ABSTRACT
Following food, mobility, and household-energy use, the consumption of textiles and fashion in Europe has been identified as the fourth highest environmental pressure category in terms of use of primary resources. Slow fashion advocates argue that it is necessary to reevaluate our relationship with clothes and to reduce overall fashion consumption in affluent countries. This article examines a relatively new practice of voluntary reduction of apparel consumption through the lens of three popular online minimalist fashion challenges that encourage participants to use a limited number of clothes, shoes, and accessories over a certain period. It explores how the initiators of the challenges frame the reasons that lead to downsizing, the benefits from undertaking the challenge and the idea of “good life” as the result of living with less. The findings indicate that rationales for voluntary reduction of apparel consumption are more focused on individual wellbeing than on altruistic concerns. The analysis also suggests that in defining an upper limit in apparel consumption (how many garments a wardrobe should contain), numerical indicators serve as a benchmark rather than a goal.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 12 September 2019
Accepted 11 February 2021

KEYWORDS
Fashion consumption; minimalism; sustainable fashion; consumption corridors

Introduction
The concept of consumption corridors posits that we need to redefine what “good life” is within the maximum levels of consumption justified by the planetary boundaries, the impacts on the “good life” of others, and the minimum levels of consumption required for a life of dignity as defined based on the agreed principles of justice (Di Giulio and Fuchs 2014; Fuchs and Di Giulio 2016; Di Giulio and Defila 2019; Defila and Di Giulio 2020; Fuchs 2020). While the notion has many possible applications in terms of units and scales of analysis, one of the most straightforward applications is by lifestyle domain or consumption practice. Sahakian and Lorek (2018), for example, explored the case of heating larger homes and applied the conceptual lens of consumption corridors to residential space. This article explores possible applications of the consumption-corridors concept to the domain of fashion consumption.

Textile and apparel consumption represent the fourth most greenhouse-gas intensive lifestyle domain in Europe after housing, transport, and food (EEA 2019). Changes to unsustainable apparel-consumption patterns resonate with important discourses on poverty and inequality, environmental and social sustainability, and challenges of overconsumption. This study examines the practices of voluntary reduction of apparel consumption and bottom-up initiatives to define an upper limit to the number of garments owned and used. These lifestyle experiments are examples of public deliberations that attempt to redefine what good life is.

Fashion plays an important role in consumer culture (Meamber, Joy, and Venkatesh 2017). This article uses the term “fashion” in one of its meanings, commonly invoked in popular culture, that equates it with apparel—clothes, shoes, and accessories that people wear. Clothes today serve beyond their functional purpose to protect human bodies from harsh weather conditions—to communicate identity (Crane 2012; Niinimaki 2010), to express creativity (Godart 2014), to display social status (Veblen 1925), and to facilitate belonging to certain subcultures (Hodkinson 2002).

While fashion is not a new social phenomenon, overconsumption of apparel is a recent problem with profound social and environmental implications.¹ With the rise of fast fashion in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the apparel production-
consumption system underwent an unprecedented transformation. The fast fashion-business model moved the industry toward more frequent changes of collections, higher numbers of units produced, and plummeting quality and durability of garments (McArthur Foundation 2017). It instilled a mentality of “disposable fashion” among Millennial and Generation Z consumers in the global North (Fashion Revolution 2017a, 2017b).

Material throughput of the global fashion system has doubled since 2000 (McKinsey 2016). Outsourced mostly to global South countries with poor environmental and labor-protection laws, fast-fashion production evolved into complex supply chains that rely on cheap labor and what some observers have described as “modern slavery” (see, e.g., Minney 2017). In addition, the environmental impacts of fashion include excessive water use and pollution, chemical contamination, carbon-dioxide (CO₂) emissions, and textile waste (Niinimaki et al. 2020).

Contemporary fashion-consumption patterns also mask pervasive inequalities. The main markets that drive the contemporary growth of fast fashion are no longer based in the global North but rather are in the “emerging economies” such as China, India, Brazil, Russia, and Mexico with growing middle classes that have certain lifestyle aspirations (McKinsey 2016). However, in absolute terms consumption of apparel, Europe and North America still exceed the global average more than threefold: 16 versus 5 kilograms (kg) per person per year, respectively (WWF 2017). Another study estimates that Europeans buy 26 kg of textiles per year on average (EEA 2019). Consumers in the global North acquired 60% more clothes in 2015 and kept the garments for half as long compared to 2000 (Greenpeace 2018).

The slow-fashion movement emerged initially as a design- and production-oriented response to injustices in fast fashion-supply chains (Fletcher and Tham 2014). Over the past 5–10 years, activism has evolved to embrace different consumption practices that seek to reduce environmental and social impacts of wanton fashion consumption (Pookulangara and Shephard 2013). Suggested as more sustainable, “slow” alternatives to fast fashion are practices such as buying secondhand, renting, and swapping apparel (Fashion Revolution 2017b). In academic literature, these practices that help extend the garments’ lifespan are generally referred to as “collaborative fashion consumption” (Iran and Schrader 2017).

In the words of British fashion designer, Vivienne Westwood, the slow-fashion approach calls on consumers to “Buy less, choose well, make it last” (BBC 2017). Purchasing fewer garments of higher quality that would pass the test of time is viewed by proponents as an alternative to the frantic acceleration of fashion consumption (Sanhahani 2019). While slow-fashion advocates seem to agree on the need for overall reduction of apparel consumption, perspectives on the size of a “sustainable” wardrobe in terms of number garments vary significantly, as evidenced by multiple online experiments (also called “challenges”).

“Minimalist fashion challenges” are experiments in downsizing wardrobes that aim to help participants eliminate clutter and reduce the number of garments they buy and own. Information and guidelines, as well as engagement options, are usually presented in the form of blogs or posts on social media. The concepts of “minimalism” and “minimalist lifestyles” have been gaining more prominence in popular Western culture recently (Meissner 2019; Kang, Martinez, and Johnson 2021). Echoing the philosophy of a long-standing movement toward voluntary simplicity (Elgin and Mitchell 1977), recent popular self-help books on minimalism question how many possessions one needs and promise to liberate the reader from the perpetual “rat race” by downsizing what one owns and how long one works (Crabbe 2014; Sasaki 2015; Loreau 2017). Similarly, minimalist fashion challenges focus on individual wellbeing and offer participants a “blueprint” to a better life with fewer clothes. The main motivation behind these experiments is to encourage participants to consume differently, re-learning how to buy and use fewer garments but of higher quality and durability and with more options to express personal creativity.

This article analyzes three popular recent online minimalist fashion challenges, all originating from North America, to understand discussions of the upper limits of fashion consumption. It also explores how the initiators frame their motivations toward reducing fashion consumption and the benefits from participating in the challenge. This work contributes to research on sufficiency and sustainable lifestyles by adding to our knowledge about grassroots initiatives to activate deliberations regarding upper limits of consumption in the domain of fashion and apparel. The next section provides a brief and necessarily selective review of the literature on voluntary simplicity and fashion consumption relevant to framing and understanding the minimalist fashion challenges as downsizing experiments. The methods section discusses the grounded theory approach chosen for this study, with details on the sampling procedure, data collection, and analysis. The article then presents results, clustering them into several categories (motivations, benefits, and
“the magic number”), followed by a discussion, including limitations of this study, and conclusions.

Literature review

Practices related to voluntary reduction of apparel consumption have not been studied in much detail, especially the effects of the recent decluttering and “minimalist wardrobe” trends (Tolentino 2020). However, there is a rich literature that addresses similar processes in other lifestyle domains. In the 1970s, a social movement focused on voluntary simplicity emerged in the United States that was defined as an “outwardly simple and inwardly rich” way of life that “embraces frugality of consumption, a strong sense of environmental urgency, a desire to return to living and working environments which are of a more human scale” (Elgin and Mitchell 1977, 2).

