

Circular Economy and Secondhand Clothing Businesses

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Abstract

This research explores how secondhand clothing stores can be used to promote and expand a circular economy (CE) for used clothes. The CE model is a system in which products are kept in a cycle of use, thus reducing natural resource extraction and waste accumulation. Some circular activities include reusing, repairing, sharing, and recycling. This model contrasts with the primary apparel market which relies on a linear model to produce, use, and dispose of clothes. How do secondhand stores remake people's relationship to commodities and to other people in their communities? How do secondhand clothing stores enable people's engagement with, and potentially expand, the circular economy? I interviewed five business owners/managers and surveyed 92 secondhand shoppers in the Boston Metropolitan Area to understand how market segmentation can be used to expand the secondhand market to meet a variety of consumer needs and learn of the different motivations to shop secondhand. From my findings, I infer that the diversity in the secondhand market allows a variety of consumers to participate in secondhand shopping, and market diversity enables businesses to connect with people in their community. I also found that the burden of managing textile waste in the form of unwanted, used clothing often falls upon secondhand stores. Improving textile waste management will require retailers, producers, and policymakers to rethink how the CE is practiced.

Circular Economy and Secondhand Clothing Businesses

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Guardian published a news article in 2022 calling on us, the people, to make six key lifestyle changes to help curb climate change (Taylor, 2022). One suggestion was to limit buying clothes to only three new pieces annually. While consumption itself is inevitable in a capitalist economy, the main problem is overconsumption (e.g. depleting global resources causing environmental harm). Capitalism molds people into consumers with an insatiable desire for stuff (Higgs, 2021). However, with the rise of climate change concerns, more people are considering lifestyle changes that work well for them and the environment. A capitalist economy may be unavoidable, but there are options for people to participate in a more sustainable consumption culture, especially for clothing, than what is prescribed by the predominant culture. Secondhand shopping offers a popular alternative model that is recognized as less harmful for the environment while still meeting the needs of consumers. To better understand this different consumption model, I investigate how secondhand shopping can meet consumers' need for stuff while disrupting the linear model. This thesis explores how secondhand stores contribute to reshaping people's relationships with their communities and commodities. Through interviews, I explore businesses' decision-making processes on price and quality determination, sourcing methods related to reclaiming clothes, and their community involvement. From survey responses, I learn why people shop secondhand. Their responses help to answer my two research questions: how do secondhand stores remake people's relationships to things and to other people in their communities? And, how do secondhand clothing stores enable people's engagement with, and potentially expand, the circular economy? This thesis explores why people shop secondhand to understand how more people can participate in the circular economy, a model that

keeps products in a cycle of use, as a more sustainable approach to reduce waste and our environmental impacts.

Thesis Overview

The remainder of this introduction provides important background information on the current apparel industry, describes the waste management hierarchy, defines key terms, and describes the boom of the secondhand market. Chapter 2 describes my methodology, including my literature review process, interviews I conducted, survey responses I collected, and my data analysis process. Chapter 3 discusses the different academic literature I engaged with related to the CE, motivations for shopping, and approaches to extend the life of commodities. Chapter 4 reveals how secondhand clothing stores make decisions about pricing and sourcing, which influences the types of customers their businesses attract. Chapter 5 reveals the diverse motivations people have for shopping secondhand which challenges literature that suggests people shop used because of thrift or frugality. Chapter 6 discusses how secondhand stores are involved in their neighborhoods and ways they support their patrons which play a part in remaking people's relationships to their things. Chapter 7 details the disposal stage of clothes, including donation as a common mechanism for disposal, and how the current processes of clothing disposal and recovery affect workers in the secondhand market. Chapter 8, my final chapter, summarizes how these findings respond to my research questions, reviews some of the limitations of this research, and lastly, provides recommendations for future research, policy, and planning.

Background: Apparel Industry Development, Waste and Sustainability Efforts

The Industrial Revolution gave rise to a factory system in which products shifted from handmade to machine-made. Since the Industrial Revolution, businesses typically manufacture

clothing using raw materials and textiles in a linear model which illustrates a make-use-dispose system. This linear system of production started in the 1800s and there has been an overwhelming increase in production over the decades which has reached a pinnacle called fast fashion. The fast fashion industry's use of a linear model focuses on making a product quickly and cheaply for consumers. This dominant business model describes how the production of garments has skyrocketed, providing readily available and inexpensive fashion (Bick et al., 2018).

The apparel industry is huge; in 2019, the global market reached 1.9 trillion U.S. dollars (*Apparel market in the U.S.*, 2022). The World Economic Forum estimates that 150 billion new clothing items are made annually (*Our Love of Cheap Clothing Has a Hidden Cost – It's Time for a Fashion Revolution*, 2016) and the True Cost estimates that about 80 billion new pieces of clothing are consumed every year (*Environmental Impact*, 2015). The industry relies on a global supply chain, and impacts associated with the production stage in the fashion industry include major water use, energy consumption, chemical use, and waste production across many countries (Niinimäki et al., 2020). More specifically, these impacts are most felt in the Global South where production is outsourced because work wages are lower and labor laws less stringent in these countries. These varying social and environmental impacts pose a threat to human health and the environment which leaders in power attempt to address today.

Sustainability is broadly used as a concept to combat the issues described above including natural resource depletion. Sustainability is defined as the “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Bruntland, 1987). In 2015, the United Nations created the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are 17 global goals “to achieve a better and more sustainable future”

(United Nations, 2017). These global goals are meant for all, but people in power, such as industries, have the greatest potential to address them. SDGs aim to address the three pillars of sustainability: balancing economic, social justice, and the environment (Boussemart et al., 2020; Brand & Jax, 2007). One of the goals, SDG 12, is to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns and sets 11 targets to meet this goal. These targets aim to reduce waste and pollution from the production process, which address larger issues like human health, as well as air and water quality. Some companies have already integrated an SDG framework for their corporate social responsibility reports. This action signals that these companies acknowledge and are willing to address the issues that they perpetuate. Even though there is movement within companies to develop sustainable business practices, utilizing SDGs as a framework is largely voluntary and based on companies' respective principles. As a result, businesses are not consistent in integrating SDG frameworks into their production and disposal practices. The fashion industry is acutely aware of the problems associated with production, yet many apparel companies still rely on a linear economic model guided by profit maximizations (Jain et al., 2021).

The problems associated with production are not the only ones that need attention, though. Textile waste, which also has large environmental impacts, is prevalent in all stages of the make-use-dispose system. According to the Council for Textile Recycling, an estimated 85% of textile waste generated in the U.S. goes into the landfill; the other 15% of textile material is either donated or recycled (Council for Textile Recycling, 2012). Other sources say that, globally, around 8% of clothes are reused and about 10% are recycled (Eder-Hansen et al., 2017). Although the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) imposed stricter regulations in 1988 on landfills to improve air and groundwater quality (Carless, 1992; Taylor, 1999), methane

emissions from landfills still pollute the air. “Landfills are the largest human-generated source of methane emissions in the United States,” and they release carbon dioxide emissions as well (Castaldi, 2014). Specific materials like wool produce methane when decomposed (Tammemagi, 1999), and synthetic fibers take a lot longer to decompose since they are predominantly made from plastics. These environmental impacts are only going to get worse as textile waste is a rising contribution to U.S. landfills. From 1999 to 2009, textile waste increased almost 40% (Norum, 2017). This increase in textile waste underscores the need to understand current consumption and disposal practices in the U.S. and how they can be altered to create a more sustainable waste management system.

The EPA shared a four-tiered, waste management hierarchy to help others understand consumption and disposal and that public and private agencies can utilize. According to the EPA’s hierarchy, landfills are the least preferred option, and source reduction and reuse are the most preferred for waste management (US EPA, 2017). The next preference after reuse is recycling and composting which requires mechanical or chemical processing that is used to create something new. Reuse is different from and preferred to recycling because items do not need to break down into new material to be usable. Reuse on a larger scale can be defined as the recirculation or “redistribution of previously owned material goods in their original form” from one owner to another (Cindy Isenhour et al., 2017). The concept of reuse reimagines the make-use-dispose system by passing on goods, and therefore extending their life, creating a circular model. This circular model, also known as the CE, refers to a continuous circulation of products and materials so that waste can be designed out or reduced (Levänen et al. 2021; Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017, Murray et al., 2017).

There is no doubt that the secondhand market, which reclaims used clothes and material objects that are then re-entered back into use, contributes to the CE. There are a variety of brick-and-mortar secondhand clothing stores that are supporting circularity. A common type is donation-based thrift stores which can be national, like Goodwill or Salvation Army, but can also be local or regional. Thrift stores are usually run by non-profit organizations to generate revenue for a charitable foundation (Bassing, 2003). Oftentimes, they sell a variety of used goods besides clothes, and their inventory is generally only organized by the broadest category (e.g. trinkets, shoes, glassware, clothes) (Christiansen & Snepenger, 2005). Consignment stores are different in that they accept goods on a batch basis, a set amount of clothes for a set period of time and pay the previous owners 40-60% of the selling price of the clothes after they are sold (Gopalakrishnan & Matthews, 2018). If the clothing is not sold in a specific timeframe, it is returned to the owner, or the store is given rights to do as they wish with it. In contrast, instead of waiting for items to be sold, re-sale stores purchase the merchandise out-right from different owners and then sell to customers (Bassing, 2003).

In addition to the different ways to source their inventory, some secondhand stores select for different needs or styles. For example, vintage stores sell curated items that were made from previous eras. There are also children's clothing stores that meet the needs of parents. Thrift stores, vintage stores, and children's stores are types of resale stores since the business model is similar in that they purchase or obtain full ownership of items. Another form of shopping is by-the-pound, where the price is determined by the weight of the items. The price is usually at a fixed rate and is more affordable because items are arranged in piles and typically uncategorized. By-the-pound meets the needs of people who enjoy bargain hunting and finding items that are

retailed at a deep discount. These varied types of secondhand businesses cater to different kinds of buyers.

The secondhand retail market has grown alongside the primary market. The global secondhand and resale apparel market was estimated to be worth 27 billion U.S. dollars in 2020 (ThredUP, 2021; *Secondhand Apparel Market Value Worldwide 2012-2025*, 2022). ThredUP, an online resale platform, reported 18 billion U.S. dollars from traditional thrift and donation stores, and 9 billion dollars from online resale. They project that the resale sector will grow 11 times faster than the broader retail clothing sector by 2025, and the total secondhand market will reach \$77 billion that same year (ThredUP, 2021). Other online platforms, like Poshmark, Mercari and Depop, have given individuals the opportunity to participate in direct sales between buyers and sellers, contributing to the market's growth. This boom in the secondhand market underscores the importance of understanding how secondhand business and consumers implement circular practices that bolster reuse activities.

Despite the growth of the online secondhand market, I opted not to look at the online market as closely as brick-and-mortar secondhand stores. This decision was made primarily because the interaction between online buyers and sellers are typically “frictionless” (Tramuta, 2021), meaning that there is little interface between the buyer and seller. These frictionless transactions “undermine the social goals of circularity” (Berry, 2021). Social goals related to the circular economy includes repairing social capital alongside environmental resources (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2013). Yet frictionless shopping removes the consideration of how and where products are sourced. Online re-sale platforms could reproduce inequalities similar to the linear system if these large corporations can easily collect unwanted goods to be resold and the profit goes back to these corporations rather than the people that participate in the secondhand

market (Berry, 2021). Friction, on the other hand, slows the speed of exchange and allows people to interact and support its local economy. Through this research, I found that brick-and-mortar secondhand businesses can foster interpersonal relationships with their customers and directly support local organizations. Brick-and-mortar stores exhibit a CE that considers both the social and environmental impact on its community.

Research Significance

This research contributes to the academic conversation related to motivations for shopping at secondhand stores and the role of these businesses in the waste management system, circular economy, and in their respective communities. I analyze secondhand shopping behaviors and secondhand business practices to assess the relationships that are fostered between people, things, and their communities. I describe the human experience related to working with used clothes as commodities which suggests why durability is an important component in the secondhand economy. Not every garment is durable enough to be used over and over, which leads to garments that are either disposed of in the trash or donated. My research is also significant in that it illuminates consumption and disposal practices related to thrift and ethical commodities. Some might believe that consumption, or overconsumption, is justified if they donate excess clothes once they no longer use them. Some might also believe that donation of used goods is altruistic and would directly benefit the receivers. But as I later discuss in Chapter 7, these presumptions are not always the case. More broadly, my research discusses the social dimensions of circularity. I point to how secondhand stores create opportunities to fulfill consumer needs and wants. People shop at secondhand stores for different reasons including as a recreational activity. My research is useful in understanding how to promote a circular model in the secondhand market. Knowledge of what the secondhand market offers and why people shop

at thrift stores can help regulators and businesses create sustainable, circular models for production and consumption.

Chapter 2: Methods

This chapter discusses in detail my literature review, interview and survey methods, and my data analysis. I used these methods to answer the following research question:

- How do secondhand stores remake people's relationships to things and to other people in their communities?
- How do secondhand clothing stores enable people's engagement with, and potentially expand, the circular economy?

