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Love and Let Go:
The Confessions of Sustainable Fashionistas

Exploring Sustainable Fashions Disposal from a Consumer Perspective

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Abstract

Sustainable fashion is sometimes called an oxymoron as many of the practices associated with fashion production and consumption are environmentally and socially taxing (Payne, 2019). Companies are experimenting with and developing more circular business models to decrease environmental impact and waste (Binotto & Payne, 2017). Thus, consumer waste plays a pivotal role in circular business models (Koszewska, 2019), i.e., when reintroduced into the consumption cycle, the final output of one circle becomes the input for a new one. Hence, knowing how consumers perceive and experience disposal is key. However, research on fashion disposition from a consumer perspective is scarce (Crane, 2010; Binotto & Payne, 2017; Dahlbo et al., 2017; Kirchherr & van Santen, 2019; Mellander & Petersson McIntyre, 2020; Shrivastava et al., 2021). This paper aims to provide a nuanced description and in-depth insight into consumers' understanding and experience of sustainable fashion disposal. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six Swedish consumers interested in fashion and sustainability who re-circulated their clothes. The key insights from the analysis suggest that this group of consumers finds disposing of fashion to be a puzzling and meaningful experience highly guided by values and norms. The participants' accounts also point to the fact that all phases of the consumption cycle are interlinked, and emotions and mental justifications in each phase ultimately seem to affect the disposition decision-making process. Drawing on these indications, fashion companies striving for more circular business models could benefit from emphasizing the feeling of meaningfulness in their communication and designing service offerings that encompass all the phases of the consumption cycle and opt for more holistic service designs.

“If you love something - let it go.”

The original source of this old saying will probably never be known. Neither will its originator ever be held accountable for how incredibly difficult it is to actually achieve this act of setting free, nor be able to unveil how to do so successfully or with ease. Perhaps, this very well-known, and perhaps equally clichée (?), quote has stuck around simply because it is that difficult. It is easier said than done and oftentimes it feels somewhat contradictory as people tend to want to keep what they love close to them and not let go at all. In many cases, it appears as though regardless of the beloved person or item in question, it is challenging to let go. There is an emotional and cognitive connection between the owner and the object (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1992). Even if it sometimes is *just an old sweater* or a cherished pair of jeans folded in the deepest depths of a wardrobe (Mellander & Petersson McIntyre, 2020). Yet in a sense, the act of letting go seems to become increasingly important to master, not the least in everyday consumer life - however tough of a decision it might be to make. As the fashion industry slowly makes way towards more circular business models, *old sweaters* become a valuable resource as the input for a new circle. The tensions and contradictions between having and letting go in relation to sustainable fashion lie at the heart of this paper. Particularly how it is perceived, experienced and made sense of by a group of sustainably minded fashionistas in Sweden. Disposing of one's clothes might seem like a trivial dilemma, but as this paper is about to show, it is actually a rather complex conundrum consumers face on a regular basis

when navigating the landscape of sustainable fashion disposal.

Sustainable Fashion - an Oxymoron in Transition?

The concept of sustainable fashion is often argued to be somewhat of an oxymoron (Payne, 2019) due to the ever-changing nature of fashion itself not being in harmony with the underlying values of sustainability (Fletcher, 2012). The two are often portrayed as inherently different and incompatible (ibid). At the same time, fashion and the fashion industry are heavily influenced by cyclical tendencies (Fletcher, 2012; Tham, 2015; Mellander & Petersson McIntyre, 2020), e.g. trends resurfacing with a certain periodicity, theoretically offering opportunities to increase circularity as the phenomenon is already present on a conceptual level. Even though the foundation of the fashion industry, as part of an aesthetic system (Belk, 2017; Meamber et al., 2017), is based on the longing for the *ever-new* of postmodern consumer society (Belk et al., 2003; Ozcaglar-Toulouse, 2007), novelty and creativity are also indigenous to fashion (Fletcher, 2010, 2012; Tham, 2015) - components not necessarily in contradiction to sustainability but rather the opposite.

Recently, the fashion industry, and Fast Fashion (FF) business models, in particular, have received a lot of attention and criticism regarding their unsustainable practices (Crane, 2010; Fletcher, 2010; Fletcher, 2012; Laitala, 2014; Bovone et al, 2016; Dahlbo et al., 2017; Koszewska, 2019). The issues brought forward are many, ranging from poor and oftentimes hazardous working conditions (Fletcher, 2010), excessive water use and chemical pollution in production damaging local ecosystems (Dahlbo et al., 2017), the

accelerating pace of product-to-market flow promoting a survival of the fastest culture (Fletcher, 2012) overreliance of virgin materials in production (Dahlbo et al., 2017), and of course, increased amounts waste both pre and post-consumption (Koszewska, 2019). Over the last three decades, clothing consumption has increased by 28-40 % within the EU (Dahlbo et al., 2017) yet the relative price change has not matched these figures (ibid) contributing to making clothing be increasingly perceived as disposable (Binotto & Payne, 2017), ergo in turn leading to an increased amount of waste (Dahlbo et al., 2017). In response to the sustainability and credibility crisis that many fashion businesses are facing, the sector has started to spend more resources on solving these issues (Bovone et al, 2016). Companies are experimenting and investing in new more efficient ways of pattern design and cutting (Binotto & Payne, 2017), technologies that will reduce water and energy use, and access-based consumption such as clothing subscriptions and peer-to-peer (P2P) platforms attempting to bring fashion and sustainability together (Shrivastava et al., 2021). The fashion industry is slowly transitioning towards more circular business models. Thus, when developing and later implementing circular practices the role of disposal and disposition within the consumption cycle transitions as well.

The new Role of Disposition - Valuable Waste

One of the main differences between circular and more traditional, linear, business models is the understanding and application of the notions of value and waste and how these relate to each other (Binotto & Payne, 2017; Wastling et al, 2018). Within a linear business model, the concept of value-adding activities

within a value chain illustrate how value is transformed, curated or created in different steps (Koszewska, 2019). The intrinsic value of raw materials and resources applied along the value chain all add up resulting in a finished product reaching the market at its peak value from which it gradually declines through consumption and ultimately becomes valueless waste, i.e. the value is consumed or used-up and it is little to no intrinsic value left (ibid). This stands in contrast to a more circular approach, where one of the main objectives is to maintain the value of resources throughout all stages of the value chain and for it to be reapplied in or re-introduced to the chain in a never-ending cyclical way (Shrivastava et al., 2021), e.g. the final output, or the waste, becomes the input for a new cycle of value-adding minimizing the use of virgin materials. As a result, here the notion of value is understood as subjective and dynamic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Building on this perspective, the perceived value of a garment fluctuates over time and one person's trash might quite literally become another one's treasure (Binotto & Payne, 2017). Thus, understanding and researching consumers' post-purchase decision-making, e.g. how, when and why consumers dispose of products, become just as important as pre-purchase decision making (Albinsson & Perera, 2009; Young Lee et al, 2013; Laitala, 2014; Koszewska, 2019), and has recently gained interest both for businesses in general as well as within the fashion industry in the quest of becoming more sustainable (Koszewska, 2019; Mellander & Petersson McIntyre, 2020). Herein lies the research gap which is the main concern of this paper as research regarding sustainable fashion disposal and disposition from a consumer perspective to this day is scarce (Crane, 2010; Binotto & Payne, 2017; Dahlbo et al., 2017; Kirchherr & van Santen,

2019; Mellander & Petersson McIntyre, 2020; Shrivastava et al., 2021).

Purpose and Research Question

Research on consumers' fashion disposal is scarce (Crane, 2010; Binotto & Payne, 2017; Dahlbo et al., 2017; Kirrherr & van Santen, 2019; Mellander & Petersson McIntyre, 2020; Shrivastava et al., 2021). Marketing research has predominantly been concerned with consumers' pre-purchase behaviors, decision-making, and experiences, and research on sustainable fashion disposal has mainly taken on a producer and manufacturing perspective (Kirrherr & van Santen, 2019). Still, disposition behavior constitutes a natural part of the consumption cycle whose importance is brought to light in the strive for sustainability for both academia and practice. According to Latiala (2014) and Young Lee et al. (2013), the more consumer focused disposition research has predominantly been survey based. The lack of research on sustainable fashion disposal from a consumer perspective assuming more qualitative strokes is identified as a research gap this paper concentrates upon.

In a time when consumer influence is increasing and the boundaries between formal and informal market actors are blurring (Tham, 2015; Shrivastava et al., 2020), e.g. fashion magazines lose some of their legitimacy on behalf of social media influencers and user-participation for collaborative design (Crewe, 2013), it appears to be more important than ever to know your customer. Apart from being an all-time number one salesman rule, given this rise of consumer agency and knowledge, it has in a way become equivalent to knowing your partner.

For academia, a more nuanced understanding of consumers' fashion disposal behavior provides an array of interesting research opportunities. One of them is drawing attention to the later phases of the consumption cycle that have the potential to enrich the understanding of consumer behavior and decision-making of the whole cycle, from pre to post-purchase. Insights that could facilitate the transition towards more circular patterns for sustainable development. Furthermore, investigating fashion disposal could shed light on the aforementioned development of a new relative power balance and interdependence between consumers and producers and how to understand, approach, and act within this new landscape.

This article *aims* to provide such nuanced description and in-depth insight of consumers' experience and understanding of sustainable fashion disposal by exploring how the tensions and contradictions associated with sustainable fashion disposal are lived through and made sense of. An investigation of decision-making regarding discarding garments serves as a means to unveil underlying reasons and perceptions of the subject to deliver a thick description (Crang & Cook, 2011). The research question guiding this article forward is *How is sustainable fashion disposal experienced and understood from a consumer perspective?* The main body of empirical material to aid in answering this question has been construed from fieldwork following an ethnographic tradition. Over a period of six months, a group of sustainably-minded fashion consumers from Sweden have been interviewed regarding their fashion disposal behaviors.

Theoretical Framework

To Have, to Not Have, and the Implications for Sustainable Fashionistas

In order to understand why it is at all difficult to let things go and what it means *to dispose* of clothes and fashion items for consumers, one also needs to understand what it means *to have*, own and wear clothes. To detangle the conundrum that is sustainable fashion disposal for consumers, it is pivotal to understand that all parts of the consumption cycle are inextricably linked to each other. Hence, even though acquisition, use and disposition all favourable can, and as argued in this article should, be studied separately one cannot be fully understood without the other. As such, all phases of the consumption cycle are interconnected. For clarity, previous research on fashion and how it relates both to having and disposing from a consumer perspective will first be presented as two separate themes. Namely *To Have* and *To Dispose* of fashion. Then follows a literature review on the implications of the tension that the oxymoron sustainable fashion entail for consumers, also divided into two parts. The *first* part explores issues related to internal conflict and strategies applied to combat cognitive and emotional dissonance. The *second* part explores consumer agency within the fashion system and how it affects how consumers experience and navigate the field of sustainable fashion disposition. These four areas of research combined make up the theoretical framework of this paper and serve as a foundation and previous reference for the upcoming analysis. Brought together, these bodies of work provide a possible road map for detangling why it sometimes can be hard to let go of the aforementioned *old sweater*.

To Have - Fashion and the Extended Self

The meaning of, the symbolism behind, and the function of clothes and fashion for consumers have been widely researched within the consumer culture theory (CCT) tradition (Meamber et al., 2017). Clothes have been described as “an aesthetic resource for self-presentation” (Bovone et al., p.267, 2016) and an integral part of the extended self (Belk, 1988), a base product (Koszevska, 2019), carriers of affect (Mellander & Petersson McIntyre, 2020) and a second skin (Meamber et al.p.435, 2017) which “speaks for us” (Bovone et al, p. 268, 2016). Fashion on the other hand is thought of as something beyond fabrics draped on one's body. It is described as a form of human expression (Payne, 2019), “an aesthetic device at the service of personal identity” (Bovone et al., p.270, 2016), and “a situated bodily practice” (Entwistle, p.71, 2000). Within this line of research, clothes have surpassed being more than just fabric by far. The garments chosen to cover and adorn one's body are loaded with symbolism that aids us in telling the story about ourselves to ourselves and others (Dittmar, 1992; Fletcher, 2012; Tham, 2015; Bovone et al, 2016; Meamber et al, 2017; Payne, 2019). Fashion and clothing represent both very personal and intimate possessions and at the same time something very public, visible for others to see, interpret, and judge (Petersson McIntyre, 2019). As such, both fashion and actual clothing have both social and physical dimensions (Bovone et al, 2016). The clothes serve as a bridge between the two dimensions and as a tool aids in identity creation (ibid).

