AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Miriam Collett for the degree of Master of Science in Design and Human Environment presented on June 3, 2011.

Title: An Examination of Factors That Perpetuate Fast Fashion and Consumer Feelings Regarding Fast Fashion

Abstract approved:

________________________________________________________________________

Brigitte G. Cluver                                      Hsiou-Lien Chen

Fast fashion is a term used to describe trendy apparel created with a short cycle time and planned obsolescence. Consumers view such items as disposable due to poor garment quality and low price points. Although consumers are aware of the environmental impact of apparel consumption, the popularity of fast fashion persists. Manufacturers and retailers push fast fashion into consumer markets, yet research has not focused on consumers’, specifically future professionals in the apparel industry, feelings about fast fashion and its impact on the environment. Therefore, the present research addresses this gap in existing research.

The purpose of the study was to identify factors that perpetuate fast fashion as well as to investigate the constructs and feelings consumers associate with the fast
fashion cycle. Furthermore, this research sought to determine if consumers of fast fashion perceived the limited lifespan of their clothing as problematic.

In-depth interviews were conducted using a moderately structured questionnaire. Thirteen female undergraduate students majoring in design and/or merchandising management participated. During the interviews, participants displayed five fast fashion items they no longer wear and discussed why they stopped wearing them, as well as how they feel about no longer being able to wear them. Participants also discussed how they feel about fast fashion, as well as how they feel fast fashion impacts society and the environment.

The first objective was to understand what factors prompt consumers to stop wearing fast fashion apparel. Communicative failure of the garments, including quality issues, fit issues and style-related meaning conflict, as well as boredom prompted participants to stop wearing the fast fashion items. The second objective was to understand how these factors change consumers’ feelings about fast fashion apparel items they no longer wear. Quality issues and fit issues changed how participants felt about the items; these findings were explained within the context of Symbolic Interaction Theory. The third objective was to learn how consumers feel about the limited lifespan of fast fashion apparel. Feelings ranged from neutral to negative. Participants often noted that the low price of the apparel justified the limited lifespan. When asked how fast fashion impacts society, feelings ranged from positive to negative. Social implications included the promotion of consumerism,
stimulation of the economy, fashion accessibility to all levels of income, ethics, and environmental impact. Based on findings, a model was developed to describe why consumers purchase fast fashion, why consumers stop wearing fast fashion, consumers’ perceptions of social implications, and consumers’ coping strategies and justification for fast fashion.
An Examination of Factors That Perpetuate Fast Fashion and Consumer Feelings Regarding Fast Fashion

by

Miriam Collett

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Oregon State University

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Master of Science

Presented June 3, 2011
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Chair of the Department of Design and Human Environment

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Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Miriam E. Collett, Author
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Many of us are familiar with the catch phrase “Reduce-Reuse-Recycle” (3 R’s). However, are consumers actively participating in this concept? A recent article in the local paper highlighted the amount of clothing waste that is generated by consumers. According to the Corvallis Gazette Times, (“American Trashes,” 2010) on average, each American throws away 54 pounds of clothing and shoes into the waste stream every year. This means that in the United States alone, Americans throw away more than 9 million tons of clothing every year, (“American Trashes,” 2010). According to the EPA website, “an estimated 12.7 million tons of textiles were generated in 2009, or 5.2 percent of the total municipal solid waste production” (epa.gov, 2011). The importance of implementing the concept of 3R’s goes beyond just reducing the clothing waste that goes into landfills. The
consequence of clothing production also includes 1) the depletion of nonrenewable resources (i.e. clothing fibers come from the petrochemicals) 2) environmental challenges such as contribution to the air and water pollutions from the production of many of the clothing items (Chen & Burns, 2006; Claudio, 2007) and 3) energy required for care and refurbishing and problematic chemicals for dry-cleaning of clothing items. These problems will continue to escalate as the United States population continues to grow unless consumers, manufacturers, and retailers all make an effort to curb such excessive clothing waste production (census.gov, 2010).

One contributing factor to this excessive clothing waste production is the rise of so-called “fast fashion”. According to Hines and Bruce (2007, p.44), the target market for fast fashion is “16- 24 year olds” and is “gender biased towards female consumers simply because they tend to purchase clothing more frequently and spend more on clothes”. Fast fashion, sometimes referred to as disposable or throwaway fashion, is defined as apparel created with a short life cycle and planned obsolescence by retailers, (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Bruce & Daly, 2006). Planned obsolescence is a strategy that retailers and manufacturers may use to sell merchandise at a faster rate. Planned obsolescence is not a recent phenomenon; Paul M. Gregory wrote about it in 1948. He asserted “purposeful obsolescence exists a) whenever manufacturers produce goods with a shorter physical life than the industry is capable of producing under existing technological and cost conditions; or b) whenever manufacturers or sellers induce the public to replace goods which still retain substantial physical usefulness” (Gregory, 1948, p. 24). Also, according to Gregory
(1948, p. 24), the first type of purposeful obsolescence happens when manufacturers produce items with bad quality so that consumers will have to replace them often (reducing their “physical utility”). The second type of purposeful obsolescence occurs when retailers convince a consumer that her general wearing apparel is no longer fashionable, although it is still functional. This style of obsolescence reduces the “psychological utility of goods in the hands of consumers, so that they must be replaced before their physical utility is exhausted”. In addition to apparel manufacturers and retailers, consumers are also responsible for the perpetuation of premature obsolescence of clothing as they embrace what has been termed “fast fashion”. Often, the items of fast fashion are trendy but are disposed of by consumers because of “lower quality, new fashion trend, or clothes were bought for a one off event” (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007). In addition, despite the lack of quality and the trendiness of the items obsolete rapidly, consumers continue to purchase fast fashion because of its relatively low cost and current fashion appeal (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009).

In addition to quality, trendiness, and cost reasons, symbolic interaction theory helps to explain why consumers ultimately stop wearing a fast fashion item. It also provides perspective about the wearer’s feelings about no longer wearing her fast fashion clothing. Symbolic interaction theory states that both the wearers of clothing as well as those viewing the person wearing the clothing assign meanings to the garments. By choosing to wear an item, the wearer has stated that the
clothing item represents who she is. By the same token, when a person stops
wearing an item, it means that the symbolism attached to the clothing no longer
represents that person. It may be that the meaning held by the item has changed or
that the identity that the person wishes to communicate has changed.

In order to understand why fast fashion clothing has such a short life span
and how consumers feel about this, the purpose of this research was to identify
factors that perpetuate fast fashion as well as to investigate the constructs and
feelings consumers associate with the fast fashion cycle. Furthermore, this research
sought to determine if consumers of fast fashion perceive the limited lifespan of
their clothing as problematic.

Research Questions

1. Why do consumers stop wearing fast fashion clothing?

2. How does the meaning of fast fashion clothing item change from the point it was
   acquired by the consumer to the point the consumer decides to no longer wear it?

3. How do consumers feel about no longer being able to wear certain fast fashion
   clothing? And what factors, according to the symbolic interaction theory, influence
   how the consumers feel about no longer being able to wear such items?
Research Objectives

1. To understand what specific factors will prompt consumers to stop wearing fast fashion apparel.

2. To understand, within the context of symbolic interaction theory, how these factors change consumers’ feelings about the fast fashion apparel items they no longer wear.

3. To learn how consumers feel about the limited lifespan of fast fashion apparel.

As we understand that the existence of fast fashion creates issues that have negative impacts on several fronts of our environments, this research is the first step to look into the factors that perpetuate fast fashion and how to slow down or to curb such excessive clothing waste production. This research topic is also in line with the concept of slow and sustainable fashion. A recent Wall Street Journal article indicated that slow fashion is gaining in popularity because the items are “easy to wear and long lasting”, and can be used and kept for years, rather than “trendy, crazy contraptions that is going to be worn to one party and toss aside” (“Luxury Goods,” 2010). Also mentioned in the article, four out of five shoppers are willing to pay more for apparel that would last more than one season. In addition to slow fashion, sustainable fashion is receiving more attention in recent years. As indicated by Janet Hethorn (2008, p.67), “truly sustainable fashion should address the emotional, expressive, and physical qualities that garments can provide for
consumers. She also pointed out that comfortable clothing is “worn more often and is kept longer”. One way to achieve comfort is to create garments that expand and contract with the consumer. Hethorn (2008) talked about the possibility of garments with built in expanders to cover fluctuations in body size dimensions. The ability to accommodate variations in body type would mean consumers could keep clothing even if they changed sizes slightly. Hethorn (2008) also mentioned that designers interested in sustainability should "look for ways to provide quality at low cost". If low cost quality options were available, consumers would be able to choose garments that would last longer and could “stop supporting the wasteful production of junk” (Hethorn, 2008, p. 73).

A Priori Expectations

Because the present study is qualitative in nature, it is important that my research assumptions are addressed up front (McCracken, 1988). These assumptions are based upon what was learned through a review of related literature as well as what was learned from a pilot study I conducted in the Spring of 2010.

Objective 1 a prioris:

1. Product quality issues will cause consumers to stop wearing certain fast fashion apparel items (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009).
2. Changes in fashion trends will cause consumers to stop wearing certain fast fashion apparel items. (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Shim, 1995).

3. Reasons related to comfort and fit will cause consumers to stop wearing certain fast fashion apparel items, (Smith, 1993; Bye & McKinney, 2007).

4. Boredom related to clothing will cause consumers to stop wearing certain fast fashion items. (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009; Shim, 1995)

5. Personal identity change will prompt consumers to stop wearing certain fast fashion apparel items. (Belk, 1988, Freitas et al, 1997; Banim & Guy, 2001).

**Objective 2 a priori:**

The factors that cause consumers to stop wearing fast fashion clothing items (quality issues, changes in fashion trends, issues with comfort or fit, boredom, or a change in personal identity) will change the symbolic meanings of these items. (Shim, 1995; Sull & Turconi, 2008; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009).

**Objective 3 a prioris:**

1. How the participants feel about not being able to wear their fast fashion apparel may be related to how much they spent on the items. (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009).
2. How the participants feel about not being able to wear their fast fashion apparel may be impacted by how they felt when they wore the garments in the past. (Banim & Guy, 2001; Kleine et al, 1995).

3. How the participants feel about not being able to wear their fast fashion apparel may be impacted by their perceptions of apparel's impact the environment. (Kim & Damhorst, 1998; Butler & Francis, 1997).

Definition of terms:

**Fast Fashion**: Apparel created with a short cycle time and planned obsolescence by manufacturers and retailers. The items are trendy and are viewed by consumers as disposable because of poor garment construction and low price points (Birtwistle and Moore, 2007; Bruce and Daly, 2006). Examples of fast fashion brands include Forever 21, H&M, Zara, and Mango (Reuters, 2005, 2010).

**Fashion**: “A style of consumer product ... that is temporarily adopted by a discernable proportion of members of a social group because that chosen style or behavior is perceived to be socially appropriate for the time and situation" (Sproles & Burns, 1994).

**Inactive Clothing Item**: An inactive clothing item is an item that an individual perceives as one that he/she does not wear, yet still has in his/her possession (Cluver, 2008, p. 7).
**Quality:** “1. Quality consists of those product features which meet the needs of customers and thereby provide product satisfaction. 2) Quality consists of freedom from deficiencies” (Juran, 2003).

*Fit:* How well the garment conforms to the three-dimensional body (Brown, 2001).

*Perceived Comfort:* An individual’s perceptions regarding a garment’s “thermophysiological wear comfort” which relates to heat and moisture transport through the item, “skin sensorial wear comfort” which relates to sensations caused by the item when in direct contact with the skin, “ergonomic wear comfort” which relates to the fit and freedom of movement allowed by the item, and “psychological wear comfort” which relates to personal perceptions regarding fashionability and aesthetics (Bartels, 2005, pp. 177-178).

*Personal Identity Change:* Personal identity is not static. “For individuals to maintain a stable communication of identities via dress may involve their abandoning of dress whose characteristics no longer serve as identity markers for positions in various social structures and making ‘correct’ choices from among newly available options” (Roach-Higgens & Eicher, 1993, p. 36).
CHAPTER 2,

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To provide background on what has formed the a priori expectation of this study, the review of literature includes: 1. The term “fast fashion” is defined and its perceived benefits to both retailers and consumers are explained. 2. Reasons consumers cease wearing fast fashion clothing are presented within the context of symbolic interaction theory. 3. The impact of fast fashion on the environment is discussed, as well as ways in which consumers and the textile/apparel industry is responding to lessen the negative impact of fashion on the environment.

What is Fast Fashion? Why Does it Exist?

Sproles and Burns (1994) define fashion as “a style of consumer product ... that is temporarily adopted by a discernable proportion of members of a social group because that chosen style or behavior is perceived to be socially appropriate for the time and situation,” (Sproles & Burns, 1994, p 4). Sproles and Burns also point out that the definition of fashion has four main points: 1) fashion involves an object; 2) the fashion object is only temporarily adopted by the masses; 3) fashion has to be socially appropriate to the time and to the people who adopt it; and 4) the fashion has to be adopted by a social group and this group has to be a large portion of society, (Sproles & Burns, 1994).
In the fashion industry, a new term has emerged: fast fashion. Fast fashion, sometimes referred to as disposable or throwaway fashion, is defined as apparel created with a short life cycle and planned obsolescence by retailers (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Bruce & Daly, 2006). In fact, McAfee et al. (2004) notes that fast fashion retailers sell garments they presume will be worn only ten times. Studies of customer expectations and behaviors show that fashion-forward consumers, heavily influenced by fashion media, shop more frequently and spend more per month when compared to fashion laggards (Birtwistle & Moore, 2003). Fast fashion caters to fashion-forward consumers who expect to see new trendy, low-priced products arriving in stores on a regular basis. In fact, these consumers actually view fast fashion items as disposable because of poor garment construction and low price points and expect to wear such garments for single occasions or only a few times before they discard the clothing (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Bruce & Daly, 2006). To respond to the demands of fast fashion consumers, retailers employ a variety of techniques, including strategic sourcing, production, and stocking. These practices accelerate the design-to-delivery cycle of their clothing by as much as 90% compared to the rest of the garment industry. They also cut costs throughout the design, delivery and sales cycle. (Sull & Turconi, 2008, p 6).

Table 1 compares and contrast the attributes of fast fashion versus general fashion. The first difference between the types of fashion is that fast fashion has a much shorter cycle time from design to store compared to general fashion. In
general, fast fashion has a shorter cycle time from the time it is purchased to when it is discarded. Fast fashion is trendier than general fashion, so usually is not worn for as long of a period. The quality of fast fashion is low, but the quality of general fashion varies from high to low quality. General fashion has more original designs, as it is up to the designer to decide what will be fashionable. Fast fashion copies runway trends, and is often accessible to consumers before designer garments. Fast fashion creates smaller runs than general fashion, meaning that designs sell out quickly and most is sold at full price. Lastly, fast fashion sources close to home for maximum flexibility and rapid restocking, while general fashion uses overseas manufacturing that is cheaper but takes longer to arrive in stores.

Successful fast fashion retailers source labor and materials close to home and produce many small manufacturing runs to reduce cycle time. To accelerate the design process, these companies employ many in-house designers who can create thousands of designs based on upcoming trends. Rather than taking the time to develop original designs, famous fast fashion retailers, such as Zara and H&M, look at the runway to get ideas for knock off designs. The Spanish retailer Zara is particularly successful in reducing cycle time, claiming that some of their items go from concept to delivery in as little as two weeks. (Barry, 2004)
**Table 1: Comparisons Between Fast Fashion and General Fashion**

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<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Fast Fashion</th>
<th>General Fashion</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cycle time: design to store</td>
<td>Garments can go from concept to delivery in as little as two weeks (Barry, 2004). New clothing arrives in stores several times a week (Levy &amp; Weitz, 2009).</td>
<td>Garments can take three to six months to go from design to delivery (Barry, 2004). New clothing arrives in stores ten to twelve times a year (Levy &amp; Weitz, 2009).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle time: purchase to discard</td>
<td>Items are expected to be worn less than ten times (Birtwistle &amp; Moore, 2007).</td>
<td>Varies depending upon changes in garment meaning (Kaiser et al, 1995).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of trendiness</td>
<td>Very trendy and becomes passé in weeks rather than seasons (Sull &amp; Turconi, 2008).</td>
<td>Ranges from trendy to classic to “permanent fashion”. Can be in style for more than one season (Clark, 2008).</td>
</tr>
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<td>Quality of garment</td>
<td>Fast fashion is generally low quality and relatively inexpensive, and consumers wear them for a short time (Birtwistle &amp; Moore, 2007).</td>
<td>Depends on the retailer. Higher cost retailers such as Saks Fifth Avenue focus on high quality while low cost retailers focus more on value than quality (Levy &amp; Weitz, 2009).</td>
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<td>Design originality</td>
<td>Designers are “inspired by the most attractive and promising trends spotted at runway shows” (Tokatli, 2008). Speed to market lets the trends hit before the originals.</td>
<td>Designers create clothing based on their interpretation of upcoming trends (Tokatli, 2008).</td>
</tr>
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<td>Size of production runs</td>
<td>Smaller runs of clothing causes a sense of exclusivity, buy-now mentality (Barry, 2004). The small runs mean that most styles sell out and only fifteen percent is sold at a discount (Levy &amp; Weitz, 2009).</td>
<td>Popular fashions are “mass produced and sold in large volumes at all price ranges (Sproles &amp; Burns, 1994). Forty percent of the merchandise is sold at a discount (Levy &amp; Weitz, 2009).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sourcing strategy</td>
<td>Sources close to home for maximum speed to market (Tierney &amp; Davies, 2004). Uses just-in-time rapid restocking strategy (Sull &amp; Turconi, 2008).</td>
<td>Many retailers source their clothing production from “facilities located in developing economies... because of very low labor costs in these countries”. This strategy saves money but can create lost sales if the assortment is unpopular (Barry, 2004).</td>
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</table>
With a design-to-market time measured in weeks, a fast fashion item actually can become passé before the original runway design ever hits stores (Sull & Turconi, 2008; Tokatli, 2008). Most fashion retailers who are not oriented towards offering consumers with fast fashion apparel have two major seasons for their clothing. If those companies miss an upcoming trend, it could take them up to six months to deliver that trend to their stores. Conversely, if a fast fashion retailer missed a trend or ran out of stock, they could have new clothing into their stores within weeks. This rapid response to consumer demands can lead to higher sales volumes and can contribute to smaller numbers of lost sales in fast fashion stores (Barry, 2004).

Fast fashion companies create tens of thousands of designs each year, choose the trendiest designs to produce, and deliver small amounts of each design to their stores. These practices combine to produce an artificial scarcity that provides two major benefits for the company. The first is that consumers feel some pressure to buy on the day they visit, because they know their chosen items may not be available the next time they come in. Customers who want to see the newest items will visit every week or even every day rather than every month. This pressure to "buy now" means that 85% of all fast fashion items are sold at full price, compared to 60 percent for non- fast fashion garments (Sull & Turconi, 2008). (Also see Table 1). The other benefit is that stocking decisions can maximize profits and minimize losses. If an item is more popular than expected, fast fashion companies can restock within weeks. If an item is unpopular, the company does not suffer a big loss (Sull &
Turconi, 2008), as no single item among the thousands available will make or break the company's profit for the season.

From a consumer's perspective, fast fashion retailers offer an ever-changing array of clothing options. As previously stated, fast fashion retailers create small runs of many different designs, creating a sense of urgency to buy now before the shops sell out (Tokatli, 2008). Despite the large size of the stores, the small runs of each style create a sense of “exclusivity” for customers that would be more commonly found in a boutique setting (Tokatli, 2008). In fact, one study has documented the sense of buyer urgency and hoarding behaviors in fast fashion stores (Buyn & Sternquist, 1999). Customers who crave variety are thrilled with the ten thousand plus new designs that cycle through the stores each year (Tokatli, 2008). With new items arriving every day, consumers know that the store will look different every time they visit, and with limited numbers of each clothing item, consumers can be confident that they will look different than their peers (The Economist, 2005).

While consumers may not necessarily want to look exactly like their friends, fast fashion provides them an economical way to look like celebrities. Fast fashion retailers have been successful in achieving this goal by creating copies of runway pieces for a fraction of the cost, and by teaming up with top designers and cultural figures to raise the status and exclusivity of the brands (Cardona, 2000; Business Wire, 2007). For instance, Stella McCartney, Madonna, and Kylie Minogue have
teamed up with H&M while Kate Moss has been designing for TopShop (Sull & Turconi, 2008). Whether the consumers are buying from an actual celebrity line or simply wearing knock-offs of the clothes they see celebrities wearing, they can have high fashion without the high cost (Barry, 2004). As its name implies, the fast fashion industry accommodates rapid changes in consumer tastes by creating trendy, low-cost items that are designed with a short lifespan.

