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by

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Bloomer: A magazine promoting sustainable fashion

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Bloomer: A magazine promoting sustainable fashion

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Report

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my mom, dad and brother, who always taught me to repair what is broken instead of buying a new one.

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Abstract

Bloomer: A magazine promoting sustainable fashion

Nevena Boteva Peeva, M.F.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2017

Supervisor: Carma Gorman

“Seasons” in the fashion world have little to do with temperature. Fashion’s increasingly rapid turnover is meant to boost producers’ profits and respond to consumers’ desire for novelty. On the down side, “fast fashion” comes with grave environmental and social costs.

Bloomer is a magazine and an online platform that aims to slow down the conversation around fashion, and offer a platform for reflection and appreciation. In a throwaway culture, what does it mean when someone rebels by keeping and cherishing a garment for years? What makes people value some garments more than others? Is it the labor value in its creation, or sentimental value gained through lived experience, or the status value in its brand identity? The aura of a garment is a complex intersection of market forces, cultural ideals, and metaphysical subtleties.

Rather than scolding or guiltig people into adopting more sustainable wardrobes, *Bloomer* takes a positive approach to sustainability by featuring glamorous Austinites

wearing their own clothes, sharing their stories of sustainable consumption, and promoting local thrift shops and sources of high-quality “slow fashion.”

The first issue of *Bloomer* features a series of photos documenting how a variety of people practice sustainable fashion. Using the visual and written language of advertising and fashion, is it possible to cultivate an appreciation for the garments we already own, and for sustainable wardrobe practices? The goal of *Bloomer* as a magazine about sustainable fashion is to show pictures and tell stories of people who have unique and meaningful relationships with their clothes, and encourage the rest of us to ask ourselves “What is my relationship with my clothes?”

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Why sustainable fashion?

I grew up in Sofia, Bulgaria. Many conservative (and frugally conservationist) practices still prevail in Eastern Europe. Clothes there are an expensive commodity so when we need to purchase a new coat or a new shirt, we spend some time to consider all of the options before making the final purchase. Clothing is an investment. We expect it to give back by dressing us for many years. People in poor, post-communist Eastern European countries like Bulgaria cannot afford to buy multiples or poor quality clothes.

Back in Bulgaria, when I was getting ready for prom, I needed a dress. I had a design by British fashion designer Alexander McQueen in mind, but I could not find anything similar in the stores. I decided to hire a seamstress, buy fabric, draw the design and have the dress made. That process was so interesting, engaging, educational, and inspiring that it made me look at clothes a little bit differently and appreciate the craft of making clothes and what it means to wear an original piece.

Moving to the United States at age eighteen, I was shocked to see the consumer culture here. Clothes piled on the floors of department stores, people pulling from racks only to then throw the clothes onto the floor. The idea of having many, different, cheap pieces of clothes was very foreign to me.

It is hard to pinpoint who is to blame for the USA's culture of fast fashion (which has spread to the rest of the world in the last twenty years), though fast fashion brands' desire to make more money faster is part of the answer. Do consumers really want new designs every week? Or, do big brands use advertising to convince them that they do? Either way, fast fashion is damaging to both workers and the environment. That is why I decided to draw on my past experiences and find a way to promote more meaningful and

lasting relationships with clothing. I wanted to find a way to create an “aura” around garments to encourage people to value them more and keep them longer.

Understanding fast fashion

THE RISE OF FAST FASHION

There are commonly understood to be three main categories of fashion: “The first model, that of couture, hinges on the concept of luxury, seen as a distinction of class. The second model, prêt à porter, focuses on the concept of modernity of ‘life-style.’ The third model, fast fashion, is centered on versatility, considered as the immediate gratification of new ‘temporary’ identities. So, in couture, prêt à porter, and in fast fashion lines there are not only different clothes at different prices, sold in different locations, but also imaginaries and cultures within which both clothing and communicative practices are outlined” (Reinach, 2005).

