Understanding Apparel Consumption Behavior of Voluntary Simplifiers:

A Phenomenological Approach

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

BY

Hyojung Cho

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Dr. Hye-Young Kim, Adviser

July 2018

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to understand the lived experiences of voluntary simplifiers in the context of apparel consumption. Moreover, this study sought to identify the specific personal motivations of voluntary simplifiers. The research questions developed to meet the research objectives were as follows: 1) What are consumers' deeper personal motivations to pursue voluntary simplicity? 2) How do consumers practice voluntary simplicity in terms of apparel consumption? To answer these research questions, this study adopted the consumer decision process model (Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel, 2001) as a framework. This model includes a series of stages to explain the cognitive and behavioral activities of consumers: problem recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision, use/care/storage, post-purchase evaluation, and disposal. This model can provide a thorough guideline for understanding the apparel consumption of voluntary simplifiers.

By adopting phenomenology, the apparel consumption of voluntary simplifiers was considered a unique phenomenon and described through the common or shared experiences of the research participants. Their experiences were shared through in-depth interviews, and eight participants living in Minnesota were interviewed. Interview questions were developed based on the seven stages of the consumer decision process model, which were categorized into three bigger categories: acquisition, use, and disposal.

A range of personal motivations and apparel consumption behaviors of voluntary simplifiers were revealed. The first and most common personal reason to pursue voluntary simplicity was "intergenerational transmission between the participants

and their parents," followed by "transformative life stages: trials and learning," "toward a coherent self," and "reducing clutter and anxiety." The participants of this study shared that their learnings from their parents and transformative life stages helped them consider making this simple lifestyle choice, in addition to their efforts to maintain a coherent self and achieve perfection in every aspect of their lives.

The common themes of apparel consumption of voluntary simplifiers were discussed according to these three categories: acquisition, use, and disposal. The findings show that voluntary simplifiers represent an empowered consumer group who pursues sustainable apparel consumption. Policymakers and consumer educators may use these findings to support the promotion of this lifestyle alternative. In addition, by understanding the needs and deeper meanings of a sustainable lifestyle from the perspective of consumers, marketers and retailers in the apparel industry would be able to apply their learning to their sustainable merchandising practices and strategies.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Defining the Problem

In contemporary American society, excessive consumption is prevalent and highly encouraged by retailers and marketers. To some people, consumption may be a means to reach happiness and life satisfaction (Irvine, 2005). These consumption-prone individuals, often called shopaholics or compulsive buyers, are known to buy material goods and seek exciting consumption experiences to fulfill their need for self-significance (Belk, Ger, & Askegaard, 2003). Research shows that individual consumption traits are often shaped and activated in a collective manner, conceptualizing materialism as a group's shared cultural trait and value (Belk, 1985; Richins & Dawson, 1992). For example, one study conducted in the mid-1990s reported that approximately 90% of Americans strongly believed that buying and consuming is the American way of life (The Harwood Group, 1995).

As such, Americans tend to view themselves as hyperactive consumers. However, a perspective that contradicts American consumption culture has been also growing. Zavestoski (2002) stresses that: (a) American consumers are exposed to ceaseless advertising and overwhelmed by countless purchase alternatives; and hence (b) they are too stressed and exhausted to acquire an adequate level of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and authenticity they seek through material consumption. While self-esteem and self-efficacy may be easily obtained through consumption to some extent, many people still struggle to find authenticity (i.e., a true sense of self) through consumption (Zavestoski, 2002). In addition, overconsumption makes individuals fall into personal

debt and overwork to earn more money for more consumption (De Graaf, Wann, & Naylor, 2014). This situation often results in losing time to spend with their significant others, loss of community, physical or mental illness, emptiness, and general unhappiness with life (Kasser, 2002). In response, many pundits agree that it is time for Americans to contemplate whether they can actually benefit from consumption and what they should do to improve the quality of their life.

This consumption-oriented culture not only negatively influences consumer well-being but also harms the broader society and the environment. Upscaling to more luxurious types of products, buying larger sizes of vehicles and houses, and purchasing multiple versions of items that consumers have already had (e.g., televisions, computers, and apparel) are patterns of unsustainable consumption. This consumption trend significantly affects the environment, causing the depletion of energy and resources (Schor, 2005). Regarding this aspect, Alexander and Ussher (2012) discuss several problems of overconsumption, such as ecological overshoot, poverty, overpopulation, excessive economic growth, and peak oil. They point out that our common belief about "sustainable development" may rely on science and technology that can help us produce and consume in a more clean and efficient way. However, the authors maintain that it does not reflect reality. Even though a number of national economies are now better at producing commodities in a more clean and efficient way, the whole volume of commodities is still increasing because of the growth of the global economy, thus resulting in increased ecological damage (Jackson, 2009). This finding shows that technology and science cannot solve the ecological crisis. Moreover, some parts of our world are still struggling with poverty, and human population is overly increasing. In

addition, competition over our planet's natural resources, such as oil, will be substantially intense (Ehrlich & Ehrlich, 1990). The peak of oil production leads to terminal decline, thereby resulting in a decrease in oil supply and drastic increase in oil prices (Hirsch, Bezdek, & Wendling, 2010). Accordingly, the consequences of high oil prices will be extreme because modern industries are substantially dependent on oil (Heinberg & Lerch, 2010). Therefore, the term "sustainable development" is nothing but an oxymoron that does not apply to this intense competition over natural resources.

In summary, excessive consumption not only damages an individual's well-being but also drains resources and pollutes the environment. What can be done to improve this situation? What can consumers do to increase their quality of life and possibly contribute to the environment and society more actively?

People have begun to realize that material consumption cannot resolve their feelings of stress, lack of fulfillment, and unhappiness (Zavestoski, 2002). To create and maintain a healthy self, individuals seek to regain control of their lives and their immediate environment. They also desire for the authentic feeling of being true to themselves. According to a study conducted by the Harwood Group (1995), Americans are aware of the problems of this material culture. While the study was conducted in the mid-1990s, its relevance to contemporary American society is still valid and ever more important in the 21st century. The findings show four themes on this matter:

- Too much of American value is placed on wealth and prosperity and not enough on social responsibility and family life.
- Americans' mentality of possessing and consuming "more, more, more" is unsustainable and will inflict serious repercussions if not strictly curbed.

- Americans express strong ambivalence about making changes in their own lives and in society. They want to live in material comfort, yet their deepest aspirations stem from nonmaterial values.

- Americans see the environment as connected to their lives, yet their perceived connection is somewhat vague and general. Americans have not thought deeply about the ecological implications of their own lifestyles.

A large number of Americans are realizing that their consumption style is unsustainable and that it affects their lives, society, and the environment. They are willing to make changes in their lifestyle to pursue their nonmaterial values, yet want to maintain material comfort. Americans' consumption style is geared toward sustainability now more than ever (Bonnell, 2015). Natural Marketing Institute (2014) revealed that 85% of Americans are adopting sustainable practices to a certain degree, and a growing number of them are increasing their green purchases and accepting sustainable behaviors (as cited in Bonnell, 2015). They are willing to learn about approaches or alternatives for making sustainable changes in their own lives. Although Americans are motivated to make changes in their consumption behavior, they may not possess concrete knowledge or skills to practice a consumer lifestyle that can positively influence their well-being and the environment. Researchers must identify and deepen the understanding of a sustainable consumer lifestyle.

Excess consumption is notably severe in the apparel category. Fast fashion contributes to a swift cycle of consumer acquisition and disposal of apparel products (Schor, 2005). Fast fashion products sold at cheap prices result in the excessive accumulation of apparel and textile waste. Consumers' low use rates of existing

inventories of apparel, high rates of discard, and rapid cycle of fashion are associated with the unsustainable apparel consumption of U.S. consumers (Schor, 2005). Other unsustainable practices, such as environmental damage and worker exploitation, exist in the apparel industry (Bianchi & Birtwistle, 2010). To address this problem, people may adjust their consumption level and think about what and how to consume, especially in the context of apparel consumption.

A Perspective on the Problem

In the view of the problem described above, one viable solution may come from the notion of voluntary simplicity, which is an approach of reduced consumption. If the current high-consumption lifestyle is not a solid path to personal happiness, then *reducing* consumption may be a plausible way for a more fulfilling life (Alexander & Ussher, 2012), for reducing the ecological footprint, and for leaving more resources for future generations. Regarding the styles of reduced consumption, the concepts of *voluntary simplicity* and *downshifting* are usually compared and discussed in the literature. One of the most frequently adopted studies is Etzioni's (1998) distinction of the terms. From the author's perspective, downshifting is a moderate form of voluntary simplicity. Whereas voluntary simplicity is associated with various motivations such as being self-oriented and/or altruistic, downshifting mostly focuses on self-oriented reasons, such as quality of life. For instance, downshifters voluntarily give up luxurious consumer goods even when they can afford them while spending more time and money on non-materialistic matters. Voluntary simplifiers significantly rearrange their lifestyle. They give up high-paying and high-stress jobs to seek more free time. They also reduce the number of consumption items for both self-centered and altruistic reasons. Voluntary

simplicity is more intense than selective downshifting of consumption items. The distinction between the two terms may be unclear, but voluntary simplicity seems to be more suitable to addressing the problem above as it involves a consumer lifestyle.

Even though the concept of voluntary simplicity pursues simplicity, the motivations or behaviors in engaging in this lifestyle can be varied and complex. Studies have been conducted to explore the motivators to engaging in voluntary simplicity (e.g., Alexander & Ussher, 2012; Black & Cherrier, 2010; Shaw & Newholm, 2002), experiences and practices (e.g., Ballantine & Creery, 2010; Huneke, 2005), and its contribution to consumer happiness (e.g., McGouran & Prothero, 2016; Rich, Hanna, & Wright, 2017).

However, little research has focused on voluntary simplifiers' apparel consumption behavior over the course of different consumption stages, ranging from the pre-purchase stage of problem recognition to the post-purchase stage of disposal. To the researcher's knowledge, a few notable exceptions exist in the literature. For example, Wu, Boyd Thomas, Moore, and Carroll (2013) investigated the motivations of voluntary simplifiers through an online community on an apparel diet. In another study conducted by Ruppert-Stroescu, LeHew, Connell, and Armstrong (2015), consumer creativity was identified as a positive consequence of voluntary simplicity in the context of apparel consumption. However, these studies did not fully capture how voluntary simplifiers' personal motivations could function in everyday consumers' lives and how their experiences vary across different consumption stages. To date, few studies have fully examined how consumers practice voluntary simplicity in the context of apparel consumption and what their lived experiences are. As previously mentioned, apparel is a

category with tendencies towards excessive consumption (Schor, 2005), and it involves the problems of unsustainable consumption and decreased consumer well-being. Therefore, understanding the lifestyle of voluntary simplicity in the context of apparel consumption may contribute to solving the problems of unsustainable consumption and improving consumer well-being. In addition, as the most common motivations for adopting this lifestyle in terms of apparel consumption are personal and self-oriented (Wu et al., 2013), conducting further research on what personal motivations trigger voluntary simplicity will be meaningful.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the lived experiences of voluntary simplifiers in the context of apparel consumption. Moreover, this study seeks to identify the specific personal motivations of voluntary simplifiers. The research questions developed to meet the research objectives are as follows: 1) What are consumers' deeper personal motivations to pursue voluntary simplicity? 2) How do consumers practice voluntary simplicity in terms of apparel consumption?

To answer these research questions, this study adopts the consumer decision process model (Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel, 2001) as a framework. This model includes a series of stages to explain the cognitive and behavioral activities of consumers: problem recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision, use/care/storage, post-purchase evaluation, and disposal. This model can provide a thorough guideline for understanding the apparel consumption of voluntary simplifiers.

This study adopts phenomenology as a methodology and considers apparel

consumption of voluntary simplifiers as a unique "phenomenon" to study. Phenomenology is the study of "phenomena" (Smith, 2003), and this approach enables a researcher to understand the way people experience these things. Conducting in-depth interviews with voluntary simplifiers, their experiences and personal motivations in the context of apparel consumption will be fully described and interpreted.

Significance of the Study

The findings from this research provide both theoretical and practical implications. From the theoretical perspective, the current study will contribute to understanding the apparel consumption of voluntary simplifiers. The literature on voluntary simplicity in the context of apparel consumption is limited (Ruppert-Stroescu et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2013), even though the apparel industry is significantly involved in unsustainable consumption (Schor, 2005). By investigating the apparel consumption style of voluntary simplifiers following each step of the consumer decision process model (Blackwell et al., 2001), from problem recognition to disposal, the findings of this study will fully describe why and how they adopt this lifestyle. By gaining a deeper understanding of personal motivations, which accounts for the largest portion of voluntary simplifiers' motivations (Wu et al., 2013), this study builds on the previous literature on motivations for voluntary simplicity.

From the practical viewpoint, the outcomes of the current study have useful implications for both consumers and marketers. For consumers, this study will provide specific knowledge about how they can adopt voluntary simplicity as their lifestyle, especially in terms of their apparel consumption. As previously stated, Americans are ready to make changes in their lifestyle to reflect their nonmaterial concerns, but they

still want to maintain a certain level of material comfort (The Harwood Group, 1995). In achieving this goal, they need to obtain knowledge on what approaches and alternatives to use for their own lives. The results of this study will contribute to our understanding of consumption choices in modern consumer cultures (Alexander & Ussher, 2012). Consumers will be able to understand the personal motivations that drive adopting voluntary simplicity, how they can practice this lifestyle, and what positive influences there may be. Moreover, policymakers or educators may use this knowledge to develop a more effective strategy to enable the transition to this lifestyle alternative.

      The results of this study bear useful implications for fashion marketers and retailers. Voluntary simplifiers pursue sustainable and socially responsible consumption. As consumers' attitude toward sustainability is "trending" and "reaching an all-time high" (Bonnell, 2015), voluntary simplifiers' specific needs toward apparel can be applied to sustainable design and practices of apparel brands and companies. According to Natural Marketing Institute (2014), 69% of American consumers care if a company follows a socially responsible business model (as cited in Bonnell, 2015). When sharing brand stories of sustainability, companies are likely to capture a large portion of the market immediately (Bonnell, 2015). From the attributes of the products to the social responsibility practices of the companies, the findings of the current research may introduce ideas for identifying new opportunities to develop effective strategies.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter II reviews previous literature on voluntary simplicity. An initial literature review was conducted from a phenomenological perspective. In phenomenology, the understandings of the researcher should be based on the immediate insight into the phenomenon itself, freed from all previous theoretical suppositions and assumptions (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974). Knowing too much about the phenomenon to study can bias the view of the researcher due to the nature of the inquiry (Van Manen, 1990). Thus, exploratory literature review was conducted to develop an appropriate and meaningful study instead of conducting a thorough literature review. After the data were collected and themes were identified, an additional literature review was conducted to obtain a deeper understanding of key research findings (themes) in Chapter IV.

This chapter offers the initial literature review in the following order. First, literature on defining voluntary simplicity is discussed. Second, values, beliefs and motivations of voluntary simplifiers are determined. Third, behaviors and practices of consumers who adopt this lifestyle are explained. Fourth, the positive outcomes of this lifestyle are described. Fifth, why voluntary simplicity entails pursuing social responsibility on consumer end is rationalized. Finally, the framework to guide the current qualitative study is identified, following the development of research questions.

Defining Voluntary Simplicity

Voluntary simplicity refers to a lifestyle that involves the practice of frugality in association to the mental and spiritual well-being of the individual, as well as the environment. Gregg (1936) first proposed the idea of voluntary simplicity, which avoids

the exterior clutter and numerous possessions irrelevant to the main purpose of life. Elgin and Mitchell (1977) proposed five values that voluntary simplifiers hold: material simplicity, self-determination, ecological awareness, human scale, and personal growth. Building on their five values, Leonard–Barton (1981) suggested that voluntary simplicity represents the degree to which an individual chooses a lifestyle intended to maximize their control over daily activities and to minimize their consumption and dependency.

Etzioni (1998) defined voluntary simplicity as the free will in choosing to limit expenditures on consumer goods and services and to pursue nonmaterialistic satisfaction. This definition also denotes that this lifestyle is facilitated by our freedom of choice, and not produced through coercion or budgeting due to difficult economic conditions. He identified three variations: downshifters, strong simplifiers, and the simple living movement. Downshifting is a moderate form of voluntary simplicity. Downshifters voluntarily give up luxury consumer goods when they can readily afford the rich lifestyle. For example, they dress down by wearing jeans and wearing cheap shoes when they can afford expensive items. However, strong simplifiers significantly restructure their consumption life. They choose to buy and earn less, giving up high-paying and high-stress jobs and pursuing more free time. Given that they significantly curtail their income, their lifestyle simplification is more severe than selectively downshifting items for consumption. The simple living movement is associated with the most dedicated and holistic simplifiers who adjust their entire lifestyle. They move from the suburbs or large cities to smaller or countryside towns. This group differs from downshifters or strong simplifiers in their motivation. They hold the philosophy

associated with explicit anti-consumerism, and they pursue dramatic changes in their consumption patterns.

Craig–Lees and Hill (2002) identified five themes of voluntary simplicity: freedom of choice to lead a simpler life, a reduction in material consumption, access to resources like wealth and education, non-abandonment of the ethical or environmental characteristics of products or services used as non-voluntary simplifiers. The authors of this study named three types of beginner voluntary simplifiers (BVS): apprentice simplifiers, partial simplification, and accidental simplification. Apprentice simplifiers are those who just started on voluntary simplicity. They are usually highly connected to resources in order to know about the alternatives to changing their lifestyles. People who pursue partial simplification are stable BVS who adopted a few features of voluntary simplicity, but are not fully engaged in the lifestyle. Finally, the third type of BVS, accidental simplification, represents those who accept some aspects of voluntary simplicity without ethical and environmental motivations.

Similarly, McDonald, Oates, Young, and Hwang (2006) identified types of voluntary simplicity. They reviewed empirical work on voluntary simplifiers and nonvoluntary simplifiers, and then identified an intermediate group, the beginner voluntary simplifiers. This group embraced some aspects of voluntary simplicity without supporting a complete lifestyle change as voluntary simplifiers.