Although consumers may view fast fashion in a positive light, some may be concerned with the impact fast fashion’s short life span on the environment. Several studies have looked into what happens to clothing items after consumers stop wearing them (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009; Shim, 1995; Tranberg, 2004). For example, Morgan and Birtwistle (2009) interviewed consumers about why they stopped wearing fast fashion clothing as well as what they do with their clothing when they no longer wear it. Their results showed that the respondents “kept items for as long as they were wearable and stopped wearing the cheaper clothing for three main reasons: lower quality, new fashion trend and clothes were bought for a one-off event” (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009, p 195). Their research showed “cheaper clothing used for socializing would quickly become unwearable because of wear and tear and were simply discarded” (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009, p 195). While this study gave some insight as to why respondents stop wearing their fast fashion clothing, it didn’t talk about how the respondents felt about no longer wearing these clothes.
Why Consumers Stop Wearing Fast Fashion Clothing

In Bristwistle and Moore’s (2007) study, the researchers were interested in exploring “consumer attitudes towards purchasing and disposal of fashion garments” (Bristwistle & Moore, 2007). Based on their findings, the researchers concluded that “consumers kept items for as long as they were wearable, and stopped wearing the cheaper clothing, such as clothing from H&M, for three main reasons: lower quality, new fashion trend, or clothes were bought for a one off event” (Bristwistle & Moore, 2007, pg 213).

In addition to Bristwistle & Moore’s (2007) findings that people stopped wearing their fast fashion clothing because of bad quality, trend issues, and one-time event purchasing, the results of my pilot study provided three additional explanations to why consumers stop wearing fast fashion clothing: a) they had undergone a personal identification change; b) the fit of the item had changed; and c) they simply were bored of the item.

My pilot study found that personal identity change is one of the reasons why some respondents stopped wearing fast fashion clothing. The results showed that when the wearer’s identity changes, their clothing would no longer represent who they are. The present study further identifies how the change of identity and clothing representation of oneself fit within the context of Symbolic Interaction theory. From a Symbolic Interaction perspective, consumers’ decide what to wear
and what not to wear based on the meaning the items communicate to one’s self and others.

Overview of Symbolic Interaction Theory

Symbolic Interaction theory gives a solid explanation from the psychological perspective on how a once-desirable garment can go from being desired to devalued and, finally, discarded. From this perspective, an individual will wear clothing ensembles he or she believes others will interpret in a way consistent with how he/she wishes to be perceived. Ideally, both the individual wearing the clothing and the others viewing the clothing agree on the symbolism for the garments (Kaiser, 1996). Over time, the symbolism of clothing changes for both the wearer and the viewer; therefore, an item of clothing that communicated to others what one wants to communicate may suddenly no longer serve that purpose. It is anticipated that the meaning assigned to a specific fast fashion item changes especially quickly because the trends in fast fashion clothing change so quickly. According to Birtwistle and Moore (2007), consumers kept more expensive clothing and discarded the inexpensive fast fashion items. However, Birtwistle and Moore (2007) also found that fast fashion is often thrown away, whereas more expensive items are sold or given away. Before clothing is discarded, it has lost value to the wearer. The lost value may be explained in terms of Symbolic Interaction Theory.

The symbolic interaction theory discusses the meanings of clothing to the wearer as well as the observer. By choosing to wear an item, the wearer has stated
that the clothing item represents who she is. By the same token, when a person stops wearing an item, it means that the symbolism attached to the clothing no longer represents that person. It may be that the meaning held by the item has changed or that the identity that the person wishes to communicate has changed.

Susan Kaiser (1996) has written extensively about the symbolic interaction theory and how it relates to fashion.

Kaiser (1996) laid out five basic assumptions about how the symbolic interaction theory relates to how fashion is judged by the wearer or observer. The first assumption is that “humans create their own realities, in part, by managing their appearances” (Kaiser, 1996, p 41). This means that the clothing one selects holds meanings for that wearer. A consumer may want to buy a fashion item because it portrays who they are at that particular time, or they may be more interested in trying to fit into a social group they aspire to be a part of. Sproles and Burns (1994) stated,

Consumers are often motivated to purchase products because the products are perceived to communicate a certain image, social role, or status. It may be that certain fashion objects are selected because the person views the products as being symbolic of ‘who they are’ or ‘who they would like to be,’ (Sproles & Burns, 1994).

Stone (1962) found that the symbolic interaction theory reveals three distinct viewpoints for every clothing item: what the wearer thinks of her own garment; what the viewer thinks about her garment; and what she imagines the viewer thinks of her garment. Through the selection of certain garments, the wearer can portray
who she is to the public. Therefore if a consumer stops wearing a garment, she is declaring that the garment no longer represents who she is.

The second assumption is “to fit their lines of action together, people use symbols” (Kaiser, 1996, p 42). This means that viewers categorize clothing and the people who wear them by drawing on personal meanings they have attached to clothing symbols. The judgment may not be completely accurate, but it is a simple way to categorize (i.e. the wearer is preppy, punk, hippie, goth, etc.).

The third assumption is that “we act toward people, in part, on the basis of the meanings their appearances hold for us,” (Kaiser, 1996, p 42). People use past interactions to quickly judge and categorize others by what they wear. Thus, the person wearing an outfit may think they are going to be perceived one way while in reality, they give off quite a different impression to an observer. In such a case, the wearer and perceiver may attribute different meanings to the same symbol.

The fourth assumption is “meanings associated with appearance symbols emerge from social interactions with others” (Kaiser, 1996, p 42). Kaiser quoted Herbert Blumer, who said that observers have a “storehouse of meanings” that viewers draw from. If a person was wearing a black lace dress in the summer, the viewer could interpret the outfit in many ways, depending on his past experiences. For example, he could think the wearer was going to a funeral, was gothic, was in a play, or was simply dressing up for dinner, depending on other experiences he had with black lace dresses. The viewer’s interpretations could be in line with the
wearer’s intentions, or could be quite different. The fifth and last assumption states that “meanings assigned to clothing and appearance are manipulated and modified through interpretive processes” (Kaiser, 1996, p 44). There is not one way to interpret clothing, and the meanings assigned to clothing change over time. The symbolic interaction theory helps explain why consumers negotiate clothing items out of their wardrobe.

When the meaning a clothing item holds is not in line with what a person wants to communicate to others, the item may be negotiated out of his or her wardrobe. Clothing can be a powerful tool to modify or reinforce personal identity. It serves as a symbol that is easy to read because, “(a) clothing is used in daily activity, (b) clothes constitute a frequent public display, and (c) clothing choice is an easily manipulatable symbol,” (Feinberg et. al., 1992). One’s clothing choice can “make a statement about age, gender, social class, school affiliation, or religion,” (Roach Higgens & Eicher, 1992).

Kaiser et al (1995) published a series of papers on how the symbolic interaction theory relates to fashion. In the paper entitled Ambivalence and Change, the authors sought to understand why consumers would accept new styles of dress, and found that fashion is “diffused through groups, as opposed to following a trickle-down model,” (Kaiser, et. al, 1995, p 173). The trickle-down model is originated from Georg Simmel’s imitation-differentiation model where fashion trends started with the upper class and slowly trickled down to the lower classes through the lower
classes’ imitation. Then as soon as the upper class would see that their fashions were being copied, they would adopt a new fashion that would later be imitated (Simmel, 1904). However, this imitation-diffusion model stopped during the 1960's when “appearance styles seemed to be influenced more by countercultural, subcultural, and diverse ethnic inspirations than by the motive to appear wealthy,” (Kaiser, et al, 1995, p 173). Since fast fashion copies runway looks, it would be hard for the layperson to tell the wealth of the wearer without looking at their clothing tags.

In order for people to want to adopt new fashions, they must be able to notice them, which means that fashion must constantly change. A new fashion jars a viewer’s sensibilities and makes her take notice. Yet a style cannot be totally novel or it would make the viewer feel uncomfortable. According to Kaiser et al (1995, p 177), “A perceiver rarely encounters a style of appearance that is totally unfamiliar to them or her, within a given cultural context. More commonly, changes in style are evolutionary rather than revolutionary”. The researchers also discussed the need for consumers to “collectively negotiate” these new styles. If the style is adopted, it means that a large number of people decided to give the item a similar symbolic meaning (Kaiser, et. al, 1995, p 177).

*Fast Fashion with the Context of SI Theory*

The existence of fast fashion has provided consumers with a plethora of items to express their identities. Fast fashion retailers introduce new fashions and stock
new apparel items at a rapid rate (Barry, 2004). With such a rapid rate of turnover at the retail level, one may question what prompts consumers to negotiate apparel items in and out of their wardrobes in a manner that perpetuates this rate of turnover. Consumers have embraced this practice, as research has shown “Generation Y would prefer a higher number of low-quality, cheap and fashionable clothes” (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010. The participants from my pilot study also confirmed that one of the reasons they negotiated fast fashion clothing item out of their wardrobes was because changes in the individual’s identity.

Quality Changes

Research shows that wearing a poor quality piece of clothing communicates to viewers that appearance is not a priority for the wearer. Stone and Farberman (1970) said,

Clothing must be maintained, controlled, and coherently arranged. Its very appearance must communicate this. Torn clothing, frayed cuffs, stained neckties, and unpolished shoes are felt as embarrassing in situations where they are expected to be untorn, neat, clean, and polished, (p 184).

This relates to the looking glass self, or how “our self- concepts are formed as reflections of the responses and evaluations of others in our environment” (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983, p 77). Thus, the wearer wants others to see her as caring about her appearance. This echoes the findings from the pilot study in which the participants indicated that once their clothing became worn (pilled, stretched, faded, or shrunk) they no longer wore them.
Researchers have slightly different definitions for product quality. Definitions are often either user-based, manufacturer-based, or a combination of both. Abaham-Murali and Littrell quote E.S. Maynes (1976) who stated product quality is “the extent to which the specimen provides the service characteristics that the individual consumer desires” (Abraham-Murali & Littrell, 1995, p 149). This is an example of the user-based definition as the consumer determines the level of quality based on what characteristics the product offers (Abraham-Murali & Littrell, 1995). These same researchers cited Crosby’s (1972) definition that quality is “conformance to the requirements,” (Abraham-Murali & Littrell, 1995, p 49). This definition would count as manufacturing-based.

Hoyer and Hoyer (2001) looked at definitions of quality by eight well-known quality experts. They quoted Deming’s definition of a quality product as “a product [that] can be designed and turned out to give satisfaction at a price that the user will pay” (Hoyer & Hoyer, 2001, p 55). Joseph M. Juran (1989) had a twofold definition of quality “1) Quality consists of those product features which meet the needs of customers and thereby provide product satisfaction. 2) Quality consists of freedom from deficiencies,” (p 58). Juran’s definition is the most functional because it gives both a user-based definition (a product that satisfies needs) as well as looking at a manufacturing-based definition (a product free of deficiencies). Since quality issue was one of the four reasons participants in the pilot study stopped wearing fast fashion clothing, it suggests that the quality failed either in manufacturing (it was
not free of deficiencies) or for the user (it did not satisfy the consumer's needs and expectations), or possibly both.

In an article called “What Does ‘Product Quality’ Really Mean?” David A. Garvin (1984) listed the Eight Dimensions of Quality as follows: performance, features, reliability, conformance, durability, serviceability, aesthetics, and perceived quality. The first dimension, performance, is manufacturing-based and takes into account the product attributes that can be measured (Garvin, 1984). For apparel, such attributes include drape, colorfastness, and strength (Kadolph, 2007). The attribute of one product can be compared objectively with the attribute of another product. The second dimension of quality, features, is user-based and refers to the extra characteristics, or “bells and whistles,” (Garvin, 1987, p 105) associated with the product. Kadolph (2007) explains how a side pocket on a pair of pants is considered a style feature that may impact quality. If the side pocket is in fashion, it would add to the garment’s quality; on the other hand, if the side pocket is out of fashion, it would take away from the garment’s quality. The third dimension of quality is reliability. According to Garvin, reliability is the “probability of the product’s failing within a specified period of time” (Garvin, 1984). Such a definition is manufacturing-based. For apparel, examples of failure would be incidences of broken zippers and torn seams or fabric (Kadolph, 2007). Conformance, the fourth dimension of quality, is also manufacturing-based and refers to how well the product, in this case a fast fashion garment, conforms to the standards set forth for it (Garvin, 1984). A
manufacturer may specify which laboratory tests a garment must undergo, as well as what results must be obtained to achieve conformance (Kadolph, 2007). The importance of testing to ensure conformance is evidenced in an article by Maria C. Thiry (2004, p 36) that states, “uncovering problems through testing can enable the manufacturer to take appropriate corrective actions”. The fifth dimension of quality, durability, looks at how long the product can be used for its original end use (Garvin, 1984). Such a definition is both user- and manufacturing-based. Kadolph (2007, p 21) notes that this definition of durability encompasses the physical quality of a garment over time, “such as colorfastness and abrasion resistance, and less measurable dimensions, such as fit and fashion”. The sixth dimension, serviceability, is user-based and refers to how fast and efficiently a product can be repaired. Kadolph (2007, p 21) notes that while product repair is not of great importance for apparel, “clean-ability” which is another dimension of serviceability is important. The clean-ability of a garment whether a garment can be “cleaned and restored to its new or near new condition”. The seventh dimension of quality is aesthetics. Such a definition is user-based, as Garvin (1984) said that this dimension is more personal and subjective in nature than the previous six dimensions of quality. Aesthetics for apparel could refer to a garment’s appearance, hand, or fashionability. Each consumer has a very different idea of what is aesthetically pleasing to her (Kadolph, 2007). The eighth and final dimension, perceived quality, is also user-based, as it is very subjective in nature. Garvin discussed how the
perceived quality is not based on product characteristics but is instead judged by “images, advertising, and brand names,” (Garvin, 1984, p 32).

Abraham-Murali and Littrell (1995) published an exploratory study about the perceptions of apparel quality over time. The study tested the idea of “perceived quality” versus actual quality of items purchased from Land’s End, Inc. The research showed that the perceived quality consumers attached to the clothing item simply because of past experiences with a company rather than based on a clothing item itself.

Past research regarding quality has also been focused on consumers’ quality expectations (Hines & O’Neal, 1995; Abraham-Murali & Littrell, 1995); how the apparel industry measures quality standards, (Karnes & Kanet, 1994; Ford, 1993; Thiry, 2004, 2006); and whether higher prices indicate higher quality merchandise (Gerstner, 1985; Riesz, 1978).

**Fit Changes**

In my pilot study, fit-related problem was why participants negotiated fast fashion clothing out of their wardrobes. If a garment does not fit, it is uncomfortable both psychologically and physiologically. One researcher associated psychological comfort as proper aesthetics, (Smith, 1993). The garment physiological comfort aspect, was placed in one of three categories: sensorial, thermophysiological, and fit.
The fit comfort was broken up into two subcategories: tight fit overall and tight local areas, (Smith, 1993).

Clearly, consumers do not go shopping with the intention of buying the incorrect size, but people gain or lose weight, items stretch or shrink, and shoppers sometimes have different opinions about clothing fit once the tags are taken off. All of these instances can lead to an item becoming ill fitting. Although Smith (1993) separated psychological comfort from physiological, there is some area of overlap. For instance, a woman could stop wearing a short-sleeve blouse because the overall fit is fine, but the elastic cut into her upper arms. A tight local area not only makes a garment uncomfortable, but also makes it less aesthetically appealing, and in turn, makes her uncomfortable psychologically. Or if a garment was stylish but had shrunk in the wash (thus becoming a tight fit overall), it would have fit issues both psychologically and physiologically, (Smith, 1993).

Two researchers studied how feeling overweight affects how a woman dresses (Kwon & Parham, 1994). Their female subjects were categorized as being in a “Fat State” (those who have recently gained weight) or a “Slender State” (those who have recently lost weight. The researcher studied whether the different weight functions (slim vs. fat states) would affect how women would look at the five clothing factors: Fashion function (wearing fashionable, stylish clothing); Camouflage function (clothing that is loose or hides the person’s figure); Assurance function (wearing bright, or otherwise body flattering clothing); Individuality function (clothing that
draws attention to the wearer); and Comfort/Concealment function (clothing that the person feels comfortable wearing. The results showed that for the Fat State, women were more interested in the Camouflage and Comfort functions, meaning that when a woman has gained weight, she is more likely to seek clothing that is comfortable and that will camouflage her body flaws. In the Slim State, women were more interested in the other four factors (Fashion, Assurance, Individuality, and Comfort). This means that if a woman has lost weight, she prefers to wear clothing that is different, body flattering, stylish, as well as comfortable (Kwon & Parham, 1994). In contrast, a woman in a Fat State is less likely to prefer clothing that is as trendy, such as fast fashion. According to the findings in this study, if a woman’s body has changed so the fit of the garment changes, she would be more likely to wear clothes that camouflage than ones that would call attention to any body flaws (Kwon & Parham, 1994).

Bye and McKinney (2007) looked at reasons why women would keep clothing that does not fit. Their findings helped to solidify not only why women would keep the ill-fitting clothing, but also why they stopped wearing the clothing in the first place. They used an online questionnaire to ask forty-six women from the ages of 35 to 65 why they kept clothing that do not fit their bodies. The symbolic interaction theory section discussed how clothing symbolically displays to viewers what the wearer wants to portray. Clothing shows the wearer’s personality and so if a person wants to give a good impression, she would wear things that are in good physical
shape and fits her body (Bye & McKinney, 2007). However, fluctuating sizes were one of the reasons listed in the study for why women kept clothing they no longer wore. Many women had multiple sizes of clothing in their closets. The researchers asked all of the participants how many items were in their closet that did not fit. 15% of the respondents said that they had zero ill-fitting items, 37% said that they had one to ten garments with bad fit, 17% of the women claimed they had eleven to twenty pieces that did not fit, and shockingly, 15% said they kept twenty-one to fifty non-fitting items (Bye & McKinney, 2007). This demonstrates that many women stop wearing clothing because of fit issues.

Studies have shown that fit and comfort can be important factors in why they choose to wear or not wear clothing items. Tiggemann (2003) studied how women’s body image is related to age. The results showed that women’s ideal body shape is thinner than what most women can achieve naturally. The researcher also pointed out that many women have a negative opinion of their weight and size status, and cited a startling survey that showed an increasing number of women are unsatisfied with their bodies. A survey by Cash, et al, (2004, p 1082) found that “college women report significantly more negative body-image evaluations, greater psychological investments in their appearance, and more frequent body-image dysphoria than do their male peers”. This trend shows that an increasing number of women are unhappy with their weight, and are, according to Kwon and Parham’s (1994) study, less likely to wear fashionable and trendy clothing. Therefore, if a woman’s weight
increases, it could contribute to her negotiating trendy, form-fitting clothing out of her wardrobe.

_Fashion Changes_

In order to understand why a college student would stop wearing fast fashion, it is important to understand why she would buy it in the first place. According to Sproles and Burns (1994, p 4), the definition of a clothing fashion is “a style of dress that is temporarily adopted by a discernible proportion of members of a social group because that chosen style is perceived to be socially appropriate for the time and situation”. This definition highlights a few important points, the first being that fashion is only temporarily in style. No matter how popular the item becomes, it will eventually give way to a newer, fresher trend. Secondly, the fashion has to be chosen by a large quantity of people to be considered a popular fashion. Finally, the adopters of the style have to decide that the fashion is a good match to the time period. Therefore, when a consumer discontinues wearing a fashion item, it means that there has been a change in fashion, and that item is no longer socially appropriate to wear (Sproles & Burns, 1994).

_Stages of the fashion process._ Sproles and Burns also broke down the fashion process into a six separate stages. Clearly, there are some blurred edges to the phases, but all fashions will move through the stages of this bell curve at some point. The six stages are: creation; fashion leadership; increasing social visibility; conformity; saturation; and decline and obsolescence, (Sproles & Burns, 1994).
The first step, creation, refers to the design of a new fashion that will soon be introduced to consumers. In the second stage, fashion leadership, innovators will find the new style and (the industry hopes) adopt it. If the style is unique but not too different, the other members of the fashion leader’s group are more likely to adopt it. However, if the peers find the fashion strange, the new style would end here, (Sproles & Burns, 1994). The third stage, increasing social visibility, the style is starting to spread to the early adopters (those consumers who purchase and wear a new fashion soon after it appears). According to the researchers, more people in different social circles wear the fashion at this point, and stores put more money into advertising at this stage. In the fourth stage, conformity, the fashion is found in many social circles and no longer holds any danger of being interpreted as strange or different by others. The fifth stage, saturation, is when all parties are aware of the trend and have either decided to adopt the fashion or not. Since everyone has access to it, innovators look at the fashion as passé or bland. The sixth and final stage of the fashion process is the decline or obsolescence stage. It is at this point that the popularity that caused the fashion to grow popular is the same oversaturation that will destroy it. At this stage, the fashion is not novel to anyone, and the next trend that has started moving through the fashion processes. According to the authors, “for an existing fashion to die, there must be a more desirable replacement for it,” (Sproles & Burns, 1994, p 17).
Every popular fashion goes through these six stages, but fast fashion accelerates the speed at which they pass. The fast fashion designers create new fashions, which are in the stores within the month and sell out quickly (Tokatli, 2008, p. 23). The fashion leaders purchase the clothing, which increases social visibility of the trends. Other fashion followers see the leaders wearing the new styles, and they purchase versions of the trends found in other markets (conformity). The fashion companies market the new fashion heavily, and the fashion becomes socially acceptable. Soon even the fashion laggards have adopted the fashion, and the fashion leaders have long since rejected this fashion in favor of whatever new fashion is on the horizon. In the meantime, the fashion becomes boring, and people are looking for the next new thing (saturation). Finally, a new fashion emerges and the former style becomes obsolete. For a fashion leader, the stage in which her clothing is negotiated out of her wardrobe would be earlier. She would be the customer in the store every week looking for the newest styles and not wearing clothing once she sees anyone else wearing similar fashions (Sproles & Burns, 1994).

