

The paradox of sustainable fashion: handling change with consumption diaries

Anna Hedtjärn Wester

The County Museum of Sörmland

anna.hedtjarnwester@dll.se

Magdalena Petersson McIntyre

Centrum för konsumtionsvetenskap, Göteborgs universitet

magdalena.petersson@cfk.gu.se

Abstract

Sustainable fashion is a challenge. Fashion is usually defined in terms of change and novelty, while sustainability involves re-use and continuation.

Many initiatives for making fashion sustainable focus on finding ways of keeping the logic of fashion, that is change, while avoiding to burden the environment with unsustainable production methods.

In this paper we examine the relationship between fashion and sustainability by analyzing how Swedish consumers handle this paradox. The paper builds on a wardrobe study with 34 consumption diaries and wardrobe inventories collected by the County Museum of Sörmland who invited people who were interested in documenting all the clothes and shoes purchased during a period of three months during 2014. The paper discusses how the study was carried out, as well as the different ways in which the writers of the diaries related to questions of shopping, fashion, sustainability and change.

Sustainable fashion is a challenge. Fashion is mostly defined in terms of change and novelty, while sustainability involves re-use and continuation. This paper builds on consumption diaries by contemporary Swedish consumers in order to examine how they handle the paradox of sustainable fashion and how and if they deal with a desire to change. Many initiatives for making fashion sustainable focus on finding ways of keeping the logic of change, while avoiding to burden the environment with unsustainable production methods. Consumers are often encouraged to consume more sustainably and fashion is a sphere in which consumers are believed to be able to make a difference by changing their consumption behavior (Johansson & Nilsson 2016). Fashion is a sphere that is generally considered to contain large amounts of “unnecessary” consumption; new clothes are bought for reasons of identity, social pressure or simply a craving for novelty. The textile industry is among the dirtiest and conditions for workers among the worst. Clothes are manufactured and sold for their fashion value rather than for their use value and are sometimes only worn a few times. But what would a world without fashion be like? Is it even possible to imagine? In this paper we argue that to change consumption patterns, it is also necessary to understand why consumers shop so many clothes, what meanings it has for them and to investigate aspects, often discussed in fashion theory, such as emotions, gender and body ideals. We do this by analyzing consumption diaries – collected as part of a project initiated by County Museum of Sörmland and in which contemporary Swedish consumers described and reflected upon their own practices regarding consumption and use of fashion (see also Hedtjärn Wester and Petersson McIntyre 2017). Museums have large collections and keep collecting artefacts and stories from our own time. They do so because artefacts tell about people and their lives. For new and interesting approaches collaboration with researchers is needed and this paper is an example of such collaboration. Researchers mainly work within universities and in many ways museums and universities act in separate spheres. This is unfortunate as we are convinced that we need each other. This paper is thus a way of building a bridge between us and we find it has been very rewarding for both parties. We also aim to contribute to the field of sustainability by the use of wardrobe methods (Laitala & Klepp 2011).

Background and methods

The consumption diaries are part of a larger project called *All about clothes* which also features an exhibition, started by the County Museum Sörmland in 2014. The museum started *All about clothes* to raise the issue of consumption and sustainability. The consumption of clothes in Sweden has increased with 50% over the last 15 years. Consumers do not only buy a lot of

clothes, they also throw away a lot, and it often ends up in the trash bin as textile recycling is poorly developed in Sweden. The museum found this new information was quite difficult to grasp. What had happened in this short time? Why do Swedish consumers buy all these clothes? In order to get a picture of the people behind the statistics, the Museum turned to the public for help and asked for participants to keep a consumption diary over a period of three months during the autumn of 2014.

The consumption diary had two separate but interlinked parts. The first part was a form in which the participants filled in information about their purchases of clothes and footwear over a three months period. Apart from facts about price, material and retailer they were asked to explain why they made their purchase, if it was planned or on impulse etc. The second part of the consumption diary was about the participant him/herself. They were asked to reflect upon their own consumption behaviour. Other questions concerned use and reuse of clothes. What happened to clothes they did not want or could use anymore? Did they ever mend clothes? They were also asked to count all the garments in their wardrobe. Part two was important to put the filled forms in a context.