Values, Beliefs, and Motivations of Voluntary Simplifiers

Previous research has explored various reasons behind individuals choosing voluntary simplicity (Table 1). Personal values, beliefs, and priorities are vital in making individual lifestyle choices, thereby influencing daily decision-making (Dobscha &

Ozanne, 2001). Numerous values are behind the adoption of this simple lifestyle. For instance, Elgin and Mitchell (1977) suggested values, such as reduced materialism, self-sufficiency, spiritualism, ecological responsibility, and increased control over one's life as the main reasons to pursue this lifestyle. Craig–Lees and Hill (2002) proposed that voluntary simplifiers tend to give up or reduce their work hours to spend more time in their hobbies, family, community, and environmental issues.

Table 1

Motivations for voluntary simplicity

Source	Motivations
Elgin & Mitchell (1977)	Material simplicity
	self-determination
	ecological awareness
	human scale
	personal growth
Craig-Lees & Hill (2002)	Focusing on family and self
	Relationships/community
	Environment
	Spirituality
Zavestoski (2002)	Personal authenticity
	Environmental concerns
	Being tired of the pressure to consume
Huneke (2005)	Concern for the environment
	Dissatisfaction with stressful lifestyles
	Anti-consumption attitudes
	More satisfying ways to spend time
	A desire for personal authenticity
Iyer & Muncy (2009)	Need for self-actualization
Alexander & Ussher (2012)	Spending more time with family or for oneself
	Saving money

Environmental concern

Self-sufficiency

Decluttering life / Minimalism

Spirituality and mindfulness

The motivations for pursuing voluntary simplicity may be generally categorized into two: me-oriented and other-oriented reasons. People may feel overwhelmed and stressed by consumption-focused culture, such as constantly pouring advertisements and unlimited choice of products and services (Frost, 2003). This culture may result in spending less quality time with family and friends or for oneself due to the amount of time spent earning money or purchasing goods. This can also be associated with increased personal-debt and decreased monetary savings (Brown & Kasser, 2005; Schor, 2005). These outcomes can significantly reduce the subjective well-being, quality of life, and self-esteem of individuals (Brown & Kasser, 2005). To regain and sustain their own life satisfaction, they may try to spend less time and money on shopping (Elgin & Mitchell, 1977), and instead spend more time with family and friends (Craig–Lees & Hill, 2002; Huneke, 2005) and in pursuing spirituality and mindfulness (Alexander & Ussher, 2012).

In addition, Zavestoski (2002) proposed a life of voluntary simplicity as a way to achieve personal authenticity, the highest stage of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1970). The authors indicated that consumption can meet the lower order needs and two of the higher order needs: physiological, safety, belongingness and love, and esteem. Among the self-actualization needs on the top of the pyramid, only efficacy can be acquired through consumption. Therefore, voluntary simplicity, a form of anti-

consumption, can help an individual acquire unique skills which can be harnessed to achieve high income, control, and personal fulfillment, along with being driven by values, such as humanism, self-determination, environmentalism, spirituality, and self-development.

However, voluntary simplifiers may choose this lifestyle for other-oriented reasons, such as environmental concern (Craig–Lees & Hill, 2002; Elgin & Mitchell, 1977) and social responsibility (Huneke, 2005). For example, Huneke (2005) empirically examined voluntary simplicity as a social phenomenon through a survey of online forums. Factor analysis was conducted to identify the dimensions of voluntary simplicity in the US: ecological and social responsibilities, community, and spiritual life. Almost a quarter of the respondents stated natural environment as the main reason for adopting voluntary simplicity. The next highest portion mentioned that they want to control the way they spend time and money, followed by the aim to remove some stress-causing elements from their lives and to follow religious beliefs. Shaw and Newholm (2002) also proposed voluntary simplicity as a trait of ethical consumers in two qualitative studies. The results showed that consumers who believe their consumption can be connected to ethical issues care more about their consumption level. Ethical concerns are clearly related to reduced consumption styles.

A study was made to identify the motivations for this simple lifestyle in the context of apparel consumption (Wu et al., 2013). The authors conducted content analyses of 834 individual autobiographies and blog entries from the Great American Apparel Diet (GAAD). The GAAD is a virtual community that applied the concepts of a weight loss community, thereby supporting a spending diet on clothing. The six

categories of internal and external motivation categories to engage in voluntary

simplicity are identified: personal, lifestyle, social, economic, financial, and

environmental. The overall descriptions of the six motivations are provided in Table 2.

Table 2

Internal and external motivations for adopting voluntary simplicity (Wu et al., 2013).

Motivation	Description
Personal (44%)	Personal issued including goals, weaknesses, challenges, and problems, etc.
Lifestyle (22%)	Lifestyle issues including living situation, shopping behaviors, consumption behaviors, etc.
Financial (15%)	Financial issues including spending habits, bills, debt, savings, etc.
Environmental (10%)	Environmental issues including environmental impact and footprint, green or eco-friendly products and materials, re/up-cycling, etc.
Economic (5%)	Economic issues including job loss, unemployment, recession, etc.
Social (3%)	Social issues including country of origin, fair trade, fair labor, etc.

Among various motivations, the personal motivation theme accounted for the

largest part of reasons behind the adoption of voluntary simplicity in the apparel context

(44%), followed by the lifestyle motivation theme (22%). The findings show that

internal motivations such as the personal, lifestyle, financial themes are the main reasons

for consumers to adopt voluntary simplicity. Especially, personal reasons can be very

important for them to adopt the lifestyle, therefore, it will be meaningful to study them further.

Reduced Consumption Behaviors and Practices: Manifestations of Simplicity

Several studies that investigate consumption behaviors and practices of voluntary simplifiers exist. Even though the lifestyle is associated with simplicity, behaviors and practices to pursue it can be varied and complex. Leonard–Barton (1981) identified a behavioral index to measure an individual's tendency to pursue voluntary simplicity, in terms of the effort to decrease personal consumption of goods (material simplicity), self-sufficiency (self-determination), and ecological awareness. Each dimension can be associated with more specific behaviors and practices.

First, individuals who engage in this lifestyle need to establish different mental routines and daily practices to decrease their consumption of goods (Huneke, 2005). They may try to avoid excessive exposure to advertising or consider their necessities to avoid impulse buying (Grigsby, 2004). In contrast, they can spend their extra time and money with family and friends, even for themselves (Huneke, 2005). Second, instead of purchasing new goods, individuals may home make what they need, borrow or share, and buy at second-hand shops (Grigsby, 2004; Leonard–Barton, 1981). For example, they can grow food and cook at home. In addition, they can repair or repurpose the items they already own through various skills, such as carpentry, sewing, and knitting (Grigsby, 2004; Leonard–Barton, 1981). Finally, individuals with ethical or environmental concerns tend to choose organic goods, fair-trade products, or items with eco-friendly claims (Grigsby, 2004; Leonard–Barton, 1981). Furthermore, they may adopt disposal methods, such as donation, giveaway, recycling, and composting.

Different motivations manifest themselves through various practices. For instance, Craig–Lees and Hill (2002) conducted 53 one-hour interviews to address what constitutes voluntary simplicity behavior. They compared and contrasted two different groups: simplifiers and nonsimplifiers. Simplifiers consciously limit their consumption to their volume and product purchase. The findings yielded three underlying motivations for the reduction of consumption that influences purchase behavior: environmental, spiritual, and self-oriented reasons. Environmentally-motivated simplifiers possessed more secondhand goods and are more focused on product quality and packaging. However, self-oriented simplifiers tend to buy cheap products.

Consequences: Happiness and Well-being

Most recent studies that investigated the positive consequences of voluntary simplicity show that adopting this simple lifestyle positively influence consumer happiness and life satisfaction (Alexander & Ussher, 2012; Boujbel & d'Astous, 2012; Rich, Hanna, & Wright, 2017). For instance, Alexander and Ussher (2012) adopted a theoretical approach to provide empirical insight on the phenomenon. They conducted a multinational survey analysis of the voluntary simplicity movement. The 50-question survey included demographic questions and queries on individual lifestyle, values, motivations, and behavior. Furthermore, they include items to measure income, community, politics, and happiness. The results show that the transition to a simple life positively influenced happiness, even though pursuing voluntary simplicity lifestyle includes some challenges (price of "green" consumer products).

Rich et al. (2017) also argued that pursuing a voluntary lifestyle can improve consumers' life satisfaction. The authors adopted self-determination theory to examine

the relationship between voluntary simplicity and life satisfaction mediated by the gratification of three psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness). The results show a positive relationship between voluntary simplicity and life satisfaction through the proposed psychological need.

In terms of apparel consumption, consumer creativity may be another positive outcome of adopting voluntary simplicity. Ruppert–Stroescu et al. (2015) examined consumer creativity in relation to fashion detox. Fashion detox involves consumers that refrain from obtaining fashion apparel for weeks and blogged about the experience. Content analysis of the blog entries was employed. The findings indicate that creative contributions generated by voluntary simplicity can meet the need of consumers for novelty and change.

Associating Voluntary Simplicity with Social Responsibility

As discussed so far, consumers adopt voluntary simplicity for both me-oriented and other-oriented reasons, such as quality of life and environmental concern. Those reasons are manifested through their behaviors, including material simplicity, self-sufficiency, and ecological awareness (Leonard-Barton, 1981). The outcomes of pursuing this simple lifestyle results in life satisfaction and happiness. Looking into the nature of social responsibility, numerous similarities are noted between social responsibility and voluntary simplicity. Voluntary simplicity is to pursue social responsibility from a consumer perspective.

Social responsibility is a concept originally derived from the field of business administration. It was first described by Howard Bowen in 1953 as "the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of

action, which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society" (as cited in Carroll, 1999). Carroll (1999) also identified the four dimensions of social responsibility. The first dimension is related to corporate profits, the essential goal of business. The second component is to observe the law. The third dimension is to be ethical with regard to dealing with all the expectations of society. The fourth dimension is involved with firms' voluntary activities to improve society.

Apparel and textile scholars also defined the concept of social responsibility. Dickson and Eckman (2006) contributed to the conceptualization of social responsibility in the context of apparel and textiles. They adopted online survey research methods to investigate the term *socially responsible apparel/textile business*. In their study, 80% of respondents replied that working conditions, child labor, consumerism, and environmental degradation are important topics to discuss. In addition, wages (75.9%), trade policy (72.4%), and body image (72.4%) are considered to be rather important. The concept of *socially responsible apparel/textile business* is defined with three main themes (see Figure 1).

The first theme is orientation of apparel/textile businesses. Especially, orientation toward the environment and people/society is considered important. Socially responsible businesses should run their business in a manner that can be compatible with maintaining the environment and positively affecting people and society. The second theme involves business philosophy, goals, values, and activities of firms. This theme is related to the day-to-day business practices and actions to achieve goals. Their practices (e.g., strategies, production, media and advertising) should be both ethical and profitable. The last theme is outcomes and consequences of businesses. The

consequences of socially responsible businesses should positively affect people or the environment.

OUTCOMES

Promote Consumer Well-Being

Consume Fewer Resources

Uphold Human & Worker Rights

Lower Pollution

PHILOSOPHY & ACTION
Ethical
Profitable

ORIENTATION
Environment
People/Society
System
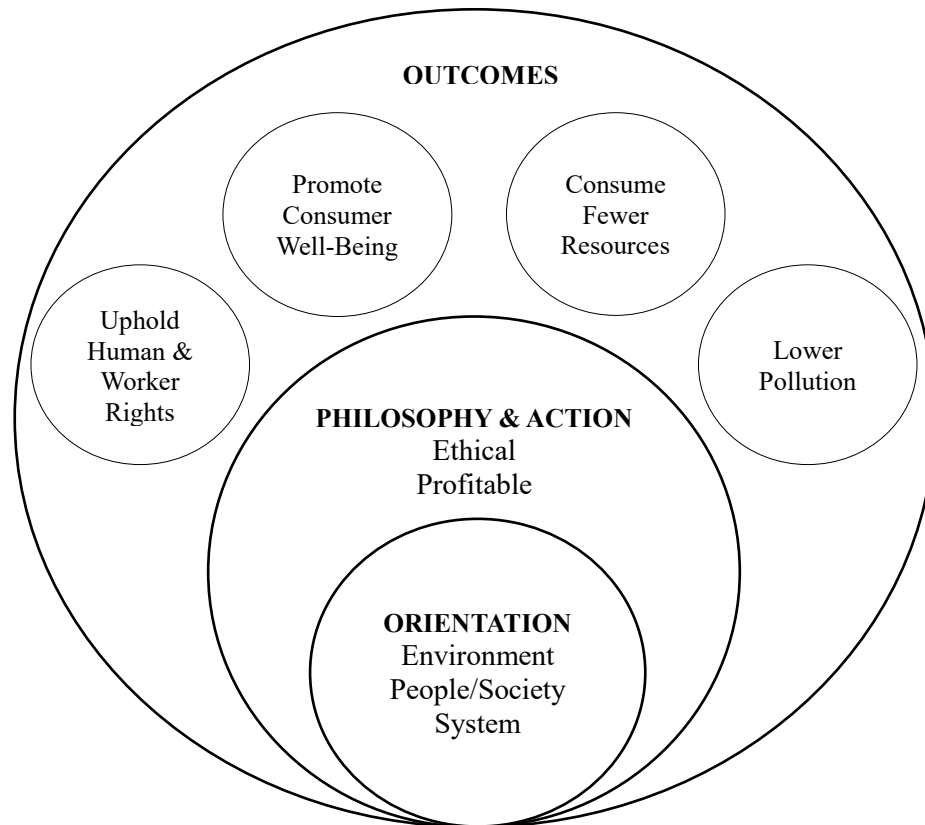
Figure 1. The model of socially responsible apparel and textile business (Dickson & Eckman, 2006).

The definition of social responsibility involves the positive impacts on people and the environment, beyond profitability of business. By applying this definition to the position of consumer, the goals, actions, and outcomes of social responsibility correspond with the motivations, behaviors, and outcomes of voluntary simplicity.

Consumers pursue voluntary simplicity to improve their quality of life by regaining their control over their financial resources and environment, which can be compared to corporate profits, the essential goal of business. Voluntary simplifiers are also likely to purchase sustainable and socially responsible options to support worker rights and protect the environment. Thus, understanding voluntary simplicity can involve studying socially responsible consumers. Gaining a deep understanding of their personal reasons to adopt this simple lifestyle and their apparel consumption behavior may contribute to pursuing social responsibility on consumers' end.

Theoretical Framework: Apparel Consumption Behavior Model

A number of studies adopted Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Etzioni, 1998; Huneke, 2005; Zavestoski, 2002) as theoretical framework as the model appears associated with lifestyle explanation. However, the theory is extremely universal to explain specific lifestyles (Craig–Lees & Hill, 2002). For example, the need for self-actualization can be universal; however, the values and behavior to meet the need can be diverse due to personal and cultural differences. Lifestyle studies are often conducted for marketers to understand a segment by examining purchase decision-making or post-purchase behavior. This study aims to investigate the personal motivations of voluntary simplifiers and their apparel consumption behaviors. It is helpful to use a framework that encompasses all stages of their behaviors associated with apparel consumption. Therefore, this study adopts the consumer decision process model (Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel, 2001) as a framework. This model can provide specific steps to describe and to understand the apparel consumption experiences of voluntary simplifiers and their reasons behind them through each step.

Blackwell, Miniard, and Engel (2001) proposed the consumer decision process model. This model includes seven stages encompassing a series of cognitive and behavioral actions among consumers: problem recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision, use/care/storage, post-purchase evaluation, and disposal. Problem recognition can be triggered when a gap exists between the actual and ideal states. The decision-making process of consumers follows the direction of improving from actual to ideal states. If people figure out the need that can be satisfied with buying a new shirt, then they will start searching for information. This second step involves two elements: internal and external searches. Internal search refers to finding information based on people's knowledge or past experiences with goods and services in their memory. External search means gathering information from friends, family, and other marketplace sources, such as television and magazine. After comparing and evaluating all the alternatives based on what they think are most important, they choose to buy one of them. The purchase decision also involves complex interactions between environmental elements including cultural backgrounds, geographic conditions, and family and friends, and individual differences, such as age, gender, education, values, and past experiences. For instance, their purchase decision may depend on what types of retailers are available to them and their past experiences with those retailers. After purchase, consumers will wear the shirt to meet their needs, store it, and care for it to maintain its quality. When the shirt cannot function to meet their needs, it will be disposed through various means, such as selling, giving away, and throwing away. All of these interrelated processes and consumption actions can be assessed to understand the lived experience of the participants.

These stages may be classified into three higher categories: acquisition, use, and disposal. Consumption is defined as an individual's acquisition, use, or disposal of products, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy their needs and desires (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004). Consumption further involves more than just an exchange of money for goods and services. When people consume products, they engage in many behaviors apart from shopping. For example, a person may dispose of a skirt for various reasons (e.g., need for more room in the closet) and through different methods (e.g., donation and throwaway). Figure 2 illustrates the finalized model.

```
                    ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                    │         ACQUISITION         │
                    │                             │
                    │      Problem Recognition    │
                    │       Information Search    │
                    │      Alternative Evaluation │
                    │       Purchase Decision     │
                    └─────────────────────────────┘
                                  ↕
                    ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                    │             USE             │
                    │                             │
                    │       Use/Care/Storage      │
                    │    Post-purchase Evaluation  │
                    └─────────────────────────────┘
                                  ↕
                    ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                    │          DISPOSAL           │
                    │                             │
                    │          Disposal           │
                    └─────────────────────────────┘
```
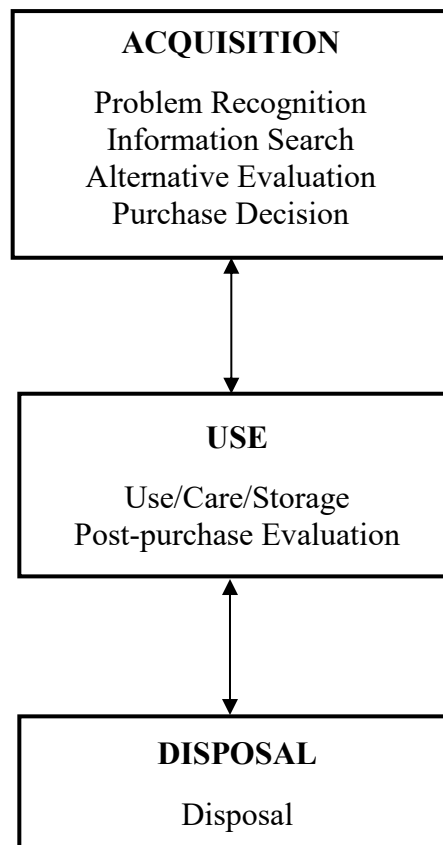
Figure 2. The consumer decision process model (Blackwell et al., 2001)

This model may not be as solid as it is designed for quantitative approaches for understanding consumer decision process. However, this model serves as a good framework providing a guideline to understand various stages of voluntary simplifiers' thoughts and actions regarding apparel decision making, purchase, use, and disposal. The model is helpful for forming open-ended questions to conduct a semi-structured interview and organizing research findings.