My research participants included business owners, managers, and secondhand shoppers.

Owners and managers were able to provide valuable information about their business practices and the people they serve. Interviews allowed me to spend one-on-one time with owners and managers and discuss in depth the work they do and how their businesses are involved in the community more broadly. I used survey methods to reach secondhand shoppers and learn about their motivations for shopping used. Together, these methods help to illuminate factors that encourage people to engage with the circular economy through secondhand businesses. I also conducted an expansive literature review to connect my work with existing theories and frameworks.

This research was reviewed by the Tufts University Social and Behavior Research Institutional Review Board (IRB) and recruitment began immediately following the approval. To protect the privacy and confidentiality of my participants, no identifiable information was collected from my survey. My interview guide and survey questions can be found in Appendices A and B, respectively.

Literature Review

I conducted literature reviews on the following topics: textile waste, waste management, circular economy, sustainability, durability, material culture, consumer culture, and value creation. In these academic arenas, I connected discussions related to environmental behaviors and re-creating value in used material, particularly with clothes. I searched for and saved journal articles, chapters and books from Annual Reviews, Web of Science, and Science Direct databases. In order to narrow the focus of the topics that I mentioned above, I searched for these phrases in conjunction with: “United States”, “business model”, “consumption”, “fashion industry” and “corporate social responsibility”. Researchers provided context about the current state of their fields including the types of questions that exist but still need further research, giving me an understanding of how my research can contribute to the conversation.

My literature review helped me formulate questions that I wanted to ask my participants and identify frameworks I could use to analyze my own data. I not only identified significant findings and frameworks, but I also recognized areas that needed further research. Ultimately, I wanted to know why people shop secondhand and whether these researcher’s frameworks were applicable to real people, such as my participants. In addition, many of the questions that still needed answering were related to the social impacts of waste and the current state of the waste management infrastructure for unwanted clothes. For instance, how do secondhand businesses process unwanted clothes? Questions like this uncover secondhand businesses’ expertise in expanding the life of clothes.

Interview

Interviews can provide valuable insight into the perspectives of particular people (Hesse-Biber, 2007). In this case, I conducted five semi-structured interviews with business owners or

general managers within a 30-mile radius of Boston, Massachusetts. I relied on convenience sampling, which is defined as recruiting willing participants that meet the required criteria of the research in my proximity (Robinson, 2014). Although I recruited “any willing participants” I was specific in choosing participants that sell used clothes and manages a brick-and-mortar store. An advantage of interviewing informed informants is the quality of the data that is attained in a relatively short period of time (Marshall, 1996). My participants shared with me their expertise on the secondhand market. The interviews allowed for deeper investigations into specific topics (Roulston & Choi, 2018; Suter, 2012). I interviewed at least one owner or manager of these defining types of secondhand businesses: vintage, re-sale, donation/nonprofit-based, consignment, and children’s clothes. Since my research was limited to a few brick-and-mortar stores, it was important I maximized the diversity of my sampling to increase my chance of identifying a variety of themes related to my research questions. Identifying a variety of themes helped to understand the scope of successes and challenges that the secondhand market can experience. I wanted to capture the reality of their work as closely as possible.

Table 1 lists the five participants and their respective business type. I interviewed two owners and three general managers who work in different secondhand retail businesses. The owner at Store A sells a selection of vintage clothing and shoes for all genders. The general manager at Store B oversees three donation-based thrift stores in which proceeds go toward a 501(c)3 non-profit public health and wellness organization. The owner at Store C owns a mid to high-end re-sale store with a selection of leather goods. The general manager at Store D oversees a 501(c)3, children’s clothing store in which proceeds directly fund their local library. The general manager at Store E supervises the flagship location of a local consignment business.

Table 1: Participants and store type

| Interview | Participant | Number of locations | Store Type |
|-----------|-----------------|---------------------|--|
| Store A | Owner | 1 | Vintage |
| Store B | General manager | 3 | Donation-based thrift (nonprofit) |
| Store C | Owner | 1 | Re-sale |
| Store D | General manager | 1 | Donation-based children's clothes thrift store (nonprofit) |
| Store E | General manager | 2 | Consignment |

This research aims to understand how in-person interactions lead to more expansive relations between people and their community and clothes. I did not include online secondhand retail platforms like Depop, Poshmark, and Mercari since these platforms enable effortless, remote, often global transactions as opposed to local, brick-and-mortar retail establishments that require more engagement between shoppers and sellers. E-commerce, or re-commerce in this case, is a business model in which individuals can sell previously owned, used, or new goods for free across state and country lines, connecting sellers and buyers directly without considerable interaction. Since it is likely that sellers and shoppers live in completely different places, there may be a lack of emotional connection compared to brick-and-mortar stores. I wanted to focus on the connections made through person-to-person and person-to-product contact that help build relationships between people, their things, and their communities. Since I did not include the online market, this research omitted a comparative analysis between online and brick-and-mortar stores. Despite this missed opportunity, my case studies still revealed many important social interactions between buyers and sellers that influence the CE in their communities. Furthermore, my participants shared their perspectives and experiences with selling secondhand clothes online. My findings on the online resale market are included in Appendix C.

My participants and I explored interview topics such as sourcing, merchandise, partnerships, and customer relations (see Appendix A). I first asked them to share how they

select items to restock for their inventory, the amount and types of clothing that are reclaimed, how they price their clothing, and their understanding of what becomes of unpurchased post-consumer clothes. These topics revealed the circular process of reclaiming clothes that fit their business and consumer needs. Next, I inquired about their customer base to learn what types of people their businesses serve. I also asked how they promote their businesses to understand how people might find them, such as word-of-mouth, online searches for specific items, or advertisement and promotion. This question revealed how expansive their network is and how they build their clientele to expand the CE. Then, I asked if they have any formal or informal partnerships with local groups to determine how they are involved in their neighborhoods to connect with clienteles. They also shared their views on people's shopping and disposal behavior which I will go over in Chapter 7. Overall, the interview results inform my research by uncovering how secondhand stores' business models contribute to the CE and how they reach their customers to participate in the CE.

Survey

My research included a qualitative survey that received 92 responses. The survey was self-administered and consisted of open-ended questions that were presented in a standard order to all participants (Braun et al., 2021). I also included multiple choice questions in my survey (see Appendix B). The survey was designed to provide insight into how and why shoppers interact with secondhand stores and whether they participate in other CE related activities. The survey results further inform my research by illuminating people's relationship to clothes. I recruited participants online via flyers with a QR code, social media platforms, and emails. I relied on my social connections to share my study with people who take an interest in secondhand clothes shopping. This sampling method, referring others to share this project with

people they know who possess characteristics that pertain to my research interest, is known as snowball sampling or chain referral sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). I anticipated that most of my participants would be people I know, so I emailed a flyer with a QR code to secondhand stores to reach participants beyond my own social network and age demographic. Secondhand stores that agreed to the research helped share the survey with their network via email. Although I did not collect data on respondents' locations, based on my connections, I speculate that the majority of respondents are from the east and west coasts of the U.S. Since I did not collect personal information such as location, age, gender, and household income, it is unknown whether my data is skewed towards a certain demographic. My sample size cannot represent the whole secondhand market, but it did allow access to a sufficient sample size of people that can share their views, experiences, and material practices in a short amount of time (Braun et al., 2021).

The survey questions aimed to understand peoples' relationship with their clothes and the secondhand retail market. Questions about how they engage with thrift stores revealed what factors influence consumers to shop secondhand. I asked participants why they shop secondhand and how often they do so, which revealed qualities that attract consumers to secondhand businesses as well as how prevalent secondhand shopping is in peoples' lives. I also asked questions related to whether they care for their material belongings, such as mending, repairing, or altering their clothes. This question identified how participants interact with their personal belongings and how they cultivate material longevity. To identify more of the emotional aspects of owning clothes, I asked participants what garment they have kept the longest and why. From their responses, I infer the ways retail stores can foster these aspects that can then increase

material durability and longevity. Overall, survey responses were useful in understanding how thrift stores facilitate the expansion of CE and their role in consumers' lives.

Data Analysis

I used grounded theory to analyze the qualitative data collected from both interviews and survey responses to answer my research questions. Grounded theory is an iterative process that involves coding, memo-writing, theoretical sampling and saturation to construct middle-range theories (Charmaz, 2008). Theoretical sampling is a data sampling method to create emergent categories. Saturation occurs when new data no longer provides enough information to necessitate a new category. I took notes throughout my analysis to capture ideas and discoveries. I used NVivo 12, a qualitative data analysis computer software, to code my interview and survey responses. Coding entails an iterative process of data sampling, categorizing, and reapplying data (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2006; Miles et al., 1994). I followed previously established grounded theory techniques (Carolan, 2006) for my data analysis process: 1) I started with an initial coding and coded participant responses into applicable categories; 2) I compared categories, consolidating categories that were similar; 3) I sorted and synthesized my data to home in on my theoretical categories; 4) I decided what data to collect next based on the categories and theories that emerged from my existing data – a process known as theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Once I reached theoretical saturation, I stopped my analysis since I had sufficient data to support the theories I generated.

I used Microsoft Excel to quantitatively analyze data collected from my survey responses. Within Excel, I calculated the proportions of participants that responded differently for each question. I filtered and sorted my data, and then created my charts to present my information in my results chapters.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

This literature review will focus on understanding people's motivations to shop secondhand. First, I will discuss different ways in which CE does and does not reduce waste and consumption. I also highlight areas that need improvement in order to reach environmental goals such as resource and waste reduction. Next, I go over research suggesting environmental awareness as a first step in changing people's behavior to alleviate the textile waste predicament. Then, I discuss factors beyond awareness such as critical, economical, recreational (Guiot & Roux, 2010), and fashionability (Ferraro et al., 2016) that can influence environmental behaviors. I also discuss anthropological perspectives on people's shopping behavior and share how commodities can be used to describe sociality. Finally, I compare two frameworks (Neto & Ferrerira, 2020, Hollander et al., 2017, Haines-Gadd et al., 2018) that discuss how interpersonal relationships between people and their clothes can increase material longevity, resulting in things being kept longer rather than disposed of.

Whether the practices of CE would contribute to the reduction of waste and consumption is still a debate amongst researchers (e.g. Worrell et al., 2016; Zink & Geyer, 2017; Cooper & Gutowski, 2017; Levänen et al., 2021). In contrast to a linear economy, a circular economy implies that products are kept in a cycle of use. Geissdoerfer et al. (2017) states that if the principles of circular economy are practiced, there will be a reduction in environmental burden compared to the current, linear economic model, suggesting that people will buy fewer new products because they are reducing, reusing, or sharing their commodities. However, Cooper & Gutowski (2017) argue that we cannot assume that a single used product can be substituted for an equivalent new product. They contend that reused products displace some primary production and expand the lower end market, but they also suggest that there is limited expected reduction

in demand for new material production (Cooper & Gutowski, 2017). Zink and Geyer (2017) refer to this occurrence as the circular economy rebound, when secondary products are unable to substitute for primary products. These researchers suggest that the current CE plays only a small role in reducing environmental burdens, waste production, and consumption. By examining the textile recovery process and business owners' rationale for selecting specific clothes for resale, this research can potentially inform design decisions that will enhance the use life of clothing.

Many scholars assert that increasing consumer awareness will lead to pro-environmental behavior (e.g., Camacho-Otero et al., 2019; Diddi & Yan, 2019; Holtström et al., 2019; Bartkus et al., 1999). Guiot & Roux (2010) found that consumers will distance themselves “from [the] mainstream market for moral or ethical reasons.” The drive to change their behavior is called critical motivation, which can be expressed through means of supporting ethical and ecological concerns such as recycling and combating waste (Guiot & Roux, 2010). Critical motivation cannot occur unless consumers are made aware of problems associated with their shopping behaviors. As people become more aware of neglectful mainstream companies, they seek out alternative options such as secondhand stores.

Other scholars like Ki et al. (2020) argue that both internal and external stakeholders, such as industry, customers, and government have the ability to work within their respective fields to advance circular practices in different ways. For example, internal stakeholders can incorporate closing or slowing the resource loops in their own company (Ki et al., 2020), but government entities are solely responsible for creating and enforcing laws and regulations to manage circular practices. In addition, both stakeholder groups can use educational campaigns to push for circular fashion. Although government agencies and business enterprises are responsible

for instituting circular fashion in different ways, they can promote sustainable fashion and disposal alternatives to their customers or constituents.