Examples of voluntary simplicity practices included giving away or selling unnecessary possessions that cause clutter; consuming simple, easy-to-repair goods that are durable, aesthetic, and made of natural materials; eating simple, healthy foods (possibly home-grown); using less fuel-consuming modes of transportation (e.g., biking, public transport, car-pooling); participating in altruistic political movements (e.g., neighborhood-food cooperatives); drawing support and building a sense of community from nontraditional extended family networks (Leonard-Barton and Rogers 1980). Elgin and Michell (1977) note that similar practices were emerging in European countries, although less was known about them in the academic literature written in English at the time.

Possible reasons for people to engage over the past few decades in the practices of voluntary simplicity have ranged from concerns about broader socioeconomic and political problems to more private motives, such as a “desire to escape the ‘rat race,’ boredom with the job, the desire to live a less plastic life” (Elgin and Mitchell 1977, 16). Environmental and spiritual commitments have also been variously noted as important drivers for adopting voluntary simplicity lifestyles (Etzioni 1999; Craig-Lees and Hill 2002).

Elgin and Mitchell (1977, 12) noted in their original study of voluntary simplicity that it is not to be equated with the “back to nature” movement or with poverty; rather, these lifestyle changes are (were at the time) popular predominantly among urban, white, upper- and middle-class, educated citizens. Living simply does not mean living cheaply—good quality products that last longer than mass-market alternatives usually come with a premium. More broadly, voluntary simplicity philosophy views material possessions as “supportive of, rather than central to, the process of human growth” (Elgin and Mitchell 1977, 5). The degree and nature of material simplification, therefore, would be as diverse as are the ways of expressing human growth.

Gambrel and Cafaro (2010) argue that voluntary simplicity as an attitude and as a virtue contribute to basic individual and societal flourishing, personal freedom and autonomy, acquisition of knowledge, living meaningfully, and protecting non-human beings. Moreover, empirical results (a national survey conducted in Australia) indicates that transitioning toward a simpler life increased happiness (Alexander and Ussher 2012). Cafaro (2001) suggests that adopting voluntary limits on consumption contributes to the idea of “good life.”

Studies have analyzed patterns of engagement among voluntary simplifiers and identified groups based on adoption levels of the practices and philosophy of voluntary simplicity. Etzioni (1999) distinguished among three variations: downshifters, strong simplifiers, and holistic simplifiers. Downshifters are economically well-off citizens who voluntarily give up some consumer goods that they could easily afford but overall maintain a rather rich and consumption-oriented lifestyle. The most common changes that downshifters engage in are reducing work hours, switching to lower-paying jobs, and quitting work to stay home. Motivations of downshifters are not clear-cut and diverse and the patterns of their voluntary simplicity practices are often inconsistent. Strong simplifiers embrace another variation of voluntary simplicity and this group comprises people who have given up their high-paying and stressful jobs, choosing to earn and consume less. Unlike downshifters, strong simplifiers choose to curtail their income and, as a result, substantially change their consumption patterns as opposed to tinkering with some elements of lifestyles. Finally, holistic simplifiers are the most dedicated followers of the ideas of voluntary simplicity. They are motivated by a coherently articulated philosophy and reconfigure their whole life patterns in accordance with the ethos of voluntary simplicity (Etzioni 1999).

McDonald et al. (2006) further explore the diverse variations of voluntary simplicity engagement and identify an intermediary group of beginner voluntary simplifiers, people who adopt some elements of voluntary simplicity lifestyles but are not fully committed to readjusting their consumption patterns. Within this group, the study distinguishes between three types of simplifiers: apprentice simplifiers (on a path toward fully adopting a voluntary simplicity lifestyle), partial simplifiers (content with simplifications in some lifestyle
areas but not committed to broader changes), and accidental simplifiers (undertake some lifestyle changes consistent with voluntary simplicity but do not share broader environmental and ethical motivations).

Clearly, attempts to declutter and simplify lives and lifestyles are not new. “More fun, less stuff” was a principle advocated by the (now closed) Center for New American Dream in the United States (Schor 2008). Efforts to refrain from shopping are captured in numerous books (Levine 2007; Beavan 2009; Dannemiller 2015; Flanders, 2018), which recently adopted the terminology of “minimalism” (Millburn and Nicodemus 2015). However, despite the richness of practical efforts and academic literature on voluntary simplicity, only a handful of studies to date have explored voluntary simplicity practices in apparel consumption.

Wu et al. (2013) examined 834 individual autobiographies and blog entries from The Great American Apparel Diet, an online “support group” for people who wanted to reduce their overconsumption of fashion. The “challenge” not to buy clothes for a year ran between 2009 and 2010 (since then, it has been discontinued and went offline). Wu et al. (2013) identified several general categories of internal and external motivations to engage in voluntary simplicity, as reported by the challenge participants. The most cited were personal motivations (44% of citations). Within this group, a dichotomy of “wants versus needs” was cited 84 times: many participants engaged in in-depth reexamination of their needs in terms of apparel and the “wants” that were imposed by fashion magazines and through other marketing channels. Other citations associated with personal motivations included “use current wardrobe” and “change shopping habits,” as well as “guilt” and “self-improvement/control.” Among participants who were impelled by lifestyle-related motives (22%), the most popular responses were to “do a wardrobe makeover,” to “save time,” and “to cut back on consumption.” Participants acknowledged that they had “too many clothes” and engaged in “general overconsumption.” Financial motives (15%) included references such as “make/save money,” “pay bills/debt,” and “live within means.”

Environmental motivations (10%) were reflected through citations such as “green/eco-friendly,” “reduce carbon footprint,” and “re/upcycle.” Another study by Martindale and Lee (2019) supported the low importance of pro-environmental concerns as a motivation to reduce apparel consumption. Participants of the study (students) believed that sustainability alone was an insufficient reason for adopting minimal transformable wardrobes. Similar findings related to the role of altruistic motives were reported by Park and Armstrong (2019) in relation to collaborative fashion consumption, showing that financial motives drive engagement with clothing resale and rental online platforms rather than environmental and other altruistic concerns.

Ruppert-Stroescu et al. (2015) and Armstrong et al. (2016) explored in-depth the processes, benefits, and barriers to reducing apparel consumption through a Fashion Detox challenge, an educational experiment, which ran in 2012–2013. As part of the challenge, Millennial participants (students of three universities in the United States) had to abstain for ten weeks from buying new clothes and record their experiences and thoughts about these changes in the form of blog entries. The findings indicate that going on a “shopping fast” contributed to enhanced creativity and self-regulation among the participants (Armstrong et al. 2016). Unlike motivations behind actual behaviors of people who voluntarily reduced their apparel consumption studied by Wu and colleagues (2013), participation in the Fashion Detox challenge in 2012–2013 was rewarded with university credits and, thus, was not an example of voluntary simplicity in a classical sense.

More recently, Kidd (2020) adopted the framework of a Fashion Detox challenge and launched it online, first in Scotland and then globally, as a public intervention open to all. Through this research-in-action framework, Kidd analyzed the “lived experiences” of fourteen participants. The study found that participants of the challenge re-evaluated their consumption habits as they noticed the stress caused by owning too much, confronted the misperception of “having nothing to wear,” and cleared out or organized their wardrobes in the beginning of the experiment. Participants of the new online Fashion Detox engaged in conscious exploration of their needs and wants, rediscovering existing clothing and using “slip-ups” as meaningful learning experiences. Finally, findings indicate that the challenge served as a source of personal empowerment as participants confronted their fears and assumptions related to apparel and felt released from the pull of purchasing habits and from internal and external pressures related to frequent purchasing.

To conclude, research on wardrobe-downsizing experiments as expressions of voluntary simplicity philosophy is limited and lacks theoretical frameworks that could help explain the motives and obstacles for adopting practices associated with the reduction of apparel consumption. Empirical research on the minimalist fashion challenges could help shed light on the reasons why people choose to downsize their wardrobes and provide useful
conceptual insights regarding sufficiency thresholds in fashion consumption.

**Methods**

To explore bottom-up online public deliberations on voluntary reduction of fashion consumption, this article adopts an inductive approach that relies on a grounded theory methodology. Grounded theory is often used to explore social phenomena that are recent or not well understood, and when theoretical frameworks to analyze them are missing or incomplete (Glaser and Strauss 1967). As demonstrated by the literature review, there is a lack of empirical research to elicit the social process of voluntary reduction of fashion consumption and associated deliberations on upper limits of consumption, which warrants explorative inductive research to generate pertinent theoretical insights.