*Functions of clothing and fashion change.* Sproles (1979) also defines the functions that clothing provides for consumers: utility, modesty, adornment, sexual attraction, symbolic differentiation, social affiliation, psychological self-enhancement, and modernism. The first and second functions cover the basic needs clothing offers, covering the body and giving the user a sense of modesty through cover. The third function of dress, adornment, allows the wearer the ability to
express herself with clothing using creativity and uniqueness. The fourth function of dress, sexual attraction, gives the wearer the ability to show parts of their body while still keeping the main sexual organs covered. The sexualized body parts have changed over time (ankles, legs, breasts, shoulders, etc) but clothing gives the wearer the ability to show the sexualized body part without showing her whole body. The fifth function of dress, symbolic differentiation, allows the wearer to differentiate themselves through their clothing choices. This function of dress especially relates to those wearing a uniform of sorts. This could relate to someone belonging to a nationally known group (military), or a subculture (gothic). This type of dress, according to Sproles, is symbolic. The sixth function of dressing is for social affiliation. Dressing like others will help a consumer feel like they belong to a group (Sproles, 1979). The seventh type of dress, psychological self-enhancement, relates to how people use clothing to express who they are and communicate uniqueness from others. The eighth and last function of dress, conveys a wearer’s modernity. This means that by keeping up with fashions, a consumer is stating that she wants to wear modern styles. Since styles are constantly changing, customers must be willing to try new things and make an effort to stay current.

Sproles’ eight functions of dress help to explain reasons why consumers would wear clothing and what fashion means to people. No fashion lasts forever, and Sproles explains the three reasons why: the rule of excess; planned obsolescence by fashion companies; and social changes that cause consumers to change styles.
Sproles’ (1979) rule of excess can best be explained by examples. For instance, a
designer can only shorten a skirt to a certain point before it stops functioning as a
skirt. At that point, the designer has no other option than to create a longer skirt.
The same could be said for low-rise pants. If the rise becomes too short, they would
no longer be considered wearable. According to Sproles, “fashion trends end when
they reach an extreme point where further change of styling cannot physically
occur,” (Sproles, 1979). At this point, the fashion pendulum swings the opposite
direction and the old trend ceases to be fashionable.

Sproles’ second explanation, planned obsolescence, occurs when marketers
convince consumers to purchase new clothing by launching new and updated
fashion to the marketplace. According to Sproles, “the termination [of the current
trend] is forced or imposed on consumers, whether or not their demand for the
fashion has actually been exhausted” (1979, p 169). Sproles (1979) explains that the
third reason for fashion trends to stop is because it becomes socially saturated. This
means that the fashion has become so commonplace that the only way to lure
additional sales of the style is through lower price. Sproles says this can happen to
both extremely popular trends as well as less successful styles. For the popular
fashions, the style would become so popular that most stores have a version of it
and it would appear boring and commonplace to consumers. A less popular trend
would end because the visual saturation needed for a style to catch on has not
occurred. Sproles (1979) explains the concept of social saturation in terms of
differentiation, social change, and lack of social appropriateness. The need for differentiation, the need to separate oneself from one’s peers, may prompt one to stop wearing a garment. Sproles (1979, p 170) stated, “A widely diffused fashion loses much of its prestige and exclusivity”. Thus, if everyone has a garment, it is no longer special, and a new trend will emerge. Social change may also prompt one to stop wearing a garment. Sproles (1979, p 170) also noted, “the termination of behaviors that have no functional purpose in a changing social environment,” will also make older fashions obsolete. Two examples of such societal change provided by Sproles (1979) include the discontinued wear of the hobble skirt in the early 20th century, which made it difficult for women to ride in a car because of the skirt’s narrowness and the discontinued use of many fancy dress styles because people have more active lifestyles. Lack of social appropriateness may also prompt on to stop wearing a garment. If a style violates what is considered socially appropriate, society will rebel against it. Sproles (1979) noted that the three main violations of social appropriateness are “body exposure, sexual attention, and moral decency”. If a specific fashion violates social appropriateness, it will be rejected.

Identity Changes

One’s identity is not static. Furthermore, what a possession communicates about an individual is not static. Belk (1988) wrote about the idea of how one’s possessions communicate one’s identity. He argues that consumers consider the
things they own as a part of who they are. This relates back to the symbolic interaction theory because if a person claims that a fast fashion article represents them, or “is me”, then when she negotiates an item out of her wardrobe, she is claiming that the item “is no longer me” (p 159). Belk talked about the disuse of possessions, and how “consumers should shed or neglect possessions ... when possessions no longer fit the consumers’ ideal self images” (p 159). He said this would happen when the person’s personal identity changes and/or the possession no longer means what it once did to the consumer.

Belk’s (1988) assertions are supported by research conducted by Kleine, et al (1995). These researchers surveyed thirty U.S. college students between the ages of 20 and 28. Subjects were asked to think about four possessions they still owned: their most cherished possession, most favorite piece of clothing, least favorite piece of clothing, and their cars (Kleine, et al, 1995, p 330). For each of these four possessions, the respondents indicated their level of attachment for the item, strong vs. weak attachments (me vs. not me). Responses were grouped into five different categories: “Keeping memories of others”; “It’s me and I like it”; “It’s not me anymore”; “Utility”; and “Breaking away”. The researchers were looking at reasons that people kept non-fast fashion clothing even if it did not represent who they are. While the reasons for keeping possessions are not in line with my research question, the category of “It’s not me anymore” does relate to this research topic. The researchers said that the possessions in this category could be removed from these
people’s lives and they would not be upset. The authors stated that these items represent two separate categories to the participants: “Not me now” or “Not who I am becoming,” (Kleine, et al, 1995).

Freitas, et. al (1997) studied clothing and identity change. They conducted nearly 300 interviews with people who were from five different groups, although most of them were students: “a general student population, African American, Koreans (interviewed in Korea, Asian Americans, gays, and lesbians” (Freitas, et. al, 1997). They interviewed the participants about their clothing choices as they related to three categories: Age/Temporality, Gender/Sexuality, and Ethnicity/Intersecting Cultural Identities. The study investigated participants’ least favorite clothing, and how participants distanced themselves from a group by negotiating clothing out of their wardrobe. The researchers stated that some people stopped wearing clothing purposefully to distance from a certain group (such as punk rockers or homosexuals, or hippies) or from a time in their past. Their findings support that in some cases, individuals cease wearing certain clothing items when they experience an identity change.

Banim and Guy (2001) also addressed the subject of identity and clothing. Their findings support that a clothing item’s ability to represent one’s identity will impact whether an individual will continue to wear the clothing item. The focus of their research was on why women keep clothing items they no longer wear. The researchers uncovered that women look at clothes as a reminder of how they felt
when they wore them. If the last time a woman wore a clothing item ended with her looking in the mirror and feeling unattractive or unfashionable, then she would have negative feelings attached to this clothing. In the case of personal identity change, she might remember feeling young and carefree the last time she wore a specific item, but now she feels bogged down with responsibility and work. This clothing no longer represents who she is.

Banim and Guy (2001) listed three types of identities women have with clothing items the have in their possession but no longer wear: continuing identities; discontinued identities; and transitional identities. Continued clothing identity means that even if a woman does not wear the clothing, she still feels that it represents her current identity. Discontinued clothing identity would refer to clothing that no longer represents the woman she is now. Clothing that represents discontinued identity may be “inconsistent with their identity;” “never portrayed the right image;” was a “mistake;” or “reinforce insecurities about identity [and] body image,” (Banim & Guy, 2001, p 211) Lastly, transitional clothing identity means that the clothing does not represent who the woman is now but is not so distanced that it is completely removed from her current style. Although the wearer has stopped wearing a garment, they hold the feeling that it may hold symbolic meaning for them again someday (Banim & Guy, 2001).

Whether a woman negotiates clothing out of her wardrobe because of a change in quality, fit, fashion, or identity, the impact on the environment is the same. Fast
fashion speeds up the process from purchase to discard (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009, 191). Therefore, it is important to consider the rapid adoption and discard of clothing from an environmental perspective.

Environmental Issues Related to Fast Fashion

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, in 2008 (the most recent year on record), “10,480,000 tons of textiles were discarded in the municipal waste stream in the United States,” (epa.gov). The EPA estimates that in 2008, “12.4 million tons of textiles were generated” which adds up to five percent of the municipal solid waste generation” (epa.gov). While the EPA does not specify how many of these textiles are due to fashion items, a large portion of the textiles thrown away are apparel items. With fast fashion gaining in popularity (and new stores opening all the time), the environment is affected through the amount of discarded clothing (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). According to Bruce and Daly, “Fashion consumers expect and thrive on constant change and so new products have to be available on a frequent basis,” (Bruce & Daly, 2006). Yet the constant creation of fast fashion clothing has created environmental issues that must be addressed.

A study done by Crewe and Davenport (1991) stated, "Young people of the population that constitute Generation Y would prefer a higher number of low-quality cheap and fashionable clothes as compared to baby boomers, who would
prefer to purchase fewer number of higher quality clothes”. Clothing as throwaway commodity is problematic partially because of the lowered standards for fast fashion clothing, according to the researchers. Because consumers pay a low price, they do not expect the garments to be of high quality, and may only wear the clothing a few times before they negotiate them out of their wardrobes. The environmental worry about this throwaway attitude is that it “leads to a new phenomenon of disposing of garments which may only have been worn a few times even when the fabric lasts for decades” (Farrer & Finn, 2008). This relates to Fletcher’s concern about the materials in fast fashion clothing matching the short time they will be in use,” (Fletcher, 1999). Otherwise, overdesign adds to the environmental issues associated with fast fashion.

One article tackled the environmental issues associated with the clothing industry, starting with the impact of the fibers used in fast fashion. Claudio (2007) pointed out that polyester, a common material used in fast fashion, is made of petroleum, which is a non-renewable resource. Claudio noted that the demand for man-made fibers such as polyester and nylon is rising, but so are the health problems associated with the petroleum-based products. Specifically, the processing of man-made fibers can releases gasses and matter into the air that harm the lungs of the processors. Claudio also states that the “by-products of polyester production are emitted in the wastewater from polyester manufacturing plants,” (Claudio, 2007, p A 450). It is also important to note that synthetics derived from petroleum
sources are neither biodegradable nor renewable (Chen and Burns, 2006). Cotton, although a natural and renewable fiber, actually “accounts for a quarter of all the pesticides used in the United States,” (Claudio, 2007). Furthermore, when blended with other fibers to spin yarns and weave fabric, cotton is difficult to recycle (Chen & Burns, 2006). Rayon is another popular fiber that is made from the wood pulp of trees. Although trees are renewable, the trees used for most rayon is from mature forests, so it makes the fiber unsustainable. Furthermore, the manufacturing of rayon fiber can cause air and water pollution (Chen & Burns, 2006). It is evident that all fibers used to produce fabric have some negative impact on the environment. Practically, all stages in the manufacture of an apparel item from fiber to the finished product can negatively impact the environment. Chen and Burns (2006) assert that environmentally harmful fiber processing practices (pollution from cotton, wool, or synthetic fiber production, and herbicide or pesticide usage) have received little attention by the textile industry. However, the pollution doesn't stop there. “Pollution also comes from the finishing and dyeing/printing processes” (Chen & Burns, 2006).

Although precious environmental resources are invested in the manufacture of clothing, consumers often discard apparel items when the items still can be used from a practical standpoint. Claudio (2007) contrasts such a phenomenon with the behaviors of those from previous generations. In the past, clothing was passed down from child to child, mended, or made into rags or quilts. Such practices
lessened when the retail prices of clothing made it easier and more cost effective to purchase new clothing items. According to another statistic from the EPA, “Americans throw away more than 68 pounds of clothing per person per year, and clothing and other textiles represent about 4% of the municipal solid waste,” (Claudio, 2007). Not all clothing goes into the garbage, however. Some are recycled in one of three ways: in thrift stores; being sent to developing countries; or recycled and used for clothing or other goods (Claudio, 2007). Thrift stores and eBay sales are on the rise, but the majority of people still do not shop second hand: a staggering 85% do not, according to America’s Research Group (Claudio, 2007, A 452). The Council for Textile Recycling figures that “2.5 billion pounds of post-consumer textile waste... is... collected and preventing from entering directly into the waste stream,” (Claudio, 2007). This sounds impressive, but they estimated that recyclers are only catching 15% of what is being thrown away, (Claudio, 2007). Clothing is sent to third world countries, but eventually the market will be saturated and then the United States will need to deal with the issue.

*Consumer Behavior and Environmental Concern*

Since the 1970’s, consumers have shown more concern about the environment than ever before (Butler & Francis, 1997). Past studies have shown the linkage between consumer environmental awareness and purchasing patterns (Butler & Francis, 1997; Kim & Damhorst, 1998). Other researchers have discovered that
general environmental awareness does not translate into concern with environmentalism of apparel consumption (Shim, 1995; Koch & Domina, 1997). In fact, although Kim and Damhorst (1998) found that respondents in their study professed general environmental concern, they found that respondents did not have the same concern in regards to their apparel consumption. Kim and Damhorst’s (1998) study shows the ambivalence consumers face with regards to apparel consumptions. Such ambivalence can be explained in terms of consumerism versus environmental consumerism.

An article by Peter Jones, et al (2005) lists several definitions of the word consumerism. These are:

“Consumerism describes a society in which many people formulate their goals in life partly through acquiring goods that they clearly do not need for subsistence or traditional display,” (Stearns, 1997, p 35).

Consumerism is a “theory that an increasing consumption of goods is economically beneficial,” (http://www.cogsci.princeton.edu).

Consumerism is “consumption beyond what is reasonable to meet human needs. The act of purchasing or consuming goods and services as an end in itself,” (Centre for Alternative Development Initiatives, 2003, p 36).
Consumerism is “economically manifested in the chromic purchasing of new goods and services, with little attention to their true need, durability, product origin or the environmental consequences of manufacture and disposal,” (www.verdant.net/society.htm). (Jones, et. al, 2005, p 36).

The first definition implies that all consumption is unsustainable because consumers buy things they do not need. The second definition implies that consumerism needs to always increase in order for it to be economically viable. Yet, this seems at odds with the environmental movement, which would suggest that consumers should buy what they need and nothing more in order to be sustainable. The third definition takes into account that many people look at consumerism as a fun pastime. People go shopping for fun, and enjoy consuming items they may not need. It seems that in this definition sustainable or environmental consumption would be at odds with this definition of consumerism. When compared to the first three definitions of consumerism, the fourth shows the starkest contrast between the consumerism and environmental awareness. According to this definition, consumers are “chronic” purchasers of products that are harmful to the environment because they are made in an unsustainable and non-environmental manner.

Environmental production of apparel has to take the whole process of creating clothing into account: the materials and chemicals used during production; the
environmental guidelines for the country in which the products were made; the
distance the products have to be shipped; the conditions to the manufacturing
plants; the amount of time the product can be used; and what will happen to the
product once its life is over. Environmental consumerism has a much different
definition. Kim and Damhorst (1998) quoted J. Ottman Consulting’s definition of
environmental or “green” consumerism, “individuals looking to protect themselves
and their world through the power of their purchase decisions,” (p 126). They state
that environmental consumerism spans far beyond the apparel industry, but far less
research has been focused directly on apparel. According to Winakor (1969),
“apparel consumption describes all activities related to acquiring, storing, using,
maintaining, and discarding apparel items,” (p 629). This means that the
environmental consumer not only has to be aware of the way the products they
purchase are made, but also have to think of the effects that caring for and
discarding of the items have on the environment. Kim and Damhorst (1998) cited
Sproles who said that “fashion change results in inevitable obsolescence of fashion
purchases” (p 126). However, Sproles made this statement in 1979, years before fast
fashion had become a lasting trend. The poor quality of the garments, coupled with
the extreme trendiness of fast fashion garments has sped up the process of
obsolescence, which has led to a garment being in and out of fashion within weeks
or months, quite the opposite of environmental consumption of apparel products
(Sull & Turconi, 2008).
Research shows the ambivalence surrounding consumerism versus environmental consumerism. Kim and Damhorst’s (1998) surveyed 261 undergraduates attending a midwestern university from the ages of 19 to 46. The study looked at several factors: environmental apparel product knowledge, environmental concern, and general environmentally friendly responsible behavior. The researchers found that for their sample the high level of environmental concern did not match up to a high level of environmental behavior. Their reasoning was that although the participants showed an interest in environmental concern, perhaps they were more concerned with “self-expression, aesthetic satisfaction, group conformity, and participation in the campus Zeigeist,” (Kim & Damhorst, 1998). From the results of this study, the need for aesthetic and trendy clothing appeared to have trumped the respondents’ environmental concerns.

Butler and Francis (1997) created a questionnaire exploring how consumers’ environmental attitudes affected their apparel purchasing attitudes. They surveyed 402 females from the ages of 25 to above 65 and found that “consumers were more neutral about their attitudes about the environment where clothing is concerned” (p 80) even if they had indicated general environmental concern. Butler and Francis (1997) also found that “consumers did not tend to consider [the] environmental impact when making clothing purchases” (p 80). These same women had reported a favorable environmental attitude (they said they had a concern for the environment and thought that consumers should try to help the state of the environment), but
this attitude did not seem to increase the subjects’ desire to take the environment into account when they purchased clothing (Butler & Francis, 1997). The researchers found that although their subjects thought the environment was important in theory, in practice, they did not consider the environment as important in their purchase decision as “price, style, or fit” (Butler & Francis, 1997, p 84).

**Industry Response/Sustainable Fashion**

Although the fashion industry has become synonymous with planned obsolescence, there are companies within the fashion industry that are working toward a more sustainable future. One method designers and companies are taking is to take a slow fashion approach (which takes its cues from the slow food movement). Another way companies are choosing to have a more positive environmental approach is to make changes to their process to make it more sustainably minded.

The slow food movement started in 1989, and focused on sourcing ingredients locally, making sure the food was grown in an environmental way, and paying a fair price so the farmers made a profit (Tran, 2008). They wanted to cook and serve food in a way that would combat the standardized blandness of fast food. Since then, sections of the fashion industry have taken inspiration from the slow food movement and so the slow fashion movement was born.
Slow fashion makes the selection of clothing a social responsibility issue. According to Clark (2008), the creation and purchase of slow fashion is a choice made by the designers, producers, and consumers. It would appear that slow fashion cannot be trendy, so this would mean that the designer would have to choose styles that would not become unfashionable at a fast rate. According to a recent article, slow fashion has three main aspects: the fabrics were researched and are from environmentally friendly sources; they are made by workers who are paid fairly and are treated well; and are created with durability in mind (Tran, 2008). The creation, purchase, and maintenance of slow fashion clothing may take more time for everyone involved, but an item that is built to last could end up saving a consumer money because she would not have to constantly shop for clothing that has fallen apart or gone out of style (Clark, 2008).

Many slow fashion articles focus on the idea of wearing well-made basics rather than trendy clothing to help consumers purchase clothing that will last more than one season. Slow fashion is also concerned with the issue of durability, which looks at how long an item would be worn. According to Fletcher (1999), the producer of a product should not be focused on the maximum durability, but should be concerned with how long the item will be used. For a slow fashion item, this time frame will be much longer, but for a fast fashion item, the trendiness will lessen its lifetime and thus should be made with materials that will degrade in a faster fashion. Fletcher (1999, p 165) says, “rather than designing for maximum durability, it is important
that materials and components are appropriately durable, i.e. they have a life which matches the product’s expected useful life.” One of the biggest differences between slow and fast fashion is how long the garment is expected to perform. The effect of fast fashion’s rapid lifecycle would not be so extreme if the fabric for fast fashion decomposed as quickly as the trends did. Similarly, Fletcher asserts, “fashion fabrics quickly become obsolete and are often made from long life materials. Environmental benefits could be gained by matching a fabric’s resource intensiveness and its durability to its expected useful life” (Fletcher, 1999). This is one of the most pervasive environmental problems associated with fast fashion. The clothing is meant to be stylish for a very short time, yet the material the fast fashion is created from is made to last for years (Fletcher, 1999, p 165).

