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Well-being in liquid modernity: an annotated bibliography.

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Well-being in Liquid Modernity: an Annotated Bibliography

Karen Cross

The studies for my PhD, titled "Comfort in Clothing: A Baumanian Critique of How Clothing Contributes to the Well-being of Women in the United Kingdom" utilized Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "liquid modernity" as a critical lens to explore the synergies between Western contemporary fashion, clothing and dress practices, and the subject of well-being.

Zygmunt Bauman (1925-2017) was a sociologist and considered a prominent Critical Theorist. Where orthodox sociology was concerned with human obedience and conformity, sociology in modern times, according to Bauman's *Liquid Modernity* (2012), is more concerned with freedom, autonomy, and responsibility.[1] In *Culture in a Liquid Modern World* (2011), Bauman links fashion to the tensions between a need for social support, belonging, a longing for safety, and the human desire for individuality and independence.[2]

Bauman used the term "liquid modernity" where other authors use "post-" or "late-modernity." In this changeable and materialistic economy, Bauman suggests a culture of consumerism, which reflects the current fashion system in terms of speed of change (trends), ease of access (cheap, mass produced, and readily available), and ease of disposal (wear once, throw-away practices). Bauman acknowledged a move towards individualization, with diverse and deregulated opportunities for people's progress and improvement, and stated that "[l]iving among a multitude of competing values, norms and life-styles, without a firm and reliable guarantee of being in the right, is hazardous and commands a high psychological price." [3] Thus, Bauman suggested that the choices available to contemporary society are "...too wide for comfort...", causing anxiety.[4] Uncertainty increases in proportion to the number of competing choices or possibilities that must be selected from, and uncertainty-related anxiety is higher when there is no clear framework to follow. Bauman asserts that solidity, in the form of societal rules, routines, and norms, once provided stability and collective well-being to the citizen, who was committed to the common interests of society. According to Bauman, the move towards individualization has led to a lack of solidarity, a more fragmented society, with the citizen now replaced by the person, who shows less commitment to society and is more concerned with their individual problems.

Levels of happiness in Western societies have remained static for the past fifty years and rising mental health issues are identified as a global health concern. Bauman noted that many people are unhappy without being

able to articulate why or what might be causing their unhappiness. Thus, the postmodern human condition is identified by Bauman as an ongoing challenge, the very meaning of "staying alive and well", suggesting that Bauman's concepts are an appropriate choice for research with a focus on well-being.[5]

The reading list below includes texts related to fashion, dress, and well-being, focusing on the key topic of comfort from both a sociological and psychological perspective.

1. Kamalha, Edwin, Yongchun Zeng, Josphat I Mwasiagi, and Salome Kyatuheire. "The Comfort Dimension: A Review of Perception in Clothing." *Journal of Sensory Studies* 28 (2013): 423-444.

This journal article provides a comprehensive overview of comfort in clothing, spanning the three key elements of physiological comfort, physical comfort, and psychological comfort. Physiological comfort is concerned with thermal regulation of the body. Thermal sensations contribute to physical comfort, which also involves moisture sensations, pressure sensations, acoustic properties, scent properties and aesthetic perceptions. Psychological comfort is related to the wearer's values, roles, and social being, the internal self-consciousness, and self-satisfaction (linking to Bauman's individualistic person). Several clothing-comfort models are reviewed, with evident consensus on the importance of the wearer's previous experiences, anticipations, and influences. While physical and physiological comfort are well-researched and can be scientifically measured, research into the psychological comfort found in clothing and dress practices is less comprehensive and more subjective.

2. Masuch, Christoph-Simon and K. Hefferon. "Understanding the Links Between Positive Psychology and Fashion: A Grounded Theory Analysis." *International Journal of Fashion Studies* 1, no. 2 (2014): 227-246.

Masuch and Hefferon posit two types of psychological well-being gained from fashion and dress. Hedonic well-being involves feelings of pleasure, whereby clothing can make the wearer feel good. Eudaimonic well-being is gained through dress practice providing a source of fulfilment or meaning, perhaps through nostalgia, for sentimental or even supernatural reasons, where the wearer imbues the dress item or routine with lucky or talismanic power. Utilizing the Positive Psychology movement, Masuch and Hefferon suggest that clothing practices can be used to negotiate selfhood, manage mood, and befriend the body which are all important in Liquid Modernity (where Bauman describes

the body as a besieged fortress). Thus clothing, fashion, and dress practices were found to be a source of positivity—a form of appearance management used to facilitate everyday well-being.

3. Ruggerrone, Lucia. "The Feeling of Being Dressed: Affect Studies and the Clothed Body." *Fashion Theory* 21, no. 5 (2016): 573-593.

