally, sustainability discourse on strategically using pleasure and systems perspectives is currently burgeoning in the field of sustainable studies.⁵ My synthesis of these fields provides new directions for research and interventions.

A key contribution of this project is the position that stakeholders, in sustainability initiatives not only consider, but also embrace how we live in dressed bodies embedded in relationships. We need not sacrifice aesthetic pleasures, but rather sensitively attend to those embodied, sensory aesthetic and emotional encounters as opportunities to craft sustainable products and practices. By building on these encounters, which may not be socially or environmentally motivated, we can create meaningful, fulfilling consumption. Indeed, as participants' practices reveal, those with strong pro-environmental values do not always actualize them in their clothing behavior, while those without may exhibit sustainable clothing practices. Moreover, there is great variation in sustainability across consumption stages even within a single individual's practices. There are various ways we can attend to clothing: considering them as material objects; engaging with them through multisensory experience, or thinking about social encounters and how they change over the lifecycle. These differing approaches are

⁴ For key examples, see Joanne B. Eicher, Sandra Lee Evenson, and Hazel A. Lutz, *The Visible Self: Global Perspectives on Dress, Culture, and Society*, 3rd ed. (New York: Fairchild Publications, 2008); Peter Corrigan, *The Dressed Society: Clothing, the Body and Some Meanings of the World* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2008); Eileen Green, Alison Guy, and Maura Banim, eds., *Through the Wardrobe: Women's Relationships with Their Clothes* (Oxford: Berg, 2001); Victoria L. Rovine, "Handmade Textiles: Global Markets and Authenticity," in *Dress Sense: Emotional and Sensory Experiences of the Body and Clothes*, ed. Donald Clay Johnson and Helen Bradley Foster (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 133–143; Susan B Kaiser, *The Social Psychology of Clothing: Symbolic Appearances in Context* (New York: Macmillan, 1985).

⁵ For examples of each approach, see Kate Soper, Martin H. Ryle, and Lyn Thomas, eds., *The Politics and Pleasures of Consuming Differently* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Jane Kolodinsky, "A Systems Approach to Food Future Proofs the Home Economics Profession," in *Creating Home Economics Futures: The Next 100 Years*, ed. Donna Pendergast, Sue L.T. McGregor, and Kaija Turkki (Bowen Hills: Australia Academic Press, 2012), 157–169.

relevant from whatever stance we take—as researchers, designers, manufacturers, retailers, policymakers, educators, or consumers. This mindful attentiveness can help penetrate these intersections between practice and context, ultimately pointing to directions and strategies for change, so that participants across clothing production and consumption cycles have tools to re-orient, re-imagine, and re-create products and practices on a more ecological, socially just, and needs-fulfilling trajectory.

By zooming in on participants' micro concerns, my project reveals elements of the bigger picture—magnified perspectives of often unarticulated, accepted cultural norms. We need to recognize the silences in the literature and women's stories—the unspoken assumptions or unquestioned standpoints around clothing practices such as emphasis on individuality, domesticization of laundry, unequal experiences of socioeconomic class, disparate stories of ethnic or racial groups, economic growth centered measurements of progress, or forfeiture of power to industry. Even when participants critiqued economic and political structures, their individual concerns and capabilities dominated the discourse. As environmental scholar Maniates states, “Dealing with these topics... demands a practiced capacity to talk about power, privilege, prosperity, and larger possibilities.”⁶ Through its emphasis on middle-class consumers in the American Midwest, this project takes for granted the material prosperity evident in women's consumption choices. Similarly, it distances itself from the ecological consequences and social injustices of that prosperity. While this project does not explicitly examine global patterns of power and privilege, it opens spaces to question and change the systems and practices that support power imbalances.

⁶ Michael Maniates, “Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World?,” in *Confronting Consumption*, ed. Thomas Princen, Michael Maniates, and Ken Conca (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 62.

Responding to the call to “engage with emotions, with dominant cultural values, and sources of human identity,”⁷ this project contributes to sustainability research by refocusing attention on these themes. My analysis reaffirms the importance of the role of affective and subjective dimensions of behavior, which, as Maniates explains, are “among such terms as *love, caring, kindness, and meaning* that raise eyebrows when introduced into political discourse and policy analysis.”⁸ In particular, this project highlights how essential the embodied, relational dimensions of clothing practices are when unpacking affective and subjective experiences. Therefore, it contributes additional evidence for how and why “political discourse and policy analysis,” as well as consumers, designers, retailers, etc., should respectfully engage with intimate and emotional dimensions of clothing practice, dimensions that are not consistently pursued in sustainability policies.⁹

My project also contributes to sustainability discourse by suggesting we expand theories used to build principles or ethics of practice to address aesthetic, affective subjective, and symbolic experiences—theories such as material culture, aesthetics, care ethics, and human ecology. Codes of practice could establish evaluative criteria for sustainable consumption that sensitively integrate intimate and interpersonal dimensions of clothing consumption. My analysis

⁷ Julian Agyeman, “Foreward: Joined-up Research,” in *Researching Sustainability: a Guide to Social Science Methods, Practice, and Engagement*, ed. Alex Franklin and Paul Blyton (London: Earthscan, 2011), xvii.

⁸ Michael Maniates, “Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World?,” in *Confronting Consumption*, ed. Thomas Princen, Michael Maniates, and Ken Conca (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 43–66. 64.

⁹ For academic works engaging with these themes, see Tim Jackson, “Readings in Sustainable Consumption,” in *The Earthscan Reader in Sustainable Consumption*, ed. Tim Jackson (London: Earthscan, 2006), 1–23; Elizabeth Shove, “Beyond the ABC: Climate Change Policy and Theories of Social Change,” *Environment and Planning A* 42, no. 6 (2010): 1273–1285; Soper, Ryle, and Thomas, *The Politics and Pleasures of Consuming Differently*. For designers pushing these boundaries, see Kate Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Design Journeys* (London: Earthscan, 2008); Kate Fletcher and Lynda Grose, *Fashion and Sustainability: Design for Change* (London: Laurence King Publishers, 2012); Jonathan Chapman, *Emotionally Durable Design: Objects, Experiences, and Empathy* (London: Earthscan, 2005); Jonathan Chapman and Nick Gant, eds., *Designers, Visionaries and Other Stories: A Collection of Sustainable Design Essays* (London: Earthscan, 2007).

contributes to sustainability initiatives by emphasizing these theories as potentially relevant and fruitful. I argue that these disciplines not only offer codes in line with sustainability objectives, but also build from existing relationships and meanings. These disciplines can help navigate initiatives and activities across the scaffold presented in my Web of Practice model.

As discussed in the literature review, material culture theory encourages us to look at objects as sites of meaning. Aesthetic theory, in particular feminist and vernacular approaches, encourages us to embrace the quotidian and the sensual. While scholars bring a diverse range of critical theory to material culture studies, core themes in the discipline emphasize objects, through their materiality—as sites of individual and cultural meaning, which in turn shape the individual and culture in which those objects are situated.¹⁰ Similarly, various writers in aesthetics have sought to unpack the affective dimensions of aesthetic encounters, how meaning materializes through our perception and cognition of objects and experiences. For instance, in their work on art and value, Rader and Jessup encourage us to “respond to the world in a skilled, active, artistic way, our senses aroused, our tastes cultivated, our imaginations at work.”¹¹ Feminist aesthetic theory similarly embraces a socially-situated, sensual aesthetic pleasure, often in everyday experiences, rather than a disinterested appreciation of an abstracted beauty proposed by Western philosophers, such as Kant.¹²

¹⁰ Chris Tilley, *Handbook of Material Culture* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2006).

¹¹ Melvin Rader and Bertram Jessup, *Art and Human Values* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1976); Thomas Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (Buffalo, NY: Broadview Press, 2012); Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

¹² Hilde S. Hein and Carolyn Korsmeyer, eds., *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Beverly Gordon, *The Saturated World: Aesthetic Meaning, Intimate Objects, Women's Lives, 1890-1940* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006); Kathy Davis, ed., *Embodied Practices: Feminist Perspectives on the Body* (London: Sage, 1997).

My questions initially focused on the material and aesthetic dimensions in individuals' clothing practices. Participants' narratives reinforced their relevance. I found that garments did embody meaning, but participants were not always conscious or mindful of this meaning. Similarly, aesthetic experiences were important, yet minimized in contrast to functionality or social appropriateness. As evident in the work of anthropologist Miller, material culture studies sheds light on how "stuff has a quite remarkable capacity for fading from view, and becoming naturalized, taken for granted, the background or frame to our behavior;" Miller commented that the process made him "feel rather sorry for the way ordinary stuff has been neglected."¹³ Nevertheless, this project reaffirms the agency of objects. Objects materialize interdependent relationships—from parental care to global citizenship. By building practice based on material culture and aesthetic theory, multi-sensory interactions with object can act as sites of critical practice. Principles built on material culture and aesthetic theory can bring to the forefront the role clothing plays in our lives, as experienced through aesthetic, affective, subjective, and symbolic frames. Rather than "neglecting" objects and our daily encounters with them, we mindfully, thoughtfully, and creatively cultivate relationships with them, and through them relationships with people and places less geographically or culturally close. Through paying attention and celebrating the ordinary, we can resist materialism and trivialization often associated with clothing consumption practices.

The persistent appearance of topics such as personal relationships, family and household dynamics, self-interest and self-sufficiency, object stewardship, and empathy and compassion directs our attention to consider "*love, caring, kindness, and meaning*" as factors in sustainable

¹³ Daniel Miller, *Stuff* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).155, 156.

practice. Care ethics and human ecology can help us engage with these affective experiences. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, care ethics describes moral systems that emphasize situated-needs; particular relationships; relational definitions of persons; a feminist sensitivity to our “embeddedness in familial, social, and historical contexts;”¹⁴ and values such as attentiveness, patience, empathy, responsiveness, and mutual consideration. Building on Bronfenbrenner’s model for human development described in chapter five, human ecology points to interconnections and interdependencies of humans with each other and their environments.¹⁵ These theories can help us answer—in theory and practice—the following questions: What clothing choices, policies and legislations, industry and consumer practices might change if we advocated for care and compassion rather than prioritized self-interest and autonomy? What if we attended to interlocking relations between ourselves and other people and the environment? What if we invested attention in or made choices based on improving the wellbeing of our family as well as the environment, other individuals, and other communities on which that wellbeing depends?

The individualization, domesticization, and neoliberalization of clothing consumption also emerged as themes in my analysis. Although care ethics and human ecology may appear to perpetuate the former two phenomena, these theories actually can help situate seemingly insular practices in broader environmental and social frameworks. Despite their historical association with women, mothering, and the home, these disciplines need not naturalize domestic skills and care as female. On the other hand, human ecology’s closely allied discipline home economics

¹⁴ Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 42.