Although fast fashion has created a desire in consumers for constantly changing trends (Bruce & Daly, 2006), slow fashion creates an opportunity for consumers to appreciate their clothing over the long run. Amy Twigger Hoyroyd, fashion designer, supports the slow fashion movement by challenging the wearers of her clothing to “buy less by forming a strong bond with individual garments” (Clark, 2008, p 441). This strong bond with clothing garments seems to be exactly the opposite of the experiences of fast fashion purchasers. Slow fashion retailer Jeannine Braden admits that slow fashion prices are much higher, but states that this is because the slow fashion creations are like artwork. And like artwork, slow fashion should be appreciated over a long time period (Tran, 2008).
Designers of slow fashion have had many solutions to how to create interesting and long lasting clothing in an ethical and environmental fashion. Researcher Hazel Clark (2008) listed a few of these designers and described what they are doing to create slow fashion. One of these companies is Worn-Again, that uses “99% recycled materials, which would otherwise end up in a landfill, with the added objective of ‘improving social, economic, and environmental conditions in regions where we operate while building a profitable business” (Clark, 2008). The company creates new clothing out of discarded fabric, and work with their producers to make sure their products are created ethically. An interesting aspect of their purpose statement is that although they are striving to be an ethical and environmental clothing company, they still want to create a profit for themselves. That may seem like an obvious statement, but it makes the point that slow fashion can indeed be sustainable as well as profitable. Companies like Junky Styling gives “wardrobe surgery” to worn but sturdy clothing. The workers let the consumer help to redesign the clothing, and they will create a new piece out of the existing garment. This gives the consumer the double benefit of being able to wear something that they had stopped wearing for various reasons as well as getting a one-of-a-kind design (Clark, 2008). Clark also mentioned the retailer TRAID (Textile Recycling for Aid and International Development) that gathers recycled garments and gives them new life as a remade garment. Clark stated that by 2008, when her article was written, that TRAID had sorted through 2,000 tons of clothing and reconstructed it into new
garments (Clark, 2008, p 440). The success of these business ventures implies that slow fashion has room to grow in the fashion industry for those who challenge themselves to slow down the cycle of fashion. Clark finished her article by stating “slow + fashion is not an oxymoron, rather it offers an approach for a more sustainable future, but one which also demands a redefinition of fashion that acknowledges the slow principles and practices that have been described” (Clark, 2008, p 444).

One key principle of slow fashion is that the consumer may feel the need to keep a smaller, less trendy wardrobe. According to Schor (2002), “if we reject the need to keep up with fashion and can be satisfied with a smaller wardrobe, we can spend more per garment, as consumers do in Western Europe,” (p 55). Although buying fewer garments for more expensive prices may work for some, the majority of people may balk at this solution. Another solution is for the customer to research the sustainability efforts of apparel companies and decide to support those who are making an effort to produce clothing in a sustainable manner. According to one source, consumers must show an interest in sustainability and “reach a point where they’re ready to pay more and ready to wear something that will make a statement about their lifestyle,” (Ryan, 2008, p 36).

The World Commission on Environment and Development define sustainable expansion as “development, which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,” (Jones,
et al, 2005). There are many companies who strive to change their business model to better fit this definition. Patagonia is a prime example of a sustainability-minded company. Sustainability has been a central focus since its inception and since 1996, all of the cotton they use in their apparel is 100% organic. More recently, Patagonia initiated a program that takes back polyester clothing so it can be recycled.

According to the Sustainable Solution Design Association, Patagonia was the first company to use fleece made from reclaimed plastic bottles. Since polyester is made from petroleum, the resource is not renewable, but it is recyclable, and Patagonia’s take-back program helps the fibers to be recycled rather than thrown away.

Patagonia also has a strict code of conduct policy that addresses labor policies and fair pay for workers (Breds, et al, 2002).

Several companies have followed Patagonia’s suit. Nau, Inc., is a Portland, Oregon based outdoor clothing company that focuses on “environmental practices and philanthropy” (Cole, 2008). Nau donates money to non-profits and pays every employee at least 1.5 times the minimum wage (Cole, 2008). They have made sustainability (both environmental and social) their competitive advantage. Another company making sustainable strides is Nordstrom, a Seattle-based retailer. Their goal is that by 2011, twenty percent of the cotton they use in their private lines will be organically grown (Cole, 2008).

Levi Strauss Signature is another example of a manufacturer who has focused efforts on promoting sustainability by educating consumers about how to care for
their products with a minimal environmental impact (Cole, 2008). According to Cole (2008), Shari Hatch of Levi’s brand communications department asserts “a lot of the energy consumption actually happens after the consumer has taken the product home, when it’s being washed and dried” (p 17). Hatch says that washing jeans in cold water and air drying them will save energy and keep the product looking better longer, meaning that consumers have to purchase them less often. Nike, another major manufacturer has been using organic cotton in their sportswear, with the goal set of having all of their cotton products being at least 3% organic. They are going to slowly raise the percentage of organic cotton used in their products as more organic cotton is available. Although Nike has been criticized for their labor practices, they now have a minimum age of 18 for footwear workers and 16 for other Nike products (Bredsd, et. al, 2002). In 2002, they started to eliminate toxic chemicals from the making of their shoes so they were both made of recycled materials and could be recycled (Bredsd, et al, 2002).

Although many companies are truly changing their business practices to be more sustainable, there are unfortunately others who deliberately confuse consumers with vague promises of sustainability without making any real changes. “Greenwashing” as it is known, allows companies to state that they are “natural”, “eco-friendly”, or “green” without ever specifying what specifically they are doing for the environment (Bealer Rodie, 2008). Unfortunately for the consumers, there are no standards of what these words actually mean, so businesses can feign to
answer the call for more environmentally friendly apparel without making any actual changes to their products. The unfortunate product of greenwashing is that consumers think they are supporting companies that support an environmental cause, and they may never find out they were mislead.
CHAPTER 3
METHOD

Statement of Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research is to identify factors that perpetuate fast fashion as well as to investigate the constructs and feelings consumers associate with the fast fashion cycle. Furthermore, this research seeks to determine if consumers of fast fashion perceive the limited lifespan of their clothing as problematic. A qualitative approach was taken, and consumers of fast fashion were interviewed to address the objectives of this study.

The three objectives are:

1. To understand what specific factors will prompt consumers to stop wearing fast fashion apparel.

2. To understand, within the context of symbolic interaction theory, how these factors change consumers’ feelings about the fast fashion apparel items they no longer wear.

3. To learn how consumers feel about the limited lifespan of fast fashion apparel.
Research Approach

Because there has been little research directed towards consumer attitudes regarding fast fashion, the present study is exploratory in nature. Thus, a qualitative approach was followed. McCracken (1988) provides direction regarding qualitative research involving participant interviews. Therefore, McCracken’s (1988) four-step method of inquiry guided the research process for this study.

*McCracken’s (1988) Four-Step Method of Inquiry*

The four steps include a “Review of Analytic Categories”, a “Review of Cultural Categories”, the “Discovery of Cultural Categories”, and the “Discovery of Analytic Categories”. The research methods adopted for the present study are in line with McCracken’s (1988) four step method of inquiry.

*Step 1, Review of Analytic Categories*

A “Review of Analytic Categories” entails an “exhaustive review of the literature” (McCracken, 1988, p 29). McCracken states that a good literature review “enables the investigator to define problems and assess data” (McCracken, 1988, 31). The literature review also aids in “the construction of interview questionnaire” (McCracken, 1988, p 31). To complete a review of analytic categories, I engaged in an extensive literature review that can be found in Chapter Two. By completing such a review, I learned not only what research had been completed but also identified
gaps within the body of literature addressing fast fashion. Through the review of literature, I was able to identify concepts that relate to why consumers stop wearing apparel items as well as how fast fashion impacts the environment; this helped in the development of my interview guide.

**Step 2, Review of Cultural Categories**

A “Review of Cultural Categories...is where the investigator begins the process of using the self as an instrument of inquiry” (McCracken, 1988, p 32). In other words, the research begins to look at his or her personal experiences with the subject matter. McCracken (1988) claims that such a process serves three purposes: 1) “To prepare for questionnaire construction”, 2) “To prepare for the ‘rummaging’ that will occur during data analysis”, and 3) To establish the ‘distance’ between the researcher and topic at hand, (McCracken, 1988, p 32). To complete a review of cultural categories, I developed a list of a priori expectations that shows my own assumptions regarding the topic of fast fashion. These a priori expectations were formed using my own intuition regarding the subject as well as findings from my pilot study and discoveries from my extensive review of literature.
Step 3, Discovery of Cultural Categories

The “Discovery of Cultural Categories” requires careful participant selection, a well-planned interview guide, and careful execution (McCracken, 1988). With regards to participants, McCracken (1988) suggests the following:

1) respondents should be “perfect strangers;” 2) respondents should be “few in number (i.e. no more than eight);” 3) respondents “should not have a special knowledge (or ignorance) of the topic under study” and 4) “The selection of respondents is an opportunity to manufacture distance. This is done by deliberately creating a contrast in the respondent pool,” (McCracken, 1998, p 37).

With regards to the interview guide, McCracken (1988) states that it should be formalized with “a set of biographical questions with which to open the interview (McCracken, 1988, p 34). This will allow time for the participant to become at ease and aware that what they say will not be judged and will be confidential. After this step is completed, the interviewer should ask the “grand tour” questions, as well as “floating” and “planned” prompts. This assures that all of the topics are covered in the same order across participants and that all areas of interest will be covered in the interview process. Despite the structure provided by the interview guide, the questionnaire should also allow for “exploratory, unstructured responses” and the interview should still be open-ended (McCracken, 1988, p 25). In addition, must also be cognizant of “impression management, topic avoidance, deliberate
distortion, minor misunderstanding, and outright incomprehension, taking, in each case, the necessary remedy to deal with the problem” (McCracken, 1988, p 39).

To address step three, the “Discoveries of Cultural Categories”, I developed an interview guide that includes questions designed to address the three research objectives of this study. Questions were developed and refined based on the review of literature and findings from my pilot study. Although the interview guide served as the basis for what I initially asked participants, I also encouraged participants to talk beyond my initial questions by using prompts. The interview guide evolved as an increasing number of participants were interviewed because of the potential for discovering new categories throughout the interview process. After data collection and initial analysis, I engaged in member checking, a strategy in which a researcher contacts participants for further clarification and validation of research conclusions.

**Step 4, Discovery of Analytic Categories**

The “Discovery of Analytic Categories” involves not only data collection, but also data analysis (McCracken, 1988). First, interviews must be video or audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim to ensure that all data is recorded and available for analysis. Second, data is analyzed. McCracken (1988) describes an inductive data analysis approach in which the researcher first considers “the particulars of individual lives” and then develops and understanding regarding “the
general properties of thought and action within the community or group under study” (McCracken, 1988, p 46).

According to McCracken, there are five stages to the data analysis process. The first stage “treats each utterance in the interview transcript in its own terms, ignoring the relationship to other aspects of the text” (McCracken, 1988, p 42). At this stage, the researcher begins to identify different categories independent of one another. In the present study, I followed McCracken’s direction by audio recording the interviews and transcribing all interview testimony verbatim directly after completing each interview.

During the second stage, all of the single observations are placed into distinct categories. Themes emerge and data is grouped into categories accordingly. The third stage involves the examination of “the interconnection” between the different categories (McCracken, 1988, p 42). Throughout the second and third stages, the researcher is not only considering the data collected during the interviews, but also what was learned during his/her previous literature and cultural review. The fourth stage “takes the observations generated at previous levels and subjects them, in this collective form, to collective scrutiny” (McCracken, 1988, p 42). It is at this stage that the interviewer looks for “intertheme consistency and contradiction” (McCracken, 1988, p 42).

During the fifth stage the researcher “takes these patterns and themes, as they appear in several interviews that make up the project, and subjects them to a
final process of analysis” (McCracken, 1988, p 42). McCracken states that these five steps take the interviews “from the particular to the general” (McCracken, 1988, p 42). Meaning, that until the interviewer focuses on the similarities across the interviews, each interview will seem disparate. After going through each of these stages, the interviewer will be able to discover the major themes that emerge across the interviews.

Research Method

The following section describes the procedures I followed regarding interview guide development, participant selection, data collection, data analysis, and research quality control.

Interview Guide

Interview guide development occurred in two stages: (1) pre-pilot study and (2) post-pilot study. In the Spring of 2010, my interest in fast fashion drove me to perform a preliminary review of literature regarding fast fashion. Through this review, I identified a gap in knowledge regarding fast fashion and developed a rough interview guide that I later used for a pilot study in which I interviewed four female undergraduate college students who were consumers of fast fashion. General questions were asked to gain insight into what problems participants encountered when they wore and cared for fast fashion items, as well as how they felt about
these problems. After analyzing data from the pilot study, more research questions emerged. I performed a more extensive review of literature and further developed and refined my research purpose, research objectives, and the interview guide.

The resulting moderately structure interview guide (Attachment 1) consists of three sections: 1) general questions about clothing purchase behavior, 2) questions regarding each garment discussed during the interview, and 3) questions regarding feelings about garment lifespan. In total, the sections include questions that elicit information about each participant's background related to apparel consumption and that elicit information that addresses the three objectives of the present study. Questions relating to participants' backgrounds and each objective are presented below.

Participants

To participate in this study, participants must have purchased apparel items from at least one of the four fast fashion retailers identified by Reuters (2005, 2010), Forever 21, H & M, Mango, and Zara; furthermore, they must have in their possession five inactive fast fashion clothing items. In addition, McCracken (1988) suggests that it is wise to choose few participants (his suggestion is eight) that are neither familiar nor unfamiliar with the subject matter. Therefore, thirteen undergraduate female Design and Human Environment majors from Oregon State University served as participants. This is considered a convenience sample and it
will not be representative of the population as a whole. However, it is assumed that participants will meet the criteria outlined above, as research shows this age group is the target market for fast fashion retailers (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010).

Participants were recruited from lower division undergraduate courses offered by the Department of Design and Human Environment at Oregon State University. The first thirteen that signed up and completed the interview participated. As stated before, I expected that thirteen interviews would be sufficient to gather enough information for my study, as redundancy in findings were achieved after this number of interviews.

All participants were female undergraduate students majoring in design or merchandising management at a university in the Pacific Northwest. They ranged from 18 to 28 years in age and spent $400 to $2,400 on clothing annually. Appendix 4 provides biographical sketches of each participant.

*Questions to learn about participants' background*

At the beginning of the interview, questions were asked to learn about each participant's clothing purchase behavior. This section was more general in nature and served as a time for participants to become more comfortable with the interviewer prior to talking about specific articles of clothing. Questions included: 1) How would you describe your current style? 2) Are you concerned with keeping up with current trends? 3) What stores do you purchase clothing from and why?
The following planned prompts were asked: A) How do you feel about H&M, Zara, Forever 21, and Mango? B) Do you plan to continue buying clothing from these retailers and why? 4) How frequently do you buy clothing? 5) In total, how much do you think you have spent on clothing within the last twelve months? 6) How much do you think you have spent on clothing from Zara, Forever 21, H&M, or Mango? 7) Where does your clothing budget come from?

*Questions pertaining to objective 1.*

The first objective was to understand what specific factors prompted consumers to stop wearing fast fashion apparel items. To prompt discussion, I used the auto driving technique, which is a planned prompt in which the “respondent is asked to comment on a picture, video or some other stimulus, and to provide his or her own account of what they see there” (McCracken, 1988, 36). Specifically, participants were instructed to bring in five fast fashion clothing items that they no longer wear from one of four retailers: Forever 21, H&M, Mango, and Zara. For each of the five fast fashion items, participants answered the following questions within the interview guide: 1) Tell me about this garment. Following this grand tour question, three planned prompts were asked. A) Where did you purchase this garment and what brand is it? B) How long ago did you get this garment? C) What was your motivation to purchase it? 2) Would you say it was expensive, moderately priced, or inexpensive? 3) Approximately how many times did you wear this
garment? This question was followed by a planned prompt. A) Is that not often, often, or very often for you? 4) When did you stop wearing this garment? 5) What things contributed to you not wearing this garment anymore? This question was followed by three planned prompts. A) How did you feel the last time you put it on? B) If anything could be changed about the garment that could make you wear the garment again, what would it be? C) Did you have any issues regarding quality or performance of this garment?

Questions pertaining to objective 2.

The second objective was to understand, within the context of symbolic interaction theory, how these factors changed consumers’ feelings about the fast fashion apparel items they no longer wear. Again, each participant brought five fast fashion items they no longer wear and answered the following questions centered on this objective: 1) When you first wore this garment, how did you feel? 2) How would you feel about yourself if you wore this garment now? 3) How would others perceive you if you wore this garment now? 4) How do you feel about not being able to wear this anymore? 5) What do you plan on doing with this garment now?
Questions pertaining to objective 3.

The third objective was to learn how consumers felt about the limited lifespan of fast fashion apparel. To garner opinions about fast fashion, I read a paragraph explaining the nature of fast fashion and asked the participants to respond to the paragraph. The paragraph was as follows: The items you brought in today are considered by some as “fast fashion”. Fast fashion retailers encourage consumers to make frequent purchases in their stores by continually bringing in new fashion-oriented clothing items and selling them at low prices. How do you feel about this concept of “fast fashion”? Four follow up questions were asked as followed: 1) Is this a good, bad, or neutral thing for consumers? 2) Is this a good, bad, or neutral thing for society? How long do you think that clothing items should last? 3) What do you think happens to clothing items after you get rid of them? 4) Please share your thoughts about the connection between clothing consumption and the environment. These questions have purposely been placed last for two reasons: 1) I did not want to influence responses relating to objectives one and two by bring environmental issues to their immediate attention, and 2) questions regarding issues such as the environment are more personal and should be left until the end of the interview when participants are more likely to trust that the interviewer will not be judgmental (McCacken, 1988, p 34).
Data Collection

Data was collected through in-depth interviews. Before the interview, the participant received written instructions about what to bring to the interview. They were instructed to bring five fast fashion garments that they no longer wear that were originally from Forever 21, H&M, Mango, and Zara.

Interviews took place in an empty conference room in Milam Hall at Oregon State University. Before the interview began, participants read and signed a letter of informed consent that explained the purpose of the study as well as their rights as participants. After signing the letter of informed consent, audio recording of the interview commenced and continued until the end of the interview. To generate discussion, the researcher used a moderately structured interview guide. Photographs of the five clothing items were also taken. The interviews took between forty-five minutes and ninety minutes. After the interview was over, hand-written field notes were taken. The audio recordings, photographs, and field notes were placed in a locked cabinet to ensure total privacy.

Data Analysis

Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. Using transcripts, open coding was performed on each interview and across all interviews. Creswell (2007) defines open coding as “the first step in the data analysis process for a grounded theorist. It involves taking data (e.g. interview transcriptions) and segmenting it into categories
of information” (Creswell, 2007, pp 239-240). Throughout this process, I compiled a list of emerging themes and categorized the data accordingly. Throughout this process, ways to further condense categories were identified. This is an iterative process in which the researcher continuously considers how data from one interview relates back to all interviews. A final list of categories was developed, and relationships between the different categories were identified. Creswell recommends reducing the number of major categories to five or six (Creswell, 2007). It is anticipated that findings will allow the researcher to develop a model based upon “data from participants who have experienced the process” (Creswell, 2007, p 63). Thus, the process of data analysis used in the present research took a grounded theory approach, “a qualitative research design in which the inquirer generates a general explanation of a process, action, or interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants” (Creswell, 2007, p 63).

Measures to Ensure Research Quality

John W. Creswell (2007) stated that in qualitative research, “validation... [is] an attempt to assess the ‘accuracy’ of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants” (Creswell, 2007, p 206). He listed eight strategies that can be used by qualitative researchers to ensure validation. Of these, he recommends that, “qualitative researchers engage in at least two of them in any
given study” (Creswell, 2007, p 209). Of the eight strategies Creswell listed, I chose three.

The first validation strategy I chose was “clarifying researcher bias from the outset of the study” so that the reader can understand how any biases would affect the study, (Creswell, 2007, p 208). The researcher must discuss “past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation of the study,” (Creswell, 2007, p 208). In order to complete step two (Review of Cultural Categories) of Grant McCracken’s four-step method of inquiry, I administered the questionnaire on myself to learn about why I stop wearing clothing items. Based on my responses during this process, and based on what I learned when completing my initial pilot study and a review of related literature, I developed a priori expectations that show my own assumptions regarding the topic of fast fashion. The second validation strategy I chose was member checking, in which “the researcher solicits participants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations” (Creswell, 2007, p 208). This means that after I have coded and interpreted data, I will take “data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account,” (Creswell, 2007, p 208). I completed this validation strategy by conducting short telephone meeting with selected participants after I interpreted my data but before I wrote up my findings.
Lastly, the third validation strategy I chose was to write with “rich, thick description [that] allows readers to make decisions regarding transferability” (Creswell, 2007, p 209). Research findings are explained by using quotes from participants. Furthermore, Appendix 4 includes biographical sketches of participants. This allows the reader to “transfer information to other settings and to determine whether the findings can be transferred ‘because of shared characteristics’” (Creswell, 2007, p 209). Although my sample is small, my study may uncover some universal truths that could be applied to future research.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Factors Perpetuating Fast Fashion

The first objective of this research was to understand what specific factors prompt consumers to stop wearing fast fashion apparel items. The participants revealed they stopped wearing fast fashion items for two main reasons: communicative failure and boredom.