Research Questions

This study aims to explore the general apparel consumption behavior of voluntary simplifiers and identify their personal motivations to adopt this simple lifestyle. Their lived experiences of apparel consumption are investigated following the seven stages of the consumer decision process model (Blackwell et al., 2001). Toward this end, research questions are developed as follows: 1) What are consumers' deeper personal motivations to pursue voluntary simplicity? 2) How do consumers practice voluntary simplicity in terms of apparel consumption?

METHODS

The purpose of the present qualitative study is to explore voluntary simplifiers' lived experiences in the context of apparel consumption. Also, this study seeks to identify their specific personal motivations for pursuing voluntary simplicity. Chapter III explains this study's methods. First, the rationale for choosing a qualitative approach is discussed. Second, the procedures of this qualitative study are described.

Rational of Research Design

Overview of Qualitative Research

According to Creswell (2003), three elements should be considered to determine approaches to research, quantitative or qualitative, based on Crotty's model (1998): 1) knowledge claims, 2) strategies of inquiry, and 3) specific methods. First, knowledge claims include epistemology (i.e., theory of knowledge behind the theoretical perspective) and the theoretical perspective of the researcher (i.e., philosophical stance to support the methodology). Second, strategies of inquiry refer to methodology (i.e., strategy that guides the researcher's choice of methods). Finally, methods are techniques to collect and analyze the data. These three elements are further discussed to explain how this study is designed.

In general, qualitative research is an approach to explore and understand the meanings individuals or groups share associated with a social or human problem (Creswell, 2003). This type of research typically involves developing questions and procedures, collecting data in the participant's setting, building inductive data analysis from particulars to general themes, and interpreting the meanings of the data. As an

epistemological position, qualitative researchers adopt subjectivism. Epistemology represents how you define the nature of "knowing" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Epistemology can have two contrary positions: objectivism and subjectivism. Objectivism proposes that there is a concrete reality that exists independently from your own thinking processes or interpretations; therefore, the task of a researcher is to discover the reality without influencing it. On the other hand, subjectivism assumes that there cannot be the reality completely separated from a researcher's thinking processes or interpretations because all knowledge is filtered or influenced by a researcher's cognitive lens.

A theoretical perspective means a philosophical stance to support a methodology (Creswell, 2003). Creswell calls it a "worldview," and the four philosophical worldviews are: 1) post-positivism, 2) constructivism, 3) transformative framework, and 4) pragmatism. These worldviews can function as a foundation for three research approaches: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. Quantitative research is based on the worldview of post-positivism, whereas qualitative research is supported by constructivism and transformative framework. Pragmatism guides the mixed-methods research. As qualitative research is rooted in constructivism, the researcher seeks to understand the world where people live (Creswell, 2013). Participants construct subjective meanings of their experiences, and these meanings can be varied and multiple. Rather than applying a theory (as in post-positivism), the researcher asks open-ended questions to allow participants to share their experiences in their specific context. As the researcher is a tool for analyzing the data, the interpretations of the research findings are influenced by the researcher's own experiences and background.

Researchers should "position themselves" in their research to recognize that their interpretations are shaped by their personal and cultural backgrounds.

Finally, there are five qualitative approaches as methodology: narrative, phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, and case study (Creswell, 2013). They provide specific directions for research procedures. Depending on methodology, a researcher may choose different methods for collecting and analyzing the data. An overview of these methodologies is shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Five key qualitative research approaches (Creswell, 2013)

Approach	Purpose	Data Collection
Narrative research	Studying the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives chronologically	Using primarily interviews and documents
Phenomenology	Describing the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants	Using primarily interviews with individuals, although documents, observations, and art may also be considered
Grounded theory	Developing a general, abstract theory of a process, an action, or an interaction grounded in the views of participants	Using multiple stages of data collection, primarily interviews with 20-60 individuals
Ethnography	Studying shared patterns of behaviors, language, and actions of an intact cultural group in a natural setting	Using primarily observations and interviews, but perhaps collecting other sources during extended time in field

| Case study | Developing an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals | Using multiple sources, such as interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts |

Rationale for the Chosen Methodology: Phenomenology

Phenomenology was chosen for this study because it is compatible with the research questions guiding this investigation and stands out among other qualitative approaches. First, this study aims to investigate the personal experiences of consumers who adopt voluntary simplicity as their lifestyle and how their personal motivations can be manifested through their apparel consumption. Phenomenology is a study of "phenomena" (Moustakas, 1994; Smith, 2003; Van Manen, 1990). The type of problem that is best suited for phenomenology is one with regard to understanding several individual's common or shared experiences of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Considering a lifestyle of voluntary simplicity as a unique phenomenon, participants are able to describe their lived experiences of adopting voluntary simplicity in terms of apparel consumption, and their personal motivations behind it.

Second, in choosing phenomenology as a methodology, two other qualitative traditions are frequently compared: grounded theory and ethnography. Grounded theory can be defined as a systematic approach to inquiry for theory development (Charmaz,

2014). This approach may allow a researcher to conceptualize a topic based on the data. However, the goal of this study is to describe and understand the experienced apparel consumption of voluntary simplifiers. Since the focus of grounded theory is not about description, phenomenology can help the researcher to fully achieve the goal of this study.

Ethnography is an approach to describe and interpret cultures among members of a certain group, rooted in anthropology (Creswell, 2013). A researcher can join the culture through in-depth interviewing or observing the group. This approach also assumes that a culture can be learned and shared among members of a group. However, this approach may not be appropriate to be applied to this study. It is unrealistic for a researcher to join each consumer's daily life and observe everything they do. Also, the involvement of the researcher may influence the group members, thus phenomenology may be a better approach to adopt for understanding the phenomenon as it is because it relies on interview data and analysis of supporting documents.

The procedures for conducting this phenomenological research come from Moustakas's (1994) model that was adopted because it includes systematic steps from preparation to collect data to conclusion. It can serve as a good framework for the methods and procedures (Creswell, 2013). The major steps from the model are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Research procedures of Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological model

Procedures	Descriptions
Preparing to collect data	- Formulate the questions: Define terms of questions - Conduct literature review and determine original nature of study - Develop criteria for selecting participants: Establish contract, obtain informed consent, ensure confidentiality, agree to place and time commitments, and obtain permission to record and publish - Develop instructions and guiding questions needed for the phenomenological research interview
Collecting data	- Establish rapport for conducting the interview - Conduct the interview to obtain descriptions of the experience. Consider informal interviewing, open-ended questions, and topical-guided interview
Organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing data	- Develop individual textural and structural descriptions - Develop composite textural and composite structural descriptions - Develop synthesis of textural and structural meanings and essences of the experience

Summary, implications, and outcomes	▪ Summarize entire study
	▪ Relate study findings to and differentiate from findings of literature review
	▪ Relate study to possible future research and develop an outline for a future study
	▪ Relate study to personal and professional outcomes
	▪ Relate study to social meanings and relevance
	▪ Offer closing comments: Researcher's future direction and goals

This study follows the above procedures. In the previous sections, research questions were developed through a comprehensive literature review. Further steps are explained after discussing researcher positionality.

Researcher Positionality

The current research adopts a qualitative research approach, focusing on phenomenology as a methodology. Having been trained for both qualitative and quantitative approaches, I believe that both approaches are valuable to create new knowledge. Although topics regarding voluntary simplicity can be studied through quantitative, qualitative, or both approaches, the research questions of the current study are best answered through phenomenology, a qualitative approach.

As previously discussed, the philosophical stance of a qualitative study is constructivism. Given the nature of it, I position myself as the researcher in this study. First, this study explores personal motivations and apparel consumption behavior of voluntary simplifiers living in Minnesota. Although I seek to accurately record and deliver their experiences, I acknowledge that my analysis will be influenced by my own

experiences and personal and cultural backgrounds. Thus, I try to bracket or set aside my experiences, values, beliefs, and assumptions toward the phenomenon. Finally, I need to collaborate with the participants to create accurate and meaningful findings.

Sample Selection and Participant Recruitment

Participants were purposefully selected for this study. As this study adopts a qualitative approach, the researcher should purposefully select participants to best understand the research questions (Creswell, 2013). In addition, snowball sampling was adopted. Snowball sampling is particularly useful to study sensitive topics or when it is difficult to reach populations (Berg & Lune, 2012; Creswell, 2013). Through snowball sampling, people who are interested in participating in this research could act as a link (Richie & Lewis, 2003). Thus, they can identify other potential participants. As voluntary simplicity is a certain lifestyle, voluntary simplifiers tend to share their interests or engage in relevant organizations (Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002). Thus, this sampling technique will be useful to recruit participants.

Invitation emails including the information of this study and the criteria for voluntary simplicity were used to recruit the participants who pursue voluntary simplicity as their lifestyle (see Appendix A for the invitation email). As the criteria for voluntary simplicity, the criteria of Craig-Lees and Hill (2002) that was derived from Elgin (1981) were used. The criteria are useful to identify voluntary simplifiers since it reflects all the elements of voluntary simplicity. In addition, behavioral index questions of voluntary simplicity (Leonard-Barton, 1981) were also implemented on the potential participants before the interviews to check if their actual behaviors reflect voluntary simplicity (see Appendix B for the behavioral index questions). Thus, a total of eight

participants were recruited for this study. The data were collected until such became

saturated. In addition, McCracken (1988) proposed that eight respondents are sufficient

for capturing relevant themes and meanings of a phenomenon. Also, it was suggested by

Polkinghorne (1989) that the researchers may interview from five to 25 participants for

the phenomenological study. The results of the behavioral index questions of voluntary

simplicity and the characteristics of the participants are presented in the next chapter.

<center>**Data Collection and Analysis**</center>

Data Collection Procedure

The data for this study were collected through in-depth interviews. This

technique collects information through face-to-face contact with participants (Berg &

Lune, 2012). It is useful to explore details or probe latent attitudes and feelings. This

method is helpful to deeply understand voluntary simplifiers' practice and meanings

regarding apparel consumption. The semi-structured format was also adopted. It includes

a number of predetermined questions based on the research questions as well as provides

freedom to probe further (Berg & Lune, 2012). It allows participants to freely talk about

the questions and more. The interview questions can be developed based on the research

questions and the framework of this study, and the researcher can flexibly guide the

interview with follow-up questions. In addition, prior to the interviews, participants were

asked to bring photos of significant apparel items they recently purchased. The items

were used as a means of telling rich stories of their apparel consumption behaviors. The

interviews were conducted in a public setting that was convenient to the participants and

that allowed a private conversation, such as local coffee shops. The length of each

interview was approximately one hour. The interviews were recorded using two different

personal devices (cellphone and laptop) as well as through taking notes. Each interview was then transcribed verbatim through a transcription service. Those transcribed interviews were verified and analyzed by the researcher.

Interview Protocol

The interview participants were given a consent form before the interview. The researcher read through important information on the form to ensure confidentiality and obtain permission to record and publish (see Appendix C for the consent form). The participants signed the agreement and kept a copy of the form for their information. This process allowed the researcher to establish rapport for conducting the interview. This study used semi-structured interview as previously discussed. Therefore, some guiding interview questions were developed according to this study's framework and research questions. The consumer decision process model (Blackwell et al., 2001) includes seven stages encompassing a series of cognitive and behavioral actions of consumers: problem recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision, use/care/storage, post-purchase evaluation, and disposal. Based on each step of this model, the researcher asked the guiding questions and probed further. The participants shared their experiences and stories about the significant apparel items they recently purchased and their general apparel consumption behaviors. The interviews ended with asking a set of demographic questions such as gender, age, marital status, education, occupation, and income (see Appendix D for the interview questions).

Data Analysis Strategy

The data were analyzed based on the three steps suggested by the model of Moustakas (1994) as previously discussed in this chapter. The first step was coding the

texts of each participant to develop individual textural and structural descriptions. Each participant was given a pseudonym for anonymity. Relevant statements and quotes that described the participant's meaningful experiences of the phenomenon were then highlighted. These statements and quotes were developed into themes. Under these themes, textural (what the participant experienced) and structural (the context or settings in which the participants experienced the phenomenon) descriptions, including verbatim examples, were generated.

The second step was developing composite textural–structural descriptions across all participants, capturing common themes. These themes were according to the two main categories based on the research questions: personal motivations and apparel consumption behavior. The apparel consumption category had three sub-categories: acquisition, use, and disposal. Following the seven stages of the consumer decision process model (Blackwell et al., 2001), themes were developed and assigned to each sub-category. As the final step, a synthesis of textural and structural meanings and essences of the experiences was developed.

<p align="center">**Trustworthiness**</p>

From the perspective of qualitative research, validity does not convey the same connotations as it does in quantitative research (Creswell, 2003). It is neither reliability (stability or consistency of responses) nor generalizability (the external validity of applying the research findings to larger populations or to new settings). Validity in qualitative research is considered as a strength of the research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). It is used to determine if the findings are accurate from the aspects of the researcher, the

participants, or the audience. There are several terms associated with it such as "trustworthiness," "authenticity," and "credibility" (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Triangulation was used to confirm the validity of the findings. This strategy is commonly employed for checking and establishing the validity of qualitative research by assessing the evidence from multiple perspectives to develop a coherent validation of themes (Creswell, 2003). For example, research findings (themes) can be examined by other investigators or the participants to check if their views on the evidence are similar. Member checking and peer debriefing were used.

Member checking is a technique to improve the validity of qualitative studies by submitting a portion of the report or interpreted information to the participants for review. After each interview, the recorded data were transcribed and summarized by the researcher. Summarizing the transcription of one interview involved the first round of data analysis. With modifications to the example of Smoot (2017), the report of themes with the participants' quotes supporting the theme were emailed to all participants for review, allowing them to freely correct or make comments on each theme. Some of the participants commented on how the themes can be modified to improve the accuracy of the interpretation. These comments were reflected in the final draft of research findings.

Peer debriefing involves another person (a peer) reviewing the research to establish its trustworthiness. I requested my academic advisor, Dr. Hye-Young Kim, to review the research findings and asked if alternate interpretations are possible to improve the quality of this study.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

In this chapter, the results of the data analysis are discussed to answer the two research questions: 1) What are consumers' deeper personal motivations to pursue voluntary simplicity? 2) How do consumers practice voluntary simplicity in terms of apparel consumption? Thus, this chapter summarizes the characteristics of participants in this study and identifies their personal motivations in pursuing voluntary simplicity. Next, the lived experiences of apparel consumption of voluntary simplifiers are described. By adopting phenomenology, the apparel consumption of voluntary simplifiers was considered a unique phenomenon and described through the common or shared experiences of the research participants. Their experiences were shared through in-depth interviews, and interview questions were developed based on the seven stages of the consumer decision process model: problem recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision, use/care/storage, post-purchase evaluation, and disposal (Blackwell et al., 2001). These seven stages may be categorized into three bigger categories: acquisition, use, and disposal. The common themes that emerged from interviews with participants were discussed according to these three categories. Prior to the interviews, participants were asked to bring a photo of a significant apparel item they recently purchased. The item was used as a means of telling rich stories of their apparel consumption. Questions about their general apparel consumption were also asked to fully explore their experiences.

Identifying the Participants

A total of eight participants were interviewed. All participants met the criteria for voluntary simplicity (Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002; Elgin, 1981) and answered "Yes" to more than half (from 11 to 18 out of 18) of the behavioral index questions of voluntary simplicity (Leonard-Barton, 1981). The entire set of behavioral index questions of voluntary simplicity and the participant responses are shown in Table 5.

The participants were allowed to freely leave any comments for each question item. In terms of each item, all participants responded "Yes" to four items. For example, they indicated they all had actively participated in recycling newspapers, glass jars/bottles, and cans used at home. Next, seven items were answered "Yes" by most participants (7 out of 8 participants, 87.5%). For instance, they tended to make gifts instead of buying and hold skills to increase self-reliance such as sewing. In addition, when purchasing apparel, they had a tendency to shop at second-hand stores or at garage sales. Finally, the participants indicated that they had tried to bike whenever possible. They rode a bicycle for exercise or recreation (100%), for errands within two miles (87.5%), and for transportation to work (50%).

Table 5

Results of behavioral index questions of voluntary simplicity

Items	Yes (%)
2. Do you ride a bicycle for exercise or recreation?	100.0
3. Do you recycle newspapers used at home?	
4. Do you recycle glass jars/bottles used at home?	
5. Do you recycle cans used at home?	
1. Do you make gifts instead of buying?	87.5
7. Have you gotten instruction in skills to increase self-reliance, for example, in carpentry, car tune-up and repair, or plumbing?	
8. Do you intentionally eat meatless main meals?	
9. Do you buy clothing at a second-hand store?	
10. Do you buy major items of furniture or clothing at a garage sale?	
12. Have you exchanged goods or services with others in lieu of payment with money, e.g., repairing equipment in exchange for other skilled work?	
18. Do you ride a bicycle on errands within two miles of home?	
14. Do you contribute to ecologically-oriented organizations (such as Greenpeace, Sierra Club, etc.)?	75.0
6. Does your family member or friend changes the oil in the family car?	62.5
11. Do you make furniture or clothing?	
15. Do you belong to a cooperative?	
13. Do you have a compost pile?	50.0
16. Do you grow the vegetables the family consumes during the summer season?	
17. Do you ride a bicycle for transportation to work?	

