Clothes Make the (Wo)man:

A Qualitative Study on the Construction and Expression of a Green Identity through Second-Hand Clothing

by

Julia Deutschen and Gloria Moll

May 2021

Master's Program in International Marketing
and Brand Management

Abstract

Title	Clothes Make the Wo(man): A Qualitative Study on the Construction and Expression of a Green Identity through Second-Hand Clothing
Authors	Julia Deutschen and Gloria Moll
Supervisor	Veronika Tarnovskaya
Course	BUSN39 Degree Project in Global Marketing
Submission Date	May 31st, 2021
Thesis Purpose	This study aims to deepen the understanding of green identity construction and expression among female Gen Z consumers in relation to second-hand clothing.
Theoretical Perspective	By applying a sociological and a consumer perspective, identity construction and sustainability act as two research domains in which this study is positioned. The Processual Theory of Identity (PTI) by Cherrier and Murray (2007) is used as a foundation for the analysis.
Methodology/ Empirical Data	This exploratory study applies an abductive research approach and is qualitative. We conducted five focus groups with a total of 23 female Gen Z consumers born between 1995 and 1998. The gathered data was analyzed with a qualitative content analysis.
Findings	A green identity is constructed through five phases: (1) Sensitization, (2) Self-Gratification, (3) Shift, (4) Socialization, and (5) Self-Realization. The first phase is expressed through a consumerist mindset and selling clothes, whereas the second phase is expressed through thriftiness and fashion leadership. In the third phase, consumers undergo a shift towards 'greener' values, which they then promote in the fourth phase. The last phase is expressed through adopting a green identity to the entire lifestyle. These phases are temporal: consumers move through the different phases according to the shift in their consumption behavior.
Contributions	By applying an existing phenomenon (identity construction) to a new context (second-hand clothing), and adapting and extending the PTI, we enhanced the understanding of green identity construction. This study is relevant for marketers in the resale industry to enhance their understanding of their female consumers of Gen Z.
Keywords	Identity Construction, Green Identity, Sustainability, Second-Hand Clothing, Sustainable Fashion Alternatives

Acknowledgments

Julia Deutschen   Gloria Moll

Lund, May 31st, 2021

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the background of this thesis: the social and environmental issues in the fashion industry and the ever-increasing awareness of sustainability among consumers. After elaborating on the research problematization, we present the research question that this study aims to answer. Eventually, we elucidate on delimitations, how this research intends to contribute, and outline the structure of this thesis.

1.1 Background

> I don't truly have a good reason not to [buy second-hand clothing]. I think that's it, because we know that it's better for social sustainability, we know it's better for the environment, we know it's cheaper. It's all these things! And so, what's the reason for me not to buy second-hand? And I really cannot come up with a good reason not to do it. (Maja, Transcript of Focus Group 3, pos. 88)

The phenomenon that Maja describes in this statement is a prominent point of view in society nowadays. Over the last years, sustainability has become an emerging megatrend due to several environmental issues that have increased, making it inevitable to live more sustainably (Lubin & Esty, 2010). However, it is not only the environmental aspect that the concept of sustainability comprises but also the social and economic aspects that Maja touched upon as well (Chandler, 2020).

In the apparel sector, a sustainability debate flared up in April 2013 when Rana Plaza, a textile factory in Bangladesh, collapsed, killing more than a thousand people (e.g. Chandler, 2020; McQuillan, 2019). This event served as an eye-opener for society, showing that the fashion industry acts as a major contributor to the social and environmental issues that we were and still are facing, "with negative environmental impacts spanning the entire life cycle of a piece of clothing, from manufacture to consumer disposal" (McNeill & Venter, 2019, p.368). Particularly the social issues were discussed then because this collapse drew attention to the working conditions during clothing production and, as a result, prompted many consumers to rethink. In the last few years, the sustainability debate in fashion has increasingly emphasized the importance of transparent supply chains, eco-friendly materials, and tackling overconsumption through new business models, such as renting or resale (BoF & McKinsey & Company, 2021).

Another recent event that encouraged consumers to rethink their consumption patterns is the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The daily routines of consumers were disrupted by new regulations and lockdowns, which has not only accelerated a pre-existing critique of consumerism but also increased the importance of sustainability in purchasing decisions and the rise of circular business models (BoF & McKinsey & Company, 2021).

Due to these recent incidents in the fashion industry, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the overarching megatrend of sustainability, consumers nowadays increasingly want to buy their clothes more consciously, leading to a rise of sustainable fashion alternatives. Among these alternatives are fair fashion, rental services, and resale, which try to reconsider the impacts fashion production and consumption have on the workers, communities, and environment (Moisander & Pesonen, 2002). In this regard, the resale industry, especially the second-hand clothing industry, is considered a big winner of the pandemic, as the industry's growth has accelerated (thredUP, 2020). Consequently, a study by BCG & Vestiaire Collective (2020) shows that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 68% of the respondents plan to buy more second-hand items in the future. Particularly consumers belonging to Generation Z (Gen Z) are said to contribute to the further growth of the second-hand clothing industry as they adopt second-hand clothing faster than any other generation (thredUP, 2020).

However, this growth has already picked up pre-pandemic times due to the digitalization of the second-hand market. While this market was dominated by flea-markets and non-profit actors for a long time, social media platforms have emerged in recent years, offering the consumers a new range of options for selling and buying used clothes. (Sweet, Aflaki & Stalder, 2019) Therefore, accessing the second-hand clothing market has become easier for consumers.

At the same time, the drivers behind the purchase of second-hand clothing have changed in the last years: in the past, second-hand clothing was mainly purchased to save money; however, nowadays, the drivers include ethical concerns as well as identity construction and expression (Herjanto, Scheller-Sampson & Erickson, 2019), making second-hand clothing more popular among the masses.

The practice of constructing and expressing an identity through consumption, particularly through second-hand clothing, is highly relevant for consumers belonging to Gen Z (Francis & Hoefel, 2018), specifically for female consumers. While Gen Z consumers are known for their high willingness to buy sustainable products (PwC, 2020), this especially holds for female consumers, as studies have shown that they are more likely to buy sustainable clothing alternatives to construct a green identity (Eisler, Eisler & Yoshida, 2003; McNeill & Venter, 2019; Tung, Koenig & Chen, 2017). Therefore, the consumption behavior of female Gen Z consumers sits at the intersection of sustainability, identity construction, and second-hand clothing, which is highly interesting and thus investigated in this thesis.

1.2 Research Problematization

By analyzing the current state of knowledge on the topic of sustainability, identity construction, and second-hand clothing, three popular research areas emerge: the consumption of eco-friendly clothing (e.g. Kim, Jung & Lee, 2021; Niinimäki, 2010), the formation of a green self-identity (e.g. Niinimäki, 2010; Perera, 2014; Saraiva, Fernandes & von Schwedler, 2020), and the values, motivations, and barriers behind consuming sustainable fashion alternatives (e.g. Han & Sweet, 2021; Lundblad & Davies, 2016; McNeill & Venter, 2019; Tung, Koenig & Chen, 2017). These areas lead us to our research domain, namely the intersection of sustainability and identity construction, which we investigate in the context of second-hand clothing, as portrayed in figure 1:
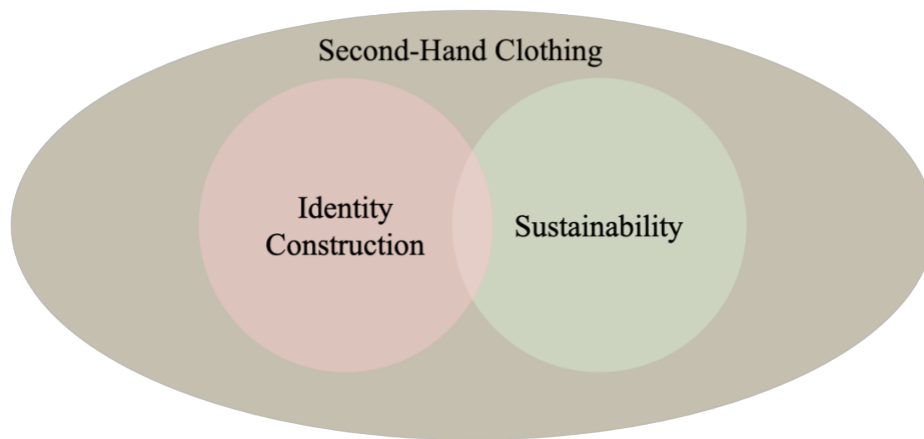
Figure 1: Research Domains and Context (own illustration)

Regarding the academic literature on identity construction, researchers mainly focus on constructing an identity through eco-fashion (e.g. Niinimäki, 2010) or collaborative fashion consumption models (e.g. McNeill & Venter, 2019), however, not on second-hand clothing. Other scholars connect the ideas of identity construction and sustainability in the concept of a green self-identity, which is characterized by the environmentally conscious and green attitudes and values of a person (Hansmann & Binder, 2020; Tung, Koenig & Chen, 2017). In this regard, scholars mainly examine general consumption habits (e.g. Perera, 2014), organic food (e.g. Saraiva, Fernandes & von Schwedler, 2020), and electric cars (e.g. Barbarossa, Beckmann, Pelsmacker, Moons & Gwozdz, 2015).

When investigating sustainable fashion consumption, Lundblad and Davies (2016) claim that many scholars look into the general population instead of actual consumers of sustainable fashion, which is an aspect we aim to change with this research. Furthermore, regarding the studied age group, researchers such as McNeill and Venter (2019), Perera (2014), and Tung, Koenig and Chen (2017) focus on the consumption practices of young people aged between 18 and 25 years, which belong to Gen Z. As already mentioned above, this age group is highly

relevant for this study due to the nature of their consumption behavior and is therefore used as a sample for this study.

Apart from these commonalities, we also identified a contradiction in academic literature. Niinimäki (2010) argues that ethical commitment and ethical values are essential drivers towards purchasing eco-friendly clothes, eco-materials, and recycled clothing. Conversely, McNeill and Venter (2019) argue that consumers who engage in collaborative consumption models, such as swapping, renting, or buying second-hand clothing, engage in the former mainly to express their identity and less for the social and ethical implications of their consumption. This paradox is further investigated in our research through the concept of a green self-identity. Consequently, we intend to unravel this paradox and explore if and how the motivation for consuming second-hand clothing changes as consumers construct their identity.

In essence, the connection between the process of identity construction and sustainability in the context of second-hand clothing is not yet sufficiently explored by academic scholars. Therefore, with this research, our motivation is to start filling this particular research gap by investigating the process of identity construction and expression through second-hand clothing. Moreover, the adoption of eco-friendly consumption practices produces a profound context that enables us to investigate identity formation processes.

1.3 Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to enhance the understanding of green identity construction and expression in the context of second-hand clothing, as there have been few studies published in this research area. Thus, this thesis aims to broaden the understanding and existing knowledge of female Gen Z consumers, specifically how they construct their identity in relation to sustainability and second-hand clothing.

Parallelly, the previous section shows that the combination of the research domains of sustainability and identity construction in the context of second-hand clothing is highly relevant. This is not only due to the change in consumption patterns related to COVID-19 but also caused by the recent rise in popularity of second-hand clothing and the overarching megatrend of sustainability. Thus, this research gap is highly relevant to be studied, particularly since fashion can be used for identity construction, and second-hand clothing is nowadays mainly purchased for this exact purpose.

Therefore, this master thesis investigates and tries to find an answer to the following research question:

How is a green identity constructed and expressed among female consumers of second-hand clothing in Generation Z?

By differentiating between the construction and expression of a green identity, we aim to determine the internal processes that consumers undergo when constructing their green identities and how the different phases of identity construction are expressed or communicated to the outside world through specific actions.

1.4 Delimitations

As the previous section shows, this thesis aims to understand how consumers construct and express a green identity. Therefore, we look at sustainability from an individual level in terms of consumption and, parallelly, take on a consumer perspective. While this thesis provides practical implications for marketers (see sections 1.5 and 5.2), we do not investigate the brand management perspective, which allows us to solely focus on the green identity construction process of consumers.

We further limit our research to the context of second-hand clothing instead of investigating the entirety of sustainable fashion alternatives. This enables us to contribute theoretically and practically by investigating a new context and thus providing rich and context-specific insights into the green identity construction process.

To ensure that we meet our research goal, we narrow down the sample by only looking at female consumers in Gen Z. Consequently, this study does not cover male or non-binary consumers and other generations. As already elaborated on in section 1.1, female consumers belonging to Gen Z are particularly relevant for our research goal and investigating them allows us to answer our research question. Nevertheless, we try to maximize the heterogeneity of this sample in terms of our participants' nationalities. While aiming to include participants from as many different nationalities as possible, we do not aim to compare different countries. Instead, we use the heterogeneity of our sample to enrich our findings.

Consequently, by narrowing our research scope, we intend to obtain valuable insights into our participants' identity construction and expression, and therefore contribute both theoretically and practically.

1.5 Intended Contribution

As highlighted in the previous sections, the context of second-hand clothing has not been extensively researched by scholars, which leads us to the intended theoretical contributions of this research.

Our main contribution is the investigation of an existing phenomenon in a new context. By researching the concept of a green self-identity, which scholars in different contexts already studied, we apply this phenomenon to a new context, that is, second-hand clothing. Therefore, this thesis intends to fill the research gap that emerges at the intersection of sustainability and identity construction in the context of second-hand clothing (see figure 1).

By using the Processual Theory of Identity (PTI) by Cherrier and Murray (2007) as a theoretical framework (see section 2.4), we aim to deepen not only the understanding of the process of green identity formation but also adapt the framework based on the new context in which it is studied. The PTI comprises four phases that we aim to verify and possibly extend based on the second-hand clothing context.

Another research domain to which this thesis aims to contribute is that of ethical fashion consumption. By investigating the topic of second-hand clothing, we intend to enhance the understanding of how the consumption of second-hand clothing changes as consumers move through the green identity construction process.

Besides these theoretical contributions, this study additionally intends to contribute on a practical level by offering marketers working with second-hand clothing a means to improve their understanding of a selected target audience, namely female Gen Z consumers, and thus, make their marketing efforts more efficient.

1.6 Research Outline

To answer the research question of how a green self-identity is constructed and expressed among female consumers of second-hand clothing in Gen Z, this thesis is structured in five chapters. The first chapter introduces the reader to the research background and the research problem, question, and how this study intends to contribute.

The second chapter is a literature review that presents the most critical constructs relevant to answer the research question, namely sustainability, second-hand clothing, identity construction, and consequently, the theoretical framework.

In chapter three, the methodology used to investigate the research question is described by elaborating on research philosophy and the used research approach as well as the data collection and analysis. To round up the third chapter, we also reflect upon reflexivity, ethical principles, and research quality criteria.

Our research findings are presented in the fourth chapter, along with an interpretation and discussion of the aforementioned findings.

In the final chapter, we conclude these findings and answer the posed research question by elaborating on theoretical contributions and practical implications. Finally, we touch upon the limitations of this research before proposing possible future research areas.

2   Literature Review

To answer the research question of how a green identity is constructed and expressed among female consumers of second-hand clothing in Gen Z, this chapter lays the theoretical groundwork by introducing the two research domains, sustainability and identity construction, along with the context of second-hand clothing. First, the topic of sustainability in general, on an individual level, and in the clothing industry is explained before elaborating on the drivers behind purchasing second-hand clothing. Furthermore, the topic of identity construction is introduced before the two domains are connected. This chapter ends with an introduction of the theoretical framework for the subsequent analysis.

2.1   Conceptualization of Sustainability

2.1.1   Definition of Sustainability

"Sustainable development seeks to meet the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future." (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p.39, paragraph 49) This quote from the Brundtland Report depicts the definition of sustainable development which the UN's World Commission on Environment and Development initiated. It became a fundamental and widely accepted definition of the term sustainability, inter alia, because of its broadness (Chandler, 2020). Nidumolu, Prahalad and Rangaswami (2013) well-summarize the importance of the concept by stating that there is no other option than sustainable development and that the key to achieving this is innovation.

When viewing the term 'sustainability', two separate words can be extracted: 'sustain' and 'ability', meaning "the quality of being able to continue over a period of time" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Thus, another characteristic of sustainability is inter- and intragenerational equity (e.g. Stern, 2006; Vojnovic, 2009). While the former means the requirement of equity or fairness between generations, the latter describes providing fair access to resources within a current generation (Vojnovic, 2009).

As mentioned before, sustainability entails not only an environmental (or ecological) dimension but also a social and an economic dimension. These three pillars are comprised in the so-called 'triple bottom line', which measures a company's environmental, social, and economic performance over time (Chandler, 2020). Nevertheless, as the opening statement by our focus

group participant Maja suggests, the triple bottom line can also be relevant for consumers when it comes to their daily consumption decisions. Yet Chandler (2020) mainly focuses on a company perspective and, thus, proposes four reasons why firms must act, namely "climate change, resilience, natural capital, and stakeholders" (Chandler, 2020, p.422).

However, sustainability is not only interesting from a corporate perspective but also essential for governments or individual consumers (e.g. Peattie, 2010; Schaefer & Crane, 2005). In turn, our research question instead regards sustainability from an individual level in terms of consumption, which is elaborated on in the following section.

2.1.2 Sustainability on an Individual Level

As this study investigates female Gen Z consumers, we take on a consumer perspective. By viewing sustainability from a consumer perspective, it is crucial to conceptualize sustainable or 'green' consumption to be able to answer this study's research question.

According to Schaefer and Crane (2005, p.79), "more sustainable consumption patterns will be achieved through consumer demand for more environmentally benign goods and services". Moisander and Pesonen (2002) agree by adding that green consumers engage in making socially responsible decisions by having values or attitudes that are oriented towards ethics and the environment. This implies that the 'green' consumer has distinct environmental attitudes and values and, thus, a high willingness to engage in sustainable or ethical consumption (e.g. Niinimäki, 2010; Schaefer & Crane, 2005; Tung, Koenig & Chen, 2017). Peattie (2010) agrees by stating that consumers must be willing to acquire 'greener' products as a means of developing more sustainable consumption patterns and production systems. The author concludes that the "emerging picture of green consumption is of a process that is strongly influenced by consumer values, norms, and habits, yet is highly complex, diverse, and context dependent" (Peattie, 2010, p.195).

Haanpää (2007, p.15) detects three elements of green consumption: "contextual factors" (e.g. economic, social, and cultural resources), "individual factors" (e.g. economic and socio-demographic factors, habits), and "personality factors" (e.g. attitudes, values, needs). In this regard, Peattie (2010, p.199) summarizes that sustainable consumption is dependent on certain "aspects of consumer behavior, including the willingness to reduce some aspects of consumption, [...] to reduce the material and energy intensity of some consumption behaviors, and to differentiate in favor of more ecologically efficient producers".

After its integration into the Agenda 21, sustainable consumption commenced to be discussed on international policy levels. The Agenda 21 is an action plan regarding sustainable development that the United Nations initiated at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. (Seyfang, 2005; United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, 1992) Seyfang

(2005, p.292) elaborates that this milestone reflects the beginning of an "international environmental discourse that over-consumption in the developed world" could be seen as the immediate cause of unsustainability. Academic scholars agree that materialism negatively affects consumers' willingness to purchase sustainable products (e.g. Kilbourne & Pickett, 2008; Roux & Guiot, 2008).

These propositions, in turn, provoke a shift in consumption patterns (e.g. Lang & Armstrong, 2018a). In this context, Cherrier, Black and Lee (2011) investigate non-consumption and consumer resistance due to lacking sustainability. They find two themes of non-consumption: the first theme expresses non-consumption against an opponent who is not a brand, but rather "the mainstream consumer who does not consume in a sustainable manner" (Cherrier, Black & Lee, 2011, p.1765). The second theme refers to non-consumption for sustainability reasons on an everyday basis (Cherrier, Black & Lee, 2011). These themes show that consumers actively engage in resistance towards consumption behaviors that they do not consider sustainable or environmentally friendly.

By referring to ethical consumerism, Gabriel and Lang (2015) emphasize morality in consumer choice, such as weighing products and services on, e.g., environmental, social, or political impacts. Similarly, Moisander (1991 cited in Niinimäki, 2010, p.151) argues that "[e]thical consumption can create an individual, symbolic feeling of advantage that links to a certain lifestyle or expression of personal identity and other social values". This statement mirrors the importance of consumer choice and how it affects an individual's identity.

Nevertheless, Peattie (2010) argues that green consumption is not the same but rather overlaps with sustainable, ethical, and responsible consumerism. As stated before, the color 'green' refers to environmental consciousness and pro-environmental or ethical attitudes (e.g. Schaefer & Crane, 2005; Tung, Koenig & Chen, 2017). However, green consumption as such can be seen as contradictory in itself because the color "implies the conservation of environmental resources, while consumption generally involves their destruction" (Peattie, 2010, p.197). Even so, it is almost impossible not to consume, which is why the awareness for greener consumption practices must be increased.

To sum up, this section examines sustainability on an individual level, more specifically sustainable or 'green' consumption. Being a green consumer implies having a willingness to buy sustainable or ethical products. Moreover, green consumers share green attitudes and values and show great ethical commitment, while materialism is often criticized and expressed through consumer resistance. The following section elaborates on sustainability in a specific area of consumption, the clothing industry, which is relevant to investigate due to this study's research context.

2.1.3 Sustainability in the Clothing Industry

As mentioned before, the apparel sector provoked a sustainability debate when Rana Plaza, a textile factory in Bangladesh, collapsed, and killed more than a thousand people (e.g. Chandler, 2020; McQuillan, 2019). By again picking up on the triple bottom line, particularly the social dimension was discussed then, as this collapse drew attention to the working conditions during the clothing production and, as a result, prompted many consumers to rethink. Sustainability in the clothing industry involves the whole supply chain, including "manufacture, distribution, purchase, use and disposal of garments" (McNeill & Venter, 2019, p.369).

Concerning the working conditions in the fashion industry, the exploitation of workers or their welfare are often being criticized (e.g. Dickson & Dickson, 2017; Tung, Koenig & Chen, 2017). Apart from the social dimension, also the ecological dimension in the clothing sector is highly debated. For instance, Thomas (2019) argues that, yearly, 80 billion garments are purchased worldwide, which is an average of 68 newly acquired pieces per year and per capita. Similarly, Greenpeace (2015) claims that clothes have become disposable items and that, for instance, in Germany, every fifth piece of clothing is almost never worn. One reason for the overconsumption of clothes is that they are too cheap (Lang & Armstrong, 2018a). As a possible solution to this problem, Chandler (2020) suggests lifecycle pricing, meaning that if "prices reflected all the costs, including ecological costs spread across generations, the world would not face sustainability challenges, at least in theory" (Hayat, 2011). Nonetheless, the cost of clothing is a relevant determinant in consumers' purchasing decisions, particularly when it comes to second-hand clothing, and is therefore included in the course of this thesis.

Moreover, the textile industry is one of the top users of chemicals worldwide, which, in turn, leads to the pollution of rivers and oceans (e.g. UN Environment, 2019). This comes from, for instance, pesticides on cotton farms or water contamination from fabric dyeing, finishing, and microplastic (e.g. Dickson, Eckman & Loker, 2009; Tung, Koenig & Chen, 2017). Parallelly, this industry is responsible for 1.2 billion tons of CO_2 emissions annually (Environmental Audit Committee, 2019), which is even expected to increase (WRAP, 2017) and, thus, leads to the fact that the clothing industry negatively affects the planet.

These reasons provoke consumers to increasingly demand sustainable fashion. However, there is no consistent definition of sustainable fashion, which means that the term is, similarly to 'sustainable development', very broad.

