ETHICAL SELF FORMATION IN SLOW FASHION:
THE CASE OF THE SEWING COMMUNITY ON INSTAGRAM

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ABSTRACT

ETHICAL SELF FORMATION IN SLOW FASHION: THE CASE OF THE
SEWING COMMUNITY ON INSTAGRAM

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Slow fashion is often presented as having a stable set of principles and rules in the literature, and there is a lack of focus on the individuals and communities who practice slow fashion in their daily lives. This thesis explores how norms of sustainability and ethical consumption are constructed among home sewists who participate in the garment sewing community on Instagram. By utilising the data I collected from 25 in-depth interviews with community members and 2 years of participant observation, I discuss how virtual community building and maintenance practices contribute to the construction of normalcy in slow fashion and how practices of making and buying clothes serve as ethical work. Through a Foucauldian approach to ethics, I first question how community building and maintenance practices like community rituals, knowledge sharing, establishing symbolic boundaries and techniques of inclusivity contribute to the community members' ability to recognise their place in the broader movement of slow fashion, as well as feeling the obligations that come with being an active member and practitioner of slow fashion. I then analyse how the knowledge of making and buying the most sustainable and ethical sorts of clothes are communicated between members, what sorts of rules and guidelines members create and follow in

their sewing, buying and dressing practices, how questioning their own morals can uncover their sense of ethics, and how they engage in ethical consumption.

ÖZ

YAVAŞ MODADA KENDİLİĞİN ETİK OLUŞUMU: INSTAGRAM DİKİŞ
TOPLULUĞU VAKASI

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Yavaş moda, literatürde kuralları ve prensipleri sabit, sınırları net bir şekilde çizilmiş bir hareket olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Yavaş moda pratiklerini uygulayan kişiler ve toplulukların bunu günlük hayatlarında ne şekilde uyguladıkları üzerine bir çalışma bulunmamaktadır. Bu tezin amacı, sosyal medya üzerinden kıyafet dikimi etrafında bir araya gelmiş sanal bir topluluğun parçası olan insanların, sürdürebilirlik ve etik tüketim normlarını topluluk içerisinde ne şekilde oluşturduklarını tartışmaktır. Bu tez topluluk üyeleri ile gerçekleştirilen 25 adet derinlemesine mülakat ve 2 yıl süren katılımcı gözlem sonucunda toplanan verilere dayanarak sanal toplulukların kurulma ve korunma pratiklerinin, yavaş moda normlarının oluşmasına ne şekilde katkıda bulunduğunu, kıyafet dikme ve satın alma pratiklerinin, etik birer pratiğe ne şekilde dönüştürüldüğünü göstermektedir. Bu tezde Foucault'nun etik tartışmalarından hareketle sanal dikiş topluluğu içerisindeki yerleşik ritüellerin, bilgi paylaşım yöntemlerinin, topluluğu diğer gruplardan ayıran sembolik sınırların ve kapsayıcılık pratiklerinin önemi tartışılmıştır. Bunlar birer topluluk kurma ve koruma pratikleri olarak tartışılıp topluluk üyelerinin bu tür pratikler üzerinden kendilerini topluluk içerisinde ne şekilde tanımladıkları ve topluluğa dahil olmaları ile birlikte yavaş moda

yükümlülüklerini ne şekilde üzerilerinde hissetmeye başladıkları sorgulanmaktadır. Sürdürülebilirliği uygulamanın, kıyafet dikme ve satın almanın en etik yollarının, bu sanal topluluk içerisinde oluşturulduğu ve bunların bilgisinin yine sanal topluluk üzerinden paylaşıldığı tartışılmıştır. Topluluk üyelerinin topluluk içerisindeki etik üretim ve tüketim faaliyetlerine katılımları sonucunda kendilerini etik birer birey olarak oluşturdukları vurgulanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: yavaş moda, dikiş, etik tüketim, sanal topluluklar

To Mert!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, there have been growing concerns over environmental issues such as climate change, pollution, deforestation, desertification, and depletion of natural resources; as well as social justice problems such as unsafe working conditions, child labour, impoverishment of local communities and the abuse and exploitation of workers. Through the growing awareness around these concerns, alternative ways of living such as voluntary simplicity (Elgin & Mitchell, 1977; Shaw & Newholm, 2002), downshifting (Juniu, 2000; Larsson, 2015), slow food (Chrzan, 2004; Petrini, 2013), ethical tourism (Weeden, 2002) and slow fashion gained popularity.

Slow fashion can be defined as an alternative way of engaging with fashion and clothing that is centred on guiding principles such as sustainability, ethical production and ethical consumption. Through these principles it responds to all the concerns that are mentioned above. There is a plethora of ways each of these principles are practiced on a company or consumer level; with some examples being using biodegradable materials, incorporating zero / low waste techniques, employing traditional production techniques, repurposing old garments, shopping second hand, and of importance for this thesis, making your own clothes at home. Home sewing is used as a strong alternative by many people who have an interest in the craft of sewing and a motivation to practice a slower approach to fashion in their daily lives. There are a number of online and offline communities that are centred around home sewing, and I am particularly interested in how slow fashion is practiced within the virtual community of garment sewing that exists on Instagram.

This project is born out of a personal journey towards changing my relationship with the clothes I wear: I started making my own clothes in the December of 2019, and I

have been an active member of the sewing community on Instagram since the May of 2020. During this time I had the opportunity to witness first-hand how the norms of slow fashion are built, communicated and practiced in-community. My own views on sustainability and ethical consumption were challenged many times through the discussions that were being held within the community and the conversations I had with other members.

In this thesis, I am seeking to answer three research questions: i) How are norms of sustainability and ethical consumption constructed among home sewists who practice slow fashion on Instagram? ii) How do virtual community building and maintenance practices contribute to the construction of normalcy of slow fashion? iii) How do practices of making and buying clothing serve as practices of ethical self formation / ethical work? Using data from 25 in depth interviews with community members, 2 years of participant observation, and a Foucauldian understanding of ethics; I try to provide a more nuanced look into how the norms of slow fashion are constructed and practiced, as well as how the people who practice them engage in ethical self formation. I argue that these processes of communal norm construction and ethical self formation are interlocked processes that cannot be bisected.

1.1. Outline of the Chapters

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the theoretical framework I used, a review of the literature, and a description of the methods I employed and the field I worked in. Chapter 2 is focused on the discussion of how community building and maintenance practices contribute to the norm construction around slow fashion. I discuss how the community acts as a mode of subjection (Foucault, 1990) for its members that are seeking to become ethical subjects through their involvement in slow fashion. In Chapter 3, I turn my attention to the work of making and buying "the right clothes" - the clothes that are deemed sustainable and ethical. I show how the practices that surround the making and buying garments act as technologies of the self (Foucault, 1988) that help the individuals transform themselves. Finally, in Chapter 4, I provide a brief conclusion.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

Foucault's work on ethics has caused there to be a shift in the way ethics are conceptualised in the literature. Rather than locating ethics in the external moral codes and values, his work pulls it into the domain of everyday life and daily practices. (Lewis & Potter, 2011) The individual is conceptualised as responsible and powerful over their actions, and it is through their actions that they accomplish self-realisation. (Allon, 2011) This understanding of ethics as rooted in practice is important for my work as it allows me to frame the practices of slow fashion in terms of ethics and see how the actors involved form their ethical selves based on their involvement in these practices.

According to Foucault, ethical work has four aspects: the ethical substance, the mode of subjection, the practices of the self, and the telos. (1984, 1990) In this section, I would like to go over each of these four dimensions and point out their relations to the central questions of my thesis.

1.2.1. Ethical Substance

The first dimension concerns the determination of the ethical substance, with involves the identification of the material, the part of the self that is to be worked over by ethics. (Lehtokunnas, Mattila, Narvanen and Mesiranta, 2020) With the constitution of "this or that part of oneself as prime material of his moral conduct" (Foucault, 1990, p.26) the matter of the ethical work is outlined as certain behaviours, feelings, desires, urges, intentions and so on. (Moisander & Pesonen, 2002) In other words, ethical substance denotes the object of ethical practice.

In relation to my project, I am seeking to answer what parts of their selves and conducts do slow fashion practitioners seek to change and work on. What areas of their sewing, shopping and dressing practices do they identify as needing ethical work? What aspects of their selves do they see as being open to transformation? What do they problematise in their self-conduct?

1.2.2. Mode of Subjection

The second dimension in the mode of subjection (*le mode d'assujettissement*), which Foucault defines as "the way in which the individual establishes his relation to the rule and recognises himself as obliged to put it into practice." (1990, p.27) It can also be thought of as the ways in which people are invited or incited to recognise their moral obligations and situate themselves in relation to them. (Moisander & Pesonen, 2002) In other words, it concerns why people realise the ethical work that they do by seeking out the motivating and ordering factors such as divine law, natural law, a cosmological order, rational universal rule, spiritual tradition or group membership and custom. (ibid, p.331)

As I am interested in the ways norms of sustainability and ethical consumption are constructed, the mode of subjection is crucial for framing my problem. The second chapter of this thesis is dedicated to exploring how community building and maintenance practices serve as technologies of mode of subjection insofar as they help individuals navigate the ethics of sustainability and consumption. Here, I am seeking to answer how individuals come to know their personal obligations in the practice of slow fashion, how they recognise their relation to the broader normative framework and how they identify their responsibilities towards their selves and others.

1.2.3. Practices of the Self

The third dimension constitutes the practices of the self (or self-practice, self-forming activity, elaboration, ethical work / *travail éthique*). As Foucault puts it, these practices are realised "not only in order to bring one's conduct into compliance with a given rule, but to attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one's behavior." (1990, p.27) These practices concern the very techniques by which the individuals renders themselves as an ethical subject, the ways in which the ethical substance is worked such as learning, self-reflection, testing, monitoring and so on. (Moisander & Pesonen, 2002)

This is another crucial dimension for my work, as it is through the practices of the self that people's ethical work becomes visible and open to analysis. The third chapter of this thesis frames the work of making and buying the types of clothes that are deemed ethical and sustainable as practices of the self and ethical work, and it explores the ways in which individuals construct their ethical selves through these practices.

1.2.4. Telos

The fourth and final dimension is the telos (téléologie), the ultimate goal that the individual is trying to achieve through their ethical work. (Allan, 2013) Foucault frames the telos in the following questions: "Which is the kind of being to which we aspire when we behave in a moral way? For instance, shall we become pure, or immortal, or free, or masters of ourselves, and so on?" (1984, p.355) In other words, the telos refers to the version of our selves we seek to accomplish through the practice of ethics, the version where the ethical substance has been adequately worked over in accordance with the mode of subjection and through practices of the self.

I am curious about how ideals of sustainability and ethical consumption are created, negotiated and changed with daily practice, and therefore also the fluctuating nature of the goals that individuals set for themselves. What do they aspire to be through their ethical sewing, buying and dressing practices? Who do they see themselves becoming as they carry out their ethical behaviours?

1.2.5. Research Questions

In this thesis, I am primarily concerned with answering the questions that are raised with the second and third dimensions; namely the mode of subjection and the practices of the self. My main research questions heavily relate to these two aspects, and they are as follows:

1. How are norms of sustainability and ethical consumption constructed among home sewists who practice slow fashion on Instagram?

2. How do virtual community building and maintenance practices contribute to the construction of normalcy of slow fashion?
3. How do practices of making and buying clothing serve as practices of ethical self formation / ethical work?

Through these questions I am aiming to outline the role of ethical self formation within the processes of normativity construction in the slow fashion community. I hold that the normativity of slow fashion is ever changing and evolving, and this process of transformation is heavily dependent on the community in which it lives and grows. Instead of claiming that the locus of slow fashion is clothing companies, I argue that it is the communities of people who practice slow fashion on a daily basis through making, buying, wearing, repurposing, and disposing of garments.

1.3. Literature Review

1.3.1. The Foucauldian Influence on Sustainability and Ethics

There have been a number of academic works using Foucauldian frameworks to open up the discussions surrounding sustainability and ethics, many of which have served as inspiration for this thesis. Of particular note, Denegri-Knott, Nixon and Abraham's 2018 paper focuses on analysing a small intentional community in England through the lens of Foucault's understanding of practice as governed by power-knowledge. They hold that power plays a key role in the construction of normativity, and that power-knowledge produces the space in which people, discourses, rules and artefacts come together in practices. (p.555) They bring forth a number of social technologies that contribute to the continual formation of the ethical subjects, the construction of the normative framework the individuals live in, and the collective ethical work that unfolds in the life of the community. By doing so, the practices of sustainability are evaluated as separate from the natural state of normality and instead dependent on the constant construction and reconstruction of normativity. (p.563)

Foucault's understanding of ethics has informed a number of works centred around notions of sustainability and ethical consumption. Moisander and Pesonen's 2002

paper discusses the representations of green consumerism in prevalent institutionalised discourses and in the self-narratives of ecologically oriented citizens. (p.329) Starting from the acceptance of our subjectivity being constructed through power and discourse, they argue that political struggles (like green consumerism) can be conceived as ethics, which forms the basis of our self-formation. (p.330) They utilise the four aspects of morals as outlined by Foucault in 1984 (the ethical substance, the mode of subjection, the self-forming activities and the telos) to navigate the representations of green consumerism as informed by ethics. These four aspects forms the conceptual framework of numerous papers: Lehtokunnas et al. (2020) utilise this framework to analyse how food waste reduction practices function as ethical work, arguing that in order to transition to a circular economy of food consumption, consumers need to take on daily ethical work. Hanna, Johnson, Stenner and Adams (2015) base their discussion of sustainable tourism and other forms of ethical consumption on the same framework, claiming that "sustainable tourism can be understood through an appreciation of the emotional and reciprocal relationship with the other, thus taking seriously individuals attempts to engage with ethical practices." (p.301) Quastel (2009) focuses on ethical consumption practices such as fair trade coffee consumption to explore how "Foucault's emphasis on practices of the self helps elucidate the virtue ethics involved in consumption choices." (p.25)

Ethical self formation is a key concept that shows up time and time again in discussions surrounding ethical consumption and ethical living practices. Varul (2009) states that fairtrade consumers are in a process of ethical self construction, which is realised through their enactments of their political and moral concerns through consumer choice. (p.183) He argues that this process of self formation is only possible through drawing on cultural contexts. Skinner's 2012 paper examines ethical self formation through the activity of organic farming in a self-managing community. She draws on Foucault's concept of technologies of the self in order to explore how ethical self formation takes place through modes of subjectivation and objectivation. Taylor (2010) takes up ethical vegetarianism as an example of ethical self transformation, arguing that our food choices "function as practices of self-constitution in both disciplinary and aesthetic fashions." (p.71)

1.3.2. Portrayal of Slow Fashion

The literature surrounding the concept of slow fashion has mainly focused on proposing slow fashion practices as alternatives to the fast fashion model in hopes of eliminating and reversing some of the harm that is caused by it. Most papers on slow fashion present slow fashion principles as predetermined, static rules that can be incorporated by companies to become more ethical or environmentally and socially responsible. The locus of slow fashion is often presented as the clothing companies that embrace and practice these preset principles (Brewer, 2019; Jung & Jin, 2016; Pal & Gander, 2018) rather than the communities of people who practice slow fashion in their daily lives. There is a much heavier emphasis on the production processes rather than the aspects of consumption and use, along with a solution-based tone that has the unintended consequence of concealing the inner dynamics of communities that practice slow fashion, as well preventing a deeper inquiry into how slow fashion practitioners construct ethical subjectivities through their involvement in this movement. As I will argue in the following chapters, slow fashion is not an aggregation of predetermined, fixed rules and guidelines; and people who practice slow fashion in their daily lives do not base their practices on these rules - rather, the principles of slow fashion are written and rewritten in practice and in their interactions with their community.

Bonini and Oppenheim (2008) outline five barriers that stand in the way of "greening": lack of awareness, negative perceptions, distrust, high prices and low availability. Looking at the literature on slow fashion, we can see an unbalanced focus on awareness building as the solution to encourage people to behave more ethically in their shopping and dressing practices. (Joy, Sherry, Venkatesh, Wang & Chan, 2015, Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013). This is contrasted by other scholars who present a more comprehensive view of the existing challenges in the face of slow fashion, such as McNeill & Moore (2015), Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik (2014) or Stefko & Steffek (2018) who give a more complete picture of slow fashion as it is practiced both by producers and consumers, and everyone in between. Although they successfully showcase the practices of slow fashion and present avenues for improvement; the

element and effect of community and communal norm construction are still missing from these works.

Since coming up with the term, Fletcher has continued to emphasise the idea that the core principles of slow (or fast) fashion cannot be found by simply looking at the production conditions of garments. (2007, 2010, 2012, 2016) For instance, she is adamant about the fact that high speed is not "in itself a descriptor of unethical and/or environmentally damaging practices" (2010, p.259) in the case of fast fashion, and thus a slower speed of production is not enough to define slow fashion. She instead bases her definition of slow fashion on the rejection of a continuous, boundless growth centred business model. She criticises that "slow fashion has been superficially mediated and adopted particularly by the fashion media as a descriptor for products that are in some way less fast" (2010, p.262) and that slow fashion is defined by a set od descriptors that are attached to garments; such as durable, seasonless, timeless, or traditionally produced. While I agree that slow fashion cannot be reduced to a handful of characteristics, I also think there is some value in taking stock of which of these characteristics or descriptors show up time and time again in the daily practice of slow fashion. This focus on -for example- durability or traditional production techniques in the practice of slow fashion informs us about the norms and values that emerge out of a communal practice of the idea of slow fashion.

1.3.3. Defining Fast Fashion

Because slow fashion has emerged as a response and reaction to the rise of fast fashion, in order to understand the motivation behind and the principles of slow fashion, we first need to define and describe what fast fashion is. Fast fashion is a model of garment design, production and consumption that is centered on the mass manufacturing of immense volumes of clothing for low costs and with great speed. We can trace its emergence back to the 1980s, where the Inditex group (the parent company to Zara, Pull & Bear, Bershka, Massimo Dutti and more current fast fashion brands) started outsourcing its manufacturing, expanded its reach internationally, and experienced dramatic financial growth. (Crofton & Dopico, 2007) The Inditex group has revolutionised fashion retail business and triggered many different brands to follow

suit. (ibid.) Over the four decades that followed, fast fashion models have become so ubiquitous that it serves as the default way clothing consumers acquire new garments. Most - if not all - of the most popular clothing brands today like Zara, H&M, Shein, Boohoo, Nike, Adidas and so on are all examples of clothing brands that are run using a fast fashion model.