Demographically, the participants' ages ranged from 25 to 44 years old and six out of eight participants were female. Majority of the participants (7 out of 8 participants, 87.5%) were single and one was married. In terms of educational attainment, one participant held a master's degree and two participants were completing their master's degree, while the rest had bachelor's degrees. The participants were engaged in various occupations with annual income levels ranging between $31,000 and $150,000. Huneke (2005) mentioned that voluntary simplifiers were mostly female (73.5%), well-educated at least holding a 4-year degree (65%), and likely to have more household income than average American in the empirical study. The demographic characteristics of the participants in this study replicate those findings. An overview of these demographic characteristics is shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Demographic characteristics of participants

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Marital status	Education	Occupation	Income ($)
Jake	Male	44	Single	Masters	Nurse/general contractor	125,000-150,000
Anne	Female	32	Single	Bachelors	Retail store manager	50,000
Claire	Female	32	Married	Bachelors	Teaching specialist	46,000
Emily	Female	32	Long term partner	Bachelors	Chef	40,000
Jennifer	Female	29	Single	Bachelors	Gallery director	50,000-70,000
Ian	Male	25	Single	Bachelors	Non-profit executive director	45,000
Kala	Female	27	Single	Bachelors	Freelance event designer/nonprofit fundraising consultant	31,000
Linda	Female	25	Single	Bachelors	Project manager at web arm	55,000

Personal Motivations to Pursue Voluntary Simplicity

In Chapter II, it was proposed that studying personal motivations further would be meaningful because it accounts for the largest part of the reasons for pursuing voluntary simplicity in the apparel context (Wu et al., 2013). This section looks into their personal motivations more deeply. A total of four themes emerged from the interviews with the eight voluntary simplifiers: *1) love it or hate it: intergenerational transmission of voluntary simplicity, 2) transforming life stages: trials and learning, 3) toward a coherent self, and 4) reducing clutter and anxiety.* Each participant was given a pseudonym and quotes were coded under this name. One theme was extracted when there were at least five of the eight participants shared similar stories associated with the theme.

Love It or Hate It: Intergenerational Transmission of Voluntary Simplicity

Almost every participant was influenced by their parents or significant others in their adoption of voluntary simplicity. Six out of the eight participants were motivated to explore this simple lifestyle because of the direct influence of their parents or significant others. The participants inherited those values through transformation or by choosing the opposite direction. For instance, Claire grew up with parents who practiced voluntary simplicity. She stated:

> I grew up…we bought stuff at thrift stores, and we did not have a lot of money. I did not get lots of new clothes, and I never had any name brands, we always had a garden, and we did not eat out a lot, so things like that.

She was raised to be "thrifty," "self-reliant," and "creative." Her mother had grown up in a farm being one of 16 children, and thus, her mother's family did not have sufficient financial resources. It was a matter of survival for her mother to be frugal and

resourceful. Her father also liked to build things that he needed by himself. Claire stated:

> My dad wanted a new deck on the back of the house, and he made it, and we
> helped him with it. My parents would buy us a tool kit as a Christmas present
> for all of us, like a kids' toolkit so we would not steal his tools, but we could still
> build our own stuff.

Thus, Claire learned the skills to be self-reliant and think "outside the box" from

her parents. Her parents provided her with tools and methods to make what she wants

instead of simply buying it and to be "independent." She continued:

> I got presents such as how to make a pair of pajamas, and so I would get fabric
> and a pattern and then a lesson from my mom on how to sew. But she used to
> leave me alone and I kind of figured out on my own. She raised me to be very
> independent and very…work with my hands and be really resourceful and know
> that I was capable of doing things. Those are really valuable lessons to me that I
> definitely carried through.

Emily also modeled her life from her parents living simply. She learned to spend

her financial resources on "something that would last a long time" to reduce frequent

purchases that would increase the number of items. She narrated:

> I grew up without a lot of money, so you learn to be pretty self-reliant to look
> for good things rather than a lot of things when you can find them, and that is
> just something I have always enjoyed doing. Yes, that is definitely how I grew
> up, it was more 'So if it breaks, you fix it' rather than 'If it breaks, you get
> something new.'

Emily's parents are both children of immigrants, and so they grew up in a new

environment without sufficient financial resources. They learned practical skills to be

self-sufficient, and Emily inherited those skills and mindset to be self-reliant from them.

For example, her mother would sew a dress if she wanted one instead of buying one:

> If my mom wanted a new dress, she sewed one rather than go out and buy one. I
> think they both [her parents] see those skills as something still valuable even
> though maybe it is not 100% needed anymore. I mean, you can go anywhere
> and find a dress, it's not hard to do, but I think that they passed that value onto

us. You can still do things for yourself and that sometimes that is the best way to get what you would like rather than settling for something close but not really what you want, teaching yourself how to do the thing that will get you to what you want and look for things in unexpected places.

As Emily shared, she understood why her parents appreciated the skills to be self-sufficient. She believed that she can have the option to obtain what she exactly wants by having those skills, and those are the values inherited from her parents. Walther and Sandlin (2013) argued that family is a significant space associated with passing the values and practices of voluntary simplifiers to the next generation. Transmitting consumption patterns is a strategy to reproduce social class of families (Holt, 1998). Thus, it was maintained that passing the consumption practices is to reproduce their middle-class status and a privileged position. The parents of Claire and Emily might not have sufficient economic capital, however, passed cultural capital of consumption practices to their daughters.

Although the participants were influenced by the frugality of their parents, sometimes those values were passed onto the participants through transformation. For instance, it may combine with values of significant others and evolve beyond frugality. Ian stated: "I started dating my girlfriend and she was more conscious of consumerism and kind of living…reducing waste than I was, so I started to do that." His parents focused on saving money, but his girlfriend placed greater emphasis on environmental concerns. Thus, his consumption style evolved beyond finding "the cheapest thing." He shared:

> I was kind of raised and always thought about just spending the least amount of money on each individual item and that was not at all the way she viewed things. She bought what she wanted or was less concerned with finding the cheapest thing.

47

Participants may also be influenced by their parents in the opposite way. Their parents' shopping habit acted as a trigger for the participants to explore simple living. For example, Anne described how much her mother liked to shop at second-hand stores and she learned to find "a good deal." However, her mother kept "too much stuff." Her lifestyle became different from her mother's by taking the opposite direction. She stated:

> I mentioned that my mom loves shopping second-hands, but she owns a ton of stuff. She has a million pairs of pants. That's an exaggeration, but it seems like it sometimes. One of her good friends also is the same way, and they both have told me that their reason is that when they were kids, they had no extra stuff. They grew up and their moms were very controlling. They did not spend extra money on clothing. As soon as they became adults, that was all they wanted, to have more stuff. I wonder if my generation, because I grew up and saw that my mom had so much, naturally, I have done the opposite. I wonder if it sort of goes like this. It is the same thing with my refrigerator at home. My mom lives alone, I live alone. Her refrigerator, she could feed an army for two weeks, and I have empty shelves. I wish I had a refrigerator this tiny in my apartment because I do not need it all. But it is just like we are the opposite of each other. I wonder if someday my children will have a million pairs of pants. Who knows?

As discussed so far, the participants explained how the values and practices of voluntary simplicity were transmitted from their parents and evolved in different ways that triggered pursuing this lifestyle. The participants inherited those values and adopted this simple lifestyle in their own way. On the other hand, one participant shared that she began to pursue this lifestyle to live the opposite life.

Transforming Life Stages: Trials and Learning

Another personal motivation to adopt voluntary simplicity is to avoid negative consequences based on the past experiences at the transforming life stages. Five out of the eight participants mentioned they began with considering simple life choices when they were in college. Moving away from their parents, they started having their own

places and making their own life decisions. They were in transition and entering a new life stage. Kala disclosed, "I would say it started when I moved away from my family and started making these decisions on my own in college." Throughout her college life, she experienced moving to new places several times. Those moments also made her think how much stuff she will maintain at her place because "it's going to have to be packed eventually and move somewhere." She realized that owning a great deal of stuff she does not need makes it harder to move to a new place.

This phenomenon can be associated with operant conditioning. Operant conditioning was extensively studied by Skinner (Solomon, 2014). It is a learning process suggesting that a behavior can be modified by reinforcement or punishment. There are two types of conditioning: classical conditioning and operant conditioning. Whereas classical conditioning involves producing simple reflexive behavior by stimuli, operant conditioning is more complex in nature. Classical conditioning occurs when an unconditioned stimulus is paired with a conditioned stimulus. In Pavlov's experiment, the bell sound (neutral stimulus/conditioned stimulus) paired with the meat powder (unconditioned stimulus) was given to a dog. Accordingly, the dog salivated. After this pairing was repeated, the dog salivated when only the bell sound was provided. Given that the bell sound is associated with the meat powder, such sound made the dog salivate (conditioned response).

In instrumental conditioning, a behavior is rewarded or punished when stimuli are given, so the behavior is either reinforced or avoided in the future. As the participants shared, keeping unnecessary possessions (behavior) resulted in putting in more effort to move to a new place (bad consequence). Thus, they learned through these

past experiences and found a solution to improve their life, which was choosing this simple lifestyle. In other words, adopting this lifestyle involved a trial-and-error learning process for those who are very rational, economical people. These trials may happen more frequently when people are in transition to a new life stage and given the opportunity to evaluate their overall lifestyle and shopping habits. For instance, Anne shared:

> When I was in college, so maybe like, 18 to 24 or so; those first few years when I was living on my own, I was sort of figuring out what was my style and what do I like to wear, now that I could make all my own decisions. I just bought so many things that I did not really care about, and it would just sit in my closet, and I would never wear them. Then after moving a few times, I realized like, 'why am I doing this?' So, I was actually moving and packing, and then unpacking. I would realize this is really silly, and then, that kind of got me thinking about it. So, it is the process of hauling it into a new place.

As indicated above, Anne started to make her "own decisions" about overall life. In terms of wardrobes, she tried to develop her own "style" and realized she had owned clothes she did not wear in her closet, making it harder for her to move. She realized that it is "silly" to have clothing in her closet that she never wears because it means she "wasted a lot of money." That realization helped her change her perspective on her possessions. Jennifer also experienced a change in her perspective on what she should own. She declared,

> I think maybe when I went to college, that is when I like, you know, you have to really assess what you have and what you need and leave things at home…and I realized I don't remember what I have there, it doesn't matter if I have it or not.

Jennifer's comment means you do not need it when you "don't remember" what you have and "don't find it." She continued:

> Like, I thought these things were really important, and they filled my room and

were a part of me. I thought that identified me, but it doesn't. You know, relationships identify you and what you make and what your lifestyle is, instead of the things that you have.

Jennifer realized what she keeps at her place does not "identify" her nor are "a part of" herself. It is discussed further in the apparel disposal of voluntary simplifiers, but Jennifer separated her belongings at her place from herself and learned that she did not need them.

The participants who mentioned this theme all experienced self-realization, "aha moments" that involve critical life lessons learning through trials at a new life stage. The direction was toward considering a simple life choice, which became a motivation to pursue voluntary simplicity.

Toward A Coherent Self

Another personal motivation to live simply is sometimes explained by voluntary simplifiers' effort to maintain their coherent self in every aspect of life. Ahuvia (2005) argued that consumers construct a coherent identity narrative through their possessions and activities. In contemporary society, consumers hold multiple, sometimes contradicting identities, so they utilize their possessions and activities to maintain a unified sense of self. This viewpoint can be associated with the extended self. Belk (1988) stated that people consume to extend and strengthen their core self. The core self refers to the sense of who they are (i.e., their body and ideas), whereas the extended self involves items, persons, and places that may identify them. Thus, consumers make decisions in every aspect of their life in an effort to develop and maintain a coherent self. For example, Emily shared: "I think that if I were consuming differently…I would feel like I wasn't being true to myself." She believed that pursuing voluntary simplicity is

51

"fulfilling a responsibility as a member of the world" and being "true" to herself. So, living simply is her choice to maintain her authentic self. She continued:

> I feel like every person has the opportunity to make their own choices with how they consume…I am kind of fulfilling my responsibility as a person of the world to try and do things that make sense and causes that are as harmless as possible…and participate in kind of higher quality of goods and economy, second hand and sustainable clothing.

This tendency can also be manifested through their career choices. Claire was in the apparel industry and realized that her line of work created "a lot of harm for people and the planet," even though she loves clothing as a form of "self-expression." Thus, she was trying to find a solution to the problem through her lifestyle choice:

> I've always struggled with the apparel industry as a profession because I think it creates a lot of harm for people and the planet. I also love fashion and I love…I do not love fashion; I love clothing and self-expression in the cultural patterns of clothing. I have always had a problem with how to combine those things into something without adding more harm to the world. I think all these things together have an influence. They are all intertwined for me, and I am currently working on constantly improving my impact in my life and my career at how to orient my research and my practice to encourage better consumption habits in others as well, and also in the industries to create better products.

In order to reflect her values, Claire chose to teach fashion design, encouraging students to adopt simplified consumption styles and continues her research to develop better apparel products in the industry. Jennifer also shared a similar story how she was inspired by minimalism as an artist. She was impressed by the minimalist work aesthetically first, then the core concepts of this art movement began to correspond with her values. She stated: "I like minimalist work. Clean, simple, beautiful works that can stand alone and considers its environment make me feel really good. It satisfies a part of my soul." She believed minimalist works "could stand alone" and "considers its

environment," which may be consistent with her core values such as independence and environment concerns. Her preference for minimalism as an artist can be her choice to strengthen a coherent self or her "soul." She continued:

> I am an Artist Administrator and I grew up as an artist. I like to think of myself as one when I have time. And it's kind of adopted into a lot of our culture in art world to live simply and to, you know, barter, to reuse things. Not everyone does it but I think it is an important contribution or, I don't know, a way of thinking that we all can adopt.

Kala also made consistent choices to hold a unified sense of self in college. She became involved in environmental councils when she was in college and started her own research to be more sustainable. She slowly adopted the simple lifestyle, became a vegetarian, and looked at her clothing and resultant waste. She shared,

> I became a vegan but through the whole process…I was studying textiles and costume design. I was in the theater and making costumes…there's so much textile waste and I was like, 'Well, what can we do with this?' Thus, I started researching that and then I fell down the rabbit hole of researching the impact of the textile industry and how it is the second most detrimental to the environment aside from oil. The second I learned that I could not go back. I was obsessed with it. I knew that that was my calling.

As Kala and other participants shared, every aspect of life can be part of their extended self and can be intertwined together to pursue a coherent self. To these participants, pursuing voluntary simplicity is a lifestyle choice to maintain a unified self. This perspective can also be discussed with self-realization needs (authenticity and efficacy), the highest stage of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1970). Adopting voluntary simplicity is an effort to meet personal authenticity, the highest element in the pyramid that cannot be achieved by mere consumption (Zavestoski, 2002). Thus, it is suggested that consumers' effort to achieve personal authenticity manifests through their extended

selves, such as their education and career choices, developing a coherent self.

Reducing Clutter and Anxiety

The last theme also accounted for voluntary simplifiers' personal motivation to

pursue a simple lifestyle. Five participants felt "distracted" or "out of control" if their

space became "too cluttered" that it gave them "anxiety." Jennifer stated:

> I'm a minimalist. I don't like clutter and it doesn't make me feel good. I don't
> like it, like to see, you know, anything unorganized around me. I like the places
> to be where they're supposed to be, and I don't like to just keep using things and
> getting rid of things and just having like…it's like this burden.

Jennifer stated that "clutter" and "anything unorganized" do not make her feel

good, as other participants felt "out of control" and "anxious." The definition of clutter

in this context is "a lot of things in a messy state, especially things that are not useful or

necessary" ("Clutter", n.d.). Thus, the meaning of clutter that the participants shared is

anything unnecessary or unorganized around them. To explain the symptoms of feelings

"anxious" and "out of control," it may be useful to ponder the issue of whether these

unpleasant feelings are derived from Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) even though

the participants cannot be examined clinically. OCD refers to showing either obsessions

or compulsions, or both (Veale, 2004). An obsession means "an unwanted intrusive

thought, image or urge" entering one's mind repeatedly such as contamination from dirt

and concern with order (Veale, 2004, p. 65), whereas compulsions refer to "repetitive

behaviors or mental acts that the person feels driven to perform" to reduce discomfort

such as checking and cleaning/washing (Veale, 2004, p. 66). The emotional

consequences of an obsession are discomfort or distress and the most common emotion

is anxiety. A person with an obsession with contamination or order, therefore, may show

the compulsion of cleaning or ordering to reduce that anxiety. Besides, obsessions are

sometimes the results of cognitive biases such as "intolerance of uncertainty" and "the

need for control." Thus, the perfectionism and concern for mistakes of the person can

contribute to the presence of an obsession (Veale, 2004, p. 65).

As the participants of this study describe their emotional consequences of

having clutter around them as being out of control and anxious, they may have a certain

extent of obsession with cleanness or order. A logical extension of this thinking is that

their cleaning or organizing behaviors may be their effort to reduce the anxiety.

Interestingly, it can be cautiously proposed that this group of voluntary simplifiers may

be perfectionists who are afraid of making mistakes and want everything around them in

control. While the participants were not clinically assessed regarding their level of OCD,

their motivation to pursue voluntary simplicity may be relevant to individual obsessions

and compulsions. Jake also shared that he started reducing clutter even at a very young

age. He stated,

> I think sometimes I relate it to anxiety just because...I was a very anxious person
> growing up and I found that having things made me very anxious. So I decided
> to live without the things at all. It didn't happen overnight and it's still a
> process. Life is a whole process. So I would say, I started getting rid of a few
> things and the next thing, and then I got rid of a few more.

He mentioned that he was "a very anxious person" in nature and "having things"

around him made him very "anxious." His obsession with cleanness may have triggered

his decluttering behavior to reduce his anxiety. He continues to describe:

> I think it has always been in me. I mean, as a child, I don't remember... I have
> phases going in and out as a child I really don't want to have stuff. I remember, I
> was about 8 years old and I drew up my plans for my house and my house was 8
> by 8 feet and that was what I wanted as a kid. I was a kid I was able to fit in that
> 8 by 8-foot space a little better. But actually, I'm in the process of building my

home right now. I'm just building an 8 by 8 home right now.