Inductive reasoning and exploratory research design, and specifically grounded theory methodology, have been used to study the emerging trends and practices of fashion consumption. For example, Park and Armstrong (2019) apply such an approach to explore motivations for participating in collaborative fashion consumption (actual behavior as opposed to intention and attitudes). Grounded theory helps authors derive from evidence conclusions that are in a way contradictory to prevalent conceptual deliberations about motives that drive consumers to participate in collaborative fashion consumption (i.e., authors conclude that money is the biggest motivation and find almost no support for environmental and sustainability related motives in their study). Hunting and Conroy (2018) apply an exploratory research design and grounded theory to analyze the role of spirituality and stewardship in consumption, including apparel consumption. The study generates theoretical insights into connections between sustainability, self-transcendence, mindfulness, and reduction of conspicuous consumption. To analyze voluntary reduction of apparel consumption, Wu et al. (2013) applied an inductive approach and carried out a thematic analysis of blog entries to identify from the evidence motivations for voluntary simplification. Using grounded theoretical approaches in all three cases allow researchers to make sense of new, emerging practices and to understand linkages among different concepts and relations in the context of insufficiently developed theoretical frameworks.

**Sampling procedure**

This study focuses on examples of online fashion challenges that considered the reduction of apparel consumption (using fewer garments) and that were extensively justified by their initiators (individuals who started the challenges and wrote the guidelines). To select cases for analysis, a systematic search was conducted in January 2019 through two platforms, Google and Instagram. On Google, the keywords “minimalist fashion challenge” were searched. On Instagram, posts with the hashtags #minimalistfashionchallenge and #minimalistfashion were analyzed. While general research through Google gave a broad idea about different initiatives that existed at the time, Instagram helped assess popularity of the challenges by proxy of the number of followers and posts with relevant hashtags. The selection criteria for the challenges were (1) to provide clear, structured guidelines for participants on how to reduce their apparel consumption; (2) to offer detailed information about the initiator’s personal “journey” associated with the challenge; and (3) to have substantial following on social media (individual challenge hashtags and numbers of posts by hashtag—at least 10,000 posts).

Google research identified six initiatives that were active at the time, aimed to help participants reduce their apparel consumption, and were described as “minimalist fashion challenges.” Two challenges were discarded due to lack of consistent guidelines and information about their initiators (“7 × 7 Remix” and “Styling Your Capsule,” initiators unknown). “Shop Your Closet,” another challenge, which has substantial social media following, detailed guidelines, and information about the initiator was also set aside because its initiator does not engage meaningfully in a discussion over how much clothing is enough, accepting any preexisting closets and any number of items a person may want to keep (Chivers 2019). The key goal of this initiative is to curb the shopping and spending habits of participants by banning apparel shopping for a year—as opposed to gradually reducing the size of the wardrobe and the number of garments one owns.

Upon applying the selection criteria, three minimalist fashion challenges were selected for the analysis (which were also the most popular of the six initially identified cases based on social media following): “Project 333,” “Un-Fancy Experiment,” and “10 × 10 Challenge.” An overview of the challenges is presented in Table 1.

All three challenges position themselves as experiments in minimalism. Project 333 is called “a minimalist fashion challenge,” while the Un-Fancy initiative started as an experiment in “minimalism.” Vosburgh (10 × 10 Challenge) writes that she started her challenge “to find contentment with less” and the main motto of Project 333 is to “be more with less.” Each challenge assigns a certain numerical
value to the maximum number of garments to use over a specific period, essentially testing and discussing how much clothing is enough.

All three challenges originated in North America (two in the United States and one in Canada). Their geographical scope is more difficult to define; available online, guidelines may be applied by anyone anywhere in the world, with or without reporting or registering their participation. The original blogs were written in English so anyone with knowledge of the language and access to the Internet could apply the guidelines to their consumption practices.

### Data collection

Once the cases were selected, blogs (websites) for each challenge were analyzed in detail. Unlike fragmented presence on Instagram, which is constrained by the short length of post descriptions, blogs provide space for initiators to express themselves more freely and to provide coherent narratives and personal stories. Only texts written by the challenge initiators were included in the analysis; comments and media coverage were not taken into consideration. The initial data set (collected in March 2019) included fourteen blog entries (texts) from three websites (five from Project 333; five from Un-Fancy; and four from 10 × 10 Challenge), at total length of approximately 4,900 words and written between 2010 and 2019.

The sample included entries in which initiators talk about personal journeys, as well as guidelines for participation and “troubleshooting” posts in which issues that may arise for first-time participants are discussed. It is important to note that some of the texts that were included in the initial analysis in March 2019 have since then been removed. For example, Project 333 initiator Courtney Carver published a book entitled *Project 333* in 2020 and deleted some content previously available for free on her blog, while also moving Project 333 to another website.²

All three initiators of the selected challenges received an invitation for an interview but decided not to take part in the study (two refused and one did not respond). To complement the findings of the blog analysis, one additional source of information used for this study is an interview with Sebastian Juhola, founder of a popular Instagram account called The Minimalist Wardrobe (@theminimalistwardrobe, over 228,000 followers as of January 2021). Juhola has first-hand experience in managing a social media account that advocates for the reduction of apparel consumption and provided useful insights from a practitioner’s point of view on the topic of wardrobe downsizing. The interview took place in March 2019; it was recorded, transcribed, and coded following the same procedure as the texts obtained from the blogs. The insights from the interview helped interpret and enrich some findings that emerged from the analysis of the minimalist fashion challenges.

### Data analysis

Following standard grounded theory procedure, the data analysis consisted of coding data, writing memos, and eliciting theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1997). Data were analyzed through open and selective coding. In open coding, text analysis inductively revealed many concepts that were discussed by the initiators of the three challenges. Codes with similar content were grouped and several general categories (themes) emerged, including themes of motivation, benefits, and maximum number of garments. At this stage, memos were also written for the emerging themes. The core categories were then further developed through selective coding and by constant comparative analysis of data and memos. The final step of the analysis was integrating, refining, and writing up theoretical insights to detail the experiments in wardrobe downsizing.

### Results

Three themes common for all three minimalist fashion challenges emerged inductively from the analysis. First, “motivation”—discussions why initiators decided to engage in a decluttering experiment. Second, “benefits”—reflections on the positive outcomes of downsizing. And finally, “the magic number”—deliberations regarding the maximum number of garments to use. Results, clustered by theme, are presented below in more detail.

#### Motivation

All three initiators discuss, in one form or another, the reasons that prompted them to conduct a

---

Table 1. Summary of the minimalist fashion challenges selected for the analysis (as of March 2019).

| Challenge name, Instagram handle, website | Initiator          | Followers | Founding year | Location      | Idea                                      |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------|---------------|---------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Project 333 @theproject333.com           | Courtney Carver    | 127 K     | 2010          | USA (Utah)    | 33 clothing items for 3 months            |
| Un-Fancy Experiment @caroline_joy www.un-fancy.com | Caroline Joy     | 119 K     | 2014          | USA (Texas)   | 37 clothing items for 3 months            |
| 10 × 10 Challenge @leevosburgh www.stylebee.ca | Lee Vosburgh   | 78 K      | 2015          | Canada (Toronto) | 10 clothing items for 10 days              |

² For more information, see the original blog entries removed from Project 333’s website.
personal downsizing experiment. According to the blogs, initiators were driven by “frustration” or “dissatisfaction” with personal style, troubling shopping habits, and general quality of life.

