Why so much?

An exploration of consumer behaviour and the social dynamics surrounding frequent clothes shopping

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Why so much? An exploration of consumer behaviour and the social dynamics surrounding frequent clothes shopping.

By

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The appendices contain a sample of the forms and data collected. A full set for every participant can be made available upon request.

Abstract

It is widely believed that the challenges of climate change are such that our current levels of consumption are simply not sustainable (McDonagh and Prothero 2014). Frequently changing clothing trends or 'fast fashion' and low cost clothing are often associated with the unsustainable exploitation of resources and accused of promoting a culture of disposability, waste and materialism (Ertekin and Atik 2014; Joy, et al. 2012). The Clothing Action Plan estimates that the consumption of new clothing is higher in the UK than any other European country (Watson et al. 2018). Much is known about why women buy clothes but issues of frequency and volume have previously been little explored. The traditional narrative of ethical clothing consumption has tended to focus on the supply chain and sustainability of production (Birtwistle et al. 2003; Carrigan et al. 2013) or explores consumer attitudes and behaviour towards choosing ethically manufactured products (Shaw et al. 2007; Chatzidakis et al. 2006). Whilst any progress towards more ethical and sustainable manufacture is beneficial, it fails to challenge the dominant social paradigm of excessive consumption (Kilbourne, McDonagh and Prothero 1997).

This study explores the behaviour of frequent female fashion shoppers. Taking a symbolic interactionist (SI) standpoint it investigates the driving factors behind the frequency and volume of clothing consumption. Using in-depth interviews and individual case studies the research uncovers shopper rationale, social dynamics and emerging areas of dissonance as people engage in frequent clothes shopping as part of their daily lives. The findings make a significant contribution to understanding excessive clothing consumption. They discover the relevance of SI theories of fashion in explaining aspects of the fashion shopping environment that contribute to frequent clothes shopping behaviour. The study reveals features of frequent fashion shopper behaviour including the perpetual scanning of clothing options, transient satisfaction with their wardrobe and low levels of involvement with the garments they buy. The findings describe how frequent fashion shoppers derive satisfaction from the anticipation of social approval and how shopping experiences are not pleasurable for them unless they result in the purchase of a desired garment.

The conclusions indicate that bringing about sustainable patterns of consumption requires the transformation of behaviour, creating and embedding new habits and transforming social symbols so that status is linked with sustainable behaviour. It is revealed that, given the right circumstances it would be feasible for some frequent clothes shoppers to consume fewer garments without detriment to their perceived wellbeing.

PART I – INTRODUCTION

1. Overview of the Research Project

The concept of sustainability involves the recognition that resources are finite and the way in which they are used has ecological, economic and socio-political implications (Joy et al. 2012). It is widely believed that the challenges of climate change are such that our current levels of consumption are simply not sustainable (McDonagh and Prothero 2014). In the case of clothing, frequent purchase and disposal of cheap garments and 'fast fashion' has become common behaviour amongst some groups of females in particular (Joy, et al. 2012; Morgan and Birtwistle 2009). The problems associated with the current pace and volume of clothing production are described in more detail in the sections to follow. In summary, fashion production at its current rate consumes natural resources at a pace that outstrips their supply (Holmberg et al. 1999), has been associated with unethical working practices (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2006; Birtwistle et al. 2003; Claudio, 2007) and stands accused of fostering a culture of disposability, waste and materialism (Ertekin and Atik 2014; Joy, et al. 2012). This study takes the view that the current volume of fashion consumption has a negative influence on sustainability (WRAP 2011) and that it would be desirable for consumers to be persuaded to buy fewer garments and keep them for longer.

However, for many UK female fashion shoppers, the frequent acquisition of affordable clothing has become a regular and pleasurable part of consumer behaviour (Zarley Watson et al. 2013; Miller et al. 2013). This presents a challenge to anyone proposing an agenda of consumption reduction since attempts to curtail clothing acquisition may be viewed as a negative action, restricting individual consumer choice, even though a reduction in clothing volume may be more sustainable for the environment and society as a whole (Fletcher 2013). This study aims to better understand the behaviour of those women for whom buying at least 20 garments per year has become part of their

regular purchasing patterns and to uncover their opinions concerning the notion of buying less. It is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute to the development of a pathway to more sustainable clothing consumption in the future.

1.1 Why women buy clothes

Setting aside practical requirements such as the need for warmth, clothing is already understood to fulfil a variety of symbolic and social desires for a number of people. Links between clothing consumption, self-identity, social relationships and self-esteem are well documented (Auty and Elliott 1998; Banister and Hogg 2004; Davis, 1994). In addition, products such as garments which are perceived to have symbolic value are acquired by some in order to maintain an existing self-image (Sirgy et al. 1997) or to satisfy an aspiration for a 'better,' more ideal self (Dittmar 2004). These topics are reviewed in greater detail within the literature review along with their potential to explain the frequency and volume of acquisition.

Occurrences of the use of fashion to indicate social standing or belonging have been detailed throughout history and across cultures (Trentmann 2016; Miller 2010). Whilst such motivations for acquiring and wearing fashionable clothing may be little altered it is evident that in more recent history something has changed. Women in the UK own on average four times more garments than they did during the 1980s (Siegle 2011) and British shoppers are buying twice as many items of clothing than they did a decade ago (Oxford Economics 2014). A recent report commissioned by the European Clothing Action Plan estimates that the consumption of new clothing is higher in the UK than any other European country at 26.7kg per capita compared to the next highest nation – Germany at 16.7kg (Watson et al. 2018).

We know that the growth in clothing production is linked to a decline in the number of times a garment is worn (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). People are buying more and priorities in terms of quality

and longevity are changing. For cheaply made fast fashion garments the expectation is believed to be that garment will be worn less than ten times prior to its disposal (Morgan and Birtwistle 2009). Supermarket chains have become one of the main places to buy clothes. In 2016 45% of female clothes shoppers had purchased at least one garment in store from a supermarket (Mintel 2017c). Primark continues to be the most frequently used store for fifth year running and remains popular amongst female shoppers across all income brackets (Mintel 2017c). This supports the notion that the purchase of low cost garments is driven by something other than necessity and that the stigma attached to buying from value retailers has dwindled (Birtwistle, Siddiqui and Fiorito 2003).

Despite garments becoming cheaper and women owning a greater selection of clothing, research shows that people are increasingly dissatisfied with their appearance. A study conducted by OnePoll (2016), suggests that women spend an average of 12 hours per week worrying about their appearance, almost three hours specifically concerned about what to wear and whether their outfit looks acceptable. Obviously the influences on body image and self-esteem extend beyond the realm of clothing, but clothing does play an important role. It seems that women now may be less confident and happy with their appearance than their 'smaller-wardrobed' 1980's counterparts. Evidence gathered by WRAP (2011) indicates that only 23-30% of garments are worn regularly whilst Watson et al. (2018) and Ha-Brookshire and Hodges (2009) found that clothing donated to charity consistently contains an amount of unworn items.

A situation of 'double dividend' is described by Jackson (2005) as 'the ability to live better by consuming less and reduce our impact on the environment in the process' (Jackson 2005:19). Given the amount of unworn and easily discarded clothing in addition to the information that suggests that women are not happy with their appearance despite their larger wardrobes, it seems feasible that reducing clothing consumption may have the potential to deliver such a double dividend. The prospect of simultaneous positive outcomes for sustainability and for consumer satisfaction adds to the merit of investigating consumer behaviour in this area.

1.2 Under researched aspects of clothes shopping behaviour

Despite a wealth of research surrounding the relationship between clothing appearance and identity the question of why some women currently buy so many garments has been neglected. Previous research into consumer clothes shopping behaviour and the appeal of changing fashions has scrutinised the hedonic value of shopping (Arnold and Reynolds 2003; Babin et al. 1994; Hirschman and Holbrook 1982) and the contribution of the symbolic value of clothing to enhancing self-image (Auty and Elliott 1998; Davis 1994; McCracken and Roth 1989; Wilson 2003). However such studies have neglected to challenge the dominant social paradigm that the more we consume, the better off we are (Jackson 2005; Kilbourne, McDonagh and Prothero 1997) which is linked to excessive consumption (Kilbourne et al. 1997). Consequently the reasons behind frequency and volume of shopping for clothes are little understood.

Many of the influential theories and most cited works relating to person-object relations (Belk 1988; Sirgy et al. 1997), the symbols of consumption (McCracken 1986; Dittmar 1992) and clothing and identity (MCCracken and Roth 1989; Auty and Elliott 1998) were carried out during the 1980s and 1990s. Similarly, much of the widely cited, formative research relating to hedonic motivations for shopping such as Hirschman and Holbrook (1982), Babin et al. (1994) and Arnold and Reynolds (2003) was conducted over fifteen years ago and over thirty five years ago in the case of Hirschman and Holbrook (1982). This is not to say that the timing of these works necessarily makes their findings any less true for today's frequent female clothes shoppers. In fact, the enduring relevance of these studies could be seen to imply that the relationship between consumer, product and the hedonic value of shopping has changed little.

This potentially raises the question that if the symbolic value of clothing and pleasure from shopping has remained relatively constant over time but consumer behaviour has changed then what is different about today's clothes shoppers and the environment in which they operate?

The literature review that follows in section three demonstrates that there is a wealth of research considering aspects of modern clothes shopping behaviour. These include the influence of social media and on fashion choices (Wiedmann, Hennigs and Langner 2010), the role of fashion blogs in perpetuating trends (Rocamora 2011; Pihl 2014), the fragmentation of tastes and impact of social groups fashion creation and diffusion (Atik and Firat 2013) and the appeal of fast fashion (Zarley Watson et al. 2013; Miller et al. 2013). In addition there has been much research in the areas of sustainable fashion. Studies specifically concerned with sustainable behaviour in fashion shopping have tended to focus on sustainability of production and design (Fletcher 2013; Niinimäki 2010), the supply chain (Birtwistle, Siddiqui et al. 2003; Carrigan, Moraes et al. 2013) or the exploration of consumer attitudes and behaviour towards choosing ethically manufactured products (Shaw et al. 2007, Chatzidakis et al. 2006). However, with the exception of investigations into compulsive shopping (Benson and Eisenach 2013; Hartson 2012) and impulse buying (Hausman 2000; Sharma et al. 2010; Tifferet 2012) the specific reasons behind the frequency and volume of clothing purchases have been little explored. The under-exploration of the reasons behind excessive clothing consumption is a barrier to effectively challenging unsustainable consumer behaviour in this area. This study aims to better understand the reasons that frequent female clothes shoppers buy so many garments. This information may be used to develop a pathway towards more sustainable fashion consumption.

1.3 The Objective of the Study and Its Research Questions

With the overarching aim of making clothes shopping behaviour more sustainable, this study explores the behaviour of female frequent fashion shoppers and the factors that motivate them to make repeated purchases. It investigates their perceptions of the notion of buying less in order to better

understand the barriers which would need to be overcome in order for consumption reduction to happen. Since fashion is premised on the obsolescence of old styles and attractiveness of the new, some people may consider the notion of sustainable fashion to be an oxymoron (Clark 2008; LeBlanc 2012). The existence and desirability of fashionable clothing is documented as early as the fifteenth century (Trentmann 2016) yet the significant impact of unsustainable clothing consumption is relatively recent. It seems therefore that it is not fashion in itself which is unsustainable but the current pace and volume of consumption. With this in mind the study takes a symbolic interactionist (SI) approach which considers the social mechanisms responsible for driving consumer behaviours. The study explores the SI theories of fashion espoused by Blumer (1969) and Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton (1995) to investigate whether they remain relevant in today's fashion shopping environment and whether they may illuminate the reasons behind the increase in pace and volume of fashion consumption.

This study aims to work towards sustainability by exploring the behaviour of the group who appear to be making the largest contribution to the volume of clothing acquisition – female frequent clothes shoppers. The decision to select female only participants is based on studies that reveal that the market size for female outerwear is double the size of the male market (Mintel 2017a; Mintel 2017b) and its size offers the largest potential gains in terms of sustainability from any change in behaviour.

For the purpose of this study my definition of frequent shoppers are those who self-proclaim to have added at least twenty garment to their wardrobes in the past twelve months. My method of arriving at this 'frequent shopper' definition is discussed in greater detail within section 7.2.1. It is estimated that the definition may be relevant to somewhere between 20-40% of the female clothes buying population. This is indicative of the extent to which frequent shopping for clothes is becoming normalised within consumer behaviour and thus its significance in contributing to the issue of sustainability.

In order to challenge this behaviour we must first seek to understand its appeal. The objective of this research is to understand the complicated emotional, symbolic and social meanings associated specifically with **frequent** clothes shopping for women. It is the aim of this study to better understand the social dynamics, consumer opinions, perspectives and actions surrounding frequent clothes shopping and the perceived and experienced benefits of this behaviour. This exploration is timely and warranted since, in order to construct an effective suggestion regarding the way in which current unsustainable behaviour patterns may be changed, one first requires an in-depth understanding of the existing behaviour.

Four key research questions are employed by the study in order to deliver this understanding:

Research questions

1. What are the behaviours of the female frequent clothes shopper?
2. What is the nature of the rewards which perpetuate this behaviour?
3. To what extent do social dynamics impact frequent shopping and excessive clothing consumption?
4. How do frequent shoppers perceive the notion of buying less?

It is intended that the information obtained will provide a current and more complete picture of frequent fashion buyer behaviour including their rationale for often shopping for clothes, the social environment within which the behaviour occurs and how this is linked with the shopper's self-identity. The study also sets out to reveal the areas of dissonance and satisfaction created by aspects of current behaviour and to provide a description of consumer attitudes towards the notion of buying less. Whilst it might not solve the issues surrounding sustainability in fashion I hope that it will provide a useful first step towards understanding potential routes for a more sustainable and fulfilling fashion shopping future.

1.4 Novelty of Contribution

The symbolic nature of clothing, its links with self-identity and the pleasure associated with the shopping experience are paths well-trodden within the extant literature (Auty and Elliott 1998; Banister and Hogg 2004, McCracken and Roth 1989, Arnold and Reynolds 2003). However, this study is different to previous empirical investigations in a number of ways. Firstly, it provides the opportunity to focus specifically on the behaviour of female frequent clothes shoppers exploring the appeal of repeated clothes buying and the acquisition of a volume of garments. Rather than considering why women buy clothes, this study instead scrutinises the reasons that frequent female clothes shopper buy so many garments. In this way the study tackles the most pressing issue for sustainability - that of the volume of consumption.

Secondly, the study aims to unravel the largely unspoken social dynamics underlying frequent acquisition of clothing. The tacit social influences which motivate acquisition of clothing is an area that appears to have been thus far underexplored possibly because these behaviours 'just happen' and are taken for granted with little consideration of how and why they occur.

Thirdly, the research seeks to understand how the demand for frequent clothing acquisition is socially negotiated. Set in the current context of experiential marketing (Schmitt and Zarantonello 2013; Van den Bergh and Behrer 2016), rather than considering individuals as passive receivers of marketing communications, experiential marketing recognises that consumers are increasingly actively involved in their relationship with products and brands (Schmitt et al. 2015). In the sharing of their opinions and experiences, often via social media, groups of consumers act to co-create symbolic meaning and establish normalised behaviours in relation to the product or category (Vallaster and von Wallpach 2013). In this way consumer behaviour is not dictated by the marketer but evolves as a collective negotiation.

The exploration of social dynamics and collective negotiation leads to the fourth point of novelty which is that this study takes a symbolic interactionist approach. The nature of symbolic interactionism (SI)

and its theoretical standpoint are discussed in greater detail later in the thesis. In summary SI considers that behaviour is directed by learned meanings of socially derived symbols (Blumer 1969a; Mead 1934). SI theory views fashion as a social system rather than purely a matter of individual identity (Blumer 1969b). If the reason for excessive fashion consumption lies in the social setting and context of recent times then the SI perspective is useful in illuminating the social dynamics concerned with the pace and volume of clothing consumption.

1.5 Defining the Frequent Shopper

The most damaging elements of fashion in terms of sustainability are concerned with the volume of consumption and disposal of clothing. In the interests of making clothing consumption more sustainable this study seeks to understand the behaviour that is making greatest contribution to the problem. The harmful behaviour for sustainability is the frequent purchasing of garments which appears to have increasingly become the normal behaviour pattern for some clothes shoppers (Mintel 2017b).

An agreed definition of 'frequent fashion shopper' has yet to be constructed, and it remains an elusive concept, albeit one that is often discussed within the clothing literature (Evans 1989; Goldsmith 2002). This is not surprising since it is a subjective description that is context and person specific. The issue is further complicated by shopping patterns, for example some people may buy many garments twice a year, whilst others buy a single item once a week. The value of spend may also influence subjective judgment and definition of frequent shopping, for example a person who spends £10 each week (£40 per month) may perceive that they are less of a shopper than the person who buys one garment per month at £100. Moreover, the perception of whether the value spend on clothes is 'high' is relative to an individual's disposable income and one's attitude towards earnings and propensity to spend or save. In the absence of an agreed definition of frequent shopper and to avoid imposing my own judgement regarding what might comprise frequent shopping, I sought consumer opinion on the

subject. My method of reviewing popular opinion is detailed in the chapter relating to methodology. Drawing upon this necessarily subjective categorisation I created my definition of 'frequent shopper', as someone who estimates that they have added a minimum of 20 new garments to their wardrobe in the past 12 months.

Whilst I have been unable to locate any specific data relating to the average number of garments purchased by women, information relating to the description by women of the number of times they buy clothes suggests that 19% purchase clothes at least 2-3 times per month and 39% purchase clothes at least once per month (Mintel 2017b). Given that the term 'clothes' could relate to more than one garment purchased, it therefore seems likely that my 'frequent shopper' definition may be relevant to somewhere between 20-40% of the female clothes buying population. This is indicative of the extent to which frequent shopping for clothes is becoming normalised within consumer behaviour and thus its significance in contributing to the issue of sustainability.

1.6 The Wicked Problem of Sustainable Fashion Consumption

Problems that are complex or impossible to solve are sometimes described as wicked problems (Rittel and Webber 1973). Commonly encountered in social policy, wicked problems tend to occur where problems lack clear definition and no particular route presents itself as being the definitive solution or indisputably in the public good (Rittel and Webber 1973). Due to complex interdependencies, attempts to solve one aspect of a wicked problem may reveal or create other issues. The complicated issue of making behaviour more sustainable has been described as a wicked problem (Peterson 2009; Hastings 2016) because the required levels of information, clarity of an end goal, and coordination of efforts amongst all involved parties are difficult to achieve (Head 2008). In addition, successful approaches to solving the problem of unsustainable behaviour would need to adequately consider the

values, perspectives and experiences of the stakeholders who may be directly or indirectly involved, assisted or inconvenienced by behavioural interventions (Fischer 2003). For clothing, interventions to improve sustainability are likely to require actions from many parties in the clothing sector such as retailers, designers, policy makers and consumers (Harris, Roby and Dibb 2016). Similarly, the problem of overconsumption of clothing may be considered to be a wicked problem since there is no clear definition of what constitutes **over-**consumption. There is no target amount by which consumption would need to be reduced in order to deliver a significant improvement to sustainability and the impact of reduced consumption on stakeholders including those working in the supply chain, retail businesses and consumers is largely unknown. The complexity of the issues involved may be one reason why any effective movement towards sustainable fashion has been slow to gain traction. Another reason could be that, the current fast fashion system has proved to be a lucrative source of growth for fashion companies that they may be reluctant to relinquish. Since fashion is premised on obsolescence then any questioning of sustainability within the clothing industry based on the throughput of garments is going to be dilemmatic. The common rationale offered by fashion companies for the increasing pace and volume of fashion consumption is that it is driven by consumer appetite for fashion and is serving customer need (Pankaj and Jose 2006). The inference from this narrative is that it would somehow be detrimental for consumer wellbeing for the volume of consumption to be reduced. A contrasting viewpoint is presented by Soper (2007) and Schor (2010) who propose that consumer pleasure and satisfaction may be improved by reducing the volume of products acquired leading to a greater appreciation of the smaller volume of goods owned. This study aims to unpick the underlying influences that perpetuate women's frequent clothes shopping behaviour and to understand the opinions of this group towards the notion of buying fewer garments. Although it is not expected to solve the wicked problem of sustainability in fashion it is intended to provide a useful a first step towards a more sustainable fashion shopping future.

1.7 Outline Structure of the Thesis

Part one of this thesis has outlined the context of the research project and has introduced its primary aims. Part two provides a review of the current literature beginning with a discussion of the nature and scale of the problems caused by excessive fashion consumption. The chapter continues by considering the various bodies of literature which contribute to current understanding of why women buy clothing, the gaps in this understanding and the resultant scope of this study. Chapter three begins by considering the difficulties in defining overconsumption as well as the relationship between material acquisition and wellbeing. This chapter describes the definitions of materialism for the purpose of this research drawing from the consumer values scale derived by Richins and Dawson (1992) as well as a discussion of the potentially positive and negative aspects of materialistic behaviour (Kasser 2002; Sirgy et al. 2013; Shrum and Lowrey 2014). It also explains the meaning of the term wellbeing within the scope of this study accepting the view of Veenhoven (2008) in considering that "overall happiness" is synonymous with life satisfaction and subjective wellbeing. Chapter three continues with a review of the literature relating to hedonic shopping motivations (Arnold and Reynolds 2003; Bäckström 2011) including a view of the recreational shopper (Guiry and Lutz 2000). Chapter three proceeds to consider the habitual aspects of shopping behaviour (Aarts et al. 1998; Verplanken and Aarts 1999) and the implications relating to behaviour change (Hargreaves 2011; Shove and Walker 2010). The discussion then moves on to the various theories of fashion beginning with the notion of clothing as part of the extended self (Belk 1988), then considering theories of identity motivated consumption, multiple selves and social identity including a critique of the trickle-down theory of fashion. Chapter four introduces the Symbolic Interactionist (SI) theories of fashion, contrasts them with identity theories of clothing choice and discusses the potential of the SI theories to illuminate the reasons for increases in the pace of fashion consumption.

In part three, I discuss the research approach beginning with the theoretical perspective of SI and the associated ontological and epistemological standpoints. A considerable part of this section is devoted

to detailing methodology including the techniques used to ensure credibility within the study and the process of data analysis. Part four comprises a detailed description of the findings of the study, evidenced with pertinent excerpts from the participant accounts. The findings are structured around the core concepts of the SI theories of fashion, identity, hedonic shopping motivations and the normalisation of overconsumption of clothing. For each core concept a summary section reviews the key contributions towards achieving an enhanced understanding of frequent clothes shopping behaviour. Part four concludes with a descriptive summary of how the findings relate to each specific research question.

Part five begins with a summary of the ways in which this research makes an original contribution to knowledge followed by a diagrammatic illustration of the key contributions to understanding and how these are situated within the existing literature. This section also includes a table that displays the page references for the findings from which the key contributions have been drawn. Chapter nine continues with a more detailed description of the study's key contributions to knowledge describing new information revealed by this research about the behaviour of female frequent shoppers. The discussion describes the relevance and usefulness of the SI theories of fashion when studying the pace and throughput of clothing before considering the implications of the study. Part five of the thesis also outlines the limitations of the study and opportunities for further research, concluding with a summary of the relevance of the study to academic, practitioner and consumer audiences along with an agenda for future research.

PART II - REVIEW OF CURRENT UNDERSTANDING

2. Fashion Sustainability in Context- The Nature of the Problem

The following sections 2.1 to 2.6 describe the nature of the UK fashion market and developments within the garment industry that are associated with unsustainable production, usage and disposal of clothing. They describe the nature of the problems and the serious consequences associated with volume and frequency of clothing consumption. This serves to highlight the importance of seeking an alternative to current frequent clothes shopping habits.

2.1 The UK Fashion Market

The UK has a dynamic market for fashion clothing driven by a diversity of individual perceptions and attitudes towards brands and styles. It makes an important contribution to the UK economy, directly contributing £26 billion to GDP in 2013 and supporting circa 797,000 jobs across the sector (Oxford Economics 2014). Contrary to the opinion of some critics that the desire for clothing represents a superficial need (Diener et al. 2010; Kasser 2002), the category demonstrates an enduring relationship between the individual and their fashion choices which has a significant influence on behaviour. Even during times of inflation consumers have consistently proved willing to increase spend on clothes in real terms (Mintel 2014). UK consumers now own more garments than at any time in history (Siegle 2011) and all estimates indicate that the appetite for fashion purchases is set to expand further reaching a retail market expenditure of between £67.4 billion and £60.1 billion by 2019 (Mintel 2014). The scale and economic importance of the fashion market has made it a popular topic for research (Atik and Fırat 2013; Ko 2013; Macchion et al. 2014; Naderi 2013). Some hail the achievement of market growth, lower prices and rapid access to a vast array of styles as a model of successful quick response production methods, effective use of technology and streamlined supply chains implemented in response to consumer demands (Christopher et al. 2004; Ghemawat et al. 2003).

Others describe the current state of the fashion market as an unsustainable treadmill churning out low quality garments that are aggressively marketed as the latest 'must have' styles thus fostering a society focused on outward appearance and a culture of waste and disposability as old trends are discarded in favour of the new (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2006; Ertekin and Atik 2014; Fletcher 2013; Joy et al. 2012). Whilst these appear to be opposing viewpoints they are not necessarily mutually exclusive; it is true that the fashion industry is enjoying a period of growth and that individuals are apparently happily buying the output but it is also evident that this growth has a cost in terms of the unsustainable use of natural resources (Claudio 2007) and a potentially negative impact on social wellbeing (Kasser 2002; Sirgy et al. 2013).

2.2 The Quickening Pace of the Fashion Cycle

Over the past two decades business operations within parts of the fashion industry have changed, moving from working to a seasonal pattern with a turnaround time from catwalk to retailer of around six months (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2006) to a production cycle that can produce inexpensive copies of the latest styles and deliver them to consumers in a matter of weeks (Bianchi and Birtwistle 2010). This speeding up of fashion production and rapid time-to-market for a continuous stream of new trends is known as fast fashion. Originally adopted by retailers such as H&M, Zara and Top Shop targeting fashion conscious 16-24 year olds, fast fashion offers a means of achieving competitive advantage by delivering the very latest catwalk trends, at affordable prices, in the shortest possible time (Morgan and Birtwistle 2009). The attractive gains in profits and market share demonstrated by the first fast fashion retailers has created a momentum within the industry driving the normalisation of shorted fashion cycles across the sector not only amongst retailers targeting the most fashion conscious. UK shoppers have welcomed the fast fashion model demonstrating a widespread appetite for cheap clothing across age and income segments. In 2017, 28% of the fashion spend was with 'value retailers' including Matalan, Primark and supermarket fashion brands and leading discount retailer Primark was the most frequently used store for the fifth year running (Mintel 2017c) thus supporting

the notion that the stigma attached to buying from value retailers has dwindled (Birtwistle, Siddiqui and Fiorito 2003). Alternatively, rather than embracing fast fashion it may be argued that, as fast fashion systems pervade the sector the popularity of products manufactured under this regime is simply due to the fact that they are difficult to avoid. Even consumers expressing strong intention to reject low cost fashion due to ethical concerns over the nature of its methods experience practical barriers to purchase such as lack of information regarding the nature of manufacture, availability and selection of suitable styles (Bray, Johns and Kilburn 2011, Shaw et al. 2006).

The key to achieving the fast fashion business model is the adoption of a "quick response" operations strategy that is based on actual sales information, rather than being forecast driven (Birtwistle, Siddiqui and Fiorito 2003). Quick response was a concept first developed by Kurt Salmon Associates (KSA) in the US (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2006). Its primary philosophy is to make the supply chain shorter and more efficient by eliminating non-essential processes and improving coordination between retailing and manufacturing in order to increase the speed and flexibility of response to changes in demand (Ghemawat et al. 2003). This is achieved partly by the use of technology such as electronic point of sale (EPOS) barcode scanning, electronic transfer of sales information to a stock control system for intelligent, demand-responsive ordering (Birtwistle, Siddiqui and Fiorito 2003), and partly via the employment of a flexible supply chain able to adapt its output volume and type of production to the demands of the retailer. The fast fashion system allows retailers to quickly cease manufacture and supply of the least popular garments and switch manufacturing effort to the lines that are selling well. Working with manufacturers who can supply new product quickly reduces the necessity for retailers to carry stock which reduces both cost and the risk of being left with unwanted items (Ghemawat, Nueno and Dailey 2003).

The impact of fast fashion and quick response has been the subject of debate. Ten years after the introduction of quick response operations, an evaluation of the results of implementing a quick response strategy, conducted by Kurt Salmon Associates (1997), indicated that quick response

operations had resulted in positive outcomes in the form of wider choice, increased availability and lower prices for the consumer whilst returning greater profitability for the retailer (Cachon and Swinney 2011; Birtwistle, Siddiqui and Fiorito 2003). It might be reasoned that the process of manufacturing in response to demand rather than forecast and minimising stock holding has a positive environmental effect in minimising resource use and waste. Conversely there is evidence to suggest that the reported benefits of quick response may only be achieved at the expense of product quality, relationships within the supply chain, ethical working conditions and sustainability (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2006; Birtwistle, Siddiqui and Fiorito 2003). In addition it may be reasoned that increased supply of affordable garments that are most popular at any point in time is a contributory factor to the overconsumption of clothing (Joy et al. 2012; Fletcher et al. 2012).

2.3 Supplier Relationships and Ethical Concerns

Frequent fast fashion changes involving the production of a wide variety of styles has led retailers to augment the number of suppliers they use in order to achieve flexible output volume and cater for production specialisms such as garment embellishment (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2006, Textile Exchange Online 2014). Adopting a quick response approach allows the retailer to make small pre-season orders, then to continually reassess the demand for products making small, frequent, in-season orders that are informed by real-time consumer activity (Christopher, Lowson and Peck 2004). Whilst this may have cost advantages for the retailer that could potentially help to keep prices down for the consumer, the short production runs and frequent orders that are fundamental to delivering quick response reduce commitment to any single supplier making the opportunity for long term investment in their business development unlikely. Cost conscious retailers seek only the most advantageous deal for themselves in the short term (Birtwistle, Siddiqui and Fiorito 2003). Ready access to many potential suppliers places the power within the supply chain firmly with the retailer who is able to insist that manufacturers meet their conditions and are responsive to their needs or

they will simply take their business elsewhere (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2006). Consequently retailers have been able to push increasing responsibility for tasks such as quality control, packaging and ticketing on to suppliers in order to reduce cycle times (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2006; Christopher, Lowson and Peck 2004). Suppliers report feeling squeezed by brands and retailers demanding low prices, large quantities and rapid delivery (Birtwistle, Siddiqui and Fiorito 2003; Ethical Fashion Forum 2014). High end designers also complain about the speed at which new styles are required, claiming that they struggle to be profitable in the fast fashion cycle they feel forced to supply (Gonslaves 2015).

The adversarial nature of supply chain relationships that have been created by the introduction of some quick response operations (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2006; Birtwistle, Siddiqui and Fiorito 2003) is contrary to the theoretical intention of the system. Quick response was intended to create a close connection between the retailer and their suppliers through shared information that allows the co-management of inventory (Christopher, Lowson and Peck 2004). Although the suppliers are selected from a wider pool and the relationship is project based and not permanent, it should still be close (Christopher, Lowson and Peck 2004). Whilst this objective is not unachievable, research suggests that in reality the supplier view is more commonly that suppliers take all of the risk and bear the costs whilst the retailers gain the financial benefits (Taplin 2014; Hunter and Valentino 1995).

The increased pressure on suppliers to deliver on time and to take on additional responsibilities places ethical working practices at greater risk of being ignored (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2006). Tragic events such as the factory collapse at Rana Plaza in 2013 and factory fires at Tazreen and Dhaka have attracted media attention (Ethical Fashion Forum 2014) and demonstrated the potential effects of non-compliance with safety standards. In addition, television exposés such as the BBC's 'Primark: On The Rack' (2008) and the Telegraph's coverage of British retailers found to employ child refugees in their factories (MacIntyre 2016), has drawn public attention to unethical employment practices and sub-standard working conditions. Whilst exploitative working conditions have dogged the production

of clothing for hundreds of years (Wilson 2003), globalization and technological advancements have broadened the issue by allowing the fashion industry to site its manufacturing facilities in locations best placed to offer low cost rapid production (Joung 2014). Popular locations for the establishment of quick response operations include Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia, China and Vietnam where there is a fabric manufacturing base, so reducing transport time and cost, and where material and labour costs are low (Textile Exchange Online 2014). Consequently, around 70% of the clothes imported to the EU come from developing countries (Pedersen and Gwozdz 2014). The imbalance of power between manufacturer and supplier and lack of commitment to long term investment in the supply chain has led to the accusation that retailers and consumers within wealthy nations are exploiting the workforce of developing countries motivated by their own greed (Fletcher 2013).

The retailers' defence is often that the production of fibres and garments has the potential to provide significant economic and employment benefits to the host countries (Cataldi, Dickson and Grover 2010); that supply chains comprising wholesalers, agents, contractors, and sub-contractors are highly complex and difficult to control (Pedersen and Gwozdz 2014); and that any negative effects are unintentional claiming that they are unaware of how their purchasing practices might affect the workers supplying their products (Ethical Fashion Forum 2014) or that negative issues are associated with a single stakeholder such as a factory owner hence the issue may be resolved by and revoking that particular contract (Carrigan, Moraes and McEachern 2013).

It is acknowledged that operating sustainably whilst organising the manufacture, transport and aftercare of garments via a globally fragmented supply chain presents a challenge for the fashion industry (Henninger et al. 2015). There is however, increasing pressure on the industry from consumers, regulators and governments urging fashion companies to recognise and take responsibility for reducing their impact on the environment and improving the ethical standards employed in the manufacture of garments (Carrigan, Moraes and McEachern 2013, Shaw et al. 2006).

It is reasoned that slowing the pace of fast fashion would have a positive impact on sustainability for social and ecological reasons (Crewe 2013; Ertekin and Atik 2014; Fletcher 2013). The competitive landscape of fast fashion and use of quick response operations often results in retailers demanding the lowest production costs and fastest turnaround from their suppliers. This pressure on growers and manufacturers often results in poor working conditions, excessive hours and low wages (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2006; Birtwistle, Siddiqui and Fiorito 2003; Claudio 2007). It could be argued that slowing the pace of consumption might remove the pressures for fast turnaround so helping to ensure that working hours are not excessive. However the precise consequences of demand reduction on retail prices, profit margins, employment opportunities and investment are unknown and the outcomes for all of those in the supply chain may not necessarily all be positive. Such complex interdependencies and the possibility that attempts to solve one aspect of the problem of unsustainable clothing consumption may create issues elsewhere, serves to highlight its status as a wicked problem (Peterson 2009).

2.4 Fashion Consumption and the Environment

In terms of environmental sustainability it does seem likely that there would be some ecological gains from reducing the number of garments purchased in the UK. Producing the natural fibres used for clothing manufacture, such as cotton, wool or silk requires large quantities of water and land, often in countries which have water stress or scarcity (WRAP 2011). The widespread use of pesticides used in cotton growing is responsible for the degradation of soil, water and biodiversity (Cataldi, Dickson and Grover 2010). The processes for bleaching and dyeing fabrics are water and energy intensive and involve the use of potentially harmful chemicals (Claudio 2007). The demand for timber as a raw material to create cellulose for the production of man-made fabrics such as viscose has resulted in areas of deforestation (Cataldi, Dickson and Grover 2010). Fabrics man-made from petrochemicals such as polyester and nylon are non-biodegradable and involve manufacturing processes during which

the greenhouse gas nitrous oxide is released into the air and water (Claudio 2007). Fashion production at its current pace consumes resources at a pace that outstrips their supply, jeopardises forests and ecosystems leading to issues such as droughts, desertification and climate change which have a damaging effect on society (Holmberg et al. 1999). Given the environmentally damaging nature of these fashion production methods it could be deduced that a reduction in the number of garments manufactured would have a positive impact on sustainability. This assumes that production and consumption is only reduced and is not switched from many items to fewer, more luxurious items as it has been suggested that in the luxury sector the manufacturing processes are more intensive and less sustainable in their use of resources (Achabou and Dekhili 2013).

2.5 Clothing Disposal and Waste

Fast fashion which prioritises the latest style at the expense of quality appears to have created a culture where it is normal to acquire high volumes of low cost garments that are seen as disposable, wear them only a few times and then discard them in favour of a newer style (Cline 2013; Morgan and Birtwistle 2009). Consequently there is an indisputable relationship between fast fashion and the increasing volume of textile waste (Bianchi and Birtwistle 2012; Joung 2014; Morgan and Birtwistle 2009) which is an issue for sustainability. The impact of fast fashion on clothing disposal habits is supported by Goworek et al (2012) and Bianchi and Birtwistle (2012) whose focus group participants confirmed that they more readily discard cheap garments and that repair of fast fashion items is rarely considered. Nearly half of UK consumers put at least some clothing in the bin contributing to an estimated total of 350,000 tonnes of used clothing entering landfill in the UK every year (WRAP 2011). Clothing that is discarded before being worn out represents economic loss and an unsustainable waste of resources unless a second-hand market exists or the garment may be re-cycled (Dardis 1974; Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015). Although it is more sustainable to keep wearing old clothes the current practice of exporting the UK's discarded clothing to developing countries has fostered a

dependency on the west for clothing and has been accused of preventing the development of local industry (Brooks 2015). Reducing the number of fashion garments purchased in the UK is likely to have a positive impact on sustainability, reducing not only the resources used in manufacture but also the waste generated and volume of second hand clothing exported. It is predicted that, if the life of each garment could be extended by an extra nine months of active use then this would cut resource costs by around 20% or £5 billion (WRAP 2011).

The average UK household owns around £4,000 worth of clothes but individuals report that only 20-30% of the garments owned are worn regularly and circa 30% of the clothing an average wardrobe has not been worn for at least a year, most commonly because it no longer fits (WRAP 2011) . It could be deduced that within a culture where clothing is seen as disposable and where such a small proportion of the garments owned are worn regularly, reducing the amount of clothing purchased would have minimal or no negative impact on wellbeing as the majority of garments seem to hold little value. However, this reasoning appears contrary to research that espouses the importance of clothing as a form of self-expression, status and social identity (Auty and Elliott 1998, Banister and Hogg 2004).

2.6 Fashion and Sustainability

Sustainability has many definitions, one which is widely quoted is that written by Brundtland (1987) who describes sustainability as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own need'. It is widely believed that the challenges of climate change are such that our current levels of consumption are simply not sustainable (McDonagh and Prothero 2014) but there is no clear agreement on what sustainable consumption actually means, what would constitute a level of sustainable consumption or how it could be measured (Jackson 2005). There is a view that the statistical representation of the figures that indicate humankind's contribution towards climate change may be inaccurate as they are open

to manipulation to meet political or organisational objectives (Lefsrud and Meyer 2012). This may call into question the possibility or value of attempting to achieve sustainable consumption if consumption is not the true cause of the issues of sustainability. Douthwaite (1993) purports that true sustainability is only possible with a stable population, therefore sustainable consumption is not achievable within current situation of population growth and asserts that in a no-growth world it would be extremely unlikely that the poor would be able to receive their fair, ethically sustainable share.

A more common view of sustainable consumption is that it is not a utopian situation but a process of making purchase decisions based not only on personal interest but also on the basis of the wellbeing of the environment and society (Goworek et al. 2012). The nature of those purchase decisions and the definition of wellbeing are open to discussion. Some approaches emphasise the need to consume less, possibly by reducing the number of hours worked, earning less, spending less and replacing material items with sources of alternative hedonism such as enjoying time with friends and family (Soper 2008). Others suggest consuming differently rather than consuming less and draw attention to research that indicates that greater satisfaction may be derived from experiential rather than material purchases or the hedonistic pleasures of thrift and giving (Dunn, Gilbert and Wilson 2011; Tatzel 2014). Sustainable consumption is also viewed as having the opportunity to purchase items with the certain knowledge that they have been produced according to sustainable environmental and ethical standards (Bray, Johns and Kilburn 2011; Shaw et al. 2006).

The notion that sustainable consumption involves an evaluation of what is best for the wellbeing of society is problematic in that any evaluation requires a precise definition of what constitutes wellbeing alongside knowledge of the extent to which consumption is good for society versus the potential negative effects that it may have. The description of wellbeing as it is viewed for the purpose of this study is described in greater detail in section 3.1.12. Research suggests that humans possess an instinct for acquisition (Dittmar et al. 2014) and that the products we buy have symbolic meaning importantly associated with our self-identity, social relationships and self-esteem (Auty and Elliott

1998; Banister and Hogg 2004; Hogg, Banister and Stephenson 2009), therefore to remove or limit the facility to consume may have negative consequences for wellbeing rather than the positive outcomes that sustainable consumption is designed to deliver.

In addition, sustainability discourse often refers to the compromise or 'trade-offs' that consumers will need to make in order to achieve sustainable consumption (Grunert 2011, Karlsson 2009; McDonald and Oates 2006). Although described by Scott, Martin and Schouten (2014) as 'false dualities' that are avoidable, the actual nature and extent of any compromise in the form of choice, performance, affordability or convenience that may be required in order to make consumption more sustainable, is uncertain as is the level of compromise that would tip the balance of maximum wellbeing away from sustainability and in favour of consumption.

The difficulties in measuring wellbeing are compounded by the fact that the same outcomes may be positive for some members of society but have detrimental effects for others, whilst some individual consumers may enjoy simpler choices others may feel deprived of the chance to enhance their material status; or whilst part of the supply chain may benefit from improvements in ethical working standards, others may find themselves precluded from the workforce and unable to make a living if their employer does not meet the required standards.

It could be argued that human influence on the climate system is now having such a devastating impact on natural systems that without co-operative effort the warming climate will place the world under enormous strain causing starvation, forcing mass migration and increasing the risk of violent conflict (IPCC - Core Writing Team 2014). Under these circumstances personal perceptions of wellbeing become less relevant compared to the single most important social objective to protect the planet and human race from environmental catastrophe.

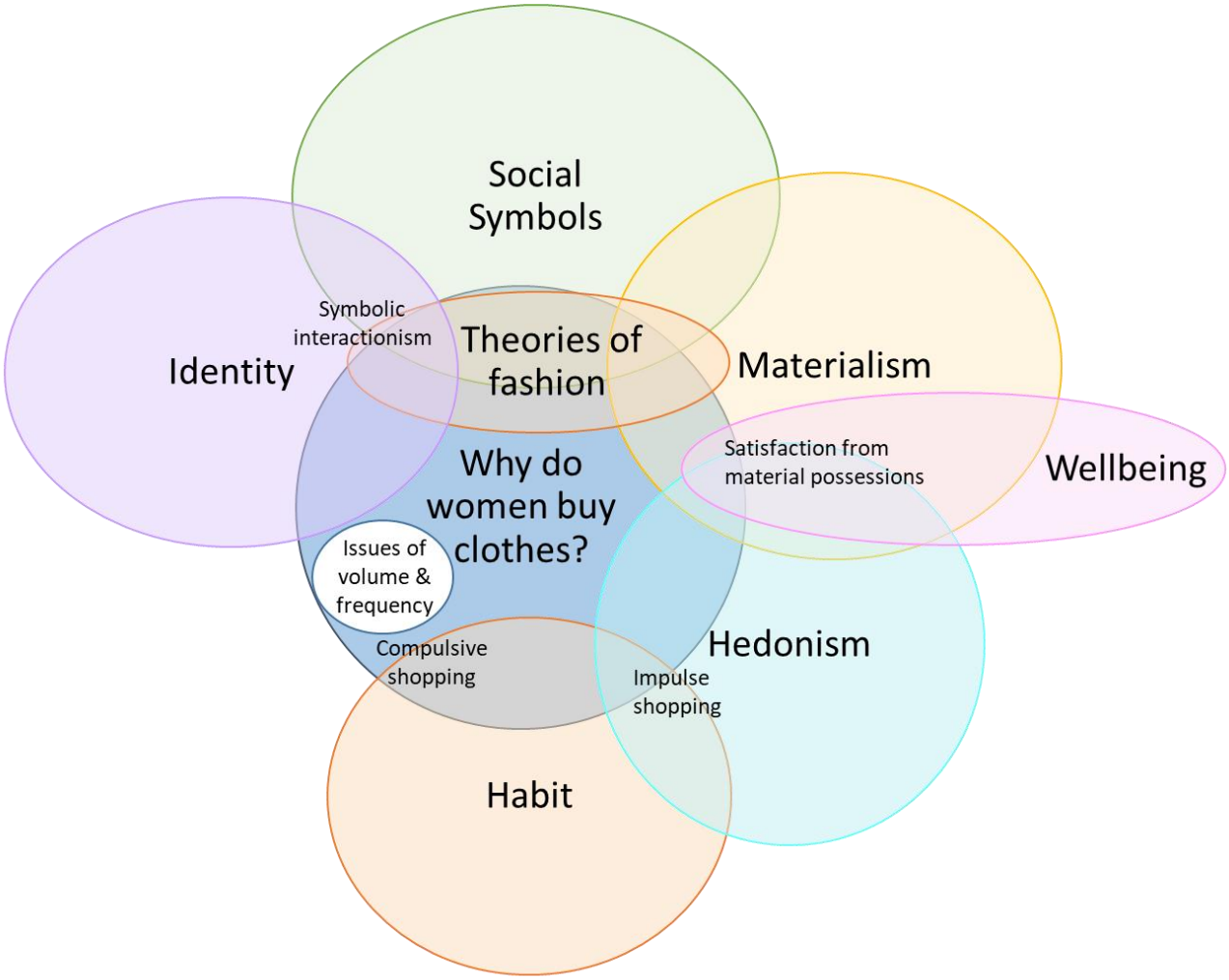
Reflecting upon the contextual evidence, this study takes the view that the current volume of fashion consumption has a negative influence on sustainability, predominantly via the environmental impacts

of carbon emissions, waste and water usage - often in areas where there is already water scarcity (Waste and Resources Action 2012). Based on this information it appears desirable for consumers to be persuaded to buy fewer garments and keep them for longer. The success of any attempts to reduce the level of clothing consumption may lie in the extent to which it can become viewed as normal. This study works towards understanding the type of emotional and symbolic, cultural meanings that may encourage restrained and reduced consumption in the future.

3. Reviewing the Existing Literature

If sustainability in fashion is defined as a wicked problem and given that I am aiming to shed light on the broader social context surrounding frequent clothes shopping, it is to be expected that the existing literature spans a range of subject areas. The current understanding of the reasons that women acquire clothing is located within research that explores issues of identity, social groups and product symbols. Fashion theory has also tended to focus on these areas. Issues relating to the desire to consume products spans explorations of materialism, hedonism, and habit. Importantly for this study, concepts regarding the social mechanisms that propel the fashion system are discovered within the Symbolic Interactionist theories of fashion. Figure 1 illustrates the bodies of literature which contribute towards understanding why women buy clothing.

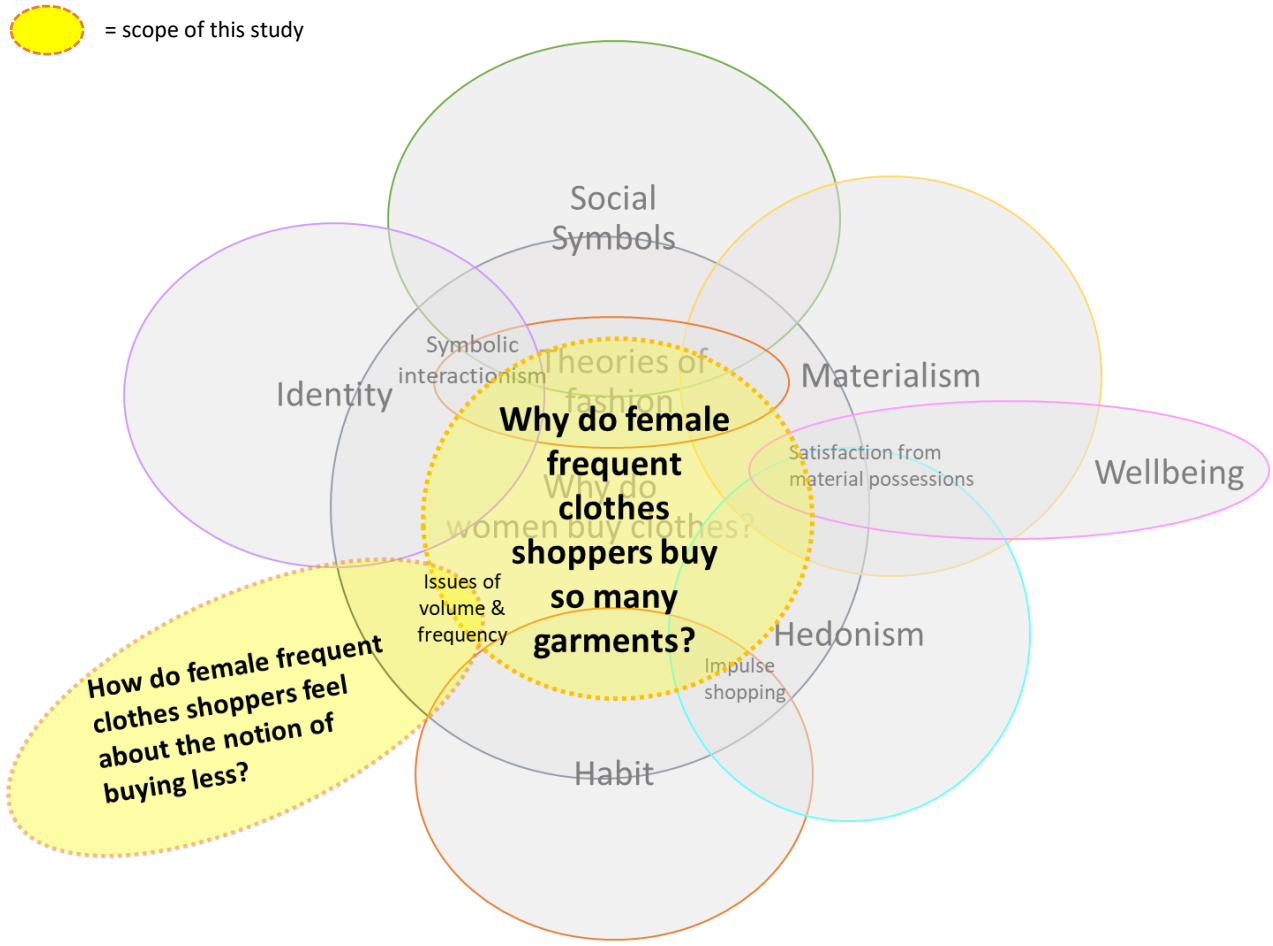
Figure 1: The bodies of literature which contribute towards understanding why women buy clothing



The subject areas included within figure 1 contribute greatly to understanding why women buy clothing for reasons other than practical necessity. They illuminate possible reasons for a desire to be fashionable and for the choice of garment styles. However issues of frequency of clothing purchase and the volume of garments acquired are under explored within the extant literature. This study proposes that volume and frequency are the key components of unsustainable fashion shopping behaviour. It seeks to understand why women make repeated purchases and their feelings towards the notion of buying less hence filling a gap of understanding in this area. Since the question of why female frequent clothes shoppers buy so many clothes is a subset of why women buy clothes then it

follows that some of the literature is relevant to both issues. Figure 2 illustrates the scope of this study within the context of the existing literature.

Figure 2: The Scope of This Study Within the Context of the Existing Literature



The review of existing literature aims to identify those aspects of our understanding of the reasons that women buy clothes that may also hold some influence over the frequency and volume of clothing purchased. Premised on the understanding that 'overconsumption' is taking place my starting point is to review what is meant by overconsumption and explore how this concept is linked by some with materialism and quality of life. The literature relating to materialism signposted a starting point for my review of the topics of hedonistic shopping motivations and identity and from that point I

continued with a traditional literature review (Jesson, Matheson and Lacey 2011) based on my critical assessment of a selection of materials which best illuminate the topics in question.

3.1 Overconsumption, Materialism and Quality of Life

The relationship between material acquisition and perceived quality of life is relevant to the topic of overconsumption in fashion clothing. An individual's perception of their own quality of life may be partly determined by what they have and their satisfaction with standard of living (Sirgy 1998). Satisfaction with standard of living, in turn, is determined by evaluations of one's actual standard of living compared to a set goal (Sirgy 1998; La Placa, McNaught and Knight 2013). Such goals are often influenced by subjective peer comparisons and affective judgements, for example, what is 'deserved' (Sirgy 1998) or by socially defined concepts such as shared understanding of 'how life should be' (Veenhoven, 2008). In this way the acquisition of symbolic goods such as clothing may become representative of achieving a certain standard of living and the individual desire to maintain or enhance standard of living therefore has the potential to influence the type, volume and frequency of goods consumed.

3.1.1 Overconsumption of Clothing

Although the term 'overconsumption' is in common usage, its exact definition is unclear. It is described in the Oxford English dictionary as 'the action or fact of consuming something to excess' however, the point of excess is open to debate. From an environmental point of view overconsumption exists where the pace of resource use is faster than the sustainable capacity of the environment. This situation has already been reached as it is estimated that, globally, we are already using resources at a rate that is 20% greater than sustainable capacity (Sustainable Consumption Roundtable 2006). Assuming that ecological catastrophe would be detrimental to quality of life for all of humankind, and bearing in mind

the devastating environmental impact of the clothing manufacturing process and wasteful disposal of short lifecycle clothing (WRAP 2011) it seems unavoidable that sustainable clothing consumption will involve buying fewer items.

