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Exploration of the perpetuating fast fashion consumption cycle: Young women's experiences in pursuit of an ideal self-image

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**Exploration of the perpetuating fast fashion consumption cycle: Young women's
experiences in pursuit of an ideal self-image**

by

Leslie H. Simpson

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Apparel, Merchandising and Design

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The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this dissertation. The Graduate College will ensure this dissertation is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2019

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family who have always supported me unconditionally. It is also dedicated to my father, Dr. John Simpson, who would have been proud that I followed in his footsteps to earn a doctorate degree.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of young women in emerging adulthood who consumed a large quantity of fast fashion apparel (in excess of 150 pieces annually). Using a phenomenological methodology, this study explored (a) the shopping experiences of the young women, (b) the meaning the young women attached to their clothing purchases, and (c) why the young women were buying large quantities of fast fashion.

Fourteen women between the ages of 19 and 25 from the mid-Atlantic region of the United States participated in the study. The research design consisted of participant blogging followed by individual, semi-structured interviews which lasted between one to one and a half hours. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Blog entries were combined with interview transcriptions into one file per participant and analyzed and interpreted for patterns and common themes using procedural steps recommended by Spiggle (1994).

Interpretative analysis of the data revealed that women in emerging adulthood had distinct fashion consumption practices that warranted a description of their shopping behavior. The contextualization of their consumption practices aided the thematic interpretation in which four topical areas emerged: (a) Pressure and Expectations, (b) Need for Fashion Browsing (c) Perpetuating Fast Fashion Consumption Cycle, and (d) Positive Emotions.

Several key points about participant consumption practices were identified. Women browsed for apparel online more often (daily) in comparison to browsing in-store. They bought more clothes online than they did in stores. They shopped consistently at the same fast fashion stores both online and in the brick-and-mortar stores that they referred to as their “go-to” stores. Women preferred to shop online due to the 24/7 shopping convenience and access to unlimited stores and brands; they preferred in-store shopping to evaluate garment quality and fit and

experience the store atmosphere. Women bought fashion items on a frequent basis in order to create complete looks enticed by store displays. They described keeping very organized wardrobes in order to manage a large quantity of clothing. Women disposed of clothing by donation to charities to free space in their closets in order to buy new styles.

The first topical area, Pressure and Expectations, described expectations from influential adults and pressure from the fashion culture (fashion images from social media, celebrities, brand advertisements) that persuaded women to acquire new clothes. The second topical area, Need for Fashion Browsing, explained the process of online and in-store browsing to keep up with the latest fashion trends. The third topical area, Perpetuating Fast Fashion Consumption Cycle, illustrated why women had a constant need for new apparel. The fourth topical area, Positive Emotions, described the happiness, excitement and sense of accomplishment women experienced when acquiring new apparel.

A model illustrating a perpetuating fast fashion consumption cycle was created to demonstrate young women's constant need for new apparel in order to achieve an ideal self-image fueled by pressure and expectations from the fashion culture. Perspectives from the possible selves and social comparison theories were utilized to guide interpretation of the themes.

Results from the present study sought to provide an in-depth understanding of the shopping experiences and meaning and motivations behind women in emerging adulthood's fast fashion apparel consumption behavior. It suggests that women acquired a large quantity of apparel to achieve an ideal self-image that they internalized from the fashion culture, but as fast fashion styles changed constantly, the need for new apparel was continuous.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Background

With the advent of fast fashion in the 2000s, the apparel industry has undergone massive changes that have impacted suppliers, retailers, consumers, and society. Fast fashion describes a retail strategy that provides affordable, trendy clothes to consumers just weeks after similar looking designs appear on international runways to “satisfy consumer demand at its peak” (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006, p. 259). Fast fashion, predominantly targeted to young women, drives a culture of frequent purchasing and discarding by encouraging the consumer to visit retailers regularly in search of newness (Gabrielli, Baghi & Codeluppi, 2013; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). Fast fashion clothing has also been described as throwaway or disposable fashion, as the quality of materials and apparel construction are typically low in order to keep costs down (Wicker, 2016).

Until the 1990s, the fashion industry was dominated by retailers who offered new styles to the consumer based on a limited, seasonal calendar (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006). Designers, for the most part, dictated the trends, and the fashion industry was dominated by buyers, magazine editors, and fashion executives (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). Since the 1990s, the fashion industry changed rapidly due to innovations in technology and global supply chain expansion (Anguelov, 2016). Consumers gained access to current fashion trends via the Internet and began to shop in stores more frequently, pushing retailers to offer new styles at affordable prices (“Inditex: The Future of,” 2005).

In the 2000s, greater transformation of the fashion industry occurred due to the emergence and growth of fast fashion. Consumers became accustomed to instant access to the latest fashion trends from around the world through social media and wanted to see the new looks in stores and online right away. Fast fashion retailers responded to consumer demand by

establishing highly efficient and effective supply chains to offer new merchandise with an emphasis on low cost and speed-to-market, rather than quality and sustainability (Anguelov, 2016). Fast fashion brands, such as Zara, H&M, Forever 21, TopShop, and Uniqlo, have enjoyed the largest growth areas in the apparel marketplace (“Fast Fashion in 2016,” 2016). The success of fast fashion retail is particularly stunning in contrast to the closings and bankruptcies of department stores and specialty stores (Donaldson, 2016).

The phenomenon of fast fashion emerged in part due to a shift in the consumer’s lifestyle. Reality television, social media outlets such as Facebook, Instagram, or Snapchat, fashion bloggers, and real-time fashion show videos created a fashion savvy consumer (Cline, 2013). Access to celebrity lifestyles and red carpet events resulted in an increased interest in appearance and fashion styles. In search of the latest trends, the consumer began shopping in the store or on-line more often, demanding fashion at an affordable price (“Inditex: The future of, “ 2005).

The consumer is central to the fast fashion phenomenon (Gabrielli et al., 2013; McNeill & Moore, 2015). Fast fashion consumption has been described as “a personal and social experience” (p. 219) as consumers enjoy exchanging information with peers and expressing individualism through new products (Gabrielli et al., 2013). The fast fashion consumer inhabits a lifestyle linked to apparel consumption, where individuals not only wear clothing but “live fashion” (p. 21) engaging in self-expression and identity creation (Anguelov, 2016). The fast fashion phenomenon is predominantly attributed to women in emerging adulthood who are fashion conscious, focused on consumption, and interested in their appearance (Donnelly & Scaff, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

Very limited research has examined fast fashion consumption, because the phenomenon is less than twenty years old. The first fast fashion studies in 2000s addressed the supplier perspective of the emerging fast fashion industry. Apparel research with a focus on fast fashion consumption started to appear in the 2010s. To date, the author was able to identify only nine research papers related to fast fashion consumption. Almost all of these studies were conducted outside the United States in countries such as Hong Kong (Choi, Lui, N., Lui S-C., Mak & To, 2010), Italy (Gabielli et al., 2013), Canada and Hong Kong (Joy, Sherry, Venkatesh, Wang & Chan, 2012), Korea (Kim, Choo & Yoon, 2012), New Zealand (McNeill & Moore, 2015), and Sweden (Wang, 2010). Only three studies (Bedford, Hustvedt, & Bhardwaj, 2016; Joung, 2014; Watson & Yan, 2013) researched the fast fashion consumer in the U.S. market. Moreover, the nine studies vary greatly on how the fast fashion consumer was defined, and who the participants were in terms of age, gender, and shopping preferences. A detailed overview of the existing fast fashion consumer research is presented in Chapter 2.

To better comprehend the fast fashion phenomenon, it is critical to study the population that is most engaged in it, which is women in emerging adulthood. Emerging adulthood is defined as the life stage between the ages of 18 to 25 years old when young people are focused on themselves prior to marriage, children and careers (Arnett, 2015). Emerging adults are exploring identity and expanding their range of experiences (Arnett, 2000). This is also a stage in life when young people are developing consumer behavior patterns (Workman & Lee, 2011).

To date, no study has explored in-depth, women's experiences in emerging adulthood as they consume large quantities of apparel and personify the fast fashion phenomenon. Most studies included men and women participants of a wide age ranging from 18-59 years old

(Gabrielli et al., 2013; Joung, 2014; Joy et al., 2012; McNeill & Moore, 2015). One study focused on women with the mean age of 21.2 years old in the U.S. market (Watson & Yan, 2013), and another study targeted young consumers specifically (19-22); however, participants were both men and women (Joung, 2014). Further, from the nine identified studies, only three adopted a qualitative exploration of the fast fashion consumer (Gabrielli et al., 2013; Joy et al., 2012; Watson & Yan, 2013). The rest of the extant research relied on a survey method to investigate the reasons and outcomes of fast fashion consumption. For a deeper understanding of fast fashion consumer shopping experiences, the meaning young women attached to their clothing purchases, and why they buy large quantities of fast fashion, a qualitative investigation was needed.

In 2016, the average American, including infants and elderly individuals, purchased 68 garments (ApparelStats & ShoeStats, 2017). In reality, this number varies greatly, even among the same demographic groups. For example, some female college students buy only 25-30 pieces of clothing annually, whereas other women from the same classroom purchase in excess of 150 garments a year (Personal communication with female undergraduates, 2016). Little is known what is behind this very high apparel consumption level. In previous studies, fast fashion consumers were identified as those who shopped at fast fashion retailers (Choi et al., 2010; Wang, 2010; Watson & Yan, 2013), or who have spent between \$500-\$599 a year on clothing (Joung, 2014). No study has examined fast fashion consumers who purchase a considerable amount of apparel (over 150 pieces of clothing annually).

The purpose of this study was to examine lived experiences of women in emerging adulthood who consumed fast fashion apparel in large quantities. This research explored their consumption practices while browsing, acquiring, wearing, storing, and disposing of fast fashion

clothing. The study attempted to understand what meaning the women attached to their apparel purchases, and why they bought high levels of fast fashion.

Research Questions

To address the research purpose, the following research questions were developed to guide the study:

1. What were lived, everyday experiences of women in emerging adulthood when they consumed large quantities of fast fashion apparel?
2. What meanings did the young women attach to acquiring large quantities of fast fashion apparel?
3. What internal and external conditions promoted these individuals' fast fashion consumption?
4. For what reasons did the young women buy large quantities of fast fashion apparel?

Significance of the Study

Fast fashion has significant environmental, societal, and economic implications. The ever-increasing rates of production put strains on the planet's resources by increasing demand for natural and synthetic fibers that rely on agriculture and petroleum (Lieber, 2017). Producing more and more apparel increases energy usage and adds to the world's carbon footprint as new clothes are shipped to stores every two weeks (Anguelov, 2016). In addition, production of fast fashion raises humanitarian concerns as the business model depends on low-cost products, which often conflicts with acceptable working conditions and fair compensation. Apparel companies face problems with workers' rights, low wages, child or forced labor, and health and safety hazards.

From the consumer perspective, increased consumption has led to high levels of personal debt. American consumer debt is at its highest since 2008 when the economy was in recession, reaching \$1 trillion in 2016 (Kilpatrick, 2017). Americans spent 14% more on clothing and

footwear in 2016 than they spent in 2011 (Schlossberg, 2017). From 2000 to 2014, the number of garments purchased each year by the average consumer increased 60% (Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2016). Further, consumers are more likely to dispose of clothing that is cheaper and trend-driven, such as fast fashion, than more expensive pieces, resulting in consumption level increases and enormous textile waste (Anguelov, 2016). Consumers admit that they will never wear some of the clothing they buy and instead will end up throwing it away to make room in their closets for the newest fashion trends (Cline, 2013). These high levels of production and consumption are not sustainable. Yet, consumers enjoy fast fashion and show no signs of slowing down the demand for it.

From a practical perspective, exploring young women's fast fashion consumption experiences will help to better understand the fast fashion phenomenon. Understanding the "whys" of fast fashion and its role in consumers' everyday lives might be useful for multiple stakeholders, including (a) consumers themselves; (b) educators and non-for-profit organizations that strive to inform consumers about the effects and consequences of apparel overconsumption; and (c) fashion companies that challenge the existing industry paradigm, which is based on continuous growth of consumption levels, in a pursuit of a more sustainable business model. The results of this study may help young consumers to understand why they consume large amounts of fast fashion apparel, which might encourage them to be more thoughtful when making purchasing decisions or consider wearing their existing clothing for longer periods of time. From a theoretical perspective, this research will add to consumer behavior literature as fast fashion consumption has been understudied. Additionally, several social psychology theories, such as upward social comparison and possible selves, were utilized to explain the meanings of fast fashion for young women consumers.

The phenomenon of fast fashion is particularly popular with young women (Cohen, n.d.). This study focused on women in emerging adulthood who were between the ages of 18-25. Women of this age group are fashion and consumption oriented and are expected to have a significant impact on the future of fast fashion. Because of these reasons, it is important to better understand fast fashion consumption by young women in the U.S. market. This study attempted to fill the gap in literature in understanding the experiences young women have in consuming large quantities (in excess of 150 pieces a year) of clothing that have not been explored in previous fast fashion research.

Definition of Terms

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Actual Self | How one currently sees oneself (Babin & Harris (2015). |
| Browsing | The activity of searching for new apparel, researching new trends, and considering what to buy. |
| Buying | The activity of acquiring apparel. |
| Emerging Adulthood | Refers to a life stage between the ages of 18 and 25. In this stage, an individual is self-focused and exploring identity development and new consumer behavior patterns (Arnett, 2015). |
| Fashion Industry | Businesses and services involved with fashion that include “design, manufacturing, distribution, marketing, retailing, advertising, communication, publishing and consulting” (Stone, 2010, p. 41). |

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Fast Fashion | Retail and supply chain strategies that offer low cost, low quality apparel representing the latest trends from international runways within the shortest time frame possible generating a consumer culture of frequent purchasing and disposal (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006; Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). |
| Fast Fashion Consumer | A consumer who renews his/her wardrobe every season and buys large quantities of fast fashion apparel that is of low cost and quality but reflects the latest trends. |
| Ideal Self | Who one would like to become in the future (Ahuvia, 2005). |
| Materialism | The consumer attaches importance to possessions that may be the center of the individuals' lives (Belk, 1985). |
| Millennials | A cohort, also known as Generation Y, born between the years of 1982 and 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). |
| Overconsumption | An acceleration in consumption of goods that effects the consumer, environment, and society (De Graaf, Wann & Naylor, 2014; Schor, 2002). |
| Possible Selves Theory | Provides insight into how people think about themselves or invent themselves, and how these thoughts influence behavior (Dunkel & Kerpeleman, 2006). The theory provides a context for self-evaluation and exploration of possible roles (Markus & Nurius, 1986). |

| | |
|--|---|
| Retail Therapy | The act of consuming that may assist a consumer in alleviating bad moods or anxiety (Sohn & Choi, 2013). |
| Self-Image | The identity depicted through physical appearance, and how the image is projected to others. Self-image affects how one sees oneself as well as how one's perceived by others (McLeod, 2014) |
| Shopping | Participant terminology for the activity of browsing apparel stores and buying apparel. |
| Social Comparison Theory | Implies that individuals have an innate desire to compare themselves to others and utilize the comparison for self-evaluation (Festinger, 1954). An individual may use upward social comparison to compare themselves to an aspiration group. An individual may use downward social comparison to make themselves feel better (Cherry, 2016). Fast fashion shoppers may use either comparison to achieve a desired ideal. |
| Symbolic Self-Completion Theory | Proposes that people engage in different activities to create a self-definition and construct an identity (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). The need for self-definition stems from feelings of uncertainty and inadequacies (Sohn & Choi, 2013), and clothing may assist in communicating self-definition to get closer to a desired self-identity. |

Young Millennials

Young cohort of the Millennial generation (ages 17-24 years old in 2017).

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review of literature is presented in several sections. The first section defines the fast fashion phenomenon, describes its evolution, and includes supplier and consumer perspectives. The next section contextualizes the phenomenon within the U.S. market and, specifically, focuses on the role of women in emerging adulthood who are active consumers of fast fashion. The following section presents theories of overconsumption and applies them to explain consumption of fast fashion. The final section describes social psychology theories that are used to frame the research study and will be utilized in the analysis and interpretation of participants' apparel consumption behavior and contextualize the research findings.

The Fast Fashion Phenomenon and its Evolution

The Fast Fashion Phenomenon

The fast fashion phenomenon is characterized by (a) short lead time from design and production to the retail sales floor and (b) a focus on quickly changing trends and affordable fashion items (Cachon & Swinney, 2011). Because fast fashion clothes are priced very low and new store deliveries of merchandise are frequent, the consumer has an incentive to buy new products every few weeks (Bain, 2015). As a result, clothing consumption is at record high levels. Fast fashion's philosophy is based on the notion that clothing is dated if it is more than a year old (Wicker, 2016). According to a recent statistic, an average fast fashion consumer wears a garment seven times and keeps it for only 35 days until it is discarded (Hill, 2016).

Scholars have researched fast fashion from different perspectives, resulting in various definitions of the phenomenon. Fast fashion has been described as retail and supply chain strategies that offer affordable, trendy apparel of low quality to consumers within the shortest time possible (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; Sull & Turconi, 2008). Fast fashion focuses on inexpensive imitations of high-end fashion trends and encourages consumers to purchase

clothing impulsively and dispose of it quickly (Joy et al., 2012). It is primarily targeted to young women who have little awareness of the social and environmental impact of fast fashion (Watson & Yan, 2013).

Transformation of the Fashion Industry

Over the past three decades, the global fashion industry has gone through a dynamic transformation due to changes in the retail business model and evolving consumption patterns. Beginning in the 1980s, the industry's success was primarily based on production of basic fashion styles, such as Levi's jeans and button-down shirts (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006). To large extent, apparel retailers predicted consumer demand and determined fashion trends. The entire industry adhered to a strict seasonal calendar of when new fashion styles were offered and when consumers could buy them. Designer shows provided inspiration and direction for the season ahead and were mostly restricted to industry insiders: buyers, fashion executives, and editors of fashion magazines (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010).

Since the 1990s, the fashion industry has seen a rapid transformation due to technological advances that allowed (a) globalization of supply chain for companies and (b) for consumers, instant access to the latest fashion trends from around the world through online sources (Anguelov, 2016). Armed with the knowledge of the latest fashion trends, consumers were motivated to buy them and began to visit stores more frequently than before in search of new styles. Further, consumers became more demanding and fashion savvy, pushing retailers to offer the right product at the right time at competitive prices ("Inditex: The Future of," 2005). Taking advantage of the global supply chain, retailers responded by offering broader and deeper product lines, lower priced clothing, and more frequent delivery of new styles to the stores. The seasonal calendar increased to six seasons a year (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010).

From the early 2000s, the fashion industry has been dominated by the emergence and aggressive growth of fast fashion retailers. Fast fashion provides low priced apparel and focuses on delivering the latest trends available in stores every two to three weeks (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; Crawford, 2017). The quality of materials for apparel has declined as man-made fibers and light weight fabrics are increasingly sourced to create inexpensive apparel. Similarly, quality of garment construction has dropped to meet shorter deadlines, and disposable clothing became the norm (Cline, 2013). Fast fashion pioneers, H&M and Zara, headquartered in Europe, originally targeted consumers in Western Europe. The market became quickly saturated, and currently, the U.S. ranks as the leading fast fashion market in terms of value (“Fast Fashion in 2016”, 2016). Fast fashion brands have shown the biggest growth at the retail level in the past decade (“Analysis of Fast Fashion,” 2015). In 2014, Zara’s annual sales were \$19.7 billion, and during the same year, H&M’s annual revenue was \$20.2 billion (Loeb, 2015). Forever 21 is the fifth largest retailer in the United States (“Forever 21 Company Info,” n.d.). In 2014, its revenue grew by 5% to \$3.9 billion (Hoovers Inc., 2017). Since 2010, fast fashion retailers grew 9.7% per year, on average (“Fast Fashion Garners Fast,” 2015), whereas traditional retailers, such as department and specialty stores, have seen continuous decline (Kell, 2015). Department store sales have declined an estimated 20% since 2006, and Kohl’s, J.C. Penney, Macy’s, and Sears all closed stores in 2016 (Donaldson, 2016).

Fashion shows, red carpet events, and celebrity lifestyles became more accessible and influential through social media, such as Facebook or Instagram, blogs, and real-time videos (Anguelov, 2016). Access to celebrity lifestyles and style events resulted in an increased interest in appearance. Social media outlets encourage fashion enthusiasts to share information about brands, styles, and their shopping experiences. Fast fashion retailers, like Zara and H&M,

responded aggressively to consumer demand and interest by reinterpreting the latest fashion trends and quickly offering low-cost knock-offs (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). The consumer began shopping online or in stores searching for the latest styles more frequently than ever before demanding quick (fast) fashion (“Inditex: The Future of...” 2005). Table 1 provides a summary of fast fashion development since the 1980s.

Table 1. *Evolution of the Fast Fashion Phenomenon*

| Evolution of Fast Fashion and Changing Roles of Creators and Consumers | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
| Decade | Supplier/Retailer | Consumer | Fashion Marketplace |
| 1980s | Low cost and mass production of apparel. Basic fashion styles are offered. Large retailers dictate product offerings. Retailers determine consumer demand. Two fashion seasons exist a year. | Limited fashion style choices. The consumer has little to no influence in fashion. | Designers and fashion shows determine fashion trends. Fashion shows are accessible only to the industry/press and not the consumer. |
| 1990s | Globalization of supply chain. Expanded product range. Reduction of lead time to get product to market (quick response). Increase in fashion seasons (6 per year). | Access to fashion trends from around the world through limited online sources. Demand for newness in fashion styles. The consumer shops more. | International fashion shows are accessible to all. Rise of fashion magazines and fashion TV shows. |

Table 1. continued

| Evolution of Fast Fashion | | | |
|---------------------------|--|---|---|
| Decade | Supplier/Retailer | Consumer | Fashion Marketplace |
| 2000s | Emergence of fast fashion retailers. Large department stores experience consolidations/closings. Increased pressure on reducing production lead time. New product in stores (2-3 weeks). Creation of disposable fashion. | 24/7 access to fashion styles from around the world. Consumer more interested in appearance and more fashion savvy. Increased consumption, speed, and volume. Consumer drives fashion marketplace. | Low-cost knock-offs available at the same time as high fashion. Real time fashion shows via the Internet. Democratization of fashion. Reality television and celebrity influence. Social media dominance through fashion blogs and videos. |

Fast Fashion from the Supplier Perspective

As the fast fashion business model emerged and began to impact the entire industry, initial research on the topic was supplier focused, presenting perspectives from the manufacturers and retailers' side (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006; Bruce & Daly, 2006; Sheridan, Moore & Nobbs, 2006; Sull & Turconi, 2008). The primary focus of this research stream has been a rapid shift from a production dominated business model to a consumer driven approach, with the emphasis on the supplier's need for quick response to consumer demand. A brief summary of fast fashion studies from the supplier driven perspective is presented.

A prevailing theme was the impact of fast fashion on supply chain management, documenting the increase of pressure on suppliers to respond more quickly to fast changing fashion trends and respective consumer demand for the newest styles (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2010). Cachon and Swinney (2011) developed a framework to define the fast

fashion business system, focusing on flexible design methods and quick response in the supply chain. Bruce and Daly (2006) explored complex sourcing issues, and the need for an agile approach to supply chain management processes to facilitate quicker buying practices for fast fashion.

A few studies focused on the retailer's challenges with the emergence of fast fashion, and the importance of store environment and marketing communications in translating the fast fashion product to the consumer (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood 2010). Sheridan, Moore, and Nobbs (2006) concluded that collaborative partnerships between suppliers and retailers to implement a category management approach was essential for success of fast fashion businesses. Sull and Turconi (2008) examined the growth of the fast fashion retailer, Zara, offering lessons for other companies aspiring to this rapidly evolving business model. The lessons included: flexible and adaptable supply chain, frequent analysis of store data, and design flexibility. Chang and Jai (2015) examined how fast fashion retailers used apparel sustainability to influence consumers' perception and purchase intention. The recommendations from these studies emphasized the need for research from a consumer perspective, because consumer demand was perceived as the driving force in the fast fashion marketplace.

Fast Fashion from the Consumer Perspective

Research examining the fast fashion consumer is under ten years old. The first studies appeared around 2010, and only a few have been published since. Bridging the gap between fast fashion research from the supplier perspective and consumer perspective, the Bhardwaj and Fairhurst (2010) study examined both. The authors noted the need for more research on the topic. Fast fashion represents a move away from supply chains 'push' to the demand driven by the consumer 'pull' (Sull & Turconi, 2008). What is known about the fast fashion consumer from research to date is discussed in this section.

A prevalent theme in fast fashion consumer research focused on comparing purchasing decisions of fast fashion consumers and the sustainable consumers. Joy, Sherry, Venkatesh, Wang and Chan (2012) studied fast fashion consumers who supported environmental issues but practiced unsustainable apparel consumption behavior. The authors found that fast fashion consumers supported the idea of sustainability but not when it applied to fashion products; the newness and low cost of products encouraged consumption. Watson and Yan (2013) explored differences between fast and slow fashion consumers during purchasing and post-purchasing decision making stages. Fast fashion consumers found enjoyment in purchasing large quantities of trendy clothing due to low prices and were more likely to throw away unwanted apparel. In contrast, slow fashion consumers purchased quality clothing at consignment stores or from eco-friendly brands to build a long-lasting wardrobe.

