

Stitching and Sustainability: Understanding How Home Garment Makers
Value Clothing

A Thesis

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Dedication

To my husband Dan, for selflessly managing the household chaos while I wrote this thesis.
To my parents, for believing in the value of education at any age. And to women who bravely start new chapters in their 40s, for showing me I could do it, too.

Abstract

Textile waste is a rapidly growing problem, and consumers must find more sustainable ways to meet their wardrobe needs without creating endless mountains of clothing waste. One important step toward sustainability is treating clothing as valuable rather than disposable. However, there is not a comprehensive model for value in clothing. People who make their own garments through sewing, knitting, or weaving may have a unique perspective on the value of clothing because they are both producers and consumers of clothing. This study explores the practices of home garment makers throughout the clothing consumption process from creation or acquisition to use and maintenance and eventual disposal. The objective is to understand how home garment makers value clothing through their garment making and use practices. The study contributes to existing knowledge in the domains of craft practice, slow fashion, and sustainability.

Fifteen adults who had made at least five garments for themselves were interviewed for the study and asked to share three to five of their handmade garments during the interview. Their responses reveal that clothing has three intersecting types of value: Aesthetic, Physical, and Emotional. Through many aspects of their making practices, participants create, maintain, and acquire value in both their handmade and purchased garments. This focus on clothing value leads home garment makers to keep and maintain their garments for many years. Their awareness of the time and effort involved in making clothing leads home garment makers to reduce their overall clothing consumption and enjoy their handmade garments. The results suggest that increased instruction in garment making methods could lead to consumers placing higher value on clothing items and thus an overall decrease in textile waste.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Textile waste is a rapidly growing problem, and the statistics are alarming. Worldwide, approximately 150 billion clothing pieces are produced each year, and that number continues to grow (Payne, 2021). Unfortunately, many of these garments will be burned or landfilled within the first year after their production. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency website, Americans sent over 9 million tons of clothing and footwear to landfills in 2018, more than double the amount from 2000, and the average garment is worn just seven times before disposal. Thrift stores in the US and other countries in the Global North take in many more donated clothes than they can sell. Those garments are often shipped to the Global South but overwhelm the population there and wind up in landfills anyway, leading countries like India to ban the import of secondhand clothing (Payne, 2021). The fashion industry is responsible for 20% of industrial water pollution and 35% of microplastic pollution worldwide (deCastro, 2021). Much of the clothing waste comes from the constant-growth, buy/wear/toss cycle of fast fashion, with retailers updating their selections multiple times per season. Poor working conditions for garment workers have also been a growing concern, especially in the wake of the Rana Plaza factory collapse in 2013, which killed over 1,100 people (Payne, 2021).

Due to the growing negative impact of fashion on the earth and its people, it will be important to consider issues of sustainability both in clothing production as well as clothing consumption. Improvements in manufacturing techniques will be of limited benefit if overall production volume continues to increase, sending more and more garments to landfills (Twigger Holroyd, 2017). Consumers must find more sustainable

ways to demonstrate their personal style without creating endless mountains of clothing waste. One important step toward sustainability is treating clothing as valuable rather than disposable. Extending a garment's use period even from one year to two years can reduce its carbon footprint by 24% (de Castro, 2021).

A growing body of research focuses on how consumers can positively influence sustainability in fashion. Alice Payne (2021) has described fashion as a system in which designers, manufacturers, and consumers play different but equally important roles in what garments move from the runway, through stores, and into people's closets. Kate Fletcher and Mathilda Tham's (2019) *Earth Logic: Fashion Action Research Plan* has called for research that focuses on "diverse ways of knowing" like experience and practice as key to creating a more sustainable future in fashion. Fletcher (2016) has advocated a shift in mindset from people as consumers to "users" of fashion, owning garments that remain in their wardrobes for years and are laundered, mended, and altered in ways that extend their useful life. Through their use practices, participants in her research attached more value to their clothing because of the meditative qualities of tasks such as ironing or replacing a button. Olivia de Castro (2021) has noted that a personal connection to garments increases people's desire to maintain and repair their existing garments rather than tossing them into the trash and moving on to new items. These researchers emphasize the need for consumers to become more conscious of their own decisions about their clothing as an important step toward fashion sustainability.

Rationale & Significance

Leveraged alongside sustainable design, craft practice has the potential to serve as a catalyst in the movement toward sustainability in general (Zhan & Walker, 2019). The

experiential knowledge that comes from craft practice has been proposed as a new area for research alongside design (Niedderer & Townsend, 2015). Craft consumers are a unique population segment, “to which the consumer typically brings skill, knowledge, judgment and passion while being motivated by a desire for self-expression” (Campbell, 2005, 1). In particular, home sewing has had a resurgence in popularity in the past 10 years as a way to create bespoke clothing that is of higher quality than popular fast fashion brands (Meiling, 2021).

Throughout most of human history, women bore responsibility for producing at least some of their family’s clothing. Sewing and knitting were considered necessary skills at all economic levels, and until the Industrial Revolution even purchased garments were typically made individually by local dressmakers and tailors. This began to change during the 20th century as clothing was increasingly made in factories. Advancing production methods in the second half of the century meant that clothing gradually became cheaper to buy than to make at home, and as women increasingly went to work outside of the home, they had less time to spend on tasks like sewing (Twigger Holroyd, 2017). Now, sewing and knitting are typically done for creative enjoyment rather than out of economic necessity. Many people do not learn these skills as children, and must seek out instruction as adults (Martindale, 2017). In combination, these factors mean that most people have little idea how or where their clothing is made (Twigger Holroyd, 2017). In an article that first appeared in *Groovy Green* magazine in 2006, Sharon Astyk broadly encourages all households to have at least one outfit for every member that was handmade from as raw a state as their time and skill made possible, so that they can appreciate the time and labor that goes into creating clothing (Revisiting Slow Clothing - Resilience, n.d.).

Home garment makers typically still purchase some portion of their wardrobes (Martindale & McKinney, 2018). As such, they represent a unique segment of the population who are both producers and consumers of their clothing, and the experience of making as well as using garments gives them a different perspective than a typical consumer whose clothing options are limited to those offered by retailers and manufacturers. The current study aims to examine the connection between their garment making and use practices and clothing value. While its scope is limited to adults in Minnesota, the results are important for understanding the benefits of hand-made garments, the value of teaching garment-making skills to children and adults, and how broader practice of these skills by consumers could improve the overall sustainability of the fashion world and reduce the amount of textile waste going to landfills.

Researcher Interest

I have over 30 years of experience making garments, both personally and professionally. I am shocked by the statistics around the average lifespan of fast fashion garments and the amount of clothing going to landfills, and by the difference between those numbers and my own experience. I am surprised when acquaintances don't know how to make basic repairs to their clothing, as I am accustomed to stitching buttons back on and mending seams without giving it a second thought. Most of my clothing stays in my wardrobe for years, and I donate it if I am no longer wearing it. However, I understand that my experiences are not universal, and I am curious to learn about the experiences of other home garment makers in creating and maintaining garments. If garment making skills can positively influence people in treating their clothing well, I am in a position to spread

knowledge and awareness of these skills to empower others to extend the life of their clothing.

Purpose & Research Questions

This qualitative study explores the practices of people who make garments for themselves around the making, use, and value of their clothing. Home garment makers have a unique understanding of the time, skill, and effort involved in making an individual item of clothing, as well as the value of fabric and other materials. It is important to understand their perspective on clothing value throughout a garment's lifespan, from construction or acquisition through use and eventual disposal in light of their special knowledge of garment production. The objective is to understand the connection between clothing value and sustainability in home garment makers' practices. The primary question guiding this research is: How do home garment makers value clothing through their garment making and use practices?

Definitions of Key Terminology

Fast fashion: Clothing that follows high-fashion trends but is produced and sold inexpensively through mass-market retailers, with new offerings available as often as every few weeks.

Home garment maker: A person who makes items of clothing for themselves using sewing, knitting, crochet, weaving, or upcycling techniques.

Value: For purposes of this study, the relative worth or importance of a garment. A garment with high value is prized or esteemed; a garment with low value is considered disposable.

Chapter II: Literature Review

In this chapter I summarize the relevant literature as it relates to the current study and the research question, How do home garment makers value clothing through their making and use practices? I begin with a general examination of clothing consumption and possible definitions of value in clothing. I then move on to specific aspects of the clothing lifespan, including making garments, garment use and maintenance, and disposal methods. I then discuss the slow fashion movement and consumer interest in sustainable fashion. Finally, I address the gaps in current research and the need for this study.

Clothing Consumption

Fashion can be considered a system made up of four networks: the production network (designers and manufacturers), the promotion network (brands and advertisers), the wearing network (consumers), and the disposal network (waste management companies). Each network influences the other three networks. While clothing designers and manufacturers in the production network have much room for improvement towards more sustainable clothing production, consumers in the wearing network have more power than they may realize, as consumers determine the ultimate fate of the garments they consume. Critically, consumers can demand less production by changing their consumption processes (Payne, 2020).

The clothing consumption process comprises three steps: acquisition; inventory, including use, care, and active and inactive storage; and discard. Acquisition may occur through methods such as purchase of new or secondhand garments, home construction, making over (i.e. upcycling), or receiving gifts (Winakor, 1969). Once a garment has been acquired, consumers have many choices about its use and care. Kate Fletcher's (2016)

seminal book *Craft of Use* urges consumers to give more thoughtful consideration to the entire consumption process. Fletcher argues that garments should be acquired with longevity in mind. Once a garment has been acquired, consumers should care for it as diligently as possible. This includes basic daily care like storage and cleaning, as well as mending and alteration as needed, with the goal of prolonging its useful life for many years. She notes, “to choose what we are and what we do with clothes daily is to have the power to alter the fashion system” (Fletcher, 2016, 23).

Value

The average garment is used for one year before disposal (Payne, 2020). Clearly, for many consumers, clothing is considered disposable. If clothing is to be kept and maintained for more than one year, it must instead be considered valuable. Research points to multiple aspects of value for clothing, rather than a single definition. Clothing may lose value if it becomes obsolete. Fletcher (2016) points to four types of obsolescence: aesthetic (changing appearance), social (shifting preferences), technological (new advancements improve function), and economic (replacement is cheaper than repair). Designing for durability may help clothing maintain value instead of becoming obsolete, but physical durability is not likely to prevent obsolescence by itself. Fletcher and Fitzpatrick (2021) argue in *Decentring Durability* that globally, “long lasting clothes” involve as many as fourteen features or practices: infrastructure, garment design, temporalities, pride and guilt, practical action and agency, place, care, the body, political economy, durability, colonial legacies, myths and stories, gender, and community.

Existing studies tend to focus on one or two aspects of value at a time. Clothing derives meaning through its visual value as a social signifier (Roach & Eicher, 1965). The

aesthetic qualities of clothing are a way to express one's personal style, and many consumers make clothing purchase decisions giving aesthetic qualities equal or greater weight than physical function (Forsey, 2013; Postrel, 2004; Payne, 2020). Studies on disposal behaviors examine how material aspects of value, such as physical condition, influence whether consumers dispose of a garment or attempt to extend its life. Garments of better appearance and quality are more likely to be considered valuable enough to repair (Degenstein et al., 2020). Other research has found that emotional attachment to clothing leads consumers to save and continue to wear garments even as their physical condition deteriorates. People are more likely to keep and repair clothing they love and enjoy wearing. Handmade clothing is particularly likely to engender emotional attachment (de Castro, 2021). Handmade garments fall under the umbrella of material culture because of this emotional attachment and the "story" of the garment (Attfield, 2020). Multiple concepts of value must be considered when examining why and how people choose to keep and maintain their clothing.

Making Garments

Home sewing has had a resurgence in popularity in the past 10 years, particularly among millennials, as a way to create unique clothing that is of higher quality than popular fast fashion brands. While sewing is not less expensive than buying mass-manufactured clothes from fast fashion retailers, it is possible to make a quality tailored garment for less than one would spend on a similar item from a premium brand (Meiling, 2021). Making one's own garments can be a pleasurable process in and of itself, and it also offers an opportunity for greater luxury than mass-manufactured clothing because the maker can choose the materials to create a one-of-a-kind garment (Lee, 2015).