Likewise, there are also different wordings for 'sustainable fashion'. For instance, Joergens (2006, p.361) defines 'ethical fashion' as "fashionable clothes that incorporate fair trade principles with sweatshop-free labour conditions while not harming the environment or workers". Similarly, Cervellon and Wernerfelt (2012) refer to the identical content by naming it 'green fashion', while Cervellon, Hjerth, Ricard and Carey (2010) elaborate on 'eco-fashion'. The British market research institute Mintel clears up the different wordings:

Ethical clothing refers to clothing that takes into consideration the impact of production and trade on the environment and on the people behind the clothes we wear. Eco clothing refers to all clothing that has been manufactured using environmentally friendly processes. It includes organic textiles and sustainable materials [...]. It also includes recycled products [...] and is not necessarily made from organic fibres. Organic clothing means clothes that have been made with a minimum use of chemicals and with minimum damage to the environment and fairtrade is intended to achieve better prices, decent working conditions, local sustainability and fair terms for farmers and workers in the developing world. (Mintel, 2009 cited in Cervellon et al., 2010, p.4)

Similar to sustainable consumption behavior in general, Niinimäki (2010) describes that ethical values and commitment motivate consumers to buy ethical or eco-clothing. By referring to 'sustainable fashion', Brismar (2019) identifies seven forms of acting sustainably when it comes to clothing (see figure 2):
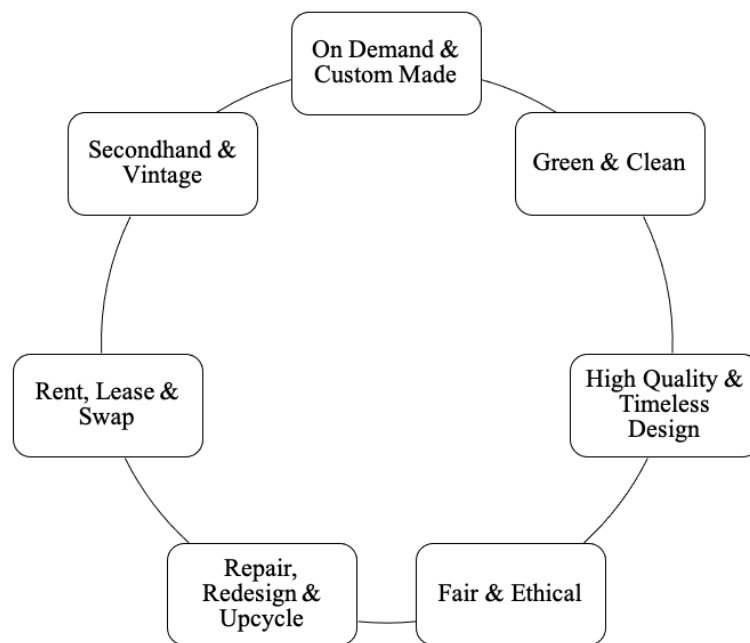
Figure 2: Seven Forms of Sustainable Fashion (own illustration, adapted from Brismar, 2019)

The author claims that, in the best case, a garment should hold each of the listed aspects. In turn, this would mean that the garment is produced (1) on-demand or is custom made, (2) without compromising the environment, e.g., in terms of the fabric or production processes. Moreover, the garment has (3) a high quality and a timeless design, and (4) is produced with ethical and fair working conditions. As soon as this garment's consumer does not want to use it any longer or it is broken, its life can be extended through (5) repair, redesign, or upcycling. Alternatively, the existing garment can be (6) swapped or (7) sold, while parallelly, a 'new' garment can be (6) rented, leased, or (7) acquired second-hand. (Brismar, 2019)

Regarding the realm of high quality and timeless design, Niinimäki (2010, p.161) argues that for the respondents of her study, "quality and aesthetics are highly important when purchasing clothes and fashion, even eco-clothes". Joergens (2006, p.369) agrees by stating that most of her respondents "are more interested in their own personal fashion needs than the needs of others involved in the apparel supply chain". However, it must be noted that both studies are relatively old, and the awareness of sustainability issues has increased during the past years, which can be seen as an explanation for these contradicting findings. Nevertheless, the aesthetics aspect in fashion, or 'fashion leadership', (e.g. Lang & Armstrong, 2018a) is highly interesting and thus subject to this research.

A relatively new concept is collaborative consumption which "is based on the principle of utilizing underused assets to benefit all" (McNeill & Venter, 2019, p.368) and includes, e.g., purchasing second-hand, renting, borrowing, and swapping (e.g. Iran & Schrader, 2017; McNeill & Venter, 2019). In this regard, Netter and Pedersen (2019, p.38) give examples for the term 'sharing economy': "Popular examples range from short-term hospitality exchange, ridesharing, tool libraries, to fashion reselling and swapping platforms, to name a few". Contextually, the authors emphasize that clothing, in particular, has enormous potential to contribute to sustainable development. Instead of throwing away clothes, their redistribution and reuse are becoming increasingly relevant to extend the textiles' lives. (Netter & Pedersen, 2019) Iran and Schrader (2017) concretize collaborative consumption by adding the fashion perspective, namely 'collaborative fashion consumption':

> When consumers decide to use second hand garments instead of buying new ones or when they decide to return their used clothes to the lifecycle by making them available for second hand use, they enter the area of [collaborative fashion consumption] with its opportunities for gifting, lending, sharing, swapping, renting, leasing, and second hand buying. (Iran & Schrader, 2017, p.471)

Another approach is circular fashion, regarding which Kim, Jung and Lee (2021) investigate second-hand, upcycled, and recycled clothing. The authors describe that circular fashion combines the concepts of circular economy and sustainable clothing. While a linear economy "flows like a river, turning natural resources into base materials and products for sale through a series of value-adding steps", a circular economy "would turn goods that are at the end of their service life into resources for others, closing loops in industrial ecosystems and minimizing waste" (Stahel, 2016, pp.435).

However, similarly to 'green consumption', also 'sustainable fashion', is composed of two concepts that might seem contradictory. While fashion can often be identified with very short product life cycles and environmentally or socially harmful production processes, the adjective 'sustainable' implies longevity, ethics, and circular products (e.g. Cervellon et al., 2010; Lundblad & Davies, 2016). Nevertheless, because the clothing industry is this pollutive, the

two concepts of fashion and sustainability must overlap to overcome this contradiction and create a more sustainable future.

Eventually, the Environmental Audit Committee (2019) well-summarizes that "the most sustainable garment is the one we already own and that repairing, rewearing, reusing, and renting are preferable to recycling or discarding clothes". This section shows that there is no consistent definition of sustainable clothing. It instead argues for different options that both consumers and producers have when it comes to making apparel more sustainable. However, by again referring to figure 2, it can be argued that, even though a garment should ideally go through each of the seven forms of sustainable fashion, this is not the reality yet (Brismar, 2019). Nevertheless, the awareness of these consumption practices, whether they are circular, collaborative, or simply emphasizing fair and green production, must be increased.

2.2 Drivers of Purchasing Second-Hand Clothing

Since this study's research question aims to figure out how a green identity can be constructed through second-hand clothing, solely this form of sustainable clothing is further investigated. Schaefer and Crane (2005, p.87) demonstrate that second-hand clothing consumption fulfills "the same symbolic functions as present-day affluent consumption but with much less material input in terms of sourcing, producing, transporting, and disposing of goods". In this regard, individuals consuming second-hand clothing can be described as 'green' (Yan, Bae & Xu, 2015). As shown in the preceding section, second-hand clothing is one type of collaborative fashion consumption. Roux and Guiot (2008, p.66) define second-hand purchasing as "the acquisition of used objects through often specific modes and places of exchange".

Parallelly, Cervellon, Carey and Harms (2012) describe vintage clothing as a growing trend. However, the authors clarify that there are differences between the purchase of vintage clothing, which is not necessarily second-hand, and second-hand clothing, which does not necessarily have to be worn already. Second-hand clothing refers to garments that another person has already owned, regardless of their age, while vintage represents authentic garments that reflect the style of a particular era or fashion designer (Gerval, 2008; Mortara & Ironico, 2011). Therefore, we can emphasize a link between vintage clothing and the pursuit to consume stylish fashion items, or 'fashion leadership', which was mentioned before. Cervellon, Carey and Harms (2012) identify a difference between the purchase motives of second-hand and those of vintage purchases. The primary difference stems from the education and income of the consumers: regardless of the age, the purchase intention of vintage clothing rises with an increasing education level and income.

Regarding consumer motivations of second-hand shopping, Roux and Guiot (2008, p.75) identify two that are especially preceding: economic motives (distance from the system, fair

prices, ethics, and ecology) and recreational motives (treasure hunting, originality, social contact, nostalgia). Similarly, Netter and Pedersen (2019) identify three motivations for buying second-hand: economic, hedonistic, and functional motives. Regarding the former motivation, the main driver is the affordability of second-hand clothing or the income from selling clothes. The hedonistic motivation primarily stems from the pleasure of buying and selling worn clothing. Lastly, the functional motivation is based on technical and purpose-oriented aspects. (Netter & Pedersen, 2019) Likewise, Mortara and Ironico (2011) investigate the motivations for second-hand purchases and equally come up with three types. Besides utilitarian motives (e.g. affordability, perceived quality), they equally enumerate hedonistic (e.g. treasure hunting, differentiation, nostalgia), and ethical motives (e.g. waste avoidance). Moreover, Cervellon, Carey and Harms (2012) as well as Yan, Bae and Xu (2015) find that especially environmental consciousness significantly affects consumer decisions of second-hand clothing, which is very relevant in the light of this study researching the concept of a green identity.

Alternatively, Han and Sweet (2021, p.180) investigate value creation through second-hand clothing and could identify three types of values that consumption of second-hand clothing provides, similar to the motivations mentioned above: "value creation through spatial narratives, value creation through social experiences, and value creation through savvy thrifting".

Besides all the upsides that second-hand clothing provides, it can also be criticized due to the problem that comes with the disposal of old clothes. For instance in Germany, more than one million tons of clothing are disposed of annually (Dachverband FairWertung, 2016), about half of which is resold in the form of second-hand clothing. Furthermore, the market is very non-transparent, enabling shady collectors to use most of the profit for themselves (e.g. Environmental Audit Committee, 2019; Hoskins, 2013). A study found that 73% of old clothes are landfilled or incinerated, while solely 1% or less is recycled and, thus, brought into a closed loop (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). Hoskins (2013) holds that one-third of all donated clothes worldwide turn up in sub-Saharan Africa, where the local markets are disturbed due to the low resale prices. Moreover, the author elucidates that recycling is not the solution to the massive amounts of old clothes.

However, in essence, second-hand clothing is a type of collaborative fashion consumption. It can be regarded as sustainable because fewer resources have to be wasted, while second-hand clothes have the same symbolic value as new clothes. The proposed motivations for purchasing second-hand clothing in academic discourses clearly overlap. While saving money and being socially interactive, consumers care for the environment and differentiate themselves through nostalgic and authentic clothes ('treasures').

2.3   Identity Construction

2.3.1 Symbolic Meanings and Identity Narratives

As this thesis aims to investigate the construction and expression of a green identity, the topic of identity construction is highly relevant to answer the posed research question. Therefore, the following section elaborates on the symbolic meanings of products and identity narratives.

In postmodernity, consumers do not purchase products simply based on their utilities but also due to the symbolic meanings these products carry (e.g. Belk, 1988; Bourdieu, 1984; Dittmar, 1992; Gabriel & Lang, 2015). These symbolic meanings have two functions (Elliott, 1997). On the one hand, the symbolic meaning of products serves an outward function in constructing the social world (Elliott, 1997). On the other hand, it has an inward function as consumers make use of the symbolic meanings of products and their belongings, particularly consumer goods, in order to construct and express their own identity (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998) as well as perceive the identity of others (Dittmar, 1992).

In this regard, Ritson, Elliott and Eccles (1996) elaborate that the same product can carry different symbolic meanings, and thus, consumers might buy the same product for a different symbolic meaning. Therefore, the symbolic meanings of products also serve to communicate the individuality of consumers (Kleine, Kleine & Allen, 1995). Several scholars add to this by arguing that consumers engage in reworking and transforming the symbolic meanings encoded in brands or material goods. Thus, they adapt them to their individuality to construct their identity (e.g. Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Holt, 2002; McCracken, 1987). McCracken (1987) further specifies that symbolic meanings cannot just be carried by products, but they can also be transferred onto brands, consequently offering symbolic resources to consumers in the construction of their identity. On a more general level, Arnould and Thompson (2005) add that the marketplace is another source offering symbolic resources to consumers which can be used to construct identity narratives. Ricoeur (1984, 1992) also touches upon the topic of symbolic resources and narratives, arguing that consumers can use symbolic resources when trying to make sense of themselves and their lives. He further specifies that consumers can come to know themselves through the narratives they construct.

The topic of narratives is also related to the notion of identity as a project, in the way that "identity projects and self-presentation form self-narratives and self-narratives organize identity projects and performances into relatively cohesive holistic identities" (Schau, 2018, p.21). Schau (2018) defines identity projects as the "ongoing creation of narratives of self-identity". By using symbolic resources, consumers can actively construct their identity project, which is then weaved together into a cohesive narrative of the self (e.g. Gabriel & Lang, 2015; Schau, 2018; Thompson, 1995). This is also in line with Belk (1988), who argues that an identity is

successfully constructed when consumers develop a coherent self-narrative. This is highly relevant for our research, as we conduct focus groups in which the participants share their identity narratives while talking about second-hand clothing. Thus, we can argue that our participants construct their identities during the focus groups, which is relevant to keep in mind during the analysis of the gathered data.

Furthermore, Giddens (1991) argues that identity narratives have to be continually reordered and revised in order to construct and particularly maintain a stable identity despite the rapidly shifting environment of postmodernity (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Other scholars assessing the influence of our current society on identity construction are, e.g., Firat (1992), Gabriel and Lang (2015), and Niinimäki (2010). According to Niinimäki (2010, p.154), the "liquid" society we live in values "uniqueness, individuality, constant change and materialistic values", which has a significant impact on the consumer's identity construction. In other words, today's society makes it harder and almost impossible for consumers to have a fixed identity (Gabriel & Lang, 2015). Therefore, it is necessary for consumers to ongoingly and actively construct and reconstruct their identity, leading to consumers being continuously preoccupied with their identity (Dittmar, 1992; Gabriel & Lang, 2015; McCracken, 1993). Consequently, we figure that society potentially also has an impact on our focus group participants in their ongoing identity reconstruction, particularly in regard to their changing consumption behavior. This is a highly interesting aspect to examine during the focus groups.

2.3.2 Identity Construction through Consumption

As mentioned above, the shifting consumption behavior of our participants might have an impact on their identity construction and expression. Therefore, to understand the impact of consumption on identity construction, it is essential to define the term consumption. Hogg and Michell (2021, p.629) define consumption as "the search for, choice, acquisition, possession, and disposal of goods and services".

Consumption, particularly of consumer goods and brands, can offer new meanings to consumers, which are needed to continuously reconstruct their identity (Dittmar, 1992; McCracken, 1993). In this regard, McCracken (1993) argues that consumers actively transfer the symbolic meaning from products or brands onto the self through consumption. This illustrates the importance of consumption for identity construction, which has been widely studied by different scholars. Among them are Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998, p.134), who state that "all voluntary consumption carries […] symbolic meanings", and thus, consumers seeking to construct their identity take advantage of the consumption of products for their identity project. Schau (2018) as well as Arnould and Thompson (2005) add to this by emphasizing that the marketplace offers resources to consumers which they can use to construct and perform their identities.

Apart from marketplace offerings, Cherrier and Murray (2007) state that, nowadays, consumer identities are also formed through social roles, leisure activities, and dispossession strategies. To capture the variety of aspects impacting consumer identities, the aforementioned aspects such as leisure activities and social roles are taken into account in the course of this thesis.

When it comes to consumption, the aspect of possessions is especially vital, as illustrated by scholars such as James (1890), Belk (1988), and Tuan (1980). Belk (1988, p.139) defines possessions as the "things we call ours". He further illustrates by quoting James (1890) and Tuan (1980) that someone's identity is reflected in the possessions of that particular person and concludes that "we are the sum of our possessions" (Belk, 1988, p.139), and our possessions tell stories about our past, present, and future (Belk, 1988).

Gabriel and Lang (2015) explain this phenomenon by arguing that consumers had very close relationships with their possessions in pre-literature cultures, and thus, they became embedded in their identity. However, they further argue that Western consumers do not form close relationships with the majority of their possessions but instead use them to influence the image that others might have of them. This is especially relevant for young adults as they use consumer goods and clothes to construct an individual style and a convincing image (Gabriel & Lang, 2015). As we investigate female Gen Z consumers, or 'young adults', it is interesting to investigate their relationship with second-hand clothing, and how they use it to create a particular image of themselves.

Another aspect concerning possessions is that a variety of different consumption objects, and thus products and brands, are necessary to adequately capture the self-identity of a consumer (Belk, 1984; Solomon & Assael, 1987), due to the complexity and diversity of one's self-identity.

As other people also impact somebody's identity project and thus their consumption behavior, this is a relevant aspect to discuss. Accordingly, Belk (1988) states that consumers do not simply exist as individuals but also on a collective level, including, for instance, family, subcultural, and national identities, which are often defined through particular consumption objects. This is in line with Jenkins (1996), who adds that consumers construct an individual self-identity while at the same time constructing a collective social identity. In a similar vein, Gabriel and Lang (2015) introduce the concept of a group identity, claiming that it is constructed through shared experiences and traditions by group members. The aspect of shared experiences is also investigated by Schaefer and Crane (2005), who argue that consumers frequently engage in consumption activities in the company of other people, such as their family, friends, or colleagues, who therefore impact their purchasing decisions. Lastly, Goffman (1959) argues that consumers want to have a specific impression to the outside world, and thus, other people indirectly have an impact on a person's identity and consumption, as consumers rely on symbols, brands, and products as a communicator of their desired impression (Bendelow & Williams, 1998). As scholars emphasize the importance of interpersonal

influences on identity construction, it is interesting to examine how these are included in the identity narratives of our focus group participants.

To sum up, consumers use the symbolic meanings of products, especially consumer goods, to construct, express, and maintain their identity and communicate their individuality. Due to the constantly changing environment, identities must be continuously constructed and reconstructed. Scholars often refer to consumers having identity projects in which they constantly create narratives of self-identity. Furthermore, consumers make use of the marketplace and consumption of products to create their identity. Other people also impact identity projects, especially through the construction of a group identity. McCracken (1990) puts it in a nutshell by stating that symbolic meanings are transferred to consumer goods and are then further transferred to individuals through possession.

2.3.3 Identity Construction through Clothing

After investigating how consumers can construct their identities through consumption, we focus on one particular consumption category: clothing. This is relevant in the light of our research question since we investigate the process of identity construction through second-hand clothing.

In general, it is essential to state that clothing is frequently used as a means of self-expression (Niinimäki, 2010). More specifically, consumers can use the external source of clothing, brands, and clothing-related status items to express their individual personality (Kaiser, 1990). Niinimäki (2010) argues that clothing is close to our inner self and values, which therefore can be expressed or hidden through clothing. Aptly, she states: "[T]he consumer wants to feel 'this garment expresses my inner mood and identity, me'" (Niinimäki, 2010, p.155). Apart from using clothing to express someone's personality, it can also be used to either cohere to the environment and/or local style (Simmel, 1957), or distinguish oneself from others (Bourdieu, 1984; McNeill & Venter, 2019). In a similar vein, Lang and Armstrong (2018b) add that consumers engaging in collaborative consumption have a need for uniqueness, which is defined by Tian, Bearden and Hunter (2001) as the pursuit of differentness and showing individuality when it comes to dressing. In this regard, Guiot and Roux (2010) find that the need for uniqueness positively influences the motivation to purchase second-hand products. Therefore, it is highly interesting to investigate the role of uniqueness in the identity construction and expression process.

Moreover, fashion also enables participation in social groups and identity construction (Max-Neef, 1992 cited in Niinimäki, 2010). Fashion can be used by consumers to construct self-narratives and further express symbolic meanings, which they use for identity purposes (Belk, 1988; Thompson & Haytko, 1997). In this regard, the idea that consumers construct their identities through unique consumption choices has impacted the promotion of fashion goods

(Emberley, 1987; Forty, 1987 cited in Thompson & Haytko, 1997) and, in turn, the symbolic meanings associated with these items.

Another aspect touched upon by different scholars is the impact others have on somebody's identity construction through clothing. For instance, Thompson and Haytko (1997) argue that consumers develop their personal self-identity by contrasting their own fashion orientation with that of others. Consequently, a "personal identity […] is negotiated in a dynamic field of social relations" (Thompson & Haytko, 1997, p.21). Similar to Dittmar (1992) and Gabriel and Lang (2015), Uotila (1995 cited in Niinimäki, 2010) emphasizes that an identity has to be constantly constructed and reconstructed. Conversely to the aforementioned scholars, Uotila (1995 cited in Niinimäki, 2010) argues that this is necessary because the process of identity construction takes into account external feedback and self-reflection. By referring to fashion discourse, Thompson and Haytko (1997) add that consumers actively rework their identity by taking into account their own perceived affiliations and contrasts to other social groups, resulting in a socially negotiated identity. This is especially relevant in the light of this research as we investigate our research question through focus groups, in which the participants engage in fashion discourse. Therefore, when analyzing our gathered data, it is essential to consider the interpersonal influences happening in a focus group, as the participants rework their identity based on the other participants.

In the context of sustainable fashion, the aspect of identity construction is investigated by Niinimäki (2010). As described before, clothing must have a strong connection to a person's self-identity. In this regard, Niinimäki (2010) claims that eco-clothing is no exception. The construction of an identity is further mentioned as one of the deeper reasons for consumers purchasing eco-clothing, others being the desire for a specific lifestyle, and social status. Similarly, another study, conducted in the context of collaborative consumption models, also found that the expression of an identity is the most critical driver when it comes to engaging in collaborative consumption models (McNeill & Venter, 2019). The same researchers found that four other aspects are also important regarding the construction of a green self-identity through fashion, namely "emotion, pleasure and hedonism; fitting in and social norms; expressing individuality and standing out; and the social implications of sustainable behavior" (McNeill & Venter, 2019, p.376).

To sum up, clothing offers consumers a means to express themselves and their uniqueness. Further, consumers can use clothing to distinguish themselves from others while at the same time offering them an opportunity to cohere with their environment and local style. Due to these features, clothing serves the consumers in the construction of their identity, which is especially relevant for sustainable fashion consumers. In the identity construction process, interpersonal influences are significant as consumers rework their identities based on others, particularly when talking about fashion. Therefore, we pay close attention to the interpersonal influences

happening during the focus groups to examine their impact on our participants' identity construction.

2.3.4 Green Self-Identity

One concept that connects the two research domains sustainability and identity construction is that of green self-identity. As this thesis aims to specifically study the construction of a green self-identity through the means of second-hand clothing, this is highly relevant to investigate and define in the light of our research question.

The concept of green self-identity is investigated by different scholars in different contexts, ranging from consumption in general (e.g. Perera, 2014), eco-fashion (e.g. Niinimäki, 2010; Tung, Koenig & Chen, 2017), organic food (e.g. Saraiva, Fernandes & von Schwedler, 2020), to electric cars (e.g. Barbarossa et al., 2015). Along with the context in which the topic of green self-identity is studied, the definitions among different scholars vary slightly.

In the term 'green self-identity', the color green can be perceived as a metaphor for the environment and nature, with which the consumer wants to live in harmony, hence portraying the consumer as ecologically concerned (Peattie, 2010). However, Peattie (2010) also adds that it might seem like this color only refers to the environmental issues; however, these are intertwined with the social and economic issues, making up the three aspects of the triple bottom line (see section 2.2.1).

Perera (2014, p.293) explores the green identity formation of young environmentalists in the context of general consumption and focuses on the "green identity formation as a process involving the dispossession of a mainstream identity", implying that a green self-identity is not considered mainstream. Saraiva, Fernandes and von Schwedler (2020) as well as Tung, Koenig and Chen (2017) define a green identity similarly, stating that it is characterized by a pro-environmental concern and environmental consciousness of the individual. In this regard, Tung, Koenig and Chen (2017) also mention ethical concerns, whereas Saraiva, Fernandes and von Schwedler (2020) instead emphasize social concerns related to consumption. Saraiva, Fernandes and von Schwedler (2020) further claim that, once consumers have stabilized their green self-identities, they start to promote green or sustainable consumption among their social field by sharing their experiences and, thus, act as agents of change.