Reducing clutter is not merely a matter of getting rid of extra stuff and organizing the participants' personal spaces. It can be applied to all other contexts such as their workplaces and digital devices. For instance, Linda shared:

> I like my spaces to be clean and like…my desk at work is clean and organized. If a lot of people have dirty dishes and stuff near their desks, I will go clean up their dirty dishes for them. It just like bugs me. So, I just don't like having clutter, I think.

Linda shared that she wanted not only her desk at the workplace but anything around it to be "clean and organized." Ian also described how clutter avoidance could be connected with digital detox:

> I don't like having clutter. I don't know…if there's a reason for it or it's logical. But I just like having a clean-living space and clean…like on my phone I have one alarm that I keep resetting, and my girlfriend doesn't really care about the clutter. She has like forty alarms on her phone that she'll turn just reset to do alarm or time. It drives me crazy.

Ian found it difficult to articulate the reason behind his clutter avoidance, but he said he did "not like having clutter." Having clutter made him feel discomfort, as indicated in the story he shared. Seeing forty alarms on his girlfriend's phone made him feel "crazy." His preference for cleanness and clutter avoidance may be relevant to his effort to reduce the associated discomfort, ultimately leading to a simplified lifestyle.

Regaining control of every aspect of daily life is one of the main reason to pursue voluntary simplicity (Elgin and Mitchell, 1977; Leonard–Barton, 1981). Individuals seek to take control of their life, over-consumption choices and their lifestyle to obtain a sense of efficacy (Zavestoski, 2002), which is an element of self-actualization, the highest level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. However, the

participants of this study frequently mentioned that having clutter or anything unorganized around them made them "anxious," a certain level of emotional discomfort. Thus, their cleaning or organizing behaviors may be their effort to reduce the anxiety, which led to the motivation to pursue voluntary simplicity.

Apparel Consumption Behavior of Voluntary Simplifiers

Apparel Acquisition of Voluntary Simplifiers

This section explores the acquisition of apparel consumption of voluntary simplifiers, which involves four stages of the consumer decision process model: problem recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, and purchase decision (Blackwell et al., 2001). The following eight themes were identified from the interviews with participants: *1) need for now, 2) extensive information search, 3) quality over quantity, 4) pursuing their own unique style rather than being trendy, 5) preference for versatile apparel items, 6) being a seeker or a skeptic: apparel products with social responsibility claims, 7) thrifting: finding unique pieces and supporting causes, and 8) having the privilege to choose: time, money, and effort.*

Need for Now

Voluntary simplifiers tend to conduct an immediate search of an apparel item when they need it and when there is no alternative. For instance, Linda stated: "If something breaks and I cannot fix it, then I try to go find something to replace it." Jennifer also shared a story about her new backpack, which was her last significant apparel purchase. She began by searching for a new one when her last one was

completely broken. She always brings a backpack with her. Thus, it was necessary for her to buy a new one. She shared the following statement:

> I always have a big backpack. Only one. But my last one was really destroyed. I had it for like five years and you know, I bike with it, I travel with it. I try to travel with just a backpack. I try to fit everything in there no matter how long [the journey is or how far] I am going for and I really like to…so, I'm always running around, and I have all sorts of jobs. I always have a backpack like I always have my laptop with me, I always have my wallet with me.

Two more participants stated that their recent significant purchase of apparel items was a bag, and one of them, Anne, shared a similar story:

> I have a few trips planned for this year, and I do not have any real luggage. I never owned luggage, and the bag that I used to use for carry-on is just getting worn out, and it looks really terrible. And the purse that I carried every day was also starting to get kind of worn out. So, both of those were sort of in the back of my mind, and I was looking, and then this walked through the door. So, it was the perfect opportunity to [replace] both of those things at once.

Sometimes your body type changes, which results in the need for new clothes. Claire mentioned that her body changed after she had a baby. Thus, she had to purchase new pants that fit. She shared the following:

> I had a baby almost 2 years ago and my body changed. None of my pants fit me afterward, which I think is totally horrible. I wore my maternity pants for a year after I had him because I was too busy to go buy pants. Finally, I decided I needed to stop wearing my elastic top jeans and none of my old ones fit. I tried them [on] for a little, but they were a bit too small. Thus, I gave up and gave them…I went to the Loft. It's the place that the pants used to fit me, and they still fit me just in a different size.

Although the participants mentioned the "need for now" as the main reason for shopping for apparel product, they sometimes struggle to be free from the need to purchase new clothes given that clothing is a way to express oneself. Kala shared:

It is usually a need but I still…I have to be honest. I still fight that internal want and desire for beautiful things and like what's trendy…I'm a design-oriented person and drawn to all of those things. I constantly want to be surrounded by them and for me, clothing is a form of expression. It's my art form.

Overall, their search for an apparel item begins when there is a need for now, not for the future. This tendency can be associated with mindfulness, one of voluntary simplifiers' values (Alexander & Ussher, 2012). Mindfulness refers to a quality of consciousness that represents attention to or an awareness of the current moment or the present reality (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Mindful individuals perceive internal and external realities openly and without distortion. They focus on what takes place in the present moment. Therefore, mindfulness can enhance one's awareness of the current consumption behavior as it is when there are numerous factors of consumerism in our modern society (Rosenberg, 2004). On the other hand, mindlessness, which signifies the opposite of mindfulness, is the state of not paying attention to current experience or to one's behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1980). Individuals may be engaged with multiple tasks or preoccupied with worries that distract them from focusing on what is going on in the present. Thus, people may 'mindlessly' consume, not paying attention to the consequences of their nonconscious choices.

The participants of this study are mindful, thus paying attention to their needs at the moment. They seek to purchase an apparel product when they need one and when there is no alternative as Anne and Claire shared. They are also aware of their internal struggles, as Kala tried to control her urge for self-expression. But this whole process allows them to be more conscious about their consumption choices and less impulsive, focusing on what they really need now.

Extensive Information Search

Voluntary simplifiers still look at reviews on websites and ask friends to obtain information on the apparel items they want to acquire. They actively utilize external sources. For example, Ian stated, "I liked to be able to see it in person. But if I can't, then I'll make sure that I have seen photos from people who have actually bought it like reviews of it, not just the photos of the product from the company so that I can kind of feel like I've seen it." They tend to exert effort to gather information when they consider the purchase as a "big investment." They ask their friends in addition to looking at online websites. Anne shared:

> I usually ask a lot of my friends. I would say, if it's something big, then I'll ask them where they bought their winter clothes, and shoes, and if they like them, because I'm going to spend a lot of money. I would like to know first-hand how it did.

According to Emily, she tends to conduct research on "practical apparel items," such as biking and winter clothing. A significant portion of voluntary simplifiers prefer and use a bike to commute in daily life. Thus, they may purchase a considerable amount of biking apparel and gather more information on biking apparel than other items. Supporting this proposition, Emily continued:

> There are certain kinds of more practical apparel items that I'll do research on like when I'm going to buy a pair of winter boots. I'll do a bunch of research. I look at biking forums to read opinions on what other people had bought and how that worked for that specific activity and I'll try things on. I do often buy athletic things like bike clothes and often times on Zappos because you have the option of trying a bunch of things on and then returning what you don't use. Even though often times that clothing isn't as sustainable as I would like it to be, since I can be so hard to fit, sometimes it's the best time option…so when I was looking for boots I would look at a bunch of different websites, try a bunch of things on and do research that way.

In addition, voluntary simplifiers are known to conduct extensive online research to find a product that meets their specific needs, especially environmental information of companies (Oates, McDonald, Alevizou, Hwang, Young, & McMorland, 2008). For instance, Kala shared her story about her recent purchase of a new bag after exerting considerable effort in gathering information. She actively searched for the ethical activities of the brands or companies and interacted with them through social media to obtain updated knowledge:

> I had bags that I could use but they were all getting very old and worn and I wanted something [else]. I was also enjoying the professional world, so I wanted something more…so, I did a lot of research. But I also knew that I could just purchase something really fast if I wanted to. I could go anywhere and find something that was really similar, but I really wanted it to be intentional and to fit one of the values that I had. I found this online and I found this company just by doing research online. I'm also very connected on social media and Instagram and I follow all of these ethical brands…and I actually had a really awesome email correspondence with the owners. I felt like it was very personal, and I shared…I shared my story and I shared theirs. I think that that was really heartfelt, and I think I've made a huge difference.

Overall, voluntary simplifiers are quite intentional about their apparel purchases and search harder for information on apparel products that can meet their specific needs. In doing so, the Internet websites are critical sources in addition to the first-hand experiences of people around them.

Quality over Quantity

Almost every participant expressed their preference for quality over quantity. Seven of them mentioned that quality is one of the most essential standards they use to choose an apparel item. For instance, when Anne talked about her new bag, she stated

that the quality of the apparel is critical in her purchase decision because it will "last for a long time." She shared: "When I saw this, [I knew that] not only is it beautiful, but it is going to last a really, really long time." However, purchasing apparel products with good quality tends to cost more. Anne mentioned that this kind of purchase is like a "balancing act." She is willing to pay more for quality products. She continued:

> It is like a balancing act. If the quality is high, I am much more willing to pay a higher price for it. If the quality wasn't very high, I would not pay very much. That sort of goes into the trendy category, like if it was a trendy piece of clothing and it's cheap, I still wouldn't want to buy it because I will not want it for a very long time. Above all else, I would rather have something for a long time. It's just a bonus if I could find it for a better price.

Other participants also shared that quality is essential in their choice of apparel items and they are willing to spend more because these items will last longer. For example, when Jennifer explained about her new backpack, she stated:

> Metal [button] is really important [in terms of] good quality, it's the only way. Good stitching and good fabric...I like to buy quality products instead of you know, buying things. I could by a $20 backpack but it's going to fall apart in a week or a month.

Linda also shared a similar story on how she chooses quality over quantity:
> Sometimes I buy clothing online from stores like Everlane. It's a store that I purchase clothing from sometimes and it's pricier. But I know that [the product] is good quality and doesn't have a huge social or environmental impact. So, I am willing to pay more for goods like that.

As Linda states, voluntary simplifiers often engage in purchasing products with quality, for environment concerns (Ballantine & Creery, 2010). They assume quality products will last longer and are more durable, resulting in less disposition and less harm to the environment. At the same time, they may have sophisticated tastes and standards

of quality, so the balancing quality and cost of apparel is still a big challenge. For another instance, Ian talked about balancing quality and cost of apparel items he wants to purchase. He has his own limit, which might interact with the cost of the specific apparel product he wants to purchase. He shared:

> If I find something that I look at and can tell that it meets my standard of quality and it's available for purchase, then I'll buy it. I don't buy things only because they're expensive but sometimes, the things that I want to buy are expensive. So I'd say I kind of have a maximum that I'm willing to pay but that maximum has increased as I've cared more about each specific item. So, yeah, I guess I'd say I'll try to buy the cheaper version if there is one that I would like equally as much, but I definitely value the specific item that I'm looking for more than the cost.

Pursuing Their Own Unique Style Rather than Being Trendy

Another standard that voluntary simplifiers pursue is their own "unique style." Seven out of eight participants stated that they do not consider themselves "trendy," but they seek their own style or attempt at uniqueness that can "last for a long time." For example, Claire stated: "Trendy? Not really. There are trends I sometimes adopt because I think they're really fun. I think about them but never end up actually participating in them." She sometimes selects trendy styles to inject variety into her apparel choices, but she knows that she pursues her own style. She continued:

> I see how quickly they change and that kind of goes against my personal feelings of…so I would say I have a style, always feel like such a funny thing of me, but I have my own style and it definitely changes and it's influenced sometimes by trends. But I work kind of to settle into my own style, so I don't feel like I constantly have to update it.

Ian also shared the attention he pays to find an apparel item that suits his style and he can enjoy for a long time:

I won't go out and buy something because I saw the trend and wanted to try it out. I always really think about what I really need or want in my wardrobe before buying it and try to make sure that I'm buying something that I know I'm not going to be tired of a month later. I realize like oh, it's not for me. That's since I definitely feel like I have a style. I will only buy things that fit into that style.

Anne and Emily also explained the "unique" style that fits them. Anne shared: "I think [I like] the style being unique, but not too trendy because I want it to last for a long time. So, kind of classic style, but still interesting, beautiful and unique." She also mentioned that pursuing her own unique style is one of the benefits of adopting this simple lifestyle:

I am not putting pressure on myself to look trendy necessarily. I never feel like I have to buy something new just because my old clothes are out of style, because I'm trying not to buy things that are coming in and out. That makes it easier and there is less pressure on myself. It also makes it a little bit easier to match or things are interchangeable a little bit more because I can kind of trust that they're all blue shirts.

Emily also knows the style that works for her and she likes to try something unique. She stated:

I think I like the style of clothes from the 40's to the 60's, in particular, a lot. I'm a short, athletic person, so it's really hard to find non-teen clothes that fit me, so I either have the options of "petites" or "teens" and I don't really like either one of them. So just the fact that the sizing was a little bit different seems to work a lot better for me. And I do like the idea of having something that I really love and is unique rather than something that is more kind of currently trendy, because I don't buy a lot of clothes. When I buy something, I'm planning on keeping it for a long time unless it's something really specific.

Two participants shared an interesting opinion of "minimalistic look." They thought that minimalistic design or style is "a trend," but they do not necessarily follow

it. They believe that a simple lifestyle and a simple look are two different elements. In other words, pursuing voluntary simplicity does not necessarily mean adopting a simple, minimalistic design or look in terms of clothing. For instance, Kala described:

> I feel like there is this wave of trendy minimalism…like all neutrals and black and white…I think that's such a struggle…it's very trendy to be basic and for me, I'm not. I feel like I love color, culture, and texture as a designer and as a customer.

She also shared how she developed her own look and followed it:

> As I got older, I have sort of developed my own style and tried to figure out how to be more timeless in choosing colors…silhouettes that fit my body type and the style that I want to create for myself…I definitely think that I have developed a sense of style that I would consider my own and have become more okay with that as I've gotten older.

Linda was another participant who viewed minimalism style as a trend. She stated: "Maybe what's trendy is like clean, simple lines, and colors…more like natural looking elements in clothing and apparel." She continued to share how this "trend" may harm the essence of living simply:

> People, you know, really value that look of minimalism. You can see it in graphics and you can see it in stores…less is definitely more and just in terms of pop culture…but I think it sort of distracts them [from] the real reasoning for living an eco-friendly lifestyle.

Prefer Versatile Apparel Items

Voluntary simplifiers also pursue versatility with regard to apparel items. Five participants stated they would purchase an apparel item that can be used for several purposes. For instance, Jennifer shared: "[I] make sure that when I'm purchasing

something, it works for not only one purpose…[so I can] pair it with something else."

Ian also mentioned his similar standard when we discussed his jacket, which was a recent significant purchase: "It is kind of in between weights…so I can wear it in the spring at night when the sun goes down, and then on the winter, I can wear it under a heavier jacket. [It] kind of gets a lot of use throughout the whole year." Based on the perception of these two participants, voluntary simplifiers prefer versatile apparel items that they can mix and match with other items they have. Two more participants shared similar stories in terms of their bags. Claire talked about how much she considers her new purchase as "multifunctional" to ensure she can wear it "in different ways." She stated:

> I always think about how I can wear it in different ways or how it would go with other things in my wardrobe…It has become multifunctional. When I'm looking for something, I usually want something really specific…I found this awesome bag that when you zip up the sides it is only 22 liters and it is like a normal daypack, but it can open up to 40 liters. So, it is like this multifunctional thing.

Anne also explained why she chose her new bag, which was her recent significant purchase. She stated:

> I can use it as carry-on luggage. I have my laptop in here, so I can use it for work…it has got its backpack straps, and side straps, so it can be kind of a million different things. I thought this would replace a purse, a backpack, and a luggage, all-in-one thing.

Voluntary simplifiers prefer apparel items that can be used in several ways, which leads to a limited number of apparel items. Thus, they tend to mix and match those items and make the best use of them. It will be discussed further in the apparel use of voluntary simplifiers.

66

Being a Seeker or Skeptic: Apparel Products with Social Responsibility Claims

The last standard that voluntary simplifiers may consider is the social

responsibility claim of fashion products. Some of them would actively seek information

on social responsibility or sustainability of apparel products, whereas others were

skeptical about this information. Three participants mentioned they considered

information on being socially responsible. For instance, Emily stated:

> I definitely look for fair trade and sustainable wage clothing whenever possible, especially with certain things…cotton apparel seems to be easier to find in that category. When I can find cotton T-shirts [and] they're fair trade…or underwear or socks or something like that. I usually look for that.

Claire also shared that she wants to financially "support" certain types of apparel

businesses, such as "women or minority-owned" businesses. She shared:

> If there is a local store, I would go to that because I prefer to support small businesses…it's important to support, or especially like women-owned businesses or minority-owned businesses…I make a point to try to do that.

Kala was mostly drawn toward social responsibility claims. She shared a brand

story about her new bag, which was her recent significant purchase:

> It is made in Ethiopia. This is probably I guess my most significant and then, this was my last purchase…This brand Carter Clay, they do women's entrepreneurship projects in Ethiopia and all of the tanning processes are authentic to the originals. So, there are no chemicals [involved]. [They observe] all-natural tanning practices…this brand is just like acting as the middleman or the middle company until these women have enough skills and feel comfortable and then they'll hand off the business to them. So, they're doing business training as well as creating cultural opportunities.

She also shared how passionate she is about being involved with socially responsible

brands and companies:

> That is something I am really passionate and interested. I am actually exploring right now the fields that [would allow me to engage in] that social enterprise women's businesses, and that cross-cultural art history skills and really bringing fair wages and fair trade to more brands in the companies. So, yeah, that would probably be my most significant purchase.

On the other hand, three participants stated that they could not trust information on socially responsible apparel products. For example, Jennifer stated: "I just don't really know how meaningful that is. I think anyone could write organic." Ian was also skeptical about the social responsibility claims of apparels. He shared:

> There is some romance that says that they are super Eco-friendly or that they are you know, the most sustainable supply chain and all of that. You never really know what is marketing and what is real, so I just try to buy things that I'm going to wear throughout their duration.