Addie Martindale (2017) found that women who sew their own clothes experience greater control over the style, quality, and fit of their garments, and as such have more control over how they demonstrate their personal style. The more garments a person makes, the more control they have in these areas. Women often receive positive feedback on the garments they have made, which further validates their creative efforts and improves their self-esteem (Martindale & McKinney, 2020). Women also sew their own clothes as a way to produce more of what they consume, and to have a tangible creative product when much of their day is spent on work in the home or office that produces intangible results (Martindale & McKinney, 2018). Women knit garments and accessories for similar reasons, with the added advantages of portability and ability to multitask while watching TV, as knitting does not require a machine. Knitters also appreciate the tactile sensations of knitting, for example, the clicking of the needles and the softness of the yarn moving through their fingers (Stannard & Sanders, 2015). Potential barriers to making one's own clothing include physical health, lack of time, stigma around sewing and knitting as hobbies, lack of patterns that match the maker's taste and skills, and disappointment in previous projects (Twigger Holroyd, 2017).

While sewing clothing was an economic necessity for women through the first half of the 20th century, it is now a choice. Sewing is a skill that women must seek to learn rather than being taught as children (Martindale & McKinney, 2020). One thing that is important to note in any study of sewing and knitting is that the goal is not a forced return to domesticity for women, but rather empowerment to be creative and express their style and values (Bain, 2016). Current US Census Bureau data indicate that people in 20% of US households engage in some form of sewing (America's Families and Living Arrangements:

2018). However, little data exists regarding the ultimate fate of these handmade clothing pieces and whether consumers treat them differently than traditional retail garments. How do home garment makers who invest time into creating or personalizing their own clothing use and maintain these garments?

Garment Use & Maintenance

Two related dimensions of wardrobe maintenance are how long participants keep clothing items, and how willing they are to use repair, alteration, or restyling to extend the useful life of clothing items. Existing research into garment life extension is limited. A mixed-methods study found that women who worked with designers to reimagine their old clothes would continue to wear those garments for a mean of two years (Janigo & Wu, 2015). Environmental awareness, fashion consciousness, and individual creativity predict consumer interest in learning upcycling techniques and upcycling their own clothing as it goes out of style (Bhatt et al., 2019). While fast fashion consumers are quicker to dispose of garments, they show more interest and motivation to repair garments that have more personal meaning or more specifically reflect their personal style (McNeill, Hamlin, McQueen, Degenstein, Garrett, et al., 2020a). Garments that have less damage, were more expensive or of higher quality at the time of purchase, and items like suits and dresses are more likely to be repaired (McNeill, Hamlin, McQueen, Degenstein, Wakes, et al., 2020b). One Norwegian study that examined making and mending habits by demographic group found that overall, the number of people who repaired their clothing declined between 2011 and 2017. Notably, while 14% of respondents said they “never repair clothing,” 70% of the people in that group had sewn on a button in the past year. This suggests that it may be

more useful to ask about specific types of repairs rather than repair in general (Laitala & Klepp, 2018).

Disposal Methods

Another dimension of garment use behavior is how participants dispose of garments they no longer wear. Do home garment makers give their handmade garments special consideration in this area? Research shows that possible disposal methods for clothing include passing to friends or family members, reselling, swapping, donating to charity, retailer take-back programs, use as household rags, textile recycling, and trash. Disposal methods for clothing vary with the level of damage or wear, fashionability, and the purchase price of garments. More expensive garments are likely to be kept longer or resold, work clothes are most often used until they wear out and then used as rags, and fast fashion garments may be donated if they can be worn again. However, because of their poor quality they are often thrown out due to damage or wear after only a few uses (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007).

Consumers evaluate individual garments to determine which disposal method to use. The physical condition of a garment is the biggest influence on the choice of disposal method. Most consumers do not consider non-trash options for items that are stained or ripped (Norum, 2017). Fashion innovativeness, environmental awareness, and general recycling behavior have been found to influence clothing disposal methods more than age and socioeconomic status (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). Consumer recycling behavior, awareness of the environment, and age predict donating clothing to charities (Bianchi & Birtwistle, 2012). Significantly, a qualitative study found that passing garments on to family or friends is beneficial because it strengthens relationships while it prolongs

garment use (Cruz-Cárdenas, González, & Gascó, 2017). In the case of handmade garments, passing the item along may have added significance because of the time and care the maker invested in their creation.

The Slow Fashion Movement

In 2006, the “Slow + Design” Symposium in Milan introduced three “lines of reflection:” valuing local resources, transparent production systems, and “sustainable and sensorial products that have a longer usable life and are more highly valued than typical consumables” (Clark, 2015, 429). Fletcher (2016) suggested that consumers look for meaning in the daily activities of wearing and maintaining their clothing as a path to extending the useful life of garments. Slow fashion can be considered a practice, involving a personal relationship with one’s garments as it includes the wearing, maintenance, and eventual restyling of clothes (Clark, 2019). In an exploratory study to develop a scale of items to measure consumer interest in sustainable apparel, Jung and Jin (2014) found that dimensions of slow fashion include equity, authenticity, functionality, localism and exclusivity. Consumers are particularly interested in exclusive slow fashion products that illustrate their personal identity (Jung & Jin, 2016). “Social manufacturing,” including do-it-yourself, do-it-together, and participatory design, has been proposed as a way to empower users to become creators (Hirscher et al., 2018). A participatory study showed that consumers who worked together to make clothing in a “makershop” created diverse and valuable garments from discarded textiles and used clothing (Hirscher et al., 2019). Investing time in creating one’s own customized, tailored clothing through sewing, knitting, embellishing, or upcycling garments could be considered the ultimate in slow fashion.

Sustainability

Much of the research regarding sustainability in fashion has been done around sustainable retail clothing, but the reasons consumers are interested in sustainable clothing are often very similar to the reasons home garment makers give for creating their own clothing. Consumers show interest in limiting excess purchases, becoming more knowledgeable about clothing that best suits them, and having more options for wearing clothing they already own (Armstrong et al., 2016). Consumers are most emotionally invested in finding variety and unique fashion, which can positively impact their desire to purchase eco-fashion. Ecological and social considerations fuel their cognitive interest in purchasing eco-fashion as well as their willingness to pay more for environmentally friendly clothing (Fu & Kim, 2019). Consumers use domains like fashion as identity signals, to demonstrate membership in a desired social group or to differentiate themselves from an undesired identity (Berger & Heath, 2007). Eco-fashion serves to promote one's identity as a person who cares about the environment (Niinimäki, 2010). Interest in sustainable fashion stems from consumers' wish to grow closer to their own ideal self-concept and their desire to feel empowered to change the trajectory of the fashion industry to a more ethical model (Legere & Kang, 2020).

Fletcher and Tham (2019) call for sustainability research in fashion to focus on eight values: *multiple centers* of knowledge, *interdependency* between earth's inhabitants, *diverse ways of knowing*, *co-creation* between researchers and participants, *action research* that focuses on practical steps, *grounded imagination* that sees possibilities for real change, *care of world*, and *care of self*. Research should occur across six landscapes: ways to live with *less* stuff, *local* solutions for sustainability, *plural* methods of engaging with fashion,

learning new skills and mindsets, *language* as a way to change thinking, and new ways of *governance* over fashion. Making one's own clothing has great potential for more sustainable fashion consumption. People who make their own garments can control the social and environmental impact of their clothing production by turning away from global mass production. The ability to mend one's damaged clothing can keep garments in use instead of being discarded. The slowness of the making process could slow overall consumption and build emotional attachment to garments. Having a literal hand in the clothing production process of garments at home could improve understanding of the production process of retail garments as well (Twigger Holroyd, 2017). Further research is needed to determine how this potential is actualized in home garment makers' practices.

Conclusion

Current research has explored many aspects of clothing consumption, but several gaps still exist. Value in clothing has multiple facets, and it is important to consider these multiple facets of value in any discussion of how to promote longevity in clothing use. We do not yet have a comprehensive understanding of home garment makers' experiences and practices or their impact on their perception of value in their clothing. These practices encompass all parts of the clothing consumption process, from acquisition or creation through use and maintenance to eventual disposal. The entire process must be examined in order to gain a holistic understanding of the relationship between practices and value. As a form of slow fashion, home garment making has great potential to promote sustainability in fashion. This leads to the research question in this study, How do home garment makers value clothing through their making and use practices?

Chapter III: Methodology

In this chapter I describe the methodology used to answer the research question, How do home garment makers value clothing through their garment making and use practices? Data for this research was gathered through a qualitative approach in order to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences. Individual interviews were conducted with fifteen people who make garments for themselves. Participants were also asked to share three to five of their handmade garments during the interview to demonstrate their design and construction priorities when making garments. Field notes were used as a final tool for collecting data.

Research Approach

Fletcher and Tham's (2019) *Earth Logic: Fashion Action Research Plan* provided the theoretical background for this study. The plan calls for research methods that approach fashion users as key stakeholders in fashion sustainability. Users, and specifically home garment makers, have untapped knowledge through their experience and practice. Research should be collaborative and respect participants as co-creators of knowledge. Rather than a binary focus on production and consumption, research should focus on relationships between people and the world. Ideally, research should occur across multiple "landscapes", including ways to live with *less* stuff, *local* solutions for sustainability, *plural* methods of engaging with fashion, and *learning* new skills and mindsets.

Qualitative methods were used for this research in order to best understand participants' individual experiences with making garments for themselves and their perspectives on the value of garments. A phenomenological approach was selected for this study as the aim was to gain in-depth understanding of the experience of a specific group

of people. In order to best understand participants' thought processes, it was important to hear about their experiences in their own words, so open-ended questions were used for interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Participants were also asked to show garments during interviews as a conversational tool and as an additional source of data. Pragmatic philosophy guided the study, as the hope was that understanding participants' experiences in making garments would lead to practical implications for action toward fashion sustainability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Participants

Garments can be made through a variety of techniques, including sewing, weaving, and knitting. In order to understand the diverse perspectives of people who use different kinds of making techniques, participants who used any technique for making their garments were included, and most participants had made garments using more than one technique. People may learn any of these skills as a hobby and then abandon them after a single project, but for this study it was desirable for participants to have a depth of experience to draw from in describing their making practices. Participants were required to have made a minimum of five garments for themselves through any method, although most participants had made many more than that. The only other requirement was that participants be age 18 or over due to additional ethical considerations for including minors in the study. Ultimately, fifteen individuals participated in the research. Participants ranged in age from 25 to 80 years old, and had been making garments for between four years and more than 60 years. All participants were female, which is consistent with the typical demographics of home garment makers as most garment making skills are traditionally feminine (Twigger Holroyd, 2017).

Recruitment

At the beginning of the study, approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Minnesota because the study involved human subjects. The Textile Center, a Minneapolis-based center for fiber arts, and Knit & Bolt, a Minneapolis retail shop that sells fabric, yarn, and fiber arts supplies, were approached for assistance with recruitment because they cater to home garment makers with a variety of making skills. Both businesses generously agreed to publicize the study. An IRB-approved announcement seeking study participants ran in March and April 2022 in the Textile Center's monthly "Textiles on the Town" email to their members, and an IRB-approved flier about the study was posted on the community bulletin board at Knit & Bolt from March through September 2022. A \$15 gift certificate to the Textile Center or Knit & Bolt was advertised in the announcement as an incentive to participate. Convenience and snowball sampling were used as members of the Textile Center and customers of Knit & Bolt engage in a variety of fiber crafts and are part of a network of makers from which additional participants could be recruited (Creswell & Creswell 2018).

Six participants responded to the Textile Center announcement in March 2022, and two additional participants were recruited through the original participants. These participants all self-identified as being over the age of 50, which did not provide the desired variety in age of participants. The IRB-approved announcement was also posted to my personal Facebook page in hopes of connecting to younger friends of friends who might be interested in participating. This yielded one additional participant. In April 2022, I expressed my concern about finding enough participants to faculty advisor Dr. Elizabeth Bye, who graciously provided contact information for several recent graduates of the

University of Minnesota Apparel Design BS program who made garments for themselves. Five additional individuals agreed to participate through these contacts. Finally, in August 2022, one participant contacted me via the flier at Knit & Bolt.