The first motive common for all three challenges is frustration with style before the challenge. Following fleeting fashion trends, challenge initiators report to having shopped on sales and bought clothes without careful consideration on an impulse. As a result, they ended up with closets “full of cheap clothes but nothing to wear” (Joy 2019). Deciding what to wear in the morning became a daunting task, which caused initiators additional stress and feelings of inadequacy:

I was constantly trying to “keep up” with fast fashion trends, buying the latest “it” anything, filling creative voids with stuff and never feeling satisfied by any of it. I felt lost in my sense of self and embarrassed about how much time, money and headspace I was spending on clothes. In a nutshell, my closet problems amounted to an inability to escape the revolving door of trends; overspending and shopping too much; an undefined sense of personal style. (Vosburgh 2019)

Frustration with excessive spending and troubling shopping habits was another common motive that drove initiators to downsize their wardrobe. All three challenges aimed at curbing “mindless shopping habits” (Joy 2019) of the initiators: buying clothes brought short-term satisfaction but did not make them happier in the long run. On the contrary, vast volumes of apparel and the cumulative bills for clothes generated frustration. All three noted that they resorted to shopping as a reward or consolation to handle emotional distress, fatigue, or frustration. Moreover, desire for more (consumption) resulted in excessive workload, heightened stress levels, and poor self-care.

Two initiators also reported broader dissatisfaction with the quality of life before downsizing, “general feelings of overwhelm and discontent” (Vosburgh 2019), which are linked closely with the general levels of wellbeing of the initiators. Carver reflected on deeper meanings behind buying clothes:

If you are overwhelmed and under-inspired, I know how you feel. I’ve been there. I’ve worked too hard, spent too much, and slept too little. I spent much of my adult life tired, full, stressed and sick. I always wanted more or thought I needed more to be happy, but I’ve changed my ways. (Carver 2019)

Apparel promises to fulfill the needs to feel and to be perceived by peers in a certain way. However, wanton consumption on impulse and above a certain threshold (in terms of both number of garments and expenses) not only does not contribute to the satisfaction of these needs; it hinders it.

I rarely bought clothes because I actually needed more clothes. I had plenty. Instead, I purchased clothing to feel a certain way and to be perceived a certain way... to prove myself. I wanted to feel smart, beautiful and loved. I wanted other people to think I was those things too. I tried to prove who I was by what I wore and by what I accomplished. The problem was that there was always more to prove and eventually I forgot who I was in the process. (Carver 2019)

Benefits

Another important theme that emerged from the blogs is a discussion about the benefits of reducing consumption of apparel, which represents an important aspirational side of the challenge. By discussing benefits, initiators shared personal stories of what worked for them and how they experienced the positive change, in a way that would attract prospective participants to engage in the challenge. The key messages advocated by the initiators are participant-centered and focused on how much participants’ wellbeing (in its different forms) would improve from living with less. Two main groups of benefits emerged from the analysis: mental/emotional benefits and financial benefits.

What initiators emphasized the most were mental and emotional benefits that came from living with less. All participants mentioned eliminating stress from clutter and frustration over their inflated wardrobes. By reducing the number of garments they owned, participants were able to enjoy more calm and peace of mind in their daily lives. For example, one blog entry noted that the concept of a “capsule wardrobe” dates back to the 1970s but has recently come to the spotlight alongside Marie Kondo’s decluttering method and a general minimalist aesthetic (Stanton 2020):

Less clutter, more calm. To me, capsuling is like a yoga practice – it brings a calm + peace into my life that spreads into other areas, like my home and the way I spend my time. (Joy 2019)

Part of the emotional benefits is satisfaction with the newly found style that gives space for creative self-expression and contentment with owning less. Joy claims that after her experiment she became “more content, more confident, and more in-tune with [her] personal style than ever before” (Joy 2019). Decluttering, according to the blog initiators, brings benefits that transcend simple closet optimization and provides space to discover what is important in life and to improve personal wellbeing:

Living with less creates time and space to discover what really matters. Through decluttering, and focusing on the best things instead of all the things, you can create a life with more savings and less or
no debt, more health and less stress, more space and less stuff, and more joy with less obligation. (Carver 2019)

Enhancing creativity and positivity through the process of eliminating unnecessary choices and reducing the number of options (of what to wear) on a daily basis was another important benefit mentioned. Initiators portrayed downsizing and capsule practices as “fun” and “positive” experiences that allow participants to express their creative side:

More fun, more fun! This one might be the most important. I capsule because I like it—it’s fun! (Joy 2019)

Initiators reported that limiting the number of garments they owned and used allowed them to understand what they like or prefer to wear, to learn more about what fits them, and, eventually, to find their personal style. Vosburgh (2019) states that by doing the 10 × 10 Challenge multiple times, she was able to “define [her] personal style and to feel good about every addition to [her] wardrobe.” According to Vosburgh, other people who did the challenge communicated similar feelings: “I gained a better sense of my personal style.” “I had a style breakthrough and found a new silhouette or look I would have never tried but love.” These are the takeaways of participants of the 10 × 10 Challenge, as reported by Vosburgh on her blog (Vosburgh 2019).

As a proxy to achieve “minimallism” and to find one’s style, initiators engaged directly with a concept of a capsule wardrobe. Joy (2019) defines “a capsule” as a “a practice of editing your wardrobe down to your favorite clothes (clothes that fit your lifestyle + body right now), remixing them regularly, and shopping less often and more intentionally.” The purpose of a capsule is to simplify the life of its owner by mindfully curating items of good quality and good fit that can be combined easily to form several outfits. According to the blogs, having a capsule can free space in the closet, shorten the morning routine by eliminating decisions of what to wear, and help find the right style for the owner.

Carver, who started the oldest of three challenges in 2010 and provides the most in-depth analysis of the process behind it, explores the topic even further. She outlines seven “invisible” benefits of what she calls “a life of simplicity” that contribute to participants’ happiness:

1) under-reacting (as opposed to busy, complicated and reactionary lifestyle); 2) improved self-care; 3) improved health (by proxy of eliminating a large part of stress from life, such as debt and clutter); 4) more engaged relationships (by proxy of unplugging from digital hyper-connectedness and layers of information); 5) hopeful life; 6) massive freedom; and 7) benevolence. (Carver 2019)

Another category of benefits from downsizing reported by the initiators includes discussions about financial aspects of curbing fashion consumption. Vosburgh (2019) says that after doing the 10 × 10 Challenge she was able to “spend less time, effort and money on clothes” and to “save money and spend more time enjoying the moments that matter.” Joy (2019) mentions “ditching a shopping habit” and “spending smarter” as the benefits from doing the Un-Fancy capsule experiment. Carver suggests that through Project 333 participants can “create a life with more savings and less or no debt” (Carver 2019).

To tackle overspending on apparel, initiators propose to the participants to focus on what they already have, choosing from existing closets, and, counter-intuitively to some, letting some of the garments go. Simplifying life starts by taking stock of what one owns, before engaging into more mindful shopping practices. All challenges advocate for intentionality in shopping habits and for a “mindful” approach to filling closets. If participants need to buy new clothes, initiators of the challenges suggest first to identify what really works for the person (“find the style”) and then buy fewer garments of better quality. Carver (2019), for example, suggests that “having one well-made version of something will be far better than 10 knock-offs.”

The “magic” number

All three minimalist fashion challenges propose a maximum number of garments (clothes, shoes, and, in some cases, accessories) for participants to use during a specific period (see Table 1). The number is essentially based on a logical estimate of how many units from each apparel category initiators would need. Joy discusses the reasoning behind her choice of 37 items to wear over three months in detail:

Why 37? After trying out different numbers, I settled on 37 because of how it broke down in each category. For example, I knew I wanted 9 pairs of shoes, 9 bottoms, and 15 tops. Then the remaining 4 were just enough for 2 dresses and 2 jackets/coats. To me it feels generous yet minimal. (Joy 2019)

Following a similar commonsense approach, Carver (2019) lists the garments she initially kept for her first Project 333, and there were 33 of them to use over three months. She acknowledges that in geographical locations with strong seasonal weather differences apparel required for cold winter months will likely be different from the 33 items used in the summer. Therefore, Project 333 does not require to downsize the whole wardrobe to 33 items in total.
but to choose 33 pieces to wear over three months. The rest, as she suggests, can be stored elsewhere, “out of sight,” or disposed of.