Fast fashion is a business model in which companies maximize profits by copying high fashion brand designs with incredible speed and sell thousands of copies very cheaply to the middle and lower classes. One example of a highly successful fast fashion company is Zara. In 1975 Inditex, a major Italian organization that holds multiple fashion brands around the world, opened their first Zara store in Spain. It began as a small shop in La Coruna where the owner of Zara, Amancio Ortega, opened the first store. In October 2015, Ortega was ranked as the richest person in the world for four hours by *Forbes*, just ahead of American billionaire Bill Gates, with a net worth of USD \$78.6 billion (Beachum, 2016). Years later Zara is one of the biggest and most talked about brands in the fashion industry. It represented 66% of total sales or €10.5 Billion for Inditex (Loeb, 2014). Loeb writes that “Zara, Inditex’s leading brand, has been a groundbreaker in bringing new fashions, new designs, and new ideas quickly to its stores. Zara’s relentless push of on-trend merchandise into the supply chain pipeline keeps its stores in stock on the latest fashions at saleable prices. Many new ideas from the fashion shows that just finished in New York, Paris and Milan will soon be on Zara’s racks” (Loeb, 2014).

The fast fashion industry seemed like a good business solution in the early 2000s. For example, writer Walter Loeb, contributor to the *Forbes* retail industry department, believes that the phenomenon of fast fashion company Zara and their fast-changing speeds is groundbreaking to the market and gives the consumer exactly what they want: new styles every week, at affordable prices. Similar points of view are seen in most business magazines and articles, which praise fast fashion companies for their innovation and profitability: “The logic is pretty simple really: Why spend \$100 on a “unique” item when you could buy one similar to it or maybe even cooler for \$20? Especially if you’re the parent of a teenager or young adult, the odds are good that in the past you’ve spent a lot of money on an article of clothing, seen it worn a few times, and then gradually migrate to the back of your kid’s closet” (Rosenblum, 2015). The low price and up-to-the-minute fashionability of the clothes makes them high demand, and that demand is what feeds fast fashion businesses’ growth.

CRITIQUES OF FAST FASHION

One common criticism of fast fashion is that it is built around the idea of copying couture and prêt à porter fashion designs as they are being shown on the runway. In Zara's case, the company tries its hardest to be placed and recognized next to major fashion brands like Valentino, Dior and so on. "The high street is really divided according to brand value," says [Masoud Golsorkhi, the editor of Tank, a London magazine about culture and fashion]. "Prada wants to be next to Gucci, Gucci wants to be next to Prada. (Thompson, 2012) The retail strategy for luxury brands is to try to keep as far away from the likes of Zara. Zara's strategy is to get as close to them as possible." On the other hand, though there is an obvious and strong denial of relationship between the two coming from the high fashion world. Designers like Tom Ford have openly stated their disapproval of the obvious stealing of garment designs by brands like Zara. Brands like Christian Dior, Balenciaga, Celine and Kenzo get ripped by Zara the moment their model walks on the runway (figure 2). The moment the garment leaves the model it starts going out of style, a process that the mass availability of cheap copies has only sped up, which creates a need for new fashions to be produced as soon as possible (Agamben, 2009).



Figure 1. Visual comparison of high fashion brands (to the left) and Zara rip offs (to the right)

Second, fast fashion companies have also been criticized for their mistreatment of workers in China and other low-wage manufacturing countries. Globalization and the fast pace of fast-fashion production has created instability and poor working conditions for garment workers. As author Chak Kwan Chan puts it, "... global capitalism, together with China's authoritarian polity, has limited workers' rights and undermined their well-being" (Chan, Peng 2011). Moving production abroad has also arguably harmed textile and garment workers in industrialized countries. Zara, for example, set up its own factory in La Coruña (a city known for its textile industry) in 1980, and upgraded to reverse milk-run-type production and distribution facilities in 1990. This approach, designed by Toyota Motor Corp., was called the just-in-time (JIT) system. (Kojima, 2010) It enabled the company to establish a business model that allows self-containment throughout the stages of materials, manufacture, product completion and distribution to stores worldwide within just a few days. Originally Zara was a small store in Spain that grew to the rest of the country and by the 90s it was opening store in the rest of Europe and USA. (Hansen, 2012)

Space is an important idea in the topic of fashion and fast fashion. We can try to explain some of it by the writings of Stuart Hall and Walter Benjamin. Hall argues that with globalization identity can be lost due to global markets widening and production being displaced away from the local society. As Lechner has argued, "the *new* international division of labor, not only links backward sections of the third world to so-called advanced sections of the first world in a form of multinational production, but increasingly tries to reconstitute the backward sectors within its own society: those forms of contracting out, of franchising, which are beginning to create small dependent local economies which are linked into multi-national production" (Lechner, 1992).