In a similar vein, Barbarossa et al. (2015) define a green self-identity through pro-environmental concerns; however, they go even further by arguing that consumers who perceive themselves as green consumers have a green self-identity. Additionally, the scholars explain that a green self-identity is a mental model that positively impacts the intention to adopt environmentally friendly consumption behaviors.

Dermody, Koenig-Lewis, Zhao and Hanmer-Lloyd (2018) examine a similar concept to a green self-identity, namely a pro-environmental self-identity. They argue that consumers show their own environmental friendliness by publicly engaging in green or sustainable consumption and using this to create their "sustainable consumption identity project" (Dermody et al., 2018, p.334). Consequently, a pro-environmental self-identity is a driver of pro-environmental behavior, thus shifting the emphasis "to what an individual is […] not what they do" (Dermody et al., 2018, p.334). The scholars further investigate different intrapersonal influences that have an impact on the pro-environmental self-identity of a consumer and found that these are "values, social consumption motivation, perceived consumer effectiveness and a lack of climate change knowledge" (Dermody et al., 2018, p.335). Lastly, Dermody et al. (2018) argue that a pro-environmental behavior becomes automatized once it can be considered consistent with someone's identity. This automatized behavior, in turn, explains that a green self-identity can be adopted to the entire lifestyle of a person (Niinimäki, 2010).

Looking at the characteristics of a green self-identity, we can argue that this concept is closely tied to sustainable or green consumption, which was already elaborated on in section 2.1.2. Especially Barbarossa et al. (2015) connect these two concepts by claiming that a person with a green self-identity perceives himself or herself as a typically green consumer.

In essence, like green consumers, consumers with a green self-identity possess environmental consciousness and have pro-environmental concerns, which positively influence the adoption of environmentally friendly consumption practices. Since their green identity can be adopted to their entire lifestyle, consumers with a green self-identity frequently promote their sustainable consumption among their social field. Lastly, the formation of a green self-identity can be considered a process of dispossession of a mainstream identity.

2.4   Theoretical Framework

In order to answer the research question of how a green identity is constructed and expressed among female consumers of second-hand clothing in Gen Z, we make use of a theoretical framework which is introduced in the following section, along with an explanation of how the model is used during the analysis.

The core of our theoretical framework is the Processual Theory of Identity (PTI) by Cherrier and Murray (2007), which is backed up by the previous review of the most relevant academic literature. The creators of this framework, Cherrier and Murray (2007, p.4), explain that "[c]onsumers' identities are now formed from an array of cultural discourses, social roles, resisting subject positions, leisure activities, the creative use of products and brands, and [...] dispossession strategies". The authors conducted interviews with individuals who have changed their consumption behavior by consuming less; that is, they gave up their current self through

dispossessions. They then carried out an intertextual analysis of each interview transcript to interpret specific themes. This resulted in the PTI consisting of four themes, more specifically four stages: *Sensitization*, *Separation*, *Socialization*, and *Striving*, also portrayed in figure 3. The process of forming an identity is not always set and can be adjusted when consumers change their values. (Cherrier & Murray, 2007)

| Sensitization | Separation | Socialization | Striving |

Figure 3: Processual Theory of Identity (own illustration, adapted from Cherrier & Murray, 2007)

Perera (2014), who used the PTI for her research, describes that the four stages embody the transformation of the consumers' perceptions and how they position themselves and their consumption practices within these stages. The author explains that the first stage, *Sensitization*, is where the consumer starts to explore a society's ideology. *Separation*, the next stage, indicates that the consumer wants to separate from this ideology. The stage of *Socialization* stands for the social interactions of consumers during the identity formation process. Finally, *Striving* represents that the consumer starts to perform the newly constructed identity in the different contexts that he or she lives in.

Consequently, the PTI by Cherrier and Murray (2007) and adaptations of it can be found in academic literature. Researchers use the model and apply it, for instance, to green identity formation in the context of purchasing organic food (e.g. Saraiva, Fernandes & von Schwedler, 2020) or general consumption practices of young environmentalists (e.g. Perera, 2014). Thus, the theory has been tested in similar contexts and, in addition, proven its applicability.

Since we aim to investigate the process of green identity construction, we consider this theory as highly suitable because it fits our research question very well. Similarly to the aforementioned authors, we use the model in our analysis by looking at the four stages *Sensitization*, *Separation*, *Socialization*, and *Striving* (see figure 3) in order to understand the process of green identity construction and expression among our sample.

As we adopt an abductive research approach (see section 3.2.2) in this thesis, we integrate the information extracted from academic literature into our theoretical framework. Thus, we allocated the most prominent themes presented by scholars among the four phases identified by Cherrier and Murray (2007). Consequently, the following figure represents an extension of figure 3, the four phases (main categories), in combination with the themes gained from the reviewed literature (subcategories). Figure 4 further allows us to distinguish between the construction and expression of a green identity: the four main categories capture how a green identity is constructed, whereas the subcategories serve as an expression of each phase to the outside world. Solely the subcategory 'Awareness in Society' in the first phase is an exception,

as the awareness in society rather serves as a factor leading to the sustainability consciousness of a consumer.
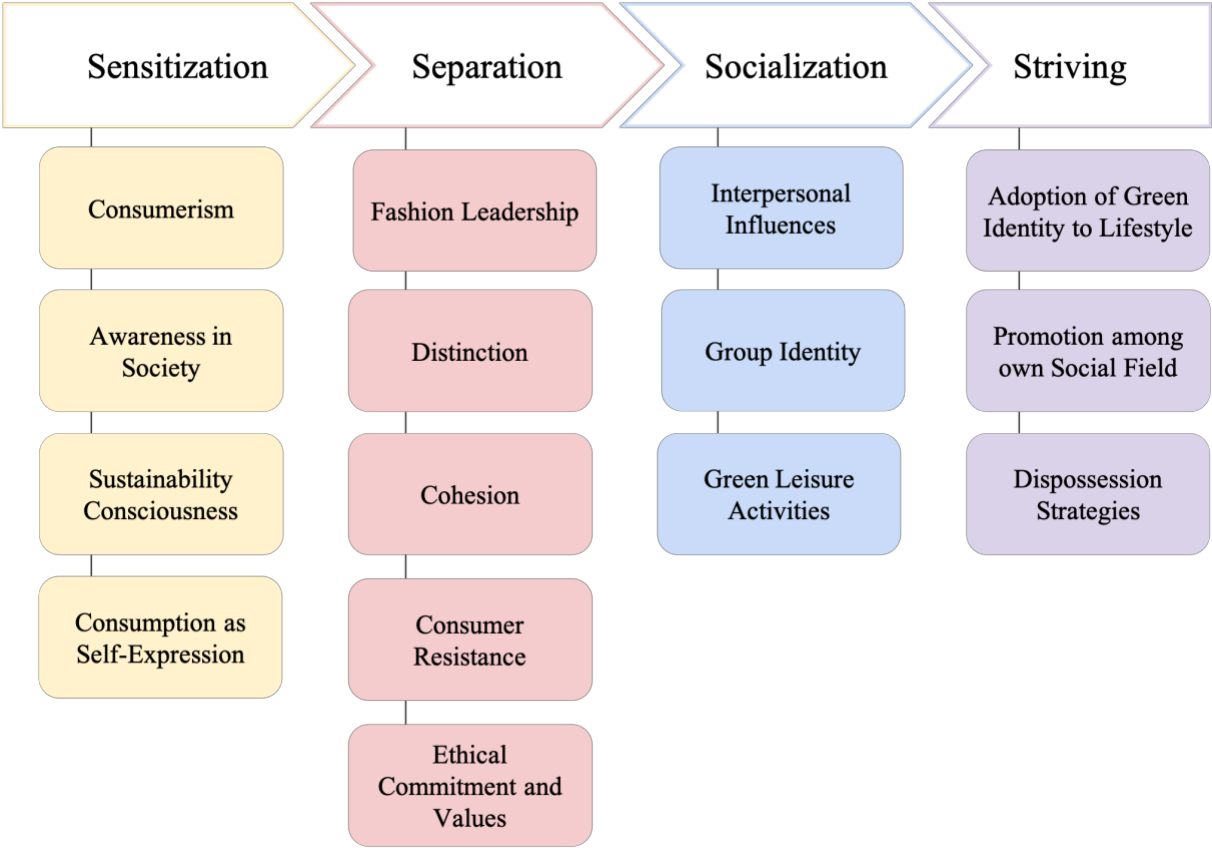
Figure 4: *Consolidated Category System (own illustration based on Cherrier & Murray, 2007)*

Accordingly, figure 4 outlines a summary of the reviewed literature of how consumers construct and express their identity in four phases. This consolidated category system was used as a toolbox of deductive codes, which was then applied in the qualitative content analysis (see section 3.4). To not be constrained by this theory, we extracted inductive categories from the gathered data and added them to our 'toolbox' during the analysis, which is also in line with our abductive research approach.

As mentioned above, the first phase, *Sensitization*, represents how consumers start exploring a society's ideology (Cherrier & Murray, 2007). The phase is characterized by consumerism (e.g. Niinimäki, 2010). Further, due to the society's awareness of environmental issues (e.g. Cherrier & Murray, 2007), consumers develop a consciousness towards sustainability issues (e.g. Niinimäki, 2010; Schaefer & Crane, 2005; Tung, Koenig & Chen, 2017). Lastly, consumers might use consumption to express themselves (e.g. Kaiser, 1990; Niinimäki, 2010).

In the second phase, *Separation*, the consumers seek to separate from the mainstream ideology present in society (Cherrier & Murray, 2007). Fashion leadership (e.g. Lang & Armstrong, 2018a), distinguishing oneself from (e.g. Bourdieu, 1984; McNeill & Venter, 2019), or trying

to belong to the rest (e.g. Simmel, 1957) are still prominent factors characterizing the second phase of green identity construction. However, consumer resistance (Cherrier, Black & Lee, 2011) and ethical values (e.g. Gabriel & Lang, 2015; Niinimäki, 2010) are becoming increasingly important for the consumer.

The third phase, *Socialization*, represents the importance of social interactions in the identity formation process (Cherrier & Murray, 2007), for instance, through interpersonal influences (e.g. Schaefer & Crane, 2005) and the formation of a group identity, along with that of an own self-identity (e.g. Gabriel & Lang, 2015; Jenkins, 1996). Further, consumers engage in green leisure activities (e.g. Cherrier & Murray, 2007).

Eventually, in the last phase, *Striving*, consumers start to act the newly constructed identity in different personal and social contexts (Cherrier & Murray, 2007), e.g., through adopting the green identity to their entire lifestyle (e.g. Dermody et al., 2018; Niinimäki, 2010) and actively promoting second-hand clothing among their social fields (e.g. Saraiva, Fernandes & von Schwedler, 2020). Additionally, consumers may have implemented dispossession strategies, for instance, the dispossession of a mainstream identity towards a green identity (e.g. Cherrier & Murray, 2007).

To sum up, the PTI by Cherrier and Murray (2007) is used as a toolbox in the content analysis, which allows us to enhance the understanding of the construction and expression of a green identity in the context of second-hand clothing. The deductive subcategories portrayed in figure 4 are complemented by inductive subcategories based on the gathered data. The model further facilitates distinguishing between the construction and expression of a green identity, as the main categories capture the construction and the subcategories capture the expression of a green identity.

3   Methodology

In this chapter, we start by elaborating on the research philosophy and the research approach that this study uses. Thereafter, we describe the process of data collection, both method and sample, followed by the specification of how we analyzed the gathered data. This chapter concludes with a section on reflexivity and ethical principles as well as a section on research quality criteria.

3.1   Research Philosophy

3.1.1   Philosophical Grounding

For any study, it is elementary to think about the philosophical grounding of the research and, thus, the underlying assumptions made by the researcher when conducting research. According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015), researchers must think about philosophical issues and research philosophy for several reasons. First, it brings clarity to the researchers as they are obliged to "understand basic issues of epistemology in order to have a clear sense of his/her reflexive role in research methods" (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015, p.46). Second, it helps with the clarification of the research design and, thus, is an aid to the researcher in evaluating it. There are two major levels of philosophy that should be considered regarding the philosophical grounding: ontology and epistemology. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018, p.9) share the opinion that "it is not methods but ontology and epistemology which are the determinants of good social science" and thus highlight the importance of the two levels for good research. Therefore, in the following two sections, we define ontology and epistemology and elaborate on the research philosophy that we apply to this study.

3.1.2   Ontology

Ontology addresses the views that a researcher has about the nature of reality and existence (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015), thus impacting the researcher's assumptions and methods applied. In natural sciences, the ontological positions vary from realism to relativism. Realists argue that phenomena exist independently from the observation by scientists (Bhaskar, 1989, p.12), whereas internal realists claim that a single reality exists; however, researchers have no direct access as they can only gather indirect evidence about a phenomenon (Putnam,

1987). Conversely, relativists in natural sciences believe that scientific laws are created by people, and 'truth' is achieved through discussion and agreements (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). A similar debate is happening in the social sciences, focusing on the behavior of people, where another ontology is added to those of internal realism and relativism, namely nominalism. In nominalism, there is no truth, and people can establish their version of the truth, thus, creating their own facts (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

As researchers of this study, we believe that the relativist ontology is the most fitting for several reasons. The relativist ontology posits that there is no single truth but rather many different perspectives on the same issue. Conducting focus groups thus allows us to gain many different perspectives on the topic of identity construction through second-hand clothing, which makes the relativist viewpoint highly relevant. Moreover, we aim to include participants from different cultural backgrounds to maximize the heterogeneity within our sample. This also works very well with a relativist ontology, as Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) argue that the definitions and experiences of reality held by different people depend on the countries in which they grew up and live, thus, making it context-specific.

Obtaining a relativist viewpoint also impacts the findings that we generate with this research. As relativists, we believe that there is no definitive answer to our research question (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Therefore, when arguing for the findings of our study, we need to be aware that our findings are just one possible answer to our research question. Furthermore, relativists believe that different researchers have different viewpoints on the studied phenomenon, making our findings very specific and dependent on our viewpoints as researchers (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Therefore, it is crucial to be aware that other researchers with other viewpoints most likely derive different findings from the same empirical material. In section 3.6, we further elaborate on the research quality criteria.

3.1.3 Epistemology

While ontology deals with the nature of reality, epistemology is concerned with the nature of the world, looking to answer questions like: "What is knowledge? How do we know what we know? How is knowledge acquired?" (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015, p.63). There are two contrasting views in epistemology, namely positivism and social constructionism. Positivists believe that "the social world exists externally, and its properties can be measured through objective methods" (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015, p.51). However, since the 1970s, there has been a trend towards social constructionism, which claims that reality is not objective but rather socially constructed and people give meaning to reality by interacting and sharing their experiences with others through verbal discourse (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Therefore, Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) argue that the researcher should focus on the feelings and thoughts of people and pay attention to how they

communicate with each other to understand the experiences they have made. Research with a social constructionist epistemology is usually conducted with a small number of cases that are chosen for specific reasons (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

As this thesis investigates the process of identity construction, which strongly depends on the individual experiences that people make, and further analyzes the focus group participants talking about their experiences with others, the social constructionist paradigm is the most relevant to apply in this study. Furthermore, Thompson and Haytko (1997) argue that, by speaking about fashion, consumers actively construct and rework their identities, leading to a socially constructed identity. This makes the social constructionist epistemology even more relevant and further aligns with the concept of intersubjectivity (Crossley, 1996). Also, social constructionists aim to increase the general understanding of a phenomenon (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015), which is exactly what we strive for with this study, as we want to enhance the understanding of green identity construction and expression in the context of second-hand clothing.

3.2   Research Approach

3.2.1   Exploratory Research

As described above, this qualitative research aims to understand how a green identity is constructed and expressed among female consumers of second-hand clothing in Gen Z. Therefore, we underlie an exploratory approach to answer the posed research question. By having gathered primary data through focus groups, we aimed to get insights into the identity narratives of our respondents, indicating a rather interpretative approach. In this regard, Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018), refer to hermeneutics. The authors describe the necessity of understanding parts only by viewing the whole, whereas the whole can only be understood from its single parts.

We decided to conduct focus groups because of this method's interactive and interpersonal nature (e.g. Agar & MacDonald, 1995; Kaplowitz & Hoehn, 2001; Kidd & Parshall, 2000). Conversely to individual interviews, focus groups allow confronting participants with the opinions of others, which enables the researchers to generate a wider array of perspectives and ideas than individual interviews would (e.g. Kidd & Parshall, 2000; Kitzinger, 1994). Moreover, "group interaction may facilitate an exchange of ideas and information", which in turn stimulates the thoughts of individual participants and makes it possible for them to build on each other's ideas (Kaplowitz & Hoehn, 2001, p.238). Another benefit of the interactivity and confrontations in focus groups is that we were able to provoke reflections about the participants' consumption behavior and thus managed to enter the core of their identity

construction and expression processes. This is especially relevant in the light of Thompson and Haytko (1997), who argue that consumers actively rework and construct their self-identity while talking to others about fashion, making their self-identity socially negotiated. Therefore, we paid attention to the focus group participants' narratives during the discussions as part of their identity constructions. Furthermore, the possibility to ask follow-up questions allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' underlying motivation, behavior, and reflections (Carson, Gilmore, Perry & Gronhaug, 2001).

An additional benefit of focus groups over individual interviews is the possibility to interview a high number of people at the same time, thus gaining many different perspectives, which is highly relevant for a relativist ontology. This leads to the fact that focus groups are a very time-efficient, flexible, and versatile method (Carson et al., 2001).

Moreover, the conduction of focus groups online brings several advantages. Richard, Sivo, Orlowski, Ford, Murphy, Boote and Witta (2021) found that online focus groups work comparably well as in-person focus groups, for instance, when it comes to interaction and idea diversity. This also holds for the focus groups that we conducted, as the participants entered lively discussions. The authors conclude that online focus groups lead to a higher rate of attendance because the participants can engage in them from the comfort of their own homes (Richard et al., 2021), which makes them more relaxed and thus willing to share information (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017). Since our focus groups were exclusively conducted online, using the video telephony software Zoom, we got the chance to open up the sample geographically. Therefore, the participants did not have to be in Lund to participate. Consequently, this enabled us to increase the cultural heterogeneity of our sample, which, in turn, enriched this research even further: the upbringing and socialization of the participants varied, which resulted in diverse and multifaceted perspectives on the topic of second-hand clothing.

3.2.2 Abductive Research

Researchers usually distinguish between three approaches to research: induction, deduction, and abduction (e.g. Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018; Dubois & Gadde, 2002). While induction originates from empirical data and infers that distinct facts lead to a generalized truth, contrarily, deduction stems from theory and aims to apply a rule to explain a specific case. Consequently, abduction cannot solely be viewed as a combination of both induction and deduction, but moreover as the inclusion of the additional element 'understanding'. (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018) Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018, p.5) add that abduction "alternates between (previous) theory and empirical facts [...] whereby both are successively reinterpreted in the light of each other" and, thus, imply that this research approach is more versatile.

Therefore, this study uses an abductive research approach to increase the overall understanding of how sustainability and identity construction are related in the context of second-hand clothing. Moreover, while we do not want to be constrained by theory, we still base the analysis on an existing theoretical framework (PTI by Cherrier and Murray, 2007) and the most relevant academic literature. As further described in section 3.4, we first developed deductive categories originating from this exact theory and reviewed literature. We then complemented the deductive categories by adding new, inductive categories during the analysis of the focus group transcripts. These inductive categories capture aspects the respondents stressed during the discussion that could, however, not be found in academic literature.

3.3 Data Collection

3.3.1 Method

As elaborated upon in the preceding section, primary data was gathered through the conduction of focus groups with four to five participants each to find an answer to this study's research problem. Because of the ongoing pandemic, all five focus groups had to be conducted through the video telephony software Zoom.

In order to test whether the research design of this thesis could be put into practice, we carried out a pilot study. Here, we conducted two focus groups and already started with complementing the category system. The pilot study showed us that the research design is feasible and could be further used for this master thesis.

The exact procedure of conducting the focus groups is based on the framework by Carson et al. (2001). Thus, prior to the actual focus groups, we created a moderator's guideline to allow a smooth conduction, facilitate the discussion, and keep track of time. This guideline (see Appendix C) was created based on Cherrier and Murray's (2007), Perera's (2014), as well as Saraiva, Fernandes and von Schwedler's (2020) research. It consists of an introduction to the focus group and nine questions, of which not all had to be discussed in the course of the focus group. These questions instead worked as a guideline with which the moderator could steer the conversation of the participants. The first question, for instance, is: "Would you share the story about how you started purchasing second-hand clothing?", attempting to trigger narrative pulses in the participants. The total number of questions is also in line with Stewart and Shamdasani's (1990) suggestion of having a maximum of ten to twelve topics. Furthermore, we added possible follow-up questions that the moderator could ask to get further insights into a specific topic. Through the moderator's guideline, the five focus groups were semi-structured, reinforcing the participants articulating their personal opinions and raising new aspects, which increases the confidentiality of the discussions (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

However, we ensured that every topic mentioned in the guideline was addressed throughout the focus group sessions. The moderator's guideline was set up and pre-tested in advance with three volunteers to ensure its practicability.

Following the suggestion by Carson et al. (2001), we determined the roles of the moderator and co-moderator as well as split up the tasks accordingly. The moderator was responsible for asking questions and guiding the conversation, whereas the co-moderator's duties included technical aspects such as setting up invitations to Zoom in advance and recording the focus groups. We agreed that we were both responsible for asking follow-up questions and time management.

During the conduction of the focus groups, we aimed to intervene in the discussions as little as possible. Therefore, the moderator gave the participants time to respond on their own before calling on somebody to share their experiences and reflections. Furthermore, whenever the participants mentioned important aspects without further elaborating on them, the moderator asked a follow-up question to get into the core of the participants' identity construction processes. To end the focus group discussions, the moderator asked whether the participants would like to add anything before stopping the recording.

The focus group sessions were all recorded through Zoom's in-built feature and then transcribed for the analysis. Having recorded the discussions allowed us to not only analyze what was said but also observe how the participants behaved, which was then as well included in the transcription of the discussions. Afterwards, we imported the transcripts into the software MAXQDA for coding and analyzing the focus group discussions (see section 3.4).

Even though conducting focus groups online has definite limitations (see section 5.4), we were successful in leading the discussions. One explanation for this favorable outcome is that the respondents are digital natives, and most of them have already used Zoom. Thus, the discussions flew very naturally as many participants have frequently used the tool since the pandemic started in spring 2020. Compared to focus groups conducted physically, the recording function of Zoom did not represent a classical observation situation because the participants did not actively perceive being recorded. Moreover, this function allowed us to repeatedly go over the material and, thus, observe the participants' body language.

3.3.2 Sampling

This thesis aims to find out how a green identity is constructed and expressed by female consumers of second-hand clothing in Gen Z. Therefore, investigating female Gen Z consumers who buy second-hand clothing regularly and are environmentally conscious is highly relevant to answer the research question. In this regard, we define 'regularly' as purchasing second-hand clothing at least once every three months. As environmentally conscious consumers try to

generally reduce their consumption, such behavior does not necessarily have to occur very frequently to be considered regular. We further elaborate on our choice of sample and why it is relevant to study in the following paragraphs.

In order to sample these specific consumers, we decided to use both purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling is used by researchers that have a clear idea of which characteristics the participants must have to serve the purpose of the study (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Therefore, purposive sampling was used to find participants that fit into the prescribed sample regarding their age, gender, purchasing behavior towards second-hand clothing, and environmental consciousness. Furthermore, we also made use of snowball sampling by asking people from our network as well as the participants from our focus groups whether they knew further suitable individuals that would be willing to participate in one of the focus groups (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Both sampling methods have limitations that are elaborated on in section 5.4.

