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How do consumers make sense of sustainable consumption: a study on lived experience and discourses

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Abstract

This paper investigates the understanding of sustainably conscious consumers on their consumption and non-consumption experience of sustainable clothes from a phenomenological perspective. It further elaborates on the underlying discourses that inform consumers way of understanding sustainable consumption and practices aligned with that understanding. For this objective a Foucauldian discourse analysis was integrated under phenomenological framework in order to gain insights into both the consumers' reflection of their 'lived' experience at micro level and how these experiences reflected the dominant discourses that inform their understanding, from a macro level perspective. Nine interviews were conducted with nine Swedish sustainably conscious female consumers who purchased both sustainable and non-sustainable clothing items. The findings illustrated three perspectives where consumers experienced different types of emotions ranging from positive ones, like empowerment and gratification, to negative ones, like anxiety and guilt, showing that consumer experience of sustainable consumption was highly emotional rather than rational. In the case of clothes, the nature of clothes having high symbolic values added to the various conflicting discourses, making the consumers experience even more intense internal conflicts when not acting accordingly to their sustainable beliefs. In addition, consumers understanding was also found to be highly subjective, individualized and influenced by prior experience, as consumers made sense of different discourses and shaped them in their own way to fit in with their own values and everyday life. They further made use of different alternative sustainable consumption practices other than the one being asked in order to address their sustainable values and identities.

Keywords: Sustainable consumption, sustainable clothes, sustainable discourses, fashion discourses, identity creation

INTRODUCTION

This paper is examining sustainably conscious consumers' understanding of consuming sustainable clothes by looking at cases of both consumption and non-consumption. The study is further examining the role of discourses in shaping the sustainably conscious consumers' understanding and consequently their behaviors.

On the field of sustainable consumption various approaches have been taken and different aspects have been examined during the millennial age. Previous research has addressed the issue of 'why don't consumers consume sustainably' where a large focus has been put to the attitude-behaviour gap. In many cases with hypothetical situations with a very general sample was employed and that consumers would like to consume more sustainably largely due to social conformity (Meyer. 2001; Papaoikonomou et al. 2011; Markkula & Moisander, 2012; Joergens, 2006; Lundblad & Davis, 2016; Jägel et al. 2012; Shen et al. 2012). In other cases, the question 'why do consumers consume sustainably' has also found mostly egoistic motives where consumers wanted to create a pro-sustainable identity (Lundblad & Davis, 2016; Bly et al. 2015). Moreover, these studies have addressed various fragments of the consumer experience and not addressed the consumer, or their experience, as a whole. They have also limited their view on consumption to acquisition practice while ignoring other aspects of consumption including usage and disposal. These approaches have been criticized as flawed due to their limitation of using specific models, looking at fragments or predefined concepts and hence inevitably reproduced the same results (Shove, 2010; Solér, 1996).

In arguing that it is important to look at the consumer experiences to fully understand them, Chatzidakis & Lee (2013) highlight the absence of research that focused on both consumption and non-consumption practices, saying that only looking at one aspect will not give a full understanding of the consumer's perception, emotions, motivation, values or beliefs and how they constitute an integrated whole. Studies that have addressed consumers' experience, on the other hand, often took a discursive approach that resulted in customer rationales and justifications for not having consumed sustainably (Eckhardt et al. 2010; Markkula & Moisander, 2012; Papaoikonomou et al., 2011), thus not capable of fully elaborating consumers understanding and meanings.

The previously used approaches also, to various extent, have not addressed the role that cultural or symbolic meaning plays in consumption and how consumers make sense of their own lives in everyday practices (Connolly & Prothero, 2003) as well as neglecting the role of emotions (Belk et al., 1998). The notion of cultural meanings is largely influenced by the discourse of consumer culture, where consumers continuously need to renew themselves, re-evaluate their identity to modify and further shape it. As such, identity creation and re-creation using cultural meanings is a never-ending process (Belk, 1988; Arnould & Thompson, 2005; McCracken, 1986). Essentially marketing has been given the blame for creating and managing this consumer culture (McCracken, 1986, Solomon & Anand, 1985; Solomon, 1986; Connolly & Prothero, 2003; 2008) where cultural meaning is imbued into goods and then adapted and structured by consumers to create their identities. Connolly &

Prothero (2003) continue to argue that people consume meanings ascribed to a product rather than the tangible product itself. Therefore, exploring the meanings perceived by consumers through their consumption practices is essential in order to establish a holistic view on consumers understanding of sustainable consumption.

As clothes have been associated with high symbolic value, the role of meanings is even more relevant and crucial to be addressed in such cases (Hoque, 2014; Thompson & Haytko, 1997; McCracken, 1986; Solomon & Anand, 1986). It is also a highly visible product which is easily used as a means to communicate a certain identity, for self-fulfillment, or imbuing personality traits (Thompson & Haytko, 1997; Taylor & Costello, 2017). This makes clothes more intensely associated with meaning, both cultural and symbolical, which is also why consumers have been calling sustainable fashion an oxymoron. where the business model of fashion encourages consumers to continuously work on themselves and their communication of self-identity by consuming more while sustainability is seen as the antithesis of consumption (Bly et al. 2015). In the case of clothes, Connolly & Prothero (2003; 2008) and Chatzidakis & Lee (2013) find that the consumer culture plays a vital part whilst when investigating sustainable consumption other practices are also important as parts of the self-image that can be reflected by assessing lived experiences.

Our aim is to investigate consumers understanding of sustainable clothes consumption. We look at the meaning of sustainable consumption to the consumers as reflected in actual previous experiences, as well as taking a broader holistic approach without predefined meaning where both sides of consumption from consumer's perspective are taken into consideration, whilst addressing a methodological gap by applying a phenomenological approach to address the lived experience. As such, thoughts, beliefs, emotions, values, motivations (Chatzidakis & Lee, 2012) and other dimensions of the lived experience will be addressed in order to let the consumers freely explain their understanding from their perspective (Solér, 1996).

Moreover, Moisander et. al. (2010) and Chatzidakis & Lee (2013) propose that most reasons people state for consuming or not consuming come from the society, institutions, companies and marketing. In other words, people get their ideas from the environment to form their ideas of meanings. They argued that consumers' beliefs about sustainable consumption are not their own; rather they are taken from discourses presented to them in society and adapted as own. Similarly, Giesler & Veresiu (2014) criticize the notion of the naturally born consumer as misleading. They say that although it might seem like a free act, the notion of freedom is shaped by market actors (Autio et al., 2009; Moisander et al., 2010). Thus, we also aim to address the issues of understanding sustainable consumption while lifting our gaze to look at discourses created by society and how they inform consumers understanding and practices. It has further been brought up that women tend to be more pro-sustainability and perform more sustainable consumption practices than men (Autio et al. 2009; Lundblad & Davis, 2016) which is also why this paper focused on female consumers.

Considering our two objectives, rather than using a solely phenomenological approach, we decided to employ integrated qualitative methods, combining phenomenological and critical

discourse analysis methodologies as suggested in Hood (2016). Hood (2016) argues that by utilizing a mixed methodological approach, we could profit from a dual lens to investigate qualitative information both as lived experience and discursive practice. This also corresponds to our focus on both the sustainable consumption and non-consumption as lived experience from consumers perspectives as well as the governing discourses that affect their way of thinking and conceiving in such decision-making. Our objective therefore is to address the two following research questions:

How do consumers understand their consumption of sustainable and non-sustainable clothes?

What underlying discourses inform their understanding and practices?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Solér (1996) stresses the importance of how personal experience shape consumer's understandings of sustainable consumption as well as their motives for engaging in such practices. Understanding how consumers make sense of their sustainable consumption practices can only be gained by describing the meaning of such practices for the individual. The consumer will make sense of and ascribe meanings in various ways which are personally shaped. Therefore, only by describing lived experiences can we see in what way sustainable consumption is meaningful to consumer and how that has informed their understanding of it.

Consumers understanding can be represented and described in various dimensions like reasons, thoughts, emotions, beliefs, values and self-image but what they all have in common is that they reflect deeper meanings for a consumer. These meanings are, as Chatzidakis & Lee (2013) argue, adapted as own but come from society and different institutions and organizations, which evidently stresses the importance of addressing dominant discourses that might have been adapted by consumers in their own understanding and perception of their everyday life.

We will start by touching on how discourses about sustainable consumption has changed, then addressing the various discourses that influence consumers understanding on sustainable clothes consumption, including; discourses on its definitions, consumer culture discourses and price. Next, we proceed to address how different discourses can cause inner conflicts for consumers and how consumers cope with the conflicts in pursuing a desired image of self that is aligned with their co-existent values.

Sustainable consumption will lead the way towards sustainable development

By the millennium shift consumers mainly perceived sustainability in terms of recycling practices (Connolly & Prothero, 2003), while neglecting the role of consumption or how they as consumers would be responsible for environmental degradations through their consumption choices (Connolly & Prothero, 2003). Some years later we saw a change in the dominant discourse where consumers are considered a market force for sustainable development, where regulating consumption could help solve environmental issues (Connolly

& Prothero, 2008) and therefore putting a great deal of responsibility on their shoulders (Moisander et al. 2010; Giesler & Veresiu, 2014; Bly et al. 2015; Hoque, 2014; Connolly & Prothero, 2003; 2008). In essence, there exists a discourse of empowerment embraced by consumers as they are seen as a powerful market force that can transform the marketplace through their choices and acts of consumption towards sustainable development (Bly et al. 2015).

