MASTER THESIS

Sustainable Fashion Consumption:
An Interactive System between Consumers and Institutions
Abstract

Sustainability in the fashion industry has become a widely discussed issue. Various actors in the industry, brands, designer labels, fashion magazines and other media sources, as well as consumers all contribute to this matter. Although a considerable amount of research has focused on consumer behavior and consumption patterns, the way the fashion industry affects these factors has been neglected. Moreover, many studies show that consumers claim to be ecologically conscious, but that they disregard this aspect when consumption actually occurs. This study aims to contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between consumers and institutions and how it affects sustainable fashion consumption. The understanding of these processes is done using several approaches such as Kawamura’s (2005) theory about the fashion system and Arnold and Thompson’s (2005) view on consumer culture theory. To obtain a deeper insight into the fashion industry, qualitative interviews with fashion media representatives and consultants within sustainability development are conducted. To ascertain the consumer perspective a focus group discussion is moderated. Findings show how a whole-system approach is needed for the fashion industry to become a more sustainable environment.

Keywords: consumption, sustainability, identity, desire, fashion, consumer culture theory, and Yuniya Kawamura.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Is sustainability only a marketing trick, or is it something people actually strive for? The fashion industry is a high-paced environment where change is essential. Historically, fashion has developed into a market where fashion designers create five collections a year. Designers start thinking about their next show even before they get off the runway. High street chains such as H&M or Gina Tricot introduce new garments in their stores every week and consumers are encouraged into excessive consumption. Fast fashion, in the sense of economic speed, is a combination of high-speed production and high speed and high volume consumption (Fletcher 2008:161). People are buying more and more garments, but a fiber still takes the same amount of time to grow also making nature’s speed a subject for consideration (ibid.). In this context, can we influence today’s consumer society towards greater awareness regarding sustainability, or are we stuck in a market economy that focuses mainly on economic growth?

Sustainability has become a widely discussed issue in research, and the fashion industry is often considered contradictory in this regard. Nevertheless, many suggestions on what either businesses or consumers can do to for a more sustainable approach are given. Additionally, many studies have shown how consumers state the importance of ecological thinking, but how at the point of actual consumption this issue becomes irrelevant. A considerable amount of research has also been done on identity and consumers’ feelings associated with fashion consumption. However, justifications from all instances, companies, consumers, media etc., include blaming each other for their unethical behavior. Therefore, what factors that influence sustainable fashion consumption and what roles the different agents in Kawamura’s fashion system play in this circumstance have been investigated. A full perspective of the entire fashion industry is needed for further progress.

This study is mainly focusing on the Swedish perspective, but is applicable to other western nations as well. To answer the research questions, previous research such as books, articles and reports were considered. Also various websites were visited for information regarding certain clothing companies, government policies, various events, and media coverage etc. Additionally, qualitative interviews and a focus group discussion were performed; semi-structured interviews with two fashion media representatives and two sustainability consultants were done to create valuable insight into what various institutions do, and could do, in terms of sustainability, as well as how the fashion industry itself relates to sustainability. Institutions can e.g. mean governments, designer labels, brands, retail
clothing stores, fashion magazines etc. To receive the consumer’s perspective, i.e. how they think, act and feel regarding sustainable fashion consumption, a focus group discussion was moderated.

The information gathered was applied to the theoretical frameworks of Kawamura’s theory of the fashion system (2005), which serves as a point of departure, and Arnold and Thompson’s view on consumer culture theory (2005). These theoretical frameworks together form an interactive system that, along with the information gathered from previous research, interviews, and focus group discussion, will help explain the relationship between consumer and institution making this study contribute to a greater understanding of how sustainability is considered in our consumer society and in the world of fashion.

1.1 Research Aims & Questions
The aim of this thesis is to investigate how sustainable fashion consumption is played out in society. Fashion is fast-paced and impermanent, and influences many aspects of our lives in today’s society. Consumers are enticed to make frequent purchases in order to keep up with the fast flow of fashion, and the concern is if this can be compatible with sustainability. The interest lies in analyzing the relationship between the consumer and the institutions, as well as to contribute to a greater understanding of why the desire to consume is such an essential part of our lives.

Specifically:
(a) How is sustainable fashion consumption influenced?
(b) How can the fashion industry become more sustainable?

Sustainable fashion consumption is an interactive system between consumers and institutions, where consumers are affected by institutional action and culture and vice versa. Every part in the fashion system plays a roll in sustainable fashion consumption and this process will be further explained by the aforementioned theories along with the information gathered from previous research, interviews and focus group discussions.

1.2 Outline
This paper will first cover previous research related to the topics of this thesis, followed by conceptual framework, and material and method. After this, the analysis is performed before ending with a conclusion.
2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

This section addresses different topics thematically by covering research concerning sustainability, the fashion industry, consumption and consumer behavior, emotions and desire, and finally other relevant research.

Sustainability

Regarding sustainability matters, Black’s (2008), Siegle’s (2011), and Kate Fletcher’s (2008) books provide elaborate research. However, Fletcher’s *Sustainable Fashion & Textiles: Design Journeys* (2008) will serve as a great resource. She thoroughly covers sustainability issues garments and fabrics face throughout their lifecycles, and gives suggestions on how to make these cycles more environmentally and ethically favorable. Fletcher explores these sustainability issues from a design perspective; design in the means of stylist, shaper of things as well as promoter of social change (xi). She wants to:

 [...] promote a broad, pluralistic view of sustainability ideas, issues and opportunities in the fashion and textile sector” and “[...] show that there is a wealth of different ways in which we can go about building a long-lasting environmental and social quality through the design, production and use of fashion and textiles that go beyond traditional ideas or expectations (xii).

While she gives elaborate information on issues in a products lifecycle and suggests various methods that could improve the sustainability during the different phases, practical suggestions of how this actually could be achieved is somewhat lacking; e.g., hands-on experience of how operations in the factories function would provide valuable knowledge and also offer greater understanding for all circumstances.

Armstrong and LeHew also explore new sustainable patterns in their article “Sustainable Apparel Product Development: In Search of a New Dominant Social Paradigm for the Field Using Sustainable Approaches (2011).” They argue that the thirst for economic growth is endless and impossible for the ecosystem to accommodate, which makes them call for new attitudes in the industry (ibid. 30-31). The concern for the exploitation of nature’s resources is of great relevance; nature’s supply is treated as an endless resource in the fashion industry, whereas many raw materials actually could come to an end, one example can e.g. be seen in the oil business, where alternatives have come to be considered as vital.

Many studies have also been done on the terms used regarding sustainable fashion. Winge (2008) discusses *eco-fashion* and the meaning of it has changed during the last decades; she argues that eco-dress from the past and eco-fashion from today is two different concepts where today’s eco-fashion is depoliticized. However, to say that the past’s eco-dress was not
fashion at the time is debatable. She also questions whether or not eco-fashion is a marketing aspect or if the fashion industry has adopted a more sustainable approach. This is also addressed by Beard (2008) in his article “The Branding of Ethical fashion and the Consumer: A Luxury Niche or Mass-market reality?” He discusses the confusion felt by consumers and “[...] juxtaposes the viewpoint and behavior of today’s consumers against the practical dilemmas and manifestations of how fashion brands promote their ethical credentials to the public (ibid. 449)”. In an attempt to deal with this confusion, Thomas (2008) suggests fashioning an eco-lexicon in order to provide some definition, clarity, and boundaries (ibid. 526). In the fashion industry, “Eco, green, and environmental, have usually been used interchangeably when describing garments that conform to ecofashion of designers, labels, and companies whose creative design and manufacture do not harm the environment (ibid. 531).” This is, however, not as clear-cut as designers, labels, and companies etc. want to portray since terms such as environmental, ecological, green, sustainable, ethical, recycled, and organic many times are used interchangeably.

The Fashion Industry

According to Reiley and DeLong, establishing sustainability in the fashion industry requires transformative changes by all involved, designers, manufacturers, marketers, and consumers (2011: 63). They feel that consumers need a vision for sustainable fashion practice, and therefore examined how fashion practices of vintage and new clothing wearers are “[...] related to a consumer’s desire for a unique appearance and sources of clothing acquisition (ibid. 63, 67)”. Reiley and DeLong find their research showing how vintage wearers express concern for the environment and have higher desires for a unique appearance (ibid. 70, 77). They promote the idea of shopping more vintage clothing to increase the sustainable fashion movement (ibid. 80); however, this is only one solution to the problem. Vintage could also be just like fashion in general, with trends that come and go, possibly not making it a long-term solution. As Winge states: “[...] ecofashion is proving that it, too, remains subject to ebbs and flows of the media and fashion industries (2008: 521)”.

Not only current trends influence consumption, but Stanforth and Hauck investigated what price consumers are willing to pay for products (2010: 615). They looked at ethically framed marketing efforts to see how and if they influenced price perceptions among consumers of health and beauty products. Findings showed how consumers expect prices to be a lot higher when produced under ethical conditions, but how they only are willing to pay slightly more (ibid.). Gam gives instead suggestions of what retailers should do to attract eco-friendly
clothing consumers, and found that marketing strategies for eco-friendly clothing and other apparel product marketing strategies should be similar (2011: 178, 191). Additionally, the article “What’s in it for the Customers? Successfully Marketing Green Clothes” by Meyer argues “[…] that green products are successful only if customers perceive the products as superior to competitors’ conventional offerings (2001: 327)”. He suggests that a perceived cost-benefit analysis could improve green marketing and that a product’s value other than environmental superiority should be stressed (ibid.).

To promote sustainability in the fashion industry, Fletcher invites to a discussion on slow fashion (2010). She discusses how fast fashion has become part of a universally accepted goal in the world, economic growth, and finds that the cost implications of this growth model is affecting the society at large, the workers, and the environment while the corporation enjoys the benefits (2010: 260-261). She argues that the fashion sector has to break away from the fast and growth-based fashion by changing its worldviews, economic logic and business models, values and processes (ibid. 262). Even if this is of great importance and the fashion industry needs to change, to change a worldview is an extensive project that will take time. It is also not only a concern for the fashion industry but for the western world’s view of the economic system. Capitalistic worldviews are a great force, where revenue and buying power have become everyday practice.

Clark also discusses slow fashion in her article “SLOW + FASHION - an Oxymoron - or a Promise for the Future”, where she gives suggestions on how the fashion industry can become more ‘slow’. Her three lines of reflection are: the valuing of local resources and distributed economies; transparent production systems with less intermediation between producer and consumer; and sustainable and sensorial products (2008: 443). While these suggestions are quite solid, some of them only seem to be able to work low-scale, and one large issue for sustainability is slightly set aside, consumption.

**Consumption & Consumer Behavior**

The University of Borås has done extensive research on consumption of clothes, and aimed at increasing the knowledge and understanding of how consumers dispose of clothing. They argue that this knowledge is essential for trade, governments, and environmental and charity organizations for being able to develop new solutions to promote reuse and recycling of clothing (2012a: 14). The report also aims at increasing the knowledge and understanding of consumer actions regarding purchases of clothing, and to see what factors characterize sustainable consumer behavior regarding clothes (ibid. 14-15). For a Swedish consumer
perspective this research provides great insight into the consumer actions regarding sustainability in the end phase of a garments life, what consumers do with clothes they no longer want and what factors that influence these actions. Valuable research regarding consumers’ consumption habits was also provided by the report Konsumtionsrapporten 2010 (University of Gothenburg 2010).

Eckhardt, Belk and Devinney’s article (2010) “Why Don’t Consumer Consume Ethically?” address the fact that consumers often do not act according to their ethical beliefs. They investigate what rationales and justifications consumers use to justify their behavior. This articles subject is also more thoroughly addressed in The Myth of The Ethical Consumer by Devinney, Auger, and Eckhardt (2010). While this research in general is agreeable, it does not address fashion alone and is conducted throughout eight different countries. This gives present study justification, since the focus is consumption in relation to fashion. A Swedish approach is given by Isenhour in her 2010 article “On Conflicted Swedish Consumers, The Effort to Stop Shopping and Neoliberal Environmental Governance.” Isenhour’s article does look at the Swedish consumer, but just like Eckhardt et. al the study is on general consumption and does not focus on how fashion – a well marketed and potentially very influential parameter – influences the consumers choices. Additionally, while both studies suggest consumers want more institutional responsibility, the view of actual institutions is not considered.

The fashion perspective is added by the paper “Ethical Fashion: Myth or Future Trend” by Joergens, which contributes to a better understanding of ethical fashion consumption (2006: 360). She argues: “Even though consumers demand more ethical responsibility from companies, it is debatable if consumers would sacrifice their own personal needs to support ethically produced clothing (ibid.).” The question is also raised by Hustvedt and Dickson who question if organic cotton products are just another fashion trend or if consumers actually are interested in the benefits of organic agriculture to the environment (2009: 49). They collected data by doing mail surveys with US health and natural foods consumers, making their findings not generalizable for ‘regular’ consumers, and found that respondents considered improving their health and their family’s health important and therefore purchased organic food and organic cotton apparel (ibid.).

Consumption is also a great aspect of identity, which is another focus of many studies. Elliot and Wattanasuwan look at how individuals constantly negotiate meanings from experiences and goods as they are trying to construct their identity (1998: 143), while Belk looks at how “our possessions are a major contributor to and reflection of our identities (1988: 
Haytko and Thompson explore instead “the ways that consumers use fashion discourse to inscribe their consumption behaviors in a complex ideological system of folk theories about the nature of self and society (1997: 15)”, while Rief (2008) looks at the politics of consumption. These perspectives are all important in understanding how the consumer behaves and why we consume, because in today’s society, consumption is a great part of how we construct our identity.

Another focus of many studies is the consumers’ feelings that are related to their consumption. Consumers’ rationality is often debatable, and various emotions fueled by desire and the culture we live in influence our decisions.

**Emotions & Desire**

Rafferty tries to “[…] illuminate how knowledge of how to consume and self-fashion in the ‘correct’ ways can become critically linked to a person’s psycho-affective well-being or balance (2011: 258)”. She argues that if emotional capital is lacking alongside economic, social or cultural resources, a person’s self-esteem could become affected negatively by consumption (ibid. 247). Rafferty indicates that social class is particularly important to consider in the context of fashion consumption since she feels it creates unequal possibilities for prospering (2011: 247); however, this study looks at the ‘general consumer’, making class not a focus of this paper. Not only can consumers become negatively affected, but consumers may also use consumption to regulate their emotions.

Kemp and Kopp introduce a new concept, emotion regulation consumption (ERC) (2011). ERC involves “[…] the consumption or purchase of a good or service for the purposes of alleviating, repairing, or managing an emotion in the short term (Kemp and Kopp 2011: 1)”. They explore the role that certain emotions, such as sadness, amusement, contentment, and fear/anxiety, play in the consumption process and how individuals might use consumption to regulate or manage these emotions (ibid.). While their article simply addresses consumption in general, emotions are involved in all kinds of consumption, making it applicable also to fashion consumption.

Fashion and anxiety is also studied by Clarke and Miller, and they argue that fashion is the practice of the people and that it emerges, not because of, but despite of the fashion industry (2002: 191). That fashion rises out of the contradictions and problems that trouble us, out of a tension between creativity and conformity (ibid. 192). While a debate on how fashion emerges is not a focus of this study, their article gives great insight into the mind and emotional sphere of the consumer.
Another great motivating source behind consumption is desire (Belk et al 2003: 326). Belk et al look at consumers’ everyday experiences of longing for and fantasizing about specific goods (ibid.). They find desire to be "[...] a powerful cyclic emotion that is both discomforting and pleasurable. Desire is an embodied passion involving a quest for otherness, sociality, danger, and inaccessibility (ibid.)". Their article is a great asset for understanding why consumers consume, and how consumption is a way for consumers to construct their identity. Belk (1988) and Ahuvia (2005) also give valuable insight into how possessions are great contributors for identity construction, while Thompson and Haytko explore “[...] the ways that consumers use fashion discourse to inscribe their consumption behaviors in a complex ideological system of folk theories about the nature of self and society (1997: 15)”.

The research on identity and feelings such as anxiety and desire are needed in order to understand how people function regarding consumption practices. It is important to understand that not only the characteristics of a specific garment influence consumer behavior, but the culture of society and consumers’ emotional state as well.

Other Relevant Sources

Several reports have also been valuable resources. Fair Trade Center (2010) and SwedWatch (2008) researched various Swedish clothing companies and their sustainable conduct, and the report Gröna Trådar. Utbud och exponering av miljöprofilerade kläder looked at the supply and exposure to environmental profiled garments (Sveriges Konsumenter 2010).

Swedish MISTRA, The Foundation for Strategic Environmental Research, is also doing interesting research on sustainability in the fashion industry. In 2010 they launched their new research program MISTRA Future Fashion. “The purpose of the MISTRA Future Fashion Program is to deliver insights and solutions that will be used by the Swedish Fashion Industry and other stakeholders to significantly improve the environmental performance and strengthen their global competitiveness (MISTRA Future Fashion 2012).” They have eight projects with different focuses, “[...] each aiming to generate new knowledge and recommendations that can be used by the Swedish fashion industry (ibid.)”. The first is concerned with Changing markets and business models: Towards sustainable innovation in the fashion industry; the second is Clarifying sustainable fashion, which focuses on improving the sustainable assessments methods and tools for environmental labeling and acquisitions of textiles; the third project addresses Interconnected design thinking and processes for sustainable textiles and fashion; while the fourth is focusing on Moving towards eco-efficient textile materials and processes; the fifth project “develops methods for collecting, handling, up-cycling and
up-grading recycled textiles into new fibers (ibid.)” and is called Reuse, recycling and End of life issues; the sixth looks at Fashion for the public sector and is concerned with comfortable clothing solutions for the public care sector in Sweden; the seventh project is Sustainable consumption and consumer behavior and “identifies strategies and tools that ensure consumer demand and purchase more sustainable fashion products and services”; while the last and eighth project identifies Policy instruments that will provide great environmental improvements in the Swedish fashion industry (MISTRA Future Fashion 2012). While many of these subjects would be relevant for this paper, they are ongoing projects and not available for study as of now.