Interviews

The literature review emphasized the importance of understanding home garment makers' practices across all parts of the clothing consumption cycle, from acquisition through use and eventual disposal (Fletcher, 2016; Winakor, 1969). An initial list of eleven open-ended interview questions was developed as part of my Qualitative and Mixed Methods Research class under guidance from Dr. Linsey Griffin. The first two questions addressed the participant's background in making garments and their decision process when making a new garment. The next four questions addressed participants' wardrobe use and maintenance and their retail clothes shopping process. The following four questions more directly addressed ideas of sustainability in garment creation, care, and value. The final question simply asked participants if there was anything else they wanted to say about any of the topics in the interview or if the participant felt there were additional topics that had not been addressed. This allowed participants to be co-creators in the study (Fletcher & Tham, 2019).

I then conducted a practice interview with faculty advisor Dr. Elizabeth Bye, who also had experience in making garments for herself. From there, possible prompts to elicit more detailed responses were added to the first two questions, and a question about participants' reasons for making garments was added to that section of the interview. A question about differences in attitudes towards handmade versus store bought garments was broken into two questions, one about use and care and one about shopping decisions

(see Appendix A for the interview script). The interviews were semi-structured and the exact order of questions was sometimes shifted based on participant responses. The list of questions was sent to participants in advance of the interview so they could gather their thoughts. Some participants read the list of questions thoroughly, while others either didn't have time or chose not to read the list of questions before the interview.

When individuals agreed to participate in the study, they were asked to use the scheduling website Calendly.com to select a mutually convenient interview time. Participants received an IRB-approved research consent form via email to review prior to the interview (see Appendix B for the consent form). Fourteen interviews were conducted via Zoom, and the interview with the mutual acquaintance was conducted in her home sewing room. Each interview started with an opportunity for the participant to ask any questions about the consent form before giving verbal consent for the interview. I then gave participants a brief description of my own background with sewing and knitting as an icebreaker and to put them at ease. The interviews lasted 30-75 minutes each and were conducted between March and September 2022. All interviews were video and audio recorded and initial transcriptions were done via Zoom. The Zoom transcriptions were then edited for accuracy while reviewing the video of the interview, and participants' names were changed to pseudonyms for confidentiality. Any other identifying details or names that participants mentioned were also removed from the transcripts to protect privacy, and filler words such as "um" and "like" were removed for clarity. Field notes were also taken during interviews, and reflections were recorded following each interview.

Other Data Collection Methods

Participants were initially asked to have three to five garments they had made ready for “show and tell” during the interview as a conversational tool to aid in description of their practices. Some participants adhered strictly to this number, while others had racks of garments ready. The show and tell portion of the interview was scripted to occur following the first question about participants’ background in making garments. Several participants referred back to their selected garments or retrieved additional garments later during the interview to use as visual aids in their responses to questions. This enabled them to discuss construction techniques and materials used in more detail. Observation of participants’ handmade garments as well as their interaction with their garments was used to triangulate the interview data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Field notes were taken with brief descriptions of the garments, and these notes were added to the interview transcripts to add details to sections where participants verbally indicated the garments. After the interviews, participants were also asked to share self-selected photos of garments to be included in publication and presentation of the research. Ten participants emailed photos, and two directed me to their public Instagram accounts where they share photos of their projects. The garment photos are included in the results section.

Data Analysis

For this study, data were analyzed in multiple steps. First, Zoom transcripts were carefully reviewed and edited for accuracy in two stages. The initial transcripts were broken up into sentence fragments with time stamps, making them difficult to parse. In the first review stage, the time stamps were removed, the sentence fragments were regrouped into coherent paragraphs, and obvious transcription errors were corrected. In the second

stage, the corrected transcripts were reviewed and checked for accuracy while watching the interview recordings. Notes regarding the garments shown were added to the transcripts during this stage. The transcripts were printed out and the field notes were added to the transcripts for simultaneous review. The field notes and interview videos helped to recollect the tone of voice and verbal emphasis participants used during the interviews, which did not come through in the transcripts alone. While this process was much more time consuming than using a transcription service, it meant that I became very familiar with the interview data in advance of the coding process.

An initial round of open coding was done manually to discover data-driven codes from each of the interviews (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011). Some codes were suggested by the interview questions, while others arose from participants' responses. The printed interview transcripts were cut apart and placed in piles according to the initial code list (see Appendix C for a list of codes and examples). Each pile of responses was reviewed again and in-depth axial coding was conducted using codes developed from all fifteen interviews (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011). For example, mentions of stitching or finishing techniques were coded as "construction quality." Through multiple rounds of memo writing, mind-mapping, and physically moving quotes into different piles, individual codes were grouped and re-grouped into sub-themes and then combined and developed into overarching themes. Two iterations of the larger themes were created before the final themes emerged. Initially, it appeared that practices could be grouped into themes of Motivation, Ethics, Knowledge, and Investment. However, this iteration lacked a satisfactory definition of value in clothing. The second iteration focused on themes of Aesthetic, Physical, and Emotional value. This definition of value was more

comprehensive, but it proved too difficult to connect making practices to a single type of value. Further analysis of the interview data revealed that practices could be categorized as Creating, Maintaining, or Acquiring value. These final themes are discussed in the results section.

Researcher Assumptions

As part of a rigorous qualitative study, it was important to bracket my own experiences and biases that may have influenced the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I learned to sew in a home economics class in middle school and taught myself to knit as an adult. I have worked as a theatrical costume designer for over 20 years and sewn or knitted a number of garments for myself. Sewing, altering, and repairing garments came naturally to me, and it was easy to forget that those were actually somewhat uncommon skills in the modern era. I also grew increasingly concerned about the environment as I got older, and while corporations and manufacturers played a major role in finding better production methods, I also felt it was important to seek out and practice more environmentally friendly practices at home.

This is particularly true for clothing items. I expect to own most garments for several years, so I avoid overly trendy styles and look at construction quality when I am purchasing clothing. If I am making a garment for myself, I use the best materials I can afford, and choose an interesting but timeless sewing or knitting pattern because I don't want to waste my precious time making something only to have it get limited use. I repair my own and my family's clothing, and I alter garments if I really love them but they don't fit correctly. I am happy to shop for secondhand clothing, and I donate rather than throw

out clothing and other items that are still useful. I was delighted to find a recycling service that includes textiles for home pick-up.

At a personal level, I feel that my garment making knowledge has a major impact on how I think about clothing. However, I recognize that other garment makers may have different beliefs and experiences, so I want to hear their perspectives to better understand what role making and repairing garments at home could have in sustainability in the apparel world. I set aside my own preconceptions about the value of clothing for this study in order to understand other garment makers' perspectives.

Limitations and Additional Considerations

This study focused on gaining an in-depth understanding of the experiences of home garment makers. Having a pool of fifteen participants helped ensure that enough time could be spent on each interview to develop an in-depth understanding, but the smaller number of participants inherently limits the generalizability of the results. The participants were also a relatively homogenous group. All fifteen participants were women, and all but one were white. This reflects the demographics of a majority of both home garment makers as a group and residents of Minnesota as a population, but more diverse perspectives would be ideal, especially as the sewing and knitting communities are becoming more diverse (Martindale & McKinney, 2020; United States Census Bureau, n.d.).

My own experience with sewing and knitting was both an advantage and a disadvantage. My insider status as a home garment maker meant that participants were very comfortable talking with me about their experiences without worrying that their skills would be dismissed as just a hobby. I was also able to understand garment making terminology without using additional time for definitions and explanations. While I felt

that my garment making skills influenced how I think about and care for my clothing, that might not have been the case for other garment makers. I needed to resist the urge to share my own experiences and thoughts during the interviews. I kept my responses neutral during the interviews so that participants would not feel that they needed to answer questions in a certain way. Because of my background in garment making and my interest in sustainability, the outcome of this research was important to me. I wanted to learn more about ways to make fashion more sustainable through personal action.

Chapter IV: Results & Discussion

In this chapter, I present the results of interviews with fifteen study participants who have made at least five garments for themselves. The literature review suggests that treating clothing as valuable throughout the consumption process could lead to greater longevity for garments, which in turn could improve sustainability in fashion. However, there is not a satisfactory overarching definition of value in terms of clothing. I propose a three-part model that illustrates how value can be interpreted for clothing based on participants' responses. I describe how participants contribute to value in their own clothing through three emerging themes: creating, maintaining, and acquiring valued garments. I include photographs of select garments participants shared during interviews to further illustrate the participants' responses.

About the Makers

The fifteen home garment makers in this study were spread across a wide age range (25-80 years old) and came from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. All participants self-identified as women, which was consistent with US demographics of who made clothing at home (Martindale, 2017). They made garments through sewing, knitting, and weaving. Most practiced multiple methods of making although sewing was most prevalent. Participants had different reasons to start making clothes for themselves, and varying degrees of experience. Olivia started sewing garments for herself four years ago, while Diane had been stitching, in her words, "since Truman was president." Participants who learned how to make clothing during the 1950s and 1960s did so primarily because "it was just what girls did" and it was a way to have nicer clothing than they could purchase for the same price. They enjoyed both the process and their results enough to continue making

garments long after it was no longer a societal expectation or financial necessity. Participants who learned their making skills in the 21st century were more often motivated by a desire to make clothing that better fit their bodies or style than what they could find in stores. This was consistent with previous studies on reasons for making garments for oneself (Martindale, 2017; Stannard & Sanders, 2015). See Table 1 for information about each participant.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age group	Making skills	Years making	Favorite things to make
Amy	60+	Sewing, knitting	50+	Wide variety
Barbara	60+	Sewing, knitting	50+	Travel garments, casual wear
Celeste	40-60	Sewing, knitting, crochet	30+	Wide variety
Diane	60+	Sewing	70+	Wide variety
Elaine	60+	Sewing, knitting, weaving, spinning	50+	Wide variety
Faye	60+	Knitting, weaving	50+	Artwear, sweaters
Georgia	60+	Sewing	50+	Wide variety
Hannah	25-40	Sewing	30+	Vintage & historic styles
Iris	60+	Knitting, spinning, sewing	50+	Artwear, sweaters
Julia	25-40	Sewing	15+	Costumes, swimwear
Kyla	25-40	Sewing	5+	Lolita fashions
Lauren	25-40	Sewing, embroidery	20+	Wide variety
Maren	25-40	Sewing, knitting	20+	Wide variety
Nora	25-40	Sewing	10+	Vintage upcycling
Olivia	40-60	Sewing, knitting	4+	Wide variety

Study participants considered the world and its people in different ways as part of their making practice. They were highly aware of the many human and environmental costs

associated with fast fashion manufacturing. They strove to make a positive impact through their own making practices because they considered garment making an extension of their interest in sustainability. As Kyla noted, “clothing and sustainability are two things that are pretty much always on my mind.” Many participants expressed that they were happy to participate in the study because they were concerned about the negative impact of fast fashion and wanted to do their part in changing things for the better. Ethical considerations about the environment and fair labor were driving forces behind participants’ desire for enduring value in their clothing.

The common thread connecting participants was that they were passionate about making garments. They were willing to invest significant time, creativity, finances, and other physical resources into their making practice. Making garments oneself required more time than buying from a store and supplies often cost more than what one could pay for a similar fast fashion version. However, as several participants noted, they made a high-quality garment for less than they would spend on its high end ready-to-wear equivalent. For many participants, making garments had become more than just a hobby, but part of their identity. Diane said of her sewing,

It’s very important to me ... from the time I was in high school it has been a point of pride, and a point of the insistence on quality, and then the economics of it, it has been important to me that I make my own clothes.

Participants saw high value in their clothing and in their making practice, so they went out of their way to make garments that would last, purchased retail clothing of high quality, and maintained the physical value of their wardrobe to extend its useful life.

Value

In order to answer the research question, How do home garment makers value clothing through their garment making and wardrobe maintenance practices? it was first necessary to define value in terms of clothing. Valuable can be considered the opposite of disposable, but what exactly does this mean? When asked directly about how they view the value of clothing, participants shared multilayered responses. Amy talked about creativity and the uniqueness of her handmade garments, and said, “I guess I’m not thinking about the clothing in terms of monetary value, it’s really more some of the intangible aspects of value.” Elaine said:

In the sense of food, shelter, and clothing, certainly, it has intrinsic value ... I think it has layers of value in varying contexts, I guess, is what I would say. I think it has value in the context of culture, certainly value in the context of one’s own sense of identity, has value in the culture in the sense of it has economic value for sure.

Barbara shared:

I mean obviously to cover one’s body, and basic comfort is a huge thing for me, self-esteem, feeling good in it, and you can see by the colors that I choose that oftentimes people will comment to me, ‘Oh, is that ever pretty,’ ... I think in getting enjoyment out of it, feeling secure.