The underlying rationale guiding a substantial part of the research of consumer behavior and fashion can be linked back to the works of Belk (1988) and the concept of the extended

self (Ladik et al., 2015;) and the relationship between consumers and their possessions, i.e. material objects (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Dittmar, 1992). As touched upon earlier, our possessions such as clothes, play a vital part in our identity formation. The things that we surround ourselves with and own provides the foundation of our self-object distinction (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Dittmar, 1992). By not being a part of oneself and existing outside and apart from oneself, material objects determine the borders of myself through recognizing what is me and mine and what is other things. That is, I create myself, the story of myself and my understanding of myself by making sense of things around me. At the same time, the very things recognized as other than me, e.g. possessions, also can become integrated into a person's sense of self through possessing them. Thus, the relationship between the external environment and oneself is fluid and exists on a continuum where the boundaries between ourselves and our possessions are blurred. My clothes become a part of me because they represent me. Material objects become incorporated into our perception of self due to different processes of emotional attachment to the object as a form of invested attention or psychic energy (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981) as well as perceived control over the object (Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1992). The more control one perceives to have over an object, the more attached to it one becomes (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981).

Attachment to possessions is also greatly connected to and influenced by symbolism. Objects and possessions are not hollow but rather filled with meanings that humans project on them, i.e. like objectified or materialized forms of psychic energy, a result

or the output of the attention and effort invested in perceiving and interpreting them (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). The symbolic value brought on by possessions serve as a representation of its owner (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1992; Ozcaglar-Toulouse, 2007; Crane, 2010; Bovone et al, 2016) who in a sense wears them as materialized signs of the underlying interpretation or meaning of the symbol. Hence, the clothes do not only speak for themselves but also for, to, and about you. Another aspect of symbolism and attachment to possessions has to do with social bonds and relationships (Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1992; Bovone et al, 2016; Mellander & Petersson McIntyre, 2020). Material objects have the capacity to represent relationships with others, as if the psychic energy invested as intention and expenditure of limited social attention is stored within the object, e.g. gifts and heirlooms from a deceased relative can serve as physical manifestations or a token of the relationship long after their passing. As such, the clothes accumulated over time can also serve a purpose as memorabilia and a sort of compilation of past, current and future hopes and versions of themselves (Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1992; Mellander & Petersson McIntyre, 2020). In a sense, the *old sweaters* folded in the back of one's wardrobe and together with other garments become a museum of representations of you, for yourself and occasionally others to see.

To Dispose - Fashion and Disposition

After exploring what it means *to have* something and fashion in particular, we are now set for looking deeper into what it means *to dispose* of something. According to Merriam-Webster's dictionary, disposition refers to the act of disposing of or the state of

being disposed of, such as transfer the care or possession of another (Merriam-Webster, c, n.d.). It stems from to dispose of, which in turn is defined as to a) get rid of b) to deal with conclusively, and c) to transfer the control of another (Merriam-Webster, b, n.d.). The definition of disposal (Merriam-Webster, a, n.d.) and its synonyms all have something to do with the transference or change in ownership and possession. What was once mine is not any longer once I have disposed of it. The act of disposition or disposal itself does not include anything else rather than the riddance of an item or idea. The way or specific mode in which one might choose to dispose of something is not accounted for within the words, i.e. disposition and disposal, themselves. As such, there are many ways of disposing of things, fashion items nonetheless, that surpass the option of binning, throwing away, or discarding them as waste, many of which have been mentioned throughout this paper, e.g., donating, lending out, selling or even put into storage (Jacoby et al., 1977; Young Lee et al, 2013; Laitala, 2014; Shrivastava et al., 2021).

Disposal is linked to *detachment* which in turn is affected by the type and degree of *attachment* that one feels towards an object (Mellander & Petersson McIntyre, 2020). Detachment can be understood as an active and deliberate process or passive state of disinterest where attachment gradually decreases and ranges between these two (ibid). As such, the level of attachment and detachment towards a garment highly influences disposition behavior. The more attached one is to a garment, the more difficult it is to discard (Albinsson & Perera, 2009). As such, the degree of attachment can be thought of as an indicator of perceived value of the garment (Young Lee et al, 2013). Laitala (2014) and Mellander and Petersson

McIntyre (2020) present that the attachment to clothes is one of the main reasons for discomfort in relation to fashion disposal. As the clothes we own and wear in a sense become a part of who we are, disposing of them can be compared to letting go of pieces of ourselves (Mellander & Petersson McIntyre, 2020). Without the physical closeness, control over and ownership of a blouse worn during a particularly pleasant vacation, it is as if the memory of the vacation itself and what it represents might be lost (ibid).

Taxonomy of Voluntary Disposition

Consumer fashion disposal behavior can also be explained by applying the Taxonomy of Voluntary Disposition, first presented by Jacoby et al. in 1977. According to the Taxonomy of Voluntary Disposition, disposition behavior modes can be divided into categories (Jacoby et al., 1977; Albinsson & Perera, 2009; Young Lee et al, 2013), either keeping behavior, temporary or permanent disposing behavior (Jacoby et al., 1977). These three have then been further split up into different subcategories by different scholars (Young Lee et al, 2013), e.g. keeping an item in current circulation in your daily wardrobe has distinct motivations and behavioral implications then storing it in the attic yet still belong to the same to the keeping mode. Furthermore, personal or psychological characteristics, object or item characteristics and other social or situational factors also influence the adoption of a particular disposal behavior (Laitala, 2014).

Personal or Psychological Characteristics

Here the individual traits of a consumer refers to various psychological dimensions of decision-making such as product retention

tendency which “reflects an individual's general propensity to retain consumption-related possessions” ((Haws et al., p. 225, 2012), i.e. keeping or maintaining control over them in some form. Frugality or lavishness along with the desire to act according to one's values, be it with possessive or materialistic values or waste avoidance values, are other aspects that determine a consumer's disposal profile. Coulter and Ligas (2003) distinguish between two types of disposal profiles, so-called *packrats* and *purgers*, who respectively show high contra low product retention propensity and general attachment to their belongings.

Object Characteristics

The object characteristics factors are largely dependent on different variations of perceived obsolescence, e.g. actual obsolescence caused by wear and tear or relative obsolescence such as poor fit (Young Lee et al, 2013; Laitala, 2014) or feeling as if the item no longer is compatible with their self-image (Dittmar, 1992; Laitala, 2014). Laitala (2014) describes relative obsolescence as both dynamic and subjective. which in itself is one of the reasons why hand-me-downs and thrifting can be appreciated by their new owners although they were discarded by somebody else. The degree of perceived obsolescence also becomes a reflection of perceived value of the garment. Whereas absolute obsolescence generally is considered more objective, but not entirely fixed, e.g. a sweatshirt that someone believes is beyond repair could be perceived as a golden opportunity for repurposing or up-cycle by another. Again, one person's trash might be someone else's treasure. Product category also influences disposition decisions. Both with regards to the purpose of the product in terms of why it was initially bought, e.g. for functional or

emotional reasons (Albinsson & Perera, 2009), and durability (Fletcher, 2010). In addition, the economic and perceived value of an item also impacts disposition decisions and consumers tend to be more conscious of if, how, and why they dispose of clothes that they consider valuable (Albinsson & Perera, 2009).

Social and Situational Factors

The social and situational factors refer to more circumstantial aspects such as when, where and how one might be able to discard one's clothes. Examples brought forward by Young Lee et al. (2013) of situational factors are a lack or excess of storage space or if there are accessible companies or organizations within the proximity that can receive and deal with donated fashion. In short the situational factors concern infrastructure and availability. The social factors on the other hand are more related to traditions, norms and upbringing and whether or not it is considered socially acceptable and desirable to dispose of items in a certain way within a certain group (Jacoby et al., 1977; Young Lee et al., 2013; Laitala, 2014).

So, why is it difficult to let go of old sweaters?

As previously discussed, the garments in our wardrobes can be viewed as an extension of and a representation of ourselves as well as a representation of our values (Dittmar, 1992; Ozcaglar-Toulouse, 2007; Crane, 2010; Young Lee et al, 2013; Bovone et al, 2016). When you are considered free to construct and curate your own persona and image, you are also in charge of and responsible for it in a different way (Dittmar, 1992; Ozcaglar-Toulouse, 2007). The proprietary rights of the brand “you” so to speak, are owned by you

and you alone will be judged by it. The idea of the continuous identity project has emerged as a response to an increasingly differentiated society where identities are achieved rather than assigned (Clarke & Miller, 2002; Belk et al., 2003). This freedom to create yourself through what you own and wear does however result in a great amount of stress and discomfort amongst consumers (Peterson McIntyre, 2019; Mellander & Peterson McIntyre, 2020), especially when the values on display can be contradictory or feel incompatible such as with the desire to be both fashionable and sustainable (Young Lee et al., 2013; Tham, 2015; Bovone et al., 2016). When trying to balance these two desires or values consumers often experience feelings of guilt or choosing between lesser evils, i.e. inner conflict (Dittmar, 1992;). In the strive to resolve the tension, consumers have been known to apply different strategies (Payne, 2019). One could be altering behavior to be more aligned with said values, e.g. deciding to only purchase organically certified cotton or exclusively shop second hand. Others entail applying different types of *mental justification* to ease the discomfort such as purposeful consumption (Dittmar, 1992; Albinsson & Perera 2009; Fletcher, 2012; Payne, 2019; Mellander & Petersson McIntyre, 2020), e.g. investing in timeless staple pieces or collecting clothes and fashion as a hobby.

In their 2013 article, Young Lee et al. (2013) show that consumers engage in several different alternative fashion practices to accommodate for both values without compromising either and that navigating the field generally is perceived as difficult. According to Young Lee et al. (2013), consumers tend to choose between several different modes of disposal such as donating, re-selling, or participating in clothes-swap

and barter events for one. In addition, engaging in these behaviors and applying different strategies to cope with the potential discomfort often requires some sort of consumer skill (Bovone et al., 2016). This means consumers at times feel the need to develop certain behaviors or gain certain knowledge in order to be able to perform the main task properly, e.g. require knowledge about how different fabrics and materials are produced to be able to make informed decisions and avoid clothing made by certain fabrics. Consumer skills, like all skills, require time and effort to master and once learned or acquired the skill itself can be thought of as a possession (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). As such, the owner of said possession, i.e. the skill, is free to do what they want to do with that skill. How and when they would like to apply the skill, and why. As mentioned, learning skills requires resources and is as such not universally found. In a sense, adequate skills are a scarcity. Examples of different consumer skills within sustainable fashion consumption that have been identified in previous research are; knowledge about styling and creating outfits, knowledge about materials, knowledge about production, knowledge of sewing and craftsmanship, knowledge about non-conventional or alternative options for both acquisitions and disposition of clothing (Fletcher, 2012; Tham, 2015; Bovone et al., 2016; Binotto & Payne, 2017).

A New Role for Consumers - the Pro's and Con's of Agency

After taking the meaning of both having and disposing of fashion into account, how to balance the somewhat contrasting desires of being fashionable and sustainable appears to truly be challenging for consumers. When

transitioning towards more circular business models, the former clear distinction between what it means to be a consumer or beneficiary and a supplier or service provider is blurring. In a circular model, both parties assume parts of each other's traditional roles. As such, consumers are experiencing or are exposed to more possibilities and responsibilities. In a sense, their agency within the fashion system has increased (Fletcher, 2012).

This is also exemplified by the recent growth of social media. The fashion system has experienced what can be called a democratization exemplified by trends and what is considered fashionable increasingly being dictated by non-formal institutions such as Instagram models (Crewe, 2013; Tham, 2015; Correia Loureiro et al., 2017; Shrivastava et al 2020). Hence, what it means to be fashionable and to some degree sustainable is now also dictated by consumers. This newly rediscovered agency in form of a promise of influence and ability to change the system has then, in turn, become one of the stressors of participating in consumer society through fashion consumption, e.g. consumers are feeling a moral obligation to take action yet have difficulties navigating the field, contributing to inner conflict (Fletcher, 2012; Petersson McIntyre, 2019; Shrivastava et al., 2021). Much like the previously mentioned discomfort associated with the ongoing identity project associated with the postmodern consumer society (Belk et al., 2003; Ozcaglar-Toulouse, 2007), this new role for consumers can be a source for discomfort and pressure (Clarke & Miller, 2002).

To cope with the unpleasantness of inner conflict, e.g. alleviating feelings of guilt and uncertainty, consumers engage in different

consumption behaviors thought to be sustainably oriented. For instance one might avoid purchases of certain products or brands (Clarke & Miller, 2002; Ozcaglar-Toulouse, 2007), try different forms of recycling or repurposing (Binotto & Payne, 2017), second-hand shopping and barter (Albinsson & Perera, 2009; Bovone et al, 2016; Shrivastava et al., 2021), or applying conceptual justifications of consumption such as collecting certain products (Dittmar, 1992; Albinsson & Perera 2009; Mellander & Petersson McIntyre, 2020) or supporting fair trade brands (Crane 2010). Consumption in itself when paired with sustainable values becomes a way for consumers to convey these values by a demonstration of consumer agency, i.e. when avoiding certain products and opting for others, consumers vote with their wallets and consumption can be understood as a political act (Dittmar, 1992; Arnould & Thompson, 2007; Crane, 2010; Bovone et al, 2016). However, and as previously mentioned, having agency comes with both the freedom and the burden of choice (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Value congruent behavior is hard to achieve when values and norms are contrasting (Clarke & Miller, 2002; Ozcaglar-Toulouse, 2007), yet if accomplished feels good (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981).

