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Performing a Respectable Consumer Identity

A Qualitative Study on How Consumers Justify Their Fashion Rental
Behavior

by

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Abstract

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Thesis Purpose: To add to the social debate on the relationship between society and fashion consumers. To explore this, the phenomenon of fashion rental is investigated to provide insights on how fashion consumers account for their behavior in order to come off as respectable.

Methodology: A qualitative study was conducted with a relativist ontological standpoint and from an epistemological approach, a constructive position. The data was analyzed through an ethnomethodological perspective to uncover how consumers account for their behavior.

Theoretical Perspective: This study focused on the reviewing and applying theories established within the field of identity construction and possessions. Further, theories surrounding justification and value generation were applied to guide the analysis in answering the research question.

Empirical Data: Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather the empirical material for this study. The sample consisted of female consumers between the age of 22-27 who had experience of using fashion rental services.

Findings/conclusions: How consumers justify themselves highly depends on aspects within their ideal self and actual self. The chasm between the two selves evokes anxieties among consumers. Individuals draw from these anxieties in delivering justifications to explain their fashion rental behavior. In doing this individuals will provide justifications from their desire to maintain a respectable identity in order to not disturb the social order.

Practical implications: The findings from this study emphasize the subjectivity and complexity of consumer's motivations to adopt fashion rental behavior. Businesses and marketing managers, therefore, must formulate well established strategies for their target consumers, shaped to their personal motivations.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces a background to how society shapes consumer behavior. The complex nature of social situations and dynamics probes a problem and in conjunction with previous literature, a need for this study to be conducted. This is followed by a description of the purpose and aim of this study.

1.1 Background

In contemporary society there are immense pressures faced by consumers regarding the societal expectations on how they look, act, and even consume. You do not have to be a Carrie Bradshaw of *Sex and the City* to acknowledge the unwritten rules that exist in today's society about how one should dress. Pop cultural icons like Carrie Bradshaw and the rest of the *Sex and the City* women are renowned for never wearing the same outfit or garment twice throughout the television series (Dalton, 2016). The bestowed idea of repeat outfit wearing has been tarnished in fashion consumers' mindsets to be socially rejected. When did the stigmatization around outfit repeating arise? As children, our favorite role models, cartoons, and characters all had iconic outfits. Mickey Mouse had his red shorts and yellow shoes, Pippi Longstocking with her overalls and mismatched stockings, and Snow White with her yellow and blue gown. However, as we grew older, our mindsets evolved to perceive uniformity as inferior and that it constrains individuality (Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997; Solomon & Douglas, 1987). The pressures to present unique and creative fashion looks became more important for consumers to deliver.

To satisfy the consumers desires, fashion companies have utilized these ideas and incorporated it into their business models. Fashion companies are designing, selling, and distributing clothes at an increasing speed (Ellen Macarthur Foundation, 2017). Trends emerge from the runway to high street fashion retailers within no time as producers have gained the ability to reproduce trends and deliver them to their consumers, igniting society to migrate from the traditional 'need-to-have' fashion industry to the 'want-to-have' mindset. These artificial needs generated by the fashion industry are infiltrating consumers to have updated wardrobes that are contributing to an unsustainable society. In fact, studies show that consumers will wear an item approximately 7-10 times before it is thrown away (Ellen Macarthur Foundation, 2017). Fashion consumers have

contributed to the current linear production model that we operate in with their disposable mindsets towards clothing and trends. Igniting the World Economic Forum to express that the world we live in will no longer be able to operate under this current basis (World Economic Forum, 2014).

In addition to this, society has shifted into a new era where ‘ordinary people’ live affluent lifestyles with endless opportunities. Reality TV shows, blog posts, to now the dominating Instagram platform, there now exists the possibility for ordinary people to influence other ordinary people. This asserts an immense amount of pressure onto consumers to deliver consistent identity performances. Individuals are not only able to share pictures of their everyday lives but are also constantly fed with others’ messages and content which breeds the pressures and expectations on how one should present themselves in a favorable manner. With the rapid development of the digital landscape and the existence of social media in individuals’ everyday lives, one's social presence is constant. Individuals are forever presenting their identity to an audience and the pressures to upkeep their social image is immense. As a negative aspect of the constant presence, these pressures can become overwhelming and further yield the anxieties within individuals.

1.2 Problematization and Research Question

To navigate oneself through all the social expectations, individuals naturally attempt to manage and satisfy what is expected of them. Invoking the shift in technology in contemporary society, this has become ever more sensitive with both the physical and digital presence of one’s self. Social media platforms, for instance, have contributed to individuals' constant social presence, enhancing their exposure to other people's judgment. It is important to come off as a good, competent member of society and to comply with the governmental process of society to preserve a respectful identity (Giesler & Veresiu, 2014). In order to not be stigmatized or to stand out of the crowd in a negative light, one must deceive any vain, superficial, or ridiculous behavior. Discourses in society sculpt how consumers make choices and the methods apply to accomplish the lifestyle they think they want to live (Dean, 2010, cited in Egan-Wyer, 2019). However, with so many signals and communicated messages in today’s society, what is considered wrong or stigmatized is hard to determine and rather subjective. Everyone has their own interpretations and there is a fine line between what can be conventionally considered right or wrong between in a societal context. In contemporary society, consumers are constantly trying to present themselves

as what they suppose is considered a ‘good’ consumer or citizen (Egan-Wyer, 2019). Individuals strive to be approved as members of society by practicing conventional and expected behaviors. Everyone in the world is just trying to go through life as a responsible, good member of society. In addition to being accepted, individuals want to present themselves in the best possible light and go beyond obeying societal pressures. However, the subjectivity of the ideal choices, desires, and lifestyles vary among members of society. There are a lot of influencing factors deriving from one's culture that can shape the conceptualized ideas. This creates the basis of why individuals justify their actions. What could be deemed as correct in one's eyes, may not correspond to another. To retain the social order, individuals attempt to account for their behavior in order to explain the meanings and intent behind what they have done or believe is socially correct.

This indicates the existence of the social debate surrounding the discourses of society and fashion consumers. What is evident is that fashion is subjective and a tool to express one’s personal identity. However, individuals are conditioned to adhere to what is expected by society. What remains unclear is how consumers have to bridge the gap between how they interpret these expectations with the way they present their fashion consumption and identities. This stimulates individuals to engage in discussions in an attempt to declare their establishment as good, respectable fashion consumers in society.

While there is previous research within the field of consumers' justifications, it primarily explores how consumers engage in unethical and unconventional behavior such as meat consumption (Rothgerber, 2013) or purchasing counterfeit products (Eisend, 2019; Kim, Kim & Park, 2012). Fashion is subjective and up for interpretation, where there are many unwritten behavioral rules regarding what one can and cannot do or wear. However, as it stands, there is no enforced right or wrong. Therefore, there exists a largely unexplored field in the justification dimension with the social debate of how fashion consumers attempt to accomplish themselves as respectable and competent for the eyes of others. The link between individuals justifying their choices in identity construction boasts a complex nature. To add a new perspective to the debate, the researchers will explore this through the phenomenon of fashion rental.

Fashion rental services remain a generally underdeveloped phenomenon. It has not been thoroughly researched and the primary exploration in the field observes the motivations and barriers for consumers' behavior. Fashion rental is a relatively new concept that is growing in size and demand (McKinsey & Company, 2019). There are several businesses that have created a huge establishment using this phenomenon and developed into large billion-dollar businesses, whilst on the other hand, other fashion rental services and fashion libraries are gradually gaining traction (GlobalData Retail, 2019). Recently, the global fashion giant H&M decided to invest their resources into collaborative fashion consumption and trial renting with their Stockholm customers (H&M, 2019). However, in the past, the Swedish market has witnessed fashion retailers such as Filippa K divert their resources away from their garment leasing initiatives (Filippa K, 2018).

However, leasing is still an unconventional method of consuming fashion goods and challenges a lot of what marketing managers know about consumer behavior. What is already established in previous research surrounding fashion and identity creation is limited from the new perspective of collaborative consumption. Access-based consumption disputes the ideas of how identity is created and maintained. The phenomenon of fashion rental services administers a compelling angle on identity construction and consumer justification which has not been previously researched in relation to each other. These ideas have created the basis of this study and helped probe the question formulated by the researchers to ask:

How do fashion consumers justify their fashion behavior to accomplish themselves as respectable consumers?

1.3 Aim and Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate how female fashion consumers justify their rental behavior. This study will primarily investigate how they attempt to accomplish themselves as respectable and competent fashion consumers as they utilize fashion rental services.

An ethnomethodological perspective will be applied to the study to help understand the complexity of consumer behavior within fashion. The complexity of the fashion industry, especially the phenomenon of fashion rental, can be perceived in many different subjective ways. Previous investigations into fashion rental services have been observed from more practical and quantifiable aspects. By adding an ethnomethodological perspective to the conversation of fashion rental, this will derive insights and provide an understanding of how consumers behave, how they account for their rental habits; and its implications on their identity performance.

The aim of this study is to develop upon the research field within consumer justification as well as providing new insights into the fashion rental business. A better understanding of how fashion consumers account for their behavior will further provide a wider perspective on societal discourses. The study will serve as a post in the social debate of the influential relationship between fashion and society, furthermore, adding to the discussion of how consumers act and behave in society. In understanding this, the study aims to provide insights for marketing managers which are relevant to take into consideration when analyzing complex consumer data.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter reveals what previous literature has explored and proposed in relevant themes for this study. The chapter is broken down to first explore the phenomenon of fashion rental services. Elaborated in this are the motivations and barriers for leasing as revealed from what previous literature has declared. Secondly, the chapter explores the concept of identity construction and how fashion can assist in maintaining a consumer identity. The chapter reveals what previous literature has discovered in relation to consumer justification. Finally, a critique is offered by the researchers to compile concluding thoughts on what the previous literature has established.

2.1 Fashion Rental Services

Whilst the concept of renting items is not new, the idea of renting fashion garments is still relatively undeveloped and still expanding among markets. Facilitating consumer desires of variety, affordability, and sustainability (McKinsey & Company, 2019), consumers are showing a willingness to shift away from traditional modes of accessing clothes. Fashion rental services are a dimension within collaborative fashion consumption (Iran & Schrader, 2017). Lang et al. characterized renting that it “takes place when two individuals (or parties) exchange a good with a certain amount of money for a specified period without ownership being transferred” (2019, p.521). In terms of garment leasing, items of clothing are rented by the consumer. Within this study, the terms fashion rental and garment leasing will be used interchangeably to express the examined act of having the right to enjoy and use fashion garments without the burdens of ownership. Lang (2018) and Philips et al. (2015) elaborate on these burdens of ownership as the financial costs of purchasing the garments, to the physical aspect of maintaining and storing the garment but also the risk of obsolescence and disposition.

Fashion rental services is an industry that indicates a large domain for growth, especially with the strong adjacent pressures for the fashion industry to incorporate sustainable fashion into their businesses (GlobalData Retail, 2019; McKinsey & Company, 2019). The industry has witnessed great success from the American-housed brand Rent the Runway as they have transformed into a billion-dollar business over the past 12 years. Rent the Runway offers a range of services from leasing—or a subscription option—garments that range from everyday clothing to luxury. The

relative success of Rent the Runway and equivalent businesses has caught the eye of entrepreneurs and the renting concept has seeped to formulate smaller businesses. Within the USA, Australia, and New Zealand, individuals innovatively have emerged with their own rental business, often starting by renting out their own wardrobes. Businesses such as Glam Corner, Rent A Dress Australia, Something Borrowed, Rent My Wardrobe, and Lend the Label, use social media platforms as their main contact with consumers as they provide event attire for cocktail parties, weddings, and festivals. Incorporating social media platforms into their business models means that they attract consumers as they look for fashion inspiration. With the collective success of garment leasing in a few predominant markets, along with the pressures on the fashion industry to incorporate collaborative fashion consumption, the idea has caught the eyes of fashion brands around the world as they begin trialing the leasing of their own garments. Most recently, global fast-fashion giant H&M announced their desire to enter this industry, making it evidential that collaborative fashion consumption is a vital opportunity for businesses to explore. However, as H&M moves towards fashion rental, other industry players such as Filippa K have divested their resources away from their “Lease” concept. In their sustainability report, they claim this was a strategic move after experiencing an all-time low since the launch in 2015 (Filippa K, 2018).

Luxury and event attire appears to be the highest demanded category of clothing within the rental industry. Luxury goods, as conceptualized by Loussaïef et al., convey social status and an affluent lifestyle that is associated with consuming luxury products (2019). Renting luxury goods gives consumers the ‘access to use’ whilst maintaining a desired identity or reputation without the burden of ownership of the products (Tu & Hu, 2018). Therefore, fashion rental services enable consumers to perform and ‘liquid identity’, making it easier to replicate and construct who they desire to be (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017; Bauman, 2000).

As fashion trends and styles are consistently distributed into society at an exceeding pace, fashion-minded consumers find it a financial struggle to keep up to date with the trends, especially with luxury fashion items (Tu & Hu, 2018). Fashion rental services are used as a tool for fashion consumers to express themselves in a multitude of ways. Within the field of research on fashion rental services, there currently exists a number of studies exploring the motivation and barriers for the adoption of these services.

2.1.1 Motivations

The motivations outlined by these researchers range from self-perception to the societal pressures consumers may face. Lang (2018) begins with an exploration of the extrinsic and intrinsic enjoyment that consumers perceive when renting fashion. Temporary ownership allows consumers to trial, explore, and access garments that they may not have originally had access nor the financial means to previously (Balck & Cracau, 2015; Kang & Kim, 2013; Lang, 2018; Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010). Luxury items are more attainable for consumers when they adopt leasing services as they pay a significant fraction of the retail price or in some consumer's eyes, they pay per usage leading to a higher perceived value. As Lang (2018) expands consumers view leasing as a more affordable and convenient option rather than purchasing items with limited expected usage such as formal wear that may only be worn once or twice. Encompassed within the convenience motivator, rental services also allow consumers to keep up with the fast-fashion trends without reaping the financial and ownership burdens (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017; Gullstrand-Edbring, Lehner & Mont, 2016; Lang & Armstrong, 2018; Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010; Pedersen & Netter, 2015). In today's fast-fashion society, trends are reproduced at rapid speeds from the runway to retail stores. As a fashion consumer, the societal pressures to maintain these trends can oppress and motivate consumers to lease the garments to avoid ownership burdens (Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010). Leasing makes it possible for consumers to alter their identity smoothly, easily, and temporarily in a chameleon-like fashion (Loussaief, Ulrich & Damay, 2019).

The environmental aspect of fashion rental has been determined as a strong motivator for consumers (Armstrong et al., 2015; Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Lang, 2018; Lang & Armstrong, 2018; Lundblad & Davies, 2016; Shen et al., 2012). Lundblad & Davies (2016) acknowledges that sustainability-oriented consumers are taking their ecological footprint into consideration while shopping for fashion. They place great importance on "protecting the planet" in terms of natural resources, limiting harmful waste, environmentally friendly production techniques, as well as considering the implications on the social injustices their consumption may create. Renting gives the garments the opportunity to be utilized to its fullest, giving it a second chance or to be used by others when it is not being worn by the owner (Tu & Hu, 2018). Conscious consumers supporting and participating in circular economy initiatives as they derive a guilt-free conscience and good feelings in making 'good' consumption choices.

Furthermore, sustainability-focused consumers identify themselves as striving to stand out from the status quo and emphasizing the individuality of their consumption choices (Lundblad & Davies, 2016; Loussaïef, 2019). Loussaïef says that many consumers like being able to say that it is not their own as it makes them appear more sustainable and open-minded (2019). They make consumption choices to actively restrain from fashion social norms and would resent the mainstream consumers that would follow their wake (Lundblad & Davies, 2016). Guiot & Roux (2010) reassures this concept by claiming, consumers like to be perceived as unique and this motivates their fashion behavior. As Hustvedt & Dickson (2009) further demonstrate, the consumers that identify them as environmentally conscious use this attribute and their associated actions to construct their self-image.