Hannah described the conflict between how many people think of clothing and how they treat it:

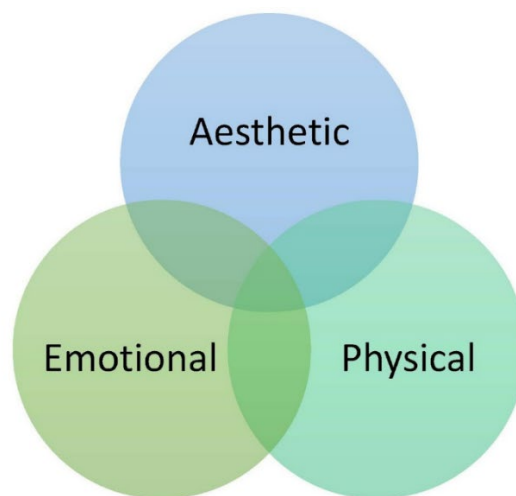
I feel like people have this dual value system, where clothing is so important for who you are as a human, like going around the world to be fashionable and ‘look at this clothing piece that I have, and I have this rotating wardrobe, and I’m in a

place in my life where I can show you that I only have to wear this thing a couple of times,’ especially with celebrities and whatnot, *gasp* if they’re shown wearing the same thing more than once. So clothing has this high value like that, but we give it very little value in how much you’re willing to pay for it, how much you’re willing to treat it as an item that needs to be cared for, so that dichotomy is really weird to me because the value should mean something to you.

I propose a new way of framing value in clothing. Through participants’ responses, it became clear that any given article of clothing has three intersecting types of value operating in tandem: *aesthetic value*, *physical value*, and *emotional value* (see Figure 1). The home garment makers in this study found importance in each of the three types of value for their clothing. They made and bought garments that have lasting aesthetic value, saw high physical value in all garments, and attached especially high emotional value to garments they made themselves.

Figure 1

Types of Value in Clothing



Aesthetic value refers to the visual qualities or social purpose of the garment and how well the garment serves that purpose. Any designed object has aesthetic qualities, but more than almost any other consumer product, clothing is often purchased for its appearance at least as much as its function (Forsey, 2013; Postrel, 2004). Garments that look good on the wearer and match the wearer's taste have high aesthetic value, but for fast fashion garments this value is fleeting. A fast fashion garment allows the wearer to follow trends and has high aesthetic value when it is first purchased, but as trends or the wearer's taste changes, this value plummets, leading the consumer to dispose of the garment. By contrast, classic styles or garments outside of mainstream fashion trends often have more enduring aesthetic value (Payne, 2020).

Aesthetic value is connected to social constructs/signifiers and the meaning of dress in displaying identity (Roach & Eicher, 1965). Interestingly, when participants are asked directly about how they view the value of clothing, aesthetic value comes up the most frequently. Iris comments, "I like to believe that the need for aesthetic pleasure is pretty close to being a basic need." Amy says, "thinking about what value clothing provides me, a lot of times it's a creative outlet and it's often a way for me to express some individuality." Diane speaks of the history of clothing, saying, "we know that it had protective value but early on ... the idea of ornamentation on clothing is hundreds of thousands [sic] of years back, and I really enjoy watching what people wear." Participants feel it is important for their clothing to have high aesthetic value. The ability to personalize the aesthetic value to their own unique style contributes to higher emotional value. It

follows that the desire for garments to have high physical value so the aesthetic value is not “wasted” on a disposable garment is also connected.

Physical value refers to the physical aspects of the garment, such as the fabric and construction quality. Physical value includes how well a garment serves its intended function, such as boots to keep feet warm and dry in the snow, or a hat to protect the face and neck from the sun. The garment maintains its physical value as long as it fulfills its intended purpose well. Garments that are poorly designed or lack the necessary technical specifications may have low physical value from the moment of their creation, or garments may lose their physical value over time as they are damaged or worn out. For some consumers, the physical value of a garment is very important, and they may make repairs to maintain the physical value. Elements of physical value, such as garment quality, often impact how a consumer decides to dispose of a garment (Birtwistle & Moore 2007; Bianchi & Birtwistle, 2012; & Degenstein et al, 2020). Physical value also encompasses individual elements of a garment, such as fabric or buttons, that may be reused in a different garment. Study participants view clothing as having inherent physical value rather than treating it as a disposable commodity. Kyla says:

I’ve met a lot of people who also share my interest in fashion, but a lot of them are on the opposite side of the spectrum where it’s a very disposable item for them. So they may cherish a dress and wear it five or six times and then they’re done with it.

And I’ve always felt like that was a little sad for the item.

Physical value comes up less often in participants’ direct responses to the question about their view of the value of clothing, but their practices strongly demonstrate that the physical value of garments is an important consideration. High physical value means garments last

longer, which is inherently important if a garment is to maintain its aesthetic and emotional value.

Emotional value refers to the wearer's emotional attachment to the garment. Favorite garments have high emotional value and may evoke a sense of personal nostalgia or a relational connection to another person. These garments often have a "story" of their creation, acquisition, or use that is important to the wearer. High emotional value may lead a person to wear or keep a garment even after its aesthetic or physical value has deteriorated (Fletcher, 2016; de Castro, 2021). Unlike aesthetic and physical value, the emotional value of a garment is generally unique to its owner and only transfers with the garment if the story of the garment can be shared along with the item of clothing itself (Attfield, 2020; Cruz-Cárdenas, González, & Gascó, 2017).

A high level of investment in their making practice played a key role in the emotional value of handmade garments. Study participants unanimously felt that their handmade garments had high emotional value due to the time and creativity the participants invested in their creation. While aesthetic and physical value were impacted primarily by concrete choices and actions, emotional value was tied in part to how participants felt about the practice of making garments. Several participants used words like "precious" in discussing their handmade garments, and Hannah described the sentiment particularly well, "it's not just a piece of clothing, it's part of who I am, because I made it." The emotional value of a handmade garment was often connected to the emotions the maker felt while creating it. As Celeste commented, "it's not just a garment, it's a little bit of everything I was feeling and thinking about while I was making it." Emotional value was also connected to how clothing made the wearer feel. Julia said, "it has such power to make you feel

something whether that's more confident, whether that is comfortable and safe, can it provide a safety type of thing, does it make you feel just vibrant and alive." Emotional value was tied to personalized aesthetic value by using favorite colors and materials, and to physical value through motivation to keep a garment useful as long as possible.

As a result of their own personal investment, high levels of knowledge of garment making, and desire for an ethically created wardrobe, the garment makers sought clothing they considered aesthetically, physically, and emotionally valuable. Through many aspects of their making practices, participants focused on *creating*, *maintaining*, and *acquiring* value in both their handmade and purchased garments.

Creating Value Through Handmade Garments

Participants used their making practice to create garments with high initial and enduring aesthetic, physical, and emotional value because they were investing significant time and resources into its creation. Many participants made a variation on the statement, "if I'm going to spend my time on making something, I want it to last." Making their own clothes gave participants complete control over the style, fit, quality of construction and materials, along with the ability to make the most of their resources. Their choice of each element reflected their motivation to create value through their handmade garments. Value was created through the emotional aspects of making, style, fit, quality construction and materials, and resourcefulness.

Emotional Aspects of Making

Participants' pride in their skills created strong emotional value in their garments. Garment making is no longer a commonplace practice, and participants especially enjoyed receiving compliments on their handmade pieces by saying "thank you, I made it" and the

additional awe and admiration that engenders. Participants felt good in their handmade garments, and chose handmade garments for work and social occasions when they wanted a confidence boost. Their handmade garments were often among their favorites, both because of the positive feelings they evoked and because they were so personalized. Julia expressed this sentiment particularly well:

I enjoy sewing. I really, really love doing it, I love sitting down and that whole, whatever part of the process it is, whether it's actually getting out the sewing machine or the hand stitching or embroidering or beading something, and I really enjoy it so then when I wear those things it just sort of compounds on that, where I feel really good about what I've made and I really enjoyed the process and now the world gets to enjoy it, and so I think the process of it just elevates the enjoyment and the experience of the garment.

Participants also felt a strong connection to others through their making practices, and this created emotional value in their handmade garments through those relationships. Many told stories of how they first learned their craft from a female relative, and continued to think of that person while they were making garments. Maren had fabric from her grandmother, and felt that her grandmother's love remains in the fabric. Other participants made garments for their family and friends as a way to show their love. Diane made wedding dresses for many of the women in her family as a way to celebrate their marriages. Hannah made a skirt for herself using a pattern that belonged to her great grandmother. Although they never met in person, she found a connection to her ancestor through the

skirt. Kyla found that sewing connected her “not just to [her] own family, but to women throughout history. I like that I’m carrying on that skill, because it’s being lost.”

The emotional aspects of making create strong emotional value in the resulting garments as the garments are a tangible reminder of the positive emotions makers feel about their practice. The pride makers feel in their work means they want it to be as beautiful as possible, creating aesthetic value. This pride also means that makers want their work to last, so they build in as much physical value as possible.

Style

Many participants said they emphasize “style over fashion,” meaning that they eschewed trends in favor of clothing that was well-designed but was not immediately connected to a single point in time. Iris said, “I don’t think I’ve ever made anything that I just thought ‘oh I’ll just do this style and then get rid of it.’ Maybe when I was in high school.” Maren said she wanted to make garments that were “timeless” and considered style when choosing a pattern. She asked herself, “is this going to be cute in two or three years? Because I want this to be able to last for a long time, and look cute and feel relevant.” Many participants shared garments they made years or even decades ago that they continued to wear today because they still considered the garments to have high aesthetic value. Georgia shared a butter yellow shirt dress she made in the 1980s and continued to wear over the years because it was simple and classic (see Figure 2). She remarked that her two adult daughters had borrowed it as well, demonstrating its lasting aesthetic value.

Figure 2

Georgia's Classic Yellow Dress



Participant photo, used with permission

Participants also enjoyed making garments that had a unique style detail that set them apart from mass market garments. Making their own clothing gave home garment makers complete creative control to make one-of-a-kind garments. Elaine preferred to make things that “have interesting lines or are just a titch unconventional.” Amy showed a little black dress she made years ago and commented that “it’s just a little black dress, but nobody else has one just like it.” Iris echoed that sentiment and said, “if I was going to make something, the other element would be at this point that it would be a little bit unusual, have a little bit of an arty edge, like maybe would be asymmetrical or something.” Lauren shared a navy and white print maxi dress she made two years ago for a vacation and

expected to wear for years to come (see Figure 3). It had a back cutout, a unique detail that contributes to its appeal.

Figure 3

Lauren's Dress with Back Cutout



Participant photos, used with permission

While uniqueness was universally considered desirable, participants were divided as to whether having a garment appear handmade enhanced or detracted from its beauty. Several participants mentioned taking classes on copying ready-to-wear garments, and Georgia had taken several couture tailoring courses over the years. Diane explained that growing up in the 1960s, many of her friends eventually quit sewing “because that identified them as country bumpkins,” and later said “it was a thing that you consciously avoided because of the sociological implications of it. But you can learn to sew so that

nobody knows that it's homemade, and I think I've reached that point." Other participants felt that seeing the maker's hand makes a garment more beautiful. Olivia said, "I remember on some social media, someone was making a comment about wearing clothes that 'look homemade' as if that's a bad thing, and all my best clothes are handmade and I love how they look!" Iris shared her handknit sweaters with intricate lace and cable patterns, which are not easily replicated via machine knitting (see Figure 4). Lauren happily spent "probably 72 hours of solid hand embroidery work" on a wool jumpsuit for herself, but said of a plaid skirt she had made, "plaid matching is not something I find a lot of joy in, it turns out, so I don't know if I'll be doing a whole lot in plaid after that." Faye commented that while many weavers are able to make fabric that looks like it could be store bought, "that's not quite as interesting to me because it doesn't have that more primitive look of a plainer handwoven fabric."