The previously mentioned research will together with further studies, interviews, and focus group discussion fulfill the purpose of this thesis and form a coherent study.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This section covers the theoretical framework supporting this study, explains terminology, and gives some background information regarding a product’s sustainability in the fashion industry.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical approaches used in this thesis include Kawamura’s idea of the fashion system (2005), and consumer culture theory as addressed by Arnould and Thompson (2005).

Kawamura’s Fashion System

Kawamura’s theory of fashion as an institutionalized system (2005: 39) will serve as the point of departure for my theoretical approaches. She states, “Fashion is a system of institutions, organizations, groups, producers, events and practices, all of which contribute to the making of fashion […] (ibid. 43).” The fashions diffusion agents within her system are described as designers who show at the larger seasonal fashion weeks, fashion journalists, editors, advertisers, marketers/merchandisers, and publicists (ibid. 73). However, they could also be e.g. bloggers, stylists, and buyers. These agents together determine what the legitimate aesthetic taste is, what is considered to be fashion, and also create symbolic boundaries between fashion and non-fashion (ibid. 73). She also stresses how fashion must be distinguished from clothing, since production of clothing does not equal production of fashion, but fashion is a manufactured cultural symbol within the system (ibid. 39, 43).
Kawamura explains:

Clothing production and fashion production are both collective activities which require large numbers of people to produce the finished product. While clothing production manufactures items of garments, fashion production perpetuates the belief in fashion. Therefore, the processes and institutions that they go through are separate. Clothing production involves the actual manufacturing process of the material clothing. On the other hand, fashion production involves those who help construct the idea of fashion. Furthermore, treating fashion as a collective product is a broader task which refers to aspects of cultural production which do not feature in the immediate making of the work. Although fashion is not about clothing, without it, fashion cannot exist. They are not mutually inclusive nor are they mutually exclusive (ibid. 50).

Meaning that the idea of fashion is interdependent, the link between production/distribution of clothing and the dissemination of fashion work in coherence (ibid. 73).

According to Kawamura, fashion systems only exist in cities where fashion is structurally organized, and in Fashion-o-logy she mainly refers to Paris, France (2005: 52). It is therefore unclear whether or not Stockholm (Sweden) according to her characteristics would be included; however, in this study the Swedish context will serve as the focus. Sweden, and especially Stockholm, does have a system that produces fashion designers and that together with organizations, institutions and individuals interact and legitimize fashion designers (ibid.). Designers are key figures in the production, maintenance, reproduction and dissemination of fashion; however, just as Kawamura states, they could not produce fashion unless other fashion professionals legitimize them as creative fashion producers (ibid. 57). Kawamura does have a point, but she does not thoroughly enough discuss the different layers of existing fashion, she simply speaks of the ‘designer genius’. Also brands are relevant in this discussion. Brands mostly do not have designers that the general fashion consumer ‘idolizes’, but the brand itself becomes the focus for appraisal. This is especially true for larger fast fashion brands, where the idea of cheap fashionable clothing, not a designer-genius, is what attracts the consumer.

According to Kawamura, fashion diffusion occurs within and across social systems (2005: 74). Several factors influence how fast and how far it diffuses, such as “[…] formal communications from the mass media, personal communications among current adopters and potential adopters, the persuasive influence of consumer leaders and other agents, and the degree to which the innovation is communicated and transferred from one social system to another (ibid.)”. When it comes to media representatives, writers and reporters of fashion can according to Kawamura be divided into two groups, journalists and editors. They are gatekeepers who review aesthetic, social and cultural innovations and both have large power
over what styles become in fashion. Fashion writings have important functions for fashion diffusion, and are also the ones that directly serve the interests of the fashion industry (ibid. 80-81). Meaning that fashion magazines “[…] diffuse ideas to encourage the selling of latest styles (ibid. 81)” In this sense, fashion magazines and other fashion writings, as well as of course advertisings, are marketing tools for brands and can be used to create larger brand awareness and greater sales. All agents are this way also all part of a greater system that could bring forward issues such as sustainability in the fashion industry.

Regarding the consumers role in the fashion system, Kawamura states that she believes that production and consumption are complementary, because consumers indirectly participate in the production of fashion (2005: 39, 89). She finds that when consumers adopt and consume fashion, fashion is transformed into something more concrete, clothing-fashion, and that consumption helps uphold the cultural product of fashion which would not be complete without the act of repetition and consumption (ibid. 89). Even though Kawamura states the importance of the consumers influence, it is not addressed thoroughly enough and therefore further insight will be provided by consumer culture theory as described by Arnould and Thompson (2005).

**Consumer Culture Theory**

Arnold and Thompsons article "Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research" in the *Journal of Consumer Research* provides an overview of “the past 20 yr. of consumer research addressing the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption (2005: 868)”, providing this study with a general base in consumer culture theory. CCT represents numerous theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings (ibid.). Culture is seen as a somewhat homogeneous system where members of society share meanings, ways of life, and unifying values (ibid. 868-869). Meaning that culture is the essence in experience, meaning, and action, and that consumer culture articulates consumers’ conceivable action, feeling, and thought and in turn makes certain behavioral patterns and interpretations more likely (ibid. 869). Also,

CCT explores the heterogeneous distribution of meanings and the multiplicity of overlapping cultural groupings that exist within the broader sociohistoric frame of globalization and market capitalism. Thus, consumer culture denotes a social arrangement in which the relations between lived culture and social resources, and between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend, are mediated through markets (ibid.).
Here the connection between the consumer and the fashion system as described by Kawamura becomes visible. Consumers are closely linked to the marketplace, not only by their consumption, but also by the common cultural ground. The consumption of goods and desirable marketing symbols is central to consumer culture; images, texts, and objects are used to support meanings and identities for both individuals and groups to make sense of their joint environment and guide them in social situations, roles, and relationships (Arnould and Thompson 2005: 869). CCT research has shown “[…] how consumers actively rework and transform symbolic meanings encoded in advertisements, brands, retail settings, or material goods to manifest their particular personal and social circumstances and further their identity and lifestyle goals (ibid. 871)”. The marketplace helps construct individual and collective identities (ibid.). Many consumers’ lives are formed by numerous realities where consumption is used for experiencing different fantasies, desires, aesthetics, and identity play (ibid. 876-877). Basically, consumption traditions and ways of life are intertwined and influenced by historical forces, socioeconomic circumstances, and marketplace systems (ibid. 869), and thereby also by institutional and social structures such as class, community, ethnicity, and gender (ibid. 874). As to say, our consumer culture is something we value and live by.

Sustainability is a complicated matter. Many people know about organic cotton and have read articles about poor worker conditions in Asia, but there is a more elaborated story to tell. For future clarity, the next section will cover common terminology used in regards to sustainable fashion.

3.2 Terminology

The terms used when discussing sustainable fashion are varied and can be confusing; the same terms are often used for different meanings. Therefore, an explanation of some of the most common terminology follows:

- *Eco* often represents an environmental connection, e.g. eco-fiber or eco-jeans, but which aspect of the conception, fabrication, manufacture or disposal that is *eco* is rarely explained (Thomas 2008: 531-531).

- *Fair trade* means that aspects of global equity, social justice and responsibility are addressed, such as that the workers involved receive fair payment or a living wage (ibid. 532).
Green refers to products or services that are environmentally friendly, but as with the term eco, it is not necessarily verified (ibid.).

Environmental usually refers to the earth, but what is viewed as environmentally friendly changes according to research, opinion, and cultural significance both within science and public discourse (ibid. 533).

Ethical is in fashion terminology often used in relation to manufacture, consumption, fashion design and trading where actions and behaviors are guided by their impact on others (ibid.). “Thus, ethical fashion refers to the positive impact of a designer, a consumer choice, or method of production as experienced by workers, consumers, animals, society and the environment (ibid.).”

Natural and organic are sometimes used interchangeably, but natural does not have reliability because it simply refers to how the fiber or the staples of the thread originated (ibid. 534).

Organic on the other hand relates to the organic standard of fibers and fabrics (ibid.).

Recycled is by Thomas explained as when a garment is discarded by the first owner and given a second life as vintage/secondhand clothing. She also uses terms such as upcycled, a garments value is increased by altering or customizing; redeployed, a garment is altered, deconstructed, dyed or customized and then sold back into the clothing system; and downcycled, a garment is transformed into rags, blankets or fiber stuffing (2008: 534-535). However, the term recycled is often also used for garments produced out of waste, e.g. plastic bottles.

Sustainability has a broad scope and is by Fletcher explained as the integration of human well-being and natural integrity (2008: xii).

Sustainable development is according to the Brundtland rapport from 1987 “‘a development that meets today's needs without compromising future generations to meet their own needs.’ The three dimensions of sustainable development - economic, social and environmental - should be coherent and mutually reinforce each other (Regeringen 2012b).” It is also explained as a long-term approach that requires a global perspective (Nationalencyclopedin 2012c). However, the concept can be variously interpreted which makes it a process where different views meet (ibid.).

On this note, a discussion of sustainability issues and opportunities regarding the entire lifecycle of garments and fabrics will follow.
3.3 Background Information

Even if this section is not considered conceptual framework for this study, knowledge regarding sustainability issues during a products entire lifecycle is needed as background information to support the understanding of the coming analysis. Fletcher states, “Materials play an emphatic role in our current understanding of what makes fashion and textiles sustainable (2008: 3).” However, being aware of the impacts of the products entire lifecycle is of great importance. This includes e.g. fiber choices, cultivation, production, manufacturing, distribution, consumer laundering, reuse and final disposal (ibid. 5).

The textile and garment industry is in general considered to be a major water user and a major polluter, but it is also connected to many labor abuses such as poverty wages, excessive working hours, forced overtime, lack of job security and denial of trade union rights (Fletcher 2008: 41). Fletcher lists reducing energy, water and toxic chemical use, and minimizing the release of chemicals in wastewater as the key environmental challenges (ibid. 46). “The key social challenges are to protect workers, provide more secure employment, pay living wages, and respect workers’ rights to freedom of association (ibid. 47).” Factors influencing the improvements in garments and fabrics lifecycles are various economic, structural, legislative and cultural forces (ibid. 43), and since the fashion industry depends on the textile industry, all of these issues are of utter most relevance.

A discussion of the different issues a product faces during its lifecycle now follows. The lifecycle as seen in figure 1 (Fletcher 2008), consists of the fiber production phase, the production phase (yarn, fabric, product), then the product is transported and enters the use phase, before entering the disposal phase where the garment may or may not be recycled.

In the fiber production phase the areas of greatest impact include: large quantities of water and pesticides required for growing cotton, emissions to air and water arising from producing synthetic and cellulosic fibers, adverse impacts on water linked to natural fiber
production, and significant use of energy and non-renewable resources for synthetics (Fletcher 2008: 7). More generally, “The process of recording and assessing impacts involves looking at resources consumed (energy, water, chemicals and land) and waste and emissions produced (to air, water and land) (ibid.)”; however, key sustainability issues in fiber production are different for different materials (ibid.). Sustainability issues associated with fibers are also complex which makes it difficult to interpret findings. To assist in this challenge different tools can be used, e.g. methods based on qualitative assessments with the aim of gathering basic information about key issues, or a technique called lifecycle assessment (LCA) where a product’s environmental impacts are quantified and balanced (ibid. 14). However, both models have limitations; “qualitative studies tend to generate equivocal findings”, and LCAs “have a history of partisan results and methodological inconsistencies arising from different ways of defining boundaries around the problem being investigated (ibid. 14-15)”. Fletcher suggests:

The process of reviewing and comparing fibres makes opportunities to reduce impact more visible. These include, for example, the development of better practices in the production of conventional fibres as well as the introduction of a group of different and inherently lower-impact fibres. Some of these changes could be brought about by a move to alternative systems of agriculture that are already well established (integrated pest management or organic cultivation methods, for example), while others are more challenging and need technical development (ibid. 18).

The environmental and social impacts of producing textiles are varied and even affect design choices, therefore, Fletcher finds it important that the complexity is acknowledged and that expertise on sustainable fibers is sought after. She finds that fibers should be chosen for their appropriateness to product and user where issues such as diversity, ethics, and consumption as well as a fibers LCA profile are considered (2008: 36).

The production phase, meaning the phase where the fiber becomes a garment, can be modified to more sustainable approaches as well. Individual production processes can be improved by e.g. minimizing energy, resource use, and waste, and the whole underlying industrial system can be transformed to a more sustainable system (Fletcher 2008: 42). Process improvements can include technology-based innovation and innovation driven by legislation, as well as the practice in fiber and fabric processing (ibid. 42-46). Technology can be blamed for environmental and ethical issues, but at the same time technology can also provide opportunities for these issues. Technology requires energy and creates waste, but innovation in this sector can also help reduce these negative impacts. As Scaturro states: “balancing the dismay regarding the role current technologies play in the fast fashion system
is an alternative belief that the right technologies, when selectively developed and applied, can play an integral role in the growth of sustainable fashion (2008: 475).” However, also changes in usage, disposal, and reuse or recycling alternatives are needed.

The end part of a products lifecycle, when the garment has landed with a consumer, the *use phase*, is often neglected in terms of sustainability. Many times, the use phase is the one with the most impact on the environment. A typical garment is washed and dried around 20 times in its life, and most of its environmental impact comes from laundering and not from growing, processing and producing the fabric or disposing of it at the end of its life (Fletcher 2008: 75). Beard agrees, “[...] it is the aftercare aspect of clothing that has the most demonstrable negative impact on the environment as a whole (2008: 457-458)”.

But what happens when a garment has fulfilled its purpose with an owner? In the *disposal phase*, Fletcher discusses reuse, recycling, and zero waste (2008: 95), whereas some terms probably could be added to the eco-lexicon applied by Thomas (2008). Waste is an important issue that has a long history within the fashion and textile industry. Fibers have been recovered and recycled, and individuals have reused, repaired, and reconditioned household textiles and garments for many generations. However, many of these solutions are short-term, and waste as a by-product of designing, producing, and consuming textiles has long been accepted.

With this information in mind it will be easier to follow the subjects addresses in the analysis section, but before heading on to the analysis, material and method will be addressed in the next section.

### 4. MATERIAL & METHOD

This section will explain how this study has been executed. As part of this thesis I have considered previous research, information from various websites, conducted qualitative interviews, and hosted a focus group. Previous research stems e.g. from academic books, academic articles as well as various reports related to different parts of my research.

Interviews were done with two media representatives and two consultants within sustainability development, and the focus group discussion contributed with a consumer view. Interviews with company representatives were not chosen, due to a high likelihood of them only expressing positive actions regarding their sustainability work. Instead, a case study was done by looking at companies’ own websites as well as media coverage or reports regarding their environmental and ethical conduct. To see what companies are advised to on a level of legislation, and what this actually consists of, the website of the Swedish government as well
as of the UNs Global Impacts were advised. For information regarding media coverage, several daily newspapers and news channel archives, among others, were visited. However, to get a sense of the presence of sustainability in fashion magazines, a brief case study of Swedish ELLE and Damernas Värld was conducted.

Additionally, material from websites also contributed to a larger picture of how different sectors of our society address sustainability in the fashion industry, while the reports addressed various subjects of this thesis and were used widely in the analysis. They investigated e.g. company activities, consumption and consumer behavior, and matters of waste. To answer the research questions, all these methods for acquiring information are necessary since all give insight into different aspects of the Swedish fashion system.

The qualitative interviews were semi-structured interviews with two agents within sustainability work and two media representatives. This way, insight into what businesses can do in terms of sustainability and how the industry actually relates to sustainability will be gained. Qualitative interviewing is based on conversation where the interview process itself relates to meaning making. The purpose is to obtain interpretations from the respondent with an aim to understand the meaning of the respondents’ experiences (Gubrium and Holstein 2001: 83). As qualitative interviewing is a sort of guided conversation, the questions were kept open-ended in order to be able to accommodate to the respondent (ibid. 84). To establish this six to eight specific main questions were developed to begin and guide the conversation, but of course more questions or follow-up questions were sometimes necessary to clarify answers or further the conversation. The aim was to conduct all interviews face-to-face; however, for one interview this was not possible due to time constraints. The face-to-face interviews were easier to perform since the conversation flowed freely and questions allowed for more elaboration where the follow-up questions could differ depending on the respondents answer. With the e-mail interview the questions had to be more specific for clarification purposes, which possibly led to slightly leading questions.

First out was Nina Torlén Simberg, the CSR manager of Fangsi, a sustainability consultant firm which focuses on quality, CSR and logistics (Fangsi 2012). Fangsi targets fashion brands and aims at helping them to produce in Asia without concerns (ibid.). Torlén Simberg has been working at Fangsi for almost two years and has a total of four years’ experience within this field (Torlén Simberg 2012). The interview was conducted face-to-face for approximately 45 minutes and was sound recorded to provide accuracy in this paper. Secondly, Helene Hagerman, vice president, co-founder and partner at Trossa was interviewed by e-mail correspondence. Hagerman is a biologist specializing in ecotoxicology and has several years
of experience as a consultant on environmental health and product assessments in the pharmaceutical, cosmetic, and food industry. She has also worked as a communications officer at MistraPharma, a research program on pharmaceuticals and the environment during the past four years (Trossa 2012). Services Trossa do for clothing and cosmetic companies include: identifying and assessing various ingredients and raw materials environmental and health characteristics to ensure that these e.g. do not cause allergies and/or are affect the environment negatively; Identify the company's total use of chemicals in order to substitute and phase out substances with undesirable characteristics; produce sustainability reports; conduct stakeholder dialogues to identify the external expectations of a company for environmental and other sustainability related issues and the extent to which stakeholders believe that the company meets these expectations (Hagerman 2012).