McNeill and Moore (2015) explored consumers' attitudes and purchasing behavior of sustainable apparel. The authors classified consumers into three distinct groups: (1) "self" (p. 220) consumers, who found meaning in purchasing fast fashion as "vital to their self-identity" (p. 220); (2) "social" (p. 220) consumers, who purchased fast fashion as a result of peer influence related to clothing choices; and (3) "sacrifice" (p. 220) consumers, who had negative attitudes toward fast fashion and supported reducing consumption overall. The study reported relationships between (1) fast fashion consumption and self-image and (2) fast fashion consumption and peer influence. The authors emphasized the importance of further investigation to understand the deeper meaning consumers may have in relation to self and fashion consumption (McNeill & Moore, 2015).

Supporting the growing importance of the topic, several books on the fast fashion consumer have been recently published. In her book *Overdressed, the Shockingly High Cost of*

Cheap Fashion, Cline (2013) described the change in the fashion industry due to the decline in the price and quality of clothing created by fast fashion retailers, and the impact of increased fashion consumption on society, environment, independent stores, and the overall U.S. economy. The author described a fast fashion consumer as someone who enjoyed sharing her shopping experiences with peers and creating “shopping haul videos” (p. 14) that post information on the latest trends (Cline, 2013). Cline briefly touched on the consumer’s strong connection with clothing and suggested that an identity may be created through fashion consumption.

In his book *The Dirty Side of the Garment Industry: Fast Fashion and its Negative Impact on the Environment and Society*, Anguelov (2016) examined the lifecycle of clothing manufacturing, fast fashion’s dominance in the industry, and its impact on the global economy and environment. The book described a consumer lifestyle where individuals “live fashion, not just wear it” (p. 21) as they integrated products into their daily consumption practices (Anguelov, 2016). Fast fashion brands allowed the consumer “to engage in unique self-expression and build their own self-identities” (p. 22) that are more recently influenced by celebrities (Anguelov, 2016).

Siegle (2011) profiled the impact of fast fashion on increased consumption by the British consumer in her book *To Die For*. The author reported that an average British consumer accumulated 28 kg of clothing and disposed of nearly the same amount annually. Further, consumers found the styles at British fast fashion retailers, such as Topshop and Zara, irresistible due to affordable prices. Fast fashion consumption was also attributed to influences by celebrities and fashion trends in magazines.

Discussion of fast fashion was also covered by media, such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. For example, *The Atlantic* article, *The Neurological Pleasures of Fast*

Fashion, explained how purchasing clothing became a “powerfully pleasurable and sometimes addictive activity” (Bain, 2015, p. 1). The author suggested that extraordinary consumption levels were encouraged by trend-driven, cheap fast fashion easily available to the everyday consumer.

Based on current industry and consumer trends, it appears that the fast fashion phenomenon will continue to remain strong, particularly, with young women consumers who are fashion conscious. For this market segment, the low cost and vast selection of new apparel copying the latest fashion from international runways and celebrity red carpets might be impossible to resist. The fashion consumer appears to be expressing a true (desired) self that may be motivated by external and/or internal influences, and clothing is significant in how the true self is expressed. Further, individuals have a complex lifestyle and are expected to dress for a myriad of activities throughout the day. Appearance is important and used to communicate various roles one performs (e.g., professional, athlete, student, intern, socialite, etc.). Fashion apparel plays a significant part in the lifestyle of today’s consumer as she may change several times throughout the day to ensure an appropriate dress code for different roles. This creates a fickle fashion consumer who will continue to enjoy affordable and extensive apparel choices that meet her evolving needs and wants.

Examining the phenomenon of fast fashion from the consumer perspective is very important, yet, this research area is underdeveloped. This study aimed to address the gap in understanding the fast fashion consumer. It explored consumers’ experiences with fast fashion by focusing on the meaning attached to continued acquisition and possession of large amounts of clothing. The study attempted to uncover consumers’ motivations, perspectives, significances, and effects of fast fashion overconsumption.

The Fast Fashion Consumer

The American Fast Fashion Consumer

The global fashion industry is estimated to be a \$1.2 trillion industry (Tan 2016), with approximately \$350 billion spent in the U.S. market alone (Schlossberg, 2017). Clothing consumption by Americans is at its highest level in history. In 2015, the average U.S. household had approximately 248 garments and 29 pairs of shoes (Sanburn, 2015). Since the early 1990s, the United States has seen a significant growth in clothing consumption. In 1991, the average American purchased 34 items of clothing each year; but by 2007, the number increased to 67 items every year, which is approximately a new piece of clothing every 4-5 days (Schor, 2011). The fast fashion phenomenon enables the consumer to buy clothing at rates not seen before as “American consumers want styles to change quickly, and they want to see new merchandise in their favorite store almost every week and at affordable prices” (Karpova & Lee, 2011).

Most studies focusing on fast fashion consumers have been done outside the U.S., in countries such as Hong Kong (Choi et al., 2010), Italy (Gabrielli et al., 2013), Canada and Hong Kong (Joy et al. 2012), Korea (Kim et al., 2012), New Zealand (McNeill & Moore, 2015), and Sweden (Wang, 2010). Further, most of these studies used a quantitative research approach to examine fast fashion consumers (Bedford et al., 2016; Choi et al., 2010; Joung, 2014; Kim et al., 2012; Wang, 2010). Three fast fashion qualitative studies that are known to the author were done outside the United States. To investigate Italian fast fashion consumption practices, Gabrielli, Baghi, and Codeluppi (2013) recruited participants through a local market research firm and conducted focus groups. The study found fast fashion to be a positive experience. Consumers bought apparel frequently due to low cost and created a unique identity and community around the fast fashion product. Joy et al. (2012) interviewed fast fashion consumers in Hong Kong and Canada to understand the lack of interest in sustainable apparel consumption even though they

expressed concern for environmental issues. Findings indicated that participants supported sustainability, but not in terms of apparel consumption, as they found fast fashion styles affordable and unique. McNeill and Moore (2015) utilized a mixed method approach, combining store intercept surveys with in-depth interviews of New Zealand fashion consumers to explore attitudes and buying behavior towards sustainable apparel. The researchers categorized participants as: (1) fast fashion consumers concerned with self-image; (2) fast fashion consumers concerned with peer recognition; and (3) fashion consumers, who were concerned with reducing their impact on the world and did not support fast fashion.

Few fast fashion studies were conducted in the U.S. The studies with American participants investigated compulsive shopping and hoarding of fast fashion products (Bedford et al., 2016), fast fashion consumers' post purchase decision making (Joung, 2014), and differences between fast versus slow fashion consumers (Watson & Yan, 2013). The only U.S. study using a qualitative research method was done by Watson and Yan (2013), who conducted focus groups and interviews to examine both fast and slow fashion consumers at the purchase/consumption, post-consumption, and divestment stages of the consumer decision process. In this study, fast fashion consumers enjoyed purchasing large amounts of apparel due to newness and instant gratification and were more likely to discard unwanted apparel. In contrast, slow fashion consumers purchased clothing to last longer as investment pieces. To address the dearth in the literature on the U.S. fast fashion consumer, this study focused on fast fashion consumer behavior in the U.S. market.

The Millennial Fast Fashion Consumer

The U.S. apparel market is the largest in the world (Tan, 2016) and is very diverse in terms of demographics, which dictates vast differences in purchasing power and consumer preferences (Schor, 2011). In addition, there is an even greater variety in consumer

psychographics that determine shopping needs and wants. To narrow down the research scope, this study focused on the Millennial consumer, specifically the younger Millennial cohort.

The U.S. Census defines Millennials, or Generation Y, as people born between 1982 and 2000. In 2017, this group was between the ages of 17 and 35. This cohort became the largest living generation in 2015, surpassing the Baby Boomers' generation. In 2016, Millennials numbered 83.1 million people and represented more than a quarter of the total U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Millennials are the most racially and ethnically diverse generation, with 44.2 percent being non-white (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

It is estimated that by 2018, Millennials will have more spending power than Baby Boomers; and by 2020, Millennials will be spending about \$1.4 trillion annually, which represents 30% of the total retail sales (Donnelly & Scaff, 2013). This cohort is a very important segment for the U.S. economy, particularly, for retailers and manufacturers. As of 2015, a third of Millennials were still in college, but when they graduate and start a career, they will further gain in earnings and purchasing power (Cohen, n.d.).

Millennials are a consumption driven cohort that has had more opportunities to shop than other generations due to a greater number of retailers to choose from, retail stores open for longer hours, and availability of online and television shopping (Bakewell & Mitchell, 2003). As many parents of Millennials worked, their children had to learn how to shop and make purchasing decisions earlier than other generations, creating a more consumer-oriented group. More recently, this generation has instantaneous access to retail apps and websites, and "the ability and wherewithal to shop and purchase at the click of a button" (Serota, 2016, p. 66). Affordable fast fashion products are of significant value to Millennials. Price was a key driver for 84% of these shoppers, and bargains played a major role in choosing brands (Viamari, 2014).

Millennials are often viewed as one large segment in research studies. However, it is important to distinguish between the older group (ages 25-35) and the younger group (ages 17-24), because their lifestyles and shopping experiences are not the same (Cohen, n.d.). Older Millennials are identified as ‘parent’ millennials with distinct shopping needs. They tend to prefer to shop at department or specialty stores instead of fast fashion retailers. They are more likely to have careers, live in their own homes and shop for others (Donnelly & Scaff, 2013). Further, they are more apt to be parents than younger Millennials and shop in children’s stores and own their residence using their disposable income for home goods rather than apparel products (Cohen, n.d.). Older Millennials who are having children are more concerned about their family budget and more careful about their expenditures than younger Millennials with no children (Lockwood, 2013).

This study focused on younger Millennials (ages 17-24 in 2017). The younger Millennials tend to buy primarily for themselves, as most of them are not married and even fewer parent a child. They are more likely to browse and shop in fast fashion stores, such as Forever 21 and H&M, than any other age group (Cohen, n.d.). This cohort has more money than any other young consumer in history, and most of their disposable income is spent on new clothes (Anguelov, 2016). Noble, Haytko, and Phillips (2008) described the younger Millennial group as consumption driven and “very cognizant of fashion trends” (p. 622).

Most research on Millennials has focused on their use of technology, social media habits, and impact in the workplace (Barton, Fromm, & Egan, 2012). The majority of fast fashion studies both outside and within the United States focused on a wide range of consumers in terms of age. For example, Bedford et al. (2016) surveyed 18-59-year-old women in the United States to explore connections between fast fashion consumption and compulsive and impulsive

shopping behavior. The sample was evenly distributed in this age span, and results indicated that participants who had compulsive and impulsive shopping tendencies purchased more fast fashion products.

Other studies segmented different age groups within this wider range. For instance, the qualitative study of Gabrielli et al. (2013) examined two age groups of men and women Italian fast fashion shoppers to explore their characteristics. The authors classified all participants into younger consumers (under 35 years old) and more mature consumers (over 35 years). The study found that both groups purchased fast fashion products but for different reasons. Younger consumers enjoyed trying on and buying a large assortment of clothing as well as the store experience. In contrast, older consumers liked finding a bargain for their children.

Wang (2010) surveyed women consumers (ages 13-55), who were shopping at fast fashion retailers in Sweden to explore fast fashion consumption. The author reported that younger participants (ages 20-26) shopped more frequently and were in fast fashion stores once or twice a week. In contrast, older participants (ages 31-55) shopped once or twice a month on average. Further, older consumers were less interested in fast fashion consumption than their younger counterparts. McNeill and Moore (2015) surveyed and interviewed men and women consumers (ages 21-52) in New Zealand about their attitudes and behavior towards ethical fashion purchases. The authors found that younger participants (ages 21-25) consumed more fast fashion products and were less interested in environmental concerns related to the fashion industry.

Only two fast fashion studies focused on the younger Millennials. Joung (2013) explored men and women fast fashion consumers (ages 19-22) in the United States and their post-purchase behaviors using a survey method. Findings indicated that participants tended to hoard apparel

products. They discarded fast fashion apparel with intention to purchase more. Further, Watson and Yan (2013) explored differences between fast and slow fashion women consumers in the United States (mean age of 21.2 years) in a qualitative study, focusing on consumption from purchase to divestment stage. The study found that fast fashion consumers enjoyed buying large quantities of clothing at affordable prices and divested more due to changes in apparel trends, whereas slow fashion consumers purchased less clothing that would last for a long time.

To summarize, extant research included a wide range of participants in terms of age. Yet, results of these studies indicate that there are notable differences in fast fashion consumption between younger and older market segments. Specifically, in comparison with older consumers, Millennials appear to favor and frequent fast fashion stores more often, buy more clothing, and express greater enjoyment of the process.

The fast fashion industry is still in its growth phase in the United States as well as around the world (“Fast Fashion in 2016”, 2016). It is important to study fast fashion consumption and driving forces behind it. To address the gap in the literature and better understand the fast fashion consumer, this study focused on the younger Millennials. Younger Millennials are consumption driven, fashion oriented, and have increasingly influential purchasing power that is likely to impact significantly the fast fashion industry in the next decade. This group represents an important market segment and warranted further investigation.

Emerging Adulthood

Younger Millennials are currently in the life stage known as emerging adulthood. Emerging adulthood is commonly described as the age group between 18-25 (Arnett, 2000). It is a “developmental period after adolescence and before adulthood” (p. 2012) when young people delay marriage, children and career responsibilities and pursue identity exploration (Mitchell & Syed, 2015).

This time period from the late teens through mid-twenties is characterized by independence as young people are actively exploring identity and social roles (Arnett, 2015). During emerging adulthood, young people typically expand their range of personal experiences (Arnett, 2011). These experiences can occur at school, work and during activities focused on self-development. Specifically, college is a time period where emerging adults are provided with an environment for identity exploration through activities and with peer groups (McAdams & Guo, 2014). Further, new consumer behavior patterns are established during this period in life. Emerging adults may pursue identity exploration through purchasing fashion products that give “visible form to personal and social identity” (Workman & Lee, 2011, p. 310).

As this study sought to understand the meaning of fast fashion consumption among young women in the United States, it was important to acknowledge this influential stage of life that focuses exploring one’s identity, partially, through fashion consumption (Arnett, 2015). Therefore, this research studied younger Millennial women in emerging adulthood, ages 18-25.

Women Fast Fashion Consumers

This study explored the consumer from the perspective of gender (woman) and not sex (female). Sex refers to biological and physiological characteristics that define an individual; whereas gender refers to socially constructed characteristics used to describe men and women (“Gender: definitions”, n.d.). Gender is made up of social concepts that shape an individual’s identity and appearance, as well as how their identity is perceived by others (“Gender vs. Sex”, n.d.). In this study, exploration of women as consumers of fast fashion was of interest.

Among fast fashion consumers in emerging adulthood, women represent a larger segment due to their interests in appearance and fashion as well as increased annual earnings and spending power (Silverstein & Sayre, 2009). Women drive approximately 80% of all consumer purchasing through a combination of buying power and influence on family members and

friends' buying decisions (Brennan, 2015). Women are more likely than men to spend money on beauty and apparel products and are willing to pay extra for clothing that appeals to them (Silverstein & Sayre, 2009). On average, women spend \$596 per year on clothing which is almost double the \$331 that men spend per year (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Further, women are more likely to spend money on new trends in clothing, whereas, men are more likely to spend money on new technology ("Money May Make," 2015).

Specifically, the woman in emerging adulthood is a significant target market for the fashion industry overall and fast fashion retailers, in particular. Women enjoy shopping and frequent clothing stores often; 47% of women in emerging adulthood shop for apparel more than twice a month (Lifestyle Monitor, 2016). Women in emerging adulthood account for approximately one-third of all U.S. retail store visits, spending, on average, \$57 per store shopping trip and \$75 per online shopping visit (Lockwood, 2013). This group has ample discretionary income, spending on apparel nearly \$900 annually (Lifestyle Monitor, 2016).

Young women are interested and enticed to shop at fast fashion retailers due to low price, newness, and variety of products (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006). This cohort is price sensitive, but also wants the newest fashion trends. An NPD Group (2015) reported that 48% of women consumers aged 18-24 shopped at the trend-setting fast fashion retailers H&M and Zara (as cited in Cohen, n.d.). Fast fashion consumers who showcased their large quantities of clothing on social media from retailers, such as Forever 21 and H&M, were typically women under 25 years old (Cline, 2013).

Several studies have examined fast fashion consumers and included both men and women participants. However, the research did not provide justification as to why both genders were studied together for their fast fashion consumption practices. This is despite the fact that statistics

demonstrate clear differences in shopping frequency, spending, and store preferences by gender. Gabrielli's et al. (2013) qualitative study of Italian men and women investigated consumption practices of fast fashion products. The study based participant selection on the need for a broad range of variables (age, sex, level of education, job) that was considered relevant to fast fashion behavior. The study reported differences in consumption by age group (younger consumers under 35/older consumers over 35), but not by gender. Joy's et al. (2012) qualitative study found that Hong Kong and Canadian fast fashion consumers' concerns for the environment did not translate into sustainable fashion practices. The authors, who recruited participants interested in fashion consumption, did not report any differences between men and women, even though previous research indicates that women tend to be more environmentally conscious than men (Shim, 1995).

McNeill and Moore's (2015) study conducted mall intercept surveys in New Zealand and selected five women and five men for in-depth interviews to explore their sustainable apparel attitudes and fashion consumption practices. Men and women participants were recruited based on their fashion purchasing frequency (study did not indicate the amount) and average monthly spending on fashion products. Some participants were categorized as self-oriented, were frequent purchasers of clothing, and influenced by the shopping behavior of their peers, whereas others were focused on being sustainable and reducing their impact on the world through decreasing clothing consumption. The authors did not report any differences between men and women participants. The results were contradictory to previous research that reported that men were not frequent purchasers of clothing (Silverstein & Sayre, 2009), nor as concerned about the environment (Shim, 1995) as women.

In contrast, several studies focused only on women consumers. In a qualitative study, Watson and Yan (2013) investigated young U.S. women (mean age = 21.2) decisions related to purchasing/consumption, evaluation, and divestment stages. The authors reasoned that only women were included in the research because fast fashion stores primarily offer women's clothing. Similarly, Wang (2010) chose to study only women in Sweden arguing that (1) the vast majority of fast fashion consumers are women; and (2) women's apparel consumption is quite different than men's. The study found that women consumers chose fast fashion brands due to low price and trendy styles and had a positive experience.

Statistical data and extant research indicate that women apparel consumption differs from male apparel consumption due to spending priorities (clothing vs. technology), importance placed on appearance, interest in fashion trends, and overall needs and wants. Given that, this study focused on women consumers. Overall, this research explored and sought to understand the fast fashion consumption experience of young women consumers in emerging adulthood in the United States. For this study, the fast fashion consumer was identified as a young woman in emerging adulthood (ages 18-25) who purchased large amounts of clothing.

Overconsumption

Defining Overconsumption

Brown and Cameron (2000) described overconsumption as the “excessive use of goods and services” (p. 28) within the context of an individual pursuing satisfaction, happiness, or comfort. While overconsumption can result in immediate gratification and even a lasting enjoyment, scholars agree that any excessive consumption is viewed as “problematic and/or excessive” (Hakasson, 2014, p. 693) and has negative effects on consumers, society, and environment. From the consumer perspective, overconsumption has been linked to high debt, longer work hours to maintain a consuming lifestyle, unhealthy habits, and overall decreased

quality of life (De Graaf et. al., 2014). From a broader perspective, overconsumption is taking a toll on the environment by depleting the earth's resources and increasing the levels of pollution and waste in the process of making products that are consumed at greater rates (Schor, 1999).

Shortly after World War II, western countries began to recover economically, and consumption of goods became fundamental to a productive economy (Lebow, 1955). The “age of consumerism” (p. 15) began in the 1950s, when the U.S. economy experienced unprecedented growth, and Americans engaged in record consumer spending and buying new products (De Graaf et al., 2014). In the 1990s, consumption accelerated again, marking the era of “new consumerism” (p. 3) in the United States (Schor, 2002). The new era represented a shift in values as consumers focused on materialism, affluence, and status in their consumption practices. The shift was fueled by a significant decline in consumer good prices, an increase in credit card usage, and the rise of mass market retailers across the country (De Graaf et al., 2014). Consumption practices of Americans continued to increase in the coming decades.

Since the 1950s, the United States has been at the forefront of ever-increasing consumption (Schor, 2011). Why are Americans overconsuming? An obvious reason—because they can afford it due to availability and low prices of goods. However, overconsumption may have other, not so obvious reasons. In *Affluenza: How Overconsumption is Killing Us and How to Fight Back*, De Graaf, Wann and Naylor (2014) discussed how U.S. consumers attempted to meet their needs such as “identity, creativity, expression, and belonging by owning and displaying our stuff” (p. 32). The authors mentioned that clothes are frequently used to meet these needs. Perhaps, there is a deeper meaning to this desire for stuff that results in overconsumption. The following sections outline various historic and contemporary perspectives that provide insights and offer potential explanations for the meanings of overconsumption.

Materialistic Values and Overconsumption

Schor (1999) identified overconsumption as a focus on materialism, when society seeks more consumer goods, such as fashion, luxury homes, nice vacations, or the most current technology. Belk (1985) defined materialism as “the importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions” (p. 265). Over shoppers have been identified as materialists whose main goal in life is acquiring goods (Benson, 2008). Materialistic belongings convey one’s status and success to the world (O’Cass, 2004). Further, people with a high level of materialism view material possessions to be at the center of their lives and identities (Belk, 1985). A study on smartphone usage found that individuals with a high degree of materialism were more likely to compulsively use smartphones (Lee, Chang, Lin, & Cheng, 2014). In Gabrielli et al. (2013), Italian fast fashion shoppers did not identify themselves as habitual buyers who had to frequently purchase fast fashion. They only admitted that they knew people who were compulsive fashion shoppers. In contrast, participants in McNeill and Moore (2015) study in New Zealand identified themselves as frequent purchasers of fashion, admitting that their strong personal wants for acquiring fashion overpowered practical needs.

Guido Brera, an Italian Investment Manager, interviewed in *The True Cost* documentary film notes that consumption of fast fashion is deceitful as it makes people feel good and feel rich, because they can afford to purchase more material goods: “one to two T-shirts a day” (Ross & Morgan, 2015, 36:58). This happens because of deflated apparel prices even at a time when costs of all truly necessary goods and services (i.e., food, health care, education) are increasing and becoming less affordable for an average consumer. Materialistic values warranted more research to better understand the fast fashion consumer and overconsumption practices as this had not been explored in-depth in previous fashion studies.

Conspicuous [Over]Consumption

Veblen (1967) described how public demonstrations of expensive goods were a means for the rich to show off their wealth and social position in order to secure status at the upper levels of society. In his conspicuous consumption theory, the author suggested that individuals rising in socioeconomic status showed their growing prosperity through public display of expensive goods (Veblen, 1967). He further argued that consumption for other social classes was driven by upward mobility (Schor, 1999). For example, an upper middle-class lifestyle focused on affluence became an aspiration for U.S. consumers (Schor, 2002).

Overconsumption may be fueled by a desire to belong as we engage in social comparison with those nearest to us in our social groups in an attempt to keep up with the Joneses and find our place in society (Carr, Gotlieb, Lee, & Shah, 2012). Overconsumption may be related to the pursuit of greater recognition and acceptance by neighbors, co-workers, and one's social circle (De Graaf et al., 2014). In Gabrielli et al. (2013), fast fashion consumption had a socialization aspect as Italian consumers created a community around fashion products to communicate and share advice and experiences described in positive terms. The authors did not confirm that social status was a motivation for fast fashion consumption. McNeill and Moore (2015) concluded that some New Zealand consumers used fashion purchasing in terms of "fitting in" (p. 217) as society can be judgmental if one's appearance does not conform to a group's norms. Participants noted that "people dressed well there" (p. 217), and they did not want to feel out of place (McNeill & Moore, 2015). However, a drive towards upward mobility in social status was not expressed as motivation for consuming clothing in the study. More research was necessary to explore if overconsumption of fast fashion related to the consumer's needs for social status, recognition, and/or desire to fit in to a social group or community.

Coping with Negative Emotions and Overconsumption

Constance (2005) wrote in *Consuming Desires* that overconsumption habits may be driven by “avoidance of confronting one’s own feeling of worth by acting out social aspirations through shopping” (p. 123). Benson (2008) posited that overconsuming develops from insecurity and the need to transform oneself into someone new and worthy. Buying more may distract from feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. Overconsumption can stem from “shaky self-images” (p. 26), and consuming may grow in importance to gain self-satisfaction (De Graaf et al., 2014).

In a study on compulsive buying and shopping addiction, participants used shopping as a way to “boost self-esteem” (p. 246) as they filled up feelings of worthlessness with shopping (Sohn & Choi, 2014). Little is known about self-esteem issues with the fast fashion consumer. In Watson and Yan (2013), U.S. consumers discussed that fast fashion garments complemented their looks and improved how they felt about themselves, but potential connection between consuming excessive amounts of fashion and deeper self-esteem motivations were not explored. Further, Joy et al. (2012) suggested that fast fashion offered endless possibilities to shop and redefine the self. However, participants expressed fast fashion consumption in the context that “trendy items allow me to update my wardrobe more regularly than before” (p. 282), without a deeper exploration related to consumer self-esteem (Joy et al., 2012). Further exploration of fashion overconsumption and consumer’s self-worth and self-esteem is warranted to understand experiences of the fast fashion consumer.

Overconsuming may be motivated by and result in a myriad of complex emotional states. Excessive shopping often originates from the need to avoid unpleasant feelings and can be a temporary repair for negative moods (Sohn & Choi, 2014). The excitement of shopping can make people feel better and elevate bad moods, especially in the short-term. Benson (2008)

described how compulsive buyers began shopping in a low mood, but after purchasing products, the mood improved substantially. However, the effects were short-lived; soon after shopping, the mood significantly declined again (Benson, 2008). “Retail therapy” (p. 249) alleviated negative moods associated with depression, anxiety, and feelings of deficiency (Sohn & Choi, 2014). The act of shopping through retail therapy may become a coping mechanism for individuals who are sad or anxious (“Can Shopping Help,” 2014). Food overconsumption has been linked to managing negative emotions such as “stress/anxiety, loneliness, and sadness” (p. 206) and provided short-term emotional gratification and distraction from negative feelings (Kemp, Bui & Grier, 2013).