Figure 4

Iris's Lace and Cabled Sweaters



Participant photos, used with permission

Other makers had a personal style that was outside of modern fashion trends and did not match garments that were readily available in stores. Hannah and Nora wore predominantly vintage styles, so they made and purchased clothing that fit that aesthetic. This allowed them to ignore changeable trends by wearing clothing they enjoyed even though it went out of fashion decades ago. Both reported receiving compliments on their clothing, reinforcing its aesthetic appeal. Kyla favored Lolita, a type of Japanese street fashion. She bought some garments from online stores based in Japan, but made many of her own garments to fit the Lolita hyper-feminine aesthetic. Within that style, she aimed to keep her clothing versatile and interchangeable. She shared sets of blouses and bloomers she had made in coordinating colors (see Figure 5). She wore these under dresses to change her look.

Figure 5

Kyla's Lolita Blouses and Bloomers



Participant photos, used with permission

Participants made their garments with versatility in mind. Diane said, “I rarely make anything that doesn’t go with at least 14 things in my closet ... I don’t like to make single occasion things.” Kyla made her wedding dress in two pieces – a knee-length dress with a ruffled skirt she wore over a full-length length skirt with lace trim (see Figure 6). The long skirt made the ensemble formal enough for the ceremony, but she wore the short dress on its own for the reception and with a blouse for other events beyond her wedding. She said, “that’s generally how I make things. I hope I can wear it again, whether that be for formalwear or for everyday wear.”

Figure 6

Kyla’s Versatile Wedding Dress



Participant photos, used with permission

Participants planned ahead by making garments with comfort and ease of use and care in mind. Kyla and Olivia put pockets in everything they made, and Kyla commented,

“wearability and comfort are my two highest concerns.” Barbara said, “comfort is a huge issue for me, that’s really the first priority for me and my clothes.” Several participants made a variation on the statement, “if I’m going to spend the time making it, I want to be able to wear it.” Lauren stated that everything she makes has to be machine washable, “it can’t be overly complicated for me to care for it if I’m going to put a lot of time into making it because I’m going to feel like I can’t wear it, what if I spill something on it, and then I can’t clean it easily and then it’s ruined, but I spent all this time on it.”

Participants create aesthetic value in their garments by making styles that they believed would be beautiful for years to come. Garments that were timeless, unique, and versatile. The ability to make garments with personalized style meant those garments were more likely to become favorites, which created emotional value as well. While style did not impact physical value as directly, the desire to create garments with lasting aesthetic and emotional value led participants to create garments whose physical value would endure so the other types of value could be preserved.

Fit

Participants’ extensive experience with making clothing meant they were very knowledgeable about fit as part of a garment’s aesthetic value. Home garment makers were often frustrated by the poor fit of off-the-rack garments, and the ability to create garments that fit perfectly was a major motivation to make garments for themselves. Olivia learned to sew primarily because she was frustrated trying to find garments she liked that fit her plus size figure. Julia said, “if I’m making something from scratch, I have a particular idea of how I want it to fit my body.” Lauren expressed that “making something from start to finish gives me that control of making sure it does fit me in a way that I want it to, that I

will feel comfortable and confident in.” Hannah noted that she often makes adjustments to sewing patterns before she cuts her fabric, saying “I know things about my body that as I’m starting the project I automatically make changes.”

Participants also build fit flexibility into their garments as they create them. Maren described several garments she made with a flexible fit for her changing body during pregnancy and postpartum. Georgia discussed how she planned for possible future alterations, and said, “if there’s something with a fitted waist you want to allow extra so you can take things out.” Hannah shared, “when I was in high school things that I made my mother made sure I put in like excessively large hems, and I did end up taking those down and wearing them for more years as an adult.”

Several participants discussed how being able to wear properly fitted clothing had a positive impact on their self-esteem. Maren said making garments that fit her really well was important to her confidence, and “it makes me feel a lot better about my body image than trying to find them at stores, because it’s really hard to find things that fit correctly.” Olivia expressed how sewing had impacted her:

The wonderful thing about sewing is, it has really helped me move forward with body acceptance, because I feel like in the store fitting room, if something doesn’t fit, I always felt like there was something wrong with my body. But I’ve learned with sewing, you just make it right by making it fit your measurements, and you know, the size of my hips is the size of my hips.

Nora described her change in thinking, from “one day I’ll be skinny enough to fit into this coat” to “this coat is going to fit me, because there is actually nothing wrong with me as

is,” and continued, “I think there’s a self-love element and acceptance to tailoring clothes myself.”

Making garments that fit well creates aesthetic value because garments that are tailored to fit the wearer look better on the body. Garments that fit well are likely to last longer because there is less wear and tear on seams, fasteners, and hems, so making well-fitting garments also creates physical value. The ability to make properly fitted garments also creates emotional value. Makers feel better about themselves and their bodies when they make clothing that fits them instead of trying to fit themselves into commercially made clothing.

Quality in Construction and Materials

Participants focused on construction as a major part of creating value by making sure their garments will stand the test of time. They talked about basic steps like sewing sturdy seams, as well as using advanced construction techniques that gave their handmade garments a polished, professional appearance. Kyla said, “I’m not stingy about seam allowances or thread or stitch length or anything like that, I’m making it as sturdy as I possibly can.” Diane favored French seams for her garments because they prevented fraying and gave a garment a refined finish. She noted, “I guess my philosophy is just do it right the first time. Get good fabrics to the degree that you possibly can afford it, and then make it carefully.” Participants put in extra effort to correct problems with construction as well. Hannah showed a cape she set aside in frustration because its two layers were not lined up correctly, but explained that she would get back to it “when I decide that yes, I am going to rip it back apart, because I’ll be happier in the long run, but still, it’s painful.”

Participants also created value through investing in materials that would hold both their physical and aesthetic value. Garment makers were knowledgeable about different textile fibers, and looked for fabric and yarn that would behave as desired in the finished garment. Wool, silk, and linen were mentioned over and over as favorite fibers. Diane fondly reminisced about saving her birthday money from her mother to be able to splurge on Pendleton wool suiting, and showed a wool coat she made in 1989 and still used, “it’s just now that you’re starting to see some wear on the collar and cuffs due to, you know, the linting effect.” Georgia expressed her preference for silk, saying, “it’s wonderful to sew with because it’s so malleable and you can get lovely colors printing with silk.” Olivia said linen was her favorite fabric because it was comfortable but still had structure, and shared examples of tops and skirts she had made in linen (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

Olivia’s Linen Blouse and Skirt



Participant photos, used with permission

Participants also appreciated that fibers like wool and linen were natural and renewable, so they were more earth-friendly than synthetics. Iris expressed that earth-friendly materials were part of her desire for sustainability in her making and said, “I only like to use natural renewable materials in general.” Participants avoided polyester and acrylic because they pilled more quickly, held odors even through cleaning, and didn’t feel as nice in the hand. Elaine said bluntly, “the quality of the fabric is really a driver for me. I don’t like sleazy cheap polyester fabrics.” Nora elaborated, “I stopped buying synthetics because I don’t like the way they age, I don’t like the way they feel on my skin, I don’t like how they can’t break down in a landfill, I don’t like the way they pick up odor.” Maren wanted to use materials worthy of her time, and shared that she hates “the thought of creating a garment and using synthetic yarn, for example, that’s going to pill really easy and it’s not going to withstand the test of time and wear and care and washing.” Several participants expressed concern about the negative environmental impact of commercially grown cotton due to pesticides. Celeste and Elaine said they were committed to using only organic cotton fabric and clothing to avoid this negative impact.

Participants feel that quality construction and materials create aesthetic value because good technique and good materials simply make garments look better. They also express over and over that quality construction and materials create physical value by ensuring that a garment can endure extended use. Quality construction and materials also mean that the emotional value that is created in a garment will last for years of wear and love.

Resourcefulness

Participants were very resourceful with materials and created value through even small amounts of fabric and yarn to avoid waste. Several participants saved their scraps for children or grandchildren to practice sewing or use in other crafts. Diane used her fabric scraps for doll clothes and joked that she is the “designated couturier for at least three American Girl dolls of [her] acquaintance.” Barbara shared one of several “Origami Jackets” she had made using four short lengths of quilting cotton (see Figure 8), and Hannah shared a two-tone linen duster she made and said, “I didn’t have enough of this [darker shade], so it was trying to decide how I could punch in the other fabrics that I also had and still make it look deliberate” (see Figure 9). The weavers in the group favored garments that are essentially rectangles sewn together to maximize usage of their priceless handwoven fabric. Elaine shared a vest she made using her handwoven fabric accented with a small piece of silk recycled from an old kimono and said, “using a piece of hand woven fabric, you really have to cut them carefully so that there’s very little waste because they’re precious” (see Figure 10).

Figure 8

Barbara's Origami Jacket



Participant photo, used with permission

Figure 9

Hannah's Two-tone Linen Duster



Participant photo, used with permission

Figure 10

Elaine's Handwoven and Recycled Silk Vest



Participant photo, used with permission

Participants also collected and used materials that were pre-owned or deadstock. They happily received fabric and yarn from family members. For example, Maren was enjoying working through the fabric stash she inherited from her grandmother. Several participants bought most of their materials from garage and estate sales or from SR Harris, a local fabric store that sells mill ends and clothing manufacturer overruns. Others collected buttons and trims to save for future projects. Lauren commented “I almost never have to buy trim for a project, I just work from my collection.” Participants kept extensive stashes of newly purchased materials as well, but found that fabric and yarn in their raw forms maintained a kind of potential physical value – they can be used for anything.

Several participants described using garage sale or stash fabrics to make test versions, or wearable muslins, of garments when the pattern was particularly difficult or the final fabric was expensive or delicate. Amy described her process:

I believe in making muslins, testing out a pattern, fitting, but I also want – you’ve probably picked up on this very strong practical bent – so it’s like if I’m going to put in the time to test something out, if there’s a possibility that I can use it at the end, great. I had the fabric anyway.

Georgia showed both versions of a dress she had made, first out of a cotton batik from her stash to test the fit, and then from a silk charmeuse once she had gotten the first version to her liking. She explained that she wore the cotton version as a simple summer dress and the silk charmeuse for formal events like her daughter’s wedding.

Participants use their resourcefulness to create aesthetic value out of even small amounts of beautiful fabric. This creates physical value by putting to use materials that otherwise would go to waste. Being resourceful also allows makers to create emotional value by making sure that special fabrics are used in the best way possible.

Maintaining the Value of Existing Garments

Participants were very thoughtful about how they used and cared for their clothing, with the goal of maintaining its value. Maintenance practices included the enjoyment makers felt in wearing their handmade garments, day to day cleaning and storage, making necessary alterations and repairs, and disposal of garments in ways that promote reuse. While many of these practices revolved around the physical value of garments, any practice that maintained the physical value of a garment also allowed the garment to maintain its aesthetic and emotional value.

Wearing Handmade Garments

Participants maintained the value of their handmade garments in part by keeping them front and center in their wardrobes and reaching for them often. Elaine explained, “you’ve spent a long time on it, you want to wear it,” and said she wears her hand knitted and woven items especially around other makers because she knows they will appreciate her work. Celeste said, “I wear something that I sewed, knitted, or crocheted every single day.” Lauren talked about wearing her handmade embroidered wool jumpsuit to work, and said, “while the amount of time and detail in it makes it feel fancy, to me it’s not outlandish to wear that to work ... and it’s like I didn’t spend all this time on something that only gets seen once every five years.” Julia shared photos of swimwear she made in her senior year of college, and said, “I’ve worn some of the bathing suits and the skirt portions after the senior show, which is a pretty cool thing to be able to do like a decade after I did that” (see Figure 11).

Figure 11

Julia’s Swimwear



Participant photos, used with permission

Wearing handmade garments maintains their aesthetic value because makers are reminded why they like the garment, especially if they receive a compliment. Wearing handmade garments maintains their emotional value because makers get a boost of pride and joy each time they wear a handmade garment. Wearing handmade garments has the natural effect of deteriorating their physical value through wear and tear, however, the desire to continue using them motivates participants to take measures to maintain their physical value.

Cleaning & Storage

Participants had varying methods for cleaning their clothing, but all chose the method they felt would best maintain the value of their clothing. As Julia said:

I really want to preserve the pieces that I have. I try to take really good care of my clothing, because I know what goes into it, I know how hard it was to make, and I definitely do a lot more hand washing, cold washing, spot treatment type of garment care than I think the average young person does.

Celeste echoed that sentiment, “the more I sew, the better care I take of my garments because I appreciate the labor that went into it.”