2.1.2 Barriers

As evident in society, fashion rental services are still growing and being slowly adopted by mainstream consumers. The industry still lacks in size and credibility as many consumers are hesitant to adopt collaborative consumption practices into their behavioral patterns (Lang et al., 2019). A large factor of this hesitation is the lack of ownership (Belk, 2007; Gullstrand-Edbring, Lehner & Mont, 2016; Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010). When renting a product, the consumer pays for the temporary ownership of a good. As Belk (1988) has traditionally argued, you are what you own and that the extended self is constructed through what possessions an individual owns and has access to in relation to others. When acquiring leased garments, goods become a temporary part of one's self. This challenges consumers' conventional mindsets as the goods that they are temporarily accessing will have to be returned within a limited timeframe and the ownership will be further transferred to another. Society embeds that ownership of possessions is important and consumers desire to own material assets (Belk, 2007; Gullstrand-Edbring, Lehner & Mont, 2016). Therefore, consumers desire to own items in a library type manner of all their possessions and use this to facilitate their identity (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012, 2017; Belk, 2007). Ownership is also viewed by some as a symbol of status (Lang, 2018; Lang, Seo & Liu, 2019) and as Bardhi & Eckhart (2012) examined, renting may be considered in some cultures to comprise a relatively low social status and low financial power.

Aside from the lack of ownership, hygiene has been determined as another main obstacle for consumers (Armstrong et al., 2015; Gullstrand-Edbring, Lehner & Mont, 2016; Lang, 2018). Garments that are leased are worn by numerous users and this ignites uncertainty in the consumer's mind about the cleanliness of the products. The researchers above have noted that as consumers are unable to ensure the sanitation of the garments they rent and by associating the leased items to be unhygienic, it causes consumers to reflect negative associations towards rental. Argo et al. (2006) further raise concerns that consumers have contamination fears with clothing that has previously been worn by others, especially by strangers unknown to the consumer. This may impede the consumer's attitude and affect the enjoyment of the rental process. This correlates into another concern by consumers as determined that consumers present a lack of trust in the service provider (Lang, 2018; Armstrong et al., 2015; Gullstrand-Edbring et al. 2016). A lack of trust will result in fears surrounding the hygiene and quality of the product and presents itself as an issue as it is out of the control of the consumer. Lang (2018) expands on the anxiety, discomfort, and uncertainty consumers may face surrounding the quality of the goods. The undisclosed history of a garment creates anxiety among consumers, including concerns about who, what or where the item has been worn, or how well the item was looked after. In terms of online fashion rental services, consumers may not be able to try on the item prior to placing an order (Lang, 2018). This presents an overwhelming uncertainty, especially for first-time users what Lang labels as performance risk (Lang, 2018). Additionally, this can also ignite a financial concern for consumers as they cannot ensure certainty in what quality and level of cleanliness they will receive in exchange for their money (Armstrong et al., 2015; Kang & Kim, 2013).

As previously mentioned, in a cultural context, lack of ownership may represent larger implications of your social status in society (Lang, 2018; Lang et al., 2019). Kang and Kim (2013) emphasize that rental services may damage self-image in the eyes of others evidencing in an impaired self-esteem. This influence can comprise an individual's perceived enjoyment of renting, demotivating consumers further (Yüksel & Yüksel, 2007). Lang (2018) also comes to the conclusion that garment renting may degrade one's personal style and lose further self-esteem if the consumer does not align renting with their personal image. Loussaïef et al. expand on this concept claiming that garment leasing may result in identity confusion as "the borrower slips into the other person's skin and feels like she appropriates her fashion taste, leading to some identity

confusion” (2019, p.270). The consumer may perceive rented items as not their own and associate themselves with falsifying their identity and incorporating the garments into their extended self (Loussaief, Ulrich & Damay, 2019).

2.2 Identity Construction

Individuals in today's fragmented society utilize the consumption of goods and symbols to compose their identity (Belk, 1988; Schau, 2000). Belk concludes that consumers use the possessions that we associate with our 'self' to help us and others understand who we are as individuals (1988). As your identity is no longer assigned to you through your position in society, consumers formulate their sense of self through symbolic resources such as goods and services. Clothing was traditionally a method to negotiate societies' status boundaries however, in today's postmodern era, this is no longer applicable (Crane, 2000; Solomon & Rabolt, 2007). Consumers are free and liberated to consume goods as symbolic and communicative means rather than rationally or functionally (Dittmar, 1992; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Kniazeva & Venkatesh, 2007). Crane argues that the motivation to dress-up is as a means to self-express and to negotiate identities into social classes and groups (2000). Fashion incorporates both taste and social distinction and therefore clothing is primarily socially motivated rather than a means of a necessity nowadays (Crane, 2000). Consumers' selection of specific styles is consumed in relation to its perceived linked value to social groups to reinforce ties from the consumer to other members of the groups (Cova, 1997). As Cova explores in his article, the consumption of products ties an individual into certain social groups (1997). The postmodern consumer looks to form links with others in the community. Incorporating the ideas of Belk and Schau, the goods that an individual chooses to consume relates to how they wish to be perceived and who they feel—or wish—to identify with. Living in a judgmental society, consumers may care about what other people think. Within fashion consumption especially, individuals may consume in order to gain social acceptance from the people around them (Lundblad & Davies, 2016). A fashion consumer must be creative and competent to follow trends. To obtain the desired social acceptance, anxieties are created relating to the stigmatization of the expectations of fashion consumers. Therefore, whilst specific consumption choices are made in relation to self-expression for the individual themselves, it is also made in relation to making a social statement that one is inspirational and influential.

Loussaïef, Ulrich and Damay (2019) conducted their study on the specific nature of non-ownership for luxury branded items and its implications on self-identity. Their findings communicated that when borrowing luxury fashion garments, it is vital that the items must remain consistent with the consumer's identity. A criteria was established from their research that goods must "complement, represent, resemble, and 'not betray' them" (Loussaïef, Ulrich & Damay, 2019, p. 266). Contradictory to these findings, was Bardhi and Eckhardt's pioneer study (2012) on access-based consumption, found in the case of car renting, the rented object did not have to reflect the consumer's identity nor allow the cars to be incorporated into their extended self. Wearing luxury items have the power to influence the consumer's self-interpretation of their own identity. Specifically, Loussaïef, Ulrich & Damay found individuals felt valued, more attractive, and glamorized such as a star or a real-life princess when wearing luxury garments (2019). To further assist in their identity, consumers also found themselves personalizing or accessorizing the borrowed luxury garments to make the garment 'theirs' and part of their extended self (Loussaïef, Ulrich & Damay, 2019). Finally, when consuming specifically luxury branded items, consumers may feel as they emit status and power over others in their horizontal class (Loussaïef, Ulrich & Damay, 2019).

2.3 Consumer Justification

When making consumption choices in a social context, certain conflicts may arise due to contradicting opinions. Determining what is 'right' or 'wrong' is getting increasingly complex due to the subjectivity and the constantly changing social systems in today's society. Depending on our consumption choices and its relation to its context, consumers naturally justify themselves. Scott and Lyman introduce the concept of justification as "accounts in which one accepts responsibility for the act in question but denies the pejorative quality associated with it" (1968, p.47). Justifications differ from excuses in the sense that the individual excuses their actions by mitigating the responsibility when their action has been doubted. Scott and Lyman (1968) emphasize that justifications are the assertion of the positive aspects of the action. In a social setting, the act of justification minimizes the gap between the action in question and the expectation. The acts of justification have been researched against various fields of ethics such as meat consumption, counterfeit products, and hedonic goods (d'Astous & Legendre, 2009; Eisend, 2019; Kim, Kim & Park, 2012; Okada, 2005; Rothgerber, 2013). The current research that exists

in today's literature applies Scott and Lyman's ideas in the sense that participants that were studied felt the need to justify their actions when they knew what they were doing was either illegal or socially wrong. In the case of justification regarding consumer's acquisition of counterfeit products, Eisend investigated the ethical dimension in illicit behavior. Eisend proposes that consumers find the need to justify their behavior in "wrong, unethical and immoral" consumption (2019, p.301). In a study conducted by Rothgerber (2013), consumers were affected by the social norms that are implied through societal pressures and governing acts and this applies pressure onto the actions on consumers leading to the act of justification. He further insinuates that the individual's concept of what others around them are doing will influence how they should present their own self.

Okada (2005) explores the gap between justification between hedonic and utilitarian goods. She implies that hedonic goods are easier to justify spending money on utilitarian goods than on hedonic as hedonic goods project an associated sense of guilt to consumers. Okada also further explains that it is harder to justify hedonic goods as the benefits are more difficult to quantify (2005). Clothing can be argued as either a necessity or a good bought for hedonic reasons depending on the underlying motive for purchasing—need or want. As Oskada (2005) permits through an example of sports shoes, individuals justified their time as an agency of currency. The time and money trade-off that consumers value in fashion rental will be perceived as the feeling of gratification generated by accessing something they would not have access to otherwise.

2.4 Critique Towards Existing Literature

Collaborative consumption has steered its vitality into the fashion industry. Fashion rental services currently present a vast amount of opportunities for businesses to explore, especially for current brands to incorporate leasing concepts into their business model. In terms of the current literature that exists today, the motivations and barriers for consumers to indulge into garment leasing have been relatively researched. The main motivation is the newfound access to goods that the fashion rental supplements to the consumer. This can be broken down into a number of sub motivators, such as the rarity of the item or the price. As prior literature examined, the cost of fashion can be expensive as one pursues the ever-changing fashion trends. With fashion rental services on offer, this erases the financial burdens that this bears on those fashion-conscious consumers and offers

access to a wider range of clothing at a circulating rate without the tedious financial conditions of staying up with trends (Lang, 2018).

Challenging the concept of access, a number of researchers present that short-term access to clothing can present a number of barriers for consumers. Ownership and the desire to possess is a traditional concept that constructs one's identity. As fashion is strongly related to building one through expressive imagery, it creates paradoxical ways of thinking and can be challenging for consumers to adopt. Lang et al. (2019) discuss the cultural aspect of non-ownership and that it can be degrading to one's self-esteem, initiating further hindrances in conventional markets.

Collaborative fashion consumption was established as a solution to the devastating effects the fashion industry has on the environment. The current state of the fashion industry is unsustainable and garment leasing presents consumers with alternative modes of consuming, constituting to encourage the circular economy. The environmental aspect of fashion rental services is extensively fabricated as another main motivator for consumers to practice garment leasing. It not only makes them feel good about themselves for participating in environmentally friendly consumption practices but also assists in constructing their identity to be perceived as a good and respectable consumer.

On the contrary, this chapter has also explored the concept of consumer justification. Justification for consuming particular goods remains a narrowly researched topic and primarily centers around unfavorable consumer behavior in the eyes of society. The researchers also observed a theoretical gap in the prior literature that explores consumer justification. There lacks an exploration and the application of Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot's *Worlds of Worth* (2006). Their theories help understand the value that consumers generate through their actions, which in turn, justifies their untoward behavior. In terms of the fashion industry, the current literature that exists exploring consumer justification predominantly comprises counterfeit garments. Counterfeit consumption is an illegal behavior that provokes consumers to justify the false portrayal of themselves to come off as better than they are. Fashion leasing, on the contrary, is a field that promotes ethical and sustainable practices, and this may reveal contradictions to how consumers apply justification techniques. Therefore, an interesting aspect is to investigate how consumers justify themselves

and their consumption behavior to present themselves as respectable and sensible fashion consumers.

Based on the previous research within the conjoining fields mentioned above, there lacks research linking fashion, garment leasing, and consumer justifications enabling the need for further discussion. With fashion rental services, consumers have access to goods that they are able to use to maintain their fashion identity. It poses the area of research required to explore how consumers ensure they come off as respectable fashion consumers and justify their fashion rental behavior.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter presents the selected approach for this study. Firstly, the researchers will outline the research approach, strategy, and design. Followed by how the researchers conducted the data in terms of sampling, the interview strategy, and saturation. The reliability and validity of this study are argued to determine the strength of this study. Lastly, the limitations of the study are elaborated upon as well as the ethical considerations are taken into account.

3.1 Research Approach

The study presented is a qualitative report on how individuals justify their behavior. In order to analyze the subjective character of justifications, the researchers of this study will position themselves as relativists from an ontology perspective. This refers to the philosophical assumption about the nature of reality. From an epistemological standpoint, they will position themselves as constructivist researchers. Given the character of the research field, the researchers recognize that there are many ‘truths’ that exist. Different individuals hold different views and that their ‘facts’ will be determined by their position within society and past experiences (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). With there being no single reality in the way and no definitive answers in the debate of how consumers justify their behavior, the researchers acknowledge that more that there are many perspectives to be observed. This encompasses the researchers to endorse that individuals will have differing opinions and methods of how they justify their personal choices. These decisions surrounding garment leasing will be dependent on how they have been shaped as individuals (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018).

3.2 Research Strategy

The study was selected as most appropriate to be conducted qualitatively due to the nature of its character with the purpose to investigate the aspect of consumers' identity construction and their justification of using fashion rental services. A qualitative approach is fundamental when a study investigates deeply rather than broadly (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Therefore, this study collects rich and extensive data from a confined sample rather than expansive data from a wide sample. The researchers of this study take a relativist position as they can argue that there are many ‘truths’ in society and these are defined and experienced differently by different people (Easterby-Smith et

al., 2018). Renting, as a concept, can be recognized as a social phenomenon that is dependent on the collation of multiple societal perspectives. Through qualitative research, the underlying meanings behind an individual's justification methods can be examined and from the given epistemological standpoint of the researchers, it is vital that observations will be most valuable if made from multiple perspectives (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). As McCracken establishes, qualitative research is an effective method for understanding and improving social scientific studies through stepping into the mind of another person to "see and experience the world as they do themselves" (1988, p.9). Furthermore, this study will examine how the consumers attempt to account and establish for the different versions of the socially constructed truths (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018).

3.3 Research Design

The researchers chose to conduct the study through semi-structured interviews to collect the empirical data. This method was selected to yield in-depth insights surrounding how individuals account for their behavior. Conceptualized by Baker (2002), interviews are a conversational interaction. Semi-structured interviews gave the researchers the opportunity to be more flexible during a conversation and immerse both the interviewees and researcher in an open discussion that will allow the researchers to dive deep into the interviewee's thoughts and provide the opportunity to develop constructs. Interviews allow researchers to obtain a more in-depth understanding of how the interviewees experience certain social phenomena such as renting (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018).

Interviewees are usually aware that they have been selected to participate in interviews as they are representative members of particular social categories. Therefore, interviewees will attempt to account for themselves as competent members of this categorization over the duration of an interview (Baker, 2002). By electing interviews for the design of this study, the researchers are able to collect data from the "explaining, attributing, justifying, describing" as well as the sense-making that the interviewees engage in (Baker, 2002, p.8). With the nature of the research question exploring the theme of justification, an ethnomethodological approach was selected in order to analyze the empirical material from this study. Therefore, the research design follows the structure

of finding suitable participants, conducting semi-structured interviews before finally analyzing the data through an ethnomethodological ‘lens’.

3.4 Data Collection Method

As previously mentioned, this qualitative study consisted of semi-structured interviews. The interviewees were selected using a criteria that would supplement empirical data surrounding how consumers maintained a respectable fashion consumer identity. Semi-structured interviews were carried out until the researchers observed saturation in the data.

3.4.1 Sampling

For this study, the researchers selected participants based on select criteria. It was crucial for this study to analyze consumers who have and had previously engaged with fashion rental services. Therefore, participants were selected on a disclosed preliminary question surrounding their previous involvement with leasing. It was important for this study to compromise a variety of opinions and experiences with fashion rental services. To ensure this, the researchers took a global stance and interviewed participants from a range of nationalities. Adjacently, it was important to the researchers to interview participants that came from countries where fashion rental services were moderately defined within the market. Therefore, the chosen participants were selected from the USA, Australia, and New Zealand. The researchers further limited the study down to only females in accordance to reflect the current garment leasing industry. Male garment rental services are minimal in relation to the female catered industry. Finally, the participants in this study were between the ages of 22-27 as this age group is the best target age demographic for clothing rental (GlobalData Retail, 2019).