When consumer power and responsibility was taken into consideration, sustainable consumption was perceived in terms of a rational decision where altruistic motives lead the choice. However, Bly et al. (2015) later found that it was in fact mostly driven by egoistic motives where sustainable consumption has been linked to creations of identity. Connolly & Prothero (2003) also explain that sustainable consumption is promoted through a commodity discourse where sustainable consumption offers an image of being a better person if you still consume but choose more sustainable options. They argue that consumption in itself has a certain communication value on a personal and societal level and that meaning of consumption should be considered if we want to understand the consumer from their perspective. Due to the commodity discourse and ideology of consumption the pleasure of consumption is exchanged for the pleasure of self-fulfillment (Bly et al. 2015), stressing that the choice is individualistic and egoistic, as well as emotional rather than rational (Connolly & Prothero, 2008). Hobson (2002) further says that the rationalization discourse lacked addressing the cultural meaning attached to consumption like personal identities and social concern, as discussed above. The importance of understanding the meaning is partly due to the belief that consumers through sustainable consumption are regarded as a key player for sustainable development (Hobson, 2002; Connolly & Prothero, 2003; 2008, Hoque, 2014).

The notion of consumers regulating their consumption for the cause of sustainable development, however, is just a façade to strengthen the image that consumers have power with their freedom of choice (Moisander et al. 2010; Giesler & Veresiu, 2014). Nonetheless, it is illustrating a dominant discourse of the consumer within the field of sustainable consumption.

In this study, we draw on the case of sustainable clothes, thus the following part addresses the various meanings attached to sustainable clothes consumption and therefore discourses within that field.

Sustainable clothes consumption – various definitions

Sustainable consumption in the case of clothes has been scrutinized in various ways over time. One of the main issues is the existence of differing definitions and ascribed meanings which have not always been shared among researchers or consumers or between the two (Bly et al. 2015). One dominant discourse is that of sustainable fashion which has a focus on ethical aspects, regards to worker's conditions, aspects of environment and organically sourced material, with a large focus on the garment itself (Joergens, 2006; Lundblad & Davies, 2016; Henninger et al. 2016). Sustainable consumption in this view means to buy better sourced products that are more sustainable, but not addressing consumption as an issue. With a different perspective, Clark (2008) proposes the discourse defined as slow fashion

which promotes long-term thinking in addition to quality of an item seen as durable, for example organic or recycled materials made in timeless designs or cuts as they could work all year round without being sensitive to seasons and losing cultural meaning. This second perspective therefore questions the notion of fashion as being exclusively centered around the acquisition of new and reinventing the self. Since slow fashion focuses on the pace of consumption and advocates to reduce the impact of it by choosing in a more thoughtful way, Henninger et al. (2016) also stress that consumers perceive sustainable fashion contradicting to sustainability and slow fashion due to the fast turnover in the fashion industry. In addition, Bly et al. (2015) find that consumers viewed sustainable fashion as a paradox due to the business model upon which fashion is built. Another aspect is put forward by Lundblad & Davies (2016) who argue that the usage of clothing has an even greater impact on the environment beyond the purchase and initial choice. As such, the notions of use, reuse, care and disposal should not be excluded from the definition of sustainable consumption (Connolly & Prothero, 2008; Lundblad & Davis, 2016), showing sustainable consumption could also be reflected through non-consumption practices such as caring for and extending the life length of such products.

Bly et al. (2015) find in their study that sustainably conscious consumers use the term sustainable fashion as an umbrella term for slow fashion, covering all aspects from purchasing less frequently and more durable clothing, to choosing better sourced materials and turning to second-hand and sewing or upgrading own clothes. Such a definition stresses the complexity of sustainable clothes consumption as the way consumers perceive it could vary. Henninger et al. (2016) conclude in their study that the definition of sustainable fashion is subjective and that people have a set of beliefs and associations about sustainable fashion that could differ from others, which suggests that there are different personally experienced realities. These differing ways of perceiving what sustainability is when it comes to clothes and to whom reflects the complexity and the different meaning embedded with sustainable consumption. In order to understand the consumers perspective and not set any frames to their own definitions whether it is called slow fashion or sustainable fashion, we would take into account not only the purchase, but also the usage and disposal, and being open to the aspects that sustainability can be perceived differently among consumers to be in line with how consumers use products and services to express themselves with various meaning (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

This leads us to the next discourse about how meanings are created and imbued into consumption practices and products.

The antagonist of sustainability – Consumer Culture – a means for creating self

There is a shared understanding in the field of consumption that consumer goods and services can carry and communicate cultural meaning, therefore their values should not be limited to the utilitarian aspect (McCracken, 1986; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Instead, consumer goods and services can be considered the creations and creators of meaning. Society is built on beliefs and assumptions about culture, just as McCracken (1986) argue that consumer goods have a performative function where they embody cultural meanings for individuals,

and the meanings move from goods to consumers but are also interchangeable. Actors like advertising offer a lexicon of cultural meaning provoking different associations with the use of visual, textual and emotional means. Meaning is constantly changing and consumers are encouraged to change as well through continuous consumption as a continuous project. Consumption is thus a tool to create, foster and develop personal identities where symbolic meaning is an outward expression of self and the connection to society (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004; Hoque, 2014). Consumption is a way of leading the good life, helping to create a certain desired image as a better person for the consumers (Connolly & Prothero, 2003; Thompson & Haytko, 1997). The transfer of meanings reflects an underlying sociocultural process, where cultural shared meanings and values move between macro-societal structures to the micro-practices in the everyday life (Thompson & Haytko, 1997). The macro-societal structure reflects activities of cultural intermediaries and it moves to cultural discourses where the consumer interprets these messages and finally choses the desired ones to create a self and social identity. Put differently, meaning is constructed on a higher level, and meaning is a conversation between the intermediaries and the consumer. Sometimes meaning is a choice and sometimes it is subject to social conformity or manipulation by dominant forces (Thompson & Haytko, 1997).

Solomon (1986) highlights that some products possessed extraordinary symbolic significance to consumers in comparison to others, such as clothes, where products were used as a mean to define aspirations and fantasies emphasizing value creation. As Belk (1988) says, humans are primarily seen as consumers, we are what we have. While we might imbue our own identity on our possessions we may also ascribe identity from them onto ourselves, reflecting this sociocultural process. Consumers might want to choose certain products to fit into a created lifestyle but can also bend the meanings they perceive of those products to fit their life circumstances (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

All of this builds on a dominant ethos of radical individualism centered around personal distinctiveness and autonomy in lifestyle choices (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). In this study the product of interest is clothes which is why it important to address the meaning of them and the influence of prevailing discourses in the following sections.

Cultural and symbolic meaning intensified for clothes – playing on emotions and desires

As Solomon (1986) notes, clothes possess an extraordinary symbolic significance, while Thompson & Haytko (1997) argue that consumers use various fashion discourses to constantly renew, recreate, defend and modify their identity. Some of the discourses in fashion are the moral of consuming, conditions of self-worth, pursuit of individuality, the relation of appearance and personality traits and many more. These different discourses serve as a platter of options for consumers to combine and experiment with and can forge opposing values and beliefs, causing inner conflicts and distress (Thompson & Haytko, 1997). Since clothes are not regarded solely to their utilitarian value but rather in terms of fashion and lifestyles, many different institutions put great emphasis on ascribing meanings to them (Thompson & Haytko, 1997; McCracken 1986). Similarly, McCracken (1986) argues that clothes were more complex than other goods since meaning was ascribed from so many

various actors but also under constant change and scrutiny from various actors. Being a more complex commodity, emotions and immersion are used in the communication of fashion discourses to affect the consumer in deriving symbolic meaning to a greater extent (Taylor & Costello, 2017). Fashion has a way to immerse consumer's self-perception in cultural meaning and ideals created by society that foster a materialistic lifestyle and obsession over physical appearance (Thompson & Haytko, 1997). Clothes further play a sociocultural role represented in their symbolic value (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Moreover, they are also seen as an extended part of the self, in cases when there is a disparity between the ideal and real self the symbolic meaning intensifies, causing a greater internal tension (Solomon & Anand, 1985). To understand the meaning of clothes also means to understand the discourses presented within the fashion industry, but also to understand how such consumption is experienced and lived and how it ultimately plays a vital role in communicating and presenting the self (Colls, 2004; Hoque, 2014). Colls (2004) also argues that emotions are connected to clothes. This emotional connection to clothes mirrors a wider context of the individual construct of self but also a deeper relationship to clothes that women have. They feel empowered though choice of clothes in how it is related to the construction of identity. In that aspect emotions are linked to internal values. Values are defined by desirable goals that serve as a guide and personal values can be conflicting (Jägel et al. 2012). Some of these emotions come from a pressure of serving to social conformity to choose the right item for the right occasion (Solomon & Anand, 1985).