In a more specific example, Norum (2017) expects companies to take a proactive role in diverting textile waste away from the landfill. She studied consumer decision-making associated with clothing disposal. She wanted to know the kinds of clothes that are disposed of, where and why they are disposed, and participants' knowledge of the post-consumer waste process. She found that individuals had criteria for clothing to be appropriate for donation. Her participants were uncomfortable donating undergarments or very worn clothing. Shockingly, Norum found that many participants lacked knowledge of the post-consumer waste stream, revealing a need to shift general consumer perception from seeing an item as "unusable" to seeing that it still has a usable life. Besides awareness on the environmental impacts of clothes disposal, she also found that people were largely unaware of what clothing donation centers would accept and what would default to trash. Norum stated that an essential component of the education effort is to inform consumers that all clothing, including items in poor physical conditions, can be recycled or reused. Based on her findings, she recommends that apparel companies facilitate clothing disposal through take-back programs to create easier access to textile recycling. This effort is championed by other stakeholders as well. Drawing from Ki et al.'s (2020) work, government entities, group organizations, and small local businesses can conduct and promote outreach for awareness campaigns and recycling or reuse programs.

Although there is a large amount of research suggesting that increasing consumer knowledge and awareness may lead to changes in consumer environmental behavior (e.g. Norum, 2017; Camacho-Otero et al., 2019; Diddi & Yan, 2019; Holtström et al., 2019) there are also bodies of research showing no correlation between environmental knowledge and green

consumption behavior. Even if people are conscious about why or how to make environmentally friendly choices, there is little impact on their consumption habits (Neto et al., 2020; Petersson McIntyre, 2021). Davies et al. (2002) found in their research “that knowledge about recycling activities [does] not influence participation in curbside recycling schemes” (Peattie, 2010). Scholars like Pedersen & Neergaard (2006) found that access to more information “does not necessarily lead to changes in purchasing behavior”, supporting the notion that there are myriad factors that show a lack of consistency in consumer behavior (Peattie, 2010). While knowledge and awareness indeed are one of the first approaches to nudge people towards conscious, ethical behaviors, these researchers suggest that environmental knowledge is not the only factor in driving green consumption. This debate on consumer behavior requires us to have a deeper understanding of other factors that influence consumption choice.

Social ideology could be one of the factors that does influence shopping behavior and green consumption. Davies et al. (2002) found that social and personal norms are leading contributors to altruistic behaviors. The context of peoples’ living situations cannot be ignored when trying to understand why or how people participate in pro-environmental behavior. Anthropologist Daniel Miller’s (2012) shopping theory proposed that the majority of shopping is born out of necessity. Shopping behaviors involve price comparisons, sales, and bulk buying to guarantee thrift, which is generally held to be a virtue (Miller, 2012). Ethical commodities are usually more expensive, and hence people will forgo the ethical purchase because they either cannot afford it, or they value saving money over ethical consumption (Miller, 2012). Shoppers may forgo ethical or green commodities to maintain the virtue of thrift (Miller, 2012). Attributes of secondhand stores are both “thrifty” and “eco-friendly”, yet they typically advertise as the cheaper alternative and rarely advertise themselves as contributors to the circular and reuse

economies. Miller's theory is challenged when considering thrift stores as both a green commodity and an income saving option. These two conditions can coincide: shoppers do not necessarily forgo green consumption, and shoppers may be able to guarantee monetary savings. This idea closely relates to one of Guiot & Roux's (2010) economic reasons for people to shop secondhand. Yet, thrift depends on the individual's view of a bargain and circumstance. Besides saving money, thrift could also be defined as saving time and labor. Economic motivations may encourage people to shop at secondhand stores in order to ease the financial pressure (Ferraro et al., 2016), but they might give up other resources, such as time, to find what they need.

Besides critical and economic reasons, Guiot & Roux (2010) found that people have recreational motivations for shopping secondhand. Recreational motivations are related to the social aspects of shopping, such as "treasure hunting, authenticity, social interaction, and nostalgic pleasure" (Ferraro et al., 2016). Qualities of recreational motivations include a sense of community between shoppers and buyers (Ferraro et al., 2016; Stone et al., 1996); and the hope of finding meaningful items is a marker of their identity (Ferraro et al., 2016; DeLong et al., 2005). This motivation is rather different from critical and economic motivation because there is an emphasis on participation in their community. People are also motivated by hopeful interactions they might have with clothes, which suggests that shopping is a gratifying activity.

'Material Culture Studies' explores peoples' relationships to clothes and provides a deeper investigation into shopping behavior. Clothing, no doubt, is a constant material that everyone engages with in some way, and acts as a form of personal expression that influences how people interact with each other. Ferraro et al. (2016), proposed that there is a fourth motivation to shop secondhand: fashionability. Shopping secondhand allows consumers to simultaneously follow fashion trends while pursuing authenticity and originality. This idea

somewhat relates to Miller and Woodward's study on blue denim. People wear blue jeans to encapsulate a sense of conformity because of its homogenizing look; however, it also upholds differences through its style and brand. Miller and Woodward connected the phenomena of denim with the intricate roles that clothing plays in society. Their study on blue jeans revealed patterns associated with comfort, cost, appearance, and identity (Galeucia, 2016). Miller and Woodward's study reinforced ideas about differences and hierarchy while also illuminating the ways people address social differences in their daily lives (Galeucia, 2016). For example, the price of denim jeans ranges widely based on the apparel company that produced it and the material they used. Miller and Woodward established that studies of ordinary items (like blue jeans) provide insight on social choices, normativity, and identity at both local and global levels (Miller & Woodward, 2018).

Researchers like Neto & Ferreira (2020) provided an interesting insight on crafting interpersonal relationships with our clothes as an approach to ease the ongoing textile waste increase. They argued that "if the speed at which we change our relationships with clothes were to slow down, the production and waste rate would follow suit" (Neto & Ferreira 2020). They identified three interconnected dimensions that make up people's relationships with their clothes: interaction, perception, and emotion. Neto & Ferreira's (2020) framework focused on rebuilding the existing wearer-clothing relationships. The first of any relationship is interaction. Interaction with clothes is mostly a physical and sensorial experience and it happens instantly when a person finds a garment in the store and makes the decision to buy it. This is the first of many interactions that unconsciously affect people's perception, which is the second dimension. A person's sensory perception includes how the garment looks, feels, and smells while they are wearing it. People evaluate their clothing each time it is worn and expect a certain outcome from

it (Neto & Ferreira 2020). Outside of physical quality, people often value their clothes based on personal perceptions, such as form of expression. A piece of clothing's perceived value changes over time depending on the context of a person's life, which can be seen with once trendy clothes that have gone out of style. Then, there is the emotional dimension of clothes, which is shaped by interaction and perception (Neto & Ferreira, 2020). Emotion refers to how we feel towards our clothes based on our interactions over time. These feelings evolve and become something meaningful in our lives. These three dimensions (interaction, perception, and emotion) build attachment for clothes (Neto & Ferreira, 2020).

At first glance, these dimensions seem closely connected to the concept of emotional durability. Emotional durability is far less researched than physical durability (den Hollander et al., 2017), but it refers to a person's attachment to the item. High emotional durability occurs when an isolated emotional experience creates a meaningful bond between a person and a product, such as a graduation gown. These items become cherished and will not be discarded. Yet, Neto & Ferreira (2020) argued that "durability is only a side effect of our continuous engagement with the clothes we own." Neto & Ferreira (2020) believe constant interaction fosters attachment and use. People perceive clothes as "fit" for their lives and therefore continue to use them. This is different from an intent to increase the durability and use of the clothing (Neto & Ferreira, 2020). However, people are capable of developing an emotional attachment to their belongings over time without the intent of doing so. Eventually, this emotional attachment encourages people to extend the life of their favorite clothes. Neto & Ferreira (2020) believe their idea is distinct, but their three dimensions are closely related to many elements of emotional durability. Still, Neto & Ferreira (2020) did not consider how socioeconomic class influences people's relationship with their clothes. For instance, who has the time, knowledge, or access to

develop complex interactions with their clothes? Similarly, they did not discuss the physical, material nature of clothing as a component in building people's relationship with clothes.

From another standpoint, researchers are looking at building emotional attachment earlier on during the design and production phase. Haines-Gadd et al. (2018) conducted research on product longevity and found nine themes that developed emotionally engaging product experiences. These nine themes are: relationships, narratives, identity, imagination, conversations, consciousness, integrity, materiality, and evolvability. An example that can be used to identify some of these themes is a Patagonia jacket. Imagine a person that bought their first Patagonia rain jacket for a camping trip with friends. The rain jacket meets Haines-Gadd et al.'s narratives, identity, and integrity design themes. The narratives theme focuses on capturing a moment in time, drawing on a sense of nostalgia. The buyer purchased a jacket for a specific occasion and the use of the jacket embeds a memory that reminds the buyer why they bought it. The identity theme aims for self-expression and connection with its respective community. Patagonia is known to be for those with an “active lifestyle and enjoy nature and outdoors” (*Patagonia: Where Do They Stand?*, 2018), and it is also lauded for its environmental and sustainability efforts. The brand signals to others a type of lifestyle and personal values. The integrity theme relates to both the structural integrity and transparency of how Patagonia jackets are made, including the materials that were used. Patagonia is a Certified B Corporation, meaning that they are meeting high standards of social and environmental performance and demonstrate transparency by making their global impacts assessment publicly available (*About B Corp Certification*, 2022). The integrity theme helps consumers feel a sense of trust in the company's social responsibility and their products. Designing for emotional and physical durability is a necessary tool for expanding the CE because a change in product development

(den Hollander et al., 2017) can extend the use life of clothes. The Patagonia jacket, for example, illustrates how clothing can embody both physical and emotional durability.

Chapter 4: Market Segmentation

In this chapter, I share information about secondhand businesses owners' and managers' customer base, their decision-making process for pricing clothes, and how they source their inventory. I infer from these results that secondhand stores attract different types of consumers based on their target market and affordability. Price and inventory contribute to who shops at their store. Business owners and managers play a role in diversifying the secondhand market by appealing to different needs and desires. Market segmentation identifies these groups or segments of consumers that have strong common bonds or needs (Parment, 2013). Segmentation approaches have focused on variables such as socioeconomic status, demographic, age, and location but can also apply to consumer motivation and behavior (Parment, 2013). I draw parallels between the characteristics of the secondhand market and Miller and Woodward's (2018) discussion of how blue jeans have effectively dominated contemporary clothing and fashion to suggest that secondhand clothing can be both widespread and individualized. I go on to theorize that increasing market segmentation can grow the secondhand market and encourage more people to participate in circular activities.

I asked business owners and managers a variety of questions related to their customer base including who their target market is and what types of customers they usually see at their store. Table 2 provides a summary of my participants' responses. Store D caters to a narrow audience because they focus on the needs of parents with young children. In contrast, Store A and Store E expressed seeing a range of customers and have no specific target market. Most of the stores have a young customer base, such as high school students, college students and those who are younger than 25 years old. Another similarity is that all stores communicated that their main customers are people living in their respective neighborhoods. Their responses show their

familiarity with their customer base and that they have select groups they are targeting. This also helps us understand how particular products appeal to specific groups of people. For example, Store D sells only children’s clothes to attract those that are caretakers for children. Owners and managers can identify what types of products would appeal to their customers.

Table 2: Customer base

| Who is your target market? What types of customers do you usually see? | |
|--|---|
| Store A | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a full range of customers but currently see a lot more younger people. A quarter of customer base is under 25 years old. • “We don’t have a target market for this business. It’s popular with young people who are part of the market, but it’s really for everybody.” |
| Store B | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get a lot of people that are price sensitive, and we try to meet the needs of low-income folks • Revival amongst college students • Have had retirees and seniors stop in the store • Each store has their regulars • “Melting pot, and there is no one type of person – more so dependent on the neighborhood.” |
| Store C | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target market is young professionals and neighborhood family, men and women • Started off as mid to higher end market and would then offer sale • Became more student oriented |
| Store D | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents with toddlers; best for children ages 2-8 years of age • First time parents, and pregnant moms that already have children |
| Store E | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide range of people, anywhere from high school girls to retired, older ladies • Most clients sell with the store • Saw a demographic change within the two years. Its customer base first started out with local residents from the neighborhood, which were mostly older ladies, but now has about evened out with people of all ages |

I asked my participants how their store determines the prices for their clothes. Table 3 details some of the decision-making processes related to pricing. Both Store B and Store D are donation-based thrift stores, yet their pricing schemes are different. Store B prioritizes a flat-rate system to price their clothes before auditing for high-end items. Store D, on the other hand, looks at the brand first to determine its price point before defaulting to their general price range. Store E sells a mix of brands including luxury brands and mainly determines the price based on market

retail, charging anywhere between 20-50% of the retail price, depending on the brand, season, and condition. Store A and Store C did not provide information on how they price their clothes. Store C mentioned their customer base started off as mid- to higher-end. Store A sells vintage clothes that are typically priced higher-end due to the material that is used to make the garment, its age, and how rare it is. This information helps to characterize how secondhand stores determine how to price the clothes they sell.