*Communicative Failure*

Communicative failure occurred due to quality issues, fit issues, and meaning conflict. Figure 1 below shows the frequency subjects cited these reasons.

![Graph showing frequency of reasons for communicative failure cited by subjects](image)

**Figure 1:** Frequency of Reasons for Communicative Failure Cited by Subjects
As the chart in Figure 1 shows, quality issues were the most common reason cited for no longer wearing fast fashion clothing (184 mentions over 13 interviews). This was followed closely by fit issues, which subjects mentioned 171 times. The tertiary reason, with 47 citations, was that the subject had a meaning conflict with the garment.

Quality-Related Issues

Quality issues with fast fashion clothing was the reason most subjects discontinued wearing their fast fashion clothing items. The larger category of quality failures were broken up into nine sub-categories: shrinkage, holes, fading, growth of garment, fabric choice, stains, general quality complaints, pilling, or wrinkling. Table 1 lists the nine quality issues, as well as the percentage of the total quality concerns fit into each sub-category. It also gives quotes from the subjects for why they no longer wear their garments because of each quality issue.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons Subjects Cited For No Longer Wearing Garment</th>
<th>Percentage of Mentions</th>
<th>Subjects' Quotes Exemplifying Reasons For No Longer Wearing Garment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shrinkage of garment</td>
<td>56/240 = 23.3%</td>
<td>“It fit perfectly before I washed it, and then once I washed it, it shrinks up” (Tiffany); “But it has shrunk a lot. This is a medium, but this is not the medium size. It kind of looks like a child's medium now,” (Danielle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holes in garment</td>
<td>54/240 = 22.5%</td>
<td>“There's little holes everywhere. There's a little hole here in the seam... I don't know, I thought it would hold up and I guess not,” (Danielle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fading of garment</td>
<td>25/240 = 10.4%</td>
<td>“The dirt, dingy dirtiness of it. Like certain things I can wear over it and it looks like a cream tank top. So really just the discoloration is the only reason I would not wear it anymore,” (Kristin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growing/stretching of garment</td>
<td>24/240 = 10.0%</td>
<td>“I washed it a lot ... and it is stretched out in a weird funky way. But um, it definitely isn’t the shape it was when it was brand new,” (Sarah)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabric choice of garment</td>
<td>23/240 = 12.5%</td>
<td>“I mean maybe not make it out of silk? Something a little different. Because I don't think a lot of people who shop at Forever 21 get their clothes dry cleaned anyway,” (Stephanie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stains on garment</td>
<td>20/240 = 9.6%</td>
<td>“I think there is a stain there. Like coffee or something. So that may have something to do with why I don't wear them anymore” (Sarah);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General quality complaints</td>
<td>16/240 = 6.7%</td>
<td>“I just didn’t find it as flattering anymore. Like it just didn’t... the more I wore it the more it... maybe it was just the way it was washed or something but it just seemed a little off. And I could never make it feel as cute as it was during the summer,” (Kelly);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilling in garment</td>
<td>16/240 = 6.7%</td>
<td>“I don’t really wear it anymore because the fabric really pills a lot, like it is just really awful,” (Olivia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrinkling of garment</td>
<td>6/240 = 2.5%</td>
<td>“It did wrinkle, fairly easily. Just when I sat down it wrinkled in the back quite a bit more than I would have expected it to I guess. I'm used to my clothes taking quite a bit of, being thrown on the floor and then picked back up and worn again kind of thing, and I expect it to still look kind of decent, and this just didn't do that” (Amber)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Quality Issues Leading to the Disuse of Fast Fashion Garments, Percentages of Each, and Representative Quotes
**Shrinkage.** The garment shrinking during wear or care was the number one quality complaint cited by the subjects. Amanda stopped wearing her shirt because it no longer fit in the same way it did in the store. She said, “Yeah, it shrank too, like all of their clothes. Like it was longer because I wouldn’t buy something this short”. Many items the subjects brought in were no longer worn because they felt like the garment was too short for them. The garments were once an ideal length for the wearers, but after wearing and caring for the clothing, they no longer function as the original purpose for the wearer. Stephanie had a dress that was long enough when she first bought it, but after one washing, it shrunk to an inappropriate length. When asked what she would change about the garment, Stephanie said “I would probably make it longer so I could wear it during the day to class and stuff”. Tiffany also complained that her fast fashion top was too short, “It fit perfectly before I washed it, and then once I washed it, it shrinks up”. The shrinkage of garments discussed led the wearer stops wearing the garment completely or to rethink its original use.

**Holes.** The second most common reason for the disuse of fast fashion garments was because of holes in the garment. Kimberly had stopped wearing her shirt when it developed holes. She said, “Now it is just falling apart. It got holes, and it is just kind of fading. Yeah, just kind of run down in the seams and stuff”. Danielle brought in a basic stretch tee shirt that had seen better days. She said

> It is pretty stretchy when you put it on, but it also, there’s a lot of, I guess, wear and tear associated with that stretch, like ... a hole there. But I bought two of these, one of them in this color and one in purple, and they both kind
of did the same thing at the same time, so it was a consistent thing that this style of shirt was not going to hold up.

For both of these subjects, the holes were enough to discontinue wearing of their garments.

_Fading._ The loss of the original color, or fading, was the third most common complaint from participants. Elizabeth had trouble when she noticed how a true black legging caused her shirt to look faded by comparison. She said, “And it has been hard to wear with leggings because of the black, and then the black has been fading with each wash, which I expected. But with my black leggings, it just looks like really washed out”. Tiffany discussed a pair of jeans that used to be a richer color. She said, “I don’t know, they were a lot darker. They have definitely faded. Like the colorfastness is not at all what they used to be”. The complaints regarding fading included both the fading that resulted from washing as well as fading that resulted from wearing the garments.

_Growing or stretching._ For the subjects, shrinkage was the most mentioned quality failure, but stretch or growth of the garment was still the fourth most common complaint. Tiffany talked about how her garment stretched out while she was wearing it. She said “they worked well for the first few wears I would say, it is not durable, but it is semi-durable, but it stretched out. So it loses its shape immediately”. For Naomi, the growth and stretch of her garment happened during the care and washing process. She said, “after I started washing it, it started getting
baggier at the bottom, so I don’t really wear it much anymore. Just because after I washed it, it kind of got ruined”.

**Comfort.** The choice of fabric at the design and manufacturing level was the fifth most commonly cited complaint. Complaints included the discomfort from fabric when touching the skin, the desire for an easier fabric to care for, and the lack of breathability or softness of the garment. Sarah said that she would have changed the fabric of her blouse because she didn’t like how it felt. She stated,

It’s definitely a fabric choice that I wouldn’t choose again. I don’t like this thin, like I like the polka dots, but I don’t like the thin, chiffon type feeling that is in right now for blouses. They are itchy.

Danielle discussed her senior picture dress that she wore when she took pictures in Hawaii. She said the dress did not suit the conditions that she bought it for, “The fabric isn’t very breathable either, so it’s kind of warm, yeah I think it is like a rayon and nylon and polyester. It’s not very breathable. Yeah, it’s an interesting fabric”.

**Stains.** Staining on garments was the sixth reason subjects cited for not wearing their fast fashion clothing any longer. Stains came from various sources- through care (washing), through wear (spilling), and through storage (unknown cause). Olivia said her garment was so stained and old that she didn’t even feel good donating it. She said,
This is one that I wouldn’t feel right like giving to someone because it’s like stained and stuff, but, and like falling apart. So, I’ll either try to fix it, like fix this stuff and find time to do that or I’ll just throw it out.

Stains seemed like a source of embarrassment for the subjects, and cause for disposal of the garments.

*General quality complaints.* General quality failures were those listed that didn’t fit into a specific category. They ranged from parts falling off to seam distortion to general dissatisfaction with how the garment looked. Danielle mentioned how her shirt no longer had straight seams. She said, “There is some awesome seam distortion there”. Kimberly has so many issues with general quality with a top that she had stopped wearing it rather than fixing it. She stated “Yeah, it looks like the belt is definitely coming apart at the grommets and I can definitely feel the buttons, like they are down to a string. And I never sew buttons… oh and it’s missing a button”.

*Pilling.* The sixth quality issue, pilling, showed up after the garments were worn and cared for. Elizabeth looked over a shirt she had brought and said, “I can see that it has that fuzzy white on it … now that I am looking at it, it has a lot more fuzzy white than I thought”. Tiffany was adamant that she never washed garments according to directions, so all of her shirts showed signs of fading and pilling. She said, “I don’t follow directions, so it’s got a little bit of pilling, they all have a little pill”. The subjects that mentioned pilling in their garments felt that pilling was a definite sign of age.
Wrinkling. A wrinkled garment came both from the choice of fabric (see quote from Amber in the wrinkling section of the Table 1 above), or from how the subject took care of or stored the garment. Although wrinkling was not as clear-cut of a reason to get rid of a garment, it did show a lack of quality and care in the garment. Sarah showed me some cotton shorts with cuffs and explained “it wrinkled really fast. I guess that’s what you get with cotton though. I’d have to iron it”.

Fit-Related Issues

Fit issues were the next most common reason the participants cited for why they stopped wearing fast fashion clothing. For the purpose of this study, the fit issues presented are not related to the shrinkage and growth quality issues discussed earlier. Rather, the garment has remained the same size as when it was initially purchased. Table 2 below lists the three fit issues, as well as percentage of the total fit concerns fit into each sub-category. It also shows representative quotes from the subjects for why they no longer wear their garments due to each fit issue.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons Subjects Cited For No Longer Wearing Garment</th>
<th>Percentage of Mentions</th>
<th>Subjects’ Quotes Exemplifying Reasons For No Longer Wearing Garment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Too small</td>
<td>98/171 = 57.3 %</td>
<td>“But actually I think I bought this in a large because when I buttoned it, it fit around here, but not up here. So it was like a medium on the bottom but a large up top,” (Danielle); “It doesn’t look good in the arms. It looks very tight in the arms. It doesn’t just feel tight, it looks tight, and that’s not a good look. I would not feel confident,” (Amber)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too large</td>
<td>37/171 = 21.6 %</td>
<td>“And it might just be that I’ve changed, my body has changed and it doesn’t look the same way that it used to, but I feel like it makes me look like I am pregnant,” (Sarah); “I am kind of in the place where I want something even more body conscious than that because I have been trying to work out and stuff and so I kind of want to show it off a little more than that would because it was very loose and flowy,” (Kelly). “It was really long, it was awkwardly long, like is it a tee shirt or a really, really short dress? So I wore it with jeans. And I feel like it felt ok. Like it was somewhat cute, so I might as well just get it,” (Michelle);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General fit issues</td>
<td>36/171 = 21.1 %</td>
<td>“It’s too blocky ... Just not quite the right size,” (Amber).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Fit Issues Leading to the Disuse of Fast Fashion Garments, Percentages of Each, and Representative Quotes

*Too small.* The most common fit complaint was that the fast fashion garment was too tight for the wearer. This could have to do with the subject not trying on the garment in the store, weight gain, or because the garment seemed good enough in the store and it was only when the subject took the item home that they noticed the
tight fit. In Kristin’s case, it was only when she got home that she realized that
although she had grabbed her size, the leggings were much too tight. Kristin stated

I got home and realized they were zero flattering and don’t fit, like this
waistband has no give and maybe I was really, really small the day I bought
them, but they are a size medium, and they are really unflatteringly small
and uncomfortable too.

Kimberly bought a dress from Zara when she was a nanny in France for a year. She
wanted something that would be classic and chic so she wouldn’t feel like such a
tourist. However, Kimberly recounted that,

It is actually a very tight fit. Yeah, I think it has spandex in it, it is very
stretchy. And you definitely have to be very slim to pull it off. And it has the
slit up the back so it didn’t even do what I wanted it to do.

Amber bought a tailored men’s style blouse that she was hoping would be a classic
piece for her wardrobe, but she ended up with a shirt that was too tight. When
asked how she would feel in this garment, Amber replied, “Not so good, it doesn’t
look good in the arms. It looks very tight in the arms. It doesn’t just feel tight, it looks
tight, and that’s not a good look. I would not feel confident”. Amanda said the tank
top she discussed was so small that it would not function even as an undershirt. She
stated,

Since I am kind of busty this will be like right over my boobs now and that is
not really an attractive thing, because really that is what it looks like. It
doesn’t look like this on me, let’s just say that, anymore like it did on the
mannequin.

Too large. The second most common fit related reason for no longer wear fast
fashion clothing was that the garment was too large. Sarah had two observations
about how a garment being too large can be unflattering on her body. She said, “It is one of those shirts that sags down on the sides so you can see your bra and I don’t really like that, I am not a fan of that”. She also said that if a blouse was too baggy, it gives off the wrong impression. Sarah stated, “It might just be that I’ve changed, my body has changed and it doesn’t look the same way that it used to, but I feel like it makes me look like I am pregnant”. Excessive length was an issue for some participants. Michelle recounted her struggles figuring out how to wear a particular garment.

It was really long, it was awkwardly long, like is it a tee shirt or a really, really short dress? So I wore it with jeans. And I feel like it felt ok. Like it was somewhat cute, so I might as well just get it.

Danielle described her struggle to wear a short sleeved but very lengthy vest. She said, “It’s really long, actually. I can’t wear it with any jackets because it goes out underneath the jackets. So that is one of the reasons I stopped wearing it because it just looked silly”.

*General fit issues.* The third category of fit issues is that of general fit. When describing fit issues, terms that did not mirror “too small” or “too large” were used. For example, Sarah bought a racerback tank top because she liked the design, despite not liking the fit of the shirt. She only wore it twice before she realized, “It’s too blocky … Just not quite the right size”.


Meaning Conflict

The third reason participants cited for why they no longer wear fast fashion clothing is that the garment is not in-line with current identities. Table 4 displays the three reasons participants stopped wearing garments due to the conflict between the identities they wish to communicate and meaning held by the garments, as well as the percentage that reason was cited. It also gives representative quotes for each of the reasons for no longer wearing the garments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons Subjects Cited For No Longer Wearing Garment</th>
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<th>Subjects’ Quotes Exemplifying Reasons For No Longer Wearing Garment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Style change for the wearer</td>
<td>39/47 = 83.0%</td>
<td>“I think it was kind of one of those things that I put on and I was just like, nuuh, not me, take it off,” (Olivia); “And it is not really my style. I like floral, I like more color, or like sometimes plain, but this is too, kind of like chunky. It is not really my bag anymore,” (Amanda).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garment never in line with wearer’s identity</td>
<td>4/47 = 8.5%</td>
<td>“I bought it and I didn’t know if I liked it or not. I think after wearing it for a few hours I decided I didn’t like it and took it off and I didn’t ever put it back on. I think it was a little too… too much for me,” (Naomi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garment not in line with wearer’s age</td>
<td>4/47 = 8.5 %</td>
<td>“Kind of young and childish almost. My grandma said I looked like I was ten years old,” (Kelly); “I think just the little fruits on your tee shirt with the cute little designs, I just grew out of it. It got old. Um, yeah, it looks more kiddish,” (Michelle)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Meaning Conflict Issues Leading to the Disuse of Fast Fashion Garments, Percentages of Each, and Representative Quotes
*Personal style change.* The most common reason the subjects cited for no longer wearing fast fashion clothing due to a meaning conflict was because they underwent a complete style change. There is nothing necessarily wrong with the garments, but the subjects simply choose to no longer wear them. Elizabeth had stopped wearing some of her more trendy garments because her “style changes every term. It just gets more and more... classic I guess”. Olivia also tried a sweater that was trendy and popular for a short while, and wore it a few times. However, she said now if she tries it on, she says “nuuh, not me, take it off”. Amanda purchased a green and black color block dress because her boyfriend said it looked good on her. She said, “It is not really my style. I like floral, I like more color, or like sometimes plain, but this is too, kind of like chunky. It is not really my bag anymore”. Sarah had two garments that had a conflict of meaning for her. The first was a bright pink scarf that was a little out of her comfort zone. She said she decided “pretty much just that I wasn’t interested in it anymore. It was just kind of a trend that was done, I guess. The color”. Her second garment was a pair of seersucker shorts. She said “I think I just kind of decided that I had grown out of them. They kind of just don’t appeal to my fashion sense anymore. . . . I am just kind of over them”.

*Garment never in line with wearer’s identity.* The second reason subjects mentioned for no longer wearing their fast fashion clothing is because they never felt the garment fit into their personal style. This usually had to do with an
unplanned purchase of a trendy garment. In Naomi’s case, the item was a tee shirt that came with a sewed on necklace. She said,

I bought it and I didn’t know if I liked it or not. I think after wearing it for a few hours I decided I didn’t like it and took it off and I didn’t ever put it back on. I think it was a little too… too much for me.

She decided that she didn’t like the “style of it”.

*Garment not in line with wearer’s age.* The third meaning conflict mentioned was related to age. In some cases, participants felt that their clothes was too young for their current stage in life. Michelle displayed a shirt that she really liked the styling of, but felt that the pattern was too young and immature. She said, “I think just the little fruits on your tee shirt with the cute little designs, I just grew out of it. It got old. Um, yeah, it looks more kiddish”. Kelly talked about a purple plaid sundress that she bought when she was in high school. She said if she were to wear it now, she would feel “kind of young and childish almost. My grandma said I looked like I was ten years old”. It seems natural that the transition from high school to college would leave certain items feeling like part of the past.

*Boredom*

The least common, although still frequent reason cited for no longer wearing fast fashion clothing was boredom, with 38 citations throughout the 13 interviews. Table 3 below displays the two reasons participants stopped wearing garments due to boredom, as well as the percentage that reason was cited. It also gives representative quotes for both reasons participants no longer wore the garments.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons Subjects Cited For No Longer Wearing Garment</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lost interest in the garment</td>
<td>36/38 = 94.7%</td>
<td>“I just didn’t feel like dealing with it anymore I guess... It was just whatever,” (Michelle); “It is not like I would feel awful, it is just not something that I really feel like I need anymore,” (Sarah)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgot about the garment</td>
<td>2/38 = 5.3 %</td>
<td>“I either just forgot about it or moved on from this look. Probably got other clothes that I was more in love with. Yeah just kind of one of those put away and not ever think about again,” (Michelle)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Boredom Issues Leading to the Disuse of Fast Fashion Garments, Percentages of Each, and Representative Quotes

Lost Interest in Garment

The most common reason subjects gave for no longer wearing their garments due to boredom was that they simply lost interest in the garment. They were drawn to it when they first had it, but they didn’t ever feel like wearing it anymore. When asked how she would feel wearing a shirt, Michelle responded, “maybe just like EHHHHHH, it just wasn’t as like cool I guess as when I first bought it, I definitely haven’t worn it in a very long time”. Kimberly described herself as having a large, eclectic collection of clothing. When talking about a striped sweater with large ruffles on the shoulders, she said

I guess I was just kind of thinking to myself like I am just not drawn to wear this, and I have so little closet space then like if something is not, I am not excited to wear it, then I don’t want to keep it around.
Olivia knew she had her yellow summer dress in her closet still, and said,

I would put it on a lot and then take it off and change my outfit a lot. It is one of those ones where I’d put it on, and be really excited to wear it and then like two hours later I would just take it off again. Like, well, I am over it. The subjects may even like the garment still, but just don’t feel the same draw to it they once had.

*Forgot About Item*

The second subcategory of boredom relates to when subjects forgot they even had the garment in question. When asked how she felt about no longer wearing the pink scarf anymore, Sarah said, “Not that bummed. Kind of forgot I had it until I was digging for stuff for this. I don’t really care. I have other things that have taken its place”. Michelle also had forgotten she still owned the loose, flowing top in question. She said that she “either just forgot about it or moved on from this look. Probably got other clothes that I was more in love with. Yeah just kind of one of those put away and not ever think about again”.

*Changes in Feelings Regarding Fast Fashion Items*

The second objective of this research was to understand, within the context of symbolic theory, how these factors change consumers’ feelings about the fast fashion apparel items they no longer wear. As stated in Chapter 2, symbolic interaction theory discusses the meanings of clothing to the wearer as well as the
observer. The wearer’s viewpoint (internal) and the observer’s viewpoint (external) may be in agreement with each other, or they may be at odds. If the viewpoints disagree, the wearer has to figure out a way to resolve the dissonance. In addition to conceptual components, both internal and external perspectives may include feeling components as well.