Some participants favored dry cleaning for some garments so as not to shrink or otherwise damage delicate fabrics. Maren described a silk dress she made for a friend’s wedding, and when she accidentally spilled food on it, she opted to dry clean it afterwards, “I don’t want to ruin it, I don’t want to try to clean it myself.” Others flat out refused to dry clean anything. They disliked the chemicals used in dry cleaning and their negative effects on the environment, so preferred to wash garments in cold water and hang them to dry. Faye pointed out that “often it says dry clean only, but I think that’s protecting them from

people not taking very good care of them.” Knitters were accustomed to spending the time to handwash their garments and dry them flat to prevent felting and sagging.

Several participants said they chose materials with washability in mind. Kyla said all of her garments needed to be able to go through the washer and dryer, so she favored cotton for its ruggedness. Faye said she chose washable wool when knitting sweaters for babies and toddlers, “I figured it would be too mean to tell a parent of a two year old that they had to hand wash dry flat that sweater that I’ve made.” Lauren explained:

It’s just being thoughtful about how it will fit in with my lifestyle, to make sure that the maintenance necessary is pretty low key. I put in all the time on the front end of the creation and then the rest of it, I just want to wear it and have fun and not have to think about it a ton.

Participants also employed methods to reduce the wear and tear inherent to laundering (as well as reducing their water usage). They aired and spot-cleaned garments to stretch the time between washes. Georgia and Olivia noted that they were careful to hang garments up after wearing to prevent wrinkles. Several participants noted that they wore camisoles or other lightweight layers underneath other garments to protect from sweat and deodorant. As Nora explained, “I almost always layer with [t-shirts] as a base, so what happens is I’m not usually sweating directly on the garment.” Participants made sure seasonal clothing was clean before putting it away for extended periods, and many used a cedar closet or sealed wool garments in plastic to prevent moths. Julia, who made elaborate costumes for events, noted that she stored the costumes in individual garment bags to protect them. Diane described her process for freshening garments up after extended

storage: “I will run a pretty well-tailored suit through the dryer with just a damp cloth or something to steam it up a little bit and take it out, get it back in shape.” Iris was delighted to learn from her son, a biologist, that baking wool in a low oven would kill moths. She has employed this method successfully in the past, but she shared a devastating recent incident: “I pulled out a sweater I hadn’t worn for a while and it had terrible moth damage. So I took a pile of the sweaters that were around it and shoved them in the oven carelessly and burned the sweaters, which was awful.”

Laundering and storing garments carefully maintains their aesthetic value by avoiding shrinkage and color fading. Gentle care maintains the physical value of garments by preventing wear and tear, extending their useful life. Thoughtful cleaning and storage practices affect emotional value less directly, but they do maintain the emotional value of garments simply by preserving them for continued enjoyment.

Alterations and Repairs

Participants maintained the value of garments by altering them to fit themselves and others. Diane described a wool kilt she made for herself in college and the many alterations she did to the hem, saying:

That kilt still fit me for about another ten or twelve years and at times I had to sew on hem tape to get a hem on it, because they were wearing them long, and at other times it was essentially self-lined because I had hemmed up the length wearing the mini mini mini.

Georgia had a beautiful green wool suit jacket, of which she said, “it was too pretty to put away so I’ve made the waistband bigger, you know, after three kids, I’ve been different sizes along the way so I alter stuff.” Julia and her husband made extensive alterations to

the suit he wore for their wedding because he loved the style but it was several inches too long in the arms and legs. Olivia commented that “people ask me to help them all the time” and described what she felt was a simple alteration to the sleeves of a friend’s shirt, saying, “that felt like a win, I kept it from going in the garbage.”

Participants also maintained the value of their clothing by fixing damage that occurred, and every participant talked about repairs they had made. Knowing how to make garments meant they had the skills to stitch a button back on, fix a dropped hem, or mend a seam. Olivia repaired her handmade garments immediately when they were damaged: “I just bring it right over to my machine and stitch it up and put it back in the closet.” Lauren said she allowed garments needing repairs to pile up for a bit, “and then I have day where I say, ‘okay, we’re fixing all the things!’” Iris said of a damaged favorite sweater, “I’m not willing to get rid of it yet, but the moth damage is really bad so I was going to run to my local yarn store and pick up a spool of yarn to see if I could find something to repair it.” Participants often became the designated menders for friends and family as well. Hannah explained, “little seams that rip and buttons that come off, things that I don’t really think are a big deal, but if you don’t know how to sew on a button that becomes a big deal.” Kyla said that she repaired her own clothes as well as her husband’s, and commented, “I patch those up for him all the time.” Barbara volunteered her time with Mobile Menders, an organization that holds mending days at libraries and other public sites to provide sewing supplies, skills coaching, and repair services to the community.

Making alterations and repairs to garments maintains their aesthetic value by keeping them looking their best. Of course, altering and repairing garments maintains their physical value by keeping them in useful condition instead of throwing them away.

Alterations and repairs maintain emotional value by ensuring favorite garments can remain an active part of the wardrobe.

Reuse and Upcycling

Participants maintained and extended the value of existing clothing through reuse of sewing and knitting patterns, materials and old garments, and shared many stories of finding creative uses for things that had just been sitting around. Hannah appreciated that using the same pattern could give completely different results. She searched her extensive pattern library, which she has cataloged in a spreadsheet, when she wanted to make a garment rather than purchasing a new pattern. She showed a robe and pajamas she had made from two old bedsheets from an estate sale. Julia enjoyed making elaborate costumes for events and parties, and saved them to be reworked for future use. She gave the example of saving a long skirt and explained, “I’ll just cut the elastic out of the waistband and fold up the fabric and put it back in my fabric storage and reuse it that way.” Amy didn’t like to make quilts out of new materials but said she has made a number of commemorative t-shirt quilts because “if there is a strong reuse element to it, I can get really into that.” Faye described a rag rug she once made by cutting up old shirts into strips and dyeing them to colors that coordinated because “it’s hard for me to just let it go.”

Several participants also described ways they maintain the value of clothing by upcycling it. Diane showed a jacket she made by shortening and adding trim to an old kimono, and Elaine was in the process of turning an outdated boiled wool jacket into a vest that suited her current style better. Celeste preplanned an upcycling project when her son got a new shirt she really liked, and told him, “I want that. When you grow out of that, when you don’t want it anymore, give it to me, I want that.” When he outgrew it, she cut

off the sleeves and added a waistband to turn it into a skirt (see Figure 12). Maren and a partner started a business upcycling clothing and fabric scraps into garments and clothing for children. She shared some of their children's sweatshirts and said that all of the material for the shirts came from adult sweatshirts purchased at thrift stores or received through their local "Buy Nothing" groups on Facebook (see Figure 13). Nora made most of her wardrobe by buying vintage clothing and accessories and updating them with trims and buttons from her stash. She shared a classic Chanel coat she purchased and then freshened up with ribbon and new buttons (see Figure 14).

Figure 12

Celeste's T-shirt Turned Skirt



Participant photo, used with permission

Figure 13

Maren's Upcycled Sweatshirts



Participant photos, used with permission

Figure 14

Nora's Vintage Chanel Coat



Participant photo, used with permission

Reuse and upcycling maintain the aesthetic value of garments and materials by recombining and updating them to create fresh new garments that match the makers' taste. Through reusing and upcycling existing garments, makers maintain their physical value by keeping them in circulation instead of throwing them in the trash. Reuse and upcycling also maintain the emotional value of garments by keeping garments with precious memories in use even if their form is altered.

Disposal

Participants overwhelmingly preferred disposal methods that allow for some form of reuse to maintain some of the physical value of their clothing because they know the time and effort that goes into making garments. The acute awareness of effort extended to the labor of garment manufacturing workers as well. Several participants made comments along the lines of "somebody made that, I'm not throwing it away." If a garment no longer fit their style or their body but was otherwise in good condition, participants tried to find someone else who could use it. They often first checked with people they knew. Faye had knit many garments for her grandchildren, and enjoyed seeing them handed down as the children outgrow them. She found that each new wearer increased the garment's emotional value. Kyla said when she was done with a garment, especially a handmade one, "I'll ask my sister if she wants it, or I'll ask my friends if they want it, my mom even, find a new home for it." Some participants elected to resell retail garments through a consignment shop or online platform such as Poshmark or ThredUp. Nora said, "I probably like once a month clean out my closet and consign the things that no longer serve me," and Maren talked about taking her daughters' too-small clothing to a children's consignment shop once a season, and then letting the girls pick out new clothes while they were there.

Other participants expressed some frustration that consignment shops wouldn't take handmade garments because they don't have a label, so instead they donated both retail and handmade garments to thrift stores. Retired now, Diane donated much of her professional wardrobe to an organization that provides business attire to underprivileged people to wear to interviews and when starting a new job. If a garment was damaged beyond repair, several participants said they cut it up for household rags, while others accessed textile recycling services through their city or a private company like Ridwell or Terracycle. Celeste said that after checking with her city government, she had gone so far as to remove thread and other notions like buttons or zippers from 100% cotton garments and then shredded them into tiny pieces to place in her compost pile. Trash was a last resort only after other options had been exhausted. As Amy said, "my last action, my last option is actually throwing it away."

Disposal of a garment through a method that involves reuse maintains the aesthetic value of the garment by transferring it to someone else who appreciates it. Disposal by reuse maintains physical value by keeping garments in use, and disposal by textile recycling maintains what limited physical value a badly damaged garment has by turning the materials into something else. Disposal by giving the garment to a family member or friend helps maintain its emotional value by keeping the garment's "story" alive and adding a new chapter for the new owner.

Acquiring Value Through Purchases

In addition to creating and maintaining value through their making practices, participants acquire value through their purchases. Makers are still consumers and must shop for both materials and clothing. None of the study participants make all the garments

in their wardrobes, and they feel their garment making experience influences their retail purchases. Participants seek to acquire value in their garments by changing their shopping habits and choosing their sources thoughtfully as well as finding value in other people's work.

Changing Shopping Habits

Participants acquired value by purchasing quality clothing. When shopping, garment makers' skilled eyes noticed tailoring techniques, and construction and material quality weighed heavily in their purchase decisions. Kyla said, "I am that person that stands and makes sure the sleeves are the same length ... I'll check hems and things like that." Iris shared, "I mean if something is poorly made, I'm not interested in it, and conversely when I see something really well made, especially if it's handmade it's like its intrinsic value increases for me." Lauren said she is "pickier" now about fabric and construction, and added, "that is something that I have become a little more snobby about since I am more knowledgeable about garment construction." On the other hand, participants were willing to pay more for well-constructed garments because those garments would last, and many favored specific brands because of their construction quality. Nora kept lists of her favorite vintage brands and saved labels from garments. Georgia noted that when Target debuted a new brand the quality was better. As with making, participants looked for quality materials, and their avoidance of synthetic fibers in favor of natural fibers extended to their retail purchases.

Participants also felt they acquired more value in their clothing by buying fewer things overall. Some participants limited their purchases to things they couldn't or didn't want to make. Amy said, "for some basic items like t-shirts, those I'll buy, in part because

I have just never mastered being able to get a nice even neckline on a knit.” Julia said, “it slows my purchasing habits. I think that because I can make something or fix something, I buy less or I look for things that are really exceptionally made.” Olivia said that since she started sewing four years ago, “I have purchased hardly anything, which I feel good about, other than a few things, like socks.” She added that making her own clothes helped her resist impulse buying when “one t-shirt is \$10, but five t-shirts are \$20,” and because she knew what goes into making garments, it helped her buy only what she actually needed.

Participants acquire aesthetic value in their clothing by shopping thoughtfully for garments that meet their high standards. They acquire physical value by purchasing only garments that are well constructed from high quality materials that will stand up to years of use. Participants acquire emotional value in their garments by limiting purchases to things they love and appreciate rather than shopping on impulse.

Sources

Source of materials contributed to value in garments for participants. They preferred to support small and independent shops where they felt they could find better quality and more unique materials while supporting business owners. Participants listed a number of small, local fabric shops during interviews, and lamented the loss of others that closed over the years. Several makers said they avoid buying online because they liked to feel the fabric or yarn before they bought it, although Maren noted that she made an exception for small online businesses. Participants expressed frustration with large, corporate craft stores like JoAnn Fabrics, and tended to shop there mainly for immediately needed supplies like notions. Amy complained that JoAnn was “doing their own version of fast fashion” because the fabric is such poor quality. Faye occasionally bought fabric

there, but not yarn, because “you can’t buy wool at JoAnn.” Diane shared, “I’m conscious of where things are made, and I will pay extra if a fabric is made in the United States ... I really like to know where my fabric came from.”