Table 3: Decision making process on clothes pricing

| How do you determine how to price your clothes? | |
|---|---|
| Store A | Information not available |
| Store B | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flat-rate for different types of clothes (\$2 basic tank tops and t-shirts, \$4 short sleeve shirt, \$6-8 pants) • Second round of staff audits rack for high-end brands to sell at the third of the price of their original retail • Clothes with original tags are priced differently |
| Store C | Information not available |
| Store D | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision making starts with brand consideration and quality of the clothing • Range from \$2.50 to \$12, and many items priced at \$4 • Seasonal winter coats priced higher • Generally, third of the price of their original retail |
| Store E | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on brand and quality of the clothing • Typically priced anywhere \$25 and up • Sell at 20-30% the price of retail • New items priced at 50% of the retail cost |

In general, store owners and managers examine the type of garment, the quality, and the brand of the clothing to determine their price in relation to their customer base. In the mainstream market, retail brands vary by quality and price, and clothing value is often transferred over to the secondhand market. Similar to the mainstream market, the secondhand market could appeal to a range of socioeconomic consumers. Store B targets those that are price sensitive, aiming to meet the needs of low-income individuals, as opposed to Store E that sells name-brand clothing priced at a discounted price of \$25 or more. The owners and managers of

secondhand stores play a role in segmenting the second-hand market, pricing used clothes for specific socioeconomic groups.

Considering the quality and brands of their inventory, I asked the owners and managers how they source their inventory to understand more about their clothing stock and price. Table 4 provides their responses. Store B and Store D receive donations at their store locations, and Store E receives items from their clientele. Owners from Store A and Store C actively seek different opportunities to source their inventories, such as attending estate sales and participating in bulk buying. These five stores show different pathways for obtaining used merchandise to sell: donations, consignment/re-sale, bulk buying and estate sales. These results show that there are a variety of ways that people reclaim used goods for their business. Their method for sourcing affects the types of brands and quality of clothes they receive, which transfers over to how they present and price their clothes for consumers.

Table 4: Sourcing and supply

| Where and how do you receive your merchandise/stock? | |
|--|--|
| Store A | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various ways: attend estate sales; bulk buying; and some of inventory come from a rag house. People also bring things to sell. |
| Store B | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People drop off donations to their store. |
| Store C | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bulk buying used, estate sales, buy individual pieces. |
| Store D | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People drop off donations to their store. |
| Store E | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People come in to the store to consign with them. The store pays the owners about 50-60% of the selling price of the clothes after selling them. • They look for in-season, current and trending clothes, and luxury brands |

Sourcing helps store owners and managers build up their inventory which then attracts the types of customers they are targeting. Store B accepts all donations; clothes that are put out for sale only meet basic requirements: no rips, no stain, no smell. Many of their clothing pieces are lower-end retail clothes, although they occasionally see reputable brands that could go for a

higher price point than the flat-rate system. Store B can price their clothes based on a flat-rate system due to the influx of donations they receive. Store D is also donation-based yet they arrange their prices based on the brand of the clothes. This distinction shows that Store D caters their inventory for who they believe, most likely parents, would likely to purchase. Store D puts in time to price their clothes while also ensuring their customers are buying at a discounted price point as opposed to buying new. Store B's price point and vast inventory is much different compared to Store A's vintage apparel. The owner for Store A curates his inventory by shopping at estate sales and buying individual pieces that he can then mark up at his store. The owner for Store A can price his clothes at a higher cost because he sells authentic garments from set time periods which the mainstream market is not inundated with, and vintage is a niche subgroup valued by those that take an interest in aged garments. Store E consigns with their customers and can be more selective with their inventory to guarantee that their clothes get sold. The store manager does not accept fast fashion brands and only considers luxury or reputable brands. These differences between the stores' sourcing supports the conclusion that they have different target customers based on the affordability of the clothes and the type and brand. Different market segments participate in the shopping experience at different stores based on their style and cost preference. Store owners and managers also segment the market by endeavoring to appeal to people that are at different life stages. The stores' targeting strategies reveal the different possible market segments.

Market segmentations in the secondhand market upholds differences and could also produce conformity. This idea parallels with some of Miller and Woodward's findings in their global denim project. Denim varies in style, material use, and price that can be associated with social and class differences. Similarly, secondhand businesses range in pricing, available brands,

and styles. In addition, target markets and tailored branding could attract different groups of people that have not considered secondhand before. Miller and Woodward pointed out three characteristics of jeans: global, expressive yet intimate, and the default choice for people uncertain as to which clothes to wear (Miller & Woodward, 2018). Secondhand businesses such as Store A, Store D and Store E curate their inventory to fit the style and needs of their target market. By creating more individualized secondhand stores targeting other social differences or interests, the secondhand market could be just as widespread as the traditional market. The secondhand market is global; its businesses are expressive and intimate, but it is not a majority of people's first choice though it has the potential to be. As secondhand businesses become more widespread and people's perceptions of secondhand shopping change, more people might consider secondhand as their first choice. Comparing the secondhand market to the phenomena of blue jeans could help us consider how the secondhand market can be just as dominating and acceptable.

Secondhand businesses created market segmentation that could allow more people to consider shopping secondhand so long as there is a business that provides its service to the diverse needs of its consumers. The different types of businesses can normalize secondhand shopping across socioeconomic classes. Blue jeans, as Miller said, are ordinary items but can communicate social differences and social choice. Similarly, the secondhand market has a range of businesses from those who sell luxury used goods to others who sell lower-end goods. These differences can normalize secondhand shopping all while allowing people to choose a store that fits their needs and desires. Market segmentation allows consumers to participate at secondhand businesses and can create a societal acceptance for shopping secondhand at all economic classes. My research suggests that growing the secondhand market by using market segmentation might

be invaluable if we want more people to participate in circular activities. Having secondhand clothing stores as options for people during certain points in their life help people connect and familiarize themselves with services that are connected to mainstream retail, through clothing brands, without the increase in production. The different types of businesses can normalize secondhand shopping and expand the secondhand economy through market segmentation.

Chapter 5: Consumer Motivations

This chapter focuses on consumer motivations drawn from my survey responses. I first focus on the idea of thrift by sharing sentiments from Store B and Store E on how thrift is made manifest in their store. The idea of thrift is prevalent in the secondhand economy. Secondhand shopping is often associated with thrift and frugality because used clothes are typically sold at a discounted price. Although thrift is one of the attractions to secondhand shopping, there are other reasons people shop at secondhand stores. Researchers have identified the following as motivations for shopping second hand: critical, economical, recreational, and fashionability (Guiot & Roux, 2010; Ferraro et al., 2016) . I use their frameworks to sort the different reasons people shop used which helps reveal how secondhand stores cater to people's different needs and desires.

Thrift is dependent on the individual's circumstances and view of a bargain. Secondhand stores can appeal to consumers from a range of socioeconomic classes, as exemplified by Store B's price and inventory. Store B targets low-income households by retailing clothes using a flat rate system. As shared previously in Table 3, basic tank tops and t-shirts are \$2, short sleeves shirts are \$4, and pants range from \$6-8. However, their store doesn't always follow that rule and may retail clothes at a slightly higher price based on their brand. The price rating system seemed appropriate for the store's target customers, which the store manager defined as low-income folks. The Store B manager was not sure if anyone among her patrons would buy the marked-up clothes, but later in the interview, the manager recalled a time when a shopper found a dress that their store priced higher than the typical flat rate. She remembered the patron considering a dress that she, herself, thought was overpriced compared to all the other clothing at the store, but the patron thought it was a bargain, given the brand and style of the dress. Examining who the thrift

store is marketing for and the actual customer base reveals what counts as a bargain. Although Store B targets low-income folks, Store B attracts a range of shoppers with different amounts of disposable income and knowledge of fashion brands, so their perspective on what thrift means differs. The flat rate prices are already a deal, but some shoppers are open to finding items with a slightly higher price if it meets their idea of a bargain. This analysis leads me to believe that thrift is dependent on the individual's circumstances and view of a bargain, and therefore thrift exists in secondhand businesses so long as an item falls beneath an individual's expectation of what the brand and style might normally cost.

Some people shop secondhand because it helps fulfill their lifestyle needs or desires for a discounted price. The value of thrift exists and is sought after amongst secondhand luxury retail too. On the other side of the spectrum from Store B, Store E sells luxury apparel and accessories to their customers at about half the market price. The manager shared how her customers are drawn to the discounted prices for luxury goods. In talking about her customers, she shared, "A lot of them come in for like their go-to [brands]. Like Lululemon that they want to rotate out. Or if they're looking for something specific" (Store E manager, personal communications, February 15, 2022). Store E offers their customers certain, lavish lifestyles without feeling burdened by a higher price tag. While Store B offers a more conventional example of "thrift", which is understood as frugality, Store E shows that the value of thrift exists and is sought after amongst luxury retail too. The manager believed they were bringing more people access to luxury goods, a commodity to enjoy. Their store offers slightly lower-income households the opportunity to participate in luxury consumption. Thrift is not only a necessity for folks that rely on discounted commodities, but also a quality that people from all economic backgrounds can appreciate. Customers' perception on affordability is one factor that attracts people to their store. The

secondhand market remakes people's views on thrift by offering a variety of used goods (lower-end to higher-end) which enable all sorts of people to participate in this particular circular activity.

I categorized the different motivations, including the value of thrift, and the levels of motivations that my survey participants expressed using motivations identified by Guiot and Roux (2010) and Ferrero et al. (2016): critical, recreation, economic, and fashionability. Critical motivations relate to ethical and ecological concerns in which people's actions are based on moral or ethical reasons (Guiot & Roux, 2010). Recreation motivations are reasons such as: treasure hunt, authenticity, social interaction, and nostalgic pleasure (Guiot & Roux, 2010; Ferraro et al., 2016). Economic motivations include: bargain hunt, gratification from price, fair price, wish to pay less, and the value of thrift. And Ferraro et al.'s fashionability motivations refer to fashion-seeking and the fashionability of shopping secondhand. My participants wrote a response to my open-ended question, "when or why do you shop for used clothing?" Many participants provided multiple reasons which I organized into critical, recreation, economic and fashion reasons shown in Figure 1. My participants often listed more than one reason for buying used clothing. One way to interpret this data is to presume that the reason listed first is a "primary" motivation and the others are of lesser importance for the respondent. The graph below reflects this interpretation and describes the number of times each motivation was listed first, second, third, or fourth. However, the total number of times a motivation was mentioned (regardless of the order in which it was listed) can also help to illuminate its overall importance as a motivation for shopping used. In total, economic motivations were mentioned 46 times; critical motivations were mentioned 42 times; recreation and fashion motivations were mentioned 23 times, respectively.

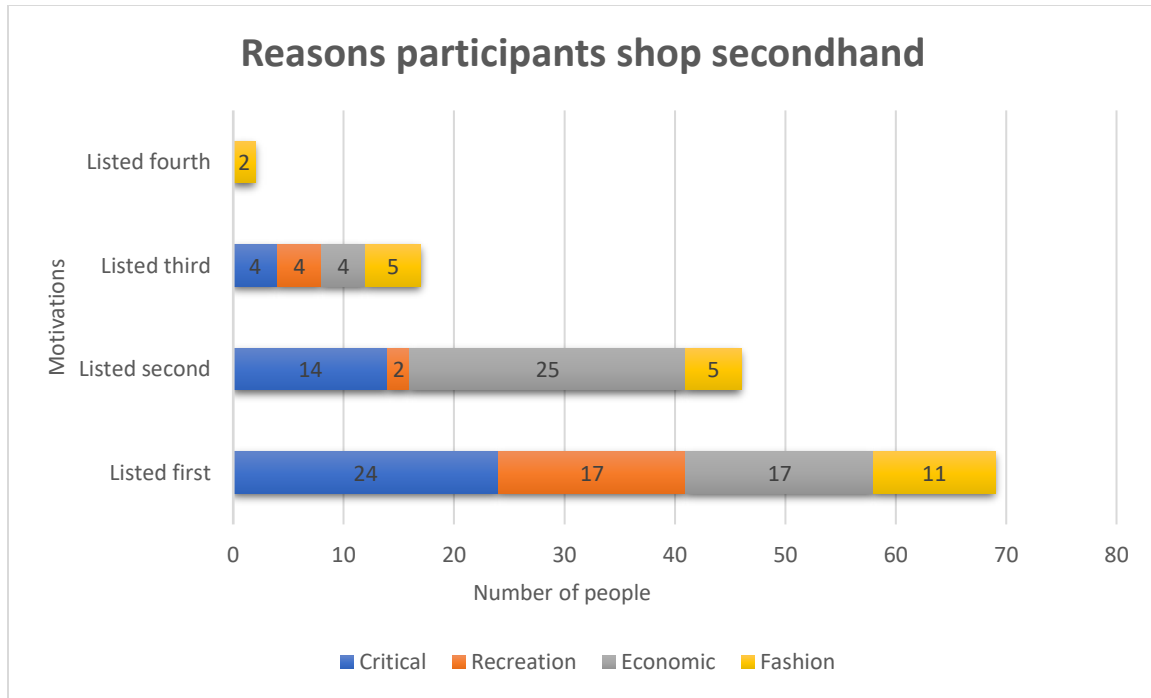


Figure 1: Reasons participants shop secondhand (motivations)

All four motivations for shopping secondhand were mentioned. 24 participants identified critical motivations first. Some of the responses included: “my small way of reducing my carbon footprint”, “environmental benefits”, “greater interest in environmental and social justice issues”, “more sustainable” and “divest my spending away from corporate markets”. There were 17 participants that listed recreation as their first motivation. This includes those that go shopping for fun, “bargain hunting”, or as an activity with friends. Another 17 identified economic motivations like getting good deals and clothes being cheaper. 11 people said fashion, such as finding unique pieces, first. One survey response includes “sometimes I can find more fun stuff” and another response said for “vintage and individualistic pieces”. Critical motivation was a dominant motivation that was mentioned first but other reasons to shop secondhand were not that far behind. Recreation and economic motivations were evenly split, and fewer people, but still a significant amount, listed fashionability reasons first.