The sample of environmentally conscious female Gen Z consumers who regularly purchase second-hand clothing is highly relevant to investigate due to several reasons. First, Gen Z consumers are critical for the research question because of their high willingness to buy sustainable products (PwC, 2020) and the common practice of expressing themselves through consumption (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Furthermore, this generation is relevant in the context of second-hand clothing, as a study by thredUP (2020) shows that Gen Z consumers significantly impact the growth of the second-hand industry because they adopt second-hand clothing faster than other generations.

We decided to further limit the sample to Gen Z consumers born between 1995 and 1998 to make sure that all participants have sufficient knowledge of the English language and are able to independently purchase clothing whilst understanding the consequences of their actions. Initially, we aimed to investigate consumers ranging from 1995 to 2002. However, we could not acquire any consumers born between 1999 and 2002 that fit the sample of regularly purchasing second-hand clothing and having an environmentally conscious mindset.

This research further focuses on female consumers as studies show that these are more likely to be eco-friendly and sustainable than their male counterparts (e.g. Ottman, 2011; Peattie, 2001, 2010). This, in turn, has an impact on the consumption behavior since females are more likely to purchase and consume eco-friendly apparel to construct a green self-identity (e.g. Eisler, Eisler & Yoshida, 2003; McNeill & Venter, 2018; Tung, Koenig & Chen, 2017), making this gender relevant for answering our research question.

We decided not to limit the sample to a specific country to maximize the heterogeneity within the group of female Gen Z consumers. The participants' different views and perceptions have enriched our research findings to an extent that would not be possible by looking at one country only. As relativists, gaining insights into many different perspectives is of high importance

because we believe that there is no single truth but rather many different perspectives on the same issue.

Eventually, we were able to interview consumers of eleven different nationalities (see table 1) from Northern, Central, and Southern Europe. However, it proved to be challenging to find participants from outside Europe, which we attribute to two reasons. First, we are both Europeans and therefore do not have an extensive network outside of Europe. Second, the difficulty to find non-Europeans who shop second-hand clothing regularly and have a pro-environmentalist mindset might be related to the sustainability movement being more prominent within Europe (Wendling, Emerson, de Sherbinin & Esty, 2020).

Regarding their occupation, all participants are either full-time university students or university students with a part-time job. Since the investigation is limited to Gen Z with the oldest participants being 26, diversity regarding the participants' occupation is limited. Furthermore, this limitation is partly caused by the use of snowball sampling, as we are both students, and so are many people in our network. We further touch upon these aspects and the limiting effect they have on our findings in section 5.4.

We sent out short questionnaires (see Appendix A), asking the participants for their name, the regularity of their second-hand purchasing behavior, their age, nationality, and occupation to make sure that they fit into the prescribed sample. This ensures that the heterogeneity within the focus groups as well as the homogeneity among the focus groups is maximized, providing us with rich information about the participants' identity construction and expression processes. All participants willing to participate in the focus groups were sent an official consent form from Lund University (see Appendix B) to sign. We ensured to provide them with enough information in advance (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019) in order for them to make a fully informed decision. Further, we changed the names of the participants to ensure their privacy and anonymity. We further elaborate on these aspects in section 3.5.

The number of conducted focus groups, and thus the actual sample size, was determined by theoretical saturation; that is, we conducted focus groups up to the point where an additional focus group would not have yielded any new insights, and no new inductive code was added during the analysis. Eventually, theoretical saturation was reached after five focus groups, including a total of 23 participants.

Table 1: Focus Group Participants

Nr.	Pseudonym	Home Country	Birth Year	Occupation	Date	Duration
1	Mia	Austria	1997	Student	2021/02/24	44 min
	Jessica	Germany	1998	Student		
	Sofia	Estonia	1995	Student with part-time job		
	Emilia	Finland	1995	Student with part-time job		
	Lily	Canada	1997	Student with part-time job		
2	Vanessa	Luxemburg	1997	Student	2021/02/25	45 min
	Ella	Finland	1995	Student		
	Emma	Sweden	1996	Student with part-time job		
	Katharina	Germany	1996	Student with part-time job		
	Lina	Germany	1997	Student with part-time job		
3	Yara	Netherlands	1998	Student with part-time job	2021/04/06	42 min
	Maja	Sweden	1995	Student		
	Rebecca	Germany	1997	Student		
	Aino	Finland	1998	Student		
4	Klara	Germany	1996	Student	2021/04/07	48 min
	Theresa	Germany	1995	Student		
	Grace	England	1998	Student		
	Linnea	Sweden	1995	Student with part-time job		
5	Leonor	Portugal	1995	Student with part-time job	2021/04/19	44 min
	Maria	Austria	1997	Student		
	Paola	Italy	1995	Student with part-time job		
	Elena	Germany	1997	Student with part-time job		
	Lara	Germany	1997	Student with part-time job		

Source: own illustration

3.4 Data Analysis

We carried out a qualitative content analysis to analyze and interpret the gathered data, which allowed us to understand how the focus group participants construct and express a green identity. According to Mayring (2010) and Kuckartz (2018), the analysis is divided into several parts that we, in turn, adapted to our study purpose. The following figure represents our adaptation of the qualitative content analysis process:
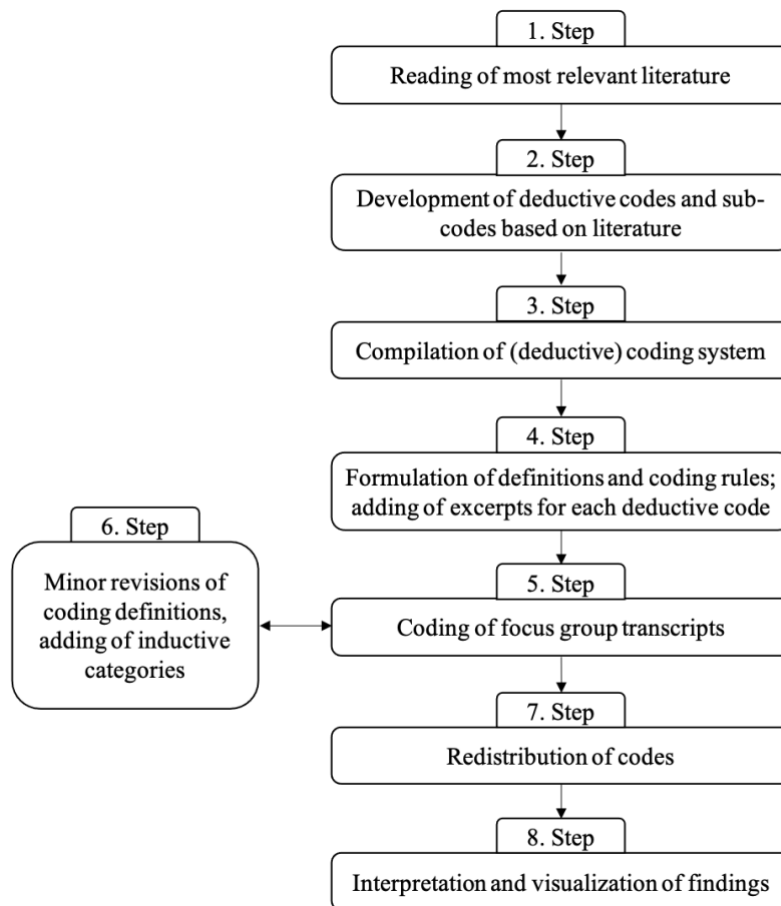
```
                          ┌──────────────┐
                          │   1. Step    │
                    ┌─────┴──────────────┴─────┐
                    │ Reading of most relevant │
                    │        literature        │
                    └────────────┬─────────────┘
                                 │
                          ┌──────┴───────┐
                          │   2. Step    │
                    ┌─────┴──────────────┴─────┐
                    │ Development of deductive │
                    │ codes and sub-codes based│
                    │       on literature      │
                    └────────────┬─────────────┘
                                 │
                          ┌──────┴───────┐
                          │   3. Step    │
                    ┌─────┴──────────────┴─────┐
                    │ Compilation of (deductive│
                    │      coding system       │
                    └────────────┬─────────────┘
                                 │
                          ┌──────┴───────┐
                          │   4. Step    │
                    ┌─────┴──────────────┴─────┐
                    │ Formulation of definitions│
                    │ and coding rules; adding │
                    │ of excerpts for each     │
                    │ deductive code           │
                    └────────────┬─────────────┘
                                 │
  ┌──────────────┐        ┌──────┴───────┐
  │   6. Step    │        │   5. Step    │
┌─┴──────────────┴──┐ ┌───┴──────────────┴──────┐
│ Minor revisions of│←→│ Coding of focus group   │
│ coding definitions,│  │      transcripts        │
│ adding of inductive│  └───────────┬─────────────┘
│    categories     │              │
└───────────────────┘       ┌──────┴───────┐
                            │   7. Step    │
                      ┌─────┴──────────────┴─────┐
                      │  Redistribution of codes │
                      └────────────┬─────────────┘
                                   │
                            ┌──────┴───────┐
                            │   8. Step    │
                      ┌─────┴──────────────┴─────┐
                      │ Interpretation and       │
                      │ visualization of findings│
                      └──────────────────────────┘
```

Figure 5: Content Analysis Process (own illustration adapted from Kuckartz, 2018; Mayring, 2010)

As we chose an abductive approach (see section 3.2.2), the first step was to start reading and working with the most relevant literature, which, in the second step, was used for developing thematic categories (Kuckartz, 2018). Thus, we first developed deductive main codes, based on the PTI by Cherrier and Murray (2007), and then sub-codes stemming from the reviewed literature. Figure 4 (see section 2.4) displays the deductive coding system, which initially consisted of four main categories and 15 subcategories.

As a next step, all data collected during the focus groups was coded (Kuckartz, 2018). More specifically, we added newly identified categories as inductive categories; thus, all transcripts had to be coded again with these categories. Subsequently, we complemented the existing deductive coding system by inducing 14 new categories from the gathered material. Moreover, we extended the main categories by one, finally leading to five phases of green identity construction instead of four as proposed by Cherrier and Murray (2007). To clarify, we use the terms 'category' and 'code' interchangeably, whereas 'main category' or 'main code' are the same as a 'phase' of identity construction. Eventually, we redistributed the overall 29 subcategories among the five phases. An overview of the categories is displayed in section 4.1, whereas the coding frame including all deductive and inductive categories, their definitions, coding rules, and excerpts can be found in Appendix D.

As stated above, we sorted the subcategories into five phases that represent the most recurring themes. To find the optimal fit between each subcategory and phase, we rearranged them multiple times. This "actual order", in turn, can be "seen as an important result of the study" (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018, p.92).

The last step was to interpret and visualize the findings (Kuckartz, 2018, 2019). As mentioned before, we used the software MAXQDA for coding the transcribed focus groups. Furthermore, the program allowed for a simple quantification of the qualitative results, which increases the relevance of the findings (Mayring, 2010). When it comes to interpreting the gathered data, Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018) hold that the "pattern of interpretation should make individual details of the text understandable, while at the same time growing from them", whereas facts from the gathered data should be included (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018, p.125). Thus, in the findings chapter of this study (see chapter 4), we include excerpts from focus group participants to demonstrate their points of view. Moreover, we want to gain a deeper understanding of their identity narratives by interpreting their given statements.

Eventually, we reduced our identified categories "into a more manageable quantity" to handle the data easier and have a more interesting data set; however, we tried not to restrain our findings (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018, p.107). Thus, we first present all categories in figure 6 (see section 4.1) before elaborating on the findings in detail. Figure 7 (see section 4.3), in turn, shows the reduced number of categories and, thus, depicts a summary of our findings.

3.5   Reflexivity and Ethical Principles

Taking into consideration that this thesis aims to interpret the gathered data, reflexivity was essential for us to integrate. Reflexivity, according to Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018, pp.10), means that the researcher bears in mind "the way different kinds of linguistic, social, political and theoretical elements are woven together in the process of knowledge development, during which empirical material is constructed, interpreted and written". Moreover, the authors hold that reflexive research bears two main characteristics, namely reflection and interpretation. Reflexive interpretation, in their words, is "the open play of reflection across various levels of interpretation" (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018, p.329).

Hence, this implies that we tried to reflect on the effects that our data collection has on the outcomes of this study (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). By doing so, we worked with multiple levels of interpretation as a means of creating rich and diverse findings, whilst, parallelly, being self-critical (Alvesson, 2003; Alvesson, Hardy & Harley, 2008). This is expressed in the fact that this study was conducted by two researchers, thus we could motivate each other in being more reflexive. In line with Alvesson and Sköldberg's (2018, p.336) instructions, we differentiated between a conventional interpretation, a critical interpretation,

and a "self-critical and linguistic reflection". For instance, we challenged each other's views, ways of thinking, and interpretation. Another example of the different levels of interpretation is that both of us independently coded the empirical data, which eventually enriched the findings of this thesis.

Furthermore, it is essential to be aware of ethical issues while conducting research, especially when it comes to protecting the research participants (e.g. Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). As mentioned before, all participants were required to sign an official consent form (see Appendix B) before participating. The consent form also served to provide the participants with enough information (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019) to make a fully informed decision. For instance, before a focus group was recorded, the moderator presented what the discussion would be about. However, here we only mentioned the topic of sustainability and second-hand clothing and omitted the part about identity construction in order for the participants not to be biased. The moderator further emphasized that there are no wrong answers, asked for any questions beforehand, and eventually announced that the recording would start. This transparent and honest communication made sure that the participants gave their consent and were informed, eventually making our research more ethical.

An additional ethical principle is to protect the participants' privacy and anonymity in order not to harm them in any way (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Especially in qualitative research, it is highly critical to ensure confidentiality of data (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019), which is why we assigned a pseudonym to each of the participants. Moreover, both the pre-questionnaire and consent form that we sent out in advance allowed us to ask the participants for their written consent on recording the focus groups with audio and video.

3.6   Research Quality Criteria

Important criteria to establish and evaluate the quality of quantitative research are validity and reliability. However, since this research is of qualitative nature, thus lacking the aspect of measurability, using the concepts of validity and reliability to evaluate the research quality is not supported by scholars. (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019) Instead of using reliability and validity, Guba and Lincoln (1994) claim that qualitative researchers should use the criteria of trustworthiness and authenticity to assess the research quality, whereas trustworthiness consists of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Similar to us, the scholars believe that there is more than one truth, which makes these criteria relevant for our study (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

The first criterion, credibility, considers the multitude of different realities (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019), making it necessary to determine whether there is a fit between what the participants said and how this is presented by the researchers (Tobin & Begley, 2004). We argue

for achieving credibility in this thesis as both the data collection and analysis were done by two independent researchers. Thus, this takes into account that different researchers can have different viewpoints, which is particularly relevant in the light of our relativist ontology and reflexive approach. Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019) refer to this as triangulation of researchers, which is said to increase the credibility of the research. Moreover, the transcriptions of the focus groups allowed us to provide an unbiased recording of the discussion, which was then used for the content analysis, and, in turn, further increased credibility.

The second criterion proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1994) is transferability, which refers to whether the findings are adaptable to other contexts. According to the scholars, providing what Geertz (1973) refers to as a 'thick description' of a phenomenon, allows others to make judgments about the transferability of research findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In this regard, our study presents a weakness. Although we studied a small group of individuals sharing certain characteristics intensively, thus producing thick descriptions, our sample is very narrow, and the findings can only be transferred to other contexts with further judgment due to their context-specificity. In turn, this presents an opportunity for future research, which we elaborate on further in section 5.5.

The third element is dependability, referring to the notion that researchers should adopt an 'auditing' approach (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), which ensures that the researchers document the entire research process in an accessible manner. As we conducted focus groups and analyzed the transcripts with a content analysis, we produced a high amount of data in our research process. Here we can argue that our dependability is high as we have documented all steps of the research from the problem formulation to the data analysis on our computers and Google Drive. Consequently, the accessibility of the documents is ensured, which further offers the possibility of a research audit.

The fourth and last element of trustworthiness is confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), which entails the researcher's objectivity. While complete objectivity is not possible in qualitative research, the scholars emphasize that researchers should not let personal values and experiences affect the research findings. In this regard, we can argue that, as already mentioned, we have a reflexive approach with which we aim to focus on the complete whole, using "multiple levels of interpretation" (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018, p.339), instead of focusing on one single level or theme. Furthermore, during the focus group sessions, we did not express our feelings and perspectives on the matter to not influence our participants. Lastly, by writing definitions and coding rules for the content analysis (see Appendix D) and both of us coding the available material independently, we aimed to be as objective in the data analysis as possible. Nevertheless, qualitative research is subjective by definition; hence, the conducted study is affected by researcher bias up to a certain extent (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

In addition to the criteria of trustworthiness, Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest the criterion of authenticity to fully assess the quality of research. This refers to the importance of treating the

different points of view expressed by the participants with fairness and securing the authenticity of their voice. During the focus group sessions, we gave every participant time to speak and further emphasized that there are no wrong answers. Furthermore, by transcribing the discussions and adding excerpts in the findings, we ensured that the participants' points of view were kept authentic. As authenticity also involves the researchers having a deep understanding of the research topic and theoretical background, we further ensured this by conducting a thorough literature review and spending a significant amount of time becoming familiar with the main theories and concepts (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

To sum up, we can argue that we achieved the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity of our research findings. However, this research shows a limitation regarding the transferability of our research findings to other contexts due to their context-specificity. Nevertheless, this presents an opportunity for future research to investigate.

4 Findings

This chapter comprises this study's findings in four sections. After presenting an overview of the findings, we elaborate on each phase of green identity construction and expression separately. Eventually, these findings are interpreted and discussed in the light of the most relevant academic literature. Thus, the following sections challenge the chosen theoretical framework by confirming and disconfirming certain aspects based on the categories we created.

4.1 General Findings

Our theoretical framework, the PTI by Cherrier and Murray (2007), was used as a foundation for the qualitative content analysis and adapted to fit the context of second-hand clothing. Originally, Cherrier and Murray (2007) identified four phases, namely *Sensitization*, *Separation*, *Socialization*, and *Striving* (see figure 3). In addition to those, our analysis revealed a fifth phase in the green identity construction process of second-hand consumers.

We formed analogies around our five themes during the analysis, which is in line with Rennstam and Wästerfors' (2018) proposition. Consequently, we renamed the five phases after having finalized the coding frame according to those analogies. By choosing combinations of abstract and concrete wordings, we came to introduce the following five phases: *Sensitization*, *Self-Gratification*, *Shift*, *Socialization*, and *Self-Realization*. Therefore, we extended the PTI by introducing a fifth phase. However, it cannot be clearly stated which phase can be considered our contribution because of the change in the phases' characteristics.

The following figure portrays these phases along with all related subcategories. In addition to the 15 deductive subcategories (colored boxes) that we identified before the conduction of the focus groups, 14 inductive subcategories (blank boxes) were complemented during the content analysis. As the deductive subcategories are based on the reviewed literature, we redistributed some of them according to their characteristics during the content analysis. Moreover, all boxes displayed in figure 6 are arranged based on how often the specific subcategory has been coded. While this does not reveal anything about how important a particular code is, it eases the overview.
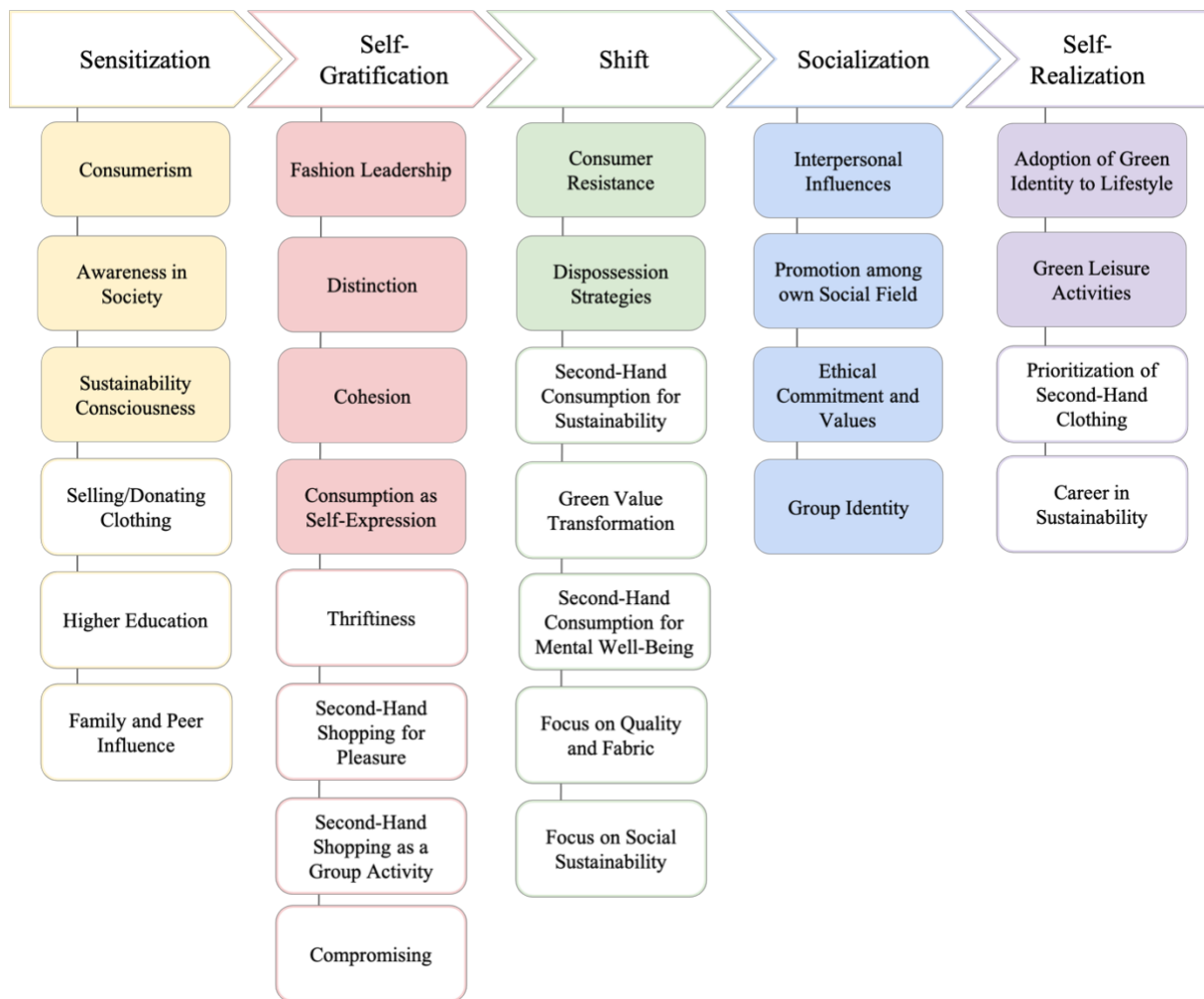
Figure 6: Five Phases of Green Identity Construction (own illustration)

Yet before diving deeper into the five phases, there is one general finding to begin with. A crucial aspect related to the phases of identity construction is their temporality. As mentioned earlier, the single stages in the identity formation process are not permanently fixed and can transform whenever consumers change their environments (Cherrier & Murray, 2007).

During the analysis of the focus group sessions, we found that the phases are temporal, implying a flowing transition of consumers moving through the different phases in accordance with the shift in their consumption behavior. We came to this conclusion because the respondents repeatedly emphasized that they underwent a development in the past years regarding their sustainability consciousness and purchasing behavior of second-hand clothing. Especially when the respondents discussed how they started purchasing second-hand clothing and how they behaved thereafter, it is evident that they went through a process that began with the phase *Sensitization*. Moreover, we found that consumers can be in multiple phases simultaneously as they showed different behavioral patterns that could be assigned to more than one phase. However, amongst all 23 respondents, we could still identify an overall pattern represented in the five phases and the distribution of the subcategories, which is portrayed in figure 6.