Post-Consumption Regret

The emotions associated with overconsumption were found to be connected to feelings of regret. In Sohn and Choi (2014), individuals expressed that shopping helped them to cope with feelings of “worry, stress, and loneliness” (p. 249), but after their purchases, they expressed regret and realized that shopping was the only way they knew to cope with these negative feelings. Similarly, excessive drinkers explained that they consumed alcohol to cope with negative feelings (Muraven, Collins, Morsheimer, Shiffman & Paty, 2005). They expressed regret after excessive drinking, which led them to consume even more alcohol in the future.

However, in previous research, the consumption and post-consumption of fast fashion products have been linked to a positive post-shopping experience. In Gabrielli et al. (2013), fast fashion shoppers’ reactions to the fast fashion experience were “related to positive sensations” (p. 219) as pleasure was found in the ability to wear something different every day. Post-consumption was a continued positive experience as fast fashion shoppers felt they had “found a bargain” (p. 214) and enjoyed exchanging advice with others on the fast fashion shopping experience (Gabrielli et al., 2013). Fast fashion consumers were “generally satisfied with the

products they purchased” (p. 34) even six months after the purchase (Wang, 2010). In Watson and Yan (2013), consumers found excitement in buying fast fashion as they enjoyed both the store and social experience, and no regret was expressed.

Other forms of overconsumption related to consumer products such as alcohol or food have led consumers to feelings of regret. Current literature had not found the fast fashion shopping experience to be equated with negative emotions or significant feelings of regret. There is a dearth of information related to fast fashion consumption and negative emotions or regret during or after the shopping experience that warranted more exploration.

Overconsumption and Fast Fashion Comparisons

Even though fast fashion has not been linked to overconsumption research in the literature, the review of overconsumption studies and theoretical underpinnings indicate that there are similarities between fast fashion shopping and overconsuming other types of products (e.g., food, alcohol, technology). For example, consumers admitted that fast fashion products improved how they felt about themselves (Gabrielli et al., 2013; Watson & Yan, 2013) as was found in research on food consumption (Kemp et al., 2013) and shopping addiction (Sohn & Choi, 2014). Further, fashion shoppers admitted wanting more apparel than they needed (Cline, 2013; McNeill & Moore, 2015), which is a materialistic value (Benson, 2008).

At the same time, some differences between fast fashion consumption and existing overconsumption research should be noted. For example, excessive alcohol drinkers expressed negative emotions and feelings of regret after excessive drinking episodes (Muraven et al., 2005). In contrast, fast fashion shoppers expressed positive feelings with no regret after consuming large quantities of apparel (Cline, 2013; Gabrielli et al., 2013; McNeill & Moore, 2015). Further, no study reported that fast fashion shoppers bought clothes to improve their social status, which has been described as a motivation for overconsumption (Schor, 2002;

Veblen, 1967). It was important to explore the links between fast fashion consumption and overconsumption of other products.

Theoretical Frameworks

Clothing is often one of the first things people notice about others, and in many ways, it defines us as individuals and allows outlet for creative expression. Clothing is a necessity to function in contemporary society and protect us in our daily lives. Yet, for some individuals, apparel is consumed to excess. The fashion consumer may be motivated to increase their consumption levels for a variety of complex reasons. The following theories were used to frame this study as well as provide further insights into understanding the fast fashion consumer, their experiences with clothing, and the meaning they attach to these experiences as they personify the fast fashion phenomenon.

Symbolic Self-Completion Theory

Symbolic self-completion theory proposes that people engage in many different activities to help create a definition for themselves and to construct an identity (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). This need to engage in activities for self-definition is based on an individual's feelings of uncertainty or insecurity. Within the context of self-completion, the person's flaws are "covered over by self-symbolizing behaviors" (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982, p. 90). To find an identity, they search for "symbols of completeness" (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982, p. 93). These symbols, such as items they may purchase or experiences, they may engage in, help to clarify their identity and contribute to self-completion (Moss, 2016).

Further, one's identity might be questioned, particularly by peers. In response to real or imaginary questioning, an individual might utilize a material symbol, such as a fashion item, to compensate (Moss, 2016). According to symbolic self-completion theory, these symbols enable the individual to receive recognition from peers and acknowledgement by others, which "moves

an individual closer to their self-defining goal” (Gollwitzer & Wicklund, 1985, p. 704). The individual is not necessarily looking to please others, but to re-confirm his or her identity in his/her own eyes and to be socially acknowledged by their self-identity.

Arthur (1997) proposed that people who feel incomplete in their identity may use props, such as clothing, to create completeness in their lives. Grotts and Johnson (2013) used the symbolic self-completion theory to explore Millennial consumers’ consumption of handbags. They found this cohort sought to portray status and receive acknowledgement from peers through consumption of well-known handbag brands. Rosenbaum and Kuntze (2005) used the theory to explore why compulsive buyers unethically return designer merchandise to retailers after wearing garments to events. The authors concluded that obtaining and wearing designer merchandise evoked positive observations from others and supported self-definitions of fashion trendsetting.

The fast fashion consumer might compensate for feelings of insecurities and/or uncertainty in self-definition by buying more apparel (Constance, 2005; Sohn & Choi, 2014). Symbolic self-completion theory implies that people might use material goods, such as apparel, as symbols to help define and complete themselves and communicate their desired self-identities to others. Fast fashion consumers may engage in buying excessive amounts of clothing in order to get closer to their desired self-identity. The fast fashion consumer is influenced by celebrities, the styles seen in glamour fashion magazines, and/or advertising (Anguelov, 2016). Symbolic self-completion theory helped to explain overconsumption of new clothing and consumers’ pursuit of fast fashion in order to create and communicate a self-definition aligned with role models, whether it is a celebrity, or a popular individual in one’s peer circle.

Social Comparison Theory

Social comparison theory implies that people have an innate desire to compare themselves to other people and evaluate themselves by comparing to others (Festinger, 1954). Comparison to others helps individuals reach assessments about themselves (Morse & Gergen, 1970). These comparisons assist individuals in determining how similar or different they are to the compared group(s) (Festinger, 1954). Morse and Gergen (1970) found that even remote exposure to another person is enough to provoke comparison. This drive for comparison can affect a person's behavior (Festinger, 1954).

The theory focuses on two types of social comparison: upward social comparison and downward social comparison (Festinger, 1954). In upward social comparison, individuals compare themselves to those they believe are better and search for ways to achieve similarities with an aspiration group (Cherry, 2017). Upward comparison can allow an individual to emulate ideals presented to them by attractive individuals. In the fashion world, this could be celebrities or peers who might be particularly fashionable in their apparel style, or simply popular for other reasons. Fast fashion shoppers in their pursuit to compare themselves to celebrities may consume more to achieve the desired ideal. Further, to emulate a peer group they want to be a part of, the fast fashion consumer may shop for more clothing that is comparable to the peer groups to look similar and have a sense of belonging.

In downward comparison, people compare themselves to those that are not doing as well as they are. This comparison is often centered on making oneself feel better (Cherry, 2017). For instance, consumers may compare themselves to people who do not have the means to purchase higher-end branded apparel, or those who are not concerned with appearance and fashion. In not wanting to be comparable to these groups, consumers might choose to acquire fast fashion

brands that represent the latest trends to look more stylish. In short, consumers might want to look different than a downward comparison group.

In pursuit of feeling better about themselves and be favorably compared to others, consumers may shop for clothing more frequently. In Noble et al. (2008), college aged consumers compared their fashion styles and knowledge with their peers to reassure that they were “trendy or keeping up with their peers” (p. 623). In addition, some consumers compared their fashion styles to not only peers but also celebrities, who they described as “classy and fashionable individuals” (Noble, Haytko & Phillips, 2008, p. 623). Fast fashion shoppers may consume more clothing in their pursuit of upward social comparison to peers and celebrities. The comparison seeks to decrease uncertainty about one’s identity and place in the society. Fast fashion consumers might buy more apparel to move closer to their ideals in upward comparison to a peer or celebrity, who they aspire to emulate.

Possible Selves Theory

Markus and Nurius (1986) introduced possible selves theory as “ideal selves we would very much like to become [...], the selves we could become, and the selves we are afraid of becoming” (p. 954). It is a theory to explore and assist with “meaning making” (Markus & Nurius, 1986 p. 12) and to provide a context for evaluation of the self (Dunkel & Kerpelman, 2006). Possible selves theory explores the ways people think about themselves, or possibly invent themselves, and how these thoughts influence their behavior. For instance, possible selves may be one’s ideal self-described as “the successful self, the creative self, the admired self” (p. 954); whereas, the possible selves that is not ideal could be “the alone self, the depressed self, the incompetent self” (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954).

Within the context of possible selves, individuals imagine many roles they can invent for themselves and aspire to be based on hopes, goals, and fantasies (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Further, possible selves reveal the inventive nature of the self and allows for individualization of desired aspirations (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The concept can provide insight into what an individual may or may not do and guide one's behavior (Dunkel & Kerpelman, 2006). For example, in the researcher's personal conversation with a young fashion consumer in emerging adulthood, she shared that every day she wakes up and thinks about who she wants to be for that day, and then picks an outfit that expresses the desired image. In other words, she uses her clothes as a form of daily costume. The woman had recently purchased a blue striped dress, sandals, sunglasses, navy purse, and bracelet that had a compass on it. The woman felt the outfit was perfect for "being" a cute sailor girl and envisioned herself on a sail boat adventure that she might go on someday.

Young consumers in emerging adulthood, such as college students, envision their possible selves as they venture in the world outside of home and school. They may consume more apparel to create the possible selves they would like to become as adults and professionals, or simply take an imagined role for a day, envisioning "becoming" someone else. For example, "I am now a college student but could become a successful professional, who takes a vacation with a perfect outfit to complement the scenario." The possible selves theory provides insights into motivations a fashion consumer may have for acquiring apparel that supports their aspirations for personal reinvention and trying on different roles of various possible selves, who they might become in the future.

Possible selves theory was developed to further explore "self-knowledge" (p. 954), specifically, how individuals think about their potential and future (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The theory has been used to frame research in diverse fields, such as psychology, sociology, business, medicine, and education as well as in the discussions about gender, sexuality, and

“fantasy development” (Dunkel & Kerpelman, 2006, p. 8). This researcher is not aware of the theory being used as a framework in the apparel discipline. The theory was used to explore the possible selves a fashion consumer may pursue, and how apparel products might be used in the process.

The theories discussed in this chapter were useful in studying the complex nature of the fast fashion consumption habits of women in emerging adulthood. The two theories, symbolic self-completion and possible selves provided an important foundation for understanding themes focused on ‘self’ as participants expressed constructing one’s identity through clothing consumption. Social comparison theory assisted in explaining participant experiences that affected their consumption behavior, in particular, social influences, such as the fashion culture.

Summary of Fast Fashion and Overconsumption Research

In review of the literature, a significant motivator for consumption is an individuals’ feelings and emotions. Individuals may feel insecure, inadequate or have a low self-image that motivates them to consume for alleviation of negative emotions. From the research, this appears to be more common in people who consume food, alcohol, or other non-fashion items. On the other hand, individuals seem to consume to fulfill needs that evoke positive emotions. These motivations are more varied: desire to belong, receive recognition, identity creation (for oneself and others), instant gratification, role communication and creativity. The consumption process in both overconsumption and fast fashion studies has resulted in positive emotions. Additionally, consumption has outcomes that effect the environment, economics, and society in general. Based on the extant research, a summary of findings in Tables 2 and 3 that follow was compiled to provide insight to motivations and outcomes of general overconsumption and consumption of fast fashion.

Table 2. *Motivations for Overconsumption*

| Motivation | Research Study, Date |
|--|---|
| A. To deal with/reduce <i>negative feelings and emotions</i> (bad mood, sadness, stress, anxiety, and even depression) that result from: | |
| Feelings of uncertainty and insecurity [symbolic self-completion theory] Feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, poor self-image | Benson (2008); Wicklund & Gollwitzer (1982) Constance (2005); De Graaf et al. (2014); Sohn & Choi (2014) |
| Loneliness such as perception of not belonging to a social group | De Graaf et al. (2014); Kemp et al. (2013); McNeill & Moore (2015); Muraven et al. (2005) |
| B. To generate <i>positive emotions</i> (enjoyment, excitement, pleasure, good mood) that result from: | |
| Belonging and fitting in (peer influence), feeling accepted; achieve similarities with an aspiration group [social comparison theory; upward social comparison] | Carr et al. (2012); De Graaf et al. (2014); Festinger (1954); McNeill & Moore (2015); Veblen (1967) |
| Receiving compliments, recognition, and acknowledgement from peers [symbolic self-completion theory] | McNeill & Moore (2015); Watson & Yan (2013); Wicklund & Gollwitzer (1982) |
| Improved appearance / looking good (imagine or real) for themselves or others [possible self theory – self consumer would like to become] | Gabrielli et al. (2013); Markus & Nurius (1986); Watson & Yan (2013) |
| Aspirations influenced from others/social status (looking fashionable, trendy, cool) | Constance (2005); Schor (1999); Veblen (1967) |
| Create identity or complete self-identity (imagined or real) [for themselves] | Anguelov (2016); Cline (2013); Gabrielli et al. (2013); McNeill & Moore (2015) |
| Communicate one's roles and identities in the society [for others] | Cline (2013); De Graaf et al. (2014); Gabrielli et al. (2013) |
| Need for variety and uniqueness/newness (wearing something new every day) | Cline (2013); De Graaf et al. (2014); Joy et al. (2013) & Wang (2010) |
| Feeling proud when finding a bargain/experience of a “hunt” for that special piece, instant gratification Expressing creativity/aesthetic preferences/artistic side | Cline (2013); Gabrielli et al. (2013); Watson & Yan (2013) Anguelov (2016); Cline (2013); De Graaf et al. (2014) & Wang (2010) |

Table 3. *Problematic Outcomes of Fast Fashion Consumption*

| Outcome | Research study, date |
|--|--|
| Achieving any points listed in A and B. | |
| Post-consumption regret and guilt (overconsumption) | Muraven et al. (2005); Sohn & Choi (2014) |
| Negative impact on the environment (fast fashion consumption and overconsumption) | Anguelov (2016); Schor (1999) |
| Addiction, impulsive/compulsive shopping (fast fashion consumption and overconsumption) | Bedford et al. (2016); Lee et al. (2014); Muraven et al. (2005) |
| High debt (overconsumption) | De Graaf et al. (2014) |
| Decreased quality of life (poor health, unhappiness, need to work longer hours) | De Graaf et al. (2014) |
| Materialism (overconsumption) | Schor (1999) |

To date, limited understanding of the fast fashion consumer exists, specifically, of their experiences associated with acquiring and using large amounts of inexpensive fashionable clothing. Previous studies (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; Gabrielli et al., 2013; Watson & Yan, 2013) of the fast fashion consumer identified the need for more research. Previous research on fast fashion consumption has primarily focused on consumers of varying age and gender outside of the United States. Further, no research has focused on fast fashion [over]consumers, those who buy large quantities of apparel, trying to understand possible motivations for this type of consumption. The goal of the study was to understand the experiences of young women in emerging adulthood who consume fast fashion apparel in large quantities and explore the meaning and motivations behind this significant level of consumption.

CHAPTER 3. METHOD

This research explored lived experiences of women in emerging adulthood who consumed large quantities of fast fashion apparel, and why they bought this level of apparel. Specifically, the study sought to understand the meaning the women attached to their clothing as they shopped for, acquired, wore, stored, and disposed of fast fashion apparel. To address the purpose of the study, a qualitative research method was utilized.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is used for in-depth exploration of a phenomenon and focuses on understanding complex situations in their natural settings (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research is a way to understand the meaning an individual may assign to a problem or daily activity (Creswell, 2014). This research method provides understanding and description of personal experiences “from the perspective of those being studied” (Lee, 2014, p. 94). Qualitative research is useful for studying a limited number of individuals’ experiences in-depth (Creswell, 2014). The researcher interacts actively with participants in the field to garner as much detail and description of experiences expressed in participant’s own words (Creswell, 2013).

Apparel consumption in general is a complex process as motivation and behavior differs among individuals. Fast fashion consumption is a relatively new phenomenon, and very limited research exists on the topic. Through the researcher’s personal conversations with young women, some of them purchased small quantities of clothing (25-30 pieces), whereas others bought large quantities (over 150 pieces) within one year. This study explored experiences of young women who were considered fast fashion consumers as they consumed large quantities of apparel. The study sought to gain insights into the motivation behind this level of consumption during various stages of the consumer decision process. The goal was to allow each participant to articulate

their personal feelings, experiences and perceptions related to clothing to understand the meaning fast fashion consumption had for participants.

In creating a qualitative research study, the researcher needs to consider his/her approach to the research in terms of “philosophical worldview” (Creswell, 2014, p. 5). Social constructivism perspective guided this study, as the researcher acknowledged that understanding of complex reality is socially constructed and shaped by individual experiences. Crotty (1998) described constructivism as contingent upon human practices and “the unique experience of each of us” (p. 58) in understanding meaning. The researcher’s goal is to interpret the meanings that individuals have about the world (Creswell, 2014). Their “meanings are varied and multiple” (p. 24), and “reality is co-constructed between the researcher and the researched and shaped by individual experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 36).

This study explored the meaning clothing had to the fast fashion consumer, and how young women used excessive consumption of apparel to experience reality. Meaning was culled from participant descriptions of any engagement with apparel in their daily lives. Further, the theories introduced in Chapter 2 regarding symbolic self-completion, possible selves exploration, and social comparison were applied for interpreting meanings of participants’ experiences.

Phenomenological Tradition

Phenomenology has been used in consumer research to seek in-depth understanding of complex issues (Goulding, 2005). Phenomenologists believe that “truth and understanding life can emerge from people’s life experiences” (Byrne, 2001, p. 830). The purpose is to understand individuals’ lived experiences, and the meanings they attach to these experiences by describing them (Moustakas, 1994). Meaning emerges from the “perspective of the experiencing individual” (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1990, p. 347). In the phenomenological process,

“language is the central medium for transmitting meaning” (p. 302), as the language is used “to convey information and describe reality” (p. 302, Goulding, 2005). This reality becomes the data that are garnered via “observations, interviews, or written descriptions” (Byrne, 2001, p. 831). In this study, phenomenological approach was used to obtain in-depth understanding of participants’ experiences as they consumed large quantities of apparel and thereby embodied the fast fashion phenomenon. The researcher explored participants’ perceptions, feelings, and experiences related to consumption of fast fashion apparel that communicated an identity. Exploring “everyday consumer experiences with a description of lived meaning” (p. 360) enhances the understanding of consumer behavior (Thompson et al., 1990).

Epoche Statement

In qualitative research, the researcher considers the “epoche process” (p. 85) and prepares themselves “to look with care, to see what is really there, and to stay away from everyday habits of knowing things, people, and events” (p. 85) as they examine the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). In other words, a researcher should make every effort to approach their study without preconceived notions or assumptions. The researcher acknowledges how their background, beliefs, and values might affect their perspectives on the research topic as well as during the interpretation of the results.

As an individual, I have always been interested in how and why people interact with clothing as they acquire and use garments to construct and communicate their identities. For me, appearance is important, and clothing is a form of expression; a way to demonstrate something about myself to the world. I think about what I am going to wear each night before the next day, and this may be influenced by the next day’s events at work, or in my personal life, or how I want to feel. Clothing is a significant part of my lifestyle, and I assume that the same is true for

many people. If it is not, this is also interesting to me, but I have preconceptions that most people are interested in their appearance. Clothing can be transformative as people change their appearance through manipulating clothing and styling outfits. Individuals may use garments to fit in or stand out, empower themselves, make themselves feel better, or demonstrate a certain social status. I have preconceptions that this is true for many people, too.

Further, as a woman, clothing has been an important part of my life since I was young and continues to influence who I am today. My identity as a woman from youth to middle age is closely linked to clothing. In my childhood, it was exciting to go back to school shopping and decide what new clothes I would have and wear, and then in the teenage years, clothing became more about trends and conformity. In college, my thinking about clothing changed dramatically and assisted with self-identity formation, and peer influences were also important. As I age, clothing continues to be linked to appearance but in a different way as body shape changes and roles are more complex. I approach this research wanting to understand what other women think about when they consume clothing, particularly women in emerging adulthood who have many influences and choices in dress where role may play a major factor.

In reading about the evolution of the fashion business and the emerging dominance of fast fashion and its continued growth, I am particularly interested to learn why individuals have increased their clothing consumption to extraordinary levels. I was born before the retail industry offered fast fashion, but now find myself occasionally buying fast fashion items as it can be hard to resist another very affordable piece of clothing that will enhance my appearance and image in some way. I worked for a fashion accessories company and was based in China for several years, sourcing textiles during the emergence of fast fashion. I saw the direct impact on workers and the environment through producing so many products – health and safety hazards

and environmental pollution. I have strong beliefs that society should consume less and seriously consider the impact of overconsumption on our society. Further, the topic of overconsumption of apparel is of a interest as I am an instructor of students in emerging adulthood, who frequent fast fashion retailers. The students love to discuss their clothing purchases and share their experiences with fashion. From my point of view, apparel consumption will continue to increase as changing appearance through clothing and accessories is important for all consumers, and especially, for the younger generation. I would like to better understand these consumers' experiences as they purchase an ever-greater quantity of apparel items and frequent the fast fashion retailer.

Pilot Study

In spring 2017, a pilot study was conducted with two women undergraduate students majoring in fashion at Stevenson University, upon receiving an IRB approval. For one week, each day, both participants created individual blog entries with unique titles; for example, "My (All Time) Favorite Cardigan" and wrote, on average, two to three short paragraphs, reflecting on their daily experiences with clothing. After the blog part of the study was completed, individual interviews were conducted with each participant. The interviews lasted approximately one and a half hour. Blog comments were discussed during the interviews, along with photos posted by the participants. This allowed for an open dialogue and discussion of the whole experience.

It was found that the blogging activity provided deeper insights into the meaning of fast fashion consumption and various themes related to identity construction, self-expression, emotions, fantasy, and peer approval. It appears that participants were more open when sharing their experiences through blogging than during interviews. This might be because this generation

finds the use of technology more natural as a form of communication. Another reason is that they had an opportunity to blog at the time, or right after, their experiences, which seemed to provide additional richness and authenticity of expressed thoughts and feelings. Participants commented that they enjoyed blogging about their apparel-related experiences. The interviews were important and useful for follow-up questions to clarify blog comments and to better understand participants' feelings and lived experiences. Based on the pilot study, the interview protocol was edited to focus less on store-related experiences and more on the participant experiences using fast fashion clothing and the meaning it brings to their lives.

Research Participants

Defining Research Population

As discussed in Chapter 2, women in emerging adulthood were the target population as this generation is more consumption oriented, trend driven and consumers of fast fashion than older women (Noble et al., 2008). Women in general spend more on clothing and frequent apparel stores more often than men (Silverstein & Sayre, 2009). Statistics indicated that an average U.S. consumer, including infants and seniors, purchased 68 garments in 2016 ("ApparelStats & ShoeStats," 2017). Based on the researcher's personal conversations with young women in emerging adulthood, a significant number of them purchase in excess of 150 pieces a year. In this study, young women who purchased over 150 pieces of clothing a year were invited to be research participants. To date, no fast fashion study had investigated this apparel consumption level. Previous fast fashion studies have researched participants who shopped at fast fashion retailers (Choi et al., 2010; Wang, 2010; Watson and Yan, 2013), or reported that participants purchased on average 20-24 garments a year (Joung, 2014).

Young women in emerging adulthood (18-25) were recruited from the college student population. The traditional college-age population consists of ages 18-24 and has steadily risen

since 2000 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Moreover, women account for the majority of college students. Specifically, participants were recruited from a student population at Stevenson University, a mid-Atlantic university in a large suburban area of the United States. Women were recruited from undergraduate student population enrolled in different majors throughout the University. The investigator's goal was to obtain a participant pool from a variety of majors to garner a broad perspective of the fast fashion overconsumption experience. A complete description of participants is provided in Chapter 4.

Participant Recruitment

The study used a purposeful sampling method that allows to select certain individuals in order to better “understand a central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2015, p. 205), which in this study, was the consumption of excessive amounts of clothing by women in emerging adulthood. After IRB approval was received (Appendix A), recruitment of participants began on November 28, 2017 and was completed in January 30, 2018. To reach the research population, the researcher approached professors in various disciplines at Stevenson University and asked permission to talk to students in their classes. Four classes were attended, and the research was explained using a script (see Appendix G). A flyer describing the study was distributed to students and encouraged them to participate in the research (see Appendix B). The flyer was also posted throughout University buildings for recruitment. A \$25 VISA gift card was offered as an incentive to encourage participation in the research.

The research utilized a snowball sampling technique (Creswell, 2013). Women, who agreed to participate in the study, were asked to recommend other potential research participants, and the researcher followed-up these leads with an email to potential participants (see Appendix H). Most participants (11 women) were recruited through the flyers posted on campus, two were through in-class recruitment, and one was referred by another participant. Recruiting was

challenging as it began three weeks prior to the end of the fall semester, and then resumed on January 17, 2018 after the winter break.