The media representatives are Jenny Fredriksson, fashion editor at Swedish Elle Magazine, and Lotta Lewenhaupt, independent Swedish fashion journalist and author. Jenny Fredrikssons interview was held face-to-face at ELLE magazine’s offices in Stockholm for about 30 minutes, and Lotta Lewenhaupts interview, also face-to-face, was conducted at her home lasting approximately 40 minutes. Both interviews were sound recorded.

To tie the industry’s views together with the consumers’, a focus group discussion with consumers was conducted, lasting for about two hours. Also this activity was sound recorded for accuracy. Due to limited time, separate interviews with the informants were not chosen; instead a group of six female participants were recruited. The six respondents are all females living in Stockholm, Sweden, they are moderately interested in sustainability matters, have different incomes and backgrounds, and are between the ages of 26-38. In this thesis, focus group participants will be addressed LF, LP, NO, CS, KB, and HH. LF is a 38-year-old anesthesiologist, LP a 26-year-old student in law and gender studies, NO a 27-year-old fashion stylist, CS a 30-year-old art student, KB a 29-year-old teacher, and HH a 33-year-old business owner.

For availability reasons the respondents are within my social circle, however, since it has been stated that focus groups should involve people who do not know one another, none of the participants are closely linked to each other (Gubrium and Holstein 2001: 152). One goal was to recruit a harmonious group so that the conversation would flow freely (ibid. 152). However, one argument against focus groups is that people are less likely to say what they really think in group interviews (ibid. 151), but by achieving the previous mentioned goal, this was hopefully subdued. Another possible complication for both the interviews and the focus group could have been that possible respondents chose not to participate, which
happened with some of the interview prospects that were contacted. However, in the end, a satisfying number of participating respondents were achieved. To obtain respondents who fit the research perspective, but at the same time were most likely to attend the interviews, the respondents were chosen through theoretical sampling as well as through closeness in my social circle (Gubrium and Holstein 2001: 90). All interviews and the focus group discussion were held in Swedish, whereas all quotes referenced have been translated to English by the author.

The theoretical framework of Kawamura’s fashion system also contributes to the layout of the analysis where focus is put on three variables: companies, consumers, and the rest of the fashion industry. The information gathered is then applied to these variables where consumer culture theory is used as an all-embracing theory, but especially influences the section on consumers. Now, the analysis of the different parts of the fashion system will follow.

5. SUSTAINABILITY IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY

Sustainability in the fashion industry has become a large issue in recent years, where many consider it to be contradictory. Nevertheless, the industry necessitates new attitudes towards ethical and environmental practices. Fashion arises from various intersecting practices such as market and economic practices, labor relations and practices, and technological developments as well as various cultural practices such as marketing and design (Entwistle 2000: 227). The fashion industry is of “[…] major economic, environmental and cultural significance, […] and has been significant to the industrial and economic development of a number of countries (ibid. 208)”]. However, as Entwistle states:

[…] fashion has also played a significant role in global relations between nations. The expansion of capitalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries depended upon the exploitation of resources in developing nations, with devastating effects on their indigenous populations and environment. The extension of ‘free-market’ capitalism in recent years has meant a continuing search for greater profit by textile and clothing manufacturers, which depends on finding and exploiting the cheapest labour in developing nations […] (Entwistle 2000: 208).

Nevertheless, if following the fashion system then fashion is also created by e.g. individual agents, producers, buyers, magazine editors, journalists, retailers and consumers (Entwistle 2000: 235). Therefore, all aspects addressed in the analysis are of great importance. They are all part of the fashion system, and all are in need for change to support the ever more stressing need for sustainable conduct. This analysis section will begin with exploring the role of the companies, then move on to investigating the consumers, until ending with the role of the rest
of the fashion industry.

5.1 Companies Sustainable Practices
Companies in this sense mean brands, designer labels, and other clothing companies. This section does not only focus on company practices in the production phase, but also considers actions in advertising and marketing. Clothing companies have started to take some responsibility in their supply chains, and improvements have been done, e.g. have issues such as child labor and safety in factories improved (Fair Trade Center 2010: 7). However, Fair Trade Center argues that these problems are the ones that are easiest to address, but that many complex challenges still lay ahead (ibid.), e.g. are issues with environmental concerns and worker conditions and wages still pressing subjects.

Environmentally, key components in what brands, designer labels, and other clothing companies can do to create more sustainable businesses are e.g. innovations in design, in fabric production and manufacturing, as well as in textile production and manufacturing. Considerations to the products entire lifecycle must be given, and the conditions that products are made in must be of greater concern. But in terms of corporate social responsibility (CSR\textsuperscript{1}), what are businesses actually advised?

5.1.1 Legislation
In 1999 the United Nations (UN) Secretary General Kofi Annan encouraged the business world to take global responsibility, and this initiative led to the formation of UN’s Global Impact who list principles on human rights, labor, environment, and anti-corruption (Regeringen 2012a). The guidelines have been recommended by approximately 40 governments across the globe that also have committed to establishing national contacts that will follow up on the rules and regulations (Nationalencyclopedin 2012b). In Sweden these contacts are represented by the government and by labor market parties (ibid.). The rules and regulations can be interpreted differently in different countries, but even so, “The UN Global Compact asks companies to embrace, support and enact, within their sphere of influence, a set of core values in the areas of human rights, labour standards, the environment and anti-corruption (UN Global Impact 2012).” These values incorporate 10 principles that can be viewed in appendix 1.

\textsuperscript{1} “Corporate social responsibility programs guide company initiatives for the voluntary social and environmental considerations they can incorporate into their activities to contribute to sustainable development (Nationalencyclopedin 2012b).”
Fletcher argues, “Legislation influences market forces because non-compliance is expensive and increases business risk. Businesses do ‘what they can get away with’, particularly when prices are low, rarely innovating beyond the minimum required in order to satisfy legal requirements (2008: 44).” Even if this seems to be true, companies face various issues along the way that influence their actions. For example, among the large number of small and medium-sized companies that Trossa work with do many see the benefits of engaging, but the lack of skills and capacity makes it difficult for them to fully integrate sustainability issues in their long term business strategies (Hagerman 2012). Suggesting a common denominator, money. Also Torlén Simberg states that small companies usually cannot afford to do any social audits\(^2\) at their factories at all, while the slightly larger companies can afford to do one social audit but not a follow-up audit, which according to her makes the entire process somewhat pointless (Torlén Simberg 2012). Also, it needs to be beneficial for all parties, for the factories as well as for the companies applying them, which is not always the way it is perceived overseas (ibid.). According to her it is of great importance to influence what the local government sets as the standard, since it is these guidelines that are followed and therefore would be able to make a greater difference; e.g. China would never have gotten as far in sustainability issues if it would not have been for international pressure (ibid.).

Unsustainability issues in the fashion and textile sector are commonly linked to the scale of production and consumption, and its use of resources (Fletcher 2008: 137), and some of the greater issues is the environmental impact and issues about worker pay and worker conditions, where also the lack of union rights and free trade unions is another challenge in manufacturing countries. When it comes to environmental impact, issues regarding waste and chemical use are widely discussed. Chemicals get prohibited on a EU-level (Regeringen 2012c) and can easily be found in garments by testing (Torlén Simberg 2012). Knowledge and labeling requirements for all chemical substances manufactured outside of or imported into the EU are set up, and Sweden’s government communicated in 2007 that “Sweden will work to improve international information on chemical substances in products, and thus contribute to reduced environmental and health risks throughout the life cycle (Regeringen 2012c).” However, the report *Den Blinda Klädimporten* (the blind import of clothing), claims that extremely few of the substances used in the production of clothes are limited by the EU at this time, and that the production outside of the EU regulations is missing regulations in

\(^2\) “An official examination of how well a company behaves, for example how it treats its workers, the environment etc. (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2012).”
general (SwedWatch 2008: 6). Also, the tests checking on chemicals are expensive and therefore not performed by companies as often as sought after (Torlén Simberg 2012). The large amount of time and money needed for these tests is also mentioned by Armstrong and LeHew who furthermore note that the tests do not include social and economic impacts of the product (2011: 52).

Fair Trade Center’s report states that the textile sector is one of the industries that use the most chemicals; they are used in several stages and processes of production (2010: 8). One large issue is that most chemicals used in production are decomposed or flushed into the wastewater, possibly ending up in water streams since the cleaning of the waste water usually is poor (ibid.). Chemicals are also great health and safety risks for workers, possibly being carcinogenic. Substances can be inhaled or absorbed by the skin, and therefore, education in chemical handling and safety equipment is of great importance (ibid.).

Concerning worker pay and work hours it becomes more difficult according to Torlén Simberg, for even if workers’ pay in China has increased by around ten per cent yearly for the past four years, it is a needed increase since they have an inflation of about eight per cent making the increase not that significant (ibid.). She sees a lack of understanding and states:

> It is so easy for a buyer to say that workers want to work a lot, but of course they want to work because when you compare it to what is needed to get by in their country they need to work so and so many hours of overtime. So of course they want to work a lot, but maybe not because they are so ambitious or find it so much fun to work, but to be able to keep afloat. It turns into a question about national economics. And then many find that China has become expensive and move their production to Bangladesh, Vietnam or Indonesia… (ibid.)

The report from Fair Trade Center states that minimum wages still lie under living wages, and that companies’ ‘need’ for low costs pressures the suppliers into keeping workers’ pay down (2010: 7). In 2010, large protests in Cambodia and Bangladesh against these conditions, lead to the Bangladesh government increasing the minimum wages for textile workers; however, pay is still not up to living wages and working days consisting of up 19 hours are still not uncommon (ibid.). Living wages are considered to be wages that cover the basic needs of a family: food, clean water, shelter, clothing, child education, medical care and small savings (ibid. 8). However, Fair Trade Center report claims that only few clothing companies list living wages in their code of conducts. Companies usually state that suppliers need to pay minimum wages and that these need to cover basic needs and some extra savings, although this is seldom complied with (ibid.).
A fact that cannot be ignored is that companies want to earn revenue. Combined with the trend of fast fashion, cheap and fast production is essential. This in turn makes it easy to see how worker conditions are being ignored and that expensive tests on chemicals are set aside. A contributing factor for the issues in textile production is the low prices of clothing (SwedWatch 2008: 5). According to SwedWatch, suppliers in China see a decrease in international orders if they raise their prices due to higher environmental requirements, and the idea that the buying companies, who in the end are the ones who contaminate, should pay these costs does not exist. Instead of increased prices in Swedish stores, the costs affect the local governments and the population instead of the Swedish clothing companies and the Swedish consumers (ibid.).

Even if there is certain legislation, the rules and regulations differ from nation to nation. Sweden has different legislation than various nations in Asia, making companies abide by other rules in production then they would be if business processes only were done on home ground. Nevertheless, further problems remain.

5.1.2 Transparency

The last ten years the interest of consumers and stakeholders for sustainable development issues, such as human rights, recycling, and production, has been growing. This has meant that companies have been provided with increased demands for transparency in its activities […] and that environmental issues have gone from being an isolated area, to becoming part of the entire concept of sustainable development (Hagerman 2010).

Research from SwedWatch also sees transparency as an important factor. They identified four issues in their research on clothing companies, the lack of transparency in the supply chain, low environmental requirements from Swedish clothing companies, lack of control that the environmental regulations are followed, and the companies hunt for the cheap product (2008: 36). However, they also found that companies do not see a demand for sustainably produced clothes, and that many consumers lack knowledge in why they are supposed to choose these kinds of garments (ibid.). SwedWatch argues that there is a chain of command; that knowledge leads to demand, and that demand leads to increased availability. However, the main connection here, they argue, is transparency (ibid.). That companies credibility can be questioned when companies decline to enclose of what kind of environmental requirements they have, about production conditions, and the control they have over how their suppliers comply with these requirements (ibid.). SwedWatch gives Nike as a suggestion, who after their ‘scandal’ concerning child labor have made all their factories public, and that this in turn
has been great for business (ibid.). They argue that increased transparency not only gives increased credibility, but that it also can help them in getting greater control over their own production, which seemingly is of concern for many companies (ibid. 37). This argument is strengthened by Hagerman who states:

There are many examples of where economic success is inextricably linked to structured accountability from an environmental and social perspective. Many companies see today that strategic sustainability performance reduces risk and increases the chances for successful operational and business development. This requires knowledge of their operations’ impact, current issues in the industry and external demands and expectations (Hagerman 2012).

However, there are also many opportunities for companies that want to engage in furthering their sustainability practices.

5.1.3 Innovations for Sustainability
Other ways that companies can become more sustainable is by valuing local resources and distributed economies (Clark 2008: 429). “The utilization of physical and social resources can provide an alternative to standardization, centralization, and moreover, to identical products (ibid. 430).” Fletcher also suggests opportunities such as designing local and designing light, both inspired by ecosystem properties and dynamics (2008: 137-138).

Designing local means “[...] developing a sector with a greater sensitivity to place and scale; a sector devised to sustain communities and support jobs while protecting the quality of the environment (ibid.).” This refers to e.g. biomimicry, transportation issues, and different versions of localism such as using local wisdom and building on distinctiveness (Fletcher 2008: 138-151). Designing light on the other hand, “[...] is focused on promoting resourcefulness in production and consumption (ibid. 138)”. This includes introducing more lightweight materials and structures and to maximize efficiency of products and their use (ibid. 151). For example are polyester and other synthetics, lightweight materials that need fewer kilograms to make more garments and that at the same time are more efficient to transport. This reduces energy and resource consumption when comparing to heavier fabrics and also saves energy in the consumer use phase. Polyester and nylon also dry quickly and can be washed at low temperatures. Natural fibers are not always the most sustainable choice; an encouragement to seek innovation also in unfamiliar places (ibid. 152). Arnold agrees: “It is, of course, important to move towards using more ecological fabrics, including synthetics that, despite cultural conceptions of the contrary, can sometimes be greener than cotton,

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3 “The study of biological systems, functions, and structures to create new technologies and products (Nationalencyclopedin 2012c).”
which is often bleached and dyed with poisonous chemicals (2001: 30). This is further supported by Scaturro who argues that technology’s role in eco-fashion should not be diminished and that eco-fashion is most successful when technology is acknowledged (2008: 473). However: “Many of the lightest and strongest materials are composites, like technical fabrics for example, which, while delivering superior function fulfillment with minimal materials, are very difficult to reuse or recycle and do not biodegrade (ibid.).”

The process could also be started from the beginning, and Armstrong and LeHew encourage designers to be open to sustainability principles (2011: 31). They believe that “[...] fashion could prove a powerful conduit in the transition to environmentally friendly and socially responsible production and consumption, attracting attention, energy, and imagination around sustainability solution (ibid.).” Armstrong and LeHew also suggest industrial ecology⁴ where waste is not an option and consumed resources are reutilized (Armstrong and LeHew 2011: 33). Focus lies on material and energy use, on preserving local landscapes and biodiversity, and on cooperation and communication internally and externally to the specific industry (ibid. 34). Companies need to look beyond its own knowledge and supply chain and create partnerships outside their field, e.g. environmental expertise or sources for waste that could be used to create materials, where valuable information and services could be exchanged (ibid. 54-55). Also Fletcher discusses options such as industrial ecology and cradle-to-cradle⁵, suggesting a cyclical system where waste is exchange and becomes the source material for new goods, an ecosystem inspired design approach (2008: 108-111). However, Chapman reminds us that:

Sustainability design should not simply be a question of recycling, disassembling unwanted products and designing biodegradable waste; the potential is far greater than this. Approaches such as these are wholly symptom focused and sorely neglect the actual root cause of the environmental problem we currently face (2005: 173-174).

Namely, consumerism.

Armstrong and LeHew suggest three approaches for a new social paradigm in the field of fashion (2011: 52). These points involve costing, cooperation across fields (as mentioned

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⁴ “Industrial ecology involves designing industrial infrastructures as if they were a series of interlocking man-made ecosystems interfacing with the natural global ecosystem. Industrial ecology takes the pattern of the natural environment as a model for solving environmental problems, creating a new paradigm for the industrial system in the process. [...] The aim of industrial ecology is to interpret and adapt an understanding of the natural system and apply it to the design of the man-made system, in order to achieve a pattern of industrialization that is not only more efficient, but which is intrinsically adjusted to the tolerances and characteristics of the natural system. The emphasis is on forms of technology that work with natural systems, not against them (Tibbs 1993: 3, 6).”

⁵ “Cradle to Cradle is about seeing garbage as a perpetual resource and think right from the beginning. It is about getting our community and product development to mimic ecological systems in which all resources are used efficiently and cyclic (Svid 2012).”
earlier), and changes in the industries belief system (ibid. 52-56). ‘Regular’ items are sold at market price, whereas sustainable products involve real costs of externalities and the impacts of resource use show the ecological value and therefore also hold higher prices. Armstrong and LeHew argue that developers must start shifting their costing policies to better reflect real costs of production than simply giving retailers the prices they want (ibid. 52-54). Another important factor is to change the apparel industries own nature; reevaluate and look at the purpose and consequences of the constant strive for economic growth, the relentless competitive environment, and also how fashion affects other aspects of human life (ibid. 55).

In this sense, Fletcher suggests an approach of slow fashion:

Slow fashion is about designing, producing, consuming and living better. It is about combining ideas about sense of nature’s time (of regenerating cycles and evolution), culture’s time (of the value of traditions and wisdom), as well as the more common timeframes of fashion and commerce. Its emphasis is on quality (of environment, society, working conditions, business, products etc.). So slow in this context is not the opposite of fast – there is no dualism – it is simply a different approach in which designers, buyers, retailers and consumers are more aware of the impacts of products on workers, communities and ecosystems (2008: 173).

However, she feels that the fashion media has adopted slow fashion to describe products that are less fast, products that are durable, produced with traditional techniques, or have seasonless designs (Fletcher 2010: 262). Either way, as Lewenhaupt (2012) argues: "ecology is about conscious choices, choice of quality [...] that you have o make people understand that quality is long-term, and that long-term is a prettier word for sustainability”.

