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Is It Really Me? The Influences on Clothing Choices by Women Indifferent to Fashion

Philippa Crommentuijn-Marsh, Claudia Eckert, Stephen Potter and Sandy Black

Abstract

There is a widespread perception in contemporary society that women love fashion and shopping and are very conscious about how others perceive them. This paper reports on a study which analyzed the clothing choices of ten mothers, who ranged in age from the mid-twenties to mid-sixties. Fashion, in particular fast fashion, is often regarded as being the dominant influence in a woman's choice of clothing, however this

Philippa Crommentuijn-Marsh was a post-doctoral researcher at the Open University. This paper derives from her PhD which focused on clothing purchasing and consumption by ordinary women and studied their awareness of

study revealed a very different picture, where social identity, practicality and their own individual style played an important role. Implicit and explicit influences on their clothing choices were analyzed and their clothing needs were discussed with reference to both Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Max-Neef's Universal Human Needs. The paper concludes that further research on a more "needs based" analysis of clothing behavior is required, as this area is under-researched.

KEYWORDS: clothing needs, influences, fashion, consumers, women

1. Introduction

Women's identity and their relationship to fashion have been extensively debated, but there has been far less scrutiny of the ways in which women relate to and experience clothes in their everyday lives (Klepp and Bjerck 2014; Buckley and Clark 2017). Fashion as the ever- changing expression of our culture is distinct from the "fashion system": the clothes on offer and the way they are produced and sold (Entwistle 2000). The fashion system defines the latest aesthetic, helps to shape trends and tastes that structure our experience of clothing in daily life. The fashion system is often described as a pyramid, with haute couture at the top, prêt-à-porter and diffusion lines in the middle and High Street fashion at the bottom (e.g. Doeringer and Crean 2006). The High Street offers ranges from high quality affordable (mid-priced) clothes from multiple-store brands to the cheapest of mass-produced fast fashion from mainstream global brands. Fast fashion is driven by catwalk styles, and celebrity looks (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2010). The importance of fast fashion for some young consumers is well recognized (McNeill and Moore 2015), however the role fashion in general plays for adult women is less clear. Most studies of fashion consumers have focussed on college students (Kozar and Hiller Connell 2015), and have in particular, neglected studying older women (Twigg 2007). This paper reports on the findings of the in-depth study of the clothing behavior of 10 women between 25 and 65, who were mothers and were not in full time employment. While none of the women stood out as "unfashionable", all proclaimed their indifference to fashion and lack of interest in the newest fashion trends. The paper takes the lens of clothing needs with reference to both Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Max-Neef's Universal Human Needs, to analyze what factors influence their clothing choices, both in terms of purchasing and keeping clothes.

Consciously or unconsciously, fashion is used to communicate and challenge social status, class and gender (Barnard 2002). Not following fashion can also be a personal statement. The identification with and active participation in face-to-face social groups involves the human body and its adornment and clothing (Polhemus and Procter 1978). Everyday clothing reveals an ongoing engagement with fashion from the

sustainability and the sustainability of their behavior. Her ethnographically inspired research took the form of case studies to study the participants' behavior in detail. Interests include all aspects of sustainable fashion but particularly the consumer viewpoint and clothing consumption.

Claudia Eckert is Professor of Design at the Open University in the School of Engineering and Innovation. Her main research interest lies in understanding and supporting the design processes of complex products through the development of tools and methods. She has a long-standing interest in fashion design processes and sustainable fashion, where the study of consumers gives her a unique insight into the factors and that affect people's behaviors regarding the objects they own and how they maintain and replace them. claudia.eckert@open.ac.uk

Stephen Potter is Emeritus Professor of Transport at the Open University in the School of Engineering and Innovation. His research includes exploring the human and institutional aspects of transport innovation and of the environmental impacts of product design and development. He has participated in several research projects on transport innovations in partnership with Milton Keynes City Council, operators and commercial businesses including the Milton Keynes *Plugged in Places* programme and *MK:Smart*.

Sandy Black is Professor of Fashion and Textile Design and Technology at London College of Fashion (LCF), University of the Arts London. As a practitioner, author and researcher, she is a founder member of LCF's Center for Sustainable Fashion and has published pioneering texts on sustainable fashion. Her research explores the role of design entrepreneurship in sustainable fashion business models, working with innovative values-led enterprises that integrate sustainability and social justice principles throughout their operations.

extraordinary to the ordinary, even though ordinary clothing tends to be commonplace and remains unnoticed (Buckley and Clark 2017).

Whist the extraordinariness of high fashion is highly publicized, surprisingly little is known about ordinary clothing behavior. This has only recently been addressed in ethnographic studies around the notion of the biographical wardrobe. Woodward (2007) reflected on how fashion was linked to individuals' personal biographies, to trace their lives in terms of their particular "look". Skjold (2016) found that participants developed specific taste patterns for shapes, colors, fabrics in their youth which then were refined over the years. Both studies demonstrated that while the prevailing fashion trends may date a particular style or look, complex factors linked to an individual's self and identity played a bigger role in their clothing choices. This paper adds to the growing body of knowledge by arguing that some women select their clothes based on the needs of the situations they find themselves in and their convenience and personal preferences with little regard to fashion. The data on shopping and clothing behavior was gathered primarily from a wardrobe sampling task which investigated T-shirts and jeans as everyday clothing along with a special item in the participants' wardrobes, observations during shopping trips and a concluding interview.