To better describe the fast fashion model, I would like mention the characteristics of the products, the production system, and the consumption patterns as they stand today. Garments that are produced within a fast fashion model are made of lower quality, inexpensive materials, a vast majority of which is polyester, other synthetics like acrylic, spandex and polyamid, and cotton. (Clark, 2008; Jung & Jin, 2014; Niinimaki et al., 2020) The garments are made using the fastest, most efficient construction techniques possible, which often means that the construction of the garments is not reliable and meant to last. This combination of cheap materials and poor construction gives the garments a short lifespan, and strengthens the built-in obsolescence of the garments in question. In terms of design, there is close to no original design work that is being done for these collections. The system is built on manufacturing replicas and iterations of the latest pieces from runway collections and streetwear trends. (Aggarwal & More, 2021; Brewer, 2019; Ertekin & Atik, 2014; Hall, 2017) The final key characteristic of the products is their shockingly low prices, which enable the bulk consumption of the garments.

The production process of fast fashion is characterised by a fast and highly responsive supply chain. (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; Ertekin & Atik, 2014; Hall, 2017; Tokatli, 2007) Lead times and the development cycles of the products are extremely short, meaning the latest designer pieces are quickly swept away and sent off to the overseas productions plants, and the replica garments commonly become available to purchase within two weeks rather than the six months that it took for traditional ready-to-wear stores to supply the garments for purchase. (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010) Instead of producing seasonal collections that correspond to the colder Autumn/Winter and warmer Spring/Summer seasons, the garments are produced as part of micro-seasonal collections. With a new collection being released every week, we can talk about 52 micro-seasons per year, instead of 2. (ibid.)

This entire production system culminates in a consumption style that depends on consumers viewing their clothes as disposable things that they can and need to get rid of to make room for the newest arrivals. The sheer quantity of garments that one can acquire gains priority over the actual quality of the pieces. The twice weekly restocks of the stores with new garments instills a sense of urgency to the customers, encouraging impulse buying rather than careful consideration. (Niinimaki et al., 2020)

1.3.4. Defining Slow Fashion

In order to determine the core principles of slow fashion as they are portrayed in academic literature, I pulled 30 articles written on slow fashion systems that have been published in the last 15 years. I coded these articles on MAXQDA, and saw some reoccurring themes and ideas emerge. Namely; notions of sustainability, durability, ethical production and consumption and timelessness were frequently mentioned as the main characteristics of a slow fashion centred way of making, selling and consuming clothing. Here, I would like to briefly mention the key processes in slow fashion production to showcase how these principles are operationalised and grounded.

The design phase in slow fashion is crucial in setting up the subsequent processes for success. There is a great emphasis on designing pieces that stand the test of time, resist the whims of fashion, and remain relevant across multiple seasons. A timeless, seasonless look to the garments is praised as it allows the consumer to utilize the pieces over the course of years, or even decades rather than weeks or months. Apart from the aesthetics of the garments, designing multifunctional, transformable, modular garments that work in a plethora of settings and combinations is key for guaranteeing the longevity of the garments. (Gwilt, 2014; Pal & Gander, 2018) From a more technical angle, building in durable construction techniques to the design of the garment ensures that the actual garment will survive years of wear and care. Here, traditional production techniques such as cleaner seam finishes and sturdier structural components serve to extend the garment's lifespan. (Hall, 2017) Another key point in the design process concerns the selection of materials that will be used to construct the

garment. The durability and quality of the materials used such as the fabric, thread, interfacings, closures and other notions is obviously of relevance here. Apart from the longevity of the materials, it is also crucial to consider the end of the garment's life and decide on which materials facilitate better conditions for the end-of-life[1]. For instance, mono-materials (materials that are produced using a single type of fiber rather than a blend of multiple fiber types) are much easier to recycle when the garment stops being useful to its wearer. (Gwilt, 2014) Pattern design is an important avenue for the implementation of better practices that help with reducing waste and preventing the excessive use of materials. Zero-waste or low-waste pattern designs have been gaining popularity in slow fashion circles because they are composed of pattern pieces that lock together, making sure the width and the length of fabric needed for the garment is used as efficiently as possible.

The principles that relate to the production process can be further separated into two categories: environmental principles and social responsibility. Sustainability is at the very core of the slow fashion movement, so the production systems are designed in a state of environmental mindfulness. The materials that are used are mostly comprised of natural fibers such as linen, cotton, wool or silk; meaning any of the waste that comes about as a result of the manufacturing process is biodegradable. There is also a preference for using organic and recycled materials in order to avoid the use of harmful pesticides and other chemicals, and to reduce the amount of waste produced. (Brewer, 2019; Steffko & Steffek, 2018) Garments are produced at a smaller scale and a slower speed compared to the fast fashion production model, which prevents the exploitation and overuse of natural resources. Finally, local manufacturing using locally sourced materials is a key principle that allows for a smaller carbon footprint, owing to the fact that materials and / or finished goods do not need to be shipped long distances. (Hall, 2017; Steffko & Steffek, 2018)

In terms of social responsibility in the production process, the entire process is structured in a way that protects the wellbeing of the communities and workers

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[1] "End-of-life" is a tem used to denote the stage where an article of clothing stops being used as clothing. This may be brought about by damage to the material, or changes in the owner's body size or preferences.

involved in the production of garments. Longer lead times and production cycles serve to decrease the time pressure on garment workers, providing them with better working conditions. (Hall, 2017; Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013) Fair living wages for the garment workers and designers are built into the price tag of the garment, and instead of living off of temporary contracts, workers are offered greater job security. (Brewer, 2019) The working conditions are transparently displayed for the consumers in order to keep the producers and the brands accountable and responsible.

In regards to the consumption and use of the garments, this new approach to fashion fosters an environment of education and learning about garments for the consumers. (Hall, 2017; Steffko & Steffek, 2018) This allows for consumers to learn about proper garment care, extending the lifespan of their wardrobes. For instance, over-washing garments leads to a much shorter lifespan, and the specifics of laundry practices like water temperature, type of detergent used, the drying method and iron settings have a sizeable impact on how the garment will look, feel and fit over the course of its life. Consumers are encouraged to buy higher quality garments with less frequency, and they once again form a deeper, pleasure-based, more intimate relationship with their clothes, in turn distancing them thinking of clothes as disposable, throwaway objects. (Jung & Jin, 2014) There are a number of strategies that can be employed to foster such a relationship, such as showcasing the stories of the garments (how it was made, who worked on it, who did the garment first belong to, etc.). As an added benefit, the consumers also end up developing a more personal, individual style due to detaching themselves from the current trend cycles that dominate fast fashion markets.

All garments are discarded at one point, which can happen due to a number of reasons. The material may have worn out, the size may no longer work for the wearer of the garment or the piece may have lost its appeal in the eye of its owner. The principles of slow fashion dictate that the consumer's responsibility does not end when the time comes to discard the article of clothing, but that they need to come up with a suitable way to dispose of their clothes. There are numerous alternatives that work for the different states the garment may be in. If the piece is still in wearable condition (i.e. there are no holes, tears or stains in the material, the closures still work, and the piece is not misshapen) it can be reintegrated to the market through reselling, donating, or

handing it down to a friend of family member, thus extending the lifespan on the garment. If the piece has flaws, the piece can either be mended or pieces of it can be used to construct a new garment, often by combining parts of multiple discarded garments. Completely damaged garments can be recycled through mechanical or chemical processes, but there are quite a few challenges in the face of textile recycling - such as the prevalence of blended materials or the availability of recycling programs. (Gwilt, 2018)

In sum, slow fashion is not merely about slowing down the production of garments. It represents a fundamental change with the way the clothing consumers think about and relate to their clothes. As Fletcher puts it, it involves "a break from the values and goals of fast (growth-based) fashion. It is a vision of the fashion sector built from a different starting point." (2010, p.5) This shift away from a purely growth motivated production and consumption system brings with it a number of principles that are rooted in sustainability, social and environmental responsibility, and transparency.

1.3.5. Significance of the Thesis

As this brief review of the literature shows, the concept of slow fashion has not received much sociological attention. The academic works that are centred on slow fashion mostly come from marketing and business management literatures, and they are mostly focused on determining a set of principles that can be applied to manufacturing and marketing processes of clothing companies to help them become better alternatives to fast fashion. This point of view conceals important aspects of the topic, such as how the very people who practice slow fashion experience the daily realities of practicing slow fashion and how they grapple with ethical questions and moral dilemmas.

Inspired by scholars who employ a Foucauldian understanding of ethics to discuss matters of sustainability and ethical consumption practices, my aim is to explore how slow fashion's normative framework is constructed, negotiated, changed and practiced on a public platform like Instagram by people who make their own clothes. My hope

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is that this project will contribute to the literature in a way that provides a more nuanced portrait of slow fashion.

1.4. Research Methods & Description of the Field

1.4.1. Research Process

For the purposes of this thesis, I have employed two qualitative research methods: I have been engaged in participant observation for the past two years, and I conducted semi structured in depth interviews with 25 community members.

1.4.2. Participant Observation

I have personally been a member of the sewing community on Instagram for over two years. I began sewing and making my own clothes in the December of 2019 and decided to start a sewing-centred Instagram account after coming across the sewing community and seeing how warm and inviting it was. Since I joined the community in the May of 2020, I have had the opportunity of observing the community dynamics, as well as having many informal conversations with community members about the ethics of slow fashion and sustainability, ethical consumption, the community happenings and so on. As I am an active participant; I have been able to intimately witness how community rituals and events play out, how different members respond to instances of conflict, what the members show, question and discuss on a daily basis, and how different challenges that arise from the practice of making clothing are met.

A lot of content that is put up on Instagram is fleeting: Stories (see below for further explanation) are videos and still images that disappear after 24 hours unless their creator saves them onto their profile. As stories constitute one of the main ways of communication, knowledge sharing and community building, continual observation of them is key in getting an accurate picture of the community. Through engaging with

the community on a daily basis, I have been able to capture the content that is shared using them.

Here I must mention that I am following a relatively small number of accounts (at around 500) in order to be able to keep track of all new posts and to be able to communicate with the people I follow in meaningful ways. While this is immensely helpful in gaining a deeper understanding of the community and its members, I am also aware that it causes me to compromise on the breadth of the study.

1.4.3. In Depth Interviews

I have conducted 25 in depth, semi-structured interviews between mid-February and mid-March of 2022 with different community members. I put out a public call for participants in early February on the stories of my sewing Instagram account, inviting the community members who had been active community participants for at least 6 months to apply to become a respondent for this project. From the 135 applications I received, I selected a sample of 25 respondents. The key criterion I looked for in the sample selection process was an active participation in the community, meaning I was looking for members who were frequently posting content, interacting with other members, and consuming the content put out by others. I also wanted to make sure that I had a diverse and representative group of respondents in terms of age, gender and geographical distribution. The selected sample of respondents reside in 8 countries consisting of Australia, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, United Kingdom and the United States. As some of them are expats living abroad, the list of countries of origin also include France, Malaysia, Peru and Poland. Their ages range from 25 to 65. 3 of them are non-binary, 1 of them is a cisgender man, and the remaining 21 of them are cisgender women. Most of them had been a member of this community for a couple of years, with some of them having been active in older online sewing communities that existed on different platforms.

Out of the 25 respondents, 19 of them are currently employed, with 1 of them working part-time and 4 of them working for themselves. These 19 respondents include school nurses, teachers, architects, museum guides, government workers, dentists, journalists,

flower farmers, software engineers, accounting specialists, authors, designers, pattern makers and more. The remaining 5 respondents are composed of a retired teacher, a full-time veterinary student, a full-time PhD student in physiology, a housewife, a pharmacist who is on maternity leave, and an artist who is between jobs. The employment status of my sample is matches my observations regarding the employment status of the community members at large. Most community members approach sewing as a leisure time activity that they do alongside their day jobs, and many of them intentionally set aside time to be able to fit sewing into their busy daily lives.

The interviews lasted between 90 to 120 minutes on average, and were all held over Zoom. The audio from the Zoom meeting was recorded after receiving written and verbal consent from my respondents, and the recordings were later run through an auto-transcription software, and coded on MAXQDA. All interviews were conducted in English, so the quoted passages in this thesis are in their original language.

1.4.4. Instagram as a Host Platform

As mentioned above, I have been engaged in participant observation for the past two years, which allowed me to develop a clear understanding of how Instagram as a host platform works and how it affects the sewing community. In this section, I will briefly describe the main characteristics of Instagram's user interface and some of the relevant features it has as they relate to the main questions of this thesis.

The sewing community exists on Instagram, a social media platform that was launched in 2010. The platform was initially created for photo-sharing purposes where individual accounts could share a photo they took on their smart phones with a short caption. Within the last decade, there have been a number of updates that were implemented which greatly changed how people use Instagram, such as being able to upload up to 10 photos under a slideshow format post, the ability to upload both long form and short form video content, and the stories feature which lets users share 15 second videos, photos or graphics that disappear after 24 hours.

To give a brief tour of the user interface, today the application has five main spaces: the home page, the explore page, the reels tab, the shopping tab, and the personal feed. Each user can choose to follow as many accounts as they wish, and the content put out by these accounts show up in the user's home page in an algorithmic order. The home page also hosts the stories posted by the accounts the user follows. The explore page features personalised recommended content as well as a search bar that allows the user to look for different accounts, tags, audio or locations. The reels tab is dedicated to short form video content uploaded by accounts, a format that was popularised by the application TikTok within the past few years. The shopping tab features products that are sold through Instagram by brands. And finally, the personal feed is the user's profile page containing a) their profile pictures, b) their bio, c) key numerical information (such as the numbers of posts, followers and followed accounts), d) the highlights they saved, and e) the photos and videos they shared. (Figure A)
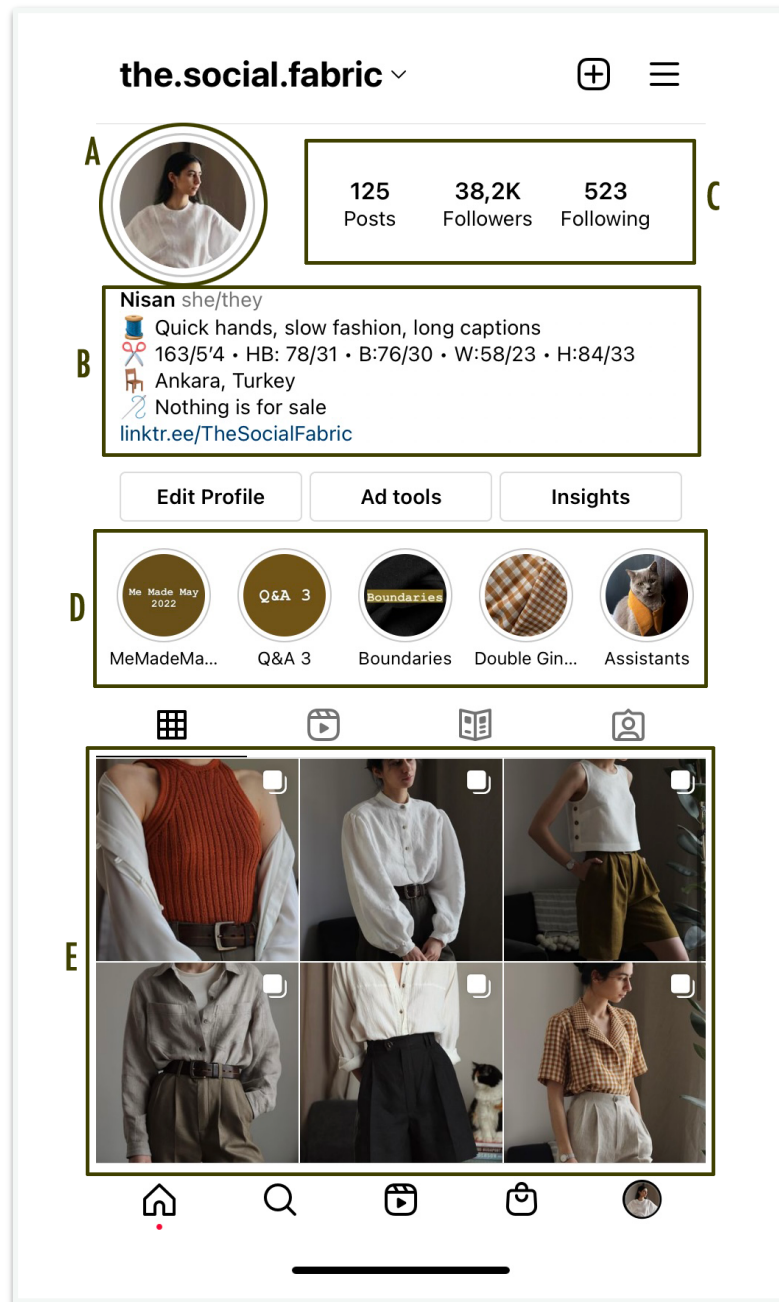
Figure A. Screenshot showcasing the main features on an Instagram profile: a) profile image, b) user's name and biography, c) number of posts, followers and followed accounts, d) highlights, e) feed posts

Instagram has grown to be a massive platform over the last decade, and they have incorporated a large number of features into their interface. It would be impossible to mention them all here, but I will quickly go over some of the main features that are important in understanding the structure of the sewing community:

- **Hashtags:** Instagram uses an optional tagging system where each user can choose to put up to 30 tags for each post they put up. These tags are used to facilitate searching for specific content on the platform. In the case of the sewing community, most sewing pattern designers announce a designated hashtag for their sewing patterns so that both they and other users can easily find posts featuring garments sewn using that pattern. They are also used for drawing boundaries around specific communities, certain hashtags (such as #slowfashion or #slowsewing) are heavily used among sewing community members that are focused on slow fashion while others emphasise that the account is more in line with hobby sewists.

- **Stories and Highlights:** Stories are 15 second photo or video contents that disappear after 24 hours. The users are able to add "stickers" onto their stories, which come with a variety of features like adding external links, adding music, tagging other users, adding a question box or poll, and so on. The stories that are put up users disappear after 24 hours, so if the user wishes to pin and save the content of these stories to their profile, they can use the highlights feature which lets the user create individual folders containing up to 100 stories. Stories and highlights allow users to easily document their processes, engage in community building practices, share knowledge in an effective way and connect with other members of the community.

- **Mentions and tags:** Users can also mention another user in their captions or stories, as well as tag another user directly on the photos or videos they post. In the sewing community this feature is mostly used for tagging the pattern designers and fabric stores that sell the materials that were used to create the garment the post is about, or crediting other sewists for ideas or techniques they learned from them. These features serve to form networks between different Instagram accounts, they direct the viewer of the post to other relevant accounts and allow members to discover other like-minded sewists.

These features in particular are important as they facilitate the building and maintenance of distinct communities on Instagram. By allowing users to easily link

with each other and each other's content, these features lend the platform towards community building and networking.

1.4.5. Description of the Community

In this section I would like to briefly describe the community to provide some useful background information for the chapters to follow.