However, Fletcher’s and Armstrong and LeHew’s suggestions are things that have to be accepted by the entire fashion industry. Companies are reluctant to increase their prices since they are afraid that consumers then will turn to their competitors, suggesting how we value clothes must change. Lewenhaupt argues similarly, that in the Swedish perspective, the sustainability issue is on so many levels, that it is about attitude and what clothes stand for fundamentally, and that as long as it is part of culture there is always room for a personal style, but that Sweden not really has that tradition as e.g. France does (Lewenhaupt 2012). She finds that Swedes need to start trusting their own taste and put clothes together as they like, without turning to somebody else. That this ingredient is very important because the attitude towards how we dress needs to change, where people need to question themselves if they want to look like everybody else or as themselves (ibid.).
The organization *Sveriges Konsumenter* (Sweden’s Consumers), give in their report *Gröna Trådar. Utbud och exponering av miljöprofilerade kläder* several demands on what companies should do to increase their sustainability. They suggest increasing the selection of sustainable products, keep the prices reasonable, and if possible get certified with well-known labels. Additionally, provide consumers with more information regarding the environmental alternatives and develop a short brochure where the company’s sustainability policy as well as their own labels is described, this also being clear and easily found place on the company’s website. Larger and clearer exposure of sustainable garments is another suggestion, and vital in the process is that all employees are educated in these matters (*Sveriges Konsumenter* 2010: 31). Research done in the UK even supports the fact “[…] that eco-efficient firms have higher market values than those lacking environmental strategies (Al-Naijär and Anfimiadou 2011: 49)”, suggesting that firms should become involved with environmental policies and change their processes to the changing environmental conditions (ibid. 49, 57). They argue that this would save businesses time and reduce costs and risks, and therefore increase firm value (ibid. 57).

Beard also sees an opportunity with sustainable fashion, and argues that the creation of eco-fashion is another way for fashion brands to stand out in a now overcrowded market. He sees two alternatives, that a new firm has the opportunity to build an ethical business from the beginning, and that existing firms have the opportunity to reexamine their practices and procedures to accommodate the principles of eco-fashion. In all scenarios, the fashion brands are forced to balance economic growth with a sustainable business (2008: 451-452).

### 5.1.4 Ethical Branding

Cayla and Arnould see branding as a specific symbolic form, a certain way of looking at the world. Branding is a form of communication, “which tells stories in the context of products and services, addresses people as consumers, and promises to fulfill unmet desires and needs (2008: 86)”. Meaning, that also brands are cultural forms since they enclose ideas about the way people should live, look, and think (ibid. 87). Thompson and Haytko on the other hand say that reproducing well-known brand images or looks is for consumers an antithesis to creating a personal style. So in order to achieve uniqueness, meanings need to be refined and rephrased to become more personal (1997: 27). That is, brands can be used as a resource for the symbolic construction of self, however more on a social level than on a personal level. Cultural categories such as social status, gender, age, and cultural values such as family and tradition can be established and communicated through brand consumption, but the meaning
of brands also need to be validated through refinement in a social context (Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998: 136). Ahuvia quotes Miller: “Relationships to brands certainly matter, but they are important because of the way they express and mediate the relationship to other people (2005: 180).”

However, Hagerman states that many companies also are reluctant to proclaim their sustainability work because the more they say they do, the more media attention they receive and the more they will be investigated (Hagerman 2012). This is supported by Torlén Simberg who has worked with brands that, regardless of their high standards in sustainable development, do not want to be associated with sustainability because they find it affecting their brand image negatively, making them ‘uncool’, which in her opinion does not help the purpose (Torlén Simberg 2012). Nevertheless, as Beard states, in positioning themselves as ‘ethical’, “[…] fashion brands need to ensure their practices and procedures go beyond mere aesthetics in terms of marketing and branding. Instead, these practices need to be integrated and demonstrated to all involved in the firm, whether employees, suppliers, shareholders or customers […] (2008: 458)” Fletcher agrees and sees fashion as unified with consumerism where “action and change are of central importance to sustainability, as long-term environmental and social quality requires that we develop a new model of individual and social action that is different to the one we have today (2008: 185).”

Rief argues that consumption is shaped by the interaction between civil society, the state and the market (2008: 564). So to understand society, its organization/institutions, need to be studied. Nicosia and Mayer view an institution “as a set of specific activities performed by specific people in specific places through time (1976: 67).” In this sense, a department store, a brand or a designer label and their retail stores can be considered institutions. These institutions create norms by guiding towards specific activities, and maintain these norms by upholding certain patterns of interaction. Norms are successfully implemented by communications and visibility. How much/often, what, and how the norms are communicated is essential, e.g. through advertisements, window displays, store layout, mass media, and word of mouth (ibid. 67). The norms that this study is focusing on are those impacting on consumption activities, where also demographic and economic correlations can affect how and what people consume, but time is also an essential part of consumption activities (ibid. 68). Like Nicosia and Mayer say, “activities may be guided by institutional norms that are bounded by cultural values (1976: 71).” This is further supported by Elliott and Wattanasuwan who state: “All voluntary consumption carries, either consciously or unconsciously, symbolic meanings; if the consumer has choices to consume, s/he will
consume things that hold particular symbolic meanings. These meanings may be idiosyncratic or widely shared with other people (1998: 133).

How the consumer acts and feels regarding consumption practices will be further discussed in the section on consumers and consumer behavior. However, before this a brief case study of various Swedish clothing companies will be performed. Questions that will be examined are: what is their code of conduct, do they seem to follow it, and what issues or opportunities of sustainability are addressed in company practices.

5.1.4 Case Study: H&M, Gina Tricot, Acne, and Filippa K
This case study looks at two fast fashion brands, H&M and Gina Tricot, and two more expensive, however not high fashion brands, Acne and Filippa K. Their own statements as well as media coverage and findings represented in various reports regarding their practices were taken into consideration. First H&M and Gina Tricot will be investigated, followed by Acne and Filippa K.

H&M

H&M is one of Sweden’s largest fast fashion brands and they list plenty of information on their websites regarding their work in sustainable development. H&M has e.g. introduced its new concept, conscious, which is the name for all the work they do when trying to offer more sustainable fashion (H&M 2012). They state: “Our vision is that all business operations shall be run in a way that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable (ibid.).” H&M also lists several so called accomplishments, such as 300 million liters of water saved in denim production, 2.3 million garments donated to charities, 72 per cent females in management positions, and 440 000 Bangladesh garment workers educated on their rights. Also they claim to be the number one user of organic cotton worldwide where their aim is that all their cotton comes from more sustainable sources by 2020. Another claim is that H&M performs 500 000 quality tests and 30 000 chemical tests per year (ibid.). However, a report issued by Greenpeace in 2012, “Dirty Laundry: Reloaded”, shows that four out of six H&M garments tested in 2011 contained nonylphenol ethoxylates (NPEs) which H&M claimed to have stopped using in 2009 (Greenpeace 2012 and Hedström 2012a). Nevertheless, actions such as H&M e.g. educating Bangladesh workers on their rights is a great influence on the local government, pressuring them into making changes in the local rules and regulations. Torlén Simberg agrees that this is valuable in the work towards greater social sustainability (Torlén Simberg 2012). However, as the Swedish news program Rapport reported in April
this year that workers at these factories still work ten hours a day and six times a week, with a monthly pay that hardly enables them to live a decent life (SVT Play 2012).

According to Fair Trade Center’s report is H&M a member of the multi-party initiative Fair Labor Association (FLA) since 2008, and in 2004 they signed a global agreement with the global union UNI, however, the agreement does not cover workers in the supplier factories (2010: 19). H&M has also had a code of conduct since 1997, which was revised in 2009. It is based on ILO’s (International Labor Organization) conventions and UN’s convention of children’s rights and manages homeworkers, migrant workers, overtime, safe buildings and housing conditions, however not living wages (ibid.). H&M argues that living wages is an issue that should be handled on a nation or industry level and not on a company or factory level (ibid. 21). They have however, together with other large retail companies, written letters to the Bangladesh government, asking them to revise minimum wages (ibid.). Audits have been done since 1998, and according to H&M has 90-95% of the company’s 700 suppliers had at least on audit, whereof some even unannounced. However, audits further back in the supply chain, such as raw material producers, are not performed (ibid. 19-20). Regarding chemicals, H&M claims to follow the legislation for all markets and that workers are educated in safe handling. The demands are placed against main suppliers, which in turn are made responsible for subcontractors (ibid. 21).

H&M has been the subject of several negative occurrences, in 2011, Rapport reported on 300 H&M factory workers collapsing in Cambodia due to low wages, malnutrition and chemicals (SVT 2011a). Again in early 2012, Fair Trade Center reports on how a public general court in Phnom Penh had demanded that international actors in the textile industry immediately need to address the poor wages for textile workers (Fair Trade Center 2012). H&M was criticized hard, but had refused to attend the hearing, which e.g. addressed 34 different occasions since the summer of 2010 where a total of 2400 workers had fainted, and where several occasions were at H&M suppliers. H&M’s own investigation however claimed that the fainting was due to a ‘mass-psychogenic disease’ (Fair Trade Center 2012).

**Gina Tricot**

Gina Tricot is another large Swedish fast fashion brand, and they as well have easily found information regarding their sustainability development. The slogan on their website greets visitors with “New Fashion Every Day”, embracing the fast fashion culture in a sentence. On their website they explain how their corporate social responsibility program functions and state their environmental policy as well as a brief version of their code of conduct. They are
members of various organizations working with sustainability matters, e.g. BSCI, the Business Social Compliance Initiative, that aims to improve working conditions in supplier countries; Sweden Textile Water Initiative (STWI), where the aim is to produce guidelines for sustainable water use in the production chain; and Swerea IVF’s chemicals group, to keep themselves updated and informed in the field of chemicals; They also claim that their products do not contain any harmful chemicals (under REACH, the Registration, Evaluation, Authorization and Restriction of Chemicals) (Gina Tricot 2012). Gina Tricot also claims to give to charities, stating that excess garments, defective goods and clothes that do not fulfill their quality standards are donated to a range of aid projects. Gina Tricot also tries to involve their customer, encouraging consumers to shop consciously by using their own labels for sustainable items (ibid.).

Gina Tricot’s code of conduct is also based on ILO’s conventions, with own additions of animal keeping and chemicals. However, the code does not cover homeworkers, migrant workers, living wages or safe buildings (Fair Trade Center 2010: 17). Audits are done by independent parties, who also are responsible for education in the manufacturing nations. Education is only given to management, who in turn are made responsible for informing their workers about the code of conduct (ibid. 18). Gina Tricot claims to have requirements of safety gear having to be available and used at factories, but also here it is the supplier’s responsibility to educate workers in chemical handling and health and safety protocols. All demands are placed against main suppliers, which, same as H&M, also are made responsible for subcontractors (ibid.).

**Further Comments on H&M and Gina Tricot**

Based on H&M’s website they seem to work a great deal on their sustainable development. They have extensive information regarding various goals, achievements, strategies, visions, and commitments for sustainability. Commitments include providing fashion for conscious consumers, choosing and rewarding sustainable partners, being ethical, being climate smart, reducing, reusing and recycling, using natural resources responsibly, and strengthen communities (H&M 2012). As a very large fast fashion company with major production in Asia, they have great possibilities for influencing change. Their large production placement in various nations in Asia would create incentives also for local governments and businesses to change their practices. This large production however also creates greater impact on both natural and human resources, making their contribution towards sustainability essential.
Gina Tricot does have easy access on parts of their sustainability work, but even if they list plenty of information, they do not seem close to being as active as H&M. It is also difficult to find media coverage regarding their practices; however, they have been criticized for not doing enough for increasing workers low wages (Sveriges Radio 2009). Important to note however, is that this does not mean that they are better than other companies. Either way, both H&M and Gina Tricot have code of conducts addressing various sustainability issues, but they also still have problems regarding transparency, e.g. neither of them wanted to provide Fair Trade Center with an audit control report (2010: 18, 21), making their credibility debatable.

Two other relatively large Swedish brands are Acne and Filippa K. Due to higher prices and since they do not introduce new garments every week, these brands are generally not considered fast fashion brands. Filippa K releases two main collections per year, spring/summer and fall/winter, while Acne puts out four collections a year, pre and main autumn/winter, and pre and main spring/summer (Filippa K 2012 and Acne 2012).

**Acne**

Acne does claim to work with CSR, but the information on their website is very scarce, simply stating:

> Acne aims to produce all products as responsibly as possible. This is a continuing process between Acne and its manufacturers. Acne is also collaborating with Fair Wear Foundation to ensure that the process is as secure as possible. Below you can download the current code of conduct that all manufacturers have to agree to (Acne 2012).

A code of conduct is not available for download, but former vice president, Mikael Schiller states in an interview that they work actively with both environmental and human law to ensure an exemplary level (DN 2006).

Either way, both Fair Trade Center’s report and Fair Wear Foundations’ website gives plenty of information regarding Acne’s environmental and ethical conduct. Acne’s code of conduct covers overtime and living wages, but not homeworkers, migrant workers, housing arrangements or safe buildings (Fair Trade Center 2010: 13). Acne has together with FWF made a plan to control all the companies’ suppliers, and have so far given priority to their largest supplier nation, China. Acne’s CSR-manager claims that all Chinese suppliers and subcontractors have been inspected in three rounds (ibid.). Stated on FWF website, Acne has now covered 60% of their supplier base with performed audits (Fair Wear Foundation 2012a). Audits are done by an Acne employee, but will continually be complemented by external
audits done by FWF. However, all inspection reports are taken part by FWF (Fair Trade Center 2010: 13). FWF state:

In total, Acne Studios did 27 internal audits in 2010. This is an ambitious level of auditing considering the number or suppliers of Acne Studios. The audits done by Acne Studios do not meet all FWF’s requirements on audit quality as outlined in the FWF Manual for Affiliates. […] From the two verification audits done by FWF it was found that the internal audits had not detected several important non-compliances. These included compliance with specific national legislation and findings regarding communication between workers and management. These areas are not easily covered without good knowledge or local laws and practices, as well as the ability to do workers interviews. Audits generally also require more time than Acne Studios has used in some cases, in order to properly be able to check all documents and cross check with interviews (Fair Wear Foundation 2012a).

Also at Acne are suppliers made responsible for informing their workers on the code of conduct; however, they claim to demand that a translated code of conduct should be listed on factory walls. As stated earlier, Acne does have living wages on their code of conduct, and according to them they always work with ensuring that supplier workers get a higher pay than the legislated minimum wage (ibid.). They state: “[…] since Acne pays a higher purchase price than many low-price-brands, there is also a larger scope for suppliers to pay higher wages (ibid)”. Also Acne demands that suppliers follow REACH, EU’s legislation regarding chemicals, and that workers have adequate safety gear and some education in chemical handling. Main suppliers are made responsible for following these requirements, and random sample checks are made by Acne to check on enforcement (ibid. 14-15).

Filippa K

Filippa K on the other hand announces some of their CSR-work more at length on their website. Parts of their code of conduct, which is based on UN’s human rights and ILO’s conventions, and relationship with suppliers is described, Filippa K also being members of FWF and STWI, and statements are made on goals such as having ten per cent of the styles in any of their collections made from eco-friendly material. They also claim that all of their offices use green energy and that they have increased the number of organic cotton garments included in their collections, in autumn 2010 reaching eighteen styles. Chemicals are said to be monitored through random sampling guided by NGO’s (non-governmental organizations associated with the United Nations) Sin List (Filippa K 2012). In 2008 they also started their own second hand store, where consumers can hand in their used Filippa K clothes (UR 2012). They also claim that all of their factories in Portugal, Italy and Turkey have been inspected, and 73 per cent of their Chinese factories, with a goal of having 90 per cent of their
suppliers in China inspected by 2011 (ibid.). Regarding audits, FWF states on their website that:

The monitoring system of Filippa K consists of using FWF audit teams for factory audits and letting production managers together with agents follow up the corrective action plans at factory level. Through this monitoring system, Filippa K had covered a total of 87% of their supply chain by the end of 2010. Filippa K had audited 40% of the production and 47% of production was covered by the low risk policy (Fair Wear Foundation 2012b).

However, FWF also state that Filippa K has had a relatively low level of activity in the past two years, and have not done corrective action at the same level as before; however, they believe it will improve since Filippa K now has a CSR manager (Fair Wear Foundation 2012b).

As part of their brand image Filippa K also state: “Filippa K stands for high-quality clothing and timeless fashion. Our clothes can be used from one generation to the next, producing sustainable fashion that is moving toward a brighter and greener future (Filippa K 2012).” This statement also fits in with Clark’s suggestion of making sustainable and sensorial products. This is where greater attention is put on valuing and knowing the garment, where “[…] the product is an investment, has functional longevity, and also remains ‘in fashion’, it retains its attraction for the particular consumer or user beyond the fashion season (2008: 440)”.

**Further Comments on Acne and Filippa K**

Both Filippa K and Acne seem to be quite transparent when it comes to their environmental and ethical work, even if it not seems so at first glance. Substantial information is available on various organizational websites, where both companies’ negative and positive aspects of their businesses are revealed. Acne sends control reports to FWF and to everyone working with production and to all buyers; when asked they also sent several reports to Fair Trade Center 2010: 14). As stated earlier, Filippa K are also members of FWF, making them scrutinized by a third independent party. Also these brands are difficult to find in media coverage regarding sustainability, but are subject for investigation in various reports; however, not necessarily in a negative aspect.

**5.2 Consumers and Consumer Behavior**

The consumers are an important part of the fashion system and can create valuable influence on the fashion industry’s quest for sustainability. There are several subjects to consider when looking at the consumer in this instance; consumers’ knowledge about sustainability,
consumer behavior, ‘green’ consumption, second hand clothing, matters of waste, and identity and feelings associated with consumption.