In the posed research question, we differentiate between how a green identity is constructed and expressed. We found that the five main categories, namely *Sensitization, Self-Gratification, Shift, Socialization* and *Self-Realization*, serve the purpose of constructing a green identity as they display the inner processes which consumers undergo. The subcategories, i.e., the deductive and inductive sub-codes, serve the purpose of expressing to the outside world that a consumer is in a particular phase, as they comprise specific actions and states of mind that are typical for this phase. In this regard, only the first phase constitutes an exception as the sub-codes 'Awareness in Society', 'Higher Education', and 'Family and Peer Influence' do not present specific actions but can be considered factors triggering the start of the green identity formation process.

Moreover, it is essential to highlight that the phases cannot always be clearly distinguished as some subcategories can be interpreted differently by varying observers. Hence, these subcategories may be assigned to other phases as well, depending on the researcher's viewpoint, which is also in line with our relativist ontology. Furthermore, the phases and accompanying subcategories depend very much on the interviewed consumers, which implies that the subcategories identified by us are just one possible answer to our research question.

4.2 Five Phases of Green Identity Construction

4.2.1 Phase 1: Sensitization

The first phase in the identity construction process is *Sensitization,* which serves as an entry gate to the respondents' 'second-hand journey'. Many of our respondents started selling their clothes because of their initial consumerist mindset. Furthermore, the awareness in society, higher education, as well as family and peers serve to confront them with sustainability issues, which leads to sustainability consciousness and thus triggers the start of the green identity formation process.

Overall, this phase is the least prominent of all phases, occupying solely around 12% of all codes, which implies that this phase is not as important as others in the identity narratives of the respondents. The naming of this phase, *Sensitization*, was taken from Cherrier and Murray (2007): while the specific characteristics of the phase vary due to the new context in which the identity construction process is studied, the overall characteristics of the phase are still similar. The phase consists of six sub-codes; three of them deductive, namely 'Consumerism', 'Awareness in Society', and 'Sustainability Consciousness', as well as three inductive sub-codes that were added during the analysis. These are 'Selling/Donating Clothing', 'Higher Education', and 'Family and Peer Influence'.

In this phase, the most prominent deductive subcategory is 'Consumerism', implying a high importance for the respondents. In discourse with the other respondents, the participants stress their prior consumerism, often at the age of 14-17, which they have left behind. In this regard, Grace reflects on her past behavior: "And because it was cheap, I didn't really think about what I wanted and kind of just got loads of stuff which I never ended up wearing." (Grace, Transcript of Focus Group 4, pos. 11). The respondents further claim that they started selling the clothes they did not like or wear anymore, to buy more clothes eventually: "I was buying so much cheap stuff [...]. And then at some point, [...] I was looking for an opportunity to sell some of it and make money [...] to buy more stuff." (Katharina, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 2).

The deductive subcategory 'Awareness in Society' is also a prominent code in this phase and captures that a society is aware of sustainability issues. The respondents argue that, due to the societal movement of sustainability, they were increasingly confronted with the topic, which, in turn, impacted their consumption behavior. In this regard, Ella elaborates on unsustainable consumption choices: "I [...] realized it's not worth it and also, at the same time, this has been going on in society as well, so I was [...] aware that it's not smart." (Ella, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 17). Therefore, the awareness in society serves as a trigger to increase the sustainability consciousness of our participants.

The least coded subcategory of the first phase is the deductive code 'Sustainability Consciousness', which includes, for instance, buying brands that promote sustainable or eco-friendly practices. This subcategory was only coded five times, thus implying that the consciousness of the respondents towards sustainability issues exists in the first phase but does not yet determine their actions taken, e.g., due to a consumerist mindset.

Connected to this aspect is also the inductive code 'Selling/Donating Clothing'. The participants argue that they started their 'second-hand journey' when either selling or donating their clothing:

> I think I started selling clothes first because I noticed that I have a lot and I don't need everything. I sold it to friends and I also started selling it on Tradera [...] and then I started consuming [...] because you can find more unique clothes and [...] it's cheaper. (Emma, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 8)

Interestingly, we could not identify a similar category in academic literature, which makes this subcategory highly relevant, especially considering that respondents repeatedly stressed this aspect during the discussions.

Apart from the deductive code 'Awareness in Society', the respondents mention two other factors that impacted the change of their purchasing behavior and thus triggered the start of their green identity construction process, namely 'Higher Education' and 'Family and Peer

Influence'. Remarkably, only one of those three factors could be detected in academic literature, implying that scholars have not yet fully investigated this topic.

The inductive subcategory 'Higher Education' captures that higher education serves as a factor that increased the respondents' awareness of different sustainability-related issues and thus impacted their purchasing behavior. Participants studying degrees related to sustainability argue that being confronted with the topic every day impacted them: "When I was studying my master's degree, I (…) became super aware of the human choices in everything [...]. And I became super aware of what I bought." (Leonor, Transcript of Focus Group 5, pos. 42).

As the participants further emphasize the influence that their family and peers had when they started buying second-hand clothing, we introduced the inductive subcategory 'Family and Peer Influence' to capture this phenomenon. Many of the respondents first got in touch with second-hand clothing through their mothers selling used children's clothing or purchasing second-hand clothing themselves: "I think, already my mom did it. So, it's kind of been a natural thing to me." (Sofia, Transcript of Focus Group 1, pos. 5).

Remarkably, the influence of family and friends, as well as higher education, has not been addressed by academic scholars, which makes these sub-codes highly relevant.

To sum up, we can argue that, up to a certain extent, the first phase of green identity formation has already been studied by scholars. However, since we induced three new subcategories, the context of second-hand clothing bears new aspects which are lacking in academia. Our analysis shows that 'Awareness in Society', 'Higher Education', and 'Family and Peer Influence' serve as factors triggering the start of the green identity construction process. Further, through 'Consumerism', 'Selling/Donating Clothing', and 'Sustainability Consciousness', consumers express that they are in the first phase of the process.

4.2.2 Phase 2: Self-Gratification

The second phase, *Self-Gratification*, captures that consumers in this stage are very pleasure-oriented when it comes to their second-hand shopping. They use second-hand clothing to be trendy and value that second-hand clothing is very affordable, thus offering them a possibility to be thrifty.

This phase consists of eight subcategories, of which all indicate how the phase is expressed by consumers. Four of them are deductive due to their prominence in academic literature, namely 'Fashion Leadership', 'Distinction', 'Cohesion', and 'Consumption as Self-Expression'. During the analysis of the focus group discussions, four inductive subcategories were added, which are 'Thriftiness', 'Second-Hand Shopping as a Leisure Activity', 'Second-Hand Shopping as a Group Activity', and 'Compromising'. Regarding the subcategories, it is

remarkable that the inductive categories dominate this phase: during the discussions, our participants emphasize aspects that were not previously found by scholars, making the inductive categories very valuable.

The most prominent deductive subcategory is 'Fashion Leadership', which indicates that consumers have a strong interest in new fashion trends and shop second-hand clothing to find trendy, unique, and individual clothing pieces. In this regard, Leonor reflects on her past behavior:

> I did a lot of scrolling Tumblr. [...] I wanted to have this type of clothes [...]. So, the first time that I started to buy second-hand clothes was not about [...] sustainability. It was more about fashion. (Leonor, Transcript of Focus Group 5, pos. 3)

Emma further elaborates: "If I want an item that is trendy, [...] then I will probably not buy [it] new [...]. So, then I prefer to buy it second-hand." (Emma, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 29).

Moreover, consumers in this stage of identity construction value that they can use second-hand clothing to distinguish themselves from others, which is expressed by the code 'Distinction'. The respondents share that they like to purchase second-hand clothing because it allows them to have a more unique style: "And for me, especially when you find something that you really like and it's unique, people won't have the same." (Emma, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 19).

The deductive subcategory 'Cohesion' was, conversely to what we reviewed in academic literature, solely mentioned once in the respondents' identity narratives. This implies that, when shopping for second-hand clothing, our respondents do not aim to fit into a style that is prominent in a specific location or among a certain group.

Furthermore, the deductive sub-code 'Consumption as Self-Expression', which we originally placed in the first phase (see figure 4), was shifted to this phase because it fits the characteristics of *Self-Gratification* more appropriately. Nevertheless, this subcategory was not coded at all, which is astonishing in the light of the literature: while academia stresses the importance of using consumption as self-expression, particularly for Gen Z consumers, our respondents did not include this aspect in their identity narratives.

The most prominent inductive subcategory in this phase and, simultaneously, the third most prominent code among all phases is the inductive code 'Thriftiness'. The respondents frequently emphasize that saving money when shopping for second-hand clothing was very important when they initially started shopping second-hand clothing and is still a relevant aspect nowadays. Emma explains: "I think, when I started buying second-hand [...], it was only

because it was cheaper. And that is definitely not [...] the case right now. That's just a bonus."
(Emma, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 66). Conversely, some participants even mention the
aspect of saving money as their number one motivation for engaging in second-hand shopping.
Particularly the latter aspect is in line with the literature, as Roux and Guiot (2008) identified
economic drivers as a motivation for second-hand shopping. However, as we do not examine
the respondents' motivation but rather how they construct a green identity, we did not include
this motivation as a deductive code. Nevertheless, since this aspect was repeatedly stressed
during the focus group discussions, we decided to induce the sub-code 'Thriftiness', which
further serves to express that the consumer is in the second phase of constructing a green
identity.

An additional highly emphasized subcategory that we induced is 'Second-Hand Shopping for
Pleasure', which is also captured well in the naming of this phase, *Self-Gratification*.
Conversely to what is stated in academic literature, our respondents stress that, in the early
stages of their 'second-hand journey', they mainly went second-hand shopping for fun reasons.
In this regard, Emilia reminisces about her teenage years: "We just went because it was a fun
activity and there was nothing else to do." (Emilia, Transcript of Focus Group 1, pos. 24). Yara
further adds: "I think I just really love to go vintage shopping." (Yara, Transcript of Focus
Group 3, pos. 91).

Another aspect relevant for consumers in the stage *Self-Gratification* is captured by the third
inductive code 'Second-Hand Shopping as a Group Activity'. While the respondents highlight
that shopping second-hand served as a group activity with friends when they started their
'second-hand journey', they still enjoy doing it nowadays. "[I]n Berlin it was more an activity
with friends [...], we would go into the city and go into second-hand stores (...) and to spend
some time together." (Vanessa, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 28) Similarly, Sara adds:
"Especially during the summer in the parks, we kind of almost just hung out with friends and
discovered that it's also a cool way to find new clothes." (Sara, Transcript of Focus Group 2,
pos. 13).

In terms of both subcategories 'Second-Hand Shopping for Pleasure' and 'Second-Hand
Shopping as a Group-Activity', it is astonishing that scholars did not emphasize these aspects
since they were highlighted in the identity narratives of our respondents and further serve as an
expression of this phase.

Another characteristic of consumers is reflected in the inductive subcategory 'Compromising',
which reflects that consumers in this phase are still willing to compromise in two different
ways. On the one hand, the respondents argue that they make compromises when it comes to
the fit of the clothes, as Katharina explains: "I'm making compromises (...) by going for maybe
a bigger size, like a size I would not buy in store, but I know that I can make (..) it fit somehow."
(Katharina, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 24). On the other hand, consumers are willing to
compromise in terms of buying an item new that they were not able to find second-hand. In this

regard, Aino shares: "But where I compromise, I think definitely with underwear and, (…) definitely also jeans are hard to find in the right size [laughs]." (Aino, Transcript of Focus Group 3, pos. 25). However, we can argue that the willingness to compromise decreases as the consumer moves through the green identity formation process.

Overall, it is astonishing that the most coded categories of the phase *Self-Gratification* were not yet explored by scholars and are therefore valuable in enhancing the understanding of the green identity construction process. Our findings indicate that consumers primarily express that they are in this phase through their 'Thriftiness', the importance of 'Fashion Leadership', and that they shop second-hand clothing for pleasure and as a group activity.

4.2.3 Phase 3: Shift

The third phase, *Shift,* describes the process in which consumers undergo a shift from a rather consumerist to a sustainability-aware mindset. For instance, they actively resist buying fast fashion and purchase second-hand clothing because of sustainability reasons instead of solely their style.

Of all five phases, *Shift* was coded most often, taking up around one-third of all coded items. This shows that the third phase is of high importance since it is a fundamental phase in constructing a green identity: without the shift in values from a consumerist to an environmentally conscious mindset, a green identity cannot be constructed. Moreover, it is remarkable that this phase comprises more inductive than deductive subcategories. This indicates that academic scholars do not emphasize the value shift as much as consumers do in their identity narratives.

Overall, this phase consists of seven subcategories, all of them serving to express that consumers are in the third phase of the green identity construction process. Two of them are deductive due to their high prominence in academic literature, namely 'Consumer Resistance' and 'Dispossession Strategies'. The remaining five categories were induced after conducting the focus groups and are 'Second-Hand Consumption for Sustainability', 'Green Value Transformation', 'Second-Hand Consumption for Mental Well-Being', 'Focus on Quality and Fabric', and 'Focus on Social Sustainability'.

The first deductive subcategory, 'Consumer Resistance', was initially located in the second phase, however, eventually redistributed to the third phase as it is part of an inner shift in values. In this regard, Maja explains: "But now, I really don't see an excuse for buying new things because I can just go online to online thrift stores or marketplaces [...]." (Maja, Transcript of Focus Group 3, pos. 17). Our respondents especially emphasize their aversion towards fast fashion. As they may have consumed fast fashion earlier, they then realized how bad it actually is and stopped doing so: "But then, of course, I realized that: 'oh my God, Primark is really

fucked up for the planet', so I also stopped doing it, so [laughs]." (Yara, Transcript of Focus Group 3, pos. 11). These findings align with the reviewed literature as our respondents expressed non-consumption both for sustainability reasons and against mainstream consumers who do not consume sustainably (Cherrier, Black & Lee, 2011).

The second deductive sub-code is 'Dispossession Strategies' and was, conversely to the reviewed literature, hardly emphasized by our respondents. Leonor refers to minimalism when explaining: "I'd like to have the minimalist style of living (…), so, I don't need to buy a lot of things to have in my room or in my house." (Leonor, Transcript of Focus Group 5, pos. 49). That this category was coded only five times is surprising when looking at the reviewed literature, where especially Cherrier and Murray (2007) elaborate on this topic. Thus, it can be argued that the process of giving up one's current self is none of the main drivers in constructing a green identity through second-hand consumption.

'Second-Hand Consumption for Sustainability' is the inductive subcategory that has been coded most often, making up one-fourth of all sub-categories belonging to the third phase. Rebecca claims that her biggest motivation for buying second-hand clothing is sustainability: "There's a lot of reasons [to buy second-hand clothes], but the biggest, I would say, is sustainability." (Rebecca, Transcript of Focus Group 3, pos. 90). Likewise, Klara describes: "[...] And that's why I also (…) think that second-hand shopping is the best way to be sustainable." (Klara, Transcript of Focus Group 4, pos. 45). This indicates that consumers especially value the sustainability aspect related to second-hand clothing.

The inductive subcategory 'Green Value Transformation' is central to phase *Shift*, as it describes the shift in the consumers' values since they started purchasing second-hand clothing or acting sustainably. For instance, Elena used to value the aesthetic aspect of second-hand clothing: "So, that really started to switch from, 'okay, it's just the aesthetics' to (…) be the whole sustainability thing." (Elena, Transcript of Focus Group 5, pos. 10). Similarly, Vanessa describes a shift: "I definitely also have become more conscious over the years and also, towards all regards, environmental, but also social." (Vanessa, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 71). Overall, a high proportion of respondents commented on this theme, indicating that they could observe how they themselves transformed over the years.

'Second-Hand Consumption for Mental Well-Being' is a subcategory which describes that consumers buy second-hand clothing or sustainable products because it weighs less on their conscience. In this regard, Vanessa elucidates: "If I buy second-hand, I would have at least the feeling that [...] nothing new gets created and no new materials are sourced for this." (Vanessa, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 22). Likewise, Grace explains that "when you second-hand shop, you don't feel so guilty." (Grace, Transcript of Focus Group 4, pos. 14), whereas Elena describes: "Sometimes, I justify my longing for buying clothes with buying second-hand." (Elena, Transcript of Focus Group 5, pos. 10). Interestingly, we could not identify any similar category in academic literature, which makes this subcategory a highly relevant finding.

Finally, two inductive subcategories that were not mentioned as often but are still relevant are 'Focus on Social Sustainability' and 'Focus on Quality and Fabric'. Both categories show that the respondents have intensely thought about the topic of sustainability in the clothing industry. For instance, Vanessa usually considers both social and environmental aspects of the triple bottom line: "I definitely have become more conscious over the years and also, like towards all regards, environmental, but also social. What are the conditions of labor, especially behind clothes?" (Vanessa, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 71). Regarding the quality and longevity of a garment, Grace explains: "And if there is something I want, I try to find good quality second-hand. So yeah, more expensive pieces, but that are a better quality and probably last." (Grace, Transcript of Focus Group 4, pos. 11).

In essence, this section shows that consumers especially emphasize how their values have shifted when it comes to their identity construction through consuming second-hand clothing, be it because they recognized how harmful fast fashion is or simply as they want to act more sustainably. Out of all seven, we figure that the three subcategories 'Consumer Resistance', 'Buying Second-Hand for Sustainability', and 'Green Value Transformation' are most central in how consumers express the progress of their identity construction. As mentioned above, it is astonishing that the *Shift*-phase was not as intensely elaborated by scholars as by us. Consequently, as our analysis revealed five inductive subcategories, we can argue that the third phase is mainly built on our findings and, therefore, one major contribution to academic literature.

4.2.4 Phase 4: Socialization

Compared to the previous phase, the fourth phase, *Socialization*, was not coded as often, however, still represents an essential stage in the identity construction process. The naming of this phase was taken from Cherrier and Murray's (2007) PTI as our findings concerning this stage fully align with theirs. Similarly to how Perera (2014) defines this phase, *Socialization* mirrors the social interactions happening while consumers construct their identities. This phase is also in line with further scholars that we reviewed as, for instance, Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) claim that, in particular, social interactions confirm a self-identity.

In addition, it is remarkable that we could solely identify four subcategories, of which all are deductive in nature. These are 'Interpersonal Influences', 'Promotion among own Social Field', 'Ethical Commitment and Values', and 'Group Identity'. We located *Socialization* as the fourth phase because we found that it indicates that consumers have proceeded in their identity construction.

The first subcategory, 'Interpersonal Influences', constitutes the most prominent among our respondents. It entails that the respondents are not only influenced by but also influence other individuals in their social field to buy second-hand clothing. Overall, we found that some of the

respondents were influenced by others, some not, whereas some of the respondents have influenced others, some not. For instance, Vanessa was influenced by her friends: "But for me, my friends definitely had an impact, like, early on." (Vanessa, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 39). Conversely, Elena is the one having influenced her boyfriend:

> But, e.g., my boyfriend, I took him vintage shopping his first time and he was like: 'oh okay, I'm not sure about this [laughs], are they dirty?' (…) But he really loved it, and, in the end, we went back several times, and he really enjoys it. (Elena, Transcript of Focus Group 5, pos. 27)

The second sub-code in the *Socialization*-phase is the 'Promotion among own Social Field', which means that the consumers promote second-hand clothing among others in their social field. However, compared to the previous subcategory 'Interpersonal Influences', these individuals do not necessarily have to change their behavior. On the one hand, Paola promotes it due to thriftiness: "[...] I think that I bring it up quite often because I think that's about the fact that I, (…) very often [...], feel like I made a good deal [...]." (Paola, Transcript of Focus Group 5, pos. 34). On the other hand, Leonor stands up for second-hand clothing because of her acquired knowledge:

> I think that it's more like I influenced other people because of, basically, my major and my knowledge about it. And I start with facts! Like: 'if you buy it, you are wasting a lot of water!'. And: 'you are polluting stuff!'. And it's more like I am the one who tries to change minds [laughs]. (Leonor, Transcript of Focus Group 5, pos. 26)

The findings concerning this subcategory are well in line with what academic scholars propose. For instance, Saraiva, Fernandes and von Schwedler (2020) describe that, as soon individuals have adopted a new identity, they start to share their experiences with others.

The third sub-category is 'Ethical Commitment and Values'. As the process of socialization can be defined as "a continuing process whereby an individual [...] learns the norms, values, behavior, and social skills appropriate to his or her social position" (Dictionary.com, n.d.), we saw the necessity in re-allocating this subcategory from the second phase to the *Socialization*-phase. For instance, Vanessa narrates about her ethical commitment: "I can't think of a future where I don't incorporate sustainability or ethical decisions in my lifestyle." (Vanessa, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 73).

The fourth and final subcategory is 'Group Identity', which was, conversely to what the reviewed literature suggests, coded solely three times. For instance, Saraiva, Fernandes and von Schwedler (2020, p.77) emphasize that the common engagement in a subculture of consumption helps "participants reshape their consumption practices and reinforce their environmental convictions". Likewise, Gabriel and Lang (2015) argue that a consumer obtains

his or her individual identity by identifying with a group. In this regard, Yara elaborates on second-hand shopping as a bonding activity with her friends: "Yeah, I would say that all of my friends are really into (…) vintage shopping. It's like a big bonding activity [...]." (Yara, Transcript of Focus Group 3, pos. 38). Nevertheless, as this category seems rather unimportant to our respondents, it indicates that consumers do not share a common identity with other individuals they regularly surround themselves with. In the second phase, *Self-Gratification*, we elaborate on the inductive subcategory 'Second-Hand Shopping as a Group Activity', which, even though it has been coded more often than this subcategory, could not result in a common group identity.

Overall, *Socialization* is a highly critical stage in the identity construction process. Especially the fact that consumers influence each other or promote second-hand consumption, as well as that they have adopted ethical values, indicate that they have far proceeded in constructing a green identity. Our analysis shows that, in particular, the subcategories 'Interpersonal Influences', 'Promotion among own Social Field', and 'Ethical Commitment and Values', indicate how consumers express their green identity.

4.2.5 Phase 5: Self-Realization

Lastly, the phase *Self-Realization* represents the final stage in the consumers' green identity construction and can thus be interpreted as an outcome of their identity formation process. It is characterized by consumers who have adopted or intend to adopt a green identity to other areas of life, e.g., their free time or career.

Altogether, we could identify four subcategories that capture how consumers express their identities: 'Adoption of Green Identity to Lifestyle' and 'Green Leisure Activities' are deductive subcategories that we retrieved from academic literature. In addition, we induced two subcategories, namely 'Prioritization of Second-Hand Clothing' and 'Career in Sustainability'.

The first deductive subcategory, 'Adoption of Green Identity to Lifestyle', was coded 60 times, thus most often among all codes. This indicates that many of our respondents try to act out their green identity in different parts of their lives. Interestingly, there were many commonalities among our participants. For instance, vegetarianism or veganism was a highly emphasized area, whereas they additionally brought up organic food, natural cosmetics, and the avoidance of traveling by plane. Furthermore, e.g., Elena tries to scrutinize: "So, maybe questioning my upbringing, rethinking stuff, buy less, make it last, and just incorporate a more sustainable mindset into my whole life [...]." (Elena, Transcript of Focus Group 5, pos. 50). In a similar manner, Maja elaborates on how she questions whether she needs certain items:

> I think I've become more conscious about how my choices affect things in
> general. I wouldn't say that second-hand shopping affects everything I do, but

at the same time, it's always in the back of my mind, like: How will this affect the rest of the world if I do this thing? (Maja, Transcript of Focus Group 3, pos. 75)

That the second deductive subcategory, the practice of 'Green Leisure Activities', was not at all coded, indicates that, either, our respondents do not have this kind of free time activities or simply do not consider them as important parts of their green identity narratives. This is especially striking since most of the respondents want to adopt a green way of living. However, the lack of practicing 'Green Leisure Activities' can be explained by our participants' age group; for instance, Aino still studies and therefore plans to do gardening rather in the future: "I think I've always had the dream of having my own garden and growing my own food. So, that's definitely a big goal of mine." (Aino, Transcript of Focus Group 3, pos. 83). Consequently, this sub-code is rather negligible as our analysis shows that Gen Z consumers do not stress this field of action. Yet, we re-allocated this subcategory from the former third phase to this final phase because it shows a high engagement in acting sustainably.