Walter Benjamin's concept of the "aura" of art is useful in understanding fast fashion, too. Benjamin writes that "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art [or

fashion!] is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.” (Benjamin, 2008). Fast fashion’s mass reproduction of already existing original designs in places far away from where the originals were conceived or are consumed creates a lack of uniqueness and “aura.” The throw away culture of fast fashion, especially in the USA, is the exact opposite of the idea of the “aura.” Instead of trying to keep something and add value to it, Zara and other fast fashion manufacturers want us to get rid of clothes as fast as the newest trend arrives. Arguably, a re-introduction of Benjamin’s aura—and a sense of place—is needed in order to create the “aura” that makes people want to keep their clothes instead of throwing them away when styles change.

A third critique of fast fashion is that it is a very first-world way to think about clothing. Ortega was famous for his view on clothes as a perishable commodity; He believed that people would love to use them and throw them away. It is often cited that he produces ‘fresh baked clothes’ that survive the changing street fashion trends for not more than a month or two (O’Shea, 2012). This is a very privileged attitude, and also a quite recent one. So-called throw-away culture developed in the USA in the 1950s and 60s. The first time the term was used in *Life* magazine in 1955, when an article was published called “Throwaway living” (Cosgrove, 2014). This was the era of Tupperware and disposable items. It seemed like a waste of time to clean up after yourself and the better option was to purchase plastic or paper disposable items for your kitchen needs. People like to believe that nowadays we are better at recycling and we are trying our hardest to fix the effects of the throw-away society of the 50s, but according to the US Environmental Protection Agency, in 1960, U.S. citizens disposed of 2.7 pounds of trash per person each day, whereas now they dispose up to 4.5 pounds of trash each day (EPA, 2016).

Countries with poor economies cannot afford to indulge in fast fashion because they do not have the resources to keep buying new clothes all the time. A good example is Bulgaria. A country with a struggling economy, Bulgaria recently entered the EU in 2007, and is trying to prove its position next to big western leaders like Germany, France and the UK. Despite it being a poor country with an average annual income of \$6,000, Bulgaria has a strong culture of clothing. It is accepted that you need to always wear brand new clothes that are not damaged or ill fitting. But because people are poor and cannot afford to always purchase new clothes, they take impeccable care of the clothing they do have. Such care and value is missing when it comes to American society. In a country with 300 million people the production need is gigantic and the options for clothing that varies from prices and styles is enormous. A culture such as Bulgarian ways of taking care of clothing is hard to flourish since in the US people are constantly showered with new and cheap clothing.

Fourth, the fashion industry is the second largest polluter in the world after the oil industry. One of the main reasons is the large amounts of water used (and polluted) in producing and dyeing textiles. Nancy Szokan explains “Water is a big part of the problem: Cotton is a thirsty plant. Textile manufacturers use a lot of water, and the vast amounts of waste water they discharge are contaminated with bleaches, solvents, acids, alkalis, dyes, inks, resins, softeners and fluorocarbons” (Szokan, 2016). A few attempts have been made to battle the waste and pollution of water, such as Levi’s Water<Less campaign. They have a collection of jeans that have been dyed without water, as is explained on the company’s website: “The Water<Less™ process approaches the decisions made in the design process in a different way, reducing the amount of water used in the finishing process. It’s not rocket science, but it is innovative. For instance, by simply removing water from stone

washes or combining multiple wet cycle processes, we can significantly reduce water usage — up to 96 percent for some styles” (Levi-Strauss, 2017).

RESPONSES TO FAST FASHION

Scholars have been writing about the negative effect fast fashion has on societies in globalized world for about a decade now, and in the last couple of years the media has also begun to push back against the industry. A number of writings, movies, commercials have been made that critique the fast fashion industry, and a number of non-profit foundations, educational documentaries and articles, clothing brands, and clothing manufacturers have proposed ways of minimizing its negative effects.

Small business foundations such as the British not for profit Fashion Revolution aims to educate consumers about the fast fashion industry and ask the question “Who made my clothes?” (figure 3). Fashion Revolution seeks to connect makers with the consumers by bridging the space and place gap between them. This may help give clothing a greater “aura,” but it doesn’t necessarily help concretely reduce pollution or workers’ mistreatment, or even slow down the fashion cycle.



Figure 2. Advertisement for Fashion Revolution promoting transparency between makers and consumers.