¹⁵ Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

does develop vital domestic skills. In some ways, these skills might allow one to feel more independent or self-sufficient. However, ethics of practice based on these theories can mobilize personalizing issues but avoid individualizing solutions. For example, these theories could challenge commodity culture or reinvigorate how we value labor—in the home and in the garment factory. They position individuals as global citizens in a world in which we cultivate relationships, trust, and respect for mutual interdependencies.¹⁶ In particular, Held explains, “we should care about one another as fellow members of communities, including gradually of the global community on which the future health of our mutual environments depends.”¹⁷ While emerging scholarship explores pro-environmental consumption and citizenship, care ethics and human ecology are consistently absent from the discussion. These theories together offer tools to harness the personal connections and relationships we experience through clothing to cultivate compassion and empathy; highlight the interdependencies between people, objects, and environment; and expand efforts for change beyond individual behaviors.

Bringing together scholarly work across these seemingly disparate disciplines is an important step forward to using design, acknowledging aesthetics, and embracing care for sustainable outcomes. For example, my research extends anthropologist Kevin George’s work on ethics, objects, and materiality into sustainability discourse: “In that mutuality of influence between people and things there is both care and violence. An ethical realm stretches between us.

¹⁶Rima Apple, “Home Economics in the 20th Century: A Case of Lost Identity?” (paper presented at the Home Economics: Classroom, Corporate, and Cultural Interpretations Revisited: A State-of-the-Art Conference, University of Georgia, Athens, GA, February 27, 2012); Donna Pendergast, Sue L.T. McGregor, and Kaija Turkki, eds., *Creating Home Economics Futures: The Next 100 Years* (Bowen Hills: Australia Academic Press, 2012); Megan Elias, *Stir It Up: Home Economics in American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 185–186; Shannon Hayes, *Radical Homemakers: Reclaiming Domesticity from a Consumer Culture* (Richmondville, NY: Left to Write Press, 2010); Held, *The Ethics of Care*; Selma Sevenhuijsen, *Citizenship and the Ethics of Care: Feminist Considerations on Justice, Morality, and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1998).

¹⁷ Held, *The Ethics of Care*, 119.

And so I pose a question: Will we see ethics differently, will we see conscience in a new light, if we look to things as a fulcrum or as partners in ethical relationships?”¹⁸ Based on my research on women’s clothing practices, I propose that treating garments as “partners in ethical relationships” would address the deeply personal, physical, and symbolic experiences we have with those garments. Moreover, respecting objects as “partners” would help intertwine the consumer’s experiences with the stories of others whose lives are also entangled in the garment. If we grounded these mindful partnerships in approaches synthesizing care ethics, materiality, and aesthetics, they might indeed help us see “conscience in a new light,” make tangible interdependencies, and enact those principles in sustainable practice.

Suggestions based on Web of Practice

My Web of Practice model visualizes individually-scaled experiences—in particular embodied aesthetic, affective, subjective, and symbolic dimensions of clothing practices—as critical factors that affect and are affected by systems structures. Attending to (e.g. recognizing, respecting, redirecting, or reinforcing) these strands of meaning along thematic issues can help craft meaningful and sustainable practices. I overlay my thematic analysis onto the Web of Practice to not only help us see the overall picture better, but also focus attention to embodied dimensions. This model visually translates theories to show us where we can implement initiatives in relation to thematic issues so that we can actualize change (see figure 9.1).¹⁹

¹⁸ Kenneth George, “Companionable Objects, Companionable Conscience: Episode 1, Two Effigies” (presented at the Institute for Research in the Humanities Seminar, Madison, WI, October 3, 2011), <http://irh.wisc.edu/archives.php?menu=events11>.

¹⁹ Donella Meadows, *Thinking in Systems: A Primer* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2008); Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*; Shove, “Beyond the

I point to five fronts in the Web of Practice through which to address unsustainable clothing consumption (see table 9.3). Based on topics that emerged in interviews, I compiled strategies along these different fronts that we can use to address the issues that my analysis revealed as most salient. These suggestions emerged from the participants' themselves, my analysis of their stories, and existing literature and practice.²⁰ I contextualized existing proposals in the field to the thematic issues in women's practices. My contextualization fills a gap in the literature: I connect the intimate dimensions of clothing practices throughout the consumption stage to broader cultural issues.

Table 9.3. Fronts for change

Front	Systems Level(s)	Description
Norms	Macro	Social and cultural norms, attitudes, and values
Individual behaviors	Micro	Individual consumption behaviors and family or household contexts
Apparel industry	Exo	Apparel industry practices, including design, manufacturing, labeling, and marketing of materials, components, and garments
Infrastructural support	Exo and meso	Social, cultural, physical, technological, educational, economic, legislative and other infrastructural support
Systems interactions	All	Intersections of production and consumption systems and role of community

ABC"; Douglas B. Holt, "Constructing Sustainable Consumption: From Ethical Values to the Cultural Transformation of Unsustainable Markets," in *Communication, Consumers, and Citizens: Revisiting the Politics of Consumption*, ed. Dhavan V. Shah et al., *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* v. 644 (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2012), 236–255.

²⁰ Key texts for strategies for sustainable clothing systems include the following: Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles*; Fletcher and Grose, *Fashion and Sustainability*; Chapman, *Emotionally Durable Design*; Chapman and Gant, *Designers, Visionaries and Other Stories*; Gwilt Alison and Timo Rissanen, eds., *Shaping Sustainable Fashion: Changing the Way We Make and Use Clothes* (London: Earth Pledge, 2011); Sandy Black, *Eco-chic: The Fashion Paradox* (London: Black Dog, 2008); Sass Brown, *Eco Fashion* (London: Laurence King, 2010); Stuart Walker, *The Spirit of Design: Objects, Environment, and Meaning* (New York: Earthscan, 2011).

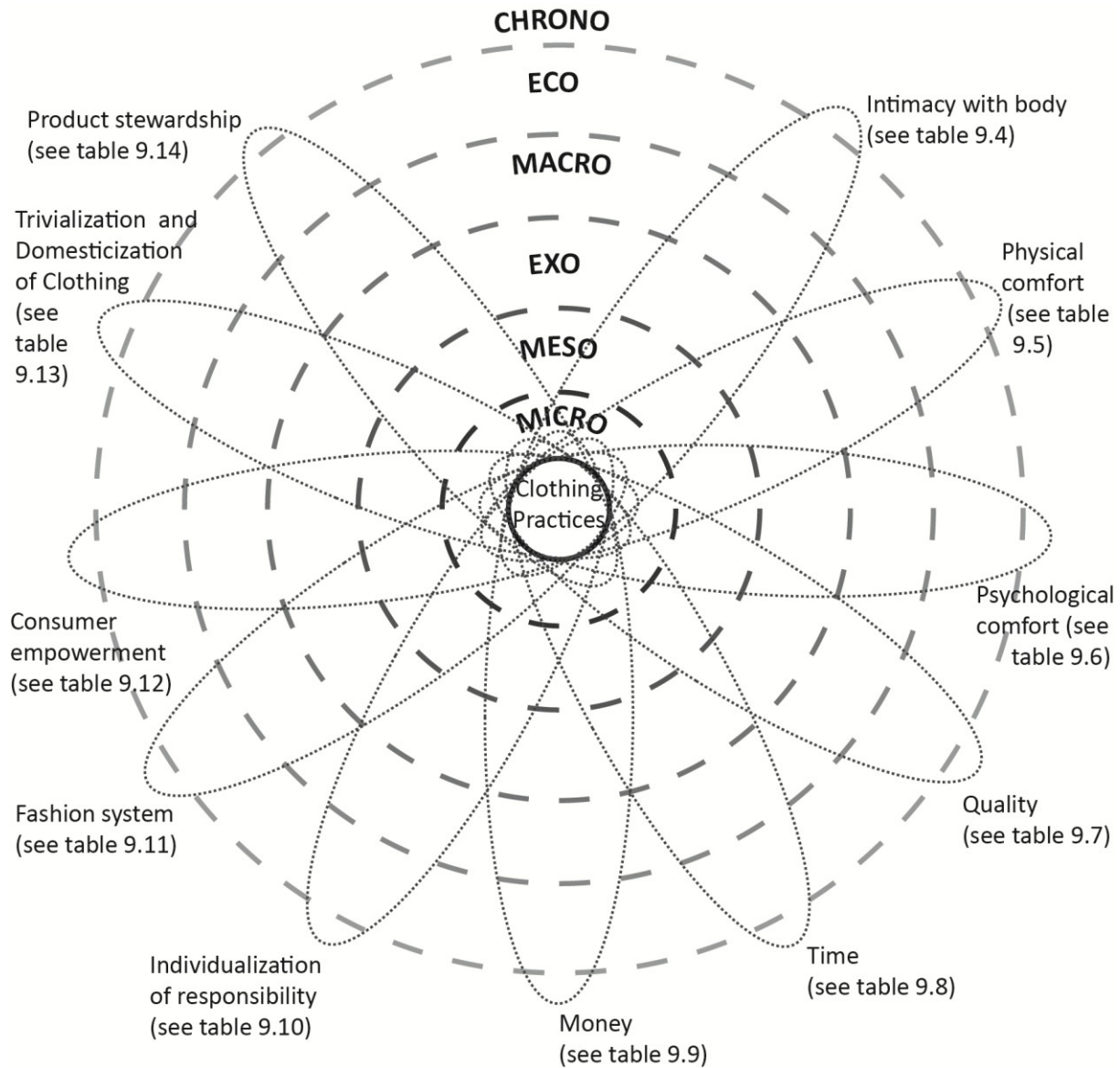


Figure 9.1. Web of Practice model: thematic issues for potential interventions

Some of the suggestions I mention here focus on changing elements of practice. Others focus on accommodating these elements with better, more sustainable options. As established in systems theory, changes in one area may necessitate or begin a change in the other. Additionally, not all of these suggestions apply to everyone in every context, so we need to follow different strategies for different lifestyles or taste cultures. Tackling the problem of consumption, then,

demands that we consider all of these fronts, so that actions on one front support actions in another. Nevertheless, each issue, each suggestion, is a point of entry, a potential opportunity to pursue individually or collectively. Overall, the model maps out sites of intervention that can reshape the structure to support sustainable patterns of behavior.

While this project does not offer strategies on how to change all of these norms or elements, it encourages dialogue around some elements that are not often articulated in sustainability conversations, despite playing an intimate role in practice. For example, anxieties about odor increase washing frequency, energy and water use, garment wear, and the perceived need for more clothing. Textile scientists have begun to develop fabric that does not acquire odors, although whether or not these designs are safe for the environment or people is still under review. Alternatively, there are rhythms of consumption that we can heighten instead of, or in addition to, seeking technological solutions—such as encouraging repeat wearing (which also preserves quality) or encouraging wool fiber use (as long as wool harvesting was ethical). Additionally, we can critically examine some of the social norms around odor. Are laundry product manufacturers exacerbating social anxieties of otherwise non-harmful body odors? Or are laundry product manufacturers helping us satisfy legitimate sensory preferences? These questions do not always have simple answers or straightforward ecological-minded advice. Nevertheless, this dissertation pushes us to ask questions like these of ourselves and of other participants (individuals, companies, or otherwise) involved in reproducing these practices. The potential actions listed below only begin to answer some of these questions. Hopefully, they raise additional questions and spark creative responses.