Conversely, the inductive subcategory 'Prioritization of Second-Hand Clothing' was thematized more often. In this regard, Rebecca describes: "In the beginning, I started doing it sometimes because you can buy some cool stuff. But now it's where I go first." (Rebecca, Transcript of Focus Group 3, pos. 17). Likewise, Paola considers second-hand as her first choice: "And (…) yes, [second-hand shopping] would always be my first option if I already know the exact thing that I want." (Paola, Transcript of Focus Group 5, pos. 11). Interestingly, academic scholars do not touch upon this aspect. This, however, can be explained by the lack of research taking into account identity construction in the context of second-hand clothing.

The second inductive subcategory refers to aiming for a 'Career in Sustainability'. Accordingly, many of the respondents emphasize that they strive to work in a sustainable company: "My aim is [...] to work for a sustainable company or, like, a company with purpose, I'm trying to find a job at [...] a purpose-driven start-up now." (Theresa, Transcript of Focus Group 4, pos. 55). Additionally, a quote by Klara stands out, as she wants to incorporate sustainability-related topics in educating children:

> I will work with children because I'm studying to become a primary school teacher, so I think, (…) here it is crucial to [...] educate the children about these important topics and, (…) yeah, that's my aim to influence them in a good way to live with the environment in (…) a good way. (Klara, Transcript of Focus Group 4, pos. 57)

Aiming for a 'Career in Sustainability' is especially prominent among our respondents, we figure, because they are all still university students and not working full-time yet. Thus, they show high ambitions in causing a change, or in Lina's words, trying "to make an unsustainable company more sustainable." (Lina, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 78).

In essence, the phase *Self-Realization* marks the final stage and outcome of how consumers construct their green identity. Hence, consumers who have reached this stage express their identity in acting it out in their lifestyle, be it career- or hobby-wise. Consequently, the three subcategories 'Adoption of Green Identity to Lifestyle', 'Second-Hand before First-Hand', and 'Career in Sustainability' are most relevant in the consumers' green identity expressions.

4.3 Synthesis

After having presented our findings regarding the phases of identity construction, the following section serves to answer the research question of how a green identity is constructed and expressed among female consumers of second-hand clothing in Gen Z. The importance of focusing on the complete whole instead of just looking at single levels or themes is also emphasized by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018). Moreover, in this section we come closer to unravel the paradox that emerged during the literature review.

In the course of the analysis, we adapted the PTI by Cherrier and Murray (2007), which consists of the four phases *Sensitization*, *Separation*, *Socialization*, and *Striving*. Based on the focus group discussions in the newly studied context of second-hand clothing, we adjusted the characteristics of these phases and, in addition, introduced a fifth phase. Thus, we were able to deepen the understanding of the process of green identity construction by having introduced the framework in a new context.

By answering the research question, this section presents a condensation of our findings to those subcategories that were most prominent or relevant to our respondents. This course of action is in line with Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018), who encourage researchers to reduce the identified categories into a manageable number to increase the meaningfulness of the findings, as already mentioned in both section 3.4 and section 4.1.

Consequently, we can answer the posed research question by arguing that a green identity is constructed in five phases, namely through *Sensitization*, *Self-Gratification*, *Shift*, *Socialization*, and *Self-Realization*. Furthermore, these phases are expressed to the outside world through specific actions taken by consumers or their states of mind. The first phase, *Sensitization*, is expressed through individuals who still have a consumerist mindset and sell or donate clothing, while the second phase, *Self-Gratification*, is expressed through consumers that want to be fashionable, save money, or simply buy second-hand clothing because it entertains them. Thereafter, consumers in the *Shift*-phase express this through being resistant, consuming second-hand clothing for sustainability reasons, and undergoing a value shift towards 'green' values. The fourth phase, *Socialization*, is expressed by consumers influencing and being influenced by others, promoting second-hand shopping among their social fields, and having an ethical commitment. Lastly, the phase of *Self-Realization* can be interpreted as an

outcome of the green identity formation process in which consumers have adopted a green identity to their entire lifestyle, prioritize second-hand clothing over new clothes, and strive for a career in sustainability. Furthermore, we argue that these phases are temporal, meaning that the consumers move through the five phases according to the change in their consumption patterns.

Whilst figure 6 (section 4.1) shows the allocation of all subcategories that we identified and distributed among the five phases, the following figure visually displays the answer to our research question, that is the construction and expression of a green identity among female consumers of second-hand clothing in Gen Z:
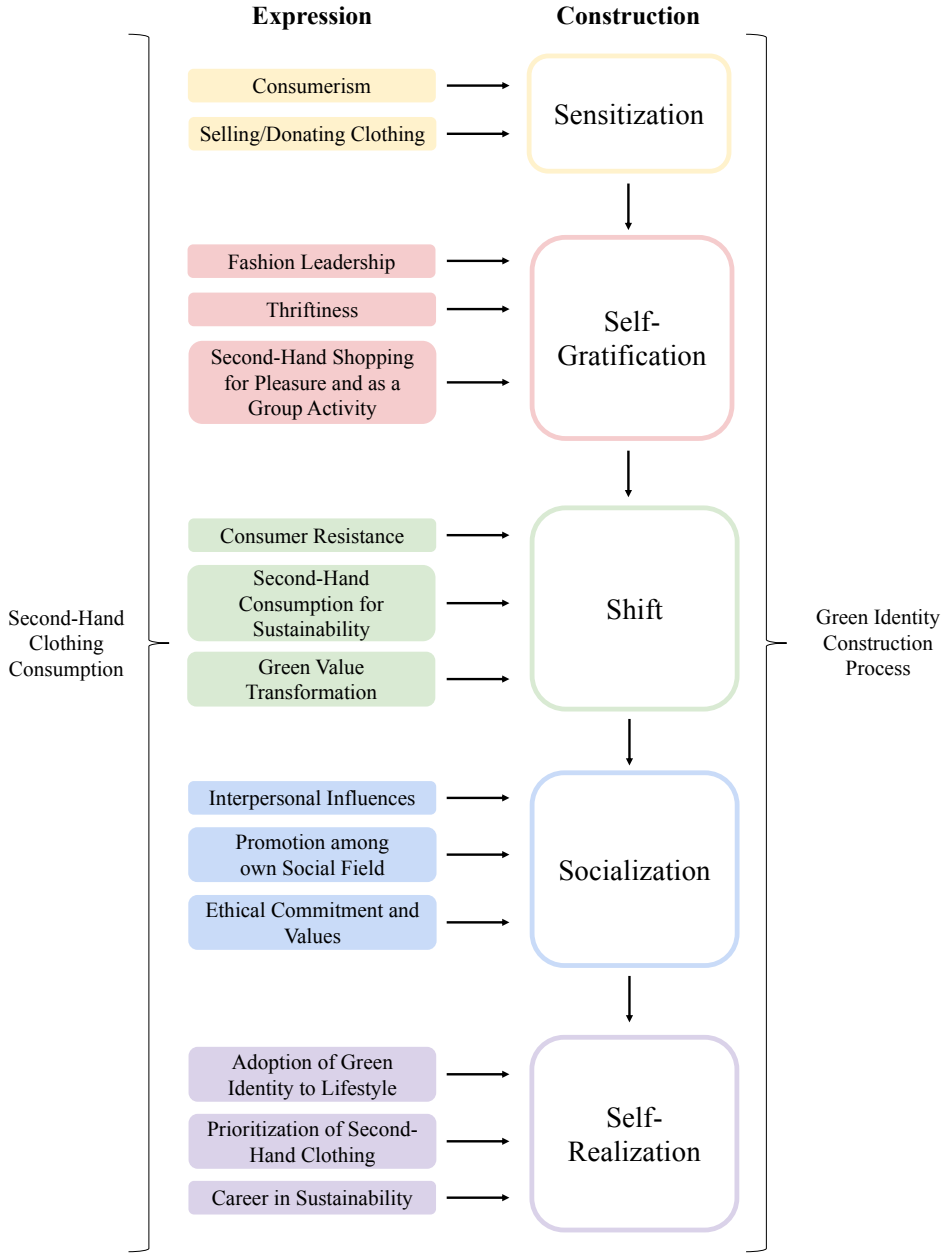
Figure 7: Green Identity Construction and Expression (own illustration)

In addition, our gathered set of data enables us to unravel the paradox that we identified while reviewing the most relevant academic literature: Niinimäki (2010) argues that ethical commitment serves as an important driver of purchasing eco-friendly clothing, whereas McNeill and Venter (2019) argue that consumers who engage in collaborative consumption models do so to express their identity and not for ethical reasons. Therefore, the scholars found two contrasting drivers behind the engagement in sustainable fashion alternatives: ethical commitment vs. self-expression. We found that the motivation for consuming second-hand clothing changes as our participants move through the green identity construction process. While they did not mention using second-hand clothing as a means to express themselves, they still use it at the beginning of their identity construction process for rather hedonistic motives, such as being trendy and having fun. This implies that our participants consider ethical motives not the primary driver at the beginning of their 'second-hand journeys'. However, our analysis shows that, as they move through the process of constructing a green identity, purchasing second-hand clothing for sustainability reasons and the adoption of ethical values becomes increasingly important and dominates the last three phases of the identity construction process. Therefore, our contribution to solving this paradox is that both ethical commitment and self-expression are drivers to engage in sustainable fashion consumption, yet they occur at different points in the green identity construction process.

4.4   Discussion

When comparing our findings with those of other studies, for instance, Perera (2014) and Saraiva, Fernandes and von Schwedler (2020), who also investigate the construction of a green identity with the help of the PTI by Cherrier and Murray (2007), our findings differ when it comes to the number of phases as well as their characteristics. Therefore, by investigating the same phenomenon as the aforementioned scholars but with a differing context and sample, we were able to add to previous research.

Consequently, we deepened the understanding of how the construction of a green identity occurs in a new context, that is, second-hand clothing, and a specific age group, that is, female Gen Z consumers. This is especially relevant in the light of the sustainability megatrend and the recent growth of the resale industry. Furthermore, female Gen Z consumers are of particular relevance due to the common practice of constructing and expressing their identity through consumption.

The difference in our findings compared with those of other scholars can be attributed to the different samples and contexts in which the green identity formation process is investigated. Consequently, our findings are highly dependent on the researched context of second-hand clothing, which is also reflected in the characteristics of the five different phases. However, by

studying an extremely narrow sample in a new context, our findings provide rich and context-specific insights into the construction and expression of a green identity among female Gen Z consumers of second-hand clothing.

Moreover, the analysis of the focus groups brought up two rather unexpected results, one of them being the third phase in the green identity construction process, namely *Shift*. As already mentioned, this phase was coded most often and is fundamental for the green identity construction process, as a green identity cannot be constructed without the shift from a rather consumerist towards a sustainability-oriented mindset. Therefore, it is even more surprising that the third phase mainly consists of inductive codes and was not prominent in the reviewed literature. The fact that scholars have not yet thematized this shift can potentially be explained by three aspects. First, many scholars investigate the general population instead of actual consumers of sustainable fashion (Lundblad & Davies, 2016). In contrast to individuals who actually consume sustainable fashion, the majority of the general population has not yet experienced this shift towards a sustainability conscious mindset. Therefore, this phenomenon cannot be examined by scholars that are not narrowing down their sample to this specific group of consumers. Furthermore, for instance, in the case of Saraiva, Fernandes and von Schwedler (2020) who investigate the context of organic food, the green identity construction process starts when the critical incident prompting the change in consumption behavior towards organic food has already happened. In the context of second-hand clothing, one potential reason why the shift that our respondents went through was so prominent in our findings is that they purchase second-hand clothing also for reasons not related to sustainability, such as uniqueness and trendiness, which then changes as the respondents move through the process. This indicates that the *Shift*-phase could also occur in other contexts, particularly in those where the primary drivers behind purchasing a product can vary between, e.g., hedonistic and ethical drivers. Hence, this offers an area for future research, which we elaborate more on in section 5.5. On a more general level, we can argue that our extended model of green identity construction, and particularly the third phase *Shift*, show that the process of identity construction is never fixed and can change depending on the social surroundings of consumers.

The second astonishing finding is related to the use of clothing as a form of self-expression. Several scholars, such as Niinimäki (2010) and Kaiser (1990), agree that clothing is used for self-expression and particularly attribute this behavior to Gen Z (Francis & Hoefel, 2018) and the consumption of second-hand clothing (Herjanto, Scheller-Sampson & Erickson, 2019). However, during the focus groups, it appeared that our participants do not use their way of dressing as a form of self-expression; they rather use the motives behind shopping second-hand clothing to express their identity. Therefore, our participants engage in another kind of self-expression than proposed by academic scholars, which can be explained by the act of self-expression happening on a somewhat subconscious level. Consequently, it may not have been revealed by our participants during their identity narratives.

While our findings allow us to enhance the understanding of green identity construction and expression, they also allow us to both support and challenge existing research. When it comes to factors prompting green consumption, Haanpää (2007, p.15) identifies "contextual factors", "individual factors", as well as "personality factors". Our findings support that particularly the contextual factors relating to social and cultural resources impact the participants: a general awareness in society, higher education, and family or peers trigger the shift towards green consumption. Furthermore, individual factors related to economic motives are important as the participants frequently mention the aspect of saving money whilst second-hand shopping. Lastly, our findings also support Haanpää's (2007) argument that personality factors (e.g., attitudes, values) prompt green consumption as we found that sustainability consciousness and ethical commitment impact both the consumption behavior and identity construction process.

Concerning the topic of symbolic meanings, Elliott and Wattansuwan (1998) argue that consumers use the symbolic meanings carried by products to construct and express their identity. We agree with the scholars as we found that our participants indeed use second-hand clothing to construct and express their identities. When it comes to the kind of symbolic meanings carried by products, Ritson, Elliott and Eccles (1996) claim that the same product can have different symbolic meanings for different consumers. Our findings are in line with this as they show that second-hand clothes carry various symbolic meanings depending on the consumer. For instance, our participant Theresa values second-hand clothing because it allows her to communicate her pro-environmental mindset. Additionally, we were able to contribute to literature as we found that not just the individual consumer has an impact on the symbolic meanings carried by specific items but also the different stages of the identity formation process. For instance, in the second phase, consumers wear second-hand clothing because it carries the symbolic meaning of being fashionable and trendy, whereas in the third phase, wearing second-hand clothing rather indicates consumer resistance and a consumer's sustainable mindset.

In relation to the construction of an identity, Gabriel and Lang (2015) argue that having a fixed identity is not possible in today's society, which makes it necessary for consumers to reconstruct their identities continuously. Our findings support this claim as we found that consumers moving through the process of green identity construction ongoingly reconstruct their identities, which in turn allows them to move to the next phase of identity construction.

Thompson and Haytko (1997) further elaborate on this topic by stating that consumers rework their identities while talking about fashion, for instance, by contrasting their behaviors and beliefs with those of others. This is a highly relevant aspect as our participants engaged in fashion discourse during the focus groups. Therefore, our findings support Thompson and Haytko's (1997) findings because our participants have constructed their identities while narrating about fashion in the focus groups. In this regard, we can argue that there were two types of interpersonal influences present when our participants constructed their identities. The

first type occurred among the participants present in the focus groups, making them rework their identities based on contrasting their own consumption choices with those of the other participants' narratives. The second type of interpersonal influence during identity construction is captured by the deductive code of the same name, which describes those interpersonal influences that occur in everyday life and impact the participants' second-hand consumption behavior. Consequently, we can argue that our participants' identities became socially negotiated in two ways.

Contrasting our findings with the reviewed literature also put forth a limitation: Belk (1984) as well as Solomon and Assael (1987) argue that a variety of consumption objects is needed to adequately capture the complexity of one's self-identity. However, this thesis focuses on one consumption object in particular, that is second-hand clothing. Therefore, it can be argued that the complexity and diversity of our participants' identities could not be fully captured with our focus groups. However, this limitation presents an opportunity for future research, which is further elaborated on in section 5.5.

To conclude, through our research, we were able to enhance the understanding of the green identity construction process in a new context and a specific age group. Our study has also brought two unexpected results, namely the third phase of the green identity construction process *Shift* and the implication that our participants use their consumption motives instead of their way of dressing to express their identity. Lastly, our findings both support and challenge existing theories.

5 Conclusion

This concluding chapter summarizes the most important findings, followed by the presentation of our theoretical and practical contributions. Eventually, the chapter closes with the limitations to this study and how these offer possibilities for potential future research.

5.1 Empirical Findings

This study set out to investigate how a green identity is constructed and expressed among female consumers of second-hand clothing in Gen Z. The posed research question is relevant to examine because the connection between the process of identity construction and sustainability in the context of second-hand clothing is not yet sufficiently explored by academic scholars. Due to the sustainability megatrend and the associated critique, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic accelerating the growth of the resale industry, the here addressed research question is of great importance and can help to close the research gap mentioned above. As second-hand clothing is nowadays used for identity construction, the sample of female Gen Z consumers is particularly relevant due to their practice of using consumption to construct and express their identity. To answer the research question, five focus groups with a total of 23 participants of the aforementioned sample were conducted.

This study found that constructing a green identity in the context of second-hand clothing takes place in five phases: *Sensitization, Self-Gratification, Shift, Socialization,* and *Self-Realization.* These findings are visually presented in figure 7 (see section 4.3). To sum up, the first phase is expressed by consumers through their consumerist mindset and the sale of clothing, whereas the second phase is expressed through thriftiness and fashion leadership. In the third phase, consumers undergo a shift towards 'greener' values, which they then promote in the fourth phase. The last phase is expressed through adopting a green identity to the entire lifestyle, which can also be considered the outcome of the green identity formation process. These phases are temporary, and consumers move through the process in accordance with their shifting consumption behavior.

Moreover, this study brought two rather unexpected results, the first one being the third phase of the identity construction process, *Shift,* which consists mainly of inductive subcategories and was thus not emphasized by scholars before. However, we found that this is a fundamental

phase in constructing a green identity because, without the shift from a consumerist to a sustainability-oriented mindset, a green identity cannot be constructed. As this phase is mainly built on our findings, we can argue that it presents one of our major contributions.

The second remarkable finding is of opposite nature: scholars emphasize that particularly Gen Z consumers use their clothing as a means of self-expression, which was, however, not stressed by our focus group participants. Instead of using their way of dressing to express their identity, our respondents rather use the motives behind shopping second-hand for identity purposes, for instance, shopping second-hand clothing for sustainability reasons.

Consequently, by investigating the above-mentioned research question, we could enhance the understanding of how the construction of a green identity occurs in a new context, that is second-hand clothing, and a specific age group, namely female Gen Z consumers. We further elaborate on our contributions in the following section.

5.2   Theoretical Contributions

With this thesis, we contribute to the academic literature by applying an existing phenomenon to a new context. By doing so, we start filling the research gap that emerges at the intersection of sustainability and identity construction in the context of second-hand clothing in order to deepen the understanding of the process of green identity construction. Furthermore, we contribute by adapting and extending the PTI by Cherrier and Murray (2007) based on the newly investigated context of second-hand clothing.

To begin with, the major part of our findings agrees with previous research. The deductive subcategories that we identified before collecting our own data align with what is proposed by academic scholars. Apart from solely two subcategories that our respondents never brought up, our findings overlap with what we deduced from academic literature. Moreover, we could identify several inductive categories that were not included in the literature we reviewed. Consequently, we were able to support and add to existing research.

Our main contribution is that we complemented the theoretical framework by introducing an additional phase. Conversely to Cherrier and Murray (2007), who initiated the PTI, our findings stress a shift in values. As mentioned before, this finding enhances the understanding of identity construction in a way that consumers must experience a shift in their mindset to construct a green identity.

Moreover, we came closer to solving the paradox that emerged during the literature review. As elaborated on above, Niinimäki (2010) argues that ethical commitment serves as an important driver of purchasing eco-friendly clothing, whereas McNeill and Venter (2019) claim that

consumers who engage in collaborative consumption models do so to express their identity rather than for their ethical commitment. In turn, we found that the motivation for consuming second-hand clothing changes as our participants move through the green identity construction process. At the beginning of their identity construction process, our participants buy second-hand clothing for rather hedonistic motives, such as being trendy and having fun. As they then move through the process of constructing a green identity, purchasing second-hand clothing for sustainability reasons and the adoption of ethical values becomes increasingly important and dominates the final stages of the identity construction process. Thus, we can only partly agree with Niinimäki (2010) but rather disagree with McNeill and Venter (2019).

To conclude, by extending and adapting the number of phases and their characteristics, this work contributes to the existing knowledge of the green identity construction process. In essence, we mainly support what was found by Cherrier and Murray (2007) and further applied by other scholars who used the PTI. Thus, we can confirm the applicability of this theoretical framework in the context of second-hand clothing. Additionally, we were able to obtain a rich understanding specific to the context of second-hand clothing, which allows us to increase the analytical generalizability of our findings. However, due to our very narrow sample (see section 3.3.2), there is still plenty of potential research to be done on this aspect, which we further elaborate on in section 5.5.

Eventually, we can infer that we are currently going through a transformation from conventional fashion models, such as fast fashion, towards more sustainable alternatives. This study taught us that consumers increasingly deal with sustainability-related issues and thus want to consume more sustainably. Hence, as second-hand clothing or further sustainable fashion alternatives are getting more attention from consumers, there is a need for academic scholars to keep up with investigating these changing consumption patterns.

5.3   Practical Implications

Apart from the theoretical contributions, this study can also contribute on a practical level for both marketers and consumers.

First, this thesis is especially relevant for marketers that are interested in resale business models or are already working in the second-hand clothing industry. Through an enhanced understanding of how the consumption of second-hand clothing changes as consumers move through the green identity construction process, marketers can better understand their consumers, particularly those that are female and belong to Gen Z. More specifically, this knowledge can be used in their marketing efforts because marketers can adapt the messaging of their marketing materials based on the phase of the green identity construction process the consumer is in, making the marketing efforts more efficient. For instance, companies targeting

Gen Z consumers that are still at the beginning of their green identity construction process can emphasize the aspect of saving money and finding unique clothing in their messaging, whereas consumers at the later stages of the process can be instead convinced by the sustainability aspects of shopping second-hand.

Second, this study provides valuable insights for consumers purchasing second-hand clothing or sustainable clothing alternatives. The findings of this study are relevant for them as it encourages them to reflect on their own behavior. Moreover, by offering them a means to better understand themselves and the process of how they can construct a green identity, it further enables the readers to place themselves within the process. Additionally, especially for second-hand consumers in the early stages of the green identity construction process, this study and the understanding of this process can provide them with aspiration for their future development towards a green lifestyle.

5.4 Limitations

There are certain aspects that limit the findings of this study, which are relevant to consider in the light of our reflexive and thus self-critical approach (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018).

The first limitation to influence our findings is related to the chosen method of focus groups. To begin with, the ongoing pandemic made it obligatory to conduct all focus groups online. However, the participants of this study are digital natives and most, if not all, have already used Zoom or another similar video telephony software. Moreover, as stated above, conducting the focus groups online allowed us to increase the sample heterogeneity.

As mentioned before, the main advantage of focus groups is the interaction happening between the participants. On the one hand, conducting the focus groups online made it harder to detect the participants' body language; however, on the other hand, the recording function of Zoom allowed us to record the sessions in a non-invasive way, leading to a more natural behavior of the participants. Yet, since our main focus lies on consumers' identity narratives, the body language of our participants was not the primary subject of analysis.