A corresponding view of overconsumption may be that it constitutes that proportion of consumption where any physical, emotional, economic and social rewards do not justify the real cost to the environment, those working in the supply chain and society at large. Whilst the cost/benefit approach could be contemplated as a theoretical definition it would be problematic to define since any evaluation requires knowledge of the extent to which consumption is good for society versus the potential negative effects that it may have. Such is the nature of a wicked problem (Rittel and Webber 1973). The difficulties in measuring what is good for society are compounded by the fact that the same outcomes may be positive for some members of society but have detrimental effects for others. An alternative suggestion is that a situation of excessive or hyper-consumption exists where consumers are no longer aware of the natural and human resources employed in the manufacture of goods (Kilbourne, McDonagh and Prothero 1997). This has similarity with the Marxist notion of commodity fetishism whereby there is a total separation of the item being consumed from the intrinsic value of its production, consequently it is the image that is being consumed rather than the object (Hudson and Hudson 2003). If this definition of hyper-consumption were taken to be synonymous with overconsumption then the vast majority of clothing purchases would fall into that category since clothing functions beyond its utilitarian attributes (Blumer 1969b; Davis 1994). Clothing choices are rarely made on the basis of functional considerations such warmth or for the skill of the craftspeople who made them (Davis 1994). More typically the source of the satisfaction derived from the acquisition of garments is the belief that they will enhance one's appearance in the eyes of others (Auty and Elliott 1998). In this respect clothing consumption could be regarded as satisfying a symbolic, social or psychological need as opposed to a natural or physiological need (Deci and Ryan 2000).

The view that hyper-consumption exists where an object is being consumed for its image rather than its functional attributes implies that symbolic acquisition is surplus to requirements, more than is needed. The inference is that natural needs are regarded to be somehow more valid or genuine than symbolic or social needs (Alvesson 1994; Hudson and Hudson 2003). This viewpoint is reflected in the philosophy of Marcuse (1964) who suggested that individuals uncritically respond to false needs perpetuated within mass media (Marcuse 2013) accepting the apparent freedom to choose as an excuse for continuing environmental destruction (Luke 2000). Conversely the consideration of symbolic needs as being imagined, destructive or of inferior importance may be disputed since they have been associated with significant aspects of wellbeing such as social belonging (Miller 2010; Shankar, Elliott and Fitchett 2009), self-identity (Blumer 1969b; Davis 1994) and positive evaluation of standard of living (Sirgy et al. 2013). The positive and negative aspects of material acquisition are discussed in greater detail in the following section relating to materialism.

Still, if it were to be assumed that symbolic and social needs are somehow false (Marcuse 2013), since products are often imagined symbolically prior to their production, the distinction between cultural symbols, product image and utility is rarely clear-cut (Bhat and Reddy 1998; Dolan 2002). Even the use of mundane products and ordinary consumption habits have been shown to comprise an element of congruence with self-image in their selection (Kleine, Kleine and Kernan 1993). It may be considered that buying behaviour motivated by product image is the main contributor to overconsumption since it is seemingly limitless, appearing to satisfy no finite objective. It is consumption for its own sake (Kilbourne, McDonagh and Prothero 1997). One could argue however that consumption to satisfy symbolic needs is not necessarily over-consumption. If consumption has an objective even if the only purpose is to enjoy the experience of acquiring the item and a product satisfies any kind of need whether it be symbolic, social or hedonic, can it ever be considered as overconsumption?

This study takes the view all consumption which takes us beyond the capabilities of natural resources is overconsumption but that hyper consumption as defined above is not the same as overconsumption. The viewpoint of this study is that buying something for social or symbolic needs is not automatically over-consuming. For frequent clothes shoppers, social and symbolic needs are real and offer experienced rewards that have an impact on the view of self. This is evidenced within the findings. For the purpose of this study, consumption is not overconsumption provided that it is sustainable, that is to say that it operates within a system which can be supported indefinitely in terms of human impact on the environment and social responsibility (Fletcher 2013) and that it satisfies a consumer need whether that be symbolic, social or hedonic.

The notion of shoppers choosing to acquire clothing without reward may seem unlikely. However given indications from the (WRAP 2011) that only 23-30% of garments are worn regularly, alongside evidence that clothing donated to charity consistently contains an amount of unworn clothing (Ha-Brookshire and Hodges 2009) as well as reports of levels of disappointment amongst fast fashion consumers (Zarley Watson et al. 2013) it appears that a proportion of clothing brings very little consumer satisfaction. As part of its exploration of the behavior of frequent female fashion shoppers this study seeks to investigate which shopping scenarios deliver least satisfaction, how and why this behavior occurs, and whether some purchases may be more readily relinquished in the interests of sustainability.

3.1.2 Money, Quality of Life and Wellbeing

A dominant social paradigm is defined as a social belief structure which influences the way in which people interpret the world around them (Kilbourne, McDonagh and Prothero 1997; Polonsky, Kilbourne and Vocino 2014). Within Western society, the common economic perspective is that the consumption of goods and services fulfils some kind of desire and that consumer wants and needs are insatiable (Lipsey and Chrystal 1999). Emerging from this assumption is the dominant social paradigm

that the more we consume, the better off we are (Kilbourne, McDonagh and Prothero 1997) thus the level of consumption is inextricably linked with perceived quality of life. The common assumption is that the more we have the happier we are. Both Polonsky et al. (2014) and Kilbourne, McDonagh and Prothero (1997) describe how the prevalent ideology that acquisition of material wealth improves wellbeing and quality of life, presents a challenge in making consumption habits more sustainable. Yet there are good grounds for associating quality of life with income. Money provides access to medical care, education and social status (Ahuvia et al. 2015). It offers a buffer against worry, buys leisure time and the opportunity for pleasurable experiences (Dunn, Gilbert and Wilson 2011). The standard of health, level of education, employment opportunities and longevity have all been seen to correlate with wealth (Diener et al. 2010). Within areas of poverty there is a dependable link between increased income and subjective wellbeing or happiness as additional wealth allows people to better meet their basic needs (Ahuvia et al. 2015; Ahuvia 2008). Other studies support the finding that there is a modest, but reliable link between household income and feelings of subjective wellbeing (Aknin, Norton and Dunn 2009; Diener and Oishi 2000). However it does not follow that consumers in the wealthiest countries are the happiest (Haller and Hadler 2006).

The relationship between material acquisition and subjective wellbeing is relevant to the topic of overconsumption in fashion clothing since it is useful in understanding the potential reasons why clothes shoppers may be motivated to make frequent purchases if the reward from these acquisitions is an improved sense of wellbeing. It is also important in considering how any attempt to reduce the volume of clothing consumed might have a negative impact on the happiness of consumers. The concept of wellbeing is complex. There are many descriptions of wellbeing yet the question of how it should be defined remains unanswered (Dodge et al. 2012). In 1978 Shin and Johnson defined wellbeing as 'a global assessment of a person's quality of life according to his own chosen criteria'. It is clear from this definition that wellbeing and quality of life were viewed as different constructs. Wellbeing construed as a subjective assessment of quality of life, the meaning of which is not defined within the article (Shin and Johnson 1978:478). However, more recent literature within the field of

social policy has a tendency to use the terms wellbeing and quality of life interchangeably (La Placa, McNaught and Knight 2013; Dodge et al. 2012) further complicating the task of defining wellbeing. Marks and Shah (2004) aligned wellbeing with a description of a 'flourishing society'. In contrast to the dominant social paradigm described by Polonsky et al. (2014) and Kilbourne et al. (1997) which assumes that the more people have, the better off they are, the view expounded by Marks and Shah (2004) is that as wellbeing means being happy, fulfilled, developing as a person and making a contribution to the community. The view that consuming less has the potential to improve life satisfaction is supported by Soper (2008) and Schor and Thompson (2014) who suggest that by reducing the number of hours worked, escaping the work/spend cycle (Schor 2010) earning less, and replacing material items with sources of alternative hedonism such as enjoying time with friends and family.

This study is concerned with the sense of wellbeing that is experienced by female frequent clothes shoppers and is associated with their decision and ability to acquire more than twenty garments of clothing per year. Drawing upon Diener et al. (2010), subjective wellbeing in this study includes an individual's positive and negative evaluations about life satisfaction, how they are viewed by others and their perceived levels of happiness. This study accepts the view of Veenhoven (2008) in considering that "overall happiness" is synonymous with life satisfaction and subjective wellbeing. Whilst individuals actively create and interpret wellbeing, it is capable of being influenced by socially defined concepts such as shared understanding of 'how life should be' (Veenhoven, 2008). Kahneman (1999) described two types of individual wellbeing, those which require a reflective judgement of one's life, such as how life is compared to how it 'should be' and in contrast, momentary positive feelings of happiness. Income has been found to be strongly associated with the former, those with higher incomes consistently report feeling more satisfied with life; but weakly associated with the latter as income has very little effect on the degree of positive day to day emotion (Diener et al. 2010; Kahneman 1999).

There is some evidence to suggest that consumers can find the post purchase experience of owning certain products engrossing, positive and transcendent (Ahuvia 1992). However, the more common suggestion is that money and possessions are limited in their capability to improve subjective wellbeing (Diener et al. 2010; Kahneman 1999; Aknin, Norton and Dunn 2009; Diener and Oishi 2000). One suggested explanation for this is that, whilst money provides the opportunity for happiness, the purchasing choices made by consumers do not bring the level of pleasure that they anticipate (Dunn, Gilbert and Wilson 2011). This implies that consumers do not fully understand what brings happiness or how to sustain it. This notion is supported by Dunn et al. (2011) who suggest that this is because, when deciding how to spend, individuals rely on affective forecasts based on imagined impressions of future events and the extent of their appreciation of products, which often turn out to be inaccurate (Dunn, Gilbert and Wilson 2011; Wilson and Gilbert 2005). Similarly, individuals have been shown to express a preference for changeable decisions when in fact there is evidence to suggest that greater satisfaction is linked with permanent choices. This also demonstrates how errors in affective forecasting can lead people to behave in ways that do not optimise their happiness and well-being

Within the fashion market it could be said that disposable income and choice allows consumers to buy what they perceive they want and the shopping experience may provide them with feelings that they enjoy (Diener et al. 2010). It does not however guarantee that their chosen products will be sufficiently liked to deliver the anticipated level of happiness. A qualitative study of 39 fast fashion consumers revealed them to have higher levels of dissatisfaction with their purchases than those who avoided fast fashion stores (Zarley Watson et al. 2013). The source of the post purchase disappointment tends to be with how the garment makes the wearer feel rather than any dissatisfaction with the longevity of the garment since fast fashion items are often purchased with the expectation of a short wardrobe life (Zarley Watson et al. 2013). One could argue that overconsumption of fashion clothing may be the result of the inability of consumers to understand which garments will bring them the greatest satisfaction over time. There have been suggestions that individuals might be happier with their wardrobe if they purchased fewer, well considered, better quality garments (Cline 2013; Fletcher,

Grose and Hawken 2012; Siegle 2011). If a lack of understanding how money may best be spent to optimise wellbeing is the cause of overconsumption then one can speculate that consumption could be reduced by educating consumers regarding how to best evaluate their options prior to purchase. In this way consumption may be reduced without detriment to wellbeing as consumers enjoy their perfect capsule wardrobe[1] so achieving the double dividend situation (Jackson 2005).

Whilst there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that moving from a situation of high volume clothing ownership to a purposefully curated capsule wardrobe makes some people more satisfied with the clothing they own (Cline 2013), this situation is not necessarily the same as people maximising their sense of wellbeing. One could argue that in pursuing a sense of wellbeing via clothes shopping, rather than misconstruing what makes them happy, the opposite is true. Overconsumption of fashion could be the result of people understanding exactly what maximises their happiness; that is, to shop often. There is evidence to suggest that experiencing many small pleasures brings a greater sense of wellbeing than one greater or more expensive experience, since the pleasure of new items is fleeting as people quickly adapt to their ownership (Dunn, Gilbert and Wilson 2011). If overconsumption is motivated by the frequent desire for gratification then any change in behaviour towards reduced consumption would require a challenge to the relationship between pleasure and the frequent purchase of something new.

Under symbolic interactionist tradition, the reason that material acquisition brings gratification is rooted in the consumer's belief that the ownership of the product will be favourably perceived by others (Mead 1969a). Since the shared symbols of goods are socially constructed it could be reasoned that breaking the link between the accumulation of material goods and the social status or symbolic value that delivers the sense of pleasure would require a change in the prevailing view that material

[1] The term "capsule wardrobe" was devised by London boutique owner Susie Faux in the 1970s. A capsule wardrobe was defined as a compact wardrobe made up of 30 or fewer staple garments in coordinating colours

wealth and possessions improve quality of life and bring happiness (Kilbourne, McDonagh and Prothero 1997; Polonsky, Kilbourne and Vocino 2014).

3.1.3 Materialism

Materialism is the commonly used term to describe the importance that one attaches to material goods. The concept of materialism is important in considering why some consumer may be inclined to purchase high volumes of products, particularly those with symbolic value such as clothing. Research has characterised materialism in a variety of ways. In 1992 Richins and Dawson explored the consistently appearing themes of materialism and concluded that these are, 1) the view that material possessions are an indication of the level of success of oneself and others; 2) the acquisition of possessions is central to the lives of materialists and this serves as a life plan or set of goals; 3) material objects are viewed as essential to satisfaction and well-being in life. For materialistic individuals the acquisition of money and possessions is a motivational goal (Nickerson et al. 2003; Sirgy et al. 2013). One of the reasons that acquiring goods is of exaggerated importance to materialists is that they view these as essential to their happiness and satisfaction in life (Belk 1985; Kasser and Ahuvia 2002b). The reason that material acquisition brings these individuals happiness and satisfaction is that they tend to judge their own success and the status of others, by the number and type of possessions accumulated (Kasser and Ahuvia 2002b; Richins and Dawson 1992). The materialists' preoccupation with how one is seen by others may drive accumulation of money and things in an attempt to enhance appearance, impress others and foster popularity (Kasser and Ahuvia 2002b). Materialist individuals have been observed to shop more frequently (Flynn, Goldsmith and Pollitte 2016) and in this respect materialism could be viewed as contributing to overconsumption.

Materialism is sometimes associated with luxury or status goods which may be less frequent, high value purchases (Hudders and Pandelaere 2012; Joy et al. 2012). One viewpoint is that this type of conspicuous consumption (Tilman 2006) could be more sustainable than the high volume purchasing

of mass produced items since luxury products may be designed to offer lasting worth (Cuercini and Ranfagni 2013). For clothing, luxury ranges could be seen to offer durability and exclusivity that last in the wake of changing fashions (Cuercini and Ranfagni 2013; Kapferer 2015). In a quantitative study of 966 respondents who had purchased at least five luxury products within twelve months Kapferer (2015) found that consumers of luxury clothing were inclined to keep garments for longer or invest in having them repaired and such garments are more likely to be re-used once they are disposed of by their original owner (Kapferer 2010). In contrast, criticisms levelled at the luxury fashion market include accusations that it has been slow to review whether its manufacturing operations are conducted in a socially, ethical and environmentally responsible manner (Carrigan, Moraes and McEachern 2013). In addition luxury is seen by some to signal waste, excess and inequality, said to be contributory factors to social tension (Kapferer 2015). If the driving force of materialism is a desire to emulate the richest in society, then luxury products may provide an opportunity to lead the way by re-defining the ideal consumption from a selfish individual one, to a more sustainable alternative (Kapferer 2010).

However the popularity of fast fashion suggests that it is not the luxury, quality, exclusivity or durability of clothing which is aspirational rather the newness, variety and ability to shop frequently (Miller, Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2013). The driving force behind this type of materialism may still be seen as the desire to enhance appearance in the eyes of others, but it appears to demonstrate that for frequent clothes shoppers, the consumption ideal that is perceived to impress is not a display of wealth, luxury or material status. Frequent fashion consumers appear to perceive that the way to impress others is the ability to remain modern and stylish (Atik and Fırat 2013; Blumer 1969b; Zarley Watson et al. 2013) and to look 'right' or on every occasion by dressing in a way that includes elements of the latest fashions within the confines of social appropriateness (Davis 1994; Thompson and Haytko 1997). For consumers of fast fashion the route to the admiration of others is sometimes viewed as the ability to be first to adopt new trends (Miller, Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2013), to be seen as expert in creating different 'looks' and being able to change one's style frequently (Miller, Barnes and Lea-

Greenwood 2013; Zarley Watson et al. 2013). Social media has provided a convenient vehicle to elicit the admiration of others via the sharing and display of fashion choices either via deliberate fashion blogging (Rocamora 2011) or using popular platforms such as Facebook and Instagram (Blázquez 2014; Cho and Workman 2011).

If materialism is a contributory factor to overconsumption driven by the desire to present a favourable image to others, and the general perception is that status comes from the ability to keep up with changing fashions, then consumption reduction would require either a challenge to materialistic instincts or the type of consumption that is commonly viewed as bringing commendation.

There has been much discussion regarding whether materialism is a positive or negative human trait and its impact on wellbeing. Research has linked materialistic tendencies with lower well-being, including depression, anxiety, physical health problems and dysfunctional consumer behavior (Kasser 2002; Kasser and Ahuvia 2002a; Richins and Dawson 1992). However, despite the consistency of these findings the causal direction is not clear – does materialism make people unhappy or do people who are generally discontented try to make themselves happier through consumption (Shrum and Lowrey 2014)? A later study by Sirgy et al (2013) revealed that highly materialistic individuals felt more negatively about their quality of life as they frequently compared themselves with inflated and unrealistic expectations. However the same study showed that a degree of materialism had a positive effect on perceived quality of life in creating economic motivation and a sense of achievement where the individual measured themselves against more realistic, ability-based targets (Sirgy et al. 2013). If some aspects of materialism make a positive contribution to wellbeing then this raises a question regarding whether there is a type or extent of materialism that should be fostered. Alternatively, are there aspects of materialism that should be discouraged in the interests of sustainability and how may these be defined?

The desire to possess material goods may be viewed as a natural human instinct (Jackson 2005; Miller 2010) however this does not explain why the drive to acquire possessions is much stronger in some

individuals and societies than in others (Dittmar 1992). This study aims to uncover how materialistic features present themselves and the impact they may have on frequent fashion shopping behavior. Belk (1985) linked materialism with personality traits of envy, non-generosity and possessiveness that were negatively correlated with satisfaction and happiness in life though it was not determined whether the personality traits or the life satisfaction scores were the consequence of or antecedent to materialistic tendencies (Belk 1985; Polonsky, Kilbourne and Vocino 2014). Material goods are also important to people because of what they symbolise. Acquisition and consumption may bring happiness as part of valued behaviours such as homemaking and caring for others (Jackson 2005; Miller 2010) or fulfilling motives such as family support, security, and pride (Shrum and Lowrey 2014). Of particular relevance to fashion, the acquisition of clothing may constitute an important signal of self-identity (Davis 1994) or symbolise the desire to belong to a certain group (Banister and Hogg 2004). In addition the ability to choose and acquire goods may provide a sense of control or power over one's life and a sense of self-esteem (Shrum and Lowrey 2014).

Materialism is often viewed as a concern with self-interest and the pursuit of individual rather than community goals. Materialistic values have been negatively related to ecological concern and behaviours (Kilbourne and Pickett 2008) though the extent to which material goals may override concern for the environment has also been demonstrated to depend on cultural attitudes towards protection of the environment (Polonsky, Kilbourne and Vocino 2014). The potential link between materialism and the volume of clothing consumed is not specifically explored within the extant literature. For some individuals an exaggerated belief in the transformative nature of products and an over emphasis on material acquisition (Richins 2011) may be linked with compulsive buying (Dittmar 2005) and/or have negative impacts on wellbeing (Kasser and Ahuvia 2002a). However, this is not universally the case. It has been argued that a common pursuit of consumption goals or the shared experience of evaluating, choosing and discussing what to acquire can have a positive impact on life satisfaction (Belk 1985; Gentina, Shrum and Lowrey 2015).

If the desire to acquire goods is not inherently bad for social or individual wellbeing then perhaps the focus to improve sustainability should be to renegotiate the symbolic meanings that are associated with success. Accepting that this is not a simple task, and one that requires social and cultural change, if the pursuit of favourable judgment by others is the motivation for consumption then it may be possible to change consumption habits by altering their associated meaning (Jackson 2005). Can there be anything impressive about clothing manufactured under reprehensible working conditions producing catastrophic levels of pollution? (Kapferer 2010; Shaw et al. 2006). If the symbolic understanding of products were to reflect the ethical and sustainable nature of what is owned then it may be possible for materialism to exist alongside sustainability. From the extant literature we understand that materialism plays a part in motivating consumption and that products are consumed for their symbolic value as well as their practical attributes. It is also apparent that consuming certain products can provide some individuals feelings of wellbeing, achievement and social belonging. This study seeks to complement this knowledge by specifically exploring why frequent female clothes shoppers buy so many garments. It aims to reveal the nature of the symbols associated with frequent clothes shopping and to discover how shared understanding of these symbols is socially perpetuated.

3.2 Hedonic Shopping Motivations

One of the greatest drivers of consumption is seemingly that people enjoy shopping. An exploration of hedonic shopping motivations is therefore relevant when considering why some fashion shoppers frequently buy garments. For many the shopping experience holds some hedonic value and for some it is positively fascinating (Prus and Dawson 1991). Hedonic consumption is commonly described as involving the acquisition of products in the pursuit of happiness and to achieve immediate gratification (Miller et al. 2013; Hirschman and Holbrook 1982; Arnold and Reynolds 2003; Zarley Watson et al. 2013). However it is not just the acquisition and consumption of products that bring feelings of

pleasure. A mixed methods study by Arnold and Reynolds (2003) used qualitative techniques to uncover six hedonic reasons that people shop, these were adventure, gratification, role, value, social, and idea shopping motivations. These categories describe the emotional and experiential pleasures that individuals derive from shopping. Using these hedonic motivations as a base a cluster analysis of 269 consumers was used to reveal five shopper segments, called Minimalists, Gatherers, Providers, Enthusiasts, and Traditionalists. With the exception of the minimalists who scored low on all apart from one of the hedonic motivators, every segment was shown to derive pleasure from the shopping experience.

Whilst shopping is generally accepted as a pleasurable pastime in modern culture (Prus and Dawson 1991; Bloch and Richins 1983; Tifferet and Herstein 2012; Barnes et al. 2013) some critics of hedonic consumption view the notion that individuals derive pleasure from the accumulation of goods as indicative of self-indulgence possibly at the expense of other values such as spirituality and family orientation (O'Shaughnessy and Jackson O'Shaughnessy 2002; Dittmar et al. 2014). Similar accusations are levelled at the concept of materialism (Shrum and Lowrey 2014). Whilst materialism and hedonism may be viewed as stemming from the same need for gratification (Kasser 2002; Dittmar et al. 2014) there are distinct differences in how the satisfaction is experienced. Hedonic consumption is driven by the enjoyment that an individual derives from shopping for, buying and using a product (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982). The hedonic buying task is concerned with experiencing entertainment, fun, fantasy and sensory stimulation (Babin et al., 1994). There is evidence to suggest that the seeking experience may be far more significant than the acquisition of the product (Sherry 1990). In essence the purely hedonic consumer buys so they can shop rather than shopping so they can buy (Babin et al. 1994). In contrast, the purely materialistic shopper is focused on the task of acquiring a product and is unlikely to be satisfied with the experience if nothing is purchased (Babin et al. 1994; Dittmar et al. 2014; Bäckström 2011).

The following sections 3.2.1 describe what is known about the hedonic reasons for shopping behaviour. Whilst the literature surrounding hedonic shopping motivations does not specifically address frequent clothes shopping, the understanding of how individuals gain pleasure from shopping may illuminate aspects of the reasons for overconsumption of clothing.

3.2.1 Recreational Shopping

In reality, for most people, the shopping experience comprises a combination of task-related, rational choices between products and emotional aspects of an enjoyable leisure activity (Arnold and Reynolds 2003; Hirschman and Holbrook 1982). Individuals have been found to simultaneously describe shopping as both recreational and laborious (Prus and Dawson 1991; Babin et al. 1994). For example shopping may be exciting and interesting but at the same time frustrating and rushed. Whilst some shopping expeditions are regarded as onerous, unavoidable and boring others are undertaken with enthusiasm, interest and excitement (Arnold and Reynolds 2003). It has been proposed that the hedonic value of a shopping occasion depends on both situational conditions and personal attitude towards shopping (Tifferet and Herstein 2012). Shopping occasions are likely to be described as more enjoyable when they are perceived to be pressure-free, relaxed, adequate funds are available and the shopper feels familiar and competent in their surroundings (Prus and Dawson 1991).

In addition, certain individuals have been shown to have a greater personal pre-disposition to the enjoyment of recreational shopping. Using a quantitative survey of 561 respondents Guiry and Lutz (2000) described these groups as ‘normal recreational shoppers’ and ‘recreational shopping enthusiasts’, definitions which were later refined by Guiry et al. (2006). Both of these groups were seen to perceive the shopping experience in a different way to the ’non-recreational shopper’ (Guiry and Lutz 2000). The two recreational shopping groups described the act of shopping as incorporating dimensions associated with leisure pursuits such as fantasy, escape, enjoyment, mastery, spontaneity

and social interaction (Shamir 1992). These leisure associations were found to be strongest for the 'recreational shopping enthusiast' who were also distinguished from the 'normal recreational shoppers' by their consideration that shopping contributed to their self-concept as it facilitated their intensified need for uniqueness and desire to be creative (Guiry and Lutz 2000; Guiry, Mägi and Lutz 2006).

Related to studies of hedonism and materialism, research into the experiences of fast fashion shoppers has revealed that they experience high levels of emotional arousal through the shopping experience (Zarley Watson et al. 2013) and that they delight in the ephemerality of ranges that enables them to create unique looks and change them frequently (Miller, Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2013). In addition a higher degree of pleasure experienced whilst shopping has been linked to an increase in the volume of clothing purchased (Scarpi 2006). In order to understand the reasons for overconsumption in fashion shopping, it is therefore necessary to appreciate the ways that shopping for clothes delivers feelings of pleasure and enjoyment.

3.2.2 Escapism and Excitement

Within the literature, it is proposed that individuals often appraise products including clothing based on their symbolic meanings rather than practical attributes (Auty and Elliott 1998; Grubb and Grathwohl 1967; McCracken and Roth 1989). In this respect product image and emotion rather than stark reality is the central focus. The relationship between clothing and identity will be discussed in greater detail in the following section. Related to hedonic motivations, the purchase of clothing is often tied to the imaginative constructions of the 'ideal self' based not on what consumers know to be real but what they desire to be real (Dittmar 2005; Hirschman and Holbrook 1982). Providing an escape from reality and an opportunity for fantasy is commonly cited as one of the ways that the shopping experience delivers pleasure to consumers (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982). Even for people who are 'at home' with reality, the notion of escaping the routine or moving to a more ideal or exciting

scenario may be appealing (Cohen and Taylor 2003). Arnold and Reynold's (2003) study of hedonic shopping motivations summarised these feelings as adventure seeking behaviour. Their respondents described sensations of excitement stimulation and being in another world (Arnold and Reynolds 2003). Similarly shopping activity has been likened to scouting (Bäckström 2011) with consumers gaining enjoyment from just being at the marketplace (Sherry 1990) since it provides a sense of escapism and emotional stimulation (Bäckström 2011; Guiry and Lutz 2000). It is suggested that those with a greater interest in the product concerned might experience a higher level of mental stimulation and pleasure from browsing activity (Bloch and Richins 1983; Workman and Studak 2007). Bloch and Richins (1983) propose that opinion leaders are the most frequent browsers and often find the act of browsing pleasurable in itself. Similarly, for fashion shopping, style leaders compared to fashion followers, are described as shopping more frequently and valuing the experience more highly as a means of entertainment and stimulation (Workman and Studak 2007). For online shopping behaviours, Cho and Workman's (2011) study of 277 fashion shoppers age 18 to 26 revealed that consumers high in fashion innovativeness showed a greater enjoyment in browsing for fashion, and often chose to do so both on and offline. Women who were high in fashion innovativeness and opinion leadership took greater satisfaction from touching the garments when shopping for clothing, yet this group more frequently went on to make the purchase online demonstrating a multi-channel approach to browsing (Cho and Workman 2011).

3.2.3 Mastery and Competence

The consumer desire to take a multi-channel approach to fashion shopping via browsing and evaluating products online as well as experiencing them in store (Blázquez 2014) may suggest that shopping affords pleasure to consumers by enabling them to feel that they have a high degree of competence or mastery over the purchase task (Guiry and Lutz 2000). Some individuals are seen to approach the marketplace as a challenge in which one may shrewdly assess the situation in order to

make the 'best' purchase decision (Prus and Dawson 1991). In this respect shopping may be seen to deliver a similar sense of enjoyment as a game to be won (Prus and Dawson 1991), solving a puzzle or mission (Guiry, Mägi and Lutz 2006) or the satisfaction from hunting for and finding objects of desire (Bäckström 2011). For some, satisfaction is derived from browsing to add to one's stock of knowledge and potentially become a 'better player' (Prus and Dawson 1991). The notion of acquiring skills to respond well to a challenge is considered to be an engaging element of hobbies and tasks (Csikszentmihalyi 1994). Others may find gratification in seeking out the items that they perceive as best value (Arnold and Reynolds 2003; Sherry 1990). There is evidence to suggest that some shoppers enjoy hunting for bargains, looking for sales and finding discounted or low prices (Arnold and Reynolds 2003; Sherry 1990). It is also suggested that the perception of finding a bargain provides increased sensory involvement and excitement (Babin, Darden and Griffin 1994) and may lead to satisfaction from personal achievement (Arnold and Reynolds 2003). For some, the facility to review purchases online or share images and opinion on garments may add to their sense of ownership of a particular style (Rocamora 2011). For fast fashion shoppers high levels of satisfaction were seen to be associated with locating inexpensive, on-trend garments and acquiring them in abundance (Miller 2012). A qualitative study by Zarley Watson et al. (2013) revealed that, for those choosing fast fashion, low garment price facilitates their enjoyment of buying high volumes of clothing and serves to keep post-consumption guilt over the amount spent at an acceptable level. In contrast, consumers of slow fashion were observed to derive lower levels of satisfaction from finding inexpensive garments, taking greater pleasure from the quality of the garment and its versatility in the anticipation that it will be worn many times (Zarley Watson et al. 2013).

3.2.4 Elevation of Mood

Studies regarding hedonic shopping motivations also point to the perceived ability of the shopping experience to reduce stress levels and alleviate a negative mood (Arnold and Reynolds 2003). Some consumers have been observed to use the shopping experience to relax, wind down, return to emotional equilibrium or just to treat themselves (Arnold and Reynolds 2003). It is proposed that hedonic consumption which involves emotional experience, pleasure and fun, activates positive mood (Kronrod, Grinstein and Wathieu 2012). The phrase 'retail therapy' is in common usage illustrating a belief in the use of shopping as a therapeutic activity employed as a "pick-me-up" or a "lift" when feeling depressed (Babin, Darden and Griffin 1994). It has been shown that, for some, even anticipation of shopping can raise levels of dopamine in the body which is a neurotransmitter released during pleasurable experiences (Berns 2010) and that shopping is associated with increased activity within the area of the brain associated with positive thinking (Dennis et al. 2007). In providing the opportunity to avoid the problems of daily life and negative aspects such as dullness, stress or anxiety (Arnold and Reynolds 2012), shopping offers a chance to respond to positive stimuli such as interest in fashion, novelty and value seeking, and becomes an attractive pursuit with escapist qualities (Babin, Darden and Griffin 1994). Woodruffe (1997) upholds the suggestion that consumption plays a key role in maintaining positive mood and is widely used by people to remedy negative emotional states. Her observations include the use of consumption behaviour to compensate for feeling depressed or tired, family tension or a hard day at work (Woodruffe 1997).

3.2.5 Social Shopping

A pleasurable shopping expedition is sometimes seen to be a consequence of sharing the experience with others (Arnold and Reynolds 2003). Shopping with friends and family provides the opportunity to socialise and bond with others (Arnold and Reynolds 2003). Shopping as socialising may represent a leisure occasion for the purpose of amusement regardless of whether a purchase is made (Bäckström

2011). In addition, some shoppers appreciate the opportunity to talk about and consult one another about intended purchases (Bäckström 2011; Westbrook and Black 1985). Such shoppers gain pleasure from comparing brand meanings and ideas whilst making joint efforts to find desirable items (Bäckström 2011). The online shopping experience has also been shown to have a social dimension emerging from the facility to share product reviews and involve friends in the shopping process and experience via social networks (Trevinal and Stenger 2014).

An individual's interpretation of their social role has also been shown to influence the satisfaction that they derive from shopping activity (Arnold and Reynolds 2003). There is evidence that women take their identity as shoppers seriously, feeling that it is part of their role to be capable and knowledgeable in the shopping environment (Woodruffe 1997). A study by Fischer and Arnold (1990) observed that women appeared to view shopping for Christmas gifts as real and important work in comparison to men who saw gift shopping as "play". In addition high levels of enjoyment have been observed amongst shoppers when seeking to find the perfect items for others as this may be considered a reflection of their ability as a mother/friend/wife (Arnold and Reynolds 2003). These feelings may also reflect the importance that women place on the task of shopping for their own clothing. This is consistent with Guiry and Lutz (2000) definition of the recreational shopping enthusiast who views shopping as a salient dimension of their self-concept.

3.2.6 Seeking Novelty and Variety

For some individuals the satisfaction of keeping up with new trends fashions and innovations is an important part of shopping and makes a significant contribution to their enjoyment of the experience (Arnold and Reynolds 2003). Novelty or variety seeking behaviour may be considered as a natural human inclination that serves as a means of creating a bank of potentially useful knowledge (Acker and McReynolds 1967). However the natural tendency to show curiosity about new products and ideas or inherent novelty seeking (Hirschman 1980) may be distinguished from actualised novelty

seeking whereby consumers purposely undertake specific action in order to explore the new and interesting (Hirschman 1980). The consumer desire to investigate new product ranges may be linked to the notion of competence or mastery (Guiry and Lutz 2000) if the purpose is to evaluate and comprehend the options available in order to make an informed decision (Hirschman 1980). Alternatively, described by Arnold as 'idea shopping,' consumers may seek inspiration about what they should buy next from browsing new ranges (Arnold and Reynolds 2003) or they might simply seek to avoid boredom and enjoy the stimulation of experiencing newness and variety (Kahn 1995; Sharma, Sivakumaran and Marshall 2010). It has been observed that variety seeking behaviour may also occur where consumers are uncertain of their preferences or find a decision difficult to make, so choosing more than one option (Goodman and Vohs 2013; Kahn 1995).

Within the studies of fast fashion consumers, a great deal of pleasure is associated with keeping abreast of the frequently changing styles (Miller, Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2013; Zarley Watson et al. 2013). The prevalence of online shopping provides opportunity to be 'the first' to view new trends without need to physically be present at a store (Blázquez 2014). Shoppers experience excitement at the prospect of viewing new ranges for the first time (Miller, Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2013) and the short lived availability of garments is seen as a positive attribute that allows for individual creativity by preventing many others from copying a certain style (Zarley Watson et al. 2013). Variety is suggested to be a key source of hedonistic value for fast fashion shoppers (Barnes, Lea-Greenwood and Miller 2013) who gain joy from the abundance of clothing (Zarley Watson et al. 2013) and find pleasure in shopping and in creating a multitude of looks (Barnes, Lea-Greenwood and Miller 2013). Consumers of slow fashion have been observed to demonstrate a similar sense of excitement when presented with new garment ranges but in contrast to fast fashion shoppers, they appear to take pleasure from viewing the detail, quality and craftsmanship of the garment (Zarley Watson et al. 2013). Whilst the hedonic goal of the fast fashion consumer is instant gratification from buying in bulk, slow fashion consumers achieve their hedonism through the anticipation of continued satisfaction from consuming a quality garment (Zarley Watson et al. 2013).

3.2.7 Negative Shopping Experiences

Considering the many ways that shopping is able to deliver feelings of happiness it does not seem surprising that it remains one of the UK's favourite ways of spending time (Soper 2008) but shopping is not always a positive experience. Overwhelming choice and nebulous product comparisons may be experienced as disconcerting or perplexing, undermining the hedonic pleasure that is sought (Prus and Dawson 1991). Problems of garment size and fit have the potential to elicit feelings of frustration or raise negative emotions in relation to body image (Kim and Damhorst 2010; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013). Constraints on time and/or budget which hamper one's ability to make the 'best' choice may result in feelings of frustration or incompetence of self where an individual is unable to find and/or have the means to acquire what they want (Prus and Dawson 1991). Within studies of fashion shoppers, however, any negative aspects of the shopping experience appear to be outweighed by the pleasurable elements of seeking and buying garments (Barnes, Lea-Greenwood and Miller 2013; Zarley Watson et al. 2013).

As marketers have increasingly recognised the importance of hedonic motives as drivers of consumer behaviour they employ progressively greater efforts to encompass elements of experiential gratification into their strategies as a means of differentiating their brands (Van den Bergh and Behrer 2016). This has led some to accuse marketing of creating hedonism by extolling messages that normalise frequent shopping and provide consumers with an excuse for self-indulgence (Alvesson 1994; O'Shaughnessy and Jackson O'Shaughnessy 2002). However whilst advertising messages might seek to persuade consumers of the virtues of buying products, hedonism, like materialism, existed long before the advent of marketing practice (Jackson 2005; Miller 2010; O'Shaughnessy and Jackson O'Shaughnessy 2002) so marketing cannot be construed as the cause of pleasure seeking behaviour. In addition the criticisms of marketing for the perceived creation of hedonism assumes the viewpoint that hedonism is an inherently negative force. By contrast, some highlight the potential value of hedonic pursuit as a natural human characteristic and the body of evidence to illustrate the positive

hedonic experiences of selflessness, gift-giving, and sharing (Belk and Coon 1993; Miller 2010). Whilst it may be possible to gain pleasure from altruistic pursuits, when considering the overconsumption of fashion clothing it is the repeated seeking and achievement of gratification from buying unnecessary garments that is of concern. For the majority of consumers the volume of clothing that they purchase is not a destructive influence on their lives and they are largely in control of their consumption behaviour (Dittmar 2005). However, where individuals place an exaggerated sense of importance on the process of shopping or buying clothing then the gratification of finding great discounts or the perfect outfit may have the potential to be sufficiently stimulating to create addiction-like behaviours (Benson and Eisenach 2013; Hartston 2012). More frequent behaviour has been seen to exaggerate addictive tendencies (Hartston 2012) and since online shopping has made the opportunity to browse and buy a continual possibility then this may contribute to a rise in habitual or compulsive purchasing behaviour.

If consumption is driven by hedonistic goals and shopping offers instant gratification to the extent that repeated shopping may become addictive then it seems unlikely that frequent fashion shoppers would voluntarily reduce the level of their clothing consumption.

3.2.8 Hedonic Value and the Shopping Experience

When considering how people might be persuaded to break the cycle of the 'work, spend spiral' (Soper 2008) it has been suggested that rather than denying consumer gratification, efforts should be made to better understand the types of activity that produce feelings of pleasure (Soper 2008; Tatzel 2014). It is proposed that enjoyment of consumption largely comes from the anticipation of the pleasure that a product will bring (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy 2002) consequently delaying purchase could add to the hedonic value of the experience (Dunn, Gilbert and Wilson 2011; Tatzel 2014). Rather than

taking fleeting gratification from the latest fashion or fast food, Kate Soper's view of 'alternative hedonism' suggests that a more satisfying and long-lived sense of pleasure could be achieved via the re-evaluation of what constitutes 'the good life' (Soper 2007; Soper 2008). Similarly it is suggested by Jackson that if consumption is a vital part of social communication and self-identity then consuming differently or consuming less without detriment to wellbeing would require a re-assessment of the personal and cultural values that are associated with achievement and success (Jackson 2005). The view that sustainable consumption may only be achieved by an adjustment in cultural values is shared by O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2002). They describe the philosophy of consumer freedom to 'do what you want' as creating unrestrained shoppers who believe themselves to be free of any obligation other than to self-indulge (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy 2002). Whilst it is acknowledged that consumption, materialism and hedonism can make an important contribution to people's sense of wellbeing, in order to achieve sustainable levels of consumption, it may be necessary to replace individual, self-seeking hedonism with a viewpoint more similar to the concept of universal hedonism which lies behind the utilitarian objective of achieving the greatest good for greatest number of people (Babin et al. 1994) or ethical hedonism which allows the pursuit of gratification but selecting only from choices that are sustainably sound (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy 2002).

From the extant literature we understand that there is much pleasure associated with shopping activities and that enjoyment of the experience encourages consumers to repeat their buying behavior. The aim of this study is to understand more about the specific behavior of frequent female fashion shoppers. The research seeks to discover which and whether aspects of frequent clothes shopping behavior are driven by hedonism and what are the pleasurable aspects that lead them to shop frequently.

3.3 Habitual Consumption

Since we rarely do something for the very first time, the majority of our daily behaviour may be considered habitual (Verplanken and Orbell 2003). Repetition seems to be the rule rather than the exception. The study of shopping habits is relevant in considering the reasons that some female fashion shoppers frequently buy new garments. At low to moderate levels, habits such as impulse buying and unhealthy snacking are frequently viewed as innocent and pleasurable activities driven by the pursuit of hedonistic goals (Verplanken et al. 2005) yet when these behaviours are multiplied they may become harmful (Darnton et al. 2011). It is becoming increasingly apparent that unsustainable patterns of consumption are associated with environmental challenges such as climate change (Hargreaves 2011). For the fashion industry, the consumer habit of frequent buying and disposal of high volumes of garments is associated with unsustainable production methods (Cataldi, Dickson and Grover 2010; Claudio 2007; Waste and Resources Action 2012) and unethical trading practices (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2006; Birtwistle, Siddiqui and Fiorito 2003; Claudio 2007). The relationship between habitual behaviour, frequent clothes shopping and overconsumption of garments is not specifically explored within the extant literature. However, from the understanding of habitual consumer behaviour described in the section to follow, it appears that tackling unsustainable patterns of fashion shopping will require changes to existing habits.

3.3.1 Frequency and Automaticity

Habits may be defined as “learned sequences of acts that have become automatic responses to specific cues, and are functional in obtaining certain goals or end-states” (Verplanken & Aarts, 1999:104). One of the key features of a habit is that it includes an element of frequency (Darnton et al. 2011), the more frequently an action is performed the more likely it is to become habitual

(Verplanken and Orbell 2003). This may imply that the tendency for clothes shopping to occur more often is one of the reasons that this behaviour has become habitual. However it is not frequency in itself that creates a strong habit. The desire to repeat a behaviour is associated with the systematic experience of rewarding consequences from that behaviour (Deci and Ryan 2000; Verplanken and Aarts 1999). In order for frequent fashion buying to become habitual the shoppers must experience gratification from the repeated behaviour. Any attempt to change this habit may therefore require a challenge to the reward system that perpetuates the conduct.

A second feature of habitual behaviour is that it is considered to be automatic. Within cognitive science it is claimed that the brain has two systems of generating behaviour. One is 'automatic', which is uncontrolled, effortless, emotional, fast, and unconscious; the other is 'reflective', controlled, effortful, deductive, slow and self-aware (Dolan and Britain 2010; Kahneman 2011; Thaler and Sunstein 2008). It is proposed that a great deal more human behaviour is governed by automatic mental processes which are intuitive and emotion-driven compared to reflective behaviour which requires the deliberation of options and application of rational thought (Thaler and Sunstein 2008; Verplanken and Aarts 1999).

Some unconscious responses such as nail biting are almost entirely automatic behaviours. More commonly, behaviour combines both reflective and automatic processes (Dolan and Britain 2010).

Bargh (1994) described four types of automaticity as unintentionality, uncontrollability, lack of awareness, and efficiency (Bargh 1994). Habitual behaviour may be characterised by one or more of these varieties of automaticity. Frequent shopping for clothes, like most habits could be described as intentional behaviour. That is not to say that every aspect is planned and conscious but rather it is deliberately goal directed (Verplanken and Orbell 2003). For example, the intended purpose of buying a garment may be to enjoy the experience of having something new (Arnold and Reynolds 2003; Hirschman 1980), to elevate mood (Babin, Darden and Griffin 1994; Woodruffe 1997) or to buy something that leads to the feeling of looking 'right' (Davis 1994; Zarley Watson et al. 2013). Whilst frequent clothes buyers may have an intended goal in mind when they shop it is argued that for

habitual behaviours these intentions are influenced by the environment in which the activity occurs (Darnton et al. 2011). These influences are sometimes referred to as contextual cues (Darnton et al. 2011; Dolan and Britain 2010; Thaler and Sunstein 2008; Verplanken and Wood 2006). These 'hidden persuaders' (Wansink and Sobal 2007) including environmental cues such as time of day or location, particular mood, the presence of typical shopping partners or events, may trigger the habitual behaviour (Verplanken and Orbell 2003; Verplanken and Wood 2006). In this respect the activity may be considered as unintentional (Bargh 1994). Whilst the frequent clothes shopper may perceive that they are making a controlled and purposeful choice of individual expression some may argue that they are simply repeating the conventions of specific socially organised practices felt to be necessary to live a good life (Warde 2013).

Social conventions for fashion might include the expectation to dress appropriately, the wearing of something new for an occasion or the importance of appearing up to date with the latest trends (Entwistle 2015; Wilson 2003). These conventions combined with environmental cues such as walking past a favourite clothing store, negative feelings about one's appearance, receiving marketing messages about new styles or offers of price reductions may automatically trigger the habitual desire to act with little intentional decision making to buy something new (Verplanken and Wood 2006).

Although most habits are, in principle, controllable, for example, by deliberate thinking and planning what to buy (Verplanken and Orbell 2003) once the recurring behaviour has been associated with achieving the desired goal it can be difficult to overrule strong habits (Aarts and Dijksterhuis 2000). It is suggested that one of the reasons that habits are hard to break is that they provide the individual with an efficient (Bargh 1994) means of achieving their goals under conditions of time pressure, information overload or distraction (Verplanken and Orbell 2003). Within online shopping behaviour routine browsing and price monitoring is described by some as a habit developed to ensure products were obtained at the lowest cost (Trevinal and Stenger 2014). Under the symbolic interactionist theory of fashion (Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton 1995) the desire to buy new clothes is perpetuated by

cultural ambivalence and symbolic ambiguity (Kaiser et al., 1995). This is characterised by mixed messages and multiple options regarding available styles combined with an uncertainty over how these may be perceived by others. If habit is used as a mechanism to achieve goals under conditions of information overload and uncertainty (Aarts and Dijksterhuis 2000; Verplanken and Orbell 2003) then it seems likely that consumers would readily adopt habitual behaviour in the complex fashion shopping environment.

3.3.2 Cues and Rewards

Making a deliberate choice, setting goals or doing something for the first time often involves making effortful choices between available options (Gollwitzer and Bayer 1999; Verplanken and Aarts 1999). In contrast, habitual behaviour involves little decision making or complex choice rules even when alternatives are openly available. Gollwitzer and Bayer (1999) described this as an implemental mind set characterised by a disposition which is closed to new information, focusing mainly on when and where to act. Those with strong habits have been shown to have a perceptual readiness for habit-related cues, but are less attentive to new information or courses of action (Verplanken and Aarts 1999). For example individuals who regularly travelled to work by bicycle, when presented with a new journey, had a stronger tendency to view the bicycle as the primary option before possibly having to consider other choices if travel by bicycle was not practical (Aarts, Verplanken and Knippenberg 1998). Once a typical behaviour becomes the default course of action and that action remains practicable, then this may prevent an individual from adopting other means of achieving their goal (Verplanken and Aarts 1999). In fashion shopping therefore, once buying something new is experienced as the behaviour capable of elevating mood or feeling that one looks 'right' and this behaviour continues to be accessible and continues to fulfil the desired goal, then it has the potential to become a strong

habit. In addition, once behaviour becomes habitual it may become seen by some individuals as part of their identity. The Self-Report Habit Index (SRHI) was an instrument designed by Verplanken and Orbell (2003) to measure the extent of behavioural traits associated with habit. The link between strong habits and self-identity is reflected within the SRHI since two of the characteristics of strong habits are suggested to be where an individual perceives that a behaviour "belongs to my (daily, weekly, monthly) routine" and that the behaviour is "typically me."

Therefore when considering how behaviour may be changed to encourage reduced consumption of clothing, habit presents a significant barrier. As described above, habitual behaviour has the potential to prevent open-mindedness towards alternative courses of action (Gollwitzer and Bayer 1999; Verplanken and Aarts 1999), is perpetuated by well-established social practices (Dolan 2002; Warde 2013) and may be closely guarded as part of individual identity (Verplanken and Orbell 2003). For these reasons individuals are sometimes described as being 'locked in' to habitual behaviour whereby their choice **not** to undertake a particular behaviour is limited (Darnton et al. 2011).

3.3.3 Changing Habitual Behaviour

The literature provides two central perspectives on habit and effective routes for behaviour change. One view is that habitual behaviour originates in the individual and is the product of their attitudes, beliefs and other motivational factors (Darnton et al. 2011; Triandis 1979). Another is that habits exist as regular practices which are socially created entities and are reproduced by the individuals who perform them (Shove 2010; Warde 2013). These two viewpoints have some similarity with the concept of the 'I' and the 'me' which exists within symbolic interactionist theory (Blumer 1969a; Mead 1934). The 'Me' is a learned from social conventions and interactions with others in a similar way to routines and practices. The 'I' is the response of the individual to the social convention, taking the view that people do not blindly follow rules but interpret them in line with their own attitudes and beliefs (Blumer 1969a; Mead 1934). If behaviour is viewed as being driven by both the 'me' and the 'I' then it

seems logical that interventions aimed at changing consumption patterns need to tackle both the social and individual reasons for the existing behaviour.

Historically, the majority of interventions aimed at changing behaviour to increase the well-being of individuals and/or society have taken the form of information based initiatives which encourage people to assume greater personal responsibility for their lifestyles choices (Dolan and Britain 2010; Shove 2010; Warde 2013). Social marketing approaches to behaviour change seek to utilise the concepts and techniques of commercial marketing and apply these to convince the public to voluntarily modify their behaviour (Dibb and Carrigan 2013; Peattie and Peattie 2009). Primarily, social marketing campaigns have been deployed to promote behaviour change for the improvement of health (Peattie and Peattie 2009; Dolan and Britain 2010). Information based campaigns and self-help programs are described as 'downstream interventions' which are offered after the undesirable behaviour has occurred in an attempt to change the direction of future behaviour (Verplanken and Wood 2006). Whilst educational campaigns may successfully convey information and have some impact on attitudes and intentions this does not necessarily change consumer behaviour (Shove 2010; Warde 2013). The gap between attitudes/intentions and behaviour is well documented in the literature relating to sustainable consumption (Carrigan and Attalla 2001; Carrington, Neville and Whitwell 2010; Hassan, Shiu and Shaw 2016; Moraes, Carrigan and Szmigin 2012; Shaw, McMaster and Newholm 2016). The amount of people with pro-environmental attitudes and values is consistently higher than the number who take measures to change their behaviour (Warde 2013). Within the fashion industry, widespread publicity and high consumer awareness surrounding the unethical working conditions associated with some fast fashion producers has not been readily translated into changes in fashion shopping behaviour (Barnes, Lea-Greenwood and Joergens 2006; Shaw et al. 2007).

The suggested ineffectiveness of purely information based interventions in changing behaviour may be seen as being due to the nature of habitual behaviour. As described above, habitual behaviour

involves little deliberation (Verplanken and Orbell 2003), is partly an automatic response to environmental cues (Bargh 1994) and strong habits may result in a mind-set which is largely closed to the influence of alternative information (Verplanken and Aarts 1999). The dependence of habits on environmental cues is seen by some as a point of opportunity to disrupt routine behaviours (Verplanken and Wood 2006) since it implies that changing the environment might change the behaviour. The adjustment of the way that choices are presented to individuals in order to change behaviour is sometimes referred to a choice architecture or nudge marketing (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008). Examples to encourage more sustainable fashion consumption might be presentation of conscious cotton ranges in a more prominent position in store than less sustainable alternatives or to routinely ask at point of purchase, whether the shopper has a garment to submit for recycling. It is suggested that nudge marketing successfully capitalises on the human tendency to make automatic choices (Selinger and Whyte 2011). Despite its proclaimed good intentions, ethical concerns have been raised about nudge marketing on the basis that people are unaware that a nudge is influencing their behaviour and are unwittingly being manipulated (Selinger and Whyte 2011). Proponents of nudge marketing maintain that the practice does not threaten personal freedom since it does not prevent individuals from choosing what they prefer it simply tries to influence choices in a way that will make the choosers better off "as judged by themselves" (Thaler and Sunstein 2008).

It may be argued that any anxieties over nudge marketing techniques curtailing individual freedom are exaggerated since all choices are constrained in some way. Individuals can be 'locked in' to behaviours by infrastructure or supply chain constraints limiting the available choices or by social conventions and shared goals (Darnton et al. 2011; Warde 2013). Practice theory asserts that the individual is not the originator of a behaviour but they are simply carrying out a practice which is the product of rules and resources (Darnton et al. 2011). Under practice theory actions are viewed as practices which are facilitated by materials, competencies and images (Darnton et al. 2011; Shove 2008). The overconsumption of clothing may therefore be seen as the product of access to cheap clothing via a supply chain that produces and makes it available through a proliferation of retail outlets

and online sites, perpetuated by a cultural desire to be seen as 'up to date' and social conventions associated with buying and wearing new clothes, reproduced by the negotiation of the symbolic meaning of new styles and frequent exposure to marketing messages and peer comparison. Consequently the complex issue of making behaviour more sustainable has been described as a wicked problem (Hastings 2016) requiring a more urgent and radical change to consumption patterns than relying on nudging billions of individuals into minor beneficial modifications (Warde 2013).