Both Project 333 and Un-Fancy Capsule Challenge emphasize that there is “no magic number” of garments one should keep or discard. According to both Carver and Joy, they suggest numbers 33 and 37 (of items to wear per season) because they worked best for them. Other people may choose a different total number—as well as count by clothing category—that best reflects their lifestyle and aspirations. Higher and lower numbers are also a place to start engaging into living with less. Flexibility is central to how initiators treat the “upper limit” of apparel consumption:

The point of this is just to try something new if we don’t like our current closet situation—it’s not about getting obsessed with a number. If 37 isn’t your thing, find a number that’s right for you. It’s not about rules or numbers or having the smallest closet out of all of your friends. It’s about trying something new, having fun, and being open to a different way of thinking about your stuff. (Joy 2019)

Although she does not engage directly with discussing the choice of ten garments for her 10-day challenge, Vosburgh also emphasizes the importance of flexibility in approaching the process:

Don’t stress! If something isn’t working, you can swap it out at any time. It’s more about learning than perfection! (Vosburgh 2019)

Initiators agree that initially downsizing a wardrobe may appear discouraging and unrealistic to some prospective participants, especially those who are active shoppers and buy clothes to pass time. They suggest not fixating on the number but rather on the process of transformation that leads to overall reduction of garments in use. For example, Carver remarks:

If you just started Project 333, dressing with less may be a struggle. When I first started this project in October of 2010, I didn’t think I would survive with only 33 items in my closet. It’s amazing how easy it is to get used to a new normal. Today, it’s a challenge for me to use all 33 items. (Carver 2019)

Contentment with less, and the empowerment it creates, is emphasized by all the initiators. Vosburgh (2019) shares that she has been able to achieve the goal she set for the process to “find contentment with less” and that other participants of the 10 × 10 Challenge also commonly reported at the end of the experiment discovering that “I really don’t need a huge closet (or to shop a lot) to satisfy my style.” Contentment with less is also fused with creativity as fewer options require participants to experiment with what they have, find new combinations, and wear things they own in new and unexpected ways:

- Less options, more creativity. Keeping a capsule is a powerful reminder that I can do more than I think I can with less. (Joy 2019)

The main purpose of setting a maximum number is to limit options and only keep garments that participants enjoy wearing (adjusted to differences in lifestyles). Using fewer garments encourages participants to be content with less—and, as a result, happier:

A few years ago, I used to dream about a big, beautiful walk-in closet to hold more stuff. Today, I could easily store my clothing and accessories without a closet (and I am so much happier). (Carver 2019)

Evolution is another feature of the challenges that demonstrates initiators’ constant reflection on the process of downsizing and on their role in it. All three of them describe how their views and methods of doing the challenge have changed over time: projects transformed since their inception as a response to lessons learned from initiators’ personal experiences. They contend that evolution is normal, and participants should expect that their views and ways of engaging with the challenge will change along the way:

- It used to be more about rules, but now it’s about intentionality. It used to be about minimalism, but now it’s about mindfulness and moderation. I used to limit my closet to a specific number, but now I go with what feels right. I used to get caught up on having a perfect, “finished” wardrobe, but now I celebrate that it’s a dynamic, ever-evolving work in progress. I used to do a capsule to curb my shopping habit, but now I just do it for fun. (Joy 2019)

Since starting Project 333 as a personal blog to share a fashion experiment in 2010, Carver developed the idea further. She created a blog called Be More With Less dedicated to “life of simplicity,” (which incorporated Project 333, and published two books (Soulful Simplicity (Carver 2017) and Project 333: The Minimalist Fashion Challenge That Proves Less Is So Much More (Carver 2020)). What started as a clothing experiment evolved into a more general philosophy, way of life for the initiator—and a new occupation (as writer and speaker).

Vosburgh, who started with a simple experiment of a “shopping fast,” moved on to conduct an in-depth exploration of various aspects of her “troubling” shopping habits, personal style, and closet curation. After reportedly doing the 10 × 10 Challenge more than a dozen times, she developed a list of helpful tools and exercises for her blog readers, which cover different aspects of fashion consumption, such as “Going on a Shopping Fast,” “Considering Your Style Story,”
“Identifying Shopping Triggers,” and “Conducting a Closet Edit.” The challenge evolved over time, as the initiator was critically assessing its various dimensions.

Discussion

The minimalist fashion challenges discussed in this article represent experiments in voluntary reduction of apparel consumption. This practice fits into a broader philosophy of the voluntary simplicity movement, although none of the three initiators make this connection explicit on their blogs. According to Etzioni’s classification (1999), initiators of the three challenges fall into the category of “downshifters”: relatively well-off middle-class professionals who can afford rich consumption-oriented lifestyles but choose to reduce their consumption of some goods (apparel). As Etzioni suggests, downshifters’ engagement into voluntary simplicity practices is fragmented and often inconsistent. The experiments are focused on wardrobes and reducing fashion consumption, without providing much indication of whether initiators engaged in similar simplification practices in other lifestyle domains.

Within the classification of McDonald et al. (2006), challenge initiators qualify as “beginner voluntary simplifiers.” Among the three initiators, however, Carver may be categorized as an “apprentice simplifier” based on the evolution of her views on reducing fashion consumption into a broader philosophy of “life of simplicity.” Carver left her stressful job and reduced her work hours in the years following the beginning of Project 333, which is consistent with the belief she advocates for that “less is more.” Joy and Vosburgh, based on the data available on their blogs, fit better into a subcategory of “partial simplifiers.” Their wardrobe-downsizing practices were well thought through and consistent but, according to data available on their blogs, limited to the domain of apparel consumption.

Drivers for downsizing

The key motive that drove Carver, Joy, and Vosburgh to downsize their wardrobes was defined as “frustration” and “discontent.” These women were unhappy with their personal style, overspending, and, more broadly, their quality of life. Reasons that prompted them to start downsizing experiments, thus, were centered on their personal well-being and happiness.

These results are consistent with the findings of Wu et al. (2013) who indicate that personal motives, such as “self-improvement/control,” “changing shopping habits,” and financial motives such as “save money” and “pay bills/debt,” were central to the decisions of participants to engage with the Great American Apparel Diet experiment. More broadly, discontent with the quality of life, excessive levels of stress, and loss of a sense of control over one’s spending also fit with the voluntary simplicity literature, which suggests that voluntary simplifiers try to reduce stress associated with long work hours required to afford continuous consumption (Elgin and Mitchell 1977; Etzioni 1999).

As a result of doubling apparel consumption over the past two decades (McKinsey 2016), middle-class consumers (mostly women) have faced a new problem of clutter that is best captured by a popular saying “Nothing to wear and nowhere to store.” Studies in psychology have shown a strong negative effect of possession clutter on perceived wellbeing and on life satisfaction (Roster, Ferrari, and Jurkat 2016; Ferrari and Roster 2018). Storage space of an average dwelling puts a cap on the number of garments one can own and store. Yet, consumers continue to buy more, ignoring physical limitations of their homes.

The success of Marie Kondo’s method to tidying homes (Kondo 2014) was not accidental: the book came out at the perfect moment when clutter from overconsumption, including from fast fashion, reached a new peak. All ecosystems have ways of disposing and managing their waste matter. Our homes, to function well, cannot store more possessions than their physical capacity, especially if many of those possessions are not in use. The initiators of the minimalist fashion challenges suggest limiting the amount of clothes, shoes, and accessories and getting rid of the excess to address this problem.

Discussing needs, wants, and the “good life”

The benefits that initiators report to have experienced after completing one of the minimalist fashion challenges mirror these motives and fall into two groups: mental/emotional benefits and financial benefits. By listing positive outcomes from wardrobe downsizing, initiators essentially discuss what good life is, at least in relation to how we dress. Reducing and rethinking wardrobes results in decreased stress levels and debt and enhanced satisfaction with what one owns, general contentment with less, and creativity. This finding supports the dominant theoretical perspective in the literature that good life, at least in the current context of the global environmental crisis, requires breaking the vicious circle of overconsumption by more affluent groups of people, reducing overall levels of consumption, reconsidering our needs and wants, and setting limits to what individuals and groups of people should consume.
The challenging distinction between “needs” and “wants” makes fashion an interesting domain to apply the framework of consumption corridors. In its various forms, fashion satisfies all nine protected needs (Di Giulio and Defila 2019), which proves its relevance to the debate on defining the essence of good life. As a satisfier, fashion requires both natural and social resources, which are limited. Global Fashion Agenda (2017) highlights that the fashion industry has already breached several planetary boundaries beyond the safe operating space, including CO₂ emissions, land use, and waste creation.