Table 9.4. Strategies for addressing intimacy with body: cleanliness and odor

Front	Strategies
Norms	<p>Overcoming concern about donating or recycling clothing that was in contact with intimate areas of body</p> <p>Overcoming concern about contamination of garments available secondhand</p> <p>Accepting body odor or decreasing anxiety around body odor</p> <p>Minimizing expectation that clothes should be perfumed/scented</p> <p>Reassessing clean, odor-free garments and middle-class moral status</p> <p>Decoupling cleanliness from stain-free</p> <p>Decoupling cleanliness from odor or scent</p> <p>Decoupling cleanliness from warm or hot water wash</p> <p>Accepting broader ranges of cleanliness</p> <p>Decoupling cleanliness from having been washed</p>
Individual behaviors	<p>Airing out between wearings</p> <p>Line drying for fresh scent</p> <p>Line drying for additional cleanliness</p> <p>Layering garments that can be washed more frequently</p> <p>Using components for areas likely to need cleaning (e.g. collars, cuffs)</p> <p>Wearing multiple times before washing</p> <p>Spot-cleaning garments</p>
Apparel industry	<p>Developing energy and resource efficient compostable fabrics for clothing that is unlikely to be reused</p> <p>Designing garments that are entirely compostable or can be serviced for disassembling</p> <p>Designing washable components</p> <p>Developing fabrics that do not acquire smells</p> <p>Designing for spot-cleaning</p> <p>Designing so that stains become part of garment's style</p> <p>Developing fabrics that do not need to be washed to be clean</p> <p>Developing non-polluting and safe (during production and use) laundry stain treatments</p> <p>Developing non-polluting and safe laundry soaps</p> <p>Developing non-polluting and safe laundry fabric softeners (liquid or dryer sheets)</p>
Infrastructural support	<p>Promoting the connections and relationships, mystery or imagined stories secondhand consumption allows</p> <p>Providing infrastructure for recycling or composting of fabrics, e.g. municipalities have curbside pickup or retail stores provide take-back programs</p> <p>Creating infrastructure to communalize or socialize laundry practices</p> <p>Having closet or storage systems that incorporate spaces for airing out</p> <p>Creating infrastructure for line-drying, especially in non-single home dwellings</p> <p>Marketing fabrics based on need to wash less (e.g. wool)</p> <p>Making secondhand stores smell less musty or more pleasant</p>

Table 9.5. Strategies for addressing physical comfort: textures and fit

Front	Strategies
Norms	Accepting stiff or wrinkled clothes Minimizing expectation for especially soft fabric post-drying Changing assumptions about comfort of natural over synthetic fibers Expanding language of touch and senses Developing co-production and alteration systems that could modify and customize for use as garment or body changes
Individual behaviors	Being willing to buy custom-fit garments to achieve desired fit Looking for adaptable designs Mindfully attending to sensory experiences of clothing Learning about fabric and garment construction to help make choices Doing or hiring out alterations to get right fit
Apparel industry	Designing with fabric that maintains texture for longer periods of time Developing non-polluting and safe wrinkle-free fabrics Designing to fit individual's women's bodies and tastes, e.g. through adaptable, customizable components or through mass-customization systems (e.g. eshakti.com) Designing clothes that can be adapted to different body sizes (e.g. adjustable components, knitwear, larger seam allowances, surplus fabric, flat seams for altering) Designing easy modification solutions into garment construction Moving away from mass-manufactured, standard sizing
Infrastructural support	Promoting use of tailoring and alteration services Educating consumers on altering practices so they can do alterations to make clothes fit their bodies (and changes in their bodies)
Systems Dynamics	Linking solutions for accommodating body changes to solutions for accommodating various body shapes/sizes

Table 9.6. Strategies for addressing psychological comfort: appearance and identity

Front	Strategies
Norms	<p>Reassessing negative views of wrinkles or other undesirable textures</p> <p>Decoupling conceptions of self-worth, respect for others from wrinkled appearance of clothing</p> <p>Changing norms that women need to be in fashion or made-up to be perceived as competent</p> <p>Expanding fashion and beauty norms to be more accepting of diverse body shapes, sizes, ages, and appearances</p> <p>Critically examining fashion and popular media's idealization of particular appearances</p> <p>Reframing visible mending as dynamic, stylized part of garment</p> <p>Decoupling secondhand clothing with lower socioeconomic status</p> <p>De-stigmatizing lower socioeconomic status</p> <p>Reassessing use of clothes to express and enhance individuality</p> <p>Changing expectations to dress in different clothes on daily basis</p> <p>Consider acceptability of literal or more individual uniforms</p> <p>Critically examining how clothing is used to fit into peer groups, establish status</p> <p>Changing norms about what is acceptable to wear (e.g. stigmatizing unsustainable clothing)</p>
Individual behaviors	<p>Nurturing and respecting others in immediate or extended networks for positive self-image</p> <p>Accepting others' tastes and checking biases against appearances</p> <p>Using wardrobe items strategically and efficiently to express personality, fit in style, repurpose clothes, adopt new styles, keeping old styles in rotation</p> <p>Have smaller closet and dresser spaces as a way to limit clothing owned</p> <p>Remixing clothing to creatively use existing wardrobe</p> <p>Refashioning clothes (new, handmade, secondhand) to make one's own style, taste, etc.</p>
Apparel industry	<p>Designing for strategic and efficient use of garments</p> <p>Designing garments to be versatile, multifunctional, adaptable, reversible</p> <p>Designing to fit individual's women's bodies and tastes, e.g. through adaptable, customizable components or through mass-customization systems (eshakti.com)</p> <p>Producing color sustainably and safely for safe consumption</p> <p>Local production of wardrobe "staples": jeans, t-shirts, button down shirts, slacks</p> <p>Designing so that sustainable production or use features are visible</p> <p>Designing or marketing style and aesthetic to make sustainable options appealing</p>
Infrastructural support	<p>Fashion and popular media promoting wrinkles and other textures that require less resources to maintain</p> <p>Fashion and popular media being more diverse in images and editorial content</p> <p>Fashion and popular media encouraging self-esteem, self-acceptance, and wellbeing</p> <p>Expanding knowledge of invisible mending</p> <p>Providing opportunities to learn invisible mending techniques (either formal education or informal skill sharing)</p> <p>Accommodating style and aesthetic tastes through designing adaptable products</p> <p>Expanding on existing strategies women use and that are promoted in popular media</p>

Table 9.6. Strategies for addressing psychological comfort: appearance and identity, cont.

Front	Strategies
Infrastructural support, cont.	Building dialogue around these practices as sustainable Expanding individual do-it-yourself (DIY) efforts by offering services, events, or skill learning to transform clothing to help prevent failed person-garment relationships Encouraging secondhand clothing consumption as a way to take risks, try new styles, increase variety, etc. Providing infrastructure for sharing, swapping, or renting clothes—either local or internet based
Systems Dynamics	Accommodating style and aesthetic tastes through co-production and co-design

Table 9.7. Strategies for addressing quality

Front	Strategies
Norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expecting higher quality apparel Breaking out of the norm of settling for easily accessible lower quality Decoupling mending with low quality, unacceptable wear Expanding when it is worth to mend something Recognizing ongoing changes in condition, and subsequent alterations and repairs as adding to value Changing assumptions that secondhand stores do not have quality stock Changing assessment of secondhand stores based on comparisons to retail stores that have regular stock availability in various sizes Embracing and celebrating the serendipitous and uniqueness of secondhand store stock Challenging natural fibers as the standard for fiber performance if synthetics offer viable opportunities Expanding quality assessment and expectations beyond formal or professional attire Re-establishing trust in brands' production conditions and quality
Individual behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expecting and demanding higher quality Using garments to the fullest level their quality permits Investing in clothing that is worth repairing Buying vintage clothing to get quality Engaging with materials through making as a way to increase knowledge, build expertise, and enhance quality assessment Line drying as a way to preserve quality Washing in cold as a way to preserve quality Washing less often as a way to preserve quality
Apparel industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designing and producing garments to last physically Designing and producing garments to last stylistically Designing clothing that is worth repairing Developing compostable options for items that people are reluctant to mend Designing, labeling, or marketing patina of use Designing for emotionally durable relationships
Infrastructural support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educating consumers on how to assess fabric performance and distinguishing fabric from fiber Learning in formal education settings, like home economics courses in school Learning through informal self-practice or DIY activities or communities Providing guidelines about what garment conditions can be donated or reused to minimize still wearable garments or recyclable materials going in trash Creating infrastructure to support learning about fabric and construction Creating infrastructure to apply and pursue skilled and informed decision-making (e.g. labeling garments, staffing stores with knowledgeable employees)

Table 9.7. Strategies for addressing quality, cont.

Front	Strategies
Infrastructural support	<p>Creating infrastructure to provide safe and fair services for maintaining quality, e.g. garment over-dyeing services or take back programs</p> <p>Lengthening expected life expectancy established in Fair Claims Guide for Consumer Textile Products published by the American National Standards Institute</p>

Table 9.8. Strategies for addressing time

Front	Strategies
Norms	<p>Reassessing tendency to work more to have more money to buy new garments</p> <p>Considering working less to have less money, more time to care for clothes</p> <p>Challenging the false economy of planned obsolescence</p> <p>Thinking in longer-term scales, beyond immediate or generational period</p> <p>Changing norms of how laundry fits into schedule or flexibility in schedule</p> <p>Changing expectations or preferences for easy, convenient consumption behaviors—from shopping to laundering</p>
Individual behaviors	<p>Being willing to spend more time caring and maintaining clothing condition rather than replacing</p> <p>Being willing to spend time for custom-fit garment</p> <p>Making as a way of slowing down and changing time experiences</p> <p>Being willing to hand-wash select items</p> <p>Being willing to spot-clean items</p> <p>Being willing to spend time researching companies and products</p> <p>Mindfully attending to time spent on activities, including clothing consumption practices</p> <p>Using time to advocate for environmental and social justice issues through contacting and petitioning companies, policymakers, media, etc.</p>
Apparel industry	<p>Designing clothes to be worn over the long term</p> <p>Releasing new styles less frequently</p> <p>Maintaining product availability over longer cycles</p>
Infrastructural support	<p>Popular media and advertising modeling working less</p> <p>Economic, employment, and other governmental policies supporting shorter work weeks</p> <p>Visualizing time (and materials and other costs) already embodied in garments</p> <p>Offering services, events, or skill learning to alter or mend clothing</p> <p>Make non-time or non-monetary costs visible in product price or information</p> <p>Make machine drying less convenient</p> <p>Counteracting hurried experience of modern consumer culture—potentially through mindfulness</p> <p>Making sustainable products and behaviors easiest, most accessible norm</p> <p>Making less sustainable products and behaviors less easy or convenient</p>