Methodology

Exploratory Approach

The main contribution of this article is its aim to provide a nuanced description and in-depth insights of consumers' understanding and experience of sustainable fashion disposal by exploring how the tensions and contradictions associated with sustainable fashion disposal are lived through and made sense of. Previous research on this topic is scarce (Crane, 2010;

Binotto & Payne, 2017; Dahlbo et al., 2017; Kirchherr & van Santen, 2019; Mellander & Petersson McIntyre, 2020; Shrivastava et al., 2021) which makes this study a great candidate for assuming an exploratory research approach as the topic is relatively unexplored (Crang & Cook, 2007; Saunders et al., 2009). Previous research of consumers' fashion disposal behavior has most commonly been survey-based with more quantitative strokes (Laitala, 2014). This study has assumed an ethnographic approach with an emphasis on semi-structured interviews in order to complement already existing research and possibly enrich the field.

Ontological Positioning

The study at hand is guided by CCT research and methodological traditions (Arnould & Thompson, 2007; Belk, 2017) and has strived to follow the guidelines and general norms of qualitative methods (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011) recommended for projects where the goal is to gain insights, enhance understanding and provide descriptions of consumers' lived experiences (Thompson et al, 1989; Merriam, 1998). The ontological assumption of this article is one of subjectivism or constructivism (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011), and as such views both reality and the knowledge of this reality to be socially constructed (Bengtsson, 1988). The study has also been influenced by existential phenomenology, the notion of life-worlds, and the inherent contextuality of knowledge and inseparability from its producers (Thompson et al, 1989). As a result, to investigate the subjects in an as authentic or real-life-like manner as possible to *come closer* to these life-worlds (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Petersson McIntyre, 2019; Mellander & Petersson McIntyre, 2020) was deemed important. For this reason, including

a connection to where the disposal of fashion takes place in consumers' lives was perceived as crucial. However, the ability to perform actual onsite visits and meetings in person was heavily constricted due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic (Folkhälsomyndigheten, nd).

Preferably, ethnographic fieldwork requires presence as all senses are utilized to gather and interpret information in order to retain a thick description (Crang & Cook, 2007). This leads to an emphasis on and acknowledgment of the importance of words, wordings, paraphrasing, mannerisms and body languages and the interpretation of how they are used to portray this meaning (Polkinghorne, 2005; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011). Qualitative research is suitable for investigating perspectives, points of view, and meanings that are contextually rooted and socially constructed through continuous interaction between social actors (Polkinghorne, 2005; Thompson et al, 2009), reflecting the ontological position of this study. However, presence is not only confined to physical presence and there are ways to circumvent the potential lack of impressions picked up from behind a screen.

Abductive Approach

The research process of this study has followed an abductive approach which is considered a suitable approach when relatively little is known of the subject or phenomena at hand within a study, i.e. for exploratory research (Saunders et al., 2009; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011). Abduction constitutes a blend of deduction and induction. The research process has been characterized by a continuous motion back and forth between the books and the field, from the first interactions with the subjects to

the analysis of the materials and finally writing of the finished article. The iterative strokes of this process of revisitation exemplifies an abductive approach (Bryman & Bell, 2014).

Participant Selection

The sampling of the subjects is a combination of purpose sampling and snowballing (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Erikson & Kovalainen, 2011). The purpose criteria consisted of the subjects considering themselves as relatively sustainably-minded fashion interested consumers who currently participated in other clothing disposal modes than binning as well as them engaging in sustainable fashion disposition in Sweden. Prior research has shown that consumers that are interested in a research topic are more likely to be willing to share their thoughts (Correia et al., 2017). As such, the subjects were initially sampled through following the hashtag #F/ACT which is a part of a Swedish research initiative to promote sustainable production and consumption of fashion and textile (F/ACT Movement, nd) and a part of the Textile & Fashion 2030 agenda, a governmentally funded platform for sustainable fashion and sustainable textiles (Textile and Fashion, nd.) However, as this study mainly is concerned with the lived experience of consumers it was deemed best that the subjects were not engaged professionally within the fashion industry. This was also included as a purpose criterion. All subjects have an Instagram profile where they share posts about sustainable fashion and were contacted with an invitation to participate in this study through Instagram direct messages. In the invitation, all participants were informed about the overall purpose of the study and that participation was voluntary, anonymous, and that they

could withdraw their participation at any time.

In total, a number of six participants were interviewed for approximately 45 min to one hour. The number of participants was ultimately a result of convenience, not being too large as to fit the scope of the article yet not too small either. Qualitative research, and small-n studies in particular, are often criticized for its lack of generalizability (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011). However, as the objective of this study concerns nuanced description of consumers' experiences the richness of insights obtained outweighs this loss of generalizability and instead leaves different themes and potential constructs for future research to test quantitatively. For this reason, the sample size of six is argued suitable for its purpose and the scope of the study.

Online Interviews - Remote yet Close

As mentioned, all interactions with the participants of the study have been online or virtual in some form, i.e. the interviews were held in online meeting rooms, for both safety and ethical reasons. However, the aforementioned constraints due to Covid-19 (Folkhälsomyndigheten, n.d.) also appeared to have had positive implications to the quality of the study as all meetings were conducted in the comfort of the participants' home, potentially allowing for a more relaxed ambiance and freer or more unrestricted answers. The distance that meeting on two sides of a screen provides could prove to be beneficial as the formal context of an interview might be perceived as less intimidating since there is no actual or physical intrusion to the participant's home. Naturally, there are both up- and downsides to meeting online but overall, following the recommended pandemic constraints forced

forward a more creative research design affecting the study predominantly positively. It also gave rise to opportunities to visit a more dispersed sample due to less travel time and other practical issues.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner using an Interview Guide which can be found in the Appendix. In contrast to structured interviews, using an Interview Guide for support rather than a set script allows for more flexibility to discover and follow-up interesting themes in the moment (Crang & Cook, 2011). The interview can thus follow a more conversation-like pattern and opens up for more free associations on behalf of the interviewee. Assuming this more actively listening and free approach is favorable when opting for thick descriptions and exploring life-worlds (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Hence, this was deemed an appropriate method for this study as it suits its aim and research question. In addition, all interviews were conducted in the participants native tongue, Swedish, thus further enabling authentic answers (Polkinghorn, 2005).

Research Process

All interviews were recorded as videos, with the consent of the subjects of course, with the audio later transcribed and sent to the subjects for approval. During the interview sessions, the researcher did not focus on taking excessive notes rather opted for writing down initial thoughts and notes directly after the sessions to summarize the first impressions yet be present and attentive during the interview (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Later, the interviews were re-watched in their entirety both with and without the transcripts as well as certain passages individually for

clarification. The opportunity to press pause and rewind to take notes provided valuable insights allowing for a more in-depth analysis of the material and the uncovering of different themes within said material. After concluding this step the raw transcripts were read through the lens of thematic analysis. The initial readings of the raw transcripts resulted in the construct of broad themes to guide the analysis further. As a starting point, insights rooted both in previous research and drawn from the researchers notes were used to construct the themes. Namely emotional aspects, values and beliefs, sustainability, fashion, financial aspects, general and disposition related characteristics, circularity, and situational factors. Later the theme values and beliefs was further divided and developed into different sub themes as values and underlying guiding principles stood out as a particularly important facet in understanding the link between the participants and their disposition style of choice, i.e. the behavior. Namely, values and beliefs regarding sustainability, values and beliefs regarding fashion, values and beliefs regarding financial aspects etc. Throughout the analysis of the transcripts they were kept in their original language, Swedish, so as to not lose or distort information in the translation process (Polkinghorne, 2005). The quotes appearing in the *Analysis* were translated as the paper was written.

Good Practice - Quality of the Study

In order for any research to be able to call itself research with a sense of dignity and part itself from mere speculations, accounting for how it has dealt with trustworthiness issues is normally in place. For qualitative research, addressing how the research process and final product perform in relation to four quality parameters for qualitative studies has become

a well-established and legitimate way of communicating these aspects (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Crang & Cook, 2011; Bryman & Bell, 2014). Taking these four parameters into consideration throughout the research process is generally considered good practice and is thought to enhance the study's overall quality and ethicality. Namely, *Credibility*, *Transferability*, *Dependability*, and *Confirmability* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Some issues encountered and measures taken to combat those have already been addressed previously in the *Methodology* but will be repeated here in a more condensed form for clarity.

Credibility

Beginning by assessing the credibility criterion, this has a lot to do with and can be enhanced by performing research in line with so-called "good practice" (Crang & Cook, 2011), i.e., following what is commonly deemed "good practice" represents well-established scientific processes and will make the results more believable. Actions thought to ensure or enhance higher levels of credibility, apart from good practice, are to make sure that the respondents or participants of a study are well-informed about the purpose of the same (Bryman & Bell, 2014). The participants' understanding of the topic at hand also contributes to enhancing the credibility of a study (ibid). The participants in this study were all well-acquainted and informed about the topic at hand as well as the purpose of the study. From the initial invitation to part-take in the study to reading and approving of transcripts from their interviews and interactions, all participants were kept well-informed. Exhibits of communication regarding the purpose of the study can be found in *Appendix, Participant Communication*.

Transferability

The transferability criterion addresses to what extent the results of a study could be replicated if performed under the same or similar conditions (Bryman & Bell, 2014). It also refers to whether or not the research at hand is conducted in a familiar and accepted manner within the given research field (Crang & Cook, 2011). As stated in *Ontological Positioning*, the research process and methodological decisions made for exploring sustainable fashion disposal are both influenced and aligned with CCT traditions. The methods applied for this study are rooted in existing and relevant literature in accordance with suggestions for qualitative research (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

Dependability

Dependability refers to how easy it would be to repeat and follow the research process for a given study or situation (Crang & Cook, 2011). The decisions made and steps taken in constructing the material of this paper are thoroughly accounted for in *Participant Selection, Online Interviews – Remote yet Close, Semi-Structured Interviews* and, *Research Process* to assure high levels of dependability. Other actions assumed to enhance the dependability of this paper were to ensure similar conditions for the interviews and virtual wardrobe visits as possible, e.g., the use of the same initial invitation to part-take in the study, the same interview guide, held in the same language, recorded, transcribed and translated by the same person. The interview guide can be found in *Appendix, Interview Guide*. Following the suggestions of Bryman & Bell (2014), the recordings of the interviews, the transcripts,

and the author's notes are available upon request.

Confirmability

The confirmability criterion is perhaps the least straightforward criterion of the four related to the objectiveness of the research conducted and its results (Crang & Cook, 2011). As per the *Philosophical Positioning* of this paper, this makes achieving and in some way even striving for complete objectiveness impossible and to some extent not desirable to attain, as there is no such thing as complete objectiveness. Nevertheless, some actions to reduce excess subjectivity have been taken throughout the writing of this paper. These include the use of the aforementioned interview guide, seeking advice and guidance in previous research within the CCT tradition, and inviting feedback from both supervisor and fellow students as sanity checks during the writing process (Crang & Cook, 2011). Again, following and implementing measures that make up "good practice" is one way of meeting this criterion.

Analysis

The research question guiding this paper forward; *How is sustainable fashion disposal experienced and understood from a consumer perspective?* contains two verbs. To be able to analyze the material and answer the question it seems both appropriate and helpful to divide the investigation of the material constructed into two parts concentrating on each verb separately, i.e. how do fashion consumers experience and understand sustainable fashion disposal. The following analysis will investigate said verbs. In order to provide a natural and more comprehensible

description of the participants' lived experiences the analysis will begin with a short presentation of the participants.

Participant Presentation - Meet the Fashionistas

The Vintage Lover

This participant shopped exclusively vintage and had been doing so for a long time. A lot of thought went into the acquiring process and they consequently choose their garments with care with the intention to have and wear them for a long time, usually until they reach material fatigue or actual obsolescence (Laitala, 2014). On the rare occasions that this was not the case, e.g. relative obsolescence due to physical fit issues occurred, they mainly re-sold their clothes through different reseller sites or consumer-to-consumer (C2C) forums. They also used their Instagram account to teach others about sustainable and slow fashion and the benefits it can have on expressing one's personal style. A lot of time and attention and striving to be "greenfluencer" and values to spread the word to others. In their opinion knowledge is meant to be shared. "We can only do this together", seemed to be the underlying rationale behind this strategy. I.e., consumers as a group have and should express and enact their agency in order to reduce fashion waste.

The Urban MBA Mom

This participant described sustainability as their chosen lifestyle and sometimes found having fashion as a hobby to stand at odds with that lifestyle. Their preferred disposal method was "to let garments transition from person to person" as they believed this was better for the environment than to let the clothes be redistributed by a reselling

company or organization. As such, they primarily opted to resell their clothes through different C2C platforms and forums. They worried about the surplus of secondhand clothes at charity shops etc. and that the opportunity to be able to “*donate something if it doesn't fit leads to overconsumption anyways*”. They also expressed frustration towards companies' inaction and inability to offer adequate sustainable fashion and circular business models. Issues regarding accountability, availability and agency and how it is distributed between consumers and businesses was a recurring theme they often pondered upon.

