

1 MAKING WARDROBE SPACE: THE SUSTAINABLE POTENTIAL OF MINIMALIST INSPIRED FASHION CHALLENGES

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Abstract: Minimalist fashion has become a key element of the wider minimalist movement that promotes reducing one's wardrobe space to a bare minimum of essential items (or a 'capsule wardrobe') with few, quality items that co-ordinate. Minimalist inspired 'fashion challenges', in which participants are challenged to only wear a certain number of garments over a certain time period, have also gained increasing momentum: particularly in the USA and the UK. This study considers 'Project 333' (in which participants must only wear 33 items of clothes over a three-month period), and 'the 6 Items Challenge' (which requires participants to only wear 6 garments over 6 weeks), to explore their potential to encourage sustainable fashion (non)consumption. This is achieved via an analysis of 20 blog posts of individuals reflecting on their own participation in the two challenges and an auto-ethnography of my own participation in the 6 Items Challenge. The research reveals that whilst just over half of participants mentioned sustainability as a motivation or outcome of their participation in a fashion challenge, the challenges' focus on garment reduction, re-use, repair and not shopping whilst partaking in them, renders them sustainably driven in practice. Almost all challenges also mentioned personal benefits of conducting a fashion challenge (such as money and time saved plus greater fashion creativity) which could be seen as a helpful way in which to encourage their uptake. However, the paper also considers the idealisation of 'perfect' minimalist wardrobe spaces and subsequent fashioned identities and issues regarding who has the pecuniary means to embrace the quality over quantity narrative of the challenges. The paper therefore concludes that fashion challenges do have the potential to encourage more sustainable

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fashion practices, but they simultaneously raise tensions regarding idealised minimalist fashioned identities.

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2 INTRODUCTION

Minimalism is an increasingly popular lifestyle movement that involves reducing the number of possessions owned to a bare minimum. This is with the intention of making space, whether that be physical, temporal, and/or mental space, to focus on the ‘important’ (potentially immaterial) things that are seen to add value to one’s life (Martin-Woodhead, 2021). Resounding the long-standing voluntary simplicity movement (Vladimirova, 2021), that emerged in the USA in the 1970s (Elgin & Mitchell, 1977), minimalism has gained increased popularity over the last decade in western economies, such as Japan, the USA, and Europe.

Minimalist fashion has become a key element of the minimalist movement, in which minimalist fashion advocates use social media to promote ‘detoxing’ the space of the wardrobe by removing unwanted clothing and accessories. The remaining items are intended to create a ‘capsule wardrobe’ of a bare minimum of fashion essentials with few, quality garments that co-ordinate. Emphasis is placed on simple, timeless and classic fashion looks, as opposed to fast fashion trends, and there is a preference for simple, complimentary colour palettes and versatile pieces.

Minimalist inspired fashion ‘challenges’, in which participants undergo ‘experiments in voluntary reduction of apparel consumption’ (Vladimirova, 2021: 112), have also gained increasing momentum. For example, the ‘fashion detox challenge’ was started by academics in the USA (Ruppert-Stroescu et al., 2015), and later in the UK (Ritch et al., 2020). It challenges participants to undergo a ‘fashion detox’ by refraining from clothing consumption over 10 weeks, in order to promote sustainable non-consumption of fashion. Other challenges involve detoxing the space of the wardrobe of unwanted items and only wearing a certain number of

garments over a certain time-period. These types of challenges involve the refashioning of the wardrobe space by asking participants to assess their clothing and assign it into categories of either 'dormant' or 'inactive' clothing (Woodward, 2007), that will remain unworn for the course of the challenge, or 'active' clothing (ibid) that will be worn. This is with the intention of encouraging participants to perhaps see how few 'active' items are needed within a wardrobe space and subsequently prevent the build-up of dormant wardrobes which are commonly known for holding many items which aren't worn regularly (ibid). To ensure the continual promotion of the challenges, and encourage their completion, participants are also encouraged to share their 'active' items and outfit ensembles via social media, thus revealing the normally private space of the wardrobe (ibid) to the public realm.