After participants contacted the researcher, they began one-week blogging component, which was the first part of the data collection. Originally, a total of 16 women agreed to participate in the study and began the blogging activity. Two participants dropped out of the study due to time constraints. One stopped blogging after four days, and the other after three days. There were 14 women who participated in the study as saturation was reached. Saturation occurs when enough information has been gathered, and the major themes have been identified, and no new information will add to understanding the phenomenon (Creswell, 2015). Creswell (2013) recommends between 5 to 25 participants for qualitative research conducted in a phenomenological tradition.

Data Collection

Human subject approval of the study was obtained from the Iowa State University's Institutional Review Board. Prior to the data collection process, all women were presented a consent form (Appendix C) to inform participants about their rights, outline the procedure, and solicit any questions. The research design was comprised of two stages:

1. Participant blogging, with optional photo sharing;
2. Individual, semi-structured interviews.

Participant Blogging

The first part of the data collection process was comprised of participant blogging. Blogs are forums where individuals can express their thoughts and share experiences on a particular subject in a creative and personal manner (Rocamora, 2011). The blog was set-up individually for each participant, using Blackboard, a course management software, at the University to protect research data and participant identity. Blog entries were not shared with other research

participants and were only accessible to the blogger and the researcher. Loose guidelines for blogging were provided to participants as an example of what to include in their posts (Appendix D).

For a one-week period, women were asked to post daily blog entries (journal style) about their experiences related to clothing and appearance. Several open-ended questions about their clothing experiences were provided to introduce the topic. Participants were instructed to share any thoughts and feelings about their daily experiences while planning and shopping for, trying on, dressing up, storing, or disposing of apparel. If comfortable, participants had an opportunity to include photos of garments, outfits, and their closets to illustrate their experiences, thoughts, and feelings. In addition, participants had an opportunity to share a photo of their closet and blog about its contents answering a few open-ended questions about closet organization.

Participant blogging entries helped bring a deeper understanding of their daily experiences and the meaning they attached to these experiences of consuming fast fashion. The photos were used as a tool for the participants to illustrate their experience and help remember these experiences for discussions during the interview. They helped the researcher elicit additional questions during the interview. Using photos in a study may enhance the research process and better understand an individual's experience (Prosser & Schwartz, 1998). The images of material objects in the photos were not included in the analysis of the data.

Participants were given a pseudonym to be used for blogging, and in subsequent interviews, to ensure anonymity of the data. Blog posts were compiled into a single file for each participant. The researcher carefully reviewed all blog entries and made notes to ask additional questions during individual interviews, with the goal to better understand participant experiences and construction of meanings from these experiences.

Individual Interview

Semi-structured, individual interviews with participants were used for the second part of the data collection process. Interviews gain insight into reasons for individuals' experiences and behavior (Esterberg, 2002). The phenomenological interview is informal and interactive and uses open-ended questions (Moustakas, 1994). It allows participants to express their thoughts and feelings in their own words. To ensure a systematic approach to data collection, an interview protocol was used (Appendix E).

During the interview, participants engaged in a self-directed conversation with the researcher and answered open-ended questions about clothing consumption, including planning, acquisition, storing, wearing, and disposing from the interview protocol. Participants were asked to describe recent shopping trips and describe their experiences while choosing and wearing clothing, how and why they made clothing-related decisions, and how they felt about themselves. Probe questions garnered a more in-depth understanding of participant experiences and the meaning they attached to these experiences. To facilitate the conversation, the researcher followed up with participant blog entries by asking them to discuss how they felt during experiences they shared in blog post comments, and why they did or did not do things they blogged about. The interviews lasted approximately one hour. With participant permission, each interview was audio recorded with a digital recorder and later transcribed.

Data Analysis

In a qualitative study, management of the data consists of organization, transcribing interviews, analysis for common themes, and interpretation of participant lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). The data from the blogging activity was combined with the interview transcript for each participant for analysis. Individual blogs and interviews were combined into one document for data analysis. There were 14 separate documents (30 pages each on average)

that totaled approximately 420 pages of data. Procedural steps devised by Colaizzi (1978) were used to guide the data analysis, as outlined in Figure 1.

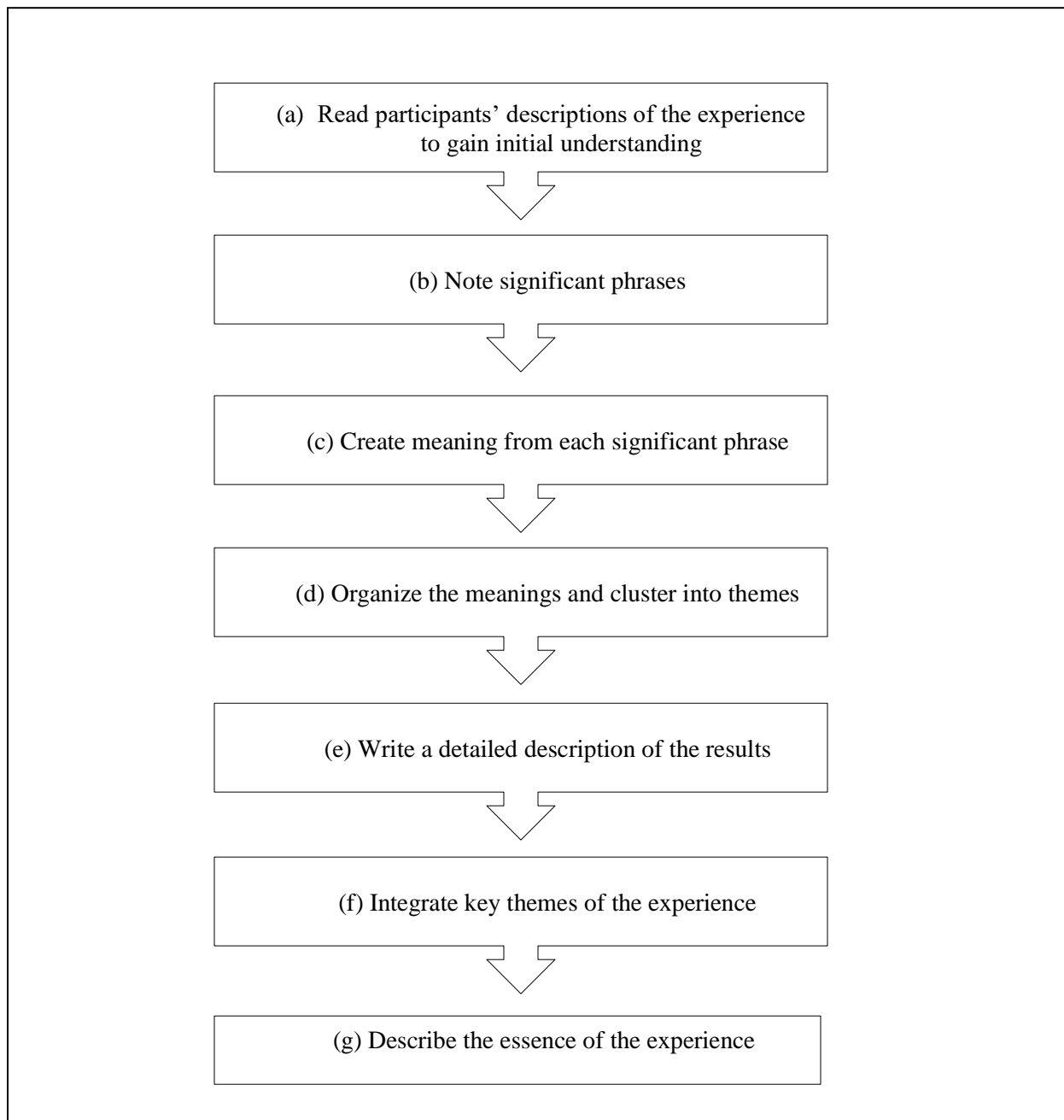


Figure 1. Flowchart outlining the steps for analysis of phenomenological data. Adapted from “Living With Hepatitis C: A Phenomenological Study,” by R. Hill, M. Pfeil, J. Moore and B. Richardson. 2014. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 24, p. 431. Copyright 2014 by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Research questions presented in Chapter 1 guided the data analysis. In the coding and theme development process, the researcher used an iterative approach moving back and forth between individual interviews and blog posts and the entire dataset to observe any connections and patterns (Spiggle, 1994). Further, as themes began to emerge from the data, theories introduced in Chapter 2 were used to guide the interpretation of the blog and interview data. For phenomenological research, it is important to demonstrate how “participant descriptions support the thematic interpretation” (Thompson et al., 1990, p. 347).

Trustworthiness

Several measures were taken during the data collection and analysis process to ensure trustworthiness of the research results. First, triangulation “using different types of evidence” (p. 176) was implemented using data from the blogs and interviews that support themes and perspectives for the study (Esterberg, 2002). This use of a “variety of data sources” (p. 85) in the collection of information is recommended for research credibility (Guba, 1981). Next, peer debriefing technique was used to enhance the accuracy of the data analyses and interpretation of the results (Creswell, 2013). For example, a random sample of blog and interview transcripts was reviewed by two scholars to ask questions and provide feedback on trustworthiness of data collection, analysis, and emerging themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, member checking was used to ensure accuracy of the findings by asking several participants and non-participants to review descriptions, themes, and conclusions of the study (Creswell, 2014). Four participants were given various parts of the findings in Chapter 4 to review for accuracy and feedback. They provided comments that elaborated on the theme “We Love a Discount” pointing out the importance of store coupons that increased their consumption of apparel. All participants confirmed the themes depicted their experiences as Betty confirmed, “I read over the pages, and it does capture the behavior and shopping habits of young women.” Three women who were not

participants in the study were given emerged themes in Chapter 5 to review for comments. One woman agreed with the experiences of the participants, “I think it’s perfect the way it is and refreshing to know I’m not the only one with the same views. ‘It’s a Hunt’ was a great overview and summed up nicely.” Further, another young woman commented, “I think your theme [perpetuating fashion consumption cycle] is very credible and speaks for a collective of people who shop like that.”

Reflexivity

Qualitative researchers need to “position themselves in their writings” (p. 216) and acknowledge “experiences that he or she brings to a qualitative research study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 216) through reflecting on his/her background, preconceptions, beliefs and attitudes toward the research topic and other relevant issues. In creating the epoche statement at the beginning of this section, the researcher expressed her experiences and preconceptions regarding the research topic in a conscious and thoughtful manner. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher kept a diary of observations and reflections to document her thoughts and feelings towards participants’ views and experiences.

CHAPTER 4. PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTION AND DISCUSSION

This chapter begins with a description of the research participants. The following section describes participants' fashion consumption practices, such as where they shopped, how often, and how much they consumed. Next, shopping channel preferences are discussed. The two final sections describe how participants stored and disposed of clothing.

Description of Participants

The research participants included 14 women between the ages of 19 and 25, with the average age of 21.3 (see Table 4). All the women were full-time students at Stevenson University, a small private university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States with close to a 4,000-student enrollment in 2017 (Stevenson University Fall 2017 Fact Book). Participants were enrolled in six academic majors. Five students were majoring in fashion merchandising, four in business communications, and two in fashion design. Other majors included art, nursing, and psychology. There were no differences in participant fast fashion consumption practices and experiences that could be attributed to academic major. Students were equally distributed in terms of year in college, with five of them being seniors and another five being juniors. Four participants were sophomores.

Geographically, all the women were from the East Coast: 12 from Maryland and two from New Jersey. Of the 14 participants, seven were African American (50%), three were Caucasian (21%), two African American/Hispanic, one Asian American/Caucasian, and one African American/Caucasian (see Table 4). The university student population is comprised of.: 55% White, 27.6% Black or African American, 5.7% Hispanic, 4.8% two or more races, 3.6% Asian, and 3.3% unknown (Stevenson University Fall 2017 Fact Book). The study represented a large percentage of African American women (19-25 years old) compared to the total population

of 18-24-year-olds in the United States (15.33%) and the population in the state of Maryland (34%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017), where the university is located. There was only one difference in participant experiences related to fashion consumption that could be attributed to ethnic background, which is discussed in Chapter 5.

Table 4. *Description of Participants*

| Participant pseudonym | Age | Ethnicity | Academic year | Academic major | Annual income / month |
|-----------------------|-----|----------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Ally | 20 | African American/Hispanic | Junior | Nursing | N/A |
| Amy | 22 | African American | Senior | Fashion Design | \$200 |
| Anna | 19 | African American | Sophomore | Fashion Merchandising | N/A |
| Beth | 21 | African American | Senior | Fashion Merchandising | \$1,500 |
| Betty | 22 | Caucasian | Senior | Business Communications | \$800 |
| Carrie | 20 | African American | Junior | Business Communications | \$800 |
| Dawn | 25 | Asian American/Caucasian | Sophomore | Fashion Design | \$1,600 |
| Debbie | 25 | African American | Junior | Fashion Merchandising | \$800 |
| Donna | 20 | African American | Sophomore | Art | N/A |
| Jan | 23 | African American | Senior | Fashion Merchandising | \$1,250 |
| Linda | 20 | Caucasian | Junior | Fashion Merchandising | \$500 |
| Ruby | 21 | African American/Caucasian | Senior | Psychology | \$1,000 |
| Sally | 19 | African American/Hispanic | Sophomore | Business Communications | \$1,000 |
| Tina | 21 | Caucasian | Junior | Business Communications | N/A |

Nine participants had part-time jobs in the service industry or at the university. Four participants did not disclose their annual income (see Table 4). For the other 10 women, income levels ranged from \$200 to \$1,600 a month, with an average monthly income of \$945. This

number did not include other sources of income (allowances from parents, gifts, etc.). All participants confirmed that they purchased in excess of 150 pieces of clothing a year. Twelve participants estimated that they purchased in the range of 150 to 200 pieces a year. Two women stated that they purchased over 200 fashion items a year.

The Anatomy of Fast Fashion Shopping

This section describes the frequency with which participants shopped for fashion online and in brick-and-mortar stores, which stores they frequented, and the quantities purchased.

Shopping Frequency: How Often and How Much

In this study, the term *shopping* describes all activities related to acquiring new fashion items. Specifically, participants referred to shopping when they were describing their experiences related to

- (a) browsing online and in brick-and-mortar stores—looking at new clothes and trends without the goal of buying anything specific); and
- (b) buying new items—comparing prices, quality, design details, etc., of the same or similar types of clothing with the goal of acquiring a product.

Women shared that they shopped for clothing “all the time,” which meant “daily” for about three quarters of the participants. Anna explained, “All the time, too much. I will go shopping right now. Nothing stops me from shopping. I always think about what different things I need to add to my closet.”

Online shopping

When describing their shopping experiences, all the women acknowledged that browsing for clothing was more often done online rather than in brick-and-mortar stores. This can be explained by the convenience of online shopping and ability to do so from any place and at any time (Correia Loureiro & Breazeale, 2016). Most women (71%) browsed online stores daily (see

Table 5). According to Amy, “Every day I have to be looking at some type of clothing online.”

This activity appeared to be part of a daily routine for participants. Jan explained, “One of the things I do on my free time is look at clothing.” On average, women were browsing daily on four different websites, spending anywhere from 1 to 4 hours a day.

Table 5. *Frequency of Online Fashion Browsing and Purchasing*

| | Frequency | Number of people | Range | Average Estimate | Estimate of total items purchased annually |
|--|----------------|------------------------|----------------|---------------------|---|
| Browsing apparel websites | Daily | 10 | | | |
| | Every 2-3 days | 2 | | | |
| Time spent | | | 1-4 hours | 2.5 hours | |
| Number of websites visited | | | 1-20 stores | 4 stores | |
| Buying clothes | Weekly | 5 | 2-5 pieces | 3.5 pieces | 910 = 52 weeks x 5 people x 3.5 pieces |
| | Biweekly | 3 | 2-8 pieces | 5 pieces | 390 = 26 weeks x 3 people x 5 pieces |
| | Monthly | 4 | 1-10 pieces | 5.5 pieces | 264 = 12 months x 4 people x 5.5 pieces |
| Estimate of total items purchased annually, per person | | | | | 130.3 pieces |

Note. Only 12 participants provided estimated frequency for online apparel browsing and buying.

Most participants (57%) bought new fashion online on a weekly or biweekly basis. The number of garments purchased varied from two to five pieces per online shopping spree, with an average being three pieces. As Carrie described, “I buy two to three pieces online on a weekly basis.” Betty had similar shopping habits: “I would say, probably, three to four times a month is when I actually buy something. I probably [buy] four to five pieces.” Other women described purchasing fashion online monthly, buying two to 10 pieces at a time. As Beth explained, “I buy online twice a month and buy two to four pieces monthly.”

Favorite online stores for fashion shopping were Forever 21, H&M, Rue 21, Fashion Nova, and others (see Table 6). According to Anna, “When I do online shopping, I like Fashion Nova, Forever 21, and H&M.” Women tended to consistently shop the same stores. “Most of the time, I shop the same stores, every day” (Jan). These stores cater to young consumers and focus on fast fashion. They are known for selling lower-quality inexpensive clothing with new styles appearing weekly (Bain, 2015). It is likely that these attributes were appealing to the participants and encouraged them to shop frequently.

Table 6. *Participants’ Favorite Online and Brick-and-Mortar Apparel Stores*

| Online | Brick-and-mortar |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| www.asos.com | Abercrombie & Fitch |
| www.boohoo.com | Forever 21 |
| www.fashionnova.com | Francesca’s |
| www.forever21.com | H&M |
| www.hm.com | Kohl’s |
| www.hollister.com | Love Culture |
| www.misguidedus.com | Old Navy |
| www.prettylittlething.us | Rainbow Shops |
| www.rue21.com | Rue 21 |
| www.zara.com | Victoria’s Secret |
| | Walmart |
| | Windsor |
| | Zara |

In summary, most of the women browsed online fashion stores daily, visiting several websites and spending 2.5 hours, on average. Annually, they purchased approximately 130 pieces of clothing online (see Table 5). They bought several items every week or every other week.

Brick-and-mortar shopping

Even though all of the women acknowledged that they most often browsed for fashion online, about half of the participants (57%) stated that they preferred to browse and purchase the latest fashion at brick-and-mortar-stores. Other women preferred to use the Internet to browse fashion stores and do trend research prior to going to the mall. Ruby explained, “I find something online, and I want to see it and try it on. I’ll go to the store.” Most women who preferred to shop at brick-and-mortar stores bought new clothes biweekly or monthly (see Table 7). It was typical for this group to go shopping when they had a specific purchase in mind:

Usually, before I go to the mall, I know exactly what I want to get from the mall. So, I’ll try a store called Windsor. Then, I’ll go to, probably, Forever 21 and, then, H&M. I go maybe at least two times a month. (Sally)

The number of pieces typically purchased at brick-and-mortar stores varied from one to six items per shopping trip, depending on participant and occasion, with the average number of pieces falling between three and four. Debbie described, “It’s about three pieces on a shopping trip, I think.” Similarly, Betty explained her in-store shopping frequency: “I’ll go to the mall and buy about four to five pieces each time.”

Table 7. *Frequency of Brick-and-Mortar Fashion Browsing and Purchasing*

| | Frequency | Number of people | Range | Average estimate | Estimate of total items purchased annually |
|---|-----------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|--|
| Browsing for clothes | Weekly | 9 | | | |
| | Monthly | 3 | | | |
| Time spent | | | 30 minutes–5 hours | 2-3 hours | |
| Number of stores visited | | | 2-10 stores | | |
| Buying clothes | Weekly | 2 | 3-4 pieces | 3.5 pieces | 364 = 52 weeks x 2 people x 3.5 pieces |
| | Biweekly | 5 | 1-5 pieces | 3 pieces | 390 = 26 weeks x 5 people x 3 pieces |
| | Monthly | 5 | 2-6 pieces | 4 pieces | 240 = 12 weeks x 5 people x 4 pieces |
| Estimate of total items purchased annually per person | | | | | 83 pieces |

Note. Only 12 participants provided estimated frequency for in-store apparel browsing and buying.

On a typical trip to the mall, half of the women reported visiting two to four stores; the other half visited eight to ten stores. Many favorite brick-and-mortar stores were the same as the favorite online apparel stores. The most frequently shopped brick-and-mortar stores were Forever 21, H&M, Old Navy, and Windsor (see Table 6).

I probably visit 10 stores. I kinda have my go-to specific stores when I want new workout clothes or jeans from there. But the other stores, I'll just browse and see a cute top or sweater that can go with staple items that I have. (Donna)

Going to the mall, I usually spend three to four hours shopping and visit like eight to ten stores. Stores like H&M and Forever 21 and maybe Victoria Secret. (Betty)

In-store shopping was most often at a local mall, where participants spent 2 to 3 hours, visiting up to 10 stores. They purchased new fashion styles less frequently in-store than online, most commonly on a biweekly or monthly basis (in comparison to weekly or biweekly online). Further, they bought an average of 83 items in stores annually (see Table 7).

Interestingly, the number of brick-and-mortar stores visited per trip was higher than the number of online stores per shopping visit. A possible explanation is that when these women were able to find time in their busy schedules to drive to the mall, they wanted to visit a large number of stores to make the trip worth the time and effort. In contrast, online shopping was done more frequently (daily for many participants). Because online shopping was available 24/7, participants did not feel the need to browse large number of stores at a time. Instead, they had favorite online stores that they frequented over and over, every day, because they liked the aesthetics of the styles, could afford the purchases, and knew the fit and sizing for their body types.

Shopping frequency: online vs. brick-and-mortar

The women estimated that they were buying more fashion online than in brick-and-mortar stores, despite the fact that eight of the 14 participants stated that they preferred to shop in physical stores. Based on self-reported shopping frequency (see Tables 5 and 7), participants bought an average of about 130 garments a year online. In brick-and-mortar stores, on average, the women bought 83 pieces a year, 36% less than the amount of clothing purchased online.

For the study participants, shopping malls were located within roughly a 30-minute drive from the university or their homes. All research participants were full-time students. Nine of 14 participants had part-time jobs and participated in various social activities. Therefore, they had limited free time to go shopping at local malls. Each shopping trip required planning and was time consuming, making online shopping more convenient and accessible.

Given the urban setting of this study, participants had many opportunities to shop at large malls, which typically had several department stores and over 100 specialty stores. Yet most of their fashion purchases were done online. This suggests that in rural areas, where brick-and-mortar shopping is limited, young women are likely to acquire an even greater percentage of their wardrobe online.

Shopping frequency in extant research

A limited number of studies have examined online fashion shopping frequency. The majority of previous studies focused on brick-and-mortar shopping. Further, there was no research identified that examined frequency of browsing for fashion online and in stores. In the present study, participants bought apparel more frequently in brick-and-mortar stores than has been reported in previous studies (Lachman & Brett, 2016; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). For online shopping, women in the present study purchased apparel much more frequently than was reported in prior research. A study of consumers in Portugal identified men and women who bought online only a few times a year (Correia Loureiro & Breazeale, 2016). Another study, of young male and female consumers in the United States, reported that only 17% of women preferred to purchase clothing online because they liked going to stores to “examine the products” (Lachman & Brett, 2016, p. 16). The present study is unique in that it offers an in-depth description of young women’s fast fashion shopping practices, both online and brick-and-

mortar. The results included browsing and purchasing frequencies as well as estimated quantities of purchased items.

Fashion Shopping Preferences

This section describes perceived advantages and disadvantages of fashion shopping online and in brick-and-mortar stores.

The experience of brick-and-mortar shopping

Roughly half of the participants (57%) preferred brick-and-mortar over online fashion shopping. According to these women, the major advantage of in-store shopping was the ability to touch garments, feel the fabric, and evaluate clothing fit and quality (see Table 8). Amy explained, “Shopping in-store, you’re able to actually see how it fits, and if it’s the quality you want.” Brick-and-mortar shopping ensured that the women purchased what they wanted, which were clothes that fit right.

Most of the time I don’t really like online shopping because I like to touch and feel and see the clothes. I bought some bathing suits through a website, and they didn’t fit right. I don’t really like buying clothes online. (Debbie)

I usually go in-store because online shopping is just harder for me—not knowing my size for different things. (Sally)

Table 8. *Attributes of Apparel Shopping at Brick-and-Mortar Stores*

| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|
| Ability to evaluate garment fit, quality, and fabric | Too many different products to look through (can cause fatigue and anxiety) |
| Store atmosphere (displays, ambiance/music, lighting) | Poorly organized/messy stores (too much effort and time to find what is needed) |
| The pleasure of the experience (customer service, browsing, trying on clothes, window-shopping) | |

Another important reason why the women preferred shopping in brick-and-mortar stores was the experience. Participants enjoyed appealing store displays, good customer service, and overall pleasing store ambiance. Tina explained how much she appreciated the experiential nature of in-store shopping: “Going into a store and having an experience where the people help me and treat me really well, I love that.” Linda shared a similar perspective:

I like the way the stores set the atmosphere. It’s important with the lighting, the music, how loud it is. If it looks really messy, I just feel like I’m not going to enjoy my experience at all. How the employees treat you is important, too.

The women’s descriptions of their brick-and-mortar shopping experiences indicated not only that the product mattered (quality, fit, material, price, fashionability, etc.), but that the environment where the browsing, selecting, and acquiring happened was equally significant. Participants wanted the most from these experiences, noting the importance of all major senses being stimulated while shopping.

Consequently, when women’s brick-and-mortar shopping expectations were not met, and the experience was not pleasant, they expressed frustration and disappointment. Jan, who preferred online shopping, explained, “I don’t like going to stores. They can be kind of overwhelming and disorganized. I don’t enjoy my experience.” A common negative attribute of in-store shopping was untidy stores: “If it looks really messy, I’m going to be folding stuff and putting it back on the hangers” (Linda). Disorganized merchandise displays made it challenging to find products. Ally explained, “[Stores,] they’re usually just messy in general, so it’s really hard to find good stuff.”