Table 9.9. Strategies for addressing money

Front	Strategies
Norms	Breaking out of the norm of buying cheap, getting a deal, spending less Reassessing expectation of inexpensive clothing Recognizing quality clothing may cost more than previously accustomed to paying Recognizing environmentally and socially responsibly made clothing may cost more than previously accustomed to paying Challenging the false economy of planned obsolescence Highlighting particular acquisition and clothing care as embodiments of thrift values
Individual behaviors	Saving money by buying secondhand Saving money by sharing or swapping clothes Saving money by re-purposing clothes Saving money by mending and repairing clothes Saving money by line drying Saving money by washing in cold or less frequently Being willing to spend more money upfront for something of better quality or sustainably produced (may save money over time) Being willing to pay more for custom-fit garment
Apparel industry	Using fabrics that consumers might be more willing to pay higher sums for Designing for long term investment Designing for non-dry cleaning laundering
Infrastructural support	Using thrift to support individual, social, and environmental thriving—tapping into thrift ethic, e.g. self-sufficient homemaking, exercising frugality, conserving resources Highlighting money saved in the long-term Paying fair wages for labor Enforcing fair wages and labor conditions with trade policies or other regulations Accounting for social and environmental costs in price of garments Marketing garments based on not having to dry clean because it saves money Pricing products higher so that purchasing new garment is higher investment monetarily than spending time mending Reassessing sale and discount-models for retail stores that encourage getting deals Pricing sustainable products lower to encourage purchasing Instituting financial/economic policies that encourage sustainable behavior or making costs visible or more immediate (e.g. coin-operated washers) Increasing costs of water usage for laundering Increasing costs of energy use for dryers Increasing costs of new garments Making the immediate and long-term monetary costs more visible

Table 9.9. Strategies for addressing money, cont.

Front	Strategies
Infrastructural support, cont.	Changing trade, tariff, or subsidy policies to encourage and make more affordable/accessible organic, recycled production or fair labor conditions Developing transparency and visibility for green, eco, ethical marketing claims, especially if at a higher price point
Systems Dynamics	Considering apparel leasing or rental systems

Table 9.10. Strategies for addressing individualization of responsibility

Front	Strategies
Norms	Explicitly recognizing symbolic meaning of clothing Promoting considering more distant, less immediately personal issues Expanding frame of reference for behaviors—global and historical Changing assumption that individual choices best or primary strategy Reassessing individualized (vs. service-oriented) approach to advanced textile skills Recognizing and cultivating the power of imagination, emotion, and objects as way to create relationships, affiliation, and care Explicitly recognizing aesthetic and creative clothing practices as political acts of resistance
Individual behaviors	Aligning with larger groups, organizations, or movements Taking control of, harnessing moments of being, investing meaning into clothing Cultivating relationships around clothing practices (in the home or in the community) Participating in non-retail exchanges, skill-sharing, clothes swapping, sharing, renting Raising girls (and boys) to have positive self-esteem independent of commercialized beauty standards Making consumption choices based on empathy, sensitivity, and relationships
Apparel industry	Developing infrastructure, spaces, organizations to facilitate community skill sharing, exchanging services, sharing durable goods Enacting imagined and affective responses through individual choices and organized responses Modeling sustainable behavior and choices in movies, television programs, magazines, other popular culture media, as individuals, communities Modeling alternative practices practiced in other time periods, geographic areas, cultures, and sub-cultures in popular media, museums, etc.

Table 9.11. Strategies for addressing fashion system

Front	Strategies
Norms	Changing how we interpret having choices as positive if quality of choices not always satisfying in terms of meeting our goals Changing how we evaluate effectiveness/meaning of choice, freedom, security Changing norm of buying new clothes at start of fashion season or weather seasons Creating norm of repairing and modifying garments at season changes Reducing pressure to follow short-term fashion trends
Individual behaviors	Wearing styles for longer periods of times Continuing to cultivate personal aesthetic styles Disengaging from fashion media
Apparel industry	Moving away from quick turnover of product lines Slowing down speed and frequency of fashion changes and style turnover Maintaining availability of products that women have good relationships with Expand what colors are considered in season, e.g. longer-term colorways, mass-customization infrastructure
Infrastructural support	Fashion press, media, and popular culture promoting messages of slowness, adaptability, style diversity, restyle Fashion press, media, and popular culture de-emphasizing messages of novelty, change, in-season trends Building on women's existing ability to manage trends, select particular ones Changing standards or reference groups for usage Making environmentally and socially responsible clothing choices visible and goal to "keep up with" Developing/expanding clothing rental programs Changing retail environment to slow down purchases, encourage or create space for garment inspection Applying principles from fair trade or alternative trading organization business practices to other designs and retail contexts Promoting low-commodity products and services
Systems Dynamics	Building co-production design systems

Table 9.12. Strategies for addressing consumer empowerment in production/consumption systems

Front	Strategies
Norms	<p>Changing assumption that consumers lack power</p> <p>Changing assumption that consumer's primary power is through buying or not buying particular products</p> <p>Empowering consumer to believe they can effect change through communicating with stores, companies, manufacturers, organizations, or local or national governments</p> <p>Changing assumption that solution is a particular product and not an attitude, behavior, or systems change</p>
Individual behaviors	<p>Pushing oneself to examine garments themselves, history, and systems around garment</p> <p>Demanding more from journalists to let consumers know about unethical practices</p> <p>Connecting to designer, maker, or other participants in garment story</p>
Apparel industry	<p>Designing to fit individual's women's bodies and tastes, e.g. through adaptable, customizable components or through mass-customization systems</p>
Infrastructural support	<p>Building an infrastructure of garment care support, in family or community, in informal or formal economy</p> <p>Localizing some aspects of production, maintenance, reuse/disposal, e.g. co-operatives, local designers/artisans, craft fairs, local exchange networks (formal economic or informal sharing/swapping)</p> <p>Encouraging awareness and making visible consumer's agency in broader production and economic systems</p> <p>Journalists and other media coverage providing information about current good and bad practices</p> <p>Enforcing or encouraging transparency about production systems</p> <p>Enforcing or encouraging transparency about consumer impacts</p> <p>Making visible the lives and resources embodied in garments, so that women have a more tangible impact with these elements</p> <p>Expanding and making more tangible connections and affiliations to otherwise abstracted and distant environmental or social concerns (since connections and affiliations matter—care ethics, human needs)</p> <p>Telling individualized garment stories to each other, in the media, through apparel industry, through product marketing materials</p> <p>Not just providing information, but contextualizing that information in relation to the individual's role, stake, or opportunities</p>

Table 9.12. Strategies for addressing consumer empowerment in production/consumption systems, cont.

Front	Strategies
Systems Dynamics	<p>Providing transparent and meaningful opportunities for consumers to give feedback to designers, manufacturers, retailers, etc.</p> <p>Providing opportunities for producers to communicate to consumers</p> <p>Acknowledging producers as consumers, and consumers as producers</p> <p>Putting in place systems for consumers to inform design</p> <p>Building co-design and co-production systems on local or larger scales</p> <p>Expanding refashioning services and instruction</p> <p>Integrating mending, alteration, refashioning services in retail environments</p> <p>Increasing opportunities for social connections and relationship building to fulfill needs, promote positive experiences, and strengthen affiliations, build networks of care</p>

Table 9.13. Strategies for addressing trivialization and domesticization of fashion, clothing, and textile skills

Front	Strategies
Norms	<p>Readjusting household and professional responsibilities to make time for learning or money for hiring out garment services in gender balanced way</p> <p>Decoupling laundry with private, domestic, individual behaviors</p> <p>Reassessing expected privacy for laundry practices</p> <p>Reassessing space needs for accommodating line-drying indoors</p> <p>Recognizing fashion, clothing, and style as legitimate activities, albeit currently unsustainable</p> <p>Respecting and appreciating work of materials and garment construction</p> <p>Respecting and appreciating work of clothing care—from monotonous hand-washing or button sewing to creative selection of materials or sensory pleasure of line drying</p> <p>Decoupling textile skills and clothing care from domestic, crafty personality</p> <p>Reaffirming basic textile skills and clothing care as life skills</p> <p>De-gendering textile skills and clothing care as female activity</p> <p>Embracing and celebrating sensory pleasure, creative play, and positive self-identity possible through clothing practices</p> <p>Respecting sensory experiences as ways of knowing</p> <p>Challenging (often gendered female) trivialization and de-legitimization of sensory or affective knowledge</p> <p>Changing skills we encourage (e.g. mending instead of shopping)</p> <p>Critically examining historical, cultural, technological, and economic shifts in women's access to public spaces and consumption as contributing to current shopping practices</p>

Table 9.13. Strategies for addressing trivialization and domesticization of fashion, clothing, and textile skills, cont.

Front	Strategies
Individual behaviors	Participating in making and mending practices Embracing aesthetic pleasure through mindful clothing practices Talking about personal and political dimensions of clothing choices Setting up temporary or permanent lines in private or shared spaces
Infrastructural support	Highlighting in media and popular culture the economic, environmental, political, and social consequences of fashion Highlighting in media and popular culture the economic, environmental, political, and social forces that shape fashion as it exists Economic, employment, and other governmental policies supporting healthy work-life balance Building infrastructure of services that could do some laundering services in environmentally and socially responsible way Communalizing laundry care to encourage social networks and engagement, and make practice more meaningful Making visible the invisible work of clothing care and other domestic work Doing mending in public Creating communal sites or service or learning for mending or other clothing care Ensuring equitable distribution of domestic work (may involve changes in labor, economic, or social policy) Making visible those things that are close, intimate, and taken-for-granted Accounting for domestic and third-shift work Using family as a building block for sustainable practices, socialization, etc., but not settling for limiting support for social change to family

Table 9.14. Strategies for addressing valuing materials and product stewardship

Front	Strategies
Norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrating product stewardship into an ethic of care Extending care to include environmental resources and human labor invested in garment Valuing the materials embodied in garments Valuing the energy embodied in garments Valuing the intellectual and physical labor in garments Respecting the ecosystems that are affected Respecting the people and communities that are affected Addressing assumptions about sustainability of natural fibers over synthetic fibers Promoting mindfulness of how many clothes currently owned and what needs might be Expanding ideas of special clothes to more of our wardrobes so they receive same emotional attention and care
Individual behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Purchase responsibly produced apparel Acquire fewer items Being mindful of purchases and care Taking control of, harnessing moments of being, investing meaning into clothing Physically engaging with garments through making or mending—enhancing awareness, knowledge, expertise, care, attachment Connecting the materiality of meaning with the materiality of production
Apparel industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designing garments to age into reusable or repurposed styles Making visible how clothes are made Making visible in product design or marketing materials the lives and resources embodied in garments, so that women have a more tangible impact with these elements Making garment designs, materials, construction, etc. special or specific to a place, person, etc.
Infrastructural support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting mindfulness, slowing down, and making conscious connections so actions are deliberate, potentially more meaningful, and goal/need fulfilling Learning in formal education settings, like home economics courses in school Learning through informal self-practice or DIY activities or communities Marketing based on material connections (e.g. American Apparel and Patagonia) Linking individual choices/behaviors with extended consequences, e.g. climate change impact on energy bills Renting industrial washing machines to individual consumers for more efficient laundering and reduction in consumer waste of durable appliances Implementing grey water systems for households or municipalities
Systems Dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involving consumer in designing or making as way to mindfully attend to and care for clothes and associated materials and labor

Reaching Out and Implementing Ideas

Here, I review implications for selected key stakeholders implicated in the above suggestions. The work of the stakeholders below will continue to shape existing practices and introduce new ideas as we discover what succeeds and what does not.

