



## **Designing a sensibility for sustainable clothing: making and mending as a social practice to encourage pro-environmental behaviour change**

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### **Introduction**

Fast fashion has increasingly come into the spotlight for its deleterious social and environmental consequences. On 24 April 2013, the collapse of the Rana Plaza building raised awareness of the dire human and social consequences of the cheap production of clothes. Garment worker employees were forced to work in the factory on that day even though they could see that the building was vulnerable to collapse, leading to the tragic death of over 1,000 of them (Sinkovics and Hoque 2016).

The social implications of fashion are serious, but so too are the environmental ones. Distinct from many other products, clothes have exceedingly complex supply lines, leaving trails of environmental degradation and pollution – from soil condition and care, fibre production, the manufacture and colouration of textiles, the transportation of different components to assembly lines and to global markets, and the subsequent mountainous creation of textile waste (see Fletcher 2008 for a comprehensive introduction to the issues). The low material quality of garments and fast pace of fashion perpetuate social and environmental issues by generating a ‘buy now, throw away tomorrow’ culture (Morgan and Birtwhistle 2009) that additionally encourages a race-to-the-bottom in the industry (Taplin 2014). Stacey Dooley’s *Fashion’s Dirty Secrets* (2019) documentary and The House of Commons Environmental Audit

Committee's (2019) report *Fixing Fashion* are but two of many significant recent initiatives on fashion, which emphasise the need to make urgent changes to the fashion industry.

Our AHRC-funded interdisciplinary, multi-partner project, 'Designing a Sensibility for Sustainable Clothing' represents a significant attempt to experiment with a promising strategy to contribute to fixing fashion by encouraging pro-environmental behaviour.<sup>1</sup> It has sought to do this through engaging around 40 volunteer participants in hands-on making, mending and modifying clothes workshops, thus providing conditions in which to generate and develop new sets of social practices. We envisaged that this could potentially offer an experiential journey that may alter the ways in which people think, feel and react in relation to clothing. In this paper, we situate our work within the broader field of sustainability and fashion research, outline our motivations for this approach as rooted in social practice theory, and evaluate our attempt to foster a sensibility for sustainable clothing among our research participants. We show that our approach has encouraged more pro-environmental behaviour, but that deep seated habits and emotional connections to clothing can reduce the effectiveness of our approach.

### **The state-of-the-art of research on sustainable clothing**

The need to fix fashion, however, is by no means new. It has been recognised in academia for several decades. The field of research known as 'sustainable clothing' can be characterised into six sub-disciplinary (but not mutually exclusive) approaches: 1) identification of the problems associated with fast fashion; 2) technological approaches to make fibre production more sustainable; 3) sustainable design protocols; 4) corporate responsibility; 5) sociological or social-psychological accounts of clothing consumption and dressing behaviours; and 6) pro-environmental behaviour change. Contributions to the field therefore come from a broad range of disciplinary backgrounds including biologists, engineers, fashion and textile designers, sociologists and social psychologists, economists, business school scholars and economists, and political scientists.

Kate Fletcher is probably one of the most well-known scholars working to raise awareness of the *problems associated with fast fashion*. Her 2008 book introduces readers to the diverse impacts of fashion and textiles, but it also contributes to work on sustainable design protocols: showcasing new design concepts and social innovations designed to reduce fashion's impact.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the project, please see our website, available here: <http://sites.exeter.ac.uk/s4s/>. Last accessed 04/04/19.

Moreover, she points out the long history of sustainability initiatives in fashion (Fletcher 2015). In a similar vein, other scholars have shone light on environmental impacts across the fashion life-cycle (Kozlowski et al 2012) and of the ethical issues of fashion from a consumer perspective (Shaw et al 2004). *Technological approaches* to sustainabilising fashion are diverse. At the forefront of this strand of research is the notion that ‘science and technology play an important role in changing the nature of fashion’ (Peters et al 2014), although there is recognition that some technological processes are more environmentally damaging than others (Scaturro 2008). Gordon and Hill’s (2015) book on *Sustainable Fashion*, includes a chapter about the material origins of fibres. They discuss the trade-offs between using natural versus synthetic fibres, and for moving towards promising new synthetics that are less damaging to the environment. But work also cuts across this theme and others, especially research by Rebecca Earley and Kate Goldsworthy at the Centre for Circular Design. Their recent project work has sought to ‘create and embed sustainable design processes within companies’ (Earley et al 2016, p.15). Among other things, they brought together designers and textile fibre specialists mimicking collaborative design in the motor industry (Earley et al 2016).

*Sustainable Design Protocols* are usually the remit of academics working in Schools of Fashion. The emphasis here is on designing clothes with sustainability principles embedded: durability, slowness (Jung and Jin 2016, Minney 2016), adaptability and eco-chic (Black 2008) are key concepts guiding this work. There is, however, recognition that eco-fashion and eco-dress are not the same thing: the former might be a fad whereas the latter explicates a more deeply grounded eco-consciousness (Winge 2008). It is for this reason that we prefer to use the term ‘sustainable clothing’ rather than ‘sustainable fashion’. Kate Fletcher, a significant pioneer in sustainable design protocols for clothes argues that her:

... goal is to showcase a wealth of alternatives for building long-lasting environmental and social quality through the design, production and use of fashion and textiles that goes beyond traditional ideas or expectations ... Business as usual, or more to the point, fashion as usual, is not an option. (Fletcher 2014:2)

Other forerunners in sustainable design protocols include Sandy Black (2011) and Dilys Williams (2016), but the field is enlarging and gaining increasing credibility with producers and retail outlets, who are seeking to improve their *corporate responsibility*. Particularly since the Rana Plaza disaster, scholars have charted increased interest from businesses to improve

their reputations, whether or not these are genuine attempts to embed sustainability principles into their production lines (e.g. Donaghey and Reinecke 2015).

*Sociological or social-psychological accounts* of fashion try to understand what people buy and wear and why, and where it ends up (see, for example, Birtwhistle and Moore 2007). The emotional connections that people have with their clothes are central to this perspective, which recognises that clothes are much more than functional: they shape the identity of the wearer (e.g. Creed et al 2002, Rafferty 2011) sometimes in negative ways (Tseelon 2012). Although consumers are central to many of these strands of research on sustainable clothing, few studies have taken individual *behaviour change* as their central guiding principle. One rare example of a study in this field is by Durrani (2018) who considered how engaging non-professionals in clothes mending workshops – as vehicles for material and social practices – could be a means for pro-environmental behaviour shifts. Durrani’s in-depth interviews with organisers and participants revealed that they learned how to identify quality garments, how to care for them and how to mend them.

In this paper we build on the existing state-of-the-art of research around sustainable clothing. Our project engaged around 40 participants in a series of 20 one-day workshops focused on all phases of the clothing lifecycle (see methods), and assessed whether this practice-based approach can encourage pro-environmental behaviour change. Attuned with our brief thematic literature review (above) our immersive workshop series revealed to participants the *issues* with fast fashion and introduced some alternative and more sustainable fibres, processes and practices (natural wool, natural dyes and *ethical standards in fashion*), alongside teaching them how to generate their own *design protocols* (as well as how to modify and repair garments more generally). Our additional exploration and enquiry into their *reasons for choosing the clothes* they buy and wear deepened their connection to their clothes. For many, the process resulted in at least some *pro-environmental behaviour change*.

### **A social practices approach**

Our work is rooted within the tradition of social practice theory, drawn from the variant by Shove and Pantzar (2012), which posits that pro-environmental behaviour change requires the presence of assemblages of ‘things’ such as equipment and infrastructures, of ‘competences’ such as knowledge and skills, and of ‘meaning’ such as emotional resonance and identity (Hargreaves 2011, Shove 2010). The idea that simply changing attitudes automatically changes behaviour (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975, Kollumss and Agyeman 200) is now very outdated and

is ill-proven by evidence of a value/attitude-behaviour gap (Blake 1999). It is now widely recognised that social context, social norms and social infrastructures act as barriers to change, and need to be re-enacted by practices to become facilitators for change. It is only by embedding individuals in sets of practices (in our case making fabric, and making, mending and modifying clothes with the provision of things, competencies and meaning) that individuals develop new ways of interacting with the world in more pro-environmentally friendly ways (Warde 2005).

Thus, we purposively provided our participants with the things, competences and meanings to facilitate pro-environmental behaviour change. In terms of *things*, we provided them with physical space, equipment and materials to learn how fabric is made from fibre and how clothing can be made, mended and modified. In relation to *competencies*, we taught them a variety of skills and embedded casual conversations about clothing into our workshops so as to improve knowledge about the principles of sustainable clothing. Finally, we helped to generate *meaning* by encouraging emotional connection to their clothes (i.e. through the wardrobe audit – see methods section) and by fostering intergroup solidarity, allowing new social norms to be developed and/or reinforced. The sharing of difficult emotions, experiences and group support among trusted peers can encourage both deeper engagement with environmental issues and pro-environmental behaviour, as Buchs et al (2015) found in relation to Carbon Conversations.