From the viewpoint of practice theory, the focus for behaviour change is no longer on individuals' attitudes and behaviours and but instead on how practices form, how practices recruit practitioners to maintain and strengthen them through continued performance, and how these practices may be challenged, eliminated and the practitioners be persuaded to adopt more sustainable practices (Hargreaves 2011). Bringing about sustainable patterns of consumption, therefore, does not depend upon educating or persuading individuals to make different choices but instead on transforming practices to make them more sustainable (Hargreaves 2011). This may require societal transformation including new technologies, new markets, user practices, regulations, infrastructures and cultural meanings (Shove 2010). In line with this viewpoint many initiatives promoting sustainability have been implemented upstream, aimed at altering structural conditions that embed consumer behaviour (Gordon, Carrigan and Hastings 2011). In tackling sustainability issues within fashion, similar upstream interventions may be targeted at editing out garments that do not come with evidence of environmental and ethical responsibility. Challenging the practice of frequent clothes buying may require attention to the price of clothing as well as working to transform the social conventions which reward frequent style changes over quality, longevity and sustainable choices. It is apparent from the extant literature that consumer behaviour is largely habitual, strong habits are hard to break and it is important to understand the nature of the habit in order to change behaviour. By specifically exploring the behaviour of frequent clothes shoppers, this study seeks to better understand the cues or rewards that lead to repeated clothes shopping behaviour.

3.4 Identity Theories of Fashion

In this section I review the psychological explanations for why people seek to be seen as fashionable. Whilst much has been written about the connection between identity and clothing choice, the extant literature does not specifically address the desire to **frequently** acquire new clothing. Based on an understanding of the relationship between self-image and the acquisition of clothing gained from existing research, the aim of this study is to enhance knowledge by better understanding the potential role of self-identity in explaining why some individuals buy high volumes of clothing.

The notion of identity is a prominent feature within theories that endeavour to explain why people dress the way they do. Within the literature, a wide range of terms including 'self' (Belk 1988; Goffman 1959), 'self-concept' (Evans 1989; Grubb and Grathwohl 1967), 'self-identity' (Auty and Elliott 1998; Niinimäki 2010), 'identity' (Belk 1988; Davis 1994) and 'self-image' (Grubb and Grathwohl 1967; O'Cass and Julian 2001) are used synonymously to describe how a person subjectively perceives who he or she is. The possession of clothing may be seen as having a particularly strong connection with self-concept as it is often fundamental to appearance which conveys a sense of identity to both the observer and the wearer (Davis 1994; Miller 2010; Stone 1962).

Beginning with a review of the role of clothing as part of the extended self (Belk 1988; Belk 2013) this chapter goes on to explore current understanding of the symbolic value of clothing (Davis 1994; Entwistle 2015) and how this is used to construct an identity that is congruent with the individual's view of self (Sirgy et al. 1997; Dittmar 2004). Since consumers commonly have multiple versions of self, reflecting the various roles they take in everyday life (Ahuvia 2005; Markus and Nurius 1986) the chapter proceeds to review understanding of how this may affect clothes shopping behaviour. The review then considers the influence of social groups and social norms (Hogg, Banister and Stephenson

2009), how these are involved in the diffusion of fashion trends (Atik and Firat 2013; Sproles 1985) and how they may impact the desire to buy high volumes of clothing.

3.4.1 Clothing as Part of the Extended Self

The body of literature exploring the nature of self-identity and person-object relations is too vast and diverse for a thorough discussion within the scope of this thesis therefore I have focused on the aspects of this field that best illuminate the potential relationship between an individual and their clothing and offer insights into the possible causes of overconsumption.

Building on William James' theory of the material self (1890), Belk's (1988) "Possessions and the Extended Self" is frequently referenced (Ahuvia 2005; Escalas and Bettman 2005; Hogg, Banister and Stephenson 2009) as shaping current understanding of how consumption helps define people's sense of who they are. Drawing from an array of previous studies including experiences of grief resulting from loss of possessions (Rosenblatt, Walsh and Jackson 1976) and the testing of self-related object categories (Prelinger 1959; McClelland 1951), Belk (1988) suggests that individuals possess a core self, likely to comprise body and ideas; and an extended self that includes possessions, persons and places to which one feels attached. As part of the extended self, possessions including clothing are used by people to define and remind them of their identity (Belk 1988). This view is supported by Dittmar (Dittmar, Beattie and Friese 1995; Dittmar 2004; Dittmar 2007) whose work illustrates how individuals construct identity through material goods conveying a perception that, to some extent, 'you are what you own' (Dittmar 2004).

The ability of material goods to contribute to self-identity rests partly with the symbolic values that are bestowed on them by individuals and society (Banister and Hogg 2004; Grubb and Grathwohl 1967; Sirgy et al. 1997). Material objects are considered to have symbolic value when individuals attribute them with meaning beyond their physical characteristics (McCracken 1986; Sirgy et al. 1997).

Consumers have been shown to invest products with the ability to signal class, status, success, occupation and lifestyle (Belk, Mayer and Bahn 1982; McCracken 1986). Clothing is often used as a sign of personal identity representing the wearer's status, qualities and values (Stone 1962; Davis 1994) and may sometimes be connected with the owner's life narrative and relationships with others (Ahuvia 2005; Niinimäki and Koskinen 2011). Since the self represents one's feelings, perceptions and principal values, it is seen by most as something to be safeguarded and, if possible enhanced (Grubb and Grathwohl 1967). As a consequence, buying choices may be motivated by a desire to preserve self-identity by choosing products or brands perceived to be congruent with self-image (Sirgy et al. 1997) or to choose items in order to fulfil an aspiration for a 'better,' more ideal self (Dittmar 2004). For some consumers the choice of clothing brands or styles perceived to be highly fashionable may represent a more glamorised version of self, compared to the monotony of daily life (Thompson and Haytko 1997). The choice of clothing to support self-identity does not always necessarily lead to high volumes of acquisition. Within fashion, both consumers of fast and slow fashion have been seen to purchase garments that align with their self-image (Zarley Watson et al. 2013). However, a study by Zarley Watson et al. (2013) revealed that fast fashion purchasers tended to want to display a knowledge of the latest styles whilst slow fashion consumers were more inclined towards making selections which they felt were a reflection of their own personality. Though the volume of clothing is not explored within the Zarley Watson study (2013) it may follow that preserving a self-image associated with knowledge of latest styles is likely to involve a higher volume of clothing acquisition. Ahuvia (2005) highlights the intricacy of appearance and identity by describing the conflicted feelings of Pam who is struggling to reconcile her choice of the frilly, ornate styles that she finds aesthetically appealing with her identity as a strong, independent businesswoman. The complexity of identity related choices may be a contributing factor in overconsumption. A quantitative study by Goodman and Vohs (2013), though not specifically concerned with fashion clothing, indicates that where the choice is perceived to reflect self-identity and there is no clear 'best' purchasing decision, individuals tend to buy more, 'one of each', in order to resolve choice conflict. Individuals also protect their sense

of self by avoiding products linked to disassociate groups (Banister and Hogg 2004) or out-groups (Escalas and Bettman 2005) who represent a negative version of self (Banister and Hogg 2004; Markus and Nurius 1986). A qualitative study by Van der Laan and Vethuis (2013) illustrates how individuals may choose to avoid the clothing associated with standing out from the crowd or slavishly following fashion in favour of an appearance style perceived to convey greater authenticity and independence. For some the sense of self may be preserved by rejecting consumption orientated behaviour, choosing to consume less or make ethical or environmentally sustainable choices (Shaw and Moraes 2009). The prevalence of a self-view that incorporates some element of consumption moderation may have significance for sustainability as it has the potential to encourage more considered or responsible buying behaviour (Dermody et al. 2015; Shaw and Newholm 2002).

It may be argued that even ordinary products that we use in day-to-day life are self-expressive to some extent (Kleine, Kleine and Kernan 1993). However goods such as clothing that are publically consumed through their display have a greater opportunity to convey symbols about the user (McCracken 1986). Publically expressive products are therefore more likely to inspire consumption related emotions than privately consumed product categories such as grocery items (Escalas and Bettman 2005). Such emotions lead individuals to form attachments to some objects whereas they may easily dispose of others (Niinimäki and Koskinen 2011; Schifferstein and Zwartkruis-Pelgrim 2008). Enjoyment and memories linked with persons, places, and events have been shown to contribute positively to the degree of product attachment (Schifferstein and Zwartkruis-Pelgrim 2008) as have feelings of accomplishment and positive self-image (Kleine, Kleine and Allen 1995). For clothing, this notion is supported by Niinimäki and Koskinen (2011) who found that the longest kept garments often carried a strong connection to a cherished memory or an elevated feeling of pleasure such as 'I feel pretty when wearing it' (Niinimäki and Koskinen 2011). The ability to foster product attachment may be significant when considering ways to transform fashion consumption habits. Encouraging a deeper attachment to the clothing we buy has the potential to motivate consumers to better care for

garments and lengthen their lifespan moving away from unsustainable high volume and the rapid replacement cycle characterised by fast fashion (Niinimäki 2010; Niinimäki and Koskinen 2011).

The fact that people choose material goods to express who they are and also to construct a sense of who they want to be may not always contribute directly to overconsumption. Evidence of the person-object relationship and its connection with self-identity is well documented throughout history, spanning geography and culture without the detriment of unsustainable buying behaviour (Miller 2010; Trentmann 2016). However, in the discussion to follow there are two aspects of modern relations with material goods – identity motivated buying (Dittmar 2004) and multiplicity of selves (Cantor et al. 1986), that may be linked to the current overconsumption of clothing.

3.4.2 Identity Motivated Consumption

The gap between the actual self or how individuals see themselves and the ideal self or how they would like to be seen is described as self-discrepancy (Dittmar 2005). One way that consumers deal with self-discrepancy is to acquire goods with the symbolic values associated with the ideal self, so in owning that product or wearing that style the consumer perceives that they have enhanced their self-image (Dittmar 2004; Grubb and Grathwohl 1967). Shopping that is motivated by the aspiration to move towards a more ideal version of the self has also been associated with compulsive buying (Dittmar 2005). Compulsive buying is a behavioural disorder that is excessive and uncontrolled leading to psychological distress and negative consequences such as serious debt (Benson and Eisenach 2013; Dittmar 2005). Whilst this study explores 'normal' clothes shopping behaviour and is not concerned with compulsive buying, the topics of self-discrepancy and identity related buying motives may offer insight to the issue of overconsumption in clothing since they are seen to drive shopping to excess for some individuals. Buying goods in order to move closer to an ideal version of self or to improve one's social image is central to current consumer culture (Miles 1998; Miller 2010; Trentmann 2016) yet it is problematic to suggest that this might be the principal reason for current levels of clothing

overconsumption since this is not a new characteristic of consumer behaviour. It may be proposed however that today's consumers might experience more frequent or a deeper sense of self-discrepancy which contributes towards them acquiring a higher volume of clothing as they strive towards more ideal versions of themselves.

In today's digital world consumption is more public than ever and it has become commonplace to actively manage and promote oneself online (Belk 2013; Rocamora 2011). Identity viewed as staging a character (Goffman 1959) or as an evolving process of becoming rather than a being pre-date the digital era (Giddens 1991). However the now widespread use of social media which is predominantly visual and open to manipulation (Lister 2009; Rocamora 2011) may perpetuate identity related buying motives as individuals have an online platform via which they more frequently strive to display the best possible versions of themselves (Chou and Edge 2012). Identity related buying motives including self-expression and improving one's social image are suggested to be linked to a higher degree of materialism (Dittmar, Long and Bond 2007; Richins 2004), and this is associated with more frequent shopping (Dittmar 2005; Dittmar 2007). Various studies have explored the relationship between comparison with others, life satisfaction and the use of social media. Whilst some suggest a link between social media use and low sense of wellbeing (Chou and Edge 2012; Kross et al. 2013; Sidani et al. 2016) the direction of this association is unclear. Contrasting studies highlight the ability of social media to combat loneliness, enhance self-esteem and foster feelings of community support (Shaw and Gant 2002; Steinfield, Ellison and Lampe 2008). It is however generally acknowledged that a feature of social media is exposure to idealised representations of peers (Chou and Edge 2012; Steinfield, Ellison and Lampe 2008) and for those individuals experiencing self-discrepancy the internet provides a tool for frequent comparison with others which may or may not lead to identity driven purchase decisions.

Since the purpose of fashion is described as communicating one's identity to others (Auty and Elliott 1998; Blumer 1969b; Davis 1994; Stone 1962) and this may be done partly to enhance outward

appearance or influence social standing (Auty and Elliott 1998; Belk, Mayer and Bahn 1982), then in this respect fashion clothing may be described as conspicuous consumption. In 1899 the notion of conspicuous consumption was defined by Veblen ([1899] 2005) as expenditure on luxury goods in order to enhance outward appearances and social standing (Veblen 2005). Regarding fashion, Veblen's view of conspicuous consumption is typified by the preoccupation with designer clothing labels popular during the 1980s (Segal and Podoshen 2013). However Veblen's (1899) view that it is the pecuniary element of material acquisition that brings social esteem is not what appears to be taking place for current consumption of low cost, fast fashion. Rather than impressing others by the ability to afford expensive luxury garments, for some the qualities that are perceived to elicit the admiration of others may be the result of personal style (Eckhardt, Belk and Wilson 2015; Tilman 2006) or an ability to re-invent oneself and remain up to date with emerging trends (Pihl 2014; Rocamora 2011). If the nature of socially impressive consumption has changed, placing the emphasis on variety, modernity and newness over quality and price then this may contribute towards explaining overconsumption of clothing.

3.4.3 Multiple Selves and Consumption Behaviour

The contemporary consumer is often described as possessing a fragmented and multiple sense of identity (Ahuvia 2005) or a multi-dimensional self (Kleine, Kleine and Kernan 1993) including desirable possible identities (Markus and Nurius 1986) and undesired versions of self-image (Hogg, Banister and Stephenson 2009; Ogilvie 1987). Since the acquisition of material goods is associated with the construction of identity (Dittmar, Beattie and Friese 1995; Dittmar 2004; Dittmar 2007) then it might follow that the construction and preservation of multiple selves would require a higher volume of consumption. The basis of multiple identities is said to be the different social roles that individuals ascribe to themselves (Kleine, Kleine and Kernan 1993). The negotiation of daily life, taking different

roles depending on how we think about ourselves and our place in society is not a new phenomenon (Mead 1934) and therefore, in isolation, is unlikely to account for any recent change in consumer behaviour. However if each identity is related to an ideal, linked to the perceived social expectations of that role (Kleine, Kleine and Kernan 1993) then this may introduce a degree of self-discrepancy for each identity. As described above, the gap between the 'real' self and the idealised self or a perceived social expectation for an assumed role may result in identity driven purchasing (Dittmar 2005; Dittmar, Long and Bond 2007). Therefore aspects of modern life that have the potential to influence self-discrepancy such as social comparison (Chou and Edge 2012; Sidani et al. 2016; Sirgy et al. 2013) or prevalence of idealised images (Hogg, Bruce and Hough 1999; Richins 1995; Wilcox and Laird 2000) could contribute to increased buying behaviour and this may be multiplied across several versions of self.

A feature of contemporary life in a global economy that operates under an intensified consumer and media culture (Deuze 2011; Connor 1989) is a plethora of signs and images relating to choices in the construction of identity (Van Dijck 2013; Kaiser et al. 1995). The freedom to select the way one presents oneself may be seen as a positive attribute providing consumers with flexibility, abundant choice and removing barriers to achieving the preferred lifestyle (Firat and Venkatesh 1995). In contrast, Cushman (1990) argues that many individuals seek the reassurance of community and tradition in guiding their choice of identity. For these individuals exposure to a profusion of lifestyle options, each with competing norms and symbolic values creates an 'empty-self' whereby they perpetually acquire possessions in the name of self-improvement but never reach contentment and satisfaction with their self-image (Cushman 1990). Cushman asserts that uncertainty or self-emptiness regarding identity leaves individuals particularly vulnerable to the influence of advertising messages that emulate authority and certainty (Cushman 1990). Since the aim of advertising is to sell products then the solutions that it offers to enhance self-image are centred around the acquisition of goods (Ahuvia 2005; Cushman 1990). Under Cushman's theory therefore, in situations where individuals are constantly striving to enhance their self-identity and to meet advertised ideals, never feeling as if 'they

have got it right' then overconsumption of self-improvement products including clothing is likely to exist.

Whilst Cushman's (1990) theory suggests the desire for a coherent identity narrative, others highlight the desire to break with convention and distinguish oneself from others as a way of maintaining some sense of individualism or specialness (Snyder 1992; Thompson and Haytko 1997). These points of view are not mutually exclusive. Gronow and Gronow (1997) describe fashion as fulfilling a desire for social identification whilst affording the opportunity for individual distinction. The drive to preserve a sense of uniqueness may contribute to overconsumption in fashion due to the cycle of pursuit of scarce commodities (Snyder 1992). Individuals sometimes seek out products or styles that distinguish themselves from others but the market may be quick to understand and exploit the desirability of these goods making more of them until they become less scarce and leading consumers to pursue and acquire the next distinctive item (Snyder 1992). The decision whether to conform or to dress in an individualistic way is a common one and most people probably do both to varying degrees depending on the context (Banister and Hogg 2004; Triandis 1993). Increasingly there is a sense within fashion stores and publications that you have to buy something now in case it goes out of stock. The reality may be different, but this is the message that is communicated. Since the fast fashion business model allows clothing retailers to quickly adapt to emerging trends then the desire to stay ahead and remain individual may be a factor that motivates some frequent clothes shopping behaviour.

3.4.4 Sociological Models of Fashion

Whilst the above describes features of an individual's self-identity and person object relations, this is inextricably linked with one's social identity (Belk 1988; Mead 1934). A common view is that self-concept is formed through the interaction with significant others such as parents or peers and the

expectations of the wider community or generalised other (Blumer 1969a; Harter 2000; Heatherton, Wyland and Lopez 2003; Mead 1934; Rosenberg 1965). As individuals reflect on the roles that they occupy and their place in the wider social structure, this provides a sense of self (Banister and Hogg 2004). The maintenance of a positive self-image, feeling worthy or self-esteem can be linked to the sense of public self (Heatherton, Wyland and Lopez 2003). Mead's (1934) symbolic interactionism describes how people appraise themselves by way of their perception of how they are viewed by others (Cooley 1902; Mead 1934). Subsequent thinking regarding self-esteem is in accordance with the basic principles of symbolic interaction in that self-appraisal is inseparable from social judgment (Harter 2000; Heatherton, Wyland and Lopez 2003; Rosenberg 1965).

In order for consumer products including clothing to function as a basis for social evaluation and communication of identity, their symbols and meanings must be socially understood, shared and re-iterated during social interactions (Banister and Hogg 2004; Blumer 1969b; Davis 1994). From a symbolic interactionist viewpoint the meanings associated with products are socially constructed and behaviour towards an object, garment or style of dress will be guided by its symbolic connotations (Blumer 1969a; Blumer 1969b; Cooley and Schubert 1998). People construct a social identity by categorising themselves as having similarities with others in associate or in-groups (Turner and Reynolds 2011). People often have a repertoire of category groups to which they feel some affiliation and this will guide how they perceive they should behave including which products they should acquire (Hogg, Terry and White 1995). Whether or not a person perceives that a particular product is 'right for them' will depend on how they believe its social meaning will be interpreted by their affiliated groups or groups to which they aspire to belong (Auty and Elliott 1998; Banister and Hogg 2004). If social conventions demand that different situations and roles require different standards of appearance then this may lead individuals to buy more clothing in order to comply with social expectations.

3.4.5 Self-Monitoring and Involvement in Fashion Clothing

The extent to which one evaluates and is willing to modify their self-presentation for the purpose of social appropriateness is described as self-monitoring (Snyder 1974). There is some debate in the literature regarding the relationship between self-monitoring behaviour, materialism and involvement in fashion clothing. A quantitative study by Snyder (1974) developed, validated and tested a scale to assess the degree of an individual's self-monitoring behaviour. This scale has been applied to the area of fashion consumption. In a quantitative study of 287 individuals, Browne and Kaldenberg (1997) explored the relationship between self-monitoring, materialism and product involvement for fashion clothing. Via the combined use of Snyder's (1974) self-monitoring scale with Richins and Dawson (1990) Material Values Scale and Kapferer and Laurents' (1985) Consumer Involvement Profile it was found that higher levels of self-monitoring were associated with increased materialism (Browne and Kaldenberg 1997). High self-monitors viewed possessions as more important than low self-monitors and believed them to be more central to happiness and success. This study also found high self-monitors to be the most involved with fashion clothing though this involvement was mainly concerned with the aspects of the pleasure and importance of acquiring the right product rather than the aesthetic value of the product itself (Browne and Kaldenberg 1997). A subsequent mixed methods study by Auty and Elliott (1998) used an adapted version of Snyder's (1974) self-monitoring scale to explore how self-monitoring behaviour was related to brand perceptions in the jeans market. High self-monitors were shown to have a greater propensity to seek the reassurance of brands that are recognised within their associate groups as acceptable symbols of style (Auty and Elliott 1998). In this study Auty and Elliott (1998:119) describe self-monitoring to be 'a surrogate for' product involvement.

Viewing self-monitoring and product involvement as similar constructs is disputed by O'Cass (2001). The relationship between a product such as clothing and the individual has been conceptualised via the construct of involvement (Michaelidou and Dibb 2008). Given the links between clothing and self-

identity which may emotionally attach consumers to their garments (O'Cass 2001), involvement is potentially an important factor influencing clothes shopping behaviour. Research regarding types and extent of product attachments including involvement and its impact on consumer behaviour is complex and extensive and it is not within the scope of this study to provide a full analysis of the extant concepts in this area. However, in summary, the predominant view within the consumer behaviour literature is that involvement consists of more than one dimension commonly reported to include self-expression or sign value (Laurent and Kapferer 1985; Zaichkowsky 1985), interest in the product category (Michaelidou and Dibb 2006), the pleasure associated with the purchase (Laurent and Kapferer 1985), the importance of the product (Bloch and Richins 1983) and the perceived risk associated with making a poor purchase decision (Laurent and Kapferer 1985).

Studies exploring the relationship between individuals and clothing have described a broad spectrum of fashion consciousness and behaviours (O'Cass 2000) however there is a common suggestion that those who buy most clothing are the most involved with clothing as a product category (Auty and Elliott 1998; Michaelidou and Dibb 2006) or 'that the highly fashion involved consumer is also the heavy clothing fashion buyer' (Tigert, Ring ad King 1976:46). Building on the work of Browne and Kaldenberg (1997), but using different measures of self-monitoring and involvement, O'Cass' (2001) quantitative study of 450 students found that self-monitoring influences consumer behaviour related to fashion clothing because it is associated with presenting a socially acceptable image to others. High self-monitors had a strong concern for their appearance and were more likely to take pleasure in fashion clothing. Social approval was a strong driver for the high self-monitors' choices in fashion clothing (O'Cass 2001). However the direct relationship between self-monitoring and involvement in fashion clothing was shown to be very weak – the clothing itself was not seen as interesting or important to this group. This study showed that self-monitoring has an indirect relationship with fashion clothing involvement the specific motive of social approval.

This debate is relevant to the topic on overconsumption in fashion since it raises the question of whether the motivation to shop frequently is driven by a need for social approval, a love of fashion or the pleasure of the shopping and wearing experience. If the current pace of fashion consumption is unsustainable then it is important to understand the underlying reasons for current consumer behaviour if it is to be successfully challenged.

3.4.6 Social Identity and Diffusion of Fashion

Social identity theory describes the way that individuals perceive themselves as 'we' or 'us' as part of their self-experience (Turner and Reynolds 2011). There are aspects of group affiliation that may contribute to overconsumption of clothing. The number of groups to which one is associated may have an impact on the volume of clothing acquired. If appearance norms are different for each group then this might lead to excessive consumption in order to appear socially appropriate for each audience. In addition, affiliation to any group whose notion of appropriateness involves volume, newness or keeping up to date with the latest fashion has the potential to influence clothes shopping habits (Rocamora 2011). In the digital world consumption is more shared than ever and it could be argued that social media platforms have accelerated the ability of groups to come to an understanding of what is a 'good look' or 'our kind of style' (Belk 2013; Naylor, Lamberton and West 2012). In addition, easy access to browsing opportunities have increased exposure to new trends associated with aspirational groups and the frequency of the triggers that create a desire to shop (Trevinal and Stenger 2014). If online behaviour has facilitated a speeding up of the group negotiation of changing symbols then this may be one reason for a more rapid acceptance of new trends which could have the potential to contribute towards more frequent clothing purchases for those who want to acquire the latest styles.

The notion of aspiring to be seen as part of a social group is a feature of the trickle-down theory of fashion (Sproles 1985). Popularised by Simmel's 1904 article (Simmel 1957), the trickle-down theory

describes how an upper-class group that is aspirational to those in lower classes, recognises and develops new expressive styles of dress which are then 'trickled-down' through the class structure as those of lower class adopt the new fashion. The fashion spreads in society but once it is adopted by the lower classes it is no longer desirable to the high class fashion leaders who seek a new style and so the cycle continues (Simmel 1957). Critics of the trickle-down theory dispute the notion that fashions are launched at the top of the social structure and then work their way down to the bottom (Blumer 1969b; Davis 1994) however the principle of fashion being led by certain groups and followed by others is a feature of subsequent fashion theories (Sproles 1985). Rogers' (1983) adoption diffusion model, in Rogers (2010), has been widely applied to the case of fashion (King and Ring 1980; Sproles 1985; Tigert, Ring and King 1976). The theory suggests that certain groups act as innovators and opinion leaders, who, by displaying new trends and influencing the choices of their social network, act as agents for change in diffusing a new style (Sproles 1985). The nature of these influencing groups is not necessarily defined in terms of social strata. A qualitative study by Atik and Firat (2013) who interviewed fashion sensitive consumers, fashion designers and professionals suggested that fashion does not just trickle down, but also trickles up from street styles and trickles across social groups. The mass market theory of fashion (King 1963; King and Ring 1980) describes how modern production methods make new styles simultaneously available at a range of price points to all socioeconomic classes. Opinion leaders then help to assign meaning to the new fashion which will influence the pattern of adoption (McCracken 1986). The status of fashion leaders has been seen to come by virtue of their beauty, celebrity, accomplishment, knowledge or talent (McCracken 1986; Wiedmann, Hennigs and Langner 2010). By their support of a particular product or style opinion leaders persuade some consumers of the cultural and symbolic meaning attached to a product (McCracken 1986) and help to convey to others what it means to own or wear it (Grubb and Grathwohl 1967). Davis and Miller (1983) observed how individuals conformed more to the judgments of fashion style that were attributed to fashion experts compared with opinions of other reference groups .

Since opinion leaders potentially have the power to influence shopping habits when exploring the reasons for frequent clothes shopping it is necessary to understand the nature of influencing groups and how people decide whether or not to behave in accordance with their cues. The extent of influence from the opinions of others is described as dependant on the frequency of the information, who is offering the opinion and the context in which it is provided (Shrauger and Schoeneman 1979). Where the evaluation by others, perceived or declared, does not match self-perception individuals may make a decision whether to accept or deny this evaluation and whether or not to change their opinion of themselves and their behaviour as a result (Shrauger and Schoeneman 1979). The degree to which one maintains self-perception in the face of different social opinion sometimes depends on how an individual feels that they compare against others (Festinger 1954). Social comparison theory describes a process by which the individual chooses the focus of their comparison with others and makes a subjective evaluation of the elements that they feel are relevant (Festinger 1954; Wood 1989). This might include the dismissal of any comparison target that the individual feels is simply unattainable (Hogg, Bruce and Hough 1999). The individual then compares themselves with the set of perceived similar people (Wood 1989). If they feel that they don't compare favourably then this is likely to cause self-discrepancy which may lead to identity related purchases (Dittmar 2005) as previously described. Although the foundations of social identity theory stem from the work of Tajfel and Turner (1979) recent research has indicated that social identity is also being constructed on social networking sites (Barker 2009; Ellis 2010). Ellis (2010) describes the way that Facebook participants engage in an ongoing social process of identity creation. A survey of 292 participants by Wang (2012) reveals how brand preferences tend to result from learning acquired through online communication and a desire to conform to peer expectations. This enables social media to significantly influence attitudes towards products. If members of social networking groups face conformity pressures when they make purchase decisions then this may explain the normalisation of frequent clothes shopping habits where shared discussions describe the merits of buying many garments.

As evidenced above, studies relating to fashion shopping behaviour span a variety of viewpoints and academic disciplines each with the desire to comprehend and analyse the dynamics of dress and appearance. The extant literature does much to explain how and why consumers engage in fashion shopping. However, given that this study is primarily concerned with the reasons underlying excessive fashion consumption, theories centred round identity based motivations fall short of explaining the more recent and seemingly perpetual desire by frequent clothes shoppers to buy more.

3.4.7 The Limitations of Identity in Explaining Excessive Clothing Consumption

The psychological interpretations of fashion described above provide a view of the motivations and emotions that may influence clothing choices. However the feelings that they describe such as novelty seeking, desire for prestige, rebellion and conformity exist in all human societies, even those where institutionalised fashion has little influence (Miller 2010). Such emotions are also evident throughout history. The embellishment of items worn and owned as a display of status can be seen in ancient artefacts (Miller 2010) and the use of fashion as social capital is documented from as early as the 15th century (Trentmann 2016).

Accounting for fashion purely in terms of psychological motives provides useful insight into how emotions operate with the fashion environment but it does little to explain how these sentiments give rise to a fashion process (Blumer 1969b). Likewise, psychological interpretations of fashion neglect to explain variations in the pace of fashion or the reasons behind the recent increase in the volume of garment buying.

There are three contextual aspects that are likely to have contributed to the growth of clothing volume. The first is reduced prices. Between 1996 and 2012 UK garment prices declined by an average of 10% despite an average annual inflation rate of around 2.2% (Eurostat 2013). However, although the circa 10% reduction in average garment price might be an enabling factor it seems unlikely that it

would account entirely for the proportionally greater increase in volume of clothes purchased. For example, there has been a 33% increase in the volume of clothing bought between 2002 and 2006 (Ravasio 2012) which is possibly more than one might normally expect demand to increase in response to a price reduction of around 10%.

Secondly, median disposable income in the UK has grown at an average of 1.9% per year between 1996 and 2015 (Office of National Statistics 2016) allowing greater spending on consumer goods including clothing.

The third factor is a shortening of the lifespan of a garment. Fast fashion manufacturing processes have a direct correlation with lower garment quality (Ravasio 2012). In 2008 around 80% of all donated clothing was in good enough condition to be re-used or sold as baled goods, by 2011 this percentage had fallen to around 65% (Ravasio 2012). Whilst this decrease may not be entirely due to garments wearing out sooner, it is likely that some increase in clothing purchase may be due to existing items more quickly coming to the end of their useful life. That said, the fact that 65% of clothing donated was of sufficiently good quality to be re-used indicates that people are buying and discarding many clothes that are not yet fully worn out. This may lead one to speculate that as well as a quickening in the pace of physical obsolescence of clothing wearing out, there is also a shortening of the time before a garment is perceived by the wearer to be out of style or at the end of its useful life.

So, if the psychological theories of fashion and the contextual economic factors are not able to fully explain the degree of increase in clothing consumption then why are people buying and disposing of more clothes than ever, even compared to recent history (Ravasio 2012, Siegle 2011)?

This study proposes that the symbolic interactionist theories of fashion provide a more useful framework than that of identity based motivations when considering issues related to the volume and rate of clothing consumption.

4. Symbolic Interactionist Theories of Fashion

4.1 The Continuous Mechanism of Fashion Consumption

In contrast to psychological interpretations of fashion which tend to focus on how particular styles are chosen, Symbolic Interactionist theory presents an explanation of why fashion trends continue to emerge and evolve (Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton 1995). Herbert Blumer, the founder of the term Symbolic Interactionism, considered psychological theories surrounding clothing choice as inadequate in explaining the nature of fashion (Blumer 1969b). Blumer expresses the opinion that

> These schemes do not identify the nature of the social setting in which fashion arises nor do they catch or treat the mechanism by which fashion operates. The result is that students fail to see the scope and manner of its operation and to appreciate the vital role which fashion plays in modern group life. (Blumer 1969b:277)

Having studied the extant literature I suggest that the consideration of fashion as a continuous mechanism has potential to explain the pace and volume of clothing acquisition. This chapter describes two specific symbolic interactionist theories of fashion, those being that of Blumer (1969b) and Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton (1995). I consider these theories to be useful in deliberating the issue of overconsumption of clothing as they regard fashion as a social system rather than purely a matter of individual identity. Since the rapid increase in the pace of clothing manufacture and disposal is a relatively new phenomenon, gathering pace from the end of the 1990s (Cline 2013), then it may follow that the reason for overconsumption could lie in the social setting and context of these times.

4.2 Blumer's Theory of Collective Selection

In considering the way that people engage in change and perceive modernity, Blumer observed behaviours amongst fashion buyers – those responsible for selecting the designs within Paris fashion houses (Blumer 1969b). From these observations he described fashion as a process driven by the

desire to express new tastes in a changing world. The symbolic meanings of new designs are socially negotiated to establish a notion of what is beautiful, proper, unique and stylish from which emerges a collective taste. Blumer's evidence of this collective selection between competing styles is based on his observation that, when presented with over one hundred new dress styles, the set of between 100 to 200 fashion buyers, each making their selections in secret, chose almost identical ranges of six to eight garments. On speaking with some of the buyers about their choices Blumer concludes that they had developed common sensitivities, appreciations and ability to sense the direction of emerging public taste. This finding upholds the earlier opinions of Sapir who described the role of the fashion designer as intuitively divining what people want and coaxing them to accept styles that they have themselves unconsciously suggested (Sapir and Mandelbaum 1985). Blumer admits that exactly how these collective tastes develop and are recognised is 'mysterious'.

> When the buyers were asked why they chose one dress in preference to another-between which my inexperienced eye could see no appreciable difference-the typical, honest, yet largely uninformative answer was that the dress was "stunning." (Blumer 1969b:277)

In addition Blumer describes how participants are not always aware that they are engaging in collective fashion tastes and may even shun that notion.

> What may be primarily response to fashion is seen and interpreted in other ways-chiefly as doing what is believed to be superior practice (Blumer 1969b:280)

Despite the mysteries of how collective tastes emerge and disseminate, Blumer asserts that the fact that we do not fully understand the process of collective selection does not contradict in any way that it takes place. Blumer's failure to pin down the exact features behind collective selection has attracted the accusation that his work is incomplete, and lacking in the attention that it gives to the visual, aesthetic sphere of appearance communication (Shibutani 1988). Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton (1989) have attempted to address the gap in understanding why appearance styles continue to emerge, are adopted and change by combining Blumer's theory with other symbolic interactionist viewpoints. Their SI theory of fashion (Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton 1995) is described later in this chapter.

Setting aside any concerns with how particular designs come to be collectively thought of as aesthetically pleasing, accepting that the fashion mechanism is driven by a process of evolving collective taste and that it moves in a direction consistent with modern life, Blumer identified certain prerequisites for the existence of a fashion system, described below.

4.2.1 Blumer's Six Essential Conditions for the Appearance of the Fashion Mechanism

The following six conditions are paraphrased from Blumer (1969b:270)

1. There must be a willingness by people to revise or discard old practices and beliefs in favour of new social forms. This involves a desire to keep abreast of new developments, a perspective which places a premium on being "up to date" and which implies a readiness to denigrate older styles as being old fashioned. It also necessitates a platform for the demonstration of what is regarded as modern.

2. The fashion mechanism requires an openness to the recurring presentation of new styles. The exhibition of various new designs introduces a competitive situation for selection between them. New styles will differ from each other and from the prevailing social forms.

3. There must be a relatively free opportunity for choice between the styles offered. This requires that consumers have access to the retail outlets and finance but also the intellectual sophistication, decision making ability and aesthetic sensitivity to allow them to understand the options available and decide what to buy.

4. The fashion process will not take root where an objective and decisive test can identify the correct or 'best' choice. A strong fashion mechanism requires that choices are made on the basis of subjective evaluations of pretended merit or value rather than utilitarian product attributes.

5. The fashion system requires the presence of influencing figures who extol the virtues of one or another of the competing styles. Such persons must be acknowledged as qualified to pass judgment on the value or suitability of the rival designs. Their choices carry weight as an endorsement of the superiority or propriety of a given option and enhance the likelihood of adoption of that style.

6. The fashion consumer must be open to new influences such as the impact of outside events, the rise of new influencing figures, new market entrants and changes in social opinion. This condition is primarily responsible for shifting taste and redirecting collective choice which constitute the essence of fashion.

It is Blumer's view that if the above six conditions are met then fashion will be in play. Since the above are proposed as essential conditions for the appearance of the fashion mechanism, I suggest that the extent or strength of feeling behind these conditions would have an influence on the speed at which the fashion mechanism turns around new styles. Though Blumer's work in this field may be seen as a 'processual skeleton' (Davis 1994 p119) indifferent to exactly what is being communicated by fashion, I suggest it makes an important contribution when considering the volume of clothing purchased.

4.3 Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton (1995), A SI Theory of Fashion

Building on Blumer's notion of collective selection and drawing on other SI theories, Kaiser et al 1995 presented an explanation of fashion as a social process including the underlying concepts that instigate and perpetuate changing styles. In order to illuminate the areas of understanding that are not addressed within collective selection, the theory brings into play the notions of cultural ambivalence and symbolic ambiguity.

4.3.1 Ambivalence

Ambivalence describes instances where individuals hold different beliefs about a single issue which results in them feeling torn between two emotions or choices, for example the head versus the heart (Fabrigar, MacDonald and Wegener 2005, Thompson and Zanna 1995). The conflict between passion and reason has been a topic of debate dating back to the time of Plato and Aristotle (Thompson and Zanna 1995) and the idea of unconscious conflicts is central to many clinical theories of psychology including those of Freud, 1929-1962 and Jung, 1928-1953. A definition of ambivalence was formalised by Swiss psychologist Eugen Bleuler (1857-1939) where it was considered to be the result of multiple alternative choices that are perceived as being equally available and attractive but having different implications (Kuhn and Cahn 2004; Thompson and Zanna 1995). This definition was further developed to describe how ambivalence may lead to a state of tension when considering the positive and negative aspects associated with choices and that this conflict has an impact on thoughts and action (Lewin 1951).

With regard to fashion, Davis 1994, applies the concept of ambivalence to the mixed emotions that individuals perceive about their identity.

> What are the consequences of appearing as this kind of person against that kind? Does the image I think I convey of myself reflect my true innermost self or some specious version thereof? (Davis 1994:24)

Having studied with Blumer in Chicago in the 1940's, Davis became inspired by Blumer's insights on fashion in the symbolic interactionist tradition (Davis 1991). Blumer and Davis both view fashion as a social process that results from the need to make sense of emergent styles of appearance. However whilst Blumer describes fashion as a route to 'looking modern' (Blumer 1969a) Davis' work emphasises the importance of aesthetics as well as polarities in identity such as masculinity versus femininity, ostentation versus understatement, the erotic versus the chaste (Davis 1994).

The portrayal of women by the media and their self-presentation within social media is a widely considered topic; due to parsimony it is not my intention to include the debate within this study. Suffice to say that there is a considerable body of evidence to suggest that the objectification of women in the media results, for many, in dissatisfaction and anxiety over body image (Aubrey 2010, de Vries and Peter 2013, Fredrickson et al. 1998, Grabe, Ward and Hyde 2008, Halliwell and Dittmar 2004, Harper and Tiggemann 2008, Kaiser 1991). That said, a wide range of female appearance styles can be found in popular culture, fashion magazine and advertising (Englis, Solomon and Ashmore 1994, Kaiser, Lennon and Damhorst 1991, Solomon, Ashmore and Longo 1992) and there are some who believe that advertised images of beauty are becoming more inclusive (Englis, Solomon and Ashmore 1994, Scaraboto and Fischer 2013). Events such as Plus Size Fashion Week 2015 in New York and London attract hundreds of fashion decision makers and include information about promoting body confidence and styling to flatter different body shapes (Swash 2013).

It is not surprising that given the perceived pressure to meet advertised ideals and in the absence of a clear aesthetic model in terms of the 'right' style, ambivalence thrives in attitudes towards fashion (Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton 1995). Davis views this ambivalence as a driving factor in the evolution of fashion, describing it as 'fashion's fuel' (Davis 1994:19). The concept of ambivalence as a motivating factor upholds the earlier view of Sapir who described fashion as stemming from the conflict between the desire to express individual freedom whilst maintaining group acceptance (Sapir and Mandelbaum 1985).

Outside the remit of fashion, but in a similar vein, Thompson and Zanner explored the link between levels of ambivalence and personal fear of invalidity (PFI), (Thompson and Zanna 1995). PFI is a concept defined by Kruglanski describing an individual's concern about the consequences of their decisions (Kruglanski 2013). Thompson and Zanna found that there is a positive relationship between PFI and levels of ambivalence (Thompson and Zanna 1995). Given the volume of evidence referenced above, regarding the extent to which women are objectified and therefore judged on their

appearance, fear of the consequences of 'bad' clothing choices may be seen as a likely contributor to ambivalence in relation to fashion. In considering why clothing volume has increased so significantly in recent years one could point to the highly public and everyday opportunities afforded by social media to be praised, critiqued or condemned (Dominick 1999, Stein 2016). With the advent of social media, the opportunities to be photographed have grown exponentially, with enduring images being captured for public consumption. This has the potential to amplify the consequences of appearance choices making it more important for some people to get the look 'just right. It may be possible therefore that social media plays a part in increasing both PFI and ambivalence.

In considering how uncertainty leads to buying behaviour, using contemporary US as the context for the illustration Kaiser et al (1995) purport that within postmodernist cultures cultural ambivalence increases (Nagtsawa, Kaiser and Hutton 1996). Postmodernist features such as multiculturalism, plurality of styles, multiple self-identities, digital communication and fragmented markets (Connor 1989, Ratneshwar, Mick and Huffman 2003) result in a plethora of influences and choices that are perceived as being equally available and attractive but having different implications – the definition of ambivalence (Thompson and Zanna 1995).

The capitalist market responds to this openness to eclectic influences by increasing the variety of appearance modifying commodities on offer in an attempt to benefit financially from the diverse demands of the consumer thereby increasing the number of available 'looks' (Nagtsawa, Kaiser and Hutton 1996). Faced with a plethora of choice and uncertain of the 'best' option the consumer tendency is to acquire more (Goodman and Vohs 2013).

4.3.2 Symbolic Ambiguity

A principal theory of SI is that meanings are established by the social understanding of symbols. Prior to this social scrutiny anything new has an element of symbolic ambiguity requiring interpretation and explanation. New and varied styles of appearance emerging in the marketplace must therefore be negotiated via social interaction in order to be assigned meaning (Davis 1994).

Whilst adopting an SI viewpoint, Stone (1962) is critical of George Herbert Mead's (1934) perspective for its focus on verbal communication and discourse, neglecting the importance of appearance as a form of communication and comprehension of symbols (Stone 1962). When encountering a new appearance style, Stone purports that the degree of unfamiliarity ranges from nonsensical, where the observer has no frame of reference to interpret the appearance and therefore is unable to de-code its intent, to stereotypical or automatic where the appearance is so familiar it requires no effort to decode (Stone 1962). Stone suggests that new appearances most commonly fall somewhere in the middle of this range having sufficient familiarity for the observer to understand the potential for multiple meanings but with an element of symbolic ambiguity that requires interpretation (Stone 1962). The requirement to de-code the ambiguous meanings of clothing styles is a concept echoed by Davis (Davis 1994) though both Stone and Davis agree that such translated meanings are ephemeral varying tremendously on the identity of the wearer, the place, the occasion, the company or even something as transient as observer's or the wearer's mood (Davis 1994).

In his study of 8000 responses to individuals based on the way they look Stone describes appearance and clothing as a form of non-verbal communication that performs many functions to the wearer and to the observer (Stone 1962). Negotiating a new style involves not only identification ***of*** that style but the observer is also evaluating whether they identify ***with*** that style (Stone 1962). Stone asserts that appearance has the facility to announce identity indicating to the observer where this individual is placed in society - are they a parent, a professional, rich or poor? Observers also use appearance to make judgments about an individuals' values and mood for example are they outgoing, cheerful,

detached or shy? These appearance based evaluations also lead to the anticipation of the attitudes that may be held by that individual – for example, assumptions that the older, expensively dressed, serious looking businessman probably has negative attitudes towards popular music. The automatic, unconscious operation of stereotypes such as those based on appearance, is well documented (Greenwald and Banaji 1995; Grubb and Grathwohl 1967; Naumann et al. 2009; Sirgy et al. 1997). There is evidence to suggest that some attitudes may be activated outside the conscious mind (Fazio 2001) and that individuals do not differentiate between implicit attitudes based on heuristic judgments or stereotypes and those conscious attitudes formed on the basis of evaluation of attributes and alternatives (Greenwald and Banaji 1995). Hence behaviour may just as likely be founded on a subconscious judgment made about an individual based on their appearance as an informed evaluation of that person. The premise that appearance based judgments have the ability to influence attitudes and behaviour gives weight to the fears of those experiencing personal fear of invalidity (PFI) since appearance is likely to have social consequences.

Within SI theory, the notion of self is reflective that is to say it is developed from the contemplation of how one is perceived by others. Described by Cooley as 'the looking glass self' (Cooley and Schubert 1998) individuals shape their self-concepts based on how they believe they are seen by others. As Stone (1962) describes where individuals make judgments based on another's appearance then they naturally assume that others will review them by the same means. In this way the symbols that people rely on to evaluate others is a mirror of how they expect to be seen or their 'self'. Therefore, a person's review of another's appearance is intricately linked to their own self-concept (Cooley and Schubert 1998, Stone 1962). Given this link between appearance and self-concept, it is important to the individual to understand the symbols associated with new styles of dress so that they can be used to construct and convey their own identity as well and evaluating the appearance of others (Davis 1994, Stone 1962).

Under Stone's theory, misunderstanding the accepted social meanings of symbols in appearance could result in others misconstruing one's identity, mood, values and/or attitudes. Since the social stakes of the 'wrong' appearance are so high then deciphering the symbolic ambiguity with new styles becomes involving, intriguing and engaging (Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton 1995, Stone 1962).

4.3.3 An SI View of the Fashion Process

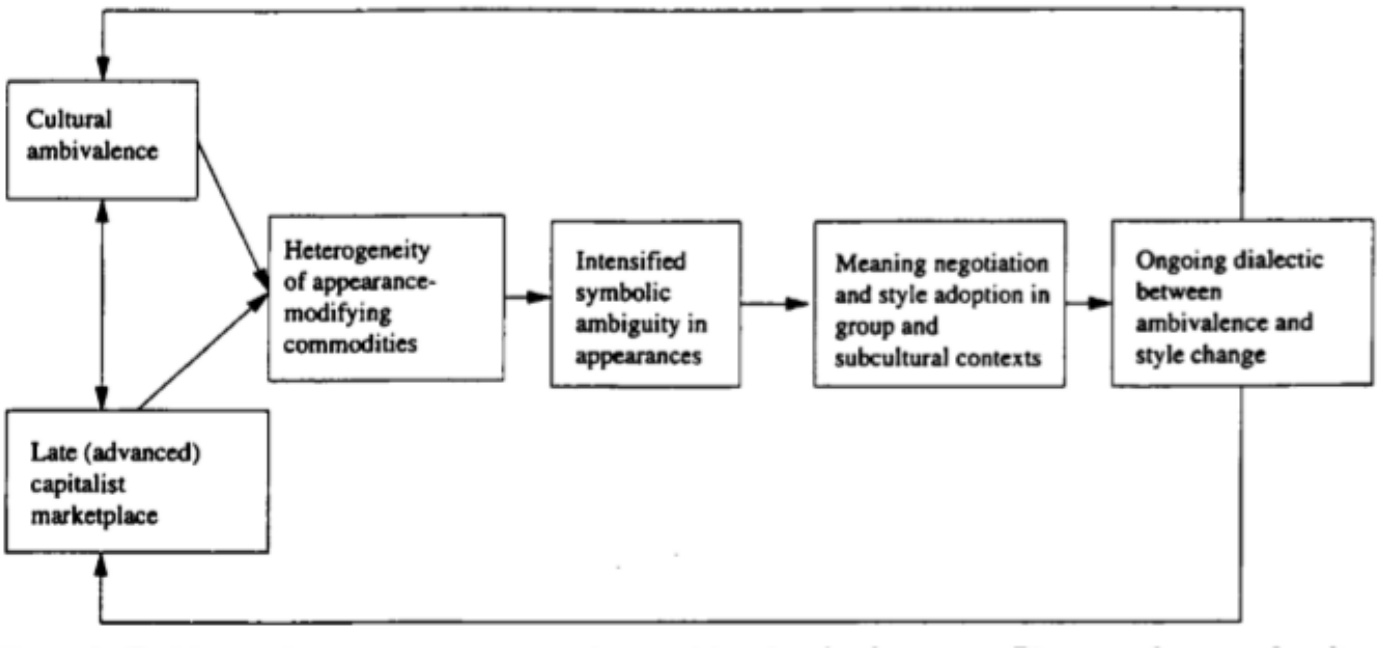
In their SI theory of fashion Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton (1995), view fashion change as a social process that results from the human need to make sense of symbolic ambiguity within emergent appearance styles. Yet even when certain appearance styles are adopted by a majority of consumers they are unlikely to resolve ambivalence (Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton 1995). In fact, the process of a style being adopted by many may create ambivalence amongst those consumers seeking connotations of cutting edge fashion or individualism (Thompson and Haytko 1997) .

Fashion does not aim to settle ambivalence giving a single solution to what is stylish, it fosters ambivalence by allowing multiple appearance styles to be simultaneously considered fashionable (Davis 1994, Nagtsawa, Kaiser and Hutton 1996). Ambivalence may be seen as a human condition, a natural and continual predisposition to seek novelty and compare alternatives that have different implications (Fabrigar, MacDonald and Wegener 2005). In addition since businesses within the fashion industry serve to profit from continuing ambivalences it is unlikely to be motivated to resolve them once and for all, even if that were possible (Nagtsawa, Kaiser and Hutton 1996). The continual negotiation of social symbols in order to construct and reconstruct the self serves to create an ongoing dialectic surrounding what is 'in fashion'.

Based on a series of axioms drawn from the works of Blumer, Davis and Stone it was suggested by Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton (1995) that the fashion process is propelled by a continual cycle of cultural ambivalence. These mixed feelings and the absence of a cultural consensus regarding the

'best' way to dress leads to the emergence of many new styles that require interpretation, resulting in an ongoing dialectic that fosters further ambivalence, as illustrated in their chart below.

Figure 3. Fashion and appearance processes in transitional societal contexts



Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton (1995:176)

In considering the reasons behind current overconsumption of clothing this theory provides a useful framework to explore some of the potential driving factors that may lead people to feel that they 'need' to purchase new garments in order to construct identity and meet social expectations. Though apparently relevant in exploring the pace and volume of clothing consumption, both of the SI theories of fashion outlined above were produced some time ago – almost 50 years ago in the case of Blumer's 1969 theory and 22 years ago for that of Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton in 1995. This may call into question their suitability for exploring modern day frequent fashion shopping behaviour. This research provides the opportunity to assess the SI theories of fashion in the light of empirical evidence within the current fashion shopping context and to evaluate their contribution to understanding today's frequent fashion shopping behaviour. In addition, the study will reveal how these social dynamics are played out and experienced by those who frequently shop for clothing.

5. Understanding Fashion Shopping Behaviour – Implications for the Thesis

The review of current understanding has served to highlight that consumer behaviour in fashion shopping is a complex phenomenon which engages a vast array of theories and concepts spanning issues of identity and self-image (Belk 1988; Dittmar 2004; Sirgy et al. 1997), hedonistic behaviour (Arnold and Reynolds 2003; Babin, Darden and Griffin 1994), shopping habits (Shove 2008; Verplanken and Orbell 2003), symbolic and social systems (Blumer 1969b; Davis 1994; Hogg, Banister and Stephenson 2009) both off and online (Blázquez 2014; Rocamora 2011). The specific objectives of this study are to explore the consumer behaviour of the frequent clothes shopper, the ways in which this behaviour is influenced by social dynamics and delivers feelings of wellbeing as well as opinions towards the notion of buying less. It is not so much concerned with the appeal of fashion and the desire to acquire clothing but the drivers that perpetuate the behaviour leading to repeated purchase and disposal.

The literature review has highlighted the potential of the SI theories of fashion to explain fashion as a social mechanism. Assuming that the SI perspective of fashion as a socially perpetuated system may facilitate a deeper understanding of frequent clothes shopping behaviour, this study is informed by SI theory and its associated research approach.