Implications for Individuals

Individuals, through consumer or civic activities, play key roles in reproducing habits and creating change. In addition to consumption practices, individuals can support other stakeholders' efforts by purchasing sustainable products, talking with retailers, writing companies, or contacting policymakers. Although some may interpret these actions as sacrifices, my analysis suggests that sustainable products and practices need not be a sacrifice, but may instead satisfy needs and desires more effectively. Moreover, many suggestions build on women's existing practices of care for their clothes, affection for their family and friends, and concern for others—so that individuals can amplify existing values and attitudes (that may not necessarily be explicitly pro-environmental but have environmental benefits). In embracing these connections to others, individuals can consider and act on their role as not only consumers who buy eco-friendly products, but also as global citizens who actively respect and care for people and the planet.²¹ Collectively, individual attitudes create the norms that may need changing. We can effect these changes through our actions in consumption and civics.

While these lists may feel overwhelming or confusing, there are key places individuals can begin to effect change (see table 9.15). Because of the environmental impacts of laundering,

²¹ Sevenhuijsen, *Citizenship and the Ethics of Care*; Held, *The Ethics of Care*.

washing in cold water, line drying, and wearing multiple times before washing are good places to start. Because of the documented human rights abuses in the labor industry, one could start purchasing clothes from ethical or secondhand sources, sharing and swapping with others, or making and altering clothes. The sustainability literature shows, and my research confirms, that finding something that matters is important to maintaining behaviors. The key is to start somewhere and not stop, to not limit oneself to consumption but engage with other systems.

Table 9.15. Strategies for sustainable individual consumption practices

Acquire	Wear and Use	Store and Maintain	Dispose
Purchase sustainably produced apparel	Wear clothes that can be adapted to different sizes	Wash less frequently Spot clean	Wear until completely worn
Acquire fewer items	Repurpose clothes to different uses if quality changes	Use less water, soap, and products	Reduce how many garments discarded
Invest in physically and stylistically long-lasting pieces	Wear clothes that fit personality, not latest trends	Avoid dry cleaning	Avoid putting clothes in trash
Share or swap clothes	Wear patched/ mended clothes	Air dry	Reuse textiles, materials, and components
Buy secondhand or vintage garments	Wear multiple times before cleaning	Mend invisibly or visibly	Recycle or compost materials
Consider making garments or collaborating with designers and makers	Wear what you own	Alter or customize instead of discard	Donate clothes if still wearable
		Learn or improve textile skills	
		Use mending or alteration services	
Across Clothing Lifecycle Stages			
Be mindful of consumption experiences, including multi-sensory aesthetic pleasures, connections to people and places, and impact on environment and others' wellbeing			
Value and respect materials, resources, energy, and labor embedded in garments and care			
Engaging with other stakeholders and systems levels			

Implications for Garments

As stated, this project encourages us to consider garments as key partners in sustainable practice. Rather than treating garments as material objects to be accumulated or show off status, we can respect garments and the stories they embody. However, it is our responsibility to care for the garments, acting as stewards for them. Through mindfully attending to garments' materiality, we can embrace aesthetic encounters, respect the resources and labor embodied in garments, and cultivate relationships with people and places near and far. By attending to garment stories through information, design elements, or direct involvement, we can expand what we value (e.g. rekindling respect for craft and labor), who we respect and care for (e.g. illuminating the interdependencies between garment workers and purchasers or people and environmental resources), and what we invest our time and money into (e.g. waiting to purchase or make fewer items that are of high quality and offer personal connections).

Implications for Designers and Producers

Designers and producers manage a diverse, complex set of variables in their design choices, from aesthetic potential to practical constraints. Designers can seek out ways, however small or large, to address the various issues explored in this dissertation—e.g. accommodating bodies and tastes, slowing down frequency of change, increasing fabric performance, easing laundering burdens, providing opportunities for creative making or re-making, promoting servicing of products, or transparently disclosing production stories. Certainly, not all of these variables will always be in an individual designer's control, especially when working for larger design firms. Nevertheless, designers might incorporate these strategies within existing

manufacturing systems or create new systems. Through any or all of these opportunities (and others not discussed here), designers and producers can work together not only to create sustainably produced garments but also to enhance interactions with them.

Implications for Cultural Mediators

Cultural mediators include a broad swath of stakeholders, including buyers, retailers, marketers, and journalists, among others. These actors play important roles in influencing both the apparel industry and conversations around the industry.²² Cultural mediators can use their position to select garments for sale that follow sustainable production principles, frame product benefits for consumers, identify injustices or violations, or increase visibility of the many product and service options available. Cultural mediators are in a position to increase the visibility of and normalize sustainable options. Additionally, particularly journalists can provide information and critical analysis of industry practices. All of these factors were prominent themes in my results, and cultural mediators are in an important position to influence the perception and availability of information and options.

Implications for Educators

Similarly, educators could incorporate garment stories and skills into curricula to help consumers have better tools through which to navigate the apparel market. In particular, the discipline and curriculum of home economics, built on applied research designed to improve daily life, can provide skills to critically examine apparel's material dimensions and creatively

²² Joanne Entwistle, *The Aesthetic Economy of Fashion: Markets and Value in Clothing and Modelling* (Oxford: Berg, 2009); Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashion-ology: An Introduction to Fashion Studies* (Oxford: Berg, 2005).

engage with practice and products.²³ This education may occur in formal primary or secondary school settings or in informal sharing situations. Moreover, through collaboration with and educational outreach to various communities—the kind of extension projects the discipline has historically embraced—it can connect these life skills to broader environmental and social justice movements.

Educators in design, retail, and marketing, also have a pivotal role in shaping future practices. My research suggests that educators may want to consider incorporating material culture and care ethics into their curricula. Additionally, they can use any existing sensitivity to sensory aesthetics to encourage long-term relationships with garments. Moreover, educators might consider how they equip students to be agents of change. What tools or strategies can they use in their industry to voice concerns, propose alternatives, and successfully implement them?

Implications for Policymakers in Government or Industry

Although my research does not explore clothing policies specifically, international, national, and local government and industry policies shape or have the potential to shape elements of practice. For example, policymakers or industry leaders could hold industry accountable for including environmental and social costs in pricing. Such voluntary or enforced regulations or incentives could nudge behaviors (of producers and/or consumers) in more sustainable directions. Some policy makers are reluctant to nudge behaviors or reduce perceived autonomy in consumption choices. However, my research suggests that strategies such as

²³ Pendergast, McGregor, and Turkki, *Creating Home Economics Futures*; Yvonne Dewhurst and Donna Pendergast, “Teacher Perceptions of the Contribution of Home Economics to Sustainable Development Education: a Cross-cultural View,” *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 35, no. 5 (September 2011): 569–577; Arran Stibbe, *The Handbook of Sustainability Literacy: Skills for a Changing World* (Totnes, UK: Green Books, 2009).

improving quality of choices might improve consumers' ability to fulfill their goals.²⁴ Moreover, my project asks us what values our current policies support (e.g. those supporting neoliberalism and self-interest) and what values they could support (e.g. those embracing care and empathy).²⁵

Implications for Academic Researchers

Researchers could explore many areas, as elaborated under “Future Research and Directions” below, in order to better understand sustainable consumption opportunities, design and manufacturing systems, marketing and retailing practices, and supportive policies. The implication for researchers is to ask questions that address both individual behaviors and system patterns, and then communicate their findings with diverse audiences, from designers to consumers, retail buyers, marketers, policy makers, and other researchers.²⁶

Future Research and Directions

Despite ongoing research on sustainable consumption, gaps remain in the field. To address the limitations in this project, further studies—either singularly-focused or involving cross-comparative analysis—could be proposed focusing on the following:

- Different genders
- Different age ranges (e.g. teenagers or older adults)
- More diverse clothing interests (e.g. fast-fashion followers)
- More diverse sustainability interests (e.g. voluntary simplifiers)

²⁴ Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein, *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*, Rev. and expanded ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 2009); Sarah Conly, *Against Autonomy: Justifying Coercive Paternalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Arlen C. Moller, Richard M. Ryan, and Edward L. Deci, “Self-Determination Theory and Public Policy: Improving the Quality of Consumer Decisions Without Using Coercion,” *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 104–116.

²⁵ Sevenhuijsen, *Citizenship and the Ethics of Care*; Held, *The Ethics of Care*.

²⁶ Alex Franklin and Paul Blyton, eds., *Researching Sustainability: A Guide to Social Science Methods, Practice, and Engagement* (London: Earthscan, 2011).

- Different socio-economic classes
- Different ethnic, cultural, or sub-cultural groups
- Different urban/rural, regional, national, or other geographic contexts
- Longitudinal study

Investigating different socio-economic classes, racial or ethnic groups (my participants were primarily white, university educated, and middle-class) could elaborate the challenges and opportunities in various circumstances. While my study points toward some of the ways cultural values, social norms, and individual tastes intersected, further research should investigate further into the interstices of individual and social factors as they manifest in lived practices under different conditions.

Because the cultural context of my participants affected my results, exploring experiences in other contexts is a clear direction for future research. For example, while my participants could be considered part of different subcultures with access to somewhat varied economic or cultural capital, almost all participated in homogenous dress styles, purchased clothing from conventional sources, and cleared their closets of clothes that were still wearable. No one explicitly connected to or regularly engaged in particular ethnic or folk dress practices; regularly followed fast-fashion trends or purchased high-end designer apparel; or led particularly austere, simple (voluntary or otherwise) lifestyles, though two women explicitly expressed interest in that movement. Additionally, scholarship has suggested, and my own participants asserted, that certain regions and cosmopolitan areas are more fashion-conscious than others are. Living in the Midwestern United States permits a degree of casualness and minimal trend following that affected results—but could also offer models for sustainable practice, in which the “third coast” could be the leader of sustainable fashion.