Snowball sampling was carried out by reaching out to friends and colleagues of the researchers for referrals of individuals that would be well suited as participants. All the participants met the above criteria (female and having previously participated in garment leasing) and to ensure the study consisted of participants that would be beneficial by representing a variety of individuals in terms of nationality and age to increase the variety and avoid biases (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). Through emphasizing variety in the study, the research conducted would investigate a range of opinions circulating around fashion rental and a diversity extending from the types of garments

having been leased to the reasons that the participants rented (*See Table 1*). This would further establish the researchers' relativist standpoint that truths differ from individual to individual. The process of recruitment was repeated until reaching a satisfactory number of participants and the researchers were satisfied with the saturation.

Table 1: List of Participants

Name	Age	Gender	Occupation	Nationality	Length of Interview
Kelsi	22	Female	Retail Manager	New Zealand	52 minutes
Amanda	27	Female	Student	USA	48 minutes
Laura	23	Female	Marketing Assistant	New Zealand	48 minutes
Charlotte	23	Female	Dentist	New Zealand	45 minutes
Katrina	23	Female	Unemployed	New Zealand	55 minutes
Gemma	23	Female	Administration	Australia	32 minutes
Rachael	23	Female	Language Interpreter	Australia	53 minutes
Georgia	24	Female	Nurse	Australia	38 minutes

3.4.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

After the participants were selected, the researchers of this study conducted eight interviews which were held within a three-week period starting in April 2020. The semi-structured interviews were conducted through online digital platforms with participants. On average, the interviews lasted 46 minutes which generated 106 pages of transcribed empirical data.

Prior to beginning the interviews, the researchers developed an interview guide (*see Appendix 1*) in order to formulate a guide for how the interviews should follow and facilitate an unbroken discussion (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). The interviews took a semi-structured approach as it would not restrict the flow of conversation between the interviewee and the interviewer.

In the application of an ethnomethodological perspective, the researchers encouraged the interviewees to discuss stories. Further, these stories and narratives were reflected back on

throughout the interview process in the nature of new questions. McCracken (1988) suggested that an interview must provide questions that are fertile to new ideas and presents opportunities for insights. Questions were formed with an open-ended nature and that within each question, leeway for exploration with unstructured responses is possible (Bryman & Bell, 2015; McCracken, 1988). It was important that the interview guide provided no restrictions in the freedom and variability of the interview and that the researchers could pursue the interviewee to account for answers (Baker, 2002; Bryman & Bell, 2015; McCracken, 1988).

All of the interviews were recorded with the necessary permission from the participants. After each interview, the recording was transcribed and coded in accordance with a predetermined coding system (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Each interview started off with a brief explanation of the study. The researchers disclosed that the study was centered around fashion rental services and that the participants had been chosen due to their previous participation in leasing. The researchers chose to strategically avoid mentioning to participants that the purpose of the study was to examine how they account or justify their actions to avoid bias and skewed answers from the participants.

The questioning proceeded through the interview guide in a set of themes in an attempt to control the flow of questions. The interviewer had the freedom to rearrange the flow of the questions to match the conversation or to remove unnecessary or formally answered questions. As McCracken (1988) states, the metaphor that “the investigator serves as a kind of ‘instrument’ in the collection and analysis of data” (p. 32). Applying this metaphor to the study, the researchers utilized their personal experiences and creativity to uncover their qualitative objectives. This included having the ability to adapt to the responses swiftly and personalize further probing points of discussion (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). This was in an attempt to implement laddering techniques into the interviews. Semi-structured interviews use the interview guide as a template for the shape of the conversation, however bringing into play the ethnomethodological approach, the study observed how the interviewees accounted for their responses. Laddering up techniques were to be implemented to gather both underlying values from statements as well as pyramiding techniques to encourage evidence and stories (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018).

3.4.3 Saturation

The researchers initially planned to perform a number of ten semi-structured interviews. This was determined and inspired by McCracken (1988) who states that qualitative research should examine eight interviewees. The researchers observed similar patterns in the data collection method after seven interviews with the absence of uncovering no new data, the researchers assumed that saturation may have been met (Bryman & Bell, 2015). However, the researchers continued to complete an additional interview to ensure that no new information arose. After the additional interview was carried out, the researchers were satisfied that no new insights nor dimensions were emerging. Therefore, they felt confident that theoretical saturation had been met in this study (Bryman & Bell, 2015)

3.5 Validity and Reliability

Evoking the researchers ontological and epistemological positions for this study, the validity and reliability of this study can be examined through several aspects. As the research focuses on how consumers justify their behavior in making them be presented in a good light, the researchers have to empirically capture justifications. To ensure the researchers grasp an accurate representation of how consumers justify, it is dependent on the methods that the researchers collect and interpret the empirical data. Incorporating an ethnomethodological approach, to the study, from start to finish as Baker (2002) suggested will strengthen what the researchers analyze. To enhance the researcher's ability to identify valid justifications, the researchers familiarized themselves with justification literature by the works of Mills (1940), Boltanski & Thévenot (2006), and Scott & Lyman (1968), prior to beginning the data collection.

Lincoln and Guba (1986) developed a trustworthiness criteria that indicates the worth of the study. This includes establishing the “credibility, transferability, dependability, and the confirmability” of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p.77). To ensure the credibility of the study, the interviewees that were selected were chosen on the basis of their participation in the fashion rental industry. As the study focuses on fashion consumers and how they sustain their position of legitimacy, the consumers were asked to provide details in the first few questions about how they would describe their level of interest in fashion. This revealed their attitudes and how they positioned themselves as legitimate fashion consumers. However, as Lincoln and Guba infer, the research needs to ensure

that the objectivity of the participants is limited (1986). It was an objective established by the researchers to not overtly allow personal feelings, emotions and attitudes to sway how the data was collected and derived. As participation in fashion rental is a conscious decision, the researchers decided that it was a valid measurement of their legitimacy as fashion consumers and that it was a credible logic to determining their truth value.

The study has been composed of a combination of participants that has aided in capturing a wide range of perspectives. With participants representing a variety of demographic components such as ages, nationalities, and occupations, but also an assortment of categorical components such as different interests, hobbies, and the diversity in the participants' fashion interests, it can be argued that the variance has built the foundations of the trustworthiness of the study. This assisted in increasing the transferability and dependability of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). To prevent biases, the participants were perfect strangers to each other (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018; McCracken, 1988). However, there were participants that were known to one of the researchers of this study and on those occasions, the researcher who had no connection to that participant conducted the interview. To further ensure transferability of the study, the researchers conducted the study in a manner that the empirical findings could be relevant to understand other milieus. Justification is a concept within the sociological research field and in the case of this study, is applied to understand consumer behavior, specifically fashion consumers. However, to ensure transferability, the researchers gathered data that was rich in accounts for how society and culture operates. As the field of justification is under-researched in the sphere of consumer behavior, the researchers will ensure that the data collected in this study can contribute and transfer to understand other phenomenons of consumer behavior.

In order to assert the confirmability of the study, researcher bias, motivation, and interests were eliminated to ensure that the findings of the study were shaped entirely by the interviewees. Therefore, the researchers were careful not to deliver any leading questions. In another attempt to not distort the study in any way, the researchers specifically avoided using the word “justify.” This was in accordance with not disclosing the actual research topic of justification. Furthermore, the researchers were careful in avoiding asking any leading questions that may skew the responses from participants.

To assist in the trustworthiness of the study, the researchers were both present during each interview. One researcher would conduct the interview, and they had their sole focus on questions whilst the other took notes and would support the other researcher if need be (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). As the interviews were conducted through online platforms, only one researcher would be present on the screen to erase any intimidation, this was especially critical for the special case when one researcher knew a participant. Easterby-Smith et al. claimed that interviewees often distort their answers from the whole truth to make them more easily understood by the interviews and to avoid stories from being “too long to give” (2018, p. 191). To avoid this, the researchers encouraged stories before the interviews began. Furthermore, to accomplish trustworthiness in the study, empirical data and quotes are supplied to work as evidence as the researcher’s interpretations.

Authenticity is unique to the constructionist standpoint and involves assessing the meaningfulness and usefulness of the study (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Shannon & Hambacher, 2014). The study was developed specifically around the research question and has incorporated a wide variety of viewpoints to collect data and to shape the study. Each interview recording was transcribed and the notes were taken during the interview by the researchers to ensure as many details possible were collated to be examined (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The data was then individually analyzed by the researchers to enhance the scope.

3.6 Data Analysis

An ethnomethodological perspective was applied to this study. This was initiated on the foundation of the research question. As the study encompasses the concept of how fashion consumers justify their fashion behavior in order to come off as respectable. It was important to analyze how consumers justified their actions. Ethnomethodology attempts to analyze the “methods and procedures used by ordinary people to make sense of and act upon their everyday lives” (Baert, 1998, cited in Prasad, 2005, p.62). As Baker suggests, to analyze in an ethnomethodologically manner, the researchers must place large emphasis on how the interviewees provide explanations for their behavior (2002). Through analyzing this, the researchers can gain an understanding of how the interviewee makes sense of the unwritten social rules and scripts surrounding taken-for-

granted everyday activities (Prasad, 2005). Through an ethnomethodological perspective, accounts given by interviewees are seen as social mechanisms that can make sense of the social structures we live within (Prasad, 2005). These accounts are stories where people describe, analyze, or critique different constructs, phenomena, and situations (Ritzer, 1983 cited in Prasad, 2005). They are treated as devices to understand how reality is constructed. The interviewees will try to declare themselves as competent members of society, especially within the category basis that they have selected to be interviewed for (Baker, 2002). In this case, the interviewees will engage in the study as sensible fashion consumers. Using an ethnomethodological approach, the researchers can gain an in-depth understanding of how consumers accomplish themselves as respectable fashion consumers.

Due to the qualitative nature of this study and its interpretive character, the study was conducted with an abductive approach. As the study is about understanding the social phenomenon of fashion rental and applying it to existing concepts and theories found in literature. These theories were used as a tool for the researchers to analyze and understand the empirical data. An ethnomethodological study applies both inductive and deductive approaches to the study in a way that both creates and solves a puzzle (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995, cited in Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). As the abductive approach suggests, the analysis of the empirical data in this study will be progressive. Where both the theory and the data will be revised and integrated in order to generate the themes and findings.

As the interviews were carried out, the researchers applied a great emphasis on how conversations were developed. As Rennstam and Wästerfors suggest, the interview process becomes a subject to observe as both parts of the conversation are dependent on each other (2018). Therefore, after the interviews were carried out, the conversations were transcribed in full detail, including social cues and actions. The researchers then took the transcribed material to begin the initial coding. Aligned with the work of Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, the coding began to focus on similarities and differences among the responses, as well as recurring topics (2011). From what the previous research revealed, common themes were identified. These themes and general concepts from the literature provoked the researchers' initial coding. To reveal more abstract ideas in the empirical

data, focus codes were derived (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). It was these codes that constructed the basis for the analysis.

The researchers applied a large emphasis on listening to what was unsaid during the interviews and focusing on how things are said (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). It was with the assistance of searching for what not specifically verbalized to the researchers that revealed the unexpressed feelings experienced by the interviewees. Through an ethnomethodological study, the interviewees will try to form recognizable identities for the researchers that will prove they are competent members of their social affiliation, in this case, fashion rental consumers. By verifying their fashion identity membership, the interviewees did not critique the social system. Instead they attempted to prove their responsible fashion consumer identity through accounts and justifications of their actions.

3.7 Limitations

The study faces a number of limitations that must be identified and addressed in connection with the research method. Firstly, the sample size consisting of eight participants can be deemed relatively small. Whilst the size of the study can be argued due to the depth of the study is a significant feature and the researchers reaching saturation, however, it could be challenged whether the findings can be generalized into a wider population.

As the study had a multinational focus, another limitation that must be acknowledged is the narrow selection of countries that were included in the study. Adjacent to the small sample size, this also meant that the number of nationalities that would be able to be included in the study would also be limited. In turn, this fails to accumulate findings that can be generalized to represent the global opinion. As the countries that were selected for this study strictly consisted of markets where fashion rental services are established, this might provoke critique. There may be a difference in the results if the participants were from countries where fashion rental was not predominantly existent in the market. The researchers assume that the level of acceptance of the renting phenomena within a society would impact the study results. It is also important to recognize that the social norms vary among different cultures and that the findings could differ between Eastern

to Westernized countries. Further, cultural characteristics such as submissive and introverted cultures like Sweden could produce different responses to more loud and obtrusive cultures.

The researchers are also aware that it is hard to determine the level of truth in the responses that the participants provide. For this study, there is great importance in how truthful their accounting is and whether they will deliver true intentions to the researchers. How a participant justifies their behavior will reflect on themselves as an individual, therefore a limitation of this study may be that the participants will try to cover up any chasms, anxieties or attitudes that may alter how they are perceived. In this study, the purpose is not to seek the truth but rather to gain an understanding of how fashion consumers justify themselves.

As the interviews were conducted through online mediums, this may have evoked a social limitation as participants could have adapted their social behavior behind the virtual screen. Through the researcher's ethnomethodological approach, it was necessary for the researchers to observe social cues and through online interviews, these social cues may have been unobserved due to the character of the interview. It further causes the barrier that participants adjusted their behavior to what they would have done if they were engaging in a face-to-face interview. It is also critical for the researchers to note that the participants may have shared more or less information depending on the condition of the interview.

Lastly, another limitation was the various levels of involvement with fashion rental among participants. Some had rented many times whilst some were restricted to discussing their limited experiences. On the other hand, there was also variance in when they had rented as some had not rented in the past few weeks while for others it had been over a year. It is also of importance that the researchers acknowledge the current state of the world and its economy. A number of participants reflected on that they had not rented in a while due to imposed national lockdowns during this pandemic and the current global state of uncertainty may have impacted the participant's responses.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

During all stages of the study, the researchers ensured to apply ethical considerations to establish the integrity and privacy of the participants. Firstly, it was made clear to the interviewees that they were not forced into participating in the study and that it was at their own free will to cooperate. They were welcome to pass a question if, for any reason, they did not want to answer it. Also, they had the ability to withdraw from the study completely if they wished. The participants were not forced into sharing any sensitive or personal information that they did not wish to volunteer to share. Before each interview, the participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to hear their opinions and experiences in their involvement with fashion rental services. This was done in order to increase transparency (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

All data collected was treated in line with the regulations of the GDPR. Prior to starting the interview, permission was obtained from the participant to record each interview solely for the researcher's purpose to transcribe the interviews with clear accuracy. It was made certain to the participants that all they shared during the interviews would be kept confidential. This included their names as the researchers provide pseudonyms throughout this report to replace their identities (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Each voice recording and transcription will be discarded after the publication of this study.

Finally, the researchers treated all participants with respect and dignity and were never exposed to any kind of physical or psychological harm. Their involvement in the study was acknowledged as a grateful act that assisted in the researchers' master thesis.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents the existing theories relevant to this study. The chapter is broken down into two overruling concepts; the presentation of one's identity and how consumers justify their actions. In order to understand the concept of identity for this study, Erving Goffman's work surrounding the dramaturgical approach to performing an identity must be reflected upon. As well as Russell W. Belk's work of conceptualizing how possessions are used as important props to assist in composing one's identity. On the topic of justification—a central concept to this study—strategic thinking and competencies are vital in understanding how one builds and presents their identity. Marvin B. Scott and Stanford M. Lyman developed upon the idea of accounting for one's actions while Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot created 'Common Worlds' that consumers generate value in, in order to justify their behavior. Invoking these concepts, a foundation will be laid to analyze the empirical material.

4.1 The Performance of Identity

Identity is a social construct that allows an individual to express something about themselves to others. It refers to the concept of presenting yourself in a manner that reflects who you are and provides a sense of belongingness to societal groups and classifications. However, it is a concept that requires constant work. Individuals consciously create and maintain a personal identity through the application of different tools. The idea of how individuals in society self-project themselves to others has been compared to how a theater actor projects their character to an audience. As Erving Goffman explores through what he has defined as Impression Management Theory, individuals consistently fabricate impressions which facilitate building their identity in an orderly structure (1959). Social cues, expressions, and symbolic gestures are performed in a series during social encounters to formulate an individual's role in society. How an actor communicates an impersonation in a theatrical play that can be depicted as their identity performance. In a performance, an actor will convey the audience's feelings and emotions towards the character they are playing. This can be closely resembled with how we, as individuals, 'perform' our identities and roles in society. Individuals build and attempt to maintain a conception of themselves through a dramaturgical approach (Goffman, 1959, p.243). The performer of the identity will also incorporate the particular 'stages' or social spaces around them into the impressions they perform.