My survey participants are motivated to shop secondhand for multiple reasons. There were 46 participants that provided an additional motivation. Many of my participants listed economic motivation second (25 participants), followed by 14 participants that identify critical motivations second. One sentiment that was commonly brought up in my participant's responses was the fact that they think it is cheaper or they can get a good bargain when shopping secondhand. As I described previously, shoppers determine whether the price point imbues thrift. This is not to say that low-income shoppers are motivated exclusively by price. Thrift (either as either an economic or recreation motivation) was a consistent reason to shop secondhand, but it was not the only reason. My participants that indicated both critical and economic motivations show that they are well aware of the environmental impacts and appreciate the inexpensive price. As such, affordability and green consumption are aligned, and thrift is only one element that influences participation in green consumption and the CE.

My survey results showed that the four motivations (critical, recreation, economic, fashionability) exist, but my survey results also revealed obstacles that prevent people from participating in secondhand shopping. One such obstacle was physical access to a store. Five survey respondents shared how they wished they could shop at thrift stores more often but there was a lack of convenient locations nearby. Although the secondhand market has grown exponentially over the years through online platforms, there are still those that wish to shop at physical stores. Researchers should focus more on these obstacles that prevent people from participating in CE activities like shopping locally or used. My thesis thus far has focused on Guiot & Roux's and Ferraro et al.'s four motivations but has not yet considered accessibility. Different forms of accessibility to consider besides proximity of physical stores are hours of operation, convenient transportation options, and accommodations for differently abled bodies.

Because these forms of accessibility are often neglected, many people cannot regularly engage with secondhand stores. More importantly, convenience or access could be added to the list of reasons people choose to shop secondhand.

Chapter 6: Interpersonal Relationships

This chapter discusses the interactions and relationships cultivated between these entities: secondhand businesses, the general community, individuals, and those individuals' clothes. I first share how secondhand businesses support and connect with community organizations and their customers, which helps build social cohesion in their neighborhoods. I share survey results on the number of participants that have a regular thrift store that they shop at as a way to learn how prevalent secondhand shopping is in their lives. I also share the survey results for the types of garments that have been kept the longest and why. I use Neto & Ferreira's framework on relationships with clothes and Haines-Gadd et al.'s nine design themes to explain how these traits could be found in secondhand stores which are useful in remaking people's relationships with their clothes. Neto & Ferreira claim that the dimensions of interaction, perception, and emotion are important in cultivating a person's relationship with clothes. Haines-Gadd et al., on the other hand, believe emotional attachment is built into garments themselves. Both studies along with the survey results I collected, show how relationships exist between people and their clothing. In addition, I use my survey results to share how emotional and physical durability is a necessary component to increase garment longevity. These various interactions explain how secondhand stores help build relationships and strengthen individual and community identity.

Some secondhand stores take an active role in supporting their neighborhoods through formal or informal partnerships. Table 5 shows the different ways that secondhand stores in this research are involved in their respective communities. Some of the partnerships or relationships with other local groups include schools, recycling companies, local businesses, and general volunteer opportunities. These symbiotic relationships help connect their businesses to people in their community. Only Store A expressed that they had no partnerships of any kind, although

they have hosted community socials in the past. Store B and Store D accept volunteers to help sort and tag clothes. Store D works with local high school students needing volunteer hours and retired folks wanting to spend more time outside of their houses. Store C connects with others by meeting people at flea markets and working with faith-based organizations, which helps the Store C owner promote her business through these networks. Store E partners with local businesses that are interested in selling hand-crafted items at their store. They also take part in philanthropic endeavors. If the consignee's clothes do not sell during a specified period, with the consignee's permission, Store E would place the clothes on sale and those proceeds would go to faith-based groups, food banks, pet rescue or other charitable organizations. If the clothes are still not selling, then they would donate the clothes to their local churches. These different interactions connect their businesses to the greater community. They are able to move resources along to other people and organizations in need.

Table 5: Involvement with the community

| Does your store have any informal or formal partnerships with any groups? Who are they and what does the partnership look like? | |
|--|---|
| Store A | No |
| Store B | Partnered with a textile recycling company; general volunteer opportunities |
| Store C | Meet people at flea markets and in communication with church organization |
| Store D | School affiliated volunteers; general, volunteer opportunities |
| Store E | Philanthropic donations; local businesses consign with them |

The owners and managers in my research shared sentiments about what they believed was their store's best attribute and many pointed to the connections they have made and how they support their patrons. These sentiments hint at how the owners and managers perceive their customers and their role as a business. Store B shared:

We are such a part of the community, we shut down during early [during the] pandemic and on the community board people expressed how they missed us and were concerned

whether we were out of business. It feels personal to people, there are people who are just nuts about thrifting but it's good to know we have a fanbase. And it could be because of how we curate our store and find things people would like. (Store B manager, personal communications, November 23, 2021).

Store E shared:

I feel like it's such a neighborhood store, like I know the names of the majority of our regulars. And they are consigners, and they know us. They each have like a staff member that's their go to that they know that they love to come in and talk to, so it kind of feels like its own little community, it's nice. (Store E manager, personal communications, February 14, 2022).

Store B and Store E both mentioned a sense of community due to their interactions with their patrons. Their service extends beyond providing goods as they also establish meaningful connections with their patrons. Their interactions produce normalcy and a stronger community since they strengthen the ties between people outside of their close family and friend network (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982). These interactions help increase trust and a sense of camaraderie among members in the community (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982).

Extending connections outside of the conventional work and family groups helps build larger networks that are beneficial for people's well-being. For example, Store D shared how they are able to support families in their community by providing affordable toys and clothes for children that may otherwise have been unavailable (Store D manager, personal communications, February 14, 2022). Their businesses create access to necessities that are more affordable than buying at traditional retail prices. Store B, Store D, and Store E shared how they support their patrons in multiple ways. In addition to providing used goods at affordable prices, the stores

established a place for their patrons to build friendships with staff members, give back to their community by volunteering, and simply shop for leisure. In addition, these connections are especially useful during times of hardship in which patrons can rely on other members of the community to provide new information and resources that can assist them.

I asked survey participants whether they have a regular thrift store they visit to gauge how prevalent thrift stores are in their lives as well as whether they felt connected to a thrift store and consider the place as a “regular” spot. Their responses suggested that thrift stores could be considered “third places,” which are places outside of work and the home that provide people a sense of well-being and belonging (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982). Figure 2 is a pie chart showing survey participants’ responses. Forty-two respondents (46%) said that they have a regular thrift store that they go to, and 41 respondents (44%) said they don’t. Nine respondents (10%) answered ‘maybe’. From the proportion of people that believe they have a regular, go-to thrift store, I infer that secondhand stores produce reliability, which is why people continue to visit them. It provides people a sense of place and grounds them in their perception of identity and belonging.

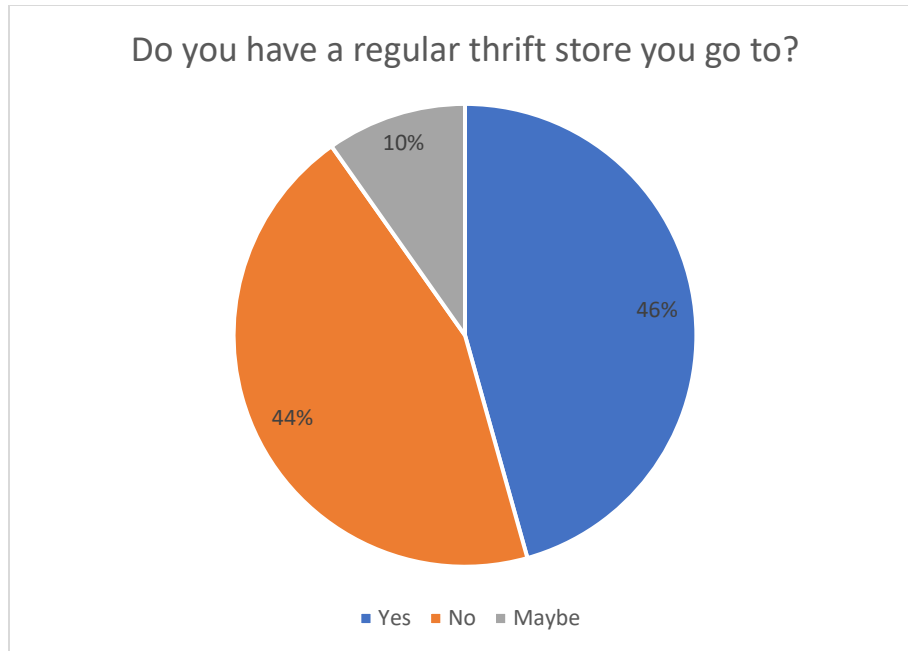


Figure 2: Do you have a regular thrift store pie chart

I looked beyond the secondhand market to understand how relationships between clothing and people are shaped by its use. I asked my survey participants an open-ended question, “what is one piece of garment you have kept the longest and why?” Their responses reveal the qualities that are needed to increase material longevity. Figure 3 shows the different types of garments that were named. Twenty-two participants identified shirts, t-shirts, and tops being kept the longest, followed by 18 participants that identified sweaters, sweatshirts, and cardigans, and then 15 participants who identified jackets and coats. Five garments were categorized as “Seasonal/events” including: christening gowns, girl scout uniforms, and snow pants. Lastly, 11 participants did not identify anything specific and were categorized as “Unknown”. Notably, the majority of these identified items are just ordinary garments. How are such ordinary items able to outlast other clothing? My survey respondents share a variety of reasons why these pieces of clothing are kept and used.

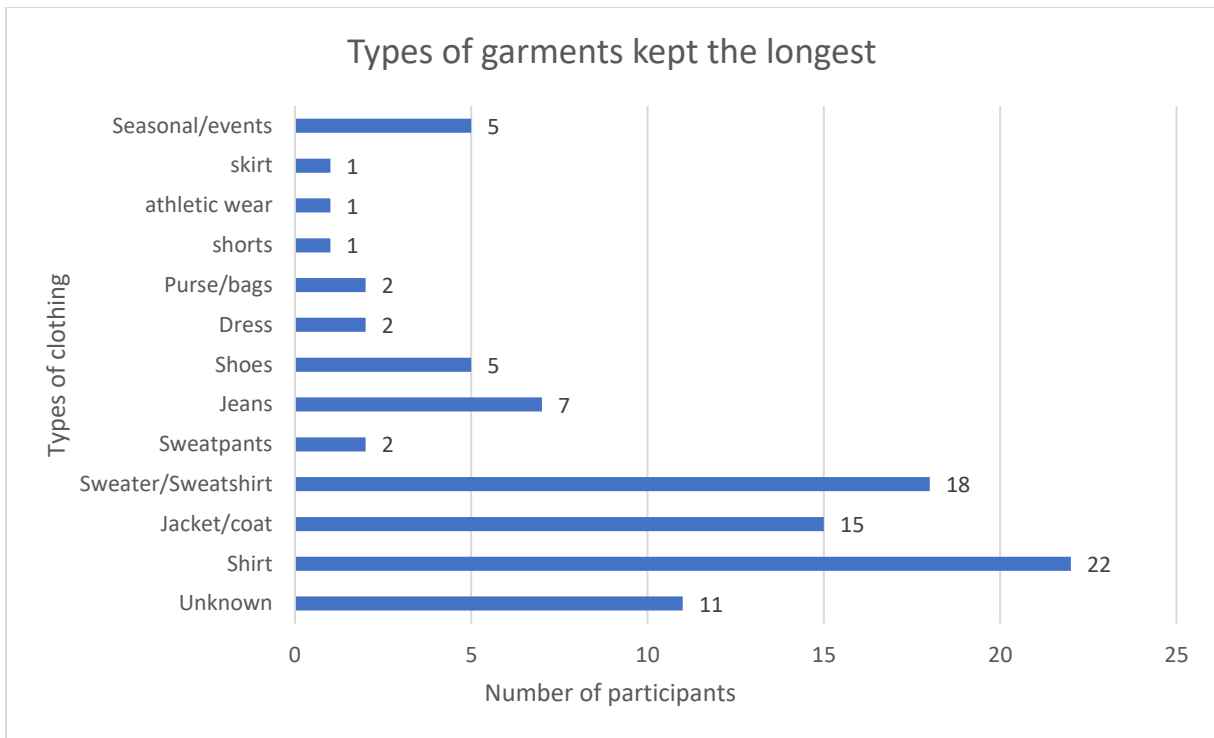


Figure 3: Types of garments kept the longest

My participants explained why they kept these items the longest in their responses, with 27 participants that said they kept their garment for so long because they were still “durable”. Connecting back to Neto & Ferreira’s research, people perceive the quality of the clothes each time they wear it to determine whether it is fit to be worn again. This interaction between my participants and their clothes reveals a development of trust towards these pieces. To connect with Haines-Gadd et al.’s design themes, durability relates to the integrity design theme. The integrity design theme refers to building physical and emotional quality into the product. An integrity design theme exists here because my participants were satisfied and grew attached to the success of their clothing’s utility, and their clothing delivered what it promised (Haines-Gadd et al., 2018). Producing physically durable clothing is not only important in developing emotional durability amongst its wearer; it also has a higher chance of being recirculated into the secondhand market if the wearer decides to donate it one day.