Clothing purchased and photographed by the participants during the writing period. (The County museum of Sörmland)

The consumption diary was open to all and the Museum invited people through different channels. The Museum toured on markets and festivals with a workshop titled *What are you wearing?* The Museum also made a call for participants on the museum's website, on radio, social media and invited school teachers and their students. Participating meant quite a commitment and therefore it came as quite a surprise that so many people signed up. Some

participants dropped out along the way, for different reasons, but as many as 106 fulfilled the commitment and handed in their diary to the museum archive when the writing period was over.

Of the 106 participants 34 signed up as individuals and the remaining part were students at the age of 14-18 who were signed up by their teachers. 43 men and 63 women of various background, age, interests and occupation participated. The museum soon realised that it had a unique material in the museum archive. A first glance at the material gave an important insight that had impact on the work with the exhibition: People today behave and think very differently when it comes to consumption and use of clothes. This requires a range of various approaches toward the issue of consumption and sustainability. A more in-depth analysis was however not only desirable but necessary to make the consumption diaries justice.

The diary writers can be divided into two categories, on the one hand the adults who signed up individually and on the other hand the students from five school classes who were signed up by their teachers. This study concerns the first category, ie 34 diaries.

Purpose and aims

In this paper we analyze the consumption diaries in order to examine why consumers shop so many clothes and what the deeper meanings of clothing and fashion are in their lives. How do these consumers or writers handle the paradox of sustainable fashion and how do they think about questions of over consumption? Were there ways of dealing with the desire to change that did not involve purchasing new things and what were they? By relating such problems to issues central in research on fashion and clothing we aim to shed light on reasons behind a shift to more sustainable consumption patterns, why consumers do and do not. Many wrote that they wanted to consume sustainably, but found that they did not and could not really explain why. Others bought little or nothing, and had no interest in fashion at all. Others yet found that they bought garments they did not need that then were left hanging in the wardrobe which made them feel guilty. Some of these saw the participation in the project “Consumer Diary” as a way to improve their sustainability thinking and practices regarding consumption.

All in all we argue that it is necessary to understand these questions in order to change consumption patterns. To achieve more sustainable consumption practices we need to understand why and how people shop for clothes, what meanings shopping practices have in their lives and the relationship consumers have to their wardrobes. We believe that an analysis that takes the social and cultural meanings of fashion into account is essential. And these diaries

are an excellent source for examining the deeper meanings of fashion and clothing in people's lives.

Sustainability

The technologies for sustainable production are already developed. The real challenge is how to convince consumers to make sustainable choices. Scholars of consumption have however also criticized such standpoints where the responsibilities of making sustainable choices are placed upon consumers, when really; the lack of sustainability is a problem on a societal level (Röpke 2009). Elisabeth Shove (2010), for example, has questioned the ideas that sustainability can be achieved by changing attitudes. Instead, she argues, we should seek a perspective where consumption practices are understood as interwoven with other parts of society. Further, identity should not be understood as an "obstacle" that we must find ways to get past, as is often the issue in sustainability initiatives. Projects that encourage consumers to buy "green" or sustainable fashion is, from this perspective, not sufficient because these proposals reinforces status quo - they encourage us to continue to consume, and to think of ourselves as consumers, thus maintaining existing models. Instead, we need to reflect more deeply on what consumption means. From the field of fashion studies a similar approach is held by Kate Fletcher (2008) who argues for a systems change that questions the ideas of economic growth and promotes small scale, near produced and crafts. Reiley and DeLong (2011) discuss how consumers can cope with the craving for novelty and a unique look without buying new goods.