Practices are generally thought of as assemblages that bring individuals together. Here, however, we depart slightly from social practice theory by looking at how *individuals* develop and respond to a set of social practices. Our research addresses two key questions: 1) do workshops that foster social practices around the making, mending and modification of clothes encourage participants to think, feel and act more sustainably? 2) what factors encourage (in)coherence in thinking, feeling and acting sustainably in relation to clothes?

At the core of our study design is the concept of a ‘sensibility’, which is commonly conceived of as the mobilisation of creative energy in combination with heightened awareness that allows for dominant norms to be challenged (Haskell 1985, Babuscio 1993). We interrogate the conception of a ‘sensibility’ through the notions of thinking and feeling. We posit that social practices *can* facilitate a sensibility for sustainable clothing (i.e. ways of thinking and feeling more sustainably) among individuals that allows their actions to cohere with thoughts and feelings. Thus, our central proposition is that social practices in particular combinations can

act as carriers that allow a convergence of thinking, feeling and acting in more pro-environmental ways. Our work, therefore, makes a distinct contribution to research on sustainable clothing, social practices and pro-environmental behaviour change. We explore this using a mixed methods approach consisting of analysis of before and after surveys (n=24), in-depth interviews with wardrobe audits, and participants' reflective diaries and contributions to reflective videos (see Research methods section).

In the rest of the paper we outline our mixed method methodology, present our findings, discuss our contribution to the field and make suggestions for scaling up our work.

## **Research methods**

Our research methodology has three main phases: 1) co-created workshops and the development of a project charter; 2) a survey of participants with a quasi-experimental design and 3) a package of qualitative methods consisting of interviews about wardrobe content, reflective diaries, natural talk and reflective films.

### ***Co-created workshops***

In January 2018 we held launch events in the West Midlands and Cornwall. Over 100 participants attended. Launch event participants completed a pre-participation survey (see more, below), which we also used as a tool to recruit a smaller number of participants to our workshops. In Cornwall we had 10-12 regular participants in our workshops, in the West Midlands we had nearly 30 participants, some of whom became regulars. Between February 2018 and October 2019 we ran four sets of five-day workshops in the West Midlands (coordinated by our University of Wolverhampton partners) and the same number in Cornwall (coordinated by the University of Exeter team). The themes were set out by researchers, but the exact content was shaped by our participants.

The workshops were designed to mimic the lifecycle of clothing, from the cradle to beyond what might usually be conceived as the grave. The workshops iteratively built upon each other and were focused on: 1) Fluff to Fibre: spinning, dyeing and weaving yarn (Cornwall); 2) (De)Constructive/(Re)Constructive Knitting: un-picking and re-making garments (West Midlands); 3) Towards Zero Waste: learning about the problem of global textiles waste (Cornwall); 4) Vintage Pattern Cutting: making patterns and garments using 1940s techniques and waste materials (West Midlands); 5) Make-Do-And-Mend: learning and applying sewing, darning and repair techniques (Cornwall); 6) (In)Visible Mending: using stitch techniques such as needle weaving and gold work to embellish stains, rips and tears in clothing (West

Midlands); 7) Second-Hand and Ethical: charity shopping, adapting and re-making garments (Cornwall); 8) Re-Make, Re-Purpose, Upcycle: upcycling, repurposing existing garments and making new artefacts from waste leather (West Midlands).

### ***The project charter***

In the Cornwall group, participants co-designed a project charter. Initially, participants at Cornwall launch event wrote on sticky notes their own ideas for encouraging consumers to think, feel and act in more sustainable ways in relation to clothing. This combination of ideas was summarised by the lead researcher and then discussed with participants in the workshop series on Towards Zero Waste. It was refined after discussion with participants and the resulting Charter is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Cornwall participants' notion of a sensibility for sustainable clothing**

|   |
|---|
| <p>A sensibility for sustainable clothing means:</p> <p>TO THINK about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• who made your clothes</li><li>• how your clothes were made</li><li>• what might be the ethical and environmental consequences of your clothing choices</li></ul> <p>TO FEEL:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• empathy with those who made your clothes</li><li>• comfortable, even stylish, in clothes with an independent sense of style tailored to self-identity</li><li>• that eco and ethical is cool</li><li>• empowered to make changes</li></ul> <p>TO ACT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• to buy and dress in an environmentally and ethically conscious way</li><li>• to learn to mend and modify clothing to extend its lifecycle</li><li>• to share knowledge and experiences with others to encourage them to also develop a sensibility for sustainable clothing.</li></ul> |
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### ***A survey of participants***

The survey had three purposes. It acted as: 1) a screening questionnaire to allow us to recruit an appropriate range of participants to our workshops (see above); 2) a tool to measure behaviour change through a quasi-experimental design; and 3) a screening devise to select a

small number of participants to reveal their S4S project journeys in more detail through qualitative material.

We designed a quasi-experimental questionnaire, which asked our participants for self-reported assessments of the ways in which they think, feel and act in relation to clothes before and after participation in our workshops. One of the batteries of questions was explicitly based on the project charter devised by the Cornwall team of researchers and participants (Table 1). Although the sample size is small (n=26 for the post-participation survey and n=24 for completion of both the before *and* after surveys), this enables us to gather a quantitative measure of the effects of our workshops.

We also used the survey to select four participants to illustrate qualitatively their journeys through the project. They are referred to here by pseudonyms – Bianca, Jennifer, Christine, and Susan. These participants are chosen because they have significantly different responses to the survey from one another, even though they all claim to now think more carefully about the clothes that they buy and have exhibited some pro-environmental behaviour changes.

Meet Bianca. Bianca is aged 36, has upper secondary education, is self-employed and does not identify with any social class. She labels her style ‘artistic’. Her clothing spend remained low (£5-20 per month) from the start to the end of the project.<sup>2</sup> She does not think differently about how she dresses since before the workshops, but does claim to buy fewer clothes. Jennifer, who identifies as working class, has a Masters degree, is aged 35 and is in full-time employment, also has a stable clothes spend from the start to the end of the project, but hers is higher at £50-100 per month. She claims that her style is smart / casual with a hint of the 1990s. Unlike the other participants we examine closely, she strongly disagrees that she has changed her style and answered ‘neutral’ in response to the question asking whether she seeks more ethical garments.

Our two other closely examined participants have reduced their clothing spend significantly since the start of the workshops. Their survey responses suggest that the project has had a significant impact on the way they think, feel and act in relation to clothing. Susan, aged 34, who works full-time and identifies as upper middle class, reduced her monthly clothing spend from £50-100 per month to £5-20. At the start of the project, Susan characterised her style as ‘preppy’ and driven by quality and brand. At the end, she had dropped quality and brand from

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that the ‘before’ and ‘after’ surveys were both conducted in the winter, which allows us, in this comparison, to control for seasonal effects.



her characterisation, but added denim and white, blue and red. Christine, like Susan, strongly agrees that the workshops have caused her to rethink her style. However, she continued to define her style as ‘casual’. Christine, who has a Masters degree, is aged 44, in full-time employment and identifies as working class, reduced her clothes spend from £100-200 to £50-100 per month.

### *Qualitative methods*

We use qualitative methods in this paper to understand more about the context of the behaviour changes that we can identify from our pre- and post-participation surveys, and to discover what the barriers are to coherence in thinking, feeling and acting. In particular, this allows us to validate and then search for explanations for the seemingly more significant behavioural changes of Susan and Christine compared to Bianca and Jennifer.

The qualitative techniques we used are three-fold. First, we interviewed our participants about their clothing practices in their homes in front of their wardrobes for 1.5-3 hours. Several of our participants were interviewed at both the start and end of the project, others completed one longer interview in the middle of the project. This was important because one of our participants had said to us that ‘it would be great if maybe at the end of the project you could come back and maybe have a look over my wardrobe then and see the differences, because ... I’m coming along’ (Christine).

This interview was combined with discussion about the results of a preparatory exercise in which participants guessed how many items of clothing they have, and then counted them. We asked them if they were surprised about any discrepancies between the number items they guessed they have in their wardrobe vis-à-vis what they actually have. They told us stories about what they were wearing at the time of the interview, their favourite outfits, which outfits were oldest and newest as well as cheapest and most expensive. We also asked them about their clothing choices and favourite clothes stores, their interpretation of sustainable fashion and what, if anything, had changed in their practices since participating in the workshops. Based on previous research work we collectively call this combination of methods a ‘wardrobe audit’, an approach we have adapted from ‘wardrobe studies’ (Klepp and Bjerck 2014, and specifically from Fletcher and Klepp (2017).

Second, our participants completed reflective diaries. Participants were provided with blank hard-backed sketch books and were invited to use these to write/draw/collage/photograph anything to do with their clothing, but central to them were written reflections on: ‘new (to

you) clothes – tell us about your new clothes!'; 'making and mending clothes – what's your latest project?'; 'today's outfit – what are you wearing today?'; and 'workshop reflections'. Open questions were tailored to the theme of the diary entry sheets, but we constantly asked participants to reflect on what this makes them think about, how it makes them feel and whether they think it will change the way that they act. Participants also used their diaries to sketch out plans for their practical projects, to stick in or staple samples of their work and to record details of processes and procedures related to skills they had learned.