There were 14 participants who suggested a garment's aesthetic or fashionability as a factor for clothing to be kept the longest. An example that one participant shared is a Hawaiian shirt that they enjoy wearing during the summer. Another participant described a pink, vintage-style dress they have kept because they love the style. I categorized these responses as fashion reasons based on the narratives they shared about the style and look of the garment. Haines-Gadd et al.'s identity theme relates to my participants' fashion reasons for keeping their clothing. Identity theme is creating product personality that co-exists with the wearer either by connecting the wearer to a community, and producing group affiliation, or by differentiating themselves as a form of expression (Haines-Gadd et al., 2018). In this case, the "vintage-style" dress and "Hawaiian" shirt have defined personalities that reinforce the wearer's identity. The identity design theme is naturally built into clothes at secondhand stores because no two pieces are the same. When thrifting, people are able to find one-of-a-kind pieces of clothing that will define their own individual personalities. Secondhand stores are able to remake people's relationship with clothes by continuing to provide clothes that are quirky, unique, or fun.

Twenty-one participants stated that they kept their garment because it was either a timeless, classic piece, or that it was adaptable for any occasion. Classic pieces produced a form of normativity rather than distinctiveness. Classic pieces relate closely with Haines-Gadd et al.'s relationships theme. Clothes with a relationship design theme include a wearer's opportunity to engage with their clothes through reconfiguration, like crafting; care and attention; ritual and habit; and a feeling of control (Haines-Gadd et al., 2018). These clothes provide stability and reliability to the wearer which helps with feelings of control. Reconfiguring clothes allows wearers to actively engage with their garments and develop a relationship. This idea also relates to Neto & Ferreira's interaction dimension. According to Neto & Ferreira, people reassess the

value of their clothing with every meaningful interaction. A wearer's time and interaction with clothing provides intimate knowledge on how to confidently adjust the clothing to meet personal needs. Besides providing durable, classic pieces, secondhand stores can embody the relationship design theme through a shopping experience. Some people enjoy altering or reconstructing clothes as a form of expression and tend to find pieces from secondhand stores that they can alter to fit their style. Secondhand stores help facilitate this form of expression through the range of styles they offer.

Another 27 participants cited sentimental reasons for keeping their selected garment. For example, one participant kept their high school sports team sweatshirts that are over 10 years old because "they bring up feelings of nostalgia"; there were some participants that identified sweaters from middle school, high school, or college as items they have kept the longest due to sentimental reasons. The examples that my participant shared also highlight the identity theme because my participants associate themselves with a community such as their high school or college they attended. Sentimental reasons are closely related to Neto & Ferreira's emotional dimension of clothes. My participants share personal, relational narratives about their clothing associated with a time in their lives or the people it connected them to. They were able to explain why they kept certain clothes longer than others. People's connection with their clothes helps develop longer relationships between them.

In contrast, vintage clothing draws on people's fascination with an era that they may not have experienced. In fact, vintage clothes embody sentimental sensations and displays materiality and identity design themes. Materiality theme is defined by choosing materials that mature in a beautiful or interesting manner which is no doubt one of the characteristics of vintage clothes. Clothes from the past are known to be made with different materials and are often much

more durable than today's clothes. Vintage clothes embody the identity theme because the clothes, such as past sports jerseys, are associated with either an era or a group. However, in order for people to have this opportunity to connect with their clothes, clothing must be, in some form, durable. Vintage stores support those that have nostalgic feelings of the past by providing clothes and objects from previous decades.

Lastly, 17 participants said they kept a certain garment the longest because they felt the most comfortable when wearing it. Ten other participants shared a mutual relationship with their clothing. For example, one participant has a skirt they had bought new 15 years ago and have altered it to continue wearing it till this day. They said, "there are a couple spots that have become threadbare, but I patched them with another fabric." A mutual relationship has formed because the participant repairs their skirt, keeping it "alive", while the skirt continues to be "wear-able" and of service for them. Another participant expressed the care they provide to their shoes, stating, "I keep them in good condition and can wear them over time." Another participant said that they have a coat they have kept "for ages" and have replaced all the buttons up to this point. These examples closely relate to the relationship design theme, as well. My participants show that there is an attentiveness to their belongings, which contributes to product durability. People can interact with their clothes in a positive, mutual relationship. Caring and tending for their clothes show that the emotional attachments that take place can help increase material longevity.

This chapter looked at relationships that are built in and out of secondhand stores. Thrift stores play multiple roles in providing accessible used goods and social connections to their patrons. They are essential places for people to connect with others, such as with employees or with friends that want to shop together. In addition to the relationships they create with

individuals, they support other local businesses and organizations (e.g. partnering with textile recyclers, schools, charity). Furthermore, my research shares the human experience that people have with their clothes outside of the secondhand store by connecting Haines-Gadd et al.'s and Neto & Ferreira's contrasting ideas on emotional durability to my survey responses. The development of wearer-clothing relationships and material longevity depends on the presence of emotional or physical durability to enforce trust and reliability. Product durability is a necessity to build a trusting relationship between people and their clothes.

Chapter 7: Infrastructure

Broadly speaking, people donate clothes as a convenient means of disposing unwanted garments (Fisher et al., 2008). This notion was also shared by the general manager of Store D who believed that people felt less guilty about donating clothes than throwing them away (Store D general manager, personal communication, February 14, 2022). This chapter shares the predicament that donation-based stores grapple with around donation collection: receiving large hauls of used goods and dealing with the burden of deciding which to re-sell. I will first share data on how my survey participants dispose of unwanted clothes to show how common donation as a choice is. Then, in order to explain the lifecycle of donated clothes, I will describe in detail Store B's process to get donated goods onto the store floor and ready to sell. This information on the labor involved in clothes recovery shows how intensive the process is and provides insight that can help readers reconsider the lifecycle of clothes and how they want to engage with the CE. Acknowledging the labor intensity and the drawbacks of the current textile waste and recovery infrastructure would hopefully encourage consumers, policymakers, and producers to think of innovative ways to create new pathways for used clothes to ease the burden on donation-based stores.

My research showed that donation is a widely used mechanism to get rid of clothes. I asked survey participants, "what do you do with old clothes that you no longer wear?" Participants were able to select more than one option: donate, re-sell, trash, use for other purpose, or other. Many participants selected more than one option. The figure shows that 90 of the 92 participants donate old clothes they no longer wear. Forty-three of the participants selected re-sell as another option alongside donate. Of the 23 participants that selected trash, this was not the only choice they chose. 44 participants selected "use for other purpose" and ten

selected “other”. When given the opportunity to share additional comments, some of the ten participants said they selected “other” for textile recycling. Although my research focused on self-selected secondhand shoppers, I suspect that donating unwanted items is utilized by all sorts of people, even those that do not shop secondhand.



Figure 4: Pathway of old clothes that participants no longer wear

Businesses deal with unwanted clothes at a larger scale. I asked secondhand business owners and managers two questions to learn more about clothes that they are unable to sell. Their responses are shared in Table 6. Since these businesses have different sourcing models, my question “what clothes do you retain to sell and what usually gets tossed?” applies to Store B and Store D since they are donation-based. They receive volumes of items that must meet their minimum quality standard. When I asked Store B how much of the donated goods their store usually retains, she estimated that about 60% of a 16-foot box truck is reclaimed, and the other 40% is sent to the textile recyclers. Store D is even more selective; they shared that they only

keep about a fourth of the clothes that are donated, and the rest are re-donated or, on rare occasions, disposed of in the trash if they are completely un-useable. Their responses reveal the proportion of donated clothes that are acceptable for resale. Donations that Store B and Store D receive may not be in usable condition due to rips, tears, or stains. The first question is also relevant to Store E when they are deciding what clothes they want to accept from their consignors, but they can give unwanted clothes directly back to the consignors. Notably, both Store B and Store D pointed to overconsumption as a huge problem for the sorting and inspecting process, as more than half of donated items cannot be recovered for resale.

The second part of the question, “what do you do with clothes that aren’t selling?” is applicable to all stores. They all use discounts as a common alternative to encourage a sale before having to decide how to dispose their clothes that aren’t selling. Store C, Store D, and Store E use donation as a pathway to get rid of clothes from their inventory. They either donate their unwanted clothes through their local charity or recycle them at a participating organization, such as a school fundraiser. For Store B, they transport clothes that don’t sell to their partnered textile recyclers. In contrast, store owners and managers from Store A, Store C, and Store E shared a sentiment that they only source used clothes they believed would sell which greatly reduces the amount of clothes they dispose. Store C and Store E would re-donate clothes if other solutions, like sale promotions, did not work. Store A emphasized:

We don’t throw anything out. At a certain point it might go on sale and if it gets damaged, we repair a lot of things. If it’s really messed up, we have a ‘trunk of treasure’ where all of the items are five dollars. Like it could be a leather jacket with a tear or a skirt with the elastic stretched out on. If something is really, truly absolutely, unusable we turn it into rags. (Store A owner, personal communications, November 3, 2021)

The Store A owner considers the textile waste and cost associated with reclaiming old clothes, and thus carefully chooses their items that fit their customer base.

Table 6: Decision making on used clothes intake

| What clothes do you retain to sell and what usually gets tossed? OR What do you do with clothes that aren't selling? | |
|---|---|
| Store A | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We don’t look to pick up things we don’t think it can’t sell.” • Clothes that aren’t selling: discounted at store to encourage sale |
| Store B | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clothes are sorted and inspected for stains, rips, tears, and smell. If it doesn’t meet their quality standard, clothing is sent to a partnered textile recycling industry • Clothes that aren’t selling: If clothes don’t sell at the store even at an additional discounted price, then they go in a pile that is sent to the textile recycling industry |
| Store C | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clothes that aren’t selling: discounted, free if damaged, or re-donated |
| Store D | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It must be clean, no rips, tears, or stains. Whatever is not kept is re-donated or recycled • Clothes that aren’t selling: discounted at store to encourage sale |
| Store E | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When deciding what clothes to accept for consignment, they do not take basic, plain tops; do not accept office wear such as trousers, loafers, blazers; no fast fashion like Shein, and Romwe • Clothes that aren’t selling: discounted, returned to owner that was selling, or donated |

Donating is such a common method for people to get rid of clothes that it has become a bigger issue. Not only do shoppers utilize donations, but businesses in my research also use donations as a means to get rid of unwanted inventory too. Store C, Store D, and Store E re-donate as options when clothes aren’t selling, passing on the burden to another entity. Since Store B and Store D are donation-based, they are overloaded with a range of low to high quality used goods. This can be a benefit since they are in surplus of supply, but it is also a drawback because there is little control of what items are dropped off at their store. They select whichever items that the sorters are able to get through and select items on based on their minimum quality criteria. The flood of stuff is too much for sorters to go through, and donation centers have little control over the types or amounts of stuff they receive. Although donating offers used goods a

second life, there is a problem with how it is currently practiced due to the rate of production, consumption and disposal. Not everything that is donated is re-circulated back into the economy because some products are simply not re-usable as they are designed cheaply. The high quantity and low quality of clothes makes labor in reclaiming materials burdensome. The reality of the donation system shows how overconsumption of cheaply made products affects labor in the secondhand market, and it is especially concerning as the secondhand market is continually growing.

Reclaiming used clothes is an intensive process that requires many levels of people to determine the physical quality of the clothes. As one example, the general manager for Store B oversees three stores that accept donations for a variety of items: old clothes, books, trinkets, and sometimes furniture. The staff at the store conduct the first sorting, placing all the clothing apparel in a pile for its second round of sorting. The staff then fills a 16-foot box truck with the donated clothing, and a driver hauls these clothes to a warehouse that is about 20 minutes away. Most, if not all, of the action happens at the warehouse. After the clothes arrive, the next step is to inspect the clothes, which requires another group of people to check for rips, stains, tears, and odor. The clothes get sorted and tagged, then priced, and then hung on racks waiting to be sent back to one of the stores. The clothes that don't meet their quality standard are piled up and sent to a textile recycling center. Store B has a partnership with a for-profit textile recycling company and receives a stipend from the textile recycling company for the unwanted clothes. The clothing that is approved is driven back to one of the stores, reentering the economy. Different sets of people are involved throughout the process and time is essential to bring the items back to stock the store floor.