The Northern Maximalist

As one of the participants who did not live in a bigger city but in the northern and more remote part of Sweden, this participant expressed a deep concern of transportation related sustainability issues. Their preferred fashion disposition mode was to resell their clothes through C2C forums then opted for donating to charity if the garments were not sold. When selling their clothes this was mainly due to poor fit issues, both physical and style related. They described a feeling particularly sad and anxious about so called *miss-buys* as they felt that they could have been avoided. As such, they were not completely content with their chosen disposition mode. Both acquiring and disposing of clothes made them feel guilty about unnecessary transports when reselling or swapping with instagram friends. Still, they described re-selling miss-buys as the lesser evil and better than throwing away or binning clothes. Lack of access to viable more circular fashion services appeared to be a predominant stressor amplifying their inner conflict and discomfort.

The Swap-til-you-Dropper

This participant engaged in many different disposition modes. They regularly donated to charity, shared clothes with friends with similar size and taste, lended out and swapped. They stressed that they preferred not to involve money in the process of C2C or C2B as it felt wrong to them on a moral level. They defined themselves as a “*lefty/socialist*” and explained that profiting on someone else for their own personal gain “*feels inherently wrong*”. They referred to and viewed their wardrobe as a collection in order to justify the amount of items and size of it. They also expressed that they were aware that doing so was a mental justification for what according to their other internal norms and values might be considered overconsumption. They expressed that they actively make an effort not to be wasteful. As they partially considered clothes to be collectors items, the definition of using them was not confined to wearing often or on a regular basis. In comparison to the other participants they showcased the most packrat-like traits (Coulter & Ligas, 2003).

The Purging Entrepreneur

This participant demonstrated the most typical purger traits in contrast to the previous participants and probably the most purger like one of the bunch (Coulter & Ligas, 2003). Despises to have things that are not in use, this applies not only to clothes and fashion items but in general. This was expressed as them following a “*rule*” to never store something away in the basement and either donates or most often resells items, all types of things. Described themselves as an early adopter and frequent user of C2C reseller sites, though not as much anymore as they claimed to make more thoughtful purchases

nowadays (when it comes to fashion) and thus makes fewer miss-buys. They highlighted the importance of using items as a requirement for keeping them and stated that if you do not wear an item on a regular basis it should be disposed of. There were however some exceptions to this “rule” such as seasonal garments and special occasion wear. They described themselves as not being very nostalgic.

The Spreadsheet Maximalist

This participant strictly followed a “one in-one out principle” and kept meticulous track of their purchases and sales in an excel spreadsheet. Their preferred and almost exclusively applied disposal method was reselling through different C2C sites and forums, one of which they had been a part of creating a couple of years back. However, they did not consider this sustainable, mainly because they thought they “consumed too, too often and too fast.” Thus, regardless of how they disposed of their clothes, it was not considered sustainable in their eyes as they disposed of too many clothes in total. To them, the choice to resell their clothes was motivated by justifying their leisure consumption by meeting break-even or even sometimes profit financially from their hobby. To them, engaging in fashion per se was synonymous with wastefulness as “we only need very few clothes if you think about it.” This utilitarian approach and the inability to integrate their hobby with their values made them abandon the issue altogether.

How does it feel? - The Experience of Sustainable Fashion Disposition

Throughout this paper, fashion disposition has been presented as a problematic field for consumers to navigate, filled with

contradictions that often result in inner conflict due to conflicting values (Fletcher, 2010; Payne, 2019). Adding a component of aiming to consume and dispose of fashion items in a sustainable manner, the difficulty only seems to increase (Clarke & Miller, 2002; Ozcaglar-Toulouse, 2007). According to previous research, engaging in sustainable fashion disposal can be a bit of a struggle. As is soon to be revealed, this statement also holds true for the participants of this paper. However, this is not to say that disposal is associated with only negative experiences but seems to encompass a rather complex mixture of positive and negative emotions. The mixed feelings were directed towards the fashion industry, disposition in general, and, perhaps more interesting, towards themselves. That is, the meaning and implication of their actions on their perceived well-being and self-image. Nevertheless, all of them did, however, not in the same way or for the exact same reasons, find combining sustainability and disposing of fashion items and garments difficult to some degree, and it stirred up quite the amount of emotions.

“It worries me and makes me sad when I think about how little it (Fast Fashion items) cost. I mean, first there is the cost of the material, then shipping and other costs. There is hardly anything left for the seamstresses in the end. It sickens me, really.” - the Purging Entrepreneur

One of the main issues seemed to be feelings associated with consuming fashion items and the fashion industry itself as problematic. Overall, the participants described fashion consumption as harmful to the environment and not congruent with their core values and the desire to live a more sustainable lifestyle. This was exemplified by the participants expressing feelings of disgust, shame,

concern, and confusion regarding purchasing and disposing of clothes. There seemed to be a general consensus that consuming "*too much*" was and felt bad. At that, "*too much*" of what was thought of as "*bad types*" of fashion items were considered particularly bad or shameful to consume, own, and wear. Examples of these were items from Fast Fashion brands, newly produced items rather than pre-owned ones, or certain types of materials such as polyester. Purchasing these types of products often led to the feeling that the item was a so-called *miss-buy*, or a wrong or unnecessary purchase. These miss-buys in themselves then resulted in disposing of more items than they felt comfortable with. Hence, the concern and shame associated with overconsumption and buying "*too much, too often*" seemed to transfer the negative feelings evoked by the initial miss-buy into the disposition process. The general idea portrayed by the participants was that oftentimes the disposal itself would not have occurred without the initial miss-buy. The Northern Maximalist in particular expressed a deep sense of sadness about these situations. They described the miss-buys as a sort of failure. They worried about the environmental impact these miss-buys had on an individual and an aggregated level, which they described as anxiety-inducing. Here, in relation to potential miss-buys, fashion disposal came across as something not desirable and something best avoided.

The feelings of shame were also showcased by many of the participants speaking about their prior fashion consumption patterns and behaviors. While in the past they might have purchased a new top to wear to a particular event rather than finding a new way of wearing or styling one they already owned, the participants stressed that they were not aware of how "*bad it was at the time*" and

how they would "*never do that today*". Purchases from Fast Fashion stores were portrayed as particularly bad and shameful and were often labeled as "*wrong purchases*" or "*miss-buys*" and thus avoided at all times. The Swap-til-you-Dropper expressed that they had difficulties "*...even finding anything in those stores*" as they were feeling "*overwhelmed and disgusted by the mere sight of the clothes*" and the quantities of the same garment. All participants expressed concern over increased overproduction and, following overconsumption of clothes, the pace at which the items were produced and discarded as out of fashion, as well as the working conditions for the people who had made the actual clothes. The Purging Entrepreneur shared that they were utterly appalled by how the low retail prices of Fast Fashion items result in meager wages for the workers. Again, the miss-buys were associated with unnecessary disposition and unnecessary use of resources. The way that the feelings associated with a purchase decision and how it carried over or affected the feelings regarding a garment in other stages of the consumption cycle supports the idea of studying all parts of the cycle as beneficial. As suggested previously, when investigating disposal it seems necessary to consider what happens during the other stages of consumption (Albinsson & Perera, 2009; Binotto & Payne, 2017; Henry et al, 2021).

In conclusion, having knowledge about sustainability issues associated with the fashion industry and fashion consumption made them feel discomfort and unease. The awareness of the environmental impact of consuming fashion through all phases of the consumption cycle provoked emotional discomfort due to value incongruence, not only disposition per se. Yet, as the last step in a conventional or linear business model it

appeared almost as if the emotions evoked during the previous steps of the cycle lingered on and accumulated when faced with the parting decision. The notion of miss-buys was one of the most prevalent factors of feelings of shame amongst the participants and one common reason for disposing of fashion items and was frequently mentioned throughout the interviews. If they made a miss-buy on occasion, disposing of these was often associated with sadness or disappointment as they felt like they could avoid disposal.

Altogether, the experiences and feelings described by the participants connect to and illustrate a common denominator of underlying values guiding their disposition behavior. This can be described as a general rule or norm for avoiding wastefulness. This anti-wastefulness norm was one of the most notable guiding values among the participants. The way that underlying values and norms seemed to be guiding the participants' consumption behavior or their aspirations and actions and activities they deemed desirable is in line with the Ozcaglar-Toulouse (2007) and their findings on ethical consumption. Similarly, when not behaving cohesively with one's values, the participants too felt discomfort, as suggested by Tham (2015) and Bovone et al. (2016), among others (Clark & Miller, 2002; Crane, 2010; Young Lee et.al, 2013; Payne 2019; Petersson McIntyre, 2019). This theme will be further explored in *Underlying Rules and Guiding Principles*.

Shame, Concern and Avoidance - The Not-So-Great Feelings

The participants also expressed feelings of shame, disgust, and concern regarding the fashion disposal behavior of others. During the interviews, the participants shared their

views of what other consumers were doing, or rather what they were *not* doing, and why so. Largely reflecting behaviors they perceived as shameful or lesser if performed by themselves. When asked why others might not circulate their clothes and chose to bin as their preferred disposal method, themes such as laziness, indifference, unawareness, and simply a lack of empathy were brought forward as reasons. Why others might not resell their clothes, donate them to charity or lend them out to friends, participate in clothes swapping events, etc. Issues regarding the availability of excessive storage space and sentimentality were also portrayed as reasons not to dispose of fashion items. Having an ample storage space was thought not to make disposing of fashion items feel as urgent as if there were less space available to these others leading to excessive and thoughtless accumulation of things. This was interpreted as unawareness of sustainability challenges and passivity towards solving them. The examples of the actions and inactions of others illustrate what was considered unsustainable disposal behaviors which were not deemed suitable or desirable, hence the feelings of shame due to perceived value incongruence. Even though not disposing of items on a regular basis by recirculating them was regarded poorly, there was a sense of understanding and compassion towards these other consumers as well.

“I think people can't be bothered. And, there are so many things to take into consideration. I think it is simply too much for them to take in, so they do nothing. ... They have enough on their plate as it is with their own lives and issues”. - The Vintage Lover

As when sharing their past fashion behaviors, the shame associated with this less desirable or acceptable disposition behavior the

participants seemed to distance themselves from those behaviors. If opting for what was considered a lesser disposal style or method, such as binning, it appeared as if that reflected poorly on themselves.

Joy, Fulfillment and Relief - The Oh-So-Great Feelings

“This is my passion, my hobby. I get to do what I like.” - The Spreadsheet Maximalist

Not all emotions associated with sustainable fashion disposition had bad connotations. In fact, the most common response when asked how it feels to circulate clothes and engage in more sustainable fashion disposal was that it felt good. Great even. The potential challenges and lack of motivation portrayed when talking about why others might not recirculate their clothes did not seem to bother them at all. The participants described experiencing circulating their clothes as a fun and meaningful activity which brought them feelings of satisfaction, enjoyment, excitement and anxiety relief. Spending time engaging in behaviors that were aligned with one's values simply felt right. When creating a post on a C2C forum or picking out garments for a swapping event, they were spending time on their hobby, i.e. fashion, in a way that was perceived as less harmful to the planet. The participants described circulating their clothes as being less wasteful and comforting. It made them feel less bad about themselves and what they were doing, i.e. reduced the emotional dissonance caused by engaging in fashion even though they also considered the fashion industry to be unsustainable as a whole. In contrast to how disposal seemed to be thought of in relation to possible miss-buys, here disposal appeared to be something beautiful, purposeful and important. Not

something that should be avoided but rather encouraged.

It was not only the reduction of negative emotions that made circulating clothes a pleasant experience. The actual procedure of deciding what and when to dispose of garments was described in positive terms. The time spent on arranging sustainable fashion disposal signified time spent doing one's hobby. From the initial time spent reviewing the pieces in their wardrobe to wrapping up neat packages ready to be sent to its next owner and walking to the post office, the activity itself was portrayed as enjoyable. Although not described quite as thrilling as procuring fashion pieces, getting rid of them did include a sense of thrill or a rush. Some of the more business minded participants, namely the Purging Entrepreneur and the Spreadsheet Maximalist, expressed sheer excitement and pride when speaking about how they on occasion had managed to sell a garment for more than they originally purchased it for. Others stressed that the feeling of being able to share one's passion for sustainable fashion with a garment's next owner, regardless of whether there was any monetary exchange involved or not, was more than enough motivation to keep circulating their clothes. By sharing their passion they were also sharing and experiencing joy. The overall impression of the participants' descriptions of how circulating their clothes made them feel was that it made them feel as if they had done something good and important. That they had contributed to the quest of creating a more sustainable society. That they *“at least”* had done *“something”*. As suggested in previous research, value congruent actions feels good (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Ozcağlar-Toulouse, 2007; Albinsson &

Perera, 2009; Fletcher, 2010; Young Lee et al., 2013).