Another common theme that emerged in my results was the influence of age and place in lifecycle. While studies of teenage fashion choices have examined the role of peer influence and identity formation in purchasing apparel, future studies could further investigate how sustainable clothing does or does not become a visible, desirable status symbol or norm. Alternatively, studies could further pursue how and when children and teenagers learn or do not learn sustainable norms and practices around clothing care—such as when to wash something, how to mend something, and when salvaging an item is worth the time and/or effort. Women themselves asserted how they have changed dress practices over time, and those with teenage daughters described being interested in their daughter's interest in clothing. However, life histories were beyond the scope of this study so that many life experiences or cultural influences, such as teenage years or religious values, were unexamined. Unpacking these habits from earlier stages could further enhance our understanding of how and why unsustainable practices persist and how they might shift direction.

Connecting research on how women use other elements of dress beyond clothing, which have their own environmental and social justice implications (e.g. leather use in shoes and purses, mining for metals and gemstones) to sustainability studies would further enhance our understanding of the sustainability of dress as a system. Although my research focused on visible apparel, participants fluidly moved between talking about garments, accessories, shoes, jewelry, makeup, and other elements of dress, attesting to the importance of looking at these elements in this systemic way.

Quantitative data of women's behaviors (e.g. through resource auditing, time surveys, and expenditures tracking) might provide additional perspective on how their perceptions match

with their behaviors or identify which were most misaligned. These metrics alone might not be able to capture the subjective nuances of clothing meanings that I explore in this project. Nevertheless, they might illuminate patterns of time and money expenditures otherwise invisible to our sense of our own habits.

Although this project's interview-focused methods are useful for reflecting on practices and meaning, other data collection methods would provide additional perspectives in unpacking themes explored here. Diaries about clothing choices, with or without photographs or an expenditures log, for example, might be useful. Asking participants to consider sustainability issues in their written reflections might reveal similar themes to the ones discussed in this project, raise new questions, or be used as tools of intervention. Research has suggested that documentation of food choices, in particular through photography, affects food consumption.²⁷ Might visually documenting one's clothing show a similar effect? The plethora of personal and street style blogs—ranging from reviewing new, brand-specific purchases to displaying creative remixes of thrift store finds—are ripe for further inquiry.

While examining individual practices yielded rich data and many thematic concerns, this approach did not systematically investigate the social dynamics within the home, as they affected both my participant's clothing experiences or other household members' experiences. My analysis pointed to the importance of balancing issues around family, household, work, and leisure systems of practice. Therefore, intensive household ethnographic observation could illuminate how the themes explored in this dissertation play out differently in a variety of

²⁷ Lydia Zepeda and David Deal, "Think before You Eat: Photographic Food Diaries as Intervention Tools to Change Dietary Decision Making and Attitudes," *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 32, no. 6 (November 2008): 692–698.

situations, emotional moods, household routines, and atypical or unexpected events.²⁸

Additionally, analyzing the clothing practices of all members of a household (or a peer group) could help show how the household and networks contributes to the creation of sustainable or unsustainable of clothing practices, which are publicly seen as an individual act but which are intimately bound up with family and peer socialization. Clothing care and maintenance occur within the home and are learned through family networks. Therefore, further investigating the sustainability of these experiences on a household level could help unravel otherwise invisible, private acts that have external, environmental, and social costs.

As much as I designed this project to consider multiple stages within the consumption lifecycle, I excluded analysis of people's experiences in current design, production, and disposal industries. Nevertheless, my analysis of the consumer's perspectives illuminates how intertwined these various systems are in lived experiences. A systemic analysis of these contexts could enhance our understandings of social dynamics in these systems interactions. For example, I positioned my analysis in dialogue with both academic research on sustainable consumption as well what scholars have termed "gray literature:" popular accounts of the apparel industry and clothing-specific and general lifestyle consumer guides in addition to government and industry reports on clothing production and consumption.²⁹ An intensive content analysis of design strategies and consumption advice presented in these works might be a way to continue this project's objectives to unpack the meanings, assumptions, and assertions circulating around clothing practices. Alternatively, future research could analyze fashion advice and clothing

²⁸ For an example of in-depth fieldwork in homes, see Jeanne E. Arnold et al., *Life at Home in the Twenty-first Century: 32 Families Open Their Doors* (Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press, 2013).

²⁹ Chris Gibson and Elyse Stanes, "Is Green the New Black? Exploring Ethical Fashion Consumption," in *Ethical Consumption: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Tania Lewis and Emily Potter (New York: Routledge, 2011), 169–185.

norms presented in popular lifestyle and fashion magazines, dress advice television programs, and books in relation to sustainability objectives. Examining how this media encourages or discourages environmentally or socially responsible behavior could provide additional context for larger social factors with which individuals are grappling in their everyday clothing choices.

Journalists, popular culture, marketers, retail buyers, and other cultural mediators play pivotal roles in clothing practices—regardless of whether one accepts a top-down or bottom-up explanation of fashion change. Future research could apply this project’s research design to studying the choices of these cultural mediators—examining how sustainability issues are acknowledged and addressed in their work. While research has focused on specific labor issues and product narratives, the experiences of the mediators warrant further analysis.³⁰ This research would complement this project’s emphasis on consumption by further unpacking other key elements of the clothing system.

Throughout my analysis, I point toward avenues for exploring experience, directions for moving forward, and frameworks for tackling the whole picture. Implementing and assessing any of these suggestions is a clear direction for future research. Research could be conducted through any of the methods mentioned here (e.g. individual interviews, object stories, surveys, or household ethnographic observation). However, this agenda points to other more practice-based methods, including participatory action research and research in design practice or education.

Kate Fletcher’s Local Wisdom project (documenting garment stories) and Jessamyn Hatcher’s Human-Textile Wellness Center (studying relationships with garments through

³⁰ For a recent research project along this trajectory, see Lisa G. Curwen, Juyeon Park, and Sarkar, Ajoy, “Challenges and Solutions of Sustainable Apparel Product Development: a Case Study of Eileen Fisher,” *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 31, no. 1 (January 2013): 32–47.

mending) are two models for public outreach-based research that could also be extrapolated from my work.³¹ To get people engaged in their own garment stories, designers, scholars, companies, communities, and individuals might all participate in expanding or creating web content, pop-up clinics and workshops, documentation efforts, forums to talk with industry, or other interventions. Additionally, research could investigate what participating in these activities as well as those itemized in the above suggestion list mean for those involved. For example, research could trace what ecological or ethical practices are developed in craft fair consumption and how those evolve or penetrate other facets of one's behavior.

Such projects also offer opportunities to continue to explore and implement the theories I point to as potential tools as they emerge in practice. For instance, future research might examine more explicitly how we can use care ethics strategically in political and social dimensions of sustainable movement. Research might assess how existing groups do or do not use this language in their messaging, how we might create new messaging campaigns around care values and practices, or how media treat these concepts when covering sustainability issues. While my research suggests the integration of material culture, aesthetics, care ethics, and human ecology in pursuing strategies for change, future research could endeavor to unpack how they do or do not overlap. For example, how does the attentiveness in mindfully attending to materiality parallel or diverge from the attentiveness in care?³²

³¹ Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles*; "Craft of Use - Home," accessed April 15, 2013, <http://craftofuse.org/>; "Local Wisdom - Homepage," accessed April 15, 2013, <http://www.localwisdom.info/>; Jessamyn Hatcher, "Human-Textile Wellness Initiative | An Action Research Lab That Documents People's Relationships to Their Clothing," accessed April 15, 2013, <http://humantextilewellness.wordpress.com/>.

³² For recent research connecting mindfulness and design, see Erin Miller Hamilton, "Building an Experience: Mindful Awareness in the Built Environment" (master's thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2011).

Although this project focuses on consumers, sustainability issues involve all people in their many roles—as individuals and group members, as consumers and citizens, as media consumers and journalists, as students and educators, as voters and policymakers. Research should follow these many diverging and overlapping paths and the social contexts through which they navigate to understand how sustainable and unsustainable practices emerge. Outreach efforts can occur on various platforms, and engage with diverse communities.

Parting Words

We can create change through individual and collective efforts. We should tackle a system of interlocking parts—individual habits, product design and manufacturing, marketing, and other policies—that currently degrades the environment and exploit people. While these problems are complex and nuanced, they are not insurmountable. Instead, the complexity and nuances provide innumerable points of intervention to reshape practice, rearrange the pieces, and re-imagine the system.

We can build from existing rhythms of practice, but we can also introduce new notes and instruments, or even radically reshape melodies and patterns. While each individual change, each shift in practice, each improvement in manufacturing may be but a whisper of the song, together these small sounds can move from a cacophony of tuning and tweaking to a symphony of sustainable opportunities.

Appendix 1
Survey and interview request example

Dear [group contact],

I am a student in Design Studies at the UW-Madison, and I am currently conducting interviews for my dissertation project on clothing. I am reaching out to local community groups and am hoping to include women with a range of clothing interests and attitudes.

I was wondering if I could contact women through [group] to find individuals who might be interested in volunteering for my study. Is there an email listserv, newsletter, bulletin board, or other service that I could send out a request through? Are there any upcoming events/meetings I might be able to attend and/or make an announcement at?

I am asking women to fill out a 10-15 minute survey. Based on responses, I will ask around 20 women if they would like to volunteer in two interviews to discuss their clothing choices and attitudes towards various issues. Interviews will be scheduled at her convenience. I am including a link to the online survey and project description:

https://uwmadison.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_38jXD8OvWrJ2QYc

Feel free to send me any questions or forward my contact information (ordon@wisc.edu or 608-260-8559) to women in the Dane County area you think may be interested.

Sincerely,
Maggie Ordon

Dear [participant name],

Thank you for taking time to answer the online survey for my clothing research project. I would like to invite you to participate in the interview segment of the research project. The first interview should last around 2 hours. We can do this at a library, coffee shop, your home, or another place of your choosing. The interview includes questions about your clothing uses, care, and disposal, and other attitudes.

We can schedule a time to meet at your convenience. I am generally available after 2 p.m. on Sundays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays and all day on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays. If none of these times work for you, let me know as my schedule is flexible. Please let me know what works best for you or if you have any questions.

ordon@wisc.edu
608-260-8559

Sincerely,
Maggie Ordon

Appendix 2
Screening and interview consent forms

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
Research Participant Information and Consent Form—Screening Stage

Title of the Study: Clothing Research Project

Principal Investigator: Beverly Gordon (phone: 608-262-2015) (email: bgordon@wisc.edu)

Student Researcher: Maggie Ordon (phone: 608-260-8559) (email: ordon@wisc.edu)

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in a research study about the experiences and interests of women's clothing practices.