The part of a product’s lifecycle where the consumers first step in is in the use phase. Consumers can improve their laundering practices as well as changing their habits and values regarding clean clothes. They can also repair their garments or give them to charity or second hand shops to increase the products lifetime. Consumer can likewise buy used clothing at second hand shops or transform their old clothes into something different. Of course consumers can also shop more clothing that is sustainably produced. However, essentially the most challenging but also most influential opportunity is to shop less. According to the report *Konsumtionsrapporten 2010*, has the consumption of clothes and shoes increased by 53 per cent between 1999 and 2009 (University of Gothenburg 2010: 9). Swedes bought clothes and shoes for 75 billion Swedish crowns in 2009, 5 per cent of households’ total consumption and with an increase of 2.1 per cent from 2008 (ibid. 13-14). However, the report also states that consumption is decreasing, showing a decline of 0.6 per cent from 2008 - 2009 (ibid. 15), although, this could be the effect of the financial crisis. During 2007, nine kilograms of clothes was imported per person to Sweden, and the total consumption of clothes per person is 24 kilograms per year (SwedWatch 2008: 4).

Not only do we purchase a lot of clothes, but we purchase clothes for many different reasons. Various factors influence consumer behavior, ‘pressure’ from different institutions as well as desire, anxiety and the search for identity expression. This area is complex, and consumers may not always act according to their beliefs or even fully understand their own behavior. To begin with, what do consumers know about sustainable fashion?

### 5.2.1 Consumer Knowledge

The focus group participants answered many different things when asked what sustainable fashion meant to them. KB thought of durable fashion, HH considered it to be garments without chemicals, good worker conditions, and environmentally friendly, while CS related it to contradictions. That it is launched as a trend, that clothes are flown over from afar, and that reports revealing companies misconduct always pop up every now and then; that the ambiguity always exists (Focus Group 2012). LF supports this, considering sustainable fashion to be difficult since the fashion industry is built upon constantly wanting more, about trends and consumption (ibid.). When asked what textile the focus group participants’ thought of as most environmentally friendly, several aspects occurred. CS said: “It feels like the one that lasts the longest would be the most organic” while LF states:
The one you launder on the lowest temperature […] materials are difficult, I can imagine that cotton is consuming to produce, that there are plenty of synthetic materials made out of plastic bottles that aren’t that demanding. But most often the sustainable collections are made out of organic cotton, it’s almost always cotton (Focus Group 2012).

CS adds:

I also think it matters what you buy, if you buy expensive – this I have actually worn for four years and treated kindly – this 99 crown cardigan from H&M becomes more throwaway. So I think it’s more about feeling you make an investment and that you know there’s a chance of keeping it attractive and stylish, and that you know it’s not gonna be all wrong next season (ibid.).

NO also comments: “As a normal person I actually don’t have a clue, I have no idea that I’m supposed to wash clothes before you use them. I wish there was a website or something with information”, whereas CS expresses: It’s hard to say why I don’t take more responsibility now, I actually do know very much (ibid.).

Consumer knowledge about sustainable fashion or sustainable practices seems to differ, but if this is true and how consumers relate to sustainability when shopping for clothes will be further discussed below.

5.2.2 Consumer Behavior

The report by the University of Borås showed a gap between consumers expressed concern about the environment and their daily actions (2012: 109). They see this as an indication that consumers do not need more information regarding the negative environmental aspects of clothing consumption, but argue that consumers need various measures that enable them to act more environmentally friendly (ibid.). Isenhour also states that concerns about lack of information were not nearly as important to her research participants as questions about sociality and the difficulty of breaking everyday habits, customs, and norms (2010: 461). She finds that Swedish citizens are focused on change in lifestyles when it comes to sustainability issues and states that two thirds of the people participating in her research are trying to buy less to make a smaller environmental impact, but that they find this to be one of the hardest tasks (ibid. 455, 459). It is not only about what they buy, but how much they buy (ibid. 459). Also Eckhardt et. al’s study on ethical consumption investigates the rationales and justifications consumers use to defend their incongruities (2010: 426). Three justifications strategies evolved: economical rationalization, institutional dependency, and developmental realism (ibid.). Barriers discussed in Isenhour’s study are social, lifestyle, economic, informational, and political barriers (2010: 461).
Discussions on political barriers suggested that many people feel helpless because they believe that their actions are insignificant given those of others (individuals, states, organizations, or industries) who do not seem to take responsibility (Isenhour 2010: 462). The participating Swedes argued “[...] that it would be much easier to shop less if everyone others did so too (ibid.).” The justification ‘institutional dependency’ in Eckhardt et. al’s article relates to this barrier. Here consumers’ unethical behavior is explained by their lack of individual responsibility, and blame is put on different institutions they feel should only allow ethical consumer choices (2010: 431). Institutions in this matter could mean the government, but also advertisers and other corporations. Legislation and laws should get them out of their ethical dilemmas, and many participants argued that if the government says it is ok to sell something, then it is ok for them to buy it (ibid.). According to Eckhardt et. al’s study, this justification was more apparent among Swedish participants, and they even argue that there is a distinct lack of personal responsibility in socialist democracies like Sweden (ibid.).

Economic rationalization concerns justifications that focus on personal consumer utility. Costs were more important than any other consideration and a cost-benefit analysis mentality showed (Eckhardt et. al 2010: 430). In Isenhour’s study, economic barriers were common as well and participants discussed issues related to price, availability, or the inferior quality of environmental alternatives (2010: 462). She even argues that barriers concerning price “[...] are much more significant for less privileged consumers, reminding us that the growth of markets for environmental friendly alternatives is dependent on much more than rational individual choice (ibid.).” As LP states: “yes this with ecological clothes sometimes becomes angst ridden, ok now I have to stand here and decide whether or not it’s worth to spend all this money on it, or am I getting cheated now? (Focus Group 2012)”.

The last one of the justifications in Eckhart et. al’s study is developmental realism, where many participants “[...] saw breaching their own sense of morality as part of the price to pay for of economic growth (2010: 432)”. Workers low wages and poor working conditions were considered part of the way the world works during stages of development. Lots of participants, many of them Chinese, Turkish, or Indian, did not even consider labor conditions to have any ethical issues, but argued that the pay was normal for the local area (ibid.). According to Eckhardt et. al meaning that consumers rationalize with their economic situation, political education, and close knowledge of the development and labor conditions in their countries in mind (2010: 433). This also pointing at one issue companies’ face when placing production in e.g. Asia; the local culture regarding these issues must also change.
Lifestyle barriers in Isenhour’s study were mentioned even more commonly than economic ones and are associated with overcoming routines, habits, and social norms, where the matter of time was often mentioned (2010: 463). Social barriers were however the ones mentioned the most, particularly in reference to anti-consumption and shopping less (ibid.). Isenhour states:

Consumption fulfills an important social function in our societies, helping us to signal belonging, mutual understanding, and adherence to shared societal norms and cultural logics. Today those of us living in complex post-industrial urban societies have little choice but to build our identities around symbolic objects that strangers can easily understand – possessions (ibid.). Some participants talked about how they felt pressure to consume, live like others, and keep up with the latest trends (ibid.)

To help overcome all these barriers Isenhour argues that efforts in both consumer choice and political and corporate leadership are needed for encouraging sustainability (2010: 455). Apparently Swedish consumers “[…] welcomed government regulation to help limit choices by, for example, banning the production and sale of products with significant and harmful environmental impacts (ibid. 462)”. However, this is already done to some extent, and in a society that is focusing on economic growth, many governments might not feel obliged to slow down the development. According to Konsumtionsrapporten 2010 does consumption not only contribute to a society’s growth, but it is also an important aspect of companies, state authorities, and household activities since trade is a growing part of Sweden’s GNP (University of Gothenburg 2010: 7).

Isenhour does not claim that informational awareness or social marketing campaigns are not important, but suggests there are barriers that knowledge and awareness cannot handle (2010: 466). She finds that her research proves that it does not matter how aware, reflexive, concerned about sustainability, and committed to making a smaller environmental impact individuals are, but that we are influenced by the societies we live in. That people are social creatures which attitudes, behaviors, and actions that not only reflect their own personal values, interests, and agency, but also are formed by a complex consumer culture. A culture affected by history and context as well as material realities, productive systems, methods of exchange, social organizations, and political structures (ibid.). Isenhour reasons that corporate leadership must compliment consumer responsibility, and that public policies and programs should be implemented to encourage the process and that mutual cooperation is the only way a significant long-term change would occur (2010: 466). Eckhardt et. al on the other hand, argue that “The nature of the rationales suggests that simply making information available to consumers about the ethical nature of their purchases, or even using moral appeals to try and
invoke behavior change, will not likely engender anti-consumption of unethical or irresponsible brands (2010: 434)”, and the answers from Swedish participants suggested that strong emotional appeals rather than rational incentives might increase consumer ethics (ibid.).

Evidently, to consume ‘green’ is a task that consumers find difficult for many different reasons.

5.2.3 ‘Green’ Consumption
To make conscious shopping easier, Torlén Simberg wishes some kind of general labeling would exist, and Fredriksson would like to see a manual with information about all the different aspects to be considered when shopping consciously (Torlén Simberg 2012, Fredriksson 2012). According to The Swedish Society for Nature Association (SSNC6), there are already a few labels for this purpose. Sweden has two labels “Bra Miljöval” (Good Environmental Choice) and “Svanen” (The Swan), Holland has “Eko Sustainable Textile”, the European Union has the “EU Ecolabel” (formerly “EU-flower”), and there is also the “Global Organic Textile Standard” an international cooperation for a joint eco-label (Naturskyddsföreningen 2012a). Nevertheless, it is difficult to find garments with these labels because many stores and brands use their own so-called eco-labels (Svanen 2010). The number of terms used as well as the number of labels is constantly growing, making it confusing for the consumer. A garment labeled with Svanen or the EU Ecolabel is manufactured with as little environmental impact as possible in all stages of production, from raw material to finished product. The label is also a guarantee that an independent third party has verified that the production and the finished garment meet their environmental, health and quality standards (ibid.). Importantly to note, however, is that there also is a lack of general labeling regarding social responsibility.

Green consumption has also been questioned for being just fashion trends, where ecological and social values can be aligned with lifestyle ideals and where the consumer does not have to make any sacrifices (Rief 2008: 567). Either way Rief argues that:

To consume in an eco-friendly, fair and politically correct manner is by no means a straight-forward matter, but is laden with dilemmas and ambivalences that require trade-offs between values, tricky judgments about the effects of certain actions and delicate choices between equally bad options. […] There are many shades of green […] (ibid.).

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6 SSNC is an environmental organization which spreads knowledge, maps environmental threats, creates solutions, and tries to influence politicians and public authorities at both a national and international level (Naturskyddsföreningen 2012).
Fair trade protocols can e.g. unsettle local traditions in humanitarian justice, and Rief even discusses whether or not an action against companies who exploit child labor might push the children into even worse conditions such as prostitution (ibid. 568). She sees consumption as a central arena of political struggle where consumer culture can be criticized from environmentalist, political, economic, moral and social perspectives (ibid. 569-570). Nevertheless, Rief also finds all critiques of consumption as undermining if people’s needs are not taken into account since goods may be the foundation of socially meaningful material culture (ibid. 570-571). That:

Certain consumption practices may be personally satisfying (for some), but linked to high environmental costs (for other, or for the whole society). Some may be personally satisfying precisely because other people are excluded from the same goods and practices. Ultimately, this leads to a political debate over the hierarchy of values (ibid. 571).

In the focus group discussion, LF states that if there was more available and if the design of sustainable fashion would suit her taste, then she would buy more ecological garments (Focus Group 2012). HH on the other hand, says she wishes the companies would take greater responsibility, and that they communicate their goals, e.g. that they want to be environmentally certified, that they want a certain percentage of their clothes to be organic, or that fewer chemicals should be used. She thinks that companies are “making sustainable collections that are supposed to be big sellers, and then everyone should walk around in the same clothes, that’s not how fashion works”. LF adds, “Yes, I think I also would buy more, if I knew that those companies were good, then I would make an effort to go there”, but NO disagrees, “but isn’t it the design that in the end…” with everyone agreeing (ibid.). LP adds:

I would like to have more insight, a bigger feeling for it, because now when I go to H&M it feels like, organic cotton is great, but H&M is a large corporation, it might not outweigh all the bad. I’d like a feeling of understanding every step, what’s the difference in transport and all the way from the beginning, and also social responsibility in factories. Because now it’s hard for me to see the difference, have any insight, an understanding for the industry for how it works (ibid.).

She would also like to have some kind of measurement tool, maybe for carbon dioxide; while LF thinks a label like “the Swan” or a more transparent system that would influence her (Focus Group 2012). However, LF also states:

That’s what’s so hard, you don’t have any idea – what’s the sum of it all – produced in China, the production, what happens after you through it away, you’d like a chart, how much carbon dioxide does it become. But you don’t know. It’s like with organic cotton, it can be treated in a hundred different ways
and been sown by child labor, so it can be unsustainable as a garment, but the cotton as a raw material is organic (ibid.).

Another debate is on whether the majority of consumers really would abandon their self-interests and purchase sustainable alternatives (Joergens 2006: 360). Findings from Joergens German and UK focus groups showed that participants were aware of ethical issues in the fashion industry, but that they were not concerned with them when they went shopping, they were simply interested in how the garment felt on their skin and not if it was environmentally unfriendly (ibid. 364). Young consumers were influenced by brand image, the latest fashion, and acceptance from their friends (ibid. 370). Lower prices and comfortable materials were more important than workers conditions, which not even were perceived as so unethical. However, the perception of ethical behavior among brands, showed no difference between fast fashion brands or exclusive brands. Also, even if most participants had never looked into brands corporate social responsibility, companies’ websites were not considered honest in this regard. The German participants reckoned that bad publicity would influence their buying decisions, while those from the UK wanted to see labels. Either way, all of them felt they would not know how to demonstrate their dislikes, since they did not believe there was any difference among the various companies. Also, both German and UK participants complained about the availability of sustainable fashion, expressed price as a determining factor, and argued that clothes had to suit their personal styles (ibid. 364). All German participants also admitted to buying products from unethical companies because they liked the style. However, Germans also believed it was up to the consumers to ask companies to improve their ethical conducts, while UK participants wanted to see government regulations (ibid. 362-368). Nevertheless, most respondents were positive to buying ethical fashion, as long as the fashion and price were comparable to other fashion brands (ibid. 369-370).

Joergens research supports previous statements regarding green consumption, but another way of consuming ‘green’ is by many considered to be shopping vintage or second hand clothing.

5.2.4 Second hand Clothing
Reiley and DeLong discuss consumer’s desire for a unique appearance by arguing that the sustainable alternative must be made more attractive and desirable since individuals’ style themselves according to their aesthetic responses (2011: 75). They see a significant consumer role in the fashion industry and therefore promote an acceptance towards multiple styles and used clothing (ibid. 79-80). In their study many participants found used clothing to be more
sustainable but also more affordable than clothes in regular boutiques. However, many participants were also concerned with the time, energy, and uncertainty involved in buying used clothing (Reiley and DeLong 2011: 80). Nevertheless, Reiley and DeLong predict that the sustainable fashion movement will continue to make it more acceptable to buy clothing from different used clothing sources and that this in turn could end up affecting the sales of new clothing. That if the desire for used clothing is fueled, new markets might open or new clothing stores might start selling used clothing of their own brand (ibid.). While the second hand market does draw consumers from the new clothes market, it is still not certain if vintage is just a trend or if it actually will grow and take over more market share.

The report done by the University of Borås shows a growing interest in second hand, and indicates that younger people interested in fashion increasingly shop at vintage stores to be able to express a more unique appearance (2012a: 110-111). However, consumers seemed more interested in showing their fashion sense than concern about the environment. The reason for not buying second hand was stated to be because many considered the clothes as unhygienic or a sign of being worse off financially. The report argues this might be because second hand is being associated with charity where the clothes are given to people who cannot afford to buy their own, and that more people would buy second hand if it was associated more to fashion and environmental responsibility (ibid. 111). To increase the trade of second hand clothing they suggest that retailers need to develop better retail concepts and atmospheres to get rid of the notion of being messy and unhygienic, a place where the entire shopping experience is more appealing and therefore would contribute to larger consumer bases (ibid. 115).

That used clothing is much more environmentally friendly is also stated by The Swedish Society for Nature Association. Compared to the production of new clothing, 97 per cent of energy is saved when buying second hand, vintage, or re-designed clothing (Naturskyddsföreningen 2012a). However, Beard states:

Indeed, for the consumer, ‘vintage’ and ‘ethical’ are seemingly synonymous; after all, recycling a garment by passing it on for resale in a second-hand clothing shop appears to be a practical solution. Gaining a new, stylish and unique item, at the same time reducing the consumption of a ‘new’ clothing item, answers the ethical and sartorial dilemmas of the eco-conscious customer. This is, however, not so clear cut, as often second-hand clothing items need to be dry-cleaned, necessitating the use of chemicals, which may negate the ‘ethical’ element of such a purchase in other ways (2008: 457).
Even if purchases of second hand clothing are more sustainable than purchases of new clothing, the end and disposal phase remains a large issue. So where do all clothes end up when we are done with them?

5.2.5 Waste
The research done by the University of Borås, showed a pattern of how Swedish consumers sorted the clothes they did no longer want (2012a: 110). Expensive, beautiful or well-kept clothes were given to family and friends, while clothes of lesser value or with minor defects were given to charity. By giving clothes to charity, consumers had better consciences, knowing the clothes would go to someone who needed them. Another reason was the relative ease of how to get rid of clothes, suggesting that convenience and accessibility also matter (ibid.). Giving to charity was however not associated with environmental concern, and a lot of garments also ended up in the regular trash. Consumers expressed knowledge on sorting out regular household waste, but textiles and clothes were not acknowledged in the same way (ibid.). To make consumer also sort clothes as part of their household waste, they suggest providing more information and doing marketing campaigns about the matter of textile waste (ibid. 113). To achieve progress, however, also collection sites where all types of clothes (whole, clean, torn) can be collected are needed, conveniently at the same collection sites as for regular household waste (ibid.).