The sewing community that is the subject of this thesis can be situated as part of a larger bundle of Instagram accounts who produce content about craft-related activities. Although there are no strict borders or initiation rules, there are soft boundaries that surround and delimit the community. First and foremost, this community is very much focused on garment sewing rather than sewing home textiles, quilts, toys, or accessories. Second, the sewing activities are self-centred and non-commercial, meaning the owner of the account primarily posts about the garments they have made for themselves - although some people also occasionally show the garments they have made for their loved ones. Third, there is an emphasis on following the principles of slow fashion in one's sewing practice, rather than sewing for the sake of sewing or making garments just to show them on Instagram. All following mentions of "the sewing community" or simply "the community" are made in reference to this specific community of slow fashion focused, non-commercial garment sewists and adjacent accounts.

There are a number of sub-communities within the broader sewing community, such as Sew Over 50, Sew Queer, Asian Sewist Collective, Fat Sewing Club, and so on. These collectives are usually centred on discussing the intersection of sewing and the specific identity markers that characterise them. So, for instance, Sew Over 50 is dedicated to highlighting the work of sewists that are older than 50 years old by showcasing their creations on a public and popular Instagram page, while Fat Sewing Club is dedicated to discussing the issues fat sewists face in their sewing and dressing practices, as well as featuring blog posts written by club members on their feelings towards their bodies. These sub-communities all bring forth interesting moral questions relating to diversity, inclusivity, representation, social justice and identity

work, but as I am more interested in how the sewing community acts as a collective group, I will not be focusing on the differentiations between these sub-communities but rather looking at the sewing community as one unit.

When asked to describe the sewing community to outsiders, my respondents gave quite uniform answers that matched my observations and descriptions of the community. It was described as being predominantly composed of women with some non-binary sewists, and very few men, mostly aged mid-twenties and up. The community is characterised by its interactive, supportive, friendly, left-leaning, inclusive, and progressive nature. Although there are some more popular and influential accounts, there are no distinct community leaders or cultural authorities.

CHAPTER 2

COMMUNITY BUILDING AND MAINTENANCE PRACTICES

2.1. Chapter Introduction

There are a lot of online and offline spaces that are centred around the activity of home-sewing, from subreddits and sewing forums to Facebook groups and in-person sewing circles. While the vast majority of these groups remain firmly centred on the act and hobby of home-sewing, we see an interesting exception in the case of "the sewing community" on Instagram. Here, there is a heavy emphasis on becoming more sustainable and ethical subjects through the careful adjustment of one's sewing and buying practices. Although this community is very much centred on the activity of garment sewing, its ethical concerns distinguish this community from others.

The specific virtual community that is the subject of this thesis can be situated inside a larger group of Instagram accounts that are centred around craft-related activities. There are many people who exclusively post about their sewing projects who would not be considered as members of the "sewing community" on Instagram. Although there are no strict borders or initiation rules, there are soft boundaries that surround and delimit the community. First and foremost, this community is very much focused on garment sewing rather than sewing home textiles, quilts, toys, or accessories. Second, the sewing activities are self-centred and non-commercial, meaning the owner of the account primarily posts about the garments they have made for themselves - although some people also occasionally show the garments they have made for their loved ones. Third, there is an emphasis on following the principles of slow fashion in one's sewing practice, rather than sewing for the sake of sewing or making garments just to show them on Instagram. I will be referring to this specific community as "the

sewing community" for the remainder of this chapter, but I only mean the slow-fashion focused, non-commercial garment sewing community by this name.

In this chapter, I will first establish the sewing community as a virtual community by showing how different aspects of the community follow Herring's (2004) six criteria for defining virtual communities. Next, I will discuss how four techniques of community building and maintenance serve to ground the members 'practices of the self by providing them with a mode of subjection: Through the rituals that take place within the community, members find the chance to reflect on their practices as they relate to the norms of the community and the slow fashion movement. Through the strong emphasis on knowledge sharing, the norms and values of the community get communicated and dispersed within the group. Through the establishment of symbolic boundaries, the community redefines itself as different from outside groups, as well as strengthens its normative framework. Finally, through techniques of inclusion the community re-establishes its ethical standing towards its members and grounds its activist practices.

2.2. Establishing the Sewing Community as a Virtual Community

With the emergence of online spaces and virtual communities, there also emerged criticism regarding the reality of these communities. Scholars such as Wellman and Gulia (1999), Memmi (2008) and Herring (2004) have been on the opposing side of the debate, claiming although virtual communities exist under unique conditions, they are no less "real" than in person communities. Herring cites six important sets of criteria for defining virtual communities: i) an active and self-sustaining participation from regular participants, ii) a shared history, purpose, culture, norms and values among the members, iii) solidarity, support and reciprocity, iv) criticism, conflict and means of conflict resolution, v) self-awareness of group as an entity distinct from other groups, and, vi) the emergence of roles, hierarchy, governance and rituals. (2004, p.14)

Based on these six criteria, the sewing community on Instagram is a perfect example of a virtual community: It's a highly active space where members come together around their shared interests in home sewing and slow fashion. There are new posts

and stories every day, and members who have been contributing to the community for over 5 years.

There is an immense amount of support between the community members with a constant asking for and providing of feedback and help, as well as an endless exchange of compliments and praise in the comments sections and private messages. In fact, the supportive and helpful nature of the community was the first thing that was mentioned by my participants when they were asked to describe the characteristics of the community:

> So I guess I would say that it's just like a really like solid community, where people are very encouraging of each other. People are very supportive. You know, there's bad eggs in there as well. But mostly people are always willing to share. And that's probably the thing that I like the most is that people are like, so willing to share and give feedback and help everyone. (CT)

> So I think that's another thing about Instagram and like the community that we're in it, everyone is supportive and friendly. And you don't feel like you're going to get lots of horrible comments. Whereas I feel like if you were doing the same thing for a more like mainstream fast fashion brand, you would get a lot more horribleness. (JB)

> I've been a part of other online communities and the first thing I would say is that the slow fashion and home sewing community on Instagram is much more supportive and like supportive kind everyone. Most people I've seen, like want to help each other and it's also very inclusive in every way. (JF)

Apart from frequently helping each other with sewing problems or complimenting each other, the community also seeks to support its members that come from marginalised groups:

> But what I think I love about the community and the biggest takeaway for me, is that it's a community that supports all bodies, and it is a community that advocates for all bodies, no matter who you are, you know, how able bodied or you are or not, and, and just normalises all of that. And it's actually shocking when you go out into the world and you don't see that that you're like, 'Is this not what the world is?' (RT)

There is a real sense of solidarity when it comes to supporting the needs of different community members, such as pushing for more size inclusivity and disability-

adaptability in sewing patterns, calling out instances of cultural appropriation in pattern and fabric design, normalising the use of accessibility functions like closed captions, image descriptions or alternative-texts, and shifting towards a more gender expansive or neutral language in describing patterns:

> I've always been under 12 In sizing in Australian sizing. And so I haven't had to face barriers of size inclusivity. And that was a big one for me, just like watching what other people would say what other people would post and just kind of feeling their hurt alongside them and empathising, with that. (SM)

> But like really becoming more embracing of like, body neutrality. In the way that clothing is described, and bodies are described, instead of like a male or a female body, it's like, this pattern will like have bust shaping, or no bust shaping. And I really, like love that as well. And I think many patterns or pattern companies are like moving in that direction, which I really like. (JF)

Like any community, there are instances of conflict, criticism and disagreement in the sewing community. These instances are usually seen as productive spaces where the problems of the community are addressed and discussed openly, and solutions are put forward in order to improve the community for all its members. The criticisms regarding how to be more responsible members of this community are welcomed. AP, one of my respondents, talked about an instance of personal conflict following a statement she put in one of her posts:

> I posted something, maybe a year ago, where I was like, I'm not going to put my measurements out because I don't, I don't like being reminded of how my measurements are not the same, like it wasn't because I didn't like *how* they were changing. It's that I didn't like that they *were* changing because it means I have to make a new wardrobe. And I can't remember what her first name was, but "(…)" is her handle, I looked to see if anyone had shared my post and she had, and she'd said like, 'I'm really mad that I can't comment on this 'because she wasn't a follower. She was like 'I'm mad that I can't comment on this. Because this is fucked up that she's saying this. 'And I ended up saying to her like, 'I'm like, if you have the energy, I want to hear more. Tell me why it's fucked up. 'And she was like, 'fat people started this like, it's not yours to say like, I don't want to put my measurements. 'But yeah, but she like called me out. And I was like, I'm here for this like. And, like now she and I, you know, interact really regularly. And so I just I like that there's that aspect to it, where people generally are willing to be like, oh I fucked up and people are willing to be like, you're fucking up.(AP)

Upon mentioning her personal discomfort with publicly displaying her measurements at the time, AP received some criticism from another community member who argued

that since the act of displaying measurements originated in the fat community, it was not acceptable for AP (a thin, straight sized woman) to complain about her feelings regarding her changing measurements. AP saw this as an opportunity to hear their side of the story, and to learn more about fat people's point of view when it comes to sewing and displaying measurements. This dynamic of people calling others out and the receiving party being open to apologising and fixing their mistakes is highly valued by her.

The group identity is quite strong, with many members openly and regularly acknowledging the existence of the community and how much it changed their lives. The idea that joining the sewing community completely changed my respondents 'way of engaging with fashion, sewing and consumption in general came up multiple times.

Different community members take on different roles within the community: Some are there to share their expertise on a specific sewing related task, some are there to inspire others, some to document their fitting process in order to potentially help others with similar bodies and some to simply connect with other sewists with similar interests:

> And then I do like posting stories when I have the time, especially if that's I think stories are where I like to post more like details if I'm like working on a more complex technique or something I like to I like to capture it in stories. (JF)

> My favourite type of content to post is, like feed posts with details on the pattern. So like, I like to discuss what modifications I made, what textile I used. Any, anything that I think other people would find helpful in terms of making that pattern. (JF)

> I always say if I have to be 110%, myself just so somebody can be or feel come to me 2% More themselves, I'll do it. So I feel like Happily Dressed is a kind of a window into the crazy imaginative world of like my brain when it comes to fashion and what I enjoy wearing. And I think it really helps other people feel inspired to step out of their comfort zone. And I know before my hiatus, my role was a little different and like trying to teach. (…) I kind of like stepped back more from that and wanted Happily Dressed just to be a space of inspiration, be a space of playfulness, be a space of support and empowerment, like I, I've done a talk on my page about how everything you want in life starts this way. (BH)

There are also several rituals that take place in the community, ranging from daily rituals to yearly events. The most notable examples are sharing photographs of newly made garments with an accompanying description of the garment, documenting the sewing and design processes on stories, and participating in community wide events.

2.3. Community Rituals

As mentioned above, there are numerous rituals that take place in the sewing community on Instagram. On a daily basis, we can see community members post about garments they made or share how they made the garment on their stories. Some members do monthly round-ups of the garments they finished within the month in questions, and perhaps most significantly, there are community wide "challenges" that take place on a yearly basis. It is on this last ritual that I want to focus in order to show how practices of self unfold in the context of a virtual community. In this context, challenges refer to community members challenging themselves to do certain activities, such as sewing a specific garment in a specific amount of time, coming up with different combinations of clothes that relate to a list of prompts, or sewing garments that are appropriate for a predetermined theme. The main motives for members 'participation to these challenges are to earn prizes from the challenge's sponsors[2] , to motivate themselves to sew more, or to learn more about themselves and their sewing practices.

Two of the most popular challenges that take place within the community are Make Nine and Me Made May. These two challenges are held every year at January and May, respectively. For the Make Nine Challenge, the participating community members make a list of nine garments they wish to make in the new year, as well as reflect on how they performed in the previous year. For the Me Made May challenge, members are encouraged to wear their hand made clothes every day for the month of May, and document it online if they wish to do so. The participating members share

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[2] Different sewing related brands such as sewing pattern companies, fabric stores, sewing machine brands or haberdasheries sponsor these challenges by providing prizes for the winners. In turn, they gain some brand recognition through having their branding visible in different challenge related posts.

their personal pledges at the end of April, which usually look like "I pledge to wear only me made items in new to me combinations during May" or "I pledge to wear at least one me made piece every day in May." It is perhaps the most popular challenge / event that takes place in the community with a large portion of the community members participating in it in some form, and most of them setting themselves specific goals they would like to achieve by the end of the month. These goals are mostly centred on reflecting on one's wardrobe as well as one's making practices.

A major part of these challenges is the opportunity they provide for self reflection. Through turning their attention towards the garments they have made for a whole month, the members are able to determine what is missing from their wardrobes, what they have too much of, what they reach for and what does not get enough wears. For many members, the month of May serves as a chance to analyse their wardrobes and learn lessons from the articles of clothing they have made. For instance, if a member finds that they are not reaching for tops that have voluminous sleeves, they will often share this finding on their profiles to remind themselves not to make more tops with this design element. Or, if they find that they are no longer wearing their favourite pair of trousers because they feel a little too snug, they will go in and let the seams out so that the trousers become wearable once more.

All of these practices are centred around the goal of making the most of clothes they own - either by being more careful in designing future garments, or by taking care of existing ones. This is one the major ways we see a normalcy of sustainability being built and enacted: getting as many uses as possible from each garment and extending the lifespan of clothing are two of the main tenets of slow fashion. Through reflecting on their selves, practices and the objects they create, community members also seek ways of becoming more in line with the principles of slow fashion. In other words, they forge sustainable, ethical selves through self reflection. Here, self reflection can be seen as a practice of the self: it is an act of governance that takes the self as its object, and the goal is to create a mode of subjectivity that is ethical. (Dean, 2009)

2.4. Knowledge Sharing

The sharing of knowledge between the community members is one of the most valued aspects of the sewing community. During my interviews, the vast majority of my respondents cited this aspect as one of the core, defining characteristics of the community:

> Like, I think about the way that we are able to share knowledge and, like starting to knit was like, so it was so mysterious to me. I mean, the first pattern that I got was a joke, what are these words like, K1 P2, K2tog, whatever... But, like, it's so nice to be able to just ask questions, and then like, 50 people will have an answer. It just, it's, it's brilliant. It's like, it's, it's such a miracle in my life that you know, that we're... But it's really, it's really amazing, the, the, just the sharing of knowledge and then this fringe benefit of being able to learn about each other and connect with each other. (AP)

> Yeah, I would say just, it feels like one of the more like, safe and helpful communities that I've encountered, and it just, it feels like a big like, club. Yeah, and it's just like, I would say that it just feels like a really good place, a really good resource as well to learn things. And like, I think I've, I've learned a lot more on about, like, about fiber crafts and everything on there than I have learned from like, my mom. (LH)

According to Foucault's conception of ethics, people engage with practices with the goal of cultivating their ethical subjectivities, and these practices are not as individualistic as they first appear. They are essential in forming a "…whole bundle of customary relations of kinship, friendship, and obligation" (Foucault 1990, p. 52, as cited in Hanna, Johnson, Stenner & Adams, 2015, p.306) This means that responsibility towards others plays a key part one's own construction of the ethical self. As Hanna et al. put it, "individuals have a responsibility to offer guidance and counselling to others, individuals are exercising a right when one is asked for guidance and individuals are performing a duty when they assist others and have an obligation to receive the help of others appreciatively." (2015, p.306) In other words, the practice of collective knowledge sharing is a crucial part of practicing ethics on a personal and communal level.

There are a number of avenues for sharing knowledge on and off Instagram. A lot of technical, practical information such as specific construction techniques, fitting

methods, advice on materials to use and avoid are passed down using the stories feature of Instagram and the captions that are attached to feed posts. Some members also use third-party services and spaces like their personal blogs or websites to share more detailed knowledge due to the character constraints present on Instagram.

Passing on of sewing know-how is one of the core roles that the community fulfils in members 'lives. Many community members who have not had a chance to learn how to sew from more traditional means like family members or in person sewing classes rely on the community as the source of this knowledge. When asked about what she learned from the sewing community, one of my respondents answered:

> Well, I mean, certainly the sewing techniques. So my handle is Frankie and Gert. And those are my two grandmas and they were they were incredible seamstresses and creators and I never got to meet Frankie but I have her creations like in my house. And then my grandma Gert was like the matriarch of a big Irish Catholic family (…) and she was so smart. And like she could like see a suit and just recreate it, right, like so that was like her, but I think I think there's a way in which like these different levels of like feminism that we started intentionally or unintentionally, like looking down on, like, those domesticated trades, you know, or like, create, like crafts and art. And so like, I didn't think at that time to, like, ask her how to sew, and like, that feels like this generational loss. Now that she's passed away that like, I didn't get to do that. But there's, there is that knowledge, you know, that we interact with on Instagram, where, you know, I see how your tips and like how to make a different type of like, welt pocket or whatever it is, you know, where, like, maybe she would have taught me that, but now I am able to, like, learn it through other people or like, you know, smocking and that kind of thing. (LO)

She sees the knowledge sharing practices on the community as a way of dealing with the generational loss she experienced from not having learned these skills from her grandmothers.

Garment disposal is another key area of knowledge sharing in that a lot of information on what are the best, most ethical, most environmentally friendly ways of disposing of garments that are no longer wearable is shared by community members. For example, donating old but wearable garments to charity stores or thrift shops en mass has historically been regarded as a good option, but there have been more and more reports of these stores becoming overwhelmed by the amount and quality of the garments donated, pushing the online slow fashion communities to spread the news that the

mindless dumping of large quantities of fast fashion pieces is not as ethical an option as it first seemed.

It is important to note that the content of this shared knowledge matters, meaning these technical tips and tricks are not neutral pieces of information. With every instance of knowledge sharing, there is an implication that the receiver of the knowledge would like to make better garments: garments that are more durable, garments that can be adapted and modified as needed, garments that create minimal waste in the production process, or garments that do not cause environmental harm. The communal act of sharing knowledge is a crucial process in the making of "the right clothes" and the normative framework that surrounds, grounds and guides these practices. The self-governance of conduct cannot take place unless the members can access the knowledge of how to become ethical, moral subjects.

Apart from the obvious sharing of practical sewing tips, there is another layer of knowledge sharing that takes place within the community: the introduction to the sewing community often acts as an introduction to the concept of slow fashion, which is due to the fact that many community members feel a moral calling to educate their followers on the consequences of fast fashion. It is commonplace to see infographics explaining the ways fast fashion causes environmental harm or human rights violations being re-shared in people's stories. These infographics often come from other Instagram accounts that are centred on educating the public about fast and slow fashion, and they can include information about different types of fabric and how environmentally friendly they are, fast fashion brands and the harm they cause, or recommendations and advice on how to be more sustainable in one's dressing practices. This sort of knowledge sharing plays a crucial role in helping other members relate to the movement of slow fashion and find their roles in it. Through being exposed to knowledge, advice and calls to action of this kind members feel an increasing moral obligation to do their part by becoming more ethical consumers and sustainable sewists.