Third, we analyse reflective talk and the content of reflective videos. Short reflective videos were integral to the research project, resulting in 27 2-5 minute reflective films available on the S4S project YouTube Channel.<sup>3</sup> Our film-makers worked as research assistants interviewing our participants and teasing out common themes (Hackney et al 2019). In addition to analysing the short videos themselves, we also analyse the sum of the audio recordings from natural talk and film-makers short interviews with participants *and* the reflective mini-focus group discussions that took place during each workshop series.

## **Findings**

### ***Pre- and post-workshop surveys***

Overall, our survey results suggest that, post-participation, our participants think considerably more deeply about their clothes purchasing and engage in a more ethical and environmentally-oriented set of practices, even if their preferred style remains relatively fixed.

We asked our participants to provide a list of their top five shops for purchasing clothes. We then characterised these as: high street, charity, online, vintage and reused. The majority of the 22 participants for whom we have valid pre- and post-participation answers preferred to list high street sources both before (on average 2.8 out of 5) and after (on average 2.2 out of 5) workshop participation, with a very slight shift away from the high street towards charity shops (mean before =0.6, mean after = 0.7).

Most of our participants (16 of 20 valid answers) reported that they would 'not continue to buy fast fashion' in general except for essentials, like underwear. This marks a significant change from the claim made by 19 of 23 that they *had* purchased clothes from a fast fashion retailer in the past 2 years. However, a minority would be tempted to purchase fast-fashion in a sale (only

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<sup>3</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCISPU0KuQXLMtSoLKRSE8Eg>, last accessed 04/04/19.

4 of 18 said they would do so). Their overall spending on clothes appeared, on average, to have increased from pre- to post-participation.

Of our 22 participants with valid answers to the question on clothing spend in both the pre- and post- survey, 9 had increased their monthly clothes spend, 8 had remained the same and 5 had reduced it. Of the 12 spending less than £20 per month at the start of the project, four had maintained a low spend, and 7 had increased to £20-50. Of the five participants who spent £20-50 at the start of the project, three had remained the same, one had increased to £100-200 and one had reduced to £5-10. One participant spending £50-100 kept her spending constant, but another had reduced from £50-100 to less than £20 per month. All 3 of our participants who used to spend more than £100 a month on clothes had reduced their spending: one to less than £20 per month, another to £20-50 and the third to £50-100.

That some participants had increased their clothes spend seems to be related to their more discerning tastes post-participation, as they increasingly sought more ethical – and presumably more expensive – fashion items. In Table 2, we show the mean scores (where 1=not at all and 5=very much) for a range of factors that influence decisions to purchase clothes. After participation in the workshops, our participants are markedly more influenced in their buying choices by the quality of the fibre, the quality of construction, the brand and locally produced clothing items. They are also slightly less concerned about what their peers think about their clothing choices and never, overall, seemed that fussed about being in fashion.

**Table 1: Factors that influence clothes purchasing choice before and after our workshops**

| <b>Factors that influence purchasing choice (n=26)</b> | <b>Mean score before (1-5)</b> | <b>Mean score after (1-5)</b> |
|--|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Quality of fibre                                       | 3.6                            | 4.6                           |
| Country of origin                                      | 2.0                            | 4.1                           |
| Quality of construction / manufacture                  | 3.9                            | 4.4                           |
| Price  | 4.3                            | 4.0                           |
| Brand  | 2.6                            | 4.1                           |
| Locally produced                                       | 2.6                            | 4.1                           |
| Being in fashion                                       | 2.1                            | 2.0                           |
| What peers think                                       | 2.0                            | 1.6                           |

A battery of agree-disagree (5-point likert scale) questions further reveals the impacts that our workshops had upon our participants in relation to thinking carefully about what they buy, learning new skills, buying fewer items, finding new meaning, sourcing clothes ethically,

thinking differently about how they dress and being more likely to fix their clothes (Table 3). Strikingly, few reported that they have changed their style, suggesting an enduring emotive connection with style, despite shifting preferences towards more ethically sourced clothing. Less than half have acquired new equipment. Some may already own equipment, but for those that do not, this could mean that the effects of making and mending are limited now that the workshop series has ended and the ‘things’ that facilitate behaviour change are no longer readily available for our participants.

**Table 2: Thinking, feeling and acting impacts of our workshops**

| Category | Impact (n=26)  | Number agreeing or strongly agreeing |
|----------|--|--------------------------------------|
| Think    | I think more carefully about the clothes I buy         | 23                                   |
| Feel     | I feel more empathy for the people who make my clothes | 22                                   |
| Act      | I am more likely to fix my broken clothes              | 22                                   |
| Act      | I have learned new skills                              | 22                                   |
| Feel     | I feel I have made new friends                         | 21                                   |
| Act      | I buy fewer new items of clothing                      | 20                                   |
| Act      | I try to find out who made my clothes                  | 19                                   |
| Act      | I increasingly source my clothes ethically             | 19                                   |
| Feel     | I find different meaning in the clothes I wear         | 16                                   |
| Think    | I think differently about how I dress                  | 15                                   |
| Act      | I have acquired new equipment                          | 12                                   |
| Act/feel | I have changed my style                                | 8                                    |

### *Tracing the journeys of key selected participants*

#### *Christine*

##### *Thinking:*

Christine learned a lot from the first wardrobe audit interview. She was utterly shocked with her stock of over 500 items. She thought that ‘...probably the most important outcome of this conversation is that I [will] trim down, yeah ... I have just too many things’. When she started counting, she thought ‘this is insane and there is no way I can count this, I mean it will take me 3 hours ... it means that I have really hundreds and hundreds of items.’

Her understanding of the sustainability issues associated with fashion has changed dramatically over the course of the project. At the start, she was concerned about micro-fibres and child exploitation in factories, but had developed a much more holistic conception of sustainable clothing through the course of participating in the workshops. By the middle of the third series, she told our film-maker:

Before I started I had a feeling and of course you know that, you know, there is exploitation behind [fashion]. That was my main concern. So having maybe small children or underpaid people producing my clothes. I feel that I'm changing, you know, my perception about sustainability is changing every day. So it's getting more and more ... sensitive towards the topic. But I think that in a way, you know, I was already mentally prepared, you know, for this kind of thing. So it wasn't a shocking discovery that I didn't expect. It's just that the more you know the more you feel that you should do something about it.

She had become acutely aware of the complexities of fixing the fashion industry through technological means, claiming that:

...sustainability is really, really hard. It's much harder to understand and the more you learn about it then the more you know that you don't know because there are implications on any front so any time you think you have found an alternative then you are willing back the planet in a different way so you think you fix a problem and then you create another one.

By the end she told us how her thinking and actions were starting to cohere:

I am more convinced than before, basically. Yes ... whenever they produce things then they necessarily have an impact on the planet ... the easiest way for everyone basically to make a positive change is to just use less, consume less, buy less.

#### *Feeling:*

When we peeked inside her wardrobe, Christine explained that she felt proud that her wardrobe was neat, but seemed ashamed that she had too many items of clothing claiming that 'I've let myself go a little bit too much'. At the end of the first wardrobe audit she reflected: '... now that we talk a little bit more about my wardrobe I think I feel a little bit less proud of it'. When we asked her if she was proud of her wardrobe at the end of the project she replied thus: 'Not particularly, to be honest. I am not ashamed ... but I don't think I am proud'.

She had an emotional attachment to old items of clothing, particular her rather worn Diesel t-shirts from the 1990s which no longer comfortably fit her. She loved the feel of the soft cotton and felt that she could not dispose of them. She was also attached to her favourite pair of Diesel jeans that she still wears. They now look worn, were once very baggy, but now fit perfectly. This had not changed at the end of the project. In her words: 'so I am in love with Diesel jeans'.

Her motivation for joining the project was to learn new skills so that she could transform old clothes to which she has an emotional attachment into new items for her daughter.

She also described how she felt social pressure to wear fashionable items in her home country. She found it difficult it is to be herself when in her home country because she is becoming increasingly 'English' in her dress style. Her style has become more practical, she is no longer willing to ditch clothes because they are not the fashionable colour and prefers to spend money on travel or other nice things for the family, instead. By the end of the first workshop series, she reported in a reflective interview that the workshops also helped to remove the social pressure to conform to a particular style. In her end of workshops reflection with our film-maker, Christine also told us how she had dropped notions of perfection from her creative practice too, describing it as a feeling of liberation.

Christine claimed to have had an 'amazing' experience learning to spin yarn from raw fibre but found it far removed from contemporary society:

My feeling is that it takes so much patience, it takes so much effort and labour to see something done. I'm not used to that; I want things quick. Our society is like everything has to be easily accessible, just really easy. So I don't know if I could cope, and I can't imagine how much passion you must have, because it's so labour intensive, and then you told me for also such little monetary reward.