Wardrobe studies

To analyze the contents of the diaries we also draw on Wardrobe studies. Wardrobe studies refers to a field of study as well as a method and is an emerging field of research within the fashion field. In the following we will take up some texts that have inspired our analysis. The concept of the wardrobe may be used both to refer to the set of clothes a person has, and keeps at a certain place, and the piece of furniture – the wardrobe itself. Several scholars writing about wardrobes take up its wardrobe's symbolic meanings, to "come out of the closet", that is revealing secrets especially regarding homosexuality (Klepp & Bjerck 2012, Cwerner 2001, Wilson Trower 2004, Bye & McKinney 2007, Guy, Green & Banin 2001, Skov 2011, Lövgren 2015). Methodologically, the wardrobe can be seen as a space that reveals aspect of consumers' personal lives rarely shared openly. Skov (2011) discusses both what kinds of rooms wardrobes are and what kind of knowledge the study of them can provide. She sees the wardrobe as a place where the ethnographer can meet the informant in a way that is different from more

conventional research methods. The wardrobe is personal, close and important to many people. Studying wardrobes is getting close to something extremely intimate and to private aspects of life that often fall outside the normal social sciences, something that has been invisible, even though it is so important. The wardrobe points to an unconscious, bodily dimension of the owners' everyday lives. Practices of clothing contains something ritualistic and repetitive, they are the same every morning and evening; dressing, undressing, cleansing, hairdressing and makeup (Douglas and Isherwood 1996). These every day and ritual aspects imply that they are meaningful, Skov argues. Even care, replenishment and cleaning are in some sense ritual (see also Klepp 2001). Thus, wardrobe studies can also compensate for the over-reliance on the purchase act within consumption studies and instead focus on how people use and live with goods. Wardrobe Studies challenge the view of fashion as change and novelty, according to Skov, and anchors practices of clothing backward into personal histories of what has already been acquired and have worn before. Maybe the market is not the best or most important source of news, she ponders (see also Klepp & Bjerck 2014).

Sophie Woodward's (2007) anthropological study "Why women wear what they wear" is based on observations and interviews with, mostly young, women in their homes and bedrooms during the time they dress. To understand women's fashion choices, we must go back to the dressing element, she argues. In the book, which is about how dress is chosen, the wardrobe is understood as a resource for identity construction in which public presentation of the body is negotiated in the privacy of the bedroom. Women's experiences of their wardrobes are interpreted by Woodward as specific and revealing moments where the notions of clothes, society and identity arise. By creating a set of clothes over time women create their personal aesthetics while also conveying their relationship to the social world. When women look in the mirror they ask the question "is this me"; a question that is both embodied and material and externalizes and objectifies the self. A time aspect is also taken up where the wearing of old garments reconnects memories and experiences. Woodward, like Skov (2011), believes that women's relationships with their clothes are far more important than their relationship with the fashion industry. She sees wardrobes as an extension of the self, while clothing also serves as a kind of social programming through which social situations, moods and events are defined. Clothes are retained even if they are not used because they constitute a kind of material biography of its owner. Woodward also believes that relationship, for example between mother and daughter, leave imprints in adult women's wardrobes, partly because they, as children developed a taste influenced by their mothers and because mothers often continue to buy clothes

for their adult daughters. Many take over clothes from their mothers. Clothes also mediate relationships between groups of women, according to Woodward, who borrow from each other.

According to Ingun Grimstad Klepp (2005) the amount of textiles has increased tremendously in the home since the mid-1900s as well as efforts to keep them clean. More washing is done, but after work such as ironing and mangling has on the contrary decreased. The work of washing is not as hard but still requires a lot of energy and costs in the form of electricity, water, chemicals and time. In a study of the life of clothes Laitala & Klepp (2015) address the issue of how realistic data on the life cycle of clothes can be developed. LCA, life cycle assessment is often performed in technical or scientific contexts, but here ethnographic studies inspired by wardrobe studies are used to come up with additional empirical data. Existing knowledge is often flawed, say Laitala & Klepp. They found that the clothes are often used longer than has previously been known, although many garments have been used very little. Clothes were kept in the possession far more than they were used. Laitala & Klepp (2011) argue that apparel circulation can be slowed by new design and manufacturing techniques that are better adapted to human uses and preferences. In another discussion Klepp & Bjerck (2014) describe wardrobe studies as a methodology that allows for an analysis of the way that clothes relate to each other in the closet, and which makes the material dimension of clothes become clearer. The authors believe that research still does not know much about how women and men, young and old dress and why. Often fashion scholars are too close to and too uncritical of the fashion industry whose views on fashion have been allowed to define the research field, they argue. The fashion industry has been allowed to define fashion as change and told us that buying new goods is what makes us happy and beautiful. This has meant that perspectives such as stability or durability have been neglected, and led to difficulties in creating sustainable fashion. Research knows more about the market, what is bought and sold than how these things and garments are used. Klepp & Bjerck (2014) also believes that wardrobe inventories are good because many underestimate the contents of their wardrobes.