PART III – THE RESEARCH APPROACH

6. Philosophical Standpoint

The review of current understanding of fashion shopping behaviour has revealed a vast array of research approaches and methods from the quantitative development of scales to measure personality traits (Richins 2004) and survey instruments to categorise behaviour (Guiry, Mägi and Lutz 2006) to discourse analysis (Thompson and Haytko 1997), qualitative interviewing, focus groups (Zarley Watson et al. 2013) and phenomenological techniques exploring the way that clothing is experienced (Joy et al. 2012). Each approach is suitable to its research aims. The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the behaviour of the frequent clothes shopper and the reasons for high volumes of consumption, the research design is therefore interpretive in nature. The interpretive tradition aims to gain a deeper understanding of how people subjectively experience the social world in their daily lives (Blaikie 1993; Della Porta and Keating 2008). In contrast to positivism which asserts that there is a single external reality which can be known and measured (Bryman 2012), interpretivism proposes that the truth of a situation is subject to perception and is context dependent (Della Porta and Keating 2008). Critical realism is sometimes described as occupying a middle position between positivism and interpretivism by claiming that a phenomenon can exist independently of our knowledge but accepting that the mechanisms which generate behaviour are not always directly observable (Bryman 2012). Although the context surrounding frequent shopping is important in this study, the phenomena under exploration are the empirical accounts of those who frequently purchase clothes, not the causal mechanisms and macro-level systems which would be under scrutiny within a study founded on critical realist principles (Collier 1994). Research such as this study which takes an interpretive approach considers that understanding requires interpretation of why actors behave as they do and that phenomena can be understood via rich descriptions of the way one experiences the world (Geertz 1994; Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Figure 4. An Overview of Research Paradigms

Compiled from information in Bryman (2012:19-43) and Collier (1994:100-103)

	Ontology	**Epistemology**	**Theoretical Framework**	**Methodology**	**Method**
	What is reality?	How can I know reality?	Which perspective am I taking?	How will I go about finding out?	What techniques will I use?
Positivism	There is a single reality existing independently of the researcher	Social science can be measured in the same way as natural science by revealing causal laws and facts	Positivism: Measurement Causality Generalisation Replication	e.g. Experimental research Survey	Usually **Quantitative:** Define and construct sample Scale development Questionnaire Interviews Statistical analysis
Interpretative	There is no single external reality. Truth is subject to perception, depends on context, varies with time	Understanding requires interpretation of why subject is acting in a particular way – what the subject means by their actions	Approaches to interpreting reality: e.g. Symbolic Interactionism Phenomenology Hermeneutics	e.g. Ethnography Discourse analysis Grounded theory Action research Narrative research	Usually **Qualitative:** e.g. Depth interview Observation Case Study Video diary Focus Group
Critical Realism	Reality comprises socially constructed observable, experiences caused by unobservable, external mechanisms	Knowledge requires understanding the real mechanisms that cause actual events and the empirical observation of how those events are experienced	Critical Theory Feminist Theory Marxist Theory Power relationships Dialectical theories-considering opposing forces	e.g. Critical discourse analysis Action research Critical ethnography	Mix of qualitative and quantitative methods selected to best understand why events happen in specific cases e.g. Ideological review Interviews regarding power relationships

The SI theories of fashion which appear well placed to illuminate the drivers of excessive clothing consumption are interpretative in nature. These theories take the view that knowledge of fashion shopping behaviour requires an understanding of the social and symbolic meanings that underpin frequent shopping behaviour. Taking an SI viewpoint as a guide for this exploration, the sections below outline the particular theoretical perspective and ontological and epistemological assumptions associated with the SI approach.

6.1 Theoretical Perspective - Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic Interactionism (SI) was developed by Herbert Blumer (1900-1987) from the work of George Herbert Mead (1863-1931). SI is centred around specific concepts of mind, self and society (Mead 1934). The SI notion of 'mind' asserts that human life is lived in a symbolic domain and that human beings act towards things based on the meanings that these things have for them (Blumer 1969a). SI suggests that, although objects may exist in physical form they are also social objects, imbued with social meanings based on how they are used and how people act towards them (Charon 2009). Symbols are defined and maintained by social interaction and represent whatever people agree they shall represent (Blumer 1969a). Symbolic communication is meaningful in that both the user and the actor receiving the symbol understand what it represents and is used purposively to transmit meaning that the user believes will make sense to another (Charon 2009). The communication of symbols provides the means by which reality is constructed (Jones, Bradbury and LeBoutillier 2011).

The SI understanding of 'self' proposes that one's opinion of self evolves from the contemplation of how one is seen by others (Blumer 1969a). Since meaning making within SI is a social process, an individual will evaluate themselves by assuming the view of the other actors in the situation (Charon 2009) drawing on the influences of important reference groups (Blumer 1969a). A reference group is

a unit whose outlook is used by the actor for purposes such as comparison, approval, aspiration or disassociation (Shibutani 1955); for example 'will my colleagues think that this outfit looks unprofessional?' In this respect the individual does not experience themselves directly, but indirectly through the points of view of other members of their social group (Charon 2009). Blumer (1969a) suggested that there are two groups that are critical in the development of self – the 'significant other' refers to people whose opinions are important to an individual, such as friend and family and the 'generalised other' which is the perception of the community or social view that may be used as point of reference from which to view the self (Blumer 1969a). The influence of others in the formation of self-concept is also described in Cooley's (1902) 'the looking glass self' which proposes that feelings about oneself are a consequence of how people imagine that they are perceived by other people.

The 'society' aspect of SI stems from the assumption that the self is partly a product of the organisation and structure of society (Mead 1934). Within everyday life individuals may take on a variety of roles such as mother, daughter, manager or wife. These socially defined roles tend to comprise a set of behaviours, and norms that a person expects to fulfil. SI asserts that such roles are important to self-concept and may result in individuals acting to maintain and express the roles that are congruent with their sense of identity whilst distancing themselves from roles that are inconsistent with the sense of self (Charon 2009; Mead 1934).

6.2 Fashion through a Symbolic Interactionist Lens

All three key tenets of symbolic interactionism – symbolism, sense of self and social appraisal are pertinent to the area of fashion. Clothing is a physical product with practical attributes that has social and abstract symbolic meanings. The symbolic meaning of clothing is highly dependent on context. What a style of clothing means to the observer and the wearer may vary greatly depending on the identity of the wearer, the occasion and the company (Davis 1994). In addition what is signified by a style of dress can vary tremendously for different audiences or social groups (Davis 1994; Thompson

and Haytko 1997). Fashion is frequently described as a means of conveying social identity which relies on shared understanding of how values are symbolised by style of clothing (Auty and Elliott 1998; Davis 1994) and this may influence behaviour.

6.3 Ontology and Epistemology

Coming from a pragmatist standpoint, Mead, Blumer and symbolic interactionists operate from an assumption that a physical objective reality exists external to what our thoughts are about it (Charon 2009). However, knowing this reality would require the objective analysis of every possible consequence of the concept (Peirce 1992) which is unattainable since all human understanding is distorted through perceptual frames and therefore all knowledge is partial. Although one might accept that humans exist in a physical objective reality, pragmatism proposes that what is real for people will always depend on their own interpretation. Symbolic interactionists assert that interpretation is based on shared understanding of the social meanings of objects. Therefore the reality experienced is a social reality and it is this socially defined reality that is the subject of symbolic interactionist study. This viewpoint has similarities with both interpretivism and social constructionism. Interpretivism is often linked to the theories of Max Weber who asserted that the knowledge of social phenomena requires an understanding of a social world that people have already constructed and the meanings ascribed to actions as the actors understand them (Fay 1996). The ontological stance inherent in interpretivism is that reality is socially constructed (Schwandt 2000) therefore the truth of a social situation is not a 'thing' to be interpreted, it **is** the interpretations of the social actors themselves (Blaikie 1993). Social constructionism takes a variety of forms but all founded on the basis that knowledge is created and sustained by social processes, that the ways in which we understand the world are influenced by perspective, culture and place in history, and that social action is influenced by common understanding (Burr 2003).

This study takes the epistemological viewpoint common within SI, interpretivism and social constructionism, that knowledge regarding why people shop in the way they do, is founded in the accounts of the social actors who carry out the behaviour. Although the participants' accounts may not be '**the** truth' in empirical terms, they are certainly the participants' own truths (Blumer 1969) and each person's account tells us something that is important about the whole phenomenon (Charon 2009). The aim of this research is to attain the best achievable understanding of the social reality experienced by the actors who engage in it. Since human behaviour is seen as an interpretive process constituted by people interacting with each other it follows that human life is studied as it is experienced by the very people who are active in its production. The study of lived experience is fundamental to research within the SI tradition. Lived experience, as it is explored and understood in SI research, is a representation and understanding of how individuals derive shared symbols from the communities in which they are located and how they use these symbols to define, anticipate, implement and assess their behaviour (Prus 1996).

Although symbolic interactionist research is similar to an interpretivist approach in that it is concerned with the study of socially defined reality and it accepts that this reality will be different for each individual, the underlying assumption of SI that there is an objective external reality, albeit inaccessible to human knowledge. As a consequence, within SI some accounts may be considered as 'better' at revealing the truth of a situation than others, compared to interpretivism, where all accounts are equal. It is acknowledged within SI that the definition of 'better' is not easily achieved and is open to bias and preconceptions (Charon 2009). Nevertheless, SI proposes that, given the appropriate criteria, a measurement of accuracy of an account versus the objective truth is possible. In the absence of a defined measure of accuracy SI accepts that it is reasonable to suggest that each account has value in its own right in that it focuses on a different aspect of reality (Blumer 1969). This reality will be different for each individual as they each approach the situation from a different perspective (Charon 2009).

6.4 The Study of Perspectives

A perspective may be described as a point of view based on a set of values and beliefs that help form perception (Shibutani 1955). SI proposes that the individual holds many perspectives which are created via social life and change as the person takes different roles and associates with different groups (Charon 2009). The exploration of perspectives within symbolic interactionist studies differs from traditional social psychology research where the examination of attitude is more commonly used. Perspectives differ from attitudes in that attitudes may be seen as part of the individual; although they may be developed socially, they are carried as a personal trait from situation to situation (Charon 2009). The cognitive component of an attitude refers to an individual's beliefs about an object that creates a predisposition to act a certain way (Chisnall 1995). It is not used by the individual rather it directs the individual. In contrast, perspectives are not individual characteristics or beliefs: they are social constructs that are used to guide the way that a situation is defined (Shibutani 1955). An individual may choose to apply any one of their perspectives for a given situation, for example a person may in a single day be a student, a mother, a daughter, a teacher and their perspective may vary depending on their role and the context. An individual temporarily adopts the perspective that fits best with how they define themselves in any given situation. The dominant view in studies of behaviour is that human action may be ascribed to initiating factors such as motives, attitudes, needs or demands (Blumer 1969). In contrast, SI places greater emphasis on the dynamic process of self-interaction through which the individual interprets the situation and constructs their action (Charon 2009).

Previous studies in ethical consumption of clothing and food have found an attitude behaviour gap between individuals' feelings, intentions and their shopping behaviour (Bray, Johns and Kilburn 2011, Shaw et al. 2007, Shaw, Shiu and Clarke 2000). Although this was found to be somewhat due to practical considerations such as product availability or financial constraints, it may also be possible

that the gap is partly due to the perspective taken by the individual at the point of purchase. For example, one may have strong attitudes against sweatshop manufactured clothing but from the perspective of a time-pressured, cost conscious mother, an easy purchase of cheap school uniform from an unknown source may be the selected course of action. The use of symbolic interaction in this study aims to provide an alternative view to attitude-based studies by focusing on the perspectives applied by consumers when making fashion shopping choices. This standpoint allows an exploration of different consumer choices for different situations, the consideration of opinions of others and how the individual expects to be viewed.

In the use of perspectives to guide the choice of behaviour, individuals do not simply respond to the symbols they encounter: they understand their representations and can apply them to any situation as they see fit (Charon 2009). As the collective generation and transmission of symbolic meaning is fluid (Crotty 2003), in order to make sense of the world around them people construct mental models and apply their experiences and thoughts to problems as they arise. In this respect, behaviour is not learned or determined but is selected as appropriate on the fly, taking into consideration the interpreted meaning of the social setting (Jones, Bradbury and LeBoutillier 2011). SI asserts that human behaviour may only be understood through the people's choice of action (Blumer 1969). A grasp of behaviour therefore requires a comprehension of the reasons that particular conduct is deemed appropriate within the given social context and it is the role of the researcher to make the actors' understanding explicit. Hence, for this study, although the research objective surrounds the issue of consumption reduction, the epistemological stance is that knowledge regarding this topic will not be revealed in isolation but requires an understanding of the broader social context surrounding the choices that consumers make in their fashion shopping behaviour. The research questions therefore seek to illuminate the social dynamics, emotions and behaviours surrounding frequent clothes shopping, hence my review of the current literature spans a range of subject areas.

7. Methodology

The aim of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the actions that are responsible for unsustainable shopping patterns by exploring the behaviours of the frequent clothes shopper, their reasons for excessive consumption, ways in which this behaviour delivers feelings of wellbeing and how they perceive the notion of buying less. In his explanation of Symbolic Interactionist research methods Blumer (1969a:40) describes two modes of enquiry, exploration and inspection. Exploratory study is described as a flexible procedure starting with a broad focus whose purpose is to move towards a clear understanding of a sphere of social life. Inspection often follows exploration and involves the intensive examination of analytical elements and the relationships between these elements. As this study is descriptive in nature it may be described as an exploratory study. Its objective is to produce a qualitative thematic description (Sandelowski and Barroso 2003) illuminating common definitions and the shared, but often unexpressed, understandings supporting patterns of individual behaviour and social life. The sections below address the methods used during the course of this research.

7.1 Research Design

For an exploratory study, the framework of Symbolic Interactionism allows for a flexible research approach using any ethically allowable procedure that is likely to deliver a clearer picture of social life (Blumer 1969a). However, although that theoretical framework allows some degree of flexibility, the credibility of the research findings is still dependent on the development of a research design which delivers methodological rigour, able to produce findings which are reliable and valid (Bradshaw and Stratford, 2010).

7.1.1 Choosing the Mix of Qualitative Methods

There is debate within the literature regarding whether, in the absence of the numeric values and measurable results of a quantitative study, reliability and validity are suitable terms for the assessment of qualitative findings (Janesick 2000, Morse et al. 2002). Reliability is concerned with the replicability of the findings, however, the extent to which this is possible for a qualitative study has been questioned on the basis of the complexity of the phenomena and the unavoidable impact of context (Ritchie et al. 2013). It has been suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) that, for qualitative studies, the term 'transferability' or 'generalisability' is more appropriate than reliability.

Since Symbolic interactionism views behaviour as dynamic, selected 'on the fly' dependant on circumstances and perspective, it seems unlikely that situations and observations may be precisely replicated (Denzin 1973). Whilst I accept that exact replicability and therefore unequivocal reliability may be impossible, unless there is some belief that a finding would be repeated for similar data samples then it would call into question the significance of the research (Morse et al. 2002, Ritchie et al. 2013). In contrast to a quantitative study seeking prediction and generalization of findings, this qualitative study seeks instead to illuminate understanding that may be extrapolated to similar situations (Golafshani 2003). In an attempt to ensure the reliability of this study I have included transparent descriptions of my methods of sampling, data collection, interpretation and analysis (Morse et al. 2002, Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba 2007) so that judgments about the degree of similarity may be made by others who may wish to apply all or part of the findings elsewhere.

The validity of research traditionally refers to whether the means of measurement are accurate and whether they are actually measuring what they are intended to measure (Mason 2002). Since many qualitative studies such as this one seek to describe rather than measure, there is some debate regarding whether the term validity is at all applicable to qualitative research (Janesick 2000, Ritchie et al. 2013). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest the term 'credibility' as an alternative to validity for qualitative studies. In contrast Hammersley (1992) considers the term validity to be suitable for

qualitative research and that an account may be considered valid if it accurately represents the features of the phenomena that it is intended to describe. Whilst most qualitative researchers recognise the need for some kind of qualifying check for their research (Golafshani 2003) the literature reveals no single, fixed or universal concept of validity within qualitative studies. Instead, it is the job of the researcher to weave appropriate mechanisms for verification into each step of the inquiry in order to construct a solid product (Creswell 2012, Morse et al. 2002).

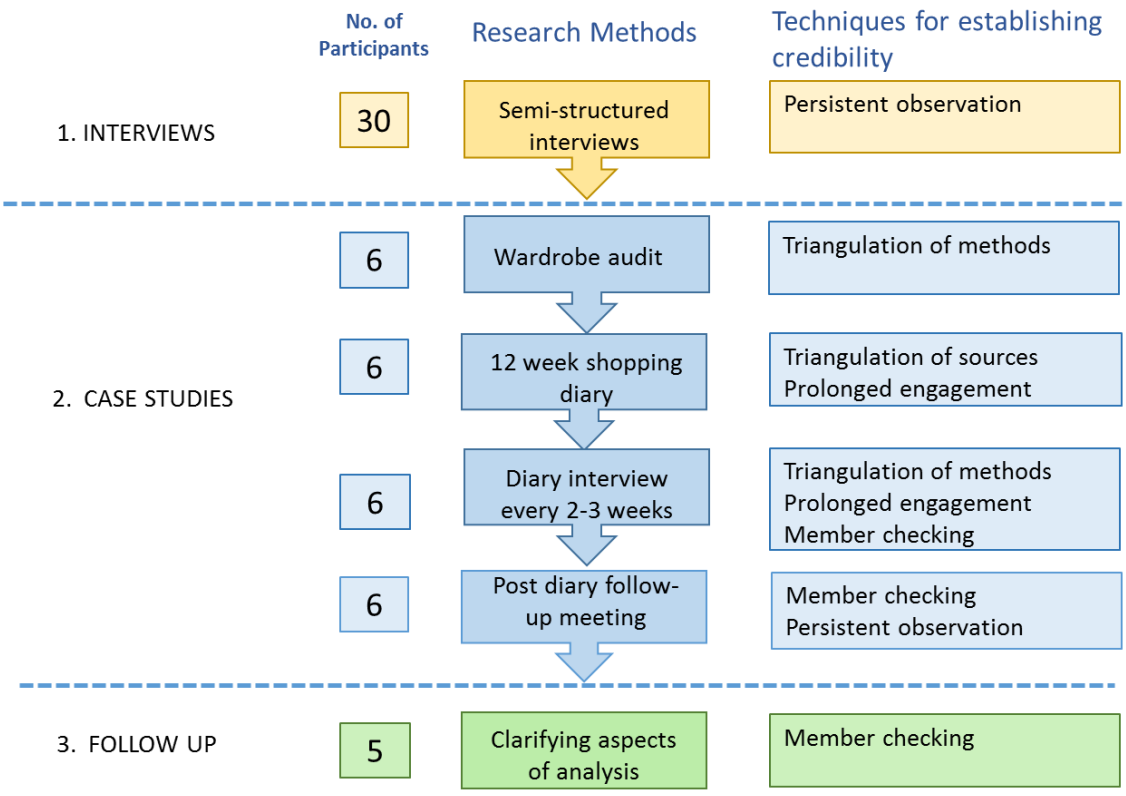
Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest techniques designed to establish credibility in qualitative research and help to ensure the 'trustworthiness' of the findings, these include prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation and member checking (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Prolonged engagement involves spending adequate time in the field to build rapport with the research subjects and to understand the cultural and social setting of the phenomena under exploration (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Where prolonged engagement affords scope, persistent observation provides depth of intelligence to identify and focus in detail on those characteristics of the situation that are most relevant to the issue being explored (Altheide and Johnson 1994; Lincoln and Guba 1985). The concept of triangulation is concerned with the use of multiple data sources and/or methods in an investigation to enhance understanding. In quantitative studies triangulation is often used as a test for validity by cross referencing different sources to identify any inconsistencies in the results (Patton 2002). However, for qualitative studies such as this, triangulation is not employed as a method of validation, rather it is used to ensure that the participant accounts are more fully revealed, comprehensive and well developed (Lincoln and Guba 1985, Denzin 1978). Member checks (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Morse et al. 2002) allow the interpretation of comments, analytic categories and conclusions to be discussed with member of those groups from whom the data were originally obtained.

Mindful of the suggested techniques to construct credible qualitative research (Lincoln and Guba 1985) and that it is the responsibility of the researcher to design a robust programme of enquiry

(Creswell 2012) this research was designed to incorporate mixed qualitative methods and mechanisms for verification.

The research design consisted of three key stages comprising thirty qualitative interviews, six case studies and follow up interviews with each of the case study participants. A summary of the research design and the corresponding techniques for establishing credibility is outlined in figure 5 below. Details of how each of these methods were administered is contained within the chapter regarding data collection.

Figure 5. Summary of research design and techniques for establishing credibility



7.1.2 Semi Structured Interviews

Symbolic interactionism acknowledges that the world is understood through symbols and shared meaning and the communication of symbols provides the means by which reality is constructed (Jones, Bradbury and LeBoutillier 2011). This reality will be different for each individual as they each approach the situation from a different perspective (Charon 2009). For this reason individual interviews were chosen rather than focus groups. Whilst it is acknowledged that group interviews such as focus groups may take advantage of group dynamics to reveal the underlying reasons for behavioural patterns (Guest et al. 2017) there is a risk that the opinions of one or a few members may sway others (Frey and Fontana 1991). This study takes the view that a grasp of behaviour requires a comprehension of the reasons that particular conduct is deemed appropriate within the given social context from the individual's perspective at that time. The decision to interview individuals rather than groups was therefore more consistent with the epistemological stance since it allows the exploration of personal perspectives.

Although the overarching aim of the research surrounds movement towards the reduction of clothing consumption, the SI viewpoint asserts that knowledge regarding this topic will not be revealed in isolation but requires an understanding of the broader social context surrounding the choices that consumers make in their fashion shopping behaviour. The in-depth interview is a commonly used method in interpretive research to uncover meanings and grasp the essence of participant experiences of their world (Wengraf 2001). This type of interview allows for rich detailed answers satisfying the requirements of persistent observation (Lincoln and Guba 1985), with an emphasis on how the participant frames and understands the issues (Bryman and Bell 2011). The aim is to gain the 'insider view' in order to unravel the subjects' experience and common sense understanding of daily life (Douglas 1970). In order for interviews to provide insight into the participant's life, world and meaning, the data needs to be rich in such a way that it provides thick descriptions (Schultze and Avital 2011). To this end, the interview was designed to explore not just practical and social reasons behind

behaviour, and the implications of behaviours, but also the intentionality of that behaviour in order to reveal its meaning and significance (Brekhus, Galliher and Gubrium 2005).

7.1.3 Case Study

To ensure that the topic of interest was well explored, and the essence of the phenomena revealed, the research design included a second stage of data collection in the form of individual case studies. The qualitative case study facilitates holistic, in-depth investigation by allowing the researcher to explore phenomenon within its context (Feagin, Orum and Sjoberg 1991).

The research questions to be addressed by the case study were the same as for the interviews. The use of case studies as a technique to gain insight into the research questions reflects Stake's definition of an instrumental case study (Stake 2011). In contrast to an intrinsic case study where the case itself is of primary interest, for an instrumental case study the case per se is secondary to understanding a particular phenomenon (Stake 2011). The role of the instrumental case study is to facilitate understanding and gain insight into a particular issue. Similarly Yin defines this type of descriptive case study as portraying a phenomenon in its real world context (Yin 2013). The purpose of qualitative case study is to promote understanding rather than make explanations (Von Wright 2004). Descriptive case studies aim to reveal information by telling the story of the participants feelings, behaviours, beliefs and attitudes as they occur (Woodside 2010) in order that this may be articulated within a thick description of the lived experience and its meaning to the subject (Geertz 1994). Within SI research lived experience is a represented as an understanding of how individuals derive shared symbols from the communities in which they are located and how they use these symbols to define, anticipate, implement and assess their behaviour (Prus 1996).

The methods employed within the case study were a wardrobe audit and a twelve-week shopping diary during which period 3-4 diary interviews were held to discuss the contents of the shopping

accounts. Re-addressing the research questions within individual case studies enabled some enhancement of the data as well a comparison of the information and opinions obtained in the interviews with real life or 'actual' behaviour (Stake 2011). Whilst it was not the intention of the case studies to provide a measurement of the validity of the interviews, they were useful as a means of triangulation of qualitative data sources and methods in considering to what extent the attitudes and behaviour described within the interview remained consistent during different times and situations (Patton 2002).

Since Symbolic interactionism views behaviour as dynamic, selected instinctively depending on context and perspective it seems unlikely that situations and observations may be exactly replicated so hindering the possibility of triangulation (Denzin 1973). With this in mind, the use of case studies aims to uncover additional interpretations rather than to confirm a single meaning (Stake 2011). Any discrepancy between the information provided during the interview and the behaviour noted during the case study methods is not considered as indicative of a lack of validity in the interview responses (Stake 2011). It is treated as an interesting observation that the participants are either applying a different perspective to that scenario (Charon 2009) or are unwilling or unable to openly or accurately articulate or recall their behaviour (Metcalf 2003). There are other reasons that a researcher may encounter inconsistencies in behaviour between methods and sources. It is accepted that the process of being interviewed or observed may influence participant behaviour (Metcalf 2003). In attempting to reflect themselves in the best light (Lin, Lin and Raghubir 2003), participants may provide the information that they feel the researcher wants to hear (Stake 2011) or may choose to lie or omit relevant data (LeCompte and Goetz 1982). However since it would take some effort on the part of the participant to keep up a pretence over the course of a twelve week case study, it was anticipated that the diary technique would reduce the risk of contrived responses and allow for rapport building which offers the opportunity to better understand the participants (Metcalf 2003).

In addition, the philosophical standpoint of the study accepts that an individual take many perspectives and temporarily adopts the perspective that fits best with how they define themselves in any given situation (Charon 2009, Shibutani 1955). Whilst it may be difficult to display a range of perspectives within an interview situation, the use of individual case studies was designed to explore the salient issues through a variety of real life situations and perspectives as they arise. This allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood.

The wardrobe audit has proved useful in encouraging reflection on clothing ownership and use in fashion studies concerning wear and waste (WRAP 2011). It is also used by fashion stylists to help their clients achieve an efficient choice of clothing that best suits their body shape and lifestyle (Wellington and Bryson 2001). SI asserts that well informed participants contribute most towards understanding (Blumer 1969). The aim of the wardrobe audit process was to equip the participants with information about the clothing that they already owned, to encourage reflection surrounding how they came to purchase this volume of garments and how they felt about the clothing they have. It was intended that this would provide a knowledge base from which to embark upon the diary study.

Symbolic Interactionists believe that understanding human action requires insight into the actions of people in real situations. Fashion shopping browsing and buying behaviour is often spontaneous, can happen at any time, for example those who report quick checking of fashion web sites in periods of boredom, and can be extremely frequent for some participants. It is therefore a difficult area to reliably observe first hand. In order to obtain information about the day to day fashion shopping behaviour of the participants and the meanings of those activities a diary: diary interview technique was used (Jacelon and Imperio 2005, Zimmerman and Wieder 1977). The diary allowed participants to note features of their behaviour in real life situations as they occurred (Jacelon and Imperio 2005). The purpose of the regular diary interviews was to fill in the details surrounding the behaviour described but also to go beyond the events reported to explore the purpose and meaning of the

shopping activity (Zimmerman and Wieder 1977). The diary interview was also designed as a means for unpacking taken for granted elements of behaviour (Elliott 1997) such as browsing without buying.

In addition, the research was designed to provide multiple opportunities for member checks (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Member checks were incorporated into the diary interview process and the follow up interviews. This process provides an opportunity for participants to challenge what they perceive as incorrect interpretations and to volunteer any additional information that may help to clarify the researcher's understanding (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Whilst Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that member checks are a crucial technique for establishing credibility, others are critical of this technique pointing out that participants may have changed their mind about an issue or a new experience may have since intervened (Morse 1994), that participant and research may have different views of what is a 'fair' account (Creswell 1998) or the participant may seek to please the researcher by agreeing with their interpretation when they are not truly convinced that it is accurate (Morse 1994, Creswell 1998). Whilst I acknowledge the potential weaknesses of member checks, I felt that it was important for the accuracy of my findings that I had checked my interpretation with the participants particularly for the shopping diary element of the project where the information had been completed by them in isolation and was sometimes in brief note form.

My selection of research methods is in accordance with the symbolic interactionist theoretical framework for an exploratory study (Blumer 1969a). By designing the research to incorporate a mix of suitable qualitative methods and sources featuring multiple opportunities for verification it is anticipated that the study is robust in its ability to produce credible findings under a variety of conditions (Creswell and Clark 2007; Morse et al. 2002).

7.2 Data Collection

Symbolic interactionism (SI) is premised on the idea that people act towards things on the basis of the meanings that those things have for them (Blumer 1969). To answer the research questions, the field research therefore needs to be designed to uncover what the participants believe, what they see and what they understand (Charon 2009). Such knowledge of human behaviour requires an understanding of overt and covert action (Blumer 1969). This section overviews my working principles for data collection explaining why and how specific methods were used to help understand, from the participants' point of view, why they act as they do.

Since it is unlikely that the participants would have ever reflected on their opinions towards consumption reduction nor could they be expected to readily have a precise explanation as to the reasons for their behaviour, shedding light on the key research areas was viewed not so much a list of questions but rather a series of topics for exploration. This initial list of topics for investigation represented areas where I felt that there was a gap in the literature and current understanding relating to frequent clothes shopping and thus an opportunity to provide answers to the research questions and make an original contribution to knowledge on this subject. The following points one to four highlight the areas within the literature that were used to inform the interview guide.

1. What are the behaviours of the frequent clothes shopper?

Discussion surrounding this question included an exploration of the frequency and pattern of clothes shopping as well as the triggers that precede buying behaviour (Woodruffe 1997). Participants were invited to remember the types of feelings that had led them to shop for clothes, for example, whether that was related to their mood (Arnold and Reynolds 2003, Kronod et al. 2012), a desire to keep abreast of the latest trends (Watson et al. 2013), or bargain hunting (Sherry 1990, Babin et al. 1994). Participants were also asked to consider whether their purchases were planned or made on impulse (Hausman 2000) to provide insight on whether shopping for clothes had become an automatic response to certain contextual cues (Verplanken and Orbell, 2003).

2. What is the nature of the rewards which perpetuate this behaviour?

Participants were asked about the emotions that they associate with shopping for clothes and the reasons that they suppose they might feel this way (Arnold and Reynolds 2003). Discussions in this area were also related to pertinent issues arising from the literature including self-identity (Auty and Elliott 1998, Banister and Hogg 2004), social activity and associate groups (Guiry, Mägi and Lutz 2006), materialism and symbols of success (Dittmar et al. 2014, Shrum and Lowrey 2014, Sirgy et al. 2013).

3. To what extent do social dynamics impact frequent shopping and excessive clothing consumption?

The literature describes social identity as a driving feature behind fashion consumption (Auty and Elliott 1998, Banister and Hogg 2004, Hogg, Banister and Stephenson 2009, Rafferty 2011). Photo elicitation techniques were used at this stage to allow the participants to describe their perceptions based on appearance which helped to illuminate a range of judgements provoked by style. This led on to a discussion regarding the expectations of others as an influencing factor on fashion shopping behaviour (Hogg, Terry and White 1995).The interview further explored this topic by investigating opinions towards the volume of clothes owned (Ertekin and Atik 2014, Joy et al. 2012) and disposal of clothing (Bianchi and Birtwistle 2012, Ha-Brookshire and Hodges 2009, Morgan and Birtwistle 2009).

4. How do frequent shoppers perceive the notion of buying less?

To reveal the barriers and facilitators for any potential change in behaviour, this topic aimed to uncover feelings about existing behaviour (Andreasen 2002, Dolan and Britain 2010) and included questions relating to the participants happiness with their current actions, the contents of their wardrobe and their vision of the 'ideal' wardrobe. To investigate any misgivings about the consequences of their behaviour I introduced information about some of the negative accusations levelled against the fashion industry including, unethical manufacturing practices (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2006, Birtwistle, Siddiqui and Fiorito 2003), high volumes of textile waste (WRAP 2011),

social pressure to conform to appearance norms (Rafferty 2011) and materialistic values (Ertekin and Atik 2014, Joy et al. 2012), and enquired whether the participant held any opinions on these subjects. This also enabled me to explore attitudes towards the suggestion that greater happiness may be achieved by choosing experiences over material possessions (Soper 2007, Tatzel 2014).

As previously described within the chapter relating to symbolic interactionism, the epistemological viewpoint for this study follows the conventions of SI and interpretivism - that is knowledge regarding why people shop in the way they do, is located in the accounts of the social actors who carry out the behaviour (Blumer 1969). Taking a SI approach and using the topics of exploration as a guide, my aim was to implement a research programme that would deliver the best achievable understanding of the social reality (Charon 2009) experienced by frequent clothes shoppers.

7.2.1 Sampling framework

To ensure the sample selected were appropriate subjects I applied the qualifying criteria of *female* and *frequent shopper*. The decision to select female only participants is based on studies that reveal that the market size for female outerwear is double the size of the male market (Mintel 2014). In addition women are the principal decision makers for clothing within households as 70% of all garment purchases are made by females which includes shopping for males and children (Scott 2006). A study regarding male clothes shopping behaviour would provide potentially valuable insight, particularly as the male clothing market is now growing faster than that female market (Mintel 2017a), however I have chosen to focus this study on the market sector of current greatest economic value as its size offers the largest potential gains in terms of sustainability from any change in behaviour. Whilst some fashion shopping behaviour studies have used a combination of male and female participants (Evans 1989, Thompson and Haytko 1997) there is research to suggest that the behaviours of male and female shoppers are different. Tifferet and Herstein (2012) found that women showed a greater propensity for impulse buying and were more responsive than men to sensory cues within the shopping

environment. There is evidence to suggest aspirational symbols of success are different for men and women (Spence, Helmreich and Stapp 1975), that men and women seek different benefits from their consumption behaviour (Shim and Bickle 1994, Woodruffe 1997), and that personality constructs related to materialism differ by gender (Segal and Podoshen 2013; Belk 1984). Since this study is concerned with understanding shopping behaviour and the interpretation of social symbols associated with fashion, I anticipated that this process would vary with gender, therefore limited my sample to women only. It is not unusual for studies relating to shopping behaviour to be gender specific since it allows for a greater depth of information relating to themes of female or male specific perception.

An agreed definition of 'frequent fashion shopper' has yet to be constructed, and it remains an elusive concept, albeit one that occurs within the clothing literature (Evans 1989, Goldsmith 2002). This is not surprising since it is a subjective description complicated by shopping patterns and the value of spend. Moreover, the perception of whether the value spend on clothes is 'high' is relative to an individual's disposable income and one's attitude towards earnings and income. In the absence of an agreed definition of frequent shopper and to avoid imposing my own judgement regarding what might comprise frequent shopping, I sought consumer opinion on the subject. Since my study is concerned with frequency and number of garments purchased, not financial value and I am concerned with social habits, I referred to public blogs and forums including Vogue, Netmums and YouLookFab, where shopping frequency was discussed. After reviewing the popular opinions articulated within these sources, I developed a definition of frequent shopper based on the point at which contributors seemed to be expressing concern that it might be better if they bought fewer garments. This was based on illustrative discussion extracts such as those are presented below:

> *It's not often I go without a week without buying something (whether it be a small purchase on sale or a big ticket item). It all started getting a bit too much lately. (Vogue forum contributor A, 2014)*
>
> *It used to be pretty much on a weekly basis (I'm ashamed to say!) but nowadays, I barely ever go to the shops, which has curbed my purchasing habits immensely. It's probably closer to once a month now, if that. (Vogue forum contributor B, 2014)*

Probably about once a month, but it is my 'treat' money which I allocate to myself each month (about £60 a month). (Netmums forum contributor C, 2015)

Blog participants expressed numerous concerns that weekly shopping was 'too much' but a monthly purchase seemed to be acceptable. Drawing upon this necessarily subjective categorisation I created my definition of 'frequent shopper', locating it somewhere between these points as someone who estimates that they have added a minimum of 20 new garments to their wardrobe in the past 12 months. I acknowledge that this definition of frequent shopper may be disputed but having a benchmark, however subjective, provided a necessary means of exploring the parameters of 'too much' shopping and what that means to the participants.

Prior to the interview I asked participants whether they estimated that they have added a minimum of 20 new garments to their wardrobe in the past 12 months. Even if they said they had not, or weren't sure I continued with the interview as their input would still provide useful information as context for the development of the later stages of the study. Of the 30 participants interviewed, three said that they didn't believe that they had added a minimum of 20 garments to their wardrobe in the past twelve months and a further two thought possibly not, but during the course of the interviews, the shopping habits described indicated that had probably underestimated the volume of clothes that they purchase. Since the narrative surrounding materialism including frequent clothes shopping tends to have negative connotations (Shrum and Lowrey 2014) the under-reporting of the number of garments purchased may demonstrate a potential self-positivity bias amongst participants (Lin, Lin and Raghubir 2003) who underestimate behaviour they perceive as negative and overestimate positive behaviour.

Example:

Interviewee J - Claimed not to have added 20 garments to wardrobe in past 12 months

R *I've bought a couple of things actually recently, while I was shopping for the kids school clothes and I noticed a blouse that I liked, so again that was ooh I like that, got birds on and I thought oh yea I like that, I'll buy that and then in Liverpool it was more we were looking around the shops. But actually it was from the Art Gallery shop, so it wasn't really a shop in a way.*

I *What was that item?*

R *A Jackson Pollock tee-shirt because we'd been to the exhibition, so it's all grey and black.*

……

R *I mean I am getting worse when I go to places like the supermarkets and Primark, I do feel I'm probably getting a bit more impulsive to think well it's only six quid or eight quid so pop it in the basket*

….

R *I do like Jaeger, that sort of classy quality and yesterday I did buy a Zandra Rhodes bag and scarf. But that was more because I was at the Fashion and Textile Museum and it was in the shop and I've had my birthday money*

Whilst it may have been coincidence that I interviewed this participant following a potentially unusual period where she purchased three items in the previous two weeks, her comment regarding the impulse shopping suggested to me that it was possible that she had added at least 20 items to her wardrobe in the past 12 months but had underestimated the volume purchased. Likewise two other women who claimed not to have purchased so much, or were unsure whether they had added 20 garments to their wardrobes in the past 12 months, described shopping habits that suggested they had almost certainly purchased this volume. Therefore, some participants were included in the sample by consideration of their potential for self-positivity bias in consumption habits (Carrigan et al. 2009, Lin, Lin and Raghubir 2003).

The decision to include those who may not meet the frequent shopper criteria is based on the understanding that the recollection of how many garments one has bought over the past twelve months is an imperfect judgment and potentially subject to self-positivity bias, and on the basis that following symbolic interactionism, each person's account tells us something that is important about the whole phenomenon (Charon 2009). The underlying assumption of SI is that there is an objective external reality, albeit inaccessible to human knowledge and as a consequence in SI some accounts

may be considered as 'better' at revealing the truth of a situation than others (Charon 2009). Accepting that every account provides a valid contribution to the analysis I also acknowledge the accounts of the possibly less frequent shoppers may not be as illuminating as the accounts of more frequent clothes shoppers.

The recruitment of participants started with a newsletter insertion at a school and community centre in Worcestershire to achieve an initial convenience sample. A snowball sampling procedure (Noy 2008) was then applied whereby I asked the initial informants to refer me to other potential frequent shopper participants. Snowball sampling is a widely employed method of sampling in qualitative research that makes use of social knowledge in identifying suitable subjects (Noy 2008). I found that the snowball method of identifying participants worked well for two reasons. Firstly, from their feedback, the initial convenience sample indicated that they found the interview process enjoyable and in some cases enlightening. Their engagement increased their willingness to encourage others within their social network to participate. Secondly, research indicates that women are more inclined to do the work of maintaining and expanding social ties and relationships (Ruddick 1982); on that basis, I anticipate that the snowball sampling method was given a greater chance of success working in a female only study.

7.2.2 Ethical Process

Ethical approval to carry out the study was obtained via the Coventry University controlled, online ethics application and approval process. Details of each stage of the project were submitted for review and authorisation including all documentation and health and safety risk assessment. The initial recruitment message and the participant information sheet were designed to provide transparency about the aims of the research, the expectations of the participants and their right to withdraw from the study. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. All interviewees participated

voluntarily with assurances that their data would remain anonymous. Demographic information including age, household income and number of children under the age of 16 within the household was captured on a different form. Completion of the demographic information was optional, the forms were anonymous and, to preserve confidentiality, were collected separately from the informed consent forms so that the two sets of data could not be linked, potentially undermining anonymity. Since a discussion relating to fashion shopping has the potential to touch on sensitive areas such as income and spending, body image or shopping addiction, I observed the participants throughout the interview for any signs of discomfort (Kvale 1996, Patton 1987) . If any participant appeared upset at the line of questioning then this was not pursued and if necessary I was prepared to pause or cease the interview. However, this proved unproblematic, and the interviews were completed without incident.

7.2.3 Participants' Profile

Thirty individuals were interviewed across Worcestershire, Staffordshire, West Midlands and Warwickshire. The requested criteria for participation in the interviews was that the candidate estimated that they had added at least twenty garments to their wardrobe during the past twelve months, though this criterion was not universally imposed, as explained above. An upper age limit was not adhered to in the sample. Although some literature indicates that the sustainability issues associated with fast fashion are perpetuated most significantly by young, trend conscious consumers (Joung 2014, Morgan and Birtwistle 2009), other data reveals that older segments of the market are active consumers of fashion (Mintel 2014) and implies that chronological age is not necessarily reflective of cognitive age and therefore may not be a suitable basis for market segmentation (Szmigin and Carrigan 2000). The socio-demographic profile of the participants is contained below in table 1. My decision to collect demographic information was made for the purpose of establishing the likelihood that my sample was broad enough to identify the variability in experiences and reveal the span of core themes (Baker, Edwards and Doidge 2012). Participants' age ranged from 23 to 62 and

the characteristics of the interviewees varied in employment, income and family circumstances with each participant bringing their own experiences. Following accepted interpretive research approaches, the sample allowed for the emergence of a variety of experiences as well as shared interpretations (Patton 1987). Given the breadth and scope of the research questions this number of participants is sufficient to deliver understanding of the broader social context surrounding the choices that consumers make in their fashion shopping behaviour (Baker, Edwards and Doidge 2012).

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Profile of All Interview Participants:

Socio-demographic profile	Number of participants
Age (years)	
18- 25	2
26-30	7
31-35	3
36-40	4
41-45	6
46-50	3
51-55	2
56-60	2
Over 60	1
Prefer not to say	0
Employment Status	
Full Time	14
Part Time	10
Self Employed	2
Student	1
Not in Employment	3
Prefer not to say	0
Household Income	
Up to £20k p.a	3
£21-£35k p.a.	8
£36-49k p.a	6
£50k plus p.a	9
Prefer not to say	4
Number of Children aged under 16 years in participant household	
0	12
1	6
2	9
3	2
4	1
Prefer not to say	0

7.2.4 Data Collection via Semi-structured interviews

The participants were interviewed alone in an informal setting to allow them to comfortably reflect on their own behaviour and that of others within their social circle. In line with the criteria for successful interviewing (Kvale 1996), the aim was to be open in responding to what is important to the interviewee whilst interpreting and clarifying the meanings of participants' statements but without imposing meaning on them. Probing questions were used as a tool for the clarification of interesting and relevant issues raised by the participants and these helped to elicit valuable and complete information as well as to clarify any in- consistencies within their accounts (Barriball and While 1994, Patton 2002). Each interview typically lasted between 35 and 55 minutes.

The interviews were semi-structured, broadly following an interview topic and timings guide that was informed by the issues raised in the literature. The use of the interview guide provided a degree of structure that allowed for the relevant topics to be covered within the timeframe and with some element of consistency. The initial five interviews were used as a piloting stage. The first five respondents were not purposely selected for any particular reason and were simply the first five scheduled yet they did span several demographic categories. The socio demographic profile of the five pilot participants is described in table 2.

Table 2. Socio-Demographic Profile of Five Pilot Participants:

Age (years)	Number of respondents
26-30	2
31-35	2
41-45	1
Employment Status	
Full Time	2
Part Time	2
Self Employed	1
Household Income	
Up to £20k p.a	1
£21-£35k p.a.	3
£36-49k p.a	1
Number of Children	
0	2
1	1
2	2

The purpose of the pilot interviews was to establish whether the questions were understandable to the respondents. Each of these interviews were reviewed as described within section 8.3.2 and appropriate revisions were made to the interview questions at this point. Several further revisions were made to the schedule as the research progressed to reflect emerging relevant themes. The interview guide is presented in the appendices.

The interview questions were designed to elicit information related to the four main research questions:

Research questions:

1. What are the behaviours of the frequent clothes shopper?
2. What is the nature of the rewards which perpetuate this behaviour?
3. To what extent do social dynamics impact frequent shopping and excessive clothing consumption?
4. How do frequent shoppers perceive the notion of buying less?

Table 3 illustrates how each topic of exploration within the interview guide is associated with the key research questions.

Table 3. Summary of topics for exploration linked to research questions

Research Question	**Topics for exploration**
What are the behaviours of the frequent clothes shopper? What are the reasons for excessive consumption in fashion shopping?	• What are the main triggers for fashion purchases? • What are the social and cultural influences that promote frequent shopping? • What are the symbolic values inherent in choice of style? • To what extent is the purchased planned versus habitual or impulsive? • How is the purchase rationalised? • What is the consumer attitude towards the volume of garments owned? • What is their opinion regarding how much clothing is too much? And what level of shopping frequency is too often? • What are the perceived benefits of owning more and owning less? • What are the perceived benefits of volume and frequency? • What is the value of having something new and how does this compares with the value of quality and longevity?
What is the nature of the rewards which perpetuate this behaviour?	• Which aspects of fashion shopping are most responsible for subjective wellbeing or happiness? • What feelings are associated with shopping for and buying a new item of clothing? • Is the source of satisfaction in the browsing, the shopping experience, the garment, the owning or the wearing?
To what extent do social dynamics impact frequent shopping and excessive clothing consumption?	• Where do these consumers look for their fashion influences? • How does clothing influence their judgment of others? • How do they perceive that others judge their appearance? • What are the perceived implications and outcomes of these appearance based judgements?

How do frequent shoppers perceive the notion of buying less?	• What is consumer reaction to the notion of consumption reduction in clothing?
	  ○ How do consumers feel about :-
	  ▪ Spending less on clothing?
	  ▪ Spending the same but buying fewer garments?
	• What is the perceived impact on wellbeing?
	• How willing would consumers be to engage in such a behaviour change?
	• Are there any perceived benefits of such a change in shopping patterns?
	• What are the objections and barriers to change?

As previously described, although the research objective surrounds the issue of consumption reduction, and there are four specific research questions, the epistemological stance is that knowledge regarding this topic will not be revealed by directly asking for responses to these questions since it is unlikely that the participants would readily have a precise explanation as to the reasons for their behaviour. Knowledge of this subject requires an understanding of the wider social context surrounding the choices that consumers make in their fashion shopping behaviour therefore, as illustrated in table three above, each research question was explored as part of a broader discussion of clothes shopping behaviour.

The interview guide was used to initiate, develop and maintain a collaborative conversation enabling the collection of data relevant to the research questions (Raz 2005). If the participants wandered slightly from the topics under exploration this was allowed to occur where it enabled the participants to speak freely and to avoid stifling the discussion, although I interjected if the interview deviated too far from its purpose (Patton 2002). Open-ended questions, some of which were included in the guide and some which were not, were used to pursue the development of further understanding into the ideas emerging from the conversation. During the interviews the process of describing their own actions sometimes led the participants to reflect and comment on their own behaviour which was a naturally occurring dimension of the interview process.

The participants presented as highly involved informants who collaborated well in terms of the detail that they were able to provide and their ability to describe, reflect on and articulate their behaviour. The vast majority of participants responded openly and enthusiastically to the questions and interactions were generally lively and flowing. If there were any hesitations or reluctance on their part then these were not apparent and remained covert.

The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim to facilitate later familiarisation with the data prior to analysis.

7.2.5 Data Collection Via Individual Case Studies

Six case study participants were selected from the interview respondents. In selecting individuals to participate as case studies primary consideration was given to candidates who, during the interview, were the most amenable to the study, engaged with the topic and who demonstrated an ability to reflect on their own behaviour. This type of candidate offers the best opportunity to learn (Stake 2011). Secondary consideration was given to demographic variety in the choice of cases, not as a suggestion that this would provide a representative sample of others, but to explore breadth and variety in the experiences reported (Stake 2011). Following the interviews, a shortlist was compiled of ten candidates in priority order whom I considered most likely to present the richest context and experiences to investigate the research questions. Each of these were contacted in person or via telephone and were informed of the expectations for the 12-week case study project. Where the candidate agreed in principal to participate a face to face meeting was scheduled to allow further explanation of the commitment and potential inconvenience the study might represent. Since a twelve week in-depth study is potentially burdensome to participants, obtaining a transparent commitment from the outset was ethical (Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden 2001) and helped to mitigate potential drop out. This process continued until six individuals had agreed to take part. The decision to undertake six case studies was made on the basis that this number was practical in terms of costs

and timings. It was not expected to be representative of all frequent shoppers but I had confidence that this number would be sufficient to identify variability in experiences and reveal common themes (Baker, Edwards and Doidge 2012).

The case study process is outlined within figure 6 below.

Figure 6. Case Study Process Illustration

An initial case study meeting was held with each participant. During this meeting we re-capped the opinions expressed during the initial interview in particular the aspects of current fashion shopping behaviour that were associated with positive and negative feelings. This stage allowed me to feedback to the participants my understanding from their interview and provided them with the opportunity to confirm or otherwise that my interpretation of their comments was an accurate reflection of the participants' intended meanings. At this point the participants were also provided with a wardrobe audit form to complete.

For the wardrobe audit, participants were asked to complete a template form which involved counting the number of garments in their wardrobe by type, indicating whether they thought that they had too many, too few or just the right amount of this type of garment and how happy they were with the contents of this section of their wardrobe. The process required noting the type and volume of clothing owned and also offered the potential to identify clothing needs and a chance to reflect on the styles that flatter and outfits most worn. The audit was a useful baseline from which to then reflect on future purchases made during the case study period.

For the clothes shopping diary, participants were asked to keep a weekly diary for a twelve week period mainly during the months of November - December 2015 and January 2016. In addition to general fashion shopping behaviour, the timeframe spanning Christmas and New Year along with January sales enhanced the opportunity to explore topics which had emerged during the initial interviews including shopping for occasions, impulse buying when under pressure and the influence of price reductions on volume purchased. The diaries were issued once a week, and respondents were asked to return these the following week in a paper or e-mailed format.

Each diary contained four questions relating to the behaviour under exploration that remained consistent:

1. Have you visited any clothes stores or clothing web sites this week?
2. Did you buy anything this week? Please list items. From which stores/websites?
3. Are you happy with your purchase(s)? What is the reason for this?
4. Have you wanted to go shopping or buy something this week but resisted the temptation to do so? If Yes, why did you choose not to buy and how did this make you feel?

In addition each diary contained one or two questions designed to maintain interest by adding variety to the pattern of enquiry (Robinson and Agisim 1951) and to encourage reflection. These questions included:

- Is there an item or outfit in your wardrobe that is your favourite to wear? If so, why is it your favourite? How does it make you feel?
- Do you feel that your wardrobe audit is influencing your choices? If Yes in what way?
- How do you feel about what you have worn this week? E.g. Did it make you feel comfortable, smart, stylish, professional?
- Do you feel that sales and price reductions influence the choices that you make when you are shopping for clothes? Does a low price encourage you to buy things that you would not otherwise purchase? Do you have any examples of this?
- Have you worn anything new or for the first time this week? If Yes, how did this make you feel?

All participants returned their diary sheets throughout the twelve week study though there was considerable variation in the depth and detail captured within. To enhance the data gathered and mitigate for any omissions, diary interviews were used to expand upon the information contained

within the diary sheets. Each participant was interviewed a minimum of three times during the 12-week diary period, either face to face, by telephone or via Skype. The interviews were informal discussions lasting between 15 and 25 minutes, around the content submitted within the diary sheets. The diary interview proved useful for unpacking taken for granted elements of behaviour (Elliott 1997) such as browsing without buying. These occurrences were noted on the diary form but might have been otherwise overlooked as they did not result in a purchase yet are valuable in understanding behaviour.

Since the diary interviews related specifically to the documented actions of the participants, it was possible for a deeper exploration of this behaviour to appear to be construed as a critical scrutiny of their choices and actions. To avoid offending the participants and maintain their engagement with the project for its duration the diary interviews were informal, gentle and sensitive in tone (Kvale 1996), keeping critical elements to a minimum. To maintain informality I chose not to digitally record these discussions, and instead made notes during the conversations which were then logged in greater detail immediately following the interviews.

At the end of the 12-week diary period each participant was invited to attend a thirty minute, post case study interview. The meeting followed an interview guide which started with the opportunity for participants to feedback regarding how they had found the diary process and raise any questions they had about their contribution. Participants were then specifically asked whether they felt that involvement in the study had changed their behaviour or their view of how and why they purchased clothing. The interview then re-visited the research questions asking

- What is it about shopping for clothing that makes you happy?
- Do you feel that you buy more than you need? Can you explain why that is?
- Can you imagine any circumstances under which you might choose to buy fewer garments?

The purpose of re-addressing the research questions following the case studies is to reveal any different meanings or understandings of behaviour that were not obvious or articulated prior to keeping and reporting on the shopping diaries. It also allowed the participants to reflect on their behaviour throughout the period. These interviews were digitally recorded as the content was less sensitive in that it did not involve scrutinising specific behavioural events and the recordings were transcribed verbatim. The participants were asked whether they had any objections to being contacted again in about six months' time.