Following the Literature Review and Methodology sections, the data gathered from the 10 participants is analyzed from three perspectives: the first examines the influences on clothing when the participants were younger; the second concentrates on their current circumstances. Finally, their personal style is discussed alongside Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

2. Literature Review

This literature review starts with a brief introduction to different classifications of need before it discusses the role of fashion in the lives of fashion consumers and the influences on the selection of clothing.

2.1. Fashion and need

According to Flugel's (1930) seminal work clothes serve three purposes: decoration, modesty, and protection, with decoration as the primary purpose. The marketing community, such as Solomon and Rabolt (2004), have argued that clothing can satisfy needs on different levels. A well-known and widely used theory of need from motivational theory in psychology is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) (see Figure 1). Basic human needs are finite, few and universal (Jackson 2005) and once needs are fulfilled on a lower level, progression can take place to the next higher level. Potentially, clothing can fulfill needs at all levels of this hierarchy. Manfred Max-Neef (1991) categorized universal human needs into two broad categories:

- Physical or material needs, which are subsistence and protection.
- Psychological (non-material) needs, which are affection, understanding, participation, creation, recreation, identity, and freedom.

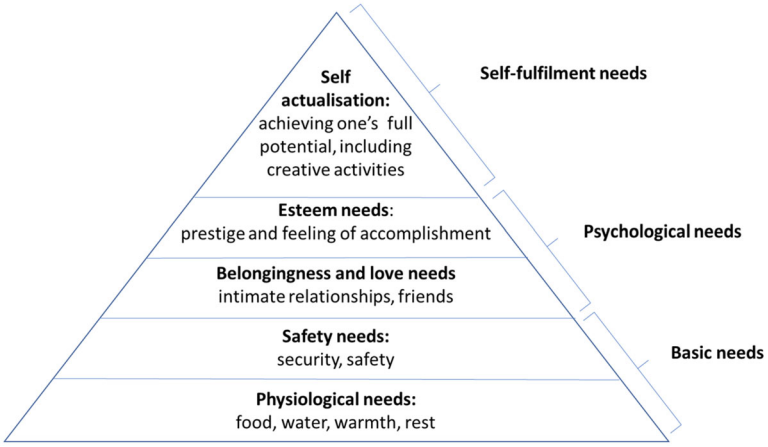

Figure 1
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow 1943).

2.2. Fashion

From the 1970s the media, such as newspapers, magazines, film, music and photography, have increased the commodification of fashion in everyday lives (Buckley and Clark 2017). However, today bloggers and social media offer the potential for empowerment through fashion, but also introduce new ways of influencing fashion consumers (Rocamora 2017).

Fashion plays an important role in building an individual's identity, participation in social groups and class, as well as individuality and differentiation from others (Niinimäki 2010). Clothing choices are motivated by the need for identity (Max-Neef 1991) and esteem (Maslow 1943; Harris, Roby, and Dibb 2016). Fashion and materialism are used to satisfy psychological needs but Fletcher (2008) cautions that consuming materials gives a false sense of satisfying these needs and does not provide the happiness people seek.

Fashion influences not only what type of clothing is sold but also attitudes and taste (Klepp and Storm-Mathisen 2005). For some individuals, the peer group will dominate their identity. Younger people tend to demonstrate a higher degree of fashion involvement than older people (O'Cass 2004). Fashion is important to teenagers, who see it as a means of presenting an age-appropriate view of the future, social interests, social status, and role, and failure to follow fashion trends as indicative of a lack of popularity and of low social status in the peer group (Klepp and Storm-Mathisen 2005). Style gives meaning, validation and coherence to teenage girls' group identity defining who is part of a group (Abbot and Sapsford 2001).

The choice in clothing is also influenced by self- identity, as first impressions are formed by clothing (Flugel 1930, 15). Fashion consumption needs to be understood in the context of a person's physical and

mental self, since garments are worn "physically" for functional reasons (warmth, protection) and are also worn for emotional enhancement (Evans 1989). The mode of dress forms an integral link between individual identity and the body (Entwistle 2016). Individuals have a natural propensity to imitate each other (Simmel 1957) to adapt to the social group while having a desire to differentiate themselves from the crowd. Fashion is a battleground between these two tendencies (Belk 1988). This is the paradox which Barnard (2002, 12) points out when he writes that we want to look like our friends but not to be clones. This manifests itself by a person falling in with mainstream fashion or by joining the fashion style of a particular subgroup, such as Goths (Abbot and Sapsford 2001). Individuals use fashion to create their own socially constructed identities out of the plethora of styles offered within the fashion system (Buckley and Clark 2017). When individuals agree to identify with a particular social group, they accept that group's ideas about what constitutes respectable appropriate attire (Polhemus and Procter 1978). Yet clothing remains deeply personal. DeLong, Heinemann, and Reiley (2005) found that women wore vintage clothing in different ensembles to satisfy personal desires, needs and motivation, and creating and recognizing a specific image of themselves.

2.3. Influences on the choice of clothing

Clothing choices are influenced by the situation in which we find ourselves and our often-tacit understanding of what is and is not appropriate under the circumstances. Social space is a crucial aspect of our experience of the dressed body, as we dress with an implicit understanding of the rules and norms of particular social spaces (Entwistle 2000). Based on ethnographic studies of shopping, Clarke and Miller (2002) argue that the larger social context determines clothing choices and that anxiety about potential social embarrassment determines the selection of which garments to wear, with anxiety as the dominant emotion. For women, dressing up in public spaces is an important part of their social identity and public image (Appleford 2016). Social identity is expressed through clothing in all aspects of life:

- Work: In some work roles, individuals have no choice over what they can wear. For example, hospital uniforms indicate or define the role of an individual (Barnard 2002). Corporate or institutional management regularly mandates the style of dress in the workplace. Clothing is part of an individual's work persona (Giddens 1991). Women often see work as performing a specific social role, which is not part of their core identity, and consequently keep specific garments to be worn for work only (Woodward 2007).
- Social life: Whilst individuals may dress unreflexively some of the time, such as to do the grocery shopping, at other times they are

more thoughtful in their dress as in selecting an outfit for a wedding (Entwistle 2000; Woodward 2007). Choosing what to wear can be difficult, when there are uncertainties as to what is acceptable attire. For example Clarke and Miller (2002) explain that black fashionwear is understood to be less individualizing than some alternative choice, so that wearers feel more secure in their sense of the approval of others.