Perhaps the most well-known minimalist fashion challenge is 'Project 333': devised by Courtney Carver (based in Utah, USA) on her minimalist living blog '*Bemorewithless*' in 2010. Project 333 challenges participants to dress in no more than 33 items (not including underwear, loungewear and sleepwear) over three months. Participants are asked to geographically distance themselves from their remaining clothes by putting them in a box sealed with tape and ensuring it is hidden 'out of sight' (Carver, 2019) with the remaining 33 items intended to become a capsule wardrobe. Since its initiation in 2010, Project 333 has grown increasing popularity within an online community and has been 'up-taken by tens of thousands of people from across the globe' (ibid). Despite being initiated over a decade ago, the challenge has continued to be up-taken and in March 2020, Carver released a book titled '*Project 333: The Minimalist Fashion Challenge That Proves Less Really Is So Much More*' (Carver, 2020).

Fashion challenges have also been instigated by charitable organisations, such as '*The 6 Items Challenge*', which was started by '*Labour Behind the Label*' - a charity campaigning for the rights of garment workers. This challenge involves participants only being permitted to wear 6 garments (not including underwear, accessories, footwear and sportswear) over 6 weeks to fundraise for the charity and promote reduced fashion consumption. Although not explicitly instigated as part of the wider minimalist movement, this challenge invokes a minimalist sentiment due to its' emphasis on non-consumption and the numerical reduction of garments. Unlike Project 333, which focuses more on personal style and wardrobe organisation, this challenge has a specific sustainable and ethical fashion motivation due to its fundraising efforts and its intention to 'challenge our increasing reliance on fast fashion'

(Labourbehindthelabel.org, 2020). This is reflected in the timings of the challenge whereby the 6 weeks are scheduled during Lent – the traditional time of both reflection and fasting on the Christian calendar. Thus enforcing the notion of ‘a fashion fast to oppose fast fashion’ (ibid).

This study draws on ‘Project 333’ and ‘The Six Items Challenge’ as case studies to explore their potential to encourage sustainable fashion (non)consumption. This is achieved via an analysis of 20 blog posts of individuals reflecting on their own participation in Project 333 and the 6 Items Challenge and an auto-ethnography of my own participation in the latter. The research reveals that whilst just over half of participants mentioned sustainability as a motivation or outcome of their participation in a fashion challenge, the challenges’ foci on garment reduction, re-use, repair and not shopping whilst partaking in them, renders them sustainably driven in practice. Almost all challenge up-takers also mentioned personal benefits of conducting a fashion challenge (such as money and time saved plus greater fashion creativity) which could be seen as a helpful way in which to encourage reduced fashion consumption. However, the paper also considers the idealisation of ‘perfect’ minimalist wardrobe spaces and subsequent fashioned identities and issues regarding who has the pecuniary means to embrace the quality over quantity narrative of the challenges. The paper therefore concludes that fashion challenges do have the potential to encourage more sustainable fashion practices but simultaneously raise tensions regarding idealised, minimalist fashioned identities. To provide a framework for this discussion, literature on both sustainable fashion and fashion geographies are now considered.

3 MINIMALISM AND SUSTAINABLE FASHION GEOGRAPHIES

Increasing attention is being paid by geographers to the wider environmental and social impacts of the global fast fashion industry (Crewe, 2008; 2017; Kozłowski et al., 2012) particularly focusing on inequalities in fashion’s commodity chains and the rights of garments workers and working conditions (Crewe, 2004; Hale & Wills, 2005; Raghuram, 2004). At a more localised scale, geographers have considered the space of the wardrobe and the sorting and divestment of clothing (Gregson & Beale, 2004) and the relationship between the space of the wardrobe and identity: including Woodward’s (2015) consideration of the wardrobe as an externalisation of the self that co-constitutes wearers’ identities and Owen’s examination of cross-dressing and

the ‘dualism between home and self-storage through the gendered materiality of clothing’ (Owen, 2020: 1269).