In the UK, around 2.35 million tons of waste per year has come from the clothing and textile industry, 40 kg per person and year. 13 per cent goes to material recovery, 13 per cent to incineration and the rest goes to landfill. 25 per cent of the waste that is reused, the products go either to textile recycling banks, charity shops, second hand shops, or are reworked into customized pieces. A small proportion of textiles are transformed into e.g. wiping cloths or filling materials (Fletcher 2008: 98-99). Looking at Swedish households, they create about 70 000 tons of textile waste per year (2008-2010) that goes to landfill, approximately 8 kilograms per person. Only 3 kilograms per person is given to charity (Naturvårdsverket 2011: 23-24, 33).

Nevertheless, while waste management strategies treat waste, production of waste is not prevented (Fletcher 2008: 107). So why do consumers feel the urge to go shopping in the first place? Why is fashion so important for consumers, and how does fashion consumption affect them on a personal level?
5.2.6 Feelings and Identity

Sociology of consumption concerns the study of three variables: cultural values, institutions and their norms, and consumption activities (Nicosia and Mayer 1976: 69). Fashion is related to all variables where:

Fashion is full of contradictions – it is ephemeral and cyclic, referencing the past but constantly embracing the new; it represents an expression of personal identity and difference, while also demonstrating belonging to a group; it can be both an individual act of ‘performing’ ourselves, and a collective experience; fashion exists for the few as one-off couture pieces or tailor-made bespoke clothing, and for many as mass-produced volume clothing (Black 2008: 17).

Thompson and Haytko agree partly and argue that fashion meanings can be used to show distinctions and a sense of standing out, or to show an affiliation with others and create a sense of social belonging (1997: 26). They claim that fashion discourses provide consumers with many interpretive positions that can make it possible for them to put together opposing values and beliefs. Consumers use these to handle tensions and paradoxes between their individual concerns and social norms (ibid. 15-16). Murray even argues that style demonstrates a subject position of a vision of how a society should be organized, that consumers often are faced with contradictory responses, and consequently fashion becomes a way of mediating this complexity (2002: 436). Meaning thereby comes from selecting fashion statements that correspond to certain cultural values and subject positions, but the process rests as much on what individuals believe in as on what they resist (ibid. 437). The play with the complex interpretive positions serves a goal for both men and women of resisting pressures of conformity applied by group norms, advertising and marketing moves, and status consciousness (Thompson and Haytko 1997: 37).

However, in order to understand what will be the dominant role Thompson and Haytko argue that personal meanings, personal history, interests, life goals, self-conceptions, and context-specific reference points must be taken into consideration (1997: 18). Consumers appropriate culturally shared fashion discourses to fit these references, and in turn these appropriated fashion meanings serve to re-inscribe the culturally conventional meanings of garments, styles, and brands in context-specific interpretations that express localized social distinctions, archetypes, gender conceptions, moralistic conceptions, and strategies for managing interpersonal dynamics (ibid.). Consumers’ uses of fashion discourses show that cultural discourses are not neutral; they are confined by the social, economic, political, and technological structures that underlie cultural ways of life. These relationships are heterogeneous, dynamic, and influenced by intersections of competing political, economic,
and societal interests (ibid. 38). However, Rief also argues that “[…] it is wrong to assume that consumption has become the main vehicle of ‘constructing’ identity, as gender, kinship, age, religion, sexuality, ethnicity, and other dimensions continue to be much more salient (2008: 564).”

**Identity and the Self**

Shankar et. al argue that identity no longer is a static construction, rather a project in process that continuously has to be worked on (2009: 76-77). Self-identity requires active construction, which partly can be achieved through developing consistent narratives of the self and partly through finding institutions to put trust in (Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998: 137) Shankar et. al find that narratives of socialization have a lasting effect on how people ‘make up’ who they want to be (2009: 75). This means that in addition to seeing one's identity as simply a number of characteristics, these characteristics are linked to memories of one’s life that in turn form a story (Ahuvia 2005: 172). This story connects past identity to present identity and might together imagine a future identity. Again, identity can be seen as a kind of performance in which consumers use goods to act out personal versions of cultural values (ibid).

Consumer culture is a great arena for different representations or identities, where the extended self and ongoing identity projects are shown through means of consumption and people are now empowered to ‘make up’ whom they want to be through various choices available in the marketplace (Shankar et. al 2009: 77). The primary driving force in consumption has become representing the self, both to oneself and to others (Ahuvia 2005: 172). However, as Elliott and Wattanasuwan state, “[…] there is always a tension between the meanings we construct for ourselves and those we are exposed to socially (1998: 132)”. Meaning needs to be negotiated, since individual self-identity is connected to that of collective social identity (ibid.). There are a variety of different consumer positions/representation/identities that people can adopt. Choosing a specific identity can work both ways; it can show an assumed power, but it can also become a chaotic choice (Shankar et. al 2009: 78). For example if a certain identity is not socially accepted or agreed upon. The existing identity and a person’s ongoing identity projects is a social act where people must gain recognition from others to achieve a valid and recognized identity (ibid.).

Elliott and Wattanasuwan argue that self-identity requires active construction, which partly can be achieved through developing consistent narratives of the self and partly through finding institutions to put trust in. Institutions can mean brands, and often brands provide
consistency that consumers might see develop into predictability, dependability, and eventually trust (1998: 137). As part of the consumer’s process of constructing and maintaining their identity, they also employ the symbolic meanings of consumer goods. Brands can then, through an understanding of the dynamics of identity construction, come to play an important role in the symbolic project of the self (ibid. 138). One can say that it works both ways. Consumers can receive symbolic meanings from brands, but brands are at the same time built upon cultural values that already exist in society, and are therefore also already imbedded in the consumer.

Our surrounding world exists of objects that have characteristics that are related to each other through time and space and causality (Carlshamre 2011: 85). Rief argues that goods never have fixed meanings, but that they can communicate different meanings in different contexts (2008: 564). Commodities go through many transformations in their daily uses and consumption rituals where goods are consumed for their function or use values, but importantly also for their symbolic and communicative qualities. These characteristics verbalize social relations, structures and divisions (ibid. 562, 564). “The people, and things, we love have a strong influence on our sense of who we are, on our self (Ahuvia 2005: 171).” Belk even says, “we are what we have (1988: 139),” and LP states that shopping feels good because it “feels a bit like self-realization” (Focus Group 2012).

That possessions are part of the self seems to be common ground, and by recognizing this we can also understand what possessions mean (Belk 1988: 139; Ahuvia 2005: 179). However, there are more factors influencing consumption and many studies have been done on how the consumption of goods affects the consumer and what kind of feelings drive the consumer to consume.

**Emotions**

Rafferty sees emotions as central to human behavior, that they condition our experiences by limiting, modifying, or enhancing them (2011: 246). According to her, fashion is an aesthetic system for dressing the body, but, also as a psychosocial concept that can cause styles of dressing to be revised quite often (ibid. 242). She states:

Fashion exists as a psycho-social mechanism that has derived from increasingly competitive social relations and continues to fuel them. Consequently, women have particular psychic and emotional experiences when consuming fashion, which depend upon the fundamental elements that have shaped their lived experiences (ibid. 243).
According to Rafferty are consumers of today enchanted by appearance fashions, where some consumers have the capacity to style themselves the way they desire and position themselves accordingly, which in turn brings them considerable emotional rewards. However, for others the maintenance of a fashionable appearance creates anxiety, distress, and disillusionment (2011: 239).

Kemp and Kopp also address this issue with their term, emotion regulation consumption (ERC). They propose that emotion regulation shows itself in two ways, either “Individuals will regulate positive emotions in an effort to maintain a positive emotion, or will make concerted efforts to ‘down-regulate’ or dispel a negative emotion (Kemp and Kopp 2011: 2).” Their findings suggest that negative emotions such as sadness, fear, and anxiety are through consumption used to down-regulate these emotions to create positive ones. Also, in positive emotions such as amusement and contentment, consumption is used to maintain this affirmative state (ibid. 5). They argue that “Emotions shape our everyday existence, including our consumption and purchase behavior (ibid. 1).” Consumption and purchases are used to manage emotions, and the consumers can use purchases of goods with various values to increase their well-being. However, they also discuss how emotion regulating consumption can have unintended effects on the consumer that not necessarily are positive, such as excessive spending, debt, stress, or sadness (ibid.).

That it is above all anxiety that determines what people wear is suggested by the study by Clarke and Miller (2002: 192). They want to open up the possibility that women’s dilemmas in choosing clothing has little do to with the industry or its fashion journalism, but that it is the social context that determines taste or fashion choice (ibid. 192-193). However, that the social context in turn is influenced by the fashion industry could also be argued. Clarke and Miller find that their research shows how women have both social and psychological supports that help them with purchases, e.g. family and friends, but when these are not available there are many commercial institutions that perform this role, e.g. catalogues (ibid. 201-202) or as I argue, also fashion magazines, stylists and personal shoppers. Their study suggests that individuals’ relationship to fashion is socially mediated and that people often are so anxious about the choices that various forms of support and reassurance are needed (ibid. 209).

Individuals’ anxieties over fashion choices are seamlessly integrated into their anxiety over relationships to people more generally. The result is an overwhelming sense of fear that an individual—even one with extensive fashion knowledge—may not actually know what they themselves like. They can only determine what the desired garment is and, beyond this, what is the right thing to buy or to wear, through
searching for a social support. This might manifest itself in the form of a friend who comes shopping with you, or the reassurance that a color is all right since it is really ‘the new black’ […] (ibid.: 211).

Although they have a point that friends and family can be used for reassurance, their claim that reassurance that a new color is the new black is something probably coming from fashion magazines, making their argument that fashion choices are not dependent on the fashion industry somewhat contradictory.

Indicating anxiety and approval from the surroundings is CS’s story from when she was a child. Her mother used to buy her used clothing all the time, which she refused to wear since everyone else wore new clothing. Nowadays, however, she finds used clothing to be much more ok since it is in fashion (Focus Group 2012); making it approved by other people. CS: “it matters a lot what other people think”, with NO and LF agreeing (ibid.). Regarding purchases of sustainable fashion CS also states:

I think you have to have the feeling that it becomes a personal engagement, that you feel you contribute with something, you can know a lot, but also that it becomes favorable on several levels, not only the personal. Maybe knowledge can do that, that it’s not only about environmental labeling, but that when another person tells me something, then it becomes personal, then I remember it. For example – Karin’s friends said… and then I can tell my other friends about it. You get affected a lot by the people you have around you, say if we go into town and you say - but damn it, you can’t buy this nail polish – then… (ibid.).

HH responds:

Such things also show a lot on Facebook, there the personal connection comes in – oh ok she supports this – and if I’d read it in the paper I might not have reacted. If you affect one person in your environment, then that person can affect someone else (ibid.).

Clarke and Miller argue that our society has transformed to a place where new forms of moral guidance is sought, that people “[…] no longer respect the authority of institutions and rules that determined how we should act, we become, as individuals, increasingly burdened with the task of creating normativity for ourselves (2002: 210)”. They feel that this is shown in our daily lives, where women spend large amounts of money on fashion magazines even though they are surrounded by similar advertisings, and that shopping is used to resolve the discrepancy between how we feel we should be and how we actually are (ibid. 210-211). However, they also see how the world of fashion has democratized people’s relationship to clothing where greater acceptance to niche or subcultural fashion has emerged, and how the traditional form of fashion authority has seen a decline; the authoritative claim as to what fashion is for a given year has been blurred (ibid. 211).
Another emotion-based motivator for consumption, and probably the most important and complex, is desire.

**Desire**

Desire is regarded as a powerful cyclic emotion that is both discomforting and pleasurable. Desire is an embodied passion involving a quest for otherness, sociality, danger, and inaccessibility. Underlying and driving the pursuit of desire, we find self-seduction, longing, desire for desire, fear of being without desire, hopefulness, and tensions between seduction and morality (Belk et. al 2003: 326).

Belk et. al make a clear distinction between consumer desire and needs or wants and explain that desire is a passionate emotion that is quite different from the dispassionate action of fulfilling wants and needs, that consumer desire is born between consumption fantasies and social situational contexts (2003: 327). Indicating this is also LF’s statement on shopping:

> It’s like a successful hunt, you come home with a new pray – yes I got it and no one else – I think about this with sustainable fashion, and shopping is so much about lust, of course you think about, you think about buying ecological, but then you see that top you just want to have, and then you buy it and you’re happy for a week, […] it’s difficult this with thinking, you’re not entirely rational, or you don’t want to be completely rational in consuming fashion, because if you are then you’re not into fashion, you can be it when you buy functional clothes but... (Focus Group 2012).

HH adds: “exactly, but you shouldn’t actually have to make that choice, everything should actually be ok, that when you want to shop lustfully you know that it’s produced ok”. LF responds: “exactly, but the selection isn’t there yet” (ibid.).

In the sense of desire, consumer goods not yet in possession become mesmerizing and create cravings where magical meanings in life are imagined. Advertisers, retailers and other merchants help to enchant these goods, and any object can potentially become the object of desire. However, a particular dress, skirt or top is desired, it is not just any other garment (Belk et. al 2003: 327-328). Belk et. al argue that people produce imaginations of a good or better life, which spurs them into actions that can make the dreams reality; desire being such imagining. These plans of action are shaped and expressed in a social context and take the form of consumption (ibid. 329). The desired object promises transformation where the consumer can get a feeling of escape or an altered state (ibid. 335). CS states:

> Yes if you feel you have a bad habit, then you can buy something that symbolizes the new falls transformation, that in the end probably fails anyway. It is quickly realizable. It’s this thing about being lazy, you buy a new pair of workout-pants but then still only exercise four times in a year (Focus Group 2012).
However, Belk et. al also state that these objects are desired by the consumer in order to be and feel like one of the others, it is not about the object per se (2003: 337); and if many other people desire the same thing, the consumer believes it is worth their own desire (ibid. 331). Desire is characterized by its warrant of responses from other people, making the desire for objects social, which in turn either can bring pleasurable experiences or be displeasing and restrictive (ibid. 336-337). Supporting the arguments set forth in the section on emotions.

Immorality is a consequence of desire that Belk et. al found many consumers being afraid of, one which by many was felt could be achieved when opposing socially valued qualities of reason such as rationality and self-control, that others possibly would see them as indulgent, weak, immoral or bad if they pursued the desires (2003: 337). They also found that desires were enhanced when the obtaining of the object was difficult or not likely, but that the emotion also changed once the acquirement of the desired object had been realized or was beyond hope (ibid. 339-340). Consumers in their study seemed to have a desire to desire, where realization led to cycling or recycling of desire and that the desire commonly refocused on a new object (ibid. 342). Feelings described after obtaining an object were largely negative, e.g. burdened, unappreciative, jealous, remorseful, and anxious, frustrated, empty, or indifferent, indicating that the positive emotions were mainly felt during the stages of anticipation (ibid: 342-343). “The cycle of desire is thus accelerated by the desire to desire, the hope for hope, and the fear of being without desire. Realization of desire results in re-initiation of the cycle of consumer desire, focused on some new object (ibid. 343).”

To show a simplified version of the cultural socialization of desire, Belk et. al developed figure 2. Desire is instigated by others, promotion, and media and leads to our imagination of a specific object and/or how this object can transform us. This imagination gives us hope for a better life and further fuels the desire. Imagination can however also make us turn to others, promotion, or media an object that could realize a better life. Desire can as well lead to frustration if the object seems unreachable, but this also makes us hope more or make us abandon the idea and move on to a new object.
Once an object has become realized, the process starts over. The entire process is constantly affected by seduction and morality.

Consumer desire is evidently a powerful emotion, and according to Belk et. al it overshadows other motivational feelings such as wants (2003: 343). The desire for objects is based on the longing for social positions and relationships, and their study suggests that consumers hope these objects will channel love, respect, recognition, status, security, escape, or attractiveness (ibid. 343-344).

Desires are nurtured by self-embellished fantasies of a wholly different self, and they may be stimulated by external sources, including advertising, retail displays, films, television programs, stories told by other people, and the consumption behavior of real or imaginary others. But we find that the person who feels strong desire has almost always actively stimulated this desire by attending, seeking out, entertaining, and embellishing such images. The desires that occupy us are vivid and riveting fantasies that we participate in nurturing, growing, and pursuing, through self-seduction (ibid. 344).

Seduction and self-seduction are according to Belk et. al key components of the motivating force of desire (2003: 345). Imagery of advertising, media, and other cultural intermediaries help seduce the consumer, but they are also their own seducers, which often is not recognized. The self-seduced consumer’s desire meets the social order where a resolution is either considered moral or legitimate, and if the consumer falls out this order, feelings of danger such as guilt, sin, imbalance, or loss of control can be felt, so various ethics existing in their cultures are used by consumers to guide them in their social morality (ibid. 345-346). Belk et. al find that their research has shown that desires are followed by paradoxical tensions such as fun versus guilt, pleasure versus health, freedom versus the enslavement of addiction, vitality versus balance, self-control versus sin, and rationality versus uninhibited animality and childishness; which for adults is what keeps the desire alive (ibid. 346).

The fashion system does, however, not only consist of companies and consumers, but also of various other actors in the fashion industry. These can e.g. be journalists, editors, buyers, and marketers, where various practices such as price setting, advertising, articles, and other events need to be taken into consideration.

5.3 The Rest of the Fashion Industry
The environmental and ecological movement has in the past twenty years spurred awareness in the fashion industry, educational institutions, media, and consumers (Thomas 2008: 525), and Beard argues that the fashion industry is starting to assume its responsibility towards society, a society that has grown increasingly aware over the impact their consumption has on the people and the environment (2008: 450). When turning to the world of fashion, there are a
variety of sources that can be used for inspiration, e.g. designer labels, brands, runway shows, movies, fashion blogs, and fashion magazines. Gam’s study showed e.g. that 64 per cent of the participants in his study mainly got fashion information from fashion magazines (2011: 190). As Entwistle states: “Fashion journalist and fashion leaders play their role in the progress of a particular fashion […] (2000: 220)”, and all these agents show how new fashion relates to previous fashion aesthetically as well as materially (ibid.). Murray also argues that the media plays an important role in establishing norms and expectations; however, in combination with the consumer’s life experience and cultural codes that also influences the body’s appearance, conception, and use (2002: 435-436).