A new series by VICE called *States of Undress* takes a somewhat different approach, aiming to show how clothing impacts different societies and what the meaning and representation of clothes have for people in different cultures. Hayley Gates, the interviewer in the series, goes to countries like Pakistan, Venezuela, Russia, Palestine, China and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where she seeks to uncover the standards of beauty, fashion and style in each of the remote areas, but in doing so also explores political and social issues of gender, identity and race (Garced, 2016). The series helps make it clear that fast fashion is not the only, or even the most common, paradigm for people's relationship to clothes.

Another example is the 2015 US documentary *The True Cost*, which focuses on human rights and environmental impact. The documentary follows the life of a Bangladeshi worker and shows the sacrifices these workers make in order to receive the minimum

payment clothing factories provide. In 2013, a factory in Bangladesh collapsed and killed 1,125 people. This was the deadliest factory accident in the history of garment making and it caused a huge controversy within and about the industry. Politicians, human rights activists and organizations gathered to create policy protecting the rights of factory workers, but with limited effects (Yardley, 2013). An interesting part of the documentary is the fact that none of the representatives of the Swedish multinational retailer H&M agreed to be interviewed for the movie.

As one of the leading brands of the Fast Fashion market, H&M is responsible for a significant part of the consequences caused by the industry. After not agreeing to be interviewed in the documentary, the brand started a new sustainability awareness campaign. In 2016, it partnered with British singer M.I.A. to create a track called *Rewear It* (figure 4). In the video M.I.A. talks about recycling and re-wearing clothes, promoting sustainability and protection of the environment. She is seen dancing on top of folded clothes in front of skyscrapers next to a big H&M logo.



Figure 3. Collaboration between H&M clothing store and singer M.I.A. Screen shot from M.I.A.'s music video.

The partnership seems kind of hypocritical and dishonest after researching the history of H&M and their production impact. The problem with The True Cost documentary and the H&M and M.I.A collaboration is that after receiving the information the customer is left feeling guilty and sad. Emotional advertising is a technique that is used to create a higher response rate than rational advertising. Shown on figure 5 we can see the effects on the consumer by both. Emotional appeal has a high effect on consumers but it also leaves them feeling guilty, and not necessarily motivated to take positive action.

Figure 5.
The impact of affect intensity and advertising appeal on emotional response in experience service advertising (Airline) (Study 3)

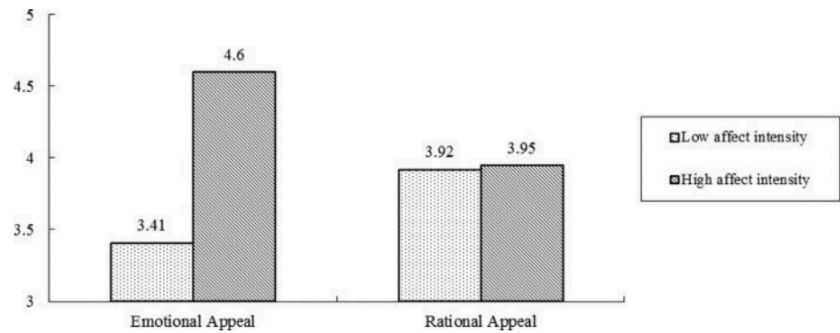


Figure 6.
The impact of affect intensity and advertising appeal on emotional response in credence service advertising (Hospital) (Study 3)

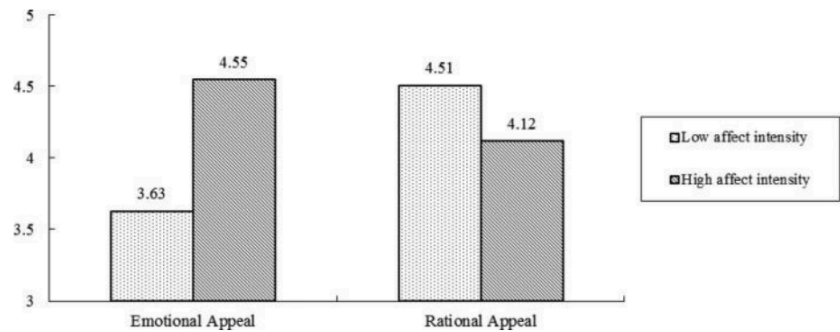


Figure 4. Diagram showing the effects of emotional appeal and rational appeal in advertising techniques.