Some participants expressed feeling inundated by all the products available when shopping at brick-and-mortar stores, as was the case for Amy: “When I shop in-store, I think it’s

overwhelming, because you have racks of clothes to look through.” An overabundance of different styles, brands, fabrics, and colors displayed at stores might trigger overstimulation and challenges to the selection process. Too many items to look through created feelings of anxiety, as reflected in Anna’s comment that “I do in-person shopping, but I get really antsy. I don’t like going through the shelves and racks of clothing.”

Brick-and-mortar shopping does not allow for “filtering” the entire assortment of a store for specific product details (e.g., size, color, type of clothing), as is possible when shopping online. As a result, consumers might have to go through many displays, racks, shelves, and numerous items to find what they are looking for. This can be a time-consuming and physically demanding activity. “I haven’t shopped in a store for a while. I am a full-time student and work part-time, so I need convenience. It’s too hard to spend time in a store going through stuff” (Carrie).

To summarize, the women liked shopping in-store to be able to touch and feel the merchandise and ensure that garments fit. Further, the store experience was very important. Participants enjoyed window-shopping, store atmospherics, and interacting with courteous sales associates. Some women avoided shopping in stores as they found them “messy,” making it too difficult to find desired apparel.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research that reported that consumers preferred brick-and-mortar shopping for (a) store atmosphere and experience (Watson & Yan, 2013) and (b) the ability to evaluate garment and fabric quality, as well as assess the fit (Furey, 2012; Gabrielli et al., 2013; Panteva, Nikoleta, & Stampfli, 2012). Young women who shop often “like to be in the stores” to touch and see the quality and variety of merchandise on

display (Kinley, Josiam & Lockett, 2009, p. 571), which is consistent with the experiences of women in the present study.

In terms of disadvantages of brick-and-mortar stores, Kim et al. (2013) reported that consumers avoided shopping in fast fashion stores because they viewed them as disorganized, with “giant piles on the racks and shelves” (p. 248) making it hard to find merchandise. Rayburn and Voss (2013) identified that consumers find stores more welcoming when they are uncluttered and organized. This is in line with the findings of the present study. The results of the present study help to better understand consumer experiences in overstocked stores, documenting that this resulted in feelings of fatigue and anxiety which have not been previously reported in the literature.

The freedom of online shopping

The major advantage of online fashion shopping was convenience (see Table 9). Online shopping allowed for browsing and buying clothes anytime from anywhere, and then having purchases conveniently delivered to participants’ homes. As Amy described, “I like to shop online because it gives me the freedom of browsing everything.” Similarly, Ally explained, “Online is really convenient. You can really just sit there and browse and pick for hours.”

Table 9. *Attributes of Online Apparel Shopping*

| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|--|
| 24/7 shopping convenience from anywhere | Clothes might not meet expectations when received (fit, style, quality). |
| Ease of finding products using filters (style, price, size, etc.) | Return shipping is expensive and inconvenient. |
| Variety of different stores and brands | |
| Broad and deep merchandise selection | |

Besides the 24/7 shopping accessibility from their living rooms or bedrooms, women noted the ease of online browsing: “There [online] everything is organized” (Linda). The ability to use filters for type and style of clothing, garment size, design features, type of fabric, and price allowed participants to pick and choose what they were looking at without being overwhelmed with infinite choices. For example, using various filters such as “dress,” “red,” “short sleeve,” and “petite size 8” resulted in very specific products being displayed. The filtering feature makes the online shopping process faster, easier, and more enjoyable. According to Jan, “I prefer to shop online, because it makes it so much easier to narrow my selection to be exactly what I’m looking for.”

Another important benefit of online shopping was access to an enormous variety of clothing styles, colors, and sizes available at participants’ fingertips. Ally explained how much she enjoyed it: “I love online shopping because of the different variety of clothes online.” Donna, who had challenges with finding clothes in her size, noted the advantage of online shopping: “I prefer shopping online. They generally have all the sizes online.” In addition to a wide selection of sizes, women were able to find more colors of their favorite styles in the deep and broad selection of online inventory. Betty explained, “I go online to buy more of an item in different colors that aren’t in the store.”

Through the Internet, the women had the “freedom” to shop stores that were not available at the local malls. “For me, a lot of the stores that I look at online are stores I can’t go to physically. I curl up in bed with my laptop and work on searching the web” (Linda). With access to any retailer around the world, participants were able to find unique items. Amy described, “I try to look at as many different places as possible. And you find stuff you won’t find anywhere else.” While it was more common to shop stores in the U.S. market, some participants were

buying from international stores in search of unique styles. “Most of the stores that I shop at now aren’t even in the United States. They are British companies that offer different types of clothing for Millennials” (Amy).

According to the participants, a major disadvantage of online shopping was disappointment when garments arrived and did not meet expectations in terms of fit, quality, and/or style (see Table 9). Amy explained, “When you get it [an online order], it doesn’t really look like how it does online. Jan had similar thoughts: “I’m afraid if I buy online, it might not fit, or I won’t like how the fabric feels and looks. And then I’ll have to return it.”

When participants did not like clothes purchased online, they did not want to deal with returns, finding the process inconvenient and expensive. According to Dawn, “If I buy online, it might not fit, and I’ll have to return it. There’s always the extra shipping cost, and I don’t like to have to deal with that.”

In summary, the participants believed that online shopping offered the convenience of browsing and purchasing the latest fashion styles 24/7 from anywhere. They liked the fact that a great variety of product options were available online, and it was relatively easy to navigate among them by filtering desired features. In addition, online shopping offered access to a variety of brands, reaching far beyond stores at local malls. However, participants were disappointed when the fashion merchandise they ordered online did not meet their expectations in terms of quality, style, or fit. Another disadvantage of online shopping was the inconvenience and expense of returning products that participants did not want to keep.

This study confirms previous research findings that a major reason for young women to shop for clothing online is convenience (Correia-Loureiro & Breazeale, 2016; Seock & Bailey, 2008). Consistent with the findings of the present study, McCormick and Livett (2012) found

that young women liked online shopping due to a wide variety of brands and styles available, as well as the ease of using search filters to find specific products. Further, consumers are enticed to shop online if shipping and returns are free and choose e-tailers that offer this service (Panteva et al., 2012).

The majority of fast fashion research has explored consumption behavior as an in-store experience (Bedford et. al, 2016; Gabrielli et al., 2013; Joy et al., 2012; Wang, 2010; Watson & Yan, 2013). One quantitative study (Liu et al., 2015) explored Chinese men's and women's preferences for shopping fast fashion apparel, comparing different channels: online, in-store, and mail-order catalog. The findings indicated that women preferred to shop for fashion online due to the convenience of searching for product information, variety of merchandise, promotions available, and speed of purchasing. The present study is unique in that it provides a more in-depth exploration of young women's online shopping behavior in the United States, identifying advantages such as ease of browsing using filters and unlimited merchandise availability. The present research identified disadvantages of shopping online fast fashion brands, such as consumer disappointment when fashion apparel was received and concern with shipping expenses.

“We love a discount”

All participants talked about extra motivation to buy new clothing, from both online and brick-and-mortar sources, when discounts and special promotions were offered by retailers. As Beth described, “Sale prices and discounts make me want to shop.” Similarly, Ally shopped more online due to the great sale prices. As her quote shows, the average price of fashion items at her favorite retailer was only about \$10: “They [online retailers] always have sales. I ordered 24 items from my favorite clothing store, and after sales, I got them for \$250.”

Further, markdowns of already low prices motivated participants to double the amount of clothing they originally intended to buy. “As consumers, we love a discount. Sales and coupon codes are a big thing online and in the brick-and-mortar stores. For me, this can boost me from a purchase of three items to six” (Anna). Jan shared a similar perspective— as she was lured by extremely affordable fashion, she bought much more clothing every year:

Why I think I buy 200 garments a year and buy so much throughout the year ‘cause it’s so easy for me nowadays, especially, with so many sales. I feel, for my age, there’s a lot that I can go and buy that’s cheap and fast fashion.

It was hard for participants to resist buying more apparel when receiving daily e-mails from brands with sales promotions and coupons. Linda described, “Retailers always send me their coupon e-mails, so I get suckered in. With coupons, I feel like you’re not spending the whole price. It kind of encourages you to go shop.”

Consistent with previous research (Lachman & Brett, 2013; Park, Kim, Funches, & Foxx, 2011; Seock & Bailey, 2008), this study found that due to clever promotional strategies and very low prices, young women were lured into purchasing more fashion: buying more often, and in larger amounts. Discounts and sales doubled the number of items purchased by participants.

Approaches to Shopping

Participants described unique ways in which they shopped for fashion. All women in the study preferred to buy several pieces of clothing at a time to create an outfit. In addition, a few participants described buying a large quantity of clothes at one time, which they called a “big haul” or “clothing haul.”

Shopping for Outfits

All participants shopped for fashion to create an outfit. The goal was to buy several individual clothing items at the same time to “build an outfit.” Two strategies were typically

used. One strategy was to buy a complete look, as promoted and displayed by retailers online and in stores. “To me, if an outfit looks good on the model, it catches my eye. I want to buy it” (Anna). Alternatively, they could create a look themselves by either finding several items (e.g., top, bottom, and accessories) that complemented each other, or styles that coordinated with clothes they already owned. “I was shopping and found a new shirt that would go so well with a jacket I already have” (Beth).

When shopping in-store, participants tended to first select a large quantity of clothes to try on—for example, anywhere from eight to 20 items. During the process of selection and trying on, they thought about what was in their closet in order to mix and match the newly considered pieces with the ones they already owned:

A typical shopping trip: I usually grab close to 20 different pieces of clothing and walk around [the store]. And in my head, I kind of build outfits with what I like. (Betty)

So, most of the stores that I shop in, I aim to take in [to the dressing room] eight pieces. I take them to complete outfits or know the items will go with an outfit I already have.

(Ruby)

The two shopping strategies (shopping for complete looks and acquiring new items that mix and match with the pieces from one’s wardrobe) helped reduce the number of clothing items bought that did not coordinate with pieces the women already owned. These strategies minimized the number of items that would “sit” in the closet because there were no garments to wear them with:

I like to shop for outfits, not individual pieces. When I was younger, I used to shop just for pieces, but I would have these pieces sitting in my closet forever, and I would never have anything to pair them with. So now, I just shop for outfits. (Carrie)

To summarize, participants bought new clothing with the goal of creating an outfit either by finding items that would complement existing pieces in their wardrobe or buying new items to make a complete look. Previous research reported that a common shopping habit was to purchase individual clothing items, not outfits (Gabrielli et al., 2013; Wang, 2010; Watson & Yan, 2013). Today, a common retail strategy is to create carefully curated fashion ensembles that are displayed on store mannequins or on models on retailer websites that entice consumers to buy more merchandise (Bell & Ternus, 2012). It appears that this retail strategy has been effective, as the present study identified the preference of young women to shop for complete looks or individual items to create outfits.

Big Haul

In addition to buying clothing frequently, several pieces per shopping trip, two women described purchasing a large quantity of items at one time. This practice was referred to as a “clothing haul.” The behavior was prompted by a perceived need to update the wardrobe in preparation for a new season (e.g., spring). In a clothing haul, women described buying between 15 and 25 new clothing items on one shopping trip, either online or in-store. Typically, these hauls were done several times a year:

I did get a clothing haul from Forever 21. That’s when I get a whole bunch of clothes at one time. I just went on a little shopping spree and got 25 new items for the spring and summer. (Jan)

Betty also participated in big clothing hauls to prepare her wardrobe with seasonal apparel:

I know when I go spring and summer shopping, I’ll get a ton of stuff right at the beginning of the season and right at the end of winter, because that’s when the new styles are coming out in the stores. So, I’ll usually do a full haul. I’ll get close to 15 to 20 different clothing pieces just to start off the season, about 2 to 3 times a year.

According to anecdotal evidence, clothing hauls are characteristic of females under the age of 25 who buy as much inexpensive clothing as possible in one day from a fast fashion retailer (Cline, 2013; Siegle, 2011). No empirical study was found that examined this type of shopping. In the present study, shopping hauls were not common among research participants who bought in excess of 150 pieces of clothing a year. Instead, most women (12 out of 14) preferred relatively smaller but more frequent clothing purchases, which occurred weekly to biweekly online and monthly in-store. This could be due to participants' desire to keep up with constantly changing fashion trends, as discussed in Chapter 5.

Storing Fashion: Organized Closets

All participants described their closets as being “very organized.” The women acknowledged that they had so many clothes that it was difficult to keep track of what they owned. “I feel like I buy so many clothes, I forget how much I actually have, and then I’ll have to go through my closet and see what’s in there” (Beth). To manage their possessions and make every day “what to wear” decisions easier required effective closet organization:

Within my closet, each piece of clothing is on a black hanger or a clear hanger that faces the same direction. This particular organization allows me to find exactly what I need every morning when I decide to pick out my outfit. (Ruby)

Women described creating several sections in the closet for different categories of clothing. Organizational structure varied by participant and their needs. For example, Donna arranged her wardrobe in categories that reflected her lifestyle:

My closet is organized into nine sections. The sections in order from left to right are: sorority t-shirts, business casual clothes, going out, formal dress, casual cute, university t-shirts, and outerwear.

Further, within each of the nine sections, Donna arranged all pieces by design features (e.g., color and length of sleeve): “The tops in each section are arranged from sleeveless to long sleeves. Within each section of sleeve length, they were color coordinated from light to dark.” In another example, Amy arranged her wardrobe by the type of garment: “When I organize my clothes in my closet, I put all my jeans together, all of my shirts, and then all of my jackets are together.”

Another common wardrobe organization strategy was arranging the closet seasonally. “I like to change my closet when the seasons change, so spring and summer [clothes] are together, and then fall and winter are in the closet” (Carrie). This helped to ensure that the current season’s apparel selection was readily available. Betty explained, “I shifted my winter selection back in October, so all of my winter clothes are right in front of the doors of my closet. All of my summer clothes are further back.”

Participants agreed that organized closets greatly helped them find pieces for certain occasions and for styling new outfits. Ability to find items easily and quickly increased utilization of garments that women owned:

I like to keep my closet pretty organized and have things in sections. It makes getting ready easier. I can go to a section and create an outfit that I know will work for a certain occasion. (Dawn)

From left to right, my closet starts with my hanging shoes. After my shoes, I start with my tank tops followed by short-sleeve shirts. Then, long-sleeve shirts, sweaters, jackets, and finally, skirts and dresses. This particular organization allows me to find exactly what I need every morning when I pick out my outfit. (Ruby)

Clearly, the women invested a lot of time and effort to keep their clothes organized and their closets in order. This demonstrated that they were creating the most efficient closet possible to accommodate their large wardrobes, and the importance of quick and easy access to various items when creating outfits. Even though the women had over 100 garments in their closets as well as other pieces (50+) in storage bins, they were able to effectively manage and use this quantity of garments on a daily basis. As Amy's quote shows, some of them were obsessively aware of every single piece in their collection and could tell if something was missing or out of order:

It's quite interesting, because I know when something in my closet is out of place or missing. One time, my sister borrowed one of my shirts without asking, and I knew exactly which shirt she took and where it would have gone if it were in the correct place.

Participants who lived in the dormitories complained that the closets were too small for all of the clothes they owned. They had to keep them especially well organized to make everything fit and usable:

A part of having the college experience is dorm living. What was probably the most horrifying though was the fact that not only was the closet miniscule, but I had to share it, too! I truthfully have well over half the closet but still struggle to make everything fit.

Organizing my closet helps me get ready in the morning. (Linda)

Even though women who lived at home had larger walk-in closets, they still complained that their closets were too small for their needs. "I just want to have more closet space, because right now I have shoe racks outside my closet" (Beth). Regardless of the size of the closet, the space was not enough to accommodate continuous new fashion additions.

In summary, the women kept their closets very organized, so they could more easily manage a large quantity of clothes. Organized wardrobes helped to make outfit styling decisions easier and faster. Further, it was a common practice to organize clothes by season and have the current season's apparel readily accessible. There is very limited research on apparel closet organization. Lapolla and Sanders (2017) reported that women found it difficult to style new looks from existing clothes when their closets were disorganized, which was in line with the present study's findings. The present research offers an understanding of strategies used by young women to manage large quantities of clothing through closet organization.

Disposing of Fashion

Participants described several reasons why they discarded their unwanted apparel. This section will explain how and why they disposed of clothes.

Doing Good

All the women discussed that they disposed of clothing by donating unwanted pieces to charities such as Goodwill or the Salvation Army. Only two participants acknowledged throwing away clothes in the garbage bin. The reason was that the clothing was not wearable and could not be donated. "If it's really worn out, then the only thing I can do is just toss it" (Dawn).

Participants explained that they gave away clothes because they did not wear them anymore. Most commonly, the reason was that the clothes did not fit properly, and they did not want to keep them if they were not going to wear them. As Donna explained, "If it just doesn't fit anymore or maybe, over time, I might look at it and think 'I'll probably never wear this,' then I will just give it away to the Salvation Army. Similarly, Ruby said, "When I find things in my closet that I just don't wear anymore, that are not flattering, I get rid of it and send to the Goodwill."

Another common reason for disposing of clothing was outdated styles that were perceived as not fashionable. “Certain things were just out of style” (Ally). Women explained that they had “outgrown” some styles, which no longer suited their lifestyle and self-image.

I saw something in it when I first bought it, but then, over time, I might just look at it and think ‘I’ll probably never wear this,’ and then just give it away. (Anna)

When I was moving. I saw a lot of things I did not wear and that I couldn’t imagine myself wearing. I found some pieces that I don’t wear because the styles had changed and I wouldn’t wear them now. (Carrie)

Freeing Up Space

Almost half (43%) of the women disposed of clothes to free up space so they could go and buy new styles. “I just found certain items were taking up too much space in my drawer. That’s when I decided to get rid of them so that I can make way for new clothing” (Ally). Women explained that when they disposed of clothing, they needed to replace the discarded items with the same amount of clothing to keep their closets balanced with quantity and variety:

Anytime I’m throwing out clothes, I always have to buy new ones to replace it because the options that you have decrease. When you throw out something, I feel like I have to replace it with something else, especially, if I can find the same item or something similar to it. (Amy)

In the case of Ruby, disposing of clothes was a weekly routine, like taking the garbage out. Ruby, who bought approximately two to three new pieces of clothing a week, disposed of her clothes at approximately the same rate. “Just as much as I shop, I also clean out my closet. I find myself cleaning out my closet once a week. Sometimes twice a week. I’m always pulling stuff out, if I’m not wearing it.”

Participant disposal of clothing picked up with the change of seasons as women went through their possessions when reorganizing their closets. For example, Tina donated “clothes on a seasonal basis.” At these times, closets were reviewed, and decisions were made about what to keep and what to discard. Carrie’s comment reflects a typical experience of these young women: “I’ll do a deep cleansing of everything for the different seasons. You know, like, a spring cleaning.”

In summary, participants disposed of clothes most commonly by donating to charities when styles were perceived to be out of current fashion trends, did not fit properly, or no longer suited their self-identity (e.g., women outgrew styles as they became older). Participants reviewed their closets seasonally to decide what to keep, and what to donate or discard. After disposing, they were motivated to buy new fashion styles to replace discarded items. These findings are in line with those of previous research: Young consumers disposed of clothing that did not fit or was an outdated style that they would not wear again (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Lee, Halter, Johnson, & Ju, 2013), and were more likely to dispose of clothes at donation centers such as Goodwill or the Salvation Army (Joung, 2014).

It has been reported that fast fashion consumers are likely to throw out clothing (Joy et al., 2012; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). However, the present study’s results indicate that very few participants disposed of clothing in the trash. Instead, they donated discarded garments to charities. It has been reported that consumers clean out closets on a seasonal basis (Ha-Brookshire & Hodges, 2009; Lee et al., 2013), which is partially in line with the present research findings—in addition to big seasonal cleanups, participants were disposing of old fashions on a weekly basis. Another contribution of this study is the finding that women bought new fashion at

the same rate that they disposed of old styles, which was dictated by the limited size of their closets.

Conclusion

This chapter presented fast fashion practices of study participants as they browsed, purchased, stored, and disposed of clothing. Distinct shopping behaviors of young women were identified between online and brick-and-mortar stores. It is evident that young women exert considerable thought and hard work in consuming and managing a large quantity of clothes. The chapter's goal was to contextualize participant fast fashion consumption practices to aid thematic interpretation of participant experiences presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5. MODEL AND THEMATIC INTREPRETATION

This chapter presents analysis and interpretation of the data collected through blog posts and in-depth, individual interviews with 14 women in emerging adulthood who buy in excess of 150 clothing pieces annually. Based on the analysis, several themes emerged that explained participant daily experiences related to consuming fast fashion. The themes were organized into four topical areas: (a) Pressure and Expectations; (b) Need for Fashion Browsing; (c) Perpetuating Fast Fashion Consumption Cycle; and (d) Positive Emotions.

In this study, several terms to describe the *self* were used. *Actual self* is how one currently sees oneself. *Ideal self* is who one would like to become in the future (Ahuvia, 2005). *Self-image* refers to the thoughts and feelings one has about oneself and signifies one's identity depicted through physical appearance (McLeod, 2014). In other words, self-image is a mental picture a person has about their appearance. Self-image can give meaning to identity (Babin & Harris, 2015) and is a part of the broader concept of *self*.

Fashion browsing, shopping, and buying are often used interchangeably in the literature, because all three are integral parts of the process to acquire new products. In this study, the three terms were defined as follows:

- *Browsing* is the process of looking at fashion items, both online and in brick-and-mortar stores, including researching trends.
- *Buying* is the act of purchasing new apparel, including comparing prices and styles across different retailers, and making decisions of what to buy.
- *Shopping* encompasses both browsing and buying. When participants described shopping in blogs and interviews, they sometimes referred to browsing only (without purchasing new fashion). In other cases, shopping did involve buying apparel.

Pressure and Expectations

The first topical area illustrated participant experiences related to the development of expectations of how they should look and dress. Three themes emerged from the data analysis and interpretation: (a) Importance of Appearance, (b) Peer Pressure, and (c) The Fashion Culture.

Importance of Appearance

Since a young age, most participants (79%) learned how important appearance and clothing are. Amy shared her beliefs, “I think appearance is everything. It comes from how I was raised. I have to care about what I’m wearing.” When explaining their perspective, women frequently mentioned an influential adult (parent, grandparent, or teacher), who they looked up to during their childhood. They reflected on how these role models communicated to them the importance of making a good impression using their looks and dress. Participant quotes illustrate that these early experiences were internalized, and that they continued to follow them as young adults.

For example, Carrie had two influential adults whose opinions shaped her perceptions of how a girl, and later a young woman, should present herself in the society. First, it was Carrie’s mother and, later, a teacher, “I always dress to impress. I follow the philosophy my mom instilled in me, what my high school teacher instilled in me. You never know who you are going to run into.” Carrie’s high school teacher, who was “fashionable” herself, reiterated the importance of dress in everyday life:

In high school, my business teacher taught me to never dress down. She is one of the most fashionable and beautiful people I have ever met. People always ask me why I dress up every day for class or even on lazy Sundays. I just know you can get more out of your day by dressing up a bit.

Similarly, Anna learned from her mother the significance of what one communicates through dress and appearance. These role models emphasized to their daughters that “you are what you wear”:

Appearance for me is everything. I think it’s just how I was raised. My mom raised me to give a good first impression. You just always want to be mindful of what you’re wearing and like the image that you’re putting off.

Compared to other participants in this study, all five African American women appeared to experience more pressure, specifically from their mothers, to make a good first impression through dress. During the interviews, they described how important appearance was to their mothers, who emphasized the significance of always dressing well to present a best self. Beth explained, “My mother instilled in me that you can’t just roll out of bed looking any type of way and go out somewhere. She would tell me you never know who you’ll run into so make a good first impression.”

During childhood, parental figures (mothers, fathers, and grandmothers) took participants on frequent shopping excursions. Women learned from these important adults that shopping for clothes was a vital part of life, “a ritual,” and a positive experience.

My mom would buy me things for Christmas, buy me new clothes. She’d want me to have a new dress to look nice for the holidays. And now, it’s very much an important part of my life. I constantly find myself shopping or needing to buy new things [clothes], or just wanting nice, new things. My love for clothes has increased since I was younger. (Linda).

My dad was always obsessed with clothes. He always liked to dress and look good. I kind of got that from him. He always was buying something. I loved shopping with him. He

would take me to Kohl's, and I would go to the kid's section. I think when I was seven or eight, I would come home with bags of clothes with him. I think it's always been ingrained into me that fashion is cool. Shopping is fun, and a ritual that everyone does.

(Jan)

Betty described an example of her grandmother's love for shopping on Saturdays that was not interrupted even for a family visit. Her grandmother shopped often and bought a lot of clothing. Betty, who reported purchasing 200+ clothing items a year, shared her memories of all the nice clothes her grandmother owned. The model of shopping and owning a lot of clothing was passed down to the granddaughter:

Growing up, we would go to my grandparents each weekend. Every time we would come down and visit my grandmother, she'd be like, "Alright, you know what Saturday is?"

And we were like, "Shopping day." She loved to shop and had really nice clothes. Going through her house and cleaning things, I want to say she had close to like 1,000 dresses and 500 or 600 pairs of pants.

Participants shared that since childhood, they strived to live up to appearance expectations instilled in them by influential adults. They emphasized how important it was for them to use dress to present themselves in public and make a good impression. These beliefs are likely driving young women's fashion shopping practices in their pursuit of creating the right appearance and communicating who they are and their identity through dress.