7.2.6 Follow Up at Six Months Later and Checking Interpretations

Approximately six months after the end of the case study the five willing case study participants from the original six were re-contacted. The purpose of this follow up meeting was to investigate whether the participants felt that their shopping habits had changed as a result of being part of the study. In addition I requested the opportunity to explore with them an issue that was not entirely clear to me from the data. Whilst the data indicated the importance amongst frequent shoppers to be perceived as looking 'right' which encompassed some aspects of being up to date, it was apparent that not every new style was adopted by every frequent shopper but the reasons for these choices were unclear. To better understand this area I produced picture sheets featuring two recent trends – cold shoulder tops and patterned trousers. As part of this follow up interview participants were asked to explain whether they had bought into these new styles and the reasons that they had chosen to adopt or avoid them. These interviews were digitally recorded were transcribed verbatim.

7.3 Data Analysis

The objective of this interpretive study is to understand the complicated emotional, symbolic and social meanings associated with frequent clothes shopping for women. Taking a social constructionist view, it involves understanding the way that social reality is constructed, managed and maintained (Gubrium and Holstein 2000) . To this end, my role as researcher extends beyond simply collecting and reporting data, it requires comprehending data, synthesising meanings, theorising relationships, and re-contextualising data into findings (Morse 1994).

This chapter describes the analytic processes undertaken in transforming the raw data into findings and in constructing an interpretive account of what is signified by the themes emerging from the data.

7.3.1 Analysis and Symbolic Interactionism

As an exploratory study in the SI tradition (Blumer 1969a) the objective of this research is to produce a qualitative thematic description (Sandelowski and Barroso 2003) illuminating common definitions and the shared, but often unexpressed, understandings supporting patterns of individual behaviour and social life. To date there is limited discussion around the explicit approach taken to analysis in the SI tradition. Many of the SI exploratory studies I have read do not clearly describe their method of analysis. Charmaz (2004:977) supports this view, citing notable SI studies that omit details of their analytical approach.

Data analysis in this study draws on symbolic interactionism as a methodological tool focusing on context, perspective and meaning when evaluating interviewees' accounts. SI asserts that human behaviour may only be understood through the people's choice of action (Blumer 1969). Analysing consumer behaviour associated with frequent clothes shopping therefore requires a comprehension of the reasons that particular conduct is deemed appropriate within the given social context. The phenomenological notion of bracketing whereby the researcher focuses on the essence of experience

(Blaikie 1993), for example the wearing of a new garment, unencumbered by any preconceptions is therefore viewed as inconsistent with the nature of this research. Rather, it is understanding of the context, including society view and retail environment in addition to the lived experience which are important for the interpretation of individual accounts.

In a study such as this where the participants are unlikely to have previously reflected upon their behaviour and may not have a ready explanation of why they engage in frequent clothes shopping behaviour, the ability of the researcher to read through and beyond the data (Mason 2002) is a critical part of the analysis. No matter how participatory the method of data collection findings do not 'emerge' from the data nor does the data 'speak for itself' (Morse 1994); the researcher is responsible for driving the interpretation and generating the findings (Thorne, Kirkham and O'Flynn-Magee 2004). My own view is that it is inevitable that a researcher's background and perspective will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the approach judged most suitable for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing of the conclusions. I therefore acknowledge that the credibility of my findings rests on my ability to adequately account for the decisions made within my interpretation and have attempted to demonstrate reflexivity throughout the process. This is consistent with Blumer's (1969) advice that as part of an SI study the researcher's conceptual framework and starting premises cannot be discounted and must instead be identified and reviewed throughout the research.

The analysis began with a critical review of the literature including existing descriptions of the aspects of frequent shopping and disposal behaviour that have a negative impact on sustainability. As described in my methodology, this informed the study design, including the interview topic guide, which evolved over the course of the project through an iterative process of data collection and analysis. In this respect the study is located within a broader field of knowledge and my interpretation of the existing understanding of consumer fashion shopping behaviour, as well as the associated issues relating to sustainability.

7.3.2 Analysis During the Interview Process

Following the literature review, the analytical examination continued throughout the interview process. The data was assessed following each interview, by considering 'what is happening here?' (Thorne, Kirkham and O'Flynn-Magee 2004) and 'does the content of the interview adequately explore the emerging topics?' Although the interviews were semi-structured and sufficiently flexible to allow the content to be adjusted to the natural flow of the conversation (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, Raz 2005), the initial analysis of the first few interviews led to the revision of the interview guide on two occasions. Revising the interview guide occurred when I felt that the adjustment required more than a natural flexing of questioning, where I felt that the change was inspired by insight gained and consequently that it was important that these topics were covered with some consistency in future interviews.

Firstly, a review of the initial five interviews revealed that social pressure to wear something new was often described in terms of avoiding a negative reaction by others, but for the same occasion there was also reference to the individual wanting something new. The tension and contradiction at play here needed to be explored. To scrutinise this further the research guide was adapted to ask for examples of how others might react to repeat wearing of the same garment, perceptions of what others might think, whether this reaction had been experienced or was it imagined. Where it was also suggested that the participant wanted something new, this allowed for the exploration of whether the predominant reason was self-gratification or a response to social pressure. Evaluating the data after this change showed that the subsequent interviews contained a greater depth of detail surrounding the themes of being judged and the emotional value of clothing in making an occasion special and the wearer feel more confident for a variety of reasons.

Secondly, although the literature suggested that appearance plays an important role in judging others, upon analysis of the first five interviews there was little data to support this. Understanding from the

literature review the many negative narratives surrounding materialism (Kasser 2002, Shrum and Lowrey 2014) I suspected that this may have resulted in a reticence by the participants to admit to the types of judgments that they made about people based on their appearance. At this stage exploratory visual aids were introduced, consisting of three picture sheets of women in various styles of attire. The participants were asked whether it was possible for them to describe, based on appearance, any characteristics attributable to the women pictured. The decision to use photographs was based on research which suggests that photo-elicitation techniques can help to connect an individual with their experience so that they are better able to describe their actions or understanding using a visual aid (Harper 2002). It has also been suggested that photographs can help to lessen the awkwardness of uncomfortable topics by providing an extrinsic example to focus on (Clark-Ibáñez 2004). An appraisal of the data following the introduction of the visual aids revealed more detailed and instinctive responses by the participants openly chatting about the signals that they gleaned about people based on how they were dressed in the images.

During the interview process the participants and interview contents were also reviewed to establish the most suitable candidates for case study. In selecting individuals to participate as case studies primary consideration was given to candidates who, during the interview, were the most amenable to the study, engaged with the topic and who demonstrated an ability to reflect on their own behaviour. This type of candidate offers the best opportunity to learn (Stake 2011:6) and is in line with the SI methodology. As Blumer (1969a) wrote, “One should sedulously seek participants in the sphere of life who are active observers and who are well informed. One such person is worth a hundred others” (Blumer 1969:41). Notes were recorded following each interview regarding the suitability and willingness of each participant as a potential candidate for case study. Figure 1 shows an excerpt from my records.

Table 4. Excerpt from notes to assist with choosing suitable case study candidates

	Overview	Engaged with topic area / forthcoming	Articulates behaviour well	Willingness to participate in case study
Amy	Loves clothes, new job, no dress code enjoying more freedom	Yes, very	Yes, very	Yes
Anna	Prolific shopper, high fashion interest , multiple roles 'selves'	Yes, very	Yes, very	Too busy
Beth	Shopping habitual, escape, 'nice' used a lot	No	No	Not asked
Cathy	Social shopping, day out, part of routine, follow the crowd	Yes	No	Not asked
Helen	Shopping pleasure linked to body image and budget, cost	Fair	Fair	Not asked
Isla	Vintage shopper, appreciates garment, picks up supermarket	Yes, very	Yes, very	Too busy
Jackie	Shopping volume and frequency is related to body image,	Yes	Yes	Yes, tentative
Kim	Prolific shopper, high fashion interest , rapid clothing	Yes, very	Yes, very	Yes
Lucy	Career is priority, much time spent away, hectic schedule,	Yes	Yes, very	Yes, tentative
Maria	Likes quality, body image and fashion post maternity leave	Fair	Yes very	No
Naomi	Volume important, buying 'stuff' clothes and homewares	Yes	Fair	No
Olivia	Buys a lot, influence of family and friends, high volume	Yes, very	Fair	No
Pam	Social visits to shopping centres end in purchases, semi	Yes	Yes, very	Yes
Priya	High fashion interest, prolific shopper, rapid clothing	Yes, very	Yes	No/ Maybe
Rachel	Limited budget, likes fashion, aspires to qulaity, developing	Yes, very	Yes, very	Yes
Sally	Likes to be savvy shopper, seeking brand quality at discount	Yes very	Yes	Yes, tentative
Yvonne	Importance of special occasions, keeps garments, builds	Fair	Yes	Too busy

7.3.3 Analysis During the Case Study Process

Providing a second stage of data collection the individual case studies allowed me to explore the phenomena within its context (Feagin, Orum and Sjoberg 1991). Re-addressing the research questions within individual case studies provided an opportunity for triangulation of data sources to consider whether the attitudes and behaviour described within the interview appeared consistent during different times and situations (Patton 2002). Where I identified discrepancy between the two, I was able to explore this further during the diary interviews. For the case study period, upon receipt of the weekly diary sheets I reviewed the data and made notes of my interpretation of the contents and any questions it raised. I was able to check my interpretation and/or explore any questions during the regular diary interviews. Figure 7 shows an extract from a diary sheet submitted and Figure 8 the corresponding notes from the associated diary interview.

Figure 7. – Extract from dairy sheet

Figure 8. – Notes from Diary Interview

Amy Week 2 – Diary Interview **7th Dec 2015**

Questions raised by diary	**Not verbatim transcript.** **Notes taken from conversation**
How did you find the audit?	"I really should have done this ages ago, I was hanging onto such a lots of stuff – partly for just in case but mainly I think that I didn't want to think I had wasted the money. But actually having it sitting unworn in wardrobe or a in a case is more of a waste, I still wasn't wearing it, at least chucking it out there's a chance that someone might have the benefit of it".
Are there feelings of guilt? – "beating myself up about it"	"yes, it did make me feel a bit guilty, not about shopping in the first place, but about not clearing out enough, not keeping on top of it"
Hanging on to things for the wrong reasons? What is wrong?	"wrong reasons? – I guess being lazy, not getting round to a clear out, or telling myself I will wear something again when I know I won't – that normally happens if something is expensive and I would feel bad about chucking it" "cos a silly waste of money"
Are there right reasons?	"Right reasons for clear out would be getting organised, being honest about what you look like, ending up feeling good"
Just in case? Of what?	"just in case – like if you buy something and then you think I wish I'd kept that pink top to go with it, you might need it"
Original diary meeting – no purchase planned as had already bought for Autumn/Winter? But purchases made – why?	"Yes, I do like shopping, I bought a coatigan and a coat – they are both very practical and in the sale!"
	"I had actually considered the coatigan in September so I was really pleased to find it half price. It is the sort of thing I'll wear a lot"
If they hadn't been in the sale would you have bought them?	"difficult to say if I would have bought them if not in the sale, I had looked but passed by the coatigan at full price, so I guess not. Maybe I would have bought something else, can't really say"
	"Yes, gorgeous, I love it, it was a John Lewis, such lovely quality, very soft and warm makes me feel comfy and cosy, and I love the luxury"
You describe coat as gorgeous – how?	"I am definitely 'getting better' it may not look like it! (laugh) I am thinking much more about what I've got and I probably would have bought even more if I hadn't done the audit.
Has the audit influenced behaviour?	"yes it is better, not buying less but I'm more likely to buy things I really like and will wear more if I have a good think about it and know what I've already got – better in that way"
Is buying less 'getting better'?	

The diary interview process provided the opportunity to check and monitor my interpretations of the comments contained within the diary. Boyatzis (1998) describes one of the obstacles to thematic analysis as 'projection' whereby the researcher 'sees' something in the account that is not there or uses their own viewpoint to mistakenly fill in the gaps. Checking my interpretation with the participants was a useful means of preventing projection (Boyatzis 1998) and verifying whether or not I had properly understood the meanings behind the information conveyed in the diary. It gave me the chance to improve the accuracy of my interpretations so contributing towards the validity of the findings (Morse et al. 2002).

7.3.4 Thematic Analysis

The next stage of analysis was to draw the main themes from the data collected. Thematic analysis is a method used to categorise and codify data to produce a detailed and systematic recording of the themes and issues addressed (Boyatzis 1998). The method of coding used for this study was developed out of those described in the grounded theory literature (Glaser and Strauss 1968; Strauss and Corbin 1990). The philosophy of grounded theory is founded in symbolic interactionism and they share a common goal in interpreting the meaning of social interaction based on shared understanding of symbols (Aldiabat and Le Navenec 2011). This study however deviates from grounded theory in two ways. Firstly this study stops short of formally linking concepts to build theory and causal interpretative explanations (Strauss and Corbin 1990). As an exploratory study in the SI tradition the aim of this study is "to develop as comprehensive and accurate picture of the area of study as conditions allow" (Blumer 1969a:42). The construction of theory is not a required outcome of this type of study "the mere descriptive information unearthed through exploratory research, may serve in itself to provide the answers to theoretical questions that the scholar may have in mind with regard to what he is studying" (Blumer 1969a:42).

Secondly, whilst grounded theory requires the researcher to reach a point of data saturation for the given sample size whereby no new information is obtained from further data, this study takes the SI view that sufficient data has been collected if it allows the research questions to be reasonably answered (Blumer 1969a). Although data saturation is not an essential requirement for an exploratory study in the SI tradition, my opinion is that a point of data saturation was reached since my analysis of the final six interviews did not elicit any new codes.

The coding process was carried out using manual coding and cluster diagrams alongside the qualitative data analysis computer software package NVivo. Three types of coding: open coding, axial coding and selective coding were used (Strauss and Corbin 1990). These are detailed in Table 5 (below) along with the outcomes of each stage. Under the SI tradition, the purpose of the research is to understand how individuals and groups make meaning and act in situations (Blumer 1969, Charon 2009). When coding I therefore focused less on the language used, and more on the substantive content including how those narratives were experienced, enacted and the assigned meanings (Ritchie et al. 2013). The data were scrutinised for both manifest and latent content (Boyatzis 1998), the former being related to aspects that are easily recognised within the text and the latter representing underlying meanings which require interpretation. Concepts which were found to relate to the same phenomenon were grouped under codes, named nodes within Nvivo, for example negative references made to the participant's own appearance. The similarly coded items were compared to establish underlying uniformity in conditions and meaning. Within grounded theory, this process is referred to as constant comparison analysis (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Constant comparison analysis allows the open coded items to be assembled into categories which represented higher level concepts, for example self-image. The use of such comparisons also revealed sub-divisions within the categories such as positive and negative versions of self-image and multiple versions of self or roles.

I began the process with the open coding of the case study data. I treated the case study data separately to the interview data and chose to analyse the case study data first. The reason for this is

that I had spent considerably more time with the case study participants including the opportunities I had to verify my interpretations which gave me a high level of confidence that I was accurately interpreting participants' experiences and connecting the associated meanings. After the initial open coding I experienced a degree of 'data overwhelm' (Glaser 2003:24) whereby a great deal of detail had been amassed which was distracting from the main research questions. I remedied this via the use of a cluster diagram (within appendices), grouping codes into broad topic areas which regained focus on the research questions. At this point I chose to commence axial coding on the case study data, to begin to consider connections between codes and the relevance of this to the research questions. This has some similarity with a grounded theory approach where the data is collected and analysed in a stepwise process until a point of saturation has been reached where additional data does not make incremental contribution to the theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990). In this way each stage of analysis informs the next data collection. Whilst all of my data had been collected at the outset I felt that the stepwise approach to analysis was beneficial since it clarified whether the initial open coding had the potential to adequately illuminate the research topics and identified any areas of confusion within the coding before I embarked on the considerably larger task of open coding the interview data.

Although the data collected from the case studies was more detailed in nature due to the length of their involvement with the study and the frequency of contact, the topics discussed within the interviews were broader than the range of data collected via the case studies. Notably the interviews had included the subjects of negative shopping experiences, awareness of the ethical issues of fast fashion and the notion of buying less which were not topics that tended to arise during the case study shopping diaries. The number of initial codes was therefore greater for the interview data at 151 codes for interviews compared to 144 for case studies and leading to the inclusion of an additional category for negative clothes shopping experiences. The full list of codes for both data sets was then reviewed and any with the same meaning were merged. As the data was analysed, hypotheses about various

relationships between the categories emerged, for example the way in which the frequent acquisition of new clothing was associated with notion of 'looking right'. The outcome was a list of ten categories comprising 121 unique codes from both the case study and the interview data. The next step was to scrutinise the contents of the responses within each of the ten categories merging them or dividing the coded comments into other relevant categories e.g. comments relating to Symbolic Ambiguity were largely related to the issue of identity with some reference to judgement by others. This stage resulted in the creation of ten categories and twenty-five sub categories which can be seen in Table 6. The categories and sub categories were then reviewed in relation to the research questions, this process resembles that known within grounded theory as selective coding (Corbin and Strauss 1990) whereby categories defined in the axial coding stage are unified around central 'core' categories. The core categories were selected due by virtue of their ability to illuminate answers to the research questions. During this stage the components of the theme of materialism were divided between those that are identity related and those aspects which are features of the normalisation of overconsumption. Table 5 provides a summary of the entire coding process.

Table 5. Overview of the Coding Process

Coding Stage	**Coding Process**	**Outcome**
Open coding of case study data Via NVivo	Open Coding: Content of case study materials was scrutinised for manifest and latent meaning. Meaningful expressions were compared for underlying uniformity and segmented within a code *Derived from Corbin and Strauss (1990)*	144 codes (Nodes within NVivo)
Cluster diagram	Codes derived from the open coding of case study data were grouped by topic area to provide a visual overview prior to axial coding	Cluster diagrams by topic area
Axial Coding of case study data NVivo	Axial Coding: The initial data codes were further explored by considering the connections between them in terms of context, behaviour	Nine categories: • Clothing and Self • Looking Right

	type, motivations, consequences and rewards (Corbin and Strauss 1990) Codes which were seen to be linked were grouped under category headings, such as self-image. At this stage, sub-categories were also identified such as positive and negative images of self	• Hedonic Shopping Motivations • Habit • Overconsumption and Materialism • Preference for Frequent Shopping • Blumer's six conditions • Ambivalence • Judgement Of and By Others
Open coding of the interview data NVivo	Open coding (as above) for the interview data	151 codes (Nodes within NVivo)
Merging of Codes	Identifying codes with the same meaning and merging these	Codes reduced to 121
Axial coding of the interview data NVivo	Axial coding (as above) for the interview data	Ten categories: • Clothing and Self • Looking Right • Hedonic Shopping Motivations • Habit • Overconsumption and Materialism • Preference for Frequent Shopping • Negative Experiences • Blumer's six conditions • Ambivalence • Judgement of and by others
Merging of categories NVivo	Exploring category content and refining categories by merging them or dividing the contents into other relevant categories e.g. Symbolic Ambiguity was largely related to issue of identity and attitudes toward volume was merged with materialism	Five categories: *Hedonism* *Materialism* *Identity* *Habit* *Fashion context(SI)*
Cluster diagram	Categories and sub categories derived from axial coding were produced as a cluster diagram surrounding the research questions to provide a visual overview prior to selective coding.	Cluster diagram by research question

Selective Coding	Selective coding: Categories defined in the axial coding stage were unified around central 'core' categories. The core categories were selected due by virtue of their ability to illuminate answers to the research questions (Corbin and Strauss 1990). The components of the theme of materialism were divided between those that are identity related and those aspects which are features of the normalisation of overconsumption.	3 Core Concepts: • Identity • Hedonism • Normalisation of Overconsumption and Aspects in relation to the SI theories of fashion

The prominent categories and sub categories within each of the core themes are outlined in Table 6 below. These categories provided me with a structure for the study's findings and are discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Table 6. Core Concepts and Their Related Categories and Sub-Categories

CORE CONCEPTS			
Identity	Hedonism	Normalised Overconsumption	Symbolic Interactionist Theory
CATEGORIES AND SUB CATEGORIES WITHIN FINDINGS			
• **Clothing and Self** • Self-Identity and Shopping Behaviour • Shopping for Self-Enhancement and Feeling Special • **Looking Right** • The Components of looking right • Confusion and symbolic ambiguity • Appearance, Confidence and Self Esteem • Favourite Garments & Staying Fashionable • The Temptation of Alternatives	• **Hedonic Shopping Motivations** • A Sense of Escape • The Hedonic Value of Material Acquisition • Impulse Purchasing • Shopping vs Other Pleasurable Experiences • Bargain Hunting • A Social and Leisure Pursuit • **Negative Shopping Experiences**	• **Overconsumption and Materialism** • Role of Opinion Leaders • Observations From The Wardrobe Audit • Frequency vs. Longevity • **Frequency and Habit** • Contextual Cues and Automatic Behaviour • **Preference for Frequency** • Rewards and Frequent Clothes Shopping • **Opinions about buying less** •Ethical and Social Issues • Alternative Experiences • Perceived impact on subjective wellbeing	• **Relating to Blumer's six conditions** • **Ambivalence** • Cultural Ambivalence • Identity Ambivalence • **Judgement Of and By Others** • Hedonistic Desire or Social Pressure • Dressing to suit audience or occasion

Using the core concepts as a framework, the findings are structured around the four core concepts of identity, hedonism, the normalisation of excessive clothing consumption and those aspects relating to the symbolic interactionist theories of fashion.

PART IV - FINDINGS

8. Findings

This chapter discusses the themes emerging from the data. It is structured around the four core concepts identified during the analysis namely identity, hedonism, the normalisation of overconsumption and the symbolic interactionist theories of fashion. In considering the consumption behaviour of the frequent clothes shopper and the reasons for excessive consumption, the findings demonstrate that all four of these core topics make a significant contribution towards a fuller understanding and that they are inextricably intertwined. The order in which they are presented does not therefore reflect the order of their importance. The chapter firstly discusses findings regarding the relevance of symbolic interactionist theories of fashion in the modern frequent shopping environment. This section establishes context by revealing information relating to aspects of the current shopping environment and social conditions which have the potential to accelerate the pace and volume of clothing consumption. The discussion progresses into the area of identity, the notion of 'looking right' and ways in which this concept compels the acquisition of clothing. The evidence is then considered in relation to the question of ways in which shopping for clothes deliver feelings of wellbeing and hedonistic drivers of frequent clothes shopping. This leads on to findings regarding the links between pleasure from clothing acquisition, materialistic tendencies and habitual shopping behaviour. The chapter then considers reasons for a preference for frequency over longevity in clothing and how excessive consumption of clothing has become normalised for frequent clothes shoppers.

8.1 Symbolic Interactionist Theory of Fashion

As seen from the literature review and evidenced within the findings that follow, it is understood that many people get a great deal of enjoyment out of shopping on a personal and a social level and that hedonistic, identity related and social aspects are significant drivers in the acquisition of clothing. However, in attempting to explain the increasing volume of clothing ownership, remembering that the average UK woman now owns four times more garments than in the 1980s (Allwood et al. 2006, Siegle 2011) and bearing in mind that gaining pleasure from acquiring material possessions is as old as civilisation (Trentmann 2016), simple enjoyment of clothes shopping is likely to account for only part of reasons behind current overconsumption.

From the review of current knowledge and theories of fashion, the symbolic interactionist theories of fashion espoused by Blumer (1969b) and Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton (1995) appear to offer the potential to illuminate the reasons behind the pace and volume of clothing consumption since they focus on social processes which have the capability of propelling the rate of changing fashion. Given that both of the SI theories of fashion were produced some time ago – almost 50 years ago in the case of Blumer's 1969 theory and 22 years ago for that of Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton in 1995, this section assesses both theories in the light of empirical evidence within the current fashion shopping context. These findings form the basis of a later evaluation of the contribution of the SI theories of fashion to understanding today's frequent fashion shopping behaviour which is contained within the chapter relating to the theoretical contribution of this study.

8.1.1 Considering Blumer's six conditions for the appearance of fashion

In 1969 Blumer described six conditions that he considered to be necessary for a thriving fashion system. The first of these is a popular desire to remain 'up to date'. There is evidence within the data of a desire to keep abreast of current styles and to turn away from trends that have come to be considered as old fashioned

I did contemplate getting rid of some of my higher waisted like more flare cut jeans because the styles have changed and the pockets are in different places and they do look quite dated – Helen

Mainly for keeping up appearances at the playground just so you look slightly up to date. I never want to be the frumpy, old fashioned mom – Donna

I'm thinking oh I'd better get something different.., even though it still looks new … I just think oh I could get something newer, update it – Lucy

The desire to be 'in fashion' was especially important to the participants who worked in occupations within hairdressing and PR which could be considered as more 'fashion led' industries

I do try and follow trends.. being a hairdresser … when you start hairdressing you go into a fashion industry and you try and follow fashion because you're in that industry - Anna

I work in a very glamorous PR office and I felt I just needed to get a few new things to get up to speed with the rest of the gang really, be a bit more trendy - Maria

Yea I think when you're a hairdresser people look at you and if you look unfashionable or really mad ..they think ooh I'm not sure how she will cut my hair -Olivia

Blumer's (1969b) concept of fashion focused on clothing style as an expression of modernity. The concept of modernity may be applied to wide range of political, theological, artistic and sociological phenomena (Van de Veer 1998) and it is not my intention to explore these in depth within the scope of this thesis. For Blumer, modernity in fashion was evidenced in the way that those responsible for designing new catwalk styles drew inspiration from the most recent expressions within fine arts, literature, global happenings and current discourse. He viewed those who choose to wear the latest fashions as demonstrating a willingness to embrace the new and therefore making an expression of their modernity (Blumer, 1969b; Wilson, 2003).

Although the data contain some evidence of a desire to look 'up to date', many of the interviewees conveyed a difference between being stylish and fashionable.

Fashion is a more generic ..in fashion at the moment, that doesn't necessarily mean it's going suit me. Mini-skirts might be in fashion but I'm pretty sure it won't suit me, whereas something that I felt more confident and comfortable in - that I would feel was more stylish - Violet

It might be highly fashionable to wear crop tops but I would never wear a crop top, to me it's not stylish at all to have your stomach hanging out - Ruby

I think it is more important to be stylish than fashionable. I watch the trends a bit but..I would rather look nice and wear something that suits me rather than something that's in fashion, but still not looking old fashioned - Ursula

The comments above indicate that participants' definition of fashionable is akin to Blumer's (1969b) view of modernity which is characterised by adopting the latest popular trends. However, the participants make a distinction between being fashionable which involves simply wearing the latest styles and being stylish which implies a superior manner of choosing and wearing garments in an elegant way. This is in line with the Oxford English Dictionary (2015) definitions of the terms:

fashionable - (of a person) dressing or behaving according to the current trend

stylish- fashionably elegant and sophisticated

The distinction between fashionable and stylish indicates that there is no automatic acceptance of new appearances on the basis that they are simply modern. New styles go through a process of interpretation before they may be accepted (Davis 1994, Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton 1995). The participants describe part of this process as learning to understand what suits them and that this knowledge is accumulated with age and experience.

As I've got older, I just know what looks nice on me -Amy

As you get older, you develop your own style, the things that look good on you .. I'm not as influenced now by others - Fay

Fashions and fads aren't really that important to me anymore I think everybody kind of finds their own niche of what suits them - Helen

When asked about their decisions to adopt or avoid the relatively recent fashion trends of patterned trousers and cold shoulder tops it was apparent that the five case study participants did not obediently accept these trends as dictated by the retailer. The data illustrate a process of consideration of whether the new garments were deemed to be appropriate for the individual. Without a particular order or emphasis, the participants considered the practicality and/or suitability of the garment based

on a number of criteria:

> *those type of trousers always seem quite comfortable to wear – Jackie*
> *if you need a jumper, why would you want the shoulders missing, what's the point? – Lucy*
> *the winter-weight ones are ridiculous, if it's cold enough for jumpers, you need your shoulders covered – Pamela*

Whether or not the garment would flatter the body shape was also an influencing factor:

> *I'm quite pear shaped so I like to keep the pattern on top – Pamela*
> *I like them and it's good because they suit a tall person (like me) – Rachel*
> *Nice if you've got toned arms but wouldn't do anything for me - Amy*

Perceived age-appropriateness was another consideration:

> *It's not me, (the style is) too young. I have seen older ladies wearing them but to me they would look better covered – Pamela*
> *I've got fat arms now so they're not really for me, I'm a bit too old, though I did have a dress like that in my youth – Jackie*

Participants also evaluated whether the new style was a good fit with their own style and personality:

> *I've always liked patterned trousers, they are quite individual, it's nice to be unusual – Amy*

> *I'm not afraid to stand out from the crowd, in other areas of my life too, not just my clothes…. I would say that the trousers are quite youthful, a bit risky, trendy….. I also have a cold shoulder top… I chose it because I have a midi skirt that is a bit 'out there' ..the outfit has a bit of a 50's vibe which I like – Rachel*

> *patterned trousers are for people who like to draw attention to themselves, generally I prefer to play it safe – Lucy*

Although the participants often describe shops and web sites as their first port of call when they wish to buy something new, they view new garments presented to them with a prior understanding of the symbolic connotations and perceived social reaction to a style of dress (Blumer 1969b; Davis 1994; Stone 1962). Whether or not a person believes that a particular product is 'right for them' will depend on how they consider its social meaning will be interpreted by their affiliated groups (Auty and Elliott 1998; Banister and Hogg 2004) alongside their individual choice of how to respond to the perceived social conventions (Blumer 1969a; Davis 1994; Stone 1962). In line with the symbolic interactionist perspective, the meaning of garments and therefore their suitability and desire to buy them are social constructs (Blumer 1969b; Davis 1994; Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton 1995).

Being stylish is perceived as a balance between not being old fashioned but also not being a 'fashion victim' who accepts every new or up to date trend regardless of its suitability. The stylish individual is expected to have a sufficient grasp of fashion to adapt it to suit body shape and social conventions. That is to say that stylish individuals are perceived to be those who are discerning in their adoption of new styles and remaining stylish potentially makes it insufficient for individuals to continue to wear their tried and tested favourite garments indefinitely. There appears to be a greater social capital in being stylish rather than merely following fashion and the link between being stylish and remaining abreast of current trends is apparent:

> *I think if you're stylish, you pick out the elements of fashion.. you've got an element of the latest trends but you styled it in the right manner for you - Olivia*

If being stylish is linked with owning the latest fashions, albeit in a way that is tailored to the individual, then the desire to remain stylish may be considered as contributing to frequent clothes shopping. Participants' comments illustrate how the desire to be perceived as 'up to date' motivates individuals to buy something new:

> *There have been days when I look at what I've got and I just feel like a bit of a frump like you haven't really kept up to date, even though they're nice clothes you just want something new – a bit more trendy, but my kind of style – Maria*

> *Lucy - I was looking at some photos and it's like three years ago and I've got the same spotty tunic on that I still wear now and I'm thinking oh I'd better get something different, a bit of a change, even though it still looks new, I haven't worn it that much and I really like it.*
> *Natalie- What is it about the fact that you're still wearing the same item that bothers you?*
> *Lucy - I don't mind for a couple of years or something, but three years! It bothers me because… well it doesn't bother me but I just think oh it's about time I should get something newer, update it.*
> *Natalie- Or what do you think would happen?*
> *Lucy - I might feel a bit old fashioned, a bit like when you've had the same hair style for yonks*

In the cases above, both individuals state that they like their existing garments yet they are driven to buy new clothes by concerns over being perceived as old fashioned.

There was some acknowledgement that it is appropriate to wear certain garments for longer periods of time. Such garments were often referred to as 'classic' and examples included *'black work trousers'*

(Kim); 'quality jacket (Maria); 'tweed skirt' (Sally). However there was a common opinion that these garments should be combined with more up to date fashion:

> *I was talking about those items as classic things, ..I think of the longevity of them because you can keep pulling them out and then team them up with cheaper things that are more fashionable so you keep in style (Helen)*

The findings show the notion of what is stylish to be socially constructed. Similarly it seems from the data that accepted conventions surrounding how often one should change their style and the symbols associated with being able to sustain a current look are socially negotiated in the same way. If the reward from frequent shopping is to be considered stylish then an agenda of consumption reduction would require the notion of restrained consumption to become aligned with the perception of style, rather than the frequent display of new clothing.

I suggest that the negotiation of the symbols associated with new fashions and the differentiation between slavishly following fashion and being stylish to also be evidence of the existence of part of Blumer's third condition for the appearance of fashion since it demonstrates intellectual sophistication, decision making ability and aesthetic sensitivity that allows the respondents to understand the options available and decide what to buy.

Blumer's (1969) second pre-requisite for the emergence of fashion is an openness to the recurring presentation of styles. This features strongly amongst the participants. Many respondents described enthusiastic browsing habits indicating not just reactive openness to new styles but a proactive desire to seek out the alternatives. Online shopping has been shown to make browsing opportunities more accessible and easier than the high street alternative (Blázquez 2014). Some described how they use the internet as a means to browse many options before making a purchase decision and this technology has certainly facilitated the presentation of many more styles to those who wish to view them.

> *I'm going on holiday so I'm constantly browsing like holiday sections on websites to see, ooh I might get that nearer the time. …If I'm going out or have an occasion that I need an outfit for,*

I will schedule the shopping day .. and usually before that I'd scan online to see kind of what I was looking for and identify the types of outfit that I was looking for - Kim

Sometimes I'll browse and I think oh I like them, especially on line because you can actually mark it so I won't necessarily buy there and then, I will take time to see what's around and think shall I have it or not - Jackie

I will spend quite a long time browsing fashion on the internet. So if I was seeing stuff that I liked then that would inspire me to get it - Karen

The majority of purchase decisions described were made on the basis of subjective judgements surrounding aspects such as aesthetic appeal, suitability for an occasion and value for money. Many participants reported making impulse purchases where the only rationale given was that a garment had instant appeal.

This summer my colour is apricot and peaches, so if I look in my wardrobe, a couple of years ago it was all lilacs and blues – Amy

While I was shopping for the kids school clothes and I noticed a blouse that I liked, so again that was ooh I like that, got birds on and I thought oh yea I like that, I'll buy that - Isla

Sometimes you go with the sole intention of getting some trousers and a top and you come away with a dress and a pair of shoes – Jackie

There can be times where I will go out and I will buy anything, anything that will take my eye - Donna

Such comments uphold Blumer's fourth assertion that a strong fashion mechanism requires that choices are made on the basis of subjective evaluations as opposed to utilitarian product attributes.

In a similar way to Blumer's fifth suggestion that a fashion system requires the presence of influencing figures, the data contains examples of where fashion shoppers seek advice and inspiration. However these are rarely 'prestigious' individuals as implied by Blumer. The fashion shoppers interviewed are informed by a variety of influences including peers, and social media as well as fashion web sites and magazines.

I like to look at what other people are wearing, so I've got a few friends who are really kind of trend setters and I always copy them – Kim

Occasionally magazines maybe and perhaps looking at other people, occasionally you see a certain star or something like that and I follow Victoria Beckham on Instagram – Maria

from social media lately, probably like Twitter and Instagram. There's a lot of fashion bloggers that I follow that all have really nice clothes - Tracey

Within a working environment participants suggest that clothing choice is influenced by the appearance of the line manager. This resembles Simmel's (1957) trickle-down theory of fashion:

So I know that some days I wear a lot more formal clothes depending on what meetings I've got compared to every day in the office and I actually try to base what I wear off what my boss wears because she's my boss so I kind of try to pitch at a similar level - Lucy

when I started, to be honest I think I dressed too professionally I think. People seemed a lot more casual, even the managers, so that was something I had to adjust to and dress down. I just sort of compared to what other people were wearing and tried to come somewhere in the middle really – Rachel

there's no written policy here. I think it comes from management I think to a certain level and I'm not talking about director level, like middle management. If they come in a suit then they obviously expect a smart appearance.. so I think it starts from the top down - Fay

Although following the management style in terms of what to wear does not appear to carry with it a pressure to frequently buy new clothes, it may add to the level of clothing consumption by requiring individuals to own a portfolio of suitable work clothes that are different to their non-work wear.

Outside the workplace there is little evidence of a trickle-down process with few participants citing celebrities or designer fashion houses as influencing their choice of clothing. Many of the participants described how they rely on their favourite clothing retailers to show them what is new:

I do quite like to look on ASOS and things like that because I do think they are quite high trend setters or have a look at the mannequins in the windows of my favourite stores, I love doing that – Kim

I look at Top Shop, I like Next, New Look as well, their websites, just looking at what they've got on display, that gives me sense of an idea really – Eva

I know what shops I like and I would go to those shops and see what they'd got to offer me rather than seeing it in a magazine – Lucy

I get e-mails and sometimes little catalogue things in the post from shops where I've bought stuff and I'll generally have a quick look to see what's new – Naomi

One could argue that high street fashion originates from the creative work of a small group of prestigious individuals within fashion houses who sense the incipient tastes of the market and develop these into trends that become more widely adopted, as is the scenario implied within Blumer's work (Blumer 1969b). Though this may still be true to some extent, the data reveals that the perception of the participants is not of a small powerful influencing group but of a broad range of potential inspirations on and off-line that they filter, so choosing the perspective that is listened to or observed.

Blumer's sixth condition for the appearance of fashion is that the consumer must be open to new influences and changes in social opinion. Whilst the study was not specifically designed to explore this issue it seems that many of the respondents have embraced the advent of online shopping and social media, citing Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest and other online sources of information, which indicates a general willingness to embrace and accept change.

> *There's various apps that I've got on my computer and it's like Style Fruits and something like that.. …that's where I tend to get a lot of my ideas. – Naomi*
>
> *I tried Dressipi.com they make suggestions about the sort of clothes you might like – Rachel*
>
> *I get inspiration from Pinterest sometimes, I wouldn't say that I deliberately go there to get clothing ideas but it's quite nice for craft stuff and them you see other things like dresses by accident - Lucy*

For some participants the facility to browse and shop for clothing online has enabled them to more easily fit this behaviour into their daily lives:

> *I might be bored at home so I go on my phone and look at the apps and the websites of the shops I like – Kim*
>
> *There's various apps that I've got on my phone and it's like style fruits and something like that, so if I'm waiting to pick the kids up I'll look at that – Naomi*
>
> *I've got links to most of my favourite stores on my tablet.. I'll happily have a mooch through the clothes if I've got some free time – Lucy*

In summary it seems that the data contains evidence of all six of Blumer's conditions for the appearance of a fashion system within today's fashion shopping environment. If we consider these

conditions to be essential for the emergence of a fashion system then one could argue that the pace of the fashion mechanism might be influenced by the strength or proliferation of these characteristics. In considering whether these factors contribute towards current excessive clothing shopping, the findings demonstrate that there are significant differences in the way fashion styles are browsed and purchased now compared to previous times when there were lower levels of clothing consumption. The findings show that online retail and social media influences the behaviour of frequent fashion shoppers. The internet, in particular mobile devices are instrumental in making available a constant stream of fashion choices, online browsing and shopping opportunities. The given pace to the volume of styles that an individual may be exposed to and has introduced broader fields of influence and browsing opportunities. Frequent clothes shoppers are not passive receivers of these influences, the majority of participants actively seek opportunities to view new styles, observe the clothing of others and peruse available clothing options.

8.1.2 The Role of Cultural Ambivalence in Frequent Shopping Behaviour

Based on a series of axioms drawn from the works of Blumer (1969b), Davis (1983) and Stone (1962); Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton (1995) suggest that the fashion process is driven by a continual cycle of cultural ambivalence. Uncertainty over the 'right' way to look leads to the emergence of many new styles which require interpretation. This results in an ongoing dialectic, which rather than clarifying the situation, fosters further discussion and uncertainty and so the cycle continues. Faced with a multitude of choices but unsure as to the 'best' option to choose consumers tend to acquire more (Goodman and Vohs 2013). A fundamental part of the Kaiser et al. (1995) model is cultural ambivalence, whereby there is no single clear cultural or aesthetic ideal in terms of female style presented within the media (Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton 1995). Seen as a feature of postmodern society, individuals are subject to a plethora of influences and choices that are perceived as being

equally available and attractive but which are imbued with different symbolic and social implications (Ratneshwar, Mick and Huffman 2003). There is evidence of this cultural ambiguity within the data.

> *When you think about say the past decades, like the 50's or 60's you know the style going on. When you think about now, maybe because we're in it, it's very difficult to figure out what our style is....It feels like we're taking lots of elements of old style clothing and putting them all together but it keeps changing, but then maybe that **is** a style? It's just not very easy to identify - Rachel*

> *I think we're spoilt by choice these days and that just makes it a bit more difficult. It's confusing, those are the aspects that I don't enjoy… the more you see it in the media, the more you want to try and mirror the things that you see – Fay*

> *Sometimes I think you can be presented with too much choice and you think oh gosh, I may as well try another one …and when you've got undressed about ten times, you just feel shattered and you still don't know what to choose – Jackie*

Jackie's comment is an indication of the paradox of choice (Schwartz 2004). Whilst variety and the freedom to choose are often extolled as positive aspects of modern society, excessive choice can be problematic for consumers leaving them overwhelmed and confused as to the best course of action. For frequent fashion shoppers, being unconvinced of the suitability of one garment or feeling that there are other appropriate options can lead to them buying something additional:

> *…in TK Maxx again and I wasn't sure which one was best and I felt like I needed to have a think at home so I bought both, but I may take one back - Sally*

Whilst the data provides evidence of the existence of cultural ambivalence its contribution towards the frequency and volume of clothing consumption is unclear. Within the SI theory of fashion proposed by Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton (1995) if cultural ambivalence increases, then the variety of available style choices will also increase. Although it can be seen from the data that cultural ambivalence and a broad range of clothing choice are present together, it is impossible to define whether the former is the cause of the latter. Considering the contribution of cultural ambivalence to the volume and pace of clothing purchased, for some individuals, the presentation of many styles and the inability or unwillingness to choose between them does influence the frequency and number of garments purchased.

> *I just like lots of different choices and the fashion changes that much at the moment doesn't it, .. so it's nice to go through all the trends and the fashions – Helen*

I tend to shop online because you have more variety. People like ASOS and things, they're always bringing out new styles and I'm always up for trying different things just because I want a bit of a change, I don't want to miss out on anything – Priya

I'm a sucker for what's new, so I would probably pop into town once a week and I will buy something almost every time - Kim

Liking one's clothing but at the same time feeling as if there might be a better option could be considered as an example of ambivalence. When faced with many different style alternatives perceived as being equally available and attractive but having different implications (Thompson and Zanna 1995) individuals may experience uncertainly over which to choose. The promotion of many clothing options provokes a natural and continual human predisposition to seek novelty and compare alternatives (Fabrigar, MacDonald and Wegener 2005). The data contains examples of how seeing new clothing styles encourages some individuals to acquire new outfits:

fashion changes that much at the moment doesn't it, especially if you go to certain shops, you see all the new lines and it makes you want to buy something, though if you hadn't seen them you'd probably be happy with what you've got – Cathy

the e-mail goes ping and it says preview the new range and you have a quick look and then something might stick in your head and you think 'that would be nice' - Violet

The SI theory of fashion described by Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton (1995) and the work of Davis (1994) implies that ambivalence leads individuals to question the way they present themselves and this in turn fuels the desire for new and varied fashion. However, other contrasting theories present variety seeking behaviour as the result of satiety with the attributes of the current choice and seeking new stimulation (Kahn 1995, McAlister 1982) or variety as a means of minimising the risk of poor decisions by spreading their choices (Kahn 1995, Walsh 1995). The use of variety as a means of mitigating the consequences of poor decisions is echoed by Goodman and Vohs (2013) who observed that this behaviour is particularly prevalent where the decision being made is perceived to be a reflection of self (Goodman and Vohs 2013). The perception of the social consequences of 'good' and 'bad' fashion choices is discussed later in the part of the chapter relating to identity. Whilst this study is not able to

interrogate the causes of variety seeking behaviour, evidence emerged of this behaviour among the participants and suggests the contribution of variety seeking to overconsumption of clothing.

8.1.3 Identity Ambivalence and Response to Societal Expectations

In addition to cultural ambivalence, the data reveals another source of mixed feelings towards choice of clothing which resembles Davis' description of identity ambivalence (Davis 1994:24). Identity ambivalence is not confusion over what society expects of an individual but rather the perplexity of how the individual interprets and reacts to that expectation. That is to say, how does one negotiate the ideals and expectations that are put before one? Davis purports that the occurrence of identity ambivalence tends to surround the 'master statuses' of age, gender, physical beauty, class and race (Davis 1994) and that fashion is inspired by challenging the values surrounding these. The data illustrate different ways in which individuals negotiate society's expectations.

> *Say there was an expectation that I should cover up or dress a certain way, I wouldn't do that because I feel like clothes are an expression of your personality and you can't wish your expectations on other people's style – Priya*

Priya's comments describe the way that she deliberately resists expectations.

> *The industry I was in, it was really male dominated and quite old fashioned. I always had a suit and I never wore trousers, though I did have a pink tweed suit and I used to wear blue nail polish on my toes, I think that was a little act of rebellion – Isla*

Isla conformed to some extent whilst expressing her individuality within the constraints of a dress code. Her behaviour shows a small act of resistance and an element of individuality in choosing a pink suit and non-traditional colour of nail varnish.

> *You might see something you like that's quite fashionable and think I can't really wear that because of my age or the kids are wearing that.. you come away thinking I wish I was a bit younger, because if I was twenty years younger I might be able to get away with that –Olivia*

Olivia is conforming to values but with regret and a wistfulness; she wants to have the confidence to wear it but is held back due to the social expectations she doesn't feel able to ignore.

> *I think it's nice to see somebody looking after themselves and taking care in how they are presented, but I think some people can get carried away – like designer wear that they can't really afford and they have to be immaculate, fake fans and fake whatever else – Joanne*

Joanne is outlining the 'rules of engagement' of what she perceives is or is not an acceptable code of appearance. For Joanne, being well presented represents self-care provided that the individual is shopping within their means and appears to be displaying a groomed version of their natural self. The comments above illustrate a variety of ways that frequent shoppers negotiate social expectations and reconcile them with their own view of self. Although each individual has a different self-view the common thread throughout these comments is the purposeful consideration of the components of looking right.

The notion of identity ambivalence, a tension between societal expectations and expressions of individuality, has similarities with the symbolic interactionist view of the two 'me' and 'I' aspects of self (Blumer 1969a; Mead 1967). Mead (1967) describes the 'me' as the socialised aspect of self, aware of societal expectations and boundaries. The 'I' represents the individual's response to the 'me' in deciding whether or not to act in a manner consistent with those expectations (Mead 1967). In the fashion literature this is echoed by Sapir (1937) who describes the desire of individuals to move away from custom although only within the boundaries of appropriateness or 'adventurous safety'.

Returning to question of the contribution of ambivalence towards the volume of clothes purchased, as described above, the data show that these frequent clothes shoppers do experience a wide variety of options, an element of confusion over what style to choose and a tendency to select more than one option because they are unsure of the best choice. This indicates that ambivalence has a part to play in the overconsumption of clothing.

8.1.4 Dressing to Suit the Audience and Occasion

The reason that the participants' response to significant choice is an inclination to buy more is likely to be partly due to the pleasure derived from buying new garments as described within the hedonistic aspects of shopping for clothes. However the data suggest that the predisposition to buy more may also be associated with a feeling that different contexts and scenarios require different styles of clothing. This is not just a matter of formal attire for an occasion or business dress for work but includes more nuanced considerations of the company or 'audience' who will be present.

> *I went to the restaurant with the girls which just tends to be like a jeans and a blazer type thing but then on Saturday I went to the same restaurant with my old hairdressing friends, so I did go and have my nails done and a spray tan, put a dress on, because I knew what their expectations were – Anna*
>
> *I think for my job I suppose there's an expectation as a school secretary to look a little bit school secretary-ish, smart but practical…But when I go to meetings or we've got important visitors I tend to dress a little bit more lady-like you know, but not a power suit or anything like that – Jackie*
>
> *I check with the people that I'm going out with first to see if it's a jeans occasion or a dress up occasion. So it very much depends on what they are wearing as well, so if they said it was a jeans night out, I'd have looked for a new top to go with the jeans - Kim*

Presenting an appropriate version of self, depending on the audience, has parallels with the concept of roles and multiple selves which is discussed with respect to issues of identity later in this chapter. Selecting the 'right' outfit for every occasion requires an adequate portfolio of garments in order to present a suitable appearance and this may be a contributory factor to overconsumption. The maintenance of online as well as offline appearance broadens the scope of audience and expands the opportunity for outfits to be scrutinised (Ellis 2010; Van Dijck 2013). This may multiply the optimum number of garments that a frequent shopper perceives that they should own in order to dress appropriately for each audience and occasion.

Cushman (1990) proposed that individuals are convinced of needs as they constantly strive to achieve advertised ideals. Negotiating the images presented by the media is further complicated by the awareness that some of these images are not real.

> *Since social media, we create a life, we create a vision of ourselves on social media and I think we have to live up to that vision that we've created and it's very false in some respects. ..there are people show this idyllic life and I'm sure their lives are just not like that but that's what you see– Maria*

> *People are a lot more conscious of what they look like and unfortunately the pictures on the TV of the movie stars and magazine models and things like that are not real, they get photo-shopped completely before they go into the magazine.. but that's their role model, that's what they want to look like, but it's not real – Ruby*

These comments highlight that while women recognise the hyper-reality of what they see, they acknowledge that others or themselves sometimes, aspire to these images however unrealistic or unattainable they may be in real life. The data appear to support Cushman's (1990) vision that individuals are influenced into feeling a need for consumer goods since the word 'need' was used frequently by many of the participants to describe situations of wanting to buy something new:

> *I needed a new top for a night out – Grace*
> *I needed a few things ready to wear over Christmas– Karen*
> *I need a new dress for new year – Amy*
> *I bought a skirt and I need a top to go with it - Kim*

In this context 'need' is a relative state given they probably have many other choices already in their wardrobe, just not ones that they consider appropriate for the occasion or audience in question. Occasionally this 'need' was used in relation to practical requirements necessitating certain product attributes.

> *I will need that jumper, it will come in really handy on a snowy day, because I think it's gonna be about minus twenty some days – Jackie*

Jackie is anticipating a practical need for warmth that may or may not happen.

> *At the beginning of the week my shoes I wear for work had started to come away from the soles .. by Wednesday ..there was a huge hole in both my shoes. I had nothing else suitable so I needed to replace them - Rachel*

Rachel refers to an actual need resulting from the failure of a worn out item.

Whilst there may not be anything specific in the advertised images of clothing that instructs individuals that they should beware of becoming out of style it seems that simply showing people new fashions may carry an implication that their current clothing is outdated. Likewise, the data contains little to no evidence of situations where the participants have experienced being overtly accused of being old fashioned. Yet there are several descriptions of individuals reviewing the content of their wardrobe and feeling somewhat that it is not sufficiently up to date.

> *I hate that feeling when you look in the wardrobe and you don't know what to wear, I've got quite a few things but I wear the same thing over and over again because they're the latest things but then somehow they just seem to lose it and you feel like you need something new – Grace*

> *I did get really fed up with my clothes so much that last year and I had a personal shopper and we went through things that I would never normally dream of wearing because before I was a bit nervous of prints and the things that are a bit more fashionable – Naomi*

It appears that the pace of change perpetuated by frequent images of new styles both on and offline has the ability to create unease amongst individuals about whether their repertoire of clothing is sufficiently current. The above examples from the data highlight instances where exposure to many new styles has created a desire to acquire more clothing. The reason for this may be that viewing clothing heralded to be the latest style introduces an element of self-doubt in a similar way to that described by Richins (1991) when considering the impact of idealised images in advertising. Once an individual becomes uncertain of the appropriateness of their current clothing then this introduces a desire to buy something new so fuelling overconsumption of clothing. Extant literature describes how individuals use a process of social comparison to evaluate their own standing (Festinger 1954; Hogg, Bruce and Hough 1999; Richins 1995). There is evidence within the data to illustrate how individuals reflect on the clothing of others to assess their own stylishness and how this information informs their decision to shop:

> *if I see my colleague or my friend wearing something that I like and that would be one of the triggers. If I feel like I'm a bit behind with the fashion and I'm feeling other people are wearing different things, I feel like why am I not wearing these kinds of clothes, that's when I feel like I need to shop – Zara*

I like to look at what other people are wearing, so I've got a few friends who are really kind of trend setters so if I've got something similar to them then I'm on the right track and I do sometimes copy them sort of when they change style - Kim

Other 'triggers' for the acquisition of new clothing often surround events where individuals have a heightened concern over whether they will be favourably judged by others:

I'd definitely buy something new if I had something like a job interview, or an important meeting at work, it would just help me feel more confident knowing that I looked the part – Violet

I was going out with the girls and we hadn't seen each other for a while, and beforehand you're thinking I don't want to be the frumpy one, so I did treat myself to something new – Ursula

Or where the want to add to the 'specialness' of an occasion

at the moment I am looking for new stuff because we're going on a summer holiday. I haven't been on a summer holiday for three years and it will be really nice to have some new outfits – Anna

wedding or function definitely (buy something new) family meal or family birthday meal - yes because people tend to dress up, night out with the girls –probably (buy something new) if they've seen you often in the same stuff whereas curry on a Friday night, perhaps not so much - Helen

Participants also described feelings of 'needing' new clothes in order to be respectful of social conventions, by way of making an effort to dress appropriately and this was of particular concern when selecting clothes for an occasion.