A selection of impressions is selected based on what is most suitable to the specific audience members during the different 'stages' that may judge or question their performance (Goffman, 1959). Alongside the constant adaptation to a particular situation, it is important to note that identity is never static. Identity is not essentially composed within someone naturally but is more something that needs to be acted out. It requires constant maintenance to be updated and developed, both consciously and unconsciously. These ideas are well established within the argument of gender theory. Gender is argued to be a social construct as it is largely performed (Butler, 1988). Like gender, as Butler suggests, one's fashion identity is a social construct that is dependent on the performance and the impressions it gives off through the use of props (1988). Identity performance requires the use of props and objects as any actor would utilize during a performance to legitimize their impressions. Fashion is one method of announcement that expresses one's identity. It can help validate and establish themselves to the audience that surrounds them in social situations (Stone, 1962, cited in Solomon & Rabolt, 2007).

Russell W. Belk developed the concept of the identity creation that an individual's extended self is refined through the acquisition of goods before integrating them into one's self (1988). The goods that one possesses define one's identity, as the symbolic meanings of the good transfer into the self. Material items, such as clothing, can distinguish one individual from another. However, it can also work in the sense that it ties individuals together to form group identities and express belongingness (Belk, 1988). Uncovering the consequences of the postmodern society that we adhere to, social identity is no longer dependent on what social class, religion, family, or job position that you belong to. By possessing particular garments or brands that reflect symbolic meaning, one is able to position themselves among different social distinctions (Belk, 1988). Individuals are able to choose who they want to be perceived as and purchase goods that administer membership into certain social groups. As Bauman uncovers, individuals are motivated by their search and constant adaptation of their self-identity (1987, cited in Warde, 2005). He suggests that consumption choices are a major method in which people construct their identities. Objects hold a symbolic meaning that allows individuals to express themselves as someone they would not be without that particular object (Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1992; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). This symbolic level is determined by the social environment as well as one's own experiences (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Individuals search for symbols that they can appropriate to show the

audiences of their identity performances which social distinctions they belong to. Consumers are sovereign in their search for identity. This means that one has the freedom and ability to make their own decisions in what symbolic goods they wish to consume to maintain their identity (Holt, 2002).

As Belk expresses, one can maintain multiple levels of self and encompassed by the postmodern society, they can fluidly transform into different selves by possessing and consuming different goods (1988). The presentation of different selves is especially enforced with the assistance of the expressive imagery that clothing exerts to others of one's physical appearance. Solomon and Rabolt discuss how clothing can be viewed as a 'second skin' that consumers layer to define their identity, emphasizing how easy it can be to slip into different selves (1986, cited in Belk, 1988). As Belk explains, one maintains multiple levels of self (1988). The self is composed of different elements, some more dominant than others, and only a few will be active at any given time (Reed, 2004, cited in Solomon, 2009). Expanding on the levels of selves, Solomon and Rabolt present a distinction between the ideal and actual self, in terms of individuals identity construction through fashion (2009). The discrepancy between the two selves provokes a chasm. The actual self refers to the more realistic compilation of one's actual qualities while the ideal self is the person we ideally strive to become which is often largely influenced by consumer culture such pop culture (Freud, 1965, cited in Solomon, 2009).

Within Goffman's Impression Management Theory, he introduces four perspectives; technical, political, structural, and cultural, which help to understand how individuals present themselves in social establishments (1959). The cultural perspective introduces how moral values influence the activities within a social establishment (Goffman, 1959). More specifically, the impact that fashion, taste, politeness, and normative restrictions have on one. Stets and Burke express that "society shapes self shapes social behavior" (2014, p.58). The role of society and consumer culture presents a strong influence on one's identity construction. As society is full of symbols and meanings that are attached to occasions and objects, the interpretation of these symbols is of vital importance. Consumers learn to agree on shared meanings of symbols with the rest of society as well as developing their own interpretations (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). These symbols are observed through different social systems such as media, advertising, and lived experiences which

helps individuals understand the roles they are expected to play (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). It is through the society that individuals decide what symbolic meanings embodied within props to utilize in their identity performance and desires.

Within the structural perspective, Goffman explores how individuals can either associate or distance themselves from others through status divisions vertically and horizontally. The application of Belk's ideas incorporates how individuals will possess symbolic goods to validate themselves and perform legitimate impressions to establish themselves within specific social distinctions. Belk's theory is centered around the concept of acquisition, he reflects that having the money to buy, or simply having the purchasing power, can be classified as a means of creating the good (Sartre, 1943, cited in Belk, 1988). Money can be recognized as an apparatus that can "enlarge a sense of self because it enlarges imaginable possibilities of all that we might have and do" (Belk, 1988, p.150). It provides the power of selectivity for an individual to actively and intentionally decide what objects to acquire or reject to shape their extended self.

However, the introduction of collaborative consumption by Botsman and Rogers (2010) has presented itself as a critique to the traditional concept of acquisition that Belk developed. With the shift in society away from ownership to access, one's identity is not limited to the goods one possesses. Ownership of goods is no longer what consumers desire and, as Bardhi and Eckhart claim, consumers would "prefer to pay for the experience of temporarily accessing them" (2012, p.881). Access has become a symbolic resource for identity construction (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). Belk updates and challenges his traditional theory as he developed a paper called "You Are What You Can Access" (Belk, 2014). Within this work, he explores how non-ownership—through sharing and collaborative consumption—contributes to one's personal identity. It has suddenly become harder for others to distinguish whether goods that are incorporated into their performance are owned or temporarily accessed by the individual.

How one presents their identity is also closely developed in what is desired between different individuals and classes. Swidler developed the concept Strategies of Action to present how culture influences the construction of what individuals desire (1986). Swidler argues that culture is built upon formal and informal symbols. These can include meanings, language, beliefs, and rituals of

everyday life (Swidler, 1986). The way people behave is constructed through the use of a multitude of habits, skills and styles incorporated within different cultures. As Swidler enforces, it is these influences that explain why different individuals make different decisions in the same situation. The unconsciousness of how strategies of action are composed is deeply entwined with one's culture and the habits, norms, and perceptions of the world (Swidler, 1986). This illustrates the subjectivity of the symbolic meanings behind props and how they are used to present one's identity.

4.2 Justification

Following the theory of Swidler's Strategies of Action, individuals are part of cultures where their habits and norms assist them in navigating everyday life (1986). As individuals perform their identities, they coordinate the expectations on how they consume and behave through the discourses incorporated within the props. However, if a certain behavior or action disturbs the social conduct, an individual may attempt to manage the situation strategically by justifying themselves. In doing so, they will vindicate for their membership within the social group and culture to maintain the social order (Swidler, 1986).

The concept of justifying behavior to maintain the status quo has been academically developed over the years. In 1940, Mills developed the concept of Vocabularies of Motive as one accounts for their behavior to assert social conduct. He suggests that motives are words that are presented when the anticipation of conduct is questioned. In other words, motives are justifications for behavior that either has, will, or is currently occurring (Mills, 1940). As Mills identifies justifications as 'motives' in his work, Marvin B. Scott and Stanford M. Lyman further elaborated upon this by identifying justifications as 'accounts' in their 1968 work.

Scott and Lyman introduce the concept of how individuals use accounts as linguistic tools to manage their actions and societal expectations. The authors define an account as "a linguistic device employed whenever an action is subjected to a valuative inquiry" (1968, p.46). Controversial or unexpected behavior may evoke situations of conflict where individuals use accounts to prevent a chain of events. In other words, an account is a verbal explanation where the individual is explaining his or her adverse behavior, for example, taking part in actions that are

perceived as bad, wrong, or odd. Scott and Lyman segregate accounts into two sub-categories: excuses and justifications. Excuses refer to a category of account that is used when an individual attempts to mitigate the responsibility when their behavior is questioned, often in situations where they claim that the act was done unintentionally (Scott & Lyman, 1968). Contrarily, justifications are applied when an individual acknowledges responsibility for the behavior, but in order to cover the social consequences one dismisses the questionable aspect of the action, they highlight the positive value (Scott & Lyman, 1968).

How accounts are interpreted are highly dependent on a larger social system. Scott and Lyman emphasize “an account is expected to be socially suited to the circle into which it is introduced according to norms of culture, subculture and situation” (1968, p.57). The authors present three ‘Techniques of Neutralization’ which are methods in which individuals justify and downplay their untoward behavior to preserve the social order. The technique referred to as ‘Condemnation of the Condemners’ is used when an individual takes responsibility for a certain behavior but rejects any negative pressure by asserting that others accomplish worse things without anyone arguing (Scott & Lyman, 1968). While the former refers to distinguishing their behavior from others, Scott and Lyman offer a contrary technique referred to as ‘Appeal to Loyalties’. This technique refers to neutralizing a behavior by justifying and claiming it was correct because it serves the interest of another, which he or she has an emotional bond with which can not be disregarded. Lastly, arguing for ‘Self-Fulfillment’ is a more self-oriented approach in which the individual justifies behavior by arguing for the positive outcome it generates for the ‘self’, which legitimizes the action in question. From these neutralizing techniques, evaluating the legitimacy of an account is highly dependent on the expectancies of others which lies in complex social systems and cultures.

To conclude the theory of Scott and Lyman, an account can be understood as an essential tool for justifying actions. Attaching value to accounts helps maintain a respectable identity and present a sensible self to others. According to Graeber (2005, cited in Bertilsson & Rennstam, 2018), value can be understood both from an economic and social point of view as so-called ‘regimes’. The economic regime refers to value creation determined by the price. Whereas, in the social regime, value is determined by qualitative and complex aspects. Due to its intangible character, the social regime is difficult to quantify. Therefore, the value relies upon what is considered valuable in the

eye of the individual and detached from its economic value, which is helpful for pursuing what is considered important to them in life (Graeber, 2005, cited in Bertilsson & Rennstam, 2018). Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot established the perspective of crediting value into regimes, a practical process of justification. The authors introduced the concept of the ‘Common Worlds’ in which consumers justify actions by generating value to maintain a respectable image of themselves in a social context (2006). There are six worlds that each illustrate and present value in a different way; the Inspired, World of Fame, Domestic, Civic, Market, and the Industrial World (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). Further, a seventh world which was created in Thévenot’s later work, the Green World (Bertilsson & Rennstam, 2018).

Table 2 - Key Words as Identified in the Common Worlds

Common Worlds	Words of Worth
Inspired World	Unique, Independent, Inspirational
World of Fame	Recognized, Successful, Reputable, Star, Known
Domestic World	Hierarchical, Superiority, Respect, Honor, Authority
Market World	Monetary Benefit, Price, Payback
Industrial World	Efficiency, Input-Output, Operational, Functional
Green World	Sustainable, Environmentally Friendly

(Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Thévenot, Moody & Lafaye, 2000)

The desired outcomes in each of the common worlds vary and legitimize behavior in its own distinguished ways. In the Inspired World, value is created and measured in terms of uniqueness and the inspiration an individual generates. The value can be understood as an inner state of passion or wellbeing an individual feels, which is generated from one's social context. It could be experienced by individuals as exciting, enriching or even disturbing. Generally, the access to inspired value is generated when one is sacrificing forms of stabilization which can be done through escaping habit and rejecting norms. The own uniqueness of the individual is of the highest value which is used to serve the common good by encompassing and bringing fulfillment to others.

Inspired persons seek to clearly distinguish themselves from the greater mass and with the desire to come off as originals. Similarly, in the World of Fame value is attached to an individual's social importance, which often is determined by others. Recognition and identification determine the value where the public opinion determines what—and whom—is considered as ‘successful’. Due to the subjectivity of opinions, the value is detached from other external qualities such as one's education, profession, or income. Therefore, it does not have to derive from someone who is well recognized in the ‘big world’. Those who constitute a high value are distinguishable from others, why a feeling of fame is generated. Further, this feeling corresponds with the individuals’ high desire of being recognized and respected by others. Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) argue that in order for one to be recognizable, they require a visible name, which can be established by using communicative tools such as media. The fame itself is established through the performance of the individual in front of an audience, which places the individual in the spotlight. This will yield in recognition, where the audience identifies with the individual, like a fan identifies themselves with a celebrity. Thus, one can say that ‘worthy’ individuals attract attention and influence others (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). The two former mentioned worlds emphasize how the individual generates worth by distinguishing oneself from others, the Domestic World similarly generates worth in terms of hierarchy. Value is determined by an individual's importance in relation to others. This contributes to establishing a social hierarchy among people, which generates a feeling of superiority towards others. Indicators of worth are titles, clothing, and visible symbols, which reduces uncertainties and the cost of identification in social meetings. The audience has respect for a superior individual to the extent that they feel like they are complemented and considered by the superior (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006).

The three former worlds frame the value generated among individuals in relation to others. While the Market World and Industrial World build upon the personal desires of individuals in terms of possession of goods. Boltanski and Thévenot argue that social dynamics between humans can be understood as a competitive field where possessions can be used to resolve the tensions. In the Market World value is often monetary and quantifiable, which can be determined by the profit, benefit, payback, or the result of the transaction. This, in turn, generates value to the individual. However, value is subjective and lies in the eyes of the beholder regardless of the product or external factors such as marketing, sales, and competition. On the other hand, in the Industrial

World, goods are valued for their efficiency and not price. The level of performance, productivity, and capacity in production is important over the monetary aspect as seen in the Market World. The value generated in the Industrial World can be understood as an input-output process where the most optional alternative is the one that is functional and productive. Value in the Industrial World could be perceived in a similar light as an investment. How beneficial or profitable an investment will be, will be dependent on the outcome or expected yielded value. Therefore, Boltanski and Thévenot, apply the measurement of the input-output process in determining the value.

Lastly, presented in the work of Thévenot, Moody and Lafaye (2000), the Green World is where value is based upon to what extent the act is sustainably conscious. It could be understood as justifications are validated to the extent it generates value in terms of environmental aspects such as non-pollution and protection of environmental resources (Thévenot, Moody & Lafaye, 2000). Beyond the environmental aspect, the Green World also takes future generations' interest into account and the perspective that resources available are limited (Thévenot, Moody & Lafaye, 2000). Hence, a worthy being is someone who generates value by making sustainable actions that generate value for nature, society and future generations.

Chapter 5: Empirical Material and Analysis

In this chapter, the empirical data has been analyzed through an ethnomethodological perspective. Four overarching themes have been identified to help organize the findings. The first theme covers the societal pressures the interviewees faced influencing their fashion rental behavior. Secondly, the under-researched phenomena of 'outfit repeating' is examined in its relation to driving the motivations. This is followed by how consumers generated value through the financial benefits of fashion rental. Finally, this chapter explores how consumers justify renting luxury goods and the implications it has on the maintenance of one's identity performance.

The ethnomethodological analysis of the empirical data provided the researchers a framework to understand how consumers justify their fashion behavior. Applying Belk's theory, it is confirmed that goods become a part of an individual's identity. The symbolic value embedded in a good is highly dependent on the social context and subjective opinions. As Belk (1988) developed, possession is important for once identity construction, as well as an important attribute of one's impression management (Goffman, 1956).

Applying an ethnomethodological lens to this study provided insightful findings as the interviewees attempted to declare themselves as competent members of society through the means of the interview. Individuals bear a responsibility with the expectations of how they are assumed to behave within society (Baker, 2002). Consumers are counted upon to uphold respectable and sensible qualities, among many other societal expectations. This analysis examines how the participants of this study accounted for their fashion behavior in an attempt to maintain a responsible consumer identity.