A far more responsible and informative solution is Patagonia's. Their provocative advertisement from 2011 told viewers "Don't buy this jacket" (figure 6), and invited readers to think about the sustainability (or lack thereof) of their clothing. The ad read:

The environmental cost of everything we make is astonishing...Consider the R2 Jacket shown, one of our best sellers. To make it required 135 liters of water, enough to meet the daily needs (three glasses a day) of 45 people. Its journey from its origin as 60% recycled polyester to our Reno warehouse generated nearly 20 pounds of carbon dioxide, 24 times the weight of the finished product. This jacket left behind, on its way to Reno, two-thirds its weight in waste...And this is a 60% recycled polyester jacket, knit and sewn to a high standard; it is exceptionally durable, so you won't have to replace it as often. And when it comes to the end of its useful life we'll take it back to recycle into a product of equal value. But, as is true of all the things we can make and you can buy, this jacket comes with an environmental cost higher than its price.

The ad concludes: "There is much to be done and plenty for us all to do. Don't buy what you don't need. Think twice before you buy anything. Go to patagonia.com/CommonThreads, take the Common Threads Initiative pledge and join us in the fifth R, to reimagine a world where we take only what nature can replace." This ad is as transparent as it gets explaining all that goes into the making of the jacket, as it is a good quality expensive jacket that will supposedly last you a long time (Nudd, 2011). The brand's value is positioned very strongly as a sustainable brand that supports long lasting use of clothing and repair.

DON'T BUY THIS JACKET



It's Black Friday, the day in the year retail turns from red to black and starts to make real money. But Black Friday, and the culture of consumption it reflects, puts the economy of natural systems that support all life tentily in the red. We're now using the resources of one-and-a-half planets on our one and only planet.

Because Patagonia wants to be in business for a good long time—and leave a world inhabitable for our kids—we want to do the opposite of every other business today. We ask you to buy less and to reflect before you spend a dime on this jacket or anything else.

Environmental bankruptcy, as with corporate bankruptcy, can happen very slowly, then all of a sudden. This is what we face unless we slow down, then reverse the damage. We're running short on fresh water, topsoil, fisheries, wetlands – all our planet's natural systems and resources that support business, and life, including our own.

The environmental cost of everything we make is astonishing. Consider the R2[®] Jacket shown, one of our best sellers. To make it required 135 liters of

COMMON THREADS INITIATIVE

REDUCE

WE make useful gear that lasts a long time
YOU don't buy what you don't need

REPAIR

WE help you repair your Patagonia gear
YOU pledge to fix what's broken

REUSE

WE help find a home for Patagonia gear
you no longer need
YOU sell or pass it on?

RECYCLE

WE will take back your Patagonia gear
that is worn out
YOU pledge to keep your stuff out of
the landfill and incinerator

REIMAGINE

TOGETHER we reimagine a world where we take
only what nature can replace



patagonia
patagonia.com

water, enough to meet the daily needs (three glasses a day) of 45 people. Its journey from its origin as 60% recycled polyester to our Reno warehouse generated nearly 20 pounds of carbon dioxide, 24 times the weight of the finished product. The jacket left behind, on its way to Reno, two-thirds its weight in waste.

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TAKE THE PLEDGE

*If you sell your used Patagonia product on eBay® and take the Common Threads Initiative pledge, we will do for your product on patagonia.com for no additional charge.

Figure 5. Patagonia's 2011 advertisement

A number of fashion magazines also promote sustainable fashion, including *Elux Magazine*, *Florum Fashion*, *Ethical Hedonist Magazine*, *Peppermint*, and *Sublime Magazine*. They focus high fashion brands that use recyclable and sustainable materials. The issue with these magazines is that they target a wealthy demographic and their reach isn't enormous. The products they sell are sustainable, but at a very high price. The price of a Stella McCartney shirt featured in *Elux* varies from between \$500 and \$1,325 (figure 7). For the middle-class worker or student these prices are not within reach, given that the average American family average American family spends \$1,700 on clothes annually, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Johnson, 2016).