I spend quite a bit of time and money to prepare what I wear to a wedding…, I know how much effort goes into the wedding and how much it costs to pay for everybody to be there, like your meal and everything and it's really nice for you to put that effort in as well – Yvonne

Because it's a special occasion, it's like a celebration …I suppose because you don't want to be disrespectful when it's somebody's wedding because it's important, so you buy something new and dress up – Naomi

The role of clothing as an expression of social conformity, or indeed rebellion is not a new phenomenon and choosing the right appearance in accordance with social convention has been a feature of life for many centuries (Miller 2010; Trentmann 2016). Considering how the perceived need

to meet social expectations might be related current patterns of excessive clothes shopping the participants tell of many different audiences and nuanced situations, each interpreted as requiring different standards of dress:

> *Going out in town, definitely dress up, family birthday meal - people tend to dress up and maybe wear something new, but for a general family meal I'd dress up a bit. If it's curry house on a Friday night, perhaps not so much. All these, you're expected to make a bit more of an effort - Helen*

This may be considered as evidence of fragmentation in modern life whereby people step in and out of different roles and settings that have different conventions, which may also apply to expectations regarding dress, and little overlap (Cushman 1990; Miller 2013).

The other aspect of interest when considering frequent shopping behaviour is the implication by some participants that they are somehow compelled by social conventions to purchase new clothes. Given the evidence within the literature and data that clothes shopping is a pleasurable activity for many, it seems plausible that any social influence would not need to be very strong in order to persuade a frequent shopper to purchase an additional garment. The following sections consider findings in relation to the interplay between social pressure and hedonistic desire to shop.

8.1.5 Judgement Of and By Others

As discussed within the literature review it is generally accepted that people make judgements about others based on their appearance (Greenwald and Banaji 1995, Stone 1962). It seemed that some participants were reluctant to admit this, partly because they feared appearing superficial, and also because they understood that appearance may not provide reliable or 'fair' criteria for evaluation of an individual.

> *Yes, I know that's horrible but yes. I know it's sad but if someone wasn't wearing a suit and some of us were, I would think our status is higher, may not be right but it is the sad truth – Eva*

It can do initially yeah. Yeah definitely but I would like to think that I'm not shallow enough just to judge them on that and I always give people a chance and try and get to know them - Ursula

Despite the reluctance by some to admit the degree to which appearance influences judgement of others, the data reveals that this type of evaluation takes place and the participants provided many examples including:

there's a mom at school that I'd had down as a right old bimbo the way she dressed and she's like some head of cancer drug concoction, I mean that was another good example of I just completely judged her on how she looked – Isla

It's human nature and if somebody comes to an interview and they're not smart, I'm sorry that means that you haven't given time, effort and energy into what you look like, so how are you going to put time, effort and energy into doing the job – Ruby

one of the women is always immaculately done, in her late twenties wearing the fashionable jeans and the boots and has got a boob job and she's has her eyebrows tattooed on and she's always that way. I would be gobsmacked if she rocked up to the school in a baggy tee-shirt, jeans and pumps, because I think that's not her – Helen

These findings demonstrate that what acts as a proxy for smart, stupid, competent or incompetent in people's judgement is heavily skewed by many factors, and appearance is a powerful one. These heuristics are apparent in the participants' reflections on others are indicative of the reasons for their own choice of dress.

In addition, the data illustrate how the participants have experienced being judged by others including family, friends, colleagues and total strangers.

I said I prefer vintage and there was a physical shift, just like that… and I was already judged as unfashionable – Isla

my husband, you know he will come out and say "Oh I really like you in that, that looks really nice" Or in my case, "What's that you're wearing?" –Olivia

Because I like my makeup and my clothes and my shoes and things like, people feel like I've got nothing up there …when I go to conferences ..they never think I'm a speaker – Priya

I perceive that if I'm in jeans and a casual top, the response I get from shop assistants is a different experience to being in a suit - Violet

Given the acknowledgement that the participants often make judgements about people based on the way they look and situations where they have experienced similar judgement by others, the consequence is a natural expectation that one will be judged based on one's appearance.

> *I know that me and L. (a friend) judge people sometimes from their outfit, so you've got to assume that other people do it back to you- Donna*
>
> *I think that everybody judges everybody on what they're wearing and I think it's very easy to label people on what they're wearing as well and I find myself doing it without meaning to, so I definitely think that people do it to me – Helen*

These reflections entirely support the aspect of SI theory surrounding "the looking glass self" (Cooley and Schubert 1998) whereby individuals shape their self-concepts based on how they believe they are seen by others (Stone 1962). The symbolic meanings of styles of dress are collectively understood and are used to convey an individual's own identity as well as evaluating the appearance of others (Blumer 1969a, Davis 1994). The fact that style of dress carries such weight in terms of how one is judged by others suggests that those experiencing personal fear of invalidity (Thompson and Zanna 1995) or concern over the consequences of decisions (Kruglanski 2013) regarding their appearance, do so with just cause. Even in the few examples above there is evidence of how someone looks influencing judgements regarding their status, professionalism, intelligence, modernity, attractiveness, value as a customer and likeability.

So, could fear of negative judgment be significantly responsible for driving overconsumption of clothing? According to Goodman and Vohs (2013), when faced with complex decisions, consumers at times seek variety as a way of mitigating risk. This might imply buying more clothing than they need in order to feel secure in the knowledge that they have something appropriate for multiple scenarios. In addition, as illustrated above regarding 'audience' and occasion, the feeling experienced of 'needing' to buy something new may be driven by the desire to live up to the expectations of others. This suggests that buying something new in some way reduces the risk of unfavourable judgment. It is proposed by Blumer (1969b) that a key role of fashion is to present oneself as 'modern' and attuned

to the latest trends and that this is a potentially desirable social position that is sought by some people. However as described above within the evaluation of Blumer's six conditions for the appearance of fashion, the participants' general view is that being fashionable is less important than being stylish. Whilst accepting that being new may not bring an automatic seal of approval the way that participants describe being 'stylish' often implies wearing a version of, or incorporating elements of the latest trends.

> *I think I am, well I try to look stylish, like I'm fashionable to a certain degree, hopefully I get it right, especially as you're getting older it gets harder to wear the things that the kids are wearing but you still adapt it to suit you – Olivia*

> *I'd look ridiculous if I stuck to fashion, you've got to dress to your size and your shape to be stylish, but if I feel like I'm a bit behind with the fashion and I'm feeling other people are wearing different things, that's when I feel like I need to shop -Yvonne*

It therefore appears that having something new is a component of being considered stylish. If people perceive that they judge others more favourably if they are dressed in something new then they will assume that they will be judged by others in a similar way. The desire to be judged approvingly by others could therefore heavily influence clothing purchases.

8.1.6 Hedonistic Desire or Social Pressure?

Considering the extent to which hedonism and social pressure are potential drivers of overconsumption, there is evidence to support both as contributing towards frequent clothes shopping. Relating to the upsurge in clothing acquisition since the 1980s (Allwood et al. 2006) it may be argued that social pressure has intensified during this period due to the advent of social media (Chou and Edge 2012; Sagioglou and Greitemeyer 2014). Advertising and social media have resulted in more frequent presentation of often idealised images (Grabe, Ward and Hyde 2008; Harper and Tiggemann 2008) and have heightened the risks associated with poor decisions by publicising them more broadly (de Vries and Peter 2013; Dominick 1999). This intensified social pressure may be seen as one of the causes of excessive clothing consumption. In terms of the contribution of hedonism to

current patterns of excessive clothing consumption, it could be argued that although the inherent hedonistic nature of shopping for clothes may have been consistent over time, the pleasure associated with buying clothing has driven consumers to take advantage of the currently abundant and affordable opportunities to shop that have arisen from fast fashion (Barnes, Lea-Greenwood and Miller 2013), so fuelling overconsumption.

In order to scrutinise the combined contribution of hedonism and social pressure the participants were asked to discuss whether they perceived it to be acceptable to wear the same outfit to multiple occasions. This is an area where many initially cited social pressure as a reason for 'needing' to buy something new – i.e. what would others think if I wore the same outfit twice? But during the discussion that followed, participants found this belief difficult to substantiate.

R I went to a wedding last year and I wore the dress again to another wedding with the same people there and I did feel a bit uncomfortable.
I Do you know why you felt uncomfortable?
R I think it was so distinctive, because I notice, I notice when people are wearing the same clothes.
I What do you think about them when you see them wearing the same clothes?
R This sounds so shallow doesn't it. I don't think I particularly think anything really.
I So do you think people would notice you were in the same dress?
R Yea but I don't even think it's just about that. I think you feel more special when you've got something new, something different and you feel good in it. Nothing to do with other people really **- Karen**

R I think it's social pressure isn't it they expect you to have the latest fashion or something new.
I *If you didn't have something new, what do you think peoples' response would be?*
R I don't think other people's response would actually be that bad, I think it's more the pressure we put on ourselves **- Maria**

I If you'd worn something to an occasion a few times and then you've invited to another occasion, would you feel able to wear that outfit again?
R No.
I Why is that?
R I don't tend to worry about other people, yes I suppose it is because I would notice if people kept wearing the same things, but I would only notice, I wouldn't judge them.
I So the thing that would put you off wearing the same outfit is that other people would notice?
R Yes but I'm not worried about being judged, this is quite interesting Natalie. I think it would yes, I don't want anyone to know I've worn this before. Deep down I just want a new one because I wouldn't give twopence if everyone was saying oh she's wore that dress, if I liked it, but I think it's more secretly that I want a new one **- Isla**

The participants appeared to find it difficult to distinguish, or perhaps to admit to me or themselves, whether they simply want new clothes for their own pleasure of buying and owning the garments or in order to present themselves positively in front of others, which also makes them happy.

Studies exploring pleasure and consumption suggest that part of the hedonist value of fashion shopping is linked to creating personal style (Arnold and Reynolds 2003, Barnes, Lea-Greenwood and Miller 2013). In constructing personal style, as supported by the findings above, Symbolic Interactionist theory suggests that individuals reflect on how they would use symbols to evaluate the appearance of others and assume that they will be judged by people in a similar way. In doing this although individuals may perceive that they are dressing to construct their own identity they are likely to be influenced by the social frame of judgement (Blumer 1969a). From an SI perspective self-esteem is linked to how people perceive themselves to be viewed by significant others, such as family members, friends or colleagues (Mead 1967) and in this way self-appraisal is inseparable from the social environment (Cooley and Schubert 1998). This might explain the confusion by participants when attempting to explain whether it is social pressure or self-desire that motivates them to make a clothing purchase.

It seems therefore that the purpose of buying new clothing is linked to the aim of receiving favourable judgement by others leading to an element of happiness with one's appearance, articulated as 'looking right'. This is similar to the notion that higher levels of self-esteem are experienced by those who are happier with their appearance (Heatherton 2003, Harter 2000). Thus, it would follow that the drive for social acceptance makes a significant contribution to excessive consumption of clothing.

8.1.7 Summary

The SI theories of fashion espoused by Blumer (1969b) and Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton (1995) are relevant and important in considering issues of frequency and volume of clothing consumption since they focus on social processes which have the capability of propelling the rate of changing fashion. Although these SI theories of fashion were produced some time ago – almost 50 years ago in the case

of Blumer's 1969 theory and 22 years ago for that of Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton in 1995, the findings reveal evidence to strongly support both theories in the current UK fashion shopping environment. All six of Blumer's (1969b) essential conditions for a thriving fashion mechanism are clearly apparent. In addition it seems that technology has rendered some of Blumer's conditions particularly resonant and more influential than they may have been at the time of writing in 1969. Social media as well as online browsing and shopping have transformed Blumer's condition of openness to the recurring presentation of styles beyond what he might have imagined in 1969. Online shopping has been shown to make browsing opportunities more accessible and easier than the high street alternative (Blázquez 2014). Many respondents described enthusiastic browsing habits indicating not just reactive openness to new styles but a proactive desire to seek out the alternatives. In a similar way, social media has revolutionised the condition 'presence of influencing figures' (Blumer 1969b) which now include peer comparison on platforms such as Instagram and Facebook as well as fashion bloggers.

In support of the SI theory of fashion developed by Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton (1995), the findings indicate that female frequent fashion shoppers experience both cultural and identity ambivalence. Cultural ambivalence is evidenced by uncertainty over the 'right' way to look and identity ambivalence by the perplexity of how the respondents negotiate the ideals and expectations that are put before them. For some, the plethora of affordable choices has resulted in ambivalence and uncertainty over which is best or the feeling that a newer alternative might be better leading to the purchase of multiple items. In addition the popularisation of social media has broadened scope of audience for self-presentation, has multiplied opportunities for peer comparison and inspection of appearances as well as providing a vehicle to speed up the process of the symbolic negotiation of new fashions. The degree of scrutiny over what is the latest appropriate dress for a variety of audiences and occasions has led to countless nuances of style so fuelling excessive consumption of clothing as frequent shoppers strive to present the best image of themselves.

8.2 Identity

The extant literature contains many references to the role of clothing as a means of constructing and conveying self-identity (Auty and Elliott 1998; Davis 1994; McCracken and Roth 1989; Miller 2013), however the link between shopping and self-image has been less well explored. This section describes the findings linking shopping habits with the notion of self. The discussion continues to review the data relating to ways in which frequent shopping contributes to self-image and enhancement of self-esteem via the sensation of 'looking right'. It also considers negative cases where feeling unhappy with one's appearance is detrimental to levels of confidence and disrupts the desire to shop for clothes. The section concludes by reviewing the relationships between individuals and their favourite garments.

8.2.1 Self Identity and Shopping Behaviour

The literature exploring the nature of self-identity and person-object relations describes the concept of an extended self (Belk 1988) whereby self-image includes possessions and experiences that define and affirm one's identity (Ahuvia 2005; Escalas and Bettman 2005; Hogg, Banister and Stephenson 2009). There is evidence within the data that supports the findings of Dittmar (Dittmar, Beattie and Friese 1995; Dittmar 2004; Dittmar 2007) by illustrating how possessions such as clothing are viewed by some as part of their self-identity influencing the way in which they see themselves:

> *when I've got flats (flat shoes) on I can't concentrate because I'm like I'm wearing flats, I'm not comfortable that I'm wearing flats. Even though they're the most comfortable thing, but it's just like when I'm not wearing any heels I feel like it's not me, I'm a heels person – Priya*
>
> *I tend to wear a dress when I go out with a nice pair of shoes but then every day I just tend to be like a jeans and a blazer type person, that's me – Anna*
>
> *I do buy practical stuff for day to day but that's not really me. The real me is more quirky, I tend to buy irrational pieces, things that I absolutely love and will wear once or have nowhere to wear them, jewelled dresses, hats, vintage styles – Isla*

In addition some of the participants associate themselves with their clothing by reference to 'owning' their style.

> *I choose things that fit with my own style. I am quite a classic sort of person anyway in terms of my styling, I'm not ultra-modern. I know when it's a me-type outfit – Ursula*

> *as you get older, you develop your own style I think I'm not as influenced now by others, I have my own style. For me comfort is a huge factor, I not a suity person but I like to look fairly smart for work and pick up parts of the fashion that are right for me – Fay*

> *I think I've got a kind of style of my own, that I kind of already know what I'm going to end up buying. It's hard to describe but I know it when I see it – Helen*

Furthermore, the data reveal that self-image is not only linked to the choice of garment but there is also a link between self-image, attitudes towards fashion and shopping habits.

> *99% of the time I'm really careful, I do plan quite a lot. I devote a lot of time to thinking about what I want and then when I know what I want and I just go straight and get it, no messing, that's the way I am most of the time, I like to think that I'm a sensible shopper – Rachel*

> *I've never been a designer girl that's bought expensive things. I try and stay fashionable, that's how I've always been… I am one of these who buys cheap and I change them when I go off them – Anna*

> *I am a bargain hunter through and through, I do love the charity shops I have to admit, I find them quite satisfying…. Even if it's not right for me if it's a bargain I buy it and someone will have it – Jackie*

The references above to being 'a sensible shopper' or a 'bargain hunter' indicate that not only what the participants buy, but also the way that they shop becomes part of how they view themselves.

The proposition that self-image and social identity influence what we buy is well covered in the literature (Auty and Elliott 1998; Banister and Hogg 2004; Belk, Mayer and Bahn 1982; Belk 1988; Dittmar 2004; McCracken and Roth 1989) but there is limited discussion surrounding the relationship between the act of shopping and one's identity. Shopping may be considered as part of a consumer's extended self (Belk 1998) where the experience carries significant symbolic meaning for the individual. Within the leisure literature, when individuals experience affirmation of their talents, core values or social recognition from engaging in a pursuit then they are said to have a leisure identity (Guiry and Lutz 2000; Shamir 1992). This notion is supported by Haggard and Williams (1992), who found that

individuals felt that their self-identity was enhanced where they participated in leisure activities that symbolised desirable lifestyle images and character traits (Haggard and Williams 1992). Guiry (2000) extended the concept of leisure identity to recreational shopping and identified a group of 'recreational shopping enthusiasts' for whom shopping was seen as a path to self enhancement and used as a form of self-definition. For 'recreational shopping enthusiasts' shopping was a more fulfilling experience, offering feelings of 'mastery' over the situation in that they were rising to a challenge of making the best purchases, as well as a greater sense of enjoyment, escape and social experience compared to simple 'recreational shoppers' or 'normal' shoppers (Guiry, Mägi and Lutz 2006).

Within the data there is evidence of certain aspects of 'recreational shopping enthusiast' type experiences "*I love shopping for clothes… that kind of feel good" – Maria; "it's an escape"- Anna; "it's a social thing, it's something we do together" – Cathy; "I love the excitement of hunting for new things" – Donna; "I feel like I'm on a mission… a challenge to find the perfect thing" – Grace.*

However whilst the above provides evidence of the traits of recreational shopping enthusiasts, since this study provides no measure of the extent of these feelings compared to the 'average' shopper it is impossible to define whether the individuals concerned fit Guiry's profile of the recreational shopping enthusiast for whom shopping plays an important role in their self-image (Guiry and Lutz 2000).

An alternative view point in considering whether the act of shopping may be considered to be part of the participant's self-identity is to reflect upon their response to the question as to how they would feel about the prospect of not shopping at all for a period of time. Responses to the question - "If you decided for any reason that you were not going to go shopping for two or three months, how would that make you feel?" appear to fall into several categories. Some respondents indicate that the prospect of not shopping for clothes would change the way they feel about themselves:

> *Oh my God, I would miss out on so many outfits and styles, I think that would be a bit of an issue thing if I decided not to shop, I wouldn't really feel like me – Priya*

I think that it might make me feel a bit low, like there's always that one person in the office that always has the new handbag, the new jacket they seem to always have everything I don't know how they have the money to do it but it can make me feel like I'm not very successful if I can't have those things and I know that's silly because I have a lovely life but that's just how it makes me feel - Helen

I think it would affect the way I felt about myself - less good about myself at times, not all the time but at times. If I was going somewhere and I couldn't buy something new, I do think that would affect the way I felt about going out that day like I wouldn't be up to my usual standard, my usual appearance. Not necessarily my entire happiness but yea I would feel less confident on the day - Karen

The above descriptions suggest that for these individuals, shopping for clothes plays an important role in their self-identity. For Priya, Helen and Karen their self-image is congruent (Sirgy et al. 1997) with being able to frequently acquire new clothes and maintain a certain standard of appearance. In comparison, others describe how they would miss the experience of shopping but without linking this specifically to self-image:

I would feel like I was missing out because I enjoy it and it's kind of like a bit of a treat after or in the middle of a hard working week. I don't really spend my money in terms of spending it on myself on anything else really except for socialising. So I'd feel like I was missing out on my treat, so yea I would. If someone said to me you can't shop even for a month, I'd really struggle, I'd probably be miserable - Kim

I don't know think I'd necessarily miss out on clothes but I'd miss the feeling that you get, it's the buzz, with anything really, it's that buzz of buying something and not necessarily clothes – Naomi

I would miss it, yes because it's how I spend time with my friends. I guess we could go and not spend any money but I think, what's the point, although we don't buy a lot we are actually looking at things we might buy. We could just go for lunch or coffee but that won't keep us busy for the day and it's nice to have something to take home at the end of it - Donna

For the above individuals, whilst they feel that refraining from shopping for clothes would be detrimental to their happiness by respectively missing out on a treat, excitement or social experience, since there is no mention of the change in behaviour influencing how they feel about themselves, it may seem less likely that shopping for clothes forms part of their self-definition. They would simply miss the pleasure of the experience. Alternatively, it could be argued that under Belk's (1988) concept of the extended self, 'doing' is central to self-worth. What one has the freedom or ability to do has the potential to carry symbolic value, for example in the case of Kim, her ability to shop is seen as a

reward for a hardworking week. Activities and experiences therefore form part of the extended self-identity by virtue of the meanings that are associated with them (Belk 1988; Haggard and Williams 1992). An implication of this finding is that consumption reduction may be detrimental to the sense of wellbeing for some people. If the products that people buy and the act of buying them have symbolic meaning importantly associated with self-identity, social relationships and self-esteem (Auty and Elliott 1998; Banister and Hogg 2004; Hogg, Banister and Stephenson 2009) then to remove or limit the facility to consume may have negative consequences for wellbeing rather than the positive outcomes that sustainable consumption is designed to deliver.

Other participants describe a feeling that limiting or refraining from clothes shopping would not lead to a reduced sense of wellbeing if the action was taken in pursuit of an alternative goal:

> *I am already limiting myself at the moment because I'm trying not to spend as much as normal except for putting towards a house deposit, so I don't feel like I'm missing out really because I know I've got something else to save for – Lucy*

> *No probably not unhappy at all if I'd got a reason to do it (not go clothes shopping) like saving the money for a nice holiday or maybe a really special meal out or something – Ruby*

Similarly individuals appeared to be accepting of changes to shopping patterns that resulted from changes in life stage or circumstances:

> *I think at one stage of my life if I didn't go shopping every week which I used to do, I think yes it would have made me very unhappy, missing out on that latest trend and looking what's out there, but definitely not now I've got kids. Your priorities change don't they. I still like clothes shopping but I can take it or leave it – Sally*

> *I think when I was younger I'd get obsessed and spend hours choosing outfits, shopping, getting ready, but well as I've matured I've realised that's not the important thing, the important thing is to get out there, enjoy yourself, have fun, be with the people you love and yea you want to look good but it's not the thing that makes you happy – Ursula*

> *Jackie: Since we last spoke I have tried to stop spending on clothes because my husband's job is at risk so we're being a bit careful with money.*
> *Natalie: Do you miss shopping for clothes?*
> *Jackie: Not at all in fact it's made me think about what I've got and making use of it. In a strange way <u>not</u> shopping makes me feel like I'm helping with the problem because I can't do anything else about it - Jackie*

Again this change in behaviour may be seen as a consequence of changing perspectives (Charon 2009). The above illustrates how changes in life stage or circumstances correspond to changing priorities, goals and actions. This finding supports the literature regarding disruption of habits which describes the effectiveness of altering external factors, surroundings and circumstances in challenging well-practiced behaviour (Verplanken and Wood 2006; Wood, Tam and Witt 2005). From a sustainability point of view an important aspect of this finding is that, for individuals changing their habits as a result of altered priorities or goals, consumption of clothing appears to have been reduced voluntarily without any perceived detriment to wellbeing. This maintains the possibility of a situation of 'double dividend' (Jackson 2005) whereby it may be possible to achieve greater life satisfaction whilst consuming less.

Within studies of pro-environmental activity, self-identity has been found to be a significant predictor of behaviour (Sparks and Shepherd 1992; Terry, Hogg and White 1999; Whitmarsh and O'Neill 2010). For example, people who perceive themselves as recyclers are more likely to recycle than those who do not see themselves as typical recyclers. The link between self-identity and shopping habits may have implications for the overconsumption of fashion where individuals have come to view themselves as the sort of person who buys cheap fashionable clothing and then discards it in favour of the next trend, or as someone who cannot resist an impulse bargain purchase. It has also been suggested that identity may override attitudes, leading individuals to behave in a certain way regardless of potential reservations they may have about that behaviour (Charng, Piliavin and Callero 1988; Whitmarsh and O'Neill 2010).

This can be seen in the cases of Anna and Jackie.

Anna's shopping identity: "*I am one of these who buys cheap and I change them when I go off them*"

Anna *My son will always say, Primark dress mom? You do know that people have to work for pennies to make that dress. So yea I am aware of that and I saw the documentary on the tele*

Natalie *Does that ever cross your mind when you're choosing what to buy?*

Anna *That's really bad but no. I couldn't shop the way I do at more expensive shops.. and anyway, they might be just as bad for all that I know.*

Anna is aware of the potential ethical harm involved in the manufacture of fast fashion and describes her behaviour as 'really bad' but she puts this aside to allow herself to buy cheap clothes and change them frequently in line with her shopping identity. She rationalises this via her point that it is difficult for consumers to differentiate between retailers according to the ethical nature of the garments they sell.

Jackie's shopper identity: "*I am a bargain hunter through and through"*

Jackie: *I know I waste a lot of stuff and I end up with some that that I shouldn't have bothered with but it is so cheap. I ordered a suit, I should have known better because it was fifteen pounds and it was brand new and I thought that'll do because you know I probably won't ever wear it again, which is bad in itself, but I couldn't even put it on my back, it was awful, absolutely awful, so I ended up going spending more money and because it was going to cost too much to send back*

Natalie: *Did that experience make you more careful after that?*

Jackie: *No! You're gonna get a few buys that aren't so good, but a lot of my bargains are good value*

Jackie acknowledges that her behaviour is wasteful and that there are some instances where her 'bargains' prove to be a false economy but she counters this with the suggestion that overall, the good value purchases negate the poor decisions so justifying her identity as a bargain hunter. The suggestion that identity comprises an element of how one shops implies that any attempt to change behaviour towards reduced consumption will therefore potentially involve challenging aspects of self-identity or perspective. The concept that individuals view life through different perspectives which can sensitise them to parts of reality and desensitise them to others, is inherent in symbolic interactionist theory (Charon 2009).

All of the participants were aware of the potential ethical harms involved in the manufacture of cheap clothing and most expressed concern that this was the case, being sensitised to this aspect from the perspective of a responsible interview participant. However when placed in a shopping context the perspective appears to change to that of an uninformed fashion shopper in the case of Anna and a bargain hunter in the case of Jackie, both desensitised to the harms that they were aware of. It appears

therefore that frequent shoppers are able to switch off their sensitivity to concerns over sustainability in order to pursue shopping habits that they feel to be consistent with their self-identity.

8.2.2 Looking Right and Feeling Special

Returning to the question of the relationship between shopping for clothes and self-image, a recurring theme in the literature is that individuals are more likely to view material goods as part of their identity where the ownership of the items is associated with self-enhancement (Banister and Hogg 2004; Dittmar 2004; Dittmar, Long and Bond 2007; McCracken 1986). The process of linking products with self-identity is often described by way of culture and social interaction imbuing goods with certain symbolic meaning, which is perpetuated or may be driven by commercially advertised messages (Belk, Mayer and Bahn 1982; Grubb and Grathwohl 1967; McCracken 1986). Individuals may then be attracted to purchase products based on their perception of the 'typical owner' hoping to move towards a more idealised version of themselves by becoming part of that group (Escalas and Bettman 2005; Hogg, Banister and Stephenson 2009; Sirgy et al. 1997). Whilst this type of rationale may have been going on in the minds of the frequent clothes shoppers interviewed, there was little to no overt description of buying a garment in order to appear as a certain type of person for example more attractive, popular, beautiful, successful, richer or thinner. A reason for this might be that the validity of participants' responses was compromised by social desirability biases (Krumpal 2013). Given the traditional negative stereotype of materialistic individuals as self-centred and shallow (Shrum and Lowrey 2014), people may be reluctant to admit that they have a desire to enhance their social standing or are excessively concerned with their physical appearance.

The types of self-enhancement that were described by the respondents were less direct in their nature and tended to surround the topics of feeling special, being more confident and looking 'right'.

The word 'special' was used by a number of individuals to describe how new clothing made them feel:

I bought skirt, jumper, shoes, tights, the whole outfit, I wore it to the pub and going out for a meal and I felt special every time I wore it, like I really looked my best but not overdone – Amy

For Amy, the new outfit leads to feeling special which is connected with self-enhancement as she describes herself as looking her best. For going to the pub or out for a meal, Amy views her ideal self as looking her best but 'not overdone' implying that context is important.

I think dressing up just makes you feel special putting on a nice dress doesn't it. Because it's a chance to look your best and make an effort I think – Donna (talking about special occasions)

The association between new clothes, feeling special and looking one's best is echoed by Donna. For Donna feeling special is also associated with making an effort. This may also be an indication that context is important. Whereas looking one's best but not 'overdone' might be considered the ideal for Amy's pub visit, the comment above from Donna was made in relation to dressing up for a special occasion where being seen to make an effort may have important social connotations.

Other participants described how the ability of a garment to make them feel special was as much related to the fact that it was new as the way it made them look:

I think you feel more special when you've got something new, and you feel good in it. It doesn't feel very special if I've know that I've worn it loads of times or even if I've had something in the wardrobe and it might be new but I've had it in there for six weeks before I've worn it, I don't feel quite the same as when I've just bought it bizarrely – Karen

There's just something that makes you feel special and nice inside about wearing something new. Even if it's a cheap top from the supermarket, the first time you wear it you feel great…. I guess it's just the latest thing or something a bit different - Beth

The instances where being new is a prerequisite for feeling special might go some way to explaining the current overconsumption of clothing. For these cases, challenging existing behaviour would require changing the mind set regarding the attributes of clothing that enhance self-image, for example linking quality or uniqueness with garments that make one feel special rather than newness.

In addition to feeling special respondents described the facility of clothing to enhance their level of self-confidence. This was closely associated with the notion of looking 'right':

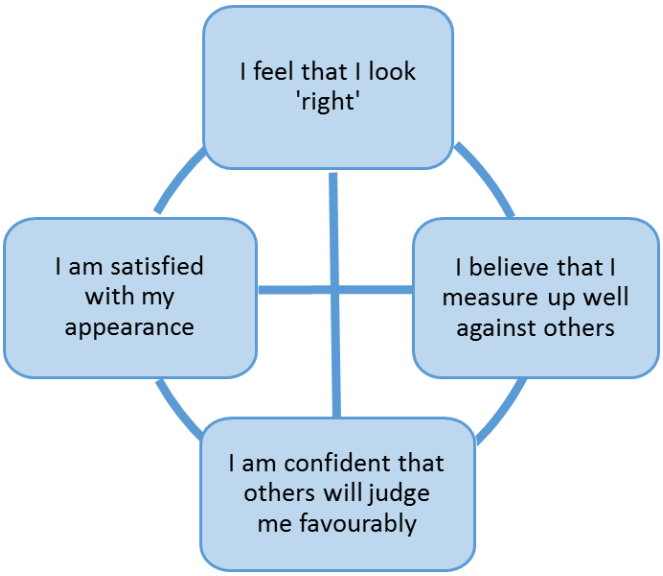
When you feel like you look right you feel nice inside and then that makes you more confident - Faye

I think in order to radiate confidence, you've got to feel confident, so you've got to feel inwardly that you look alright - Olivia

..four of us that had to go to the meeting, none of us would normally wear suits but we'd all done the same, we'd dressed differently... I think if I hadn't dressed up I probably wouldn't have felt as confident, especially with the other ladies dressed to impress – Yvonne

Within the literature the concept of confidence is closely linked with that of self-esteem or self-worth (Baumeister et al. 2003; Heatherton, Wyland and Lopez 2003). It has been found that people with high self-esteem are likely to think they create a better impression on others (Baumeister et al. 2003). The sources of self-esteem are described as including happiness with one's appearance (Harter 2000) and anticipation of positive appraisal by others (Heatherton, Wyland and Lopez 2003). This implies that there may be a circular pattern as illustrated in figure 9 of feeling that one looks right linked with perceived favourable comparisons between self and others therefore having confidence that one will be judged favourably by others, so being happy with appearance, leading back to the feeling of looking right.

Figure 9 – The Connected Components of Looking 'Right'



The data suggest that buying something new may be part of aspiring to be considered as stylish, and that appearing stylish increases the perceived chances of being judged favourably by others. From the literature, this social approval may be linked to levels of self-esteem and measures of happiness. The reward experienced for buying new clothes could therefore be seen as delivering greater satisfaction with one's appearance, social acceptance and happiness.

This behaviour may potentially be reinforced by the compliments of others.

> *If you've found something that really fits well and looks nice and you perhaps get a compliment about it, just gives you more confidence – Kim*
>
> *If I've been shopping with somebody and they've been very positive like "Yea you look great in that" I am more happy and excited about it - Olivia*

The relationship between looking right and feeling confident is also illustrated by some negative situations within the data:

> *if you're not feeling very good about yourself and then you try something on and you look awful and it can confirm what your belief is really, that you don't look good – Karen*
>
> *It definitely brings up the body image thing, if you try something and it doesn't look good then you know you wouldn't feel confident wearing it, and it depresses me more to have to buy it in a bigger size - Violet*

For some therefore it seems that there is a link between looking right, feeling confident, being happy with one's appearance and self-esteem. Since higher levels of self-esteem have been associated with a greater sense of happiness (Baumeister et al. 2003; Heatherton, Wyland and Lopez 2003) then it might also be reasonable to assume that in some instances the feeling of looking good makes people happy.

When considering the impact that this might have on the overconsumption of clothing it is necessary to consider the contribution of having something new to the notion of looking right. As previously discussed, from a symbolic interactionist perspective, an individual's view of themselves is influenced by how they believe that they will be perceived by others (Blumer 1969a). The contemporary consumer is often described as possessing a fragmented and multiple sense of identity (Ahuvia 2005) or a multi-dimensional self (Kleine, Kleine and Kernan 1993) including desirable possible identities

(Markus and Nurius 1986) and undesired versions of self-image (Hogg, Banister and Stephenson 2009; Ogilvie 1987). Whilst there is no evidence of the participants specifically referring to different versions of themselves, as previously described within the findings chapter relating to symbolic interactionist theories of fashion, they do describe different contexts and scenarios which require different styles of dress. This belief sometimes leads consumers into frequent shopping for clothes in order to accumulate an adequate portfolio of garments from which they may select 'the right' outfit for every social situation. In addition the findings highlight the contribution of being considered 'stylish' to the notion of looking right. The participant's concept of being stylish has been shown to comprise an element of incorporating the latest fashions with sufficient expertise that this is done in a manner to suit one's self-image.

In this respect volume and variety of clothes as well as newness may be seen as contributing to the feeling of looking right. If looking right is associated with self-confidence and happiness then any attempt to curtail clothes shopping habits may be seek a potentially detrimental to positive self-image and levels of happiness. Preventing any reduction in wellbeing in the event of consumption reduction may therefore require changing beliefs regarding the components of looking right and removing the links between looking right, variety, volume and newness of clothing. Alternatively one might attempt to challenge the links between appearance, self-esteem and happiness.

From the data, the ability of clothing to deliver feelings of confidence and esteem appears to rely on the belief that owning or wearing the garment will enhance self-image. This is best illustrated by two negative cases describing instances where individuals chose not to shop:

> *I was really overweight and at one point I used to totally dislike shopping because I couldn't really get into anything and feel like I looked reasonable, so I just didn't buy clothes, I thought what's the point when I couldn't look decent in anything - Jackie*

> *I've had periods where I've put on weight and I thought I'd be ok with that and I haven't looked after myself as well as I have done in the past but actually it wasn't ok. I didn't like the way I looked in anything, I hated shopping and I didn't buy much, but that was bad for me, not because I missed the clothes but I just felt bad, emotionally - Karen*

Although these cases are not positive in terms of wellbeing, they serve to illustrate that when the link between self-enhancement and shopping for clothes is disrupted then the level of clothing purchased may be reduced. Both of these respondents are describing situations where no-matter what they purchased they felt unable to improve their self-image so chose not to buy. For these individuals choosing not to buy was the outcome of a negative experience of being unhappy with their appearance. It is likely that there are many other reasons for people choosing to shop infrequently and buy few clothes. It is possible that others may choose not to buy clothing because they do not experience the desire for self enhancement or where they do encounter self-discrepancy (Dittmar 2005; Higgins 1987) they do not view shopping for clothes as the route to closing the gap between their actual and perceived ideal self. In order to provide broader insight further investigation would be required particularly amongst groups of low level or infrequent shoppers.

8.2.3 Exploring Favourite Garments

As part of the exploration into ways in which shopping and owning clothes delivers a sense of wellbeing, during the wardrobe audit, the case study participants were asked to describe the garments that were their favourite(s) and how it made them feel to wear them. In total the six participants listed twelve garments/outfits. Of these only one item was something that had been recently purchased. The most common attribute of favourite garments was an aspect of versatility:

> I *also love my little black dress as it's perfect for any occasion – Kim*
>
> *It fits great and I've worn it for a lot of different occasions - Rachel*
>
> *Classic black trousers, they fit well and I can wear them just about anywhere – Pam*
>
> *It's smart but comfortable, can be dressed up or down – Lucy*
>
> *It's comfortable and can be dressed up or down according to the occasion – Jackie*
>
> *They are my go-to outfits that can make me feel good for all sorts of occasions - Amy*

Whilst versatility may appear to be a practical attribute of clothing- the ability for a garment to be used in many situations, the way that the participants describe versatility suggests deeper, more complex emotional and social connotations.

> *It is gorgeous, it fits great and I've worn it for a lot of different occasions. It was the first jumpsuit I'd ever worn and it felt stylish and exciting to wear something different. I always get lots of compliments when I wear it so makes me feel good – Rachel*
>
> *It's a navy dress from Whistles which is a nice brand, and it's smart but comfortable, can be dressed up or down. I always feel confident when I wear it, I've worn it for an interview but also for going out - Lucy*

For these participants versatility is not just a matter of a garment being practically suited to multiple situations. The garment is adaptable because it is perceived as appropriate within different social contexts and acceptable to different audiences. These 'favourite' items deliver a greater degree of confidence for the wearer because they have already been favourably appraised by an audience. This past validation leads the wearer to feel confident that they will be well received when they wear the garment in the future which lends a certain amount of reliability to the garment. For Rachel this confidence comes from the perceived novel and stylish nature of her favourite jumpsuit combined with the compliments she has received when wearing it. For Lucy the fact that she feels smart and she perceives that the dress carries an aspirational brand provides her with a sense of confidence when she wears the garment in different situations.

This finding has similarity with the findings of O'Cass (2001) whereby high self-monitors, defined as those most inclined to adapt their self-presentation for the purpose of social appropriateness (Snyder 1974), showed little involvement with the physical or aesthetic attributes of clothing but were highly involved with the ability of clothing to elicit social approval.

It is notable that just one of the twelve favourite garments/outfits listed were new. Potentially this indicates that an individual's trust in clothing to convey an appropriate image is commonly established via the experience of wearing a garment. Yet if the aim of an outfit is to look right and the participants' favoured garments are tried and tested in this respect, it seems paradoxical that the same individuals

shop so frequently for new clothes. This contradiction is compounded by evidence within the data which illustrates a lack of ability to pre-empt the type of garments that deliver greater versatility and confidence across a range of social situations:

> *there can be times where I will go out and I will anything that will take my eye, I could buy four or five different clothing items and maybe one or two will turn out to be favourites and the others are hardly worn – Donna*

Donna's experience appears to show that she is unable to specifically identify what it is that makes a garment versatile and appropriate. Her experience doesn't create any 'fashion literacy' or learning, so she is not anticipating what factors to look for when she shops again. If this is typical then it may be contributory to frequent clothes shopping as individuals repeatedly buy unsuccessfully searching for garments that will become favourites.

Naomi's comment below highlights that some directed searches can end in disappointment:

> *sometimes I get a bit obsessed about getting things. If I've seen it in a shop previously or seen it on line or in a magazine, I will obsess about it and sometimes until I've got it but then it doesn't really live up to how you thought it would look or how much you'd wear it – Naomi*

It seems clear that Naomi had an expectation about the satisfaction that a garment can deliver, however it is not apparent how these expectations were formed and whether she was overestimating or being unrealistic about the experience of owning the garment. Dissatisfaction with purchases is likely to restart the cycle of search and purchase yet again.

In some instances, the feeling of something being appropriate or inappropriate comes only after the purchase has had validation from external peers:

> *I might buy something and think it looks okay then one of my daughters will say "I'm not sure mom, I think maybe don't wear it with that" which probably means I shouldn't wear it at all and then it puts me off – Olivia*

> *I just think wow that's really lovely, tried it on, it looks great, so I've got to have it then when you wear it if someone say's "that's a nice top" or something or your partner might say you look nice, then you feel like you made the right choice - Ruby*

It therefore appears to be accepted that purchasing a new garment comes with an associated risk that it may not become a favourite item, could possibly be little worn and may not be appraised favourably

by some audiences. Yet even under these circumstances and already having favourite garments that provide the confidence of looking right, frequent shoppers continue to buy clothing.

One might assume that individuals continue to shop for clothes because it is, for most, a pleasurable experience. This may be true to some extent as the chapter to follow contains much evidence for the enjoyment of shopping for clothes. Alternatively the desire to continue to acquire clothing may be due to the feeling that social approval is fluid and even favourite garments, reliably appraised by audiences in the past may fall out of fashion as newer alternatives become available.

8.2.4 Summary

The relationship between appearance, clothing choice and self-identity is well documented within the extant literature (Auty and Elliott 1998; Davis 1994; McCracken and Roth 1989; Miller 2013). This section has added to the discussion by evidencing the relationship between clothes shopping behaviour and identity. For frequent clothes shoppers the data reveals that it is not just what they wear but the amount that they shop and their ability to keep up with trends which has become part of the extended self (Belk 1988). For some frequent clothes shoppers the ability to afford to shop, engage in shopping as a social activity, keep up with trends, or treat themselves, has become part of who they perceive they are. Consequently they construct and maintain their behaviour to be congruent with this image even when they are aware of the potential ethical harms associated with low cost clothing. The participants are shown to achieve self-esteem and confidence via the notion that they look 'right' in the eyes of affiliate groups. This is reflected in their choices of favourite garments which are frequently related to having received favourable judgement from others. The elements of looking 'right' are closely linked to the topics covered within the findings related to the SI theories of fashion whereby social capital is earned via the perception of being stylish. Since being stylish is often associated with incorporating aspects of new fashions, the feeling of 'looking right' is often transient and dependent on regularly updating one's clothing. The maintenance of a stylish self-

image is associated with frequently updating style of dress which requires shopping for new garments therefore contributing to the overconsumption of clothing.

8.3 Hedonic Shopping Motivations

It has been said that the emotional and experiential pleasure of shopping is such that "people buy so they can shop, not shop so they can buy" Langrehr (1991:428). This section describes the findings in relation to evidence for the hedonic motivations for frequent clothes shopping. Aspects of pleasure include the sense of escape, the hedonic value of acquiring material possessions and the excitement of impulse purchasing and hunting for bargains. The findings explore the role of shopping as a social and leisure activity and the chapter proceeds to consider evidence regarding the attitudes of frequent clothes shoppers towards substituting the shopping experience for alternative pursuits.

8.3.1 A Sense of Escape and Achievement

Much has been written about various ways that shopping provides pleasure for many people (Arnold and Reynolds 2003; Babin, Darden and Griffin 1994; Bäckström 2011; Guiry and Lutz 2000). Within the data there is a great deal of support for the notion that frequent fashion shoppers engage in shopping as a leisure pursuit and enjoy many different aspects of the experience. The data also highlights a range of emotions that are evoked by both the prospect and the act of shopping for clothes (Machleit and Eroglu 2000). The concept of shopping as an adventure (Arnold and Reynolds 2003) is supported by descriptions of anticipation and excitement :

> *it's a thrill isn't it when you shop, it is for me anyway – Amy*
>
> *I call her my danger partner, because when we shop together we're a bit naughty – Donna*
>
> *I usually feel a little bit excited, full of adrenaline and just thinking mmm what am I going to find? - Olivia*

There is also evidence to support feelings of escapism but rather than the aspects of fantasy and entering another world (Arnold and Reynolds 2003; Hirschman and Holbrook 1982), the accounts of escape tend to involve elements of compensatory consumption (Woodruffe 1997) in escaping from daily responsibilities and routines :

> *I'm a busy working mum and it's just an escape to feel like me again for a couple of hours – Anna*
>
> *I think it's a break away from reality of work and life for a few minutes – Kim*
>
> *It's an escape for me, some time on my own, away from the children – Beth*

In addition individuals report gaining pleasure from browsing or 'scouting' behaviour both in store and online (Bäckström 2011; Sherry 1990). The notion of scouting within shopping has been associated with the imagining of 'possible selves' (Markus and Nurius 1986) which motivates buying behaviour as consumers are driven to acquire products associated with a desired version of themselves:

> *Yes I do have quite a lot of thought processes about what look I want to achieve myself….. I first of all focus on the colour, that's my priority really, what colours are around and what do I feel I want to wear, the choosing is a nice part – Yvonne*
>
> *I enjoy it (shopping) the most when I've got a very rough idea but I've got time to browse and absorb and I guess be inspired by what's around – Karen*
>
> *I do love deciding what to buy and I will obsess about it, as you do. There's various apps that I've got on my computer and it's like style fruits and something like that…… they put outfits together, so that's where I tend to get a lot of my ideas – Naomi*

The comments above by Karen and Naomi also reflect aspects of 'idea shopping' (Arnold and Reynolds 2003) whereby browsing is used to gain inspiration regarding what to buy. Browsing as a means of gaining fashion insight is also described by Kim:

> *If I'm just browsing for inspiration I do quite like to look on ASOS and things like that because I think they are quite high trend setters or have a look at the mannequins in the windows of Top Shop, Miss Selfridge, River Island, I love doing that…. I never buy from ASOS because I don't find it very good quality for their price but I like to look at the latest trends and they do seem to get things first….You see trends coming in and out every week almost and I wonder what's coming next - Kim*

Kim's comments above could possibly suggest that she is a fashion opinion leader as this group of shoppers are predisposed to find the act of browsing pleasurable in itself (Bloch and Richins 1983) and find the experience of perusing fashion more entertaining and stimulating than fashion followers (Workman and Studak 2007). Aside from Kim's experience there was little description of individuals gaining pleasure or a sense of escape simply from reviewing the latest styles. Whereas Kim appears to find some enjoyment purely in observing the direction of fashion, more commonly the comments reveal that the pleasure in browsing is linked with the goal of finding and acquiring the 'right' garment.

> *It (shopping) makes me happy, obviously if I find the perfect outfit – Amy*
>
> *It makes it feel like a treat when I've got something new to wear at the end of it – Pam*
>
> *I think it make me happiest when I've seen something I like and I've bought it, it's mine - Joanne*
>
> *Though I'm browsing I tend to be looking for something specific and I'd feel great if I got that exact thing, but if I feel that I've had to compromise, it's not quite what I want then I guess I don't feel as happy- Violet*

The above could be viewed as examples of the way that the shopping experience provides pleasure from a sense of achievement in finding a desirable item (Bäckström 2011) or completing the shopping mission (Guiry and Lutz 2000) by demonstrating a mastery of the situation (Prus and Dawson 1991). Shopping for clothes appears to bring particular pleasure when the garment acquired is perceived to be good value or 'a bargain'. This seems to increase the excitement of browsing (Arnold and Reynolds 2003; Babin, Darden and Griffin 1994; Sherry 1990) and the sense of personal achievement from cleverly locating best value:

> *If I bought something that I like, it does make me feel happy and if it's on sale and that's a bargain, it makes it even happier ….. if I get something cheaper than normally at their full price, it's a better buy – Eva*
>
> *I love TK Maxx …you can get lots of bargains and designer kind of stuff but not the price tag attached…I think if you shop wisely you can buy high level branded stuff at cheaper prices if you buy cleverly on line looking for discounts and you can buy really lovely things from the likes of Marks & Spencers that you know are going to last with not high price tags – Sally*
>
> *the reason that I shop in the sale is different from buying full price it's the feeling that I've got a bargain, it might not be exactly what I'd choose but I'm happy with it because it's good value, a clever choice - Violet*

Violet's comment above indicates that she is willing to settle for something that represents a lesser garment if it comes at a reduced price. This suggests that buying for a lower price, regardless of its complete suitability is a powerful driver to overconsume.

8.3.2 Leisure, Browsing and Impulse Purchasing

There is some indication that the browsing type of shopping that is associated with escape more frequently results in an impulse purchase compared to a shopping event where the individual has a specific garment in mind.

> *I pop into town and I'll just nip in to like New Look or something to see what's there and I'm like oh I'll just get the top – Grace*
>
> *I do pop in and kind of browse and only occasionally pick something up, but when I do then it tends to be oh I need to go and get this, and I like that and this and this – Maria*
>
> *I'm just walking around, having a mooch and I see something, then I might be drawn to it – Wendy*
>
> *It just seems to happen naturally …I'm somewhere shopping and there's some clothes and I have a look and spot something I want to buy - Ursula*

The pleasurable social aspects of the shopping experience are also evidenced within the data. For some occasions shopping is presented as a leisurely social event mainly for the purpose of entertainment (Bäckström 2011):

> *I've got two girlfriends and we always go shopping together, but it's not really shopping. We have a cup of coffee and a piece of cake … it's an escape really, having a chat and looking at the clothes– Anna*
>
> *I only like shopping with friends if there's lunch involved. If I'm after buying something I would prefer to go on my own, when I go shopping with friends it's just about spending the time together and having a look at what's around - Isla*

However, for others, whilst the social experience is enjoyable there is also reference to the experience being enhanced by the acquisition of clothing

> *if we (my friend and I) have got a free day we will just go right we're going shopping…we've got a little routine where we go round Merry Hill in the same pattern. We visit the same shops in the same order every time and we have lunch…. I enjoy it for the day out because we usually giggle because we do silly stuff, unintended silly stuff, but it's just fun I suppose and obviously we get to buy new clothes – Donna*

> *You see if I go with my friend, we go first think in the morning and we shop and then we have a coffee, then we do a bit more shopping and then we have lunch and we chat then we do a bit more shopping and then we come back, so it is a whole day, it's not just the buying clothes it's a social thing as well – Cathy*

Pamela felt that there was an expectation that a social shopping trip should result in a purchase

> *Pam -I do shop with friends, we would normally go for a walk but if the weather is bad then we might go round the shops, that's probably when I make most of the impulse purchases because you can't really spend the day round the shops and not buy anything.*
> *Natalie- Why do you need to buy something?*
> *Pam- Because it seems silly if you've spent all that time looking. What for? ..and if I said I wasn't going to buy then M. would probably feel like she shouldn't buy anything either and I wouldn't want to stop her from getting something*

Whilst it is a single incident, the comment above reveals that browsing clothes purely for pleasure may not be viewed by some as an acceptable leisure pursuit unless it fulfils the purpose of acquiring a garment. If this opinion is widespread then it may result in overconsumption in order to legitimise social shopping behaviour. A number of individuals described how they sometimes preferred to shop alone as they recognised that shopping with others is accompanied by a tendency to buy things that they do not really want:

> *sometimes I'm just looking, sometimes I fly in and I know what I want and I'm looking for something in particular. Whereas if you're with somebody else, there's a lot more browsing involved and they influence you and you're more likely to pick up something you didn't even go for and that's not what I would really do at the moment, pick things up randomly – Helen*

> *On my own. Going with friends, you get coaxed into buying things you wouldn't normally buy I would say – Naomi*

> *I tend to shop on my own really. I find I don't make as many silly purchases as if I shop with other people. If I'm on my own, I know what I want and I just go straight and get it - Rachel*

The comments above may imply that the engagement with shopping as a social leisure pursuit has

the potential to encourage the overconsumption of clothing. Others described a preference for shopping alone when they were short if time and/or wanted to acquire something specific:

> *Shopping with friends can be nice but if I know what I want, I'm on a mission for something it's easier to go on your own – Grace*

> *whereas when you're on your own I know exactly what I want, I go in, it try it on and that's it. So it's more functional shopping - Ruby*

Some of the enjoyment of shopping with others is also seen to come from the element of consultancy, sharing opinions and ideas in a joint effort to find desirable items (Bäckström 2011)

> *If it's for a special occasion and I need time to make sure I'm getting the right outfit, then I'd prefer to go with my mom for example- Ursula*

> *You get the chance to show them the potential things that you might buy and get their view and see what they think about what you're putting on and whether it suits you – Sally*

> *I usually go with my husband or my daughter will come, because it's nice to have someone to say oh yea that does look ok ….it's not insecurity but it's just nice to have someone there to give you a second opinion really - Jackie*

In the instances above, however, rather than encouraging impulse purchases, shopping with others may be seen to result in more considered choices that might possibly bring greater satisfaction and be less readily discarded.

From the data, the predominant opinion is that garments bought on impulse, either alone or as part of a social shopping trip tend to be the most likely to remain unworn or regarded, post purchase as 'mistakes'

> *Natalie: Have you ever bought clothes on impulse that have ended up not being worn?*
> *Eva: Yea, plenty of times, much more than if I've thought about what to buy - Eva*

> *So impulse buys, yea just thinking of my wardrobe now, all of those types of purchases I rarely wear them and those tend to be the things that after six months I chuck out or give away to charity – Fay*

> *Yes because the impulse buys, I get home and I'm like I won't wear that or that's not even going to go with anything else – Grace*

> *I bought an impulse top last week from TK Maxx and just thought I needed it and felt like I needed to just buy something and bought it and then got home and thought why have I bought this, I didn't need this, it's another stripy tee shirt top - Sally*

In terms of its contribution to overconsumption, impulse purchasing appears to add significantly to the volume of clothing acquired. Although browsing may be shopping with an intention to buy something the suggestion that individuals do not know specifically what they are looking for may indicate that this type of shopping is hedonically rather than materialistically motivated (Hausman 2000). If this is the case then it may be suggested that, individuals could more readily substitute this type of perusing shopping experience for another leisure pursuit compared to the 'mission' focused shopping trip aimed at acquiring a specific outfit or garment. The attitudes of frequent shoppers towards substituting shopping for other experiences is discussed later in this chapter.