Wider studies within the social sciences have considered the sustainable fashion focused practices and behaviours of consumers (Bly et al., 2015) such as the growing popularity of pre-loved clothing, second hand and vintage shopping (Cervellon et al., 2012), clothing rental and swapping (Lang & Armstrong, 2018) and prosumer behaviours of repairing and adjusting clothing to prolong garment lives (Grimstad et al., 2014). Attention has also been placed on the fast fashion antithesis ‘slow fashion’ (Fletcher, 2010), which is based on durable clothing with long life spans, with an overarching premise of quality over quantity. This parallels the sentiments of lifestyle minimalism that emphasises a general premise of ‘less is more’ and ‘quality over quantity’ in relation to material objects (Błoński & Witek, 2019; Dopierała, 2017; Zalewska & Cobeł-Tokarska, 2016). Fashion challenges mirror slow fashion and minimalist sentiments due to the emphasis placed on reducing clothing consumption and challenging participants to embrace wearing fewer items of clothing overall (Ritch et al., 2020). This article seeks to broaden the geographical fashion literature, via a consideration of the micro-geographies of the space of the wardrobe and everyday fashion practices, but situating this within wider questions of sustainability and minimalism – the latter having received little academic attention within the geographical discipline.

4 METHODS

The research for this study comprises of an analysis of blog posts, created between 2013 and 2021, of 20 individuals (10 who carried out Project 333 and 10 who carried out The Six Items Challenge) reflecting on their experiences of partaking in the challenges. Participants were selected using a search engine and clicking on each link until a blog post was found that was based on an individual’s personal experiences of partaking in one of the challenges. Of the 20 challenge participants – 3 were male and 17 were female. The gendered weighting towards female participants was not intentional and was instead indicative of the blog content available; which is perhaps reflective of a wider ‘gender gap in sustainable consumption’ (Brough et al., 2016: 568). Participants’ occupations comprised of a professional organiser, a volunteer at a sustainable fashion collective, journalists, writers, sustainability bloggers and employees at a waste disposal authority. 9 were based in the UK, 4 were based in the USA, two were in

Australia, one was from New Zealand, one from Denmark, one from the Netherlands and two did not reveal their location. Table 1 shows a full list of participant details.

The blog posts were compiled into the qualitative analysis software NVivo and a thematic coding analysis was carried out and a grounded theory approach was adopted in which ‘coding categories’ were ‘allowed to emerge from the data’ (Herring, 2010: 236). Codes were organised into a coding framework made up of a series of master themes refined into sub-categories that were used to identify and explore key themes that emerged from the blog posts.

This was conducted alongside an auto-ethnography of my own participation in Labour behind the Label’s 6 Items Challenge – in which I only wore the same 6 garments for 6 weeks and did not wear any other items from my wardrobe. This was a form of auto-ethnography in which the researching was not the ‘major preoccupation, apart from at a particular time when the empirical material is targeted for close scrutiny and writing’ (Alvesson, 2003: 174). The following section draws on my own reflections and those of the 20 online challenge participants to explore participants’ experiences of the challenges; including the personal benefits derived from them and sustainable motivations and practices.

Table 1. List of individuals reflecting online via blog posts about their experiences of partaking in Project 333 and the 6 Items Challenge.