One of my respondents likened the knowledge sharing practices to those in the coding community in that there is an emphasis on free, open access to knowledge in both communities and gatekeeping is not a common experience is either:

> I really appreciate, like, sharing knowledge and sharing cool things that you've, like, made or inspiring other people. And I think that's the, the basis of the sewing community is the same as like the coding community, like free access, and sharing knowledge, not gatekeeping it. (…) I really appreciate that kind of thing, where it's, it's about sharing and not like gatekeeping and it's about also holding or like, making the pattern designers and all those like be more not just like sustainable, but also more responsible with like how they're doing stuff and it's kind of like a driving people to change for the better and it's, that's what I can really appreciate about it. (GF)

She states that this environment of knowledge sharing acts as a catalyst for sewists and pattern designers to become more sustainable, socially and environmentally responsible and ethical in their practices.

For many community members, their interest in garment sewing / home sewing came before their dedication to slow fashion, but the two end up closely related with time. One of my respondents described her initial motivations to start sewing as being more focused on being able to wear clothes that fit her properly and having a creative outlet, but stated that these initial motivations changed as she learned more about slow fashion from the sewing community on Instagram:

> I got introduced to the idea of home sewing before slow fashion. (…) I got introduced to home sewing (…) and then I started making my own clothes, mostly to make clothes that fit me better and because I wanted to be creative. Then I kind of came into the understanding of slow fashion through through the Instagram sewing community, and started educating myself more on it. And now, the understanding of fast fashion and how it's affecting, you know, its implications for labour and the environment, like, affect my decision to home sew. (…) So I would say the sewing came first, then the concept of slow fashion came in. But now that is definitely like one of the main reasons that I sew. (JF)

Here, the effect of in-community knowledge sharing is apparent. Through the knowledge she acquired from the community, she engages with her sewing practice in a completely different way. What was once a hobby driven by personal wants and

needs gets transformed into a counter-conduct, a way to separate herself from the world of fast fashion.

Another one of my respondents share a similar point of view:

> And that's how I started [sewing]. But it wasn't exactly so that I could get into slow fashion, it wasn't so much of a 'Let's take a step back from fast fashion. It was more about the skill. (…) I obviously knew about the social impact, the social injustice that was happening in the fashion industry. But I kind of didn't have a better option. So I was kind of closing an eye on it. You know, like I know it's happening, but I don't know what else to do. So you know, when I started sewing, I finally understood well, oh, actually, that's a solution. And I can make it myself and it's going to have a lesser impact. (CC)

The knowledge that she acquired through the act of sewing gave her the necessary tools to make a change in her dressing and shopping habits, it allowed her a way out of the fast fashion cycle.

A similar story was told by another one of my respondents. When asked about what changed in her life after joining the sewing community, she stated that learning more about fast fashion and its impact was the first thing she learned from the community. Upon learning more about it, she found herself called to action:

> Well, definitely, the first thing I learned [from the community] was about fast fashion. I mean, not that I ever really bought much, but when we did, it was just what was affordable, which always happens to be like H&M and things like that. So that that was the first thing that I said, 'Okay, I have to start doing that. And if I can't make it, then I have to find another way. '(…) I got really obsessed with what fabrics are sustainable as well. I had no idea like the kind of water waste that goes into things like cotton. Yeah. So now if I'm not buying like a natural fibre, I try to buy deadstock fabric. (MP)

Her learning more about fast fashion directly translated into her shifting her sewing and dressing practices to be more sustainable. She now has a hierarchy of choices that she uses to navigate these practices, according to which natural fibres that require less water consumption are the most sustainable and therefore preferable option.

2.5. Boundaries

The lines that divide people, groups and things have been termed "symbolic boundaries" in the sociology literature. There are a number of ways through which these boundaries can be expressed, such as "through normative interdictions, cultural attitudes and practices, and patterns of likes and dislikes". (Lamont, Pendergrass & Pachuki, 2005, p.850) Symbolic boundaries play a prominent role in the creation and maintenance of communities, as well as in the formation of self and identity. Although most of the work on boundaries and communities has been focused on face-to-face communities, there is a growing literature on digitally mediated communities that do not involve direct contact between members. The concept of boundaries is especially important as it relates to the idea of cultural membership, as boundaries are the very things that people use to assign similarity and difference to different groups they encounter. (Lamont & Molnar, 2002)

In the case of the sewing community on Instagram, we see boundary work being done to both to reinforce the norms and values of the group, and to differentiate the group from a number of outside groups. I will explore two examples of boundary-setting to discuss these two dynamics: First, through displaying their bodily measurements on their public profiles, community members emphasise their interest in making clothes that follow the principles of slow fashion, as well as their aim in neutralising their approach to their own bodies. Second, by placing importance on the idea of slowing down their sewing practices and their preference of interacting with slower makers, they separate themselves from hobbyists who practice fast sewing as well as strengthening the in-group norms and values.

2.5.1. Measurements Movement

There are a few ways that community members signal their belonging to this specific community to others, and one of the key ways is by arranging their bios on their profiles. On Instagram, each account owner has the ability to upload a profile picture, choose a handle, assign a name to the account, specify which pronouns they use and write a short bio describing themselves in 150 characters - all of which show up at the

top of their public profiles. The vast majority of community members put their key body measurements in their bios in the following format:

B: x cm / x" , W: y cm / y" , H: z cm / z"

or

B:xW:yH:z

or

#BxWyHz

This practice started out in the November of 2019 with a creator from the community sharing the idea of putting one's measurements in posts or bios in order to help other community members with fitting. She named it "Measurements Movement", and encouraged her followers to share their own measurements on their profiles. It's also worth noting that there is an older call to action about sharing one's size without shame that started among fat sewists. Knowing a sewist's body measurements and reading their thoughts on the sizing and fit of a sewing pattern they used can be a really helpful tool for gauging how that same pattern will work on one's own body. Due to its utility, it became a widely accepted practice within the community in a very short amount of time. Now, almost three years into this practice, it also serves as a discrete sign of membership to the community.

Publicly sharing body measurements is a delicate matter for many, as a lot of people experience shame towards their size and measurements from a young age due to widespread devaluation of and discrimination against fat bodies. This practice also serves as an attempt to neutralise one's conception of their own body and size. In the original post introducing the Measurements Movement, Rachael writes:

> There *should* be no shame in these stats. Please see that they are simply numbers to help with fitting, it's taken me a long time but I've grown to accept that. Making clothes to fit your body means more than how those numbers equate to ready to wear garments. Less shame, more body inclusivity, more liberation. (Rachael, @minimalistmachinist)

This matter came up during one of my interviews, where my respondent stated that the sharing of such an intimate and personal detail helped her feel more connected to the rest of the community:

> I think if you're sharing your measurements with the world, which is such, I mean, that was such a strange transition for me, because I've always been so ashamed of my measurements, to just go "Oh, that's just a number." but I'm going to share it with people so that I can connect with other human beings who are similar. And I can, like learn what changes that they've had to make to certain garments and things like that, if you're sharing that intimate detail, I just think that naturally, that creates a community where there's a sort of like social intimacy, and a willingness to have conversations, which I think is lovely. (RT)

Here it becomes evident that along with helping to distinguish this community from others, this practice also helps form a sense of solidarity and intimacy between the community members.

This mechanism of boundary setting also highlights the community's emphasis on making clothes that fit just right and are thus more wearable and durable. By placing their measurements in such a central location at the very top of their profiles, they showcase the importance they place on taking the time and spending the effort to make the "right" clothes. Making well-fitting clothes is one of the central aims of community members as they recognise that the garments that fit them well get vastly more use in their wardrobes. As this idea of using clothing to its fullest potential is one of the strongest tenets of slow and sustainable fashion, we can see that the displaying of measurements is a strong technique of reinforcing and strengthening the group's norms and values.

2.5.2. Slowing Down

The idea that there are different styles of garment-sewing showed up a number of times in my interviews. The description of a specific type of sewist who makes a large number of garments in quick succession popped up multiple times.

> I hope it doesn't come off as like really judgmental, but like, some accounts I was following were like, they were outputting like five things a week or

something. It's like, I had no problem with the people. But like, I had to unfollow because it was like fast sewing. And, and I didn't like it at all. And even one of these people I had to unfollow just because I didn't like how much she was sewing even by the end of the year, she said something like, she was taking lots and lots of like free fabrics and free patterns that required her to test and stuff. And that like she didn't want to do it anymore, because she was just sewing like way, way more than she could wear and whatnot. (JF)

JF describes this style of sewing as "fast sewing" and states that she chose to unfollow these accounts. This idea that some people make more clothes than they could wear in meaningful ways causes a sort of rift in the broader garment sewing community. Many members of the slow fashion oriented sewing community separate themselves from accounts that practice fast sewing by way of unfollowing them.

JS is a 65-year-old sewist who is a co-founder and administrator of the account "Sew Over 50" which is focused on sharing the work of older sewists in order to increase their visibility. She mentioned that the practice of fast sewing does not sit well with her, but because she does not use the Sew Over 50 account to share her personal thoughts and ideas, she simply does not share the work of people who over-make in an attempt to discourage other sewists from engaging in fast sewing:

> But it's quite hard because when we're doing Sew Over 50 I can't push, you know, I've got to sort of be aware of everybody's views and, and things, and it's hard when, when somebody is, people don't do it so much now, but there were times, you know, people said, 'Oh, I made this and then this and then this, and then this 'and I don't want to encourage that. But equally, I can't from that account. I can't. I mean, I wouldn't say anything negative anyway. But I sort of, I try not to just, I tend not to post people saying things like that. I tend not to reshare things like that." (JS)

The act of not promoting the work of sewists who are focused on quantity rather than quality is another technique that is used by slow fashion sewists to draw boundaries around their community.

RT also draws a clear boundary between these two groups of people:

> I think that that kind of grouping in the community of folks who are interested in the hobby, is where I found myself, probably when I was a little bit early on, before I found this lovely group of people. And actually, I think that's a group

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of people who produce and produce and produce because they're not driven by this idea of slowing down. (RT)

She states that she initially found herself following accounts that viewed sewing as a hobby rather than as a way of practicing slow fashion. She associates the former with the over-production of clothing, and the latter with the idea of slowing down in one's making practice.

Here, the acts of over-consumption and over-production go hand in hand. There is a sense of judgement towards the idea of replacing the habit of fast fashion consumption with the habit of over-consuming fabric and other sewing materials, with a few of my respondents stating that they were not happy with how much fabric they were buying. They expressed an interest in slowing their fabric consumption as well as their garment production. This desire of slowing down was often talked about as one the key changes my respondents experienced in their lives after joining the community. JJ stated that the concept of slowing down has been one of the key takeaways from her time in the sewing community, and contrasted her earlier work and mindset with her current ones:

> So I think that like, like, the concept of slowing down, has been absolutely huge. Especially and then, you know, for a while, if you read some of my earlier posts, I was like, 'I was able to sew this in a day 'or 'I was able to sew this in one sitting'. And now I'm just like, oh my goodness, like now I'm just like, I want to undo all my machine stitching and like, do it by hand. And it's like, I am so sceptical of anything I finished in a day. And just, yeah, kind of like, and also just my ability to kind of just sit with just the, the noise in the room, I think before, you know what, especially because I was a student before as well, it's just constant kind of consumption and always trying to, like, listen to something and learn something, and podcasts and music and stuff like that. And now it's like, it's just kind of so nice to sit with the sound of my machine. (JJ)

Slowing down is not merely the act of sewing more slowly, but rather a combination of deliberately choosing slower techniques like hand sewing over faster ones like machine sewing, spending more time in the design and fitting stages, spacing out projects, taking on time intensive projects, breaking down the making of a garment into multiple sittings, et cetera.

Getting caught up in the excitement of being able make clothing and making too many clothes has been repeatedly mentioned as a side effect of surrounding oneself with a community of sewists. Especially in the early stages of sewing and / or community membership, being exposed to a constant stream of sewing projects inspires and motivates the sewist to sew more. However, after spending more time in the community and witnessing the conversations that are held around the idea of slowing down, many come to the realisation that they need to or want to slow down:

> And then when I started sewing, I did what a lot of people did and sewed a lot, a lot of things. And then when I stopped and when I realised what I was doing, I, I really slowed down. So now I do still sew things, but I try to be really mindful of making things that I know will be things that I will wear a lot and that will last and so I don't, I sort of stopped following fabric shops and pattern designers on Instagram. (JS)

JS mentioned that she unfollowed the Instagram accounts of pattern designers in order to remove the temptation to sew the latest sewing pattern from her life. She said that she encounters many patterns that she finds beautiful, but that she learned from her past experiences that she does not get enough wear out of some of them:

> But it's sort trying to try and to really define my style and what I like wearing and try not to be attracted to the pretty things that that are wonderful, you know, wonderful dresses and things that I just know I won't wear. (JS)

MP had a similar experience with the community where she started to feel like seeing everyone's sewing projects was tempting her to make more and more items:

> And I think end of last year and this year I was like, I just don't want to sew things I know I won't wear because it was becoming like, you feel pressure because you see people always making things. Then it was becoming negative. Like I wasn't enjoying consuming and like this, the sewing community makes was just like a to do list. So I thought this year, it would just be things I want really want to make. And that would be it and small projects from whatever else I have at home, but I don't need to go buy like new fabric unless it's like a really specific project I had in mind. I think yeah, I think just slowing down in general was a big takeaway. (MP)

These negative feelings towards a potential over-consumption / over-production pushed her to be more intentional in her making process, where she stopped casually

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purchasing fabric and focused on making garments that she knew for sure she would wear.

Despite many members 'initial tendencies of self-proclaimed "over-making", their participation in and exposure to the sewing community acts as a wakeup call of sorts, reminding them the moral backbone of this community -namely, slow fashion- and pushing them to reflect on their sewing practices. This is realised by the establishment of the symbolic boundary between fast and slow making. Along with providing the members with the necessary tools that will allow them to become more ethical subjects, this contrast between hobby-sewists who tend to be less mindful about their garment production and community members who act with slow fashion principles in mind also serves to define the boundaries of this specific community of makers and section them off from outsiders.

2.6. Inclusivity

The sewing community prides itself on being an inclusive community, and striving to become more inclusive with time. The inclusion and support of different body sizes, racial and ethnic identities, disabilities, gender identities or representations and ages is highly valued and it is seen as the ethical way of running a community. This ideal of inclusivity forms the basis of much of the activism that takes place within the community. One of my respondents talked about how inclusivity and inclusive practices are passed down in the community:

> I think there is a level of inclusivity that gets taught and passed on, in, in the community where, you know, like, like, we're doing image IDs, and we're talking you know, the, the, like size, including the size, upper limit of the size range for for sewing patterns. And then like, you know, that some people are, are not buying from companies where their size range is really limited. Like that there is this level of activism, I think that is activism that's built then or that gets passed on and shared. (AP)

Here, AP talks about three practices in particular: Providing image descriptions (commonly abbreviated as IDs) for visual content, demanding more expansive size ranges from pattern companies, and refusing to purchase from companies with limited

size ranges. By providing written descriptions of what is being shown on the photos and videos, people with visual impairments and neurodivergent people are invited to benefit from the content that is being posted. Similarly, putting closed captions on videos makes it possible for people with hearing impairments to consume the video content. By demanding bigger size ranges from companies and boycotting them in the case they refuse, sewists with larger bodies are given space and priority in the community: As mentioned above, sewing patterns are one of the most important technologies that are used by the community, and they are seen as tools of empowerment in that a well drafted pattern and a detailed set of instructions make it possible for all sewists to make high quality garments that look and feel great. The limited availability of sewing patterns that are designed and drafted for larger measurements push fat people out of the community, because they face an immediate barrier to entry. The demand for pattern companies to extend their size ranges seeks to avoid exactly that: By providing fat people with the tools that will enable them to sew, the community aims to include them in the social group.

Besides providing image descriptions and encouraging the pattern companies to extend their size ranges, community members also engage in other acts that can be categorised as inclusivity-centred practices. Examples include educating others about culturally appropriative fabric or pattern designs and textile manipulation techniques, sewing related businesses employing pay-what-you-can models, demanding more adaptive pattern designs that cater to different disabilities, and encouraging the representation of different marginalised groups.

It can be easy to see inclusivity as a binary switch that a community can turn on or off, especially when we talk about it in terms of practical examples, and the literature's focus on assessing or measuring inclusivity serves to strengthen this idea. (El-Ganainy, Ernst, Merola & Rogerson, 2021; Nelson Laird, 2011; Wach, 2012) It is important to emphasise that much like the project of ethical self formation, the project of inclusivity also does not have a definitive end point. The community does not become fully inclusive when it successfully incorporates any given number of inclusive practices - rather, there is a focus on continual self reflection and communal improvement.

2.7. Chapter Discussion

In this chapter, I aimed to show how community rituals, acts of knowledge sharing, the establishment of boundaries and practices of inclusion act as community building and maintenance technologies that ground community members 'ethical self formations by providing them with a mode of subjection. The mode of subjection refers to the ways in which individuals are "invited or incited to recognise their moral obligations" (Foucault, 1986, p.353) or how individuals relate to the normative framework present in the community and the responsibility and obligation they feel towards upholding these rules and principles. (Jacobs, Claringbould & Knoppers, 2016) In the case of the sewing community and slow fashion, the community itself forms the mode of subjection by enabling members to recognise the expectations, responsibilities and obligations that are born out of practicing slow fashion and giving them a space to practice them. Without the presence of a community, practicing slow fashion becomes increasingly difficult as the technologies used in the community help members regulate their feelings, define what to do and what not to do in the face of ever-changing conceptions of sustainability and ethical consumption, come up with solutions to moral dilemmas and achieving a clearer sense of group identity.

Community rituals like Me Made May allow the members to reflect on their sewing and dressing practices, which in turn allows them to tweak their future decisions regarding sewing and dressing. By analysing how they previous sewing projects perform in daily wear, they gain the knowledge of what works from the perspective of slow fashion, and what does not. In a sense, this and other community rituals give the members a chance to recognise their place in the broader movement and their relation to the conceptualisation of slow fashion, sustainability, and ethical consumption.

Knowledge sharing is a crucial part of the experience of being a sewing community member, where practical knowledge on how to make better performing, more pleasing garments is freely and openly shared on a daily basis. In addition to absorbing practical knowledge, many members are introduced to the very idea of slow fashion through their participation in the community. Alternative ways of practicing slow fashion like responsible disposal of unwearable garments, mending and alterations, proper laundry

and care of existing garments were frequently brought up in my interviews as learning points. Through the acquisition of this know-how, members both come to recognise their obligations and gain the necessary tools for fulfilling these obligations.