8.3.3 Negative Experiences

Although the vast majority of descriptions of the frequent fashion shoppers' experiences were positive, they were able to recall negative aspects of clothes buying so supporting the notion that shopping may be simultaneously considered as both recreational and laborious (Babin, Darden and Griffin 1994; Prus and Dawson 1991). Negative elements were varied and included frustrations with sizing, budget constraints preventing the 'ideal' choice, disappointment with the way one looks in the garments selected and messy stores making it difficult or more time consuming to make selections.

> *I think sometimes if you're not in the right frame of mind and you can't find what you want or I think sometimes and money is sometimes an issue isn't it. If you go and you haven't got a lot of money and you feel a bit flat when you come back cos you couldn't get what you would have really liked – Anna*
>
> *but a lot of places, because my size is so difficult because I feel like I'm different sizes in different stores Even when they give you the measurements it doesn't make sense and even in the same shop the same size can be completely different – Grace*
>
> *I don't enjoy shopping during the sales. I don't enjoy the time it takes to get things. Things are just all mashed together and that just makes it a bit more difficult – Fay*
>
> *I kind of hate it in there where it's kind of piled high cheap. I find that quite stressful from a shopping experience. I don't like sales and stuff.. well I like the sale bargain but don't like the sale experience - Maria*

Even though these negative elements seem very different, what they have in common is that they are barriers to finding the 'right' garment. Locating a garment which results in the anticipation and sensation of looking right is the experience often described as being associated with the 'buzz' or end goal of the shopping behaviour. Some participants described negative shopping experiences which were created by their own mood or frame of mind:

> *if you're not feeling very good about yourself and then you try something on and you look awful and it can confirm what your belief is really – Karen*

> *Just when you don't feel good about yourself and you don't want to try stuff on and you just feel miserable and then you go clothes shopping and you can't find anything that you want and that makes it worse – Helen*

In a similar way to that described in the section relating to identity, instances where an individual does not believe that the purchase of a garment will result in the feeling of looking good, this reduces the desire to shop.

It seems from the data that there are few individuals and rare occasions where browsing fashion lines without buying would be considered a truly pleasurable experience. Most appear to feel that they would leave the experience with some sense of disappointment or frustration if they could not find what they desired.

> *If I can't find what I want I tend to get really, really frustrated……When I come back with nothing, I feel what a wasted afternoon – Jackie*

> *If I haven't found what I'm looking for, then I'm depressed at the end of it (the shopping trip) – Grace*

> *If there's a function or anything like that and it's pressure to find the right thing, and I can't, that really stresses me out - Priya*

> *If I'm looking for something specific I get quite stressed if I can't find it, I get really focused on finding that perfect item and I won't veer elsewhere……..Yes, I'm really disappointed if I don't find it, in fact I just keep looking until I do (find a suitable garment) – Kim*

Notably even Kim who previously describes taking great pleasure from just browsing, details shopping occasions where she finds it stressful not to make her desired acquisition. This suggests that shopping motivations may vary by occasion and context.

The comments above may suggest that for frequent shoppers, the materialistic instinct to acquire is a more frequent motivation than hedonic pleasure seeking. From the materialistic viewpoint buying behaviour is driven by the pursuit of possessions in order to construct a self-image deemed to be perceived by others as a symbol of success (Kasser 2002; Richins and Dawson 1992). In this respect, choosing clothing in order to present the 'right' appearance to others could be construed as materialistic behaviour although it may also involve aspects of hedonistic consumption since the act of searching for the desired garment and wearing it are evident sources of pleasure.

This raises the question of the relationship between hedonic and materialistic motivations. Whilst the two might occur together, when considering the possibility of encouraging consumption reduction it is important to make a distinction between these two drivers since challenging their influence would imply different kinds of intervention. Tackling overconsumption driven by materialistic instincts may require a strategy to challenge the commonly accepted material symbols of personal and cultural success (Jackson 2005) and the definition of what constitute a 'good life' (Soper 2008). However, consumers who shop frequently for clothes primarily because they enjoy the experience may be persuaded to achieve similar pleasure from alternative experiences.

8.3.4 Substituting Shopping for Other Pleasurable Experiences

It is proposed within the extant literature that the purchase of experiences such as holidays, concerts and dining out result in greater levels of happiness than the acquisition of material possessions (Carter and Gilovich 2012; Howell, Pchelin and Iyer 2012; Tatzel 2014; Van Boven and Gilovich 2003). This implies that the experience and pleasure of shopping for clothes could be substituted for a different type of experience such a beauty treatments or days out without detriment to feelings of wellbeing.

The respondents had mixed opinions on this topic. A few were open to the suggestion:

> *materials are just materials…I buy new things I feel happy but then the happiness evaporates, it's just another thing so who cares and I feel much more a value in an experience for example eating out. Maybe not nails, not hair because I can't sit for that long but it could be about doing something with my husband, going somewhere different, that would be better than clothes, yes – Zara*

> *I think being older, you realise that actually it's more about the things that you do and the experiences that you have than the stuff that you have - Maria*

However, a more commonly expressed opinion was that different experiences would not provide the same benefits as shopping for clothes:

> *If you've got something physical, if you bought something that it's like tangible isn't it really rather than nails, because a facial you can't really see that – Naomi*

> *No it's a different kind of moment. I think it's like finding that one thing that you've been looking for that you know looks good on you and that's going to give you some pleasure every time you wear it, it's a longer pleasure opposed to instant gratification like eating something fabulous - Ruby*

> *A spa day would be lovely. But I think with things like spa days and getting nails done, they're a lot more short term, whereas with clothes they could be as often as you'd want them to be, so you've got a bit more choice with how long do you want that piece of garment to make you feel happy –Fay*

> *I think some experiences give you a bit of a boost, especially if it's like skin care or having your hair cut or something like that. But it's just a one off, that it's a rush rather than something you can keep pulling out, I think that clothing has the longevity of the fact that it makes you feel happier longer because you've got something that you can keep using - Helen*

There was however one notable illustration of the possibility that shopping trips which are not motivated by product acquisition could effectively be substituted for other experiences:

> *if I've had a really stressful day at work, I might want to head to town and get something … it used to be food for me but now it seems to have moved more towards clothes .. but then a few weeks ago we went to the cinema and that did actually make me feel a lot better because it took my mind off it for a few hours and by the time I got home, I'd got over it really and that makes more sense and it probably feels a bit more rewarding than buying something for the sake of it – Rachel*

As well as providing an example of a situation where an alternative experience was successfully substituted for a shopping trip, Rachel's comment above also illustrates the use of shopping to

alleviate negative mood (Arnold and Reynolds 2003; Woodruffe 1997). The data contains multiple examples of ways that the shopping experience is used as a means of relaxation or treat (Arnold and Reynolds 2003), to activate positive mood (Kronrod, Grinstein and Wathieu 2012) or to combat feelings of depression, dullness and anxiety (Babin, Darden and Griffin 1994; Woodruffe 1997):

> *Sometimes I shop if I'm feeling down, if I'm feeling a bit upset or just having a bad day. You think well actually I could do with a treat – Beth*
>
> *when you're in a negative Nancy kind of a mood and you're not really happy with yourself and you feel a bit miserable, sometimes the spending, the purchasing of something makes you feel better – Helen*
>
> *It's about retail therapy really isn't it because if you've had a bad day, more often than not, it's because of people or things aren't going your way and then shopping is a way of bringing some of that control back and treating yourself because you think you deserve it – Fay*

This raises the question that, if frequent clothing purchase is being used to improve a sense of emotional wellbeing then, in the interest of sustainability, is it possible to reduce consumption without detriment to perceived quality of life?

The data reveal that the prospect of shopping less frequently was generally associated with disappointment and a sense of diminished enjoyment to varying extents:

> *I do enjoy it, it's a day out for me, so I probably would feel disappointed…I don't know if it would make me actually unhappy, but I would miss it definitely – Cathy*
>
> *if I was going to shop less, it would be a bit of a shame. I wouldn't cry about it but it would make me feel a bit you know..I'd probably feel like I'd missed out but no less confident or less happy – Eva*
>
> *I don't think I'd miss out as long as I didn't look because I don't see what's out there really unless I sit down online and browse, but I would probably miss the browsing - Joanne*
>
> *I think I'd feel less good about myself at times, not all the time but at times. If I was going somewhere and I couldn't buy something new or something that I was happy with and yea I do think that would affect the way I felt about going out that day. Not necessarily my entire happiness – Karen*
>
> *I'd feel like I was missing out on my treat. ..I'd really struggle. There are times when I've said to myself right you need to save some money, don't shop for like two weeks and it made me miserable and I had to just go and shop – Kim*

The substitution of buying new clothes for pre-owned clothes is a potential avenue to make clothes

shopping more sustainable without sacrificing the pleasure of the frequent shopping experience. Opinions and experiences associated with buying second hand clothing have not been widely explored within this thesis however the topic did arise within some of the interviews.

> *I have a friend who is really clever at picking things out (at second hand clothing stores) but that's her style, kind of quirky. It's not me I wouldn't feel comfortable in second hand clothing… I just don't like the thought that someone else has worn it – Priya*
>
> *Some people do that vintage thing really well, but it's quite a distinctive look. I don't really like it to be honest, not for me anyway. I like to be wearing the latest stuff - Naomi*
>
> *I buy dresses and hats mainly (from second hand shops) but I wouldn't go there for day to day stuff … like if you want a blue t-shirt you buy a new blue t-shirt – you don't go to a charity shop and hope that you might find a blue t-shirt – Isla*

Although the few comments above are insufficient to fully unpick attitudes towards the acquisition of second hand clothing they allude to a belief by some that choosing used clothing is linked with a particular 'quirky' or 'distinctive' look that is outside the comfortable self-image of the frequent fashion shopper. The comment by Isla also raises the suggestion that acquiring second hand clothing is less convenient that choosing new garments. There is some evidence that the market for second hand clothing appears to be evolving to better mimic the experience of shopping for new garments (Ferraro, Sands and Brace-Govan 2016) for example the Oxfam online clothes shop.

Although the findings reveal an element of resistance to the notion of shopping less often, some of the respondents acknowledged that it may be feasible to shop just as frequently but to acquire fewer garments without perceived detriment to wellbeing:

> *I think that's tricky because you don't need all those clothes, but I think you get a bit of an adrenaline rush from buying something, I do anyway. You might buy quite a few items and you get that temporary high but sporadically I might buy something that I think is great and I'll feel just as good with that one thing as I would with lots of things – Sally*
>
> *I have two friends that love to shop, so the three of us go and we enjoy it and that's the same whether we end up with bag-fulls or one thing – Anna*
>
> *It's the going shopping I'd miss. I don't know whether I'd necessarily miss out on having the clothes, I'd miss the feeling that you get, it's the buzz, with anything really, it's that buzz of buying something or one thing and not necessarily loads of clothes - Naomi*

If the same amount of satisfaction can be achieved from shopping as frequently but reducing the number of garments consumed then this implies that a situation of double dividend (Jackson 2005) may be achievable where consumers buy less without feeling less happy. This is evidenced in Cathy's comment below:

> *If I came home with two tops instead of four tops then it really wouldn't make any difference. I probably only bought the four tops because I could. If I couldn't afford it then I'd have to make a decision between them but I'd still be happy that I'd got two new tops – Cathy*

Similar remarks suggest that other frequent shoppers agree that buying fewer garments would not be detrimental to their personal happiness but this is dependent on the condition that other people also adjust their clothes shopping behaviour:

> *If I was the only one who wasn't buying new stuff and everyone else was coming out in new clothes then I would feel bad, like I didn't look fashionable enough. But if everyone agreed that we were just going to keep wearing the same things and we all did the same, to save money or save the planet or whatever, then I don't think that I would miss the actual shopping- Grace*
>
> *It might actually be quite nice, take the pressure off if we said, right the dress code is that you have to wear something you've worn before, like your favourite thing you have. Then you'd all be doing the same and you'd know that there wouldn't be anyone thinking … well she didn't bother to get something new - Donna*
>
> *I know in my heart of hearts that I wouldn't be like really sad if I didn't buy as many clothes, I guess I just do it because I can and you get swept up in having something new because everyone else does and you don't want to be the frumpy one - Helen*

The comments above illustrate how frequent shoppers acknowledge that they would probably feel as happy with fewer garments provided that they believed that their purchasing patterns and style of dress were in step with their peers.

8.3.5 Summary

Participants use words such as 'thrill,' 'buzz,' 'excitement' and 'adrenaline' to describe the gratification that they receive from shopping experiences. Words such as these may be indicative of hyper

stimulation which is also associated with addiction (Hartston 2012) and the irresistible impulse to shop linked with compulsive buying (Benson and Eisenach 2013). Those who experience these sorts of emotions as a result of shopping for clothes are therefore likely to repeat the experience more often. The strength of the pleasurable feelings associated with shopping for clothes and its seeming ability to elevate mood, compensate for a 'bad day' and treat shoppers to something special may all be reasons why individuals acquire so much clothing and were often unable to imagine that the same level of enjoyment could be derived from other experiences. If this is the case then any reduction in consumption may require a change to commonly adopted coping mechanisms to deal with the negative aspects of life (Benford and Gough 2006; Benson and Eisenach 2013) and a change in the perception of what makes people happy (Carter and Gilovich 2012; Howell, Pchelin and Iyer 2012; Soper 2007). The data indicate that although it might be common for consumers to buy so they can shop (Langrehr 1991), this does not appear to be the case for frequent clothes shoppers for whom the required outcome is heavily focused on locating and acquiring a desirable garment. Consequently shopping experiences that do not achieve this result are generally considered to be disappointing rather than entirely pleasurable. There is some acknowledgement that the perception of an enjoyable and successful clothes shopping experience is not related to volume of garments acquired, rather the suitability and desirability of the garment purchased. This provides a useful indication that frequent clothes shoppers may be persuaded to relinquish volume and throughput without detriment to wellbeing provided they are still able to achieve a sense of 'looking right'.

8.4 Normalisation of Overconsumption

From the above findings relating to the symbolic interactionist theories of fashion, identity and the hedonic value of shopping it appears that one of the benchmarks for self-evaluation centres on the ability to keep up with changing fashions in a way one believes will be perceived by others as stylish.

For frequent shoppers the concept of stylish involves the discerning acquisition of elements of the latest fashions and dressing in a way that they deem to be appropriate by considering how they evaluate the appearance of others and assuming that their affiliate groups will appraise them in the same way.

The notion that individuals look to others to inform their shopping choices bears similarity to the diffusion model of fashion (King and Ring 1980; Rogers 2010; Sproles 1985) whereby fashion innovators influence the clothes buying choices of other groups of consumers. The findings above have shown evidence that opinion leaders such as trusted retailers, peers and social media are not only influencing what to buy they are indicating to others how quickly to change their look which potentially impacts on how many garments they buy. Within the data there is evidence that the frequent shoppers receive these cues via it frequently browsing fashion ranges on and offline and by paying attention to the appearances of others whether they be peers, celebrities or total strangers.

> *If I'm early for work, I just think I've got ten minutes, I will pop in that shop, I do that whenever I'm early – Lucy*
>
> *I might be bored at home so I go on my phone and look at the apps and the websites of the shops I like – Kim*
>
> *I do pay attention to how people look, even if you're in town or something and you see someone wearing something nice you do notice - Olivia*

This constant scanning of appearances intentional and unintentional has become part of the frequent shoppers' normal practices and this is discussed in more detail in the section related to habit. When asked about the volume of clothing purchased most of the participants felt that they shopped about the same amount as other women which may indicate that they perceive their level of shopping to be consistent with the social norms (Burchell, Rettie and Patel 2013; Perkins 2002) that they experience.

> *I know that I shop quite a lot, but I don't think it's any more than other people, maybe more than someone who's not really interested in clothes but nothing excessive* – Olivia
>
> *I see people I work with who go into town at lunch time and buy clothes a few times a week so I think if anything I buy less than they do so I guess I'm about normal* – Fay

Since people have a tendency to conform to what other people do (Burchell, Rettie and Patel 2013) then challenging the current level of clothing acquisition and disposal may require pointing out to frequent clothes shoppers that their shopping habits are outside the norms of most people (Carrigan et al. 2009). However both Olivia and Fay's comments illustrate how they compare their behaviour, not to the norms of the entire population but to other groups that they perceive to share expectations over the level of clothing acquired i.e. other people at my workplace; other people who are interested in clothes. This indicates that challenging what is perceived to be a normal level of clothing consumption would require a change in the habits of the opinion leaders who establish the perceived 'normal' volume of clothing acquisition.

8.4.1 How Much Is Enough?

One of the difficulties in tackling the overconsumption of fashion clothing is defining how much is too much. Clothing choices are rarely purchased solely to serve a practical need such as warmth, instead garments are acquired to serve a range of symbolic, social or psychological needs (Deci and Ryan 2000). These motivations might include the desire to enhance one's appearance in the eyes of others (Blumer 1969b; Davis 1994), demonstrate belonging to a social group (Auty and Elliott 1998; Banister and Hogg 2004) or improve self-esteem (Harter 2000). These types of symbolic motivations are not finite in number and could potentially be limitless though they are subject to the ability to afford repeated purchasing and consumer perception of what is 'enough'.

The data reveal that some of the respondents struggled to identify a point at which they might feel that they possessed 'enough' clothing. Even those who admit that they owned many clothes did not consider that their existing volume of garments presented a reason that they might want to curb their acquisition:

Natalie - *Do you think it is ever possible to have too many clothes?*

Responses from their respective interviews:

> *Donna- If you ask my husband we might have a different answer but no I don't*
> *Naomi – No, as long as you can afford it and you've got somewhere to put it, what's the problem?*
> *Joanne - No. In my ideal world it would be nice to have whatever I saw*
> *Olivia -No. Never Ever! Why would you not want as many clothes as you could possibly have?*
> *Ruby -No I don't think you can ever have too many clothes… I could shop for clothes every day*

Under general economic theory it is assumed that the law of diminishing marginal utility applies. This proposes that as an individual consumes more and more units of a specific commodity, the utility from the successive units goes on diminishing until they reach a point of satiety (Oliver 2014). However there is little evidence within the data of a point of satiety being reached for frequent clothing purchasers. This may indicate that their sense of utility or the benefit gained from each successive purchase is perceived as worthwhile.

There was some acknowledgement that income might be a limiting factor:

> *If money was not an object I would shop all the time yes– Kim*
> *Yes, (it is possible to have too many clothes) because the spending can get dangerous – Beth*
> *If money was an endless thing, then it might be different, but I can't just keep on buying- Maria*

Others cited space or storage as a reason to limit the volume of clothing purchased:

> *Definitely (can have too many clothes). I've broken a wardrobe before, broken a rail and buckled a chest of drawers – Kim*
> *Well at the moment I can't get anything else in my wardrobe, so will have to stop buying – Jackie*
> *There's no space because I'm in a very small flat now. If you asked me this last year you might have got a different answer, but right now yes there is a situation of too many clothes – Lucy*

Therefore whilst the participants described few limitations to their desire to acquire high volumes of clothing they acknowledged that there are some practical constraints on the amount they buy.

8.4.2 Observations From The Wardrobe Audit

Upon describing their existing wardrobes, many of the participants reported wardrobes packed with clothing. The wardrobe audit that was carried out with the six case study participants revealed garment numbers of up to 313 items. A summary of the number of garments is shown within figure

10. Whilst averages may be misleading and open to debate, as a comparison, a survey for the Daily Mail found that the average woman had 103 items in their wardrobe (Daily Mail 2016), making the totals definitely higher than average for four of the group, significantly so in the case of Kim, and possibly higher than average for Amy and Rachel whose audit does not include seasonal clothes stored away.

Figure 10.

Summary of Wardrobe Audit

From a self administered count of garments by six case study participants

	How many garments (or pairs for footwear)					
	Kim	**Lucy**	**Pam**	**Jackie**	**Amy***	**Rachel***
Trousers	25	4	17	12	3	4
Jeans	10	9	6	3	3	2
Shorts	12	0	3	2	3	0
Skirts	8	11	3	19	7	5
Dresses / jumpsuits	90	64	12	36	10	20
Tops and T-Shirts	110	97	56	52	20	32
Jumpers and Cardigans	12	35	35	15	20	8
Coats and Jackets	25	7	18	7	5	4
Shoes and Boots	21	30	17	11	10	9
Total Items	**313**	**257**	**167**	**157**	**81***	**84***

* Partial count as seasonal clothes stored away

When discussing what was in their wardrobe and comparing that with the number of garments that were counted in the audit, it became clear that it was not unusual for, the participants to lose track of what is in their wardrobe.

> *If I shopped less often it would make me appreciate what I've got in the wardrobe more and maybe use what I've got more. It's like the old syndrome when you want to empty your freezer, you make all your freezer teas and you think oh I've really enjoyed that. So really perhaps I ought to look at what I've got before I start to think about looking for something else.- Jackie*

Jackie appears to find some satisfaction in being able to find something forgotten or surprising in her wardrobe

> *Sometimes I don't know where to start looking for them but it's nice to have a lot of choice really, but you always tend to stick to the same old ones at the front even when you've got a wardrobe full and you go back and you think I've never worn that and I don't wear that very often – Ursula*

> *I find that because I'm always rushing in the morning and I'm not very good in the morning I think the harder it is to make a decision I grab the nearest because too much stuff, it kind of puddles me – Maria*

Ursula and Maria are struggling to cope with what is and is not visible, so there is a structural confusion or invisibility being created by the sheer volume

> *My wardrobe is full so everything that's winter is stored in a specific place and then I swap it sort of half way through the year for the summer stuff and things like that, sometimes it's tricky Autumn and Spring to have the right stuff to hand - Rachel*

Rachel has coping mechanisms to manage her volume in a way that allows her to deal with the quantity.

None of the participants specifically cited unawareness of what they owned or being disinclined to review the contents of their current wardrobe as a reason for going out and buying more. This is not surprising since they may feel that this would reflect badly on them. Excessive material possessions is seen by some to have general connotations of greed, wastefulness or a lack of appreciation for what they have (Shrum and Lowrey 2014). Given that many of the participants described themselves as 'busy' people, their comments may indicate that a new purchase would provide a low effort, convenient and time efficient means of choosing what to wear compared to selecting from their existing array of garments. There is some support for this notion within the data

> *..if I found out in the day that I was going out that evening, I'd definitely buy something new at lunch time or on the way home because I want to feel good but I wouldn't have time to go through all the stuff I have - Lucy*

> *When you buy something new, it's kind of a guarantee that it's up to date because it's new- it saves you having to think about does this outfit still look good - Fay*

The comments above highlight that, in some instances buying something new provides a shortcut to looking good. This may present another reason for overconsumption which has some parallels with the issue of food wastage where consumers have been shown to buy more because they find that easier than working with what they already have (Evans 2012).

Further remarks indicate that online shopping facilitates buying of a new garment as a rapid and low effort means of feeling stylish

> *When I go out with that group I always buy something new, it's just easier, and I know the websites that will have the right thing, like ASOS, and then it comes the next day - Wendy*
>
> *You don't really need to worry, you just go click click and then the stuff is delivered, well ..it might not fit but most of the time it's the easiest way if I want to look good on a night out or for the weekend or something – Sally*

The observations above illustrate that some frequent clothes shoppers consider that the most convenient route to looking right is to acquire something new. This notion is likely to result in them buying more garments rather then re-wearing the clothing that they already own.

8.4.3 Materialistic Values

The seemingly insatiable appetite for new clothing amongst some frequent fashion shoppers may be considered to be an indication of materialism. Materialistic individuals tend to judge their own success and the status of others by the number and type of possessions accumulated (Kasser and Ahuvia 2002a; Richins and Dawson 1992). The traditional view of materialism has often been associated with the acquisition of status symbols such as designer labels which signal social standing (Grubb and Grathwohl 1967; Shrum and Lowrey 2014). The data shows little evidence of this type of conspicuous consumption (Veblen 2005) in terms of brands or labels whose price is used as a means of ostentatiously displaying wealth in order to gain in social status (Mason 1992):

I have this thing of not buying designer clothes. So even with all the money in the world, I would still shop on the High Street - Fay

..even if I'd won the lottery, I wouldn't particularly think oh I'll go off to Armani- Isla

if someone said to me ooh where did you get your top from and it was from Primark, I'd be really happy to say I got it from Primark for a fiver, like I wouldn't care what people thought of it as long I felt like it looked good – Kim

The only thing I'd get a label on is a pair of sunglasses, but nothing else. I like nice clothes but I'm quite happy to go to Primark. As long as things look what I think looks nice it's fine yeah I'm not a designer label person at all – Karen

Karen's comment is interesting since, when it comes to designer labels, she treats sunglasses in a different way to clothing. The data does not include further investigation of why this may be the case but possible reasons may be that sunglasses hold a different kind of symbolic value or represent a more expensive purchase that is anticipated to last for at least one fashion season compared to the shorter life anticipated for an item of clothing.

Ursula's comment below is also worthy of note

I hadn't used to be like that, when it was the fashion, I would save up for better quality or a designer label like a Lacoste polo shirt or something like that and then I'd wear it every day and feel really proud of it, but I guess that's the 80's for you. Now I'd rather go and choose something new every couple of weeks… I think that you realise that the label isn't worth paying for and I don't think that it would be acceptable now to wear the same thing over and over - Ursula

Ursula has experienced a shift in the symbolic value of designer label describing how a brand name worn multiple times, once a source of pride has now been de-valued. The new accepted behaviour is that garments are not worn 'over and over' again. The lack of evidence of conspicuous consumption does not necessarily indicate that frequent fashion shoppers are not materialistic. Rather, lower priced clothes facilitate overconsumption which provides an alternative means of gaining status. As discussed previously within the findings related to clothes shopping and identity, for many of the frequent shoppers the drive to acquire clothing stems from a desire to look 'right' in the eyes of others. The findings have revealed that whether or not a person believes that a particular product is 'right for them' will depend on how they consider its social meaning will be interpreted by their affiliated groups

(Auty and Elliott 1998; Banister and Hogg 2004) alongside their individual choice of how to respond to the perceived social conventions (Blumer 1969a; Davis 1994; Stone 1962).

Therefore, whilst these shoppers are not engaging in conspicuous consumption which aims to elevate social status via a display of wealth, they appear to be engaged in status consumption whereby they use their purchase decisions to gain recognition or approval from others (Mason 1992; O'Cass and McEwen 2004) via the concept of remaining stylish.

Using the interpretation of materialism which has been adopted by this study, guided by the description of Richins and Dawson (1992), the findings demonstrate that frequent female fashion shoppers are materialistic when it comes to garments. They view clothing as an indication of the social status of themselves and others; the acquisition of clothing is central to their leisure time and the acquisition of the 'right' garment serves as a goal as well as being experienced as an essential part of looking and feeling right. However under the contrasting view expressed by Schor (2010) and Schor and Thompson (2014) 'true materialists' are deeply concerned with physical product attributes such as the texture, feel and longevity of garments. Therefore whilst the findings have revealed frequent fashion shoppers to be materialistic under the Richins and Dawson (1991) definition, they are certainly not 'true materialists' as described by Schor (2010) when it comes to clothing.

Materialism has been associated with both positive and negative outcomes in terms of wellbeing (Shrum and Lowrey 2014; Sirgy et al. 2013). The positive impact of clothes shopping on wellbeing including feelings of pleasure and reward, elevating mood and the social experience have been discussed earlier. It is not the intent of this study to provide an in-depth analysis of the personal and social impact of materialism however various concerns regarding the materialistic nature of current behaviour patterns were described during the interviews. Participants frequently described regret over unworn or little worn items which represent money wasted:

> *Sometimes I will buy things just for the sake of it because it's cheap and I think it's a good bargain and it probably isn't because I don't wear it, so I think I should stop doing that really – Donna*

I think I'm more careful since having the children, before that I was terrible, my money was my money, I could waste it. I would have clothes that I'd never even worn with the labels still on that were in my wardrobe - Grace

my wardrobe is full and yet there's only probably a handful of the clothes in there that I actually wear. There's some with labels on that I've never even worn, it's a waste - Violet

I'm quite ashamed of it actually, the amount of money that I would spend on clothes shopping in my twenties, I think about all the money I spent and I think crikey we could have paid a second mortgage with that – Karen

Other respondents appeared conscious that materialistic behaviour could be perceived as superficial and had the potential to reflect negatively on themselves:

it's a thrill isn't it when you shop. I sound very vacuous……..But I will spend quite a few weeks putting outfits together and……er I do sound really stupid don't I? – Amy

I used to be terrible, just sit at night and just ordering things, but now I've stopped because it's ridiculous behaviour, it's just silly of me – Joanne

How bad am I? (laughing) That's really consumerism at its worse isn't it? Makes me sound so superficial- Naomi

The above comments illustrate the complexity of participant opinions towards the volume of clothing that they acquire. Whilst celebrating and enjoying fashion there is a suggestion that waste can inspire feelings of shame and guilt and a belief that spending too much time focusing on clothes and appearance is a negative trait that would be seen as superficial in the eyes of others. Within the data there is little indication that these considerations have effectively altered shopping the participants' shopping patterns, however the evidence that they recognise these issues may be something that could be leveraged when considering interventions for behaviour change.

8.4.4 Awareness of Ethical and Social Issues

It is suggested within the literature that materialistic concerns and self-interest come at the expense of community goals (Kilbourne and Pickett 2008; Polonsky, Kilbourne and Vocino 2014). The data contain some evidence of recognition that the materialistic preoccupation with how one is seen by

others has potentially damaging consequences. This opinion was particularly strong when considering the impacts on younger, more impressionable groups:

> *..especially because of having a daughter who is very much getting concerned with appearances at the moment…I would say life is a lot more image conscious than it was when I was younger definitely..I think there's huge pressures to conform to an ideal for people– Naomi*

> *But I definitely think it can get to levels of obsessive and I think it's really pushed in your face as a teenager especially, that you've got to be conscious about the way you look especially at that age when you're quite sensitive to things, I think that's probably not the right message to give out….It can give people quite a negative image of themselves if they don't fit in – Rachel*

> *I think especially with social media and that is in your face all the time, whereas before you wouldn't know how celebrities were dressing or how celebrity's children were dressing and I think now you see it constantly all the time with peoples pictures on Facebook or Instagram and so I do think people are more obsessed by it – Lucy*

In addition to expressing concern over the potential harms associated with a pre-occupation with appearance, the above comments highlight the ways in which this is perceived to be entrenched in the daily lives of some people. Both Lucy and Rachel describe the way that appearance related messages are communicated as 'in your face' suggesting that they are sometimes unwanted yet unavoidable. This suggests that changing behaviour in favour of consumption reduction may encounter difficulties in overcoming the ubiquitous nature of appearance related communications. However if concerns about the impact of a preoccupation with appearance are widespread then this may bode well for any strategies aimed at achieving consumption reduction since disrupting the link between having the latest fashions and self-esteem may be accepted by some as an improvement to wellbeing, particularly amongst young people.

When considering whether to resist or conform to consumption norms two of the participants revealed mixed values when describing clothing choices for their children:

> *When I was young, you could have that individuality, but now as an individual, you tend to get talked about or you can be bullied can't you. My one son isn't fashionable, and I find myself encouraging him to be a bit more trendy. I'm worried he will be outcast but you know I do think these days there's a lot more pressure to be a clone of your friends – Anna*

shopping for my son is different and again what I was saying about the media side and influencing young people, even though I'm against it, I will buy him clothes that I think will help him fit in with his friends and help him follow fashion. He isn't asking for that to fit in, but as a parent I'm trying to help him fit in and buy him clothes that I see young lads wearing, but I know I'm perpetuating the whole obsession with appearance thing - Violet

Both Anna and Violet hold ideals that people should be able to have an individual style without feeling pressurised to look a certain way, yet they encourage their sons to conform to the social norms of dress for fear that the boys may otherwise be subject to negative reaction by their peers. Such comments support the view of Cushman (1990) who asserts that consuming to fill an empty self, lacking in sense of community, and fulfilment, can cause such a confusion in values (Cushman 1990). There is similar evidence of conflicted values within the participants' descriptions of their attitudes towards the ethical concerns surrounding fast fashion:

I'll be honest, I am aware of the ethical issues and it does bother me, but when I do buy clothing it doesn't come into my mind, I know it should – Eva

I try to be considerate but it's not as prevalent in my mind and if I'm just low on funds and I need to go somewhere cheap and then afterwards I will think about it and it will make me feel sad - Rachel

a couple of years ago when the Primark thing was really rife ..I think I kind of probably even boycotted places like that for a while, but you naturally fall back into the habit of it yeah, I can always get what I need at Primark – Helen

I am aware and I know it's awful but I don't really think about it (ethical considerations) when I'm shopping - Kim

The above comments express unease amongst the participants over the ethical issues associated with low cost fashion but they all prioritise their own clothes shopping habits ahead of these concerns. This may be viewed as a confusion in values (Cushman 1990), or as evidence of the trait of self-centredness which has been associated with materialism (Belk 1985; Richins and Dawson 1992).

Whilst the data may contain examples of values confusion, other features of Cushman's empty-self such as low self-esteem and compulsive buying are less well supported within the data. One might argue that the fact that the participants frequently buy clothes, primarily to look right and achieve a sense of social confidence demonstrates that these people are compulsive buyers with low self-

esteem, but that is certainly not how they view themselves. The participants see themselves as in control of their clothes shopping behaviour and their engagement in browsing and shopping for clothes is a mainly enjoyable activity:

> *I do enjoy it (clothes shopping) but it's not that important in the greater scheme of things maybe some people can get wrapped up in their appearance, but not me personally, it's more of a nice to have than a got to have – Maria*
>
> *I like to look after myself and I think it's nice to see somebody looking after themselves and taking care in how they are presented, but I think some people can get carried away – like designer wear that they can't really afford and they have to be immaculate, fake fans and fake whatever else – Joanne*
>
> *I like to look nice and buy new clothes, who doesn't? But if money's tight or if we're saving from something else or I just don't get time then I can take it or leave it - Helen*

The comments above suggest that the participants feel relaxed in their choice to frequently purchase clothing. It is seen and something that they choose to do rather than being so required by social pressure. They do acknowledge that a pressure to look right exists and that this may have negative implications on groups such as young people who are perceived to be more emotionally susceptible to negative peer review. In their everyday shopping behaviour the participants appear to have become desensitised to the potential ethical harms associated with low cost clothing from their perspective as a frequent clothes shopper the negotiation of this information appears to have become a normal part of life.

When describing the way in which they negotiate the ethical issues surrounding low cost clothing, some of the frequent shoppers expressed a degree of annoyance that this responsibility should be delegated to the consumer:

> *Sometimes I'll pay a bit extra for something from Marks and Spencer or somewhere. I feel like that's doing my bit, you know paying a bit extra sometimes, so I don't think that I should need to examine all of the labels or ask questions about where the clothes have come from - Ursula*
>
> *It feels like it's always the mums are to blame, perhaps it's just me but the shops sell us the clothes then it's the mums who are criticised for buying them - Violet*
>
> *You know, this (question of ethical clothing) can irritate me a bit because it's there on offer to me but I'm a bad person if I choose it? It doesn't make sense – if it's not ethical clothing then surely it shouldn't be on the shelf in the first place – Karen*

The comments above may be seen as an indication that some of the frequent shopper may prefer to have their choices edited for them rather than being expected to consciously search for information and change their behaviour.

> *If clothes were a bit more expensive because they had to meet that standard and this standard, then I guess we'd all just get used to it like when energy prices or food prices go up, you just deal with it… in fact it's probably less critical than things like the price of food and heating - Anna*

Anna's comment above suggests that she would naturally adjust to any increase in the cost of clothing and that this type of balancing affordability is not something that she would find unexpected.

8.4.5 Preference for Frequent Shopping

Despite any concerns over the materialistic nature of their behaviour, the data illustrates how the respondents consciously choose a high volume of cheaper garments over less frequent, more expensive choices. The appeal of buying cheap fashion items often described as being associated with avoiding boredom by having many options to choose from, and with keeping up with the latest styles:

> *Yes they're cheap and you can only use them for one season possibly. You don't necessarily want to use them for another season anyway because I tend to get bored quite easily with clothes, so I just want to change them all over - Zara*

> *I suppose because the fashion is always changing, with cheap fashion so you can update your wardrobe more often and you've got something suitable for every occasion regardless – Donna*

It is unclear to what extent the acquisition of new clothing is driven by an individual desire to seek novelty or any materialistic inclination to frequently update their wardrobe in order to remain stylish in the eyes of others. It has been observed that consumers who make purchases for reasons of social esteem and recognition will frequently deny that their behaviour is determined by status-seeking motives (Mason 1992). Whilst many of the respondents comfortably described, as if it were normal,

the way that they judged others based on their appearance and expected to be appraised in the same way, they tended to stop short of making a direct connection between their frequent clothes shopping and a desire to seek status amongst others. This may be a deliberate concealment of their intentions or due to them not consciously making the link between wanting to wear something new and seeking the approval of others.

Rather than admitting to a materialistic instinct, one of the reasons provided by respondents to explain why they felt that there was no upper limit to the desirable volume of clothing ownership is that they anticipate that they will tire of their choices:

> *I hate that feeling when you get up and you're like I don't know what to wear, but if you've got new things, you can reach for the new things – Grace*

> *Sometimes you open your wardrobe or you've worn something a few times and then you think I don't want to wear it again and I have bought items that are like that. I've probably worn them and then I've just gone off them and just not felt like I look nice and I want to feel good, so it makes you want to go and buy something* else *– Anna*

> *I think you get fed up with what you've been wearing and you need a change and update everything. I do like different looks, so I don't know, I do like having a choice of clothes, more is better – Donna*

It is unclear from the participant comments whether the key driver for repeated acquisition of clothing is the pursuit of novelty, variety or a combination of these. However, it is evident that many of the respondents rarely made clothing purchases with a view to keeping the garment for a long time. There was often a sense of expected obsolescence already in mind at the point of purchase of clothing which contributes to stimulating overconsumption:

> *I know I get fed up very quickly so I tend to not buy expensive because I'd rather buy more often – Anna*

> *I get kind of five to ten wears out of a top I'm happy, it's normal for me probably because I do quite like to refresh quite often. So I'd rather spend kind of less money on clothes and more often than more money on clothes and less often – Kim*

Naomi's comment below, reveals that she has little involvement with the physical properties of a cardigan preferring the variety of experiencing different alternatives

My sister isn't like me at all, she has this cardigan that's made of alpaca wool and she'll say oooh feel it and it's so soft and warm and pretty much every time I see her, she's wearing this thing …. I would much rather have five cardigans in different colours because I'd just get bored of the same one - Naomi

The evidence that individuals frequently tire of the clothing choices that they have made indicates that they are choosing garments that do not bring lasting satisfaction. This could be viewed as a 'poor choice' or supports the theory that consumers do not fully understand what brings happiness and make inaccurate forecasts about the level of pleasure that a product will deliver (Dunn, Gilbert and Wilson 2011). Many of the behavioural interventions aimed at making clothes shopping habits more sustainable appear to be targeted at helping consumers to make 'better' decisions. Common advice includes suggestion about how to make numerous outfit from a small section of garments or how to choose garments that will last for a long time:

CAPSULE WARDROBE FUN

A seasonal capsule wardrobe means clothing items are limited but possible outfit combinations are not. As little as 10 items could create 50 different looks.

http://www.loveyourclothes.org.uk/tips/capsule-wardrobe-fun

BEST-BUY GUIDES

From business suits to wool coats, acrylic jumpers to denim jeans, our best-buy guides give you the low-down on some classic items of clothing, so you can sort the investment pieces from the here-today-gone-tomorrow.

http://www.loveyourclothes.org.uk/guides/best-buy-guides

Whilst the above may provide great advice for those looking to reduce waste by getting more wear out of their garments and changes of this nature are likely to have a positive impact on sustainability, actions such as buying fewer, longer lasting garments are not necessarily the best choices for consumers in terms of wellbeing. The suggestion of a capsule wardrobe was not a popular one

amongst the frequent shoppers:

> *No, that idea (of a capsule wardrobe) is not for me, I like to have lots of choice, I'd just get fed up and feel like I was wearing the same things over and over again and people would think 'oh, she's in that again* – Donna

The data reveal that frequent fashion shoppers purposefully choose products with the expectation that the garments will not last well and in the knowledge that they will probably tire of them. They choose to buy many of these cheaper items rather than fewer, more expensive garments that are deemed to be better quality and are anticipated to last longer:

> *you could buy one expensive item and it lasts longer than if you buy five cheaper and they don't last as long really because that's the stuff you'd chuck out isn't it, the cheap ones, not the quality stuff, but I'd still rather have the five – Naomi*

There is some evidence within the data that participants perceived more expensive items as generally of a better quality and likely to last longer:

> *You can definitely tell the workmanship is better, the seams and the finishes are neater and the material washes better doesn't it – Donna*

> *I find the more expensive clothes I've bought, the more guilt was attached to it but they've lasted and if it's simple pieces like a black dress, a black jacket that could last easily ten years and it would wash well as well – Grace*

> *I think again as I've got older and realised that the more you spend on better quality, it will last longer and fits better – Joanne*

The relationship between price and quality is, however debated by some

> *people talk about the cheap and cheerful clothes that you throw away, like some people get stuff from Primark, and they say it just lasts that season. I think that's an excuse to get something new- I've got stuff in my wardrobe from Primark seven years ago, that I still wear– Helen*

> *you can go to Primark and buy a really nice cotton little cardigan and it's all fully finished at the seams and it has lovely little buttons on it and the detail in it for £12.99. You go to Warehouse and you look and you think blimey the same thing is £40 and it's no better quality – Olivia*

> *Natalie: Do you think you get better quality generally if you pay a little bit more?*
> *Sally: No not always, I don't think so. You might think you do in your head but no I don't think so. I think if you shop wisely you can buy really lovely things that you know are going to last without high price tags– Sally*

The behaviour pattern selected by frequent fashion shoppers is chosen in order to maximise both the pleasure that they get from frequent shopping experiences and their satisfaction with the clothing purchased since the value of a fashion product is largely attributable to it being new and of the latest style. This is in line with the suggestion within Dunn et al. (2011) that money provides greater happiness when it is spent on experiences rather than things. Although the frequent fashion shoppers are buying garments, the shopping experience has been shown to contribute significantly to the associated pleasure. Clothing also provides an example of the 'fuzzy boundary' (Dunn, Gilbert and Wilson 2011) between material and experiential acquisition whereby the satisfaction from the item is derived jointly from the ownership of the item and the experience of choosing, buying and wearing it. For the frequent clothes shoppers experiencing the sensation of looking right has been shown to be linked with feelings of happiness and self-esteem. Greater happiness has also been associated with the frequency rather than the intensity of an experience (Diener, Sandvik and Pavot 1991). So it seems that rather than making 'bad' purchase decisions in buying cheap clothing that consumers tire of and that wears out easily, frequent fashion shoppers may have adopted the behaviour that maximises their own sense of wellbeing.

8.4.6 Frequency and Habit

Habits have been defined as "learned sequences of acts that have become automatic responses to specific cues, and are functional in obtaining certain goals or end-states" (Verplanken & Aarts 1999:104). A common feature of a habitual behaviour is that it includes an element of frequency (Darnton et al. 2011), the more frequently an action is performed the more likely it is to become a habit (Verplanken and Orbell 2003). Since the participants in this study buy a minimum of 20 new garments per year, one could assume that, for them, clothes shopping is a repeated behaviour. Although not a daily occurrence, it is sufficiently repetitive and implies an element of frequency which could have the potential to be habit forming. The data indicates that many of the respondents prefer to make low cost but frequent purchases rather than buy more expensive items and less frequently:

I probably pop into town once a week and I would buy something every time... I would rather spend twenty/thirty pounds once a week rather than a hundred pounds in one go at the end of the month - Kim

I hate to admit it but I think I probably buy something most weeks, but they're not expensive things – Amy

I buy for myself two or three times a month maybe, I think that's probably about right – Donna

If I was looking for something maybe for myself, it (clothing purchase) would probably be once a week, not any more than that, but they're small things you know - Olivia

In a week it (clothing purchase) would be like twice a week maybe. Once or twice a week I'd say. But it's not like they're designer prices - Priya

The regularity and frequency of clothes shopping is illustrated by the descriptions given by some participants of ways in which the activity has become an automatic part of a behavioural routine:

We both know if we've got a free day together we're going shopping. We've got a little routine where we go round Merry Hill in the same pattern. We visit the same shops in the same order every time…It's just a habit we've got into - Donna

At lunch time it's normal for me to pop into town and I'll just nip in to like New Look or somewhere like that – Grace

Sometimes I just go for something to do, so I think oh I've got nothing to do this afternoon, so I will go and have a walk round the shops - Pamela

If I'm early for work, I just think I've got ten minutes, I will pop in that shop, I do that whenever I'm early – Lucy

As already discussed in section 8.1.1, for some participants the facility to browse and shop for clothing online has enabled them to more easily fit this behaviour into their daily lives.

Although one might say that the behaviours described above are controllable in that the participants are making a conscious choice to visit clothing shops or browse online there is an element of automaticity in that this behaviour appears to have become the default option in situations such as being bored, taking a lunch break or having free time. However, I acknowledge that this may be a speculative interpretation, as it is not clear from the data whether clothes shopping/browsing is

always or most often the 'go to' behaviour in these scenarios, but it seems that this is at least sometimes the case.

Some instances of behaviour were described as having a greater degree of automaticity:

> *It's just a pastime, it's just something I do. There isn't a trigger really, it's usually I see something, I like it, I buy it – Amy*
>
> *Shopping for me, it just happens – Olivia*
>
> *It's not always a mental process, it's just very spontaneous – Priya*
>
> *There doesn't have to be a reason for me to shop - Violet*

Whilst comments such as the above provide useful illustrations of automaticity, for a researcher they are problematic since respondents who perceive their behaviour as spontaneous are often unaware of, and therefore unable to articulate the triggers or contextual cues that led to their action.

However, the presence of situations where the respondents are not consciously aware of the signals that led to their clothes purchasing does not mean that these 'hidden persuaders' (Thaler, Sunstein and Balz 2014; Wansink and Sobal 2007) do not exist.

The concept of habit is associated with contextual cues that result in repeated behaviour which brings reward (Duhigg 2012; Verplanken and Aarts 1999). For this group of frequent clothes shoppers, buying garments is a repeated behaviour that appears to be done with some degree of automaticity as part of a routine. This leads me to make the assumption that frequent clothes shopping is habitual behaviour for the group of people under study. If habit exists then by the definition of habit, so must the contextual cues and rewards which perpetuate the behaviour even if these are not consciously recognised or articulated by the participants.

When asked about the triggers for clothes shopping, the participants were conscious of the type of situations which engendered the desire to buy new clothes. Some of the triggers were recognised as emotional states:

> *Sometimes if I'm feeling down, if I'm feeling a bit upset or just having a down day. You think well actually I would like a treat - Beth*

I just feel like a bit of a frump or an emotional thing really to feel a bit better about yourself if you're having a bit of a down day, you're really tired or something, you might just think ooh I'll go and treat myself to make myself feel a bit better – Maria

If I've had a bad day and if I've had a really stressful day at work, I might want to head to town and get something new to wear – Rachel

Other triggers included responses to seeing attractive styles in magazines, on web sites or worn by others:

I like to look at what other people are wearing, so when I see what friends are wearing I want to copy them or I do use magazines a lot, and I quite like to look on ASOS and things like that….. or have a look at the mannequins in the windows, I love doing that too – Kim

Off social media lately, probably like Instagram. There's a lot of fashion bloggers that I follow that all have really nice clothes sadly, and that will make me want to buy something – Tracey

If I see my colleague wearing something that I like, that would be one of the triggers. If I feel like I'm a bit behind with the fashion and I'm feeling other people are wearing different things, I feel like why am I not wearing these kinds of clothes, that's when I feel like I need to shop – Zara

I like Top Shop, I like Next, New Look as well, their websites, just looking at what they've got on display, that gives me sense of wanting to buy really. Also what the latest celebrity trends are as well- Eva

The occurrence of events, particularly those deemed as 'special' occasions were also cited as triggers which would prompt the purchase of new clothing:

If there's something coming up like an event or function. It also depends if there's a sale for me. If there's a sale then that does mean I will go to it even if I have got clothes, it means I will go to it - Eva

Maybe a night out with the girls, or a holiday, both of those things would make me look for some new clothes – Anna

If there's a function. So say if it's a wedding or you need an outfit for an occasion… or something new for an important work meeting or an interview – Helen

If there's an occasion, perhaps a new job or an event, a special occasion that I need an outfit for – Violet

The comments above suggest that the frequent shoppers recognise some of the contextual cues that can trigger their desire to acquire clothing. There may however be other cues which are not consciously recognised or articulated by the respondents.

8.4.7 The Rewards of Frequent Clothes Shopping

The general perception of respondents is that they are in control of their clothes purchasing behaviour and their understanding appears to be that they shop in response to a selection cues, as outlined above. This thesis is not a psychological study of motivation, and I recognise that the following comments contain an element of conjecture but the findings lead me to question whether the triggers described by the respondents are actually the cues to which the subjects are responding. Following from that, it is interesting to ask, what provides shopping for clothes with the ability to enhance mood and why does viewing the latest styles make one want to go out and acquire them?

I propose that for these triggers to be effective they must be based on a belief structure that somehow imbues clothes shopping with the ability to elevate mood and raise self-esteem. Also that there is an underlying symbolic understanding of the importance of being stylish and accepted social conventions surrounding the wearing of new clothes for important occasions. I would suggest that these underlying beliefs may represent the true contextual cues which influence behaviour.

Clues as to the nature of the genuine prompts may be found in the experienced rewards which perpetuate the behaviour. The desire to repeat a behaviour is associated with the systematic experience of rewarding consequences from that behaviour (Deci and Ryan 2000; Verplanken and Aarts 1999). Therefore in order for frequent fashion buying to have become habitual then shoppers must have experienced gratification from the repeated behaviour.

The nature of the experienced rewards from frequent shopping for clothes is evidenced within the data, though it does not always appear to correspond with the individual's account of their motivation. The purpose of shopping for clothes is commonly described as finding the right or even perfect garment:

I get really focused on finding that perfect item and I won't veer elsewhere – Kim

I get a bit obsessed about getting things. If I've seen it in a shop previously or seen it on line or in a magazine I have a clear idea of what I want and I will obsess about it and sometimes until I've got it - Naomi

Shopping make me really happy if I find the perfect outfit – Amy

However if the clothing itself were perfect, shouldn't one expect that these garments would be kept and cherished for their intrinsic value? It seems that the frequent shoppers are not seeking the right garment but the right feeling. To some extent this is illustrated by respondent comments about their favourite garments, as previously described in the findings related to identity:

It's a navy dress from Whistles which is a nice brand, and it's smart but comfortable, can be dressed up or down. I always feel confident when I wear it, I've worn it for an interview but also for going out- Lucy

Favourite garments are often such by virtue of the fact that they are seen to be appropriate within different social contexts and acceptable to different audiences. The reward for the wearer is not just the garment itself but a degree of confidence that they will be favourably appraised by others.

The findings also tentatively suggest that if garments were indeed perfect items then individuals may not tire of them so readily nor feel the need to replace them as frequently. It seems that for some, the notion of perfection is transient – garments are perfect only for that time or occasion. I consider this to be an indication that the individual is sensitive and responding to changing cues about what is considered stylish, socially appropriate or commendable. Changes in such collective opinion regarding the symbolic meaning of clothing styles are described within the literature as part of the foundation which propels the fashion industry (Blumer 1969b; Davis 1994; Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton 1995).

Whilst the individual might describe their goal as finding the perfect outfit I propose that rather than buying a perfect outfit, individuals are actually buying the experience of feeling that they look 'right'. As previously discussed an individual's view of themselves is influenced by how they believe that they will be perceived by others (Blumer 1969a) and for some therefore it seems that there is a link between looking right, feeling confident, being happy with one's appearance and self-esteem.

The link between looking right and self-esteem may also go some way to accounting for the ability of shopping for clothes to elevate mood, relieve stress and to create feelings of happiness.

As has been demonstrated in the findings in relation to hedonism, it is common for participants to describe negative feelings associated with shopping trips which do not result in a successful purchase.

It therefore appears that the experience of shopping for clothes is not rewarding without the acquisition of the right garment. It is rarely the act of shopping that is responsible for feelings of happiness but rather the emotions associated with acquiring clothing that is anticipated to represent looking 'right' in the eyes of others. This suggests that the nature of the behaviour displayed by frequent clothes shoppers is that they habitually review the appearances of others and the clothing options available compared to their own appearance. Shopping for clothes is the outcome of this habit which is rewarded by the feeling of self-esteem that comes from looking right.