After learning how to weave she felt in awe of the process of making fabric 'here you spend two hours and at the end you are done with this beautiful piece of cloth and you think, oh my, I did that'. Although she felt satisfied, she considered that weaving was far removed from peoples' every-day interactions with cloth. She felt delighted to have the opportunity to learn to knit ('other women would give their kidney to be here, and here I am'), but was perhaps the most content in front of the sewing machine. She was very happy to hold in her hand her first piece of machine sewn work (a pin cushion) and told our film-maker: 'I'm loving it'. She certainly seemed to get the most enjoyment out of processes that led to her holding something tangible in her hand. During workshop series 4, she described the process of making a skirt block as frustrating. After two days' work she had got to the point of having a bespoke pattern for a skirt size to fit her. She said 'I'm knackered and I have just a piece of paper in my hand, while I can go out and buy maybe from, you know, Primark, five [or] six pounds a skirt'. But as the workshops progressed, she began to love the interaction among her new friends more so than the skills aspects. As she told our film-maker at the end of the third workshop series:

I feel like every session became more and more like meeting with your friends and people who are more or less likeminded and share a nice time together independently, actually, on what we are doing. So I'm loving it so much and I'm already thinking, I can't believe it that it's almost finished. I'm going to miss it.

At the end of the workshop series she told us that she had been 'waiting for Saturday to come, and it's not so much for the skills any more'.

*Acting:*

For work she prefers clothes that are smart, but that can hide her swollen appendix due to health issues. She used to wear a lot of t-shirts, but now wears loose blouses instead. Her changing body shape means that she possesses a variety of clothes in different sizes. At the end of the workshops, she presented this as a significant barrier to change. Without a fluctuating waist line, she feels, 'it's much easier than to dress [in] anything and feel that you look nice'.

A lot of the clothes she was buying at the start of the project were costing £3.50 each and were bought in bulk from Amazon in a sale. She was aware that these items were of poor quality and 'can only be worn 5-6 times before they are not even good enough for the charity shop'. By the end of the project, she felt she had less attachment to those items and had thinned them out drastically. In her words: 'those are the items that was [sic] the easiest, you know, to get rid of and I stopped ... buying them, basically'. In the post-workshops interview, she was critical of the cheap and poor quality items she had bought. We asked her if she would do anything to improve their longevity, and the answer was: 'you know it already doesn't look nice after two washes so I won't do anything about it really because it's not worth it.' But it was not only poor quality items that she had removed from her wardrobe. She had also 'decided to give away all the pieces that I had a kind of emotional, you know, thing about them but I knew that I would never wear again ... except for a couple of coats, and things like that, that I am keeping for my daughter'. The discarded items went to charity shops, of which she is a huge fan. She continues to invest in quality jeans and coats, but likes to regularly change tops to give a different look.

In addition to thinning out her wardrobe she claimed to be buying 'definitely less than I would have bought, like a year ago, for instance' even when there was a sale on. This was a significant achievement because, as she explains, 'I just went through the most dangerous time of the year for me which is in the ... end of season sales'. She had shifted towards buying more functional items and sports-wear to go with her new and healthier lifestyle. She viewed her wardrobe

changes as work in progress: ‘I still think I can do better, it’s a slow process,’ and was still finding new and unworn items that she had forgotten about.

Even at the start of the project, when she was buying cheap items in sales, she told us that ‘my philosophy was always [to] buy expensive items on [sic] sales’. This was strongly reaffirmed in the post-workshops interview not only by her shift away from buying cheap items, but also in a more decisive plan to buy ‘few items that match well with each other’. Her shift from quantity to quality is also emphasised by her statement that she is ‘willing to spend more on items’. After learning to knit, she wanted to purchase a hand-made woollen jumper – one that would last her for years, with the seed for this initially sown during the earlier mill tour. In group reflections she commented that ‘I feel ashamed that I don’t have so much wool in my wardrobe’ and ‘I just think I would love to own a jumper like that’. For her the choice was clear: ‘So we can make a decision. We can say I decide not to spend £5 for a top, but £50 for a better one that will last years’ (reflective discussion at the end of Workshop series 1), but she was aware that some people do not have £50 available for a better quality garment.

Although the workshops *can* be credited with changing the content of her wardrobe and her purchasing habits, they did not so much change her proclivity to engage in making and mending. She told us that there are two reasons for this. First, she would have liked to have mastered some skills rather than have a taster of multiple different skills to give her more confidence to modify clothes. Second, she felt that time was not on her side. Once the workshops had ended, she found herself less inclined to spend time away from her family for fear of feeling guilty. She pointed out that ‘when you have free times then you are so tired and you just want to do nothing, if you find free times [they are] like [at] ten o’clock in the night.’ At the end of the third workshop series, she explained to our film-maker how skills development takes considerable time:

I mean, we have learned, actually, during these workshops, how hard it is to learn those skills. So it’s not something that you can do in a one-day session and go home and feel like, yes, I learned this. So it’s a long process.

Nonetheless, Christine is one of the few participants to have purchased equipment: ‘I bought myself a sewing machine so I really wanted to learn sewing and also because with a little one it makes so much sense. They grow so quickly and it would be lovely that you can change an item into something else.’ This is positive because it means that she has at least some of the ‘things’ that will allow her to sustain her practice of sewing.



When asked which aspects of the workshops encouraged a change in her shopping behaviours she replied ‘Oh yes, all of it. I mean I think that everything has changed so definitely it focused on quality instead of quantity. Yes and the appreciation for the items you have and just use them for as long as possible.’

For Christine, behaviour changes were motivated by *group processes* more than skills acquisition. As she told our film-maker in interview at the end of the third workshop series:

Well, occasionally you have this feeling that you are just one individual and if you buy one extra T-shirt it won't really change much. That is very selfish behaviour. So meeting with likeminded people and knowing that you are not doing your own, and if you will behave in this way then it's going to have an impact on a bigger scale. So it makes your choice a little bit more valued.

And her behaviour change was not restricted to clothing. She had begun to write a sustainability manual for her work place, too! She claimed that ‘I think that I would have never done it if it wasn't because if this, that's very true.’

### ***Jennifer***

#### *Thinking:*

Jennifer had initially thought that she had way too many items in her wardrobe. She told us that ‘the first time [I counted my clothes] it was a bit more dread ... I knew I had a lot of stuff’. But, after counting her clothes she had compared notes with other participants and discovered that ‘181 [items] is not that bad’. By the second time of counting she was ‘intrigued and excited’ to see what had changed because she ‘did give a few things to the charity shop but ... was buying things as well’.

We asked her why she felt it was a problem to have this amount of clothing. It appears that the reflective diaries were pivotal in helping her to think this through. She told us in her wardrobe audit that: ‘When I was writing [it] down in the book, we had to write down what we were wearing ... and I realised that I just kind of wear a lot of the same stuff a lot of time’. This made her think that many of the other items were superfluous. Then, she started thinking about the clothes she would only wear once a year and began asking herself ‘do I love this enough to just keep it for once a year?’. She used a similar logic in justifying her purchase of a new pair of Seasalt jeans: she had noticed she was wearing a £3 charity-shop pair frequently and thought ‘it's okay if I spend a bit more money on pair of good jeans because I do wear them a lot’. She

had previously looked for good quality jeans in the charity shop, and had even mistakenly bought an ill-fitting pair that were too ‘hipster’ for her taste.

At the start of the project, she claimed to be about 60% aware of the sustainability implications of fashion. She mentioned to us the ‘factory collapse’ (the Rana Plaza building) and the implication of well-known brands in that disaster. By the end of the project, she was thinking more about the composition of the clothes that she wears and buys:

I think having a discussion and learning a bit more about the different fabrics, even though it's not revolutionary – I mean, wool is wool, polyester is polyester. But, actually, the one thing I didn't know and that came out of the workshops is the micro-plastics that come out when you wash polyester. So, like, I had no idea about that at all.

Like Christine, she had developed a more ‘whole circular system’ understanding of sustainable clothing by the close of the project.

I'm now more aware that ... the fashion industry, is so much – it is throwaway. It's not just [that] the trends and the ideas are throwaway; it's, you know, it's the actual physical things and the environmental things; it's not just about ... them trying to make money out of having something new every season or every month or every year ... It's more than that. It's the whole process.

She recognised that ‘sustainable fashion’ might mean different things to different people, but that the bottom line was that:

it's considering what it's made from and how it's made and where it's come from and whose made it and then what are you going to do afterwards or can you recycle it?

She claimed to learn something new every week at the workshops, and this was not just skills-based. The informal conversations that she had with other participants during the workshops were very useful in informing her more holistic views about fashion. When we asked her whether her opinion had changed since participating in the workshops she replied: ‘Yes, yes. So, from the materials in the workshops and things that we watched and discussed and it ... was good.’ She attributed changes in her thinking to ‘a combination of just the whole process’, but there were also key moments such as the watching of a short film called Unravel. After this, she began to make links between over-consumption of clothing in the west and unsustainable agricultural practices, as well as between fast fashion and western clothes flooding the markets of poor countries (group discussion of the Unravel film).

*Feeling:*

Jennifer used to think it was acceptable for discarded fast fashion items to be given away to charity shops, but she changed her mind on this because, as she describes below, ‘felt really weird’ to know where many charity shop discards end up:

a lot of those clothes get sold to, like, Africa and South America and they’re the places that are often making the clothes and dealing with the environmental impacts of that, and then we’re selling the clothes back to them and then they’re selling those clothes to make a living. But it just feels like a really weird system where they’re suffering because of the way that we’re buying the clothes and then it seems okay to give them- to sell them back to them so then they can sell them and make a living out of them. It seems very weird.