Many participants also purchased fabric or yarn while traveling, so garments made from those materials acted as reminders of that time. Celeste purchased a lot of fabric in Guatemala when adopting her son. Amy had a collection of silk fabric from her time living in India. Georgia spoke fondly of trips to fabric stores in San Francisco, New York, and Washington, DC, while Barbara reminisced about shopping at a fabric warehouse in Hawaii. Several participants had made a special trip to the Pendleton Woolen Mill store in Oregon.

Participants also liked to purchase garments from friends’ businesses or buy clothing from small boutiques that employ local seamstresses to make garments. Julia bought her wedding dress from a friend’s bridal gown business, and said, “that was really important to me ... to have something that was very special and intricate and that I understood the work that was going behind it, it wasn’t just a dress.” Maren also talked about buying clothing from a friend: “I was always willing to spend money with my friend, because I knew it was benefitting her small business, and knew it was going to her, and that was worth the money to me.” Several participants mentioned that they like to purchase handmade items at the shop at the Textile Center, a Minneapolis, MN resource that hosts textile-related exhibitions and workshops. Barbara and Elaine ordered clothes from fair trade catalogs that support women artisans in other countries, and talked about loving the style of the garments but also being pleased to support other makers.

Participants acquire garments and materials with high aesthetic value by shopping with smaller retailers and unique sources that can provide something out of the mainstream that matches participants' taste. Participants acquire physical value in their garments and materials by purchasing from sources that provide high quality items. Participants acquire garments and materials with high emotional value when they buy from sources with a personal connection, or sources that meet their ethical standards so they can feel good about the impact of their purchases.

Value in Others' Work

Participants were acutely aware of how much human effort goes into making the clothes they wear, whether they made it themselves or bought it off the rack. Makers appreciated the work of others and considered that when they made purchases. Hannah described two of her favorite small businesses and why she was willing to spend more money with them: "you're paying what the garment is worth, it's going to be more expensive but it's a sustainable wage for a person making the thing." Iris described a sweater she bought several years ago from South America: "it is beautifully knit, and I bought it on sale and I just said, 'this is just so gorgeously made, I just can't let this go.'"

Further, participants recognized the labor of workers in garment factories. They wanted to avoid contributing to exploitation, and they didn't want to waste other people's work by treating clothing as disposable. Nora lamented, "I think it is so easy now to find such a variety of things in stores that you have to have zero knowledge of how it's made," and later said, "as I'm picking things there's a different kind of appreciation for the garment and the craftsmanship that goes into things like that." Julia explained, "it is pretty incredible then when you look at your own clothing today, 'wow this person made this,' you know

there's actually a human behind it." Celeste commented that knitting might be done by machine, but crochet had to be done by hand. She said, "if I can tell that something was hand knitted or crocheted and they're charging \$20 for it I'm like, 'I can't, I cannot buy that.' It just breaks my heart." Iris echoed that sentiment and said that she used to love getting what seemed like a great deal on cheap clothing. She has changed her mindset and no longer buys these deals because "they'll be priced at a price point that I know that there's no way that the workers are paid a living wage." Several participants also used the phrase "breaks my heart" to describe their feelings about the amount of clothing that goes to landfills because of the waste of human effort as well as materials, because "somebody made that, I'm not throwing it away." As Kyla said:

It irks me when people say 'I've worn something twice and it has a hole and I'm throwing it in the trash. That honestly breaks my heart a little bit, which you would think is a little ridiculous, it's a T-shirt, but somebody made that.

Participants appreciate the aesthetic value in other people's work, especially when they can see evidence of another maker's hand in an item. Participants see strong physical value in garments because they know the work that went into making those garments, whether in a small sewing studio or a large garment factory. Participants attach emotional value to their purchased clothing because they feel a connection to the person who has made it through shared experiences of making garments.

Conclusion

Participants see three intersecting types of value in their clothing: aesthetic, physical, and emotional value. Their practices focus on creating, maintaining, and acquiring these three types of value across their wardrobes. Home garment makers create

value through the emotional aspects of making, choosing style over fashion, making garments that fit, quality construction and materials, and resourcefulness with fabric and yarn. They maintain value through enjoyment in wearing their handmade garments, day to day cleaning and storage that preserves clothing, making necessary alterations and repairs, and disposal of garments in ways that promote reuse. They acquire value through careful shopping habits, choosing their sources thoughtfully, and finding value in other people's work. These practices lead to garments with enduring value.

Chapter V: Conclusion

Clothing has long been a daily necessity in most of the world, yet clothing is often considered a disposable commodity, especially in the United States. The fashion industry's focus on constant growth through frequent new offerings has stoked consumer desire for inexpensive garments to follow the latest trends. This in turn has led manufacturers to produce cheaply made clothing that is only intended to be worn a handful of times before it is discarded, often to a landfill (Payne, 2020). Through the literature review, it became clear that consumers can exert influence in this area by treating garments as valuable items worthy of care and maintenance. Previous research has suggested that value in clothing is a multifaceted concept (Fletcher & Fitzpatrick, 2021). However, there has not been a comprehensive definition of value in clothing to date, and most existing studies focus on a single aspect of value.

Fletcher and Tham's 2019 *Earth Logic: Fashion Action Research Plan* suggests that research into sustainability in fashion needs to expand to include people from outside the fashion industry, who have their own valuable experiential knowledge. Home garment makers have a unique insight into different aspects of clothing production and maintenance and may bring a new perspective on how to view value in clothing. In particular, those who make their own clothing may have different consumption practices and may keep clothing in use longer due to their knowledge and experience (Twigger Holroyd, 2017). Therefore, this study sought to answer the research question, "How do home garment makers value clothing through their making and use practices?" Fifteen participants who had made at least five garments for themselves were interviewed via Zoom regarding their garment making and use practices.

In this chapter, I summarize the results of the study and discuss the overarching themes stemming from the participants' responses. I also discuss the practical implications of the study and what actions should be undertaken based on the knowledge gained, such as increased instruction in garment making skills. Finally, I suggest future research to better understand how garment making skills can be useful in improving the realization of clothing's value and thus improving sustainability in fashion.

Discussion of Results

Participants' interview responses reveal a new framework for value in clothing with three intersecting types of value: aesthetic, physical, and emotional. Aesthetic value relates to the appearance and style of a garment. Participants desire attractive garments with lasting aesthetic value, rather than clothing that adheres closely to trends but loses its aesthetic value when the trend fades. Physical value relates to the function and condition of a garment and its materials. Participants desire quality garments with enduring physical value, and they see physical value not solely in a garment but also in the fabric and sewing notions that make up a garment. Emotional value relates to a sentimental connection to a garment and its origin story—emotionally valuable garments are favorites that participants reach for over and over. Participants desire garments with strong emotional value, and the process of making creates a particularly strong emotional connection to the resulting garment although participants also find emotional value in some purchased garments, especially when they know something of the garment's origin story.

Through a wide variety of practices, the home garment makers in this study were found to create, maintain, and acquire value in their clothing. Most garment creation, maintenance, and acquisition practices supported all three types of value. Participants

created garments in styles whose aesthetic value they expected to appreciate for many years and used quality materials and construction techniques for lasting physical value. The time and creativity they invested in their making process gave the finished garments a personalized origin story that ensured their emotional value. Participants maintained their clothing through careful storage, gentle laundering, and conscientious mending and alterations. These practices impacted the physical value of garments most directly, but maintaining physical value is necessary for maintaining aesthetic and emotional value. Emotional value was further maintained as participants wore their handmade garments and continued to receive compliments, which reinforced the pride participants felt in their handmade garments. Participants' experience in creating garments impacted their acquisition processes. As with making, they sought retail garments in styles that would have lasting aesthetic value, paid attention to fabrics and stitching to ensure physical value, and found emotional value in garments through personally meaningful sources and appreciation for other makers.

Participants had a variety of reasons to begin making clothing for themselves. These included the ability to tailor garments for a perfect fit, a desire for unique styles, the ability to make high quality garments for less money than comparable retail garments, and a desire for a more sustainable wardrobe. This followed previous research into motivations for sewing and knitting (Martindale, 2017; Stannard & Sanders, 2015). For participants who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s, sewing and knitting were simply a set of skills girls were expected to learn. Participants who grew up later generally did not learn garment making skills in school, but instead had to rely on older female relatives or seek out classes as adults. They practiced and took classes in advanced techniques to give their garments a

professional finish, and were eventually able to make better quality clothing than they could purchase for the same price. These skills became a point of pride and part of makers' self-identity.

Participants' garment making practices connected to six key behavior and thought patterns that impacted how they perceived value in their clothing. These included the conviction that time and creativity translate to value in their garments, the use of knowledge as empowerment to control the quality and longevity of their wardrobes, the practice of saving and wearing garments for many years, the mindset that making garments is part of a holistic sustainable lifestyle, and a deeper feeling of appreciation for their clothing.

Time and Creativity Translate to Value

Participants unanimously feel that the time and creativity they invest in their handmade garments translate to high value in those garments, and this idea comes up in their answers to most interview questions. Participants customize each element of a handmade garment, pour hours of time into its creation, and devote space in their homes to their making practices. This investment leads to garments that have personalized aesthetic value, enduring physical value, and abiding emotional value. Participants' interview responses make it clear that while making garments is a hobby, their time is valuable, and the value of their time translates directly into value in their handmade garments. They refuse to waste their precious time on garments for limited use. Nora explains, "When you're sewing, you're way more thoughtful about it, because you know how much work it takes, so you're not going to waste your time on something you're going to throw away next year."

The makers' creativity is an investment of themselves into their garments and creates an emotional attachment that leads them to consider those garments "precious". Iris goes even further, and considers her handmade garments "more on the continuum of being sacred." Lauren shares, "I'm definitely more excited to wear things that I have made versus things that I bought, probably nine times out of ten, because I know exactly how much time it took going into making all of it." Faye says her handmade garments are "all the more valuable because of spending the hours or months trying to create, to knit a Norwegian sweater or two, it gives that extra added value and it's very important to me." Elaine emphasizes that "that investment of self definitely increases the intrinsic value, and I wouldn't even say investment, yeah certainly time, money, resources, whatever but it's what you as the maker put into it. That to me is what really adds to the value."

Garment manufacturing is still among the least automated industries, with humans involved at every step of the process (Payne, 2020; Twigger Holroyd, 2017). Participants' experience of the time and effort involved in making garments gives them a greater appreciation for the labor of the nameless, faceless garment factory workers behind retail garments. Doing the stitching themselves ensures that garment factory workers are not exploited in the making process. While participants do not attach the same emotional value to their purchased garments, the idea that "somebody made that" increases the physical value of purchased garments. Even an anonymous worker's time means garments should be cared for and maintained. Appreciation for others' labor motivates participants to repair damaged garments and donate garments they are no longer using rather than throwing them away.

Knowledge as Empowerment

Participants have a great deal of knowledge and experience with making and caring for clothing, and this knowledge empowers them to create, maintain, and acquire valued garments. Their knowledge of fabric and yarn helps them to select materials with high aesthetic and physical value. Their knowledge of construction techniques allows them to make the most of those materials in making garments. Their knowledge of their own bodies ensures that their garments fit well. They use all this knowledge while shopping as well as making, so their purchased garments have the same high aesthetic and physical value as their handmade garments, even if they don't have quite the same emotional value. Their knowledge of garment cleaning, repair, and alteration techniques ensures that they are able to maintain their handmade and purchased clothing's value through years of use. Knowledge of repair and alteration techniques also allows makers to shop differently because they can make purchases with repairs and alterations in mind. This is especially important in shopping for second-hand garments which are more likely to need repairs or alterations to suit the intended use. Makers have the ability to purchase a garment that isn't quite right and modify it to meet their needs by tailoring it or updating the style. For example, when she needs a new costume element, Julia asks herself:

Can I order something off of Poshmark or the RealReal or ThredUp or something, where this is a good base, and then if I need to cut it or alter it or dye it, whatever it is, I'm at least not starting from a brand-new garment that's coming out of the cycle.