- Family: Family relationships, particularly mother-daughter relationships, affect clothing choices (Clarke and Miller 2002; Woodward 2007). Appleford (2014) found that women trusted the opinions of their mothers and posited that women may be more willing to accept their mother's comments and vice versa, because they share the same fashion capital and fashion habitus, and therefore the same perspective of what "looks good".
- Culture was also an important part of an individual's identity expressed through clothing. Woodward's (2007) ethnography of women's wardrobes found that for some participants there were clothes from their former selves, part of their biography which included cultural influences from their ethnic background.

2.4. The changing patterns of consumption of clothing as women age

How women choose clothing gives a picture of their priorities. The main criteria for garment selection for female shoppers are style followed by price (Ritch and Schröder 2012). Esthetics (i.e. style, color and pattern, fabric and appearance) is important for women when choosing their clothing (Eckman, Damhorst, and Kadolph 1990) as well as to a lesser extent construction, fabric and color, in that order (Abraham-Murali and Littrell 1995). As women become older they have a better understanding of what they want and what suits them and are better able to recognize quality. Klepp and Storm-Mathisen (2005) found that for women aged between 35 and 46 their own style, what suited them, and comfort were more important than fashion. This correlates to one of Birtwistle and Tsim's (2005) findings on clothing and the mature woman of over 45, where quality was key, and factors such as styling and comfort were highly rated.

Their clothing choices are influenced by body changes. Motherhood can have an important effect on how women engage with fashion, because of the way in which it alters body shape and perceptions of appropriate dress (Appleford 2014). Entwistle (2000) suggests that comfort is a person's "normal" experience of dress and that comfortable clothing becomes an extension of the body like a second skin, not noticeable to the wearer. Sometimes certain styles appeal more to individuals, for example the looser clothes of the sixties that are freer and easier to wear than earlier fashion (Buckley and Clark 2017).

People's wardrobes come full circle as they reach retirement age, when they typically stop wearing professional clothing and start wearing casual comfortable clothing, similar to when they were young children (Solomon and Rabolt 2004; Yurchisin and Johnson 2010; Arnould, Price, and Zinkhan 2004). Physical changes to the body occur at this point and into old age frailty can also mean that it "becomes increasingly difficult to remain part of mainstream culture with respect to clothes" (Twigg 2007, 291), however "older people are able to use clothing to resist or redefine the dominant meanings of age" (Twigg 2007, 285). Strong societal notions exist around what clothing is appropriate or inappropriate for people of certain ages, pushing older woman toward more sober, less revealing and less attention-grabbing clothes (Twigg 2013).

3. Study Methodology

This analysis was carried out as part of a study into the understanding and attitude to sustainability in clothing (Crommentuijn-Marsh 2017), which aimed to capture current behavior in the selecting, wearing and disposing of clothes. While the overall study revealed that the participants had little awareness of sustainability, they displayed sustainable behavior which resulted from the attitudes and behaviors described in this paper.

An ethnographically informed approach was adopted utilizing mixed methods, and this paper focuses on the qualitative data generated. After the initial recruitment of the participants, the study followed a three-step approach, as illustrated in Figure 2. The results were fed back to the participants and discussed with them through two feedback sessions with about half of the participants each time.

The shopping trip was carried out by the first author with each participant. Observations were audio recorded on a mobile phone during the trip. Depending on the participants preference the shopping trips were either online or physical. The shopping trips lasted between 1 hours and 3 hours shopping time. After five participants the number of trips was reduced from 2 to 1 as the second trips had yielded little additional insights. Before the first trip the participants talked about their usual shopping behavior. They were encouraged not to deviate from their habitual behavior.

The wardrobe sample consisted of an informal discussion around a T-shirt, a pair of jeans and a special garment selected by the participant and recorded through field notes. The interviews were conducted by the first and second authors and consisted of three parts: a semi structured interview about the shopping behavior, a structured interview following through sustainability questionnaires and a semi-structured interview on sustainability in clothes. These were recorded, transcribed, thematically coded by the first author and discussed amongst the authors. This paper