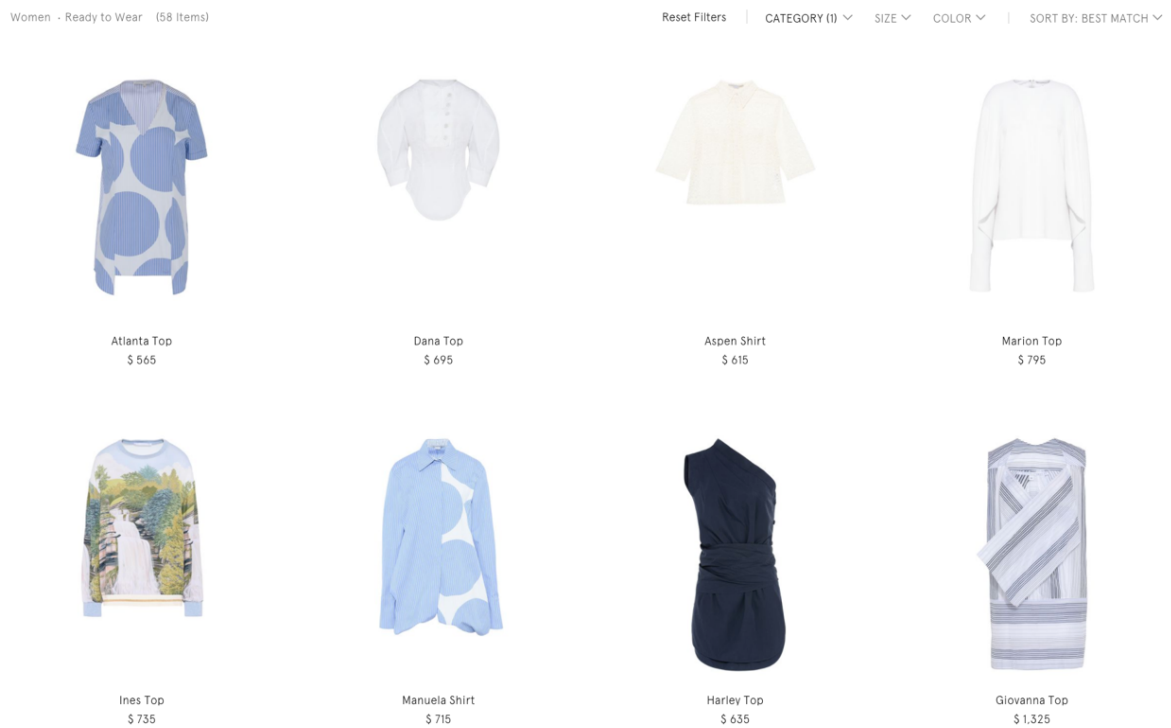


Figure 6. Screen capture from the Stella McCartney online shopping website.

In short, existing responses to the fast fashion industry each necessarily tackle only a small part of the problem. Many of the ones that seek to raise awareness are depressing, and do not seem likely to nudge people towards more sustainable choices. And many of the more concrete solutions are very expensive, and impractical for most people to implement. As a result, I began looking for a way to help restore the “aura” of clothes and encourage more sustainable wardrobe practices, but without being depressing and without proposing solutions that were too expensive to be practical. I decided there had to be another way.

Research

During my time researching the fast fashion industry and people's responses to it, I also spent time talking to different professionals and scholars on topics related to the fashion industry. I conducted interviews with faculty members at The University of Texas at Austin, local handmade brand owners, writers, and researchers on the topic of fashion consumption.

I spoke first with Lucy Atkinson, a professor in the Advertising Department. Her primary area of research focuses on the intersection of politics and consumer behavior, particularly among young people. My discussion with her revolved around consumer culture and how consumers get manipulated to purchase based on advertising techniques. We also discussed the parallels between food consumption and educating the consumer to buy organic foods and educating consumers about sustainable fashion. Ultimately, I what I took away from this conversation was that advertising and its visual language is powerful.

I spoke next with Luisa Fandiño, a lecturer at The University of Texas at Austin who researches alternative materials and construction techniques. She shared with me recent developments in materials and textiles science. For example, organic and compostable fibers are being produced and tested in order to find better solutions to making fabric. In the beginning of 2017, the Walmart Foundation and the U.S. Conference of Mayors awarded 3 Million dollars to six universities in the U.S. to fund research on new sustainable fibers (Sustainable Brands, 2017).

Another very influential person with whom I spoke with was Gail Chovan. Chovan is a fashion designer based in Austin, TX. We discussed the struggles designers have now working in a time when fast fashion dominates the clothing industry. She explained that in her opinion, fast fashion is here to stay, and is only getting bigger. Those words struck me,

especially coming from her, and made me realize that instead of trying to avoid fast fashion or shame people away from buying at fast fashion chain stores, I should focus on working alongside this industry and complementing the existing solutions by showcasing sustainable ways of wearing clothes—even clothes from fast fashion brands.