Sorting textile is at the forefront of the work required from donation-based stores. When I asked the Store B manager for her last thoughts, two of the topics she wanted to bring back up again were her astonishment of how much stuff people have and how recycling options for textile are still underdeveloped in the United States. She mentioned, “sometimes, we are not able to sort through all the clothing donations because it’s just so much stuff, so much volume” (Store B manager, personal communications, November 23, 2021). Her experience with reclaiming used clothes for her stores has been burdening due to the trends of consumption and donation rate. Large donation-based secondhand businesses are flooded with so many donations that they don’t have the human resources to sort through it (Store B manager, personal communication, November 23, 2021). And since “technology for textile waste management is not fully realized” (Store B manager, personal communication, November 23, 2021) secondhand stores face the problem of diverting their donated goods to textile recyclers. Recyclers may pass on textile waste to the next possible destination, such as overseas, if they also do not have the infrastructure to process this overwhelming amount of textile.

Certainly, if donation centers did not exist, there would be more products entering the landfill or incinerated. They play a large role in helping divert waste from landfills and are interconnected to the waste management system. Again, donation-based thrift stores accept items that people no longer want and recirculate them back into use, thereby giving used goods a “second” life. However, if the items cannot be sold, the clothing is diverted to a textile recycling center and repurposed for another use. At this point, the future of the garment is unknown as the textile recycling center may not be the last stop. Textile recyclers often go through their own sorting process, dividing the clothes by a grading system, and making determinations on how to repurpose them. Clothes that are of higher grades are resold to thrift stores again which is

noteworthy especially when thinking about donation centers that were unable to sort through everything they receive. The clothes are either resold in North America or sold overseas. Higher grade clothes get another chance for re-use unlike the lower grade clothes that get turned into rags, stuffing, and insulation. Recycled textile can be transformed into post-consumer products including wipers (for cleaning purposes), automotive components, insulation, carpeting materials, yarn, flocking, and more (Hawley, 2006). However, clothes that are not re-used or repurposed end up in the landfill or incinerated, further contributing to global warming due to the release of carbon dioxide emission. Large secondhand clothing stores work hand in hand with textile recycling companies to facilitate the movement of used clothes. Secondhand stores are key players that help facilitate waste.

Awareness of the labor intensity for used clothes is the first step to addressing the drawbacks to the existing infrastructure. Many of my survey participants use donation as a form of clothing disposal. Many people do not know what actually happens to their clothes once they are donated. But as consumers are more informed about the lifecycle of clothes, they have the choice to engage in textile disposal differently. Some businesses have take-back programs to help collect their products for proper re-use or recycling. Some municipalities have textile recycling programs which offers residents to dispose of unwanted clothes, including clothes with rips, tears and stain, to be recycled rather which eases the burden away from donation-based secondhand stores. Policymakers could develop legislations that require producers to be responsible for the products they make, including the proper disposal of them as one option to relieve the amount of stuff entering the secondhand market. Extended producer responsibility (EPR) policies make producers financially or materially responsible for their products (Lifset et al., 2013; Berry 2021). This is one approach that would not only relieve the burden of workers in

the secondhand market, but it would also address the greater waste issues. Enforcing EPR policies would have producers to consider ways to reduce their environmental impact and be part of the solution for reducing waste. Moving towards EPR is a crucial approach to prioritize circularity at the forefront. As more apparel industries are considering their corporate social responsibility and utilizing the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals as a framework for corporate decision making (*THE 17 GOALS / Sustainable Development*, 2022), government officials could be in their window of opportunity to pass legislations that encourage these efforts.

Chapter 8: Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

My research asked how secondhand stores remake people's relationship with communities and things, as well as enable them to engage more closely with the circular economy. I used interviews and surveys to understand perspectives from secondhand store owners, managers, and shoppers. My literature review helped illuminate existing knowledge on shopping motivations, consumption culture, product durability and longevity. I conclude my thesis by answering my research questions based on the evidence I collected and contributing to the field of circularity as it relates to the secondhand clothing market.

Chapter 4 described how secondhand stores can appeal to a wide range of people from different backgrounds by market segmentation. Business owners and managers from this research shared who their target market is and the types of customers that visit their stores. They were able to identify what types of products would appeal to their customers and some were able to provide what socioeconomic class they target. These businesses also differ by their pricing scheme and sourcing method. What I found is that business owners and managers are diversifying the secondhand market by catering their stores to their customer base. I look to Miller and Woodward's study on denim to understand how a commodity, or in this case a market, could become a widespread and preferred option. In other words, the shopper's perception of buying used goods should be no different than buying new. Taken further, buying used goods might even be perceived as a better option when considering environmental impact. Market segmentation, catering to different audiences, can grow the secondhand economy and therefore influence more people to participate in circular activities such as buying used.

Chapter 5 focuses on consumer motivations relating to secondhand shopping. I used Guiot and Roux's and Ferraro et al.'s motivations to categorize my survey results. I found that many people in my research had multiple motivations that encourage them to shop used. This led me to believe that secondhand stores help facilitate people's needs and desires. Shopping used is often associated with the value of thrift, but some find other benefits to secondhand shopping. Although buying used is a money savings opportunity, it also allows people to intentionally avoid traditional or mainstream shopping for ethical, social, or ecological reasons. In addition, people enjoy shopping at secondhand stores as a recreational activity and to search for unique and expressive pieces.

Chapter 6 discusses the many different interactions between secondhand businesses, the general community, customers, people, and their clothes. Secondhand businesses connect to the greater community through philanthropic monetary or clothing donations. Some offer volunteer opportunities to work with people in their neighborhood that want or need volunteer experience. Some of the secondhand businesses establish formal partnerships to properly dispose of waste, such as Store B's partnership with a textile recycling company. Additionally, secondhand stores also develop interpersonal relationships with their regular patrons. Their stores provide a space for people to use, meet up and connect with others. From an individual's perspective, stores are also places of belonging and fosters a sense of trust and reliability. I also looked at my survey participant's relationships with their clothes and why they kept certain clothes the longest. Many of my participants pointed to the fact that their clothes are durable and in good condition still which is why they have kept them. Others pointed to fashion reasons and another group of my participants shared sentiments relating to emotional attachment. In all of these cases, some form of durability must exist in order for a wearer-clothing relationship to grow but this relationship

may be difficult to develop if fast fashion apparel continues to dominate the clothing market . Secondhand stores could facilitate people's relationships with their clothes by utilizing these reasons. Secondhand stores could encourage more secondhand shopping by incorporating emotional durability designs and developing an engaging shopping experience.

Chapter 7 highlights the labor intensity of clothing recovery, especially at donation-based stores. Donation is widely used for people to get rid of unwanted goods who believe that it is a better alternative than throwing it in the trash. People believe that what gets donated will be reused but that is not always the case; some things are simply not reuse-able. This effect has strained donation-based stores' capacities to reclaim used goods due to the high volume and unpredictable quality of donations. Sentiments that were shared by the Store B manager show how overconsumption and lack of recycling and sorting technology improvements have caused a bottleneck of donated goods that need to be managed. Donation centers are crucial places that help facilitate and divert waste to its proper disposal since they are often the first place that unwanted items end up. Uplifting donation centers' crucial role in managing unwanted goods is necessary to start thinking about how consumers, producers, and policymakers can better support these businesses.

This thesis developed an understanding of what roles secondhand businesses play in the waste management system, their community, and people's lives. They cater their store for their targeted audience, giving shoppers an alternative to buying new. Shoppers' reasons to engage with used retail are often associated with frugality, but shoppers' reasons vary from finding unique pieces to add to their wardrobe to addressing environmental and ethical concerns. Additionally, participants in my survey found multiple reasons and benefits to shopping secondhand which further shows how secondhand businesses can meet an individual's multiple

needs and desires. Secondhand businesses' social role extends to the local community and patrons. They are "third places" where patrons can shop, socialize, and connect with others in their neighborhood that further builds a sense of belonging and trust amongst one another. Ultimately, they afford people the opportunities to participate in the CE just by existing. They help reduce textile waste from entering the landfill through clothing recovery, taking on that burden of managing and sorting donated goods. Yet, we are currently living in a predominantly linear economy where the burden of disposing unwanted goods is felt by the secondhand economy. Studying the social impacts of circularity underscores why there is a need to develop effective policies, business practices, and consumer behavior that curtail textile waste and support the circular economy.

Limitations and Future Research

I targeted survey participants that self-identified as secondhand clothes shoppers. Although this sampling was necessary to understand why people shop secondhand, it would have been useful to ask others why they do not shop secondhand. Moving from a linear to a circular economy requires a mass of people for it to happen. Knowing what is stopping people from participating in the secondhand market could help us understand how to encourage them. Access may be one of the factors stopping people from shopping used, and it may be useful to understand how access is a potential limitation to expanding the CE. Access, or lack thereof, affects who can participate in the secondhand market. Factors that may affect access include economic status, physical capacity, distance from a store, transportation options, and time. Overall, a future study that encompasses all shoppers would be useful in understanding people's shopping behavior.

A future study that collected people's age, gender, location, salary, and education might be useful in knowing who engages with the secondhand market more commonly than others. I did not collect personal, demographic information on my participants, so I was unable to draw conclusions based on gender, race, age, or income of my survey participants. Knowing the demographic detail of shoppers can further push researchers to ask who and why people are not participating in secondhand shopping. Many of my participants mentioned critical motivations as reasons to shop used which suggests that awareness and education contributed to people's decision making. A future study focused more explicitly on people's knowledge and awareness might be useful in understanding who and how people engage with the CE, though it is also important to continue to consider other motivating factors.

I did not come across studies on how socioeconomic class correlates with access to physically durable and emotionally engaging products. There is presently a lack of literature on how socioeconomic factors influence the physical, material nature of clothing people buy, and the relationship people develop with their clothing. People may not have the means to acquire physically durable items and therefore may not be able to create meaningful relationships that can help extend the life of material goods. A future study that explores the connection between socioeconomic classes, physical durability, and emotional durability could help us understand the limitations of circular practices.

As the secondhand market is growing, future studies on the online secondhand marketplace would produce new information on what drives people to shop used. Since this research focused on physical stores and how their businesses contribute to their respective communities, it would be interesting to understand the online community and how they exchange goods with one another. The online environment also has a variety of business structures and

platforms that could be explored. Informal exchanges such as Facebook groups and community swaps are forms of circular practices that may also reveal how social networks and online communities support each other's daily lives.

Recommendations

My research findings suggest that policy concepts like the extended producer responsibility (EPR) or manufacturer and retailer take-back programs could widen consumers' disposal options and relieve the secondhand market from over disposal. My research findings showed that many people utilize donation services to discard their unwanted clothes. Creating alternative pathways, such as retail take-back programs, would help consumers have other choices to dispose of their clothes. These programs would also help relieve the textile waste burden from the secondhand market and could divert waste away from landfills. The Store B manager shared how no donation-based stores have the capacity to manage this much textile waste in its current infrastructure system. They are often overworked and understaffed, which further calls on retail companies to develop take-back programs to help manage the textile waste issue.

My research findings suggest that policy focused on creating durable products could further support the secondhand market and help promote a longer life for clothes. Because so many people choose to donate their clothes, producers should create products that are meant to be re-used (Berry, 2021). This means decreasing production of low-quality, throw-away clothes. Designing emotional and physical durability into clothes can help consumers interact with their items longer and would hopefully reduce people's need to replace them. It would alleviate the burden for workers tasked with sorting and disposing other people's waste since the volume of clothes entering the secondhand market would be reduced to re-usable products. Sorters would

be able to quickly make determinations and process the clothes since they would not have to spend too much time inspecting each piece. There is a higher chance that durable products will be re-circulated and re-used because of its condition.

Bringing attention to the social and environmental impacts of textile waste and the secondhand market may help others reconsider their clothing disposal practices and consumption habits. In the meantime, I hope that this thesis will encourage people to consider shopping used, mending old clothes, and sharing resources with friends and family.

Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Introduction

- How long have you worked at this secondhand store?
- How did you get into this business?

Customer relationships

- Do you have a target market for your business, who and why?
- What types of customers do you usually see?
- Have you noticed a shift in customer demographic, or has it been consistent throughout the years?
 - What do you attribute it to? / Why do you think that is?
- What are specific methods or approaches for reaching consumers?
 - How do you know what customers would like to see?

Merchandise

- Where and how do you receive your merchandise/stock?
- How often do you restock your inventory (in a given time frame: week/month/year)?
 - Is there a schedule you follow?
- How many garments, either by number of garment or by pound, do you obtain each month or total in a year?
- What clothes do you retain to sell and what usually gets tossed out?
- What do you do with clothes that can't be sold?