“One of my followers bought a garment from me (on Instagram) recently. It feels really great that she gets to enjoy it now. (...) Sometimes when I see a post of someone wearing something they got from it warms my heart.” - The Purging Entrepreneur

Apart from the struggle to combine fashion and sustainability overall, other issues concerning more relational aspects of the disposition process surfaced. When engaging in more C2C dominated exchanges the relational aspect of the exchanges seemed to be perceived at a more personal level, for better and for worse. C2C exchange was described as leading to feelings of happiness and joy by knowing who the item one had let go of was bringing joy now. The knowledge that they by letting go of a garment had made someone else happy simply made them happy. Sometimes, C2C exchanges were described as providing a sense of a connection or community. For the most part, the connection was portrayed in positive terms but the more personal aspects of these types of exchanges at times caused some discomfort. In the generally more unstructured C2C market issues such as accountability for the quality of the items, the delivery and return policies arose. These more relational aspects and how they impact disposal share similarities with both the social and situational aspects suggested by Jacoby et al. (1977) and the findings of Mellander & Petersson McIntyre (2020). Knowing who a beloved item is going to belong to does not cut off the item-person bond as immediately as binning or donating to a charity organization (Albinsson & Perera, 2009; Laitala, 2014; Mellander & Petersson McIntyre, 2020) making the process of de-

attachment smoother and less abrupt. When the relational bond to the new owner extended the timeframe of the breaking of the object-person bond (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Belk, 1988; Shrivastava et al., 2021) the process appears to be experienced as more joyous.

“Sometimes it can be a little hard. You don’t want anything to go wrong, you know. It can feel a little awkward” - The Northern Maximalist

Item Characteristics and their Implications

How disposing of fashion items was experienced by the participants also seemed to be influenced by the specific garment at hand, reflecting the object characteristic criteria in Jacoby et al. (1977) taxonomy of voluntary disposition. The importance and influence of the actual garment on how the participants experienced disposal directs the focus to another relational aspect - the one between owner and object (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1992). The relationship to a particular garment played a prevalent role in the perceived difficulty of disposal. As discussed earlier, previous research suggests that the strength of the object-person bond influences the ability to let go (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1992; Mellander & Petersson McIntyre, 2020). When talking about disposal, it appeared as if the emotional bond needed to be broken first in order to physically and cognitively distance oneself from the item, i.e. they had to stop loving the item to let it go. Thus, the findings from this group of participants tangent previous research. Examples of items that were particularly difficult to let go of were

garments that could be made or gifted by a relative or close friend or be associated with a special time in one's life. The perceived value of a home-knitted cardigan made by one's mother exceeded far beyond the cost of the yarn and time spent knitting and in a sense became priceless memorabilia to its owner. Items surpassing the role indicative to them as useful objects with a purpose of wearing entering the land of memorabilia whose purpose is fulfilled by simply existing was a recurring theme in more ways than one and will be further explored in the section *“What Does It Mean?”*.

Another aspect that can be related to the object characteristic criteria (Jacoby et al., 1977) that surfaced during the interviews was the perceived uniqueness of the garment. If it was difficult to find in the first place, it seemed to be more difficult to let go of. Both the Swap-til-you-Dropper, Vintage Lover, Purging Entrepreneur and Urban MBA Mom shared that a particularly *“good find”* or *“hidden gem”* was seen as a token of their thrifting accomplishment and a representation of their consumer skills, (Fletcher, 2012) i.e., a representation of their abilities and personality that they were proud of (Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1992; Bovone et al., 2016; Mellander & Petersson McIntyre, 2020). Having a good eye for finding designer items in a thrift bin was seen as an example of being fashion savvy, i.e., possessing desirable and in some circles admirable consumer skills (Fletcher, 2012; Tham, 2015; Bovone et al., 2016; Mellander & Petersson McIntyre, 2020). Proof or confirmation of their high level of consumer skill that within certain groups was deemed desirable and provided a sense of higher status or accomplishment. The bond to these types of items seemed to be and were expressed as stronger and more meaningful to the participants and thus more

difficult to let go of. Items were described as loaded with significance to the owner and, a testimony to their great sense of style, aspirational within certain groups of people. Again, what had happened during the previous phases of the consumption cycle seemed to influence the disposal.

Other object characteristics (Jacoby et al., 1977; Young Lee et al., 2013) that could increase the attachment or relational bond to a garment was the price paid for the garment. The time, energy and monetary resources invested appeared to almost charge the garment with value for the owner, enhancing the bond thus making it more difficult to dispose of. Both the perceived uniqueness and the money spent seemed to play into the perceived value of the garments to the participants. In both cases the interpretation of value was experienced as something which expands the limits of monetary resources.

It is not me anymore...

All in all, the emotional aspects of fashion disposal, i.e. how letting go was experienced by the sustainable fashionistas, very much appeared to be linked to the attachment to a garment (Mellander & Petersson McIntyre, 2020; Petersson McIntyre, 2020) or a relational bond (Jacoby et al., 1977; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1992). If one had a strong connection or attachment to a garment it was perceived as more difficult to dispose of. Similarly, when these bonds for some reason had weakened it was described as easier or *“not hard at all”* to let go of a certain item. Regardless of how treasured and loved it had been before, if it no longer had that special feeling related to it there was little to no sign of emotional attachment to the

garment. This was expressed as the garments no longer inducing the same feelings or that the garment belonged to another time or another life. Another “*them*”. The expression “*it is not “me” anymore*” was frequently used by all participants when describing reasons for letting go of garments. This was by no means the only or sole reason expressed, but still the most common.

Building on the expression “*it is not “me” anymore*”, experiencing feelings of both shame and of fulfillment when disposing of fashion seemed to play a role in the participants perceived self-worth. Through their descriptions of their experiences, it became clear that their actions had an impact on how they saw themselves, for good and bad. All activities associated with fashion consumption, from purchasing, owning, wearing and disposing evoked feelings which in turn seemed to influence how they felt about themselves, i.e. had an impact on their perceived identity and identity formation (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Dittmar, 1992, Tham 2015). During the interviews, the participants' stories and accounts showed signs of what could be called a *mine equals me* connection. They spoke of their things and actions as representations of or being part of themselves, their personality, their style and, their life. Until they were not, and thus disposed of.

Much like the findings in previous research presented in this paper, the emotional response to a garment revealed the presence of an emotional bond (Clarke & Miller, 2002; Albinsson & Perera, 2009; Laitala, 2014; Mellander & Peterson McIntyre, 2020). The dilemma and back and forth reasoning the participants expressed regarding what was good or bad behavior, actions, items to own or feelings expressed, all tied into their self-

perception. Following CCT tradition, this is not by any means surprising. Yet, still a relevant and interesting facet in exploring the experience of sustainable fashion disposal. The notion of an extended self (Belk, 1988) and its implications on consumer experience provides one possible explanation for why the participants felt anything regarding disposition and their own disposition behavior of choice. From this point of view, the way in which they choose to dispose of fashion items reflects either poorly or positively on themselves. Ergo, when engaging in a disposition mode that they perceive righteous, they would experience positive emotions, e.g., feelings of pride, fulfillment, meaningfulness, peace, and joy. Whereas when they deviated from this behavior, negative emotions would follow, e.g., feelings of shame, concern, and anxiety.

What does it Mean? - Making Sense of and Understanding Sustainable Fashion Disposition

Evaluating the Feeling of Obsolescence

It seems almost impossible to explore how disposing of fashion is made sense of and understood without delving into the subject of obsolescence. During the interviews, it was a recurring theme, and the reasons for letting go of fashion items brought up by the participants often involved experiencing different types of obsolescence. On one level, the participants expressed obsolescence as a feeling, e.g., it does not feel like me anymore. This type of obsolescence, i.e., relative obsolescence (Young Lee et al., 2013; Laitala, 2014), was often explained as something that they could not quite put their finger on or describe why they felt in relation to a particular garment. They just “*knew*.”

However, even though experienced and portrayed as an emotional state, obsolescence benefits from being dissected from a more cerebral point of view as some parts of the evaluation process of clothes were very conscious and deliberate.

In the decision-making process regarding the disposal of a garment, obsolescence was almost always featured as an influential aspect. When the participants evaluated their clothes, relative and absolute obsolescence were considered and weighed against each other. The level of obsolescence did not only determine if a garment would be disposed of but also the way in which they disposed of it. If a garment was worn out, in poor condition, or made of a non-degradable or non-recyclable fabric, they were generally not considered suitable for re-circulating. Examples brought forward were socks and hosiery with holes, underwear, activewear, running shoes, and clothes made from polyester or low percentage cotton blends. These types of fashion items were most often binned as they were not seen to be able to endure another ownership circle. Textile recycling was discussed as an alternative option yet not viewed as an entirely appropriate solution for dealing with textile waste. However, the idea of textile recycling was met with mild enthusiasm and careful optimism, as they stated that the technology available to recycle textile waste successfully was lacking. Hence, none of the participants said they opted for textile recycling as their primary disposal method.

Smart Investments Requires Skills

Throughout the interviews, polyester received a lot of negative attention. It was seen as a bad investment with little to no second-hand value, in addition to having a limited potential

to recycle. For most participants, this resulted in them generally refraining from purchasing clothes made from polyester altogether. Materials seen as good options and investments due to their longevity and high second-hand value were silks, wool, and leather. Garments and shoes made from these materials were described to be able to last longer, be worth repairing, and easier and more appropriate to pass on to another owner. When evaluating the recyclability of a garment and which disposal method they thought appropriate, the participants leaned on their knowledge about fashion and associated consumer skills. During the interviews, several parameters for assessing a garment's quality and life expectancy were discussed and seemed to aid them in their decision-making process. Examples ranged from distinguishing durable to non-durable fabrics to having a sense of or insight into what types of cuts or prints could "*last more than one season*". As such, they all spent a lot of time seeking knowledge and educating themselves to improve their fashion and consumer skills to feel more comfortable with their chosen disposal method. Thus, educating oneself seemed like one way of navigating the field and ensuring that one's actions reflected the values one desired.

Similarly, many participants spoke of and advocated for investing in "*timeless pieces*" or "*classic cuts*" contra hopping on the newest trend and purchasing trending, namely the Purging Entrepreneur, Northern Maximalist, Urban MBA Mom and Spreadsheet Maximalist. Impulsive or hasty purchases should be avoided - unless one was very early on the trend and saw a potential to sell the garment before the "*trend had died*" or if they could see themselves using and liking a garment for years to come. Primarily purchasing vintage fashion was also

mentioned as a more sustainable approach to fashion consumption, not only by the Vintage Lover. Vintage clothing and accessories were perceived as high quality and often unique pieces. Like timeless and classic pieces, they were thought to be easier to reintroduce to the consumption cycle over and over. However, the evaluation seemed skewed more toward the procurement process than the disposal since vintage pieces were generally kept for a long time and worn until absolute obsolescence. Still, if disposed of before they were completely worn out or beyond repair, i.e., the clothes had not reached absolute obsolescence, they were considered easier to re-circulate due to their uniqueness. For both types of clothing, good craftsmanship, tailoring and materials were evaluated and prioritized. The participants stressed the importance of making informed decisions as a strategy to reduce the likelihood of potential miss-buys to occur. Both these strategies arguably require somewhat specialist knowledge and adequate consumer skills to apply. Developing these skills was explained as requiring time and effort and thus might not be accessible to consumers not having fashion as a hobby.

Physical and Emotional Fit

When relative obsolescence was stated as the main reason for disposal, other issues such as the attachment to the garment appeared to influence the decision-making process significantly. For clothes that did not physically fit one's body, this was exemplified by a difficulty to let them go due to what the garment represented as well as having emotional ties to these representations. Body image issues and nostalgia were described as reasons for having difficulties disposing of garments and represented issues and

contrasting values challenging to deal with. On the one hand, not being able to wear a garment once worn and enjoyed made them feel as if they should get rid of it. On the other, the memories stored and associated with that garment made them hesitate and question whether they might be able to wear it once again if they perhaps lost weight. Physical fit issues were portrayed as one of the issues that caused the most internal conflict. The attachment or the emotional bond to a garment appeared to impede the underlying values and otherwise reassuring guiding principles presented earlier, aligning with the findings of Mellander & Petersson McIntyre (2020). Here, different values and desires seemed to cause an internal debate to a greater extent than with other garments and situations. For clothes that did not physically fit, i.e. perceived relative obsolescence, the chosen disposal method seemed to ultimately represent a scenario where the participant believed that the garment would be enjoyed the most or do the most good. For some, that meant gifting or swapping the garment, whereas others preferred selling or donating to charity. Only one of the participants in this study stated that they occasionally altered their clothes, thus not disposing of them. Altering the garment reduced or eliminated the perceived obsolescence. Letting them move on to another owner was the predominantly chosen disposal mode for clothes with poor physical fit.

For clothes no longer representing an emotional match, disposing of them was described as *"not a problem at all"*. Again, confirming the idea of the breaking on the *mine equals me* bond (Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1992) or reduced levels of attachment (Mellander & Petersson McIntyre, 2020) facilitates disposal. The garments that were let go of had already been released or freed from

the object-person connection (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). In these cases, if the garments were considered to be in a good enough condition to be desirable to buy, wear and own by somebody else, they were easily disposed of. The chosen disposal method then seemed to depend more on personal characteristics and habits than anything else, and the aforementioned guiding principles or norms were applied without impediment from attachment.