Bloomer, a sustainable fashion magazine

The first fashion journal was published in 1678 in Paris. For centuries, people have bought fashion magazines to learn about the newest styles and trends. So I decided it made sense to use the medium of a magazine and the familiar visual language of advertising to change the way people think about their clothes, and more specifically their relationship with them. The idea to make a magazine came to me when I brainstormed how exactly can I complement the existing research and efforts being made globally to battle fast fashion and its negative effects. After reviewing all of those efforts I decided to use my skills as a visual designer and make a personal, sociological study of how clothes affect us and what they mean to us. Karen Pine, a professor of Fashion Psychology, writes in her book *Mind What You Wear* that “What you wear affects you psychologically. It can profoundly alter your mood. It also influences how others respond to you. Your clothes can affect your job prospects, your love life and even your self-image” (Pine, 2014). So I decided that if clothes represent who we are so strongly, it made sense to showcase people’s relationships with them, including their stories of reuse, alteration, repair, and other sustainable practices (figures 8, 9, 10)

I spent the second year of my time at The University of Texas going asking friends, and friends of friends, if they would be interested in telling me about their clothes. The responses were overwhelmingly positive. Almost everyone I asked wanted to invite me to their home and show me and tell me about what their clothes mean to them, where they purchased them, which ones of them they like the most, which ones mean the most and fit them the best. Ultimately, I ended up visiting 15 people’s homes and spent about an hour with each while they tried clothes on and told me exciting stories about how they got them.



Figure 7. Spread from *Bloomer* magazine.



Figure 8. Spread from *Bloomer* magazine



Figure 9. Bloomer magazine

For example, one of the fifteen people I met during this process was Celia Shaheen, who is a student at The University of Texas at Austin. She lives in a co-op and studies art. Celia is a tall slender woman with red-orange hair. Her home looked incredibly welcoming. She opened her wardrobe and pulled out tons of clothes, and was excited to share with me where she got them from, how she went to the Women's March with them, and how she likes to alter and dye some of them to her liking (figures 11-12).

I decided to ask each of my participants to write a paragraph or two about their clothes and share where they purchased them from, what makes them decide what to purchase, and how long they keep their clothes for. Here is what Celia wrote:

As of late, my wardrobe mostly consists of wide-leg pants, off-white knit cardigans, more knitted things, and inappropriate amounts of black velvet—I'd like to think of my style as comfy-eco-goth? Lots of black mixed with plant fibers and naturally-dyed fabrics. Some of my other closet buzzwords include turtlenecks, cold-shoulder tops, heather gray, Chelsea boots, and tied-up linen shirts.

I do most of my shopping online and at secondhand shops and thrift stores in Austin—some of my favorites are Treasure City Thrift, the Savers on Burnet, Texas Thrift Store off of I-35, and Hope Family Thrift. (Treasure City Thrift has a monthly 25-cent sale that should not be missed.) I really enjoy making and modifying clothes; I live in a cooperatively run house for students, and I've recently begun dyeing fabrics with vegetable skins and pits that I collect from my housemates.

My thrifted outfit is a mix of clothes and accessories from Buffalo Exchange, Texas Thrift Store, Etsy, and a Family Thrift Store in Plano, Texas. Those vintage chunky velvet boots are one of the most ridiculous things I own. I'm around 6'3" when I wear them? Which I think is kind of scary and really fantastic.

I wore my third outfit when I went down to the Texas State Capitol on January 21, 2017 for the Women's March on Austin. I was wearing my staple pair of black Chelsea boots along with a thrifted shirt from the Lilith Fund, a Texas organization that offers education and outreach about reproductive rights, as well as direct financial assistance that empowers people who are seeking to terminate unwanted pregnancies.



Figure 10. Celia Shaheen in her home.



Figure 11. Celia Shaheen in her home.

Sophia Nassif was another one of the people I photographed (figure 9). Her story of sustainable clothing practices was quite different. She travels around Morocco and Europe and makes sure she buys a piece of clothing from each place that will remind her of it afterwards. To her, the meaning of clothes can come from the place where she purchased them or the story they carry. She explained a strong relationship with her mother who is from Morocco and the clothing she purchased while she was visiting there last summer:

I bought the top in the medina in Marrakesh, Morocco this past fall. It came from a small boutique that caught my eye as I walking through the narrow passageways and cobblestone that decorates the city's center. The shop is named Al Nour, as it stands today the place is made up of artisan ladies who may be physically impaired or impoverished. The team of women hand embroider every piece of clothing you'll see decorating the racks and shelves. The place also provides their team with daycare services and professional training alongside with an opportunity to work. This is outstanding for more reasons than one, especially when considering the social and political atmosphere of Morocco and the immense inequality that exists between men and women in the workforce. When it comes between me and my clothing, this was one of the most meaningful experiences I've ever had when buying something new. Every time I wear this top it reminds me of the determination and creativity of women, and most importantly the strength. It feels like a badge of honor for me and the women of Morocco.