This study found that African American women experienced more pressure from mothers regarding appearance management than participants of other ethnicities. Davis (2015) reported African American mothers had significant influence on how their daughters should "look, dress and appear to others" (p. 139), and mothers' views had a lasting impact on their daughters'

attitudes related to dress and appearance, which is in line with the current study's results. Similar to previous research findings, mothers were found to be the primary source of influence on young women for appearance management and learning rules of how to present oneself through clothing that began in childhood (Johnson, Kang & Kim, 2014). Further, individuals form opinions and initial impressions of others based on appearance and dress (Johnson, Schofield & Yurchisin, 2002), and the women identified the importance of clothing in presenting themselves to others. Prior research has shown conflicting findings of parental influence on young people's fashion consumption practices. LaChance, Beaudoin and Robitaille (2003) found mothers to be most influential; whereas Schaefer, Parker and Hermand (2009) concluded that marketing and sales associates as well as peers were most influential. This study confirmed that parental figures (mothers, fathers and grandmothers) were very influential in developing young women's fashion consumption habits beginning at a young age.

Peer Pressure

Roughly half of participant accounts demonstrated that peers exerted some pressure on the young women to improve the way they dressed, their style, or overall appearance. For instance, Betty received explicit messages from her boyfriend that she had to improve her appearance. She felt pressured to put more effort into her clothing choices and styling:

My boyfriend at the time was, like, "You gotta have more style. You kind of have to build your outfits." He would always have this whole outfit that would be Nike or Adidas. It would all go together. So, I think that was a huge changing factor into, "Okay, let me add some taste (laughs) into my style." Just the jeans and the t-shirt and the tennis shoes weren't cutting it.

More commonly, participants received implicit messages from their peers, such as other students on campus, through observing what they were wearing. This conscious and unconscious

social comparison made them feel the need to buy new fashion items to fit in. The women wanted to belong to their reference group and look as good as their fashionable peer students:

When I'm seeing what somebody else is wearing around campus, it makes me want to upgrade my style a little bit, because I feel it's just that thing of wanting to fit in. (Amy)

From time to time, I'll see students walking on campus, and I'm, like, "that's a really cute outfit." I'll want to build an outfit similar to that. (Beth)

It is evident that women experienced both explicit and implicit pressure from peers to improve appearance through acquiring new clothing and updating their style. This motivated participants to shop for new clothes. As found in previous research, women in emerging adulthood compared their clothing to peers and wanted to keep up with other stylish women on college campuses (Noble et al., 2009) to belong to peer groups they admired (Johnson et al., 2014).

The Fashion Culture

Brand advertising and social media

Women identified Instagram and Pinterest as the most popular social media platforms that they used daily to obtain the latest fashion information. Ruby explained, "I'm very big into Pinterest, seeing what other people wear, and what they can put together. I try to mimic what they can put together." Betty used Pinterest and Instagram for guidance on new fashion to buy and how to create outfits. She constantly checked trending pages on these platforms, which fired up the desire for new clothes:

I'm on Pinterest several times a day: browsing, seeing ideas, seeing if I could build an outfit similar to that. I want to. From Pinterest and Instagram, I see trending styles and I'll be like, "Maybe I can build something along those same lines, too. If it's on the trending page, it must be good. It must be worth getting."

For Ally, Pinterest was comparable to a prophet with all the answers. She described how Pinterest made it easy to access new fashion trends and appeared to be pressured to acquire these styles after seeing them:

In today's society, Pinterest can literally be Jesus when seeking the answer to a solution. I primarily use Pinterest for the thousands of images of different types of fashion. The ease of Pinterest gives you a variety of what you may not thought you were looking for, but you really needed anyway.

Similarly, Amy followed social media for the latest trends and fashion direction. Amy's accounts, typical for other participants, indicate a clear connection between viewing fashion trends prescribed by "Instagram influencers," and the desire for buying new clothes:

I look online almost every day at clothes. I'm on Instagram or Pinterest just looking at what everybody else is wearing. It's what they call Instagram influencers. I'll look at it, and I'm like, "Oh, I want that. It's cute." Then I'll start looking for something that's in my price range.

Women in the study felt stressed as a result of looking through fashion images and comparing themselves to the constantly updated looks on various social media. The images displayed the newest "must-have" fashions and latest styling trends that captivated participants. In her blog post, Carrie illustrated the pressure experienced by participants who aspired to look like the "painfully chic" and happy girls from Pinterest, Instagram, and other platforms:

Every day I spend hours scrolling through Instagram where the world's most effortless and edgy girls are looking painfully chic. They know how to tie shirts in ways I can't even fathom. They can even wear luxe sportswear without looking like they're going for a jog. I knew I was really lost when I saw a picture of the style goddess herself, Leandra

Medine [Instagram influencer from Manrepeller] wearing plastic rhinestone kitten heels, frayed denim pantaloons and some layered top thing going on. Instead of thinking, “Yaaasss, I need this in my life,” I just feel defeated with a hint of self-loathing and went back to crying in my laundry basket.

Similar to social media influence, participants discussed how brand advertising and more traditional media (e.g., magazines) affected their desire to shop for latest fashion. Anna described an advertisement from her favorite online retailer featuring images of models that she perceived as very appealing. She found it difficult to resist buying clothes they modeled, “I like fashionnova.com, because the models look really great in the clothes. So, it makes you want to buy it. Like, ‘That looks good on her! Let me get that’.” Amy had a subscription to Vogue magazine that offered her fashion inspiration that she then tried to find in her price range, “I feel like it's an essential to fashion to keep looking at magazines just to see like, what they're talking about, and get fashion inspiration. I get Vogue. I see styles, and then try to find looks in stores I shop.”

Social and conventional media constitute a driving force behind the fashion culture (Anguelov, 2016). The findings in the current study indicate that contemporary fashion culture has established a very high bar for young women to attain in terms of appearance, what to buy, and how to present themselves. In the interviews and blog posts, participants shared anxious feelings as a result of expectations to keep up with constantly changing fashion trends:

So, every time you look online at stores or social media, you'll always see something new that's out. And I just wonder, how people do it? Because sometimes it's hard to keep up with everything. As soon as you learn one type of style and trend, then you're introduced to another one. (Amy)

Celebrities

Participant discourse indicated that women perceived celebrities as fashion idols and strived to imitate the looks they presented, “I feel like, especially for my generation, celebrities are a huge, huge influence for fashion trends” (Linda). Women in this study easily named famous women who they admired and strived to emulate. The celebrities most frequently revered were Rihanna, Beyoncé, Kylie Jenner, and the other Kardashians. Like other participants, Jan used favorite celebrities’ looks to create personal style when shopping for clothes. She described celebrities with admiration and excitement. Through imitating their styles, she aspired to become more like them and create her own, unique look:

Celebrities influence me when I shop. I like Rihanna a lot. I like Beyoncé’s style a lot. I like the Kardashians a lot, too. I just like the way they carry themselves. And they have their own signature look. I look up to them. I look up to people who are relatable, who like to be unique, have their own personal style and their own image. Beyoncé is always well put together, and she always has something that’s genuinely hers. That’s why she’s a good person to emulate.

Anna also expressed admiration for Rihanna for the celebrity’s ability to stay true to her unique styles and communicate her identity, regardless of what she was wearing. She felt Rhianna could make anything look “nice and natural,” better than on any professional model, because she always stayed true to her identity:

Somebody that I admire how she wears her clothes is Rihanna. You can look at her outfits, and people will show the model that it was on, and it doesn’t look as appealing. But when she wears it, it looks really nice and natural on her. She can literally take a man’s sweat jacket or suit jacket and just wear it as a dress, put some heels on, and it

looks good on her. If you were to see anybody else do it, it might not look as good on them. She can do pretty much anything with style, and it looks good on her.

For the women in the study, desire to look like their fashion idols created tension as they believed they were “not enough” (e.g., stylish, unique, on-trend, beautiful, etc.). As a result, they felt the pressure to look like their icons and felt that if they bought the right outfit, they would be able to attain this “ever-moving target” of fashionable style and ideal appearance. For example, Amy shared that she would mentally try on the styles presented by celebrities, thus formulating a desired self-image of how she could and should look like. Because of that, she experienced pressure to attain this ideal self-image through acquiring new clothes:

I look up to Rihanna. I know Rihanna’s into fashion. And Kylie Jenner. So, if it’s somebody I really look up to, I feel like I have to have those trends. And it even forces me to change my style a little bit.

Celebrities have access to any clothing they desire, and it is often given to them for free, in exchange for endorsements (Slonim, 2015). These famous women employ professional stylists, personal shoppers, hairdressers, and make-up artists who create natural looks presented as effortless and accessible. The women in the study seemed to forget that celebrity looks were carefully crafted and photographed by professionals. They readily internalized the looks and trends created by the fashion culture and portrayed through celebrities aspiring to be like them.

The findings indicate that participants felt the effects of the fashion culture that resulted in the need to review and adjust their self-image. Markus and Nurius (1986) introduced the idea of possible selves that provides context to the ideal self, who “we would very much like to become” (p. 954). Possible selves explore how people see and think about themselves, and individuals may imagine roles they aspire to that are based on hopes and fantasies (Dunkel &

Kerpelman, 2006). These thoughts motivate behavior. Women saw their ideal self through an ideal self-image shaped by celebrity looks and social media images. Participants believed that if they could imitate the appearance of their favorite celebrities, they may achieve the ideal self, which was an enhanced self-image driven by the fashion culture. Shopping for new fashion was perceived as an easy way to achieve this. Fast fashion retailers offer the latest trends copied from celebrity red carpet looks at the prices young women can afford (Anguelov, 2016).

Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory explains how evaluation of self happens. In upward social comparison, individuals compare themselves to others they believe are better and look for ways to get closer to these ideals (Cherry, 2017). Participants in this study used upward comparison with celebrities and fashion influencers from social media. This comparison was not favorable as women in the study did not like their current self-image that was not fashionable/glamorous/beautiful/stylish enough. They admired the beauty and happiness communicated through the media and longed to emulate the ideals presented by the fashion culture and improve their own self-image. As a result, participants experienced a strong need to shop for the latest, trendy apparel to get a sense of belonging to the fashion culture.

As found in previous research, young women compared their clothing choices to celebrities (Noble et al., 2009), were regularly influenced by celebrity and the media (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009), and looked up to celebrities for fashion ideas (Kinley, 2010). The present study furthered this research by showing that women in emerging adulthood were highly motivated to shop for fashion styles presented to them through the fashion culture channels (social media influencers and celebrities).

Need for Fashion Browsing

In this topical area, participants shared browsing for apparel as a distinct shopping experience. Two themes explore these experiences: (a) Online Fashion Browsing and (b) Brick-and-Mortar Fashion Browsing.

Online Fashion Browsing

Most participants (71%) browsed fashion online daily, describing the habit as a necessary routine, like watching TV or listening to music. Browsing was a regular activity, well incorporated into participant lifestyles. For Amy, online browsing occurred several times a day and appeared to be a part of constant checking of social media posts, “Laying down at night, I’m looking at fashion on my phone. When I’m waking up in the morning, I’m looking at fashion.” For others, like Ruby, browsing was set for a certain day of the week, “When I don’t have classes on Friday, and I’m not working, I am in my apartment and find myself looking for clothes on those days.” Similarly, for Linda, browsing online was a regular part of her week, “On weekends, I’m just lying in bed watching a show. I’ll start wondering what they have new going on, you know, in stores, and I’ll just browse.” Using a laptop or phone, with 24/7 access to online retailers, women could browse for new clothing at any time.

Women had a typical pattern of how they looked for fashion styles online. Often, website tabs of clothing searches were permanently left open. At least for some of them, it appeared to be a never-ending process of constantly opened multiple tabs of apparel online retailers. This demonstrated the priority in their lives, and importance of finding new clothes they liked:

I will pull up multiple stores on different tabs and browse. If I close down my computer for the night and then open it up the next day, I’m most of the time going to have a tab up from a store that I happen to be looking for something that I might want to buy. (Ruby)

Every day, like this morning, when I turned on my computer, I had a jacket that I wanted to get. I always see whatever is on my screen from the night before and then I'll click on my tab, because I have running tabs of different items I've been looking at and want.

(Donna)

Brick-and-Mortar Fashion Browsing

In addition to daily online browsing, participants had the need to browse fashion in-store on a weekly-biweekly basis. Consistently, women described visiting the same retailers again and again, looking for specific types of clothing, "I have my go-to stores that I visit weekly. If I'm looking for a basic, H&M is good. I go to Zara that has a lot of classic pieces to dress up or down" (Carrie). Donna and Sally explained their routines of going to the mall, and the plan they developed to search for the newest selections from their "go-to," preferred brands:

On weekends, I go to my mall. I have my go-to stores that I always visit: Nordstrom, J Crew, Francesca's, Abercrombie & Fitch, Lululemon, American Eagle and, sometimes, Victoria Secret. It's generally browsing. I go to specific stores if I want new workout clothes or jeans. (Donna)

When shopping for new clothes, I usually go to the same stores every month. I stick to Forever 21 and H&M, my main two stores. Forever 21 – they have more things I like.

H&M is for more edgy and fashionable or professional wear. (Sally)

Betty also had a well-established routine for in-store browsing. During the interview, she shared that she worked almost 35 hours a week at a retail store in a local mall and was familiar with the schedule of when window and floor merchandise sets changed in all the other stores. This ensured she would see the latest merchandise, and the most recent store displays of fashion as soon as they were available:

I'll go into a store a couple of times a week just to see what's new, see what's out, if anything's changed. So, each store, they're generally on the same two weeks of when they're doing floor sets. So, I'll go in to the same store maybe two to three times a week to see if, you know, have they done a floor set. Are there new styles out? (Betty)

The findings indicate that fashion browsing was a daily routine for young women in this study. They were enticed by fashionable images from various social and popular media outlets and had to immediately check availability of the new styles presented by the fashion culture. The established browsing routine provided assurance that they were keeping up with the latest fashion trends and were buying the newest styles that would enhance their appearance and help attain an ideal self-image.

There is a very limited apparel research on fashion browsing. Previous studies reported that consumers browsed in-store and online to see new trends and research merchandise details before buying (Backstrom, 2011; Gabrielli et al., 2013; Seock & Bailey, 2008), which is in line with the current study. The present study identified how young women enacted distinct browsing routines to keep up-to-date with the latest fashion. Additionally, the findings link social media and fashion browsing as interconnected activities.

Perpetuating Fast Fashion Consumption Cycle

The third topical area explored women's desire for new and unique fashion, and its connection to self-image. Further, it explained how the need for newness and uniqueness creates a perpetuating cycle of fast fashion consumption. Based on the data analysis and interpretation, three themes emerged: (a) Need for Newness, (b) Desire to be Unique, and (c) Fashion Addiction.

Need for Newness

All participants expressed a strong and constant need to add newness to their wardrobes, “I always feel I just need something new” (Ruby). Tina explained that seeking newness motivated her to shop for fashion, “I want to go shopping when I look in my closet and struggle with what to wear. Then I want to find something else that’s new.”

Women wanted to find clothing that they “envisioned” themselves wearing. They described the desire to find “perfect” new pieces. Often, they had a clear idea of what they were looking for, especially, in terms of color and style:

I was shopping for a distressed denim jacket to add to my fall wardrobe for school. I envisioned a grey-colored denim that has a faded look that I could wear with high waisted jeans and my boots. I was really pleased when I found it, because I felt I rocked my first outfit for the fall semester. (Betty)

This winter I want to buy more clothes that are olive green and burgundy red. I’ve seen these colors trending. I’m currently looking for a jacket that is either one of these colors as well as a long denim jean jacket, so I can layer over button downs and sweaters paired with leggings and boots. I think these are must-haves and perfect for the winter time.

(Amy)

While shopping, participants were looking for items that matched their ideal self-image. These new fashion styles helped to enhance how they viewed themselves as they saw an improved self-image when wearing these items:

I was browsing at Target and saw their new selection of swimsuits. They were so cute and trendy. To some, a brown colored, high-cut bikini might not be the perfect swimwear, but I could envision myself wearing it. I was like, “This would look so good if I wore this. This would be iconic.” (Jan)

I tried on a pair of jeans from Old Navy and looked at myself in the mirror and said, “Wow, these make me look good.” I really liked the style and cut. With that, I walked back to the shelf and picked up two more pairs. I left Old Navy with three new pairs of the Rockstar cut jeans. They are my go-to jeans that make me feel good. (Ruby)

Women in emerging adulthood are negotiating and defining their identity (Arnett, 2015). They often use fashion products as symbols to communicate who they are or want to be, an actual or ideal self (Workman & Lee, 2011). Self-image, a mental picture one has of oneself, plays an important role in the process of identity creation and is connected to the concept of self (Babin & Harris, 2015). Actual self can be mentally represented through one’s current self-image meaning how a person believes s/he looks at the present moment. Similarly, ideal self may be represented by an ideal self-image, or how one would like to look.

Figure 2 presents the perpetuating fast fashion consumption cycle of attaining ideal self-image through acquiring new fashion products. The constant race for newness is fueled by the women’s desire to create a look that matched their ideal self-image. These women did not like their current self-image in ‘old’ fashion. They felt they were not fashionable enough, especially after internalized pressure and expectations communicated by the fashion culture and reinforced by parents and peers. Dissatisfied, participants “envisioned” themselves in the latest fashions and created an ideal self-image of themselves wearing these latest fashion styles. The desire to attain the ideal self-image resulted in a perceived need for new fashion. When women bought the “perfect” item(s), they temporarily achieved their ideal self-image, and got closer to the ideal self. This stage of the cycle is associated with increased confidence and other positive emotions such as happiness, excitement, and feelings of success. However, this stage was short-lived as the new fashion quickly became old, fueled by the fashion culture constantly presenting new

looks through media and advertising of the latest styles. The women perceived the newly bought fashion as already old and outdated. As a result, they quickly became dissatisfied with their current self-image in 'old' fashion items. Women felt the need for new fashions that they observed on social media and when browsing fashion retailers. The perpetuating fast fashion consumption cycle was complete and then started all over again.

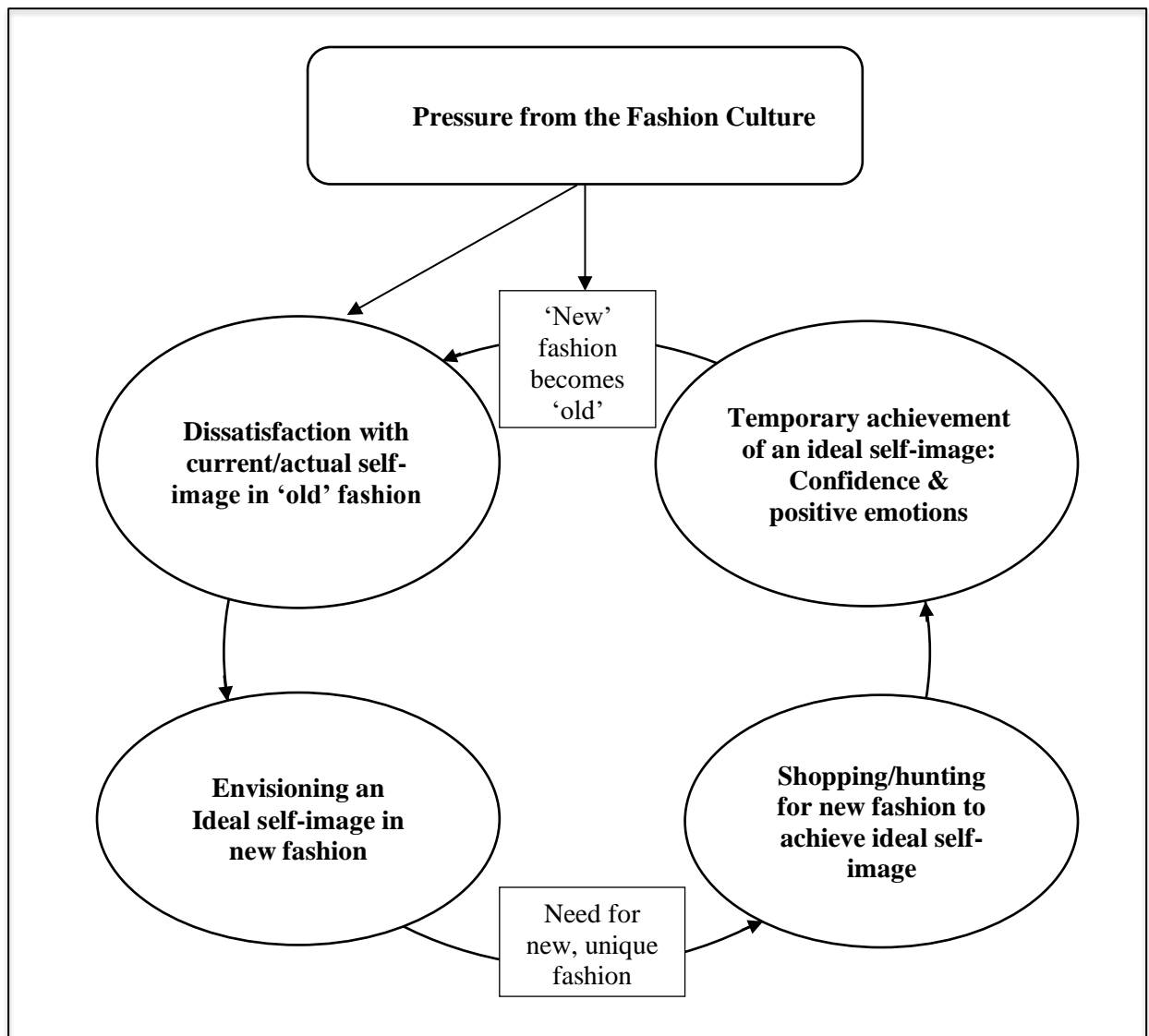


Figure 2. Perpetuating Fast Fashion Consumption Cycle.

Scholars reported that women shopped for new clothing when they sought newness in their wardrobe and grew tired of items they owned (Gabrielli et al., 2013; Joy et al, 2012; Marsh, 2009; Watson & Yan, 2013). However, previous research did not explain why consumers experienced a continuous need for newness. Examining these experiences in-depth in the current study helped to connect participant need for new fashion with the desire to close the gap between the actual self, or current self-image, and the ideal self, or ideal self-image. The understanding of the nature of the perpetuating fast fashion consumption cycle helps to elucidate high rates of fashion consumption.

Desire to be Unique

When describing their experiences, all but one woman in the study discussed a pursuit of uniqueness. Snyder and Fromkin (1980) suggested that individuals compare themselves to others and search for similarities and differences to define the self. Further, when people see parallels between themselves and others, they are driven to create uniqueness that establishes a distinctness from others (Lynn & Harris, 1997). Uniqueness has been known as an important motivator for why people seek new fashion (Sproles, 1979).

Participants were motivated to look for ‘unique’ fashion styles to set themselves apart from others, “I don’t like wearing the same thing that everyone else is wearing” (Sally). Tina’s desire to create a unique appearance was a major reason she shopped for clothes, “I shop a lot so nobody else will have exactly what I have.” Carrie explained how she did not want to look like young women from her social circle, which motivated her to create a unique wardrobe, “I don’t like having the same clothes as everybody else. What’s exciting about your wardrobe if you are wearing the same thing the other girl next to you is wearing?”

In the blog posts, participants described shopping for desirable items that were different. They looked for pieces that had specific colors, finishes and styles that could create an outfit that they perceived to be distinctly unique:

When I'm shopping, I'm looking for something cute and different. I was on fashionnova.com and found dark wash, high waisted skinny jeans. I found a sports bra in a bluish-purple color from Forever 21, and a long sleeve, denim button down from Hollister. (Amy)

Women were concerned that their appearance and clothing choices would be perceived as too conventional and boring, which, ultimately, would be projected and equated to their identity. As a result, they pushed themselves out of their comfort zones, even if it meant only choosing a shirt of a different color, "I'll try to step away from having too many black shirts or certain colors. I like stepping out of my comfort zone and try different colors" (Sally).

The women were attempting to project their unique self and differentiate from others through appearance. When buying apparel items that were perceived to be different, they could set themselves apart from their peers. Even though participants received the same messages from the fashion culture (through social media, celebrity styles, and advertising), they strived to create an ideal self-image that was unique and "different from others." However, because they all shopped the same stores, it was very difficult to achieve the desired uniqueness that communicated their self-identity. In line with the current study, prior research established that young women shopped to create unique looks (Gabrielli et al, 2013; Noble et al., 2009; Wang, 2010) that would differentiate them from others (Joy et al., 2013; Miller, 2013). The present study helps understand that creating a unique self-image was one of the motivations to consume more fashion.

Fashion Addiction

Close to half of participants (43%) readily admitted that even though they had more than enough clothing, they could not stop buying, “Honestly, I don’t need any more clothes, but I see stuff, and think ‘I could see myself wearing that’, and then I need it” (Anna). Betty shared comparable experiences. She enjoyed new outfits so much that she could not contain herself, “I constantly find myself shopping. I shop so much, and I know I don’t need more clothes, but I love building new styles, trends and outfits.” Other participants described an irresistible urge to constantly acquire new styles. This constant desire for new fashion had addictive-like qualities.

Consumers with shopping addiction find it hard to concentrate on anything else when they are not shopping (Sohn & Choi, 2014). Likewise, participants thought obsessively about clothes and buying new items was on top of their mind daily, as Amy stated, “Morning, noon and night, all I think about is clothes. I always want to look, shop and buy.” Donna had similar experiences, “Shopping is always on my mind.”