Ruth et al. (2002) propose that emotional aspect should not be regarded by itself, rather they are cooperating with cognitive interpretations with regards to consumption practices. As emotions are very subjective, they can have various effects on consumption practices. Colls (2004) says that emotions should be addressed due to their intersubjective nature as being self-reflective, requiring active perception and identification from the consumer. Thus, intersubjective emotions interact with thoughts and are constructed by the self, just like the acquisition of goods is a construct of self. Emotions that focus on personal and situated elements of everyday life and experiences give means to understanding consumption dimensions of consuming clothes. Moreover, emotions are linked to thoughts, beliefs and virtues or aspirations just like the idea of self-identity creation (Grappi et al. 2014; Williams, 2014). Arnould & Thompson (2005) says that actions, feeling and thoughts create certain pattern, behaviour and sense-making. Thus, they give a way to make sense of the surrounding and cultural meaning.

Low price culture

It is believed that all discourses are socially constructed by various institutions and appropriated by consumers, so is the discourse of price. In this field Moisander et al. (2010) argue that the logic of economic rationality is still very dominant where the price-quality ratio is an ever so important evaluation criterion in purchases. As such the rational part of the consumer will search for lower prices and bargains. In the fashion market it has become an even more crucial competitive factor where the strategy of major clothing brands like Zara and H&M is to offer the latest fashion at an affordable price. The availability of such low-price fashion products creates a point of reference for what clothes could cost but concealing

the real costs these items have for society and environment, therefore making the sustainable options unattractive as they are more expensive in reference to the cheaper ones. Moisander et al. (2010) call these lower prices artificial as they are at the cost of non-sustainable development and business strategies. Price has in previous studies been a hinder for sustainable clothes consumption that has foregone consumers ethical, environmental or sustainable belief (Joergens, 2006, Meyer 2001, Henninger et al. 2016; Jägel et al. 2012) where the sustainable clothes have been referred to having a premium price. Jägel et al. (2012) says that price is the dominant criterion for some consumers, if it is too high then other attributes or positive traits of the sustainable clothes will not be considered as price is the first barrier. On the other hand, Henninger et al. (2016) note that premium price is often perceived by only consumers who lack the experience of having bought a sustainable clothing item and as such do not know what it actually costs. Some consumers perceive sustainable clothes to be of higher price but also consider it being of higher quality which gives them value for money, suggesting that this premium price is a tool to promote egoistical values and construction of self (Lundblad & Davis, 2016; Henninger et al. 2016). Payment also serves as a mean for an investment in self from a symbolic perspective (Belk, 1988) where the reasoning about price is as Moisander et al. (2010) mentioned reflected in terms of price and quality. Bly et al. (2015) find in contrary that sustainable fashion pioneers believe that goods are not valued at their 'true' price and that 'cheap' goods could not actually be truly sustainable.

Internal conflicts from clashing values and images of self

Chatzidakis & Lee (2013) address the issue of reasoning on different macro- and micro-levels that can be linked to different ideological beliefs, thus creating an inconsistency for consumers. In addition, Connolly & Prothero (2008) find that being sustainable is only one aspect of consumer's identity and negotiating their moral beliefs due to different perceived roles pressured them. While negotiating between different roles, they experience dilemmas, ambivalence and compromise. When the sustainable beliefs or concern is compromised, they experience feelings of distress, helplessness (Hoque, 2014), guilt and anxiety (Connolly & Prothero, 2008). Such feelings are resulted from the feeling of responsibility and personal concern which stem from the the discourse of consumers being a powerful market force that can lead sustainable change. On the contrary, when they do act accordingly, consumers feel empowered reflecting positive feelings (Connolly & Prothero, 2008). Thus, the resulting feelings and the perceived responsibility should not be seen separately as the personal concern as it reflects self-orientation. Therefore, sustainable consumption needs to be addressed as a process, including feelings and responsibility for self and at larger rate (Connolly & Prothero, 2008).

Consumers have different ways of coping with these negative mixed emotions, where they sometimes turn to other sustainable practices or products (Connolly & Prothero, 2008; Lundblad & Davis, 2016) or turn to non-consumption practices (Chatzidakis & Lee, 2013) to make up for their inconsistent consumption behaviour.

In the first case, in order to address their sustainable values, consumers can choose from different practices that were more or less important in their everyday life and in line with their lifestyle (Connolly & Prothero, 2003). The chosen practices are highly linked to how consumers arrange, attach and ascribe value and meaning to their consumption and different goods. Thus, it is important to look at the consumer experience as a whole for some sustainable practices might trump others and be used to communicate their sustainable self since some practices will be more aligned with the consumer's values than others, which is essentially shaped by the consumer as highly subjective and individual. Sometimes alternating practices can result in putting larger emphasis on other sustainable products and at other times it can be about other aspects of consumption that is not related to the acquisition (Connolly & Prothero, 2003; 2008).

In the second case, consumers highlight non-consumption to distinguish themselves from others is society and uphold a green identity and values of sustainable concern (Connolly & Prothero, 2008; Chatzidakis & Lee, 2013). Non-consumption is divided into two aspects where the first one is to consume overall less and the second one is to totally not consume certain products or brands that are believed to have been green-washed in order to gain market share (Chatzidakis & Lee, 2013). In such cases that a consumer decides to go against certain consumption practices out of sustainability concerns it is a way to translate the concern into action and is treated as a sign of commitment (Chatzidakis & Lee, 2013). Both consumption and non-consumption practices are ascribed meaning, possessing sign values and serving as a mean of communication although non-consumption is harder to detect through visual communication due to its absence (Connolly & Prothero, 2003; Chatzidakis & Lee, 2013) so if meaning for consumer is to be addressed both sides need to be accounted for (Chatzidakis & Lee, 2013).

In essence, the sustainable perspectives and practices of consumers are hand-picked to fit their lives, other roles, moral beliefs and values (Connolly & Prothero, 2008; Lundblad & Davis, 2016; Chatzidakis & Lee, 2013). This further stresses how consumer choice is a complex matter especially for products linked to more intense sign values, like clothes (Chatzidakis & Lee, 2013). Because of this complexity a consumer can readdress a matter by highlighting other practices that are invested with certain meaning, but perhaps not linked to the practice or product asked for. This serves as a way to negotiate the symbolic meaning.

These competing values cause trade-offs and the motivational incongruences pave the way for some preferences to be fulfilled over others (Jägel et al. 2012). Coping with this make consumer form their own definitions but also in some cases makes them avoid consumption practices to feel good about themselves (Lundblad & Davis, 2016). As Arnould & Thompson (2005) state, in order for consumers to make sense of their lives, prevailing discourses, images, texts and objects are used through sometimes overlapping and even conflicting practices, identities and meanings.

All of this taken together, sustainable consumption is thus hard to approach since meaning needs to be addressed to understand the consumer. The notion of understanding meaning of consumption comes from a consumer culture that encourages constant consumption and

creation of self through acquisitions of new goods. Stressing how the discourse of consumer culture has a very strong bond to meaning creation. Meaning as such can also be found in non-consumption practices, whereas self-creation has been taken from consumer culture to be used against it as a statement.

Therefore, in the field of sustainable consumption there are two major streams where one is more closely attached to the consumer culture discourse of creating self, encouraging consumer to keep consuming but with better sourced 'sustainable' objects. In the case of clothes that discourse goes under the term of sustainable fashion. The other stream linked to the impact of consumption in general, is that of slow fashion, which is about consuming but at a lower pace.

All of these discourses are somewhat linked to the discourse that consumers are responsible with their actions for the sustainable development in society. As Giesler & Veresiu (2014) note, consumption and the responsibility aligned with it appears as a free act but is very much shaped by market actors which is furthermore built upon an individualistic view of humans as consumers before anything else. In this freedom, what makes the consumer free is essentially the power of money to choose their ideal 'self', whereas acts of consumption can rarely take place without it.

METHODOLOGY

Interpretive research

Our study takes an interpretive approach to sociological research methodology which puts the meaning-making practices of individual human at the center of scientific explanation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The main assumption of this research methodology is that social reality is shaped by human experiences and social contexts, therefore the reality can only be interpreted through a sense-making process as opposed to a hypothesis testing process (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Such a philosophical basis is contrasted by the positivist or functionalist point of view which considers the reality as independent of the context, therefore can be abstracted and studied on its own using objectives techniques such as standardized measures (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

In line with our argument that most reasons people state for consuming or not consuming were shaped by society or marketing, our study of sustainable clothes consumption is based on the above-mentioned philosophical viewpoint that reality is socially constructed and can only be studied from the understandings or perspectives of individuals. Secondly, in the case of ethical consumption studies which also involves our study on sustainable clothes consumption, the interpretive approach is often advocated over the opposing positivist approach by several researchers (e.g. Cherrier, 2005) as they have argued that the latter could not take into consideration the emotions often involved in ethical consumer choice in their behavioral models. In other words, they advocated the use of sense-making practices of human factors over the hypothesis testing approach in order to derive scientific knowledge.

Thirdly, the interpretive methodological approach is suitable for "exploring hidden reasons" in complicated social phenomenon (Bhattacherjee, 2012), such as in our context of sustainable clothes consumption, where several previous quantitative studies have been criticized for involving social bias in self-report survey as well as for the limited ability of numerical and rating scales to express consumer opinions (Auger et al., 2004).