She also described feelings of guilt in her reflective diary: she felt guilty for purchasing items, even from the charity shop. On another occasion in her diary she expressed feeling sadness over wool that gets wasted from discarded jumpers when it could, instead, be unravelled. Jennifer also found the workshop series enjoyable. She claimed to find the social side of the project ‘really interesting’, enjoying conversation on multiple topics – not only about clothing – but also enjoyed the support from friends.

With regards to her wardrobe, she had historically kept items that she could no longer fit into, but had started thinning out such items. This was because she felt it was ‘either ... a goal to try and fit into it again or it just makes you feel bad because you don’t fit into it’.

During her wardrobe audit, she told us of her emotional connection with the outfit she was wearing. She was wearing fairly expensive gifted trousers that she would not wish to be dismissive of by refusing, and a very comfortable cardigan. She also had a strong connection with a skirt in her wardrobe, of which she really liked the cut. She planned to one day get a pattern taken from it to make a new one that fits her. Another item she felt unable to let go was her silk graduation dress that is over 12 years old, but also no longer fits her. She also has an emotional connection to a favourite blouse that comprised part of her outfit when she went for her current job. The blouse has become ‘a bit like my lucky shirt’. Jennifer really enjoyed the wardrobe audit. She said that she: ‘got a lot of compliments for the things I was showing and things that I loved, which is nice – when you love something and someone says it’s really nice or really good quality. So it makes you feel proud of certain items’.

When our film-maker specifically asked her at the end of the workshop series how she felt about her clothes, Jennifer replied:

Feel about it, I guess that's quite a difficult one. And I guess I am feeling more conscious, feeling maybe more positive about trying to cut back rather than being concerned that erm, I'll have nothing to wear and I'll be in just, you know, moth-eaten charity shop clothes. Which just isn't the case at all because charity shops can be an absolutely wonderful place to find clothes. And yeah the way I act, I feel like I am buying less and buying better quality when I do which I am really pleased about. And I hope that I can carry on doing that.

*Acting:*

Her dressing style seems two-fold: she has a smart look, tailored for work, and a casual one swayed by comfort. She was increasingly sourcing clothes for both styles from charity shops. She did not have a definitive favourite outfit because it depends so heavily on her mood and season. Yet she did wear jeans frequently, and favoured the colour purple.

In her wardrobe audit interview, Jennifer told us that she had tried to moderate the number of items in her wardrobe by adopting a 'one-in-one-out sort of thing'. She had purposefully reduced the number of jumpers she owned because 'I think I had something like 27 jumpers on my first audit and I managed to get the number down ... because that [27] sounds a bit crazy'. She has also had a 'purge' on fancy-dress items. But she does have more t-shirts, shirts and trousers than she did at the start of the project and has nine more second-hand items. She had bought some colourful t-shirts from Seasalt because her old ones were 'getting too scruffy'. For her, this is good progress: 'I was quite pleased about that change and it seems to work better for me'.

Her shopping habits have altered in the sense that she now thinks more carefully about whether to buy at all, consciously shifting away from being an 'impulse charity shop buyer'. She told us of a three point code she had developed: 'Do I need it? Does it fit with my wardrobe? And are the colours or the fit right for me?'. In her diary she additionally drafted a five point plan for buying less clothes:

- 1) identify colours that work for me;
- 2) make sure 'new' items fit with my capsule wardrobe;
- 3) spend more on high quality basics;
- 4) shop for my body shape and size;
- [and] 5) know and stick to my 'style'.

In post-participation reflections, she refers to this practice as 'taking a pause to think' and having 'a bit of a reset'. This code developed slowly but iteratively through the course of the workshops. A reflective diary entry about 'New (to you) clothes during the 2<sup>nd</sup> series of

workshops reads thus ‘even if it’s from charity, I need to think carefully about buy it if I’m not sure of the fit’.

She was also beginning to more carefully consider the fabric composition of garments in order to make a more discerned choice. In her words:

I had actually been looking for one of those bags that you’re supposed to put your polyesters in to go in the washing machine and it’s supposed to capture all the micro-plastics but I haven’t found one yet. So I think that put me off buying polyester from charity, like. So if I see something that had, like, a pattern on it and it fits me, I would just buy it. I wouldn’t look at the composition but now I go, oh, I love it. Oh, what’s it made out of? Ooh. Umm.

However, she remained in a bit of a dilemma over gifts. Not wanting to appear uncharitable, she would wear gifted items that she would not herself buy. She also continued to buy items from the high street in the sale, which were not always as sustainability-oriented as she would like, and which she appeared to regret. For instance, she showed us a polka dot dress from Joules that she had bought in a sale. She confessed to not carefully thinking through the brand, the material, or the people who made it. Instead, she was captivated by the polka dots. She very much liked the look of it on the hanger, but feels it does not suit her: ‘it looked a bit weird, a bit frumpy; the back sort of was a bit strange’. Around the time of purchase, she reported in her reflective diary that ‘the new dress was probably unnecessary but I thought it would be good for a few events / occasions’. Despite that, she wishes to keep it to get some ‘wears’ out of it before passing it to the charity shop.

Currently, Jennifer identifies three barriers to continued improvement in the sustainability of her clothing choices related to skills, cost and predicting her future clothing needs. It was implicit in Jennifer’s contributions to interviews and discussions that she would like to continue learning to make and mend clothes. During one of our workshop series she had managed to take-in a skirt she had been gifted, but the workshop environment was crucial to her success through providing the motivation and confidence to succeed. Having said that, she does now have more confidence now to work alone, even if some apprehension remains:

I think I do have more confidence to go and adjust things on my own now since I have been doing the workshops. I am still a little bit apprehensive because it is so great to have experts and people that can show you how to do things. But I think that I will have the confidence to do simple changes that could make a difference to an item of clothing. And

maybe make my mind up a little bit more when I am shopping in the charity shops, that if something is a little bit the wrong size or the wrong shape that perhaps I could adjust it as long as I like the colour and the fabric.

On the other hand, replacing the lining of her partner's jacket is beyond her current skill set. She discovered that to pay for its replacement at a haberdashery is beyond her budget for presents (it was initially intended to be a Christmas present). She also identified the challenge of being able to discern what suits her as she matures, and of predicting what sort of job she will be undertaking in years to come. Her emphasis on the not-so-near future suggests that she is now thinking more seriously about the longevity of items she buys. But this is clearly not the end of clothes shopping for Jennifer. She told us that 'I still love shopping ... But I've definitely had a chance to just take a bit of a break from just buying things and not considering what it is [made from]'.

*Susan*

*Thinking:*

At the start of the project, Susan was already thinking through the ethical implications of fashion. In particular she was concerned about accountability in supply chains, pollution from the dyeing industry, genetically modified cotton and automated robot-driven factories. After watching the True Cost of Fashion, she was particularly hit by the involvement of significant agri-tech companies in the production of cotton and what they do 'with the seeds, yes, and the fertiliser' and thought the agri-tech companies should shoulder some of the blame for fashion's negative ramifications, not just the big clothing producing companies like H&M and Primark.

In her post-wardrobe audit, she told us that she did not think that the workshops had changed her view of sustainable clothing, partly because she had already, previously, visited sweatshops in Mauritius and Thailand. Although she might not be thinking differently, it was clear that she was thinking *more* about sustainable fashion and sustainability in general. As she said in her reflective interview with our film-maker at the end of the workshop series:

I think the whole workshop [series] have made me think more about sustainable fashion but also about being sustainable in other elements of my life. I'm now obsessed with waste. Like food-waste, and like I was always really good I would always have a bottle of water with me, but yeah like now I'm totally on this sustainable plastic-free don't want to buy into fast fashion kind of journey. I think people think I'm just going on about it as well, like family and friends they just think I am on ... this hippie run.

She also told us a story in workshop reflections (at the end of series 3) that revealed she was definitely thinking differently about buying cheap items in Primark:

I was in Truro for work and then my friend asked me if I wanted to go to the beach. But I hadn't got my swimming costume so I knew I had to go home to Redruth, which is obviously like ten miles, and then drive back again. But it's, like, five o'clock so I knew there was going to be a lot of traffic and expense and then I was like "oh but I am just down the road from like Primark so I could just like nip in and get a four quid bikini". So I did just a quick calculation in my mind – time, expense – and I was just like "oh" and then I just went to get this bikini for four quid. And I did feel quite guilty about it then. So yes, that kind of highlighted to me how I think about things now, whereas before it wouldn't have really bothered me.

Susan claimed that the workshop series helped her to think more about buying from ethical and sustainable brands: 'I look now for about what brands I'm buying and what their supply chain is about, what their ethics are about'. In her clothing diary, she had assembled the sustainability policies of some of her favourite brands, and was critical of the greenwashing aspect. In interviews she told us: 'I mean, anyone can write a sustainability policy ... And I think they turn a blind eye to things ... If they're subcontracting the work out, they don't check their subcontractors then subcontract to another subcontractor.'