Challenge	Name	Date	Location	Profession/ Blog type	Gender	URL Link
6 items	Mel	2019	Scotland	Professional organiser	Female	https://www.moreorganised.com/six-items-challenge-2019/
6 items	Frederique	2018	Queenstown, New Zealand	Freelance journalist and PR Consultant	Female	https://ecowarriorprincess.net/2018/02/the-six-item-challenge-helpful-tips/
6 items	Christin	2017	London	Employee at a waste disposal authority	Female	https://westlondonwaste.gov.uk/christins-six-items-challenge/
6 items	Emma	2017	London	Employee at a waste disposal authority	Female	https://westlondonwaste.gov.uk/emmas-six-items-challenge/
6 items	Roger	2017	London	Employee at a waste disposal authority	Male	https://westlondonwaste.gov.uk/rogers-six-item-challenge/
6 items	Anna	2017	London	Employee at a waste disposal authority	Female	https://westlondonwaste.gov.uk/annas-six-items-challenge/
6 items	Sarah	2017	London	Employee at a waste disposal authority	Female	https://westlondonwaste.gov.uk/sarabs-six-items-challenge/
6 items	Gemma	2017	London	Employee at a waste disposal authority	Female	https://westlondonwaste.gov.uk/gemmas-six-items-challenge/
6 items	Bryony	2017	Manchester	Volunteer at a sustainable fashion collective	Female	https://stitchedup.coop/campaigns-6-items-challenge-treating-clothes-better/
6 items	Tansy	2021	London	A journalist and author of 'Stitched Up – The Anti-Capitalist Book of Fashion'	Female	https://labourbehindthelabel.org/tansys-six-items-challenge/
Project 333	Jennifer	2018	Queensland, Australia	Minimalist blogger	Female	https://www.simplyfiercely.com/project-333-2-month-update/
Project 333	Lexi	2019	Australia	Sustainable travel blogger	Female	http://avaycay.com/2019/04/07/project-333-the-final-thought/
Project 333	Nati	2018	Netherlands	Eco-blogger	Female	https://myhappyfootprint.com/project-333-capsule-wardrobe/
Project 333	Joshua	2013	Vermont, USA	Minimalist figurehead	Male	https://www.becomingminimalist.com/declutter-the-closet/
Project 333	Debbie	2013	California, USA	Re-covering shopaholic blogger	Female	https://recoveringshopaholic.com/2013/07/10/top-8-lessons-from-project-333/
Project 333	Laura	Unknown	Georgia, USA	Minimalist blogger	Female	https://www.simplyclearly.com/project-333-minimalist-wardrobe/
Project 333	Maria	Unknown	Denmark	Blogger on downsizing and space optimisation	Female	https://www.godownsize.com/project-333-challenge/
Project 333	Jessica	2018	New Jersey, USA	Writer, wellness blogger and editor	Female	https://www.jessicaannwalsh.com/2018/04/after-3-months-project-333.html/
Project 333	Paul	2013	Unknown	Writer and blogger	Male	https://paulschienecker.com/2013/04/12/project-333/
Project 333	Sarah	Unknown	Unknown	Writer and intentional living coach	Female	http://thebaehr necessities.com/project-333-my-first-experience/

5 RESULTS

5.1 Personal benefits

The majority of the challenge participants reported on positive experiences and personal benefits derived from partaking in a fashion challenge. Several spoke about simple, practical benefits of relying on fewer clothing items. Including the financial benefits of spending less money on clothing (*"I ultimately saved money by not shopping in three months"* (Lexi, Project 333)), an enjoyment of having a tidier, less cluttered wardrobe and bedroom (*"Walking into a clutter-free closet was a joyful way to start my day"* (Sarah, Project 333)), having less laundry to do (*"I feel content in knowing that the laundry basket won't be filling up again for the next five weeks"* (Bryony, 6 Items)) and how packing for travel is made far easier (*"Traveling is a breeze, I only take a carry on bag now anywhere I go"* (Laura, Project 333)).

Many participants also spoke about how partaking in a fashion challenge benefited their own sense of personal style and fashion creativity. Participants spoke of how the challenges meant that *"you are forced to single out the most important, most versatile, and most loved items. You are required to identify the most valuable things in your closet"* (Joshua, Project 333). As a result of only having items in one's wardrobe that are truly treasured, participants mentioned that this helped develop their personal style and improved self-confidence as they were only wearing clothes that they were comfortable in or liked very much.

Challenge participants also reflected on how putting together outfits from a limited clothing selection encouraged them to be more creative. For example, Debbie states; *"because I was forced to dress with fewer pieces, I became more creative in how I combined garments and in my accessorizing"* (Debbie, Project 333). From my own participation in the 6 Items challenge, I too enjoyed this creative element of the challenge - discovering that the few garments I had could be extremely versatile and could be worn 'differently' to how I had originally imagined.

"I'm still getting excited when I manage to make an outfit that is new. Yesterday I created my pink cardi into a dress...It has really opened my eyes to just how many ways a few pieces of clothing can be worn". (Author's research diary excerpt)

Similar accounts were reported by participants of Ruppert-Stroescu et al.'s (2015) 10-week fashion detox which revealed that limiting their clothing choices encouraged expressions of fashion creativity such as redesigning old clothing.