Interpretive phenomenological method

Phenomenology is one of the common techniques used under the interpretive methodology, which specifically emphasizes the study of individual conscious experience in order to understand the reality (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

A guiding concept in phenomenological research is the concept of intentionality, which refers to the internal experience of being conscious of something (Husserl, 1962; as cited in Sóler, 1996). According to Husserl, every intentionality is comprised of a noema and noesis. The noema refers to the phenomenon – or appearance of a real object of interest, which varies depending on the specific context in which we are looking at that object (Ardley, 2005). In other words, the noema only exists in our consciousness (Ardley, 2005). On the other hand, the noesis refers to the meaning we construct towards that object, derived from our perception of that object (noema) (Ardley, 2005). Putting together, intentionality implies that human experience is contextualized and has a specific focus (Goulding 2005; Thompson et al., 1989)

In line with the philosophical viewpoint of interpretivism, a phenomenological perspective considers society as being composed of differing perceptions of reality. In phenomenology reality must be interpreted based from individual's embodied experiences of that social reality (Goulding, 1999; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Therefore, researchers using phenomenological approach have to focus closely on individual experience to capture the common features and meaning of an experience (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). In line with this, Solér (1996) argued that consumer's understanding of ecologically friendly buying is bound to their personal experience, therefore this kind of behavior should be investigated from a phenomenological perspective to gain a description of the experience as 'lived'.

In addition, although phenomenology requires putting special focus on the consumers' individual consumption experience and their perception and the meanings they ascribed to such experience, meanwhile "the researcher's conceptual categories are secondary to the participant's experiential ones" (Thompson et al., 1990), the use of theoretical orientation is not completely negated in the interpretive phenomenological approach. Instead, theories can be used to address the research focus and make decisions regarding research designs, such as sample, subjects and research questions (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Thus, in our study, theory was not used to generate hypotheses but to serve as an orienting framework to interpret the findings specifically on the emotional side of consumption and the power of discourses. Such use of theories is argued to not affect the description of individuals about their experience, thus is still in line with the principle of phenomenology that puts participant's lived experience at the central of study instead of pre-generated hypotheses.

Foucauldian discourse analysis

Although phenomenology and Foucauldian discourse analysis are two different qualitative methods that are based on different ideologies and interests, the integration of both methods into a study can enable a more efficient approach to generate knowledge (Martínez-Ávila & Smiraglia, 2013; Hood, 2016). Rather than opposite approaches, phenomenology and Foucauldian discourse analysis can actually be complementary as the former can give insights into individual interpretation of an experience at micro-level and the latter explore the ways discourses at a macro level affect such individual understandings (Martínez-Ávila & Smiraglia, 2013; Markkula & Moisander, 2012).

According to Foucault, discourse refers to institutionalized ways of thinking and speaking about aspects of reality, which define what can be said and what cannot in a context (Cheek, 2008). In this way, discourse transmits and produces power by its capability to produce the "effects of truth" (Alonso, 1988). Discursive frameworks enable people to differentiate the validity of statements about the world, through which they order reality in a certain way and at the same time discourses also hinder other alternative views of that reality, which is also in line with the phenomenological ideology that society is composed of different perceptions of reality (Cheek, 2008; Waitt, 2010).

In addition, Foucauldian discourse analysis is also consistent with the philosophical viewpoint of interpretive phenomenological approach in individual's knowledge and understandings are influenced by external environment. The concept of knowledge under Foucauldian discourse analysis refers to the meanings that people have to interpret and make sense of the world around them. Such knowledge is derived from the discursive practices that people encounter throughout their lives (Jäger & Meier, 2009). Thus, knowledge is not objective and value-free, rather it is conditional and contingent on where an individual locates in history, geography, social class (Cheek, 2008; Jäger & Meier, 2009). According to Foucault, knowledge is an exercise of power and power is a function of knowledge.

Foucault's theory of discourse provides us a theoretical framework to understand how particular knowledge or ways of thinking become common and dominant, while other ways of interpretation become silenced (Waitt, 2010). This also reflects our second objective of gaining insights on what discourses are dominant and how do they shape the perception and understanding on sustainable clothes consumption of the sustainably conscious consumers. The use of Foucauldian discourse analysis in this case serves as an orienting framework or frame of reference to interpret our findings, in which not only the discourses that shaped people's behaviors would be described but also the power-struggle among those discourses.

By integrating Foucauldian discourse analysis under the phenomenological framework, this study aims to not only investigate the understandings of sustainably conscious consumption about their consumption and non-consumption moments of sustainable clothes, but also reveal the dominant discourses that exist and shape those ways of thinking. In addition, such integration is also feasible due to the fact that both methodologies can both rely on interviews as the primary data collection strategy similar sample size, thus they can be applied to the same dataset (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

Interviewing and Sampling

Heidegger used the concept of co-constitutionality (Koch, 1995) to indicate that the meanings derived from an interpretive research are co-created by both participant and researcher within the focus of the study (Lopez & Willis, 2004). In order to make interpretations based on an "intersubjective understanding" between researcher and consumer (Apel, 1972), interview is the most suitable method for data collection as it enables the researchers to test their interpretation with the respondents (Solér, 1996; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). In such interviews, it is up to the interviewees to describe and interpret his or her lived experience of a specific phenomenon and the researcher subsequently interprets their narratives (Goulding, 2005; Thompson, 1998). This approach to conducting interviews was influenced by Bryman (2003) who proposed the notion of `rambling', meaning that the researcher should provide minimal guidance and allow considerable latitude for the interviewees to make their own agenda.

Under the approach of phenomenology and Foucauldian discourse analysis, we collected data through personal interviews and purposively selected participants based on their consumption experience with sustainable products (Patton 2002; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Due to our research focus on sustainably conscious consumers who purchase both sustainable clothes and non-sustainable clothes, we on purpose selected participants who could fulfil such criteria. Such purposeful selection of respondents is an acceptable sampling strategy in the case of interpretive research in order to fit the nature and purpose of the study (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

Our study is based on 9 interviews with fashion consumers who are sustainably conscious and purchase both sustainable and non-sustainable clothes. A convenient sample was used in order to fulfil the criteria, recommendations from respondents and other people of who could be suitable for an interview were also used. Another method to get in touch with the suitable respondents was through a sustainably profiled clothes store: 2 out of our 9 respondents were contacted and asked for an interview when they were seen shopping at the store.

Our number of 9 interviews is among the typical sample size for phenomenological studies which ranges from 1 to 10 persons, and also corresponds with the small sample size of discourse analysis (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). It is also in line with the notion of theoretical saturation when additional interviews do not provide any new knowledge (Guest et al., 2006; Morse, 1994). The interviews were conducted in Swedish as the native language of the respondents, lasted about one to one and a half hour each, were recorded, transcribed and translated with their consent, into English to be used as quotes in this study. They were guaranteed anonymity so the names presented are fictitious.

Interviewees	Gender	Nationality	Occupation	Age
Fiona (1)	Female	Swedish	Studying	25

Anne (2)	Female	Swedish	Working	28
Louise (3)	Female	Swedish	Working	30
Mary (4)	Female	Swedish	Working	25
Emma (5)	Female	Swedish	Working	30
Hannah (6)	Female	Swedish	Working	28
Jenny (7)	Female	Swedish	Working	30
Suzie (8)	Female	Swedish	Working	46
Patricia (9)	Female	Swedish	Studying	29

Table 1. Demographic description of interviewees

The interviewees include 9 Swedish females with a range from 25 to 46 years old, the majority of which are young professionals without children (Table 1). The demographic profile of the respondents was not an important criterion for selection, as previous studies have shown that demographics and socioeconomic factors have no significant relationship with the use of sustainable or green products, with the only greatest consistency was found for gender as female consumers are more likely to exhibit sustainable behaviors (Fisher et al., 2012). The respondents include both those who are working and those studying, both people working in fashion-related areas and those who do not.

The interviews focused on the interviewees' reflections of both experiences when they consumed a sustainable clothing item and when they chose a conventional one over sustainable alternative. In order to lead the respondents to recall the experience and enable them to describe the experience as 'lived' as possible, the opening question of the interview is particularly important (Thompson et al., 1989). It was crucial to ask questions about the specific experienced instead of abstract interpretations or opinions of the respondents about the experience (van Manen, 2016). The interviews started with very specific questions, when the interviewees were asked to recall two clothing items that they recently purchased, one sustainable and one non-sustainable item.

The starting question would be specific towards one of the item, in this case it was: "What was that item that you recently bought?" and "What in this item that was appealing to you?". Follow-up descriptive and open-ended questions starting with "How" and "What" were also used in order to make the respondents give a description rather than explanation or justification about their consumption and non-consumption experiences (Thompson et al., 1989). For example, the interviewees were also asked "How did you feel about purchasing this [sustainable/non-sustainable item]?" Questions of broader nature were also brought up to

get a whole picture of the respondent's understanding of clothes in general and sustainable clothes in particular to get a whole picture, for example "What do you often look for in [an item]?", "What do you mean by "[reasonable price/sustainable/a certain style]?" and so on. In addition, there was also additional questions to get more information on individuals' interest in fashion and clothes and their perceived relationship with clothes if those had not been revealed. This additional information enabled to make sense of one's own narrative.