*Internal Communicative Changes*

The transcripts were analyzed for quotes related to SI theory. Quotes were then encoded based on whether they related to the viewpoint of the wearer (internal) or the observer (external). The quotes relating to internal communication changes were sorted into two categories by creating an affinity diagram (See Appendix 5). This is “a method to organize ideas into natural groupings or themes,” (Melum & Collett, 1995, p. 307). The two themes were: 1. Poor quality and fit leads to negative self-image regarding physical appearance; 2. Excessively worn clothing creates cognitive dissonance for the wearer.

*Negative Self-Image*

The first finding was that poor quality and fit leads to a negative self-image regarding physical appearance. Tiffany showed her stretched garment and said “It just doesn’t feel good because it is all stretched out. And it doesn’t make me feel good”. Amanda said wearing her shrunken garment would make her feel bad about herself. She stated,
On it's own, I wouldn't feel too cute. I would feel like my clothes were too small, and like, oh god how much weight did I gain, but really, it has been washed and shrunken... I wouldn't feel too cute whatsoever.

Olivia stopped wearing her pilled shirt because of how it made her feel. She said,

I don’t really wear it anymore because the fabric really pills a lot, like it is just really awful. And it makes me feel like I have a fuzzy butt when I wear it. Cause it’s all like fabric pills and stuff.

Sarah said of poor quality clothing,

Clothes that are in bad shape need to be recycled or thrown out. Wearing them would make me feel bad about my outer appearance and probably not help me to be in a confident mood. I wouldn’t feel good about myself.

Kristin discussed her issues with how pilled and shrunken clothing made her feel.

She said,

I hate it and I feel like I am being cheap or I look cheap or like irritated. Like I remember I had a jacket that I really liked and it pilled up really bad on the sleeves and I hated it because I always wanted like to wear it but every time I wore it I was like, oh it’s pilled up. I don’t like that at all. And a lot of times, like if it shrinks funny or whatever, you feel like not good in it, you know. Usually you try to wear it because you are like I really like this, but you just don’t feel good in it.

Tiffany said if she wore her shrunken garment she would “probably feel fat because, just because they are not comfortable”. Stephanie no longer wore her shrunken garment because she said it would make her feel “a little disheveled because the seam is coming undone. And a little frumpy because it is shrunken weird”. Kristin also had bad feelings about her shrunken shirt, saying, “I’d feel really self-conscious and really giant, and really like I need to go home and change, like when is this class
over?” Lastly, Kristin said poor quality clothing made her feel “insecure, gross, and dirty”.

**Cognitive Dissonance**

The second finding of the Internal Communicative Changes was that excessive wear causes cognitive dissonance for the subjects. Cognitive dissonance theory has three assumptions. The first is “humans are sensitive to inconsistencies between actions and beliefs”. The second is “recognition of this inconsistency will cause dissonance, and will motivate an individual to resolve the dissonance”. The third assumption is that “dissonance will be resolved in one of three basic ways: a) change beliefs, b) change actions, or c) change perception of action” (Richard Hall, pp. 1-2).

The dissonance in this case is caused by the difference between what the subjects bought and what the garment looks like after wear. Naomi was unhappy with her garment and said,

The fabric quality just sucks. Uh, it stretches out really easily and it is just too big and too long and just after one wear and wash it just lost the whole shape of it, like it’s just completely... not what I wanted, not what I bought.

Danielle was unhappy with the state of her shirt. She said “I should probably just throw it away because it has these embarrassing holes everywhere and it’s got these stains, and so I just don’t wear it anymore”. Naomi disliked her shrunken garment and refused to wear it. She said,
I don’t like it at all. I don’t think it looks good, and I wouldn’t... wear it out if I didn’t like how I looked in it. I have a really long torso, so it is really hard for me to find things that won’t shrink.

Naomi and Danielle resolved the dissonance by no longer wearing the garment. By refusing to wear the item, they no longer had to deal with the difference between what they bought and what they had.

Olivia was dissatisfied with the looks of her garment. She said I think I’ve only had this for a year, but it just looks old. Um, it is kind of doing the same fabric pills I’ve talked about... it is really stretched out at the waistband, so that is kind of annoying, but it’s longer, so I try to layer it with things that are longer, but I mean it just kind of looks dirty and old.

Similarly, Michelle was unhappy with how her garment looked, but still attempted to wear it. She said,

I know with pilled stuff, it really bothers me. I try to pick it off. A lot of my clothes are from fast fashion stores so they are not the best quality, so I try to make them work. It is more like a worn look.

Olivia and Michelle tried to resolve the dissonance by attempting to change their beliefs. The garments were not the ones they bought, but they had adapted them by layering or wearing it as a grungier piece.

*External Communicative Changes*

To uncover the external viewpoint, the subjects were asked to imagine the meanings observers would attribute to them if they wore the rejected garments now. The quotes regarding external communicative changes were sorted using the Affinity Diagram (See Appendix 6), and three categories were discovered: 1. Poor fit signals the wearer’s lack of awareness; 2. Poor quality clothing implies a lack of
caring (about clothing or self); 3. Poor quality clothing conveys negative personality traits on the wearer.

*Lack of Awareness*

The first finding was that shrinkage and poor fit signal that the wearer has a lack of awareness about how the garment fits her. Amber said, “They would probably think I should size up on my shirt. And does she know that her bra is showing? There’s nothing, nothing good. Like, maybe I am not aware of what I am wearing and how it fits me”. Kristin brought leggings that were too tight in the waist. She said “If I was wearing something tight to where you could see like an indentation, I think they would be like... girl... size up! Seriously”. Amanda used the same wording regarding a shrunken blouse. She stated “I don’t think they would be like, wow that is a cute shirt, they would be like, wow that is a bit small. Next size up sister, something like that”. Kristin also talked about a shrunken shirt, stating “People would probably be like, that shirt is too small for her, or she should wear that to bed, or... what is she, 12?” She assumed this shirt would signal her lack of awareness of both fit and age appropriateness.

*Lack of Caring*

The second finding was that poor quality clothing implies that the wearer does not care about herself or her clothing. Michelle was concerned with how her pilled clothing would be perceived. She said, “I suppose that they might see me... that I don’t care too much about my appearance just because I am wearing clothing that is
not the best. I don’t really care about my clothing, just threw something on.” Tiffany thought pilled clothing looked “old, out of date”. Kristin thought pilling showed “you buy cheap clothes or don’t take care of your garments”. Sarah thought holes and stains on a garment showed a lack of care. She stated, “Holes and stains show that a person doesn’t take care of their clothes. Taking care of clothes and appearance shows how much a person cares about their appearance... usually if someone cares about their appearance they care about their insides too”.

*Negative Personality Traits*

The third finding was that poor quality clothing communicates negative personality traits about the wearer. About stains, Michelle remarked, “I guess the stain to me is like sloppy or had an accident and looks bad. Especially if it is a big one, it looks bad, I don’t want to wear it anymore”. When asked about poor quality clothing, Sarah said viewers would perceive her as “lazy, don’t care about my appearance”. Tiffany said of her faded shirt, “they would probably perceive me to be in a bad mood and lazy, sloppy maybe? This is a very sloppy shirt to me because it is faded and you can tell that it’s not... it’s been worn”. Tiffany thought stains show viewers “that you are a slob... klutzy, a slob”, and poor quality showed that “you can’t afford good quality clothing. I can’t afford it, the super spendy clothing. They would think you couldn’t afford it or maybe that you are lazy about taking care of your clothes. Messy or a slob”. She also thought others would perceive her poorly if
she wore stained clothing. Kristin said people would think, “You don’t care about yourself and are not responsible”.

**Consumer Feelings Regarding Limited Lifespan of Fast Fashion**

The third objective was to learn how consumers feel about the limited lifespan of fast fashion apparel. It was thus necessary to interview the subjects about how they feel about the quality of fast fashion. The results were then grouped into two categories: negative feelings about fast fashion quality and neutral feelings about fast fashion quality.

**Negative Feelings About Fast Fashion Quality**

Other subjects had a more negative opinion about fast fashion clothing as it related to quality. These consumers like fast fashion clothing, but have had past experiences with quality that made them question their desire to purchase this clothing. Elizabeth had past experiences with sweaters that came apart at the arm seams. She said, “I really like their stores but my sweaters from there always fall apart from Forever 21 and I get so frustrated”. Sarah had experiences with her clothing shrinking from fast fashion retailers, so she was aware of that issue. She said,

H&M I think is a little better quality than Forever 21, but when you buy those kinds of clothes you have to know, I can’t dry this, or else this dress is going to be a shirt, and that sort of thing.

Amber also had negative quality experiences with clothing from fast fashion retailers, and said she thinks
You need to have certain expectations when you go into there as far as the
garment quality. You can’t expect to go into there and expect to keep these
pieces for forever. You know, you go into there knowing that it is kind of
quick, quick shopping for a current trend and you can feel good in it for a
couple weeks but don’t expect it to last, basically.

Tiffany voiced dissatisfaction regarding the low quality of fast fashion and said, “It’s
not made to last that long. The quality of the clothes being made, the materials that
they are using are not made to last long at all”.

Neutral Feelings About Fast Fashion Quality

Many subjects felt that the level of quality was good enough because of the low
price they paid for fast fashion. These same subjects often felt that although quality
of fast fashion clothing may be lacking, the trendy nature of the clothing was
justified because of the price. Kelly said, “For what I pay I think it is good enough
quality”. Stephanie concurred, saying that the low price is more important to her
than quality. “I think that something that I pay 15 dollars for that doesn’t surprise
me when it doesn’t last. I can’t really complain about that”. When asked whether fast
fashion was a good, bad, or neutral thing for consumers, Naomi responded “it’s a
good thing if you don’t care how long your clothes last. It’s a bad thing if you kind of
do”. Naomi also pointed out that quality is not the number one concern for the fast
fashion target consumer. She said, “I mean people our age are always trying to... get
like nice looking clothes, not necessarily good quality”. Participants justified the
limited lifespan by acknowledging the cost versus quality trade-off, by saving or
using items for different purposes, and/or by saving for or giving items to other people or charities to extend the life of the items.

_Cost- Quality Trade Off_

Many participants found that the inexpensive price justified the purchase of trendy items from fast fashion retailers, regardless of quality issues. When asked whether fast fashion was good, bad, or neutral for consumers, Amber responded, “it’s good for the consumers. People who couldn’t afford pieces with this much detail that are higher quality, designer fashions can still look very, very, very chic”. Others felt that the ability to diversify their wardrobes with trendy pieces made up for any quality shortcomings. Danielle said that in her stage of life, “buying quality garments is definitely better, but budget wise, I mean for a college student, it is something a little more manageable”. Olivia concurred with this statement, saying “unfortunately you are paying the cheap price for poor quality, but it allows you to diversify I guess, your wardrobe, with all the different fashions they bring in”. Several subjects were members of sororities, and they were more concerned with having a garment that would last through a specific function rather than be a long-term wardrobe staple. Danielle said, “as a consumer, I like them just because they are more affordable and some pieces, like some of the pieces I brought, I was only intending on wearing them one or two times for that purpose”.
Give to Someone Else

When asked what they planned to go with their unworn garments, many subjects said they planned to pass it along to a friend or family member rather than throwing it away or donating it to charity. Kimberly was bored of her belted dress, but she said she would “probably give it to a friend. Like I had a couple of friends who liked it. So I’ll pass it on”. Amber didn’t like the fit of her nautical striped blazer, but she decided that she would “give it to *Clara [her sister], see if she likes it, [or] see if the sorority likes it”. Olivia also decided she was done wearing her striped tee shirt, but planned on passing it on.

My roommate really likes it. She always comes in and makes comments, so I may just give it away after kind of evaluating it like this, I may just say, here, you can have it. Cause I don’t really wear it.

Recycle into Wardrobe for Different Purpose

One way subjects were able to use lower quality or ill-fitting garments was to downcycle them for a different purpose in their wardrobes. These items were no longer able to be used for their original purpose, but the subjects could wear them to the store or for doing chores or for pajamas. Michelle no longer cared for her loose top, but kept it around because “maybe one of those days I am just going to the grocery store, and otherwise I would be home all day, I would think about putting this on with some jeans”. Stephanie was unhappy with how her skinny jeans fit her, but she said, “I’ll probably just keep them around for emergency jean wear or like if I want to go hiking or something. Something to get them dirty”. Kimberly stopped
wearing her crop top sweater for fashion purposes, but had “started wearing it with like jammies this summer, but definitely I stopped wearing it out probably last year”. Even though the subjects were no longer using their clothing for what they bought it for, they were still getting some use out of them, and tended to feel more neutral about the clothing.

Perception of Fast Fashion’s Broader Impact on Society

Ethics

Ethics were mentioned from the standpoint of stealing designs from original designers and from the standpoint of unethical labor practices of fast fashion manufacturers and retailers.

At the Design Level (Knock-offs)

As future professionals in the design and merchandising field, many subjects were aware that fast fashion retailers knock off designs from other established designers. They felt remorse for purchasing clothing from the same retailers that sell knock off designs. Danielle said “I know as like a fashion student I am supposed to frown upon them because they do take the really big, the trickle down theories and kind of mimic the designers’ designs and knock them off in that respect”. Sarah felt conflicted because she plans to continue shopping at fast fashion retailers but also realized that she would not appreciate designers knocking off her designs.

I feel like if something I designed started being replicated in fast fashion I would.... well I would definitely feel like a hypocrite because I use those
stores at the moment, but I would kind of feel cheated a little bit because I
don’t feel good if someone copies me and I don’t think designers feel good if
someone copies them.

Michelle also felt guilty about the designers but appreciated the low prices that fast
fashion retailers offered her.

I feel like well I know that Forever 21 rips off a lot of designers, yeah that is
what they do I guess. So I kind of feel bad buying the cheap knock offs, but
that is the only kind I can afford.

At the Production Level (Labor)

The subjects had heard about possible unethical labor issues associated with
fast fashion retailers. Although many still planned on purchasing clothing from the
four fast fashion retailers, it did affect how they felt about the retailers. Elizabeth
had read an article describing the failures of fast fashion retailers, and because of
this, she said she had limited how much she frequented these retailers. Elizabeth
said,

It makes me want to be more aware about where my clothing is produced
and where it comes from and the morals behind that. And that book is, I
believe about the factory workers especially overseas being paid less than
minimum wage for doing so much work and I think I would be more
concerned about that than about environmental factors.

Kimberly wondered how fair the labor practices of fast fashion were given the
low prices offered in the stores. She stated, “I am not an expert on any sweatshops
or where these things are made but the feeling you get is the standards are probably
pretty low if they want to sell them at the price they are at”. Kristin was worried that
by supporting fast fashion retailers she was only giving money to the businesses,
rather than the people making the clothes. She said that she was concerned that her purchasing power was “encouraging the sweatshops and those types of things and I think the only people who are actually benefitting are Forever 21, like the head honcho people”.

**Consumerism**

Subjects were asked whether they thought fast fashion was a good thing, bad thing, or neutral thing for consumers. Many felt that fast fashion’s low prices and trendy garments encouraged consumerism among its purchasers, which had a negative effect. Kimberly felt that although fast fashion may help the economy, the temptation to shop had negative effects for consumers. She said,

> It keeps the economy going, but it still just emphasizes, like, that’s what you do, you consume. But it is not going to lead you to happiness or help out your debt, it is kind of just part of that whole cycle, I feel like. And it kind of becomes an activity, I almost feel like, like out of boredom, like Oh, yeah, let’s go to Forever 21. Let’s go shopping. You don’t need anything, you don’t need to buy anything, but you go shopping.

Danielle thought the desire to keep up with trends may mean that consumers do not spend money on more important things. She said, “I actually think it’s a bad thing for consumers because it does encourage them to spend more of their income on fashion items rather than on more of the necessities or charitable contributions and stuff like that”. Elizabeth worried that the low price of fast fashion clothing items kept consumers from realizing how much they were really spending. Elizabeth stated,
I think it’s terrible for the consumers because they are going to keep spending their money, and it’s bad, but they get what they want, they get their fashion. They get what they think is in style, they get what they think is cool, or get what they think others perceive is cool. So they get something out of it but it comes at a price that they don’t realize how high it is until they add it all up.

Danielle worried that fast fashion companies took money away from local or more socially minded businesses. She said, “consumers are focusing all of their purchasing power on you know say clothing and everything and not local businesses or companies that maybe don’t promote like child labor or um things like that”.

Although most of the subjects felt that consumerism propagated by fast fashion was essentially negative, there were two that felt that this consumerism was good for the economy. Naomi stated, “Um, I think it is a good thing because we are spending, spending money on, we’re buying stuff, so it’s making money for people. I don’t think it’s bad”. Elizabeth concurred, saying, “I would say it is a good thing for society because it stimulates it, it keeps people spending which keeps the store, the company going, which keeps the workers going”.

*Equality for Consumers*

Fast fashion retailers offer very trendy clothing items for low prices, which allows the purchasers of fast fashion to feel up to date without going broke. This pricing strategy was popular with the college-aged subjects. Michelle said, “they are very cheap quality stuff but it is also very, very cheap. Um I do like going there just because it is so cheap and they do have a lot of very cute clothes”. Amanda stated
that she could afford trendy styles without financial stress. She said, “I used to go to Forever 21 and Love Culture a lot because they were cheap and they still had cute stuff that was in style”. Danielle pointed out that she would not be able to afford keeping up with trends if it weren’t for the lower prices offered by fast fashion retailers. She stated, “budget wise, I mean for a college student, it is something a little more manageable. Especially with all these trends that just keep going around and around and around”. Sarah said that fast fashion afforded her to purchase clothing she did not plan on keeping long-term. She stated, “because I am a college student and I don’t have a lot of money, so if I want something that is more fashionable it’s a good way to go for like a dress that I am only going to wear once to this dance, something like that”. Lastly, Stephanie was happy for the lower prices at fast fashion stores because she could recreate looks seen online for much cheaper. “It kind of gives people that are on a budget kind of an outlet to get out there and, like I can go to style.com and see an outfit and say I want to remake that but for forty dollars. And I can do that”.

*Environmental Impact*

Only two subjects, Sarah and Stephanie, mentioned their concern for the environmental impact of clothing before they were prompted with questions related to the environment. Even when prompted, most of the participants seemed to be unaware of the full impact clothing consumption has on the environment. The environmental issue regarding fast fashion involves the cradle to grave aspect of
clothing: fiber production, garment production, shipment of the garments, and the eventual disposal or recycling of the items. Although many subjects were aware that one of the four aspects may harm the environment, most of them failed to mention more than one of these as being negative factors for the environment.

*Knowledge of Environmental Impact.*

*Disposal issues.* Most participants noted that no longer used clothing is problematic as it may end up in a landfill. However, many stated they did not personally contribute to this problem, as they donated clothing to charity organizations or gave them to friends and family to avoid having them end up in a landfill. Stephanie stated that she practiced environmentally friendly behavior by keeping all clothing she no longer wore in her closet, rather than throwing them away. Many of these participants did express that although they were not directly putting clothing into the landfill, the clothing they donated or passed on to others would eventually be rendered useless and possibly end up in a landfill. When discussing the landfill issue, most participants indicated uncertainty. For example, Amber stated “if they are not sold at Goodwills, I have no idea where they go. Landfills. Or hopefully, you know, to create a different garment, yeah, reused. Recycled. I really don’t know much about this but I should”.

When discussing the landfill issue, a few participants did express concern. For example, Sarah stated “I’m hoping that somebody else wears them because I give
them to Goodwill. But unfortunately, I know that Goodwill goes to Goodwill Bins, and Goodwill Bins probably goes to garbage. Which doesn’t make me very happy.” Stephanie’s concern was expressed when she said, “we are putting a lot of synthetic fibers out into the world that aren’t going to break down like cotton does, um, so I think that is pretty awful too.” Tiffany expressed concern when she said, “it’s not good for the environment because clothes are wearing out faster, it’s going into landfills quicker.”

One participant commented on fast fashion retailer’s contribution to waste from a different perspective. Tiffany, a former employee of a fast fashion retailer discussed the irony of a fast fashion retailer’s attempt to be environmentally friendly. She said,

They used to come out with those green tote bags, like, oh reusable tote bags. Ok, that’s great, they are trying to go green. But every one of those tote bags were individually wrapped in plastic wrapped in another plastic bag in a plastic bag that goes in a box. I mean, that’s not green. I mean that is how every item is, they are all wrapped individually and there’s tons of plastic.

Participants were aware that fast fashion was contributing to the municipal solid waste stream.

*Fiber derivation and processing issues.* Discussion regarding the environmental impact of fiber derivation was much less emphasized than discussion regarding waste and landfill issues. A few participants expressed concern about the environmental impact of how fibers, both natural and synthetic, are derived. Elizabeth felt that even fabrics derived from natural sources could have negative effects on the
environment. She said, “Even the fibers that come from nature, I don’t know if those are necessarily better or worse than manufactured fibers. I mean, that can still pollute... and that has the farming issues, with the soil and the pesticides”. Michelle was also aware that natural fibers could cause pollution. She recalled,

In Textiles, how like to make the cotton there are chemicals you need to clean it and wash it and use water, and then you have to make sure it is recycled. And just growing cotton on the land and rayon is made from like tree pulp so you need to cut down trees.