Sociologist Ruggerrone notes a gap in existing fashion and clothing research regarding feelings experienced about and in clothes while they are being worn, with a focus on the body and the practices of dressing, arguing "that the way we feel about and in our clothes is a relevant phenomenon with a definite impact on our social behaviour and ultimately our social life" (p. 574). This relates to the tensions between the need for social support and belongingness while in a culture of individualism, identified by Bauman. Ruggerrone posits that the human mind considers both aesthetics and function (practicality) when choosing what to wear, but that the act of putting the clothes on the body (wearing) and interacting with the world can produce affects that may be perceived as negative or positive emotions. Sensing whether an item of clothing is 'right' or 'wrong' translates as positive emotions such as ease or self-confidence (linked with well-being) or negative emotions such as awkwardness or embarrassment (inhibiting well-being).

4. Pine, Karen. *Mind What You Wear: The Psychology of Fashion*. Hatfield, 2014.
<http://www.read.amazon.co.uk/?asin=B00KBTB3NS>

Pine notes that the psychology discipline has largely ignored the power clothing can have in altering one's psychological state. Her research suggests that people choose certain items of clothing when happy and others when feeling depressed, and that what one chooses to wear could boost happiness levels. Women in Pine's study described happy clothing as well-cut, figure enhancing, and bright in color. Pine states that the impact clothing has on the wearer is diverse and dynamic, sending internal messages, which can alter capability, thought processes, judgements, and mood, and that previously worn clothes associated with positive experiences can trigger positive memories. Pine does caution against the habit of always wearing similar styles, noting that breaking free from habits can improve mood as the mind reacts positively to novelty. This contrasts with Bauman's assertions that routines and rituals can offer protection in constantly changing liquid modernity.

5. Jayne, Mark and Slavomira Ferencuhova. "Comfort, Identity and Fashion in the Post-Socialist City: Materialities, Assemblages and Context." *Journal of Consumer Culture* 15, vol. 3 (2013): 329-350.

Jayne and Ferencuhová's journal article aligns with Bauman's description of the communitarian citizen, by highlighting the collective adoption of comfortable dress used by city dwellers to engender a sense of belonging and make their public spaces feel more homely. Change, consumerism, and the politics of comfort in clothing are explored. For example, the authors reflect on the widespread notion that wearing comfortable clothing, such as pyjamas and sportswear, in public spaces is viewed negatively; seen as backward, rural, creating a bad impression, or linked to low moral values. The combination of clothing, comfort, capitalism, and city spaces provides an interesting read, with these topics being ever more important given the desire for comfort in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and its impacts on how we live and what we wear.

6. Miller, Daniel. *The Comfort of Things*. Cambridge: Polity, 2008.

In *The Comfort of Things*, Miller details findings from an anthropological study. One hundred individuals and households from the same street in London were studied over a period of 17 months. Thirty narratives, referred to by Miller as portraits, are presented. Several of these narrative portraits focus on clothing and dress, highlighting how clothing and dress practices can provide meaning, comfort, strength, and structure. Aligning with Bauman's concerns around individualism, Miller concludes that the subjects of the portraits regarded individualism as failure, equated with loneliness, and that relationships (with family, friends, and wider community through work or groups) are what matter in life. This is important given the well-documented negative impact of loneliness on well-being. Clothing engenders psychological comfort (or a sense of well-being) through enabling these participants to fit in with others, or by acting as a reminder of loved ones.

7. Holliday, Ruth. "The Comfort of Identity." *Sexualities* 2, vol. 4 (1999): 475-479.

Holliday's research into queer communities found that comfort was initially expressed as the primary motivation for leisure time clothing, although deeper analysis revealed political and subcultural reasons behind leisure clothing choice such as being accepted in certain social settings. Holliday states "[c]omfort ... signifies the comfort one feels from the degree of fit between the outside of one's body and its inside... the imagined or 'true' self" (p. 481). This is described as closing the gap between acting (performance) and being (ontology), emphasizing the performativity of identity, linking with Bauman's description of civility as a mask-wearing activity that protects in social settings. Holliday's research participants described their home environment as a safe haven, a place where

they had a level of control (for example, on who entered the home), and therefore comfort, where they could wear comfortable clothing. In more social settings such as work, the codification of dress is highlighted as a means to reduce anxieties around fitting in and conveying confidence or authority.

8. Leopardi, Giacomo. *Dialogue Between Fashion and Death*. London: Penguin Books, 2010.

This final one is just for fun; we cannot consider comfort without also thinking about discomfort, and discourse on the discomfort of dress is not just a contemporary phenomenon. In *A Dialogue Between Fashion and Death*, poet and philosopher Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837) personifies Fashion as one who persuades and forces, "all genteel men to endure daily a thousand hardships and a thousand discomforts and often pain and torment and I even get some of them to die gloriously for love of me" (p. 8).

Notes

[1] Bauman, Zygmunt. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012.

[2] Bauman, Zygmunt. *Culture in a Liquid Modern World*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011.

[3] Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 2012, p. 214.

[4] *Modernity*, p. 73.

[5] *Modernity*, p. 135.