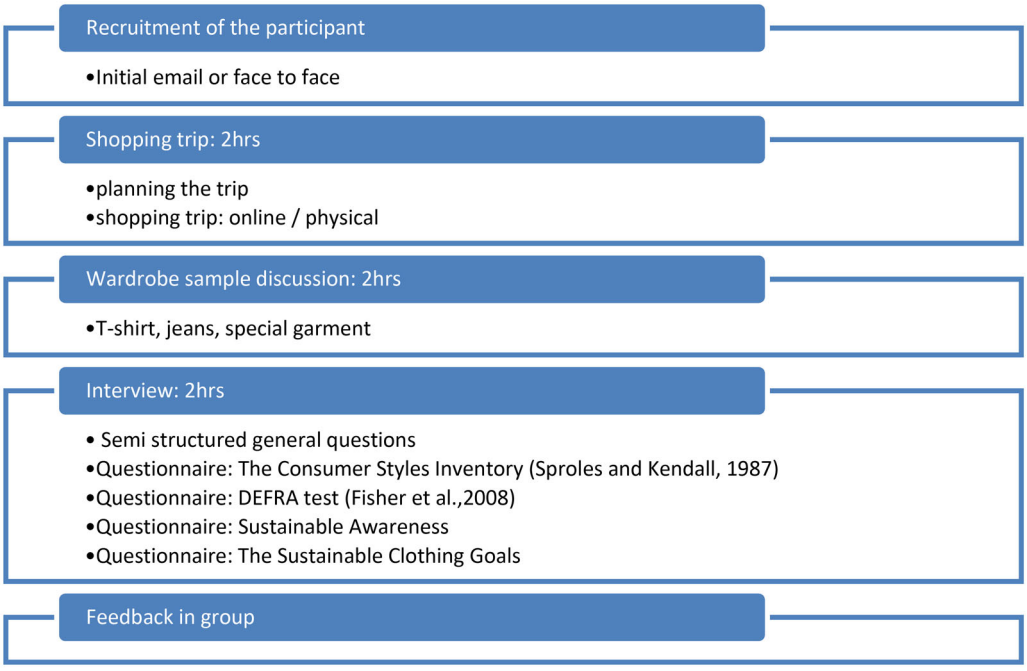

Figure 2
Overview of the methodology.

Table 1. Overview of the participants.

Code	Name	Married/ Partner	Children	Employed	Age	Degree	Shopping trip
A	Ali	Yes	1	Part Time	25	yes	City Center/Online
K	Kathy	No	3	Freelance	42	yes	City Center/Online
M	Maria	Yes	1	no	33	yes	Local Shopping Center/Online
X	Xandra	Yes	2	Small business owner	34	yes	City Center/Online
C	Cara	No	2	Part Time	38	yes	City Center/Supermarket
Sm	Sam	Yes	2	Retired	62	yes	Designer Outlet
Ss	Sasha	Yes	5	Freelance	44	yes	City Center
P	Philomena	Yes	3	Freelance	44	no	Out of Town Shopping Center
G	Gisela	Yes	1	Part Time	51	yes	Online
J	Jill	Yes	2	no	41	yes	Online

draws on the data from the shopping trips and wardrobe sample and analysis of their clothing habits from the interview.

3.1. The participants

This study targeted women who were all mothers. They ranged from 25 years to 62 years (see Table 1) with an average of 41 years. The recruitment of participants used convenience sampling (Bryman 2012, 201) of

friends of friends the first author had made in parent-child groups, identified through snowballing in the city of Leicester. Following an ethnographic tradition, a rapport was built with the participants for them to feel comfortable leading to what Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) would describe as unsolicited oral accounts about aspects of their clothing consumption. Going on shopping trips with the participants and discussing their wardrobe helped the first author to build personal relationships with the participants. Table 1 gives an overview of the participants (the names are altered). The transcripts are referred to by the code of the participant and the phase of the study.

The participants viewed themselves primarily as mothers and caregivers. Most participants were graduates but none of them were in full-time work. The study did not ask for income or class identity, however the participants gave indications. In particular, the shopping trips revealed relative income and attitude to spending and the family homes visited for the wardrobe audit and the interviews indicated the attitudes and rationale for spending.

3.2. The analysis

All activities were recorded, with the participants' responses transcribed in full followed by data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing (Miles and Hubermann 1994). The analyses of the transcripts followed a thematic approach by coding recurring themes, categorizing them for later retrieval and theory-building (Lapadat 2010). The coding was then clustered into major themes to write the narrative as advised by Cresswell (2013).

The focus is on reporting what the participants said about their clothes with the emphasis being on what Skjold (2016) terms as "the ordinary" or every day.

4. Resonances from the former selves

Many of the interviewees' attitudes to clothing formed during their teenage years and young adulthood, however behaviors also change over time. For most of the participants fashion had played a big part in their lives when they were young. This is perhaps no surprise, given that younger people tend to be more interested in fashion (O'Cass 2004). The influences of their former selves persist, in some cases as an unconscious bias and in others as a conscious rejection.

4.1. Their teenage selves

The participants looked back on their younger selves with a sense of detached bemusement. This was exemplified by Jill, who described how when she was younger, she and her friends would buy whatever was fashionable that week and go out wearing very little. Their style was

"tiny weeny little dresses and mini-skirts" (J3). At this stage in her life, Jill used to be very concerned about her image and was self-conscious. Her style reflected their group identity, defining who is part of the group and who is external to the group (see Abbot and Sapsford 2001; Ayman and Kaya 2014).

Like Jill, Cara also questioned her tastes and habits in retrospect. She went to reggae parties as a teenager and recalled what she used to wear:

> *It was … basically trousers and a top but the trousers had big holes in. So it was like those fishnets. The holes were all around, I had shorts underneath and I had this top, with these big holes and just a bra. (C3)*

While her outfit was influenced by her peer group and the fashion that they followed, she reported wearing the outfit as her own choice as part of her identity, even when it was not particularly appropriate.

According to Abbot and Sapsford (2001), young women fall into two distinct groups, the "trendies" who follow fashion, and the "alternatives" who tend to rebel against what they see as a popular youth culture. In youth fashion there is a relationship between clothes and musical taste (Abbot and Sapsford 2001). For example, Maria would fall into the alternative category. She admitted that she used to be "*stroppy*" and was influenced then by the TV, music, and bands such as The Cure and The Smiths. In a later phase she adopted the vintage/retro look that still influences her current personal style.