5.1 Pre-existing Societal Pressures

In a world where we are constantly surrounded by others and their subjective opinions, individuals will try to control the impressions they expel. As Goffman (1959) explored, an individual's self is presented in a manner that is shaped by the expectations of society, as they accomplish their identity through 'public' performances. In a social setting, the individual takes into consideration the 'audience' that surrounds them. The interviewees of the study express both implicitly and

explicitly how the social environment influences how they present themselves to others. Social events become a stage where the interviewees managed their identity through what Goffman classifies as a dramaturgical approach (1959). There are social expectations that set standards for how individuals' performed identity is judged. To be perceived as a responsible consumer contributing to society, individuals have to adhere to the societal norms and adjust to expected behaviors. The interviewees expressed how they were conscious of these pressures. They emphasized how the size, as well as the relationship of the audience, had implications on how they maintained their identity during social events. This study revealed that the interviewees justify their fashion behavior by linking it to the dynamic of their social environment. Fashion choices were reflected by the pressures they predicted at these events such as the expectations of wearing something formal, expensive, or new.

5.1.1 Social Events

When the interviewees were questioned on why they began renting, they indirectly expressed that leasing was a method they could rely on to avoid the anxieties created by attending social events. The expectations for what they wore on special occasions such as birthdays, balls, and graduations directed them to seek relief through renting garments. Invoking Scott and Lyman's neutralizing technique, the interviewees declared their rental behavior by insinuating that they did it for the common good.

"Everyone was having their 18th birthday parties every weekend [...] I wasn't necessarily going to buy a new dress every weekend" - Rachael

As exposed by Rachael, in attaining her social identity, attending these events creates pressure. There exists expectations that are reinforced by the social environment on how one must act, dress and behave at events. Rachael explicitly expressed the expectations of her to deliver new dresses for every event she attended to maintain a reputable identity. This yielded in anxieties as she reveals how she knew the ridiculousness of the expectations of her. Rachael justifies her rental behavior by playing upon the ridiculousness in a manner that appealed to the loyalties of those around her to satisfy their expectations. This is similarly noted in Amanda's technique for neutralizing her behavior where she emphasizes the interest of others in her justification (Scott &

Lyman, 1968). She justifies her reason for renting an expensive dress to maintain the social order by duplicating what others would be expecting. Amanda emphasizes this by highlighting the size of the event and what the other attendees would be doing.

“Everyone around me was wearing really nice dresses for prom, we are talking about \$300 or \$400. I could not afford that. So, I rented a \$1000 dress for \$50 dollars.” - Amanda

Fashion rental allowed Amanda to shape her identity to meet social expectations in order to relieve the stress she felt. The built-up impression of what prom ideally represents and how attendees must conform and behave at such an event generates anxieties. In Amanda’s example, this trickles down into the financial burdens of her not being able to meet the expectations. By emphasizing the feeling of gratification she felt by leasing her dress, the researchers witnessed her implying that she felt this way as she met the social behavior that was expected of her. As Goffman (1959) suggests, Amanda adjusted her behavior in order to meet the social expectations from the audience around her. In doing so, she could maintain a competent image where she conveyed the attitudes and emotions of the audience into her performance to abide by the social order. Furthermore, Amanda was aware of her financial situation and that she was unable to deliver the expected image of herself at prom that was demanded of her. By utilizing fashion rental services, it could be understood as she could bridge her actual image and the ideal image (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009). Fashion rental services were used as a tool as it created a shortcut in Amanda's identity performance and how she coped with the societal pressures.

5.1.2 Caring About What Others Think

Leasing garments assist in individuals maintaining a respectable facade and therefore facilitates them in managing their identity construction. The societal pressures of how one should act to come off as a good consumer evokes the anxiety embodied within our interviewees. These anxieties influence how the interviewees behave and how they try to manage how they are perceived by others. As a result, influencing the way they accounted for their behavior to the researchers. They were conscious of the pressures and this impacted the way they processed the situation and its expectations. However, when questioned if they dress for themselves or for others, the general

immediate response was taking a defensive approach. The interviewees then emphasized and downplayed how they incorporated the external influences. The interviewees reassured to the researchers that they, themselves, were the center of their fashion consumption decisions.

“To some extent [...] But I am not someone who dwells over someone else's opinions if someone doesn't like what I am wearing. Because like I said, I dress for myself. If I like it, then I will be wearing it and then I wouldn't care at all if anyone else disagrees. But I do care, I think to say that you don't care about what anyone else is a bit unrealistic.” - Charlotte

Accounts are given to deny the negative associations that are affiliated with the act in question (Scott & Lyman, 1968). Charlotte appeases the researchers in an attempt to show that she really does not care about what others think. She does this by acknowledging and enacting the social pressures. However, by engaging in fashion rental she certifies that she is ‘smart’ enough to navigate the pressures. She still feels that it is necessary to follow another social convention: that one shall not care too much about what others think. This contradictory attitude causes underlying anxieties present deep within individuals. In the case of Charlotte, she expresses that it is only human and realistic to actually take into consideration what other people think. As the interview proceeds, Charlotte accounts for her thoughts by reaffirming to the researchers in order for them not to think she was unrealistic. Charlotte makes the claim that it is only natural to take the social opinion into consideration when performing one’s identity. This form of justification helps the interviewees to come off as responsible and aware individuals. Evidential in this finding was how Charlotte applies justifications to navigate the social norm contradictions which requires skills in the tactics of one’s self-performance.

5.1.3 Performing a Unique Self

Analyzing these responses through an ethnomethodological lens, contradictions were unveiled in how the individuals presented themselves. It became evidential that the social context and societal expectations they endured influenced how they chose to look and behave. As revealed in this study, fashion rental services provided the opportunity for fashion consumers to adhere to the societal pressures and supplement an identity that establishes themselves as competent. A vast majority of the interviewees in this study referred back to the status quo and justified their rental behavior

based on what others did. This aligns with the neutralizing technique referred to as ‘appeal to loyalties’ by Scott and Lyman (1968). On the contrary, others expanded on the expectation of having to wear something that others liked or perceived as “cool” or “trendy”.

“[Getting to wear] stuff that was in trend [...] I guess I felt like cool, you know, I’ll be wearing stuff that people like” - Kelsi

What Kelsi implies is how fashion rental allows her to stay up with trends in order to manifest herself as a legitimate fashion consumer. The researchers define a legitimate fashion consumer as someone who can creatively invest themselves in the fashion world. Kelsi does this by maintaining a trendy impression by using clothing as props to legitimize her identity performance. In contrast to other interviewees, Kelsi justifies her rental behavior by applying what Scott & Lyman coin as Self-Fulfillment. To portray herself as a legitimate fashion consumer, she touches upon the positive outcomes rental has on herself. Her egotistical motives are presented to the researchers in a way to clarify that there are benefits for her to lease garments. This is similarly witnessed by other interviewees.

“If I’m wearing something rare, I think I feel really good about myself, I look bomb, I look cool.”
- Laura

Laura expresses related thought patterns to Kelsi as she touches upon the rarity of a garment. She clarifies that when she wears something unique, it makes her feel good about herself. This could be understood by the underlying theme that was revealed by the interviewees that wearing something unique helps assist them to feel unique. In this case, Laura justifies her rental behavior by generating value in what Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) refers to as the Inspired World. The inner state of well-being that Laura reveals is generated by her being perceived as unique through wearing something rare. This yields in her own underlying desire of performing a unique and inspirational self.

“I guess the main reason as to why I would rent them is because I know that I will be wearing something different and not the same as everyone. I would definitely say if I had to give you some reasons, it would definitely be because I know that I would be unique.” - Kelsi

Developing on the concept of uniqueness, Kelsi acknowledges her desire to be one-of-a-kind. She resorts to fashion rental services as a tool for her identity performance. Kelsi explicitly expresses a desire to come off as unique, which is a conscious process of generating value in The World of Fame (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). By applying means of communication, one can establish his or her personal brand among the public. With the emergence of digitalization, the methods of communicating one’s performance have expanded into different mediums. Social media has equipped ‘ordinary people’ to express themselves to an ‘audience’ through a channel, in which they are able to control their identity and performance. This has further developed how individuals work with impression management since their opportunities are endless. It could be understood as Goffman’s (1959) modern interpretation of his dramaturgical approach with the shift towards digitalization. Individuals today are not only limited to the performance of their identity in a physical setting but also virtually on a bigger stage to reach a larger audience.

The social media platform Instagram forms a stage where Kelsi performs her identity in front of her ‘audience’: her Instagram followers. She expresses that she is an active user on the platform Instagram and posts ‘influential pictures’ of her wearing the garments from her friend’s rental services of which she currently is an ambassador for.

“I have a friend who actually owns a renting business and she actually approached me to be like an ambassador for it. So she pretty much gives me free garments. I wear them. I post about them and she uses my photos”

“Being an ambassador for her, I would have to disclose that every time I post a picture with that. I would have to tag her.”

- Kelsi

As Kelsi declares, in this study, she posts pictures as part of her ambassador role, she downplays the superficial aspect of performing her identity by emphasizing that it is like a profession, in which she gets paid in rental clothes. However, Kelsi expresses that the gratification she receives from these pictures that makes her feel good. She admits to the researchers the positive impact renting has on her identity performance renting through justifying herself. Once again, Kelsi exhibits Scott and Lyman's Self-Fulfillment technique as she highlights the positive implications leasing garment has on herself. Despite this shallow behavior, Kelsi legitimizes her actions by acknowledging the sense of well-being she experiences and its implications on her identity performance. The contentment she experiences when being perceived as unique contributes to herself being influential on the virtual stage of Instagram. It is indicative that Kelsi is justifying her rental behavior through the value generated in the Inspired World and World of Fame (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006).

It is further evident from the empirical interviews from this study, that fashion rental behavior is influenced to various extents by societal pressures. These include the apprehended societal cues that will be present during social events such as the size and relationship of the attendees. Some individuals are very aware of these pressures as they persistently position themselves in relation to others in their identity performance. To downplay this shallow and superficial awareness, rental behavior is justified in the Inspired World and the World of Fame (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). Whilst others distance themselves from the anxieties by asserting that they are less affected by the perceptions of others around them in order to present a respectable self. To be perceived as a competent fashion consumer, one tries to implement their independence as they rule their own fashion consumption and that it is not shaped by others (Holt, 2002). There is the expectation that individuals in today's society should be sovereign in their choices and must portray their true self through not listening to the demands of others. However, there exists a social pressure to fit in and consume how others expect one to. This contradiction is highlighted in the interviews as the interviewees distinguish themselves from others to sentiment their sovereignty but the ethnomethodological perspective revealed how the interviewees still applied the culture around them in their fashion consumption. As Swidler (1986) suggests, one's actions will be influenced by the culture that they belong to. Therefore, an individual and their habits will never be fully detached from societal culture. From this study, the researchers recognize that regardless of where

an individual position themselves within the scale of self-awareness, they will always consider the social environment in their identity performance. From this study, it was evident that those who were pursuing a higher social status, in terms of superiority, were more cautious about themselves in relation to the societal setting.

5.2 The Unwritten Rule of Outfit Repeating

As Goffman presents, identity is not necessarily static, but rather needs to constantly be revised and maintained (1959). The impact of one's social environment and its implication on the self is evident in the answers of our interviewees. The interviewees of this study unveil anxieties that stem from these societal pressures, which are further stressed by the audience around them which influences their identity performance. Statistics show 41 percent of 18-25 year olds feel that they have to wear a different outfit every time they go out (Hubbub Foundation, 2017). The interviewees expressed that they avoided wearing garments that they had previously worn because of the negative implication's society has bestowed on 'outfit repeating'. The phenomenon of outfit repeating according to the interviewees implies that wearing the same outfit twice or more are socially stigmatized and viewed down upon as it is an unwritten rule within society. This causes uncertainty which leaves it to the individual to judge whether it is socially acceptable or not.

“The idea that's probably engraved in a lot of people's brains is that you need to have a new outfit for a new event. Yeah, yeah, I guess that's definitely stuck in the back of my mind.” - Laura

Originality plays a large factor in explaining why outfit repeating is stigmatized. Fashion is a chance to be creative and to experiment with colors, materials, and patterns (Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010). It could be understood that the novelty and excitement of wearing a garment diminishes after having worn it. This lost spark further drives fashion consumers to retreat to new and exciting garments. The idea of maintaining an updated and genuine fashion identity endorses individuals to wear new garments. One factor within identity performance is to incorporate the emotion of the audience (Goffman, 1959). In doing so, one attempts to avoid all embarrassment or shameful behavior in the eyes of others.

5.2.1 Meeting the Expectations of Others

As clothing carries a symbolic value: it seems to be the creative aspect that bears a more significant value than the tangible value of the garment (Dittmar, 1992). How one embodies this creativity will become a part of one's identity as it determines how fashionable one is. This will be perceived from the eyes of the beholder in relation to others which can be used to place one in a 'hierarchy of creativity'. This apparatus can evaluate how members of society are compared with one another. Fashion can express how one feels or wants to be portrayed and not taking every opportunity to experiment can come across (Solomon & Rabolt, 2007). If an individual lacks creativity this may contribute to the embarrassment of a legitimate fashion consumer's identity performance. Additionally, repeating outfits can imply a low financial status as one may not be able to afford to keep up with the demands of fashion trends (Lang, 2018). The financial discourse of 'outfit repeating' has been unrealistically developed by the minds of society. This is because ownership, in contemporary society, does not properly reflect one's financial status. This presents a strong intention for why individuals avoid wearing the same outfit twice. Circling back to the uncertainty of outfit repeating, determining whether it is socially acceptable or not, drives the anxiety within the interviewees. According to this study, it seems to reduce anxieties by individuals assuming that it is unaccepted. This evokes that feeling of constantly seeking to wear something new for events to remain a consistent fashion identity in terms of being a legitimate fashion consumer. As such, one interviewee argues that their fashion renting behavior stems from how others in their social circle may perceive them:

"Pretty much everyone tries not to outfit repeat [...] If you got photos in it, then you don't 'outfit repeat'. I wouldn't really wear the same dress twice in front of the same people. People would know if you are wearing something that you've worn before." - Gemma

With the rapid development of the social media landscape, the saying 'photos live forever' is more relevant than ever before. To be photographed in an outfit and for an image to be uploaded to a platform diminishes the novelty of the outfit even more. Once an outfit has been captured and posted online, there is visible evidence of the individual wearing the garment. For Gemma, this limits her association with garment and initiatives that if she would repeat the garment again, then

others will notice her ‘outfit repeating’. In terms of the utility of the garment, a permanent photograph can deem a garment as having completed its use.

From another aspect, Gemma also accounts for her opinion towards ‘outfit repeating’ by distancing herself from this superficial, shallow behavior as she legitimizes wearing ‘new’ garments as something ‘you have to do’. If one attempts to maintain a competent identity that follows the social norms are expected in order to maintain the social order. In order to be accepted by the culture one is part of, one will avoid participating in any unexpected and disrupting behavior that may implicate a negative impact on the social order (Swidler, 1986). On a related note, Rachael expresses a similar train of thought on how other girls behave and the exposure to negative judgment if you are ‘outfit repeating’. Social order is maintained by frequently altering her outfits depending on the event and the attendees.

“In my years when there was an 18th or 21st birthday, I was mostly going to events with the same group of people. Just the way it was, that all the girls were dressing up [...] You wouldn’t want to wear the same thing twice. So because of that, I’d be like ‘yeah I should rent something.’” - Rachael

Rachael emphasizes the ‘audience’, or in this case the attendees at the event, are taken into consideration when she justifies her rental behavior. Rachael attempts to neutralize her justification by appealing to the loyalties of those also attending the events (Scott & Lyman, 1968). This is applied as she attempts to maintain the social order and the others’ perception of her as a respectable fashion consumer. Vice versa, if Rachael was to attend these events with different audiences, she would be able to defeat the social expectations and go under the social radar and have her ‘outfit repeating’ unnoticed.

5.2.2 Uniformity

On the contrary, Laura brings up a discussion point that these same anxieties can be transferred to wearing the same outfit as someone else at an event. Whilst Laura pleads to the researchers that the situation did not bother her, there are clear anxieties from other people at the social event regarding this unwritten rule.