We have found that the consumption diaries shed light on these matters. In analyzing the diaries we have been able to come up with themes that reflect different cultural meanings of shopping and clothing and the meanings that fashion has on aspects such as emotions, gender and body ideals. It is crucial to understand the importance that clothes have in people's lives and to understand what would make them want to have fewer clothes - not what would just for instance get them to choose a differently produced fabric. By questioning the connections made between

“change” and the fashion industry, Wardrobe studies provide ways of understanding people’s dressing practices in more complex ways.

We have been inspired by these studies, but there are also some differences. In analyzing the diaries we have seen how consumers negotiate with the meaning of fashion, with the fashion industry and of change. Our study is ethnographic in terms of analysis. In reading the diaries we have been looking for patterns that make up a culture (Ehn & Klein 1994, Ehn & Löfgren 2012, Ehn, Löfgren & Wilk 2016). However, our informants have written the diaries themselves. We did not meet them in their wardrobes. We believe this was a good way of making them become more active parts in the project and they were able to contribute to the project with their own reflections and expertise in different ways than if we had just interviewed them. Many brought up matters that we might not have come to ask them about and they become co-researchers (Brembeck et al 2010, Berggren-Torell 2003, Lessiter 2005). Some of the diaries had the character of life histories. This also meant that many felt very involved and said that they would continue thinking about these matters and their own consumption behaviour after the project had ended. The participants had very different reasons for joining the project, which led to a great variety in the diaries. In the following we will outline the connections between the diaries and fashion theories and also point to aspects that have not been given so much attention by previous research.

Into the wardrobe diaries

Several of the diary writers wrote that they were interested in sustainable consumption, but found it “tricky”. Participation in the project “Consumption diary” gave them a chance to reflect on the topic, they thought. Many wrote that they wanted to consume more sustainable but still did not (see also Connolly and Prothero 2008, Binkley & Litter 2011, Fuentes in 2011, Fredriksson & Fuentes 2014). They often said that they did not know why they did not consume sustainably, and could not explain the processes behind their consumption patterns, an expression of the routine-like aspects of wardrobes (Skov 2011). Not only dressing the body, but shopping and decisions around shopping were explained as routines and not fully conscious. Some wrote that they tried to “resist” buying things but did not succeed. Most explained that they thought sustainability was important, and that they tried to think about it, but it still did not change their consumption habits. They often had a bad conscience and wrestled with dual emotions. They could not really explain their own behavior on the basis of how they really wanted to behave. These dual emotions show that consumption is a contradictory field that can

be difficult to handle. It may also suggest that many consumers see it as a problem that lies within themselves, in their choices and attitudes, just as in the models promoted by many authorities (Shove 2010). The authors' reflections also suggest, in line with Shove's analysis, that changing attitudes is complicated. The authors felt frustration because they could not understand why they do not consume more sustainably; make more sustainable choices. The will to consume sustainably and still not doing it suggests that individual consumers find it difficult to relate critically to the fashion system. The fashion system encourages and rewards consumption, encourages and enables associated lifestyles, choices and opportunities. The fashion system in turn is a product of the global economic system based on constant growth and where consumption is the basis. To ask for systemic change becomes too abstract and alienated from everyday life; rather they put the blame on themselves in explanation models that fail to grasp the reasons behind consumption patterns.

There was also both a rejection and an embracing of abundance in the diaries. Words such as "dirty" or "disgusting" were used to describe their own consumption of clothing. Many wrote about the trouble of having too many things and of participation in the "consumption diary" project as a kind of purge (Fredriksson 2016). "Filthy expensive" also occurred as a comment on purchases. These comments can be interpreted as reflecting double feelings, but also express an idea that the self in some sense deserves excess, or luxury for oneself. Many found various reasons to reward themselves, even though it felt wrong.