Interpretive analysis

In interpretive research, the observation of phenomenon is to be interpreted from the respondents' eyes and embedded in the social context (Bhattacherjee, 2012). The interpretation occurs at two levels: the first level of interpretation involves viewing the phenomenon from the subjective perspectives of the respondents, and the second level involves understanding the meaning of those individual experiences (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

The interview material was analyzed in an iterative process based on the principles of phenomenological analysis, continuously moving back and forth from the pieces of transcripts to the entirety of the social phenomenon and relating to theoretical framework in order to match the empirical material with theoretical explanations that can reconcile the diverse subjective viewpoints of individuals (Arnold & Fischer, 1994; Bhattacherjee, 2012; Goulding, 2005; Thompson, 1996; Thompson et al., 1994; Thompson & Haytko 1997). First, individual transcripts were read by considering "each transcript as a whole and relating separate passages of the transcript to its overall content" (Thompson et al., 1989). In this stage, meaning unit is generated by "crystallising and condensing" the interviewee's statements across the whole interview (Hycner, 1985). The next stage was thematisation. This procedure is when transcripts are read across interviews aiming for the identification of themes capturing the direction or focus of experience (Thompson et al., 1989). According to Ardley (2005), these themes "represent the interrogation of the meaning units, in terms of the particular issues of the study". In this step, some of the meaning units was made redundant and crossed out for the purpose of this inquiry as the researcher had to address the research questions to the units of general meaning previously identified (Ardley, 2005). The iterations between the understanding and meaning of the phenomenon and observations continues until "theoretical saturation" is reached, which is the point where additional iteration does not yield any more knowledge about the phenomenon of interest (Bhattacherjee, 2012). The analysis would result in a "thick description" of the phenomenon that can also communicate why the respondents behaved in the certain ways (Bhattacherjee, 2012). In this study, the end result of the analysis is a description of the different perspectives on sustainable clothes consumption (and non-consumption) and the relevant discourses that shaped people's perspectives and behaviors.

Research methodology rigor

Lincoln & Guba (1985) proposed a set of criteria to assess the rigor of interpretive research, including dependability, credibility, confirmability and transferability.

The current research can be considered as dependable and authentic as the phenomenon of sustainable clothes consumption was assessed independently by two researchers using the same materials before discussions were made to reach consistent conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The credibility of the current research was improved by verbatim transcription of the interviews before an English translation was made to be quoted in this paper. These transcripts can be provided upon request for the purpose of further studies or independent audit of data collection and analysis.

In addition, the finding of this study has high level of confirmability, a notion referring to the extent to which the finding can be independently confirmed by others (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In our interviews, the interviewer frequently stated and summarized her own inferences in order for the respondents to confirm or correct such inferences, which makes the findings confirmable by the respondents.

On another hand, the nature of interpretive research which focuses heavily on contextualized nature of inferences and different subjective experiences makes it less replicable and generalizable (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Thus, the current study is subject to low transferability.

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

The analysis of 9 conducted interviews resulted in three perspectives on sustainable clothes consumption and non-consumption for sustainably conscious consumers: positive feelings arising from sustainable clothes consumption, negative feelings arising from non-sustainable clothes consumption, and emotional gratification arising from non-sustainable clothes consumption justified by sustainable consumption-related discourses.

The next section will then elaborate each perspective in 2 parts: the respondents' description of their experience in consuming and not consuming sustainable clothes, and how their understandings and practices in these experience were informed by certain discourses.

1. **Positive feelings arising from sustainable clothes purchase**

1.1 The "feel good" experience of sustainable clothes consumption

Many respondents described having positive or good feelings regarding their experience of consuming sustainable clothes, which was also similarly illustrated in previous studies (Connolly & Prothero, 2008). However, as individuals have different focus and form different definitions as to what constitutes sustainable clothes consumption (Bly et al. 2015; Henninger et al., 2016), the source of positive feelings also varied across individual respondents.

Some respondents paid attention to the brand or company at large and experienced the positive feelings when purchasing clothes from brands that they believed to take environmental and/or ethical issues such as worker conditions into their production (Joergens, 2006; Lundblad & Davies, 2016; Henninger et al. 2016). One example can be seen from the experience of Fiona who bought a jacket from Fjällräven in which she described her preference for this perceived sustainable brand and how she felt to have their clothes on:

Fiona: *"It feels good to have them [Fjällräven items] on you know [...] Yeah, like, I do not know precisely, precisely how they do but they talk a lot about their environmental work, you know that they for instance extract chemicals from outdoor-products and that kind of stuff and are making it more environmentally friendly which I think is good because I like our planet and I do not want it to die before me".*

Meanwhile, some other respondents paid more attention to the materials of the garment itself (Joergens, 2006; Lundblad & Davies, 2016; Henninger et al. 2016). Their positive feelings arose when they purchased and wore clothes that were made from perceived sustainable materials, which in many cases referred to the natural fibres but can also be materials of non-animal-origin depending on the individual. For example, Mary's experience in purchasing two "vegan blouses" revealed her vegan lifestyle and the positive feeling involved in her pro-animal action:

Mary: *"So then I try to choose a bit like this, a little more silky clothes [blouses] maybe but I'm vegan so I do not buy silk but a bit more shiny [...] I do not want it to be of animal origin, preferably for me because I'm vegan, I feel more comfortable so I think it's really tough if you go to H & M with all of those, the buttons on the blouses are often of animal origin... [...] When it comes to being vegan, it's more emotional, it feels good. It's like, it feels like you've done well, then nobody has had to suffer unnecessarily for this."*

A few respondents also mentioned that they felt good when buying clothes that have "green tag" or "eco lables". Although they were aware that the labels did not mean that the items were necessarily better than the without-label items in terms of sustainability, neither did it mean that the production of those items did not leave any damage, they still favored the labelled products (Galarraga Gallastegui, 2002) and expressed positive feelings when seeing such labels on a clothing item. For example, Louise often bought eco clothes when it came to basic clothing items such as t-shirt and tank top:

Louise: *"Yes, I think it's better when it's eco... For me it looks better and feels better, but since I try to be aware that it's not always that it means so much either [eco clothes are not always more sustainable than non eco], but it meets a minimum requirement to be able to have it [the label or certification] So yes, feel better. [...] When I see that it is eco, it is the same with food and stuff, then I get an idea I think that is so stuck since childhood that eco means better for the environment and then you know, like, well some eco-stuff have not used some toxins but have done other things that affect bla-bla-bla [some eco clothes can be bad for environment in a different way] but I think that, the feeling is better."*

Although the individual respondents experienced the positive feelings arising from the sustainable clothes consumption differently, they all agreed that the sustainability aspect of the clothing items was a bonus rather than a priority in their check list. The criteria that were

higher up on their list were functional fit, social values including social conformity and identity creation, especially when there is a special occasion such as weddings, work and price issue (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Moisander et al., 2010; Thompson & Haytko, 1997; Sheth et al., 1991). This is not to say that sustainable concern was not important. Instead, it is consistent with the finding that when all other criteria including price, convenience, fit and desired style are equal, the consumers would go for the sustainable options (Joergens, 2006; Meyer, 2001). Fiona's statement makes their point clear:

Fiona: *"The most important thing when buying a winter jacket is after all that it keeps you warm, and then I'm very happy if it can also be environmentally friendly […]*

But now it's a Fjällräven jacket and it costs quite a lot but this time I got a giftcard so I got it much cheaper. Otherwise I'm not sure I would've felt that I could afford to spend that money on this jacket, I can be paranoid by things like that. […] I am very happy that I found it from a company that works with sustainability and environmental issues but it was more like a bonus".

1.2 The discourses underlying the experience of consuming sustainable clothes

What was noted at first was the variance of definitions of sustainable clothes consumption conumers had, reflecting several discourses and how they were grounded in subjectivity (Henninger et al., 2016) where consumers merged and tweaked the meanings to be aligned with their values and everyday life. In their experiences, individual respondents made sense of sustainable clothes in their own ways, which to a large extent depends on their personal experience and interest (Henninger et al, 2016; Bly et al. 2015; Solér, 1996; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). For example, as a vegan, Mary seeked for the pro-animal dimension of the clothes; meanwhile Fiona who was very knowledgeable about and interested in the environment made sense of sustainable clothes in terms of their environmental friendliness.

Secondly, the positive feelings that people got from their consuming sustainable clothes can arguably be partly connected to the discourse of consumer's responsibility and power in leading sustainable development (Connolly & Prothero, 2008; Giesler & Veresiu, 2014; Moisander et al. 2010). As Jenny is saying: *"... but I think that you vote with your money like when I am shopping...".* Put differently, the respondents felt good as they believed that they carried out a good action that can contribute to the welfare of the environment or other causes in the society. This can be seen from Fiona's statement where she agreed that she felt happy as she was doing something good for the planet with her purchase:

Fiona: *"At least I have not done anything bad, sometimes it feels like the only thing you do is to keep it the way it is. […] Maybe you don't contribute so much to making it better all the time but at least you are not making it worse."*

The tendency to take responsibility for one own's decision and consumption was also seen in the experience of Mary who believed that when she was uncertain about the materials of an item, she would get the information herself by simply using Google:

Mary: *"If I would be uncertain before I buy I would have Googled it. Like, I do not know what this material is, it's just a google away."*

The third discourse is the discourse of self-identity creation which guides people that they can signal a certain identity via their clothes, through which they can differentiate from or align with certain groups of people (Hoque, 2014; Piacentini & Mailer, 2004). This discourse can be seen from the above experiences as the respondents wanted to find clothes matching certain styles that they identified themselves with or that conformed to certain "dress codes" perceived as desirable in certain social spaces such as workplace. An example can be seen from Mary's statement regarding her experience in choosing the vegan blouses to wear at work:

Mary: *"I'm always with a customer, or how do you say, and then my recruiting company wants that I'm going [...] dressed like the best part of the dress code is."*

Another discourse is the low-price discourse which informs consumer's tendency to search for lower prices and bargains (Moisander et al., 2010). Many of the respondents mentioned "reasonable price range" reflecting their subjectivity and ambivalence regarding what price is deemed low. However, it is also worth noticing that the low-price discourse is less influential when people considered the clothes as a low risk investment, which was often the case when the item was to be used for long time such as outerwear like jacket and came from a familiar or highly transparent brand that they already had good experience with (Solér, 1996; Jägel et al. 2012, Bly et al. 2015; Lundblad & Davis, 2016; Connolly & Prothero, 2008), as in the case of Fiona's jacket:

Fiona: *"I was prepared to pay that money... I have experience of this brand, which makes me feel safer with it... My view is that they are often clear about what they have."*

Her previous experience had shaped her understanding of the quality that the brand would perform and when put into the quality-price relation such investment was perceived as reasonable as the respondents believed that it would lead to less purchasing overall and therefore be more economical. A similar example was found in Patricia's statement:

Patricia: *"It is better to buy something that might cost a few hundred more like but that you can have [it longer], then you just have to do it [purchase] less frequently"*

The above-mentioned discourses shaped the respondents' understandings and practices in that they informed several common criteria that consumers took into consideration when shopping for clothes: identity or style fit, social values, price issue and sustainable concern. In this perspective, the discourse of consumers having power and responsibility in sustainable consumption caused no conflict with the other discourses in shaping the respondents' understandings and practices and sustainability was considered at times a bonus of the purchase. Such bonus enabled them to align with their sustainable values and communicate this desired identity, as well as experience a sense of responsibility and accomplishment which consequently resulted in positive feelings.

In the next perspective that describes the experience of non-sustainable consumption, the struggle or conflict between the discourse of consumer power and responsibility in leading sustainable development and the discourse of self-identity creation as well as the low-price discourse will be even more visible when the sustainability criterion was neglected in favour of the other two criteria.

2. Negative feelings arising from non-sustainable clothes purchase behaviors

2.1 The experience of anxiety, guilt and bad conscience arising from non-sustainable clothes consumption

The respondents, when describing their experience of consuming a non-sustainable item, expressed that they felt bad, guilty, shameful or anxious about their purchase or when wearing the item. These negative feelings were also found in previous studies that investigated the inconsistent sustainable behaviors when people do not act accordingly to their sustainable concern (Connolly & Prothero, 2008; Hoque, 2014).

As can be seen from the interviews, some of the respondents expressed bad conscience when talking about their purchase of items from a brand with bad reputation when it comes to sustainability. In other words, the negative feelings arose from the thought of purchasing items from bad brands. H&M was a commonly mentioned brand in this case, as in the experience of Louise:

Louise:*"But that's because H&M has such an extremely bad reputation with everything from production to how they treat like people in the factories to I do not know what. So it does not feel good to buy H&M."*

The respondents also experienced the negative feelings when they thought about the consequences or negative impacts that those clothing items and their production would have, which made them feel bad for being a bad person. These are the cases of Louise, Jenny and Patricia:

Louise: *"… like in my world like my club bubble where you're like "no but you should not do so and what right do you have to buy these stuff that people have or children have sewn and people have died in factories just because you're not able to search a little bit longer" so I think there's something like this that if you want to be a good person and then you weren't [with her H&M purchase]…"*

Jenny: "*This exploitation of people that I think is awful that makes me get a bad conscience when I buy clothes that are not ethically produced….* "

Patricia: "*… because I know it is at the costs of someone else and it does not feel right*"

When describing the negative feelings they experienced when consuming non-sustainable clothes, some other respondents paid more attention to the misalignment between their self-values or lifestyles and the non-sustainable consumption. For these respondents, the negative feelings arose from their understandings of this misalignment or inconsistency between their values and their practices (Connolly & Prothero, 2008). For example, Hannah said that she

was normally a very "*analytical and comparative consumer*", highlighting that she would think and choose very carefully before buying an item as a sustainably conscious consumer. Thus, the consumption of a non-sustainable pair of pants appeared to be an exception case in which her purchase was inconsistent with her values, which made her feel negatively:

Hannah: *"I feel partly a bad conscience because it's not really a choice where I live as I learn"*

Similarly, Louise expressed an even stronger negative feeling when she said she felt shameful regarding the non-sustainable consumption as she considered such experience as misaligned with her view of herself:

Louise: "*...I may have quite high thoughts about how I am and therefore it will be a little shameful to go to H & M because I should not do it."*

The same situation happened to Mary who is a vegan and bought a pair of jeans that had some animal-oirgin parts on it. The anxious feeling she experienced even led to her rejecting to wear this pair of jeans at a later point:

Mary: *"I can get this anxiety sometimes by wearing my Levis because I know they have a non vegan-friendly thing on them, it's like all my actions say I think this is okay, but some days it does not feel good. Then they will be left in the closet, then I will take another pair simply…"*

Although the respondents experienced negative feelings for different reasons as discussed above, they shared a similarity in the reasons as to why they consumed those non-sustainable items in the first place. The decision to purchase these non-sustainable items was described as due to the incapability of the sustainable options to fulfill the functional issue (including physical size and functional features), self-identity issue (or the desired style) and the price issues as these criteria were prioritized over sustainability concern (Meyer, 2001; Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Moisander et al., 2010; Thompson & Haytko, 1997; Sheth et al., 1991; Jägel et al. 2012; Joergens, 2006), the same criteria prioritized as seen in the first perspective. Fiona's answer gives a clear example in which the non-sustainable item was chosen over a sustainable item due to the matter of social values and price:

Fiona:*"It's especially important that it fits the dress-code. [...] I need a fancy dress and they are generally not made of organic cotton. […] the most important thing to do is to satisfy that need within a reasonable price range, preferably sustainable but if it is not possible then you have to [compromise on that condition]. I'm prepared to compromise on this [H&M dress] that it would be convenient…"*

In this second perspective when the respondents described their experience of consuming non-sustainable clothes, they also shared a common view that buying sustainably sourced clothes was not as important as reducing the overall consumption (Clark, 2008). In other words, in these experiences the respondents promoted the slow fashion discourse arguably in order to justify for their non-sustainable consumption practices. This can be seen from the example of Patricia:

Patricia: *"Yeah because even if it is organic it is an insane water usage for cotton… so it is much better to try to use few items [no matter if it is organic or not] that you use for a long time [...] that they don't break too easily, yeah that they don't just, that you don't buy just for the sake of buying"*

When describing these non-sustainable consumption practices, the respondents also extended their answers and gave examples of other sustainable consumption practices that they engaged in, which is arguably a way for them to cope with the experienced negative feelings by re-addressing the sustainable values to alternative practices (Connolly & Prothero, 2008; Jägel et al. 2012; Chatzidakis & Lee, 2013). The mentioned practices included non-acquisition practices such as buying second-hand, reparing and fixing their clothes but also the acquisition practices of other sustainable products other than clothes. For example, Hannah said that she would have her clothes repaired instead of buying a new piece:

Hannah: *"I try to go to the tailor with these jeans I love or sew my mom's dress and really add a little more love at getting the most out of the clothes I already have today."*

And Fiona expressed her intention to donate the non-sustainable dress that she bought to second-hand:

Fiona: *"I'll have to donate it [the H&M dress] to second-hand later when I don't want it anymore."*

Meanwhile, Suzie mentioned that she would consider sustainability as a priority when it comes to food and soap products instead:

Suzie: *"Because it [sustainability] came in the first place somewhere else, food-wise and in the home with soaps and that sort of things because that is not compromised by my size"*.

In the above experiences, the inner conflict was highlighted where the consumers need to compromise on different aspects of themselves and their identities, which is less intense with other products with lower sign value (Connolly & Prothero, 2003; 2008; Lundblad & Davis, 2016; Chatzidakis & Lee, 2013; Thompson & Haytko, 1997; McCracken 1986). It was also shown that consumers actively rearranged and ascribed various meanings to their practices and everyday life, whereby some practices trump others when they reflect upon their values aligned with sustainability issues (Connolly & Prothero, 2003; 2008; Chatzidakis & Lee, 2013).

2.2 The discourses underlying the experience of consuming non-sustainable clothes

As mentioned previously in the first perspective, the struggle between the discourse of consumer power and responsibility in sustainable consumption and the discourse of self-identity creation as well as the low-price discourse is more intense and visible in this second perspective when the respondents experienced negative feelings from buying non-sustainable clothes instead of sustainable ones. The fact that the respondents turned down sustainable alternatives due to the matter of desired styles and price issue showed that these criteria were prioritized over sustainable concern (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Moisander et al., 2010;

Thompson & Haytko, 1997; Sheth et al., 1991; Jägel et al. 2012), and therefore suggesting that the discouse of identity construction and the economical discourse were more influential and powerful in shaping their practices.

In addition, as being influenced by the low-price discourses, the respondents were making sense of price by making reference to the price of other clothes products in the market, most of which are fast fashion clothes which are super cheap (Moisander et al. 2012). Therefore, they perceived the price of the sustainable clothes as being even higher, in reference to those prior, without taking into consideration the real cost of clothing production. Fiona herself was aware of this influence of low-price discourse on her consumption:

Fiona: "*Maybe it is that the ones that are cheap are extremely cheap or unreasonably cheap but if they exist then you chose them…*".