He also shared that he is willing to buy apparel items from sustainable companies if there is an "evidence" of their sustainable practices as it can "elevate a brand over another":

> I will buy certain things…if there is evidence that it's a sustainable company and treats employees well and all of that…then I'll buy for them if I like their products. I wouldn't buy something for those reasons, but it could elevate a brand over another if that's something that one has, and another doesn't.

Another participant, Linda, also mentioned that sustainability claims could be "misleading." She thought of it as another "trend" like a minimalistic look and "eco look." She stated:

> The tough part about this whole trendy and minimalism thing is [that] most clothing stores have some type of sustainability practice written into their

mission statement or whatever it is, even if they don't actually like, they kind of make it misleading because it sells. Like minimalism sells.

She continued:

It is greenwashing. It is just trying to get the customer to think, 'Okay. I'm okay. I'm not like hurting the planet.' So, I think that they are sort of a similar thing with minimalism. And like the trendy, more eco look of more natural colors, more down-to-earth looking pieces of clothing…maybe that's why I kind of have an issue with whole trendy clothing minimalism. The thing is, I don't know if people just like buying things that look like they fit that trend instead of actually doing research and making sure that it fits the ecological aspect.

Thrifting: Finding Unique Pieces and Supporting Causes

Voluntary simplifiers often shop at thrift stores. Five participants stated they are inclined to go thrifting to find "unique" apparel items and "support causes." For instance, Claire stated: "My motivation is finding something that makes me feel a little more individual and expresses myself." As previously discussed, voluntary simplifiers seek their own unique style. Claire also pursues her own style to express herself. She likes to shop at thrift stores to find unique pieces that suit her style. Two participants mentioned that they shop at secondhand stores to support social and environmental causes. For example, Kala likes to shop for clothes and maintain her "creativity" in terms of using her wardrobes, but she still wants to "support the causes." Thrifting is a method that allows her to meet both needs:

So that's really challenging but I have found some ways to offset that. So, I do a lot of shopping or exchanging. I do a lot of clothing exchanges with friends. I shop at Arc's Value Village like second hand or vintage source. I feel like that has allowed the creativity to continue while supporting the causes. Arc's Value Village promotes and does a lot of job creation for people with disabilities. So, I feel like there are ways to offset things and kind of choose wisely.

Linda was another participant who frequently shops at secondhand stores. She

wants to try a new apparel item sometimes while having a less impact on the environment. She considers the activity as "checking out a library book" since she can sell the items back:

> Sometimes I just want to try something new or I feel sick of my clothing. This might not be the best environmentally sustainable way to shop but I often justify like, 'Okay. I can go out and find something new and fun just because I shop at second-hand stores.' So, I'm making less of an impact plus it's just going to live in my closet until I sell it back to a store. I feel like it's more like checking out a library book instead of having to, you know, participate in this consumer fast fashion culture where you just find something and then throw it out.

She also mentioned that she supports the "culture" of second-hand clothing in her community by shopping at thrift stores to encourage more involvement in the culture:

> I feel like I'm also supporting a second-hand clothing culture in the community, which I think is important for actually getting up because people are buying second-hand clothing means more people will sell their second-hand clothing.

Having the Privilege to Choose: Time, Money, and Effort

The voluntary simplifiers believed that they are "privileged to choose" this sustainable apparel consumption style. Seven participants mentioned that purchasing their apparel this way takes a considerable amount of time, money, and effort; nevertheless, they appreciated the fact that they could make such choices. For instance, Linda stated, "I recognized that that's like a position and privilege, being able to pick and choose what clothing to purchase, because there are a lot of people who can't, you know; they can't afford it." Kala also shared that ethical choices can be expensive and that searching for them requires time and resources:

> It's not easy to purchase ethically, responsibly, or sustainably. It takes a lot of

time and research. I also know that it's a privilege. I have the privilege of having the time and extra resources to be able to purchase this way and be able to afford it. Not everyone has that. And it's not accessible to everyone.

Claire and Ian also shared their stories about how they must be "careful" with their time and money to purchase clothing that meets their standards. Claire stated, "I think the downside is that it takes more time and money. Its effort to think about where your clothes come from...sometimes it's just tiring; sometimes I get tired. At times, I don't want to have to care, but I do anyway." At the same time, she appreciated the fact that she is in the position to make "more conscious choices" that "morally" satisfy her:

> I think the benefits of having more conscious choices are [that] I feel better about my choices… I feel happier with my choices, and I feel more satisfied with them. I feel like my morals line up with my shopping habits, and that's a good thing.

She continued:

> I think I have a lot of privileges in my life to be able to make some of these choices and to be able to choose something more expensive because I have a good job. I'm lucky to be employed and to have the education to get to that point.

Ian shared a similar experience: "The downside is that now, my standard for quality and design is higher, and so things cost more. Financially, I have to be careful because I could easily spend all of my money on clothes and save nothing." When he described this experience, he shared an interesting story about "a cost to entry." It means that pursuing this simple lifestyle "comes from a place of privilege":

> There's some like… I don't know who he is. A writer or some person who made the analogy: for a man who needs to buy a pair of boots for work every year, he can only afford a $10 pair, and every year at the end of the season, he wears through the soles of his boots. His feet are wet every day at work until the next

year when he buys another pair for $10. Whereas, the rich man buys one pair of $50 boots. This pair lasts 10 years, and they keep his feet dry the whole time. At the end of 10 years, the rich man spent $50, whereas the poor man spent $100, and his feet were wet the entire time. Thus, there's like an initial cost, I think; if you want to have higher quality or nicer and fewer items, you need to have some capital to start that lifestyle. If you're living paycheck to paycheck, it would be a lot harder to do that. I think that it definitely comes from a place of privilege to be able to think about having fewer and more quality items.

Apparel Use of Voluntary Simplifiers

This section explores the use of apparel consumption of voluntary simplifiers. It involves two stages of the consumer decision process model: use, care & storage and post-purchase evaluation (Blackwell et al., 2001). A total of three themes emerged from the interviews with the participants: *1) mix and match: making the best use of your wardrobes, 2) extending the life of your wardrobes, and 3) closet and dresser: a guideline to control your wardrobes.*

Mix and Match: Making the Best Use of Your Clothing

Voluntary simplifiers try to make the best use of their clothing. Six participants mentioned that they would like to wear their clothes as many times as possible. For instance, Claire stated, "I'm really into getting as much use out of a thing as possible, and I wear it forever." Ian also shared that he feels "guilty" if he does not wear the clothes he has. Another participant, Anne, also believed that it is "silly" to not fully utilize your apparel: "It still seems so silly to have something sit in my closet and never come out." She continued to share how she uses her new bag daily and how she handles it:

> I use it almost every day, and I use it daily, instead of my purse. I also use it for traveling instead of a carry-on bag… I know that it's valuable to me, but it's also

durable, so I don't treat it like it's too precious. If it's raining, I'm not afraid to bring it with me… or something like that. Only in rare occasions do I choose not to bring it with me. I think that the only time would be when I do not bring a purse at all. So yes, I use it pretty much every day.

Anne is "not afraid" to use her new bag anytime and anywhere, although it is still "valuable" to her. In the previous section, when she shared the story about this new bag, she mentioned that she purchased this bag because of its versatility, that is, it can "replace" a purse, a backpack, and luggage. Therefore, what she shared above can be related to this reason. As a result of the versatility of this bag, she makes the best use of it. In addition, the versatility of an apparel item may result in a "limited number" of clothes because one apparel item can replace several items. Anne stated:

> If I have a limited number of actual pieces, then naturally, I also want to look like I'm not wearing the same exact thing every day. So it's like trying to mix and match in a way that is creative and not repetitive, I guess.

As she said, having a limited number of apparel items leads to "mixing and matching," in which you need to be "creative." Kala shared a similar story. She stated, "I think our culture has kind of come to this mentality of 'always new' and 'being something new.' You never want to wear the same thing twice. I find it a creative challenge to try to wear things in a different way all the time." She continued to explain why she prefers apparel items that she can quickly mix and match and how she wears them:

> I try to buy items that I can mix and match pretty easily and that can go with a lot of different things. So it feels different, but maybe it's still the same item… I'm trying to develop like four or five outfits that I can go to. And then when I have time to be a little bit more creative… I have been trying to be more creative with my accessories. Like with jewelry and scarves and things like that, to be able to mix and match an outfit a little bit more easily and quickly and make it feel a little bit different. That's a bit more candid. It's not easy.

As the two participants shared, creativity comes out when they mix and match their limited apparel choices, which correspond with the results of the fashion detox. Ruppert–Stroescu et al. (2015) argued that creativity can be generated by refraining from the acquisition of new apparel, resulting in the satisfaction with the apparel consumers' need of novelty and change. The participants of the study were not voluntary simplifiers, but volunteered to participate and they still exhibited the expressions of creativity through not obtaining fashion apparel for 10 weeks. Thus, this apparel consumption practice of voluntary simplifiers may be applied to general consumers for sustainable consumption.

Extending the Life of Your Wardrobe

As described in the previous section, the theme "quality over quantity" indicates that voluntary simplifiers prefer apparel items of quality that can last long. They value the quality of clothes over their quantity so that they can wear them for a long time. Similarly, they try to extend the life of their garments in terms of their use. All participants mentioned that as much as possible, they avoid using the dryer or having their clothes dry cleaned. They also try to reduce the number of times they wash their clothes to save energy and maintain the quality of their clothing. For instance, Anne stated:

> I try to limit my use of the dryer when I'm doing my laundry. So in the summertime, I dry everything outside on the laundry line under the sun, and then in winter, I'll hang them in my basement. I have a bunch of laundry lines. So, I'm trying to not use as quite as much of energy and also it helps save my clothes from being too worn out. Sweaters or coats that you would normally dry clean, I try not to do that. Instead, I'll just air dry them outside to freshen them up if I can to save money for dry cleaning because it doesn't seem like something I want to

do; chemicals… they are gross.

Ian shared his similar behavior:

> I'll usually hang things in the open to let them air out and then wash things when they kind of smell or when they're dirty. But I'll wear things, you know, until I can tell that they're dirty. I will throw them in the washer. I wash things with cold water in our washer, and I hate drying anything that I care about… I think that it makes them last longer. They don't shrink that way as much and… I have to pay to use the dryer, so I also save money in hanging them. But mostly because I don't want my clothes to shrink, lose their color, or lose any of their buttons.

Emily also explained that she would try not to use the dryer and wash her clothes often to retain their quality and save energy. She stated, "You know, why to pay for the gas to power a dryer when the sun is right there?" She continued:

> I don't mind having to hand wash something, but I do usually avoid dry cleaning things. I mean, we do a lot of laundries a few times a week, so usually, that includes all of our bike stuff. All the stuff that is actually against our skin tends to be washed many times. Things like sweaters, I try and wash them as little as possible to keep the quality. And with pants and jeans, I actually try and wash them as little as possible. Generally, I wash them when they seem too loose or when I get food grease up there. Sophisticated washing technique there. But again, just to maintain their quality of them as long as possible.

Closet and Dresser: A Guideline to Control Your Wardrobe

Having a small closet or dresser can help you "limit" and "control" your wardrobe. The participants shared that they have a small place to store their clothing and that they only keep the items they frequently wear. For instance, Jake stated, "Oh, I keep trying to reduce them… If I get one more thing, then I've got to get rid of something." Another participant, Claire, shared that she controls her garments to "fit in the closet"

using the closet as a "guideline." She states:

> I kind of keep my clothing to fit in the closet that I have. If I feel like I'm starting
> to get out of bounds in terms of the space that I've allotted for myself, I know
> that I am getting a little out of control. I need to clean something out or stop
> buying stuff and things like that. So I kind of use my closet as a guideline.

Claire mentioned that she allotted "space" for herself, which is a small closet in
the context, as a guideline. This idea of having small closet or dresser to control your
wardrobe can be associated with downsizing, the tiny house movement. Downsizing
refers to reducing the size of living space to reduce consumption levels in the context of
housing (Sandberg, 2018). By reducing dwelling size, the environmental impact of
housing can be significantly decreased saving natural resources for construction,
heating, or cooling (Klunder, 2004; Lettenmeier, Liedtke, & Rohn, 2014). According to
Raworth (as cited in Sandberg, 2018), pursuing sustainability in housing can be finding a
dwelling size that can meet both the minimum acceptable standard of living and the
maximum limit that the environment can sustain. It seems that, to voluntary simplifiers,
limiting the closet space means a strategy to control their apparel consumption level to
be sustainable.

In addition, when you have a small closet, you tend to select a limited number of
apparel items that you really like and actually wear often. This approach makes it "easier
to dress up" every day. Jennifer said, "I only have one closet. I only use half of it, and
then I have a dresser, but I don't have that much stuff... When you have less things, it's
easier to dress up." Emily also shared, "When our closet is not quite crammed, then I
feel I can see the clothes I actually want to be wearing more." Ian was another
participant who shared a similar story: "Having a small space to store clothes limits my

purchases and makes it that I really have to only keep the things that I'm wearing. I don't have a lot of room to keep things that I don't wear." He continued:

> I don't have a drawer full of things [that] I have to go through to try to find what I want. I don't have things that I don't wear cluttering my life. I can pretty much go into my wardrobe and choose any shirt, any pair of pants, and any pair of shoes, and then I can just go.

Kala also mentioned that she felt "overwhelmed" when she saw her friend's big walk-in closet. Having "too many choices" to wear may cause you to become "stressed out." She stated:

> I visited my friend Sarah, who helped me with a costume party. She had a big walk-in closet, and I walked into it, and I was overwhelmed. It was just way too much. I don't think that I would… I would be stressed out every day. And I would never know what to wear because there are just too many choices. Limiting my choices has been helpful in just getting out the door in the morning.

As Kala shared, overwhelming wardrobes choices can stress you out and makes you anxious. This can be explained by choice overload, a state of having confusion and cognitive overload due to the overabundance of options (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000). It eventually results in a decrease in the motivation to select or in the satisfaction with the chosen option (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000), as well as weakening self-control (Vohs, Baumeister, Schmeichel, Twenge, Nelson, & Tice, 2008). By limiting wardrobes choices through a small closet or dresser, voluntary simplifiers can easily dress up with their selective clothes and enhance their self-control.

Apparel Disposal of Voluntary Simplifiers

This section explores the apparel disposal of voluntary simplifiers. Two themes

emerged from the interviews with the participants: *1) sale, giveaway, and donation: bringing wardrobe back to life and 2) sentiments and attachment.*

Sale, Giveaway, and Donation: Bringing Wardrobe Back to Life

 All participants shared that they sell, give away, or donate wardrobe items that no longer fit or are not worn anymore. They also believe that they can give those apparel items "a second life" through the aforementioned disposal methods. Emily stated, "If it's a good quality piece of clothing, then I know somebody else will be able to use and enjoy, definitely good." She continued:

> If it really doesn't fit anymore or if I don't like it anymore and I just don't wear it and it is just taking up space, I will donate it.

Anne shared having similar standards in terms of deciding whether to eliminate clothing or not:

> I would say, maybe twice a year, I will kind of go through my closet. If there is something that I haven't worn for a while, I'll try it on, and then, sort of remind myself like, 'Why haven't I worn this, do I even like it? Does it even fit?' And if it doesn't then, I either decide to give it away to Goodwill or the Salvation Army, or if it's really nice and I think I might have a friend who would like it, I set aside to show it to them.

Meanwhile, Linda stated that she would throw away items that are completely "ruined." She described:

> I throw stuff away that is totally ruined and that I wouldn't want anyone else to have to deal with, like old underwear, something like that…I'll look at it and kind of determine if I think I might ever wear it again. If not, then I'll see if my friends want it and if they don't want it then I'll try to sell it. If I can't sell it, then I take it to this donation center just down the street.

Kala also shared that she can donate clothes that are "destroyed" and cannot be fixed to textile recycling facilities. This method is ideal for wardrobe items that "can't be brought back to life" and better than throwing them away. She continued:

> If it's destroyed or bad quality and I can't fix it, I'll usually donate it to a textile recycling facility. I know a lot of Hennepin County recycling centers will take old textiles. If it's like really, really destroyed and just kind of can't be brought back to life.

Sentiments and Attachment

Every participant mentioned that they attempt not to become attached to their wardrobe. They sometimes keep apparel items for sentimental reasons, even though it is rare. The participants reported having difficulty disposing of clothing that was inherited, given as gifts by significant others, or hold special memories. It may be more understood by material possession attachment. Material possession attachment involves a relationship between an individual and a material object (Kleine & Baker, 2004). It can be characterized by a personal history between the individual and the material possession, complex emotion, and the nature of evolving since it is self-extension. Thus, when a material object holds a strong personal history or reflects one's identity, the attachments become intense. For example, Jennifer shared that she generally does not become attached to her wardrobe. When asked whether she ever keeps apparel items, Jennifer stated, "Depends, mostly no. I'm really good at just letting things go." However, she has a small box of valuable things, such as watches from family members and a t-shirt from her former boyfriend:

> I keep sentimental value things in a small box. That's all I need. Those are the most valuable…it's hard with things I've inherited. Like, I inherited a quilt from

my family and watches. I'd never get rid of those things. They mean something, you know, beyond just me buying something. If someone gave me a gift, it's a little bit harder [to get rid of it], but if they gave me a couple gifts, then I'll just pick one. I have one t-shirt from ex-boyfriend, you know, that meant a lot to me.

When possessions hold memories of significant others, Jennifer found it harder to remove them as shared above. On the other hand, Ian tends not to be attached to his wardrobe completely. He stated:

> I'm very functional about them…like my girlfriend has a lot of t-shirts that sit in a box, in our basement from different things that have sentimental value. And I don't have anything like that. If I'm not regularly using it or if it doesn't have a specific function, then I get rid of it.

Ian also mentioned that people around him know that he is particular and will dispose of a clothing gift that he does not wear often:

> I think most people who would give me a gift to know that I'm really particular…in general, if somebody gives me a shirt, kind of just as another gift that they didn't really think that much about, then I would not have a problem getting rid of it. But I don't get many gifts of clothing anymore.