You have been asked to participate because you may demonstrate particular interests in clothing and other issues that are relevant to this study.

The purpose of the research is to understand the experiences and interests of women, their clothing practices, meanings of clothes, and sustainability issues.

This study will include adult women in the greater Madison area who have various attitudes toward clothes and environmental and social issues.

You may choose to take the 4 surveys now or visit a website where you can take them at your convenience.

WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

If you decide to participate in the screening process for this study, you will be asked to complete 4 surveys. The surveys will help identify interests or attitudes. Your answers will be used to select individuals who show a range of characteristics. From the completed surveys, 16-28 individuals will be invited to continue in this study. We will contact you within 2 weeks of when you complete the survey to let you know if there is room in the study for your continued participation.

Your participation at this stage will last approximately 10-15 minutes to complete the 4 questionnaires in 1 session.

If you volunteer to continue in the study, you will be asked to participate in at least 2 interviews about your clothing practices including shopping (online or in a store), storing clothes, selecting

clothes for wear, laundering and caring for clothes, and what you do with clothes you no longer use/want. If possible, you may volunteer to have these activities observed by the researcher. With your permission, interviews will be audio recorded. You will not be asked to state your name on the recording. With your permission, some of the spaces (such as closet or laundry areas), garments, and objects you interact with during clothing behaviors will be photographed.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?

We don't anticipate any risks to you from participation in this study.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?

There is no direct benefit to you.

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

While there will probably be publications as a result of this study, your name will not be used. Only group characteristics will be published. Responses to screening questionnaires will be destroyed after the study has been completed.

WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research after you leave today you should contact the Principal Investigator Beverly Gordon at 608-262-2015. You may also call the student researcher, Maggie Ordon at 608-260-8559.

If you are not satisfied with response of research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Education Research and Social & Behavioral Science IRB Office at 608-263-2320.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you begin participation and change your mind you may end your participation at any time without penalty.

Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research and voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of Participant (please print): _____

Signature

Date

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
Research Participant Information and Consent Form—Interview Stage

Title of the Study: Clothing Research Project

Principal Investigator: Beverly Gordon (phone: 608-262-2015) (email: bgordon@wisc.edu)

Student Researcher: Maggie Ordon (phone: 608-260-8559) (email: ordon@wisc.edu)

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in a research study about women's clothing practices.

You have been asked to participate because you have demonstrated particular interests in clothing and other issues that are relevant to this study.

The purpose of the research is to understand the experiences and interests of women's clothing practices, meanings of clothes, and sustainability issues.

This study will include adult women in the greater Madison area who have various interest levels in clothes and environmental and social issues.

Interviews may take place in public places (e.g. coffee shops) and in women's homes, where women can discuss specific garments and demonstrate various clothing behaviors, such as storage and laundering. Other observations may take place in retail stores, group meeting locations, and other establishments where clothing practices occur (e.g. donation site).

With your permission, interviews will be audio recorded. You will not be asked to state your name on the recording. With your permission, some of the spaces (such as your closet or laundry areas), garments, and objects you interact with during your clothing behaviors will be photographed. Only the researchers will hear the audio recordings of interviews. Audio recordings will be destroyed at the end of the research project. With your permission, photographs will be kept for future use in publications and professional presentations.

WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

If you decide to participate in this research you will be asked to take part in at least two interviews, allow the student researcher to observe your routine clothing activities, and share stories about three specific garments. In the interviews, you will be asked a series of questions. Some questions will be about your clothing practices. Other questions will be about personal interests and activities in environmental and social issues.

If possible, we would like to include the observations of the following activities in the research project: sharing a typical shopping process (online or in a local store), showing me how you store

clothes, selecting clothes for wear, demonstrating maintenance and care procedures—such as laundering, choose to dispose of clothes, and what you do with clothes you no longer use/want. You will also be asked to pick out three garments and share your thoughts and stories about them.

Your participation will last approximately 1-2 hours per session and will require 2 sessions. Additional observations will last approximately 1-6 hours. These may occur during the interview sessions in your home, or split up into multiple sessions. Participation will require 5-15 hours in total.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?

We don't anticipate any risks to you from participation in this study.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?

There is no direct benefit to you.

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

While there will probably be publications as a result of this study, your name will not be used. Only group characteristics will be published.

If you participate in this study, we would like to be able to quote you directly without using your name. If you agree to allow us to quote you in publications, please initial the statement at the bottom of this form.

Please note the one possible exception to confidentiality: If evidence of abuse or neglect are observed during interviews and observations in the home, confidentiality may be breached and the local county department of human services office may be called.

WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research at any time you should contact the student researcher Maggie Ordon at 608-260-8559 or the Principal Investigator Beverly Gordon at 608-262-2015.

If you are not satisfied with response of research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Education Research and Social & Behavioral Science IRB Office at 608-263-2320.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you begin participation and change your mind you may end your participation at any time without penalty.

Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research and voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of Participant (please print): _____

Signature

Date

_____ I give my permission to have interviews audio recorded.

_____ I give my permission to have garments and clothing spaces photographed.

_____ I give my permission to be quoted directly in publications without using my name.

_____ I give my permission to have photographs in publications without using my name.
I may decline to have specific photographs used in publications.

Appendix 3
New Ecological Paradigm scale

Listed below are statements about the relationship between humans and the environment. For each one, please indicate whether you STRONGLY AGREE, MILDLY AGREE, are UNSURE, MILDLY DISAGREE, or STRONGLY DISAGREE with it.

We are approaching the limit of the number of people the earth can support.

Humans have the right to modify the natural environment to suit their needs.

Humans are severely abusing the environment.

Human ingenuity will insure that we do NOT make the earth unlivable.

When humans interfere with nature it often produces disastrous consequences.

The earth has plenty of natural resources if we just learn how to develop them.

Plants and animals have as much right as humans to exist.

The balance of nature is strong enough to cope with the impacts of modern industrial nations.

Despite our special abilities, humans are still subject to the laws of nature.

The so-called "ecological crisis" facing humankind has been greatly exaggerated.

The earth is like a spaceship with limited room and resources.

Humans were meant to rule over the rest of nature.

The balance of nature is very delicate and easily upset.

Humans will eventually learn enough about how nature works to control it.

If things continue on their present course, we will soon experience a major ecological catastrophe.

Appendix 4
Social issues attitude scale

Listed below are statements about the relationship between humans and the environment. For each one, please indicate whether you STRONGLY AGREE, MILDLY AGREE, are UNSURE, MILDLY DISAGREE, or STRONGLY DISAGREE with it.

It is important to encourage and facilitate engagement in the political process.

The health effects of factories and power plants on individuals working in them or living nearby is a serious concern.

It is important to build strong and relatively self-sufficient local economies.

Poverty is a major issue facing the world today.

Trade agreements should not regulate labor conditions or worker's rights.

Governments should reduce differences in income levels.

To be a good citizen, it is important to support those who are worse off.

Workers should have a right to organize.

Benefits for the unemployed are too high.

Companies have a responsibility to ensure fair, living wages for employees involved in producing their products.

The conditions in which products are made are important to my purchase decisions.

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is a good measure of the country's progress.

Governments should reduce spending on health, educational, and social benefits.

Companies do not have a responsibility to improve communities in which they operate.

The country's progress should be measured by personal and community well-being.

Appendix 5
Creekmore Clothing Interest sub-scales

Concern with appearance sub-scale

Listed below are statements about attitudes and experiences with clothing. For each one, please indicate how often the statement describes your actions: ALMOST ALWAYS, USUALLY, SOMETIMES, SELDOM, or ALMOST NEVER.

I carefully coordinate the accessories that I wear with each outfit.

I pay a lot of attention to pleasing color combinations.

I keep my shoes clean and neat.

I spend more time than others coordinating the colors in my clothes.

I see that my out-of-season clothing is cleaned and stored.

I am more concerned about the care of my clothing than my friends are about theirs.

The way I look in my clothes is important to me.

I look over the clothing in my wardrobe before each season so that I know what I have.

I have something to wear for any occasion that occurs.

I carefully plan every purchase so that I know what I need when I get to a store.

I wear clothes which have buttons or snaps missing.

I wear a raincoat or carry an umbrella to protect my clothes in rainy weather.

I plan for and prepare clothes to wear several days in advance.

I consider the fabric texture with the line of the garment when choosing my clothes.

I have a long-term idea for purchasing more expensive items of clothing such as coats or suits.

Enhancement of individuality sub-scale

Listed below are statements about attitudes and experiences with clothing. For each one, please indicate how often the statement describes your actions: ALMOST ALWAYS, USUALLY, SOMETIMES, SELDOM, or ALMOST NEVER.

I try to buy clothes which are very unusual.

When new fashions appear on the market, I am one of the first to own them.

I enjoy wearing very different clothing even though I attract attention.

I avoid wearing certain clothes because they do not make me feel distinctive.

I have clothes that I don't wear because everyone has them.

I go to nearby cities to shop for better fashions.

I try to buy clothes with the best labels.

I try to keep my wardrobe in line with the latest styles.

I like to be considered an outstanding dresser by my friends.

I "dress-up" to make an ordinary occasion seem more exciting.

Appendix 6
Abridged Social Desirability Scale

Read each item and decide whether it is true or false for you. Try to work rapidly and answer each question by marking the TRUE or the FALSE.

It is sometimes hard for me to go on with my work if I am not encouraged.

I sometimes feel resentful when I don't get my way.

On a few occasions, I have given up something because I thought too little of my ability.

There have been times when I felt like rebelling against people in authority even though I knew they were right.

No matter who I'm talking to, I'm always a good listener.

There have been occasions when I have taken advantage of someone.

I'm always willing to admit it when I make a mistake.

I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget.

I am always courteous, even to people who are disagreeable.

I have never been irked when people expressed ideas very different from my own.

There have been times when I was quite jealous of the good fortune of others.

I am sometimes irritated by people who ask favors of me.

I have never deliberately said something that hurt someone's feelings.

Appendix 7

Interview guide

Thank you for taking time to meet with me. The purpose of this interview is to learn about your clothing practices and interests. I will first ask questions about your clothing, after which I will ask you questions about your interests in social and environmental issues, and then a third wrap-up section.

Again, this interview is voluntary. Feel free to decline to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. And feel free to bring up topics that I don't raise, if you think they are important for me to understand.