#### *Feeling:*

At the initial wardrobe audit, Susan had guessed that she owned about 150 items of clothing, but actually had 292. Although she was surprised at how many items of clothing she had counted, she did not feel guilty about it. This is because she very much enjoys clothes, feels an affinity with fashion, claims to wear everything in her wardrobe and 'wears them to the death'. As she told us in her start-of-project interview 'it sounds really wrong, but fashion is like my hobby and I like going shopping ... I enjoy wearing clothes ... I love fashion ... I love clothes'. She also loves reading about clothes, and watching documentaries and films about them. Her strong affinity with fashion and clothing have led her to resist the notion that fashion is 'evil'. She says 'it does have its place – doesn't it? In time you think about how it represents, you know, different years and different, you know, social settings in people's lives'.

At the end of project audit, she had only just moved house and much of her clothing was still in bags and suitcases, but in a very organised manner. She was even enjoying sorting them out:

‘I find it very therapeutic’. That said, she carefully selects outfits according to her own discerning taste. She told us that she has very few gifted items because ‘everyone knows I’m very specific about what I wear’. She was very proud of her wardrobe even at the start of the project. She told us ‘oh my God, I love it’.

Sometimes, Susan emotionally connects her clothes via memory to resonant events and places. When she first counted her clothes for us, she discovered a small top that she used to wear when she used to go clubbing. Although she no longer wore it, she did not want to get rid of it because ‘it has really nice memories’. After rediscovering it she said that ‘the next thing ... I messaged by my friends, because they all live up north, and I was like “oh, when are you all gonna come out for a night in Newquay”.. so perhaps I’ll keep it for when we go out’. By the end of project interview, she had decided to give this top away to someone she knows who might ‘get a couple of wears out of it’.

She has also kept old items that she bought while travelling to exotic locations such as Thailand and Morocco. An old skirt from Morocco reminds her of her university days, when she lived with six other women who each borrowed one another’s clothes, it is also a wrap-around skirt which means that it will continue to fit her in years to come, even though she now only wears it about once a year.

Rather like Christine’s love of Levi jeans, Susan was very fond of white t-shirts. In her words: ‘I’m obsessed with white t-shirts’ and ‘you can’t go wrong with, like, a simple white t-shirt’. Her favourite outfit would consist of a white t-shirt, usually with denim and sometimes with a blazer in a casual style.

As with the other participants whose journeys we trace in-depth, Susan enjoyed the social side of the workshops and felt that she had developed new friendships. In her words:

It’s been nice to have, like, spend time and talk to other people about fashion and clothes and, yes, we’ve all got a really, like, a common interest, so conversation flows, like, quite easily, and it’s easy to talk about stuff that you’ve bought or things that you might have read, obviously in the news and social media, about fashion.

#### *Acting:*

One of the actions that Susan was engaging in, even at the start of the project, was care for her clothes. She aimed to look after them carefully so as to encourage their longevity. In her start-of-project wardrobe interview she told us that ‘some people just shove everything in the



washing machine, won't they, all on a white coloured wash and just put it all in, but I separate it out. I do it properly. If it says hand wash, I hand wash it'. Once items had come to the end of their useful life, Susan would sometimes repurpose them into art: an old favourite shirt had become bunting, and cut-outs of her old favourite Levi jeans were displayed on the walls. White t-shirts would be organised into piles: for best when they were pristine; for wearing around the house or to the gym when they had sweat stains under the arms; for DiY or donations to her outdoorsy 'horsey' sister when they were even closer to the end of their life; or for discarding when they are not even good enough to go to a charity shop.

She was also already rebelling against fast-fashion and had noticed as she had aged that she was more interested in quality than quantity: her days of going to Primark and bagging a multitude of items for £40 were clearly over. But she did confess in interview at the end of the project that 'I still buy the odd vest top from Primark' and included a photograph of a new purchase from Primark in her clothing diary. It was washed only a few times and had 'gone bobbly' already. She was also not fond of wearing it because a friend had also purchased one the same, making her 'feel less unique' (clothing diary). These days, she would prefer to buy a more expensive and better quality item from a brand Seasalt, Jack Wills or Tommy Hilfiger, often from TKMaxx, than several poorer quality items. She told us that the workshops had reinforced her switch away from Primark for cheap holiday clothes. Instead of buying cheap items for a holiday to discard afterwards, she would now take items that were already past their prime so that it would not matter if they got stained by sun tan lotion or otherwise spoiled.

Her most expensive item was probably her leather coat, which cost around £250. She does not wear it very much because she feels it conflicts with her semi-vegetarian identity. At the end of the workshop series she told us that she had considered selling it, but that similar jackets seemed to be valued on eBay at only around £50, 'so I might as well keep it'. She was very much attracted to quality brands and the notions of lifestyle that they encompass. Her brand loyalty was such that she would not wish to 'deflect from the brands that I buy'. Instead, she would wish for 'the brands that I buy to be more ethical in their supply chain and their products to be more sustainable'. Although brand driven, she, like Christine, had a knack of finding the quality branded items that she craved in sales. She told us a story about finding a pair of Ralph Lauren jeans for £24.99, which would ordinarily cost about £120.

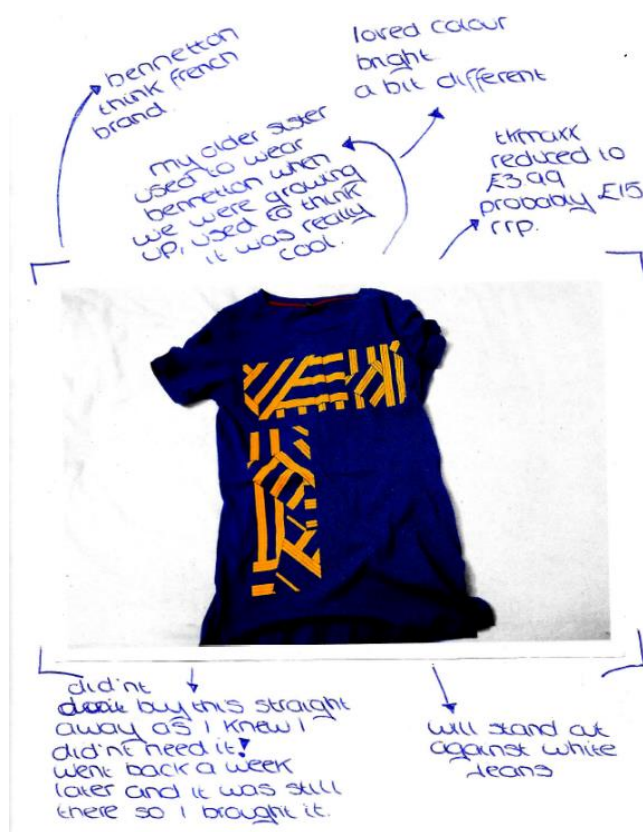
Unlike Christine and Jennifer, Susan had not consciously tried to reduce the number of items in her wardrobe, to stop buying, or pause so much before buying (although she had mentioned

she was doing less clothes shopping by the end of her third workshop series). Her taste was already discerning and her brand loyalty was almost unflinching. She includes in her reflective diary evidence of several shopping expeditions consistent with the purchasing ethos she described (see, for example, Figure 1). Indeed, she told us that ‘if I see something I really like and know I’m going to wear it out I’ll just buy two’. She could not understand why people would make mistakes when buying clothes. As she told us in her post-workshops wardrobe audit interview:

Buy something and then don’t wear it for six months and then it just goes to the charity shop with its labels on. Why? Why did you buy it? I mean, you didn’t love it; you’re not going to wear it every day, you know, all of the time.

However, she did say she might reconsider buying brands like Tommy Hilfiger if they had been lambasted in the press for poor ethical and environmental practices.

**Figure 1: Excerpt from Susan’s clothing diary**



In the 12 months between the two wardrobe audits, Susan had acquired around 20-30 new items, including a classy new trench coat, at a good price in a sale in Italy. She has also purchased a new jumper from Finisterre and enjoyed talking to friends up country about where it came from, describing it as ‘a really cool brand in Cornwall’. She was using charity shops more, but mostly for ‘home interiors’ rather than clothes because her preferred brands rarely appear in charity shops. In the final workshop series, she was surprised to find a Roxy Quick Silver denim skirt

for 50p in the end-of-the-line charity shop in Redruth. During the workshops, she lengthened it because it was initially so short ‘you could literally see your pants!’. She said that the modified skirt was not her usual style, but it was something she could see herself wearing on holiday.

Although she spends less on clothes than she did beforehand, she mostly attributes this to her relocation from Weston (and prior to that the City), where there is an abundance of clothing outlets. This contrasts with west Cornwall, where supply is considerably scarcer. Since attending the workshops, she also claimed to feel less pressured to look smart every day and had become less inclined to wear make-up.

She has also continued to use the skills that she learned during the workshops. In the post-workshops project interview she told us that 'I've fixed, like, loads more, yes, rather than sending it home to my Mum'. In her reflections on the make-do-and-mend workshop series she told us that workshops have given her skills and confidence. What was nice about them was:

someone's over your shoulder going yes that's right, keep going, keep going. I had a really delicate pink skirt which is like really intimidated me because I thought things like putting a needle in it it's going to you know make it even worse so it was quite nice to get someone's guidance.