Additionally, a general limitation of focus groups is that the moderator has less control over the course of the focus groups as these can develop a momentum of their own through the interaction of the participants (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Therefore, the moderator tried to find a balance between steering the discussion in the right direction and leaving the participants enough freedom not to constrain them by a predetermined set of questions.

Furthermore, interviewing individuals in a group setting might impact the participants sharing culturally expected views or socially desired answers (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). However,

within the moderator's guideline, we consciously tried not to ask any leading questions or push the participants to say something which fails to comply with their intention. Like this, we aimed to decrease the social desirability bias.

Lastly, there is the risk that some participants in a focus group are overly prominent and keep other participants from speaking up (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). To avoid this, both the moderator and co-moderator constantly paid attention so that everybody had an equal chance to speak up. Additionally, the moderator specifically asked rather shy participants for their opinion on the matter if they did not speak up themselves.

As already touched upon, the two chosen sampling methods, namely purposive and snowball sampling, both have limitations. The main limitation of the two used sampling methods is that they are non-probability sampling methods, hence not random, making them prone to sampling bias (Diekmann, 2018). One limitation of snowball sampling, in particular, is that researchers tend to find participants with similar views and characteristics as the researchers themselves. Therefore, our sample and the reflections that the participants expressed are improbable to represent the population of female Gen Z consumers (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). However, this is a common limitation for qualitative research methods as it is hard to use probability sampling when conducting qualitative research (Diekmann, 2018; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

While striving to maximize the heterogeneity of our sample, we mainly focused on the nationality of our sample. However, despite having eleven different nationalities within our sample, all participants are from Europe. Therefore, we cannot estimate whether the identity construction process through second-hand clothing is different in other parts of the world. Nevertheless, since we never intended to generalize the findings of this qualitative study, we still managed to reach our research goal by providing rich and context-specific insights.

Another aspect that we could not maximize in heterogeneity is the participants' occupation and social backgrounds. As all of them are either full-time university students or university students with a part-time job, their consumption behavior and reflections are generally different from those of persons who work, thus impacting our findings. For instance, they have a relatively limited budget, possibly affecting the importance of saving money through second-hand purchases. Also, students have a different level of sophistication and interest in topics such as the environment, sustainability, or ethics (Yan, Bae & Xu, 2015).

The decision to only examine female Gen Z consumers had, by design, the implication of having a very narrow sample. As already mentioned, we had difficulties acquiring participants younger than born in 1998. Therefore, we could only investigate an age range from 1995 to 1998, making our sample even more narrow. Another aspect that we could not investigate, mainly due to time restrictions, is that of gender, as we only investigated female consumers.

But still, due to this particular focus, it was possible to obtain rich and valuable insights into green identity construction of female Gen Z consumers.

To sum up, our research findings are limited, mainly due to the ongoing pandemic, the choice of focus groups, the chosen sampling methods, as well as the investigated sample.

5.5 Future Research

Eventually, most of the limitations presented in the previous section bear opportunities for future research. In particular, the research gap that we detected can be investigated by exploring different contexts and looking at further consumer groups.

In this regard, one possibility is to widen the sample by looking at further age groups. For instance, researchers can contrast Gen Z with Millennials or even with older generations (e.g., Baby Boomers) to investigate if and how the awareness of sustainability and the image of second-hand clothing varies between different generations. Looking at further consumer groups allows future researchers, on the one hand, to explore further identity construction processes and different ways of expression. On the other hand, they can develop a general model of green identity construction among all age groups, which will, in turn, add to the overall understanding of consumption behavior and identity construction in the context of second-hand clothing.

The same applies to widening the sample in terms of gender. Investigating not only women but also male or non-binary consumers bears the potential for future researchers to find out more about the process of identity construction and expression through second-hand clothing and contrast the outcomes.

Another limitation that we presented above is that we conducted this research solely with university students. This, however, highly limits the sample as students have a different disposable income and level of sophistication compared to people of the same age who work full-time. Therefore, we figure that individuals without a university degree most likely view the topic of second-hand clothing differently. Broadening the sample this way, in turn, offers a more comprehensive picture of second-hand consumers and how they construct their identities.

Likewise, future researchers can explore the proposed research gap by including participants from outside of Europe and thus further maximize the heterogeneity of the sample. This will allow the researchers to get an even better understanding of how a green identity is constructed and expressed by female Gen Z consumers around the world and, in turn, obtain rich and valuable insights.

As already discussed in section 4.4, the third phase of the green identity construction process, *Shift*, was highly prominent in our findings. We believe that this shift bears the potential to be investigated in contexts other than second-hand clothing, particularly those in which the primary drivers behind purchasing a product can vary. In a similar vein, Belk (1984) and Solomon and Assael (1987) emphasize the necessity of considering various consumption objects to capture the complexity of a person's self-identity adequately. Therefore, investigating other consumption objects and contexts as well, makes it possible to fully capture the complexity of consumers' identities and obtain insights that are not specific to the context of second-hand clothing.

Moreover, by examining this research gap through a quantitative study, different aspects of identity construction in the context of second-hand clothing can be investigated. Thus, it is possible to increase the sample units, e.g., in terms of age groups, nationalities, or gender. Conversely to this qualitative study, future researchers can decrease the subjectivity and, in turn, investigate the generalizability of our findings.

To conclude, the understanding of how different consumers construct a green identity in the context of second-hand clothing can be further enhanced through the proposed future research areas. Consequently, extensive research combined with the increasing awareness of the positive impacts of second-hand clothing might prompt more people to change their fashion consumption behavior and ways of thinking, like, for instance, our focus group participant Maja who "truly [does not have] a good reason not to [buy second-hand clothing]" (Maja, Transcript of Focus Group 3, pos. 88).

List of References

Agar, M. & MacDonald, J. (1995). Focus Groups and Ethnography, *Human Organization*, vol. 54, no. 1, pp.78–86.

Alvesson, M. (2003). Beyond Neopositivists, Romantics, and Localists: A Reflexive Approach to Interviews in Organizational Research, *The Academy of Management Review*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp.13–33.

Alvesson, M., Hardy, C. & Harley, B. (2008). Reflecting on Reflexivity: Reflexive Textual Practices in Organization and Management Theory, *Journal of Management Studies*, vol. 45, no. 3, pp.480–501.

Alvesson, M. & Sköldberg, K. (2018). Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research, 3rd edn, Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

Arnould, E. J. & Thompson, C. J. (2005). Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research, *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 31, no. 4, pp.868–882.

Barbarossa, C., Beckmann, S. C., Pelsmacker, P. de, Moons, I. & Gwozdz, W. (2015). A Self-Identity Based Model of Electric Car Adoption Intention: A Cross-Cultural Comparative Study, *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, vol. 42, pp.149–160.

BCG & Vestiaire Collective. (2020). The Consumers Behind Fashion's Growing Secondhand Market, Available Online: https://www.cjoint.com/doc/20_10/JJqhWZxt8xJ_BCG-EN.pdf. [Accessed 28 January 2021].

Becker-Leifhold, C. V. (2018). The Role of Values in Collaborative Fashion Consumption - A Critical Investigation through the Lenses of the Theory of Planned Behavior, *Journal of Cleaner Production*, vol. 199, pp.781–791.

Belk, R. W. (1984). Three Scales to Measure Constructs Related to Materialism: Reliability, Validity, and Relationships to Measures of Happiness, *NA – Advances in Consumer Research*, vol. 11, pp.291–297.

Belk, R. W. (1988). Possessions and the Extended Self, *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp.139–168.

Bell, E., Bryman, A. & Harley, B. (2019). Business Research Methods, 5th edn, Oxford:

Oxford University Press.

Bendelow, G. A. & Williams, S. J. (1998). The Lived Body: Sociological Themes, Embodied Issues, 1st edn, New York, NY: Routledge.

Bhaskar, R. (1989). Reclaiming Reality: A Critical Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy, London, Verso.

BoF & McKinsey & Company. (2021). The State of Fashion 2021, Available Online: https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/McKinsey/Industries/Retail/Our%20Insights/State%20of%20fashion/2021/The-State-of-Fashion-2021-vF.pdf [Accessed 28 January 2021].

Bourdieu, P. (1984). Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste, 8th edn, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Brismar, A. (2019). Seven Forms of Sustainable Fashion, *Green Strategy. Sustainable and Circular Fashion Consulting*, Available Online: https://www.greenstrategy.se/sustainable-fashion/seven-forms-of-sustainable-fashion/ [Accessed 21 March 2021].

Cambridge Dictionary. (n.d.). Sustainability, *Cambridge Dictionary*, Available Online: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/de/worterbuch/englisch/sustainability [Accessed 24 March 2021].

Carson, D., Gilmore, A., Perry, C. & Gronhaug, K. (2001). Qualitative Marketing Research, 1st edn, London; Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

Cervellon, M., Carey, L. & Harms, T. (2012). Something Old, Something Used: Determinants of Women's Purchase of Vintage Fashion vs Second-hand Fashion, *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, vol. 40, no. 12, pp.956–974.

Cervellon, M. & Wernerfelt, A. (2012). Knowledge Sharing among Green Fashion Communities Online: Lessons for the Sustainable Supply Chain, *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, vol. 16, no. 2, pp.176–192.

Cervellon, M.-C., Hjerth, H., Ricard, S. & Carey, L. (2010). Green in Fashion? An Exploratory Study of National Differences in Consumers Concern for Eco-Fashion.

Chandler, D. (2020). Strategic Corporate Social Responsibility: Sustainable Value Creation, 5th edn, Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

Cherrier, H., Black, I. & Lee, M. (2011). Intentional Non-Consumption for Sustainability – Consumer Resistance and/or Anti-Consumption?, *European Journal of Marketing*,

vol. 45, pp.1757–1767.

Cherrier, H. & Murray, J. B. (2007). Reflexive Dispossession and the Self: Constructing a Processual Theory of Identity, *Consumption Markets & Culture*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp.1–29.

Crossley, N. (1996). Intersubjectivity: The Fabric of Social Becoming, London: SAGE.

Dachverband FairWertung. (2016). Altkleidersammlungen in Deutschland: Zahlen, Daten, Fakten, *FairWertung*, Available Online: https://fairwertung.de/blog/blog.21/index.html?entry=page.blog.21 [Accessed 8 June 2020].

Dermody, J., Koenig-Lewis, N., Zhao, A. & Hanmer-Lloyd, S. (2018). Appraising the Influence of Pro-Environmental Self-Identity on Sustainable Consumption Buying and Curtailment in Emerging Markets: Evidence from China and Poland, *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 86, pp. 333-343.

Dickson, A. & Dickson, M. A. (2017). Social Sustainability in Apparel Supply Chains: Organizational Practices for Managing Sub-Contracted Homework, in C. E. Henninger, P. J. Alevizou, H. Goworek, & D. Ryding (eds), *Sustainability in Fashion*, Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp.193–216.

Dickson, M. A., Eckman, M. J. & Loker, S. (2009). Social Responsibility in the Global Apparel Industry, New York, NY: Fairchild Books.

Dictionary.com. (n.d.). Socialization, *www.dictionary.com*, Available Online: https://www.dictionary.com/browse/socialization [Accessed 26 April 2021].

Diekmann, A. (2018). Empirische Sozialforschung: Grundlagen, Methoden, Anwendungen, 12th edn, Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag.

Dittmar, H. (1992). The Social Psychology of Material Possessions: To Have Is to Be, New York: St. Martin's Press; London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Dubois, A. & Gadde, L.-E. (2002). Systematic Combining: An Abductive Approach to Case Research, *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 55, pp.553–560.

Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R. & Jackson, P. (2015). Management and Business Research, 5th edn, Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

Eisler, A., Eisler, H. & Yoshida, M. (2003). Perception of Human Ecology: Cross-Cultural and Gender Comparisons, *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, vol. 23, pp.89–101.

Ellen MacArthur Foundation. (2017). New Textiles Economy: Redesigning Fashion's Future, Conker House Publishing, Available Online: https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/assets/downloads/publications/A-New-Textiles-Economy_Full-Report_Updated_1-12-17.pdf [Accessed 9 April 2020].

Elliott, R. (1997). Existential Consumption and Irrational Desire, *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 31, no. 3/4, pp.285–296.

Elliott, R. & Wattanasuwan, K. (1998). Brands as Symbolic Resources for the Construction of Identity, *International Journal of Advertising*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp.131–144.

Emberley, J. (1987). The Fashion Apparatus and the Deconstruction of Postmodern Subjectivity, in A. Kroker & M. Kroker (eds), *Body Invaders*, Montreal: New World Perspectives, pp.39–50.

Environmental Audit Committee. (2019). Fixing Fashion: Clothing Consumption and Sustainability - Environmental Audit Committee, Sixteenth Report of Session 2017–19, UK Parliament, Available Online: https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmenvaud/1952/full-report.html#heading-7.

Firat, A. F. (1992). Postmodernism and the Marketing Organization, *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp.79–83.

Francis, T. & Hoefel, F. (2018). Generation Z Characteristics and Its Implications for Companies - McKinsey, Available Online: https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/consumer-packaged-goods/our-insights/true-gen-generation-z-and-its-implications-for-companies# [Accessed 28 January 2021].

Gabriel, Y. & Lang, T. (2015). The Unmanageable Consumer, 3rd edn, 20th anniversary edition., London; Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

Geertz, C. (1973). Thick Description: Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture, in C. Geertz (ed.), *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books.

Gerval, O. (2008). Fashion: Concept to Catwalk, London: A & C Black.

Giddens, A. (1991). Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Goffman, E. (1959). The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, 1st edn, New York, NY: Anchor.

Grayson, K. & Martinec, R. (2004). Consumer Perceptions of Iconicity and Indexicality and

Their Influence on Assessments of Authentic Market Offerings, *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 31, pp.296–313.

Greenpeace. (2015). Wegwerfware Kleidung, Hamburg: Greenpeace, Available Online: https://www.greenpeace.de/sites/www.greenpeace.de/files/publications/20151123_greenpeace_modekonsum_flyer.pdf [Accessed 18 January 2021].

Guba, E. G. & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research, in N. K. Deniz & Y. S. Lincoln (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, pp.105–117.

Guiot, D. & Roux, D. (2010). A Second-Hand Shoppers' Motivation Scale: Antecedents, Consequences, and Implications for Retailers, *Journal of Retailing*, vol. 86, no. 4, pp.355–371.

Haanpää, L. (2007). THE COLOUR GREEN A Structural Approach to the Environment-Consumption Nexus.

Han, J. Y.-C. & Sweet, S. (2021). Consumers Practicing Sustainable Consumption: Value Construction in Second-Hand Fashion Markets, in R. Bali Swain & S. Sweet (eds), *Sustainable Consumption and Production, Volume II: Circular Economy and Beyond*, Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp.171–193.

Hansmann, R. & Binder, C. R. (2020). Determinants of Different Types of Positive Environmental Behaviors: An Analysis of Public and Private Sphere Actions, 20, *Sustainability*, vol. 12, no. 20, p.8547.

Hayat, U. (2011). Future Challenges for Sustainable Investing, Available Online: https://www.ft.com/content/a40fcd3e-3092-11e0-9de3-00144feabdc0 [Accessed 28 March 2021].

Herjanto, H., Scheller-Sampson, J. & Erickson, E. (2019). The Increasing Phenomenon of Second-Hand Clothes Purchase: Insights from the Literature. *Jurnal Manajemen dan Kewirausahaan*, vol. 18, no. 1, pp.1–15.

Hogg, M. K. & Michell, P. C. N. (2021). Identity, Self and Consumption: A Conceptual Framework, *Research Portal Lancaster University*, Available Online: http://www.research.lancs.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/identity-self-and-consumption-a-conceptual-framework(09e5a666-90e7-4229-95e5-192967123ded)/export.html [Accessed 30 March 2021].

Holt, D. B. (2002). Why Do Brands Cause Trouble? A Dialectical Theory of Consumer Culture and Branding, *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 29, no. 1, pp.70–90.

Hoskins, T. E. (2013). Op-Ed. The Trouble with Second-Hand Clothes, *The Business of Fashion*, Available Online: https://www.businessoffashion.com/opinions/news-analysis/op-ed-the-trouble-with-second-hand-clothes [Accessed 31 March 2021].

Iran, S. & Schrader, U. (2017). Collaborative Fashion Consumption and Its Environmental Effects, *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, vol. 21, no. 4, pp.468–482.

James, W. (1890). The Principles of Psychology, 1st edn, New York, NY, US: Henry Holt and Co.

Jenkins, R. (1996). Social Identity, London: Routledge.

Joergens, C. (2006). Ethical Fashion: Myth or Future Trend?, *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp.360–371.

Kaiser, S. B. (1990). The Social Psychology of Clothing : Symbolic Appearances in Context, 1-2nd edn, New York, NY: Macmillan.

Kaplowitz, M. D. & Hoehn, J. P. (2001). Do Focus Groups and Individual Interviews Reveal the Same Information for Natural Resource Valuation?, *Ecological Economics*, vol. 36, no. 2, pp.237–247.

Kidd, P. S. & Parshall, M. B. (2000). Getting the Focus and the Group: Enhancing Analytical Rigor in Focus Group Research, *Qualitative Health Research*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp.293–308.

Kilbourne, W. & Pickett, G. (2008). How Materialism Affects Environmental Beliefs, Concern, and Environmentally Responsible Behavior, *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 61, pp.885–893.

Kim, I., Jung, H. J. & Lee, Y. (2021). Consumers' Value and Risk Perceptions of Circular Fashion: Comparison between Secondhand, Upcycled, and Recycled Clothing, *Sustainability*, vol. 13, no. 3, pp.1208–1231.

Kitzinger, J. (1994). The Methodology of Focus Groups: The Importance of Interaction between Research Participants, *Sociology of Health & Illness*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp.103–121.

Kleine, S., Kleine, R. & Allen, C. (1995). How Is a Possession 'Me' or 'Not Me'? Characterizing Types and an Antecedent of Material Possession Attachment, *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 22, pp.327–43.

Kuckartz, U. (2018). Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse: Methoden, Praxis, Computerunterstützung,

4th edn, Weinheim Basel: Beltz Juventa.

Kuckartz. (2019). Analyzing Qualitative Data with MAXQDA, Basel: Springer International Publishing.

Lang, C. & Armstrong, C. M. J. (2018a). Collaborative Consumption: The Influence of Fashion Leadership, Need for Uniqueness, and Materialism on Female Consumers' Adoption of Clothing Renting and Swapping, *Sustainable Production and Consumption*, vol. 13, pp.37–47.

Lang, C. & Armstrong, C. M. J. (2018b). Fashion Leadership and Intention toward Clothing Product-Service Retail Models, *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, vol. 22, no. 4, pp.571–587.

Lubin, D. A. & Esty, D. C. (2010). The Sustainability Imperative, *Harvard Business Review*, pp.42–50.

Lundblad, L. & Davies, I. A. (2016). The Values and Motivations behind Sustainable Fashion Consumption, *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp.149–162.

Mayring, P. (2010). Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse, in G. Mey & K. Mruck (eds), *Handbuch Qualitative Forschung in der Psychologie*, Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, pp.601–613.

Mayring, P. & Fenzl, T. (2019). Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse, in N. Baur & J. Blasius (eds), *Handbuch Methoden der empirischen Sozialforschung*, Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, pp.633–648.

McCracken, G. (1987). Advertising: Meaning Or Information, *NA – Advances in Consumer Research*, vol. 14.

McCracken, G. (1993). The Value of the Brand: An Anthropological Perspective, in *Brand Equity and Advertising*, Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

McCracken, G. D. (1990). Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

McNeill, L. & Venter, B. (2019). Identity, Self-Concept and Young Women's Engagement with Collaborative, Sustainable Fashion Consumption Models, *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, vol. 43, no. 4, pp.368–378.

McQuillan, D. (2019). Fashionopolis: Why Cheap Fast Fashion Costs so Much, *The Irish Times*, Available Online: https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/fashionopolis-

why-cheap-fast-fashion-costs-so-much-1.4075787 [Accessed 28 March 2021].

Moisander, J. & Pesonen, S. (2002). Narratives of Sustainable Ways of Living: Constructing the Self and the Other as a Green Consumer, *Management Decision*, vol. 40, no. 4, pp.329–342.

Mortara, A. & Ironico, S. (2011). Ethical Fashion Shoppers: Beyond the Hedonic/Utilitarian Motivations Dichotomy? An Explorative Research, Available Online: http://archives.marketing-trends-congress.com/2011/Materiali/Paper/CSR/Mortara_Ironico.pdf.

Netter, S. & Pedersen, E. R. G. (2019). Motives of Sharing: Examining Participation in Fashion Reselling and Swapping Markets, in S. S. Muthu (ed.), *Sustainable Fashion: Consumer Awareness and Education*, Singapore: Springer Singapore, pp.37–52.

Nidumolu, R., Prahalad, C. K. & Rangaswami, M. R. (2013). Why Sustainability Is Now the Key Driver of Innovation, *Engineering Management Review, IEEE*, vol. 41, pp.30–37.

Niinimäki, K. (2010). Eco-Clothing, Consumer Identity and Ideology, *Sustainable Development*, vol. 18, pp.150–162.

Ottman, J. (2011). The New Rules of Green Marketing: Strategies, Tools, and Inspiration for Sustainable Branding, San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Peattie, K. (2001). Towards Sustainability: The Third Age of Green Marketing, *The Marketing Review*, vol. 2, pp.129-146.

Peattie, K. (2010). Green Consumption: Behavior and Norms, *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, vol. 35, no. 1, pp.195–228.

Perera, L. C. R. (2014). A Processual Theory of Green Identity Formation: The Case of Young Environmentalists in Australia, *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, vol. 38, no. 3, pp.289–296.

Putnam, H. (1987). The Many Faces of Realism, La Salle, IL: Open Court.

PwC. (2020). Gen Z Is Talking. Are You Listening?, Available Online: https://www.pwc.de/de/handel-und-konsumguter/gen-z-is-talking-are-you-listening.pdf [Accessed 30 January 2021].

Rennstam, J. & Wästerfors, D. (2018). Analyze! - Crafting Your Data in Qualitative Research, Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Richard, B., Sivo, S. A., Orlowski, M., Ford, R. C., Murphy, J., Boote, D. N. & Witta, E. L.

(2021). Qualitative Research via Focus Groups: Will Going Online Affect the Diversity of Your Findings?, *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, vol. 62, no. 1, pp.32–45.

Ricoeur, P. (1984). Time and Narrative, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Ricoeur, P. (1992). Oneself as Another, translated by K. Blamey, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Ritson, M., Elliott, R. & Eccles, S. (1996). Reframing Ikea: Commodity-Signs, Consumer Creativity and the Social/Self Dialectic, *NA – Advances in Consumer Research*, vol. 23.

Roux, D. & Guiot, D. (2008). Measuring Second-Hand Shopping Motives, Antecedents and Consequences, *Recherche et Applications en Marketing (English Edition)*, vol. 23, no. 4, pp.63–91.

Roux, D. & Izberk-Bilgin, E. (2018). Consumer Resistance and Power Relationships in the Marketplace, in E. J. Arnould & C. Thompson (eds), *Consumer Culture Theory*, London: SAGE, pp.295–317.

Saraiva, A., Fernandes, E. & von Schwedler, M. (2020). The Green Identity Formation Process in Organic Consumer Communities: Environmental Activism and Consumer Resistance, *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp.69–86.

Schaefer, A. & Crane, A. (2005). Addressing Sustainability and Consumption, *Journal of Macromarketing*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp.76–92.

Schau, H. J. (2018). Identity Projects and the Marketplace, in C. J. Thompson & E. J. Arnould (eds), *Consumer Culture Theory*, London: SAGE, pp.19–39.

Seyfang, G. (2005). Shopping for Sustainability: Can Sustainable Consumption Promote Ecological Citizenship?, *Environmental Politics*, vol. 14, no. 2, pp.290–306.