It is a common understanding that desires (wants) drive unnecessary, excessive, and avoidable overconsumption of fashion in the global North (Wu et al. 2013; Kidd 2020). In theory, therefore, distinguishing between “needs” and “desires” could help define an equitable and sustainable range for the minima and maxima limits of apparel consumption. Yet, demarcating between needs and desires in this area is extremely difficult: a set of identity-related practices, consumption of fashion reflects a wide array of individual preferences, characteristics, and circumstances. “Enough fashion” is different for different people, if defined subjectively. What a middle-class woman living in California subjectively feels she “needs” to satisfy her fashion style will differ significantly from what a male factory worker in Dhaka requires to satisfy his clothing needs.

This perspective is consistent with findings from other lifestyle domains that call for a nuanced approach to defining needs. For example, research on energy poverty has shown that elderly and less mobile populations need warmer homes than younger people (Walker and Day 2012). In apparel consumption, too, there are groups that require more clothes to fulfill their needs than others. For example, some people with disabilities (e.g., chronic skin conditions) need more clothes due to frequent changes and washes, which wear clothes out faster (Laitala and Klepp 2019). However, this is not the group that drives overconsumption of fashion; middle-class women in the global North, who systematically buy more apparel than they need, can afford, and have place to store, are the source of the dilemma. This is also the target group that can do without most of these extra clothes, shoes, and accessories—if only they make an effort to rethink this dependency on short-term satisfaction and reflect on their true needs and desires, according to the initiators of the minimalist fashion challenges analyzed in this article.

The pitfalls of superficial subjective definition of needs in apparel consumption may be overcome though collective experiments and in-depth individual reflections. Bottom-up explorations, such as minimalist fashion challenges, help participants arrive to some common understanding and benchmarks in terms of number of garments and logic of downsizing wardrobes that enhances wellbeing. Reexamination of what one needs versus what one wants plays a critical role in these collective experiments and individual reflections on personal consumption practices. Realization that one buys and owns more clothes than one needs is a milestone toward voluntary reduction of apparel consumption, according to the findings from this study, and this assessment is supported by the work of Wu et al. (2013) and Kidd (2020). Collective deliberations on upper limits of apparel consumption, therefore, are deeply intertwined with personal reflections on “how much is enough” and could provide an avenue for a large-scale shift toward sufficiency in clothing.

Despite this positive prospect, we should be cautious regarding the potential effects of transforming unsustainable apparel consumption practices in the global North. Due to population increase, overall apparel consumption is expected to rise by 63%, from 62 million tons today to 102 million tons in 2030 (Global Fashion Agenda 2017). In a world with more people, fulfilling everyone’s needs for clothing in an equitable manner, even at the minimum, may already push the industry beyond the planetary boundaries in terms of resource use and impacts. To complicate things even further, the key markets that drive the growth of fast fashion today are the emerging economies—China, India, Brazil, Russia, and Mexico (McKinsey 2016). The expanding middle classes in these countries may no longer be buying clothes to fulfill their needs and rather consume based on their desires. Similar to the case of sharing climate change emission-reduction burdens, however, it would not be fair for the affluent countries with saturated fast-fashion markets to demand or expect any changes from emerging economies that are following the exact same path that the global North took twenty years ago.

**Upper consumption limits**

The third theme that emerged from the analysis centered on the maximum number of garments to use during the time of the challenge. This discussion can be interpreted as an example of bottom-up deliberations on upper apparel-consumption limits. Challenge initiators voluntarily limited the number of garments they used (33 or 37 items for three months and ten items for ten days), indicating these numbers as a suggestion for prospective challenge participants. To arrive at this determination,
initiators used commonsense approaches to define what worked for them, but they emphasize that there is no “magic” number, one-size-fits-all solution that should once and for all define how many pieces a wardrobe should have. On the contrary, participants are encouraged to decide on a wardrobe size that works for their lifestyle and goals. Flexibility in approaching the upper limit of garments to use signals an attempt from the challenge initiators to be inclusive and relatable to as large an audience as possible.

In discussing upper apparel-consumption limits, minimalist fashion challenges rely on numbers as benchmarks rather than the goal. They should help lead the process of transforming participants’ relationship to clothes and learning to be content with less. The exact number, however, is neither fixed nor meaningful on its own. For consumption corridors, this finding means that bottom-up deliberations of upper consumption limits in fashion discourage “hard limits” and support a negotiated strategy toward establishing an acceptable range as an objective for reducing apparel consumption.

**What is missing?**

It is worth mentioning what the analysis did not reveal, especially considering the extant literature and what might have been expected to be present in the blogs. Surprisingly, none of the three initiators discussed explicitly environmental or sustainability concerns as part of their motivations or as benefits from doing the challenge. This may seem counterintuitive, considering clear connections between reduced and more mindful consumption of apparel and sustainability in terms of environmental and social justice implications—linkages actively communicated by global advocates for a fair and sustainable fashion system (e.g., Fashion Revolution’s #whomademyclothes campaign). After all, environmental considerations have arguably played an important role in the voluntary simplicity motives and philosophy (Etzioni 1999; Beavan 2009). Wu et al. (2013) found some environmental concerns present among motivations for voluntary reduction of apparel consumption. Yet, similar to engagement in collaborative fashion consumption (Park and Armstrong 2019), it appears that the key drivers to downsize wardrobes, reported by minimalist challenge initiators, are primarily person-centered.

On one hand, this gap may be explained by the limitations of the selected sources. Since this study looks only at three minimalist fashion challenges (even if the most influential ones in English), its findings are confined to the interpretations that the initiators chose to share. Thus, they may not necessarily represent the views of all fashion downshifters, including those who followed the challenges analyzed in this article. Or, perhaps, the initiators of the challenges felt that these reasons, that resonated the most with them, would also attract the most followers and participants.

On the other hand, it may signal an important trend that explains actual behavior of fashion downshifters, as opposed to intentions and attitudes. People downsize, first and foremost, for self-interest, personal reasons and not to save the planet. This echoes an assessment provided by Sebastian Juhola, the founder of The Minimalist Wardrobe account on Instagram. Juhola, who is based in Finland, acknowledged the important role that altruistic concerns play in motivating people to downsize their wardrobes and to reduce their consumption of fashion. However, he also contended that the key reasons why people engage in minimalist clothing challenges are in pursuit of the personal benefits that the change promises. According to Juhola, people act primarily out of self-interest but publicly justify their choices through an altruistic lens. Personal benefits are responsible for the popularity behind minimalism but then sustainability is something that people like to emphasize. “[It’s] more acceptable to justify your lifestyle with an altruistic perspective” (Juhola 2019).

Furthermore, none of the three blogs discussed the social implications of the minimalist fashion challenges. For example, reflections on how reduced consumption would affect others, including people who make, sell, repair clothes, or work in textile recycling and disposal, are missing. Moreover, while initiators deliberate on what is the most one should own, the lower consumption limit is not addressed. This is not surprising since the initiators and the participants of the minimalist fashion challenges are predominantly middle-class women from wealthy countries frustrated with their overconsumption of fashion. Discussing what is the least one should own (a minimum for a decent life) is simply not a relevant concern for them, at least not as part of the challenges they propose. This finding is important for deliberations on consumption corridors in fashion because it demonstrates that, if they exist, bottom-up discussions on the minimum levels of apparel consumption will need to be sought elsewhere.

**Limitations**

This study has some important limitations. First, data for the analysis was gathered from only three blogs. Although these are the most relevant and influential examples of the online minimalist fashion...
challenges that exist today in English, it is important to acknowledge that they represent a North American perspective on downsizing wardrobes (all three initiators are based in the United States and Canada) and have a limited geographical reach due to language constraints. Conducting similar research on a larger scale (e.g., Instagram posts through data mining) or in other languages may generate different results. Second, as part of the grounded theory methodology, coding of the data was performed only by the article author, which may result in some subjective interpretations of data.