Many challenge participants also reflected on the positive benefits a fashion challenge had on their own personal wellbeing. Almost half of challenge up-takers mentioned that having less items in their wardrobe removed the need for decision making in their morning routines - saving both time and stress in the morning. For example, Mel (6 Items) states; *“The relief of not having to choose what I was going to wear each morning was an unexpected positive that far outweighed the occasional frustration of not having choice. I saved so much time and decision-making”*. This speaks to Schwartz' (2004) theory of the paradox of choice that argues that an array of consumer choice can be overwhelming and detrimental to one's psychological well-being. Therefore fashion challenges may help negate the effect of the paradox of wardrobe choice - as the amount of items to potentially choose from is so small that the usual 'wardrobe moment' (Gregson & Beale, 2004), of deciding what to wear from an array of clothes, is essentially eliminated.

Intriguingly, 6 Item Challenge participants reflected on an additional personal benefit of having reduced anxieties regarding other people's perceptions of their clothing, as they did not seem to notice, or at least comment on, participants wearing similar clothing. As Mel (6 Items) states; *“The other surprise was that nobody noticed. Nobody. How often do we dress up to fit a social requirement, a perceived “norm” or to impress? It turns out that no-one really cares... and I was delighted”*. This could also be seen as a sustainable benefit of the challenges as if participants feel they are more comfortable wearing similar items of clothing again and again, this could have the potential to promote reduced clothing consumption.

5.2 Sustainability benefits

In fact, alongside the personal benefits mentioned by participants, 11 of the 20 participants also stated that they were motivated by the wider ethical and sustainability benefits of the challenges and some commented on becoming *“more aware of the detrimental environmental impacts of the fashion industry”* (Anna, 6 Items). Some participants even saw the challenges as a way in which to highlight the issues of fast fashion to others. Here, Mel recalls her belief that her

participation in the 6 Items challenge allowed her to discuss fast fashion and even influence other people's behaviours:

"I told work colleagues, friends and family to beware that I was going to only wear the same six items of clothing for the next month and a half. They all asked why, which presented the perfect opportunity to spread the word about the problem with fast fashion. I truly believe I influenced people's opinions about fashion and consumption as a result of doing the challenge, some of whom have made life changes".

Alongside these sustainable motivations and realisations, many participants reflected on newfound sustainable and ethical fashion consumption practices. For example, Debbie (Project 333) states: "*the experience of dressing with only 33 garments showed me that I don't need nearly as much as I once thought I did*". The 'realization that one buys and owns more clothes than one needs' (Vladimirova, 2021) was also a common finding in other studies of fashion challenges (Ritch et al., 2020; Vladimirova, 2021; Wu et al., 2013) and Vladimirova (2021) argues that this 'is a milestone toward voluntary reduction of apparel consumption' (112) as the challenges question the normalised fast fashion and social media-driven discourses of 'having' to wear different clothes continually (Collins, 2018; Shrivastava et al., 2021).

Others also mentioned that they were taking better care of the clothes both within and after the challenges. For example, Tansy (6 Items) states; "*In the months since, I have mended every item in my wardrobe that needed fixing*". Here we see evidence of McCracken's 'grooming rituals' that 'are used to effect the continual transfer of perishable properties - properties likely to fade when possessed by the consumer' (McCracken, 1986: 80) which are encouraged further due to wearing fewer garments. Suggesting that the challenges have the potential to encourage participants to take on the common sustainable fashion discourses of maintenance and repair of garments to prolong their life and subsequently prevent the purchase of new items.

Similarly, several challenge participants mentioned that the challenges had encouraged them to change their fashion consumption practices by opting to choose quality over quantity, trying to buy ethical and sustainable fashion and by purchasing second-hand. For example, Debbie (Project 333) states; "*I also began to pay more attention to where my clothes were made and consider the ethics involved in the manufacture of what I'm wearing...I now choose to purchase fewer garments of higher quality that are made with ethics and sustainability in mind*".

Similarly, upon completing the 6 Items challenge Mel states: “*I have definitely changed my shopping habits after learning more about the distress and waste of our society’s addiction to fast fashion. I don’t want to be part of it, especially now I’ve found out how much fun it is to shop second-hand*”. This demonstrates that for some, fashion challenges have influenced their perspectives of fast fashion and have instigated more sustainable (non)consumption practices.