Several participants acknowledge the influence of their mothers (see Appleford 2014), both as a role model and a figure to rebel against. Sam's mother bought her clothing, but looking back she feels her clothes were rather old-fashioned. Sam commented that fashion has never bothered her. She reacted against fashion and did not wear miniskirts, but admitted that she never had the figure for miniskirts. Kathy claimed as a teenager her biggest influence was also her mother, however she tried to induce Kathy to be more fashionable, which Kathy actively resisted.

4.2. Cultural influences

Cultural background also played an important role in clothes choices of some of the participants. Kathy has an American–Israeli background and Xandra is from Colombia. All were living in the UK because of their spouses' careers. Cara, though born and raised in Leicester, is influenced by her Afro-Caribbean roots, especially in terms of her hairstyle and hair covering as she describes it, *"what black women can relate to"* (C4) (see also Boris 2017). How Cara's hair looks plays a big role in determining what she wears and affects her mood. Maria, having grown up in California, was used to lighter weight fabrics, shorter sleeves and sandals. Her style was also affected by having lived in France for a while, as she feels that women there are more "*dressed up*"

and "*tend to be a lot more put together*". Xandra, coming from South America, was used to wearing the same type of clothing all year round. Xandra still has strong cultural influences on the way she dresses.

> I think we are more vain in Latin America in general and we are more about beauty and about the body because as the weather helped you to dress differently and expose a little bit more so. (X4)

Gisela has always had a strong sense of wanting to be a bit different from everybody else. She grew up with a German mother, has an unusual name and was made to wear a "Dirndl" (a traditional German folk costume) as a child.

4.3. Former work roles

Motherhood had a big impact on the working lives of all the participants. None continued in their full-time careers. Some had casual part time jobs, but none were in full time employment. Only Gisela, who has only one now older late child, had a permanent job in university administration. In their former professional roles, some of the participants had work personas, as acknowledged by Appleford (2016). For example, Cara commented that in her previous role of Diversity Officer, she used to wear smart pencil skirts and blouses to cultivate an impression that she was "*someone not to be messed with*".

Jill described that she put on a "performance" at work to be taken seriously (see also Giddens 1991) as illustrated in the following quote:

> The sort of clothing that didn't necessary reflect what I would wear now. I must have looked very serious, or even scary. I was obviously, trying to convey … that impression of myself, … So, I decided that even if I did go back to work they weren't really me any more so,. I used to wear a lot of black and now I just find it's a bit sombre so perhaps my taste has changed as well. (J3)

Jill disposed of her work clothes, which reflects not only her decision to close the chapter on her professional life but demonstrates the fluidity of clothing styles. She saw black as a suitable color for work, partly because it was a conventional color but also because it could be worn with other colors. She did not conceptualize this as a change in fashion in colors, rather than a change in personal preference.

Philomena commented that when she was in her 20s she had a customer facing work role and high disposable income, and spent large amounts of money on clothing, but looks back on this as a kind of youthful frivolity. However, this kind of behavior had been rare amongst the participants.

Belk (1988) posits that consumers shed or neglect possessions when these no longer fit consumers' ideal self-images, because the self-image has changed. In this sense the participants moved away from sober working clothes to brighter colors.

5. Current Circumstances

The life circumstances of most people involve different roles and situations for which they need appropriate clothing. The participants had multiple roles such as mother, home maker or professional. Clothes are a powerful signal to themselves and others that they are adopting different personas for these roles.

5.1. Functional clothes for ordinary life

The participants saw jeans and T-shirts as utilitarian items to which they had little emotional attachment. One participant had a T-shirt of a favorite band she cherished. Another commented on the T-shirt matching a more important item, a long shirt. Others mainly wore T-shirts under other garments. As exemplified by Philomena's comment, they saw T-shirts as transitory:

> I don't keep things for long, particularly t-shirts and stuff, I wear them perhaps for a year on and off and then they go. (P3)

Jeans have their roots in working attire and are now the most ubiquitous garment in the world (Miller and Woodward 2007), ordinary and easy to purchase (Miller 2015). All but one participant owned jeans. For most of the participants jeans are functional everyday garments, as summed up by Kathy:

> I wear them daily, pretty much mostly. So I go through quite a few, they're a real practical buy for me. (K1)

Participants favored jeans as comfortable and practical for all spheres of their life and they valued comfort above other properties of jeans, e.g. *"they are the most comfortable jeans you will ever wear"* (Sm2) or *"Comfort is the main thing, if something doesn't look comfortable then I don't even look at it"* (K3).

As jeans age, they become more comfortable as they mold to the shape of the wearer (Woodward 2007). The participants kept their jeans until they wore out. As the jeans wore out, they were downgraded, e.g. for gardening. Several participants commented on replacing worn out jeans with identical ones, for example in Kathy's case by looking for them on eBay.

Miller and Woodward (2007) argue that jeans are habitual clothing, i.e. clothing that woman know how to wear through wearing them all

the time. Irrespective of women's social positioning or background woman have items of clothing that are "easy", "safe" and practical for participants' day to day living. Some, as Philomena and Maria, have several pairs of jeans, for everyday wear and more special occasions.

Many of the participants commented that jeans were "practical" for their day to day lives, which included for Maria, breastfeeding and for most of the others, playing on the floor with a toddler.