“Wearing the same thing, I don't care. But it's actually really funny. I had a situation where I was wearing the same dress as this girl [...] I was sitting down and a girl came up to me like "just letting you know, someone else is coming here and they're wearing the same dress as you, just letting you know." I was like “okay, I really don't mind.” But on three different occasions, I was walking around and heard other people talking about it and this is not even exaggerating or anything” - Laura

Laura deflects all responsibility for the situation that caused her inconvenience. From an ethnomethodological perspective, the reactions of others clearly had an impact on her because of the fact that people bothered informing her about it. The story recalled by Laura of the anxiety portrayed by ‘audience members’ of her identity performance made her challenge the social expectations laid upon her (Goffman, 1959). The idea of wearing something the same as another can be viewed as uniformity. In society, uniforms are most commonly worn by the working class such as policemen, construction workers, and nurses. Wearing a uniform strips one's individuality and reduces the independence in one's creative identity performance through fashion. The deprivation of a consumer's sovereignty strips their personal taste, aesthetics, and eventually their identity (Holt, 2002; Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997; Solomon & Douglas, 1987). The others in this story, contribute to the societal disapproval of not being unique and unoriginal in a fashion sense. As Laura is notably creative and a unique individual, someone else wearing the same thing as her at an event can be interpreted as an intrusion on her identity. This concept is also recognized when twins are seen wearing the same outfit which can be perceived as un-original and as a lack of their own significant fashion identity. Laura legitimizes herself by coming off as a sensible member of society who is able to see through and downplay the ridiculousness in order to maintain her creative fashion identity. As Laura confirms, she is a consistent, fashion-orientated individual and is very aware of her own identity performance. Her experience working in a fashion brand assists in incorporating fashion into her identity and self, rather than viewing fashion as a cosmetic component of her identity performance as part of her impression management (Goffman, 1959).

5.2.3 Depriving Creativity

To reduce this risk of being judged, interviewees justified fashion rental behavior by asserting their creativity. Garment leasing was accounted for as something they do for themselves and not to ‘fit into the social order.’ The interviewees express that it allows them to play around with their personal style as it is also an opportunity to express their creative self.

“At a nice event, I wouldn’t want to be re-wearing or wearing something that I already owned because then I wouldn’t feel like I don’t get to use those opportunities to wear different things. It is not so much that everyone thinks I look cool, it is more that I want to wear something different, so I can try out a new style or try out a new dress.” - Charlotte

As the above interviewee accounts for her fashion rental behavior, she maintains that she doesn’t outfit repeat because of the societal pressures but rather that she would feel as she has wasted an opportunity to explore her fashionable creative self. As clothing is an expressive tool to present yourself, Charlotte comes off as a legitimate fashion consumer by asserting that she needs to utilize every presented opportunity to experiment with styles and garments. As Katrina, on the contrary, suggests, fashion rental equips her with the access to experiment with her fashion identity.

“It definitely has opened my eyes to what ‘my’ style could be, what I could wear.”

“I don’t know what suits me. And now I have options to slowly figure out what suits me.”

- Katrina

Katrina expresses her uncertainty and insecurity with not knowing who her fashion identity is. She is often overwhelmed by different styles and options. She states that she does not enjoy shopping because she is not sure what she likes, what others think is ‘cool’, and what suits her. Katrina justifies her fashion rental behavior by coming off as sensible and proving to the researchers that she is aware and knows her insecurities. It is this self-doubt that excuses her for renting garments as she can use it as an opportunity to trial different selves. This motivation for fashion rental is aligned with what other interviewees said regarding fashion rental to style themselves and shape

their identity. Many of the interviewees accounted for their behavior by highlighting how it made them feel.

“We like to wear different stuff all the time and keep it exciting and keep it fun and different. And you feel different when you wear different stuff.” - Kelsi

“I could also try different things, different styles [...] When I was renting I could try something, wear it for a weekend and see if I liked it. So I probably experimented a bit more too with different styles.” - Rachael

As Kelsi and Rachael strengthen, by not outfit repeating, individuals get the opportunity to develop their ‘character’ with the use of their rental wardrobe. The access to these garments lets them play around with who they are and what their style represents. It not only makes them feel different but portrays different versions of themselves. This behavior is financially demanding to keep up with and fashion rental services provide a ‘solution’ for these consumers as a method to be able to do so.

This justification tactic applied by Charlotte, Katrina, Kelsi, and Rachael, attempts to neutralize their behavior by emphasizing the aspect of self-fulfillment in which renting garments allows them too (Scott & Lyman, 1968). The deprivation of creativity is a feeling within the interviewees. Therefore, they justified the reason for garment leasing as a sense to fulfill their own desires, which downplays the superficial aspects of their actions.

5.3 Money as a Tool

The societal pressures, as mentioned above, evoke a stigmatized feeling among the interviewees. Feeling stigmatized can come from either wearing the same outfit twice or the fear of not being perceived as creative or innovative. In order to keep up with the pressures, it can be financially demanding as the interviewees confirm.

5.3.1 Restricted Disposable Income

The sample of this study consists of students, recent graduates, and young professionals who commonly have a low disposable income which restrains consumption behavior. In this study, it was evidential as they justified their need to rent garments in relation to the money they had access to.

“I was renting them because they were things that I could not afford to buy but I could afford to rent on a student budget.” - Charlotte

“I don’t go and buy nice dresses and playsuits mainly because I can’t keep up with [the trends] and cannot afford it.” - Katrina

Fashion rental solved the dilemma that the interviewees faced wanting to present themselves as legitimate fashion consumers but not being able to afford the desired clothing and brands they wanted. As Charlotte signifies, her restricted student income presented an obstacle in her identity creation and garment leasing bridged that financial anxiety. She emphasized how fashion rental helped release this anxiety by accessing garments for a fraction of the retail price. Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) argue for how money justifies certain behavior in the Market World in terms of price or profit. A common justification among the interviewees is how they justify their behavior by comparing the rental price to the retail price and how it helps them come off as responsible in terms of renting it for a fraction of the retail price.

“It was great. It was a \$650 dress that I was renting for \$60.” - Charlotte

“Mainly because I wouldn’t be able to afford the garment itself. I wouldn’t be willing to pay \$1000 but I would pay \$100 to wear it for the weekend.” - Georgia

The retail price presents itself as a large factor in how the interviewees felt they could account for their renting behavior by reflecting on how much money they had saved. They enthusiastically expressed the difference between what they would have paid versus what they had paid for the garment. The interviewees came off as proud when elaborating upon their rental decision which

made them feel like they had done the ‘right thing’ in terms of paying less for a rental than the retail price. At times, the interviewees indicated that they were winners of the social systems. Linking back to the value creation in the Market World, the interviewees perceived the price difference as the value that allowed them to justify their behavior. The interviewees search for the benefits that they gain by searching for the worth in terms of pure money. In terms of the interviewees themselves, their low disposable income presents itself as an influence on the reflection process and provides a stronger basis for these consumers to legitimize themselves as sensible, good consumers by renting garments.

5.3.2 Value for Money

Closely related to how the interviewees make sense of their fashion rental habits in terms of value creation in the Market World is the value generated within the Industrial World. The efficiency or ‘price-per-use’ is related to how value is constructed in the Industrial World. The value is determined by the efficiency rather than its monetary price which justifies the action or behavior. To what extent the behavior is operational, or functional, determines the value which could be understood as the result of the input-output process (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006). In the case of fashion rental, the input-output process mentioned by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) could be understood as the amount of money paid for a garment, the expected usability, and what implications it has on one's identity performance in a social setting. The interviewees stress to the researchers that it would be ridiculous to pay absurd amounts for a garment that they only intended to wear once. This again can be tied in with the fear of ‘outfit repeating’ and the interviewees could predict that they would not re-wear the outfit. As Georgia comments:

“I hate that I have these nice dresses that I’ve worn once and then don’t wear them again [...] Then I would wear it and then sell it.” - Georgia

She expresses that it makes no logical sense to her to have garments in her wardrobe that are not fulfilling their potential. Having items lying in your wardrobe was interpreted by Georgia as an inventory cost that she may as well be re-selling items if she expected to only wear the item once. Georgia implied to the researchers that she took a resource-efficient approach to her wardrobe.

Taking this approach into consideration, several interviewees applied the same mentality to how they determined what garments they would like to purchase rather than rent.

“I remember the [fashion rental services] Instagram pages being like ‘Renting out for \$5’ and I’m like I might as well go and buy that top because it’s like \$40 dollars anyway [...] and you have to pay for dry cleaning. So you have almost potentially paid for half of the item, then I would rather just buy it.” - Rachael

Rachael expands on this concept as she justifies why she would rather not rent a garment as she perceives it as not worth it. The comparison and evaluation invoke what they consider as a fair price to pay for a garment and this is notably reflected upon how much they save from the retail price. The interviewees raise the question to the researchers why they would purchase a garment when it costs only a fraction of the price to rent.

Staple items in a wardrobe such as classic or minimalist styled pieces were deemed as more valuable to own in terms of wearability in this study. The interviewees also highlight that they prefer to purchase staple items in order to come off as ‘sensible’ as they compare how much one would spend on a staple item in relation to how often and how much wearability the garment holds. This perception of staple items will also be dependent on the self the individual attempts to maintain. For Laura, she refers to the staple items that she owns as contributing to her capsule wardrobe; an attempt to keep her style consistent and allows for her identity to come off as ‘stylish’.

“[...] You can keep wearing it. It’s more like a capsule wardrobe piece rather than fast fashion”
- Laura

For Amanda, she values classic garments that she knows are timeless and in style. For her, it means that she does not have to purchase clothing as frequently resulting in reducing her climate footprint.

“I think I used to wear a lot of patterns and floral stuff, and now I have gravitated towards more neutral clothes that I can wear in a variety of settings so you don’t need so much clothes [...] If you have solid clothes, they are basically always in style and they go with everything. If I have a black turtleneck, that is timeless, versus a floral crop top, which is for a certain mood or style and it goes out of fashion quickly. I’m not into fast fashion as well so I’m trying to reduce the amount of clothes that I’m buying.” - Amanda

As earlier implied, saving money, it makes the interviewees feel “great”. Amanda gathers a sense of satisfaction knowing that she is able to access a variety of garments without contradicting her sustainability-oriented self-image. The contentment she gains is underpinned by her not knowing that she is not contributing to a wasteful society through just limiting her fashion purchases.

5.3.3 Environmental Impact

In today’s society, the unsustainable fashion industry and the negative impact of excessive fashion consumption are causing devastating implications on society (Ellen Macarthur Foundation, 2017). In justifying her rental behavior, Amanda acknowledges the impact underutilized goods have on the environment from a societal perspective. She aligns this with her identity performance and to present a responsible self by emphasizing her contribution to the common good and a sustainable society.

“It is more practical. Why spend your time and money on something that you are only gonna wear once and then ends up in a landfill or in a second-hand store?” - Amanda

“Then, of course, I have always been very into the environment so am I gonna spend my money on something I am never gonna wear again? And then, what will I do with it? What happens to it? All this energy that went into making it? It just did not make any sense of how the circle completes itself. It was more like that” - Amanda

What Amanda is saying could be understood as justifying her rental behavior in generating value in the Industrial World by coming off as a ‘responsible consumer’. She justifies her fashion rental behavior by generating value in what Thévenot, Moody & Lafaye refer to as the Green World

(2000, cited in Bertilsson & Rennstam, 2018). She emphasizes the impact of the unsustainable fashion industry and what it has on the environment, namely the amount of waste that ends up in landfills. She justifies her behavior by offsetting her other alternative. Revealed through the ethnomethodological lens, Amanda justifies her fashion rental behavior by neutralizing her actions. She distances her behavior by highlighting what other fashion consumers do. Everyday fashion consumption is wasteful and has a much worse effect on society than her renting garments. This justification technique is defined by Scott & Lyman as the condemnation of the condemners (1968). Amanda emphasizes that it is unreasonable to spend money on a garment as others do, that she knows she will only wear once as it is a waste of precious resources being stripped from the planet. Not only is it unsustainable for the environment but also for her own economy. By considering these factors before purchasing, Amanda emphasizes that she is assisting in closing the environment loop. The efficiency gained from participating in fashion rental assists in the maintenance of a sustainability-conscious identity. Amanda emphasized that she resents fashion trends. She states that they make her feel “pretentious” as fast fashion is all about adjusting to trends generated by big corporations to make you spend more money. The artificial need created by trends is implied by Amanda as pointless with no deeper value to the self.

“I find trends incredibly wasteful. I don’t feel like I like them at all. I don’t want to participate in that. I don’t want to come off as pretentious by explicitly saying that I avoid trends [...] I’m happy to not waste my money on something I don’t think has a lot of value.” - Amanda

Value in the world seems to be driven by someone's personal and subjective desires of what they wish to achieve in identity performance. Amanda who seems to generate value in the Market and Industrial World in line with, according to herself, a sustainable lifestyle generates value in the Green World as well.

5.3.4 Rental as a Tool to Perform a Creative Self

To present oneself as a legitimate fashion consumer, several interviewees truly presented the idea that fashion rental services were a tool that allowed them to develop and perform their creative self. Some interviewees justified their fashion rental behavior by supporting the value within both the Market and Industrial World, through the Inspired World. When asked what the main

motivators were for using fashion rental services were, Laura and Charlotte both touched upon the creativity that these services enable.

“You get to try different things that you wouldn’t normally wear, different brands that I wouldn’t normally be able to afford” - Charlotte

“I think not having money to buy anything. And the dresses or the garments that you can rent are usually something new, something hip, something kind of cool, on-trend, or that appeals to you.”
- Laura

As Laura reveals, fashion rental services allow her to access a wider variety of garments that she can use to express her fashion identity. This in order to accomplish herself as trendy and inspiring. Both, Laura and Charlotte, justify themselves by merging the value generated in both the Inspired World and the Market World. They utilize different aspects of their ‘self’ to legitimize a consistent identity that remains true to themselves. As seen in the case of Amanda, she uses justification techniques that are influenced by her sustainable lifestyle whilst the other interviewees justify their desire to perform a unique and creative identity.

5.3.5 Changes to Life Situation

The monetary aspect is evidentially an important dimension of the motivations for the interviewees to rent garments. This study presents that all interviewees justified their rental behavior by generating value, to various extents, in the Market World. Among the interviewees who have experienced a shift in their occupation and income level, they also experienced a corresponding shift in their rental behavior.

“If I wasn't in a good-paying job now, I probably would still hire dresses.” - Georgia

“At that point, I was a bit older and was working and I was like ‘I probably do not need to do this anymore.’” - Rachael

As both Rachael and Georgia had experienced a change in their life situation, they did not perceive the same value in fashion rental and revealed that they did not rent garments as they used to. They justify their non-behavior by highlighting that there is no need for them to do this anymore. Therefore, they reveal through the interviews that their previous financial vulnerability was an embedded motivator for them to rent.

5.4 Luxury Goods to Perform the Best Version of Yourself

As Dittmar (1992) expresses, goods embody a symbolic value. In terms of luxury items, that symbolic value could be related to status, success, or money. Wearing something luxurious could, therefore, perform a more respected character in one's identity performance. Using the ethnomethodological perspective, the study revealed that the interviewees implicitly expressed a desire to be associated with a luxury lifestyle. The symbolic value that higher-quality, higher-priced, and branded items embodied made the interviewees feel a variety of positively associated emotions.

“I feel like people think “ooh she looks good” and have a bit more of a positive response if I am wearing something luxurious.” - Katrina

“It's the price that makes it good [...] I guess it is always nice to be wearing a high-quality luxury garment. I mean, everyone would feel nice wearing something that's like \$400” - Kelsi

Luxurious goods and its symbolic value have a way of making people feel better about themselves as they are aware of the external environment and contemplate how others are perceiving them when they are wearing them.

5.4.1 A Shortcut to One's Ideal Self

As discussed above, Georgia and Rachael both exhibited a shift in their rental behavior as their income levels changed. They utilized fashion rental services as a shortcut to keep their identity consistent while they did not have the means to afford their desired lifestyle. While they had low disposable income, renting was a way for them to maintain their ideal self and emphasize their value for fashion and high quality (Solomon, 2009). Through rental services, leasing behavior

could also be viewed as an inauthentic identity performance due to the chasm between their ideal and actual self (Solomon, 2009). This chasm creates inconsistency, and as Swidler develops, Rachael and Georgia justified their rental behavior as an attempt to negotiate their membership to the culture their ideal self felt it belonged to (1986). Similar to Georgia and Rachael, Charlotte experiences inconsistency in her identity due to financial status. Renting allowed her to suddenly reconstruct these inconsistencies.