Further, most participants share their knowledge with other people in some way. Some make garments for others, most help with repairs and alterations, and Nora uses her social media as a platform to share upcycling tips and tricks. She explains, “if everybody felt more confident to change the buttons on a coat and suddenly they gave it another life ... the teaching part is very important to me and also hopefully empowering and spreading that information.” This benefits others, who can then maintain and renew the value of their clothing as well. Maren notes, “when I have taught people very, very simple things, you can see the joy in the fact that they were able to do something themselves and it’s a very empowering skill.”

Saving Garments

Participants were asked to show three to five handmade garments during the interview as an additional source of data that supported their verbal responses. Many participants shared favorite garments they had made years or even decades ago and could still describe their choices in materials and construction in great detail. This was a stark contrast to the average single year of use described in studies on consumer behavior with fast fashion (Fletcher 2016, Payne 2020). Participants saved their handmade garments because they still had high aesthetic, physical, and emotional value. Participants had created the garments with longevity in mind. They chose classic, unique, and vintage styles that retained their aesthetic value despite changing trends in fashion. They used quality materials and construction so their garments would retain their physical value. They poured their time and creativity into the garments, leading to enduring emotional value. They maintained the value of the garments over time through careful use and repair practices.

Participants also said they were more likely to save their handmade garments than those they purchased, even when they weren't using the garment. Hannah showed the very first shirt she made as a child nearly 30 years ago, which she has kept solely for its sentimental value. Faye said if a garment no longer fit her body or her style, "if I've made it, I'll probably put it away and hope that either I'll get thinner or it'll come back into fashion." Iris was in the process of downsizing but has kept most of her handmade garments. She shared a sweater she made years ago, and said, "I've saved it all these years, just because of the nostalgia ... even though I hardly ever wear it because it's too hot." Amy showed two jackets she had made 35 and 40 years ago and shared, "even though up until recently I had gained too much weight, I couldn't wear them, I didn't get rid of them, because I had so much invested in them, and they were precious garments to me." Celeste shared the first shirt she had made, and explained that it no longer buttons in the front because she has gained weight, but she has kept it for sentimental reasons and because "I also like to look at it every now and then to be like, 'oh, what did I like about it,' and a lot of what I liked about it is I was really trying to make the inside be very well finished" (see Figure 15).

Figure 15

Celeste's First Handmade Shirt



Participant photo, used with permission

Sustainability Mindset

Many participants consider making garments a natural extension of their efforts toward sustainability in all areas of life. They are highly aware of environmental and labor issues in fashion, such as chemical pollution, pesticide use, waste from overproduction, and exploitative labor practices, and use their making practice to do their part in fixing those issues. They choose natural and renewable fibers for fabric and yarn and use existing materials where they can. When shopping, they look for those same natural and renewable fibers and patronize brands with ethical labor practices. Celeste emphasizes:

Sustainability is intricately tied to how people are affected. And my wish is basically to do no harm. We shouldn't be able to buy whatever fashion we want, whatever finishing we want, whatever color we want without *any* regard to how it affects other people.

Elaine echoes that sentiment:

Fast fashion is just desperately sad for me. Sweatshops and factories with bad conditions churning stuff out that's terrible quality, people wearing it a few times, throwing it away because it doesn't last. That, I find just devastatingly depressing and worrisome.

Participants maintain their existing clothing and donate clothing they no longer use in an effort to preserve the value of that clothing. They seek out recycling for clothing that is no longer usable to attempt to keep clothing out of landfills. Participants feel that their garment making knowledge means "this is an area I can control" and they try to make the best possible choices for sustainability in their clothing. Several participants are concerned that the high cost of sustainably produced retail clothing puts it out of reach of many consumers. As Alice Payne (2020) notes, the fast fashion model is more democratic than historic slow fashion because it allows more people access to stylish, inexpensive clothing. Home garment makers have the ability to create environmentally friendly garments using their own labor at a much lower cost than sustainable retail clothing.

Appreciation for Clothing

Participants' understanding of the time and effort involved in creating a garment leads them to feel a deeper appreciation for both their handmade and purchased clothing.

They find their shopping and garment care habits have shifted as a result of their making practices. Making their own garments acts to increase participants' impulse control in consumption because they see higher value in each individual garment. Participants don't feel the need to own as many pieces or buy new things frequently because they truly enjoy the garments they already own. Lauren said she has reduced her clothes shopping, and added that now, "I don't have as much variety, but I get more enjoyment out of the things that I'm wearing because they feel a lot more intentional." Olivia said:

I think the volume, it just doesn't make sense to make like five t-shirts when I only need one. So I've definitely reduced, and it's just such a more thoughtful process, thinking about everything from finding a fabric, choosing a pattern, thoughtfully sewing it, thinking about adjustments I might have to make, different options, sleeve length, all that stuff. And it's just, I think, prior to [sewing] shopping was so much more spontaneous or impulsive, you know, go to the store and see the five t-shirts for twenty bucks ... definitely sewing is so different, so much more intentional for me, not just on a whim.

Younger makers notice a difference between their own attitudes and behaviors and those of their peers. Kyla explained:

Generally, I don't buy as many clothes as I would say my peers do. And I will wear things for a far longer time, like a lot of my clothes are kind of ancient at this point and they're still in perfectly good condition and I don't follow the trends.

Conclusion

This study was necessarily limited in its scope and generalizability by the small number of participants and their homogeneity in gender, location, and ethnicity. Further

research is needed with larger, more diverse groups of participants to determine how the themes apply in a broader context. Future studies may also examine what level of garment making skills and investment of time and creativity leads to the personal connection to garments and desire to extend the useful life of their wardrobe that participants in this study demonstrated. Longitudinal studies would lend insight into changes in makers' attitudes and practices regarding clothing value as they gain more experience, for example, through before-and-after surveys conducted with garment making classes. Comparative studies might examine similarities and differences in acquisition, care, and disposal practices between home garment makers and others who are interested in sustainability to determine the influence of garment making experience versus sustainability over those practices.

Overall, this study demonstrates that home garment makers use their skills to create, maintain, and acquire wardrobes that have lasting aesthetic, physical, and emotional value. This is accomplished by choosing style over fashion, using sustainable materials and high-quality construction to make timeless garments that they will be able to wear for years, and repairing and restyling their existing garments to extend their useful lives. It illustrates that garment makers use their knowledge to guide how they shop for clothing, because they understand the time and effort required to produce a high-quality garment. Garment makers' experience in creating clothing helps them to better appreciate all of their garments, be they handmade or store bought. This is the case even for participants who have only been making garments for a few years. In Olivia's words, "sewing has really changed how I look at clothes 100 percent or 180 degrees."

These results indicate that increased instruction and participation in home garment making could empower individual consumers to reduce their textile waste by making more informed choices about their wardrobes. Wider education on garment making methods is needed, and could be accomplished through expanding Family and Consumer Sciences courses in schools and through promoting adult education classes at local businesses and community education programs. Garment making skills like sewing, knitting, and weaving should be promoted as activities that are not merely creative, enjoyable hobbies but also concrete, practical measures for consumers interested in greater personal sustainability. All consumers should have opportunities to learn basic mending skills at a bare minimum to enable them to maintain the value of their clothing and extend its useful life. While some consumers will continue to purchase fast fashion garments, broader instruction in garment making skills would allow more people the choice to have clothing with lasting aesthetic, physical, and emotional value at a price they can afford. This in turn could lead to an overall reduction in consumption, and ideally, a corresponding reduction in the production of fast fashion garments intended to be disposable. An increase in home garment making would thus be an important step towards improving sustainability in the whole fashion system.

The new value framework for clothing is an exciting development in this study that merits further exploration. As previous research indicates, consumers must find value in their clothing if they are to keep and use it beyond the current one-year average (Fletcher, 2016; Fletcher & Fitzpatrick, 2021; deCastro, 2021; Twigger Holroyd, 2017; Payne, 2020). While different individuals will place different levels of importance on aesthetic, physical, and emotional value, these three intersecting types of value all play a role in perception of a garment's overall value. Consumers who desire long-lasting wardrobes should consider

aesthetic, physical, and emotional value as they make clothing purchase and maintenance decisions and seek the highest value their budget and time allow. Clothing producers should also consider how they can imbue their garments with higher value as an alternative to the constant growth model currently favored by much of the fashion industry. The intersecting aesthetic, physical, and emotional value framework offers new possibilities for exploring value in clothing as an aspect of sustainability in fashion.

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Appendix A: Interview Script

Introduction

Welcome and thank you for participating in our discussion today. My name is Sara Wilcox and I am a graduate student in the Apparel Studies program at the University of Minnesota. I sew and knit, and I am interested in learning more about how garment makers feel about the value of clothing. I invited you to participate because you have made at least 5 garments for yourself. I am interested in your honest thoughts and opinions. There are no wrong answers, only points of view. Your opinions are important to me, please do not worry about being the only one who thinks a certain way. I am interested in understanding a variety of points of view.

*Review consent document.

Let's begin the interview. I will begin recording now.

1) What is your background in making garments? (possible prompts for when & how they learned their craft, making methods, types of garments made, for whom)

*Ask participant to show items they have made, observe their handling of garments

2) What is your typical process for making a garment? (possible prompts for deciding what to make, selecting pattern and materials, what are important considerations, making process – where and when)

3) Why do you make garments?

4) How do you use the garments you have made?

5) How do you care for the garments you have made? (possible prompts for storage, laundering, repair, alterations)

6) How do you decide to dispose of garments you have made?

7) Describe any differences in use, care, and disposal of purchased garments?

8) How do you view the value of clothing?

9) What role does your personal investment of time and resources play in your valuing of your handmade garments?

*Discussion of “slow fashion” movement (consuming fewer items but of higher quality, ethically & locally sourced and produced)

10) How does making garments relate to “slow fashion” for you?

11) In what ways, if any, does making garments impact your thinking about clothes you purchase?

12) What role does sustainability play in your garment making?

13) Is there anything else you would like to tell me? What else should I have asked about?

Thank you for your time today, your answers were really helpful! Confirm address for mailing gift card, let them know transcript will be emailed.

Appendix B: Consent Form

INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH

Garment Making and the Value of Clothing

You are invited to be in a research study of garment makers and their practices of making, using, caring for, and disposing of clothing. You were selected as a possible participant because you have made at least 5 garments for yourself. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Sara Wilcox and Elizabeth Bye, University of Minnesota Department of Design, Housing, and Apparel

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

Participate in a 45-60 minute recorded Zoom interview, show the researchers several garments you have made, and review the transcript of the interview.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. The recorded Zoom interview and transcript will have names removed and will be stored on the University's secure server. The video recordings will be deleted after the conclusion of the study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Will I be compensated for my participation?

If you agree to take part in this research study, you will receive a \$15 gift card for the Textile Center.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher(s) conducting this study is (are): Sara Wilcox and Elizabeth Bye. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact them at wilco435@umn.edu or ebye@umn.edu.

This research has been reviewed and approved by an IRB within the Human Research Protections Program (HRPP). To share feedback privately with the HRPP about your research experience, call the Research Participants' Advocate Line at 612-625-1650 (Toll Free: 1-888-224-8636) or go to z.umn.edu/participants. You are encouraged to contact the HRPP if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Appendix C: Codes & Examples

Better garments at lower cost: looks storebought, designer names

Connection to others: teacher, teaching others, making/repairing for others

Priority in space: sewing room/table, material storage

Repairs: buttons, seams, reweaving, darning

Alterations: hems, taking in, letting out

Upcycling: merging garments, one garment into something else

Community service: volunteering sewing/repairs, professional donation

Construction quality: finishing techniques, seams, made to last

Personalized garments: fabric aesthetics, fit, pattern modifications, know garment

Length of time kept: how old garments shown are

Materials: natural/organic, renewable, fiber content

Sources: local fabric stores, travel purchases, online

Ethically sourced: conditions of manufacture

Enjoyment of making: creativity, joy

Emotional connection to garment: precious, love, memories

Reuse: reusing patterns, recreating garments, repurposed fabric, using scraps

Design: style over fashion, pattern aesthetics

Use: when or how worn (holidays, everyday, etc)

Knowledge: skills, fiber, care, quality recognition

Cleaning: hand washing, spot cleaning, airing, dry cleaning, hanging dry

Storage: putting away clean, closets

Disposal methods: donation, recycling, rags

Environmentally friendly habits: dislike of waste, other recycling

Shopping changes: looking for quality, timeless styles

Valuing others' labor: construction of purchased clothing, someone made that