Unlike Ian, who can easily dispose of gifts from others, most participants shared that disposing of clothing given by significant others as gifts or holding special memories is challenging. Jake shared why he appreciates apparel gifts:

> When I wear those, that person becomes part of me too. I had a shirt with a French cuff and my pair of cufflinks that I have is from one of my dearest friends that she purchased when she was living in…when I wear one of those and the shirt is from my mom and the cufflinks are from her and so everything that I wear is from somebody. If I buy it myself there's no feeling attached to that. When I do dress up, all the people that I love are near me.

Jake described that when he wears a clothing item he received as a gift, the giver of the

gift becomes a part of him, which is why he keeps such items. Linda and Claire keep

several apparel items that remind them of their childhood and who they were in the past.

Those items hold an intense personal history of their past identity. Linda shared a story

about an old shirt that was from her elementary school and is full of her friends' names.

She stated:

> I think it's harder with clothes than with other stuff…like I have a shirt that I've
> had since elementary school, but I have really hard time getting rid of it. It has
> my name on the back and everybody that was in that school on the back. And it
> has some of my best friend [who] went to elementary school with me…I'm
> probably never going to get that carried away.

Claire also described her childhood backpack, which she still has, and what it means to

her. She stated:

> I have this backpack that, I should take a picture of that for you, I've had it since
> I was, probably, in the fifth grade and it just fell apart…I sewed it together and I
> patched it and I drew all over it in a super hippy way. It was, like, you can't even
> see the fabric it was made out of, originally…I would never use it now. It looks
> so high school. I'd look ridiculous carrying this because it's not where I am in
> my life, but I can't get rid of it.

Her backpack is a medium that reminds her of who she was in her childhood. It is also

"a physical representation" of her "creativity" at that time. For this specific item, she

said she could never get rid of it, but she keeps trying to detach her identity and

sentiments from her clothing she attached and to dispose of them:

> I don't need to have this [sundress] forever, like, if I lost this I wouldn't cry
> about it. I would have a picture of me wearing it and I can come across it, at
> times, when I think about it. I think things come and go and I think if somebody
> else found this and loved it and wore it then awesome. Like, the energy I put into
> it would transfer over there.

She continued:

> I can let them go and I can accept that they no longer fit in my life, but I can cherish them while I have them… sometimes you just need to stop and not restart but just make a little space for what comes next. Whether it's physically a piece of clothing or just mental space when I'm about to make choices about what I'm wearing.

As she shared above, she was aware of the fact that the specific apparel item "no longer fit in" her life, which means now she has a new identity, different from the last one. Claire has a strength to decouple her identity from her apparel items. Similar to Claire, other participants also constantly exerted effort to dispose of clothing they do not wear, even though these items may hold memories of significant others or special moments. As part of this effort, the participants may lend such apparel items. Anne shared a story about her father's coat and lending it to her friend:

> This is actually a really perfect story. I had a coat that my dad had. He used to wear it when he motorcycles. He wore it for a long, long time. He stopped using his motorcycle and he gave it to me. It actually sat in my closet for a long time. I maybe wore it once or twice but it's too big for me. I was with a friend and he expressed that he liked it and I gave it to him since that time my dad actually passed away. It's still sentimental. I didn't ask for it back, but I did tell him, I said, I'm so happy that you're using it because you are enjoying the coat, but if you would ever decide to give it away, I want him to give it back to me soon. It's like, it has another life, but it doesn't need to be in my closet. I would rather have somebody enjoy it.

Anne believes that someone else can enjoy her "sentimental" clothing that she does not wear, so she lent the item to her friend. The previous section discusses how voluntary simplifiers pursue making the best use of their wardrobes. These individuals do not want their clothes to remain in their closets. Moreover, the reason behind their disposal behavior of such apparel, such as giving away and donating, is associated with

bringing the wardrobe back to life, giving them "a second life." With the same reason,

Anne lent the jacket to her friend. Voluntary simplifiers cherish their material

possessions as they are. Another strategy for avoiding such attachment and sentimental

issues is not receiving gifts or removing clothing items before they become too

"nostalgic." Kala shared that she asked people around her not to give her gifts anymore,

which often conflicted with their desires. Instead, she asked to have good experiences

with them as gifts:

> The most emotional and painful part of this, is that so many people want to give you things. And I don't want more things. I especially don't want things that I don't know where they came from or anything about them…And I was really intentional with my parents. I don't want more things, like let's do experience gifts and I tried to be gentle and create that culture together. And I think at first, they were really upset about it and didn't take it very well….and the people that know me really well, just kind of start to know that. And so, I think it's just getting to know me and just learning who I am…so it's been a lot of grace and a lot of challenge that I've had to overcome.

Kala also believes that disposing of things is easier before "the sentiment builds" than

after attachment has already formed. She described:

> I think the sentiment of it and that builds, like I feel like that builds over time. And then the longer you keep it, the harder it is to let it go. And like at what point do you just have to let it go. And it becomes more nostalgic and I feel like the feelings of nostalgia are the most challenging for me, emotionally to overcome. And so, If I just like experience it and then let it go more immediately, that really helps me to just kind of keep on moving forward, rather than living in the past.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to explore the actual apparel consumption experiences of voluntary simplifiers and their personal motivations in pursuing this lifestyle. Considering the apparel consumption of voluntary simplifiers as a unique phenomenon, phenomenology was adopted, and in-depth interviews were used to understand the common or shared experiences of the participants. Eight participants were recruited and interviewed according to the criteria for voluntary simplicity (Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002; Elgin, 1981) and behavioral index questions to measure an individual's tendency towards voluntary simplicity (Leonard-Barton, 1981).

First, personal motivations to pursue voluntary simplicity can be explained by the learning experiences of voluntary simplifiers and their efforts to maintain a coherent self and achieve perfection in every aspect of their lives based on their values and experiences. The participants of this study shared that their learnings from their parents and transformative life stages helped them consider making this simple lifestyle choice. A total of four themes were identified from the interviews with participants: *1) Love it or hate it: Intergenerational transmission of voluntary simplicity*, *2) Transformative life stages: Trials and learning*, *3) Toward a coherent self*, and *4) Reducing clutter and anxiety.*

The first and most common personal reason to pursue voluntary simplicity was intergenerational transmission between the participants and their parents. Participants inherited the skills and values from their parents necessary to become self-sufficient and

creative in obtaining what they sincerely want. Some of the participants chose a simpler lifestyle in contrast to the consumption style of their parents. In this case, the parents of the simplifiers spent extra money on clothing and owned more things than they needed. Besides their learnings from their parents, the simplifiers also learned valuable life lessons through their transformative life stages. As most of the participants were in their late 20s or early 30s, they frequently mentioned that what they learned from their trials upon entering a college became a personal motivation to adopt voluntary simplicity. For instance, moving away from their family allowed them to decide what things to keep or discard. They realized that owning too many things would make them exert extra effort toward moving to a larger place. They reevaluated their consumption style and considered living simply through trial-and-error learning.

Another personal motivation to adopt voluntary simplicity was the effort to support a coherent self in every aspect of life. Consumers consider their possessions and activities their extended self and try to make them consistent (Belk, 1988). The participants projected their core self on their education and career beyond their consumption, thus being true to themselves. They also shared that they tended to avoid clutter to reduce their anxiety. The discomfort and anxiety derived from clutter may be attributed to a desire to control one's environment. The participants' tendency to strive for perfection and control their life may have motivated them to pursue voluntary simplicity.

This study then revealed the essence of apparel consumption behavior of voluntary simplifiers. The interview questions were developed based on the consumer decision process model: problem recognition, information search, alternative evaluation,

purchase decision, use/care/storage, post-purchase evaluation, and disposal (Blackwell et al., 2001). These seven stages can be associated with three broader categories: acquisition, use, and disposal. Common themes were discussed according to these three categories. The participants were asked to bring photos of a significant apparel item they had recently purchased to describe their apparel consumption behavior.

The apparel consumption of voluntary simplifiers showed not only similar aspects of general and green fashion consumption but also reflected different reasons and thoughts. In terms of the acquisition of apparel, eight themes were identified from the interviews with participants: *1) Need for now*, *2) Extensive information search*, *3) Quality over quantity*, *4) Pursuing their own unique style rather than being trendy*, *5) Preference for versatile apparel items*, *6) Being a seeker or a skeptic: Apparel products with social responsibility claims*, *7) Thrifting: Finding unique pieces and supporting causes*, and *8) Having the privilege to choose: Time, money, and effort.* The participants conducted an immediate search for an apparel item when there was no alternative, and the search process became more thorough depending on the practicality of the items or their specific needs. They preferred to look at online reviews and learn about their friends' first-hand experience to gather information on apparel products. They were planned, practical buyers in terms of apparel consumption.

Four factors (themes) were found to guide the participants' evaluation of apparel products; these standards included quality, unique style, versatility, and social responsibility claims. The participants looked for apparel items of high quality so that they could enjoy them for a longer time. For the same reason, they pursued fashion products that fit their unique style rather than trendy items. The participants knew what

styles fit them and developed their own look because clothing is a strong medium for expressing one's self. By pursuing their own style and avoiding excessively trendy items, they could wear their chosen apparel for a longer time. A unique style does not necessarily involve a minimalistic look, such as neutral colors and simple designs. Some of the participants even considered minimalism as yet another trend and not a reflection of the essence of a simple lifestyle. The participants preferred versatile apparel that could be used in several ways, thus reducing the number of items in their closet. While they also considered the social responsibility claims of apparel brands or a company, not all of the participants sought to purchase clothes from these retailers. Some participants did not trust the ethical claims made unless solid evidence was presented to them.

These findings may be compared to the three groups of fashion consumers regarding sustainability: 'Self' consumers, focused on their personal wants and desire, 'Social' consumers, concerned with social norms of behavior and social image, and 'Sacrifice' consumers, concerned for the environment and social issues (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Consumers in the 'Self' group rarely showed concern for the environment and ethical issues, which led to no interest in pursuing sustainable fashion products and a favorable attitude toward fast fashion products. They preferred a constant change and new trendy items of fast fashion brands. The 'Social' consumers were aware of the importance of sustainable apparel consumption; however, they were influenced by the barriers of social norms and peer opinions. They engaged in some behaviors of sustainable fashion consumption, but there were reluctant to fully adopt them due to negative opinions of their peers.

The final group, 'Sacrifice' consumers exhibited a strong interest in sustainable

fashion consumption and a negative attitude toward fast fashion products (McNeill & Moore, 2015). They sought to reduce their consumption level overall. Social norms or peer opinions did not significantly influence these consumers, instead, they held some level of skepticism of sustainability claims of the fashion industry. Voluntary simplifiers may be compared to this 'sacrifice' consumer group. Voluntary simplifiers are also concerned for the environment and ethical practices of the apparel industry, and actively seek to reflect those perspectives and beliefs on their apparel consumption behaviors. They are not fond of new trendy apparel items of fast fashion brands, pursuing their own unique style with versatility and decent quality. In addition, they sometimes become skeptical about social responsibility claims of apparel brands, seeking a concrete proof of those claims. As voluntary simplifiers conduct extensive information search and the Internet can function as a key source, so the websites of fashion brands should contain more detailed information on their sustainability practices to decrease their doubts. When it comes to the social norms and peer opinions, they may not be barriers anymore. One participant of this study mentioned that minimalism and sustainability are trendy, so it is easier for her to pursue this simple lifestyle. There may still be consumers as the 'Self' group who display no interest in sustainability regarding fashion consumption; however, as more and more consumers become aware of the importance of sustainable apparel consumption, voluntary simplifiers do not necessarily 'sacrifice' their social image. In other words, they care about the environment and pursue social responsibility in their consumption. Interestingly though, they are clearly distinguished from active "green" consumers who only shop for sustainable products due to their deeply rooted skepticism toward marketing in general.

The participants also enjoyed thrifting to find unique pieces and support causes. If they were looking for a particular item reflecting all their detailed needs, they would go to local stores or online websites to purchase it. Borrowing was not a popular option to obtain clothes for the participants unless there is a special occasion. The participants believed they were privileged to be able to make these apparel consumption choices since they were aware that this process required more time, money, and effort than usual.

Under the second category, apparel use, three themes emerged: *1) Mix and match: Making the best use of your wardrobes*, *2) Extending the life of your wardrobes*, and *3) Closet and dresser: A guideline to control your wardrobes.* The participants often mixed and matched their wardrobes to make the best use of them. They emphasized the practical use of their clothes and preferred to purchase versatile apparel in the first category, thereby enabling them to mix and match these items with other clothes they already had. They also sought to extend the life of their wardrobes. While they were not afraid of using their clothes, they took care to maintain the quality of these items to enjoy them further. When purchasing a piece of clothing, more money, time, and effort were usually required for the participants to choose one item since it had to meet their standards. Thus, when they finally found an item, they took care of the item carefully by avoiding the use of the dryer or washing it as little as possible. The closet played an essential role in controlling the number of items the participants bought. Having a small closet or dresser helped the participants keep only the items they really needed. It also allowed them to be aware of what items they had and be creative with how they wore their clothes. If their closet was full, they would consider sorting out unnecessary items or reorganizing their wardrobes.

Finally, two themes were discovered from the interviews with the participants with regard to apparel disposal: *1) Sale, giveaway, and donation: Bringing wardrobe back to life* and *2) Sentiments and attachment.* All of the participants sold, gave away, or donated clothes they no longer wore not only to reduce their effects on the environment but for the item itself. They believed that they could give the clothes they no longer used a second life. The participants were easily able to let unnecessary items go. While they became attached to items inherited or gifted by significant others, they still attempted to dispose of these clothes. They may lend or give these items to someone close to them to give the clothing another life.

The current researcher developed interest in conducting this study to determine a solution that will improve quality of life, while decreasing the impact of apparel and textile on the environment and society, from the perspective of consumers. The notion of voluntary simplicity may serve as a solution. Hence, the current study explored the apparel consumption behaviors of voluntary simplifiers and their personal motivations to pursue this simple lifestyle. The present researcher also believed that the sustainable apparel consumption behaviors of voluntary simplifiers may enable apparel brands or companies to develop sustainable merchandising practices. The reason is that an increasing number of consumers are willing to purchase apparel products from a company that pursues sustainability. The results showed that the participants pursue perfection in every aspect of their life while maintaining a coherent self. They are rational consumers who avoid impulse buying and conduct thorough information search on apparel products. Voluntary simplifiers are also concerned with the environment and ethical issues of the apparel industry. Although they are not fond of fast fashion brands

and pursue their own unique style with versatility and decent quality, they do not sacrifice their social image or self-expression. That is, they still want to look good, pursue their unique style, mix and match their apparel items, and engage in sustainable apparel consumption. They are an empowered, desirable consumer group for this overconsumption society. The current researcher has not completely adopted this simple lifestyle but understood and appreciated their values, behaviors, and reasons behind them. Moreover, the present researcher relates to the participants as a millennial and educated woman who is interested in voluntary simplicity. As the researcher and engaged collaborator of this study, I sought to accurately deliver meaningful findings but still felt connected with them as I understand their journey to pursue voluntary simplicity. However, I am not a voluntary simplifier yet. Hence, the idea of relatedness was only with the interview process and data analysis because I have not experienced their own life experiences.

The findings of this study have both theoretical and practical implications. From the theoretical perspective, the current study contributes to the current understanding of the apparel consumption of voluntary simplifiers and their personal motivations to pursue this simple lifestyle. The participants shared various personal stories that triggered a simpler lifestyle choice. As personal motivations accounted for the largest part of the voluntary simplifiers' motivations (Wu et al., 2013), the results of this study broaden the knowledge of motivations to adopt voluntary simplicity. The findings of this research also add abundant descriptions and interpretations of the apparel consumption behaviors of voluntary simplifiers to the literature on voluntary simplicity. By exploring the apparel consumption patterns of voluntary simplifiers following the seven stages of

the consumer decision process model (Blackwell et al., 2001) under larger categories of consumption (acquisition, use, and disposal), the findings of this study fully discussed why and how the participants consumed clothing.

The outcomes of the current study also provide useful implications for both consumers and marketers from a practical viewpoint. For consumers, this study provides detailed knowledge about how they can pursue voluntary simplicity as a lifestyle, especially in terms of their apparel consumption. Consumers can understand why people pursue this lifestyle through the personal motivations determined by this study. In addition, they can learn how to practice this lifestyle and develop a deeper understanding of the reasons, benefits, and challenges behind their clothing choices. The findings can help them to contemplate if this particular lifestyle alternative is adaptable to their own lives in the current unsustainable apparel consumption culture. Further, policymakers or educators may use these findings to support the promotion of this lifestyle alternative.

The findings of this study present practical implications for fashion marketers and retailers. The findings show that voluntary simplifiers represent an empowered consumer group who pursues sustainable apparel consumption. Although this study adopted an interpretive approach, extracting the main issues from its findings regarding socially responsible consumers, apparel needs, and opinions of them is meaningful. By understanding the needs and deeper meanings of a sustainable lifestyle, especially as regards apparel consumption, from the perspective of consumers, marketers and retailers in the apparel industry can apply their learning to their sustainable merchandising practices and strategies.

Recommendations for Future Research

This exploration of eight voluntary simplifiers in Minnesota shows the growing phenomenon of pursuing voluntary simplicity among young generations. These consumers shared their experiences associated with apparel consumption behavior and their personal reasons for adopting a simpler lifestyle. The following suggestions for future study are based on the limitations and the findings of this work:

First, the sample of this study involved a small group of Midwesterners in their late 20s or early 30s. Thus, further research can be conducted on the apparel consumption behaviors and personal motivations of different generations of voluntary simplifiers in various geographical areas of the United States to investigate differences and similarities among groups.

Second, further research may focus on how voluntary simplicity can be pursued in terms of apparel consumption behaviors and personal motivations in other countries to examine cultural differences or similarities.

Third, the most common personal motivation to pursue voluntary simplicity was the intergenerational transmission, but the influence of this motivation was not always positive. Further research can be conducted to reveal the factors influencing why children do or do not follow the consumption styles of their parents as adults.

Fourth, one conflicting opinion emerged from the data involved the social responsibility claims of apparel brands or companies. Some of the participants were skeptical of these marketing claims while others viewed them positively. Further research may focus on what specific aspects of those claims trigger consumer skepticism and hinder the formation of consumer trust.