Conclusion

The analysis of three minimalist fashion challenges indicates that the main drivers and benefits of apparel-consumption reduction are focused on personal wellbeing. The initiators attempt through their experiments to redefine the idea of good life and all three suggest that living with less is a path to happiness. Interestingly, the initiators in no way discuss the social or environmental implications of their experiments. This finding is relevant to public deliberations on consumption limits. It suggests that a more effective entry point for such discussions may be individual wellbeing, narrowly defined as personal emotional, mental, and financial benefits, rather than environmental and social justice concerns.

From the perspective of consumption corridors, the minimalist fashion challenges make a case that people’s needs can be satisfied with a relatively small number of matching, good quality garments that can serve the owner for a long time. Inflated, cluttered wardrobes are the result of attempts to satisfy fleeting desires, not needs, be it through buying into the latest fashion trend or to satisfy an impulse triggered by a favorable price. The act of clearing one’s wardrobe invites challenge participants to uncover their needs and to separate them from desires by questioning what they wear and why.

The analysis suggests that there is no “magic number” when it comes to defining the upper limits of fashion consumption. Initiators emphasize flexibility and evolution in approaching the challenge, suggesting to participants to “find the number that works for you.” This approach aims for inclusiveness and acknowledges that different people need different (amounts and kinds) of things. In the context of consumption corridors, it means that putting numerical value on the upper limit of apparel consumption may not be an effective solution as it would not accommodate different fashion needs and will not be accepted by the general public. However, a common understanding of possible ranges (rather than a specific number) for the upper limits may emerge through collective experiments. These experiments encourage public deliberations and personal in-depth reflections, which may contribute to forming common ground regarding how much fashion is enough—for the closet, for the wallet, and for the planet.

Notes

1. It is important to emphasize that data and evidence on social and environmental impacts of fashion are fragmented and mostly come not from scientific sources but from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or industry-facilitated research, including pioneering reports of the Ellen McArthur Foundation (2017), WRAP (2017), joint reports by the Global Fashion Agenda and Boston Consulting Group on the state of fashion (2017 and 2018), and the Swedish Mistra Future Fashion Foundation (2019). Journalistic accounts of the challenges of the changing fashion system have recently been captured in popular books by Elizabeth Cline (2013), Saafia Minney (2017), and Dana Thomas (2019). Due to its novelty and shortage of reliable peer-reviewed research, the debate on fashion’s sustainability problem continues to suffer from the use of unsupported claims and pseudo “facts” that tend to exaggerate the negative effects of different practices but, unsubstantiated, have a damaging effect on prospective policy and industry change (Wicker 2020).

2. See http://www.bemorewithless.com.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

References

Alexander, S., and S. Ussher. 2012. “The Voluntary Simplicity Movement: A Multi-National Survey Analysis in Theoretical Context.” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 12 (1): 66–86. doi:10.1177/1469540512444019.

Armstrong, C., K. Connell, C. Lang, M. Ruppert-Stroescu, and M. LeHew. 2016. “Educating for Sustainable Fashion: Using Clothing Acquisition Abstinence to Explore Sustainable Consumption and Life beyond Growth.” *Journal of Consumer Policy* 39 (4): 417–439. doi:10.1007/s10603-016-9330-z.

Beavan, C. 2009. *No Impact Man: The Adventures of a Guilty Liberal Who Attempts to Save the Planet, and the Discoveries He Makes about Himself and Our Way of Life in the Process*. New York: Macmillan.

*Dana Thomas (2019).* Due to its novelty and shortage of reliable peer-reviewed research, the debate on fashion’s sustainability problem continues to suffer from the use of unsupported claims and pseudo “facts” that tend to exaggerate the negative effects of different practices but, unsubstantiated, have a damaging effect on prospective policy and industry change (Wicker 2020).

*References*

Alexander, S., and S. Ussher. 2012. “The Voluntary Simplicity Movement: A Multi-National Survey Analysis in Theoretical Context.” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 12 (1): 66–86. doi:10.1177/1469540512444019.

Armstrong, C., K. Connell, C. Lang, M. Ruppert-Stroescu, and M. LeHew. 2016. “Educating for Sustainable Fashion: Using Clothing Acquisition Abstinence to Explore Sustainable Consumption and Life beyond Growth.” *Journal of Consumer Policy* 39 (4): 417–439. doi:10.1007/s10603-016-9330-z.

Beavan, C. 2009. *No Impact Man: The Adventures of a Guilty Liberal Who Attempts to Save the Planet, and the Discoveries He Makes about Himself and Our Way of Life in the Process*. New York: Macmillan.

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). 2017. “Vivienne Westwood Gives Her Advice on New Designers and Fashion Waste.” *BBC*, June 13. http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/40260489/vivienne-westwood-gives-her-advice-on-new-designers-and-fashion-waste.

Cafaro, P. 2001. “Economic Consumption, Pleasure, and the Good Life.” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 32 (4): 471–486. doi:10.1111/0047-2786.00108.
Carver, C. 2017. Soulful Simplicity: How Living with Less Can Lead to So Much More. New York: Tarcher Perigee.

Carver, C. 2019. Project 333. http://www.project333.com (discontinued) and http://www.bemorewithless.com (current).

Carver, C. 2020. Project 333: The Minimalist Fashion Challenge That Proves Less is So Much More. New York: Tarcher Perigee.

Chivers, J. 2019. Shop Your Wardrobe Challenge. https://myyearwithoutclothesshopping.com/30-day-shop-your-wardrobe-challenge

Cline, E. 2013. Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion. New York: Portfolio.

Crabbe, T. 2014. Busy: How to Thrive in a World of Too Much. London: Hachette.

Craig-Lees, M., and C. Hill. 2002. “Understanding Voluntary Simplifiers.” Psychology and Marketing 19 (2): 187–210. doi:10.1002/mar.10009.

Crane, D. 2012. Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dannemiller, S. 2015. Voluntary Simplicities. New York: Tarcher Perigee.

Defila, R., and A. Di Giulio. 2020. The Year Without a Purchase: One Family’s Quest to Stop Shopping and Start Connecting. Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing.

Di Giulio, A., and R. Defila. 2019. ‘The “Good Life” and Protected Needs.’ In Routledge Handbook of Global Sustainability Governance, edited by A. Kalfagianni, D. Fuchs, and A. Hayden. London: Routledge.

Di Giulio, A., and D. Fuchs. 2014. “Sustainable Consumption Corridors: Concept, Objections, and Responses.” GAIA 23 (3): 184–192. doi:10.14512/gaia.23.S1.6.

Elgin, D. 1981. Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life That is Outwardly Simple, Inwardly Rich. New York: Morrow.

Elgin, D., and A. Mitchell. 1977. “Voluntary Simplicity.” The Co-Evolution Quarterly 3 (1): 5–18.

Etzioni, A. 1999. “Voluntary Simplicity: Characterization, Select Psychological Implications, and Societal Consequences.” In Essays in Socio-Economics, edited by A. Etzioni, 1–26. Berlin: Springer.

European Environment Agency (EEA). 2019. Textiles and the Environment in a Circular Economy. Copenhagen: EEA. https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/waste/resource-efficiency/textiles-in-europe-s-circulareconomy

Fashion Revolution. 2017a. Fashion, Money, Power. Fanzine 1.

Fashion Revolution. 2017b. Loved Clothes Last. Fanzine 2. Ferrari, J., and C. Roster. 2018. “Delaying Disposing: Examining the Relationship between Procrastination and Clutter across Generations.” Current Psychology 37 (2): 426–431. doi:10.1007/s12144-017-9679-4.

Flanders, C. 2018. The Year of Less: How I Stopped Shopping, Gave Away My Belongings, and Discovered Life is Worth More than Anything You Can Buy in a Store. Brighton-Le-Sands: Hay House Australia.