Furthermore, within the discourse of self-identity creation, there can be seen a conflict between the respondent's desired self image and the identity signaled by sustainable clothes (Thompson & Haytko, 1997). For example, Louise described the perceived identity associated with sustainable clothes which she perceived as not matching with herself:

Louise: *"It's usually something like this plotting and beige over them, that is eco, that's like this, there's a beige or white sweater with little blue flowers on, always in all eco-lines … it feels like it's for a certain type [person] but this is the picture of people who buy that kind of clothes, is in a certain way and have a certain type of style... I have a picture of a teacher I had in high school..."*

Another example is Fiona's non-consuming of an organic option as it was more important for her to have a "fancy dress" that conformed to the dress-code, which also reflected her need to create a desired image in that social setting.

In this perspective, the discourse of consumer having power and responsibility to lead sustainable change caused the feeling of guilt and helplessness when the sustainable values were not aligned with the consumption practices (Connolly & Prothero, 2003; 2008; Lundblad & Davis, 2016; Chatzidakis & Lee, 2013; Moisander et al., 2010).

In order to justify their non-sustainable clothes consumption and re-address their sustainable values, the respondents brought up another common discourse regarding the definition of sustainable clothes consumption: the slow fashion discourse (Clark, 2008). This discourse shaped the respondents' consumption experience in different ways. "Slow fashion" as perceived by the respondents can mean only buying new clothes when really needed, keeping the items for longer time by having them fixed when broken (as in the case of Hannah), buying secondhand instead of new and giving the items to a secondhand shop when they do not want to use anymore (as in the case of Fiona), with regard to all the phases of consumption and not only aquisition (Connolly & Prothero, 2008; Lundblad & Davis, 2016). The respondents, in describing their non-sustainable consumption experience, stating that reducing consumption overall is more important than consuming sustainable fashion, as Mary said:

Mary: *"It's more sustainable to buy a thing every three years than to buy 6 organic stuff in those three years"*

In addition, the respondents also explained how their values of being a good person by choosing sustainable alternatives was not perceived in the sole context of clothes. One part of their sustainable values was mirrored in the choice of clothes consumption but evidently not always. Sustainability as a whole and how important it was to them was also reflected in their alternative consumption practices of other products, as the choice of food, soap, and so on. This has also been highlighted by Chatzidakis & Lee (2013) that previous research has failed to look at a consumer as a whole and that consumers will also express their values in sustainable concern through other practices. Thus, the internal conflict resulted in this case when the respondents' concern for sustainability is not always evident in their purchase actions was coped with by mentioning other sustainable practices, through which the respondents sought to align their behaviour with their sustainable image of self (Chatzidakis & Lee, 2013; Hoque, 2014; Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

3. Emotional gratification arising from non-sustainable clothes purchase justified by sustainable consumption-related discourses

3.1 The experience of emotional gratification arising from non-sustainable clothes consumption

The third perspective also adressed the situation when the respondents consumed non-sustainable clothes, but instead of negative feelings as experienced in the second perspective, the respondents in this situation on the contrary experienced emotional pleasure arising from their consumption.

The emotional pleasure that people derived from in this perspective had nothing to do with whether the item was sustainable or not, but it came from different sources. Firstly, the emotional pleasure can be rooted from the respondents' perceived relation or emotional attachment to clothes, in which case the clothes serve as symbolic access to women's emotional pasts (Colls, 2004). For example, clothes can make people remember the loved one from whom they got the clothing item, or the moment when the item was purchased or worn (Colls, 2004). This is very clearly illustrated in the case of Fiona who expressed that she had "*emotional bond*" with clothes and considered clothes in terms of the "*memory*" they are associated with. For her, the value of the clothes is mostly in terms of emotions, it depended on who gave it to her or where she bought it from. Therefore, when buying clothes for the sake of memory, she experienced emotional pleasure and also confessed that sustainability did not matter anymore in this situation:

Fiona: *"They don't have to be sustainable for it. It's got more to do with whom I've got it from or where I bought it. I've for instance bought a dress on H&M in Rome. It's special to me because it's from Rome but there is no sustainability concern in that, not at all…"*

In a different example, the "*emotional bond*" was reflected in how the business behind the clothing items can give access to the respondent's "*emotional pasts*" (Colls, 2004) of also

being an entrepreneur, as in the case of Anne. When Anne purchased some items in order to support the private business owners, her consumption was mainly driven by this sympathetic emotion, which can be seen from her purchase of work-out clothes:

Anne: *"Em, but like it is, since I work with entrepreneurs, I know how difficult it is with getting new customers so that is always with me. As soon as I buy from a smaller brand I know how hard it is for people to get customers so it's like I am in some way sympathy-buying. Yes, we were biking around Gotland this summer, me and Peter, and then we stopped out in the middle of nowhere because they had one of those, they made socks in the middle of nowhere of this Gotland-wool, sheep, and then you come in there and there is as a lot of socks (like really plenty) and there is an old woman there who is selling her socks and I definitely don't want to buy a sock. It was like 300 kr a pair like [expensive] but I can't leave without buying pair so I buy a pair of those freaking socks even if I don't need it... I get bad conscience for going in and looking... I only want them to survive with their business."*

It is also worth noticing that in this case when the consumption was driven by emotions, common important criteria for consideration such as price was less important as Anne paid a higher price that she thought was expensive.

For some respondents, clothes is a means of identity construction and they derived emotional pleasure from the relationship between clothing and female identity through the act of wearing, selecting and keeping clothes (Tseelon, 1995). The positive emotions in this case are derived from the feeling of looking good in those clothes and of being able to create their desired image through their choice of clothes (Colls, 2004). Emma's experience made a good example as her purchase was mainly driven by emotions where she felt positive towards clothes that matched her typical style and allowed her to create a unique identity:

Emma: *"Because I think that a lot of stuff in their assortment are thaaaat nice [emotional] [...] It's really no wonder I have such a dress on me, and that's what my colleagues said when I showed them they said, "That's typical of you, it's clear you're going to have it" basically."*

[...]

I think it's got to do with, like, yes, a little of this feeling about having something that is not like everyone else, I think. [...] Yes, not many people today wear color. Many go in gray, black and white. And I think that's a bit boring. It may be, partly to emphasize the personality, but also partly because, a little bit about standing out..."

Some respondents drew emotional gratification simply from the act of shopping. In this case, the meaning that is ascribed to clothes consumption was mainly as a leisure activity (Hoque, 2014). Emma is a typical consumer of this type:

Emma: *"I think it's fun to buy things... I'll just go and impulse buy something and often it will be my best purchases."*

3.2 The discourses underlying the emotion-driven experience of consuming non-sustainable clothes

The remarkable discourses that emerged in this perspective are the discourse of clothes being an access to memories (Colls, 2004), discourse of self-identity creation (Hoque, 2014; Piacentini & Mailer, 2004) and the discourse of consumption as a means to achieve well-being (Hoque, 2014). Firstly, the discourse of clothes being an access to memories or emotional pasts was reflected from the respondents' experience in buying clothes for the sake of memories (as in the case of Fiona) and for sympathetic emotion due to self-affiliation with the business owners (as in the case of Anne). Secondly, the discourse of identity construction was evidenced by the fact that the respondents sought to satisfy their need for uniqueness and have a certain style which brought emotional pleasure to them, as in the case of Emma with her "*typical*" dress, which highlights the symbolic but also emotional value attached to an item such as clothes (McCracken, 1986; Colls, 2004; Chatzidakis & Lee, 2013). Last but not least, the discourse of consumption as a means to achieve well-being shaped people's understanding that social status and values within the societies are centered on and determined by the consumption of goods and services, leading to the seeking of materialistic happiness (Hoque, 2014). This can be seen from Emma's ascribed meaning to clothes consumption as a leisure activity.

The conflict between these afore-mentioned discourses and the discouse of consumers having power and responsibility to make sustainable consumption was easily seen, where the discouse of consuming sustainable fashion in whatever forms (e.g. organic materials, sustainable brands, etc.) was completely neglected, as Fiona said:

Fiona: *"They don't have to be sustainable for it [memory]. It's got more to do with whom I've got it from or where I bought it."*

In justifying their non-sustainable consumption, the respondents also brought up two common discourses that are relevant to sustainable consumption. The first discourse reflects the previous notion where consumers did not perceive power and responsibility in leading sustainable development through their consumption (Connolly & Prothero, 2003), instead they shifted the ownership of such responsibility to the government or other institutions (Hoque, 2014). Emma's statement showed a typical perception of the sustainability issue as beyond the power of a consumer:

Emma: *"Yes, maybe people feel better to buy this organic garment because it may feel better, but it will not make such a big difference, for H&M, for example, will continue to make these wear and tear garments, these badly produced garments. Because they will not change anything if it does not come from above, maybe politically then it can change there…"*

Secondly, the non-sustainable consumption behavior of these sustainably conscious consumers justified by using the discourse of slow fashion (Clark, 2008). They said that sustainable consumption for them was to make thoughful choice to buy an item only when needed and that can last long, no matter if it is sustainable or conventional. For example, Emma said that her way of consuming sustainably is to keep an item longer by repairing it:

Emma: *"It was a dress I used once when I suddenly discovered that it was cold here under the arm, then it had been a crack all the way, but then I actually got the help of my mother to fix it, and the same thing I have a dress that got a hole by, yes but got a tear in the back but we fixed it and it does not show and then it can also get new life by fixing things."*

However, a conflict can also be seen between their idea of slow consumption and their emotion-driven impulse buying behavior. Emma perceived her consumption experience as a *"guilty pleasure"*, which also reveals the emotional consumers' understanding about the dilemma of sustainable consumption and materialistic happiness.