However, it must be considered that 9 of the 20 participants did not explicitly mention sustainable and ethical motivations or practices associated with the challenge, and instead focused upon the personal benefits they derived from them. There was also a greater focus on sustainability and ethical fashion from 6 Items Challenge participants - which is perhaps unsurprising considering the challenge was initiated by an ethical fashion charity and has a clear anti fast fashion agenda. Whereas only three out of 10 Project 333 participants mentioned sustainable or ethical fashion motivations. Again, this is perhaps unsurprising as Project 333 is promoted more as a minimalist project for self-improvement and wellbeing. However, the sustainable potential of the challenge is perhaps still evident as, relative of intent, the challenge requirements to trial a reduced wardrobe space promotes up-takers to undertake sustainable fashion practices by looking after the clothes they have, to buy less during the challenge and potentially by shifting consumer mentalities of how many clothes they believe they need— as also evidenced other fashion challenges studies (Ritch et al., 2020; Vladimirova, 2021; Wu et al., 2013). Therefore, from a practice theory perspective, in which importance is placed on everyday consumption practices, as opposed to wider motivations (Huddart Kennedy, 2020; Welch & Warde, 2015), the challenge could be viewed as having sustainable fashion practise outcomes, if not explicit sustainability motivations and could consequently be viewed as a form of unintentional or ‘accidental’ sustainability (Woodward, 2015). Whilst the personal motivations for up-taking the challenges, including money saving, time saving, stress-reduction and increased personal style and creativity are perhaps important ways of encouraging people to carry out and complete the challenges to promote sustainable garment practices, relative of intentions.

5.3 Challenges to fashion challenges

Despite the potential sustainable fashion practices encouraged by trialling a reduction in one’s wardrobe, the challenges do raise questions regarding their practically and accessibility. First,

despite the plethora of positive benefits offered to challenge partakers, some spoke of difficulties they encountered. A few mentioned getting bored with their limited wardrobe and almost half mentioned that they did not always have the ‘right’ item for a specific occasion (such as a special occasion or work event) or a change in weather. And a few spoke about how they had to break the rules of the challenge for this reason – such as needing an extra sweater or needing an outfit for a new job. This was often reported on by 6 item challengers – where perhaps the extremeness of the challenge could prove difficult and could therefore be off-putting.

Second, the challenges formulaic prescriptions of numerical requirements could be seen to rationalise and routinise the space of the wardrobe into an idealised and perfected capsule wardrobe, untainted from items that do not adhere to a minimalist aesthetic of co-ordination and simplicity. These garments are then intended to be worn on the space of the body to construct the idealised minimalist fashioned identity. This is reflective of both McCracken’s (1986) ‘possession rituals’ that ‘are designed to transfer a good’s properties to its owner’ (80) and Woodward’s (2005) material culture based theorisation of the wardrobe as ‘an externalization of selfhood’ (22) in which clothing and identity are seen to co-constitute one another. From this perspective, the rationalised sorting of the wardrobe is intended to transfer the curated and stylised properties onto the wardrobe space to its proprietor. For example, Zalewska and Cobel-Tokarska (2016) argue that bloggers showcasing the ideal items in their capsule wardrobes (and presenting lists of what items should be included within it) is an act that displays one’s taste and proficiency in outfit creation and sometimes even add prestige. This is evidenced within Project 333 which asks partakers to post details and images of their progress on Instagram using the hashtag #Project333 and via a Project 333 Community Board on Pinterest. In the following blog excerpt of Jennifer’s reflections on Project 333, she mentions a disappointment her readers may feel that she wore similar outfits again and again, as opposed to other challenge bloggers who she sees as fashioning inventive and creative outfits that appear to be continually different.

“I ended up wearing the same 19 things over and over again...I’m not sure if this is what you want to hear – I know there are a lot of bloggers out there doing really incredible, creative Project333 wardrobes where they look like they are wearing completely different outfits every day!”. (Jennifer, Project 333)

Therefore, whilst fashion challenges may contest dominant discourses of being pressured to buy enough clothing to be seen in new outfits on social media and demonstrate ‘collection capital’ (Collins, 2018), they may ironically create new pressures to create idealised minimalist fashion ensembles from a restricted amount of garments and demonstrate *minimalist* collection capital.