“[Thanks to renting] I can afford to wear \$650 dresses of pure silk that I wouldn't have been able to afford on my current budget as a student / only recently starting work.” - Charlotte

As shown in the example of Charlotte, fashion rental services serve as a practical function. While for some of the other interviewees, it serves as a tool for achieving the intangible value they recognized within the luxury goods.

5.4.2 Status Symbols

Traditionally, luxury goods were perceived as a status symbol (Solomon, 2009) and this is evident with the responses that Kelsi and Laura provide.

“[Wearing] designer clothes and you know, wearing the next best thing to feel recognized or feel cool.” - Laura

“Obviously luxury items are well-known. So I feel if I'm wearing something that is a well-known brand people will notice that, I think, as well as recognize that.” - Kelsi

How Kelsi and Laura justify their desire for luxury goods is through how they now acknowledge that the people around them will recognize the symbolic value that the garments represent. This feeling makes the interviewees feel better about themselves. In the World of Fame, the value is determined by what the public determines as successful (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). The recognition from others when they wear luxury goods generates a feeling of fame within the interviewees. They are aware of how others around them perceive the luxury goods that they are

wearing. This implies that when others view them wearing branded clothing it distinguishes themselves in relation to others. Consequently, others will place them in a hierarchy above themselves, giving the interviewees a feeling of fame. Therefore, fashion rental is also a way for the interviewees to present themselves as someone more 'fashion-sensible' or who is a legitimate consumer. As seen in previous sections, Kelsi and Laura present a neutralization technique when delivering their justifications. This is done by emphasizing the self-fulfillment they receive to downplay the shallow aspect of renting luxurious garments (Scott & Lyman, 1968). They further propose that wearing luxurious clothing will generate a positive outcome through recognition. As Scott and Lyman (1968) present, the legitimacy evaluation of the account lies within others. Whether this technique is successful in neutralizing their luxurious rental behavior lies in the societal expectations and what is deemed as respectable behavior.

“We wanted to wear the cool brands and it did make you feel good about yourself because it kind of made you feel like you've had a bit more of a status type of thing” - Laura

“I'm not going to go out and buy something that's like \$900 to wear. If it's something that not everyone's going to have because it's so expensive, I find that cool because then at least I can be the only one at the event wearing that item. There's not going to be two people wearing something that's that expensive.” - Kelsi

In the Domestic World, the value is determined by one's respectable position in relation to others. Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) suggests that the impact of clothing and visible symbols generate value in the Domestic World. Kelsi and Laura justify that they find value in wearing luxury goods as it contributes to the establishment of hierarchy among people (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). The sovereignty of their consumption decisions makes them pioneers within the fashion world and assist in coming off as fashion leaders in the eyes of others reinforcing their desired fashion identity (Holt, 2002).

5.4.3 The Impact of Social Class

During the interview, Rachael revealed what has driven her rental behavior. The anxieties she experiences is derived from coming from a working-class family attending a private school.

Growing up, money was always presented as an underlying tension for her and her family. She opened up and discussed how her family had to work hard for the money they had, whilst being surrounded by people whose money came easier to them. It has a psychological effect on her growing up, with the pressures to look and wear certain things that had an impact on her.

“I think all of this potentially comes down to that I went to a private school with a lot of people who had families with a lot of money. They probably never had ever considered it before because they wouldn't have to. My family is more working class and they worked hard for me to go to that school, so I was out of my debts in terms of that. I was never trying to convince anyone else, because I knew that a lot of anyone who acquired it I knew a lot about them that they never even had to consider.” - Rachael

This declaration makes it evident how luxury goods have been a part of Rachael's performance management and how she would adjust her 'self' to the external societal environment. She reveals how presenting herself in luxury garments came off as unnatural to her since she felt like she could not afford stuff like her friends could. Highlighting that she comes from a working-class family indicates that there is a lot of 'work' behind acquiring luxury goods. She knows that people must work hard to have the resources to purchase such opulence items. This also corresponds to why she felt 'put together' when wearing something luxurious.

“I feel a bit more 'put together'. I remember wearing it when I needed a 'lift' or just feel a little bit better.” - Rachael

Rachael reveals how luxury goods contest a symbolic value of success and wealth, which makes her feel better. It could be understood as if she embodies the symbolic value of the garment, which makes her feel more successful. Fashion rental services made it attainable for Rachael to be able to wear nice things. After leaving school, she moved to an upper-class suburb of Melbourne, Australia, where again she felt the societal pressures to present a particular identity.

“I was living in this particular area in Melbourne which is kind of a more luxurious area and it was almost like you would 'fit in' if you were wearing something [luxurious] like that. It was

nothing I considered at that time, but looking back at it yeah maybe I was doing that [...] just to be acknowledged to fit in.” - Rachael

To not come off as superficial and ridiculous, Rachael justifies her rental behavior through the loyalty she owes to those in her suburb to uphold the image of wealth and upper-class that they project. Rachael confesses she leases garments because of the pressures she faces so that her identity can fit into her social environment. In alignment with Lyman and Scott (1968), this neutralizing technique is applied to justify a behavior that serves to comply with the status quo. Through an ethnomethodological lens, Rachael is implying her rental behavior was respectable since it serves to because it serves the interest of others. Possessing luxury goods while living in this certain area of Melbourne, she feels, is an expectation to be allowed to remain living there. Because of Rachael’s upbringing and struggles she has faced with social pressures and money; she holds loyalty to those she lives around to maintain an identity and meet the expectations in her area of town.

5.4.4 Scrutinizing Fake Identities

This type of behavior that Rachael exhibited of altering her identity, was scrutinized by other interviewees during the study. According to Gemma and Amanda, renting luxury goods and performing an identity that does not reflect your income and social class comes off as superficial and ‘fake’ as you are not performing your true identity.

“If I was renting something expensive and people were commenting on it, I would feel fake because it is not mine. If you are renting something that is a luxury brand then you are trying to show off that ‘I’m wearing an expensive brand’ but then it is not actually yours. You are just renting it. It is not like it is reflective of your wardrobe. You wouldn’t define your wardrobe that way because you are just renting it.” - Gemma

Gemma scrutinizes those who rent luxury goods as it does not reflect their genuine identity. As part of her justification for why Gemma rents fashion, she applies Scott and Lyman’s neutralizing technique: condemnation of the condemners. She implies that she does not rent to achieve a higher status nor to perform an identity that is not true. Gemma distinguishes her rental behavior from

others, saying others might perform a ‘fake self’. Instead, she presents herself as someone who sees through the act of renting and is critical towards those that play it off as part of their identity performance. By asserting this, she defends her rental behavior by claiming others’ rent for more superficial reasons than her.

“I think that when it is obvious that it is a luxury good... I don't like that, it makes me feel ‘douchey’. If I had a Gucci purse I would feel absolutely ridiculous [...] A purse, which is status-symbol, one is very ostentatious and ‘in your face.’” - Amanda

This can also be seen with the way Amanda justifies herself and her implications for renting. As Amanda comments upon luxury designer items, she further emphasizes herself as an environmentally conscious person. She distances herself from these, according to herself, ostentatious, ridiculous individuals who wear big branded items. The ethnomethodological perspective reveals that Amanda is implying that wearing such a status symbol, like the Gucci handbag, does not bring a true value to an identity.

What Amanda and Gemma suggest is rejected by Laura, who scrutinizes the ‘scrutinizers’. This indicates the complexity of a debate that bears no definite answer in what is considered the correct way to act.

“I don't think I would feel any less good in a garment if I knew that someone was being like, ‘She doesn't deserve that expensive dress or something.’ Because I think that's just a ridiculous thing. That is ridiculous. It's just people are like that, though.” - Laura

The perception of luxury varies among different individuals as evident in this study. It can be valued in terms of quality or the status symbol that it embodies. The interviewees utilize luxury goods in a variety of different ways to help build their identity performance. It is very complex to understand and apply to different individuals as it is subjective among different individuals and reflects their upbringing, access, and experiences with luxury goods. Either way, a luxury life is what many interviewees implied that they wanted and by renting luxury goods, it helped them achieve this lifestyle.

Chapter 6: Discussion

This chapter presents a discussion where the empirical material and analysis is elaborated upon and put into new light. This discussion stands as a post in the social debate of how fashion consumers navigate societal expectations. The chapter then reflects upon prior literature and presents the theoretical contributions of this study.

This study explores how fashion consumers accomplished themselves as respectable and competent consumers in today's society. As revealed, fashion consumers must navigate several discourses and anxieties that challenge their behavior. The empirical material confirms that fashion rental services enable individuals to perform their desired identity. Revealed from the findings, there exist contradictions within social norms and the expectations of how one consumes fashion. These demands came across as confusing to a vast majority of the interviewees which seemed to evoke anxieties of how one should present oneself in a respectable manner. The ethnomethodological perspective unveils how they attempt to bridge the gap between the expectations and their identity to maintain the social order. To navigate these anxieties, the interviewees presented a skillful performance of how they maintained a competent consumer status through justifications.

Within this study, interviewees highlighted an increased motivation to lease garments for the events they attended. This was often reflected upon determining factors such as the size, other attendees' expectations, and the symbolic importance of the event. The interviewees revealed the impact of the social pressures of how they were expected to perform their identity evoked the need or desire to wear something new and original to these events. Using the ethnomethodological perspective, the researchers uncovered that the desire was driven by the anxiety to establish themselves as a legitimate fashion consumer. This could be accomplished by abiding by the social order developed within one's culture. The anxiety of being unable to deliver to the expectations of the culture motivates the consumers' need to justify their behavior to not be stigmatized. There is an anxiety related to not being accepted and therefore evokes fear of being labeled a black sheep. This confirms one's desire to fit into the social environment is a natural and human instinct.

The empirical findings determine that justifying is a strategy applied to accomplish one's own identity and synchronizing it with the confinements of the social group. Identity performance is about constantly balancing one's own interest within the boundaries of what is expected by the social circle. As a fashion consumer, this is accomplished by using fashion garments to portray the contradictions present. Therefore, if one does not have the competencies such as financial, creativity, class, or interest, one creates shortcuts to overcome this barrier. Fashion rental is one method that fashion consumers accomplish themselves as competent fashion consumers.

In the phenomena of fashion rental, the interviewees argued for why their behavior was correct in the social context. Depending on one's own desires, they have different techniques of neutralizing their accounts. The shortcuts fashion consumers use, assist in overcoming the barriers and they need to downplay the ridiculousness of taking shortcuts as it is unprecedented that one is not doing something the legitimate method. To be a legitimate fashion consumption, one cannot be exposed 'faking' their identity and therefore apply tactics to neutralize their behavior. Depending on the social desires, Scott & Lyman presented techniques that the interviewees applied to persevere the social order. These techniques were selected based on the individual's desires downplaying the controversy and counteracting the behavior to come off as a respectable consumer.

6.1 The Interrelationship Between the Worlds of Worth

Evoked within the ethnomethodological approach, Baker (2002) elaborates on how interviewees will attempt to declare themselves as competent fashion consumers. The interviewees of this study provide explanations in the form of justifications and statements to assure the researchers of their competencies. As Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) suggest consumers justify differences in their worlds of worth, however, it is difficult to analyze the worlds in isolation from one another. The findings of this study presented similar findings to their work of Bertilsson and Rennstam that explored value creation for brands. According to their findings, brands generate value across different regimes where they can create value in one, by destroying value in another (Bertilsson & Rennstam, 2018).

In this study, it can be determined that consumers also apply this technique to generate value for their own personal brands and become a respectable fashion consumer. When the interviewees of the study were justifying themselves, the most dominant world in focus was often tied to another interrelated world. What determined the worlds of worth an individual intertwined, was dependent on the individual's personal values, attitudes, and beliefs. This was done to help make sense of their argument and present a stronger and more legitimate account.

In this study, the interrelationship between the Market World and the Industrial World was most commonly observed. The interviewees justified themselves by emphasizing the monetary aspect of using fashion rental services. How much they 'saved' in relation to purchasing the garment was achieved by comparing the rental price and the retail price. This was reiterated among interviewees by questioning why they would pay the retail price when they only intended to wear the garment for that one special occasion. This was in their eyes a major loss of value and instead saw renting as more beneficial. Generating value in the Market World through the price was often supported by the interviewees by the value generated in the Industrial World, concerning the input-output process. Consumers tend to prefer validating a purchase by claiming they are paying for the use of the good, rather than the good itself (Moeller and Wittkowski, 2010). To come off as a sensible consumer and to validate their responsibility they presented the position to the researchers 'why pay a higher price if you only intended to use the garment once or twice?' as an inefficient way of managing your disposable income. This emphasizes that individuals attempt to come off as smart and efficient with their money. By not only justifying themselves through isolated arguments, the interviewees also attempted to validate their argument by merging the common worlds.

Another example of the intercorrelation between worlds is the Inspired World and its association with the World of Fame. The creativity and originality that fashion rental provides to individuals as they can access various trends, designs, and styles to play around with and help construct the identity they wish to perform. As Guiot & Roux claimed, the concept of presenting yourself as unique motivates fashion behavior (2010). The creativity from wearing something new and extra allows them to feel enriched with emotion as they come off as inspirational. Further, being perceived as inspirational often seemed to be linked to performing an identity of a respected and recognized role model. This newfound access to garments made interviewees feel acknowledged for the new styles and luxurious brands they were wearing. When wearing recognizable garments

in front of others, the interviewees implied to have felt influential and distinguishable from others. As the analysis of the empirical data found, interviewees tended to combine the value they experienced in multiple worlds. Similarly, the World of Fame was often not identified in interviewees' justifications without the individual claiming worth in the Domestic World. Alike with what Loussaïef et al. (2019) found, this study revealed that the interviewees felt recognized when they wore symbolic signs of worth such as luxury garments or on-trend items. This was a catalyst for the individual to initiate that they felt like a fashion leader placing them above others in a social hierarchy. The value the interviewees gained was as they identified their worth and superiority in relation to others, especially those who were unable to wear the same styles, trends, and brands. In summary, to present oneself as a respectable fashion consumer, individuals tend to deliver accounts that go in line with their values and who they want to be, emphasizing on points that they know will help them present themselves in a respectable manner.

6.2 Contribution Discussion

As the prior literature has explored, it is challenging to maintain a respectable fashion consumer identity. The financial aspect of upholding a fashionable identity can be expensive as trends come in and out of vogue at compelling speeds (Balck & Cracau, 2015; Kang & Kim, 2013; Lang, 2018; Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010). The societal pressures to uphold a legitimate fashion consumer identity corresponds with staying updated with the latest trends. The study indicated that it was also one of the main motivators. In accordance with Moeller and Wittkowski's (2010) findings, the interviewees of this study that fashion rental minimizes the effort required to explore and trial different styles. To maintain a competent identity, the study further revealed consumers justified their behavior by considerably highlighting the financial benefits. These benefits, aligned with the work of Moeller and Wittkowski (2010), assisted the consumers to meet these demands and perform their identity as a shortcut. This shortcut, provided by fashion rental services, allowed the individuals to navigate their fashion identities and experiment with different styles.

The study also confirmed that fashion rental was utilized as a tool to relieve anxieties among consumers. When the interviewees predicted that they would only wear an item a limited number of times and they argued for meaningless in paying the full amount for the garment (Lang, 2018; Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010). The interviewees indicated that they sought value in paying for the

garment in terms of per-usage rather than investing in the product itself. The anxieties caused by social pressures to that 'outfit repeating' was stigmatized and assisted in influencing this mindset. The phenomena of outfit repeating remains vague as there are no clear messages surrounding the conventionality of the act and this can be elucidated by the limitations that prior research presents.

The empirical data also revealed differences among the previous research surrounding fashion rental services. The individuals interviewed in this study had very positive associations towards fashion rental, despite not always having a fully positive experience with it. The barriers that were reported by prior literature were often related to the hygienic aspect, emotional attachment when returning an item and the fear of damaging an item that you did not own (Armstrong et al., 2015; Gullstrand-Edbring, Lehner & Mont, 2016; Kang & Kim, 2013; Lang, 2018). However, the interviewees generally had no significant association to these barriers. As barriers unfolded during the interviews, none of the interviewees admitted that it would possess a strong influence on their rental behavior. Through the ethnomethodological lens, it could be understood that the value of fashion rental one gains exceeds the negative aspects or barriers as established in prior literature. The output generated by fashion rental also seems to exceed the risks and barriers in terms of a feeling of satisfaction and value generated in the Worlds of Worth.