Remembering with clothing

Many of the writers wrote about memories and emotional attachments to garments (Woodward 2007). Some felt social pressure to look fashionable even though they did not really want to. Many of those were women and that points to the importance of a gender perspective (Banin, Green and Guy 2001). Those who described fashion as work, as pressure, or as anxiety were often women, and indicates that questions of sustainability also need to be related to gender issues, the women felt more pressure to keep up with fashion or to look good or fashionable.

The relationship between fashion and human emotions, the diary writers' feelings was a recurring theme and illustrates how material objects gives substance and form to different kinds of stories (for example, see Ek-Nilsson & Meurling 2014, Gibson 2015, Jenss 2015). Memories were a prominent theme, where emotions such as nostalgia were anchored in garments, such as children's outgrown garments as well as garments from specific eras such as the 1950s (Woodward 2007, Brembeck 2015). Several of the writers liked to shop second-hand pieces.

Particular decades were given meaning in terms of style and nostalgia, but they were also used as motivations, or even excuses, for shopping. Collecting sometimes transgressed guilt. To complete one's collection was not considered to be unsustainable, a condition that perhaps illustrates that few consumers think that it is the thinking around renewal and change that should be challenged. The 1950s or 1970s were desired decades (Gregson 2007), but other decades figured too. One couple, who both wrote diaries, explained that they did not consume any clothing manufactured after 1970 (approx.). The inferior quality of later produced garments was stated as reason. The consumption of clothing from particular decades also brought life to practices of care and services from those decades, such as tailoring, mangling, dry cleaning and professional mending. Some of these referred to "forgotten" practices, others were examples of a reinvention of services.

Many of the writers talked about their wardrobes in terms of storing, saving or collecting clothes (Bye and McKinney 2007, Cwerner 2001, Banin and Guy 2001). They saved clothes because special memories were attached to them. They did not want to do away with them even though they thought that they should or did not use them. Clothes had sentimental value; the writers were emotionally attached to particular garments because it was reminiscent of a certain phase of life. One writer recounted his life with the help of various garments or with the efforts of the creation of garments by himself or other members of his family. Garments thus become the bearer of memories, nostalgia and sentimentality, or as fashion researcher Robyn Gibson writes, an autobiographical tool by which important themes and issues in the author's life is discovered. Memories are "stitched into the seams of our favorite dresses" (Gibson 2015, xiv). Gibson believes that there is an obvious link between clothes and memories and that clothes have the capacity to bring intimate memories to life.

Pleasurable and demanding

The relation to the self or to expectations on dressing stylishly, or to self-realization with the aid of the exterior were common, ideas that reiterate or build on cultural ideals that the exterior says something important about who we are (Woodward 2007). Some described dressing as fun, and as opportunities' to stand out or show off one's individuality. Others yet, described dressing and shopping as difficult and problematic. Clothes shopping was pleasurable and demanding at the same time, for the writers. Many expressed dual emotions about fashion and clothing, and both wanted and did not want to put time and energy into dressing. Some saw fashion as work, both dressing oneself, and dressing others, such as children. Many wrote that

they hated shopping and fashion and just wanted a wardrobe that worked, “I would love a uniform”. Others wrote about their will to replace worn out clothes with the same. They did not like change. At the same time others yet explained their shopping by saying “I had to buy it because I had been looking for such a piece, forever”, or “I totally fell in love with this sweater when I saw it”. Many also described shopping as a way to spend time on one’s own.

Some writers described fashion as “an interest” that is “the best there is”. Such descriptions referred to consuming new goods as well as second hand goods. Strong, or positive feelings in relation to garments were often mentioned. To “love” a particular piece of clothing, or a favorite item was frequent, or to “fall for” a certain garment in a store. Many mentioned such emotional bonds or reactions as reasons for purchase. The relationship between consumers and clothes contains many more complex aspects than a use value, as fashion theories have shown for a long time (Wilson 1985). To “fall in love with” or “give in to” the desire to buy was brought up by several of the writers, or of not being able “to resist”. Some explained that they had bought certain garments because these seemed to be made “just for me”, or were “perfect”. On the other hand, others spoke of garments that they had been using for the past 10 or 20 years that they thought had become “part of me”.