Each interviewee's story of their sustainable fashion practices was completely different from the last (figures 13-15). Some of the participants only shop sustainable brands. They prefer to only have a few pieces of clothing in their wardrobe and substitute them as needed, but rarely add more. Others chose to shop only for high fashion brands. This is another way of adding meaning to your clothing. High fashion brands design, produce and sell their clothing with the intention of it being high value and irreplaceable. Other interviewees shared their practice of dyeing clothing, editing them by altering them, or adding patches or stamps to customize them. Each person had a different approach to shopping and wardrobe curation.



Figure 12. Sophia Nassif in her home.



Figure 13. Nick James in his home.



Figure 14. Wei Ting Yao in his home standing in front of his personal shoe collection.

Bloomer showcases these varied practices through photos of the interviewees in their own, real clothes, that are taken in the interviewees' homes. The models in the magazine are real people who are not paid to participate and have not been styled in a specific way, other than asked to dress according to their preferences. The appeal of the magazine lies in the genuine feel of the photographs and stories, which are literal quotes written by each person about their point of view on clothes. A lot of the times they mention their favorite thrift stores in town, but they also suggest other ways of practicing sustainable fashion, affordably and realistically.

The exhibition

In order to display the magazine in the Visual Arts Center at the University of Texas at Austin, I decided to make shelving that would cover an entire wall in the Fieldwork Gallery (figures 16-17). I looked at how magazines exhibit new editions and took inspiration from their display strategies. I wanted to emphasize the fact that this is a *fashion* magazine. Writer David Dean explains the importance of exhibition design when it comes to communicating ideas. He talks about how the scale, aesthetic sense, writing, and audience knowledge can all influence how information is transmitted and received (Dean, 2015). To suit viewers' different levels of engagement with the subject matter, I built shelves that would hold the magazine open, so that all of the spreads would be arrayed on the wall. I also provided browsing copies that people could peruse in the gallery (but leave there), as well as a stack of magazines people could pick up and take home to keep. The fact that so many people wanted to touch and handle the magazine confirmed my guess that people still like tangible objects, including magazines. Since the magazine talks about our relationship with clothes and the value we add to our clothes from lived experience with them, I wanted to mirror that by having a physical printed piece.



Figures 15-16. Opening evening of Bloomer exhibition.

What is next

My goal with *Bloomer* was to create a magazine that would start a conversation, and also showcase real people's sustainable fashion practices. I was successful in that aim in the sense that I had a surprisingly positive response from the participants in the project as well as from the receivers/readers of the magazine. I had a lot of interest from people who wanted to be featured in the first issue and also a lot of people who were fascinated by the idea as a whole and wondered whether it would be continued.

I see a few possible ways to develop *Bloomer* in the future. As sustainability is a pressing issue, many grants are available for continuing this kind of research.¹ A grant would make it possible to turn *Bloomer* into a publication that could reach a much wider audience. It could also exist online as a website or a mobile application, and might include features that would allow people to search for the thrift stores and local shops that the featured models/interviewees discuss in their stories. With the help of social media, *Bloomer* could also take on a life in applications like Instagram and Facebook, where people could share their sustainable fashion photos and stories for free, without the need for advertising support. A web presence could thus complement the physical magazine, but would not need to replace it. The goal of *Bloomer* is to revert fashion back to its original state—caring and finding value in our clothes instead of considering them a disposable commodity. For me the magazine needs to exist tangibly, as a printed piece, to support the idea of finding value in objects and holding on to them for their meaning and service to us. In *Bloomer's* case, the physical magazine serves to remind us to shop sustainably.

¹ Fashion Institute of Technology Sustainability Grant. <https://www.fitnyc.edu/sustainability/campus-groups/sustainability-council/grants/>
<http://sustainable-fashion.com/about/funding-and-partners/>
National Science Foundation Environmental Sustainability Grant.
https://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=501027

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