Prior literature examined that the lack of ownership could be perceived as a loss of social status (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Lang, 2018; Lang, Seo & Liu, 2019). However, this study revealed that fashion rental could be recognized as a shortcut to performing one's desired identity. This further insinuates the possibility to attain a higher status through garment leasing. As interviewees revealed, non-ownership was not recognizable from an outsider's perspective. Rather, if others were to observe them wearing embedded status symbols, the individual may achieve a more respected fashion identity. Kang and Kim comment that self-esteem may be damaged by the demeaning self-image of the eyes of others when they rent (2013). Contradictory to their findings, this study revealed that fashion rental is not as stigmatized as prior literature suggested, and therefore was not as notably damaging to one's self-esteem. In fact, the majority of the interviewees expressed a feeling of satisfaction as they utilized the shortcut to maintaining their identity. The normalization of fashion rental reduced the fear of being scrutinized for their rental behavior. However, one interviewee confirmed Kang and Kim's argument as she claimed to rent

made her feel as if she was presenting an identity that was unaligned to her true identity. As Loussaïef, Ulrich and Damay suggest, rented items that do not associate with one's true identity can damage the perceived enjoyment of garment leasing (2019). This because the fear of falsifying their identity becomes too large of a burden. The study reveals how subjective the justification aspect of fashion rental is. This can be questioned by how confident and secure an individual feel in their social setting. The subjectivity is also determined by individuals' own attitudes and perceptions towards fashion rental where the psychological security determines the dimension of the justifications.

Collaborative fashion consumption was created as a solution to tackle the currently unsustainable fashion industry. Therefore, the prior literature encompassed the environmental aspect of fashion rental as the main motivator (Armstrong et al., 2015; Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Lang, 2018; Lang & Armstrong, 2018; Lundblad & Davies, 2016; Shen et al., 2012). There are numerous benefits to collaborative fashion such as waste minimization and guilt-free consumption (Lundblad & Davies, 2016). Yet, the empirical data of this study revealed the opposite. The environmental element of fashion rental was rarely touched upon by the interviewees with the exemption of Amanda who promotes her sustainability-conscious lifestyle. For Amanda, it was one of the main motivators. She accounted for her fashion rental behavior by generating value in the additional world that was adapted to Boltanski and Thévenot's theory: The Green World. As Hustvedt & Dickson suggest, those that have a genuine sustainable focus will construct their identity encompassing these aspects (2009).

Other interviewees lightly touched upon the environmental aspect briefly in an attempt to account for and present themselves as responsible consumers. These interviewees admitted that they would be dishonest to claim it to be their main motivators. However, they did want to disclose to the researchers that it was a factor taken into consideration, to ensure that they came across as knowledgeable and sensible, to downplay the superficial motives. Through the ethnomethodological lens, this behavior comes across as egotistic as they shape their impression management to mention the sustainable lifestyle that is expected from an 'ideal' responsible consumer. These insights challenge findings from other researchers who claim that collaborative fashion consumption was adopted by consumers as they strive to live sustainably.

As Lundblad and Davies suggested, sustainable fashion choices, such as fashion rental, were adopted often as opposition to following peer pressure and societal trends (2016). Consumers, according to Lundblad and Davies (2016), were individualistic in their motivations to adopt fashion rental and were not doing it in an attempt to be activists in motivating others. However, this study found this was not necessarily true. The study focused on nationalities where fashion rental behavior has become a normalized behavior, leaving the interviewees to feel comfortable expressing their behavior. This study found that the interviewees often adopted fashion rental as it was motivated by the social pressures. These findings challenge what Lundblad and Davies concede when they suggested many consumers would change their behavior away from fashion rental if it became normalized within society. While they suggested that fashion rental choices created individualistic fashion identities on the basis that they were unique in their behavior choices, this study revealed that it provided a tool for consumers to develop a unique fashion identity.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This chapter concludes the findings of this study. The empirical analysis and discussion are revisited to present the final findings that this study has revealed. The chapter then proceeds to establish the managerial implications as well as research limitations and ideas for future studies.

This study has investigated female fashion rental habits and how they justify their fashion behavior to accomplish themselves as respectable consumers. In contemporary society, individuals have had to adapt to constantly having eyes on their self-presentation at all times, both online and offline. This has intensified the pressures felt by fashion consumers to perform their identities as legitimate. The study has contributed as a post in the societal debate of how fashion and society are interrelated. It further reveals the contradictory pressures that are faced by fashion consumers in order to be perceived as competent members of society. This research is further built upon the academic discussion of the relationship between consumers' consumption behavior and society. The discussion is conducted with a theoretical compilation of Goffman (1959), Belk (1988), Scott and Lyman (1968), Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) adding an ethnomethodological perspective to investigate the research question. This method allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of how consumers perform their identity and account. The insights were used to understand how individuals justify themselves to come off as competent consumers. The findings reveal how consumers' anxieties, derived from one's own culture, underlie the motivations and barriers to why they utilize fashion rental services. Identity performance is an on-going process where consumers constantly have to adapt and revise their identities aligning it with their personal desires within the societal context. The anxiety consumers experience seems to lie chasm of managing the ideal self and the actual self.

Norms, habits, and expectations of how one should behave provoke pressures of how consumers within a society must behave. Through abiding by these discourses, consumers accomplish themselves as competent and legitimate consumers. A legitimate fashion consumer is creative, unique, and sophisticated. Utilizing the symbolic value embodied within garments, consumers are able to maintain and accomplish the desired identity. Individuals select these symbolic props to accomplish the identity they desire. Further, one's self-perception and ideal self influences how

consumers justify their behavior. Justifications are phrased so they align with both meetings their own needs and desires, but also by presenting a legitimate self in a societal context. The fear of being scrutinized or questioned evokes anxiety as to why consumers mediate and constantly revise their identity according to social circumstances. As presented, identity is not stable and constantly has to be revised. With a constant watching eye, this becomes more and more important to work with because of the fear of standing out as a black sheep.

To conclude, the participants of this study reveal anxiety and the desire to ‘do good’ both for themselves in accomplishing their own desires, but it is important that it does not conflict with the interest of their social circle. It is also evident in this study that consumers are driven to please others’ expectations over their own, but also one’s own interest cannot be overlooked. Therefore, in this study fashion rental serves as a tool that provides a shortcut to bridge the actual self and the ideal self. How consumers justify themselves in turn is based on a complex compromise of staying true to your own desires and the interest of others.

Important to emphasize is that all participants have their own backgrounds, which determines how they justify themselves. Why the findings cannot be generalized. The overall themes found in the study are constructed by the individuals as highly complex and personal anxieties, rooted in their life path. The interviewees revealed that the justification techniques they provided to the researchers covered the basis of their own self-interest but molded the delivery of the justification to fit the expectations of society.

To conclude, fashion rental services challenge the traditional idea of access and it can come off as a superficial behavior where one is performing an ingenuine self, to cope with the expectations within one’s culture. Accordingly, the individuals will ensure that their justifications are delivered to maintain their respectable position and not be stigmatized and compromise their fashion consumer identity.

7.1 Managerial Contributions

As revealed by the study, consumers are driven by their anxieties to meet the expectations of their culture in terms of habits, norms, and beliefs. Fashion rental services provide consumers with a

shortcut to bridge the ideal self and the actual self. The findings of this study reveal that the motivations behind leasing fashion garments are dependent on subjective means of what the individual wants to pursue in terms of meeting their own personal desires and meeting one's social circle's expectations.

According to this study, the environmental motivation for fashion rental is not as much of a significant factor for consumers' motivations as prior research had established. Therefore, it is of high importance that fashion rental services acknowledge the complexity of consumer's rental motivations. The findings of the study indicate that consumers have a higher self-interest to satisfy their own needs and to meet societal expectations rather than the interest of the common good. The current state of fashion rental services advocates a large emphasis on the environmental benefit of fashion rental in their marketing (Lang, 2018; Lundblad & Davies, 2016; Pedersen & Netter, 2015; Shen et al., 2012). Due to the subjectivity of personal pursuits, and the various personal motivations for leasing, one marketing strategy cannot be established. The interviews reveal that consumers present their individual main motivators as aligned with their personal desires. While some consumers rent because of more hedonic, creative reasons, others attain the value of renting for the practical aspect.

This study concludes the managerial implications that businesses should focus on the subjectivity their consumer data is revealing. Finding a niche segment for one's business is just as crucial for fashion rental services as it is for fashion brands and retailers, due to the subjectivity of consumer preferences and behavior. Profiling a fashion rental service as sustainable meets the expectations of a green consumer, but perhaps it is not a unique selling point for someone who emphasizes the creative aspect of fashion rental. To make the most use of one's business and its marketing initiatives, the interpretation of consumer data and knowing your consumer base and their desires are of high importance.

These findings emphasize the importance of incorporating the complexity of consumer data and insights when developing a marketing strategy. It is important to know how to distinguish one's rental business by understanding what consumer they want in order to attract their business. Placing a high attention on retrieving up-to-date situation analysis and market segmentation is of

high importance in a relatively new industry like fashion rental, just as it is for established fashion industries business.

The study further revealed dimensions that were relevant for fashion rental services to consider in their product offerings. Consumers found it more valuable for themselves to invest in staple items such as t-shirts and jeans. The preference to invest in a timeless capsule wardrobe revealed a stronger desire to rent ‘unique’ garments that could contribute positively to their fashion identity. Fashion rental services should assemble their service offerings with niche garments in terms of their style, fabric, color, and rarity. Consumers also expressed they would have a higher interest in renting occasion and formal wear over everyday garments as it was deemed more valuable to them. Fashion libraries and rental services should compile their services with branded and high-quality luxury goods as consumers revealed a desire to rent as a shortcut in performing an ideal self.

7.2 Limitations and Further Research

The interviewees’ responses and how they justify themselves are related to their ‘personal story’ which influences their perception of themselves in a social context, and also what evokes their desires and anxieties. Anxieties and societal habits, norms, and beliefs seem to be closely related to social class, one’s childhood, and upbringing.

This study’s sample consisted of young females from nations where fashion rental services are an established phenomenon. This created a projected limitation to the findings of the study as the responses would have exhibited skewed responses in how it was normalized and socially accepted among the interviewees and their social environments. Fashion between cultures and markets varies immensely and a cultural exploration into this field may provide challenging responses to this study. Therefore, the researchers would like to suggest to future researchers to investigate different consumer cultures, particularly where the market of fashion rental services is still under development. This could uncover an interesting dimension of how early adopters may apply different justification strategies to declare themselves as respectable fashion consumers. Countries that exhibit high uncertainty avoidance as declared by Hofstede (2011) may unveil contradictory findings due to their perceived risk to accept fashion rental as a phenomenon. Similarly, findings may differ for more naturally introverted cultures like Sweden. As Lang et al. (2019) had explored

in his cross-cultural comparison for the motivations, Asian markets had higher perceived stigmatization for renting garments. The social concerns centered largely around what implications leasing had on class and social status.

As observed in this study, consumers utilized fashion rental in order to perform an identity that resembled their ideal self. The ideal seemed to vary from the actual self in terms of social class. Therefore, renting garments is used as a tool to climb the hierarchical social ladder. The researchers would like to suggest that an opportunity for future research could explore how fashion consumers justify their rental behavior depending on their social class and culture. The interrelationship between taste and class have been previously researched by Pierre Bourdieu (1984), applying his works could be helpful in exploring how consumers justify themselves and how this varies socially among classes in society. What could be deemed as creative and tasteful within one class, might be perceived as the opposite within another one. As well as, being perceived as someone who does not perform a creative self might lack class and style. Therefore one justification might not be accepted within a certain culture if it does not follow the social norm or habits, nor legitimizing their identity. Bourdieu's theory could explain why renting luxury clothing can be perceived as performing an unauthentic identity as an attempt to imitate a higher class. The theory of Bourdieu also takes the economic aspect into consideration regarding consumers' tastes. This study mainly consisted of individuals with a generally low disposable income. An individual with greater financial means who justified their behavior by generating value in the Market World may come off as less respectable and ingenuine. Incorporating these dimensions could potentially broaden the understanding of the interrelationship between justifications and income.

Further, Thorstein Veblen and his Trickle-Down theory (2005) explores how lower-class consumers have access to luxury garments through fashion rental service to help them imitate the higher class. Whereas, his theory on Conspicuous Consumption (2005) discusses how consumers use these goods to display economic power and perform a higher-class identity. The researchers of this study would like to suggest that a combination of Bourdieu and Veblen's theory could provide an interesting dimension in the social debate of how fashion consumers use fashion rental services, putting emphasis on that their justification tactics may vary to this finding.

Overall, social class incorporates several different perspectives and values among individuals. Therefore, how they justify their fashion behavior will intertwine different strategies as dependent on their social environment and culture. This will contribute to the social discussion of how fashion consumers navigate societal expectations to accomplish legitimate identities.

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Appendix 1

Interview Guide

General - Setting the Mood

Age:

Nationality:

Occupation and field:

Interests:

We encourage the Interviewee to formulate your answers through stories.

Characteristics of the interviewee

1. Describe your interest in Fashion?
 - a. Has it evolved or changed over time?
2. Where do you look for inspiration/what inspires you?
 - a. Why these sources? And not other ones?
3. Would you say that you dress for others or yourself?
 - a. Why?
4. How do you perceive yourself in relation to staying up with trends?
 - a. Is it important for you to stay up with trends, and why/why not?

Self-perception and renting

5. How do you view yourself in a social setting? Describe yourself in a few words (*Personality traits, social status*)
6. Would you say that you care about what other people think about you? *How you dress, speak, do etc*
7. Would you classify yourself as someone easily persuaded by fashion pressures and trends?
8. How does it make you feel wearing a luxury good? Does the feeling vary depending on if you own or rent the garment?
9. Are you conscious of what other people think when they see you wearing it? Can be both a positive and negative (wow she looks good or ...)

Experience with fashion rental

10. How were you introduced to the concept of fashion renting?
 - a. What was your initial opinion about it? Were you convinced it was practical?
11. What made you start using fashion rental?
Story: What was your first rental experience like? What was the occasion, garment? How did it make you feel? Were there any hiccups?
12. How often would you say that you rent garments? *Was there a long period of time between the first and second occasion?*
13. What type of garments do you rent? And for what occasions/when do you find yourself considering renting something? Does the size of the event, in terms of people, determine whether you are renting
 - **What garments are you most likely to rent?** *Why? What makes a luxury good desirable?*
 - **What garments are you less likely to rent?** *Why? Would you rent clothes at all price ranges?*
14. Why do you rent garments? What are your main reasons?
15. What do you enjoy about garment leasing?
16. What do you dislike about fashion rental?
17. What are the requirements for you to consider renting? (Price of item, frequency of use, the rarity of the item?)
18. Have you ever developed an emotional attachment to a rented item? Have you felt after the leasing period has expired that you did not want to give it back?

Perception of Fashion Rental

19. How does it make you feel wearing rented garments?
 - Do you think that someone else (a stranger) has worn it before you? *Why, why not?*
20. Do you know if others in your social group, let's say your friends, are renting?
 - Is it hard to determine when others rent items? Say when you're at [*insert event when they say they've rented*], are you able to spot those that have rented their items?
21. How do the risks of damaging or staining an item affect your attitude towards fashion renting because you do not own it? Is this a concern of yours?
22. How does it make you feel knowing that you have only paid a fraction of the price while there are other consumers/people out there having paid the entire/full amount for the same garment?
 - a. *Would it make you feel better or worse?*

Narrative Questions:

Case: If you would get a compliment of a rented garment, would you admit to that it is rented or how would you react in the scenario?

Case: If you met someone who did not see the value of renting, how would you persuade them? If you explained for a Swede who is not used to experienced

Case: Imagine you are going to an event where you have rented a garment to wear and people around you have not, how does it make you feel?