Recurrent in the diaries were also statements such as “fun designs cheer up”. Or, as one wrote “I needed to cheer myself up and it was on sale”. The same person also wrote “I love hearts and always wanted to have a pajama with heart print”. Such remarks raise questions about what it means to love hearts and to have always wanted a particular print, and why it is even important or interesting to have a certain print on the pajama to sleep in. The fact that it matters what print one has on one’s pajama when one sleeps reveals something fundamental about clothing practices. It is not about showing off, or show status. No one else sees, it is the self that is the viewer, it is the person herself who enjoys the garments; consumption for oneself. Many wrote similar things about loving panties or stockings with a certain print, often cute (feminine) patterns. Such remarks express meanings of fashion for working on one’s individuality (Lipovetsky 1994), about the relationship with oneself. These garments are cheap, but signal a kind of luxury or individualization. Consumption is here not primarily about showing off wealth to others, but to enjoy the luxury of a fun pajamas, socks or underwear in interaction with the self.

There were, however, many examples of what can be described as more negative emotions. One such aspect was consolation, and many wrote about shopping because one is sad or “needed

it that day". Being "in tears" in fitting rooms was a theme brought up by some authors, and linked to perceived over weight, a negative body image and of not being able to find clothes that fit in size. Not looking in accordance with ideals was also a sentiment that caused distress. Dissatisfaction with stores' plus size departments was mentioned as evoking tears.

Another theme was the requirements many wrote they felt upon themselves from employers, people around them, or perhaps themselves. Finding something that fits was often described as "a relief", particularly regarding work clothes. One wrote that she constantly suffers from "clothing stress". Anxiety was often mentioned in relation to shopping and many wished to just find clothes that function in all situations, but felt they were unable to make up their minds about what that really was (Clarke and Miller 2007, Woodward and Miller 2012). Although some described shopping as fun, others described it as boring. The will to have a perfect, well-functioning wardrobe was desired by both sides however.

One author wrote that "I have decided that this autumn I am going to wear dresses much more". The wording is interesting. Why does one decide that one is going to wear dresses more and what does such an idea express, what processes of demands, requests or maybe expectations are involved in such utterances? It says something about the relationship to clothes and garments and the meanings that garments and styles are given in everyday life.

Writing about fashion and consumption of clothing in relation to insecurities, stress and anxiety was, as mentioned, frequent. Those who chose these themes were often women, even regarding the more positive feelings, thus putting a finger on a gender aspect. Many diary writers have dual and complex feelings about clothing that involve the body and the body's ability to meet expectations, the self's ability to meet expectations and the feelings that are evoked when it does not (Clarke and Miller 2007). Some writers did not like shopping, did not find it pleasurable, neither men nor women, and just wanted a working wardrobe. A dream of a "perfect" wardrobe was often mentioned, an expression perhaps of the reasons behind the popularity of makeover programs and books. To "not know what you like" was a very common utterance in combination with perceived expectations on actually knowing such things. Choice was considered difficult by many, "decision anxiety" or difficulties in finding functioning clothing just to get away from it all. An additional theme was comfort. To be comfortable was a common motif behind purchase. Increased comfort and convenience are among the most significant changes that the clothing practitioners undergone during the 1900 and 2000s.

The body

The writer's relationship with her or his own body is also a recurring theme in the diaries. This often involves body size, ie, over weight, or to pending between different weights and the needs that in that case arise for changing the contents of the wardrobe. Fit was seen as important by many and also relates to the body. While some search for "the perfect garment", others had difficulties in finding clothes that at all fit. "Disappointment" was an often recurring emotion in the diaries and was often related to plus size lines and the ways it made one feel to have a body that is not included in the "normal" collection. Plus size departments were generally thought to create feelings of otherness and of not fitting in. One wrote, for example, that one of the main objectives of clothes for her is "to hide the belly", a statement that shows the complex relationship many people have with their clothes. Another theme related to age, and many found that it was easier to dress when they were younger, but also found needs of changing clothes, for example when they retired. Their interest was stronger when they were younger, many wrote (Klepp & Storm Mathisen 2005, Lövgren 2015).