*Bianca*

*Thinking:*

At the start of the project, it was Bianca's view that sustainable clothing meant 'to have clothes for as long as you can. To recycle, upcycle and to ... to give them away not throw them away'. Mid-way through, she affirmed that 'I find this project very much connected to my attitude to all these things, which I had from before'. Even at the start of the project she was concerned about environmental issues related to fashion, particularly in the construction of artificial fibres: 'So I am really shocked that in these last 100 years they succeed, succeeded to find so many harming materials and way to produce anything, not only clothing.' She held the strong view that fibres should be locally produced. By the end of the project, she was enlightened about sweat shops and the production of cotton. She became concerned about genetically modified cotton and vowed to use only organic cotton when making new clothes. At the end of workshop series 3, she told our film-maker 'I knew it was something bad happening, but I had no idea it was that bad'.

She thought that the 84 pieces of clothing she counted in her wardrobe – low by the standards of most other participants – was 'may be too much, because I don't actually wear all of them, I wear only a few of them only. I could say maybe I wear 20 of them more often so this is even too much for my opinion'. She had thought that she owned '50, may be 60 maximum'. She discovered that she had more dresses than she realised and thought 'I need to wear them more

or find a way what to do with them because otherwise they are useless. So this didn't surprise me, but made me think'.

She thought that the fashion industry was somewhat brutal. In her mind, the big brands were:

ruling the world much too much because there are so many creative people, so many artists who do amazing things but they are not seen because these companies are putting a shadow on them ... Because it's umm, basically what is happening now the fashion is that everyone are [sic] the same, they have three colours; that's black, white and grey right? And umm, that's the main fashion out there ... And I find that very boring ... So this fashion is stupid. Sorry.

### *Feeling*

Although she had initially thought she had too many clothes, she told us in the post-wardrobe audit that she felt better for knowing that she had many fewer items than other participants. She found the size of some women's wardrobes to be 'shocking' ('some women have wardrobes as big as a room' [reflections on workshop series 2]). Afterwards, she felt better about acquiring a few more items.

She feels that different colours are suitable for different moods. For example, she claims that 'somehow black gives me a bit of protection', although she does not wear it that often.

The oldest item in her wardrobe was a jacket that she made aged 16 (making it nineteen years old), which is one of her favourite outfits even though it is a bit broken. She feels a special affinity to it for two reasons. First, it makes her feel very proud of her clothes-making skills, especially because she had defied a teacher at school who taught the rest of the class that the way she had made hers was wrong. Second, the colour reminds her of the marketing and packaging of Milka chocolate. She is also closely attached to a pink maternity dress that she made for herself when she was pregnant with her first child fifteen years ago. She loves colour, but also fondly remembers how it made her 'feel like I was blooming'. Another of her favourite dresses was 'stolen from my shop' (see acting: regarding her clothes making), made from some fabric she had owned for about 20 years in her home country. Although she does not have many clothes, there are some items that she does not wear. But she keeps these because 'they are still a nice memory' (post wardrobe audit interview). One of these includes a peach dress that she wore when she met her (now) husband.

She feels that clothes are important for expressing ‘the real personality of every person’ and she feels that she ‘want[s] to be myself always’. At the start of the workshop series, she claimed that her own dress style is now smarter than it used to be because she wants to look respectable for her children’s sake. Even then, it has remained unique and colourful. By the end of the project she claimed she was becoming more expressive in her clothing again.

One of her favourite dresses is pink and purple with a print of leaves and flowers, which she says fits in with her identity. It is apparent that she feels happy wearing clothes that she has made, particularly a poncho that she had made from a late 1970s – early 1980s blanket that her mother had given her. She wore this for her post-project audit especially to show it to the research team. Although she has a unique style, she claimed that comfort is the overriding factor in helping her to decide what to wear: ‘something without strong elastic ... soft materials and not too tight’. Indeed, in the ‘what are you wearing today’ reflections, Bianca often mentions comfort, as well as feeling beautiful in her home-made outfits.

For Bianca, ‘feelings’ were central to encouraging people to move away from fast fashion. She thinks that people follow fast fashion because:

they don't feel good enough and they don't ... feel like brave enough to be a little bit of outcast. They need all to go with sheep in the whole, you know... and ... yeah they need always to impress others and they need always to, like, feel that they are like... the same. Like the big group.

She had continued to participate in the workshops because she enjoyed the ‘community element and the friendship’ as well as ‘just for being creative not only to make something. It was more like just relaxing and just doing it’. In reflections during the second series of workshops, she said she was pleased that clothes making workshops were taking place and to have made friends:

And I'm happy this is really spreading around. And to be part of this workshop is, for me, a big gift, because it's amazing to meet so many great women every week and have so interesting chats and new experiences. So, yes, I'm really grateful to be here.

*Acting:*

Bianca considers herself to be a fashion designer (‘even though I don’t work completely as one’ – see Figure 2 for some examples of her designs) and also an environmentalist (‘I tell my friends not to put rubbish down’). Her creativity with clothes-making stems in part from her

relatively deprived upbringing. She remembers being bought only around six new items of new clothing for 10 years of her life (aged 9-19 years), and making her first dress with the guidance of her neighbour, aged 9. She was only one of two participants in the Cornwall group who had – before the workshops – darned a sock. Bianca relishes the way in which making clothes allows her to express herself. She sees clothes making as an artistic practice: ‘for me ... sewing is like painting, so I ... actually don’t have a plan with what I will make from a thing, like I kind of get ideas while I have scissors in my hands ... like something what is to fix is boring a bit for me’ (oral history discussion, Series 3).

**Figure 2: Bianca’s creations**



Her aptitude at making clothes and her upbringing could be two reasons why she does not believe in spending a lot of money on clothes, but she is also well-practiced at not buying clothes. In her post-workshop wardrobe audit interview she told us that she ‘had years where I never bought any item of things since I was a teenager until I came to the UK’. This changed only when her work necessitated a smarter look. At the start of the project, she estimated that 80% of her clothing was self-made and the rest – t-shirts, leggings and jeans – was purchased cheaply from Primark ‘because of the budget’. She had acquired seven new-to-her items by the end of the workshop series. This included two new

pairs of jeans from Primark, because her old ones had ‘become too small’, at least one new t-shirt, some trousers and a poncho that she had made (see above) and a second-hand jacket. Midway through the workshops, she told us that she ‘had no idea Primark has any history like this,’ but she continued to occasionally buy items there. She reported in her reflective diary that she does not feel guilty about having a total of 11 items from Primark ‘it is only 11 pieces and I wear them a lot’. She also considers that removing jobs from sweatshop workers is a worse alternative to the workers’ lives than what they currently face. To express her concerns she had written a letter to Primark to persuade them to treat their workers more fairly.

In the start of the project interview, she showed us a white shirt from Peacocks that she had just bought. This was the only item she had ever bought there. She rarely wore it and, by the

end of project interview, had given it away to a charity shop, realising ‘perhaps I just don’t like shirts’. Additionally, a couple of items had found their way into her ‘recycling box’ to be upcycled into new items. At the time of the post workshop participation wardrobe audit interview, she was wearing some trousers that she had made out of pillow cases from a charity shop. Unlike other participants, Bianca has never hoarded items of clothing. Instead, her practice is this:

Basically like every few months we bring many bags to charity shop so I have .... so every time we don't need something we just put it on a pile and then when it's enough for a bag I take it so we are getting rid of things quite fast.

Not to mislead, it is important to note that these bags for the charity shops also include clothes that her teenage children have grown out of. Also at the start of the project she told us that she tried to source cheap fabrics from charity shops ‘I also find, I don’t know like nice curtains, bedding, blankets in charity shops’. But by the end of the workshop series she was reporting some guilt for using fleeces that contain micro-fibres, she will ‘not be buying more fleece’ and she wants to get a ‘washing ball’ to capture the micro-fibres.