The establishment of symbolic boundaries enables the group to define itself as separate and different than other communities, as well as highlighting the group's normative framework. By displaying their body measurements on their profiles and emphasising the contrast between fast and slow sewing, the community members showcase the importance they place on upholding the principles and obligations of slow fashion in their sewing practices. This instils a clear sense of purpose into their sewing, rendering it more than a hobby or a leisure time activity. Once again, the existence of these boundaries helps individual members establish a personal relation to slow fashion by enabling them to situate themselves within the community and the movement.

The techniques of inclusion that are utilised in-community form the basis of a major part of activism practiced in the community. By providing accessibility support on photo and video content, demanding more expansive size ranges from pattern companies, speaking out about culturally appropriative fabric or pattern designs, using pay-what-you-can models in sewing-related businesses and more; community members work towards rendering the community a more inclusive space for a more diverse group of people. It is through practices like these that they ground their ethics and put them to practice on a communal level. Inclusivity appears as one of the core values of the community, and we see it being passed down to newer members, which in turn helps them navigate their responsibilities towards other community members.

There are undoubtedly more community building and maintenance techniques that are used which facilitate individuals 'connection and relation to the idea of slow fashion and the responsibilities, obligations and expectations that come with it. These four techniques are crucial for understanding how community members come to situate their selves as part of the experience of practicing slow fashion and the process of ethical self formation that comes with it.

CHAPTER 3

THE WORK OF MAKING AND BUYING THE "RIGHT" CLOTHES

3.1. Chapter Introduction

Making their clothes themselves is the most significant way community members practice slow fashion in their daily lives. Most of my respondents mentioned that the primary way they acquire new articles of clothing is by making them at home. Like LO, who said that if her two kids need a new garment, her first instinct is to make it herself: "Right, well, um, like, in terms of like, getting more things I never think now about going shopping for it. I think about like, how could I create that? So if the boys need a jacket, then I'm just gonna make the jacket." (LO)

When asked about how much of their wardrobes consist of handmade clothes, the answers ranged from 20 to 90 percent, with the average being 57 percent. Because handmade clothes constitute such a large portion of the community members' wardrobes and because the community is first and foremost centred around the activity of making clothes, I hold that looking into the work that goes into making these clothes and making sure that they are the "right" sorts of clothes is a good way of uncovering the normative framework of the sewing community. With that being said, very few people in the community have a strict no-buy policy, meaning community members are also active consumers of clothes and accessories. Thus, by looking into how community members make and buy their clothes we can also better understand how they transform themselves into ethical subjects.

As one of my respondents put it, the very practice of sewing and participating in slow fashion helps the members form their ethical selves:

One thing that has come with sewing, as I'm sure you experience and anyone who sews really, is a real, like - actually slow fashion more broadly, not just sewing I think, is a real understanding of like myself or as a constant, constant understanding and revealing of like, yeah, finding out who I want to be, not just style wise, but kind of like ethically as well. And how I can practice that in a way that feels authentic. It feels like a bit of an annoying word, but like real and practicable. I can do it. I should, and that kind of, and also keeps me accountable as well for kind of sticking to those things, which I think is good. (RT)

Through the act of making clothes, members are able to connect with their morals on a deeper level. Sewing and practicing slow fashion by other means enables one to find a way to practice ethics in an authentic, practical manner.

The "right" clothes in this context refers to articles of clothing that reflect the principles of slow fashion; namely durability, versatility, sustainability and ethical production. Although the normativity of slow fashion is fluid and open to negotiation, there are definitely certain principles and practices that become more solidified in the community. In this chapter, I will first look into how the knowledge of making the right clothes is created and disseminated within the sewing community. I will argue that domestic sewing patterns and community members 'content play a major role in the production and distribution of this knowledge, and this knowledge makes it possible for community members to practice self-forming activities in their sewing practices. Secondly, I will go through the rules and guidelines community members set for themselves for when they are planning on introducing a new garment to their wardrobes, which will help me demonstrate the fluctuating nature of the normalcy of slow fashion within the community. Thirdly, I will explore how sewing practices that cause internal conflict for community members helps demonstrate the formation of their ethical selves. To do so, I will discuss the example of approaching garment sewing as an art form and how it clashes with the principles of slow fashion, causing internal tension. Finally, I will discuss how consumption practices of community members reify their moral standings, and how we can make sense of the idea of ethical consumption in relation to the consumption practices of the community members. The aim of this chapter is to discuss the role of making and buying clothes and materials in the construction and negotiation of community norms.

3.2. Sharing the knowledge of which clothes are the right ones

3.2.1. Sewing patterns

Domestic, paper sewing patterns have been around since the 1850s (Seligman, 1996), and they have had accompanying instructions since 1863. Throughout their 170-year history, they have taken on many forms but their core characteristics have remained the same: They consist of full-size pattern pieces that act as a fabric cutting template, and a set of instructions that guide the user on putting the pieces together. We can talk about two broad categories of sewing patterns: Traditional patterns that are produced by large companies (such as Butterick, Simplicity, McCalls, Vogue, and Burda) and independent or "indie" patterns that are created by either a single independent pattern designer or very small companies. Indie sewing patterns are immensely popular among the sewing community, most likely due to them coming with much more detailed instructions, and often including supplementary material like step-by-step illustrations, photos, videos, blog posts or workshops. Independent pattern designers have a much more direct line of communication with their customers, and they also have more authority over the product they put out into the world compared to pattern designers that work in corporate settings.

The emergence of indie sewing patterns is a crucial milestone for the existence of the sewing community as it stands now. Because these patterns are much more focused on educating the user on how to sew, they facilitated many people's first forays into home sewing as well as helping people get back into it. They greatly increased the accessibility and approachability of domestic garment sewing. By acting as a gateway into the world of sewing, they enabled a revival of sorts to take place in domestic garment sewing, much like the knitting revival that unfolded from 2000 onwards. (Dirix, 2015; McIntosh, 2011; Pace, 2007) Many of my respondents credited these indie sewing patterns as playing an important role in their sewing journeys, with a number of them discovering the sewing community through following a few independent designers' accounts.

As embodiments of design, sewing patterns carry with them norms, values, judgements and points of view. Because indie patterns are so enmeshed with the sewing community, they also afford us the opportunity to take a look into how the community's normative ideals present themselves in physical and digital artefacts. They can help or hinder the process of making the "right" clothes by their design elements, technical details or instructions, which makes it worthwhile to investigate these elements.

For instance, every sewing pattern comes with an indication of how much fabric will be needed to make the garment in question, as well as a recommended cutting layout showing how to place the pattern pieces on the the required yardage of fabric. The pattern designers have the opportunity of creating an efficient cutting layout that minimises fabric usage and waste. While putting together her latest sewing pattern, Tara from Paper Theory tweaked the shape of the sleeves of the shirt in order to have the front and back panels lock together, resulting in less fabric usage. In her stories documenting her design process, she explicitly stated that she wanted to help home sewists be as environmentally conscious as possible in their sewing practices, and making a slight compromise on her initial design to dramatically decrease the amount of fabric needed was worth it. Here we can clearly see that there is a hierarchy of priorities: the ideals of sustainability outweigh the designer's aesthetic concerns to a certain degree.

These concerns reach a high point in the case of zero (or low) waste pattern design. Zero waste pattern design is a design practice that is focused on eliminating production waste by creating clever cutting layouts that use the entire width and length of fabric required for a garment. Zero waste sewing patterns have been gaining popularity over the past few years, with pattern designers like Birgitta Helmersson, Maureen Gleason and Carly Dean releasing successful apparel and accessory patterns. Zero waste patterns present an interesting case because they have a very specific and apparent set of norms embedded in them. When one follows the instructions of the designer, there are no scraps of fabric left over from the cutting process, which acts as a response to one of the biggest problems of the fashion industry. On average, about 15% of material goes to waste after a garment is cut (Nursari & Djamal, 2019) and thus pre-consumer

waste is one of the main culprits of environmental pollution. By creating zero or low waste cutting layouts, the designers reinforce the idea that pre-consumer waste is something that must be minimised and avoided as much as possible in order to be more sustainable in one's sewing practice.

Sewing patterns can also come with design elements that are built in to help lengthen a garment's lifespan. For instance, garments that are made out of more panels and therefore have more seams can be more easily adapted if one's body changes with time. The seams can be taken in or let out to accommodate changes in size or shape. Similarly, larger seam allowances give more space to make alterations in the future, as there is more material available in the garment. The instructions are equally important in increasing the longevity, durability and adaptability of the resulting garment. The order of construction can be written in a way that leaves the most important seams easy to alter in the future, like the side seams or the waist seams. The designer can instruct the user to finish the seams of the garment using specific techniques that would make the garment more resistant to wear and tear, such as flat felled seams or French seams. A combination of different techniques can be used in a single garment in order to maximise its strength, adaptability, versatility and use.

Finally, the actual style of the garment acts as a playing field for the designer to increase the garment's versatility and longevity. Timeless, classic designs or modular garments can be more easily used throughout different years or even decades compared to styles that are trend-led.

All of these design styles, techniques and choices serve to imbue the domestic sewing patterns with the normative framework of slow fashion. Sustainability appears as one of the central aims of making clothing at home, because these specific goals like waste reduction or garment life extension come coded into the patterns themselves. Thus, the sewists who use these patterns to make themselves clothes have the opportunity of relying on the instructions of the designers in order to form their ethical selves. In other words, the encoded meanings, values and norms facilitate the practices of the self by providing the users with a template for their courses of action.

3.2.2. Content

The knowledge of making the right clothes is also produced and distributed within the web of content that community members create and consume. As mentioned in the previous chapter, knowledge sharing is one of the core tenets of the community. Technical sewing information is freely exchanged between the members, which can range from sharing a clever and easy way of adding a lining to a garment to giving advice on which type of elastic is the longest lasting, highest quality one. Keeping in mind that not all sewing patterns are created with slow fashion in mind, the responsibility of finding and applying these techniques falls on the shoulders of the sewist. Through the exchange of this know-how, members gain access to the required knowledge for making garments that fit and last.

There is also a lot sewing-adjacent knowledge that is shared as part of the content, such as demonstrations of mending / fixing clothing or information on how to best take care of different garments and fabrics. A few of my respondents mentioned that they learned about extending the lives of the clothes they make and own through the content that is shared in the community:

> I've learned to take how to take care of my clothes better. That was such a big part of it, like over washing jeans and stuff like and then they fade or they lose their strength like they get really worn out. So just that kind of stuff. I also learned through the Instagram like how to care for jumpers how to how to wash your jeans properly. (MP)

> Oh, and I've learned a lot about mending my clothes. So I've been, that's been really great because I'm normally like, I don't I don't necessarily like mending. Yeah, but I've been like, I think embracing the idea of like visible mending a bit more. And that's been helpful and I've been actually mending my clothes more. Yeah, I think learning to take care of the things I own has been really key. Yeah. (LH)

This sort of content establishes two things at the same time: First, and more obviously, it provides the consumers of the content with education on sewing, mending, taking care of clothing and so on. Secondly, it presents the instructed way of sewing as aspirational, and the qualities that are aspired towards (such as longer lasting, adaptable garments) as the ideals that should be pursued.

It is worth noting that this type of content does not always come in the form of instructions, recommendations, or advice. The simple sharing of one's own process can be enough to stimulate a conversation and thought process on what the right clothes should look and feel like. This dynamic often assumes the form of "inspiration", where community members acknowledge that the people they follow act as a source of inspiration for them in terms of design, skills, aesthetics, ethics or activism.

Thus, just by documenting their design and sewing processes (as well as how they actually use the garments in daily life) publicly on Instagram, the community members end up contributing to the building of slow fashion as a concept. Their actions are directly responsible for the construction of slow fashion's principles and the ways they are practiced in daily life.

3.3. Rules & Guidelines

Unsurprisingly, many community members end up creating a set of guidelines for themselves for their garment making practice. These are not strict rules that are followed under all circumstances, but rather guiding principles that help their users navigate their sewing practices. Both sustainability and ethical consumption are terms that lack formal definitions in the literature. They are mostly described as groupings of certain driving principles, characteristics, practices or ideals (Kozlowski, Searcy & Bardecki, 2018) and thus they are subject to change, negotiation and fluctuation. This means that the guidelines that community members use are also written and re-written in practice. Different circumstances and conditions call for different decisions to be made, and for different options to appear as more ethical or sustainable than others.

The discussions and statements about fibre content of fabrics is a good example for better understanding this process. There is a real preference among the community members towards using fabrics that are made out of natural fibres, such as linen, cotton, wool or silk; as natural fibres are accepted to be more sustainable materials. Synthetic fabrics are not biodegradable, they shed micro-plastics when they are

laundered, and the production processes used to manufacture them often rely on the usage of harmful, polluting chemicals and excessive water usage. In contrast, natural fibres are biodegradable, are often less reliant on the use of chemicals, and usually more user friendly when they are made into garments. It is therefore not surprising that the vast majority of the community leans towards using natural fibres in their sewing:

> So probably in terms of like rules, definitely the natural fibres. And also, I will only buy organic fibres for things like cotton. And that is purely an environmental thing, because I spent a lot of time in Central Asia because I studied international security studies for like, Central Asia, in the Middle East, and so I'm very concerned around things like desertification, water scarcity, causing conflict, all of those kinds of things. So, for me, bio-organic is just like, the only option that I'm kind of willing to look at. (RT)

Like many of my respondents, RT immediately started talking about her preference for exclusively using natural fibres when questioned about what sorts of rules or guidelines she follows about her sewing practice. She based her preference on an ethical ground by stating that this choice comes from a purely environmental perspective for her. Using organic, natural fibre fabrics appears as the only suitable option to her in the intensely diverse world of fabric, as the practice of making her own clothes is a core component in her ethical self formation. Her sentiments were echoed in many other interviews I held:

> Like even when I'm buying something I don't really want it to be I don't want it to be a synthetic or have synthetic content. (AP)

> Oh yes. Oh, if I'm buying new fabric, and I always try make sure whether that is 100% cotton or like a cotton linen blend or, you know, but obviously 100%, so is better because then it's easier to recycle. Try always go for natural fibres. (JB)

> I definitely pay attention to the fabric content. And for the most part, like I said, I don't really buy clothes anymore. So I do like to make things with as little synthetic material as possible. Just because I don't know, I don't like the idea of microplastics everywhere. They're already everywhere. I can't do anything about it. But I don't necessarily need to like encourage it. So, so I do prefer natural fibres when I can and then in terms of like what I introduce. (LK)

Although the tendency towards using natural fibres is apparent in the community, there are instances where a more ethical and sustainable option presents itself, like the usage

of deadstock fabric. Deadstock fabric refers to fabric that has been produced for sale at one point in time, but that has not been fully sold out. There are companies that specialise in sourcing deadstock fabric and other sewing materials from fashion designers in order to save them from ending up in landfills. Many community members have a completely changed attitude when it comes to deadstock fabric: The fibre content of the materials loses importance with the knowledge that they are effectively preventing fabric from ending up in landfills. In this case, the usage of synthetic deadstock materials can even have an ethical significance in their eyes, as it is more preferable to keep synthetics in circulation rather than abandoning them to nature: "But if I'm buying something isn't natural fibres, then I try and make sure it's deadstock. Like deadstock fabric is, like my favourite thing to buy anyway. And so I always try and look for that." (JB), "Yeah. So now if I'm not buying, like a natural fibre, I tried to buy like deadstock fabric." (MP)

Another exception most members tend to make in term of fibre content is in the case of polyester thread. Although natural fibre threads like cotton, linen or silk threads are widely available, they are nowhere near as durable as polyester thread. This difference in strength and durability leads many community members to use all-purpose polyester thread for machine sewing despite them knowing it is not biodegradable. One of my respondents stated that she only sews with fabrics that are compostable like cotton, linen, viscose, wool, or silk; but she made an exception when it comes to thread:

> I use polyester thread. I tried cotton. And it just not sturdy enough. Yeah. When I weighed in is it going to be compostable, or is it going to be durable, I was like no. If I'm investing time and work and the other materials, I want this thing to last, so thread is polyester. (KH)

The discussion surrounding members 'fibre preferences shows us one of the core characteristics of the normative framework of the community. The normativity that is produced within the community is not static and unchanging, but it is instead in a state of flux and negotiation. Using natural fibres is the most ethical and sustainable option, but this judgement switches when one encounters deadstock polyester fabric or the much more durable polyester thread. Similarly, buying old, discarded garments from thrift stores and upcycling them to keep them in circulation is an ethical practice in

theory, but purchasing larger sizes than one's own size in order to get more material to work with is not the morally justifiable option. Because the normative framework of the community is subject to negotiation and change, the very self formation of the members is also fluid and dynamic. There is no single end point, one does not become a fully sustainable and ethical consumer by following a list of steps. The project of sustainability is not one that is meant to be completed. In fact, we can even see some in-group resistance to the idea that becoming perfectly sustainable is within reach of an average practitioner. Discussions surrounding the potential harms of a zero-waste centred conception of sustainability frequently circulate within the community, and many members highlight the need for realistic solutions to the obstacles that in front of a more sustainable and ethical way of living. The production of the self keeps evolving with each new scenario that is encountered in the process of making clothing. Different patterns, materials, construction techniques, tools all provide different challenges in terms of sustainability and ethical consumption.

For instance, certain sewing patterns are not deemed acceptable, or at the very least favourable within the community due to certain characteristics they carry or lack. Sewing patterns that have a limited size range are a good example to this class of "unacceptable" patterns: there has been a significant push towards size-inclusivity on behalf of the sewing pattern companies over the past few years, where many sewists who are frequently left out of the size ranges of commercial patterns started to demand their bodies also be included. As this movement gained momentum and strength, we have seen numerous calls to effectively boycott companies that refused to expand their size ranges. This resulted in many community members rejecting to purchase from companies with smaller size ranges, or refusing to provide "free publicity" for these companies by tagging the designer on their posts or using the pattern's hashtag. Other examples include patterns that are seen as being culturally appropriate (i.e. calling grown-on sleeves "Kimono sleeves"), patterns that are described using gendered language (i.e. describing vertical shaping seams as "princess seams"), and patterns that come from companies that have not been active in instances of political activism in the community (i.e. companies that remained silent during the Black Lives Matter protests). This sort of clear judgement on which patterns are acceptable also shows us the core values of the community.

3.4. Questioning Morals

So far in this chapter I have been focusing on practices that go into making the right sorts of clothes in order to explore how ethical subjects are continually produced. There is another aspect that allows us to see how power operates within this community to make people into ethical subjects: By looking at the practices and garments that made community members question their morals, commitments, and stances; we can gather more information about how the normativity of sustainability and ethical consumption works on the selves of the members.