What doesn't it mean ?

As the focus of the analysis has shifted towards how sustainable fashion disposal is understood or made sense of, it is once again worth mentioning that disposition or disposal is not secluded to throwing away, binning, or dumping in the trash (Merriam-Webster, a,c, n.d.). As previously mentioned, disposal merely refers to the act of riddance and ownership transference (Merriam-Webster, a, n.d.). All participants stated that they rarely, if ever, "*just*" threw something away unless it was in very poor condition, i.e it had reached perceived absolute obsolescence. Common for all participants was that, in some way, shape, or form, when they were disposing of a garment, they opted for reintroducing it to the secondhand market, i.e., by reselling, lending out, gifting, swapping, or donating their clothes and accessories. Items that were not re-circulated were confined to undergarments and worn-out garments, e.g., clothes with holes and stains or when the fabric had become excessively linted. If not otherwise stated, when referring to disposal and disposition, it should be interpreted as the item in question no longer being in possession of the once owner and not discarded as waste.

All in all, sustainable fashion disposition appeared to be understood through the lens of what it *was not*. When describing their view of sustainability, sustainable fashion and sustainable fashion disposal, many of the participants explained it by examples of the opposite, i.e., unsustainable fashion disposition. Their understanding of the topic appeared to be linked to what one should not be doing rather than what one should be doing. Even so, when uncovering what this was, they all seemed to do what they themselves thought was the right thing to do, i.e., actions and behaviors that best aligned with their values (Ditmar, 1992; Ozcaglar-Toulouse, 2007; Albinsson & Perera, 2009). Yet, it also became clear that none of the participants *really knew* precisely what sustainable fashion disposition was and were all more or less convinced that there is *no single best* way but rather many *good enough* ways. Despite the lack of a single definition, they seemed to be comfortable with how they themselves handled the disposition phase of fashion consumption.

In contrast, there seemed to be one "*worst*" way of disposing of fashion, i.e., binning or throwing clothes away, handling them as end-of-line waste. Throughout the interviews, the comparisons between good or bad actions and behaviors seemed to be dictated by a set of norms or underlying guiding rules of how to be a "*good*" sustainable consumer. Some of the rules that surfaced concerned themes such as wastefulness, the importance of using garments and what it means to use a garment, and the importance of making educated choices and decisions. Relying on norms or rules seemed to provide a sense of security or relief from anxiety, serving as a mental justification for their chosen disposition behavior. It granted them permission to act in a certain way, which was deemed a desirable

and appropriate behavior. This seemed to be the case concerning the feelings of guilt and shame associated with fashion consumption in general. As suggested by previous research, acting in alignment with value-approved strategies eased cognitive and emotional dissonance (Dittmar, 1992; Ozcaglar-Toulouse, 2007; Albinsson & Perera, 2009; Bovone et al., 2016; Payne, 2019; Mellander & Petersson McIntyre, 2020). It appeared as if disposing of the items in an approved and appropriate way according to these underlying norms justified and almost corrected the initial "*wrong*" of having fashion and clothing as an interest or hobby. For these sustainable fashionistas, disposing of their garments in what to them was deemed a sustainable way was in many cases a foundational premise for them to engage with their hobby at all.

Underlying Values and Guiding Principles

Through the interviews, it was possible to discern some common themes regarding possible underlying values or norms seemingly guiding the participants' behavior and aiding them in their decision-making process when disposing of clothes and other fashion items. For the sake of understanding and enhancing comprehensibility, they have been categorized and named based on the theme it is most related to. It is worth noting that none of these norms were explicitly mentioned by the participants but should instead be viewed as an agglomerated summary of different expressions demonstrating certain opinions, i.e., they are a result of the interpretation of their descriptions, expressions, and stories shared with the author during our interactions. The following underlying rules or guiding principles appeared prevalent for all

participants, although to varying degrees and in relative importance to each other;

- a) a Use Norm, it is better to use the things you have than not to use them
- b) an Anti-Wastefulness Norm, one should avoid wasteful behavior at all cost.
- c) an Awareness Obligation Norm, one should educate oneself and make informed decisions
- d) an Accountability Norm, one is responsible for one's actions and should be held accountable for them.

The Use Norm

One of the underlying rules that seemed the most influential on disposition behavior in terms of the strategies applied and the mental justification, logic, or rationale was what will be called *the Use Norm*. Above all, fashion items should be in use or used, and if not, they should be disposed of. Thus, evaluating whether or not a garment was used or used enough to be kept was one of the key factors when deciding to let go of it or not. How much it had been used previously also played a role in the decision-making process. Often, this was interpreted as an indication of how much one enjoyed a specific garment, which served as either a justification to keep or get rid of it. So far, all participants seemed to value and assess a garment on its current, previous, and future useability. However, what "*using*" or "*in use*" actually meant differed amongst them gravely. To some, using was confined to wearing clothes and on a regular basis at that, namely the Purging Entrepreneur and Spreadsheet Maximalist. Others seemed to have a broader interpretation of the word "*use*" and viewed clothes that were perhaps not worn as often to still be in use as a part of a collection. These clothes "*had earned their place in the*

wardrobe" as expressed by the Swap-til-you-Dropper. Other examples of items that were in use but not worn regularly could be seasonal garments or special occasion wear, e.g., a winter coat in a special color, lightweight summer dresses or sandals normally only worn on vacation, outdoor activity boots or pants, or a cardigan whose particular shade of a color matched a pair of pants. Even if not worn several times per week, month, or even per year, these items were still deemed to be in use often enough to keep. Or, the clothes had a different quality to them, which released them from the in-use vs. not in-use evaluation process, i.e., they were judged on other criteria such as the level and type of obsolescence. Others were more crass about the frequency of use and shared that they did not ever put any of their clothes in storage.

"If I haven't used enough and I end up putting it in a box in the attic, the truth is that I will probably never use it again, so why keep it? It is better that somebody else gets to have it". - The Purging Entrepreneur

The Spreadsheet Maximalist, who they too preferred not to store or keep the clothes they did not wear regularly shared their thoughts, which had a slightly different angle.

"I could save, let's say, an embroidered white blouse for when that trend comes back around in five-ten years or so. But let's be honest, I will probably want a new, slightly different one by the time I want to have such a blouse again. So, I think it's better for me to sell the garment now when I have grown tired of a certain trend and when somebody else is still interested in wearing it". - The Spreadsheet Maximalist

Regardless of their definition and understanding of what it meant to use a garment, not using garments was viewed as a form of wastefulness according to some of the participants which directs us onto the next norm.

The Anti-Wastefulness Norm

All participants seemed to share the opinion that to be a sustainable fashion consumer involved avoiding wastefulness. During the interviews, the participants repeatedly expressed disdain over what they saw as wasteful behavior. Expressions that exemplify this ranged in intensity from statements such as,

"It is the absolute worst thing I know! I utterly loathe wastefulness" - The Vintage Lover

"Well, within my "bubble," no one really does that anymore (refers to binning clothes). It is just not how you do things." -The Urban MBA Mom

However, the notion of wastefulness appeared to have different meanings to the participant and was expressed and acted upon differently depending on their understanding of the word. Both the participants inclined toward packrat and purger behavior (Coulter & Ligas, 2003) respectively seemed to motivate their chosen strategies in an attempt to minimize waste. To the participants who demonstrated more purger-like traits, namely the Purging Entrepreneur, The Urban MBA Mom and the Spreadsheet Maximalist, regularly performing closet clean-outs or purgers was an essential part of their strive to be more sustainable as fashion consumers. Hence, they made clearing out their wardrobes of under-used items a priority. Not wearing their clothes regularly was seen as a wasteful and selfish

behavior since they potentially could and, according to them, should be owned and worn by someone else instead or could be *"put to better use"* as expressed by the Spreadsheet Maximalist. If they sold, gifted, swapped, or donated a garment, the new owner would perhaps not need to or refrain from purchasing newly produced products. Consequently, it was argued that the demand for newly produced clothes would go down, scarce resources would be saved, and sustainably hazardous processes associated with clothing production would be reduced. These participants appeared to be of the understanding that fashion items should be reintroduced into the consumption cycle at a higher frequency than the participants expressing more packrat-like habits.

"There is no point in them (the clothes) just lying there." – The Purging Entrepreneur

Many of the more purger-inclined participants referred to a so-called KonMari cleanse (MariKondo, n.d.) as a trend. The concept is heavily influenced by minimal or lean living where one should, to live a more harmonious life, only surround oneself with "things that spark joy" (ibid). Other strategies such as building a capsule wardrobe also surfaced when speaking about cleansing and curating one's closet, drawing on minimalist and purger-like rationale. The overall aim of both these trends is to have fewer things in general and use, meaning wear, these items more often. None of these trends do, however, imply the frequency of either disposing of acquiring items, the pace at which one should pass an item through the consumption cycle is left out of the equation. Creating a functional, versatile, and perhaps most importantly, stylish capsule wardrobe was expressed as being considered an achievement in some circles. Much like the ability to find unique or

rare fashion items at thrift stores or to be able to resell used garments for profit, this can be interpreted as a token of consumer or fashion skills (Fletcher, 2010; 2012; Tham, 2015; Petersson McIntyre, 2020). To be able to remain stylish and put together interesting outfits with fewer and less conventional items gave them a sense of pride. For some of the participants, developing these fashion skills also provided them with the means to reach their sustainability standards and values. Engaging in these behaviors appeared as a win-win situation for the participants, i.e. when they aimed to enhance their sustainability by slimming down the number of clothes they owned and re-circulating the ones they did not wear as often, their fashion skills simultaneously improved.

Another interpretation of anti-wastefulness surfaced when talking to the participants leaned more towards a packrat profile (Coulter & Ligas, 2003), namely from the Vintage Lover, The Swap-til-you-Dropper and the Northern Maximalist. Drawing on the aim to avoid wastefulness, these participants advocated for keeping their clothes for a more extended period of time with the same argument as the group mentioned above, i.e., they thought it was less wasteful. In contrast to the purger-like participants, this group did not perform wardrobe cleanses as frequently or regularly. Instead, they opted for maintaining, caring for, and curating their closet over time. By owning the garments in one's closet for longer, the fewer clothes one had to buy and get rid of, and they did not re-circulate their clothes to the same extent as the previous group. The main focus in their strive to consume fashion sustainably was put on the initial stages of the consumption circle rather than the latter, e.g. purchasing, owning, and wearing rather than disposing of clothes. For these participants, caring for their clothes

was brought forward as an important way to prolong the durability and thus create less waste. Examples of caring for clothes were washing them correctly, mending or altering them when needed either by themselves or with a tailor's help, and keeping them ironed and neatly stored while not in use. By being more selective when acquiring clothes and then caring for them to prolong the clothes' lifespan, many participants stated that they did not feel as if they had to dispose of as many items. Their wardrobes were carefully curated and contained very few *"unnecessary"* or under-used items mirroring the arguments made by the participants who demonstrated more purger-like traits. Similarly, the skills and patience required to assume this approach were described as admirable, i.e. consumer skills they prided themselves on having. The term Slow Fashion (Fletcher, 2012; Tham, 2015; Mellander & Petersson McIntyre, 2020) was brought up by some of the participants as an underlying and appropriate strategy for how they approach their fashion consumption habits. To them, Slow Fashion implied viewing one's wardrobe as an ongoing, long-term project or process. The process of building one's wardrobe sometimes required years of searching, longing, and dreaming of *"the perfect garment"* and was described as almost a rebellious counteraction to Fast Fashion, as expressed by the Urban MBA Mom. Through a mindful, deliberate process, the items that made it into the wardrobe were seen as chosen on the right criteria by complementing and enriching their slowly curated collection of clothes. These garments were perceived as less likely to become a miss-buy which would lead to disposal that could have been avoided, i.e., wastefulness. To dispose of an item was a decision that was made equally as carefully as when purchasing. Before ultimately coming to the conclusion that a garment should be let

go, the participants first evaluated different options to avoid this, e.g., mending or altering a garment to fit better or re-making altogether and creating something new. In some cases, as for the Vintage Lover, disposing of clothes was seen as a last resort option and, to some extent, likened to a form of wastefulness in itself. However, there were exceptions when disposal was seen as a suitable option.

Despite the emphasis on mindful consumption at a slower pace, this did not prevent the notion of miss-buys from occurring nor for relative obsolescence from limiting the use of a garment. For example, if they felt that a garment was currently under-used due to physical fit issues and had limited prospects of being more actively used in the future, this would make for a good candidate to re-circulate. In addition to weight loss and weight gain, not feeling comfortable in certain cuts, styles, or colors as one was aging was brought forward as examples of bodily changes that induced a sense of relative obsolescence. In these cases, the same logic as for the more purger-prone participants was applied, and letting the garment move on to another owner was perceived as the more sustainable option. Hence, on occasion, when some form of obsolescence emerged, items were eventually disposed of despite their predisposition to higher product retention.