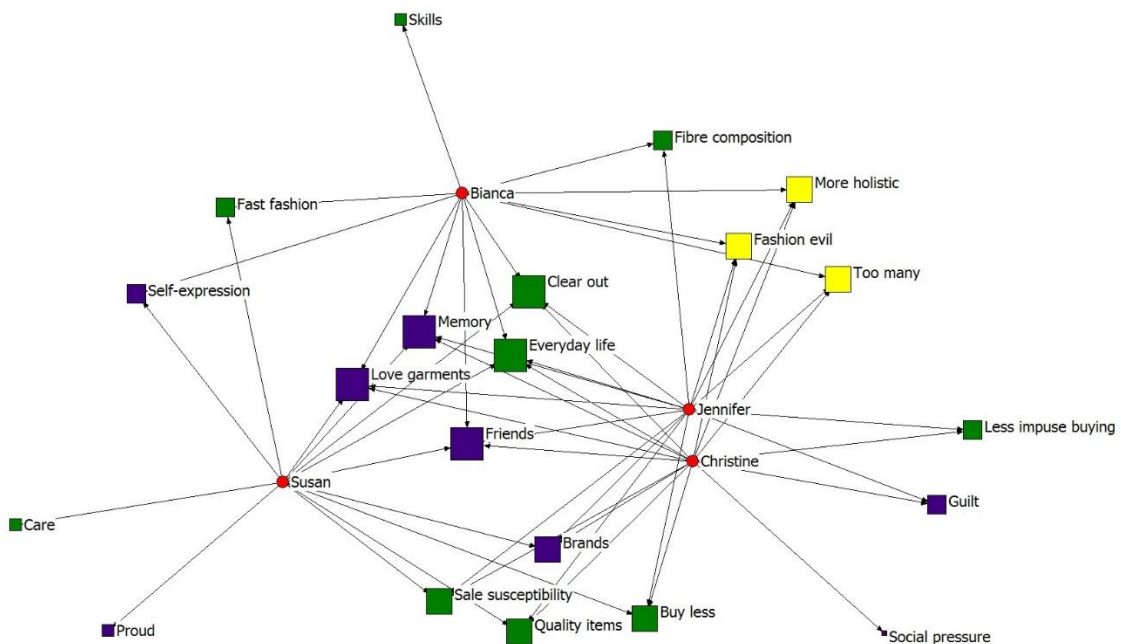
In the future she would like to make her own fabrics based on the skills that she has learned. For her, ‘the biggest shock was actually GMO cotton, because I didn't know that cotton is genetically-modified. And I really don't want to support that, at all. And umm, yeah, and the synthetic fabrics are not good for our skin and not good for environment’.

Although she is making a significant shift towards more natural fibres, she does not feel that the workshops, particularly, made her act more sustainably. The biggest realisation for her was that she should share her skills: ‘So yeah, I was always quite sustainable, so it's not like personally changing me but it is giving me a little bit more enthusiasm that I should actually share my skills. Because I never really shared these skills’.

#### *Shared themes across our participants*

Our four participants have similarities, but also nuanced differences in the ways they think feel and act in relation to the sustainability of their clothes. Key themes from their stories are included in Figure 3. A theme is considered key if either more than one participant mentions it, or if one participant emphasises it significantly.

**Figure 2. Shared key themes in the stories of Christine, Jennifer, Susan and Bianca**



Notes: Circles refer to participants. Yellow squares refer to ‘thinking’, purple squares to ‘feeling’, green squares to ‘acting’ and red circles to participants. Diagram produced in NetDraw, using graph theoretic layout.

The four participants have similar thinking: they each feel like they have too many items of clothing (‘too many’ in Figure 3), although this assessment is restricted to flip-flops for Susan. They are all also aware of the holistic nature of sustainability and concerned about the environmental and human implications of fashion (‘holistic’). However, this translates differently into their overall assessments about fashion. Susan loves fashion and thinks it has purpose, including demarking historical eras. Christine and Jennifer are relatively ambivalent, but Bianca thinks it is ‘stupid’. All except Susan would defend a position that fashion is evil (‘fashion evil’).

Each of the four, then, have a similar set of values and sophisticated understandings of the need to make fashion more sustainable. However, in line with other evidence that purports a value-behaviour gap, these views do not straightforwardly translate into pro-environmental behaviour. This is despite the fact that they each attribute their engagement in more pro-environmental behaviours to their participation in the project. Bianca and Susan continue to purchase (admittedly a few) items from fast fashion stores (‘fast fashion’). Christine, Jennifer and Susan are susceptible to purchasing items they do not really need when they are on offer



in a sale ('sale susceptibility'), and Susan is resistant to letting items go ('clear out'). Susan also claims that, unlike Christine and Jennifer, she will not buy less ('buy less'). Christine, Jennifer *and* Susan suggest that they will now buy more quality items. And Christine, Bianca and Jennifer pledge to look at the fibre composition of garments before committing to purchase. How might we explain the differential uptake of pro-environmental behaviours among our participants?

For an answer to that question, the participants stories relayed above reveal the need to examine three areas: social class / wealth, existing habits and behaviours and emotions (what we call here 'feelings'). The biggest contrasting spenders at the start of the project were Susan and Bianca. They also have the most contrasting social class background. Susan defines herself as upper middle class. In comparison, Bianca does not identify with a class, but describes herself as being from a relatively deprived background. Bianca has never become accustomed to buying new clothes, and when she does so, she does it to a tight budget. Her usual practice, since a very young age, is to make clothes from recycled materials. Her constantly low clothes spend is a result of the purchase of a small number of budget items from Primark, which was constant throughout the project. It appears that Bianca's budget would not stretch to the purchase the quality designer label items that Susan prefers. For Susan, the purchase of quality brands is a routine practice to which she has become accustomed and can presumably also afford (particular when she finds items in a sale). One of Bianca's more routine practices is to bundle up items for charity shops. This, for her, has been a constant practice, so we find her no more or less likely to dispose of no longer wanted items before and after the project.

Going clothes shopping for Bianca means sourcing essentials cheaply. The essentials do not form part of her creative and individualistic style, they are chosen for practicality. For our other participants, going shopping (or shopping online for Christine) is something that they enjoy. To some extent, it has become habitual. For them, hunting for items in the sale is (or at least has been) fun. Unlike Jennifer and Christine, Susan claims to never make mistakes with her purchases. Her shopping practices and colour code (white, red and blue) make it very difficult for her to make mistakes. She also claims to wear everything in her wardrobe. This differs from Jennifer, who pointed to a few items in her wardrobe that she had made a mistake in purchasing – including the polka dot dress from Joules – as well as for Christine, who, at the start of the project, had multitudes of never-worn clothing. This makes it easier for Jennifer and Christine to reconsider what is worth keeping and to think more carefully about what they buy.

But it is emotional connections to clothes that are both the ‘stickiest’ and the most diverse and differentially distributed themes among our participants. Susan *loves* clothes and fashion: buying it, wearing it, reading about it and watching documentaries. She also feels unwavering loyalty for brands (‘brands’) – more so than any of our other participants, although Jennifer and Christine also appreciate good quality brands. She takes good care (‘care’) of her garments. She is the only one of the four who is unequivocally proud of her wardrobe (‘proud’). Susan and Bianca find self-expression (‘self-expression’) in their clothes and neither of them feel guilt (‘guilt’) for their purchases – Bianca because she buys so few things and Susan because she is so careful with her purchasing. Christine and Jennifer, on the other hand, feel guilt. All four participants found friendship (‘friends’) in the group and talked about common interests – even though their evaluations of fashion are so diverse. They all have garments they love (‘love garments’), and items that are imbued with memories (‘memory’).

The graph theoretic layout of Figure 2 positions the four participants in terms of their similarities, with Jennifer and Christine the closest together. These two participants, thus, have the most similar thoughts, feelings and actions, and in the qualitative evidence appear to have the most significant changes to their clothing practices (note: this contrasts with what the quantitative data indicates). In contrast, Bianca’s restricted budget and creativity and Susan’s brand loyalty and careful purchasing have somewhat locked them into existing clothing practices. Jennifer and Christine have been freer to let items go and to develop more careful purchasing habits over the course of the project.

## **Conclusions**

Our attempt to create a set of social practices around the making and mending of clothes has been a successful at, in aggregate, improving the way in which people think, feel and act in relation to the sustainability of their clothing. This is evidenced by our analysis of survey responses in which our participants generally report broader and deeper engagement in pro-environmental behaviours at the end of the project compared to at the start. However, pro-environmental behaviours are differentially distributed across participants. We have suggested that it is meaning-making and habits that allow for this differential distribution.

This paper, therefore, makes a significant contribution to work on sustainable fashion, by looking deeply at ways in which social practices can encourage pro-environmental behaviour change. It has also illustrated significant barriers to change. We identified that emotional and habitual barriers exist at the individual level, but it is important to point out that these are

propped up by dominant social norms and infrastructures. Advertising tropes for clothes and the continuation of business-as-usual for the global fashion industry allow for individuals' habits and emotional resonances to particular ways of viewing fashion to be maintained. Thus, to fix fast fashion requires not just changing individual behaviours, but changing practices and processes at every stage of the life-cycle of fashion. One concern is that, as long as dominant fashion tropes persist, attempts to change social practices through workshops like the one we ran will remain niche. Our work, therefore, suggests the need and the potential for moving our work from a small group of participants in community halls and art spaces, to a normalised practice on the high street. We argue that high street brands should include stations for mending and modifying clothing in their stores (see the S4S contribution to the Environmental Audit Committee Report, 2019). Clothing available for purchase should be made with regard for environmental and human principles, and designed with durability and adaptability in mind. Infrastructures to allow people to work on adapting (changing style, fit, or fixing) clothes should be commonplace. Without continued workshops that become a part of everyday life, the pro-environmental behaviours developed among our participants may not be sustained by them, nor spread to others. It was clear that for the huge majority of our participants that social interaction was as important in shaping their views and behaviours as the learning of skills and this should be mimicked in any attempt to increase the life of our work or to upscale our work. Finding ways of expanding our project work from a small niche to a mass market in ways that ensures the social interaction that allows for meaning generation, solidarity and skill-sharing are therefore crucial.

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