_Yarn, fabric, and garment production issues._ Even fewer participants had insights about the environmental impact the production of clothing might have on the environment. However, Tiffany was concerned about the negative effects clothing processing might have on the environment. She said,

I think that fast fashion is bad for the environment...Because of the materials, the processes. ...Like it is definitely a huge connection... the whole process of making the clothes in the first place, it’s not good, the dyeing process.

Kelly felt that it was important as a consumer to be aware of what negative environmental impacts a clothing purchase might have. She stated,

I think making clothing takes a lot of energy and uses a lot of resources and so as a fashion conscious person, it is kind of important to be aware of like what you are doing to the environment by buying clothing.

*Feelings about Environmental Impact*

_Negative feelings._ The subjects were asked to share their thoughts about the connection between clothing consumption and the environment. Answers fell on a
scale of negative feelings, ambivalence, or neutral feelings about the connection.

Five subjects thought the fast fashion trend had a negative impact on the environment. These individuals thought that the short-lived trends associated with fast fashion meant that the clothing would inevitably be discarded or thrown away quickly. Amber stated,

People are buying into the fast fashion trend pretty heavily, and the more that fast fashion is used the more excess clothing, the more clothing is being thrown away obviously. Because these are garments that aren’t meant to last for a long time. So I think that it relates to the environment very negatively, um, unless we can you know, research better uses for our falling apart garments, then it’s going to have a really bad impact on the environment.

Stephanie was worried that the trendy nature of fast fashion caused consumers to feel like fast fashion was meant to be thrown away. She said,

It may give the idea that everything is more disposable. Um, but I think there is where we are kind of headed anyways. So that and I don’t really know where we put all of these clothes that we throw away either. So that kind of thing.

Danielle wondered whether the quickly changing trends created a lack of sustainability, saying, “I definitely feel that it is not very sustainable... in terms of the fact that we wear our garment and then the next day it’s out, so then we don’t wear it anymore”. She also wondered about the environmental impact caused by the quickened cycle of creating the fibers, producing the clothing, wearing and then discarding these fast fashions. Danielle stated,

When people do consume clothing, I mean there was that environmental cost to make it, like with the different plants and everything. Um, so I guess relating it back to fast fashion, the more clothing that they are making and
transporting, it is polluting the environment because all of the gasses I
guess put off by production and transportation and everything.

*Ambivalent feelings.* The majority, seven, of the participants interviewed were
ambivalent about the connection between fast fashion and the environment.
Although many identified a connection between these two subjects, they did not
consider their own role in addressing environmental issues. One participant noted
that it should be the responsibility of fast fashion companies to recycle unwanted
clothing. Stephanie said, “I think that maybe a responsible thing for fast fashion
companies is to figure out how to recycle their clothes, but definitely they have so
many consumers, why would they need to?” However, she doubted fast fashion
companies would take on such responsibility. Participants were aware of the waste
generated by discarded clothing; however, they did not plan to change their own
clothing consumption behaviors. Other participants expressed that although they
were aware of the negative environmental issues related to clothing consumption,
they did not alter their clothing consumption practices. Kimberly stated that
everything consumers purchase causes harm to the environment, and therefore,
clothing is no worse. She said,

> For me there is like I guess for me there is just like everything you buy is
> harming or is a part of the environment in some way. And part of that, like
> the way we make things is going to end up harming it, so that’s the way it
goes I guess.

Furthermore, although Naomi noted that although she is aware that clothing can
negatively impact the environment, she has not altered her clothing buying habits.
Naomi stated, “I don’t really think about that... none of my clothes I buy are like organic or anything, and that is not something that I am really, that I look for when I’m shopping for things”.

Neutral feelings. Only one subject expressed neutral feeling about clothing production and consumption and its impact on the environment. When asked if she sees a connection between clothing and the environment, Olivia said,

No. I don’t feel like it really does now that I think about it...like maybe I don’t really know where clothes go after they are thrown out. They are like biodegradable, so maybe, no I don’t think it affects it that much.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research is to identify factors that perpetuate fast fashion as well as to investigate the constructs and feelings consumers associate with the fast fashion cycle. To serve this purpose, a qualitative study was conducted in which thirteen females majoring in design and/or merchandising management were interviewed. Using McCracken’s (1998) four-step method of inquiry as a guide, I reviewed related literature, reviewed my personal experience with the topic, developed a moderately structured interview guide, and collected and analyzed data. Iterative data analysis techniques discussed by Creswell (2006) were followed. Based on findings, a better understanding of the role garment quality plays in driving individuals to cease wearing fast fashion items as well as the role garment quality plays in symbolic interaction was achieved. This process also uncovered how the female subjects felt about the poor quality of their fast fashion garments. Finally, this study yielded a better understanding of future apparel industry professionals’ knowledge of and opinions regarding fast fashion and its impact on society and the environment.

Researchers have acknowledged that fast fashion is of low quality, yet fills consumers needs because it enables the frequent purchase of new fashion trends (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007). However, beyond concluding that fast fashion is
perpetuated by rapid fashion change, researchers have not considered why consumers stop wearing fast fashion items from a more holistic perspective. Furthermore, researchers have not investigated how consumers feel about the limited lifespan of fast fashion apparel. The present research fills this gap. Refer to Figure 1, which shows the model developed from the research findings. This model provides an overview of the factors that perpetuate fast fashion’s limited life span, as well how consumers feel about fast fashion’s limited lifespan and impact on society.

![Fast Fashion Analysis Diagram]

Figure 2, Fast Fashion From Consumer’s Perspective
Findings support Birstwistle and Moore’s (2007) research by confirming that consumers purchase fast fashion because the low cost enables them to purchase new fashion trends or to purchase items they expect to wear a limited number of times. Furthermore, it provides additional reasons regarding why consumers stop wearing fast fashion items, such as communicative failure stemming from quality and fit issues, meaning conflict, and consumer boredom. The present research supports symbolic interaction theory and shows the role of quality-related issues in symbolic interaction.

Findings also provide an understanding regarding how consumers feel about the limited lifespan of fast fashion items and found that they were able to justify or cope with the limited lifespan by considering the cost versus quality trade-off, by saving for or using items for a different purpose, and/or by saving for or giving to another person or charity. Consumer perceptions regarding the social implications of fast fashion were also investigated. Feelings ranged from positive to negative regarding the impact on consumerism and the economy, the impact on consumer equality, the impact on the environment, and design ethics.

Discussion of Research Findings

Factors Perpetuating Fast Fashion

The first objectives for this research was to understand what specific factors prompt consumers to stop wearing fast fashion apparel items. The participants
revealed they stopped wearing fast fashion items for four main reasons: quality, fit, meaning conflict and boredom. When discussing clothing items they initially wore and felt good about, in most cases quality issues served as one of the driving reasons for no longer wearing fast fashion items. Complaints about product quality included: garment shrinkage, stretching and growth, holes, fading, fabric choice, stains, pilling, wrinkling, and general quality complaints. Morgan and Birtwistle (2009) also found that one reason participants in their study stopped wearing “cheaper clothing” was lower quality. Bye and McKinney (2007) conducted a questionnaire asking women why they kept things that no longer fit, but also found that many women stop wearing clothing items because of fit issues. In the present study, fit issues also contributed to participants no longer wearing some items. Meaning conflict also contributed to participants not wearing specific items, specifically when the style of the item either never communicated or no longer communicates the meaning the wearer wishes to communicate. Such a finding is in-line with Symbolic Interaction Theory.

From a symbolic interaction perspective, fashion change, or the inability of a specific appearance style to consistently communicate one’s identity over time, is often cited as the reason why consumers stop wearing certain items (Sproles & Burns, 1994, Sproles, 1979). It seems logical, and from other research (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007), that fashion change would explain fast fashion apparel items’ rapid cycling through consumers wardrobes. However, it is surprising to learn that in the
case of most items discussed in the present research, fashion change was not the reason that prompted participants to no longer wear the items as they originally intended.

Changes in garment quality, rather than fashion change, amended the perceived meanings communicated by these garments, because the poor garment quality was not in line with what the participants wished to communicate to themselves or others.

*The Role of Quality in Consumer Feelings Towards Fast Fashion Items*

The second objective for this research is to understand, within the context of symbolic interaction theory, how factors that cause individuals to stop wearing fast fashion items actually change consumers’ feelings about the items. In this study, a better understanding of the role quality issues play in changing feelings towards fast fashion items was developed. Participants felt that the quality issues cited communicate a negative self image regarding physical appearance, and cognitive dissonance for the wearer, as well as a perceived lack of awareness, lack of caring about clothing or self, or negative personality traits on the wearer.

*Consumer Feelings Regarding Limited Lifespan of Fast Fashion*

The third objective of the study was to learn how consumers feel about the limited lifespan of fast fashion apparel. Participants’ feelings ranged from neutral to negative. However, regardless of whether they had neutral or negative feelings,
participants indicated that they benefited from and planned to continue purchasing fast fashion.

Subjects who expressed neutral feelings felt that the low cost of fashion was more important to them than quality. They did not express dissatisfaction with the quality. Rather, they expressed their satisfaction with having the ability to purchase low cost but very trendy clothing items. They typically did not expect the clothing to last more than a few wears. Many bought the clothing for a special occasion and didn’t worry about whether the clothing lasted long-term. One subject thought that fashion trumped quality concerns for her age group.

Some participants noted that although they could no longer wear many fast fashion items for their initial purpose, they found comfort in the fact that the items could be used by another person or could be used by themselves for a different function. Subjects found different uses for clothing they could no longer wear for their initial purpose due to quality issues; these secondary uses include sleepwear, hiking wear, clothing to wear when running errands, or other non-public consumption. This relates back to Cluver’s Clothing Inventory Management Model (2007). Participants in Cluver’s (2007) study often held onto items they no longer wore because they felt they could be transformed into items that could serve a different purpose.

Subjects who expressed negative feelings felt that the lack of fast fashion quality was a concern. They cited negative past experiences with fast fashion clothing that
made them wary of the quality of future clothing items. They expressed their
dissatisfaction in how their clothing had shrunk, come apart at the seams, faded,
pilled, and stretched. Subjects felt that the poor quality of clothing offered by fast
fashion retailers meant that clothing they bought were not meant to be kept for the
long term. Regardless of their dissatisfaction with the quality, many felt that the low
price of fast fashion clothing justified the low quality of the clothing and the short
time that the clothing remained wearable. They felt that eventually they would care
about clothing quality, but as college students, they were more interested in
purchasing trendy clothing at low prices.

The Broader Impact of Fast Fashion

Perceived Impact on Society

Many participants felt conflicted about purchasing clothing from retailers that
employ knock off designs. They felt a sense of guilt purchasing trendy designs that
were not from the original designer, but many felt that the price point helped to
justify their purchases. Most likely, these participants are aware of this phenomenon
due to exposure to merchandising management and/or apparel design courses
throughout their undergraduate educations.

The research discovered whether the participants thought the consumerism
associated with fast fashion has a positive or negative effect on society. Some
participants felt that the consumption fast fashion could harm consumers by placing
them in debt or causing them to purchase clothing not out of need, but out of boredom. Others were concerned that by trying to keep up with trends, consumers would spend too much of their money on fashion and not on necessities. Lastly, a participant worried that by supporting large fast fashion corporations, local businesses would suffer. Although most felt that consumerism was negative for society, there were two participants who focused on how shopping helps the economy. They felt that by purchasing fast fashion clothing, consumers were helping society by supporting stores, workers, and the economy in general.

Perceived Impact on Human Rights

Many participants showed some concern over the perceived unethical labor issues associated with fast fashion. Specifically, they showed concern for factory workers overseas being paid low wages, and feared that by purchasing fast fashion clothing, they were encouraging the use of sweatshop labor. Some mentioned the low cost of the fast fashion items as being a cause for concern that the labor force was not getting paid fairly. However, although seven participants mentioned concern for the rights of factory workers, none of them had ceased shopping from fast fashion retailers.

Perceived Impact on the Environment

The participant’s awareness of the environmental impact of fast fashion was limited. Although many mentioned one type of impact on the environment, no single participant discussed the full range of impact ranging from fiber production to the
eventual discard of fast fashion clothing. Issues regarding landfill waste were most often cited by participants. Only a few participants expressed concern regarding the impact of fibers on the environment, or more specifically, the pollution caused by both natural and synthetic fibers, including water usage, pesticides, and tree harvesting. Only two participants expressed concern about the garment production issues. They were aware that clothing production takes many resources and the production may not always be environmentally friendly.

The participants were aware of some of the environmental impact caused by the production, purchase, and discard of fast fashion clothing. However, many felt that by donating their unwanted clothing to charity or by keeping their unwanted clothing rather than by throwing them in the landfills, they were helping the environment. Nevertheless, when asked what happens to clothing after they get rid of them, none of the participants had a clear picture of what happened to their donated items. Others showed concern about the rate at which fast fashion was being cycled through because this meant more ended up in the landfill.

Evaluation of Research Trustworthiness

Validation Strategies

Creswell (2007) stated that in qualitative research, “validation... [is] an attempt to assess the ‘accuracy’ of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants” (Creswell, 2007, 206). He listed eight strategies that can be
used by qualitative researchers to ensure validation. Of the eight strategies Creswell listed, I chose three.

The first validation strategy I chose was “clarifying researcher bias from the outset of the study” so that the reader can understand how any biases would affect the study (Creswell, 2007, 208). In order to reveal any biases, I first interviewed myself and used my own responses in combination with information I learned from both my pilot study and review of literature to develop a priori expectations that showed my assumptions regarding fast fashion. I also completed the interview questionnaire so that I could be aware of any prejudices that might affect my interpretations of the data.

The second validation strategy I chose was member checking, in which “the researcher solicits participants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations” (Creswell, 2007, 208). This entails taking “data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account” (Creswell, 2007, 208). After coding the data, but before completing the results section, I conducted four short telephone interviews to ensure that my subjects agreed with my interpretations.

The third validation strategy I chose was to write with “rich, thick description [that] allows readers to make decisions regarding transferability” (Creswell, 2007, 209). This allows the reader to “transfer information to other settings and to determine whether the findings can be transferred ‘because of
shared characteristics” (Creswell, 2007, 209). A biographical sketch of each participant is shown in Appendix 4. Although my sample is small, my study may uncover some universal truths that could be applied to future research.

**Ensuring Consistency**

Efforts were made on the part of the researcher to uphold consistency throughout the data collection and data analysis process. A moderately structured interview guide was used. This ensured that all participants were asked the nearly the same series of questions, and that when needed, similar planned prompts were used, as well. Consistency was also addressed by audio taping and transcribing all interviews verbatim. All of the data were collected and analyzed by a single researcher, which removes the concern of coding inconsistencies among multiple researchers.

**Limitations of the Study**

The primary limitation to this research is that as an exploratory study, it was necessary to limit the population interviewed to a small, narrowly defined population in a confined geographical region. By necessity, the research focused on a carefully tailored sample, which was very homogeneous. This limited a lot of the variables associated with choosing a widespread sample, but it also means that it is hard to generalize conclusions of my study to the larger population.

Another limitation is that although every effort was made to achieve consistency with the use of a moderately structured interview guide, each interview
differed slightly due to the relationship forged between the researcher and the participants. Planned prompts were also used, but varied due to the answers the subjects gave. The ability to gain rich data is based on the ability of the qualitative researcher to be flexible in the questioning of subjects however.

Suggestions for Future Research

As stated previously, one limitation to this study is the homogeneity of the participants. Participants were female design and/or merchandising management students. They purchased most of their fast fashion items from one specific fast fashion retailer. Future research can focus on a broader group of fast fashion consumers to verify findings. Through either qualitative or quantitative research, studies could include a broader age range, both students and non-students, both males and females, and in broader geographical locations. By expanding the geography, the research would show differences of attitudes by population density (e.g. rural, suburban, and urban sample groups). If the study was conducted on a broader group, it would be possible to detect more granularity in things such as which fast fashion companies offered garments with the lowest qualities or what types of failures or quality problems most frequently lead the subjects to discard fast fashion clothing items.

Regardless of this study’s narrow focus, findings add to the body of literature on symbolic interaction. While Symbolic Interaction literature that addressed apparel focuses on how the communicative aspects of appearance or clothing styles cause a
consumer to accept or reject clothing items, the present study addressed how quality-related issues impact the communicative aspects of clothing. Specifically, an understanding of the role quality issues have in changing apparel items’ meanings and prompting consumers to stop wearing apparel items was uncovered. Now that it is apparent that quality issues relate to symbolic interaction, future studies could be designed to delve further into this phenomenon. It could be that the role quality issues play will vary according to socioeconomic traits, personality traits, and demographics of those under investigation.

This study uncovered the subjects’ lack of awareness about environmental issues surrounding fast fashion. None of the subjects, currently all undergraduate students, were aware of the extensive environmental impact of clothing consumption from fiber through to discard. The sample was relatively homogenous regarding their required coursework and choice of majors. Therefore, there are serious curricular implications needing to be addressed. One follow up study would be to make some changes to the curriculum in a class required for all Design and Human Environment undergraduate majors regarding the environmental cost in the production to discarding of clothing items. One section could be taught about the environmental costs and another section could act as a control group. The study could be replicated in the exact manner, with individuals from each group answering questions about why they stop wearing fast fashion, how they feel about it, and what effect clothing consumption has on the environment. The only variable
would be the change in the curriculum, and it could test for a change in environmental awareness.

Another suggestion for future research would be to mine for the affective dimension of the study. For example, the interview could be followed up by a written survey that focuses on emotional impacts of clothing the subjects brought in. This would take an in-depth look at the feelings that drove the subjects to discard their fast fashion clothing items. This could be accomplished by using a five-point scale that will have subjects rate their feelings on the strength of their feelings, and with a more objective look at their feelings. The interpretation of feelings into positive, neutral and negative feelings would be easier to categorize. A psychological instrument measuring self-esteem could be used to correlate changes in the subject’s feelings about fast fashion items versus more classic clothing items.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW GUIDE
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Section 1

Grand Tour Question #1: Please tell me about your clothing purchase behavior.

Planned Prompts:

a. How would you describe your current style?

b. Are you concerned with keeping up with current trends?

c. What stores do you purchase clothing from and why?

d. How do you feel about H&M, Zara, Forever 21, and Mango?

e. Do you plan to continue buying clothing from these retailers? Why?

f. How frequently do you buy clothing?

g. In total, how much do you think you have spent on clothing within the last twelve months?

h. How much of that amount do you think you have spent on clothing from Zara, Forever 21, H&M, or Mango?

i. Where does your clothing budget come from?

Section 2

Auto-driving props: Show me five fast fashion clothing items you no longer wear

Grand Tour Question #2: Tell me about this garment

Planned Prompts:
a. Where did you purchase it from and what brand is it?
b. How long ago did you get this garment?
c. What was your motivation to purchase it?
d. Would you say it was expensive, moderately priced, or inexpensive?
e. When you first wore this garment, how did you feel?
f. Approximately how many times did you wear this garment? Is that
   not often, often, or very often for you?
g. When did you stop wearing this garment?
h. What things contributed to you not wearing this anymore?
i. How did you feel the last time you put it on?
j. If anything could be changed about the garment to make you wear it
   again, what would it be?
k. Did you have any issues regarding quality or performance of this
   garment?
l. How would you feel about yourself if you wore this now?
m. How would you feel wearing something pilled? Faded? Shrunken?
n. How do you feel about not being able to wear this anymore?
o. What do you plan on doing with this garment now?
p. When you decided to purchase this garment, would you have been
   willing to pay more if it would have lasted longer? Why or why not? If
   yes, how much mor
Section 3

Grand Tour Question #3: Please tell me your feelings regarding garment lifespan.

Planned Prompts:

a. The items you brought in today are considered by some as “fast fashion”. Fast fashion retailers encourage consumers to make frequent purchases in their stores by continually bringing in new fashion-oriented clothing items and selling them at low prices. How do you feel about this concept of “fast fashion”?

b. Is this a good thing, bad thing, or neutral thing for consumers?

c. Is this a good thing, bad thing, or neutral thing for society?

d. How long do you think clothing items should last?

e. What factors influence that decision for you?

f. How do these factors relate to the garments you brought in today?

g. What do you think happens to clothing items after you get rid of them?

h. Where do they go?

i. Please share your thoughts about the connection between clothing consumption and the environment.

j. Is there a connection? If so, what do you think it is? If not, what are the reasons that you think there is no connection?
APPENDIX 2

PRE-INTERVIEW LETTER
PRE-INTERVIEW LETTER

[UNIVERSITY/ DEPARTMENT LETTERHEAD]

[Date]

Dear [Participant’s Name]

Yesterday I spoke to your DHE 255 class and you indicated that you were interested in participating Dr. Chen’s and my study about fast fashion. As I said yesterday, the purpose of our study is to look at five clothing items that you no longer wear and learn why you no longer wear the items, as well as how you feel about not being able to wear the items anymore.