One of the main differences between the purgers and the packrats in this paper can be related to the pace and the frequency of which they circulated their clothes. For the latter category, absolute obsolescence occurred more frequently, thus limiting the ability to re-circulate an item. As garments generally were kept and worn for a longer period of time, they were subjected to more wear and tear and, in many cases, not deemed suitable or even possible to be worn by somebody

else. This resulted in a feeling of disposing of and re-circulating fewer garments in general.

"It doesn't happen that often actually. I mainly purchase vintage clothing and by the time I feel like I am done with them there is not much left of them. Don't get me wrong, I still love them. But after some time, some clothes have served their time." - The Vintage Lover

The clothes belonging to the participants advocating for Slow Fashion and keeping clothes for longer, namely the Vintage Lover and the Northern Maximalist, reached absolute obsolescence more often.

In conclusion, during the interviews, anti-wastefulness was brought forward as something aspirational and desired when aiming for sustainable behavior. Regardless of the interpretation of wastefulness, all participants stated that they strived to be less wasteful in their own way. They also appear to find people with opposite tendencies than themselves to act wastefully. This was true for both the participants showing packrat and purger tendencies, confirming suggestions presented in previous research (Coulter & Ligas, 2003). Furthermore, the discrepancy between performed behavior and the sense-making derived and motivated by the same aim, i.e., anti-wastefulness could be seen as an illustration of the personal characteristics category (Jacoby et al., 1977; Young Lee et al., 2013; Laitala, 2014) as an explanatory factor but not necessarily a predatory one.

The different views of what it means to be and to avoid being wasteful are one of the reasons for separating this guiding principle from *the Use Norm* as it seemed to generate different practical outcomes yet based on the same rationale. The use norm and the anti-

wastefulness norm almost mirror each other and separating the two might appear redundant. However similar they are, there are also key aspects of each that differentiate them enough to separate them. Neither can be fully understood within the context of the other. To avoid wastefulness, regardless of how being wasteful was defined, did not necessarily imply one had to use an item. Conversely, to use an item did not imply either being or not being wasteful but did rather encompass both. Avoiding wastefulness does not completely fit into the idea of advocating to use items as using something, depending on the definition of using, often implies partial or complete elimination or exploitation of resources. Furthermore, the notion of wastefulness seemed to include a normative function of purpose - to use purposefully, in moderation, and lastly, avoid creating waste. Hence, although the two norms are related, they benefit from being thought of as two distinct concepts. The same can be argued for the two following guiding principles, *the Awareness Obligation Norm* and *the Accountability Norm*.

The Awareness Obligation Norm

One of the issues that arose when speaking about fashion and sustainability was the importance of making informed decisions in every phase of the consumption cycle. This was expressed by highlighting the importance of acquiring knowledge and educating oneself on various topics and issues surrounding sustainable fashion, as well as stressing that lustful or impulse purchases and decisions were thought of as poor and likely unsustainable. Since knowing how to be a sustainable fashion consumer was described as not having a direct or obvious answer, searching for information to guide and

validate one's actions was common and expressed as preferred. The information and knowledge required to make more sustainable fashion choices concerned issues such as the environmental impact associated with production and distribution, e.g., CO2 emissions, the release of toxins and pesticides, and water consumption, as well as the durability and recyclability, or lack thereof, of different fabrics and materials. Knowing or at least inquiring about how, where, and under what conditions a garment was produced made it easier to feel comfortable with a certain purchase and how to later dispose of the garment. It gave them a sense of reassurance that they had made a good decision.

Knowing one's personal style and what type of garments, colors, materials, etc., suited them and they felt comfortable with was also seen as an essential tool to become more sustainable in fashion. By educating themselves on these matters, the participants shared that they were simultaneously afforded skills and means useful to them in their sustainability quest. If they knew that a particular material or color did not suit them, they were less likely to buy those and thus could avoid miss-buys to occur. Similarly, having knowledge about materials' durability and environmental impact made purchasing items suitable for re-circulating easier. Many participants stated that they spend a lot of time researching materials, trending cuts, colors, and designers to ensure that the item they purchased had a high secondhand value prior to purchasing. Hence, developing one's fashion or consumer skills was thought to facilitate being sustainable as suggested by Fletcher (2012) and Tham (2015). In these situations, the potential disharmony felt by the oxymoron of sustainable fashion was

combated with behaviors that seemingly accommodated both needs sufficiently.

Having and applying these consumer skills and knowledge was expressed as something that the participants prided themselves on and a necessity to be a sustainable fashion consumer - making educated decisions required being fashion savvy and possessing general industry knowhow. However, being aware surpassed being recommendable and leaned more towards a minimum requirement and responsibility, particularly for the Urban MBA Mom and the Northern Maximalist who both emphasized informed decision-making as vital to sustainable consumption in general.

The Accountability Norm

When talking about sustainable disposition and the different phases of the consumption cycle, it became clear that the participants felt that they should take responsibility for how they chose to consume and that it was important to assume accountability for one's actions. Assuming accountability and responsibility seemed to run through the three previous guiding principles and be applied on both a collective and an individual level. This norm encompassed all phases of the consumption cycle and seemed to include everyone, businesses and consumers alike. Yet, skewed towards higher expectations on businesses and themselves. Many of them spoke of being sustainable as a lifestyle and an active life choice. It was a life they had committed to, they had no choice but to be as sustainable as they could be within their own capacity and with their means. They identified themselves as prioritizing sustainability, and both prided themselves and demanded that they take responsibility as consumers. "*We are voting with our wallets*", influencing companies and other consumers, was also

mentioned by the Urban MBA Mom, as one aspect of demonstrating and taking responsibility. As such, the participants expressed an awareness of their consumer agency (Fletcher, 2012; Shrivastava et al., 2021). When underlining the importance of this, they also seemed to be harsher on themselves than consumers in general. They held themselves to very high standards of what to do or not to do, much higher than they did for others, and appeared to suffer quite a lot when not living up to those standards. The burden of making up for the perceived unsustainability of fashion per se was particularly expressed by the Northern Maximalist, Urban MBA Mom and Spreadsheet Maximalist. The latter stated that even though they knew the limited extent to which textile recycling led to recycled materials being able to be used for other products, they still felt guilty if they decided to put a pair of old socks in the bin. The previously shown compassion for being sustainable within the means of oneself, as described in *Shame, Concern and Avoidance – the Not-So-Great Feelings*, appeared to not apply to themselves. The flipside of consumer agency and the power to be able to do something seemed to weigh heavy on some participants. When it came to making sustainable fashion choices, no one but you can ultimately do anything about what you choose to do; the responsibility to choose and do right thus falls on nobody other than you. In line with previous research, the freedom of choice was not enjoyed without some burden (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Clarke & Miller, 2002; Belk et al., 2003).

Assuming accountability for one's actions was not confined to consumers but applied to companies, governments, and other influential institutions within the fashion industry, such as fashion magazines, editors, writers,

models, and influencers. The compassion demonstrated for other consumers struggling to “do what was right” was often expressed in conjunction with claiming that companies were “not doing enough” on their end. They described a lack of relevant information and an overflow of dubious information provided by fashion companies which made decision-making difficult, e.g., companies branding items in their collections as a sustainable choice without displaying the criteria on which they could be considered sustainable or labeling a garment as made from reused materials and not clearly disclosing the percentage of recycled materials. The general consensus among the participants was that despite the opinion that consumers, in general, should take more responsibility for their actions, not all responsibilities could nor should be put on them.

The Accountability Norm also seemed to encompass more than their actual fashion consumption. Many participants also stated that they felt a sense of responsibility to be a role-model for others. During the interviews, they shared that they tried to “be the change they wanted to see in the world” and a positive force and inspiration to think and act more green. As all participants in this study were actively engaged on the platform Instagram, many stated that they aimed to influence people in their proximity by leading by example. The term “greenfluencer”, i.e. a combination of the words influencer and “being green” referencing an influencer endorsing sustainable behavior, was mentioned on more than one occasion as they described sharing their experiences of fashion and sustainability in general, and different modes of fashion disposal in particular. Just as it was their responsibility to dispose of clothes and fashion items in an according to them sustainable manner, preferably by

recirculating them, it seemed to be their responsibility to make their experiences known to guide others who might feel lost within the contrasting do's and don'ts of sustainable fashion. The selection criteria for the participants in this study make this a less than surprising finding as all shared a passion for circular fashion. Still, this references the recent democratization of fashion suggested by Fletcher (2012), Tham (2015), Bovone et al. (2016) and Koszewska (2019). However, the potential to influence others by sharing their thoughts and experiences did not seem to induce the same feeling of heaviness as other aspects of consumer agency but quite the opposite. Again, with the selection criteria in mind, this is not surprising yet worth mentioning as it contrasts the feelings expressed about other expressions of consumer agency.

Other Norms and Guiding Principles

Other guiding principles that appeared to be influential yet not distinctly expressed by all participants were ;

- a) a No Spending Norm, the less you spend on leisure consumption the better, leisure consumption such as fashion items are unnecessary.
- b) a Do Norm, it is better to do things than not, action is preferred over inaction
- c) a Kindness Norm, it is above all things the most important to be kind
- d) a Be True to Yourself Norm, you should always follow your values, political affiliations etc

For some participants, these norms ranked highly in relative importance in decision-making processes and greatly influenced their chosen disposition style. However, they also appeared to represent individual interpretation

and further developments of the other norms. E.g., participants emphasizing the importance of doing things expressed this as assuming accountability or minimizing leisure consumption was seen as being less wasteful with resources. As with the previously mentioned norms, the behavioral implications of these norms differed among the participants. Aiming to spend as little as possible on fashion consumption was used as an argument by participants demonstrating very different practical approaches. One opted for financial equilibrium when buying and selling clothes, and the other shopped exclusively second-hand in order to spend as little as possible from the beginning and most often swapped, gifted, or donated their clothes rather than selling them. The frequency with which they disposed of their clothes also differed vastly, yet as mentioned before, they were motivated by the same intention to avoid wastefulness. Furthermore, limiting spending could be interpreted as a variation of avoiding wastefulness in itself, i.e., not wasting financial resources. Hence, despite apparent influences on the disposition decision-making process for some participants individually of the latter four norms, their behavior and argumentation for it can be seen as interpretations of the four guiding principles they all had in common.

Discussion & Conclusions

Don'ts Guiding Do's

In line with previous research, the participants in this study too found sustainable fashion disposition to be a complex topic. The understanding of sustainable fashion disposal seemed related to the participants' understanding of what it meant to be a sustainable fashion consumer overall, i.e.,

through all phases of the consumption cycle. However, both sustainable fashion consumption and disposition had multiple different interpretations. There appeared to be no single definition or understanding of how exactly to be a sustainable fashion consumer among the participants, but rather many different ways that were considered *good enough*. Being sustainable was partially seen and described as a relative notion where one did what one could do within the means of one's resources and circumstances. Hence, the participants regarded sustainable fashion disposition to be many things depending on and determined by various factors, e.g., type and degree of obsolescence (Jacoby et al., 1977; Young Lee et al., 2013; Laitala, 2014; Shrivastava et al., 2021) and level of attachment (Albinsson & Perera, 2009; Mellander & Petersson McIntyre, 2020). Yet, what it is to be unsustainable in one's fashion consumption and disposition appeared less confusing. Fast Fashion, binning or throwing away clothes that had not reached absolute obsolescence, consuming *too much* or *too fast*, and non-recyclable or non-reusable fabrics were considered unsustainable. Consequently, these things were thus to be avoided if opting for sustainable fashion disposition. As such, the participants appeared to primarily understand and make sense of what sustainable fashion disposition *is* through the lens of what it *is not*.

To stay within the perimeter of acceptable behavior for sustainable fashion disposition and avoid being unsustainable, the participants appeared to follow a set of guiding principles rooted in their values which aided them in their understanding of sustainable fashion disposition. These guiding principles were almost expressed as rules or commandments simultaneously dictating and facilitating acting sustainable as it limited the

deemed appropriate options. The guiding principles left little to no choice but to act in alignment with one's values, thus reducing the likelihood of experiencing cognitive and emotional dissonance associated with fashion consumption in general as suggested by the works of Dittmar (1992), Ozcaglar-Toulouse (2007), and, Albinsson & Perera (2009). Following or applying these guiding principles gave them something to lean against while navigating the otherwise dubious field. Sustainable fashion disposal was understood as; not being wasteful or avoiding wastefulness at all cost (*the anti-wastefulness norm*), using the garments one had to their utmost potential and disposing of them if not in use (*the use norm*), and being knowledgeable about sustainability issues related to fashion consumption and keep developing one's understanding of said issues and measures to combat them (*the awareness obligation norm*), and to above all hold oneself accountable for one's actions (*the accountability norm*). Engaging in what they perceived as sustainable and appropriate behaviors enabled them to engage in fashion altogether. It served as a mental justification to combat the idea of fashion per se as inherently unsustainable. Aiming to be as sustainable as possible from their perspective eased the discomfort otherwise experienced in relation to fashion through all phases of the consumption cycle, i.e., being sustainable made them able to enjoy fashion.