5.2. Current professional wardrobes

Most participants had casual part time work or no employment, but those who did had specific work clothing. This complied with external criteria and expectations but did not necessarily reflect their core identity (Woodward 2007). Gisela, who worked at a university, and Ali, who worked in a school, had to comply with tacit or not so tacit dress codes. Ali described this:

> It's kind of universally understood rule that of you know, no denim, not even cords, things like that, you have to be quite smart. (A3)

Ali's work clothes have smart collars and are rather conservative. For Ali, it is a type of mind-set: dressing smartly for work means that she is viewed as a professional by others and herself. Gisela's place of work did not seem to have a formal dress code. She conformed to a dress norm that derives from unspoken, implicitly understood knowledge about how people should look (Freeburg and Workman 2010).

6. Identity

All the participants wore contemporary clothes and none of them would have been noteworthy as wearing unfashionable clothes, but all claimed not to be interested in fashion. Yet despite their disinterest in fashion, their appearance was obviously important to them – mixing new and old items from their wardrobe to achieve their preferred style.

6.1. Attitude to fashion

The participants claimed that fashion was not very important to them and had limited appeal for them. For example, none of them read fashion magazines. In all shopping trips, the focus was very much on what the participant felt was a "lack" in their wardrobes, whether it was a garment to replace a worn out, a garment to wear with others or a garment for a specific purpose such as holiday.

Various participants commented during the shopping trips that the clothes they saw in their customary shops did not particularly appeal to them. Jill openly felt that the clothing market did not cater for her:

> I do feel that there is a slight gap perhaps in the market … for my age group, I sometimes wonder where to go, I just shop where I think that there might be something that I like. (J3)

Gisela, Jill, Maria and Philomena saw the influence of fashion to a certain extent. They noticed prevalent trends, which they more and less liked, but did not feel obliged to embrace. This indicates an influence by the fashion system rather than specific fashions or trend setters.

> I think it always comes up in hindsight, in the moment I think oh I'm not too trendy, um, at the moment I'm just sort of wearing kind of, what's out there, and then I look back at photos and think, wow that really does look like the nineties! (laughter). (M4)

However, although their clothing choices may have been within the predominant fashion system (Entwistle 2000), personal style emerged as a key choice determinant. Though influenced by individual choice, social group and time period have a homogenizing effect (Twigg 2007).

6.2. Influences on their clothing choices

In terms of implicit and explicit forces that influenced participants, no-one mentioned advertising or marketing. Over recent years social media has also become a major influencing factor (see Buckley and Clark 2017; Rocamora 2017). However, this did not feature strongly in the narratives of the participants. Friends, family, opinion leaders, and media play an important role (Workman and Cho 2013) as well as social structures, kinship groups, gender and social class influence an individual's choice of dress (Roach-Higgins and Eicher 1992, 16).

The participants indicated little conscious influence from the media. Their peer groups and partners play a greater role. Only Ali, the youngest participant, reflected about the subconscious influence by the social norms of fashion:

> I do … like looking at pretty pictures and stuff and Instagram, … … But I can't remember a time that I've ever gone, oh I really love your outfit, where's it from I must buy everything that you've got on! But of course, external influences definitely, I think …, in daily life it would be impossible not to be influenced. (A4)

No-one except Xandra mentioned wanting to feel "feminine". According to Craik (2009), femininity is intimately bound up with fashion as females contrive to create a certain look that becomes the object of the normatively male gaze. Male partners and husbands of the participants were not openly acknowledged to have had much influence over what they wore, except for Kathy. She is now divorced, and notes that her ex-husband wanted her to be more feminine, to wear pretty shoes

and stylish clothing, all of which she refused to do. Most of the participants were in a stable relationship, and none commented on looking for a partner. Looking sexy did not concern them, even though clothes can be an expression of sexuality (Twigg 2007).

7. Personal Style

Individual identity and the body are integrally linked in terms of clothing consumption (Entwistle 2016). According to Stacey (2006), style can be defined in terms of subgroups of objects that are perceptually similar and preferential style as the propensity to choose objects with stylistic characteristics. All the participants had reached a point in life where they know what they like or what suited them: "*When you were younger you tried different styles more whereas now styles now are pretty much the same*" (J2).

7.1. Style labels

The participants described their style in different ways. For example, Cara's clothing style showed off her well-toned body, of which she is very proud and relied on as a dance teacher. However, she described it in terms of items she liked, such as tight jackets or leopard prints. Whereas others were more reflective and used labels, such as "mods" (Maria), "rock chick" (Amy) or 1940s vintage (Gisela) to describe the style of the clothes they choose for socializing. While to an outside observer each of the participants had a consistent personal style, Sam and Jill commented that they "*had not found their style*". They knew what they liked but had no convenient label. As explained in section 3.1, Jill had followed fashion as a younger woman to fit in with her peer group and Sam had been strongly influenced by her mother.

Stylistic preferences persist regardless of fashion trends (Skjold 2016). Equally within fashion, certain garments, shapes, fabrics and styles persist and are re-circulated and reframed within different contexts (Buckley and Clark 2017, 15). From their shopping behavior it was evident that the participants had styles that they favored. Their preferred style acted as a filter. They actively searched for certain styles and ignored other entire categories of clothing.

7.2. Color

Style manifested strongly in color preferences. For example, Ali stated:

> Since I was a kid, I've always worn black. I wouldn't say it was like a sub-culture thing or a goth thing. It was more just I really liked wearing black and… if you buy everything in the same colour then everything goes with everything. (A3)

Others also had a range of preferred colors that they used as a filter to handle the overwhelming choice in shops and to coordinate their wardrobe. They liked both colors that suited them and neutral colors that go with these core colors. For example, Sam looked for a replacement white skirt on the shopping trip to complete her existing summer clothes.