Emma: *"Material happiness is something that many actually like and maybe it's a guilty pleasure in a way, because I can think it's very fun [impulse buying]"*

As a sustainably conscious consumer, Anne also said that *"I usually try to stop myself when I get those impulses"*, which showed a struggle between the discourse of sustainable consumption and the discourse of consumerism within one individual.

Last but not least, in justifying their non-sustainable consumption experiences, the respondents also reflected the discourse of non-consumption as a way to communicate values, by mentioning non-consumption practices of products that they believed to have been green-washed in order to gain market share. Such non-consumption practices carry meanings using those the respondents wanted to communicate about their sustainable values, which was a way to cope with the conflict between their sustainable concern and their consumption of non-sustainable clothes behaviors (Connolly & Prothero, 2003; Chatzidakis & Lee, 2013). In our case, H&M was commonly mentioned as an avoided brand for this purpose, as Emma said:

Emma: *"I would never go to an H & M store and buy a piece of those wear and tear clothes. Never."*

And Anne further explained:

Anne: *"H&M have a sucky reputation and there you also know that they are 100 % wrong kinda always and then it feels a little better to buy something that has another brand than H&M I would say."*

DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

This paper contributes to the field of sustainable consumption with a study that addressed consumer experience as a whole, where both sides of consumption and non-consumption were taken into consideration and so were all aspects of consumer understandings including emotions, thoughts, reasoning, beliefs and values (Chatzidakis & Lee, 2013; Connolly & Prothero, 2003; 2008; Shove, 2010). Furthermore, a focus on discourse analysis helped to extend the scope of the study from micro-level perspective to a macro-level perspective and the link between them, contributing to the field on what social discourses and how they interact to inform consumer understanding and practices in the field of sustainable

consumption. The phenomenological interviews provided access to individual 'lived' experiences from which not only the afore-mentioned aspects of sustainable consumption but also the underlying discourses that inform consumer understandings and practices can be investigated (Solér, 1996).

In addition, what roles discourses play in the sustainable consumption experience has been addressed with a special focus on the potential conflicts among discourses which could hinder the sustainable consumption practices. The study on how discourses influence consumer understanding and consequently their practices is crucial if we want to better inform the consumers in a way that could reduce potential conflicts and therefore enhance their tendency to engage in sustainable consumption practices. As previously found, other criteria including functional fit, social values, price, desired style were more important than sustainable concern in shaping consumers' sustainable consumption practices (Meyer, 2001; Thompsson & Haytko, 1997; Joergens, 2006; Jägel et al. 2012), making them only considering sustainability as a bonus element which in many cases would be compromised, especially in the case of clothes due to the more intense conflict connected to its perceived sign value (Hoque, 2014; Piacentini & Mailer, 2004; Thompson & Haytko, 1997).

Our findings suggest that the intense conflict was found to be with the self-identity creation discourse that strongly influenced the consumer choice of sustainable consumption, which was made even more visible with the choice of clothes as a product of research interest due to its nature of being highly symbolic and visible (Crane, 2012; Roberts & Sepulveda, 1999). The fact that people use the sign values of clothes as a way of self-expression (Hoque, 2014) results in a variety of constructed self-images which might or might not be aligned with the perceived values of sustainability. For product of high symbolic nature such as clothes, the switch to sustainable alternatives implies a sacrifice or compromise of their self-expression. Depending on how much capacity the items has for imposing a certain identity, and how strong the individual's need for self-expression is, the resulted conflict can be more or less intense (Solomon & Anand, 1985).

Furthermore, this paper put an emphasis on the role of emotions and how emotions were formed and perceived in these experience in an attempt to fill in the gap where previous studies have been neglecting the emotional aspect of consumer choice in the context of sustainable consumption (Belk et al., 1998). As previously found, consumers experience positive feelings when they act accordingly to the sustainable concern, in our case that means to purchase sustainable clothes, and they experience negative feeling when not acting accordingly (Connolly & Prothero, 2003; 2008; Bly et al, 2015; Lundblad & Davis, 2016). This paper further found that consumers will seek to escape from these negative feelings, or in other words to cope with the emotional internal conflicts resulted from inconsistent sustainable behaviors, by engaging in different alternative practices or arguing for different means of sustainable consumption (Chatzidakis & Lee, 2013; Hoque, 2014; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). The alternatives practices can be focused around other aspects of consumption other than acquisition, for example to reuse, recycle or donate as a means of disposal of the clothing (Lundblad & Davis, 2016), or they can also be the acquisition practices of sustainable products other than clothes, such as food and soap. In addition to

engaging in alternative practices, consumers can also argue for the discourse of slow consumption or non-consumption of certain products deemed highly unsustainable as a more important means of sustainable consumption, meanwhile downplaying the significance of consuming sustainable fashion. This is interesting considering that not only discourses influence consumer understanding and practices but consumers also actively utilize their understandings about common discourses to justify for their consumption practices.

It is also noteworthy that personal experience plays an important role in shaping people's understanding and perception (Solér, 1996). The source of emotions that people derive from the consumption of clothes is to a large extent bounded to personal experience. For example, the respondents derived emotional pleasure from not only the act of buying, but also from their affiliation with the brand or business owners due to personal experience, or with the self-asserted emotional value to the piece of clothes such as for memories, or also from the good feeling of having power to create a self-image that they personally want with their choice of clothing. On a deeper level, positive emotions were also achieved when the self-image was aligned with the sustainable values and creating a sense of accomplishment.

The implication of this study is that even though the micro- and macro-levels of consumption are separate they should be looked at together as constituting a whole. To be more specific, in order to influence the consumer understanding and sustainable practices at a micro level, it would be beneficial to work on the relevant discourses at a macro-level in a way that can avoid potential conflicts with other perceived important aspects of consumer's consumption consideration. This can be done by crafting the right messages and information in order to better inform the consumers. Specifically, in the case of highly symbolic products such as clothes, when the identity-creation discourse is very influential, it might be wise to promote or position the sustainable products along the desired identities and lifestyles that can attract the target groups of consumers instead of just focusing on the sustainable elements of such products, or in other words, not only focusing on the discourse of sustainable consumption as communicating an image of being a better person. In addition, as it was found that a significant part of consumer consumption was strongly driven by emotions, where emotions outweighed any other consideration including even the price issue, it would be advisable to promote sustainable consumption by touching upon the emotions of the consumers, both the positive emotions and pleasure that can be desired from such consumption and also the possible negative emotions that might be experienced if otherwise.

CONCLUSION

This paper investigated consumer understanding of their consumption and non-consumption of sustainable clothes as well as how these consumer understanding and practices are informed by social discourses. Three perspectives emerged, including the positive feelings arising from consuming sustainable clothes, negative feelings arising from non-sustainable clothes, and emotional gratification arising from non-sustainable clothes consumption justified by sustainable consumption-related discourses. From these perspectives, it became clear that sustainable clothes consumption is a very emotional consumer practice, whereby

emotions not only drive a large part of consumption in the first place but the emotional conflicts resulted from non-consumption of sustainable clothes can also influence other sustainable practices in order to cope with such conflict. The influence of social discourses on sustainable clothes consumption can also be evident in that identity creation and price issue were considered primary criteria when it comes to clothes consumption, meanwhile the discourse about consumers having power and responsibility to lead sustainable development was less influential. Thus, in cases when there is no conflict among these discourses, meaning that when price, functional fit as well as desired image are equal, consumers would choose sustainable options as the sustainability element is perceived as a bonus. However, when there is conflict between the sustainable alternative with either of the other discourses, meaning that the sustainable choice is costly or does not communicate a desired style, the sustainable concern would be compromised in favor of other aspects of their identity. The findings also show an integrated view of the consumers about sustainable consumption whereby they refer to a wide range of different practices to address their values of being sustainable as a whole. They made sense of their sustainable values through cross-practices including not only the practice of sustainable fashion consumption, but also other practices such as prolonging the life of existing clothes, buying clothes less frequently in general, avoiding certain "bad" brands like H&M, and even choosing to consume sustainable food or soap before sustainable clothes. Nevertheless, most of the consumers experienced negative feelings when consuming non-sustainable clothes, which itself proved that they were self-aware of the misalignment between their sustainable values and their consumption practices. In these cases, although the discourse of consumer having power and responsibility to lead sustainable change was less influential, it caused negative feelings of guilt when not acting accordingly. In this view, the use of other alternative practices seems to be more of a rational justification to re-address the misaligned practices of consuming non-sustainable clothes with the self-values of being sustainable. In conclusion, this paper contributes to the understanding of meanings consumers ascribe to their consumption and non-consumption of sustainable products in the case of clothes, from which strategies for promoting sustainable consumption can be developed with a focus on the emotional aspect of consumption as well as the identities and lifestyles alongside those products.

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