When people shop compulsively, they find it difficult to stop and struggle to control themselves (Johnson & Allmann, 2009). Participants had a persistent craving for new fashion (need for newness) that could be compared to compulsive food disorders, when individuals have no “self-regulation or control” (Kemp et al., 2013, p. 209). Like half the women in the current study, Ally had self-control issues when it came to fashion. She explained that the temptation from the abundance of available new fashion at low prices was impossible to resist, “I literally cannot help myself. There are so many different outfits and pieces to be worn! I need to have it all! Or, what I can afford for now.” These women consistently described their difficulty to resist buying new items, and their lack of self-regulation:

If I want something, I will not stop until I get it. Whether it is a pair of jeans or a shirt, I will not be happy until I find a bargain and find it. This usually stems from not seeing it

in my closet and craving a new piece so I can wear it. Well, if you take me to a mall, do you really think I am not going to buy anything? (Carrie)

Every time I end up shopping, I end up seeing something else. I'm just, "Oh, I should get another top", even though I have a million tops that look like this. "I should get another one." It's literally, like, I just gravitate right towards it. It's literally, like, autopilot is on. (Jan)

In summary, participants experienced a strong desire to shop for new fashion and expressed the challenge of having almost no control when seeing new styles. It appears that this compulsion to shop originates from constant exposure to new fashion, internalizing the images and latest trends originating from the fashion culture, and the need to acquire clothes that align with their ideal self-image (Figure 2). As discussed in Chapter 4, the young women primarily shopped at fast fashion retailers (e.g., Forever 21, H&M, Old Navy, etc.) that offer inexpensive, trendy apparel on a continuous basis, which helps fuel the fashion addiction. The findings of this study help to understand the roots of this addictive fashion shopping. Specifically, it demonstrates how the desire to attain an ideal self-image created a perpetuating cycle of perceived need for new fashion (Figure 2). For about half of participants, this need for consumption of new fashion resulted in addictive behavior.

In previous research, some women were reported to be compulsive buyers of fashion products (Yurchisin & Johnson, 2009) and admitted having a problem with buying too much (McNeill & Moore, 2015). This was in line with the findings from this study. Previous studies found that female consumers who felt they could not stop shopping had feelings of regret (Cook & Yurchisin, 2017; Sohn & Choi, 2014), which was not confirmed in the present study. Women

in the present study did not express any negative emotions associated with excessive and/or addictive shopping.

Positive Emotions

The last topical area depicts participant emotions associated with acquiring new fashion. This section consists of three themes: (a) It's a Hunt, (b) Retail Therapy, and (c) Accomplishment and Confidence.

It's a Hunt

For most participants (79%), descriptions of their shopping experiences resembled a "hunt." For them, purchasing involved a step-by-step process as women evaluated all potential products, leaving "no stone unturned." They approached these shopping excursions as a challenge, devoting considerable energy to the pursuit. Many women preferred to "hunt" alone, focusing solely on the task of finding that perfect item. Carrie explained, "I'm a die-hard fan of the skinny high waist style [jeans]. I know exactly how they fit. I am on a hunt to find some other good alternatives." Another participant, Beth, described her determined search for one specific item, a denim jacket. She expressed some frustration with the hunt, because of not being able to secure the "perfect" jacket of a certain color and finish, with particular buttons. After obtaining the jacket, she sounded proud and deeply satisfied with her "extraordinary" find:

One clothing item I have always wanted was a denim jacket. For about a year or so I've looked for a denim jacket. I wanted a jacket in the true denim color and the regular wash. There would just be a whitewash, and I don't really like that. I wanted one with orange buttons instead of black or blue. I remember last fall looking for it and then kind of gave up, and then it was winter, so I focused more on sweaters. And then, in spring, I tried looking again, and I didn't find it, but then searched again on Kohls.com. I found the one

I wanted. Not only is it a perfect fit, but the random rips give it an extraordinary look.

(Beth)

Jan and Ruby's blog posts described the efforts exerted when shopping, and the efficiency with which the women navigated stores, to find new fashion items. Ruby gave details of her search in a store:

When I enter an Old Navy, I first look at the new items in the front of the store. Then, I make my way around the store, and, finally, I reach the clearance section, which is usually in the back. By the time I've searched the whole store, I am ready to hit the dressing room. After about 8-10 items, I am ready to put stuff back and walk through the store all over again to find more clothes, to see if I missed anything. Leaving this store with multiple bags has always been one of my favorite things. I guess, it's part of accomplishment that I went into the store, and I had a plan "this is what I was going to get."

Jan described her experience while shopping online:

When I go online to shop, I usually have some type of idea of what I want to shop for. So, I've noticed I wanted more dresses in my closet. So, I'm, like, "Okay. I'm going to go online, and I'll see what dresses they have." I usually go for the sales section first, because why waste my time looking at new dresses they've added? And then, if there isn't that much stuff in the sales section, I will go to the new arrivals they have. And then I'll narrow that down. I add to either my wish list or my shopping cart. If I really want to get it that day, then I'll go through them and see which things I love and which things I don't like as much. So, I compare them.

Jan and Ruby's accounts show that they approached shopping with a clear strategy of how to scout a retail store or Internet site for a successful fashion hunt. The step-by-step process ensured the women first saw all the merchandise and then narrowed down their choices. Careful evaluation of the merchandise was a part of the process, as they compared product prices, styles, and features.

Participants experienced the "thrill of the chase," comparable to a real hunting adventure. In addition to being determined and focused, they also sounded excited about the process and delighted with its outcomes. Successful shopping, a.k.a. hunt, was a meaningful activity for the women, as they felt gratified and accomplished when they secured desired fashion items. Their hard work paid off, because they felt good when they were able to acquire new styles they envisioned wearing (Figure 2).

In previous research, shopping has been compared to hunting when consumers (Swedish men and women, 18-62) enjoyed in-store shopping for clothing and spent considerable time and effort to acquire desirable apparel (Backstrom, 2011). In addition, young U.S. consumers experienced excitement as they "hunted for goods" (p. 150) in a fast fashion retail store, although insights of the process were not explored (Watson & Yan, 2013). Consumers shopped for bargains where locating the right apparel at the right price was important (Backstrom, 2011; Gabrielli et al., 2013, Joy et al., 2012), which was not confirmed in the current study. This might be due to the fact that women in this study shopped primarily at fast fashion stores, where clothing was quite inexpensive, even more so with the offering of frequent sales promotions. Previous studies reporting fashion hunt practices did not reveal the resulting positive emotions such as accomplishment and pride associated with the 'trophy' of new fashion.

Retail Therapy

Shopping that has positive emotional benefits and helps to relieve stress and/or anxiety is known as retail therapy (Atalay & Meloy, 2011). Past research showed that people can compensate for a variety of emotional states such as bad moods, sadness, depression, and stress by shopping (Sohn & Choi, 2014). For all participants, fashion shopping was a form of a “therapy” used to deal with stress and to improve mood. Beth’s comment was typical for other women, “I always think shopping’s like a good therapy for me. I always feel good after shopping.” Jan shared the same sentiment in her blog, “Desperately needing some good ole’ retail therapy. If I’m in a bad mood, I’ll go shopping. It lifts my mood.” Fashion shopping appeared to give women a mental and emotional break from the stressors in their lives. Similar to other women, for Linda, shopping for apparel was comforting. It reduced sad feelings and helped to alleviate college-related anxiety. She commented in a blog post:

When I am sad and want to be isolated, I turn to the internet, specifically, the websites of my favorite clothing stores. I almost feel blessed at the fact that I’m a millennial and was brought up in a world where online shopping has become a thing. Usually on the days where I just feel the need for retail therapy, I run off to our local mall and alleviate my stress browsing up and down several racks of clothes and shopping from store to store.

On days like this, I usually had a difficult test in a class, or I felt unsure of how I did on a presentation.

For Jan, when dealing with a major stress associated with the death of a grandparent, shopping was a distraction that helped to reduce feelings of sorrow and grief during the difficult time. It was apparent that she used retail therapy quite often to relieve other negative emotions. When she did not “feel well”, which seemed to mean feeling sad or low, she shopped for clothes to enhance her mood:

I had a really, really rough week. I think that was the week I found out that my grandmother passed away. Yeah, and I was, like, “I really need to get out of the house and do something. If I stay cooped up in here, I'm gonna be miserable, and I'm gonna be dwelling on my own emotions.” And then I went shopping. I found this made my day so much better. It really brightened my day. Um, yeah, and it was, it was really fun. I know that shopping will help. Like some type of ailment that I have. Not ailment, but I guess like if I don't feel well, I'll go shopping.

Women in the study viewed browsing and buying fashion as self-care and used shopping as an activity to treat themselves, “I’m in a better mood because, to me, shopping is relaxing, and it’s like therapy. I have a more positive day because I treated myself to something new” (Amy). Dawn enjoyed the “me time” when shopping alone as she focused on her own needs and did not think about others:

When I'm by myself and I'm shopping, then I'm just kind of alone, and I'm in my own little world. I'm just doing things for myself, rather than trying to please other people, and it's just, it's nice. And then you bring home something that's just for you, that's personal for you to wear. It just feels good.

Kang and Johnson (2011) reported that young men and women in the U.S. shopped for clothing to relieve stress, improve mood and to self-focus. Arnold and Reynolds (2003) found men and women shopped for various products to alleviate stress and to enhance mood. Likewise, Atalay and Meloy (2011) concluded that retail therapy improved mood. Extant research is in line with the findings of this study. Most of the prior apparel research on retail therapy was quantitative (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003; Atalay & Meloy, 2011; Kang & Johnson, 2011). The

present study adds to the apparel research by identifying the range of various stressors that motivated young women to shop for fashion as a form of therapy.

Accomplishment and Confidence

All participants were enthusiastic and positive in their blog posts and interviews when discussing their fashion shopping adventures and related experiences. They conveyed a sense of excitement and pleasure. Ally explained, “I’m much happier shopping. People get happy from food. I get happy from clothes.” Jan had similar sentiments, “Buying new things makes me happy. For me, it’s probably the general feeling of happiness. I get excited for every new piece that I add. I just like the idea of having something new. It excites me.” Participants experienced immediate gratification from purchasing clothes both online and in-store, as Anna described:

I love shopping in-store and having clothes the same day, because it makes me happy. I love online shopping because it is exciting to reach the end page of the transaction as I know I will receive clothes in a week.

Women felt particularly excited with new purchases when they expressed their creativity through imagining new outfits or pairing newly purchased garments with items they already owned. Beth and Betty’s quotes illustrate how much the women enjoyed fantasizing where and how they would be wearing new fashion, and how they would look in them:

When I take clothes home [after shopping], I just start to picture how this piece can be used with stuff I have, and then how can I make outfits with different things. It just excites me. (Beth)

I just get happy when I buy clothes. I just start to visualize where I could wear the outfit and when I could wear it. (Betty)

A little more than half of participants (57%) shared that they tried on clothes again at home, immediately after buying them. They often created an improvised fashion show for their

family members or friends to “show-off” their new purchases where they enjoyed feelings of success and accomplishment.

After shopping, I bring home the bags. It feels great. I have a little fashion show for my parents. I just love the feeling of, like, I swirl around my living room, and they tell me, “That’s such a cute top.” (Donna)

After I come back from the mall, I invite a friend over, and we look at what I bought. I love trying on my new clothes to show her and see what she thinks. Most of the time, she likes what I got, and we put outfits together with shoes and jewelry I have. (Dawn)

Similarly, Tina and Carrie explained the excitement in creating a fashion show of new clothes. They experienced the feelings of fulfillment and accomplishment when others saw, approved, and complimented their purchases:

Very excited. Very excited. Show my sister, show my mom, even show my brother if he cares. I usually try them on again, because I like to pair them with other things that I have in my closet. Walk around the house, “Hey, Guys, look at my new outfit!” A little fashion show kind of thing. (Tina)

After shopping, I get so excited. Usually I try them [clothes] on again and pair with what I had a vision with, and I get so excited. When I used to live at home, and I come in with a shopping bag, I would want to show my mom what I got. And I would do a little fashion show. (Carrie)

The symbolic self-completion theory suggests that individuals may feel uncertain about their identity (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). They seek to acquire and display symbols such as clothing to ascertain and complete their identity (Moss, 2016). These symbols may enable an individual to receive acknowledgement from others that confirms and affirms self-definition

(Gollwitzer & Wicklund, 1985). In this study, fashionable clothing were the symbols presented by the fashion culture and acquired by women in fast fashion stores (Figure 2). These symbols helped participants to achieve their ideal self-image and complete identities as fashionable and beautiful, young women. During the impromptu fashion shows at their homes, women typically received compliments from others on the new purchases as well as how they looked in them. Further, women received positive feedback and acknowledgement from their peers on the new outfits. This recognition from others on their success of newly acquired symbols (fashionable apparel) was important to participants, as it helped to temporarily complete and affirm their identities that were part of the glamorous fashion culture they emulated (Figure 2).

Feelings of happiness from buying new clothes were also associated with a greater self-confidence for all participants. Being able to attain an ideal self-image (Figure 2) was a confidence booster as women felt personal success from buying the “perfect” pieces that made them beautiful.

I was happy with my winter purchases. I can picture myself wearing that sweater a lot. It personally gave me more confidence (Sally).

Finding those perfect outfits helps me to be confident within myself (Betty).

Women felt that new outfits added a little more to their ideal self by closing the gap between a current and an ideal self-image, “I am so happy with my purchase, and I feel super confident with being able to wear something that is not just sort of what I wanted, but exactly what I had envisioned” (Jan).

The possible selves theory posits that individuals imagine roles they can create for themselves based on aspirations in order to construct their ideal selves (Dunkel & Kerpleman, 2006). The theory explains how individuals may change from the present (actual self) to what

they would like to become (ideal self). For example, my actual self (current self-image) is not as fashionable, beautiful, etc.; whereas my ideal self in the latest trends (ideal self-image), can be. It appears that when women tried on new fashion, they also “tried on” a somewhat different and new identity (more fashionable, beautiful, glamorous, etc.). Acquiring these new styles enabled women to get closer to the ideal self-image and ultimately, ideal self. These intense positive emotions, greater self-confidence and feelings of accomplishment that resulted from buying new clothes appear to be a major reason that drives buying more clothes and purchasing more frequently.

Comparable to the current study, it was found that young consumers had positive emotions when shopping for fashion (Correia-Loureiro, 2016; Cowart & Goldsmith, 2007; Gabrielli et al., 2013; Seock & Bailey, 2007; Sullivan & Heitmeyer, 2008). Prior studies reported conflicting findings in terms of the relationship between apparel purchased in fast fashion stores and self-image. Watson and Yan (2013) concluded that young female consumers in the U.S. felt that fast fashion improved their self-image as it enhanced their looks, and how they felt about themselves. In contrast, Wang’s (2010) quantitative study questioned the importance of fast fashion to self-image. The author reported that the majority of Swedish consumers (75%) did not feel clothes from fast fashion stores were significant to self-image. The current study found that young women consumed fast fashion in an attempt to attain their perceived, ideal self-image.

This study discovered a connection between intense positive emotions that improved women’s self-confidence that resulted in feelings of success and accomplishment. The process of acquiring new outfits and envisioning themselves in the desired fashionable styles resulted in increased confidence that was reinforced by family members and friends. The women were able

to temporarily achieve their ideal self-image through new clothing that created positive emotions and improved self-confidence.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

This chapter presents a brief research background and a summary of the study.

Conclusions, implications, and limitations of the findings are discussed. Recommendations for future research conclude the chapter.

Research Background

In the early 2000s, the apparel industry experienced the emergence of fast fashion, a retail and supply chain business model that offers low cost, low quality fashion apparel (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). Fast fashion presents the newest styles to shoppers every two-three weeks, encouraging a consumer culture of frequent buying and disposing, known as throwaway fashion (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006). In the era of fast fashion, apparel consumption in the U.S. market has increased significantly. In 2016, the average American, including infants and elders, purchased 68 garments (ApparelStats & ShoeStats, 2017).

To date, there is limited research on fast fashion consumption, particularly in the United States. Additionally, there is no research focusing on consumer experience with the fast fashion phenomenon. Previous studies examined fast fashion consumption practices outside the United States (Gabrielli et al., 2013; Joy et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2015; Wang, 2010), investigated the supplier perspective (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006; Cachon & Swinney, 2011; Sull & Turconi, 2008), compared slow and fast fashion consumption (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Watson & Yan, 2013), and explored fast fashion hoarding (Bedford et al., 2016). Extant research produced varied results, which might be due to the differences in how the fast fashion consumer was defined and studied (Gabrielli et al., 2013; Joy et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2012).

Prior to this study, no research had explored why young women are drawn to buying large quantities (in excess of 150 pieces) of fast fashion apparel every year. The purpose of the study was to gain understanding of the everyday, lived experiences of women in emerging adulthood

who purchased large amounts of clothing. The study investigated: (a) shopping experiences of young women, (b) the meaning young women attach to their clothing purchases, and (c) why young women are buying large quantities of fast fashion.

Conclusions

Fourteen women in emerging adulthood between the ages of 19 and 25 participated in the study. They were recruited through a flyer distributed at a private university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The topic was examined through participant journal-style blogging, followed by in-depth, individual interviews. Phenomenological interpretative analysis allowed for an understanding of participant everyday experiences when they shopped for and managed a large quantity of fashion apparel. The themes that emerged from the analysis revealed the meanings attached to these experiences by participants. The themes were grouped in four overarching topical areas: (a) Pressure and Expectations, (b) Need for Fashion Browsing, (c) Perpetuating Fast Fashion Consumption Cycle, and (d) Positive Emotions.

Fast Fashion Consumption Practices

The results presented in Chapter 4 described everyday fast fashion consumption practices of the research participants. Specifically, the fashion consumption practices included: browsing and purchasing practices online and in-stores, storing and disposing behavior.

Browsing and purchasing practices

Prior studies had identified various reasons consumers browsed for apparel (Backstrom, 2011; Liu et al., 2015, Seock & Bailey, 2008), but did not provide an in-depth investigation of how often women browse for fashion, where they browse and why, detailing similarities and differences for the two channels, online and in-stores. Women spent significant time and effort browsing for fashion, both online and in-store. Participants browsed online more frequently (often daily) and for a longer time (several hours a day) in comparison with browsing at brick-

and-mortar stores (several hours a week). It was found that often young women browsed apparel online and then followed-up their internet-based research in the physical store to try it on and evaluate the quality, similar to other studies' findings (Kinley, 2009; Panteva et al., 2012).

The women shopped more often and bought more apparel online than they did in stores. On average, the women in this study bought 103 pieces of clothing online versus 83 pieces in-store, for a total of approximately 186 fashion items a year. Interestingly, a little more than half of women (8) in this study stated that they preferred to buy apparel in brick-and-mortar stores, but in reality, they were actually purchasing more clothes online due to 24/7 shopping availability from their homes, which has not been conveyed in the existing literature.

All women consistently shopped at the same fast fashion stores, both online and brick-and-mortar, such as H&M, Forever 21, and Zara. They referred to these as “go-to” stores that had the styles, price and fit they desired. When women went to brick-and-mortar stores (at their local mall), they visited a larger range of retailers (Kohl's, Old Navy, Rainbow Shops, Rue 21, Windsor) in addition to their “go-to” stores and spent more time shopping than they did online. Taking time from their busy lifestyles to drive to the mall, they wanted to make the most of the trip and see the latest fashion by visiting a greater number of stores. The results indicate that buying fashion in brick-and-mortar stores was still a significant shopping channel for young women despite the increasing popularity and convenience of online shopping, an understudied area with minimal research available.

According to participants, they shopped for new fashions with the goal of creating new outfits. They acquired styles that could be mixed and matched with pieces they already owned or bought new apparel items to make a complete, new look. This indicates that the retailer strategy

of styling outfits on models online, and mannequins on store displays, is successful in enticing young women to buy more items (Bell & Ternus, 2012).

Online vs. in-store shopping

Participants perceived distinct advantages and disadvantages of shopping in-store versus online. The biggest advantage of shopping online was the ability to browse and buy apparel from anywhere at any time, as was reported in previous research (Correia-Loureiro & Breazeale, 2016 & Seock & Bailey 2008). Next, the mode of online shopping was very convenient as it allowed the use of filters to quickly and easily find what consumers were looking for in terms of sizes, styles, fabrics, and colors as well as compare prices at multiple retailers, which confirms findings from previous research (McCormick & Livett, 2012). A major disadvantage of online shopping was discontent when shipped items did not meet expectations in terms of fit, style, material, quality, etc. Participants did not like the inconvenience and shipping costs related to returning merchandise purchased online, which supported findings from extant research (e.g., Panteva et al. 2012).

With respect to brick-and-mortar shopping, women appreciated the ability to evaluate apparel quality and fit prior to purchasing (Furey 2012; Gabrielli et al., 2013). Participants believed that store atmosphere (music, lighting, displays) and good customer service attributed to a positive shopping experience (Watson & Yan, 2013). Women in this study avoided shopping in physical stores that were disorganized and crowded with piles of clothing. They experienced fatigue and anxiety when it was hard for them to find desired fashion items; this has not been reported in extant research.

Online and in-store sales promotions and discounts provided extra incentive for fast fashion shopping (Lachman & Brett, 2013). Participants admitted that marketing campaigns that offered email coupons and extra markdowns could easily double the number of clothes they

purchased. The women in this study found it very difficult to resist buying more clothing when they were provided additional discounts for already low-priced fast fashion apparel, which supported similar results reported by scholars (Park et. al., 2011; Seock & Bailey, 2008).

Storing practices

To help manage large quantities of apparel on a daily basis, women used several strategies to manage their wardrobes. All women kept meticulously organized closets. They spent a considerable amount of time and effort to create separate sections in their closets for different categories of clothing (e.g. t-shirts, jeans, outerwear), different seasons, different colors, lengths of sleeve, etc. These strategies allowed to quickly and easily find pieces and create various outfits. The organization of closets reduced stress and anxiety when getting ready and style desirable looks for everyday use. Storing large quantities of clothing has been an understudied area, and almost no literature exists on the topic.

Disposal practices

It was found that women disposed of clothing in order to free the space in their closet and be able to add new pieces. They described replenishing items in their wardrobes at the same rate as they were discarding old fashions, purchasing the same amount of new items (more than 150 garments a year) as they disposed of, which has not been previously reported in the literature. The women reviewed their closets seasonally to determine what to discard and made their decisions based on what did not fit or was perceived as being out of fashion, which means participants almost never disposed of a garment when it was no longer usable (e.g. worn-out). All participants in this study disposed of clothing by donating it to charities, such as Goodwill or the Salvation Army. This was inconsistent with previous fast fashion studies that found women threw unfashionable clothing in the trash (Joy et al., 2012; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009).

The Whys of Fast Fashion Consumption

The results of the data analysis and interpretation presented in Chapter 5 described young women's experiences when purchasing large quantities of fast fashion, and the meaning they attached to these experiences. Based on emerged themes and topical areas, a perpetuating fast fashion consumption cycle model was proposed (see Figure 2). Drawing on possible selves theory and social comparison theory, the model helps to understand why participants had a constant need for buying new clothes.

The women in this study experienced a constant pressure to look and dress like the ideals of beauty presented by the fashion culture through social media, brand advertisements, and celebrity styles. This pressure was further reinforced by parents and other influential adults who emphasized the importance of appearance and impressions one creates through dress.

Participants continuously browsed the trending pages on social media to see the current fashion and were influenced by advertisements from brands that featured models in the latest styles and offered promotions and deals. Women looked up to celebrities as fashion idols and wanted to imitate the looks they presented in an attempt to become a part of the glamorous fashion culture. By internalizing the fashion culture images and visualizing themselves in these new styles, the young women formed ("envisioned") an ideal self-image. The desire to look like the fashion culture ideals and the perceived gap between these ideals and their current appearance created a tension, as the women felt they were not stylish or beautiful enough. As a result, the women experienced dissatisfaction with their current/actual self in 'old' and 'unfashionable' apparel and felt the need to buy the latest fashion styles.

Acquiring new styles and seeing themselves in the same outfits as the fashion culture idols, as well as receiving positive reinforcement from family and friends on their success and accomplishment, resulted in increased confidence and positive emotions (pride, excitement and

happiness) as the women were able to (temporarily) achieve their ideal self-image. However, when they went back to their daily browsing routine and saw the newest styles presented by the fashion culture, their recent fashion purchases were not able to sustain the same level of satisfaction and excitement. As women started to form a new ideal self-image, envisioning themselves in the latest fashion, they became gradually dissatisfied with their current self-image. The perpetuating fast fashion consumption cycle began again. The constant need for buying new apparel originated from the women's desire to attain their constantly moving target – an “envisioned” ideal self-image.

The findings indicate that participants felt pressure from the fashion culture that led to a creation of an ideal self-image shaped by fashion trends on social media, brand advertisements and celebrity looks. The possible selves theory provided the context to the concept of the ideal self who “we would very much like to become” (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). The women in this study felt that if they could look like the images from the fashion culture and attain their projected ideal self-image, they may achieve their ideal self. Shopping for new fashion enabled the women to get closer to an ideal self-image and ultimately, an ideal self. By analyzing women's daily experiences and the meaning they attached to fashion consumption, this research was the first to explain why young women had a constant need to consume large amounts of fashion by proposing a model of a perpetuating fast fashion consumption cycle.

Role of Gender and Race within the Consumption Cycle

This study focused on women's fashion consumption practices and everyday experiences with apparel. The majority of these women (79%) learned the importance of “dressing to impress” and internalized appearance expectations since childhood. The women felt it was important to use clothing as a means to present themselves to society and make a good impression. In Western countries, ideal female beauty is based on physical attractiveness, and

“women are enculturated” (p. 152) to construct their appearance to meet established societal expectations (Rudd & Lennon, 2000). Women face greater pressure to be attractive (Rhode, 2010) and are more likely to be assessed on their physical appearance than men (Kaiser, 2012). Further, women are much more likely to receive complements on how they look and be noticed for what they are wearing than men (Rhode, 2010). These socially constructed ideas affect how women “practice appearance management behaviors” (p. 152) and influence what apparel to acquire and fashion style to present (Rudd & Lennon, 2000). This study found that contemporary young women continue to feel pressure to conform to established societal views that they should make a good impression through a nice appearance and dressing well. It seems evident that this pressure contributed to participant perceived need to acquire more apparel and continuously construct and re-construct their identities to follow ideas presented by the fashion culture.