There were a few remarks that referenced this sort of dynamic in my interviews. An especially fruitful and interesting example comes from the idea of making art through the means of garment sewing: Some of my respondents mentioned the tension they felt between wanting to be as sustainable as possible in their sewing practices, yet also wanting to approach sewing as an art form. Because slow and sustainable fashion depends on approaching clothing from a more practical angle where garments need to be designed with longevity and wearability in mind, and a more artistic approach does not share the same constraints in terms of getting enough wear out of a particular piece, these two desires can cause tension when they exist simultaneously.

This tension was apparent in my interview with SM, a sewist who is serious about slow fashion. She pays attention to how much an article of clothing had to travel to reach her, and prefers to shop from local brands in order to reduce her carbon footprint as much as possible. She likes to visit garment factories of brands she shops from to make sure the garment workers were adequately paid and treated fairly. When she is purchasing a new garment, she carefully examines its construction to determine if it will actually hold up for a long time. She is also conscious of the speed at which she was creating new garments:

> I feel like I want to say 50% is thrifted. I think that's a big part of my wardrobe. I'm guessing here. And then maybe 20% handmade, 30% store bought or 25%. The reason why it's not more for handmade is because that also really conflicts me with sometimes, the rate of consumption and the rate of creation outweighs

what I actually need in my wardrobe. So I try to make what I really feel like is a gap in my wardrobe. And that I want or need. But yeah, especially in the beginning, I tried to create a faster pace and I was like, oh, but this isn't this is wasteful in a different way. (SM)

However, she also felt really strongly about using the act of sewing as a form of artistic expression:

And I just love the idea of like, making art. And so actually, I haven't done this this whole time because I thought that it wasn't slow fashion to make art fashion. But I think that's where I went ahead where I start to make creative pieces. And I permit myself to waste. And that's so hard to say because I want to make a dress that I might only wear once or but it takes me months to make and it's an art piece. (…) We we justify art with all other mediums but art in fashion. Especially when people, I don't know, they're loud, loud voices around slow fashion, and it's how they should be. But I still want to make art. So I don't know, I, I think I'm much more comfortable with it now because it's kind of like it makes me happy. And there's a cynical part of me as a scientist, that's like, we don't have the solution now to plastic. But we will. Yeah, I'm not worried, being a problem forever. So like, also, just like an optimism that the solution is coming. There's so many people around the world focused on finding the solution to our material that we've made. We're going to fix it we're going to get there anyway. (SM)

I would like to highlight a few points from the above quote: First, she states that she did not think making artistic pieces was in line with the principles of slow fashion, which initially pushed her away from the idea of making art through fashion. Second, she uses the phrase "I permit myself to waste" in relation to making a dress she might only wear once. Third, she brings forth the way she comforts herself in the face of this tension by mentioning that it makes her happy and that she believes that a solution to plastic waste is on its way. I would like to briefly explore these three points as they relate to the concepts of power, self formation, and normativity.

As someone who is very much aware of the consequences of fast fashion as well as the steps one can take to avoid fast fashion, any practice that shares consequences with fast fashion appears as inherently wrong and unethical to her. Although the waste that would be created by an individual artist creating one-of-a-kind garments is nowhere near the scale of textile waste created by the fashion industry, these two acts fall within the same frame when we look at them through the perspective of the slow fashion community. While it is true that there are many members of the community who

emphasise that large scale change can only happen at the company level, there is a sense of personal responsibility felt by all members. Individual actions and practices are seen as meaningful, hence my respondent's initial aversion towards the idea of creating textile waste for personal pleasure.

This permission she gives herself to waste is interesting, because there are no strict rules or regulations within the community regarding fabric waste. However, through her internalisation of the implicit imperative not to waste fabric for garments that will not be frequently worn she feels guilt about her fabric resource consumption. (Denegri-Knott, Nixon & Abraham, 2018) The wording and language she uses to describe this sentiment makes her perspective of slow fashion and the community plainly visible.

At the end, she mentioned that she now feels more comfortable with the idea of occasional waste in the name of art, and that this comfort was brought about by her feeling happiness from this activity and by her trust in the scientific community to solve the problem around plastic waste. Rather than saying she just wants to make these art-oriented pieces, she feels the need to justify this decision by providing firm reasons as to why it is acceptable to make art through sewing. By resting her argument on scientific optimism, she reaffirms her ethical subjectivity even in an instance where she does not feel like she is acting in the most sustainable way possible.

A similar narrative was present in another interview I held with a participant:

> And I don't wear bras anymore. But I love making them because I love looking at them and I love touching the lace and stuff like this. And also I love like all of the structure, like all of the construction that goes behind it. I think it's so interesting. So like, if I, if I didn't stop myself, I would make them all the time. But because I don't wear them, it doesn't make sense. (KK)

Here, they first state their admiration towards the art of lingerie-making, but add that because bras lack utility in their current lifestyle, it does not make sense to make them. We can see that according to them garments are supposed to serve a purpose, and that the sheer pleasure of making a garment is not reason enough to actually make it.

3.5. Clothing Consumption

3.5.1. Consumption Practices

Similarly to making clothes, purchasing clothes and / or materials to make clothes is another arena that showcases the practices by which members try to align their selves with their moral compasses.

While most of my respondents reported that they have completely stopped purchasing clothes from fast fashion retailers like Zara, H&M, or Shein, the remaining few who continue to make the occasional fast fashion purchase do so in a very different way to their former selves or other fast fashion consumers. There is a strong emphasis on buying these pieces with the intention of wearing them for many years:

> Um, but yeah, I think I still, I try to buy from slow fashion companies when I can I still like because of my budget will buy from, like fast fashion like Uniqlo or something if I need something, but it's definitely with the idea that like, it's something that I really need, and we'll be using for a long time. (LH.)

> And I do sometimes still buy fast fashion. I buy knits. But if I buy from fast fashion. I try to buy stuff that I know I'm going to wear really for a long time. Yeah. This one? No, it's It's H&M. The thing is, you have to know how to look for the good stuff. And has really high-quality pieces in the so called trend collection. How do they call it now? It used to be the trend collection. And they only sell it online and in very limited stores. So this is cashmere, 100% cashmere costs around 120 euro for a sweater, which is on the cheap side for cashmere. My only habit is, after Christmas they reduce all of the unsold cashmere sweaters in January. So that's when I buy. And I buy myself once every two years. So it's so like, I'm not going overboard. But you have to really know the calendar, how the stores operate, and where to find the good stuff, because the good stuff that's well, in terms of quality is definitely there. But it's hidden. You will not find it in a normal average store. (…) (KH)

Both of these respondents stated that they only buy fast fashion items if they know they are going to get a lot of use out of them, which is why they pay attention to the quality of the pieces. KH makes sure to track the sale cycles of these fast fashion retailers, and purchases these higher quality pieces, like the cashmere sweater she was talking about, in the post-Christmas season sale. She continued to explain her thinking process about buying new garments:

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> (…) It's still exported, like still, people who made it were not paid enough. And I'm aware of it. And I don't endorse it. But I know if I'm going to buy it, then then I'm going to keep it for a really long time and really wear it till death. Yeah, so I do still buy fashion, but I'm very selective about what I'm gonna buy. And for me, it's also about access. I know it fits. I know the sizing. And I hate the returns, I hate ordering something from the Internet, trying on, just to send it back, because I know, most of the stuff will end up in the returns and will never enter the market again. So I find shopping on the Internet to be extremely wasteful because of the whole return policy. Yeah. So. So that's, that's the access thing. Because no sustainable brands who, who are really nice, have a brick and mortar store where I live, I would have to make really a trip, I don't know half an hour to to find a store that really sells something sustainable. And then the price point is the one I just cannot afford. (KH)

She states that online shopping for clothing is not the most sustainable option, as the garments that are returned are often never introduced back into the circulation but rather thrown away or donated en mass. And in a scenario where she only feels comfortable with shopping in person, since the slower, more sustainable brands are far away from where she lives, shopping from a fast fashion retailer in a mindful, careful manner appears as the best solution in terms of sustainability, ethics, accessibility, and practicality. Similarly to the above scenario involving the deadstock polyester fabric, this instance also shows us that the normativity of sustainability is subject to negotiation and change in the sewing community.

Another instance where shopping from fast fashion retailers becomes acceptable for community members is when they are purchasing items for their children. Especially in the case of very young children, their constant and rapid growth makes it impossible for their parents to only purchase from slow fashion brands or to make all their clothes.

> I think that at this point, I don't have zero fast fashion. I almost never buy it new, but I do very occasionally, buy new. And with kids stuff that's harder to avoid, because it gets like, so much more expensive. And there's a lot of stuff that we're like, oh my gosh, we need something warmer for her feet, like right now. Like to target. (MB)

Having children often pushes parents towards purchasing from fast fashion retailers as well as going against some of the principles of slow fashion like keeping garments in use for extended amounts of time. It is situations like these that remind us why the

members 'relation to the obligation of acting sustainably and ethically simply must be flexible and open to change. (Lehtokunnas, Mattila, Narvanen & Mesiranta, 2020) There are purchases that are born out of necessity, and community members do not feel the same sense of guilt when they are making these purchases as they feel when they are impulsively buying garments.

Apart from instance like these, there is a definitive stance among the community members against buying from fast fashion retailers. When asked about how they practiced slow fashion in their daily lives, most community members mentioned quitting fast fashion and starting to make their own clothes as the first two things they could think of. Their separation from fast fashion consumption is a crucial step in their self conception as ethical subjects, and members usually feel a lot of pride in the fact that they were able to disengage with fast fashion consumption:

> So I never, I don't shop in fast fashion stores at all at the moment. I haven't for a couple of years, which I'm quite proud of. (JB)

> And the way I consume clothing is way different now. I just, like, a lot of the stuff that I own is something that I've made, and it makes me feel really proud. Yeah, um, and and then anything that I haven't made I either have had for a really long time or like really thought about it before I bought it, which is so different from what I used to do, like how it used to be. (AP)

As well as quitting purchasing from fast fashion brands, some respondents also started buying from smaller, slower, more sustainable brands when they started practicing slow fashion. The items they purchase tend to fall in one of the two categories: basic garments like underwear, socks, knit pieces; or special pieces from well-known designers:

> And I, I do buy from smaller brands, like when I can afford it, my budgets pretty limited. And I was a student until a couple years ago, so it was like really limited at that point. But I do buy like, I'll buy like I tried to buy like socks and tights and things from like, more ethical, or like slow fashion companies. I definitely buy ARQ underwear whenever I can. (LH)

> Or I might buy I guess, like invest in pieces by designers that I really like. Usually overseas designers like Nancy Stella, Soto, or 69, because they kind of like practice, slow fashion themselves. And they're like just interesting designers that I admire. So it's almost like a collectible thing. (CT)

> And I think the times I'm more willing to splurge is when it's made by a really small brand. I recently befriended Deva behind Phaedra clothing in the UK, and like she's someone I would support. Or there's a designer here in Brooklyn. Aurorae, I think is how you pronounce the name that I bought, like a pair of pants are like, definitely more expensive than I usually would shop. But they're like, a coveted piece of clothing. So I feel like I can justify that in my head because I'm like, I have a really big philosophy of like, supporting artists, as you know, an artist myself. (RG)

These brands are characterised by the use of higher quality materials, more thoughtful and careful design and construction, and fair compensation of their labour forces. These characteristics mean that the garments are much more expensive than their fast fashion counterparts, causing them to be less accessible to the general public. Many of my respondents reported that they do not regularly purchase from these slow fashion brands because they cannot afford to do so, and that this was one of the reasons they started sewing their own clothes. A good example is Reb, who was introduced to the idea of slow fashion through two slow fashion oriented clothing brands, and turned to sewing as an alternative way of procuring ethically made, sustainable clothing:

> And I think probably like learning about like Eileen Fisher and Elizabeth Suzann were like two of my really basic, like intros to slow fashion. However, both of them seemed and still seem kind of inaccessible to me, unless I find something second hand, because of the price point. So expensive. Yeah, which I think leads me into, like the sewing journey of: Clothes are really expensive, and if I learn how to make them, it's like, a little less expensive in that I can, I can purchase fabric for five pieces for the cost of one. And of course, you know, the trade is your time and labour and setting up a space to sew. (RG)

Another concern many community members share about purchasing garments is the possibility and prevalence of greenwashing. Delmas and Burbano (2011) define greenwashing as the intersection of "poor environmental performance and positive communication about environmental performance" (p.65). With the increasing popularity of sustainability as a concept, many clothing brands took to portraying themselves as more environmentally friendly than they actually are. Some examples include H&M's Conscious line of garments, or Zara's promise of only using cotton, linen and polyester that was "organic, more sustainable, or recycled". As greenwashing has become a prevalent marketing strategy over the past few decades, more and more brands started using vague language to announce their commitments

to sustainability. Koss mentioned that they are extremely careful when they are engaging with a brand in order to avoid any traps of greenwashing:

> So as I said, I'm super picky when I buy ready to wear, so the brand has to be super transparent. And there are there are a few websites that will track this, like I use 'Good On You'. It's an Australian website and they will tell you if the brand is transparent or not because because brands now are really good at greenwashing. So Good On You is really nice because they're really hard on like their criteria, they are really strict. (KK)

They mentioned that they use the website "Good On You" to determine if the brand is actually sustainable or if it is just successful at greenwashing. This is a website that prepares reports on how popular clothing brands perform when it comes to being environmentally friendly, sustainable, and respectful to human and worker rights. Websites and applications like Good On You, Rank a Brand, and Fair Fashion all serve to guide ethical consumers to make better purchasing decisions.

It is through a combination of these consumption practices (not buying fast fashion, purchasing pieces from slow fashion brands, using applications and websites to check if a brand is truly sustainable etc.) that the community members render themselves as ethical consumers.

3.5.2. Ethical Consumption

In their 2010 paper, Adams & Raisborough called attention to the fact that the majority of work on ethical consumption takes the "ethical consumer" as a given and focuses on the complexity of this consumer's choices. They emphasised the need to instead focus on "the broader question of if and how people negotiate the various calls to be ethical in their everyday consumption" (p.259) and considering the ways in which consumers position themselves in relation to the discourse of ethical consumption.

One of the main points I want to establish in this thesis is that the normative framework of the sewing community is subject to negotiation and change, which, in turn, positions the emerging ethical subjectivities in a state of flux. Different solutions and options are seen as acceptable, appropriate or ethical in different everyday scenarios, and this

framework extends to the realm of ethical consumption. There is no single way of consuming ethically that can be understood, accepted and followed by all, but rather there are a multiplicity of ways different subjects approach the idea of ethical consumption within the restrictions and freedoms they face in their daily lives. In other words, ethical consumption assumes many disguises for these community members, which contributes to their ethical self formation.

This perspective also requires us to move beyond the binary dichotomies of ethical / unethical, good / bad, right / wrong. As Cherrier (2007) puts it, "the moral climate has scattered into countless narratives, such that what is good or ethical may no longer be certain everywhere and in every situation." (p.321) This means that every single act of consumption carries with it a multiplicity of ethical stances: "Buying second-hand items, an electric car, or even common items such as coffee, tea, cereal, bread, or trash bags carries a plurality of ethical stances that range from environmentalism to solidarity to fair trade to health to community support." (ibid, p.321) In the case of the sewing / slow fashion community, this way of thinking is clearly exemplified as even in the singular act of purchasing a pair of socks there are a number of ethical concerns involved: Is it made from sustainable materials? Are the workers paid and treated fairly? How about the durability of the item? Is it going to last for many years yet also be easily disposed of when it no longer works? This multiplicity of stances is also evident when we look at the principles of slow fashion: unlike other fashion-related movements that focus on a single domain of ethics (i.e. sustainable / green / eco fashion), slow fashion is concerned with a more inclusive selection of moral fields.

One of the most prevalent models for understanding ethical consumer behaviour has been the informational model of ethical and sustainable consumption. This model holds that if consumers of a given product learn about how that product was manufactured, they will adjust their consumption behaviours accordingly. (Barnett, Cloke, Clarke & Malpass, 2005) In other words, it holds that the driving force behind ethical consumption is an exchange of previously concealed information. As this information is revealed, the behaviours and practices of the consumers are automatically modified and adjusted. Thus, for instance, if the consumer finds out that the t-shirt they are about to purchase was sewn by underpaid child labourers, or that it

contributed to desertification, they are expected and predicted to change their minds about purchasing it, turning towards a "better" option. Barnett et al. (2005) argue that this although this informational understanding is valuable and valid, exclusively depending on this model to ground ethical consumption conceals the power relations as well as the broader projects of moral selving and self-transformation. (p.32) They define moral selving as "the mediated work of creating oneself as a more virtuous person through practices that acknowledge responsibilities to others" (ibid, p.30) and argue that the projects one undertakes to shift one's understanding of wants, needs, desires and satisfactions are equally as important in correctly understanding their motivations for becoming ethical consumers.

They define ethical consumption as "any practice of consumption in which explicitly registering commitment or obligation towards distant or absent others is an important dimension of the meaning of activity to the actors involved" (ibid, p.29), which makes it plain that the project of moral selving is intimately connected to ethical consumption; as both rely on assuming responsibility towards some "other". In the case of slow fashion, this assumes the form of the consumer feeling responsible towards garment workers, the environment, natural resources, and communities that are pushed into dealing with massive amounts of post-consumption waste. By taking on commitments and obligations towards -for example- underpaid garment workers, the subjects redefine and construct themselves as ethical subjects. One of my respondents clearly framed this sense of responsibility when she was talking about how she first got into slow fashion:

> Actually, it was in 2012. There was this very big Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh. And I remember it very vividly, it was on television, German newspapers picked it up, there was some really gruesome photos of the whole thing. And I just remember thinking, 'I can't be a part of this anymore'. I don't want to have people living under these terrible circumstances and have them make my clothes that I can buy for 10 euros. (BA)

Here, she recognises that her consumption practices involve her self within this system of abuse and oppression, which leads her to feel uncomfortable from her purchases. She sees a direct link between garment workers living and working under inhumane conditions and her having access to inexpensive clothing, which results in her

completely changing her relation to clothing. She has since made most of her clothing herself, and only purchased items from brands that she perceives as being more ethical and sustainable. By severing the tie between her self and the consequence of fast fashion, she works to render her self more ethical and moral.

Another interesting example comes from LH's story of how they were first introduced to the idea of slow fashion. A close friend of theirs got into slow fashion first, and introduced them to the concept.