7.3. Shape and garment type

Particular cuts of garments were favored by some of the participants. The style choices were different for different personas. For example, Ali had three major styles: smart dresses with colors for work; casual leggings and jumper for home; and short black dresses for her rock chick look. Gisela's style is "vintage", particularly the 1940s as her individual "look". Sasha described her varied styles as being "*different versions of me*". Although she wears casual clothing daily, she had a very varied selection of clothing. She owned various dresses suitable for "jive dancing", ball gowns, and her amateur Burlesque costume performances, which were mainly corsets with matching accessories. Dressing up in various ways was key for Sasha's identity. She confessed to having *"more dressing up clothing than the kids"*.

The overall fit of their garments was rather important for the participants. They valued comfort and used shapes to hide parts of their bodies they did not like. For example, both Maria and Kathy favored empire-line style tops to hide a "*wobbly stomach*". Xandra and Philomena favored "*looser, more flowing*" tops.

Klepp and Storm-Mathisen (2005) found that it was essential for the women to find clothing that they defined as "becoming". To these participants the garment styles that they selected were the ones that they liked, and they felt looked good on them.

7.4. Image

Image was discussed with participants, in terms of how they thought they presented themselves to the world. Participants were conscious of their public image (see Appleford 2016) and how they presented their social identities in public places. Some of the participants did not want to draw attention to themselves through their clothing, for example by wearing too revealing clothes. In particular, Sasha was concerned to wear appropriate clothes for the school run in her Muslim neighborhood. Cara had a different viewpoint:

> I noticed that people gave me compliments in like dresses… oh yeah you look really good, that kind of thing, Maybe I should wear more of these,… to be more of an advert for my business as well so that might help me. (C4)

The perception of image is deeply cultural. Xandra, the South American, was used to a more formal and feminine dress code. She felt that in the UK people dress as they want and that nobody judges them for their clothes.

> I like to look a little bit elegant, formal … because it's better to over dress than for to be under on the occasion, you know what I mean? I feel that if someone invites me to their house, how lovely to show that the occasion is important for me, … It shows care for the other person, you know? I'm not going to arrive in a gown like I've just arrived from my bed. No, no way. (X2)

The participants wanted their clothing style to articulate the image they wished to project. Sam, Philomena and Xandra described their – rather different – clothing styles, as "*smart casual*". They wanted to be seen as wearing "*smart*" or "*sophisticated*" clothing.

Jill and Maria, the two full time mums, struggled most to articulate how they felt about their image. For example, Jill always wore jeans but felt a bit "smarter" if she wore a top with some detail on, and she considered T-shirts too plain. For Jill, similarly to participants in Appleford's (2016) research, it was important for her to dress up even though she was full-time at home to express her own identity rather than be purely viewed as a mother. Maria felt vain considering her image, but on the other hand she asked, "*Whether it is so bad to want to present yourself in a certain way*?".

The image they wanted to project was as much about how they felt about themselves than how others perceived them. However, Mead (1913) points out that "the 'I' is a social self … as it is constructed through the gaze of others and learnt, internalized social expectations. This notion of internalization helps to account for many acts of dressing which are non-reflective".

8. Clothing Fulfilling Needs

Returning to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, in summary it is evident from this research that clothing choices are very dependent on an individual's perceived "needs" which vary widely and can have many multifaceted influences. Fashion consumption needs to be understood in the context of a person's physical and mental self, since garments are worn "physically" for functional reasons (warmth, protection) and are also worn for emotional enhancement (Evans 1989). These influences are operating on all levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, in Figure 1:

- **Basic needs:** The participants took it for granted that their physiological and safety needs, would be taken care of by their clothing. These needs were barely mentioned.
- **Belongingness and love needs:** Only Maria commented on consciously trying to fit in with other young mothers. At the same

time, clothing expresses belonging to a particular social group, which is a psychological need for belonging, the middle level of the Maslow hierarchy.

- **The need to belong** was expressed most strongly in a work context, where they needed to "fit in" with the implicit dress codes, picked up by observation, and explicit dress codes, which are openly stated. Memories of clothes that were worn in the past were also evidence of past group memberships and clothes were worn actively to remember their former selves. The immigrant participants, such as Xandra, also saw clothing as a means to keep the membership of the original culture alive. Interestingly none of them expressed any desire to be sexually attractive, and only Xandra wanted her clothes to be "pretty". Some participants had kept and to some extent wore garments of large sentimental value. For example, Gisela owned a 1960s suit which had belonged her mother-in-law. These behaviors indicate how a sense of belonging is linked to the love the participants feel for people who are no longer an active presence in their lives.
- **Esteem needs** can be expressed by wearing expensive clothing, brands or accessories, as these are often used to indicate social worth or status (Barnard 2002). There was no evidence of participants actively displaying their social status through clothing and accessories, nor did they comment on possessing luxury items that are designed to be inconspicuous (see Eckhardt, Belk, and Wilson 2015). Social status did not feature explicitly in the lives of the participants beyond a certain element of fitting in with their peer group. Whilst some of the participants expressed aspirational intentions for their own lives for example, going back to work or further higher education, none of these aspirations were expressed through their clothing.
- **Self-Actualisation** is about the realization of participants' talents and potential. This featured for some of the participants. Sasha had outfits for Burlesque dancing, a key hobby for her in which she could express herself away from the responsibility of caring for five children. Cara bought tights for her carnival costume to enact her carnival "persona" as part of her cultural heritage. Gisela's vintage style of dressing for specific historic-themed events is also an expression of her personality, and an important aspect of her personal interests and enjoyment. For Cara and Gisela self-realisation and sense of belonging are closely linked. The choice in clothing is also influenced by self- identity, as first impressions are formed by clothing (Flugel 1930, 15). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs acts as a flexible structure. Everyone had a mix of garments in their wardrobe which applied to different points in the Maslow hierarchy, fulfilling multiple needs on different levels. Garments were downgraded over time, so that an

item that had been purchased to meet a psychological need later only served a basic need. A few garments became keepsakes of their former selves.