8.4.8 Summary

Overconsumption of clothing has become normalised amongst frequent clothes shoppers whose regular behaviour includes continual scanning of appearance and clothing options. Indications that the social view of garment styles has changed or that there may be newer or better clothing options are cues that lead individuals to perceive that their existing clothing is inadequate to gain the approval of others. This appears to emerge as a sense of having nothing suitable to wear. For some, the automatic response to this situation is to shop for something new and the reward for this behaviour is to restore a degree of satisfaction with their appearance. The findings show little evidence of conspicuous consumption in terms of attempting to gain social status via purchases of expensive designer clothing. Many of the respondents rarely made clothing purchases with a view to keeping the garment for a long time and stated this as a reason for choosing many low cost garments over

fewer more expensive, better quality items. As discussed previously within the findings related to clothes shopping and identity, for many of the frequent shoppers the drive to acquire clothing stems from a desire to look 'right' in the eyes of others. The findings have revealed that whether or not a person believes that a particular product is 'right for them' will depend on how they consider its social meaning will be interpreted by their affiliated groups

Apart from a few mentions about wardrobe space, occasional disappointing purchases and passing concerns about spending too much there is little evidence that the frequent shopping subjects have any desire to change their behaviour. They perceive shopping for clothes to be a largely harmless pastime that brings them a great deal of pleasure. Given that even unwanted habits can be difficult to break without considerable effort and willpower (Duhigg 2012; Verplanken and Aarts 1999), it seems highly unlikely that purely information based interventions aimed at encouraging reduced clothing consumption would ever be effective. If frequent fashion shoppers have become used to engaging in a regular practice that delivers confidence and reassurance that they are measuring up to current social expectations then any attempt to change this behaviour may therefore require a challenge to the cues and reward system that perpetuate the conduct.

8.5 Key Findings in Response to Research Questions

The study set out explore four research questions. The key findings in relation to each of these questions is outlined below.

i) What are the behaviours of female frequent clothes shopper?

- Faced with a multitude of influences and choices, satisfaction with their appearance is often fleeting. The feeling that they look right is a state that is easily disrupted by external influences such as peer comparison and marketing communications which lead them to wonder whether newer and better garments are available.

- Frequent clothes shoppers are not passive receivers of these influences, the majority of participants actively seek opportunities to view new styles.
- Clothes shopping has become the habitual response to various contextual cues including having a bad day at work, feeling bored, lunchtime routine or an invitation to an event.
- Clothes shopping behaviour occurs with little consideration of what is already owned and is enabled by the affordability of garments, the plethora of choices and easy access to shopping opportunities off and online.
- They mainly perceive that they are firmly in control of their shopping behaviour.
- This group favours buying a higher volume of cheaper garments over fewer, more expensive items despite some acknowledgement that the more expensive garments may be of superior quality.
- They believe that they will tire of garment after a short period of time and they do not generally feel happier after purchasing more expensive garments so it makes sense to them to engage in more frequent, pleasurable, low cost shopping behaviour.

ii) What is the nature of the rewards which perpetuate this behaviour?

- Attaining the sensation of feeling that they look right is the primary source of pleasure in acquiring clothing for frequent fashion shoppers.
- For this group, the enjoyment of shopping for clothes is very closely linked with the successful acquisition of a desired garment. A shopping trip that does not result in locating a garment in which they feel they look right, is mainly viewed as a negative experience.
- They claim to gain a great deal of pleasure from successful shopping experiences, recounting emotions such as feelings of adventure, excitement, escape as well as skilfulness in deciphering new styles and locating bargains.

- The pleasure they gain from clothing is less concerned with the aesthetics of the garment and is instead derived from their perception of whether it will 'look right' when worn in the intended context.

iii) To what extent do social dynamics impact frequent shopping and excessive clothing consumption?

- Frequent clothes shoppers are often motivated by questions related to whether they feel that they look right.
- The sensation that one looks right has been shown to occur when frequent shoppers perceive that they measure up well, or at least adequately compared to their peers.
- Looking right is linked with being stylish which encompasses the ability to incorporate new styles in a way that is appropriate within social conventions.
- Looking right is important to frequent clothes shoppers because they are aware that appearance has social relevance. They know that they judge others based on the way that they look and they expect to be appraised in the same manner.
- The findings reveal judgements made about intelligence, credibility at work, acceptance within social group, ability to cope with life and personality, based on the style of dress.
- They recognise many nuances in the audiences from whom they seek approval and this encourages them to acquire an extensive portfolio of garments so that they perceive they have the right outfit for every audience and occasion.
- Some frequent fashion shoppers who are active in social media are found to be concerned about appearing in shared images wearing the same outfit more times than they regard to be acceptable. They cite this as another driver in the acquisition of more clothing.
- Favourite items of clothing have become such, not because of the physical attributes of the garment, but by virtue of the fact that the wearer has received favourable feedback about the garment from others or that it was perceived to look right in front of a variety of audiences.

iv) How do frequent shoppers perceive the notion of buying less?

- They view the volume of clothing that they acquire and dispose of to be similar to those of their associate groups.
- They perceive their level of shopping for clothes to be a normal and largely harmless pastime without any desire to change their behaviour.
- All of the participants are aware of the ethical issues associated with the manufacture of fast fashion, yet none of the participants had permanently changed their clothes shopping behaviour as a result of their concerns.
- There is a lower level of awareness of the environmental impact of high volume clothing production, waste and disposal.
- Most concerns regarding issues of sustainability are mitigated in the minds of many frequent clothes shoppers through the perception that they dispose of unwanted clothing in a responsible way by using clothing recycling points.
- Some describe how they had or would be willing to buy less clothing if they wished to put the money towards an alternative goal such as saving for home improvements or a holiday.
- The common viewpoint is that other experiences such as beauty treatments would not be a comparable or adequate substitute for clothes shopping since they do not result in owning something tangible.
- They do not link their perceived happiness to the frequency of shopping for clothes or the volume of clothing purchased. Shopping for clothes is positioned by them as a pleasurable activity that they engage in because they like to and they can afford to do so, not because it is essential to their wellbeing.
- Some claim that reducing the consumption of clothing would not have a negative impact on their level of happiness provided that they were still able to satisfy themselves that they look right and that their level of clothing acquisition is broadly in line with that of their peers.

PART V – CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE AND IMPLICATIONS

9. Contribution to knowledge

The aim of this study is to make progress towards tackling the problem of the unsustainable pace of clothing manufacture and disposal via a better understanding of consumer perspectives, social dynamics and behaviour surrounding frequent clothes shopping. The reason for this exploration is that, in order to construct an effective suggestion regarding the way in which current unsustainable consumption patterns may be changed, one first requires an in-depth understanding of the existing behaviour.

A review of the extant literature revealed theories about how and why women choose and buy clothing (Auty and Elliott 1998; Davis 1994; Shaw et al. 2006; Sproles 1985; Zarley Watson et al. 2013), the hedonistic aspects of the shopping experience (Arnold and Reynolds 2003; Guiry and Lutz 2000; Miller, Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2013), links between identity and appearance (Stone 1962), material possessions and identity (Belk 1988; Dittmar 1992), consumption and happiness (Dunn, Gilbert and Wilson 2011; Sirgy et al. 2013). However none of the existing theory specifically addresses the issue of frequency and volume in fashion shopping nor does it purposely target those shoppers responsible for the frequent acquisition and disposal of clothing.

9.1 A Summary of the Key Points of Contribution

This research makes an original contribution to knowledge in several ways:

- The study is the first rigorous, critical analysis of the behaviour of the current, female, frequent fashion shopper. This segment is of importance since it makes a significant contribution to unsustainable fashion throughput and waste (Morgan and Birtwistle 2009) and, based on information relating to shopping frequency (Mintel 2017c) is potentially indicative of the behaviour of between 20% and 40% of the female shopping population.
- The findings add to what is known about fashion shopping behaviour by ascertaining some key differences in the opinions and behaviour of female frequent fashion shoppers compared to the descriptions of shopper behaviour described in studies of other samples. The study reveals a link between clothes shopping and self-identity which is different to that described by Guiry and Lutz (2000) who studied both male and female shoppers irrespective of clothing volume acquired. The findings also uncover a difference in the ways that female frequent fashion shoppers realise pleasure from clothes shopping which is different from other studies such as Arnold and Reynolds (2003) relating to clothes shoppers regardless of the volume of clothing acquired.
- This study has added to understanding of person product relations with regard to the relationship between the female frequent clothes shopper and the garments that they acquire. The findings have revealed areas where frequent fashion shopper behaviour differs to the theories presented about the symbolic nature of fashion brands (Auty & Elliott 1998; McCracken and Roth 1989).
- The findings contribute towards understanding the aspects of clothes shopping that are most involving for frequent shoppers and it calls into question the assumption that the group who buys the highest volume of clothing is the most involved with fashion garments (Tigert, Ring and King 1976).

- This research brings the Symbolic Interactionist theories of fashion developed by Blumer (1969b) and Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton (1995) into a new era, namely the exploration of frequent fashion shopping during the years 2014-2017, in order to understand the factors influencing the quickening throughput of clothing.
- The study reveals aspects of social and technological change within recent years which have fuelled and normalised excessive clothing consumption.

Figure 11 provides a summary of the key contributions of this study. It indicates the theoretical area where knowledge has been expanded in relation to the specific behaviour of frequent female fashion shoppers. Each of these contributions are discussed in more detail through sections 9.1 to 9.9.

Figure 11. Illustration of key contributions and their situation within the literature

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONIST THEORIES OF FASHION

1. Symbolic interactionist theories of fashion are relevant today and explain the key driving forces behind the pace and volume of fashion consumption

IDENTITY

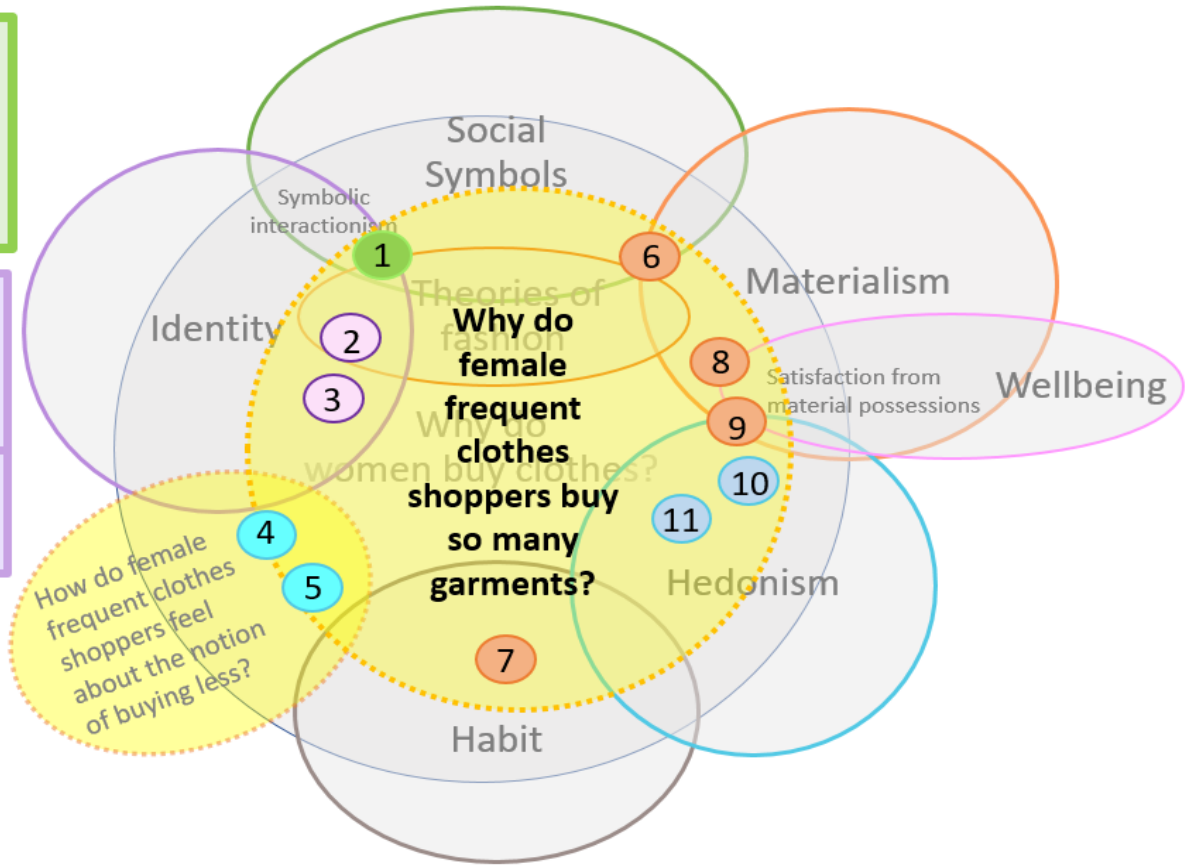
2.The amount that they shop and their ability to keep up with trends has become part of the frequent female clothes shoppers' self identities

3. Their sense of contentment with the way they look is easily disrupted via exposure to newer alternatives

FEELINGS TOWARDS BUYING LESS

4. Frequent female clothes shoppers would not voluntarily acquire fewer garments when buying more is within their means, despite being aware of ethical issues

5. They acknowledge that they would feel as happy with fewer garments provided they felt that they looked 'right' in the eyes of their peers



NORMALISATION OF OVERCONSUMPTION

6. For frequent female clothes shoppers the experience that brings satisfaction is the feeling of being stylish which encompasses being up to date with the latest trends

7. They are perpetually open to fashion influences and frequently scan online and offline for information

8. They show little involvement with garment attributes and brands. Their sense of satisfaction from clothing is derived from anticipating or achieving social approval

9. They seek the quickest route of least effort to feeling stylish which is most frequently to acquire something new

HEDONIC SHOPPING MOTIVATIONS

10. Frequent clothes shoppers only gain pleasure from the shopping experience if they acquire suitable garment

11. They do not consider other experiences as having the capability to delivering similar pleasure to shopping for clothes

Table 7 indicates the page numbers within this document where one may find a description of the findings from which the key points of contribution have been derived.

Table 7: Location of Findings Leading to Points of Contribution

Point of Contribution	Page references
1. Symbolic interactionist theories of fashion are relevant today and explain the key driving forces behind the pace and volume of fashion consumption	140-163
2. The amount that they shop and their ability to keep up with trends has become part of the frequent female clothes shoppers' self-identities	159, 165-168, 170-171
3. Their sense of contentment with the way they look is easily disrupted when they see newer clothing options	151, 155-158, 213-214
4. Frequent female clothes shoppers would not voluntarily acquire fewer garments when buying more is within their means, despite being aware of ethical issues	196-197, 205-207
5. They acknowledge that they would feel as happy with fewer garments provided they were recognised by peers as 'looking right'	169, 192-193, 205
6. For female frequent clothes shoppers, the experience that brings satisfaction is being considered stylish which encompasses being up to date with the latest trends	141-142, 173-175, 177-178
7. They are perpetually open to fashion influences and frequently scan online and offline for information	145-148, 195-196, 212-214
8. They show little involvement with product attributes and brands. Their sense of satisfaction from clothing is derived from anticipating or achieving social approval	173, 175, 177-179, 208-209, 216
9. They seek the quickest route of least effort to feeling stylish which is most frequently to acquire something new	173, 199-200
10. Frequent clothes shoppers only gain pleasure from the shopping experience if the outcome is the acquisition of a suitable garment	185, 187-188, 191-192, 215
11. They do not consider other experiences as having the capability to deliver similar pleasure to shopping for clothes	190-192

9.2 Contribution In Detail and the Implications of this Understanding

Sections 9.3 to 9.9 provide a more detailed explanation of the contributions to knowledge that have been achieved by this study. They provide a refined understanding of the behaviour of the frequent female clothes shopper and discuss the implications of the knowledge revealed by the research findings.

9.3 The Relevance and Usefulness of SI Theories

This study has added to SI theories of fashion by affirming their applicability and relevance in the context of UK female frequent fashion shoppers during the period 2014-2017. Exploring the behaviour of today's frequent fashion shoppers has allowed a comparison with two symbolic interactionist theories of fashion, that of Blumer (1969b) and Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton (1995). These theories view fashion as a social process and had alluded to the perpetuation and pace of the fashion cycle but were written 48 and 22 years ago respectively. This study has reviewed these theories in a contemporary context and has investigated their application to the phenomena of frequent shopping and overconsumption of clothing, a relevance that had been previously unexplored.

In 1969 Blumer described six essential conditions under which fashion would flourish. These conditions have been previously described in greater detail, but I briefly summarise them as, i) a desire to keep 'up to date', ii) an openness to the recurring presentation of new styles, iii) the decision making ability of individuals to understand the symbolic differences of the available options, iv) the presence of influencing figures, v) fashion choices made on subjective evaluations as opposed to utilitarian product attributes and vi) an openness to new influences and changes in social opinion. Almost fifty year later, the findings have demonstrated that, within today's UK fashion environment, where excessive clothing consumption is prevalent, all six conditions are clearly apparent. In addition it seems that technology and social norms have rendered some of Blumer's conditions particularly resonant and more influential than they may have been at the time of writing in 1969.

The advent of fast fashion has increased the pace and affordability of the presentation of accessible new trends. The findings have shown that frequent fashion shoppers display not just a reactive openness to new styles but an appetite to proactively seek out the latest garments. Mobile devices allow the opinions of influencers, marketing communications and browsing opportunities to be accessed by consumers twenty-four hours a day. For those who are interested, there is a plethora of information available regarding the multitude of clothing options and social opinion of the symbolic meanings presented by different styles. Social media presents viewers with a perpetual opportunity for peer comparison leading some to feel more pressure than ever to 'look right', which has been revealed in the findings to be linked with feeling 'up to date'. The findings of this study have demonstrated the value and resonance of the conditions described by Blumer (1969) in making a contribution to frequent clothes shopping behaviour, and suggests they are important contributors to the problem overconsumption.

There are two areas where frequent fashion shopping behaviour has been shown to differ from Blumer's (1969b) depiction of fashion shoppers. Firstly, Blumer describes fashion conscious individuals as "usually quite careful and discerning in his effort to identify the fashion in order to make sure that he is in style" (Blumer 1969b:276). Whilst this may well still be the case for fashion conscious individuals, the findings of this study indicate that today's frequent fashion shoppers are seldom careful or discerning in their purchases. Since there are now many affordable clothing options, the process of carefully choosing clothing seems to have been replaced with a tendency to buy in volume anticipating that most of the purchases will be in style, at least for a short time. The findings have shown that, whilst frequent shoppers are engaged in worrying about the suitability of the clothes they buy, they often make impulse purchases and make little reference to the design, quality or aesthetics of the garments they buy, focusing instead on their perception of whether it will 'look right' when worn in the intended context.

Secondly, the process of collective selection which is described by Blumer, centres round the ability of fashion designers and buyers to tune themselves into the collective mood and emerging trends. In this way collective opinion steers those responsible for clothing creation and the direction of fashion. With the advent of fast fashion, collective selection today appears to be far more literal. Whilst fashion designers remain instrumental in the creative process, the pressure to frequently deliver new fashion lines to market has reduced the length of the cycle from design to production. There is therefore less time to be spent pawing over "recent expressions of modernity as these were to be seen in such areas as the fine arts, recent literature, political debates and happenings, and discourse in the sophisticated world" (Blumer 1969b:277) in order to sense the direction of public taste. Fast fashion has allowed the popularity of garments to some extent to be trialled in the marketplace, production is increased for popular lines and ceased for those garments that do not sell well (Birtwistle, Siddiqui and Fiorito 2003; Christopher, Lowson and Peck 2004). Blumer had envisaged that popular opinion could be stronger than designer influence citing consumer preference for shorter skirts over the designer collection of longer hemlines as an example, however, in 1969 this was described as an exceptional example rather than the norm. The findings have shown how frequent fashion shoppers evaluate new trends in order to decide whether to adopt or avoid the styles in front of them. The literature surrounding fast fashion (Birtwistle, Siddiqui and Fiorito 2003; Christopher, Lowson and Peck 2004; Ghemawat, Nueno and Dailey 2003) describes the way that the fast fashion system responds to the influence and direction of consumer demand. It seems that Blumer's (1969b) notion of collective selection is relevant today and is even more collective and less designer led than originally described. It could be argued that the current process of collective selection speeds up the process of proliferating the latest popular range across the marketplace thus contributing to the overconsumption of clothing.

The Symbolic Interactionist Theory of Fashion presented by Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton (1995) portrays fashion consumption as being propelled by the provision of a multitude of available fashion styles that are perceived as being equally attractive but having different symbolic and social

implications. Faced with a perceived pressure to meet advertised ideals and social expectations, in the absence of a clear aesthetic model in terms of the 'best' style, consumers must negotiate the available clothing options in order to satisfy themselves that they have chosen garments which 'look right'. From the descriptions of the participants this process appears to be a largely true reflection of the fashion buying context. Achieving a sense of looking right is a matter of identity and was commonly cited by participants as a reason for wanting to acquire new clothing. Although the participants sometimes found it difficult to articulate how they defined 'looking right', the findings imply that it is seen as having a degree of confidence that one will be favourably appraised by others in affiliate or aspirational social groups. For many of the frequent shoppers interviewed, 'looking right' involved the incorporation of new styles in a way that was felt to be flattering to body shape and appropriate to social conventions as well as conveying personal identity. The findings reveal that for the frequent clothes shopper the sensation of 'looking right' is transient and easily disrupted. Disrupting influences or triggers for clothes shopping are described as incidents including seeing a desirable garment in a shop, magazine or web site, receiving an invitation and not feeling that they have anything suitable to wear or simply feeling that there may be a better clothing option available to them.

Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton's (1995) theory is relevant to the issue of overconsumption of clothing as is shines a light on one of the main drivers of fashion shopping. For the frequent clothes shopper there are always visible new suggestions and styles throwing doubt on the exact suitability of the garments they already own and this motivates them to buy something else. The findings have shown that there is some social capital (Bourdieu 1984) to be earned from looking stylish and that frequent clothes shoppers are quick to believe that there is a newer and better alternative which will lead to them being favourably appraised by others. Frequent clothes shoppers are very open to the suggestion of something new because they like to shop and the opportunity to acquire a perceived newer, better alternative is generally accessible and affordable to them.

An aspect of the findings which was not part of the Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton's (1995) theory of fashion but seems to be the case for some frequent fashion shoppers is the symbolic value of newness. For frequent fashion shoppers, the fact that an item of clothing is **new** often automatically satisfied one of the criteria found to be associated with 'looking right' and that is the incorporation of the latest styles. So the repeated purchase of new items of clothing has become adopted by some frequent shoppers as a shortcut to feeling more confident that their appearance will be favourable appraised within their social group.

A second point of difference is that whilst the SI theory of fashion (Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton 1995) views fashion consumers to be engaged in 'striving' (Kaiser et al. 1995: 180) to decipher the symbols associated with different styles of dress, the findings for most frequent clothes shoppers appear to show a less involved process. Many buy on impulse and some copy the styles of others so avoiding the effort of precisely deciphering the symbolic nature of the clothing they choose. Some frequent clothes shoppers accept that they will make mistakes in selecting clothing that does not 'look right' but this is generally accepted as part of clothes shopping and unwanted items are readily discarded post purchase. This study has shown the SI theories of fashion to be relevant in modern day context. They help to comprehend fashion as a social product rather than the result of individual motivations and preferences.

9.3.1 Implications for Slowing the Pace of Clothing Consumption

In finding the symbolic interactionist theories of fashion by Blumer (1969b) and Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton (1995) to be relevant in the current frequent fashion shopping environment this research has identified the drivers and enablers of frequent fashion shopping behaviour. This contributes an improved understanding of how the pace of fashion has been amplified. The implication of this knowledge is that by comprehending how the volume of clothing consumption has been inflated, we are in a better position to understand how it may be slowed. If Blumer's conditions have been found

to be the enablers of the fashion system then it may follow that an exaggeration of their presence may be partly responsible for the increase in pace of fashion consumption. Viewing these conditions as the 'switch' that has the potential to turn the pace of fashion consumption up or down implies that altering the fashion environment may have a part to play in achieving a reduction in fashion consumption. If an acceleration of the circumstances that enable the fashion system have resulted in an increased volume of consumption then this may suggest that a slowing or reversal of these conditions (Ertekin and Atik 2014; Fletcher, Grose and Hawken 2012) may lead to a reduction in fashion consumption. For example were individuals to tire of the presentation of new styles, or perceive little difference between the alternatives offered; if the desire to keep up to date waned or frequent change was discouraged by influencing figures then fashion shoppers may be inclined to acquire fewer garments. Whether or not it is a realistic possibility to alter the fashion shopping environment in this way is a moot point. It may be considered akin to trying to put the genie back into the bottle, at least in the short term.

Within the findings there is some evidence of discontent with the quality of high volume, low cost clothing, and a few mentions of frustration with a lack of innovation in available styles but there is very little else to indicate that consumer behaviour is likely to change. Far more prevalent is the view that clothes shopping provides a largely guilt free, enjoyable way of spending time and ensuring that one 'looks right'. The fast fashion model has been widely adopted by UK retailers (Mintel 2014), Primark remains the most frequently visited fashion retailer for the fifth year running (Mintel 2017c) and total sales value of womenswear continues (Mintel 2017b) to rise, it seems unlikely that we will see any significant voluntary change on the part of the fashion retail sector in the near future. Given that neither the consumer or producer seem inclined to significantly change their current behaviour this implies that reducing the level of fashion consumption would require some kind of disruptive intervention or a change in the structure of the market.

9.4 Issues of Identity for Female Frequent Fashion Shoppers

The findings of this study have contributed to understanding the relationship between frequent clothes shopping an identity. The research also uncovers aspects of frequent fashion shopper behaviour which are different to that presented within existing theories of fashion and identity. For frequent clothes shoppers the data reveal that it is not just what they wear but the amount that they shop and their ability to keep up with trends which has become part of the extended self (Belk 1988). For some frequent clothes shoppers the ability to afford to shop, engage in shopping as a social activity, keep up with trends, or treat themselves, has become part of who they perceive they are.

This differs somewhat from the picture of clothing and identity presented in the extant literature. In 1998 Auty and Elliott described a fashion shopper's view of the 'Moschino person' next door and the way in which 'that label [Armani] fills in the rest of the information about me' (Auty and Elliott 1998:109). The inference is that the label or brand of one's clothing provides a clear signpost to others who share understanding of the symbols of clothing as a code which is used to signpost values, identity and social affiliations. Similarly, the popular notion of clothing as a code has previously focused on the shared understanding of brands, labels and styles of dress (McCracken and Roth 1989; Davis 1994; Thompson and Haytko 1997) to convey identity to others without mention of the act of shopping and frequency of clothing purchase as components of identity. This study has found that clothing brands appeared to hold little importance for the vast majority of frequent clothes shoppers. That is not to say that frequent fashion shoppers do not recognise the symbolic nature or wearing certain styles of dress but the findings reveal that identity is associated with shopping behaviour in addition to clothing worn. The study by Guiry and Lutz (2000) recognises a group of 'recreational shopping enthusiasts' for whom shopping as a hobby is closely linked with their sense of identity regardless of whether anything is purchased. However, for the group in this study it is the acquisition of garments that fundamental to their sense of preserving a stylish self-identity rather than the act of shopping.

This study has found that, for frequent female clothes shoppers, where buying frequently in order to remain stylish has become part of the extended self (Belk 1988) then acting in a way that is congruent with that self-image (Sirgy et al. 1997) does not involve buying a certain label or always shopping but **does** involve always buying new garments.

In a situation where self-identity is associated with being stylish and being stylish relies on elements being new then not surprisingly satisfaction with self-image is easily disrupted when frequent female fashion shoppers are presented with newer alternatives. Whereas the social acceptance of a brand might have provided a degree of certainty that wearing a few garments displaying this label could bring favourable judgment by others, the situation for current UK female fashion shoppers is more ambiguous. The findings of this study support the conclusions of Atik and Firat (2013) in that fashion influence has become fragmented. Frequent fashion shoppers are not the reactive receivers of influence from experts or marketers nor does the mechanism involve a process by which consumer desires are discovered and provided for by the fashion industry. Instead a variety of simultaneous fashion trends emerge at the same time and their appeal is evaluated by individuals within a shifting, socially negotiated remit of what is appropriate dress based on age, body shape and occasion (Blumer 1969b). The absence of clear direction in terms of the 'right way to dress' and the plethora of available options results in ambivalence and symbolic ambiguity, which have been discussed in section 9.3. Faced with a barrage of new alternatives, uncertainty over whether one remains stylish often means that, for frequent fashion shoppers, the sensation of looking right is transient. Whilst a 'Moschino person' might presumably understands what it is to be a Moschino person, the identity of a frequent shopper is less clear other than that they wish to be stylish. Where the definition of stylish is ambiguous apart from a general acceptance that it features something new then the preservation of an identity as stylish requires frequent acquisition of new garments. This is facilitated by easy access and low price.

9.4.1 Challenging the social dynamics of 'Looking Right'

This study has shown that it is common for frequent fashion shoppers to have fragmented sources of influence. They often feel unclear regarding the 'best' choice of garment and tend towards buying something new since they perceive that newness is one element of being stylish. The knowledge that uncertainty over the right way to dress sometimes leads frequent clothes shoppers to acquire more garments implies that in order to encourage a reduced level of clothing consumption fashion shoppers would need to be endowed with a clear direction in terms of what to wear. This would provide a confidence in their choice of attire that leads them to be undistracted by newer alternatives. There is little evidence within the extant literature to indicate that general levels of confidence with appearance are increasing. The more common indication is that frequent peer comparison facilitated by social media is reducing satisfaction with self for some individuals (Chou and Edge 2012; Kross et al. 2013; Sidani et al. 2016). If the presence of clearly best clothing choices and enhanced self-confidence are the pre-requisites of reducing the volume of consumption amongst female frequent clothes shoppers then the findings of this study imply that this is unlikely to occur within the current fashion environment.

The findings of this study suggest that, in order to achieve a reduction in fashion consumption then one would need to challenge the relationship between the feeling of 'looking right and the perceived need to buy something new in order to achieve this state. Considering that the desire to enhance one's image through the acquisition of desirable clothing is as old as civilisation (Trentmann 2016) then it seems unlikely that it would be effective to attempt to challenge this ambition. A more pragmatic approach may be to attempt to popularise less frequent shopping thereby influencing the societal view of what 'looks right'. An inherent part of fashion is that it regularly persuades an audience that something new and different is 'better' than its predecessor. It therefore seems possible that frequent fashion shoppers could be convinced via the same mechanisms that the key to looking right lies in changing their shopping habits away from frequent purchases to fewer, more considered

garments. The findings suggest that frequent fashion shoppers look to fashion web sites, retail stores and peers for advice and inspiration regarding their clothing choices. The implication of this is that any mass movement towards consumption reduction is only likely to happen if such a change is initiated by the majority of these influencing figures. Despite some reports of grumblings within the fashion industry about the pressures of delivering the continuous style re-inventions to satisfy the fast fashion model (Gonslaves 2015) given that the market for womenswear continues to grow then it seems unlikely that there is any real intention amongst the key players in the fashion market to encourage a reduction in clothing consumption. However, it has been noted that peer comparison and the collective view can be strongly influential in the purchase decisions of frequent fashion shoppers thus swaying the direction of production. This implies that if the public mood were to change in favour of more sustainable clothing options then it may be swift to mobilise opinion via collective selection, so persuading the fashion retailers to respond to the popular market choices in the same way that they do for fast fashion trends.

9.5 The Normalisation of Overconsumption of Clothing

The findings of this study have revealed the ways in which overconsumption of clothing has become part of normal consumer behaviour for female frequent fashion shoppers. Whist comparisons are difficult since other studies do not focus specifically on frequent fashion shoppers, there are some aspects of frequent fashion shopper behaviour that appear to differ from the theories presented about fashion shopping in general. This study had found that a common feature of frequent fashion shopper behaviour is their substantial openness and appetite to receive and proactively seek out new styles and garments. Many of them fill spare time with fashion browsing activity on and offline. In the absence of similar data for infrequent shoppers for clothes, it is impossible to say with certainty that the frequent fashion shoppers in this study browse for clothing options more often than those who

buy fewer garments but it seems likely that this is the case. Where frequency of browsing is implicated in the overconsumption of clothing then the suggestion for individuals wishing to reduce the volume of clothing that they are tempted to buy is to curtail their browsing behaviour.

The regular, repeated browsing of clothing styles may be seen to imply that female frequent fashion shoppers have a high degree of interest and involvement with fashion clothing. However, in contrast to the common view presented in the literature which suggests that those who buy most clothing are the most involved with clothing as a product category (Auty and Elliott 1998; Michaelidou and Dibb 2006) the findings of this study suggests that the converse might be true. For female frequent fashion shoppers, the findings of the study reveal a dichotomy of high volume of purchase but lack of product involvement rendering it possible that the people who buy the most clothing may actually be little involved with the garments they buy.

Studies exploring the relationship between individuals and clothing have described a broad spectrum of fashion consciousness and behaviours (O'Cass 2000) however there is a common suggestion that those who buy most clothing are the most involved with clothing as a product category (Auty and Elliott 1998; Michaelidou and Dibb 2006) or 'that the highly fashion involved consumer is also the heavy clothing fashion buyer' (Tigert, Ring ad King 1976:46). The nature of the involvement of an individual with their clothing choices is frequently associated with ways in which fashion consumers strive to decipher the symbolic meanings and understand clothing as a code for communicating identity (Blumer 1969b; Davis 1994; Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton 1995; McCracken and Roth 1989). The implication is that the garments themselves have an element of personal relevance leading to product involvement (Zaichkowsky 1985). For frequent fashion shoppers the reality appears to be slightly different. That is not to say that clothing is not a code or that frequent fashion shoppers do not recognise it as such, the difference seems to be the effort applied to understanding and deciphering it. This study has found that, although almost all frequent fashion shoppers were interested in their self-image and placed importance on the appearance that they presented to others,

only some of the frequent fashion shopper participants appeared to show an interest in fashion clothing, designer brands and aesthetic appeal. Although frequent clothes browsed for new clothes very often, they did not appear to a make a concerted effort to compare brands nor did they spend time curating the contents of their wardrobe. Instead they appear to rely on the fact that a garment is new to the market as a key indicator that the garment is suitable to purchase. This is in contrast to the behaviour revealed by Auty and Elliott (1998) who found that high self-monitors, sensitive to the opinion of others were highly involved in the symbolic meaning of clothing seeking the reassurance of brands that are recognised within their associate groups as acceptable symbols of style (Auty and Elliott 1998). Clothing brands appeared to hold little importance for the vast majority of frequent clothes shoppers.

For many frequent fashion shoppers, within an understood remit of what is appropriate dress based on age, body shape and occasion, newness seems to work as a shortcut to social approval of garments removing the need to be any more deeply involved with the symbolic connotations of clothing choices. The reason for this seeming lack of effort is unclear, it may be a lack of interest in fashion or the feeling that it would be a gargantuan task to try understand the symbolic nature of a multitude of changing clothing options. This contradicts the notion that the buyers of the greatest volume of clothes are highly interested in the products per se. This finding was further supported by the evidence surrounding favourite garments which were never described as such due to product attributes such as the quality, feel, style or aesthetic design, rather the status of 'favourite' was achieved by virtue of the positive reactions of others experienced whilst wearing the garment.

For frequent clothes shoppers, the nature of involvement is not with the garments themselves but with the perceived social rewards attained by making appropriate clothing choices experienced via the sensation of looking right. This is similar to the findings of O'Cass (2001), whose study, previously described on page 72, reported that high self-monitors were strongly driven to acquire clothing by the desire for social approval but had little interest or involvement in the product category. The findings

of this study indicate that frequent clothes shoppers are highly involved in locating garments that fulfil the desire to look right, however this is not synonymous with an involvement with the product category of fashion clothing.

This has implications for attempts to reduce consumption based on encouraging the acquisition of long lasting, quality garments. The notion of a curated capsule wardrobe holds little appeal for this group of female frequent fashion shoppers implying that the use of this type of message is likely to be ineffective in changing behaviour. Lack of garment involvement also has implications for the potential success of second hand clothing as a route to improvements in sustainability. The limited findings of this study in the area of second hand clothing indicate that frequent fashion shoppers consider successful non-new clothes shopping to require an element of expertise, an eye for the right garments which they do not have. It is also associated with a quirky, individual style that is different to the common view of being stylish. In this way, the appeal of second hand clothing choices is limited. The implication is that if it were possible to re-engage frequent shoppers with the material as well as the symbolic attributes of fashion garments then this might improve the appeal of quality clothing with longevity. In addition a deeper involvement with garments might render second hand options more attractive as a means of sourcing style and quality at an affordable price.

9.6 Creating More Sustainable Habits

This research has demonstrated how frequent clothes shopping for some has become a habitual response to a variety of contextual cues such as having a bad day at work, getting paid, being invited to an event or passing a favourite store. The desire to acquire more clothing has also been shown to be a response by some to an emotional cue – the feeling that their existing clothing is inadequate to gain the approval of others. For some frequent fashion shoppers the automatic response to this situation is to buy something new in order to restore a degree of contentment with their appearance. Frequent fashion shoppers have become used to engaging in repeated buying of clothing which

delivers confidence and reassurance that they are measuring up to current social expectations. The implication of this information is that frequent shopping behaviour is largely guided by social systems. Consequently, frequent shopping for clothes may be considered to be a social practice - a 'type' of behaving that is carried out by different individuals at different points in time but is the result of common 'ingredients' such as belief systems, repertoires of meaning, institutions and technologies, (Shove 2010; Spaargaren 2003). This study has shown that, in the instance of frequent fashion shopping, the ingredients include a feeling that choosing the 'right' style of dress is important, a desire to keep up to date and an appetite for the presentation of new styles facilitated by low prices and technology that makes frequent browsing possible. The implication of considering frequent shopping as practice is that behaviour change is likely to require a destabilisation of the current fashion shopping regime (Geels and Schot 2007). With the exception of some passing concerns about wardrobe space and disappointing purchases there is little to indicate that frequent fashion shoppers have any desire to mobilise opinion to make fashion consumption more sustainable. Despite all of the participants being aware of the possible ethical concerns within the manufacture of fast fashion, the prevalent view is that shopping for clothes is a largely harmless pastime that brings them pleasure. This implies that any purely information based appeal for reducing clothing consumption is unlikely to be effective.

The research has revealed that frequent fashion shoppers have largely adopted the behaviour of sorting and recycling their clothes at collection points rather than disposing of textiles in general waste for landfill. This is a more sustainable behaviour but it appears not to be motivated by a concern for the environment rather as a mechanism used by some to absolve them of any guilt associated with the wastefulness of their shopping behaviour or as a practical means of clearing the way for newer, more desirable clothing. Thus when a change to behaviour is perceived to be beneficial or where the performers believe that they are out of step with social expectations then the implication is that nudge type interventions may have some success with a frequent fashion shopper audience. However when it comes to the volume of clothing purchased, the participants of this study are not out of step with social expectations and the behaviour of their peers; indeed they are replicating and mirroring them.

For frequent fashion shoppers, the notion of changing behaviour to reduce clothing consumption, buying quality, long lasting garments, keeping clothing for longer or changing spending habits to focus on experiences is seen to be of little benefit. The implication of this aspect aligns to practice theory (Darnton et al. 2011; Shove 2008) which asserts that bringing about sustainable patterns of consumption does not depend upon educating or persuading individuals to make different choices but instead on transforming practices, creating and embedding new habits and norms to make them more sustainable by involving less frequent, cheap clothing shopping (Hargreaves 2011).

If frequent fashion shoppers have become used to engaging in a regular practice that delivers confidence and reassurance that they are measuring up to current social expectations then any attempt to change this behaviour may therefore require a challenge to the cues and reward system that perpetuate the conduct. This study has shown that this approach may prove problematic since, although the practice of understanding and buying clothing may be social, individuals actively negotiate the conventions that they are presented with and may respond differently to the contextual cues (Hargreaves 2011). The findings have highlighted different potential changes that are likely to result in some frequent fashion shoppers buying fewer garments. Certain frequent shoppers may be persuaded to buy fewer garments if they achieved higher levels of self-confidence; others may respond to messages from peers encouraging more sustainable behaviour; for some frequent shoppers the act of limiting their exposure to viewing new trends and sale offers could potentially influence the volume of clothing that they buy. The implication is that frequent fashion shopping is a complex problem and that tackling individual behaviours would require a multifaceted solution. However, most of the frequent clothes shoppers agree that they only find it acceptable to consume the current volume of clothing if it is affordable to them. This leads to the unsurprising implication that if the price of fashion clothing were to increase then frequent fashions shoppers are likely to purchase fewer garments. Some of the shoppers within this study provided examples of times that they had reduced their clothing consumption in response to a need or desire to save money implying that their repeated clothes purchasing is a habit that can be broken.

9.7 Hedonic Motivations and the Pleasurable Shopping Experience

The literature surrounding hedonistic shopping motivations indicates that for most, the emotional aspects of the shopping experience can be a pleasurable experience without making a purchase. (Arnold and Reynolds 2003; Babin, Darden and Griffin 1994; Guiry and Lutz 2000; Hirschman and Holbrook 1982). This study has shown frequent fashion shoppers to be different to the majority of consumer segments surveyed by Arnold and Reynolds (2003) in that they rarely expressed enjoyment purely from the event of going shopping. Whilst all of the frequent fashion shoppers described gaining pleasure from the clothes shopping experience, only one of them specifically indicated that she would still enjoy the shopping experience even if it did not result in the purchase of a garment. The prevalent view amongst frequent female clothes shoppers was that a shopping trip which did not end with the purchase of a garment would be seen as disappointing at the very least. It is not that the frequent fashion shoppers have been found lacking in the hedonic motivation to shop, many experienced shopping as an escape, a social activity, an adventure, an opportunity to browse and be inspired. The difference with this group is that the pleasure of the experience can be neutralised by the absence of a successful purchase at the end of the event. This study of frequent fashion shoppers has revealed them to be unlikely to anticipate that experiences might make them happier than material possessions. Few of the participants could envisage another experience bringing the same type of satisfaction as acquiring clothes. The finding that these frequent fashion shoppers do not consider alternative experiences to be on a par with buying new clothes may imply that they would be intensely resistant to reducing their clothing consumption. However, as described in the following section 9.8 the data reveal that this is not always the case for this group.

9.8 Feelings Regarding Buying Fewer Garments

The findings of this study provide the first insight into the opinions of female frequent fashion shoppers when they are asked to consider the notion of buying fewer garments. The concept of choosing to consume less has been previously explored within the area of voluntary simplicity (Shaw and Moraes 2009; Shaw and Newholm 2002) and reveals much about the rationale and experiences of individuals who have made the choice to consume less. However the opinions of those who frequently acquire clothing with no intention to voluntarily consume less is an area unexplored prior to this research. This study has revealed that, for female frequent clothes shoppers, the notion of choosing to voluntarily constrain their consumption of clothing makes no sense to them provided it is with their financial means and it does not inconvenience them in terms of storage.

Within this study, the entire sample of frequent fashion shoppers were aware of the potential link between low cost fashion and poor working conditions for those who produce it. Despite this knowledge they did little to modify their behaviour to avoid cheaper garments. This finding contributes towards understanding of the influence of messages about consumption harms. It indicates that behavioural interventions aimed at reducing consumption purely by informing consumers of the negative impacts of their behaviour are unlikely to be effective. The comments detailed within the findings help us to better understand how frequent shoppers reconcile their desire to acquire garments and their awareness of potential harms by revealing the dialogue that is used in relation to neutralising their concerns (Chatzidakis, Hibbert and Smith 2007).

Furthermore, the findings contribute towards understanding the attitudes of this group of frequent fashion shoppers by revealing them to be reluctant to invest time and effort researching sustainable clothing choices. Whilst they are not prepared to change their behaviour in order to achieve a more sustainable level of clothing consumption they accept that it probably would **not** be detrimental to their own subjective wellbeing if choices were edited in such a way that prevented them from buying so many garments. The study uncovers an expectation by some and a preference by others for clothing

choices to be edited on their behalf. This implies that, were unsustainably manufactured garments to be removed from the available clothing choices there may be lower than expected levels of resistance from female frequent fashion shoppers.

9.9 Consumption Reduction and Wellbeing

The study highlights the association between new clothes and subjective wellbeing. Subjective wellbeing in this study includes an individual's positive and negative evaluations about life satisfaction, how they are viewed by others and their perceived levels of happiness. This study accepts the view of Veenhoven (2008) in considering that "overall happiness" is synonymous with life satisfaction and subjective wellbeing. The research findings illustrate how frequent clothes shoppers perceive that shopping for clothes enhances their level of wellbeing via feeling special and more confident when they are happy with their appearance. However they do not set out to buy multiple garments in order to acquire an amount of happiness, they buy clothing in volume because it is affordable to them.

Whilst some report that they would miss the frequent pleasure of acquiring new garments most do not link their happiness with the volume of clothing owned. The implication is that some of the frequent clothes shoppers in this study could be as happy with fewer garments. Some frequent fashion shoppers related examples of periods during which their priorities had changed and they voluntarily altered their consumption patterns without detriment to wellbeing. One of the notions cited in the literature which limits the extent to which increasing income is related to increasing happiness is that individuals quickly adapt to having more or having expensive items and so the pleasure is quickly diminished (Dunn, Gilbert and Wilson 2011; Wilson and Gilbert 2008). The accounts of situations where frequent fashion shoppers have reduced their clothing consumption due to constraints on income but have not felt any worse off imply that this condition also works in reverse – that is to say that frequent fashion shoppers are able to adjust to reduced consumption without detriment to

wellbeing given the right circumstances. The findings have shown that what is critical to the sense of happiness and confidence for most frequent fashion shoppers is their sense that they look right and measure up well against their peers. The implication is that as long as reduced consumption is felt to be the normal standard of behaviour amongst peers, and the feeling of being able to look right was not disrupted, then it would be possible to achieve a situation of double dividend (Jackson 2005) whereby we consume less without perceived detriment to wellbeing.

11. Limitations & Recommendation for Future Research

While this research has achieved its objectives, there are a number of limitations in the study, some of which could provide useful direction for future research. As with any qualitative study I acknowledge that the credibility of the findings rests on the decisions that I have made in terms of the methodology and my interpretation of the data. To this end I have attempted to provide transparent descriptions of my thinking throughout this study so that judgments about the degree of similarity may be made by others who may wish to apply all or part of the findings elsewhere. It is not the intention of this study to provide results that may be generalised however I believe that my work has served to illuminate understanding that may be extrapolated to similar situations (Golafshani 2003).

I acknowledge that some of the limitations of this research are directly linked to my choice of methodology and process. As discussed in chapter six, Symbolic Interactionism allows for a flexible research approach using any ethically allowable procedure that is likely to deliver a clearer picture of social life (Blumer 1969a). Being an exploratory study the research required a flexible process of inductive reasoning building knowledge from the information collected, however rather than the looser structure of SI I could have instead chosen a more prescriptive methodology such as grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990). A grounded theory approach would have allowed for the systematic

analysis of data in order to construct a theory about the phenomenon of interest. However, I justify my choice of 'looseness' over structure since my main research objective was to gain a deeper understanding of frequent clothes shopping behaviour. While having its own limitations, the choice of a qualitative methodology has allowed a more nuanced picture to emerge. As such, I saw a less structured and exploratory approach as more suitable and adequate for the task and more capable of generating rich insights into the phenomena under study and participants views than more prescriptive methods. Although my chosen theoretical framework allows some degree of flexibility, I believe that I have constructed a robust research design capable of delivering credible findings. I might also have chosen to adopt a perspective of critical realism for this study. Critical realism is a popular choice for research into complex wicked problems such as that of sustainability since it considers the underlying causal mechanisms that generate events in addition to what is experienced (Collier 1994). Although the context surrounding frequent shopping is important in this study, the phenomena under exploration are the empirical accounts of those who frequently purchase clothes. This interpretive study of the lived experiences of frequent shoppers is viewed as an imperative first step in tackling the problem of overconsumption of clothing. Without an initial understanding of the behaviour which perpetuates the problematic behaviour it would be difficult from the outset to determine which of the many causal mechanisms it may be fruitful for a critical realist to scrutinise.

The potential to explore the topic of overconsumption using different methodologies presents several avenues for future research. Building on the insight from this study, a grounded theory approach may be implemented to build theory regarding the causal relationships between frequent shopping and other variables such as peer comparison, browsing frequency, or traits associated with self-monitoring and materialism. The development of theory related to the components of involvement for frequent fashion shoppers would also provide valuable insight when considering the nature of attachment to repeated shopping behaviour and how this habit may be challenged. A critical realist perspective may prove fruitful in future exploration of opinions amongst key decision makers within the fashion

industry regarding reduction in the volume of clothing throughput alongside the influencing corporate structures and competitive environment which are barriers to progress in this area.

Other limitations of this study stem from the chosen sample of participants. I acknowledge that my definition of 'frequent shopper' may be open to debate. The definition of 'frequent shopper' as one who estimates that they have added at least 20 garments to their wardrobe in the past year is open to mis-estimation by the participant and although the definition served as an adequate baseline for the purpose of this exploratory study it encompasses a very broad scope of shopping behaviour as it potentially could include those who buy 21 or 1001 garments. There may be some benefit in future studies on this topic to segment participants more accurately based on the actual number of garments they buy in order to explore any differences in behaviour by clothing volume purchased. In addition whilst I have described the purchasing of a minimum of 20 garments a year as 'frequent' the research has shown that this level of shopping is considered normal within some circles so care should be taken in explaining what is meant by frequent shopping when referring to the findings of this study. The treatment of clothing as a single category may also be seen to limit this work since behaviour is likely to be different when considering whether clothing is being purchased to wear for work, socialising or leisure.

A further suggestion for future research is to explore the behaviours of those who choose to buy few garments of clothing. Understanding the reasons that individuals choose to limit their clothing consumption, whether this is a deliberate choice or an unconsidered behaviour, may assist in understanding resilience to the social pressures which are often succumbed to by frequent clothes shoppers and would provide valuable insight into how reduced consumption is carried out in practice. Research into those choosing minimalist lifestyles and a comparison of these with the opinions of excessive consumers to try and identify points of similarity and difference could also prove insightful.

By taking the decision to interview only female participants who are frequent shoppers, the behaviour of male clothes shoppers and those who estimate that they buy fewer than twenty garments a year

have been excluded from the study. Although the UK market for menswear at £14.5 billion in 2016 (Mintel 2017a) is just over half the size of the market for womenswear it continues to grow at a faster rate than womenswear (Mintel 2017b) and a similar study of male frequent clothes shopping behaviour could potentially provide a useful comparison.

This study has identified the issue of excessive clothing consumption to be complex and a form of wicked problem (Rittel and Webber 1973). The findings have suggested some of the ways in which the social practice of desiring and buying clothing could be transformed, but it is not possible for this study to define single clear direction that will bring about certain change. This is something that future research will need to examine more closely. In this respect, a study of the behaviour of those who do not frequently buy clothes might prove fruitful in identifying and understanding ways that infrequent clothes shoppers may be immune to the cues and social conventions that lead to the acquisition of clothing. The findings signal the need to address the problematic behaviour with multiple interventions and joined up action between stakeholders not just an intervention at the consumer level. Research will be needed to help identify what form those interventions might take. In order to progress understanding of the impact of consumption reduction a longitudinal study that required participants to give up frequent shopping and reduce their purchase levels to see how it impacts on wellbeing would be helpful.

Whist this study was not specifically designed to elicit information about the relationship between social media, online shopping, browsing and fashion consumption, it is clear from the findings that 'always on' attention to fashion is a significant factor in the volume of clothing acquired. I consider my failure to have anticipated the strength of the influence of online behaviour as limiting the capability of this study to fully understand the impact of this area. I recommend that further research on the role of online behaviour in establishing social expectations surrounding the volume and frequency of clothes shopping would be a useful contribution to the topic of frequent fashion shopper behaviour.

In summary, this study provides material for further intellectual discussion and adds to the policy and practice debate concerned with tackling unsustainable consumption habits. The findings signal areas of future investigation which would prove fruitful in advancing knowledge of how fashion consumption may become more sustainable by consuming less and whether this would be possible without any perceived detriment to feelings of wellbeing.

12. Concluding remarks

It is possible to conclude that a perfect storm of affordable clothing, an ever-changing availability of new styles and the desire to look right in the eyes of others has enabled frequent clothes shopping to become a repeated behaviour for some individuals. The findings of this research are timely as there is a growing realisation that the take-make-waste model cannot continue indefinitely and that the challenges of climate change are such that our current levels of consumption are simply not sustainable (McDonagh, Prothero 2014). The research has usefully applied the Symbolic Interactionist theories of fashion developed by Blumer (1969b) and Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton (1995) in order to understand the factors influencing the recent quickening throughput of clothing and the findings behaviour for the first time. As the first rigorous, critical analysis of the behaviour of the current, female, frequent fashion shopper, this study reveals the extent of normalisation of frequent clothes shopping and makes a significant contribution to understanding excessive clothing consumption. The data has highlighted a distance between the frequent fashion shopper and the physical, material properties of the garments that they acquire. Whilst this low level of involvement has exacerbated the problem of overconsumption since it makes clothing a more throwaway commodity, the fact that frequent shoppers are rarely emotionally connected with the garments they own has the potential to make consumption reduction more feasible. For those considering slowing throughput of clothing or

raising prices the study provides an element of assurance that some frequent consumers would not be resistant to having their choices edited or to accepting fewer garments. This is provided that their level of acquisition is perceived to be normal amongst their peer group and it does not disrupt the sensation of looking right.

The study concludes that female frequent fashion shopping activity is unlikely to change without disruptive intervention. The findings indicate that bringing about sustainable patterns of consumption requires the transformation of practices, creating and embedding new habits and more sustainable standards of conduct. Given that this study indicates that frequent fashion shoppers acknowledge that they could be just as happy with less, a situation of double dividend (Jackson 2005) may be possible. If it is indeed possible to achieve simultaneous positive outcomes for sustainability and for wellbeing then this is surely an agenda worth pursuing.

13. References

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Appendices:

Supplied in additional file