> She was the one who started talking to me more about like, unethical labour and everything. And she was also thinking a lot about like, the environmental impact of making clothes and hurt. She gave herself rules of like, she would only buy things that were ethically made and made in North America, so that it wasn't being shipped very far, which turned out to be like really challenging. But um, yeah, I think that, so I think for me, like, hearing her talk about that, it got to the point where I tried to go shopping at a mall once and I went into like a Forever 21 or an H&M or something. And I started feeling kind of sick to my stomach because I was thinking about like, oh my god, like, all the people who made these clothes and how awful the conditions were and everything. Um, And then I just like, I couldn't shop there again. (LH)

Through finding out about the manufacturing conditions, they started to feel repulsed by the idea of contributing to the fast fashion system, thus stopping purchasing from fast fashion retailers. So far, this narrative neatly fits within the informational model: through learning more about how the clothes in question were made, they changed their consumption practices. However, they later became a member of the sewing community on Instagram, through which their understanding and practicing of slow fashion shifted. For instance, through being more engaged with the community and the discussions that are held, they were able to lessen their feelings of guilt and shame about the occasional fast fashion purchase:

> I've also learned more about like, the actual facts of like, overconsumption and everything like I, I ended up watching some of the lectures from the slow factory last year, and like, I feel like just like, details about like, overconsumption and fast fashion, I've learned a lot more about I also think I've, I think that I've been able to get rid of like, some of the guilt and shame I had around like buying fast fashion items, like, like, now I do feel like it's okay to occasionally buy something if I know, I'm going to wear it for a long time, because I don't necessarily have other options. And it's not really helpful to feel

guilty about it. But I think before that, I would feel like an immense amount of guilt about it. (LH)

I would argue that this shift was brought about because moral selving / forming ethical subjectivities is an important part of the community experience. Thus, where the informational model remained insufficient to explain the ethical consumption practices of community members, following Barnett et al.'s line of thinking takes over to help us make sense of these practices. Another point that stands against the informational model is the heavy emphasis on emotions in this narrative: LH framed their story in terms of affective processes (i.e. "feeling kind of sick to my stomach", "I've been able to get rid of like, some of the guilt and shame", "I would feel like an immense amount of guilt about it") and these processes play a crucial role in shifting the consumption practices of community members. Although the exchange of information about production conditions acts as a useful and effective first introduction, what guides the members 'consecutive consumption practices are the feelings and emotions they associate with the commodities in question. They do not possess detailed information about the specifics of how each garment is manufactured under each brand, but as time goes on, they rely on their ethical selves and moral compasses to guide them towards the "right" decisions.

3.6. Chapter Discussion

Foucault defines technologies of the self as being engaged by subjects who "effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality'." (1988, p.18) In this chapter, I showed how the practices of making and buying the right clothes act as technologies of the self in that they are realised by community members to transform themselves into ethical subjects who act in line with the ideals of sustainability and ethical consumption. By sharing the knowledge of what can and should be done to act more sustainably and ethically, choosing to use certain materials over others, questioning their wishes and desires, and carefully managing their consumption habits, they consistently work on this project of ethical self formation.

This construction of the self is a dynamic process that continues to evolve and expand with every instance of engagement with the community, with every new piece of knowledge that is encountered, with every decision that is made on how to make a particular article of clothing. (Skinner, 2012) There are constant processes of self reflection and negotiation on what it means to live a sustainable and ethical life to community members, which also comes to mean that slow fashion is a fluctuating web of practices rather than a set list of rules to be followed blindly.

The very feelings that are experienced by community members in relation to their clothes, sewing practices and consumption habits are frequently challenged by external representations of sustainability and ethical consumption, and subsequently worked on by the individual. The challenges that are put forward by these external representations do not always lead to dramatic changes in individuals 'feelings or conducts, but they consistently play an active role in one's self formation. (Skinner, 2012)

As established above, the community does not operate through a strict list of slow fashion rules, but rather embraces a fluid normativity of slow, sustainable, ethical fashion. These norms are negotiated, supplemented, replaced, and transformed with daily practices. As Casey, Lichrou and O'Malley (2017) describe it, through "the continual framing and reframing of meaning and everyday enactment (…) what constituted 'sustainable 'at one point in time may be undone at yet another." (p.236) Like in the example of using deadstock polyester fabric, what comes to be known as "sustainable" changes depending on the circumstances. This dynamic highlights the need for constant self reflection on behalf of the community members: by analysing the components of their sewing, dressing and consumption practices, they write and rewrite the normative framework in which they operate.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

This thesis presents the findings from 25 in depth interviews and 2 years of participant observation data from the garment sewing community on Instagram. My main research questions were i) How are norms of sustainability and ethical consumption constructed among home sewists who practice slow fashion on Instagram? ii) How do virtual community building and maintenance practices contribute to the construction of normalcy of slow fashion? iii) How do practices of making and buying clothing serve as practices of ethical self formation / ethical work?

By employing Foucault's four aspects of ethics, I analysed how slow fashion norms are constructed and how ethical subjectivities are formed in the sewing community on Instagram. I first discussed how community building and maintenance practices like community rituals, knowledge sharing, establishing symbolic boundaries and techniques of inclusivity contribute to forming a mode of subjection for the members. Through these practices, community members are able to recognise their place in the broader movement of slow fashion, as well as feeling the obligations that come with being an active member and practitioner of slow fashion. I then outlined how the actual work of making and buying clothes can act as practices of the self. I explored how the knowledge of making the "right" sorts of clothes are communicated between members, what sorts of rules and guidelines members create and follow in their sewing, buying and dressing practices, how questioning their own morals can uncover their sense of ethics, and how they engage in ethical consumption.

I found that norms of sustainability and ethical consumption are in constant flux in the sewing community. Rather than being shaped by a static set of rules, they are constantly written and rewritten as new challenges are faced, new data surfaces, or new opinions are expressed. The effect of the community building and maintenance

practices was evident in the fluctuating nature of the normative framework: Members have structured opportunities to self-reflect thanks to the rituals that take place in the community, which causes there to be a growing and changing discourse on what is the most sustainable and ethical way to act when it comes to practicing sewing or dressing. Through the widespread and consistent practices of knowledge sharing, these norms are constantly negotiated and communicated between members. The community members utilise symbolic boundaries in order to define themselves as separate and distinct from other groups such as fashion influencers or hobby sewists. This helps them feel more purposeful and mindful in their practices of slow fashion, as they feel the need to define their ways of thinking more clearly to draw these boundaries.

I also found that the construction of the ethical subjectivities of the members is an ongoing process. The very feelings that are experienced by community members in relation to their clothes, sewing practices and consumption habits are frequently challenged by external representations of sustainability and ethical consumption, and subsequently worked on by the individual.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A. APPROVAL OF THE METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

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14 OCAK 2022

Konu   :   Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi   : İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu

Sayın Barış Mücen

Danışmanlığını yürüttüğünüz Naz Nisan Aktürk'ün "Yavaş Moda Topluluklarının Tüketim Anlayışı" başlıklı araştırmanız İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülmüş ve **0062-ODTUİAEK-2022** protokol numarası ile onaylanmıştır.

Saygılarımızla bilgilerinize sunarız.

Prof.Dr. Mine MISIRLISOY
İAEK Başkan

APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Can you briefly introduce yourself? How old are you, where are you from, what do you do for a living?
2. How did you first meet with the concept of "slow fashion"?
3. How would you say you are practicing slow fashion in your own life? What slow fashion practices do you practice in your own life? What do you do? (Getting dressed in the morning, shopping habits, laundry related practices, etc.)
4. How / when did you find the slow fashion community on Instagram?
5. How would you describe the slow fashion community to an outsider? What are its core characteristics?
6. How would you describe your own involvement with the community? What does a regular day in the community look like for you? (Sharing posts, chatting with others, posting stories etc.)
7. Have you made any friends within the community? How often do you talk with them? Have you met any of them in real life?
8. What changes did you observe in your life after becoming a member of this community? What have you learned? What do you do differently? What sorts of sensibilities have you acquired? How have your ideas about slow fashion changed / evolved?
9. Have you observed any conflict within the community? How have these instances made you feel? Have your opinions / ideas / practices changed after these incidents?
10. How do you feel about Instagram as a social media platform?
11. Can you introduce me to your wardrobe?
    a. How big is it? Roughly how many pieces are there?
    b. Where did you acquire the garments that make up your wardrobe? (Handmade, RTW, second hand, hand me down, etc.)
12. How often do you acquire / make new garments for yourself? What are your go-to sources?
13. How do you get rid of the pieces you don't wear anymore?
14. What are the things you pay attention to when you're adding a piece to your wardrobe? (Material, design, style, production conditions, etc.)

APPENDIX C. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Yavaş moda kavramı sosyoloji literatüründe çoğunlukla kuralları ve prensipleri sabit, normları değişmeyen bir olgu olarak ele alınmıştır. Sürdürülebilirlik ve etik üretim koşulları yavaş moda hareketinde merkezi bir yer tutan iki kavramdır. Her ne kadar yavaş moda hareketinin merkeze aldığı belli kavramlar ve fikirler bulunsa da, bu fikirlerin uygulanış biçimleri topluluklar içinde zamana ve koşullara bağlı olarak farklılık göstermektedir. Örneğin, bir durumda doğal malzemelerden yapılan materyallerin kullanılması daha sürdürülebilir bir seçenek olarak karşımıza çıkarken, başka bir durumda sentetik malzemelerin kullanımı uzun vadede daha sürdürülebilir bir seçenek sunabilir. Bu tezde yavaş moda pratiklerini düzenleyen normların ve bu pratikleri uygulayan bireylerin etik kendilik oluşumlarının nasıl değişken, esnek yapılar olduğunu ele alınmıştır. Instagram'da bulunan domestik dikiş topluluğu örneği üzerinden yavaş moda normlarının ve bireylerin etiklik çerçevelerinin nasıl oluştuğu ve değiştiği sorgulanmıştır.

Bu çalışmada kullanılan temel araştırma soruları şunlardır: i) Instagram'da yavaş moda pratiklerini takip eden ve evde dikiş diken bireyler arasında sürdürülebilirlik ve etik tüketim normları nasıl inşa edilir? ii) Sanal topluluk kurma ve koruma uygulamaları, yavaş moda normalliğinin inşasına nasıl katkıda bulunur? iii) Giysi üretme ve satın alma pratikleri nasıl etik kendilik oluşturma / etik çalışma pratikleri olarak çalışır? Bu sorular aracılığıyla, yavaş moda topluluğunda normatiflik inşası süreçleri içinde etik kendilik oluşumunun rolünün ana hatlarını çizmek hedeflenmiştir. Yavaş modanın normatifliğinin sürekli değiştiğini ve geliştiğini, ve bu dönüşüm sürecinin büyük ölçüde içinde yaşadığı ve büyüdüğü topluluğa bağlı olduğunu düşünülerek yola çıkılmıştır. Bu tezde yavaş modanın odağının giyim şirketleri olduğunu iddia etmek yerine, giysilerin yapılması, satın alınması, giyilmesi, yeniden kullanılması ve elden çıkarılması yoluyla günlük olarak yavaş moda uygulayan insanların toplulukları olduğu savunulmaktadır.

Yavaş moda kavramı 2007 yılında Kate Fletcher tarafından öne sürülmüştür. Yavaş moda hareketini anlayabilmek için öncelikle hızlı moda kavramını anlamamız gerekir, çünkü yavaş moda temelinde hızlı modaya karşıt bir hareket olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Hızlı moda büyüme odaklı, hızlı üretim ve tüketim döngülerine dayanan bir iş modelidir. Bu üretim modeli dahilinde üretilen ürünler kısa ömürlü, dayanıksız, trend ve moda odaklı ve düşük fiyatlıdır. Kar paylarının arttırılması için hem çevre hem de işçiler sürekli bir şekilde büyük şirketler tarafından sömürü altında bırakılırlar. Yavaş moda prensiplerine göre ise kıyafetler uzun ömürlü, kaliteli, doğada çözünebilir malzemeler kullanılarak üretilmelidir. Ürünlerin tasarımında zamansız, modası geçmeyen bir görüntü yakalanmalı ve hem üreticilerin üretim hem de tüketicilerin satın alma hızı düşürülmelidir. Tüketiciler ürünleri satın aldıkları andan itibaren ürünle ilgili sorumluluk almalıdırlar, yani aldıkları ürüne doğru şekilde bakarak ürünün ömrünü uzatmak, ürünü sıkça giymek ve kullanmak, ürün artık kullanılamayacak hale geldiğinde ise ürünü sorumlu bir şekilde elden çıkarmak tamamen tüketicinin sorumluluğundadır. Bununla beraber, üreticiler de ürünün üretim süreciyle ilgili sorumluluk almaya yönlendirilirler: iş gücüne adil bir ödemede bulunmak ve güvenli çalışma koşulları sağlamak, üretim esnasında çevreye ve topluluklara zarar vermemek, fazla üretim yapmamak bu sorumluluk alanlarından yalnızca birkaç tanesidir.

Teorik ve kavramsal bir arka plan olarak Michel Foucault'nun etik anlayışı kullanılmıştır. Foucault'ya göre etiğin dört yönünden bahsedebiliriz: i) etik öz, yani etik pratiklerin öznenin hangi özellikleri, duyguları, hareketleri üzerine işleyeceği; ii) benlik modu, yani kişinin etik yükümlülüklerini nasıl tanıdığı; iii) etik / kendilik pratikleri, yani kişinin gerçekleştirdiği etik iş ve hareketler; ve iv) telos, yani kendilik pratikleri sonucunda ulaşılması hedeflenen durum. Bu tez kapsamında özellikle iki ve üçüncü yönler ele alınmış ve Instagram dikiş topluluğun örneğinde bu yönlerin nasıl kendilerini gösterdikleri tartışılmıştır.

Literatür taraması gösterir ki yavaş moda kavramı sosyolojik olarak fazla ilgi görmemiştir. Yavaş moda merkezli akademik çalışmalar çoğunlukla pazarlama ve işletme yönetimi literatürlerinden gelmekte ve çoğunlukla giyim şirketlerinin hızlı modaya daha iyi alternatifler olmalarına yardımcı olmak için üretim ve pazarlama süreçlerine uygulanabilecek bir dizi ilkeyi belirlemeye odaklanmaktadır. Bu bakış

açısı, yavaş moda pratiklerini takip eden kişilerin yavaş modanın günlük gerçeklerini nasıl deneyimledikleri ve etik sorular ve ahlaki ikilemlerle nasıl boğuştukları gibi konunun önemli yönlerini gizlemektedir.

Bu çalışmada temel olarak iki araştırma yönteminden yararlanılmıştır: İlk olarak Şubat – Mart 2022 arasında farklı topluluk üyeleriyle 25 adet derinlemesine, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme gerçekleştirilmiştir. Şubat ayında Instagram üzerinden topluluk üyelerine halka açık bir çağrıda bulunulmuştur ve en az 6 aydır aktif topluluk katılımcısı olan topluluk üyelerini bu projeye katılımcı olmak için başvurmaya davet edilmiştir. Alınan 135 başvurudan 25 katılımcıdan oluşan bir örneklem seçilmiştir. Örneklem seçim sürecinde aranan temel kriter topluluğa aktif katılımdır, yani sık sık içerik paylaşan, diğer üyelerle etkileşime giren ve başkaları tarafından ortaya konan içeriği tüketen üyeler aranmıştır. Ayrıca yaş, cinsiyet ve coğrafi dağılım açısından farklı ve temsili bir katılımcı grubu seçmek hedeflenmiştir. Seçilen örneklemdeki üyeler, Avustralya, Kanada, Almanya, Hollanda, Yeni Zelanda, Norveç, Birleşik Krallık ve Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nden oluşan 8 ülkede ikamet etmektedir. Örneklemdeki üyelerin yaşları 25 ile 65 arasında değişmektedir. 3'ü non-binary, 1'i erkek, 21'i kadındır. Seçilen üyelerin birçoğu birkaç yıldır bu topluluğun aktif üyeleridir ve bazıları farklı platformlarda var olan eski çevrimiçi dikiş topluluklarında aktiftir. Görüşme yapılan 25 kişiden 19'u halihazırda çalışmaktadır, bunların 1'i yarı zamanlı, 4'ü de freelance olarak çalışmaktadır. Bu 19 katılımcı arasında okul hemşireleri, öğretmenler, mimarlar, müze rehberleri, devlet çalışanları, diş hekimleri, gazeteciler, çiçek yetiştiricileri, yazılım mühendisleri, muhasebe uzmanları, yazarlar, tasarımcılar, kalıp üreticileri ve daha fazlası yer almkatadır. Geriye kalan 5 katılımcı ise emekli bir öğretmen, tam zamanlı bir veterinerlik öğrencisi, tam zamanlı bir fizyoloji doktora öğrencisi, bir ev hanımı, doğum izninde olan bir eczacı ve iki iş arasında olan bir sanatçıdan oluşmaktadır. Örneklemin istihdam durumu, genel olarak topluluk üyelerinin istihdam durumuna ilişkin gözlemlerle eşleşmektedir. Çoğu topluluk üyesi dikişe günlük işlerinin yanında yaptıkları bir boş zaman etkinliği olarak yaklaşır ve birçoğu dikişi yoğun günlük yaşamlarına sığdırabilmek için kasıtlı olarak zaman ayırır.

Ortalama 90 ile 120 dakika arasında süren görüşmelerin tamamı Zoom üzerinden gerçekleştirilmiştir. Zoom toplantılarından alınan ses kayıtları otomatik bir transkripsiyon yazılımı aracılığıyla deşifre edilmiştir ve MAXQDA'da belirli temalar etrafında detaylı bir şekilde kodlanmıştır. Tüm görüşmeler İngilizce olarak yapılmıştır, bu nedenle bu tezde alıntılanan bölümler orijinal dillerindedir.

İkinci olarak araştırmacı tarafınfan topluluk içinde iki yıllık bir katılımcı gözlem yürütülmüş ve bu sayede topluluğun günlük akışına, tekrarlanan ritüellerine, topluluk içinde yaşanan tartışmalara ve karar verme süreçlerine ilk elden tanıklık edilebilmiştir. Araştırmacının topluluğa aktif katılımı sayesinde topluluk ritüellerinin ve olaylarının nasıl gerçekleştiğine, farklı üyelerin çatışma durumlarına nasıl tepki verdiğine, üyelerin günlük olarak neler paylaştığına, sorguladığına ve tartıştığına ve dikiş dikme pratiğinden kaynaklanan farklı zorlukların ne kadar farklı olduğuna yakından tanıklık edilebilmiştir. Instagram'a yüklenen pek çok içerik geçicidir: Hikayeler, yaratıcıları onları profiline kaydetmediği sürece 24 saat sonra kaybolan videolar ve hareketsiz görüntülerden oluşurlar. Hikayeler iletişimin, bilgi paylaşımının ve topluluk oluşturmanın ana yollarından birini oluşturduğundan, topluluk hakkında doğru bir resim elde etmenin anahtarı, hikayelerin sürekli gözlemlenmesidir. Toplulukla günlük olarak etkileşim kurarak bu içerikler yakalanabilmiş ve analize dahil edilebilmiştir.