Once being able to enjoy engaging in fashion in general by acting congruently with one's values, disposal too was experienced as an enjoyable and meaningful activity. The participants described the practical process of disposing of their clothes as fun and simple and something that was not perceived as difficult at all. This perceived simplicity seemed to be attributed to their well-

developed consumer skills. Their previous experiences and time spent exploring and educating themselves on alternative options for more sustainable and circular disposition methods made them more knowledgeable and comfortable when disposing of garments. When they had decided to let go of a garment, the participants depicted the overall disposition experience in positive terms. However, the process of getting to the actual letting go of an item, i.e., the decision-making process and detachment from a garment, did not appear as straightforward.

The Why Influences the How, and the Experience

How disposal and the process of getting rid of a garment were experienced seemed to be significantly influenced by why the particular garment was debated to be disposed of in the first place. If a garment had reached absolute obsolescence, it was perceived as relatively easy to dispose of in most cases and was commonly binned, thrown away, and on occasion recycled. Socks and hosiery with holes in them or worn-out underwear or running shoes were examples of such items, i.e., garments to which the participants, once the garment had reached absolute obsolescence, had a low level of attachment to. However, some participants expressed sadness and anxiety as they perceived textile recycling as not being an efficient enough option as of today and expressed a desire to be able to recycle more frequently. Hence, even when perceived and described as easy, disposal of clothes and fashion items was not completely relieved from discomfort. Disposing in a way where garments were not re-introduced to the market or the fashion system but discarded as waste was something that the participants aimed to avoid as much

as possible as it stood against their beliefs of what was the right thing to do, i.e., was not compliant with the guiding principles nor congruent with their values.

Garments that were described as "*just not me anymore*" i.e., garments that were subjected to relative obsolescence due to low levels of attachment or a broken *mine equals me* - bond, were also described as easy to let go of. Here the participants appeared to more or less only experience positive emotions. When they themselves did not feel drawn to the garment any longer, making sure that somebody else got the opportunity to enjoy it as they once had made them feel at peace and happy. They felt at peace or relieved from feelings of guilt since they had re-introduced the garment to another cycle and felt happy as they got to share their passion with someone else. Disposing of their once beloved garments was described as a meaningful experience. The positive experience seemed to surpass being enjoyable merely due to reduced emotional dissonance. Seeing that fashion was one of their primary interests or hobbies, finding spending time on it enjoyable might not be surprising. Yet, the many contractions and dilemmas expressed regarding how to do the right thing, i.e., dispose of their clothes without abandoning their beliefs about sustainability, enjoying the process of disposition is far from obvious.

The primary reasons for feeling guilty or sad when disposing of garments were either the garment being considered a so-called miss-buy or the level of attachment not matching the perceived relative obsolescence, e.g., garments that did not fit due to a change in body size yet still liked and seen as representative of oneself. For the miss-buys, the discomfort was related to a feeling of failure as the purchase of the garment was

thought to be wrong or unnecessary in the first place. The negative feelings towards a garment seemed to accumulate through the consumption phases, i.e., the discomfort associated with acquisition and wear or lack thereof, ultimately tinted the disposition experience. Miss-buys per se were seen as not in alignment with the guiding principles, thus a source of emotional and cognitive dissonance. For the garments suffering from a mismatch in attachment level and obsolescence, the discomfort seemed to stem from their ideals not aligning with their emotions. On a cognitive level and following the guiding principles, the item should be disposed of, but on an emotional level, they were not *ready* to do so; the *mine equals me* bond was not yet broken. Hence, getting rid of such a garment could be likened to disposing of a part of oneself (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981) which understandably, and apparently, was experienced as an uncomfortable process.

Research Contribution and Managerial Implications

The purpose of this paper has been to provide a nuanced description and in-depth insights into consumers' understanding and experience of sustainable fashion disposal. Through the accounts of the participants of this study, meanings and emotions both on a large and a more detailed scale have been presented. Thus, this paper has enriched the understanding of consumers' experiences of sustainable fashion disposal and as such fulfilled its purpose of providing rich descriptions from a consumer perspective. During the research process, how consumers interested in fashion make sense of how to dispose of clothes and other fashion items in a sustainable manner has been unveiled and

revealed insights worthy of further investigation for scholars and businesses.

Suggestions of Future Research Topics

Jacoby et al.'s (1977) Taxonomy of Voluntary Disposition seemed to provide a fitting lens for understanding how different variables can influence consumers' preferred disposal method. The model and its variables proved to be successful for the explanatory evaluation of performed actions. However, this study found the variables' ability to predict behavioral outcomes to be lacking. Participants who shared similar traits, i.e., personal characteristics, object characteristics, and situational or social factors (Jacoby et al., 1977) whose behavior arguably would be similar, in the end, chose differently when disposing of their garments. However, the Taxonomy of Voluntary Disposition (Jacoby et al., 1977) and its more recent applications (Young Lee et al., 2013; Laitala, 2014) do not claim to be a predictive model. Still, as the categories and variables appear to be a well-functioning descriptive tool, developing a more predictive model based on Jacoby et al.'s (1977) model would make a welcomed contribution to both academia and practice.

Another potential topic for future research could be to investigate the direction of the connection between the breaking of the *mine equals me* bond and perceived relative obsolescence. The accounts of the participants in this study suggest that for disposal of items that no longer were considered representative of themselves, e.g., as indicated by the expression "*it is not me anymore*," bond-breaking and obsolescence go hand in hand. It appeared that the bond needed to be broken for the garment to be considered obsolete and thus disposable for disposition. The

discomfort experienced when disposing of garments where *mine equals me* bond was not yet broken, i.e., the participants still expressed high levels of attachment towards a garment, appeared to increase and impede the decision-making process. As such, there seemed to be a correlating relationship between perceived relative obsolescence and breaking of the *mine equals me* bond. Exactly how they are related to each other and the direction of the correlation cannot be fully understood from the findings of this paper. Hence, exploring this topic from a more quantitative approach could deepen the understanding of sustainable fashion disposal and makes for an exciting topic for future research. Within the scope of this small-n qualitative study, it is not possible to accurately discern the direction of the relationship between the two. If the direction of the relationship would be known, this might increase the predictability of when a consumer will be ready to let something go. This information could prove to be valuable in designing new, more circular business models.

Suggestions for Business

One suggestion based on the findings of this study for businesses striving to become more circular is to draw on the experience of meaningfulness and to design services and product offerings with the whole consumption cycle in mind, as consumers already appear to take all steps into account. Matching the design to their understanding would arguably increase the likelihood of a higher success

rate among consumers who place value on sustainability and fashionability. Another one is to including the sense of meaningfulness in communication strategies could be beneficial as its positive connotations might make the service experience more enjoyable. For this group of consumers, a sustainable fashion disposal service offering does not need to be perceived as only quick and easy. Adding meaningfulness as a component in communication would potentially be received positively within such a target group.

Conclusion : Love and Let Go

To conclude, the findings of this study suggest that the participants' love for fashion made them act more sustainable in their disposal choices. Their *Love* for fashion and sustainability abled them to *Let Go*. Even of a beloved *old sweater*. It became a way for them to enjoy spending time and resources on fashion altogether. The potential contradiction between fashion and sustainability did not surpass the participants by but was very much felt and thought about through all phases of the consumption cycle. The overall experience, however, was both enjoyable and challenging; perhaps that is why it was also perceived as meaningful. As such, the findings of this study confirm its opening statement - if you love something, i.e., fashion and sustainability, you have to let it go, i.e., re-circulate clothes.

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Appendix

1. Interview Guide

Baseline information

- Your opinions, views, thoughts, reasoning, descriptions, your perspective.
- Of course, refrain from answering any question or deleting afterwards.
- We will start with a few questions about you and then move on to some definitions before we do a deep dive into circulating and disposing of clothes and fashion.

Participant description

- Who you are / and how would you describe yourself
- Working, living, family, etc
- How does it feel to be part of this study for you?
- Have you written an essay, degree project or similar yourself?

Definitions

- What does fashion mean to you, or how would you define fashion?
- How would you define sustainability and what does it mean for you. What is your relationship to the word?
- The combination, sustainable fashion? How do you define it and what does it mean for you?
- How would you describe / define circulating clothes?

Narrative

- how would you describe your interest for fashion
- When did you become interested in fashion / clothes
- How come you think you're interested in fashion?
- What attracted you to fashion, style and clothing and how has it evolved over time?
- When did sustainability // circulation come into the picture
- What is your relationship to your clothes? Relation to the garments / fashion? How would you describe it?
- Why do you circulate your garments?
- Do you like it and if so, what do you like about it?
- Can you discern any crucial events or insights that made you more circular in your fashion practice?
- What do you do when you get rid of clothes? What does it typically look like? An example
- How would you describe a successful disposal and how / what do you do to make it so?
- What is it that determines / influences the decision to continue circulating a garment?
- How does it feel, what feelings or thoughts come up?
- What do you think are important qualities you as a consumer need to have to circulate more? What do you think is causing you to cross the threshold? Circumstances, motivation, obstacles?
- When are you not circulating? Why? (type of garment occasion etc?)
- Under what circumstances do you find it harder or easier to get rid of clothes?
- Why do you think many people find it difficult to circulate their clothes to a greater extent, if you do?
- Can you recognize yourself in such thought experiences? Have you gone through / had them yourself at any time?
- how did you come over these thoughts and emotions or how do you deal with them if you had them?

- Is there anything else you would like to add in addition to what we have talked about so far?
- Is there a question you thought I would definitely ask but did not?

2. Participant communication

Participant invitation

Hello :)

Hope everything is alright with you this Midsummer!

I'm getting in touch with you with a request to participate as a participant in a study about sustainable fashion consumption and circular consumption patterns, which will be a part of my Master's dissertation in Marketing and Consumption at the Gothenburg School of Business Economics and Law.

I have been following you for a while here on Instagram and I think that your thoughts and experiences would really contribute with an interesting perspective, not only to my dissertation but to the field of research in general as well.

The dissertation is centered around circular fashion consumption and the focus will mainly be on the later steps in the consumption circle, namely disposal. So, how to get rid of clothes and above all, how it is experienced by both fashion and sustainability-interested consumers - which I gather you might sign up to be! A sustainable fashionista, sort of ;)

The purpose of the project is to try to reflect an in-depth and nuanced picture of how the disposal of clothing and fashion is experienced by the consumers who are at the forefront of, and are already involved in, various forms of, circular and sustainable fashion consumption. In the end, I hope that the dissertation will be able to provide an insight into how disposal is experienced from your perspective quite simply. Memories, experiences, challenges, emotions, thoughts, norms, practical procedures and everything in between. The whole spectrum of how exactly you experience and understand the complex phenomenon of circular and sustainable fashion disposal.

If you feel that it would be fun to participate, I would be happy to send more detailed info about the study. I understand that of course you have a lot of other things in life and probably full up so feel no pressure, but as I said, I think your perspective would enrich the investigation!

Have a nice day :)
Camilla Sternhufvud
camilla.sternhufvud@gmail.com

@picapicamemoirs

Confirmation Email

Hi XXXX,

How fun that you would like to participate in this study - thank you very much!

As I wrote last time, this study will form the basis for my Master Thesis in Marketing and Consumption at the Gothenburg School of Business Economics and Law. The project as a is part of my final examination and will, if all goes well, be completed by the turn of the year. The thesis will ultimately be presented in an article form, which you of course will be able to read if you want!

As a participant you and I will meet for an interview via Zoom, Meet, FaceTime or similar in about 40-60 minutes which will be recorded. I will use my computer's internal recording equipment and save the interview on an external hard drive, so the video file will only be visible to me and not published. The interview will be transcribed and the text will then be shared with you in case you want to delete or add something. The interview itself will be more like a conversation where I will ask some questions but you will have the opportunity to speak freely and share what is important to you regarding various topics related to the disposal of clothes. Given the project's time frame, my hope is that we can schedule a time for the interview during July-August.

Your participation will be anonymous and you can withdraw any part of what you have communicated at any time or cancel participation completely as it is of course completely voluntary! All recorded material will, as I said, only be seen by me and saved separately, ie not in the cloud, and is mainly there to help me during the analysis process. When the dissertation is finished, I will delete all recordings, but save all transcripts. For the sake of formalia, here is a quick repetition of the purpose of the project.

The study's main focus is on the later steps in the consumption circle, namely disposal. Disposals have not previously received as much attention compared to, for example, acquisitions in business economics research. With circular fashion consumption as a starting point, the purpose of the project is to try to provide in-depth insights and a nuanced picture of how the disposal of clothing and fashion is experienced by the consumers who are at the forefront of, and are already involved in, various forms of circular and sustainable fashion consumption. Adopting an explicit consumer perspective on sustainable disposition is also relatively unexplored. Here, I believe that your experiences and your perspective could really contribute to valuable insights.

I look forward to meeting you and hearing your thoughts!

Take care for now,
Camilla Sternhufvud