Partnerships

- Do you have partnerships with any companies or organizations, and if so who are they and what does the partnership look like?

Are there anything else you would like to share?

Appendix B: Survey Questions

Multiple Choice Questions

- How many articles of NEW clothing would you estimate you buy in a year?
- How many articles of USED clothing would you estimate you buy in a year?
- Have you shopped for used clothes at a secondhand store before? This includes vintage, re-sale, donation/nonprofit-based, consignment, and by-the-pound
- How often do you shop at a thrift store?
- Do you have a regular thrift store that you go to?
- Do you repair, mend, or alter your clothes?
- What do you do with old clothes that you no longer wear? You may select more than one.

Open-ended questions

- When or why do you shop for used clothing? Please provide as much details as possible.
- What's your favorite part about shopping secondhand? Please provide as much details as possible.
- What is one piece of garment you have kept the longest and why?
- Is there anything else you would like to share about your thoughts and experience on thrift stores and clothes?

Appendix C: Additional Results

From Interviews

In addition to asking my participants who their target markets and customer bases are, I also inquired about how they promote their businesses and reach their audiences. I asked them: what are their specific methods or approaches for reaching consumers? Their responses varied. Store A uses social media and posts some of their inventory on their website to showcase their items. They also participate in outdoor events such as flea markets and vintage markets to promote their store. Store B does not have much of a budget for advertising, so their main outreach is email marketing. They have spent some money on Instagram ads in September for students, however, others (residents) “know [them] from just being in the neighborhood” (Store B manager, personal communications, November 23, 2021). Similarly, Store C expressed that they do nothing specific especially since they are a small business and do not have the budget set aside for advertisements. Store D did not share their advertising budget, but they utilize the store’s Facebook page to communicate news and events happening. The general manager pointed out to me that visitors rely on their social network when they are looking for their store, and others rely on online searches when they are looking to donate children’s clothes: “it’s when they want to shop it’s word of mouth; when they want to donate, it’s usually ‘cause they searched online” (Store D manager, personal communications, February 14, 2022). Out of the five stores, Store E has the most online presence. When I asked the general manager what approaches they take to reach consumers, she said Tik Tok. She said, “we’ve gained so many followers [on Tik Tok]. We’ve gotten so many sales through Tik Tok, like, girls will come in groups and be like ‘I saw you guys on Tik Tok” (Store E manager, personal communications, February 15, 2022).

After discussing how Store E reaches their consumers on social media, the general manager and I spent some time in our interview discussing selling secondhand clothes online. In addition to their brick-and-mortar store, they also sell used clothes online through Instagram but not on their website. She explained, “we’ve had a website for a while, but because everything sells so quickly and the amount of work it takes to make a website listing versus the time it takes for the item to sell is not worth it” (Store E manager, personal communications, February 15, 2022). In contrast, the use of Instagram allows sellers to easily post photos and set a price in a short amount of time, and 30-40% of Store E’s sales are from Instagram. In contrast, when I asked Store D about selling online, she shared,

We just don't have the bandwidth and I also just don't think that the margins are there at the time. I mean it's funny 'cause I belong to a lot of Facebook groups. You know, people that do consignment and resale, and the amount of time to go in to take a picture and post it and track it and keep it separate from your general inventory. It's a lot of work and I'm very curious if people make money, make enough money at it. I mean, we have a very busy shop, even fantastic location. (Store D manager, personal communications, February 14, 2022).

The perspectives expressed by Store E and Store D show their different outlooks on how they can use the online market to boost their businesses. Store D feels confident in the size and location of their store and that they do not have a need for an online marketplace. When I asked others about selling online, Store A shared that they have a website with clothes posted on their website, but other stores did not express any interest in scaling up their online platform to include sales.

From Surveys

Not shown on Figure 1 are 23 uncategorized responses. The responses from the 23 participants focused on responding to the ‘when’ aspect of the original question. 7 participants expressed that they shop secondhand when their old clothes are torn, needs to be replaced and therefore need clothes. One example a participant explained is that they need to add clothes to their wardrobe for changing weather, like winters in Boston, and to replace clothes that have stretched too much and are no longer wearable. 6 participants say that they shop secondhand when they are generally looking for specific clothing items or for a specific event, like a costume or Halloween party. 5 participants explained that they do not shop at thrift stores as often anymore because its inconvenient to get to or because it is not as easily accessible; someone said, “I used to shop consignment more frequently when there was access to a great store nearby. Unfortunately it closed a few years ago.” 2 participants expressed that they do clothing exchange and secondhand clothes from family and friends instead of shopping; however, both participants expressed critical reasons, and one of the two also mentioned economic reasons for their consumption behavior. Another 2 participants shop secondhand because they are re-sellers, meaning they buy secondhand to resell to others. And lastly, one person said they buy secondhand when it is a gift for others.

I asked 92 participants how many articles of new and used clothing they buy in a year. Figure 5 and 2 shows a breakdown of clothes they buy new and used, respectively. For Figure 1, it shows that 32 respondents (35%) bought 0-5 new articles of clothes in a year. 42 respondents (46%) bought 6-15 new articles, 13 respondents (14%) bought 16-30, and 5 respondents (5%) bought 30-40 new articles in a year. My sampling size show that almost a majority bought at least 6-15 new articles a year and a small percentage that bought more than 30-40.

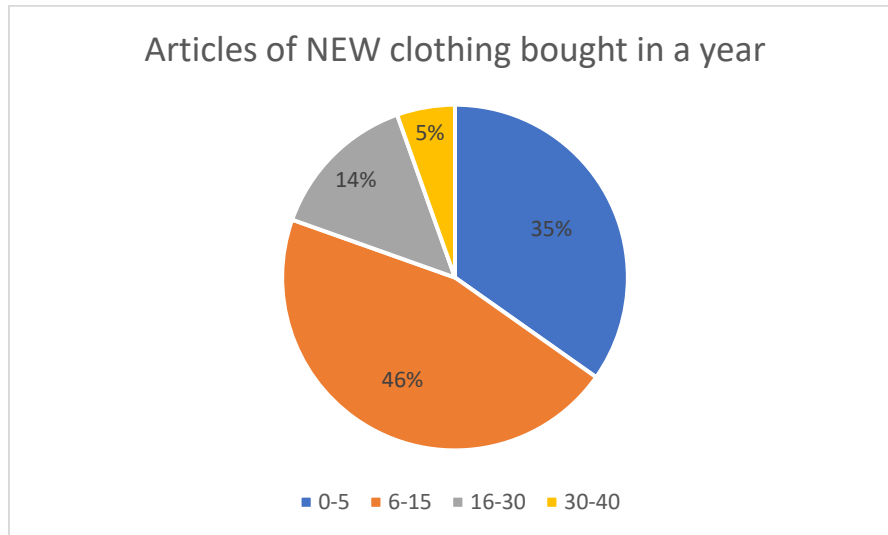


Figure 5: Pie chart displaying results of how many new clothes participants purchase in a year

Figure 6 contrasts from Figure 5 in that more people buy fewer articles of used clothing. 46 respondents (50%) bought about 0-5 articles of clothing a year, followed by 30 respondents (33%) that bought 6-15 articles of used clothing. 9 respondents (10%) bought about 16-30 and 7 respondents (7%) bought about 30-40 articles of used clothing. If we compare the percentage of how many people bought 30-40 items of clothes, slightly fewer people bought more than 30 new clothes than used clothes.

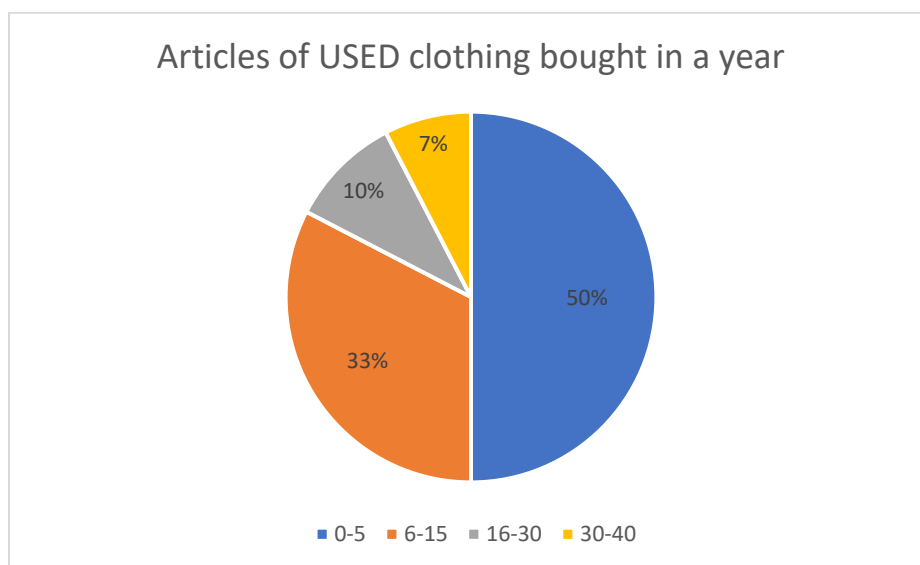


Figure 6: Pie chart displaying results of how many used clothes participants purchase in a year

Figure 7 indicates how often participants shop at thrift stores. The term thrift store is inclusive of different forms of secondhand businesses like consignment, re-sale, etc. 48 respondents (52%) said that less than half of their shopping is at a secondhand business, while 38 respondents (41%) said that more than half of their shopping is done at a secondhand business. 6 respondents (7%) said they have only shopped at a thrift store once. Although the results show that there is a greater portion that shop at traditional retail store more often than thrift stores, this figure also shows that 86 of my participants (93%) have shopped at secondhand businesses more than once in their lifetime.



Figure 7: Pie chart indicating how often participants shop at thrift stores

I asked my survey participants whether they mend, repair, or alter their clothes to know if they interact with their clothes that were beyond purchase and use. Figure 8 is a pie chart that show their responses. Selecting yes means that they do one or more of the activities: repair, mend, or alter clothing. 44 participants (48%) said yes; 24 participants (26%) said maybe; and 24

participants (26%) said no. I wanted to explore whether those that do more of their shopping at a thrift store also engage in these activities. Of the 38 participants that do more than half of their shopping at secondhand stores, 32 said yes or maybe to these activities. This observation, however, is not supported by statistical calculations. When calculating the correlation coefficient to see if the two variables are related to each other, it showed that they are not correlated.

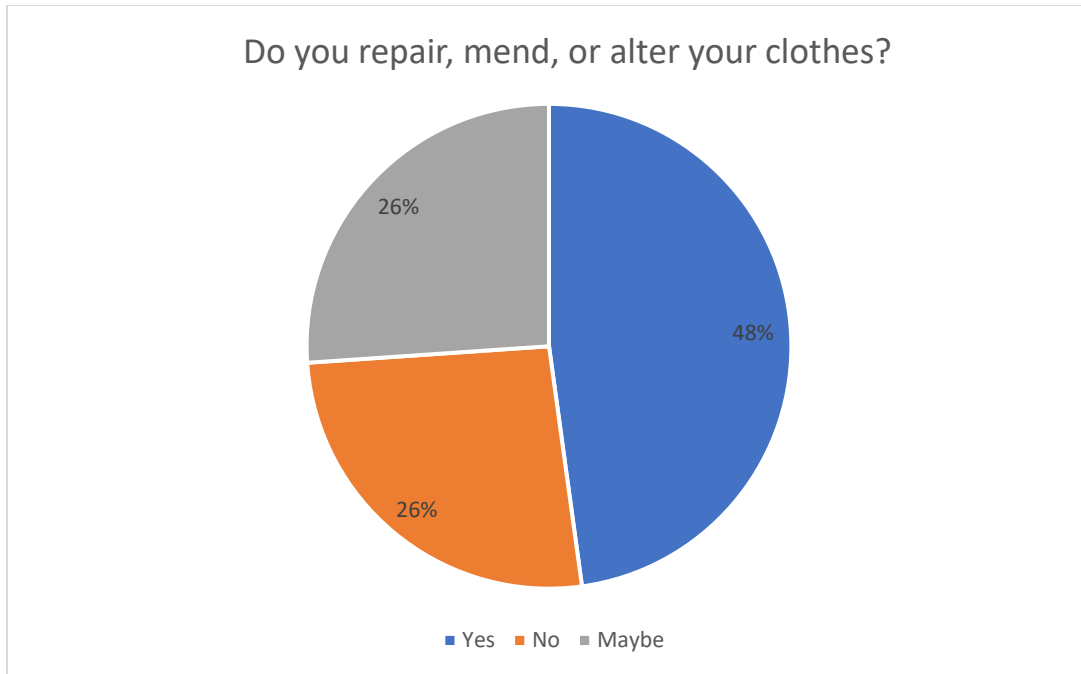


Figure 8: Pie chart of participants that repair, mend or alter their clothes

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