Fletcher, K., and M. Tham, eds. 2014. Routledge Handbook of Sustainability and Fashion. London: Routledge.

Fuchs, D., and A. Di Giulio. 2016. “Consumption Corridors and Social Justice: Exploring the Limits.” In SCORAI Europe Workshop Proceedings, 14–24. Budapest, Hungary, August 29–30.

Fuchs, D. 2020. “Living Well Within Limits: The Vision of Consumption Corridors.” In Routledge Handbook of Global Sustainability Governance, edited by A. Kalfagianni, D. Fuchs, and A. Hayden, 296–307. London: Routledge.

Gambrel, J., and P. Cafaro. 2010. “The Virtue of Simplicity.” Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics 23 (1–2): 85–108. doi:10.1007/s10806-009-9187-0.

Glaser, B., and A. Strauss. 1967. The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research. New York: Adline de Gruyter.

Greenpeace. 2018. Destination Zero: Seven Years of Detoxing the Fashion Industry. Hamburg: Greenpeace.

Hodkinson, P. 2002. Goth: Identity, Style and Subculture. Oxford: Berg.

Hunting, A., and D. Conroy. 2018. “Spirituality, Stewardship and Consumption: New Ways of Living in a Material World.” Social Responsibility Journal 14 (2): 255–273.

Iran, S., and U. Schrader. 2017. “Collaborative Fashion Consumption and Its Environmental Effects.” Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management 21 (4): 468–482. doi:10.1108/JFMM-09-2016-0086.

Joy, C. 2019. Un-Fancy Capsule Challenge. http://www.un-fancy.com

Kang, J., C. M. J. Martinez, and C. Johnson. 2021. “Minimalism as a Sustainable Lifestyle: Its Behavioral Representations and Contributions to Emotional Well-Being.” Sustainable Production and Consumption.

Kidd, E. 2020. “The Fashion Detox Challenge: A Holistic Approach to Sustainable Consumption.” In Proceedings of the Conference of the Sustainable Consumption Research and Action Initiative, June.

Kondo, M. 2014. The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying: A Simple, Effective Way to Banish Clutter Forever. New York: Random House.

Laitala, K., and I. Klepp. 2019. “Consumption Corridors: Concept, Objections, and Responses.” In Consumptions Corridors and Social Justice: Exploring the Limits. 1–210. doi:10.1002/mar.10009.

Leonard-Barton, D., and E. Rogers. 1980. “Voluntary Simplicity.” Advances in Consumer Research 7: 28–34.

Levine, J. 2007. Not Buying It: My Year Without Shopping. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Loreau, D. 2017. L’art de la Simplicité: How to Live More with Less. London: Oreon Publishing Group.

Martindale, A., and Y. Lee. 2019. “Students’ Perceptions of Adopting Minimal Transformable Wardrobes.” International Journal of Fashion Design, Technology and Education 12 (1): 76–85. doi:10.1080/17543266.2018.1477998.
McArthur Foundation. 2017. A New Textiles Economy: Redesigning Fashion’s Future. London: McArthur Foundation.

McDonald, S., C. Oates, C. Young, and K. Hwang. 2006. “Toward Sustainable Consumption: Researching Voluntary Simplifiers.” Psychology and Marketing 23 (6): 515–534. doi:10.1002/mar.20132.

McKinsey. 2016. Style That’s Sustainable: A New Fast-Fashion Formula. New York: McKinsey.

Meamber, L., A. Joy, and A. Venkatesh. 2017. “Fashion in Consumer Culture.” In Routledge Handbook on Consumption, edited by M. Keller, B. Halkier, T.-A. Wilska, and M. Truningen, 431–448. London: Routledge.

Meissner, M. 2019. “Against Accumulation: Lifestyle Minimalism, De-growth and the Present Post-Ecological Condition.” Journal of Cultural Economy 12 (3): 185–200. doi:10.1080/17530350.2019.1570962.

Millburn, J., and R. Nicodemus. 2015. Essential Essays by the Minimalists. Missoula, MT: Asymmetrical Press.

Minney, S. 2017. “Slave to Fashion.” New Internationalist, 10 May.

Mistra Future Fashion. 2019. Environmental Assessment of Swedish Clothing Consumption—Six Garments, Sustainable Futures. Stockholm: Mistra.

Niinimaki, K. 2010. “Eco-Clothing, Consumer Identity and Ideology.” Sustainable Development 18: 150–160.

Niinimäki, K., G. Peters, H. Dahlbo, P. Perry, T. Rissanen, and A. Gwilt. 2020. “The Environmental Price of Fast Fashion.” Nature Reviews Earth and Environment 1 (4): 189–200. doi:10.1038/s43017-020-0039-9.

Park, H., and C. Armstrong. 2019. “Is Money the Biggest Driver? Uncovering Motives for Engaging in Online Collaborative Consumption Retail Models for Apparel.” Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services 51: 42–50. doi:10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.05.022.

Pookulangara, S., and A. Shephard. 2013. “Slow Fashion Movement: Understanding Consumer Perceptions – An Exploratory Study.” Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services 20 (2): 200–206. doi:10.1016/j.jretconser.2012.12.002.

Roster, C., J. Ferrari, and M. Jurkat. 2016. “The Dark Side of Home: Assessing Possession ‘Clutter’ on Subjective Well-Being.” Journal of Environmental Psychology 46: 32–41. doi:10.1016/j.jenvp.2016.03.003.

Ruppert-Stroescu, M., M. LeHew, K. Connell, and C. Armstrong. 2015. “Creativity and Sustainable Fashion Apparel Consumption: The Fashion Detox.” Clothing and Textiles Research Journal 33 (3): 167–182. doi:10.1177/0887302X15579990.

Sakahian, M., and S. Lorek. 2018. “Laying the Foundations for Consumption Corridors: The Case of Heating Bigger Homes.” Paper Presented at the Third International Conference of the Sustainable Consumption Research and Action Initiative, Copenhagen, June 27–30.

Sanghani, R. 2019. “How to Cure the Shopping Addiction That’s Killing Our Planet.” The Guardian, 20 February. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/feb/20/shopping-addiction-fashionenvironment

Sasaki, F. 2015. Goodbye, Things: The New Japanese Minimalism. New York: W. W. Norton.

Schor, J. 2008. “Tackling Turbo Consumption.” Cultural Studies 22 (5): 588–598. doi:10.1080/09502380802245837.

Stanton, A. 2020. “What Is a Capsule Wardrobe?” The Good Trade. https://www.thegoodtrade.com/features/what-is-a-capsule-wardrobe

Strauss, A., and J. Corbin. 1997. Grounded Theory in Practice. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Syse, K., and M. Mueller, eds. 2014. Sustainable Consumption and the Good Life: Interdisciplinary Perspectives. London: Routledge.

Thomas, D. 2019. Fashionopolis: The Price of Fast Fashion and the Future of Clothes. New York: Penguin Press.

Tolentino, J. 2020. “The Pitfalls and the Potential of the New Minimalism.” The New Yorker, 27 January.

Veblen, T. 1925 [1899]. Theory of the Leisure Class. London: Unwin.

Vosburgh, L. 2019. 10x10 Challenge. http://www.stylebee.ca

Walker, G., and R. Day. 2012. “Fuel Poverty as Injustice: Integrating Distribution, Recognition and Procedure in the Struggle for Affordable Warmth.” Energy Policy 49: 69–75. doi:10.1016/j.enpol.2012.01.044.

Wicker, A. 2020. “Fashion Has a Misinformation Problem. That’s Bad for the Environment.” Vox, January. https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2020/1/27/21080107/fashion-environment-facts-statistics-impact

WRAP. 2017. Valuing Our Clothes: The Cost of UK Fashion. London: WRAP. http://www.wrap.org.uk/sustainable-textiles/valuing-our-clothes

Wu, D., J. Thomas, M. Moore, and K. Carroll. 2013. “Voluntary Simplicity: The Great American Apparel Diet.” Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management 17(3): 294–305.

WWF. 2017. Changing Fashion: The Clothing and Textile Industry at the Brink of Radical Transformation. London: WWF.