In comparison to other participants, the seven African American women (half of the sample) in this study appeared to experience more pressure, specifically, from their mothers to make a good impression through dress. During interviews, these women described how they were raised to always present themselves well and consider carefully what they wore in all aspects of their lives. In Davis (2015), young African American women described how their mothers were the major influence on how they should dress and present themselves. The young women were socialized by their mothers to look presentable and respectable in social and professional environments as “others would judge their daughter based on appropriateness of dress and appearance.” (Davis, 2015, p. 134). The young women understood the importance of self-presentation through dress that influenced their apparel shopping behavior.

Implications

The research results have important methodological, theoretical, industry, consumer, and educational implications, as outlined below.

Methodological Implications

Data collection in the study included online blogging, followed by in-person, individual interviews. The use of blogging allowed for a deeper understanding of participant daily experiences related to consuming large quantities of apparel. The free-style, journal-like blogging provided unique descriptions of participants' daily routine as they could freely express themselves by writing at their convenience and about any aspects related to clothing. Participants blogged for a week prior to the one-on-one interview. This enabled the researcher to review blogs before the interviews and follow-up with questions to garner deeper understanding of participant experiences and the meanings they attached to these. Use of blogging is recommended in future qualitative studies as an efficient and effective data collection method.

Theoretical Implications

The proposed model of perpetuating fast fashion consumption cycle offers new insights into fast fashion consumption and explains why young women consume large quantities of apparel. The model explains how external factors (i.e., pressure from the fashion culture) and internal factors (positive emotions from achieving an "envisioned" ideal self-image) create a perpetuating need for new fashion styles. The research contributes to the body of literature on self-identity and apparel. The model is important in illustrating how young women's satisfaction with self-image constantly changes and is dependent on always evolving fashion trends. Even though the model was proposed based on a study of fast fashion consumers who buy large quantities of apparel, the underlying mechanisms of these external and internal factors are likely

to be the same for any apparel consumption, beyond the fast fashion. Therefore, the model can be used in studies that examine apparel consumption, including:

- a) influence of the fashion culture (social media, celebrities, brand advertisement, etc.) on consumer shopping practices;
- b) consumer needs and satisfaction associated with apparel consumption;
- c) significance of apparel to appearance management;
- d) desire for new apparel and need to belong to aspiration groups;
- e) the process of attaining an ideal self-image through clothing; and
- f) affective reasons for apparel consumption.

The model could be used as a tool to guide future research on how to slow down the consumption cycle and redefine the meaning of fashion.

Industry Implications

Sustainable apparel brands with limited budgets can use the research results to better understand the shopping practices and preferences of young female consumers. Women in this study spent hours daily looking at fashion online. Sustainable brands have a captive audience of online shoppers who can be exposed to messages about the attributes of sustainable fashion, or the benefits of shifting from fast to slow fashion consumption. Women in this study indicated that an advantage of shopping for apparel in-store was the ability to evaluate the garment's quality, fit and fabric. It was also found that participants often had to return clothing bought online, because it did not meet their expectations in terms of fabric and/or construction quality. Companies can market the benefits of buying sustainable clothing by emphasizing their commitment to fabric and garment quality.

Women in this study achieved positive emotions and a sense of accomplishment after buying new clothes they liked and receiving compliments. Sustainable brands should market

themselves on the values they stand for (ethically sourced fabrics, reduced impact on the planet's carbon footprint, etc.). If young women understand these ideals, they may experience positive feelings and a sense of accomplishment when purchasing from sustainable brands. Likewise, sustainable fashion brands could seek suggestions from young women to create new fashion styles for them, and these new styles could be shared with other consumers. In seeing their styles worn by other women and promoting/creating a sustainable fashion community, the young women may experience positive emotions and a sense of satisfaction.

This study identified the importance of social media to young women when garnering fashion information and style trends. Sustainable brands with limited marketing budgets can use this free platform to promote their products and grow their market share. For example, the companies could partner with Instagram influencers who could style their clothing in the latest fashion trends and show young women the appeal of sustainable apparel. Additionally, these brands could partner with celebrities who advocate for sustainable causes and have them wear sustainable clothing, providing free publicity.

Findings from the study illustrated the impact of apparel brand advertising on young women. Participants experienced the need to browse and buy clothes when being exposed to advertisements featuring stylish women in the latest trends. Prior research has documented that women compare themselves to idealized images from apparel advertisements and shop for clothing to look and dress like the ads they see (Anguelov, 2016; Bain, 2015; Hogg, Bruck & Hough, 1999). Apparel brands that want to promote their sustainable practices (e.g., Eileen Fisher, Patagonia, PeopleTree UK) can use advertising featuring models in stylish, ethical clothing or market their socially responsible focus to increase brand awareness.

Consumer Education Implications

The research findings have significant implications for consumer education. If the perpetuating consumption cycle in the model was explained to consumers, and they were educated on why they felt the constant need to buy more clothes, they may change their perspective and want to break the perpetual consumption cycle. Further, the research found that women browsed for fashion several hours a day, fueling their need to buy the newest trends. If consumers made a conscious decision to reduce their daily exposure to fashion on social media, they may not want to buy large quantities of the latest fashion, which would save money and the planet, and perhaps result in the women experiencing positive feelings and a different sense of achievement.

Findings from the current study may add to curriculum development, both at the college and secondary levels, to educate future fashion industry professionals and consumers on the impacts of the fast fashion phenomenon and apparel sustainability. The study identified how young women are socialized from a young age about importance of appearance and fashion shopping; therefore, middle and high school curricula could begin to educate young people on the implications of consuming a lot of clothing. At all educational levels, more emphases are needed to explain the apparel industry impact on the environment (e.g., the textile industry is a major polluter), society (values and overconsumption), and consumers themselves (increased levels of consumer debt, clutter, time needed to manage large wardrobe).

In addition, educators can use the findings of the impact of apparel brand advertising on young women to better understand the connection between fashion marketing and increased apparel consumption levels. Further, organizations such as PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) have been very successful through advertising campaigns to educate

consumers on the negative impacts of the fur industry (e.g., cruelty to animals, environmental issues). Perhaps sustainable brands could use the same marketing strategies to educate consumers on the negative effects of fast fashion on the environment, factory workers, consumer debt levels.

The study found that most of the young women (71%) worked many hours a week at part-time jobs (\$945 average monthly income). These findings could be shared with university educators and financial counselors to realize if young women are working more to consume more apparel. Student success coaches could have students blog about why they work while in college to understand if there is a need to earn a significant amount of money because of their consumption practices.

Limitations

The study had some limitations that are typical of any research using an interpretive approach. Recruitment of participants was restricted to a relatively small sample of 14 women who were college students in an urban area in the Mid-Atlantic region. Young women in other areas of the country, such as rural regions, may have somewhat different fashion consumption experiences than young women from a metro area. The sample did not provide equal representation of all demographic segments, specifically, with respect to ethnicity, as half of the participants in the study self-identified as African American.

The interview procedure can create challenges for garnering honest and objective responses. Participants may feel pressure to answer interview questions in certain ways due to social desirability bias, or the researcher may influence participants answers in subtle ways. For example, all participants shared that they donate no-longer-wanted fashions to charities instead of throwing them away, the latter was reported as a common practice in previous research.

Finally, the women were self-selected to participate in the study. This could have contributed to all participants sharing positive experiences related to fashion consumption. Young women, who have negative experiences with shopping for apparel, such as a dislike for trendy apparel, or disinterest in consuming a lot of clothing, or strong dissatisfaction with their body image, are likely to have somewhat different fashion consumption experiences.

Future Research

Some scholars suggest that young consumers are willing to spend more on sustainable apparel and do not want to support unsustainable apparel brands (e.g., “The Business of Fashion”, 2017), but this was not the case in this study. Further research is warranted to understand the disconnect between young people valuing the ideals of sustainability, yet do not practice sustainable apparel consumption. The research findings indicate that participants were motivated to acquire new apparel in order to look unique and different from others in their social circles. Fast fashion retailers offer the same trendy apparel at affordable prices, which makes it almost impossible to create a distinct, unique look for those who shop at the same stores all the time. It would be of interest to explore if young women are finding unique apparel from other retail outlets (e.g. consignment stores, charity shops, small/independent brands), and experiencing the same positive emotions as reported in this study. If young women are acquiring used clothes at these other retail outlets, this could be a strategy to decrease fast fashion consumption and its negative environmental impact.

Women in this study spent significant time shopping online, making it a daily routine. They also spent time online to connect with friends and socialize, but are constantly inundated with fashion ads selling merchandise, blurring the lines between personal time and shopping. It would be of interest to better understand this experience. Additionally, it would benefit to have a

better understanding of young women's needs to look at clothes daily beyond their desire to keep up with the latest trends and styles and deciding what to buy. For example, are there deep personal or emotional needs linked to young women's browsing behavior and need to look at clothes on a constant basis?

Participants used apparel shopping as a form of therapy to reduce stress in their lives. Future research could investigate if there are other, less consumption-oriented experiences that could be offered to consumers, specifically, young women, to meet these needs. Promoting various alternative ways (e.g. social activities, hobbies, other experiences) to meet the needs of young women might help to scale down extremely high levels of apparel consumption and make their consumption patterns more sustainable.

As the model illustrates, young women were influenced by fashion culture images that resulted in continuous need for buying new apparel. It would be of interest to conduct research to have the participants commit to not browse for fashion on social media for a certain period (e.g., two weeks or one month) and have them journal about the experience. Perhaps, their consumption rate of apparel would decline.

This study was limited to exploring experiences of young women in emerging adulthood. It would be of interest to explore the consumption behavior of young men in emerging adulthood. From the researcher's personal conversations with men in this age cohort, many own in excess of 100 pairs of sneakers. It would be of interest to understand the meanings behind this high level of footwear consumption and compare findings proposed in the current study's model. The men's market is a growth area in the fashion industry (Geoghegan, 2017), and more research on men's consumption practices is needed. Further, the young consumer cohort, Generation Z (ages 9-18 in 2017), is entering emerging adulthood. It would be of significance to study their

apparel consumption habits as they are an established consumption-oriented group with distinct wants and needs and are active consumers of fast fashion (Fromm, 2018). Additional research could examine similarities and differences of consumption practices between women in emerging adulthood and young women of Generation Z and compare findings illustrated in the current study's model.

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APPENDIX A. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL LETTERS

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board
Office for Responsible Research
Vice President for Research
2420 Lincoln Way, Suite 202
Ames, Iowa 50014
515 294-4566

Date: 11/20/2017
To: Leslie Simpson
4300 Roland Ave Unit 202
Baltimore, MD 21210
CC: Dr. Elena Karpova
1072 LeBaron Hall
From: Office for Responsible Research
Title: Exploration of young women's experiences of buying large quantities of inexpensive trendy apparel
IRB ID: 17-402

| | | | |
|-------------------------|------------|------------------------------------|------------|
| Approval Date: | 11/20/2017 | Date for Continuing Review: | 11/19/2017 |
| Submission Type: | New | Review Type: | Expedited |

The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University according to the dates shown above. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- Use only the approved study materials in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.
- Retain signed informed consent documents for 3 years after the close of the study, when documented consent is required.
- Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes to the study by submitting a Modification Form for Non-Exempt Research or Amendment for Personnel Changes form, as necessary.
- Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.
- Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.
- Complete a new continuing review form at least three to four weeks prior to the date for continuing review as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.


Please be aware that IRB approval means that you have met the requirements of federal regulations and ISU policies governing human subjects research. Approval from other entities may also be needed. For example, access to data from private records (e.g. student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. IRB approval in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 202 Kingland, to officially close the project.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu.

STEVENSON
 UNIVERSITY
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DATE: 11/27/2017
 TO: Leslie Simpson
 FROM: Jeffrey D. Elliott, Ph.D., IRB Chair, Stevenson University
 STUDY TITLE: Exploration of young women's experiences of buying large quantities of inexpensive trendy apparel
 IRB REFERENCE#: SU 17-091 (crossref. ISU 17-402)
 ACTION: APPROVED
 APPROVAL DATE: 11/27/2017
 EXPIRATION DATE: 11/26/2018
 REVIEW TYPE: EXEMPT REVIEW
 AMENDMENT NUMBER: N/A



Thank you for your submission of the IRB application materials for this research study. This study has received EXPEDITED REVIEW based on applicable federal regulations. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission. The Stevenson University IRB has APPROVED your application.

MODIFICATIONS NEEDED:

No modifications are needed. Data collection may proceed effective 11/27/2017.

A stylized illustration of a woman in a black dress, holding up two other dresses, one pink and one black, against a white background.

Research participants will receive a \$25 VISA Gift Card.

1. Be a woman between the ages of 18 and 25.
2. Buy 150+ pieces of clothing a year (excluding undergarments and accessories).

[illegible]

APPENDIX C. INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: Exploration of young women's experiences of buying large quantities of inexpensive trendy apparel.

Investigators: Leslie H. Simpson, PhD Candidate, and Dr. Elena Karpova

This form describes a research project. It has information to help you decide whether or not you wish to participate. Research studies include only people who choose to take part—your participation is completely voluntary. You are being invited to participate in this study if you are a woman, between 18 and 25 years old, and purchase 150+ pieces of clothing annually. You should not participate if you are younger than 18 years.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of young women who consume large quantities of inexpensive trendy apparel (buy 150+ pieces of clothing a year) and understand what role clothing consumption plays in your everyday life. Please discuss any questions you have about the study or about this form with the researcher before deciding to participate. You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information *about the study*, contact Leslie Simpson at lsimpson@iastate.edu, or Dr. Elena Karpova, Professor, Iowa State University, karpova@iastate.edu .

Description of Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to:

- Blog in a journal style each day for one week about your clothing-related experiences, and an option to post photos of your outfits, along with the blog comments.
- Then you will be asked to be interviewed by the researcher to elaborate on your blog entries and answer additional questions about your shopping, using and disposing of clothing; the interview might last 45-90 minutes.

There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. The researcher wants to explore your thoughts, feelings, and views. With your permission, the interview might be recorded using a digital recorder.

The researcher is currently an Assistant Professor in the Fashion Design Department at Stevenson University and pursuing her PhD at Iowa State University. Your blog comments and interview responses will be used in the researcher's dissertation. Your responses may be used as data that will be published as research articles or conference presentations. Your name or any identifying information will remain confidential and will not be published.

Potential Discomforts

There are no risks associated with the participation in the study. It is possible that some participants might feel some discomfort discussing clothing consumption in the case of overspending and potential debt.

Benefits

If you decide to participate in this study, you might better understand your apparel consumption through reflecting on your clothing related experiences, and the meaning it brings to your life. The study will add to the body of knowledge and literature related to apparel consumption.

Costs and Compensation

There is no cost associated with participating in this study. You will be compensated for participating in this study with a \$10 VISA Gift card for blogging activity and additional \$15 VISA Gift Card for participating in the follow-up interview. You will need to complete a form to receive the compensation. Please know that payments may be subject to tax withholding requirements, which vary depending upon whether you are a legal resident of the U.S. or another country. If required, taxes will be withheld from the payment you receive.

Participant Rights

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in the study or to stop participating at any time, for any reason, without penalty or negative consequences. Your choice of participating in the study will have no impact on you as a student. In the blog and during the interview, you may skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

If you have any questions *about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury*, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115.

Confidentiality

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy study records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken: Your name, photos or other identifying information will not be used in the study. Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym to ensure your blog entries and interview data are confidential. Only the researcher will have access to participant names and assigned pseudonyms. Any paper files will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office only accessible to the researcher. Computer files will be password protected. Any results from the study that will be published will use pseudonyms. Participant names will remain confidential.

Consent and Authorization Provisions

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant's Name (printed): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX D. BLOG PROTOCOL

Topic: Exploration of young women's experiences of buying large quantities of inexpensive trendy apparel.

Researcher: Leslie H. Simpson, Graduate Student
AESHM Department, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011
Email: lsimpson@iastate.edu

Participant name/pseudonym: _____

Introduction:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. I am interested in your experiences related to clothing and appearance. Everything you are willing to share is of interest to me. There is no specific information I am looking for. I would like to better understand your experiences related to shopping, purchasing, styling, wearing, sharing, keeping, or disposing of your garments. I am especially interested in thoughts and feelings you have when you do anything related to clothing, no matter if they are positive or negative, big or small. Everything is of interest for me.

Instructions to access Blog page:

Log into Stevenson University's Blackboard via the Portal. On Blackboard page, under My Organizations, click on My Apparel Experiences to enter the blog page. Each day, please create a new blog by clicking on 'Creating Blog Entry'. Enter a 'title', under 'entry message' type your daily blog, 'browse my computer' to attach a picture (only if you want) and click 'Post Entry'.

Blog posting guidelines:

You are asked to blog each day for one week (7 days total) about any clothing related experiences you could share. Some examples of blog posts might include:

Your clothing shopping experience, either in store or online. Describe where you shopped, alone or with someone, what you tried on. Was there a reason you went shopping? What you liked or didn't like about the experience in general, and why? What interested you to try on or look at? What you bought or did not buy, and why? If you'd like, you could post photos of garments you tried on to illustrate your point.

When you are dressing to go to school, work, socialize, date, exercise, hang out at home/in dorm, etc. I am interested in your outfit selection process, and whether you like the result, and why. If you'd like, you could post photos of these different outfits to help you explain the following: Why you chose these outfits? How did you feel wearing them? How were you expressing yourself with these outfits? What these outfits mean to you? If comfortable, please share photos of your closet and comment how it is arranged, and what you think it says about you.

APPENDIX E. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Topic: Exploration of young womens' experiences of buying large quantities of inexpensive trendy apparel.

Researcher: Leslie H. Simpson AESHM Department, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011
Email: lsimpson@iastate.edu

Participant name/pseudonym: _____

Interview Guidelines:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. There are several questions I have for the interview and expect it to last one hour or longer. Again, I am interested in your experiences related to clothing and appearance. Everything you are willing to share is of interest to me. I am especially interested in thoughts and feelings you have when you do anything related to clothing, no matter if they are positive or negative, big or small. There are no right or wrong answers. If there are any questions you don't feel comfortable answering, please let me know, and we can skip it.

Do you mind if I recorded this interview? To confirm, your name and identity will remain anonymous and will not be used anywhere in this study.

Focus: plan, shop and acquire clothing-

You mentioned that you buy around _____ garments a year, correct? Could you please talk about your clothing shopping experiences? You might talk about your latest shopping experience, or a typical shopping trip [probes below].

How did decide that it's time to go shopping? What motivates you to go shopping?

How often do you go shopping?

Who do you usually go with? By yourself? With friend(s) or family members? Why?

Is there a different feeling for you to shop alone versus with friends/family? Why?

Do you shop both in stores and online? Why/why not?

How do you decide where to shop (what stores)? Do you always shop at the same stores? Why? Why not?

How many stores do you go to on one trip? Why? [if they shop online – how many web sites do they visit?]

How does it make you feel when you shop for clothing? Why? Is it typical for you to feel this way? Why?

How many pieces of clothing do you (usually) try on at one store? How does it make you feel? What are you thinking about?

How do you decide if you are going to buy a garment or not?

Do you always buy new clothes when you go shopping? Why/why not?

Do you have a limit to what you buy? Why or why not?

Is there anything or anyone that might influence how you shop for clothing and what you buy? [friends, family, peers, fashion magazines, celebrities, red carpet shows, tv shows, bloggers, social media outlets]

How do you feel after shopping, when you bring new outfits home? Do you try them on? Why? Why not? Do you hang them in the closet?

Once you purchase a garment, do you wear it that day or the next day? Why/why not? [probe more if they wear it a lot while it's new or not, why?]

Do you share your new purchases with anyone right away? Why/why not? How?

In general, do you talk a lot about clothing and share shopping experiences with others? Please describe. Can you give an example [send pictures to anyone, show to anyone, post on social media?]

Can you think of an example when you **really** wanted to buy a style (garment)? What was it?

Why did you want to buy it? What were the reasons you wanted it? (did you see someone wearing it?)

How have your clothes shopping changed over the years? If so, what was the reason(s)?

Focus: Wear-

Now let's talk about your experiences when you wear clothes, and how you go about it.

How do you decide what you will wear for the day?

What are the influences that may effect what you wear on any day?

What are the feelings that may effect what you wear on any day?

Do you take a long time to decide what to wear? Or does it depend on the day and why?

Are you usually satisfied with what you decided to wear or change a lot before going out for the day?

What feelings occur if you are changing a lot?

Does getting dressed each day make you think about buying more clothes?

Do you change outfits throughout the day? Why? [probe more for what occasions, emotions, feelings, influences, etc.] Why not?

How do you feel about fashion trends in general? How often do they change in your opinion? [is it important for you to be trendy?] Why? What does it mean to you “to look stylish”?

Focus: Dispose-

How often would you say you wear your clothing?

Do you have clothes you never wear? A lot of them or not really? Why?

What makes you decide what to keep and not keep?

What do you do with clothes you don’t wear?

Do you dispose of clothes because you want to buy new ones? Why or why not?

Are there any feelings you have when deciding to dispose/keep clothing?

Focus: Fast fashion-

Have you heard about Fast fashion? How do you understand the term?

Can you give examples of brands/stores that can be considered fast fashion? Why do you think so?

How do you feel about fast fashion? Why?

Do you consider yourself a fast fashion consumer? Why/why not? How do you feel about it? If not, do you know someone who is a fast fashion consumer?

What are a few of your favorite stores (online and brick and mortar store)?

Blog follow-up:

So let’s look at your photos and comments from your blog posts. I have a few follow-up questions specific to what you posted. (Will review blog posts and photos specific to participant).

Focus: Store-

Closet: (question with photo asked in blog)

So tell me about your closet.

- Are these clothes you always wear? Are there some you don’t wear but stay in your closet? Why?
- Is your closet seasonal? Or organized in a specific way?
- What does your closet say about you?

These are all questions I had. Is there anything you’d like to share about your clothing related experiences and feelings? Anything we did not cover?

APPENDIX F. DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Participant Name/Pseudonym: _____

Where do you currently live? _____

How old are you? _____

What is your ethnicity?

_____ African American

_____ Hispanic/Latino(a)

_____ Asian American

_____ Other: (Please specify) _____

_____ Caucasian/White _____

What is your year in school?

_____ First year _____ Third Year

_____ Second year _____ Fourth Year

What is your major? _____

What is your minor? _____

What is your student annual income (wages/allowance)? _____

What is your family income? _____

What extracurricular activities are you involved in? _____

APPENDIX G. VERBAL ANNOUNCEMENT IN CLASS SCRIPTIntroduction:

My name is Leslie Simpson, and I am an Assistant Professor in the Fashion Design and Merchandising program here at Stevenson University. I am also a student like you pursuing a doctoral degree from Iowa State University.

I am conducting research for my dissertation towards my PhD degree. Thank you for letting me take a few moments of your time to discuss my research project. The topic of my research is the exploration of young women's experiences of buying large quantities of inexpensive trendy apparel.

I am looking for participants who are women between the ages of 18-25 who like to shop for apparel and purchase in excess of 150 pieces of clothing a year. I would like to talk to you about your experiences related to planning, shopping, purchasing, dressing up, sharing, keeping or disposing of your garments. I am especially interested in any thoughts and feelings you have when you do anything related to clothing. How you experience clothing in your life is of interest for me.

For the research project, I would ask you to:

- 1) Blog daily on Blackboard for a week about your clothing related experiences. These can be short blogs, a paragraph or two a day.
- 2) After the blogging, I would ask you to meet with me for an interview as follow up to what you posted on the blog and answer questions about what clothing means to you.

All information you could share will be strictly confidential.

I am offering up to a \$25 VISA gift card for all participants.

I have a flyer with details on how to contact me that I will distribute and consent form if you consider participating in the study.

Any questions?

Thanks again.

APPENDIX H. EMAIL TEMPLATE FOR SNOWBALL SAMPLING

TO: Potential Participant for Study

FROM: Leslie H. Simpson, PhD Candidate, Iowa State University

RE: Invitation to participate in a study of apparel buying experiences

Dear _____:

My name is Leslie Simpson, and I am an Assistant Professor in the Fashion Design and Merchandising program here, at Stevenson University. I am also a student pursuing a doctoral degree from Iowa State University. I am conducting research for my dissertation towards my PhD degree. The topic of my research is the exploration of young women's experiences of buying large quantities of inexpensive trendy apparel. I am looking for participants in my study and was given your name and email address by _____ who participated in the study.

I am looking for participants who are women between the ages of 18-25, like to shop for apparel, and purchase 150+ pieces of clothing a year. I would like to talk to you about your experiences related to planning, shopping, purchasing, dressing up, sharing, keeping or disposing of your garments. I am especially interested in any thoughts and feelings you have when you do anything related to clothing.

For the research project, I would ask you to:

- 1) Blog daily on Blackboard for a week about your clothing related experiences.
These can be short blogs, a paragraph or two a day.
- 2) After the blogging, I would ask you to meet with me for an interview for approximately one hour as follow up to what you posted on the blog and answer questions about your clothing-related experiences.

Your participation is voluntary. All information you share will be strictly confidential. Your name or any other identifiable information will not be used in the study. I would provide you with a consent form for your signature describing the research project.

I am offering up to a \$25 VISA gift card for all participants.

Please let me know if you are interested in participating in the study.

Thank you for your consideration. Leslie H. Simpson