Your participation in this study is complete voluntary. If you no longer want to participate, I understand. Furthermore, if you arrive at the scheduled interview and change your mind either before or after I have started interviewing you, I will understand and will stop the interviewing process.

The interview will be held in Milam 333 and will last up to two hours. You will need to bring five clothing items that you currently have but do not think you will ever wear again. Any clothing item is ok, as long as it is not pajamas, outerwear, undergarments, accessories, or athletic wear.

If you are still interested, please respond to this email and indicate which of the days and times displayed below would work for you. After I receive your response, I will email you to confirm the date, time, and location of the
interview.

You will only be interviewed one time for up to one hour. However, from the list below, please let me know all of the dates and times that would work for you

(note to IRB: these are fictional dates, as we do not know when we will have IRB approval)

January 3:  either 10:00am, 12:00pm, or 2:00pm
January 4:  either 10:00am, 12:00pm, or 2:00pm
January 4:  either 10:00am, 12:00pm, or 2:00pm
January 5:  either 10:00am, 12:00pm, or 2:00pm
January 6:  either 10:00am, 12:00pm, or 2:00pm

Thank you,

Miriam Collett
APPENDIX 3

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT
[UNIVERSITY/DEPARTMENT LETTERHEAD]

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project Title: An examination of factors that perpetuate fast fashion and consumer feelings regarding fast fashion

Principal Investigator: Dr. Hsiou-Lien Chen

Student Researcher: Miriam Collett

Version Date: 11-21-2010

1. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS FORM?

This form contains information you will need to help you decide whether to be in this study or not. Please read the form carefully and ask the study team member(s) questions about anything that is not clear.

2. WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?
The purpose of this study is to look at five fast fashion clothing items you no longer wear and discover what issues led to you no longer wearing these items. I also want to discover what feelings you have about not being able to wear this clothing any longer.

Up to fourteen people will be invited to take part in this study.

3. WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

You are being invited to take part in this study because you are enrolled in DHE 255 Winter term 2011. Your instructor has agreed to let us recruit study participants from her class. We are interested in learning about how you feel about the fast fashion clothing items you no longer wear. As a college student, you are likely to have purchased and worn fashion-oriented clothing.

4. WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?

If you participate, the study activities include an interview. During the interview, I (Miriam Collett) will ask you to show me five pieces of clothing that you have worn in the past but no longer wear. I will have you tell me about each clothing item and explain why you no longer wear these items and what, if any, feelings you have about not being able to wear these items any longer. I will be recording and taking notes during the interview. I will use these notes and audio recordings to arrive at
conclusions about my research topic. Only Dr. Chen and I will have access to these notes.

**Study duration:** The interview will begin if and when you sign the consent form. We expect that the interview will last for one to two hours. I will set up an appointment that is convenient for you and I will ask you to come to an empty Milam Hall conference room to interview you. I will schedule a short telephone follow up interview with you to ensure accuracy in my interpretations and conclusions.

**Recordings and photographs:** I will be audio recording the interviews to ensure that my interviews are transcribed verbatim. I will also take photographs of each of the clothing items. I will not take pictures of you, the participant. The audio recording is a requirement of my study, so if you do not wish to have me record the interview, you should not enroll in the study.

______ I agree to be {audio recorded and photographed}.  

*Initials*

______ I do not agree to be {audio recorded and photographed}.  

*Initials*
Significant new findings: My thesis research is an exploratory study that will help find reasons consumers stop wearing fast fashion garments and their feelings about no longer being able to wear these items. There is presently no research about this topic, so my study will expand the body of research about why consumers discontinue wearing fast fashion garments.

Storage and Future use of data or samples: All hand-written notes taken during the interview will be stored in a locked file cabinet in our offices and ultimately transferred to our private password protected computer. We will assign you a pseudo name, so nothing you say in your interview can be traced back to you. After the notes have been transferred to our computers, we will then shred all hand-written notes. Also, after this project is completed, we will delete all computer files containing notes taken during the interview; we anticipate that the project will be completes by March 18, 2011. The consent form you sign will be stored in a file cabinet in Dr. Chen’s private office.

Study Results: A copy of the final results will be available to you upon request. If you want a copy of the results, contact Dr. Chen at hsiou-lien.chen@oregonstate.edu

5. WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND POSSIBLE DISCOMFORTS OF THIS STUDY?

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this study.

6. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?
There are no foreseeable benefits associated with participating in the study. This study is not designed to benefit you directly.

7. WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?

You will not be paid for being in this research study. However, if you choose to be a part of the study, you will receive ten extra credit points in your DHE 255 class. If, after reading this form, you decide not to participate, you will still receive the ten extra credit points. Also, if you sign the form and then decide not to participate after the interview has started, you can stop participating and will still receive the ten extra credit points.

9. WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION I GIVE?

The information you provide during this research study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. Federal regulatory agencies and the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. Some of these records could contain information that personally identifies you.

If the results of this project are published your identity will not be made public.
To help ensure confidentiality, we will use pseudo names in the interview notes so your answers will be kept confidential. We will lock up all interview notes in a filing cabinet in our locked offices. We will transcribe and store all interview notes on our personal password protected computers and will shred all written notes. Furthermore, we will delete all computer files that contain interview notes after the final research report is written.

9. WHAT OTHER CHOICES DO I HAVE IF I DO NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

Your DHE 255 instructor has provided you with an alternate ten point extra credit assignment if you do not choose to be a part of this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study. If you choose to withdraw from this project before it ends, we will destroy all notes taken during the interview. Furthermore, we will not use any information collected during your interview in our final report.

10. WHO DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact:

Dr. Hsiou-Lien Chen
Email: hsiou-lien.chen@oregonstate.edu
Phone: (541) 737-0996
Office: 334 Milam Hall

If you have questions about your rights or welfare as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office, at (541) 737-8008 or by email at IRB@oregonstate.edu

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.
APPENDIX 4

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF INFORMANTS
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF INFORMANTS

Michelle (pseudonym)

Michelle is an apparel design major at OSU. When asked to describe her style, she said she would call it “clean”, because she likes to be put together at all times. Her style ranges from girly to punk, and everywhere in between. She is interested in keeping up with trends, and cites fast fashion retailers Forever 21 and H&M, as well as Urban Outfitters as her favorite places to shop. She enjoys the cheap and trendy nature of fast fashion stores, but does feel some guilt for wearing clothing that is knock offs of designer fashions. She shops more often at home where there are more stores available. In the past twelve months, she had spent a thousand dollars on clothing, and somewhere between one half and three fourths of that money was spent at Forever 21 or H&M. She doesn’t have a job at school, so her clothing budget came from her mom or money she saved from birthdays or presents.

Elizabeth (pseudonym)

Elizabeth is an apparel design major at OSU. Her style is casual, loose, and trendy. She said that she likes neutral colors with a pop of color to make it more exciting. She said that she is inspired by trends, but she only follows the ones that speak to her. She is not worried about being out of date, because she said if you wait for a year, it would be back in style. She enjoys shopping at boutiques in Portland, Oregon, but also goes to Urban Outfitters, Target, Forever 21, H&M, or Pac Sun if she wanted less expensive options. She enjoys shopping at Forever 21 and H&M because
they offer basics but also have clothing that is out of her comfort zone in a price range that she can afford. She had heard about ethical issues associated with shopping at fast fashion retailers, so she was trying to shop at small boutiques more often as her budget allowed. In the previous year, she had spent between three to four hundred on clothing, and approximately one-third of that was spent at Forever 21 or H&M. Her clothing budget came from what she earned working during breaks from school or summer.

Sarah (pseudonym)

Sarah is an apparel design major at OSU. She considers her personal style eclectic, because she is into vintage, modern, and sporty clothing. She said that she is trendy, but does not follow trends that do not fit into her personal style. She looks to fast fashion retailers to help her afford trendy clothing that have a limited lifespan. She shops from Exit Real World, an Oregon-based skate and snowboard shop, Nordstrom, Urban Outfitters, H&M, and Forever 21. She enjoys shopping at fast fashion retailers because she is able to afford the trendy clothing or things she only plans to wear to one event. She shops about four times a year, and buys multiple items at a time. In the previous year, she spent $800- $1000 on clothing. Only about $150 to $200 was spent at the fast fashion retailers. Her clothing budget comes mostly from her mom, and she babysits or does random jobs on campus to help supplement her clothing budget.
Amanda (pseudonym)

Amanda is an apparel design major at OSU. Her personal style is casual, but when she dresses up, she enjoys being very girly. She doesn’t consider herself trendy, and only wears what she likes, whether or not it is currently in style. Her favorite places to shop are Nordstrom and Mario's in Portland, Oregon. She still shops at Forever 21 and H&M on occasion, but the frequency at which she shops at these retailers has decreased because of the low quality. She shops mostly in Portland when she goes home. In the past year, she estimated she spent between twelve to fifteen hundred dollars. Of this money, she thought that five hundred was spent at either Forever 21 or H&M. During breaks from school and during summer breaks, she works as a nanny, so her clothing budget comes from that or from gifts from her family.

Kimberly (pseudonym)

Kimberly is an apparel design major at OSU. Her style is self-described as eclectic. She collects clothing, and mixes and matches them to come up with new styles. Her favorite places to shop are Goodwill, TJ Maxx, H&M, and Target, and Forever 21. She doesn't shop often, only once every few months. In the last year, she has spent $500- $600 on clothing, and of this, maybe $150 was spent at fast fashion retailers. Her clothing budget is mostly her credit card, or comes from her campus job. Most of her job money goes to rent, so whatever is left is spent on clothing.
Kelly (pseudonym)

Kelly is an apparel design major at OSU. Kelly purchases vintage or vintage inspired clothing, as well as fast fashion clothing. She is not tied to trends unless she likes them. Her favorite stores are Forever 21, Wet Seal, Charlotte Russe, and vintage clothing stores, because they are affordable. She shops at least once a month, but during the summer, she shops constantly. During the last year, she has spent four hundred dollars on clothing. At least half of this amount was spent at fast fashion retailers. Her clothing budget came from either the money she earned in the summer or money give to her by her parents.

Stephanie (pseudonym)

Stephanie is a merchandising management major at OSU. Stephanie is interested in being up to date on trends but does not want to pay a lot for her clothing. Her favorite clothing stores are Forever 21 and Nordstrom Rack, because they are affordable. She is most interested in less expensive clothing clothing, but also checks seams and zippers to make sure they will hold up to wear before she buys them. She estimates that she shops for clothing approximately once a month. and that she spent about $700 on clothes during the past year. At least half of that is spent on fast fashion retailers such as Forever 21 and H&M. She does not have a job at school, so her clothing budget comes from her parents.
Tiffany (pseudonym)

Tiffany is an interior design major at OSU. Tiffany’s style is current and not expensive. She is more interested in paying her rent than keeping up with current trends. Her favorite place to shop is Forever 21 because it is inexpensive. She also likes to shop at Tj Maxx, Ross, and H&M. She doesn’t shop often, but shops before the school year begins. In the last year, she estimates that she spent $1000 on clothing, most of which was spent at forever 21. She attributes this amount to the fact that she had to purchase clothing for an internship. Her clothing budget comes from her part-time job and her parents’ support.

Amber (pseudonym)

Amber is a merchandising management major at OSU. She attempts both trendy and classic looks, and wears a lot of black because it goes with everything. She purchases clothing from smaller boutiques as well as major retailers such as Nordstrom, H&M, Forever 21, and Zara. She is motivated to purchase clothing from fast fashion retailers because they offer the current trends. She is a constant shopper, and purchases clothing at least every other week. She could not answer how much she spent in a year, but estimates $300 in a week, most of which was spent at fast fashion retailers. Her clothing allotment comes from her job on campus as well as the general funds she is provided with for her education.
Danielle (pseudonym)

Danielle is an apparel design major at OSU. Danielle’s description for her style was “sparkles”. She felt that she had to possess a “wow” piece at all times. She does not worry about following trends. Her favorite stores are Forever 21, Nordstrom Rack, and H&M. She spent $500 in the last year on clothing, and more than half of that was spent on fast fashion clothing. Her clothing budget came from her on-campus job and her job with her dad during the summer.

Naomi (pseudonym)

Naomi is an apparel design major at OSU. Naomi is not into following trends and described her style as casual. Her favorite clothing stores are Forever 21 and H&M. She calls herself an obsessive shopper, and buys clothing at least once every other week. She spent approximately $2400 in the past twelve months, and ninety percent ($2160) was purchased from fast fashion retailers. She supports her shopping habit by working frequently. Everything she spends is from what she earns, and she does not use credit cards to buy clothing.

Olivia (pseudonym)

Olivia is an apparel design major at OSU. She described her style as comfortable and active. She follows some trends, but tends to favor comfort over fashion. Her favorite places to shop are Forever 21, Urban Outfitters, Anthropologie, American
Eagle, and occasionally H&M. She is more interested in getting more for her money at this point, and favors low prices over quality. She goes shopping two or three times a month, often with her mom in Eugene, Oregon. In the past year, she estimates that she spent between $600- $700 and that about$400- $500 of this amount was spent at fast fashion retailers. Her clothing budget came from her parents, in particular her mom, who encourages her to shop because of her major.

Kristin (pseudonym)

Kristin is a merchandising management major at OSU. She considers her style to be slightly trendy, although she mostly favors classic looks. She dresses for her age, and shops for current fashions rather than current trends. Her favorite places to shop are Nordstrom, Forever 21, H&M, Tj Maxx and Ross. She favors fast fashion for the low prices and deals, but shops at Nordstrom for classic wardrobe pieces. Since starting school, she has lessened the amount she shops at fast fashion retailers because she has learned about ethical issues associated with these stores in her merchandising classes. She shops at least once a week for new clothing, and buys at least one thing each time she visits a store. In the last year, she estimated that she spent $1000. Of this amount, $200 was spent at fast fashion retailers. Her clothing budget comes from working at a bar, and she considers her tips her shopping money.
APPENDIX 5

AFFINITY DIAGRAM: INTERNAL COMMUNICATIVE CHANGES
AFFINITY DIAGRAM of PARTICIPANT QUOTES

Internal Communicative Changes

Group 1: Poor quality and fit lead to negative self-image regarding physical appearance

I’d probably feel fat because, just because they are not comfortable.

Um, probably a little disheveled because the seam is coming undone. And a little frumpy because it is shrunken weird.

I’d feel like reality self-conscious and really giant, and really like I need to go home and change, like when is the class over? For sure, awful, yeah.

Insecure, gross and dirty.

Clothes that are in bad shape need to be recycled, or thrown out. Wearing them would make me feel bad about my outer appearance and probably not help me to be in a confident mood. I wouldn’t feel good about myself and therefore people would see that and not see me in a positive way.

Wearing these items would make me feel bad about myself – reflecting how I feel on the inside.

I hate that. Oh, yeah, horrible and I hate it and like I feel like I am being cheap or I look cheap or like irritated sometimes like I remember I had a jacket that I really liked and it pilled up really bad on the sleeves and I hated it because I always wanted like to wear it but every time I wore it I was like, oh, it’s pilled up and it was agitated for sure. I don’t like that at all. And a lot of times, like if it shrinks funny or
whatever, you feel like not good in it, you know. Usually you try to wear it because you are like I really like this, and you just don’t feel good in it, yeah.

It just doesn’t feel good because it is all stretched out. And it doesn’t make me feel good.

On its own, I wouldn’t feel too cute. I would fell like my clothes were too small, and like, oh God, how much weight did I gain? But really it has been washed and shrunken and blah blah blah, so, I wouldn’t feel too cute whatsoever.

I don’t really wear it anymore because the fabric really pills a lot, like it is just really awful. And it makes me feel like I have a fuzzy butt when I wear it. ‘Cause it’s all like fabric pills and stuff.
Internal Communicative Changes

Group 2: Excessively work clothing causes cognitive dissonance for the wearer.

I know with pilled stuff, it really bothers me. I try to pick it off. A lot of my clothes are from fast fashion stores so they are not the best quality, so I try to make them work. It is more like a worn look; it is part of how they wanted it to look.

Um, I don’t like it at all. I don’t think it looks good, and I wouldn’t, I wouldn’t want to wear it out if I didn’t like how I looked in it. I have a really long torso, so it is really hard for me to find things that won’t shrink, so yeah.

It is starting to pill. I hate that look. I think that is time when you know your clothes, that they have had their...(Interviewer: That it is over?) Yeah, exactly. And then it shrunk, like when I first put if on, it was like this long. (Interviewer: Wow, so like three inches longer?) Yeah, it was one of those, like I like to have tank tops that come down lower and it used to be like that but it is not any more.

I think I’ve only had this for a year, but it just looks old. Um, it is kind of doing the same fabric pills I’ve talked about. It is a cotton knit shirt, but, um it is really stretched out at the waistband, so that is kind of annoying. But it is longer, so I mean it is nice to be able to layer it with things so it’s long, Bit I mean it just kind of looks dirty and of because I think things have kind of faded on it. I don’t know. It doesn’t look very nice any more.
The fabric quality just sucks. Uh, it stretches out really easily and it is just too big and too long and just after one wear and wash it just lost the whole shape of it, like it's just completely... not what I wanted, not what I bought.
I should probably just throw it away because it has these embarrassing holes everywhere and it's got these stains, and so I just don't wear it any more.
APPENDIX 6

AFFINITY DIAGRAM: EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIVE CHANGES
External Communicative Changes

Group 1: Poor fit signals the wearer's lack of awareness.

They would probably think that I needed to size up on my shirt. “And does she know that her bra is showing?” There’s nothing, nothing good. Like, maybe I am not aware of what I am wearing and how it fits me.

They would perceive me as not being aware of how this thing was fitting me, I guess.

If I was wearing something tight to where you could see like an indentation, I think they would be like, “Girl…size up! Seriously!”

I don’t think they would be like, “Wow – that is a cute shirt!” They would be like, “Wow – that is a bit small. Next size up, sister!” Something like that.

They would probably be like, “That girl should not wear it.” No, I don’t know. People would probably say things, like, “Size up a little bit.”

People would probably be like, “That shirt is too small for her, or she should wear that to bed. Or what is she – 12?”

Things that are shrunk is that doesn’t fit right. Not how it is supposed to fit. That doesn’t quite look right. Doesn’t make you look as nice, your image is coming across differently in these clothing items. “That doesn’t fit her right.”
External Communicative Changes

Group 2: Poor quality clothing implies a lack of caring (about clothes or self).

That bothers me. When clothing have pills on it, I need to take all of them off. Fast fashion things pill a lot. People wear a lot of fast fashion, not as strange, think I look tacky. I suppose that they might see me, that I don't care too much about my appearance just because I am wearing clothing that is best. I don't care about my clothing, just threw something on. Shows that that person can't really afford another shirt.

That it is old, out of date.

Holes and stains show that a person doesn’t take care of their clothes. Taking care of clothes or appearance shows how much a person cares about their appearance. This can either be a good thing or a bad thing. Usually if somebody cares about their appearance, they care about their inside, too.

I never feel good in those clothes. I just feel like people can see that like your clothing is not up to par. Like even if they are completely adorable, like I have this top and it has a really cute floral pattern, but it’s pilled everywhere. Actually I think this sweater is pretty pilled. But I mean it definitely does show a lower quality in your clothes. (Interviewer: So do you think that reflects onto you?) Yeah, it is a little more of a negative connotation. Yeah.

You buy cheap clothes or don’t take care of your garments.
“She doesn’t care.” If you are going to judge me on my pilled clothing, I don’t care about you. In middle school, that time in your life, it sucks when other people were shopping at the mall and I was still wearing them at Goodwill. No big deal to me.

External Communicative Changes

Group 3: Poor quality clothing conveys negative personality traits on the wearer.

I would probably be pretty self-conscious because, I mean, it is not super noticeable with the drape. But I don’t know. If someone else saw it and were like, “There is something on your shirt,” I’d be pretty embarrassed.

I guess the stain to me is like sloppy or had an accident and looks bad. Especially a big one, it looks bad. I don’t want to wear it any more.

Lazy. Don’t care about my appearance.

Lazy. Don’t care about myself that much.

They would probably perceive me to be in a bad mood and lazy, sloppy, maybe? This is a very sloppy shirt to me, because it is faded and can tell that it’s not…it’s been worn. It’s worn, yeah.

That you are a slob. But I do this every day. Klutzy. A slob.

You don’t care about yourself and are not responsible.

Don’t be cheap, and buy a new shirt.

You can’t afford good quality clothing. I can’t afford it, the super spendy clothing.

They would think you can’t afford it, or maybe that you are lazy about taking care of clothes. Messy, or a slob.