The wardrobe as project

Recurring were also descriptions of the wardrobe as a project, a place where the clothing collection was kept. "I don't want to throw clothes away", several wrote. As described in an article by Cwerner (2001) the research on clothing and fashion has been stuck to a vision of clothes as something that is necessarily meant to be worn, but many people have clothes in their closets that they never plan to wear, or plan to wear much later. Some of the diary writers viewed their wardrobe, or their own set of clothes, mostly as a collection. Many wrote that they save a lot of clothes, even from when they were children or from their mother and grandmother. Those who did that were usually women (cf. Woodward 2007). At the same time many wrote that they buy a lot which is then left hanging in the closet. They might be attracted by certain garments, often dresses and these will then be hanging in the closet because they do not really fit into the everyday demands of practical and wearable dress. To think about the wardrobe as a whole, about what was missing in the closet and would make the wardrobe "perfect" were formulations that re-occurred and in which the wardrobe was given its own meaning. "I am always looking for dresses", for example, one wrote. Vintage, treasure hunting, or to look for certain things, as a way of having the search as a project were common. When the perfect thing pops up, it must be purchased, many thought.

Gender

Gender is a theme that studies of fashion mostly relate to in one way or another. The gendered aspects of fashion are many. Clothes sit on the body and gender the wearer immediately. Few consumers choose goods from departments other than the gender segments the fashion industry offers. Gender is the perhaps most prominent marker of clothing, both regarding production and consumption. Children (boy/girl), women and men are the three (or four) segments that represent structures in virtually the whole fashion industry. Clothes and fashion retail is a feminine sphere in the sense that most who work there are women and clothes and fashion have generally been interpreted as feminine skills (Pettinger 2005). Many women are responsible for both purchase and care of clothing for children as well as male family members. While fashion has been given feminine encodings, style has often been understood as more masculine (Hebdige 1979, McRobbie 1994, Mörck and Petersson 2007). Of the diary authors (the adults) 24 were women and 10 were men, a division that may reflect such gender patterns (although the trend is also generally that women seem to participate in studies, more than men). Research has however presented convincing evidence that men of all times have been deeply involved as fashion practitioners (Beward 1999, 2016, Kuchta 2002, Hedtjärn Wester 2010). Of the participating men many reported that they had a great and personal interest in clothes and fashion, a kind of connoisseur-ship.

The everyday care for children's clothing or buying gifts for relatives was something that women were more involved in. The men shopped for themselves, because they were "interested" in fashion, while many women wrote about providing for the family. These patterns are interesting to contrast to common ideas that men's shopping is need-based, while women's shopping builds on desire (Petersson McIntyre 2013). Studies have shown that men spend larger amounts of money on shopping, while men generally also have more money to spend. Women spend a larger amount of their salary on the family, while men spend on themselves. Women mix personal needs with the needs of the family to a greater extent (Stillerman 2015, p 118). Although women's shopping often starts from the family and the family's needs and they might buy for small sums for themselves, such as stockings with fun patterns, it is women's shopping that has often been understood as a problem (Miller 1998, Stillerman 2015).

In many ways the diaries did not confirm conventions regarding gendered shopping. Several of the female diary writers described shopping as an expression of a pleasurable consumer experience that was about rewarding oneself. Women's high consumption of clothing can from such a perspective also be interpreted as a questioning of the traditional roles of women, that is, the self-sacrificing mother. Thus, from that perspective, women's indulgence in

overconsumption can be seen as reflecting changes in traditional gender patterns. There were more aspects of the diaries where traditional gender patterns were challenged. Many of the men had, as mentioned, fashion as an interest, while many women were uninterested and just wanted the closet to take care of itself. They wanted a simple and functional wardrobe that would help them fit in at work. This is an approach to clothes and fashion that has been associated with men, as for example, in the function of a business suit. To express one's personality with fashion and clothing has been associated more with women, for example, to raise oneself socially, increase one's social status by engaging in representations of the exterior, to show off one's personality or taste with the help of the body. The testimonies of male interest in fashion in the diaries provide a perspective on such notions of gender patterns.