1. How would you describe your interest in clothes?
 - a. Interest in style (historic/changes in life/child/adult)
 - b. Shopping for clothes
 - c. Taking care of clothes/ doing laundry
2. What do you think of current fashion styles or currently available clothing?
 - a. Design, quality, materials (how asses quality)?
 - b. Where do you get information about current trends?
3. What fashion/lifestyle magazines or websites do you look at?
4. Tell me about your most recent clothing purchase. When was last time you went shopping? What did you buy?
 - a. Prompts:
 - i. Where did you purchase it?
 - ii. What did you get?
 - iii. What was it for?
 - iv. What was its cost?
 - v. What factors did you consider when buying it
 1. Prompts: style, use, cost, production, fit, etc (learn about fitting body)

- b. How was this typical of your clothing purchases?
 - c. How was this not typical of your clothing purchases?
 - d. Tell me about another clothing purchase that was typical of your clothing purchases.
 - e. Tell me about a recent clothing purchase that was not typical.
 - i. How was it different?
 - ii. How did you feel about it?
5. Do you shop online or through catalogs?
6. Do you receive any clothing catalogs in the mail?
7. Do you tend to shop alone? With others? (Why like or not like?)
8. Do you tend to plan your purchases/shopping or be more spontaneous?
9. When you are thinking about buying something, what pushes you over to buy it and not leave it?
 - a. Do you ever see things you want, but don't buy? Why?
 - b. When you see something you want, what motivates you to buy it?
10. Do you ever select clothes based on environmental or social impacts?
11. Second-hand
 - a. Does it matter to you which store you go to?
 - b. Some people describe being frugal as a voluntary virtue, while others see it as a forced struggle. How would you describe your attitudes toward these evaluations?
 - c. Some people talk about not wanting to buy used clothes. Do you see any negative aspects/elements that do or don't bother you? What are some positive aspects?
12. How do you decide when you're low on something or need more of X?
 - a. Prompts: season changes, enough choices, fit, realize you don't like after got to wear and use in real life, need clothes to match others
13. Many people obtain clothes for specific activities—work, lounging, sports, outdoor activities, special events. Tell me about the activity that you get most of your clothes for.

- a. What do you consider when you are getting the types of clothes that you most often buy?
 - b. What do you think are the most important aspects that influence your decision?
 - c. What differences are there in how you shop for clothes for activities other than X?
14. How do you think your shopping is similar or different from most people's?

Now I'd like to ask some questions about the clothes you own.

15. Describe a piece of clothing that you rely on (something you wear a lot or would be disappointed to not have).
- a. What does it look like?
 - b. What does it feel like?
 - c. Where did you get it?
 - d. What do you like most about it?
 - e. What do you like least about it?
 - f. How do you feel when you wear it? (physical, emotional, senses)
16. Think of a garment (or more than one, or repeat) that you have had the longest AND that you continue to wear. Describe it.
- a. Object question list.
 - b. Is something you've had a short while the exception or is something you've had many years the exception?
 - c. How long do you think you've had most of your clothes?
 - d. How many clothes do you have that you only wear infrequently (occasional, souvenirs, gifts)?
17. Describe a piece of clothing that means a lot to you (something that you feel emotionally strong about or really enjoy owning).
- a. What does it look like?
 - b. What does it feel like?

- c. Where did you get it?
 - d. What do you like most about it?
 - e. What do you like least about it?
 - f. How do you feel when you wear it?
18. What importance do you place on fiber content? Any fiber preferences? What about like or not like?
19. Talk about process of dressing in the morning, evaluating how to decide what to wear
20. What about being formal or dressed-up/informal or casual for work/other appeal or does not appeal to you?
21. How do you think what you wear affects how you behave?
22. How do you think other people view how you dress?
23. What pressure, if any, do you feel as a woman to buy clothes, wear clothes certain way or more or differently than you would otherwise like to?
24. Some women talk about dealing with body image/pressures. How do you handle this personally in your dressing?
- a. Where do you think you learned what looks good on your body?
25. Now, I'd like to ask to reflect on how your clothing purchasing behaviors relate to your interest in environmental and social issues.
- a. Describe what role, if any, concern over X issues [from above questions] play in your decisions to purchase clothing.
 - b. What do you think the positive impacts of your clothing purchase decisions are?
 - c. What do you think the negative impacts of your clothing purchase decisions are?
 - d. How do you feel about how you obtain your clothes?
26. How would you characterize most of the clothes you own in terms of issues relating to the environment and social justice?

Care and maintenance is another part of the process of owning clothes.

27. Describe what you usually do to take care of your clothes?
 - a. Wash and dry clothes? What temps/loads/detergent? Why? Like/dislike?
 - b. How do you fold, put away, store clothes?
 - c. What do you iron?
 - d. What do you have dry cleaned?
 - e. What do you mend/repair? Where did you learn those skills?
28. How do you decide when to wash something?
 - a. If multiple, how do you decide when something needs washing?
 - b. If once, why only once? How evaluate cleanliness post-washing?
 - c. What importance do you place on care labels for garments?
 - d. Tell me about any deviations from your typical maintenance. (prompt- particular clothes, occasions, traveling, when busy)
29. How do you think your clothing laundry practices are similar or different from most people's?
30. What do you like about your current process?
 - a. What do you dislike about it?
 - b. What do you think positive impacts of your clothing care are?
 - c. What do you think negative impacts of your clothing care are?
 - d. How do you feel about your actions in this area?

There are many options available for disposing of clothes. I would like to know what your disposal activities are and your opinions on this issue.

31. How do you decide what clothes to dispose of?
 - a. Prompts: age, wear, style, sentiment

32. Tell me about the thing you do most often with clothes you longer want.
 - a. Tell me about any deviations from your typical disposal action.
 - i. Prompt-other actions, specific clothing pieces
 - b. When do you dispose of clothes? All at once, 1x1, frequency?
 - c. What were the last things you threw away? Donated? Gave away?
 - d. If you buy something new, is it hard to let it go or easy to let it go? Tell me about the last things you got rid of?
 - e. What is reasonable repair? When does it go in trash? Why trash and not somewhere else?
33. What do you think happens to clothes when you are done with them?
34. How do you think your clothing practices disposing of clothes are similar or different from most people's?
35. What do you like about your current process?
 - a. What do you dislike about it?
 - b. What do you think the positive impacts of your clothing disposal are?
 - c. What do you think the negative impacts of your clothing disposal are?
 - d. How do you feel about your actions in this area?

Now, I'd like you to talk about your general interests in social or environmental issues.

36. How would you characterize your interest in environmental issues?
37. Tell me about how you first became interested in environmental issues.
38. How would you characterize your interest in social justice issues?
39. Tell me about how you first became interested in social justice issues.
40. There is a range of areas where social or environmental issues manifest—such as food, transportation, and household goods. What are some activities that you currently do that relate to these issues?

- a. What terms or words do you use to describe them?
 - b. What do those words mean to you?
41. Which issue is most important to you or concerns you the most?
- a. What about this issue makes it important for you?
 - b. What behaviors or actions do you take related to this issue?
 - c. What are your goals in taking these actions?
 - d. How do think your goals are being met through these actions?
 - e. How do you feel about the actions you take?
 - f. What is your opinion on the goods, products, or services that are available that relate to this issue?
 - g. What would you like to see change?
 - h. What steps do you take to inform yourself on this issue?
42. We have talked about X issue as important. Are there other issues that are also important to you?
- a. Repeat question.
43. When did you first become interested in exposed to environmentally responsible produced products?
44. When did you first become interested in or exposed to socially responsibly produced products?
45. What environmentally or socially responsible produced products do you purchase and use most often?
46. [You have mentioned your participation in some groups. I'd like to talk a little about that.] or [There are a range of ways of individual and collectively being involved in these issues. How would you describe how you are involved?]
- a. How did you become ACTIVE in groups?
 - b. What is your activity in organized groups that relate to X issues?
 - c. What is your opinion of this group in how they address issues?

d. How do you feel about your involvement in the group?

I would like to take a moment to hear your reflections on your clothing practices.

47. What is your opinion on the relative importance of clothing in your personal interests in environmental and social issues?
 - a. What do you think are aspects that make it more important?
 - b. What do you think are aspects that make it less important?
 - c. How do you feel about where it fits into your lifestyle?
 - d. What do you share with others about your clothing behaviors—buying, using, caring for, or disposing—in terms of their relation to X issues?
48. What is your opinion on clothing industry's impact on X issues?
49. What is your opinion on clothing maintenance's impact on X issues?
50. What is your opinion on clothing disposal's impact on X issues?
51. How significant do you think clothing is in the big picture for environmental and social stability?
52. How would you rate your own clothing behaviors in terms of environment or social impact?
53. How do you feel the current economic situation affects your commitment to socially/environmentally sustainable clothing/goods?
54. Are there any questions that you think I should have asked?
55. Is there anything else that you think I should know?
56. Do you know anyone else who would like to be interviewed?
57. Is there anything else you'd like to ask me?

Thank you.

Appendix 8
Demographic data sheet

AGE	
RACE/ETHNICITY	
HOUSEHOLD SIZE	
OCCUPATION	
EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> High School <input type="checkbox"/> Some College <input type="checkbox"/> Associate's Degree <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's Degree <input type="checkbox"/> Master's, Professional, or Doctoral Degree
INCOME	<input type="checkbox"/> Below 25,000 <input type="checkbox"/> 25,000-50,000 <input type="checkbox"/> 50,000-75,000 <input type="checkbox"/> 75,000-100,000 <input type="checkbox"/> Above 100,000

Appendix 9
Behavior assessment guide

Legend			
Rating by potential or likely negative impact	Lower	Middle	Higher
Acquisition			
How often do you buy new clothes?	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently
How many clothes do you buy at a time?	1-2	3-5	>5
How many clothes do you buy in a year?	A few	Some	Many
How many of your clothes did you buy/receive new?	None	Some	Most
How many of your clothes did you buy second-hand?	Most	Some	None
How many of your clothes did you make yourself?	Most	Some	None
How many of your clothes did you buy from a fair trade/ethical/sustainable source? (excluding 2nd hand)	Most	Some	None
What do you know about your clothes' production?	A lot	Some	Nothing
What research do you do before buying clothes?	A lot	Some	Nothing
How often do you read clothing labels?	A lot	Some	Nothing
Use/wear			
How many of your clothes do you wear on a regular basis?	Most	Some	A few
How many items do you have that you have only worn once or twice?	A few	Some	Many
How many clothes do you have that you do not wear?	A few	Some	Many
How long do you keep clothes for?	>5 years	2-5 years	0-2 years

Legend			
Rating by potential or likely negative impact	Lower	Middle	Higher
Maintenance			
How many of your clothes have you mended or repaired?	Many	Some	A few
How many times do you wear something before washing it?	>3	2-3	1-2
How many items do you have dry cleaned?	None	Some	Many
What are your load sizes for your laundry?	Large	Medium	Small
What water temperatures do you use?	Cold	Warm	Hot
Do you use other laundry treatments?	Bleach	Softener	Dryer sheet
How do you dry most of your clothes?	Air dry	Mix	Machine dry
How many clothes do you iron or steam?	A few	Some	Many
Disposal			
How many clothes have you disposed of in the past year?	A few	Some	Many
How do you dispose of most of your clothes?	Reuse	Donate	Trash
What makes you decide that you are finished with an item?	Condition	Fit	Style

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