Fifth, a few participants shared that they became attached to the apparel items that they inherited or received as gifts from significant others or held memories of their childhood and represented who they were. This situation becomes a reality even though they seek to avoid sentimental attachment to their wardrobes and let unnecessary items go. Evidently, conflict exists between their emotional attachment and rationality. Thus, further research may focus on how they cope with such situation and what strategies they have other than not receiving clothing gifts at all and lending or giving those items to someone close to them.

Sixth, even though the themes of this study were developed based on the seven stages of the consumer decision process model (Blackwell et al., 2001) and assigned to three sub-categories (acquisition, use, and disposal), the aspects of these themes were extremely complex and diverse. Thus, future research may apply considerably detailed theoretical lenses to each theme, stage, or sub-category to further investigate the apparel consumption behavior of voluntary simplifiers.

Seventh, the results showed that purchase decision process of voluntary simplifiers are not necessarily linear. The seven stages influenced and interacted with one another. Therefore, a new model may be applied to investigate the sustainable apparel consumption behavior of voluntary simplifiers. Koszewska (2016) proposed a theoretical model to understand consumer behavior towards sustainable clothing building on the Nicosia model (1966). Although the Nicosia model is one of the most popular models in the context that provides an explanation to the consumer–producer relationship, the proposed model focuses extensively on sustainable clothing and its specific characteristics (e.g., emotional and functional value, availability, and price). The

proposed model indicates that consumers' purchase decision is influenced by several factors, including the sustainable communication of the company. Consumers may or may not buy sustainable clothing, although both cases lead to feedback toward the company and consumers who purchase and experience the apparel product, thereby influencing their future purchases. This model is circular and substantially complex, so it may serve as a good framework for a future study on sustainable apparel consumption behavior of voluntary simplifiers.

Eighth, this chapter previously discussed how voluntary simplifiers are similar to and different from three fashion consumer groups. Thus, an interesting aspect to analyze is if significant differences exist between general consumer group and voluntary simplifiers in terms of their apparel consumption behaviors. This may be completed by presenting the behavioral index questions of voluntary simplicity to the participants after the interviews.

REFERENCES

Ahuvia, A. C. (2005). Beyond the extended self: Loved objects and consumers' identity narratives. *Journal of Consumer Research, 32*(1), 171-184.

Alexander, S., & Ussher, S. (2012). The voluntary simplicity movement: A multinational survey analysis in theoretical context. *Journal of Consumer Culture, 12*(1), 66-86.

Ballantine, P. W., & Creery, S. (2010). The consumption and disposition behaviour of voluntary simplifiers. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour, 9*(1), 45-56.

Belk, R. W. (1985). Materialism: Trait aspects of living in the material world. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *12*(3), 265-280.

Belk, R. W. (1988). Possessions and the extended self. *Journal of Consumer Research, 15*(2), 139-168.

Belk, R. W., Ger, G., & Askegaard, S. (2003). The fire of desire: A multisited inquiry into consumer passion. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *30*(3), 326-351.

Berg, B. L., & Lune, H. (2012). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (8th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Bianchi, C., & Birtwistle, G. (2010). Sell, give away, or donate: An exploratory study of fashion clothing disposal behaviour in two countries. *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research, 20*(3), 353–368.

Black, I. R., & Cherrier, H. (2010). Anti-consumption as part of living a sustainable lifestyle: Daily practices, contextual motivations and subjective values. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour, 9*(6), 437-453.

Blackwell, R. D., Miniard, P. W., & Engel, J. F. (2001). *Consumer behavior* (9th ed.).

Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt College Publishers.

Bonnell, A. (2015). Consumer attitudes toward green brands reach all-time high. Retrieved from http://blog.marketresearch.com/sustainability-in-america-consumer-attitudes-toward-green-brands-reach-all-time-high.

Boujbel, L., & d'Astous, A. (2012). Voluntary simplicity and life satisfaction: Exploring the mediating role of consumption desires. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour, 11*(6), 487-494.

Brown, K. W., & Kasser, T. (2005). Are psychological and ecological well-being compatible? The role of values, mindfulness, and lifestyle. *Social Indicators Research, 74*(2), 349-368.

Brown, K. W., & Ryan, R. M. (2003). The benefits of being present: Mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*(4), 822-848.

Carroll, A. B. (1999). Corporate social responsibility evolution of a definitional construct. *Business & Society*, *38*(3), 268-295.

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Clutter. (n.d.). In *Collins Dictionary online*. Retrieved from https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/clutter

Craig-Lees, M., & Hill, C. (2002). Understanding voluntary simplifiers. *Psychology & Marketing, 19*(2), 187-210.

Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, *39*(3), 124-130.

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1980). Self-determination theory: When mind mediates behavior. *The Journal of Mind and Behavior, 1*(1), 33-43.

De Graaf, J., Wann, D., & Naylor, T. H. (2014). *Affluenza: How overconsumption is killing us-and how to fight back.* San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dickson, M. A., & Eckman, M. (2006). Social responsibility: The concept as defined by apparel and textile scholars. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, *24*(3), 178-191.

Dobscha, S., & Ozanne, J. L. (2001). An ecofeminist analysis of environmentally sensitive women using qualitative methodology: The emancipatory potential of an ecological life. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing, 20*(2), 201-214.

Ehrlich, P. R., & Ehrlich, A. H. (1990). *The population explosion*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Elgin, D. (1981). *Voluntary simplicity*. New York: William Morrow and Company.

Elgin, D., & Mitchell, A. (1977). Voluntary simplicity. *Planning Review, 5*(6), 13-15.

Etzioni, A. (1998). Voluntary simplicity: Characterization, select psychological

    implications, and societal consequences. *Journal of Economic Psychology, 19,*

    619-643.

Frost, L. (2003). Doing bodies differently? Gender, youth, appearance and damage.

    Journal of Youth Studies, 6(1), 53-70.

Gregg, R. B. (1936). *The voluntary simplicity*. Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill

    Publications.

Grigsby, M. (2004). Buying time and getting by: The voluntary simplicity movement.

    Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Heinberg, R., & Lerch, D. (2010). *The post-carbon reader*. Healdsburg, CA: Watershed

    Media.

Hirsch, R., Bezdek, R., & Wendling, R. (2010). *The Impending world energy mess*.

    Burlington, VT: Apogee Prime.

Holt, D. B. (1998). Does cultural capital structure American consumption? *Journal of*

    Consumer Research, 25(1), 1-25.

Huneke, M. E. (2005). The face of the un-consumer: An empirical examination of the

    practice of voluntary simplicity in the United States. *Psychology & Marketing,*

    22(7), 527-550.

Irvine, W. B. (2005). *On desire: Why we want what we want*. New York: Oxford

    University Press.

Iyengar, S. S., & Lepper, M. R. (2000). When choice is demotivating: Can one desire too

    much of a good thing? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 79*(6),

    995-1006.

Iyer, R., & Muncy, J. A. (2009). Purpose and object of anti-consumption. *Journal of Business Research, 62*(2), 160-168.

Jackson, T. (2009). *Prosperity without growth: Economics for a finite planet*. London: Earthscan.

Kasser, T. (2002) *The high price of materialism*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Kleine, S. S., & Baker, S. M. (2004). An integrative review of material possession attachment. *Academy of Marketing Science Review*, *2004*(1), 1-39.

Klunder, G. (2004). The search for the most eco-efficient strategies for sustainable housing construction; Dutch lessons. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment, 19*(1), 111-126.

Koszewska, M. (2016). Understanding consumer behavior in the sustainable clothing market: Model development and verification. In S.S. Muthu & M.A. Gardetti (Eds.), *Green Fashion* (Vol. 1, pp. 43-94). Singapore: Springer.

Leonard-Barton, D. (1981). Voluntary simplicity lifestyles and energy conservation. *Journal of Consumer Research, 8*(3), 243-252.

Lettenmeier, M., Liedtke, C., & Rohn, H. (2014). Eight tons of material footprint—suggestion for a resource cap for household consumption in Finland. *Resources, 3*(3), 488-515.

Maslow, A. (1970). *Motivation and personality* (2nd ed.). New York: Harper & Row.

McCracken, G. (1988). *The long interview: Qualitative research methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

McDonald, S., Oates, C. J., Young, C. W., & Hwang, K. (2006). Toward sustainable consumption: Researching voluntary simplifiers. *Psychology & Marketing,*

23(6), 515-534.

McGouran, C., & Prothero, A. (2016). Enacted voluntary simplicity–exploring the

    consequences of requesting consumers to intentionally consume less.

    European Journal of Marketing, 50(12), 189-212.

McNeill, L., & Moore, R. (2015). Sustainable fashion consumption and the fast fashion

    conundrum: Fashionable consumers and attitudes to sustainability in clothing

    choice. *International Journal of Consumer Studies, 39*(3), 212-222.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA:

    Sage.

Nicosia, F. M. (1966) *Consumer decision processes: Marketing and advertising*

    implications. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Oates, C., McDonald, S., Alevizou, P., Hwang, K., Young, W., & McMorland, L. A.

    (2008). Marketing sustainability: Use of information sources and degrees of

    voluntary simplicity. *Journal of Marketing Communications, 14*(5), 351-365.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1989). *Phenomenological research methods*. In R. S. Valle & S.

    Halling (Eds.), *Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology* (pp.

    41-60). Boston, MA: Springer.

Rich, S. A., Hanna, S., & Wright, B. J. (2017). Simply satisfied: The role of

    psychological need satisfaction in the life satisfaction of voluntary

    simplifiers. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 18*(1), 89-105.

Richie, J., & Lewis, J. (2003). *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science*

    students and researchers. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Richins, M. L., & Dawson, S. (1992). A consumer values orientation for materialism and

its measurement: Scale development and validation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *19*(3), 303-316.

Rosenberg, E. L. (2004). Mindfulness and consumerism. In T. Kasser & A. D. Kanner (Eds.), *Psychology and consumer culture: The struggle for a good life in a materialistic world* (pp. 107-125). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.

Ruppert-Stroescu, M., LeHew, M. L., Connell, K. Y. H., & Armstrong, C. M. (2015). Creativity and sustainable fashion apparel consumption: The fashion detox. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal, 33*(3), 167-182.

Sandberg, M. (2018). Downsizing of Housing: Negotiating Sufficiency and Spatial Norms. *Journal of Macromarketing, 38*(2), 154-167.

Schor, J. B. (2005). Prices and quantities: Unsustainable consumption and the global economy. *Ecological Economics, 55*(3), 309-320.

Shaw, D., & Newholm, T. (2002). Voluntary simplicity and the ethics of consumption. *Psychology & Marketing, 19*(2), 167-185.

Smith, D. W. (2003). Phenomenology. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy online* (Summer 2018 ed.). Retrieved from https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/phenomenology.

Smoot, A. B. (2017). *A qualitative study of African American elders' housing in relation to their well-being* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 10285580)

Solomon, M. R. (2014) *Consumer behavior: Buying, having, and being* (11th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Solomon, M. R., & Rabolt, N. J. (2004). *Consumer behavior in fashion*. Upper Saddle

    River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Stewart, D., & Mickunas, A. (1974). *Exploring phenomenology: A guide to the field*

    and its literature. Chicago: American Library Association.

The Harwood Group. (1995). Yearning for balance: Views of Americans on

    consumption, materialism, and the environment. Retrieved from

    http://www.iisd.ca/consume/harwood.html

Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action*

    sensitive pedagogy. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Veale, D. (2004). Psychopathology of obsessive-compulsive disorder. *Psychiatry, 3*(6),

    65-68.

Vohs, K. D., Baumeister, R. F., Schmeichel, B. J., Twenge, J. M., Nelson, N. M., & Tice,

    D. M. (2008). Making choices impairs subsequent self-control: A limited-

    resource account of decision making, self-regulation, and active initiative.

    Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 94(5), 883-898.

Walther, C. S., & Sandlin, J. A. (2013). Green capital and social reproduction within

    families practicing voluntary simplicity in the US. *International Journal of*

    Consumer Studies, 37(1), 36-45.

Wu, D. E., Boyd Thomas, J., Moore, M., & Carroll, K. (2013). Voluntary simplicity: The

    great American apparel diet. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management:*

    An International Journal, 17(3), 294-305.

Zavestoski, S. (2002). The social–psychological bases of anticonsumption attitudes.

    Psychology & Marketing, 19(2), 149-165.

Dear_____,

I am Hyojung Cho, a doctorate student at the University of Minnesota. I am currently working on my dissertation research. My dissertation topic is apparel consumption of voluntary simplifiers. I am recruiting interview participants for this research project.

The criteria of voluntary simplicity are as follows:

Criteria One

- Someone who consciously seeks to keep consumption of products to an absolute minimum

Criteria Two

- Someone who is interested in people, is concerned with the well-being of others, and who engages in activities that improve the quality of life of others

Criteria Three

- Someone who wants to, and has achieved harmony between, work, family, friends and interests
- Someone who is concerned about, and who actively engages in, environmentally friendly behavior
- Someone who values, and who is achieving or working toward, a spiritual goal
- Someone who is actively working toward and who is achieving psychological well-being

After you carefully read the criteria of voluntary simplicity, please read the following two statements:

➢ I practice voluntary simplicity in my daily life.
➢ I am consistent in my practice of voluntary simplicity.

If you agree with the above statements, you are eligible for participating in this study. The interview will be about 60-90 minutes and the participants will receive a $20 Target gift card. Please let me know if you could participate in the interview by replying to this email. I would really appreciate it.

Sincerely,

Hyojung

APPENDIX B

BEHAVIORAL INDEX QUESTIONS OF VOLUNTARY SIMLICITY

1. Do you make gifts instead of buying?   (Yes / No)

2. Do you ride a bicycle for exercise or recreation?   (Yes / No)

3. Do you recycle newspapers used at home?   (Yes / No)

4. Do you recycle glass jars/bottles used at home?   (Yes / No)

5. Do you recycle cans used at home?   (Yes / No)

6. Does your family member or friend changes the oil in the family car?   (Yes / No)

7. Have you gotten instruction in skills to increase self-reliance, for example, in carpentry, car tune-up and repair, or plumbing?   (Yes / No)

8. Do you intentionally eat meatless main meals?   (Yes / No)

9. Do you buy clothing at a second-hand store?   (Yes / No)

10. Do you buy major items of furniture or clothing at a garage sale?   (Yes / No)

11. Do you make furniture or clothing?   (Yes / No)

12. Have you exchanged goods or services with others in lieu of payment with money, e.g., repairing equipment in exchange for other skilled work?   (Yes / No)

13. Do you have a compost pile?   (Yes / No)

14. Do you contribute to ecologically-oriented organizations (such as Greenpeace, Sierra Club, etc.)?   (Yes / No)

15. Do you belong to a cooperative?   (Yes / No)

16. Do you grow the vegetables the family consumes during the summer season? (Yes / No)

17. Do you ride a bicycle for transportation to work?   (Yes / No)

18. Do you ride a bicycle on errands within two miles of home?   (Yes / No)

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

I am studying people who pursue voluntary simplicity, particularly in terms of their apparel consumption. I am interested in learning what are their personal motivations to adopt this lifestyle and how they are manifested in their apparel consumption. I am doing this research for my dissertation.

I hope that what I find will help me to learn about this consumer lifestyle and might contribute knowledge to the course and the field. It is also my hope that people who talk to me might find it useful to share their own experiences and knowledge.

Answering my questions may take 60-90 minutes. The questions I ask may touch on topics that are private and personal and may set off strong feelings. You needn't participate if you don't want to. If you decide to be interviewed, you can stop at any point and can refuse to answer any question. Also, you can ask us to turn off the tape recorder at any time. Your interviewer on this project is Hyojung Cho, a doctorate student at the University of Minnesota. You can contact me at choxx529@umn.edu. My work is being supervised by my academic advisor, Dr. Hye-Young Kim, Associate Professor in the Department of Design, Housing, and Apparel, 352 McNeal Hall, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN. Her phone is 612-624-4904, and the department's phone is 612-624-9700.

Interview recordings or notes will be kept away from all other people except Dr. Hye-Young Kim. When I am finished with them, I will probably destroy them, but if I keep them I will remove all identifying information from them. I may quote what you say in writing up this research, but I will never use your name and will change identifying information so that nobody will be able to recognize you in what is quoted. Nobody, except possibly Dr. Hye-Young Kim, will ever be in a position to know who said what specific things in this interview.

I may decide to present this research at a local, regional, or national conference, either as an oral presentation or in a poster session. If I do so, I will make it impossible for anybody to identify you through quotes I use from your interview or from descriptions I give of you.

There is a possibility that your answers may provide information that would require us to break confidentially. Under Minnesota law, the researchers cannot keep confidential information about incidents of abuse or neglect of a child, including physical, sexual, or emotional abuse or neglect. I would also be required to inform legal authorities if you reported to be in imminent danger of trying to hurt yourself or others. Do you have any questions or concerns about this before we move on?

Your decision whether or not to participate and whether or not to be recorded will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the interviewer or Dr. Hye-Young Kim, you may contact the Research Subjects' Advocate line at the University of Minnesota. The phone number there is 612-624-1650, and the address is D528 Mayo, University of Minnesota, 420 Delaware St. SE, Minneapolis 55455.

Signature: _____   Date:_____

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Guiding Questions

1. How did you come to adopt this lifestyle? Is there any personal reason for it?

2. What triggered a search for your apparel item?

3. How did you search for information on this apparel item or brands?

4. What standards did you use when you evaluate your alternatives in apparel shopping?

5. How did you purchase the apparel item you wanted? What are alternative ways to obtain those items?

6. How do you use, care, store the apparel item?

7. Do you feel satisfied, or dissatisfied with the apparel item you have purchased?

8. When do you decide to dispose of your apparel items? What kind of methods do you use?

9. Are there any family and social peer influences?

10. In what ways do you experience this lifestyle as easy or challenging to pursue?

11. What are the benefits of your methods of consuming apparel? Or are there any costs/downsides to it?

Demographic Questions

1. what is your gender?

2. what is your age?

3. what is your current marital status?

4. what is the highest level of education you have completed?

5. what is your current occupation?

6. what is your annual income level?