The hierarchy is nested assuming that higher levels will only come into play if the lower levels are fulfilled. However, this is not always the case with clothing, as the example of the young Jill and her group of friends wearing mini dresses and no coats in the north of England illustrates. The Maslow Hierarchy does not account for the selection of a specific item from a group of items that would meet the same need, or the combination of items worn at any time. While it might be possible to construct arguments why these personal and aesthetic decisions are influenced by issues such as group membership or self-esteem, the participants explained that they selected items simply by what they liked. As Shaw and Tomolillo (2004) point out, Maslow's hierarchy also does not consider the ethical consumer's perception of fashion as a value external to their personal needs.

Two of the key themes of this research, identity, which is strongly linked to an individual's personal style, and the projected image of an individual to the judgment of others, are also not addressed directly by Maslow, even though it could be argued that they fall under esteem. However, these factors are directly reflected in Manfred Max-Neef's (1991) psychological (non-material) needs, which include affection, understanding, participation, creation, recreation, identity and freedom. The Max-Neef framework looks at needs from the perspective of the individual in a society and the individual's needs for the society to work in a more holistic way.

Fletcher (2008) groups the Max-Neef framework into material and non-material needs and rejects that fast fashion can address non-materials needs. The participants bought items produced in the fast fashion system, however, with the notable exception of Philomena, many of them did not treat the items as fast fashion but kept them until they were worn out. The participants agreed and prioritized their personal style over the latest trends; however they bought fast fashion items like T-shirts in their own style. The participants attributed their personal style to multiple influences which included fashion, anti-fashion, family, music and cultural background rather than the influence of the fashion system (manufacturers, designers, journalists, retailers, magazines).

9. Conclusions

This study focused on the clothing behavior of 10 adult women between 25 and 62, who were all mothers. These women had largely found their identities, as mothers, wives and members of particular social circles. None of them had particular career ambitions.

For these participants, clothing was not particularly important, and they preferred to devote their time, money and energy to other things.

Their personal style was largely independent of what was currently "in fashion". Throughout the study there was no interest from participants in dressing fashionably though this did not mean that they dressed badly. Their clothing predominantly came from major brands and shops which are in the fashion system, so what they wore was not noticeably different to what other people wear. They selected garments that made them feel more confident as they felt how they dressed suited them in terms of their personality, their figure and coloring.

Participants were indifferent or openly dismissive about wearing the latest fashion trends in contrast to their younger selves. They bought clothing within the fashion system but focussed on what they wanted or perceived as "needed" to fill the gap in the wardrobe such as clothing for an upcoming holiday. If fashion aligned with their style, they embraced it, and bought older items second hand, if these met their style.

They had established friends and peer groups, where signaling social acceptance through clothes was less important to them. Their peer group focused on what they perceived as more important matters, such as the caring for the family. However, school runs come up in discussions, where they participants were concerned on behalf of their children not to draw attention to themselves through inappropriate clothing.

Their clothes reflected their different roles in life, their work personas and the overriding need for comfortable, practical clothing they wore for looking after small children and going through the chores of daily life. Though there had been changes throughout their lives, how they might change in the future as they aged was not discussed.

Clothes just did not particularly matter to these women. This makes them different to the subject of many other studies of fashion, that are carried out by fashion academics with participants who deeply care about fashion. There is a gap in our understanding of the fashion consumption of people indifferent to fashion, be that mothers, like the subjects of this study, older women as in the studies of Twigg (2007) or men. The fashion system does not serve their needs well. While the participants did not particularly care about clothes, they still found it difficult to find clothes they liked and that they trusted to last them for a while. They did not shop recreationally and looked for particular brands, that they had had good experiences with in the past without thinking whether they had exceeded the target customer age of the brand. It is one of the curious paradoxes of fashion that clothes surround us all, yet very little is known about the clothing behavior of the silent majority that is fairly indifferent to fashion.

The participants described their style as "smart casual", which reflected their dominant philosophy toward their clothing. They dressed in comfortable practical clothing that was smart enough to raise their self-esteem and looked good enough so that others would not judge them. The participants' overriding priority for their clothing was their

own personal style, a style that they had developed over the years, influenced by past fashion, anti-fashion, their own culture and their own likes, that expressed their own identity. There appears to be a need for many more studies like this one, as the clothing practices of older women and men are, though possibly with the notable exception of Sadkowska (2018), currently poorly understood.

The study presented in this paper is a snapshot of lives and attitudes of ten women in a city in the midlands in the UK. The adopted methodology worked well but was highly time consuming. It would have been interesting to study a larger sample with a more diverse range of people. Starting with the results of this study as starting hypothesis, it would be interesting to investigate whether different factors such as class, income or faith have a significant influence. The women were no longer young, with the possible exception of Sam, the oldest participant, did not consider themselves as old or were overly concerned about the age of their bodies, beyond the odd reference to particular cuts of tops being flattering for women who had children. It would be interesting to follow the same cohort as their lives become less dominated by the needs of their children, and they enter a new phase of paid or voluntary work. To gain a broader and more reliable understanding of attitudes to fashion and the motivation for the selection of clothing, it would be beneficial to study women from other age groups or social technical groups and to study men. A greater understanding of fashion consumption could finally lead to more clothes being produced that meet the needs of their wearer and thereby increase their sustainability through prolonged use.

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