Simmel, G. (1957). Fashion, *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 62, no. 6, pp.541–558.

Solomon, M. & Assael, H. (1987). The Forest or the Trees?: A Gestalt Approach to Symbolic Consumption, in: Marketing and Semiotics, *New Directions in the Study of Signs for Sale*, vol. 77, pp.189–217.

Stahel, W. R. (2016). The Circular Economy, *Nature*, vol. 531, no. 7595, pp.435–438.

Stern, N. (2006). Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change, Available Online: https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.hm-

treasury.gov.uk/sternreview_index.htm [Accessed 14 February 2021].

Stewart, D. W. & Shamdasani, P. (2017). Online Focus Groups, *Journal of Advertising*, vol. 46, no. 1, pp.48–60.

Stewart, D. W. & Shamdasani, P. N. (1990). Focus Groups: Theory and Practice, Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, p.153.

Sweet, S., Aflaki, R. & Stalder, M. (2019). The Swedish Market for Pre-Owned Apparel and Its Role in Moving the Fashion Industry towards More Sustainable Practices, Stockholm: Stockholm School of Economics.

Thomas, D. (2019). Fashionopolis: The Price of Fast Fashion & the Future of Clothes, London: Head of Zeus.

Thompson, C. & Haytko, D. (1997). Speaking of Fashion: Consumers' Uses of Fashion Discourses and the Appropriation of Countervailing Cultural Meanings, *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 24, pp.15–42.

Thompson, J. B. (1995). The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

thredUP. (2020). 2020 Resale Report, Available Online: https://www.thredup.com/resale/static/thredup-resaleReport2020-42b42834f03ef2296d83a44f85a3e2b3.pdf.

Tian, K., Bearden, W. & Hunter, G. (2001). Consumers' Need for Uniqueness: Scale Development and Validation, *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 28, pp.50–66.

Tobin, G. A. & Begley, C. M. (2004). Methodological Rigour within a Qualitative Framework, *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, vol. 48, no. 4, pp.388–396.

Tuan, Y.-F. (1980). The Significance of the Artifact, *Geographical Review*, vol. 70, no. 4, pp.462–472.

Tung, T., Koenig, H. F. & Chen, H.-L. (2017). Effects of Green Self-Identity and Cognitive and Affective Involvement on Patronage Intention in Eco-Friendly Apparel Consumption: A Gender Comparison, *Sustainability*, vol. 9, no. 11, pp.1–17.

UN Environment. (2019). Global Chemicals Outlook II. From Legacies to Innovative Solutions, United Nations Environment Programme, Available Online: https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/report/global-chemicals-outlook-ii-legacies-innovative-solutions.

United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. (1992). Agenda 21, Rio de Janeiro, Available Online: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf.

Vojnovic, I. (2009). Intergenerational and Intragenerational Equity Requirements for Sustainability, *Environmental Conservation*, vol. 22, no. 3, pp.223–228.

Wendling, Z. A., Emerson, J. W., de Sherbinin, A. & Esty, D. C. (2020). 2020 Environmental Performance Index, New Haven, CT: Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy.

World Commission on Environment and Development. (1987). Our Common Future, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

WRAP. (2017). Valuing Our Clothes: The Cost of UK Fashion, Waste and Resources Action Programme, Available Online: https://wrap.org.uk/resources/report/valuing-our-clothes-cost-uk-fashion.

Yan, R., Bae, S. Y. & Xu, H. (2015). Second-Hand Clothing Shopping among College Students: The Role of Psychographic Characteristics, *Young Consumers*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp.85–98.

Appendix A: Pre-Questionnaire

1. How often do you purchase second-hand clothing?
   - multiple times per month
   - once every three months
   - twice a year
   - once a year
2. What's your first name?
3. In which year were you born?
4. What's your nationality?
5. What's your occupation?
   - high-school student
   - university student
   - university student with part-time job
   - working full time
   - other (please specify)
6. Is it okay for you that we record the focus group through video and audio? Disclaimer: Only Gloria and Julia will work with the recordings and no one else will see them.
   - yes
   - no

Appendix B: LUSEM Consent Form

LUND UNIVERSITY
School of Economics and Management

Clothes make the (Wo)man: A Qualitative Study of the Construction and Expression of a Green Identity through Second-Hand Clothing By Julia Deutschen & Gloria Moll

Interview Consent Form

I have been given information about *Clothes make the (Wo)man: A Qualitative Study of the Construction and Expression of a Green Identity through Second-Hand Clothing* and discussed the research project with *Julia Deutschen* and *Gloria Moll* who are conducting this research as a part of a Master's in *International Marketing & Brand Management* supervised by *Veronika Tarnovskaya.*

I understand that, if I consent to participate in this project, I will be asked to give the researcher a duration of approximately *1 hour* of my time to participate in the process.

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary, I am free to refuse to participate and I am free to withdraw from the research at any time.

By signing below, I am indicating my consent to participate in the research as it has been described to me. I understand that the data collected from my participation will be used for thesis and journal publications, and I consent for it to be used in that manner.

Name: …………………………………………………………

Email: ………………………………………………………….

Signed: ………………………………………………………..

Appendix C: Moderator's Guideline

1. Would you share the story about how you started purchasing second-hand clothing?

2. How did your overall buying behavior change since you started to purchase second-hand clothing? And also did your second-hand buying behavior change?

3. How consistently do you purchase second-hand clothing? Do you sometimes make compromises?

4. What were your motivations for purchasing second-hand clothing? And did this motivation change over time?

5. Do the people that you surround yourself with also purchase second-hand clothing or are you the only one? *To the ones where the social field buys second-hand:*
   - Do you think that your friends/the people around you have an impact on your purchasing behavior?
   - Do you share the same values as your friends/people around you?

6. How did others (e.g. family, friends, colleagues) react towards the change in consumption behavior?

7. How open do you communicate your consumption behavior/actively promote your consumption behavior/share your experiences towards your friends/others?

8. Did the behavior of purchasing second-hand clothing influence other consumption behaviors as well?
   - How would you describe your general lifestyle?
   - Does your current lifestyle differ from a few years ago?

9. Imagine your life in 5-10 years: How will you integrate the topic of sustainability in your personal future?

Appendix D: Coding System

Table 2: Coding System

Code	Sub-Code	Definition	Excerpts	Coding Rules
1 Sensitization		The first phase in the identity construction process serves as an entry-gate to the respondents' 'second-hand journey'.	-	-
	1a Consumerism	Consumerism "instills individuals with the belief that happiness, accomplishment, and satisfaction can be attained through consumption" (Roux & Izberk-Bilgin, 2018, p.301).	"I would say from like the age of 14 to 16, I was really selling stuff to earn money to buy more." (Katharina, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 4) "So, then, of course, I realized that it really is the way to go, and I really tried to limit my spending and the amount of clothing that I was buying." (Elena, Transcript of Focus Group 5, pos. 10)	The respondent emphasizes the society's tendency to value consumerism and materialism.
Deductive	1b Awareness in Society	Society is aware of issues concerning sustainability. Thus, for instance, people in society have a 'green attitude'. An attitude is "the degree to which somebody has a favorable or unfavorable appraisal of the given behavior" (Becker-Leifhold, 2018, p.783), whereas the adjective 'green' refers to the environmental consciousness and pro-environmental/ethical attitudes of a person (Tung, Koenig & Chen, 2017).	"I mean, like, I feel like I have a lot of friends that do it for sustainable reasons, but on the other hand I just feel like it's just such a big movement, at least in Vienna, it's such a big movement and I feel like that's like people do it because it's cool." (Mia, Transcript of Focus Group 1, pos. 39) "I feel like there is a major change going on in society during the last couple of years. And we've all realized or recognized that." (Katharina, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 21)	The respondent emphasizes the society's environmentally conscious attitudes and values or that the awareness about environmental issues has increased.

	1c Sustainability Consciousness	Willingness to buy sustainable/ethical products includes avoiding the use of plastic, buying products with less or environmentally friendly packaging, and buying brands that promote sustainable practices (Niinimäki, 2010; PwC, 2020).	"For me it has been like a mutual thinking about it, not only to buy second-hand, but also to mostly buy sustainable stuff." (Vanessa, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 22) "So, that really started to switch from, 'okay, it's just the aesthetics' to (…) be the whole sustainability thing." (Elena, Transcript of Focus Group 5, pos. 10)	The respondent emphasizes the willingness to buy green products.
Inductive	*1D Selling/Donating Clothing*		"I think I started selling clothes first because I noticed that I have a lot and I don't need everything." (Emma, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 8) "I think that I started buying it because I started donating clothes. And then I started going into the shops that I was donating the clothes and then I started to look and then I kind of gradually started buying more and more from second-hand." (Maja, Transcript of Focus Group 3, pos. 3)	The respondent says that she sells second-hand clothing on flea markets or other second-hand platforms.

	1E Higher Education	"But for me, it would also, like, in the beginning of my studies, because, (..) we studied (…) economics on textiles, and it was way more important to think about it and how the things got produced and everything like that." (Jessica, Transcript of Focus Group 1, pos. 47) "Yes, also for me, I already said that I didn't start because of sustainability reasons, but (…) I also study International Business and Sustainability and at some point, we had this seminar with (…) some young girls coming from Myanmar and Bangladesh." (Paola, Transcript of Focus Group 5, pos. 11) "For me, it was when I was studying, and I have a subject where I learned how much water waste (…) is involved in the fashion industry, and (…) for me, it was a little alarming." (Leonor, Transcript of Focus Group 5, pos. 12)	The respondent has gained awareness regarding sustainability issues through her university studies.
	1F Family and Peer Influence	"If I think of myself, I've always done it, like I think, already my mom did it. So, it's kind of been a natural thing to me." (Sofia, Transcript of Focus Group 1, pos. 5) "Actually, when we were younger, my mom bought a lot of second-hand for us because [...] she always said that it's way healthier for us because the things were washed several times and she was really concerned with all the chemicals that were in the clothing." (Elena, Transcript of Focus Group 5, pos. 21)	The respondent describes that her family has already bought second-hand items before; thus, the respondent grew up wearing second-hand clothing.

2 Self-Gratification		The second phase captures that consumers in this stage like to go second-hand shopping for pleasure, as a group activity, or simply to save money. Further, they value that second-hand clothing offers them a means to be trendy and distinguish themselves from other individuals.	-	-
Deductive	2a Fashion Leadership	"Fashion trends are most commonly led by consumers who are known as fashion leaders, and they are generally people who have a very strong interest in new fashion and enjoy consuming more stylish fashion items" (Lang & Armstrong, 2018a, p.572).	"I mean, it's cool, [...] I feel like a lot of people just do it because it's cool and trendy right now." (Mia, Transcript of Focus Group 1, pos. 39) "I would agree on that. So, I think, in the beginning when I started buying second-hand, it was more of a trend for me, and I picked up on that trend. I thought it's cool, it's nice and you find good items at the second-hand shop." (Theresa, Transcript of Focus Group 4, pos. 46)	The respondent wears second-hand clothing to follow the latest fashion trends and diffuse change in fashion.
	2b Distinction	Distinction refers to consumers expressing individual values to make a statement and differentiate oneself from the local norm (Bourdieu, 1984).	"So overall, (…) still saving money, and then I realized all the appeals because it's cheaper, you can end up with things not everybody else has and it's good for the environment." (Lily, Transcript of Focus Group 1, pos. 3) "But if I wanted like nice, different pieces then I'd go to vintage shops [...]." (Grace, Transcript of Focus Group 4, pos. 3)	The respondent says that she wants to distinguish herself from other individuals by wearing second-hand clothing as it is individual or unique.
	2c Cohesion	Cohesion refers to fashion assisting consumers in cohering with their environment and fitting in with the local style (Simmel, 1957).	"Because you feel like you're connected to a group and you want to be, like the ones that you're hanging out with." (Emma, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 41)	The respondent says that she wants to cohere to her environment and fit in with the local style.
	2d Consumption as Self-Expression	"Consumption [...] becomes a means of self-expression – as opposed, for, to buying or wearing brands to fit in with the norms of groups" (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).	-	The respondent emphasizes her tendency to consume in order to express herself.

	2E Thriftiness	"I think for me, it's like, uhm (…), I would always expect that second-hand would be a little cheaper than normal stores." (Jessica, Transcript of Focus Group 1, pos. 16) "And also for me, it was not about sustainability at first, it was just out of curiosity, and then I realized for the first time that I can buy very beautiful clothes and sometimes almost new clothes for much less money." (Paola, Transcript of Focus Group 5, pos. 5)	The respondent says that she buys second-hand clothing in order to save money.
Inductive	2F Second-Hand Shopping for Pleasure	"We just went because it was a fun activity and there was nothing else to do." (Emilia, Transcript of Focus Group 1, pos. 24) "I think I just really love to go vintage shopping." (Yara, Transcript of Focus Group 3, pos. 91) "Yeah, I mean like (…) make it an activity. And (…) yeah, if it's like outside, I think most people enjoy it." (Linnea, Transcript of Focus Group 4, pos. 26)	The respondent says that she enjoys second-hand shopping.
	2G Second-Hand Shopping as a Group Activity	"And then e.g. in Berlin, it was more an activity with friends, that someone would visit me, we would go into the city and go into second-hand stores (...) and to spend some time together." (Vanessa, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 28) "And it's such a social activity, that (…) if you have friends that, like, go to the second-hand shop, you end up going anyway." (Grace, Transcript of Focus Group 4, pos. 37)	The respondent describes that she mainly shops second-hand clothing in groups.

	2H Compromising		"I'm making compromises (...) by going for maybe a bigger size, like a size I would not buy in store, but I know that I can make (..) it fit somehow. [laughs]." (Lily, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 24) "There are certain things that I buy (…) new, but that's mostly when I can't find it. So, sometimes, especially with underwear, socks, and stuff like that, it's kind of hard." (Maja, Transcript of Focus Group 3, pos. 22)	The respondent is not strict in purchasing second-hand clothing and compromises to a certain degree, e.g. in certain product categories or sizes.
3 Shift		The third phase describes the process in which consumers undergo a shift from a rather consumerist to a sustainability-aware mindset.	-	-
Deductive	3a Consumer Resistance	Consumer resistance refers to the "resistance against a culture of consumption and the marketing of mass-produced meanings" (Penaloza & Price, 1993 cited in Cherrier, Black & Lee, 2011, p.1759), for instance towards fast fashion.	"Even when you shop second-hand, I still, e.g. when I find an H&M t-shirt or something, I don't want to buy it." (Sofia, Transcript of Focus Group 1, pos. 89) "And maybe buying less stuff now than I did a few years ago, that's a big thing." (Aino, Transcript of Focus Group 3, pos. 77) "I've tried to like (…) limit my consumption of (…) any fast fashion, so now I only buy second-hand." (Grace, Transcript of Focus Group 4, pos. 3)	The respondent wants to express her resistance towards other forms of consumption (e.g. fast fashion).

	3b Dispossession Strategies	The participants are disposing of objects in order to change their consumption lifestyle. Dispossession also captures "a change of self, shedding away an old self for a newer self" as well as "a process of giving up one's current self" (Cherrier & Murray, 2007, p.2).	"And then I actually started to think about my buying behavior and to, yeah, kind of get rid of stuff to minimize the amount of clothes I own." (Mia, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 4) "I started to reduce the amount of clothes also because it started to be, like, second-hand clothes versus vintage." (Leonor, Transcript of Focus Group 5, pos. 15)	The respondent has started to reduce her possessions.
Inductive	*3C Second-Hand Consumption for Sustainability*		"So, (…) I feel like that's when I started doing second-hand shopping, not just for fun but also for sustainable reasons." (Mia, Transcript of Focus Group 1, pos. 7) "And that's why I also (…) think that second-hand shopping is the best way to be sustainable." (Klara, Transcript of Focus Group 4, pos. 45)	The respondent says that she acquires second-hand clothing because of sustainability reasons.
	3D Green Value Transformation		"I definitely also have become more conscious over the years and also, towards all regards, environmental, but also social." (Vanessa, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 71) "But then yeah (…) over the years I'd say, I started to become more environmentally, and sustainability engaged." (Grace, Transcript of Focus Group 4, pos. 3) "So, that really started to switch from, 'okay, it's just the aesthetics' to (…) be the whole sustainability thing." (Elena, Transcript of Focus Group 5, pos. 10)	The respondent has observed a shift in her own values since she started purchasing second-hand clothing or acting sustainably.

3E Second-Hand Consumption for Mental Well-Being	"If I would buy second-hand, I would have at least the feeling that I'm not buying something new, not creating, like nothing new gets created and no new materials are sourced for this." (Vanessa, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 22) "Whereas, when you second-hand shop you don't feel so guilty." (Grace, Transcript of Focus Group 4, pos. 14) "Sometimes, I justify my longing for buying clothes with buying second-hand." (Elena, Transcript of Focus Group 5, pos. 10)	The respondent says that she buys second-hand clothing or sustainable products because it weighs less on her conscience.
3F Focus on Quality and Fabric	"So, like, I prefer (..), I've started to prefer (…) better materials and also, I'm more checking the brands." (Sofia, Transcript of Focus Group 1, pos. 89) "And if there is something I want; I try to find good quality second-hand. So yeah, more expensive pieces, but that are a better quality and probably last." (Grace, Transcript of Focus Group 4, pos. 11)	The respondent especially cares about the quality or the fabric (i.e. the material composition) before purchasing the item.
3G Focus on Social Sustainability	"I definitely also have become more conscious over the years and also, like towards all regards, environmental, but also social. What are the conditions of labor, especially behind clothes?" (Vanessa, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 71) "I think it's an important topic to bring up, especially sustainability, regarding both social sustainability and environmental sustainability." (Maja, Transcript of Focus Group 3, pos. 58)	The respondent especially emphasizes the social dimension of the triple bottom line.

4 Socialization		The fourth phase mirrors the social interactions happening while consumers construct their identities.	-	-
	4a Interpersonal influences	Interpersonal influences describe "the need to identify or enhance one's image with significant others through the acquisition and use of products and brands, the willingness to conform to the expectations of others regarding purchase decisions, and/or the tendency to learn about products and services by observing others and/or seeking information from others" (Bearden et al., 1989, p.474, cited in Becker-Leifhold, 2018).	"But my sisters do and I think it's something that we all started doing when we got a little bit older and got influenced by each other." (Lily, Transcript of Focus Group 1, pos. 36) "No, I think that definitely, because we started this (..) when we were teenagers. So, we were all influenced and encouraged each other as well." (Emilia, Transcript of Focus Group 1, pos. 44) "Well, I think I influenced my mom, but I really cannot think of anyone who influenced my behavior." (Aino, Transcript of Focus Group 3, pos. 40)	The respondent is not only influenced by, but also influences other individuals in her social field to buy second-hand clothing.
Deductive	4b Promotion among own Social Field	"Once the new identity is stabilised, most of the participants begin to influence and share their experience and new habits of consumption and lifestyle, acting as agents of change" (Saraiva, Fernandes & von Schwedler, 2020, p.79).	"I get super excited when I find something cool, so I tell everyone, which is maybe be a bit annoying, but I don't care. So, I'm like: ooh, I found it in a second-hand shop, it's so cool!" (Mia, Transcript of Focus Group 1, pos. 61) "I'd say that I'm very open with it! Like, I think that most people who know me know that I only buy second-hand. It's a thing [laughs]." (Maja, Transcript of Focus Group 3, pos. 56) "I think that it's more like I influenced other people, because of, basically, my major and my knowledge about it. And I start with facts! Like: 'If you buy it, you are wasting a lot of water!' And: 'You are polluting stuff!' And it's more like I am the one who [laughs] tries to change minds." (Leonor, Transcript of Focus Group 5, pos. 26)	The respondent promotes second-hand clothing among her social field. However, compared to 4c, they do not necessarily have to change their behavior.

	4c Ethical Commitment and Values	Ethical commitment "refers to the values and beliefs in the context of the relationship between humans and the environment. The level of endorsement in an environmental worldview serves as a measure for environmental consciousness and a pro-environment orientation" (Becker-Leifhold, 2018, p.785).	"And I think it's like, then, you did more because it was fun, for me at least. And now it is more an ethical question, kind of. It wasn't, of course, we knew it was better and stuff, but yeah. It changed [laughs]." (Emilia, Transcript of Focus Group 1, pos. 6) "But then yeah (…) over the years I'd say, I started to become more environmentally, and sustainability engaged." (Grace, Transcript of Focus Group 4, pos. 3) "And I became super aware of what I bought, like (…) if I bought salmon, where did the salmon come from? How they (…) transport the fish from one country to another. And definitely, downsized my food products (…) from animals (…) and (…) I became more concerned about the way that some products are produced." (Leonor, Transcript of Focus Group 5, pos. 42)	The respondent shares ethical values or ethical commitment.
	4d Group Identity	Being involved in a subculture of consumption, with people who share the same values and adopt other consumption and lifestyle practices. These "new connections [...] help participants reshape their consumption practices and reinforce their environmental convictions" (Saraiva, Fernandes & von Schwedler, 2020, p.77).	"Because you feel like you're connected to a group and you want to be, like the ones that you're hanging out with." (Emma, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 41) "Yeah, I would say that all of my friends are really into (…) vintage shopping. It's like a big bonding activity, I think, within our friendship group, to go second-hand shopping and checking out some new stores (…), showing each other the stuff that you find." (Yara, Transcript of Focus Group 3, pos. 38)	The respondent regularly meets with other individuals that share the same values, leading to a common group identity.

5 Self-Realization		The fifth phase represents the final stage in the consumers' green identity construction and can thus be interpreted as an outcome of their identity formation process.	-	-
Deductive	5a Adoption of Green Identity to Lifestyle	"Lifestyle as a theoretical concept means the totality of a person's social practices, and the routines incorporated into habits, as well as the story that he/she tells about them (Niinimäki, 2010, p.152).	"I would say […] stuff for my home. So like furniture, whatever, like design stuff that's yeah, looking into that, because you can find really old and cool stuff that used to be really expensive but then you can find it a lot cheaper second-hand." (Emma, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 53) "So maybe questioning my upbringing, rethinking stuff, buy less, make it last, and just incorporate a more sustainable mindset into my whole life, basically. Just so, like I said, questioning maybe a few things and go for the more sustainable choice in the end." (Elena, Transcript of Focus Group 5, pos. 50)	The respondent says that she has adopted her green identity to further areas of her life, e.g. organic food, living plastic free.
	5b Green Leisure Activities	This code describes freetime activities that are practiced environmentally conscious and in accordance with green attitudes and values (see code 1b).	-	The respondent describes certain leisure activities that fit a green lifestyle, e.g. DIY or gardening.
Inductive	*5C Prioritization of Second-Hand*		"And (…) today, it's kind of my routine shopping. So, I would consider going second-hand first, and if I don't have anything I want to buy, then I would consider other stores." (Jessica, Transcript of Focus Group 1, pos. 4) "In the beginning, I started doing it sometimes because you can buy some cool stuff. But now it's where I go first." (Maja, Transcript of Focus Group 3, pos. 17)	The respondent prefers second-hand shopping over the purchase of new (first-hand) items.

	5D Career in Sustainability	"And even in my career, I envision to have a job in the future that creates some positive impact, be it social, be it in other ways." (Vanessa, Transcript of Focus Group 2, pos. 73) "I will work with children, because I'm studying to become a primary school teacher, so I think (…) here it is crucial to (…) clarify these topics and to educate the children about these important topics [...]." (Klara, Transcript of Focus Group 4, pos. 57) "Well, I am studying packing technology, so sustainability is my world [laughs]. So, I hopefully (…) sustainability is my job in 5 years." (Lara, Transcript of Focus Group 5, pos. 44)	The respondent says that she wants to work in a sustainable industry or in the sustainability department of a company.

Source: Own illustration adapted from Ulich et al. (1985 cited in Mayring & Fenzl, 2019, p.639)