The new services market that has evolved with style and shopping consultants or even wardrobe consultants can be understood in relation to this tendency; that is the desire of many of the authors for help to create a perfect and functional wardrobe. Regarding gender patterns, women's desire to have a functioning wardrobe can also be understood as expressing that fashion and clothes were perceived to be a problem area by them, that women feel more pressure to dress according to normative ideals. Women have in relation to consumption often been understood as irrational and that they cannot control themselves (Abelson 1989), but on the contrary, the diaries indicate that women's relationship with clothing disclose a careful calculation of what is needed to pass as a woman. The women felt compelled to dress children. The men could allow themselves an interest in fashion, if they think it is fun, and to opt out of it if they do not find it fun. Their social status does not stand or fall with their interest in fashion or ability to stage a fashion persona. All these points reveal that questions about clothes, fashion and sustainability must relate to matters of gender. The transformation of consumption patterns is a complex issue that involves many different aspects. To consume less is not by necessity the same endeavour for all groups of society, even if one takes the most obvious aspects such as economic assets and social class into account.



Clothing purchased and photographed by the participants during the writing period. (The County museum of Sörmland)

Conclusion

Clothing has many different meanings in our lives, it is not possible to simply say what we need and what is unnecessary. In order to change toward more sustainable practices of dressing and shopping we need to understand why people shop, what dressing means to them and what functions it fills in their lives. Different motivations were used by the writers to explain why they did or did not shop and what garments they kept, and why, in their wardrobes. These motivations ranged from sustainability, to storing memories, to gender, to body ideals, and to interests.

A central aspect of fashion is change. Several of the diary writers described how they bought clothes with the idea of changing their way of dressing, but often it did not happen and the garment was just left hanging in the wardrobe. There was often a relationship between changing one's wardrobe and changing one's life, whether to more sustainable consumption, or to looking better and more stylish or getting a better job or a more interesting life in general. And very often the diary writers expressed dual emotions, or even guilt regarding all these aspects of change, aspects that says something significant about how important clothes are for perceptions of the self, of feelings of being in control of one's life or of making a good life, or perhaps of the dream of deserving the good life. The fashion industry tells us that desire for change has to do with purchase of novelty, which for many people clashes with the concept of sustainable consumption, hence the dual emotions and feelings of guilt among the diary writers.

The wardrobe is often used as a metaphor for change in general, often relating to revealing secrets, regarding sexuality, such as in “coming out of the closet”. In the context of the diaries, change is also a prominent metaphor, however particularly so regarding change towards a more sustainable lifestyle, or a more sustainable way of life, or even a better life. This is a kind of change that involves other strategies than merely buying new garments, strategies that instead promotes a better composed wardrobe and better use and reuse of clothing.

The relation to the self, or a logic to dress stylishly and realize oneself with the aid of the exterior, were common. There is a large focus on the exterior in our time, a great expectation that the exterior says something about who we are. This relationship was described by some as fun, dressing was an opportunity not to look like everyone else. Others thought of the same as problematic and could not make sense of it. Often dressing did not turn out as hoped. Thus, clothing and fashion can be interpreted as ambivalent phenomena. Shopping for clothes was pleasurable and demanding at the same time. Many expressed dual feelings, and both wanted and did not want to put time and energy into fashion. Clothing and fashion also express the relationship between everyday life and dreams. On the one hand, many thought that fashion was uninteresting and boring and just wanted their wardrobe to work. Favourite garments were replaced when they were worn out. On the other hand, descriptions such as “this autumn I have decided that I am going to wear more dresses”, indicate that it is also about something else, about demands as well as means to self-realization. Many people feel an uncertainty about clothing and fashion, do not know what they like, what suits them and what they should wear. We believe that an increased awareness of oneself as a consumer in a society based on consumption has good potential to lead to change. As a consequence we might even reach closer to resolving the paradox of sustainable fashion. That is, if political leaders and the fashion industry show sensitivity to consumer demands and create new business models.

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