Finally, the idealisation of the perfect capsule wardrobe, with few, high quality items, raises issues regarding who has the pecuniary means to participate in these challenges. One participant states; “*we should buy less but buy better, investing in key pieces instead of many fast fashion items*” (Emma 6 Items), which is of course a noble intention to avoiding fast-fashion by buying better to buy less and thus be more sustainable. However, the premise of ‘quality over quantity’ could be financially exclusive to those who do not already have, or who have the financial capacity to invest in, high quality (Martin-Woodhead, 2021) and/or ethical items, that are often only available at higher price points (Littler, 2011). This is particularly prevalent in the fashion industry, in which the higher costs of sustainable and ethical fashion production, and subsequent higher garment costs, are well documented as a barrier to consumer accessibility (Moon, Lai, Lam, & Chang, 2015). In addition, the challenges’ process of elimination only speaks to those with items to ‘detox’ from their wardrobes to begin with – not those who have to wear a limited number of items by financial necessity rather than choice. This is perhaps reflected by the fact that all participants were based in affluent capitalist economies including the USA, Europe and Australia. This raises issues of potential class barriers to fashion challenges in which they may only be accessible to those who have the financial capital to have large enough wardrobes to downsize and to have high quality garments within them. Therefore, despite the sustainable potential of minimalist fashion challenges, they also raise problematic identity politics with regards to the idealisation of capsule wardrobe spaces and minimalist (non)consumer identities for some and potential financial and classed exclusion for others.

6 CONCLUSIONS

This paper draws on an analysis of 20 individuals’ blog posts about their experiences of partaking in Project 333 and the 6 Items Challenge, and an auto-ethnography of my own

participation in the latter, to question if minimalist inspired fashion challenges have the potential to encourage sustainable fashion (non)consumption.

The findings revealed that almost all the challenge participants derived personal benefits from the challenge. Including: spending less money on clothing, reduced stress as their wardrobes and bedrooms were less cluttered, the development of one's personal style, increased creativity of creating outfits from a limited clothing selection (Ruppert-Stroescu et al., 2015), reduced anxieties from an eliminated 'wardrobe moment' (Gregson & Beale, 2004) and lesser concerns regarding the opinions of others of what they were wearing. The findings revealed that just over half of participants were motivated to do a fashion challenge by ethical and sustainability benefits and concerns over the fast-fashion industry. For some, the challenges also encouraged sustainable practices of garment repair and maintenance, a preference for fewer but higher quality garments and shopping for second-hand items and/or from ethical and sustainable fashion brands.

The paper has also considered that although just under half of the challenges did not mention specific sustainable motivations for up taking the challenges (whereas almost all participants mentioned personal benefits derived from the challenges), a practice theory approach (Huddart Kennedy, 2020; Welch & Warde, 2015) highlights the challenges' potential to promote sustainable non-consumption fashion practices of not shopping for clothes during the challenge, and garment reduction, repair and reuse - despite this not being a primary motivation. The sustainable practices of fashion challenges therefore aligns them with other environmentally conscious consumer initiatives, such as sustainable minimalism (Seferian, 2021), becoming plastic-free and the zero-waste movement (Korst, 2012), but in practice if not always in intent. The personal benefits promoted by the challenges could also be viewed as a beneficial way of encouraging and popularising reduced fashion consumption, as ultimately, an anti-consumer lifestyle must still be personally appealing and pleasurable for it to become popularised (Jackson, 2005; Soper, 2008).

However, the paper has also posited that in spite of the sustainable benefits offered by fashion challenges, they also raise questions with regards to the difficulties of completing the challenges, the promotion of idealised minimalist wardrobe spaces (Zalewska & Cobel-Tokarska, 2016) and subsequent idealised minimalist fashioned identities, and the financially

exclusive remit of basing a wardrobe on fewer but higher quality items. This suggests that the increasing popularity of fashion challenges may promote both sustainable practices but also new formations of idealised (and potentially exclusionary) minimalist and sustainable fashion selves. Therefore, the sustainable potential of minimalist fashion challenges renders them, and minimalist fashion more widely, an important area of further research within fashion geographies – yet one which must be considered with a careful reflection of the balance between sustainable practices and fashioned identities

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