Bulgular iki temel tema etrafında analiz edilmiş ve sunulmuştur. Tezin "Topluluk Kurma ve Sürdürme Pratikleri" isimli ikinci bölümünde topluluk oluşturmaya ve oluşturulan topluluğu sürdürmeye yönelik gerçekleştirilen pratiklerin yavaş moda normlarının kurulmasındaki etkileri tartışılmıştır. Tezin "Doğru Kıyafetlerin Üretimi ve Satın Alımı" isimli üçüncü bölümünde ise topluluk içinde en sürdürülebilir ve etik olarak görülen kıyafetlerin üretim ve satın alım süreçlerinin topluluk üyelerinin etik kendilik oluşumlarına etkisi tartışılmıştır.

İkinci bölümde topluluk kurma ve koruma pratikleri dört örnek teknik üzerinden incelenmiştir. Bu dört teknik tartışılmadan önce Instagram dikiş topluluğunun Herring (2004) tarafından sunulan sanal topluluk kriterlerine uygunluğu incelenmiştir. Topluluk üyelerinin düzenli ve aktif katılımları, üyelerin ortak bir normatif çerçeve ve ortak bir tarih paylaşmaları, üyeler arasındaki destek ve yardımlaşma ağları ve

alışkanlıkları, gelişmiş problem çözme teknikleri, grubun kendisini diğer gruplardan ayrı bir oluşum olarak görüyor ve tanıyor olması ve topluluk içinde tanınabilir rollerin, ritüellerin, yönetim sistemlerinin oluşmuş olması sebebiyle dikiş topluluğu geçerli bir sanal topluluk olarak tanımlanabilir.

Dikiş topluluğunun gerçek ve geçerli bir topluluk olarak tanımlanmasının ardından dört topluluk kurma ve koruma tekniği ileri sürülmüştür. Bu tekniklerin ilki topluluk içinde gerçekleştirilen ritüellerdir. İki yıllık katılımcı gözlem sonucunda topluluğun günlük ve yıllık bazda tekrarlanan ritüelleri saptanmıştır. Bu ritüellerin en önemlilerinden biri her yıl mayıs ayında gerçekleştirilen "Me Made May" isimli etkinliktir. Bu etkinlik çerçevesinde üyeler mayıs ayı boyunca her gün kendi diktikleri kıyafetleri giyerler ve ay boyunca kendi üretim süreleriyle ilgili düşüncelerini toplulukla paylaşırlar. Üyeler bu süreçte hangi tür kumaşların, kesimlerin ve tarzları hangi sıklıkla tercih ettikleriyle ilgili öz düşünüm yapma fırsatı bulurlar. Kullanım sıklığı yavaş moda prensiplerine uygun giyinme pratikleri için oldukça önemlidir, dolayısıyla hangi tür parçaların daha çok giyildiği bilgisine ulaşmak yavaş moda pratiklerinin uygulanması açısından değerlidir.

Kullanılan ikinci bir teknik topluluktaki bilgi paylaşım pratikleridir. Bilgi paylaşımına verilen önem topluluğu tanımlayan en önemli özellikler arasındadır. Üyeler sıkça kullandıkları dikiş teknikleri, üretim sürecinde verdikleri kararlar ve yaptıkları tercihlerle ilgili paylaşımlarda bulunurlar ve bu paylaşımlarıyla hangi tür tercihlerin sürdürülebilirlik ve etik tüketim açılarından daha doğru tercihler olduklarını güçlendirirler. Bilgi paylaşım pratiklerinin böyle güçlü ve yoğun bir şekilde uygulanması topluluğun normatif çerçevesinin de daha sağlam ve iddialı olmasını sağlar.

Üçüncü topluluk kurma ve koruma tekniği sembolik sınırların çizilmesini ve uygulanmasını ilgilendirir. Sembolik sınırlar toplulukları birbirinden ayıran görünmez çizgilerdir. Dikiş topluluğunda sembolik sınırlar hem topluluğun iç kimliğini güçlendirmek hem de topluluğu diğer gruplardan farklı kılmak konusunda önemli bir rol oynarlar. Bu kısımda iki sembolik sınır örneği tartışılmıştır. Bunların ilki "Measurements Movement" (Ölçüler Hareketi) isimli bir topluluk hareketidir.

Topluluk üyeleri beden ölçülerini profillerinde ve koydukları fotoğrafların altında paylaşarak üstlerine tam olarak doğru şekilde uyan kıyafetler yapmanın önemini yeniden vurgularlar. İkinci olarak bilinçli olarak yavaş dikiş pratiklerini örnek olarak verebiliriz. Topluluk üyeleri kendi dikiş pratiklerini hobi amaçlı veya içerik üretme amaçlı dikiş diken bireylerin pratiklerinden ayırarak kendi etik pozisyonlarını ve topluluğun normatif çerçevesini güçlendirirler. Bunu kendi uyguladıkları yavaş dikiş pratiklerini öbür bireylerin ve grupların uyguladıkları hızlı dikiş pratiklerinden ayırarak yaparlar. Bununla beraber kendi kıyafetlerini evde kendileri diken bireyler arasında bile bir bölünme gözlemleriz. Yavaş dikiş yapan üyeler yeni bir projeye başlamadan önce daha çok planlama yapar, kullanacakları malzemeleri ve teknikleri daha dikkatli bir şekilde seçer ve fazla tüketim alışkanlıklarına karşı bir duruş sergilerler. Birçok görüşmeci dikiş dikmeye ilk başladıkları zamanla ilgili fazla üretim yapmaya ne kadar meyilli olduklarını dile getirmiştir. Kendi kıyafetlerini yapabilir hale gelmenin verdiği özgürlük birçok üyenin durumunda heyecanlı bir üretim çokluğuna sebebiyet verir. Bu noktada üyelerin topluluğa katılımları önemli bir rol oynar: Hızlı moda tüketiminden gelen alışkanlıklarını değiştirmeleri ve dikiş pratikleriyle yavaş moda prensipleri arasında bir bağ kurabilmeleri için topluluğun normatif yapısına davet edilmeleri önemlidir. Bu iki sınır çizme örneği topluluğun yavaş moda ideallerinden hareketle grup kimliklerini nasıl güçlendirdiğini gösterir.

Dördüncü ve son teknik kapsayıcılık pratiklerinin uygulanmasından geçer. Kapsayıcılık topluluğun aktivizm pratiklerinin temelinde yatan bir idealdir, topluluk üyeleri sıkça eşitlik, çeşitlilik ve kapsayıcılığın önemini vurgulayan paylaşımlarda bulunurlar. Farklı ırkları, etnik kimlikleri, bedenleri, toplumsal cinsiyetleri, yaşları kapsayan pratiklerin uygulanmasıyla topluluğun yapısı güçlendirilir.

Bu dört teknik (ve bu tezin kapsamında bahsedilemeyen birçok başka teknik) yoluyla üyeler "mode of subjection"larını (benlik modlarını) oluşturur ve tanırlar. Bu üyelerin genel hareket içindeki yerlerini tanıyabilmeleri açısından önemlidir. Sürdürülebilirlik ve etik tüketim ideallerinin sıkça değiştiği bu ortamda üyelerin kendi pozisyonlarını, amaçlarını ve yükümlülüklerini tanıyabilmeleri ve uygulayabilmeleri için toplulukla kurdukları bağlantılar vaz geçilemezdir.

Üçüncü bölümde "doğru" tür kıyafet üretim ve tüketim pratiklerinin bireylerin kendilik anlayışlarında oynadığı roller ele alınmıştır. Bu bağlamda "doğru" tür kıyafetler mümkün olan en sürdürülebilir ve etik yollarla üretilen ve / veya satın alınan parçalardır. Bu kriterlerin kıyafet üretim ve tüketim süreçlerini nasıl şekillendirdiği incelenerek topluluk normlarının nasıl üretildiği, müzakere edildiği, değiştirildiği ve uygulandığı gösterilmiştir. Bu bölüm dört kısımdan oluşmaktadır: İlk kısımda hangi kıyafetlerin bu kriterlere göre doğru bulunduğunun bilgisinin nasıl paylaşıldığı domestik dikiş kalıpları ve sosyal medya içerikleri örnekleri üzerinden ele alınmıştır. İkinci kısımda topluluk üyelerinin kendilerine üretim ve tüketim süreçleriyle ilgili koydukları kurallar ve prensipler incelenmiştir. Üçüncü kısımda topluluk üyelerinin kendi ahlaki pozisyonları sorgulamalarına yol açan senaryolar değerlendirilmiştir. Dördüncü ve son kısımda ise etik tüketim kavramı üstünden üyelerin kıyafet tüketim pratikleri incelenmiştir.

Üçüncü bölümün ilk kısmı hangi tür kıyafetlerin yavaş moda ilkelerine uygun olduğu bilgisinin topluluk içinde paylaşımına odaklanmaktadır. Bu kısımda ilk bilgi paylaşım teknolojisi olarak domestik dikiş kalıpları örnek gösterilmiştir. Domestik dikiş kalıpları birçok tasarım kararını bünyelerinde barındırırlar ve kalıbı tasarlayan ve üreten kişinin ideallerini yansıtma güçleri vardır. Örneğin, evde dikiş pratiklerinde israfı azaltmayı hedefleyen bir tasarımcı "zero waste" (sıfır atık) prensiplerine uygun kıyafetler tasarlayabilir ve ürettiği dikiş kalıbı yoluyla kendi yavaş moda anlayışını ve ideallerini topluluk ve genel tüketiciler arasında yaygınlaştırabilir. İkinci bir bilgi paylaşım teknolojisi olarak topluluk üyelerinin sosyal medya platformları için ürettikleri içerikler örnek gösterilmiştir. Topluluk üyeleri sıkça kendi Instagram hesaplarında dikişle, kumaş seçimiyle, kalıp tasarımıyla, kalıbı kendi bedenlerine ve ihtiyaçlarına adapte etmekle ilgili ipuçları ve tavsiyeler paylaşırlar. Paylaşılan bu bilgiler kendi içlerinde bir değer yargısı barındırırlar: Paylaştıkları bilgiler yoluyla daha temiz dikilmiş, daha dayanıklı, daha çok durumda kullanılabilir, beden değişikliklerine uyum sağlayabilecek parçalar dikmenin ve satın almanın daha doğru, uygun ve etik bir davranış olduğunu ima ederler.

İkinci kısımda üyelerin kendi dikiş ve satın alma pratiklerini nasıl düzenledikleri tartışılmıştır. Birçok üye kendisine belli kurallar, prensipler, takip edilecek ana hatlar

çizmekte ve günlük pratiklerini bunlara göre belirlemektedir. Bu kurallara verilebilecek güçlü örneklerden biri üyelerin kullandıkları kumaşların ve satın aldıkları kıyafetlerin kumaşlarının içeriklerine gösterdikleri dikkattir. Pamuk, keten, ipek, yün gibi doğal kaynaklı malzemeler doğada çözünebilirlikleri sebebiyle daha sürdürülebilir ve çevre dostu malzemeler olarak görülmektedir. Topluluk üyelerinin doğal malzemelere güçlü eğilimleri bize yavaş modanın statik belli kurallar etrafında şekillendiği kanısını verebilir. Ancak bu kanının karşısında bize yavaş moda normlarının esnekliğini hatırlatan şöyle bir durumla karşılaşırız: Her ne kadar doğal malzemeler topluluk içinde önemli bir yer tutsa da birçok durumda bu prensibe ters gibi görünen istisnai kararlarla karşılaşırız. Örneğin, "dead stock" (hareketsiz / ölü stok) kumaşların durumunda polyester, naylon, akrilik gibi sentetik içerikli kumaşların alınıp değerlendirilmesi daha tercih edilebilir bir durum olarak karşımıza çıkar. Yahut dikilen parçanın sağlamlığını ve kullanım ömrünü arttırmak için doğal içerikli bir kumaş polyester iplikle dikilebilir. Bunlar ve bunların benzeri durumlar bize yavaş moda pratiklerinin dinamik, koşullara göre şekillenen, değişen bir yapısı olduğunu işaret eder. Topluluk üyeleri verdikleri her bir kararla hem yavaş moda ve topluluk normlarını, hem de kendi etik çerçevelerini oluşturur ve güçlendirirler.

Üçüncü kısımda üyelerin kendilerinin ahlaki ve etik duruşlarını sorgulamalarına iten belli durumlar örneklenerek bu gibi senaryoların etik kendilik oluşumu çerçevesinde önemi tartışılmıştır. Sanatsal amaçlarla dikiş dikmek istemek ve bu isteğin yavaş moda ve sürdürülebilirlik ilkeleriyle çatışması topluluk üyelerinin kendi içlerinde bir tartışma yaşamalarına neden olur. Kendi üretim ve tüketim alışkanlıklarını bu derece dikkatle denetleyen bireylerin kendi etik pozisyonlarını sorgulamaları bize topluluğun genel normatif yapısıyla ilgili de bir fikir verir.

Dördüncü ve son kısımda topluluk üyelerinin kıyafet tüketimiyle nasıl ilişkilendiklerine bakılmıştır. İlk olarak üyelerin tüketim alışkanlıkları ve pratikleri görüşmeler ışığında ele alınmıştır. Üyelerin yavaş moda pratiklerini ilk uygulama biçimlerinin sıklıkla hızlı moda markalarından alışveriş yapmayı bırakmalarıyla gerçekleştiği ortaya çıkmıştır. Her ne kadar hızlı modaya karşı bir duruş sergilemek yavaş modayı takip etmenin önemli uygulama yollarından biri olsa da buradan yeniden yavaş moda normlarının esnekliğini hatırlamamız gerekir. Hızlı moda markalarından

alışveriş yapmamak gibi kurallar ve prensipler üyeler tarafından nadiren mükemmel ve istisnasız bir şekilde uygulanmaktadır. İkinci olarak etik tüketim kavramı kullanılarak "doğru" tüketim yapmanın kompleks yapısı vurgulanmıştır. Etik tüketim literatüründe "etik müşteri" çoğunlukla hazır olarak kabul edilir ve çoğu yazın bu etik müşteri karakterinin yaptığı tercihlerin karmaşıklığına odaklanır. Buna karşı olarak Adams ve Raisborough (2010) bireylerin günlük tüketim alışkanlıklarında nasıl etik tercihlerde bulunduklarına dikkat etmemiz gerektiğini iddia ederler. Bu tezde vurgulanan temel noktalardan biri topluluk üyelerinin günlük tercihleri ve hareketleriyle etik tüketim kavramını genişletiyor olmalarıdır. Normların sorgulanması, tartışılması, değiştirilmesi ve uygulanmasıyla beraber tüketim anlayışının nasıl bir etik çerçeveye oturtulduğu da değişmektedir. Buna göre etik tüketim yapmanın tek bir doğru yolu yoktur, daha ziyade bireyler sahip oldukları özgürlükler ve kısıtlamalar dahilinde belirli tercihlerde bulunurlar ve bu tercihleri sonucunda hem kendi tüketim anlayışlarını ve alışkanlıklarını, hem de topluluk ve hareket içinde uygulanan etik tüketim pratiklerini şekillendirirler. Bu anlayış biçimi doğru – yanlış, iyi – kötü, etik – etik dışı gibi ikiliklerin de ötesine geçmemizi sağlar. Cherrier'in (2007) de belirttiği üzere neyin etik neyin etik dışı olduğu artık her yerde ve her zamanda aynı şekilde anlaşılamaz. Bunun yerine her bir tüketim hareketi beraberinde çoklu etik duruşlar getirir. Dikiş topluluğu örneğinde bunu açıkça görebiliriz: üyeler bir çift çorap almadan önce bile kendilerine birçok soru sorarlar: Bu çorapları üreten işçiler hangi koşullar altında çalışıyor? Bu çorapların üretiminde kullanılan iplikler, boyalar ve diğer malzemeler çevre dostu mu? Uzun yıllar kullanılabilecek kadar kaliteliler mi? Çoraplar eskiyip kullanılamaz hale geldiğinde onlardan sorumlu bir şekilde kurtulmak mümkün ve kolay mı? Bu çoklu ve kapsayıcı etik anlayışı yavaş moda hareketi özel kılan şeylerden biridir: çevrecilik veya insan hakları gibi tek bir etik alana odaklanmak yerine birçok endişe bir araya gelip kompleks bir etik çerçeve oluşturmaktadır.

Etik tüketimin tartışmalarında sıkça kullanılan açıklamalardan biri bilgi temelli modeldir. Bu modele göre tüketicilere karşılaştıkları ürünlerle ilgili yeterince bilgi sağlanırsa tüketiciler otomatik olarak doğru / iyi / etik tercihlerde bulunacaklardır. Örneğin, bir gömleğin hangi fabrikada hangi işler tarafından ne tür malzemeler kullanılarak üretildiği bilgisi tüketici ile paylaşırsa, bu tüketicinin direkt olarak

tüketim pratiğini değiştireceği öne sürülür. Bu bilgi temelli model her ne kadar kullanışlı ve faydalı olsa da etik tüketim pratiklerini anlamak için sadece bu modele dayandığımız takdirde güç ilişkilerini, kendilik dönüşümlerini ve ahlaki benlik sorularını gözden kaçırma riskini alırız.

Sonuç olarak yavaş moda pratiklerinin hareket halinde, esnek, değişime açık bir normatif yapıya ve etik çerçeveye dayanarak şekillendirildiğini söyleyebiliriz. Statik, stabil, değişmeyen kurallar ve yasalar yerine tartışmaya, değişmeye, yeniden gözden geçirilmeye açık normlardan bahsedebiliriz. Bununla beraber bireylerin etik kendilik oluşumları da bitmeyen, karşılaştıkları her kararla şekillenen süreçlerden oluşmaktadır. Topluluk oluşturma ve sürdürme uygulamalarının etkisi, normatif çerçevenin değişime açık doğasında belirgindir: Üyeler, toplulukta yer alan ritüeller sayesinde öz düşünüm için yapılandırılmış fırsatlara sahip olurlar. Dikiş dikme veya giyinme söz konusu olduğunda hareket etmenin en sürdürülebilir ve etik yolu tartışmaya ve değişime açıktır. Yaygın bilgi paylaşımı uygulamaları aracılığıyla, bu normlar sürekli olarak üyeler arasında müzakere edilir ve paylaşılır. Topluluk üyeleri, kendilerini sosyal medya influencerları veya hobi dikişçileri gibi diğer gruplardan ayrı ve farklı olarak tanımlamak için sembolik sınırları kullanırlar. Bu, bu sınırları çizmek için düşünme biçimlerini daha açık bir şekilde tanımlama ihtiyacı hissettiklerinden, yavaş moda uygulamalarında kendilerini daha amaca yönelik hissetmelerine yardımcı olur.

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