According to Entwistle, the fashion industry has always been associated with glamour and the work of journalists, photographers, and models (2000: 210). So to be able to create a valuable image, a fashion house or label has to consider both its economic and cultural sites in this endeavor. Advertising, marketing, magazines, and shop design are all important aspects in this journey (Entwistle 2000: 210), and would therefore also assist in promoting sustainable fashion. First a discussion on so called ‘eco-fashion’ will follow, then perceptions of price, before looking at various events and media coverage regarding sustainably in the fashion industry, and finally ending with a short case study on the Swedish fashion magazines ELLE and Damernas Värld.

5.3.1 ‘Eco-fashion’
Eco, organic, and green are some of the most common terms used regarding sustainable fashion, both in brands marketing and labeling, as well as in media discussions. However, Winge argues that eco-fashion’s sustainability must be questioned. The fashion industry has in the past marketed greater awareness on these issues, such as the PETA anti-fur campaign in the 1990s. Five supermodels and several celebrities were featured in campaigns stating ‘I’d rather go naked than wear fur’, but a few years’ later models like Naomi Campbell and Cindy Crawford returned to the fur market (Winge 2008: 520-521). Whether or not ‘green’ or eco-fashions are just the latest trend or if the fashion industry has chosen a more environmental approach to fashion is discussed both by Winge and by Beard (ibid. 513). Beard finds that consumers often feel they are being misguided, which he sees as the challenge of eco-fashion brands today. Brands want to position and brand themselves as both ethically worthy and fashionable to a large consumer market and not just a niche, making it both an economic and moral imperative (2008: 449). However, Fredriksson is skeptical, often seeing brands efforts as marketing tools, questioning whether or not it really matters. If out of a collection of one
hundred garments, one t-shirt is in organic cotton, does it really make a difference? Or if a t-shirt in organic cotton is shipped all the way from China, how ecological is it then (Fredriksson 2012)? Fredriksson has a point, but Torlén Simberg sees this kind of skepticism as part of the problem, that it is important to show that things like these are important, and that things that are at least a little bit better than before also is something positive (Torlén Simberg 2012). Hagerman’s statement also reflects this:

Sure, you never really know if something is good or bad, but then I think that everyone has to take on responsibility, what do I want to do… sure, as an individual it’s difficult to influence a large company, but if H&M now launches a collection with organic cotton and everyone buys it, then they would see that there’s a profit for them there, that ok, there’s buying power for these kind of garments… and it’s also the consumers that affect the orientation of the companies, of course they want to deliver something the consumers want (Hagerman 2012).

Also, Beard argues that the usage of confusing terms when it comes to advertising and promotional strategies, adds to the consumers comfortableness with fast throw-away fashion because both the firms and the consumers are confused with the phraseology. He means that brands use terms such as ethical, fair trade, organic, natural, sweat-shop free, recycled, and second-hand or vintage to persuade customers to believe that their products are environmentally friendly and ethically sound, but that there is no single universal organizational code of conduct regarding the terms, leaving the consumer alone in the decision making of which brand is the most sustainable (2008: 450). “For the wary consumer labels such as ‘fair trade’ and ‘organic’ are no guarantee of the actual quality of the garment they are buying, in terms of either fabric or manufacture. For this reason, many firms are cautious about their use of such terminology, and so instead have taken to inventing their own (Beard 2008: 459).” One example can be seen at Swedish clothing company, Lindex, who want to make it easier for the customers by labeling every garment made out of organic cotton or recycled materials with their own specific label (Lindex 2012a).

Marketing for green products has also become popular, one example is, as mentioned earlier, H&M’s collection ‘Conscious Collection’, but such campaigns can be seen at e.g. Lindex as well. This spring they launched their sustainable collection ‘Affordable Luxury’, which was made entirely out of recycled materials (Lindex 2012b). Meyer’s research found, however, that a ‘green-only’ positioning strategy can be perceived as rather unsuccessful by consumers (2001: 328). He argues that sustainable clothes usually imply higher prices and minor benefits, and that the majority of consumers do not buy these products. Instead he finds that companies should argue that the environmental benefit only is a complementing value to
the already existing superiority (ibid.). Findings in Gam’s study support this claim, showing that “[…] marketing strategies for eco-friendly clothing should be similar to other apparel product marketing strategies (2011: 191)”.

In the fashion industry eco-conscious clothing in the past meant rope sandals, tie-dye T-shirts and hemp cargo pants and were often imbedded with a value that reflected the eco-conscious lifestyle of the wearer, values associated with environmental issues, and animal and human rights (Winge 2008: 511-512). Winge differentiates between past eco-dress and current eco-fashion, arguing that its meanings and values have changed over time to project new visual signs associated with current trends and celebrity chic (ibid. 513). She claims that: “Eco-dress includes clothing, accessories, and shoes that may be designed, manufactured, transported, consumed, or recycled with methods and materials that reflect an enlightened consciousness about environmental issues and human and animal rights (ibid. 514).” Eco-fashion on the other hand, is to Winge something that rests on luxury and style and thereby has attracted a larger consumer base, while not necessarily communicating the same ideology as eco-dress (ibid. 520). Eco-conscious fashion can nowadays have the same aesthetic as ‘regular’ fashion, which according to Winge brings several complications; that eco-fashion consumer’s loyalty has been closely linked to celebrity chic, and that this could result in an unstable consumer base over time (ibid.).

In the focus group discussion NO argued that sustainable fashion in regular retail stores often is much more expensive, making it a question of budget and elitism (Focus Group 2012). LF agreed, however added: “but the weird thing about fashion is that this sometimes makes it more desirable, it is not the same as with organic eggs, if they are much more expensive you just buy the cheaper ones, with clothes it becomes more status” (ibid). CS also states: “what makes me buy the organic milk is also that I actually think it’s healthier” (ibid.). However, consumers may not see the health benefits of eco-friendly clothing as they do with organic food (Gam 2011: 189), making Hustvedt and Dickson’s suggestion quite indicative, that organic cotton apparel would benefit from the aura of health related to the item, just as with organic food products (2009: 62).

Winge also finds that if the consumer is allowed to be both fashionable and environmentally conscious, the eco-conscious message could be entirely lost (2008: 518). Fredriksson however, feels that eco-fashion needs to blend in with ‘regular’ fashion to be able to compete with it; that consumers simply look for something beautiful (Fredriksson 2012). It is substantiated by Meyer who argues that “green products are bought only if customers perceive the products as superior to competitors’ offerings (2001: 317).” Torlén Simberg also
agrees but adds that it gets more difficult with ecological fashion than with e.g. food. That when you buy milk e.g. you get to choose between two equal products where one is ecological and one is not, whereas this choice often is not available when shopping for clothes (Torlén Simberg 2012). Again, a need for a greater selection of sustainable fashion becomes visible.

While eco-fashion in some circumstances can be significantly higher priced than ‘regular’ fashion, there are nowadays plenty of fast fashion brands that also offer less expensive selections of eco-friendly clothing, making sustainable fashion not only a subject for celebrities and the high-income consumers, but for the general consumer as well. So more specifically, how does the price affect consumer purchases?

5.3.2 Price

Regarding price on ethically produced health and beauty products, Stanforth and Hauck found that UK consumers may not allow companies to increase prices to cover the increased production costs for sustainable items, and that it is not evident that consumers expect to share this cost with the companies (2010: 615). Participants expected an increased price of 30 to 40 per cent for ethically produced goods, but were only inclined to pay ten per cent more for these products (ibid. 615, 621). However, a study made by Pollin et. al claims that only a two to six per cent increase in workers’ wages would cover the cost of ethical production in the US or Mexico (2004: 155). If Stanforth and Hauck’s numbers for health and beauty products would be comparable to fashion garments, and if Pollin et. al’s numbers also would be correct for Asia, where most of the production of the fashion industry lies, it suggests the increase would be well received by consumers. The report by Fair Trade Center also proves this theory, stating that minimum wages normally are 20 - 30 per cent of living wages and that workers pay usually represents around 0.5 - 3 per cent of the total cost of production for a garment. Thereby the price of a garment would not need a significant price increase to cover living wages (2010: 8).

Price is also a question when it comes to second hand shops, however in a different way. LP states:

I can get the feeling when I’m shopping at Myrorna⁷ that everything, it is also related to price but, you get a feeling of that the system just goes plus, that it goes to something good, and if you stand there with two shirts that cost 60 crowns, I would never have bought those items at H&M at their price, for many reasons. So absolutely, price maybe matters, but if you don’t feel like what you’re doing isn’t impacting then... (Focus Group 2012).

⁷ Swedish second hand shop.
Not only price is a factor for consumer, but they can be affected by what they read or see as well. To see what else is happening in the Swedish fashion industry, various media coverage, events, and initiatives will be looked at.

5.3.3 Discussions in the Swedish Fashion Industry
Other actors in the Swedish fashion industry have also acknowledged the need for a more sustainable fashion industry. Not only daily newspapers, but also television channels as well as museums and other organizations have covered or cover these issues.

Sveriges Television (SVT), one of many Swedish TV channels state that sustainable fashion requires innovation (SVT 2011b), and Svenska Dagbladet (SvD), a Swedish daily newspaper, also encourage more fashion awareness (SvD 2007). They suggest buying fewer items, to reuse old clothes, and to decrease our laundering (ibid.). Sandblasted jeans have also been widely covered in the media. Aftonbladet, a Swedish evening paper, write about how workers in Turkey sandblasted jeans for H&M, Lindex, and Gina Tricot etc. (H&M did not stop selling sandblasted jeans until 2010), and how many of them died or got serious health related issues affecting them for the rest of their lives (Aftonbladet 2011). Dagens Nyheter, another Swedish daily newspaper, discussed the slow retail market of 2011 and argued it might because of changed consumer character, that people want more durable clothes and no longer want the deal of three tops for the price of two (DN 2011).

Sofia Hedström, a Swedish fashion journalist for SvD and SVT among others, released in 2011 the book Modemanifestet: de stilsmartas handbook which has a starting point from her personal project, not shopping for an entire year. However, it also deals with the seriousness behind the fashion industry, teaches you how to create a fun and trendy style with the clothes you already have, and gives you creative tips for your closet (Bokus 2012). Hedström also has her own blog on SvD’s homepage where she frequently acknowledges various stories regarding sustainability in the fashion industry (Hedström 2012b).

Svensk Handel (Swedish employers’ organization for the trade and commerce sector) write about how more companies express an interest in sustainability, but how revenue still is most important (Svensk Handel 2011), and Lisbeth Svengren Holm, professor in fashion Management at The University of Borås, argues that sustainable fashion should not become just a trend, but wants to combine economic growth with less consumption (University of Borås 2012b). The University also has several research programs focusing on sustainability matters. For example “Smart Textiles” and “F:3 - fashion, function, futures” (ibid.).
The company, The CSR-guide, released in 2012 a rapport on sustainability in the fashion industry, where it analyzed the field of sustainability and looked at trends in 2011 and future trends for 2012 both locally in Sweden and globally (CSR Guiden 2012). They also announced their press release on Mynewsdesk.com, where they state that the year of 2011 in many ways changed the industries work with sustainability issues (Mynewsdesk.com 2012). They argue that the consumer has become more and more aware and to a greater extent wants craftsmanship, locally produced clothes, and greater transparency in the supply chain. However, SvD also finds the Swedish fashion industry is behind in communication matters regarding sustainability, that they mainly announce collaborations with different help organizations (SvD 2007).

Sveriges Radio (Swedish Radio Channels), held in 2008 a discussion on fashion and sustainability on their channel P4 (Sveriges Radio 2012), and another initiative on discussions in the fashion industry is taken by the Antonia Ax:son Johnsons Foundation for Environment & Development. In the last couple of years they have hosted several fashion talks, (also called Axtalk) concerning sustainable fashion (Axtalk 2012). For example: “Fashion Talks 2012 will explore the changing role of the consumer and how important trends in technology, lifestyles and business models are reshaping the consumer’s expectations and opportunities for consuming fashion, and offering exciting ways for innovative fashion brands to engage their customers (ibid.).” The foundation also organized a series of discussions between various agents related to the fashion industry on the subject sustainable fashion that aired on the show Utbildningsradion on Swedish television (UR Play 2012). In one episode, filmed during Stockholm Fashion Week in February 2012, representatives from both Acne and Filippa K participated (UR 2012).

Another Swedish initiative is Lånegarderoben (the loan closet) (Lånegarderoben 2012). It works like a library, but you borrow clothes instead of books and regular consumers can acquire a six-month membership for 600 Swedish crowns. Lånegarderoben’s idea is that consumers are to be able to renew their wardrobe without contributing to increased consumption. They are sponsored by e.g. Filippa K, J.Lindeberg, and Nudie Jeans Co. (ibid.). Similar to Lånegarderoben, and even is less expensive, is Klädbytardagen (swopping clothes day), which is an initiative by The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (Naturskyddsföreningen 2012b). Clothes swopping days were this year held at 64 different locations across Sweden; you bring five garments you want to swap, and leave with five new garments (ibid.)
However not Swedish, but a Nordic initiative is *Copenhagen Fashion Summit* (Nordic Fashion Association 2012). In 2012, over one thousand industry key stakeholders of the fashion industry (from over 27 countries), gathered in Copenhagen “[…] to share insights and identify new opportunities and forward-looking solutions for the global fashion industry to tackle the growing environmental challenges. Focus of the summit was to discuss ways on how to involve and engage consumers in sustainable consumption (ibid.)”. The Copenhagen Fashion Summit is part Nordic Initiative Clean and Ethical (NICE) initiatives, which is a joint commitment from the Nordic fashion industry towards a more environmentally and socially responsible fashion industry. Late may another fashion summit will be held in Helsinki, Finland (ibid.). Similar is The Sustainable Fashion Academy (SFA), a Swedish “non-financial profit foundation” that works with accelerating the fashion industry’s innovations for greater sustainability (Sustainable Fashion Academy 2012). They also educate and advise industry organizations, public agencies, non-governmental organizations, journalists and the media (ibid.)

Different museums have also highlighted the issue, and the Nordic Museum held in 2009 an exhibition called *Fair Fashion*? (Nordiska Museet 2012). The exhibition addressed the negative aspects of textile production and alternatives for a more sustainable future. It featured clothes lifecycles and subjects such as cotton production, chemicals, water usage, consumption, and recycling, and only used recycled material from previous exhibitions (ibid.). The Architectural Museum on the other hand invited different agents in the fashion industry to a discussion on sustainable fashion, and also arranged a re-make workshop where visitors could ‘bring new life’ to their clothes (Arkitekturmuseet 2011).

Whereas museums, fashion talks, and various other initiates mentioned above, all work towards sustainability in a positive way, daily newspapers and news programs seem to mention positive aspects such as e.g. the clothes sopping day, but when companies are concerned only their misconduct gets reported on. According to Lewenhaupt, also the press has change; be part of an information channel that can turn around the skepticism felt by many people, that many companies actually also do good (Lewenhaupt 2012).

To see if, how, and how often Swedish fashion magazines incorporate sustainability in their magazines, a short case study now follows.

### 5.3.4 Case Study: *ELLE* and *Damernas Värld*

To get a perspective of the fashion magazine world, the past seven issues of Swedish *ELLE* and *Damernas Värld* were looked at in order to see if the concept of sustainability somehow
was evident. The approach was to look if sustainability issues (e.g. environmental and ethical issues as well as excessive consumption) related to the fashion industry were acknowledged in some way, and not to see whether or not they featured brands or designer labels that create sustainable fashion.

In *ELLE* magazine, the concept of sustainability was mainly missing. A few times cosmetic products that somehow are sustainably produced were featured. However, one issue featured a two-page spread called ‘beauty with reflection’ (skönhet med eftertanke), where several beauty products with environmental and/or ethical aspects were presented. An accompanying text also explained various practices related to cosmetic products and their production and gave suggestions of different brands that engaged in sustainability in various ways. When interviewed, Fredriksson from *ELLE* stated that sustainability is not something they work with actively, but it becomes more of a bonus for their readers if the magazine features fashionable items that have been produced with sustainability in mind (Fredriksson 2012). Positively however, as someone responsible at a magazine she would like to influence people to become more aware and to shop less. For example, influence the consumers only to buy one new coat for the new fall/winter season or to buy more vintage clothing (ibid).

*Damernas Värld* only showed a slightly better picture. A few times, various projects related to sustainability were acknowledged, such as Lindex’s and H&M’s ecological collections, and the magazine also featured a greater amount of more sustainable beauty products.

Whereas both magazines sometimes featured beauty products that relate to sustainability, many times the point is that the product is ‘natural’ and thereby better for your skin, emphasizing the aspect of health rather than environmental or ethical concern. Even if, as mentioned above, this aspect also was mentioned at times. More importantly however, is that sustainability regarding clothes was missing overall from both magazines. Yes, there were sometimes interviews with celebrities who like vintage clothing, but issues regarding consumers consumption and/or other issues in sustainability that have been mentioned in this paper were missing completely. Lewenhaupt feels that fashion magazines should play a greater roll and take responsibility (Lewenhaupt 2012). However, she states:

> Even if, it is really difficult, magazines are living on showing seasonal goods, and then it might be hard to be consumers’ conscious guide simultaneously, but I do think one could be it at a greater level than one are today […] something that also could be featured in magazines is how you take care of your clothes (ibid.).

A discussion on fashion magazines roll in the fashion systems regarding sustainability will
therefore be addressed further in the following conclusion.

6. CONCLUSION

The application of my theoretical framework together with previous research and material collected from interviews, the focus group discussion, case studies, and various websites helped tackle the topic from different angles and therefore greatly contributed in answering the research questions. The aim of this study was to further the knowledge and understanding of how the relationship between consumers and institutions functions and how it affects sustainable consumption in the world of fashion.

Sustainability is becoming an increasingly larger issue every day, and for a long time this has been neglected in the fashion industry. Fletcher puts it correctly by stating:

> While fashion is at the heart of our culture and important to our relationships, our aesthetic desires and identity, the fashion and textile sector’s lack of attention to moral and environmental issues is socially and ecologically undermining (2008: 118).

However, as this research has proven, it is not only the textile sector and other typical actors in the fashion system (clothing companies, brands, designer labels, journalists, editors, marketers etc.) that have to adopt more sustainable practices, but the consumers as well. First, sustainable conduct of companies will be addressed, then consumers, followed by other variables of the fashion system, before ending with a concluding discussion.

Companies Sustainable Conduct

Past research has shown how many companies environmental and ethical conduct has changed for the better during the last decade; however, there is still a long way to go. The United Nations have acknowledged the need for sustainable practice, and given businesses guidelines that help them in this endeavor. One question seems to be how businesses can be made to embrace these guidelines and actually make them happen. Further legislation is one alternative that is widely suggested, both by consumers and other researchers. While this is greatly possible at a local level, or even a EU-level, to have worldwide governments’ agreeing on certain rules and regulations is a tricky task. Even if the general person would agree on a statement such as ‘workers should have wages that enable them a descent life’, what this actually means is not self-evident. Many different variables influence this conception, for example culture and the public national economy. Even so, what one could agree on from a western perspective is that companies should pay living wages to all workers. Factory workers in Asia (and other manufacturing nations) should not have to work excessive
overtime to be able to get by, especially since this would not be accepted on the western companies’ own side of the world. Research on this subject has made it clear that this increase in wages would be well within the range of an increased price that consumers would be willing to pay for a product.

As for the issue with chemical use and the safety protocols regarding this practice, there seems to be a lack of follow-up concerning these issues. Yes, chemicals are forbidden on an EU-level, but the majority of the textile industry puts its production in Asia, where different regulations apply. Many companies do their own testing overseas, but many companies also cannot afford doing these tests, having to rely on the factory’s assurance. Even if purchasing services from other businesses, with contracts where certain rules apply and have been signed for, a greater follow-up on these issues remains essential. It is also unclear how the EU controls the use of chemicals and what consequences there are for companies’ misconduct, if there are any at all. Either way, businesses need to work harder towards sustainability themselves, but local governments also need to contribute to both increasing the control of chemical use and to increasing the living standards of factory workers in Asia.

Another large issue is how thorough the companies are supposed to be in order to secure the sustainability of their products. As Beard states: “[…] the difficulty is how all the suppliers of these individual components can be ‘ethically secured’ and accounted for, together with the labor used to manufacture the garment, its transport from factory to retail outlet, and ultimately the garment’s aftercare and disposal (2008: 448)” This applies not only to the ethical aspect of production, but the environmental one as well. The companies not only have to consider the products entire lifecycle, but as mentioned earlier, to consider is how different garments/fabrics have different impacts during the various stages of the products lifecycle. Companies can of course never guarantee excellence in all aspects, and as previous research has shown, transparency at all their suppliers overseas is an issue that might not be so easy to address. In this instance, businesses own knowledge of production processes need to be increased, which at least enables them to understand how all stages of production work, and thereby it would also be easier to find where possible mishaps occurred. Creating dialogues with other organizations to exchange information can improve practices, whereas innovations in the chain of waste also are essential and where companies could consider ideas such as industrial ecology and cradle-to-cradle. Additional inspiration in other fields such as engineering, industrial design, and architecture can also be found (Armstrong and LeHew 2011: 36).
Many other opportunities exist as well, e.g. incorporating sustainability principles from the design phase could eliminate many environmental costs later on in the products lifecycle, innovation of new materials, or even considering existing materials sustainability are great ways of engaging in the issue. Also technology can help, but is not something that should be relied upon. One can be confident of new technology in the future helping address the issues of unsustainability; however, to wait for something that might help in the future is something the fashion industry cannot afford; action must happen now. Nevertheless, companies also need to become more transparent towards consumers. To increase credibility regarding their sustainability work, greater insight into their practices must be provided. If a company paints a picture of only doing great things and a report or article proves differently, consumers start doubting them. If companies instead communicate both successes and issues, a greater understanding and positive attitude towards them would form.

However, it is not only up to companies to ensure their sustainable production, but a more complicated picture is at hand. Even if companies have the final responsibility for their own products, the marketplace is a politicized environment where many dichotomies exist. By placing production in Asia, complex relationships with the hosting nations can increase difficulty with these issues. The hosting nation, the factory on site, as well as the producing company have to be obliged. Intersecting different ideologies and political environments creates an ongoing debate of which rules and regulations to enforce, the hosting nations being of firsthand. Even so, a company has to see to their own moralistic credentials and evaluate if their companies greater economic growth really should be dependent on another nations poor environments. Could not slightly lower revenue be worth another nation’s better work environment?

Also, as Thompson argues, political ideologies and moralistic narratives often reproduce class, gender, and racial hierarchies, and are institutionalized and contested through consumption practices (2011: 139). Therefore, consumers must also acknowledge their contribution to these issues.

**Consumers and Sustainability**

Consumers need to become more aware of the impact of their consumption practices and their impact during the use and end phase of the product. Be proactive and actually give a real effort when it comes to their own practices; launder less frequently, use less detergent, air clothes more frequently, shop more vintage clothing, recycle and donate clothing, make their standpoint known by shopping more sustainable fashion, but most importantly they need to
scrutinize themselves. Do they actually need this new top, or those new jeans? Because in the end, what consumers need to do is to shop less. As Fletcher so thoroughly argues:

It’s an obvious truth that the relationship between fashion and consumption conflicts with sustainability goals – although, like the elephant in the room, it’s so obvious that it’s often overlooked. We shop for clothes addictively and are trapped by record levels of credit card debt. The pressure to constantly reformulate identity instigated by changing fashion trends feeds insecurity and rising levels of psychological illness. The products themselves exploit workers, fuel resource use, increase environmental impact and generate waste. Fashion cycles and trends contribute to very high levels of individual material consumption that are supported by the apparent insatiability of consumers’ wants. We meet our desire for pleasure, new experiences, status and identity formation through buying goods – many of them clothes. And because we have an inexhaustible supply of desires, consumption – particularly of new items – continues to grow because we see the purchase of each new item as providing us with novel experiences that we have not so far encountered (2008: 117-118).

Since we shop so excessively, waste also becomes a big issue. Consumers need to become better at recycling their discarded clothes; if the clothes are not given away to charity or second hand shops the textile waste needs to be handed to other recycling stations where they can be taken care of correctly. Therefore governments also need to provide easy accessible containers (who also need to be informed about with various marketing campaigns) at the same collection sites as for household waste so consumers are able to dispose of them without hassle.

However, the consumers face several issues in the process towards more sustainable consumption; their concerns are the availability of sustainable products, the prices of these products, the ‘beauty’ of these products, but also the actual sustainability of them. All research shows that the availability of sustainable fashion must become much larger if the consumer is going get on the wagon, it needs to be easier to buy sustainable fashion and the selection must highly increase. At the same time, the prices cannot be significantly higher if purchases are actually going to be made, because consumers have a hard time seeing the benefits. Sustainable fashion must also compete with ‘regular’ fashion in terms of ‘looks’, it must be just as desirable as anything else; consumers are not just going to buy a garment because it is organic e.g., but it must be equally or more ‘beautiful’ as the equivalent ‘regular’ garment. As Eckhardt et. al state:

[…] doing the right thing may mean paying more, expending more time and effort to find the ‘right’ product, or doing without a popular brand. Therefore, consumers may choose to remain consciously or subconsciously ignorant of the labor conditions, environmental impacts, or intellectual property rights involved in the products they buy (2010: 427).
As a lot of research has shown, consumers tend to use various justifications to defend their unethical behavior. Not only do the above-mentioned factors, availability, price, and looks, determine purchases, but also barriers that are social, lifestyle, informational, and political. Consumers find it hard to change their own behavior if not everyone else does so as well; they find it difficult to see how their actions matter if compared to big corporations and argue that it is the companies that need to take larger responsibility instead; many even saw economic growth as a justification for morality breaches; they also find it hard to break everyday habits and social norms, where most of them find that consumption helped them be part of the rest of the society, to stay in tuned with current trends.

Consumer culture represents a variety of symbolic resources that people interact with to (re)produce their identities (Shankar et. al 2009: 90) and Arnould and Thompson even see consumers both as culture bearers as well as culture producers (2005: 873). The marketplace has become an important source of symbolic resources, where people can construct narratives of identity (Arnould and Thompson 2005: 871). The construct of self involves consumer behavior rather than buyer behavior, and the relationship between self-concept and consumer brand-choice appears to be stronger than expected (Belk 1988: 139). Identity can be seen as a kind of performance in which consumers use goods to act out personal versions of cultural values. As mentioned earlier, “[…] our possessions are a major contributor to and reflection of our identities (ibid. 139)”. Identity and/or the self are considered to be constructed and negotiated in a social setting by cultural values and historical situations; although the debate whether identity and the self is the same thing, is something the length of this essay does not allow addressing. Cultural values and social norms all affect the construction of self and identity and in this process consumption plays a large role.

Another large focus of previous research is feelings, an important aspect of consumer behavior. Consumers have both positive and negative feelings when it comes to shopping clothes, for those that feel confident in what they are supposed to purchase it feels good, but for those that are uncertain what kind of garments are legitimate, negative feelings such as anxiety and stress can occur. Consumption is also used as a compensatory tool, where consumers purchase things in order to feel better or to extend the positive state they are in. Imagination of this positive state fuels desire, desire for an object that could change everything for the better. However:

The consumer is no mere pawn, either in the web of seduction or in the web of social relations. Through the desire to desire, we allow and prepare our self to be seduced. We need only make ourselves accessible and open to becoming enchanted by the abundant promises of the marketplace. Our imaginations do the
rest. However, to be able to pursue a desire, and sometimes even to feel it and conceive of it as a desire, we must feel that we have the right and justification to do so, implying a modern subjectivity (Belk et. al 2003: 346).

It is not only the culture we live in or consumers who influence other consumers that fuel our desire, but also institutions such as e.g. brands, designer labels, and fashion magazines and other media sources with the assistance of marketing and advertising who play a significant part in this experience.

**Other Variables in the Fashion System**

Sustainability issues in the fashion industry have been acknowledged by many actors in the fashion system. Media coverage, public debates, and various organizational initiatives have all addressed the subject in different ways.

Sustainable fashion is often considered contradictory, and many question if it is a marketing perspective or a long-term approach. While it is part of a marketing strategy, it also seems to be something that clothing companies are starting to incorporate into their company visions and engage in increasingly. However, many times marketing and advertisements of sustainable fashion focus on the environmental aspects of the garments, even though studies have shown this might not be the best approach. People in general are also skeptical towards large companies, questioning whether or not their items are actually sustainable or if it is just a marketing trick to increase sales. This is where various media sources could assist in bringing the issue further. Today, news programs and daily newspapers mainly cover companies’ misconduct; instead they could also start featuring articles that show positive progress in the fashion industry. As Hagerman stated:

98% of all researchers can be in agreement, but then there’s these other two per cent. So the media picks up on this, media is so important regarding these questions, then they pick it up and it’s on the headlines. So the public must always sway, although research says something completely different. Journalists don’t usually to the issue a service (Hagerman 2012).

Even if informing on misconduct is an important part of journalism, incorporating positive feedback in the media might enable companies to be more transparent with their supply chain and production practices, and in turn giving better insight to consumers and others.

Also fashion magazines play a role in this matter. For inspiration, many consumers look into fashion magazines for fashion advice; making fashion journalists, editors, and stylists possible great contributors for increasing awareness on sustainable fashion. However, fashion magazines rarely feature sustainable fashion. Magazines can always give consumers advice
regarding consumption practices, while sustainability could also be made more visible by acknowledging various issues every now and then. Lewenhaupt even suggested having one of their editorials in every issue enlightening the consumer in various ways (Lewenhaupt 2012). This does in my opinion not necessarily mean featuring only sustainable fashion in this editorial, but bringing forth the issue in a creative way. Because, for them to increase featured fashion that is sustainable, a greater selection needs to be present otherwise this prospect does not seem likely; they want to show beautiful fashion, and if there is no beautiful sustainable fashion available it will not make into the magazine.

**Concluding Discussion**

A whole-system approach is required to increase sustainability in the fashion industry. However, a whole-system that involves all various players in companies and the media, as well as consumers is needed. Clothing and textile companies need to do their part to increase their sustainability conduct, but “Equally, consumers are increasingly called to acknowledge that their choices are not private, but have social and environmental consequences (Rief 2008: 567).” Clothing companies’ environmental and ethical practices need to improve, while at the same time larger selections of sustainable fashion must be offered to their customers. As Beard claims, if eco-fashion is going to be able to develop and grow, it needs to move from being an occasional purchase to an everyday habit for everyone (2008: 465). This is exactly why the availability of sustainable fashion becomes an issue. For sustainable fashion to become common practice for consumers, they can no longer be forced to go out of their ways to purchase it. Yes, second-hand clothing is a great alternative, but for the majority of consumers who do not purchase second hand clothing; other alternatives must be more present. Many times, companies excuse themselves by claiming that they only give consumers what they want, and the consumers excuse themselves with that they do not know any better. A sort of ‘blame-game’ has been going on for too long, where neither excuse is valid. Nowadays people in general seem fairly knowledgably about sustainability, so consumers need to look at their own actions, but also demand more from the companies and show them there is buying power for sustainable fashion. Companies on the other hand must look beyond economic growth and question their own morals, not simply doing as little as they can get away with. At the same time, the rest of the fashion industry has to their part.

As stated earlier, debates regarding the matter have been initiated, putting pressure on companies to actually follow through and also enabling them to express issues they are working on or are having trouble to correct. Fashion Magazines, bloggers, editors and other
journalists should also express a concern for issues with sustainability, and thereby contribute to making it known that these issues are important and worthwhile correcting. Although, fashion is a thriving capitalistic notion that also fashion magazines rest upon. Ads from various fashion companies often function as main financial income, decreasing the chances of more conscious features.

Other media sources such as daily newspapers and news programs must also re-evaluate their coverage on these matters, because today there seems to be a consensus in the media that only large companies who widely announce their sustainability work are to be scrutinized. If the press helps spread both positive and negative messages, consumers will be further educated, be able to release some of the skepticism regarding the already available sustainable fashion and in turn purchase more of it and give businesses incentives to increase their selection. Also, companies might become more inclined to be more transparent, further increasing their credibility towards the consumer. Media sources have shown to be one of the parts in the fashion system that is missing the most. Both companies and consumers have already started their journey towards greater sustainability, and even if it sometimes is a slow development, they have gotten much further than the media in acknowledging and supporting the task at hand.

One issue that only has been mentioned shortly in this paper is transportation. While this is an important aspect of sustainability, it is only addressed briefly, if at all, in the literature examined for this paper. Placing most production in Asia, transportation becomes a great contaminator. Fast fashion companies most definitely have to transport their clothes by air due to their high introduction rate, but alternatives can also be train or boat. Lewenhaupt even suggested that transportation is such a great villain, that it might even be more sustainable to place production locally again, in the western world where the clothes mainly are sold (Lewenhaupt 2012). The question is whether or not this is economically defendable. Revenue is, and will probably remain so as well, the thing that businesses are interested in the most resting on the fact that economic growth is the most universally accepted goal in the world (Fletcher 2010: 260).

Nature is not an unlimited resource; we have to continuously question how we people manage it and how we manage our relations to it and to our human surroundings. If the fast fashion trend is going to turn around is a question for the future to show, fashion is a constantly changing concept, which makes it possible, but consumers are also people of habit, and higher prices may or may not become acceptable. Also, higher prices are no guarantee for sustainability in the production process. Even if higher prices enable larger possibility for
them to happen, higher prices do not equal higher worker wages, better worker environments, or higher environmental concern, or even better quality at times. However, fast fashion is like fast food; it is standardized and mass-produced rapidly, and prices of tops, jeans or a dress seem unbeatably cheap (Fletcher 2008: 260). It is traded in large volumes across the globe and often styled homogeneously. New styles are quickly copied from high-end labels and introduced into stores every week capitalizing on consumers’ desire for ‘the new’ (ibid.). While, as stated earlier, fast fashion is not unsustainable in itself, factors such as low quality and mass-production make it a questionable alternative. Low quality means in turn that the garment itself wears out more quickly, making a new purchase necessary and also suggesting that durable clothes are more sustainable. Mass-production also often contributes to an unsustainable environment by exploiting nature’s resources and often also poor worker conditions, but again, this is true for smaller-scale production as well since smaller businesses often cannot afford to do audits at the factories they use.

What needs to change at the core is our culture. Cultural values and norms are imposed by the society and its inhabitants, meaning that all institutions as well the consumers are to be considered in this process. All players are interacting with and influencing each other, making it essential that everyone steps up to the plate. The capitalistic view of the world where ‘ignorance is bliss’ might be difficult to change; however, an attempt still has to be made. While this research has focused on Sweden, the findings can presumably be applied to other western societies as well, where this assumption has also been pertained to various sources in previous research. Even if this study has developed a clear conclusion, it has only touched upon the surface of a solution. Therefore, further research on how the fashion industry actually can adopt these changes would be fruitful.
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 Websites & Blogs


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**Interviews**


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**Focus Group**

UN GLOBAL IMPACT – 10 PRINCIPLES

Human Rights
- Principle 1: Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights; and
- Principle 2: make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses.

Labor
- Principle 3: Businesses should uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;
- Principle 4: the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour;
- Principle 5: the effective abolition of child labour; and
- Principle 6: the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

Environment
- Principle 7: Businesses should support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges;
- Principle 8: undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility; and
- Principle 9: encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies.

Anti-Corruption
- Principle 10: Businesses should work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery.

Source: UN Global Impact 2012