

8-29-2019

Why Do They Sew? Women's Motivations to Sew Clothing for Themselves

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Garment sewing is undergoing a resurgence in participation, with a growing number of women choosing to sew their clothing instead of buying readily available fast fashion. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the current motivations of an ethnically diverse sample of women who sew garments for themselves. The in-depth interview data from 15 interviews revealed personal fulfillment to be the overarching reason for participation. Personal fulfillment was achieved through main emergent themes of investment, control, and empowerment with 10 subthemes. Theoretical perspectives of prosumerism, craft and do-it-yourself consumption, and uses and gratification theory were applied to the emergent themes to interpret the motivations of these women to sew garments for themselves. A model of sewing motivations for female garment sewing was developed to illustrate the connection between the emergent themes' contribution to the women's personal fulfillment and recurring cycle that takes place each time the women create a new garment for themselves.

Keywords

sewing, motivations, fit, consumption, gratification theory, craft consumption, do-it-yourself, prosumer

Disciplines

Family, Life Course, and Society | Fashion Design | Fiber, Textile, and Weaving Arts | Politics and Social Change | Women's Studies

Comments

This accepted publication is published as Martindale, A., McKinney, E. Why Do They Sew? Women's Motivations to Sew Clothing for Themselves. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*. 2019, Doi: [10.1177/0887302X19872552](https://doi.org/10.1177/0887302X19872552). Posted with permission.

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Clothing and Textiles
Research Journal
1-17
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sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/0887302X19872552
journals.sagepub.com/home/ctr


Addie Martindale¹  and Ellen McKinney² 

Abstract

Garment sewing is undergoing a resurgence in participation, with a growing number of women choosing to sew their clothing instead of buying readily available fast fashion. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the current motivations of an ethnically diverse sample of women who sew garments for themselves. The in-depth interview data from 15 interviews revealed personal fulfillment to be the overarching reason for participation. Personal fulfillment was achieved through main emergent themes of investment, control, and empowerment with 10 subthemes. Theoretical perspectives of prosumerism, craft and do-it-yourself consumption, and uses and gratification theory were applied to the emergent themes to interpret the motivations of these women to sew garments for themselves. A model of sewing motivations for female garment sewing was developed to illustrate the connection between the emergent themes' contribution to the women's personal fulfillment and recurring cycle that takes place each time the women create a new garment for themselves.

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Influenced by an influx of inexpensive ready-to-wear clothing from Southeast Asia, more women working, and a decline in school sewing programs, there was a period of dramatic decrease in home garment sewing in the 1970s and 1980s (Courtless, 1982; "Sewing Firms Try," 1986). However, over the last three decades, there has been a gradual resurgence in home sewing. It began in the late 1990s as part of the larger Do-It-Yourself (DIY) movement (Haider, 2015) and was further fueled by the rise in domestic activity participation that happened after 9/11 as individuals wanted to be more connected to home (Chansky, 2010). In 2008, the Great Recession increased unemployment, providing individuals with increased time to participate in sewing (Hall & Jayne, 2016; Matchar, 2013). Concurrently, many individuals who were engaged in computer-based professions turned to garment

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home sewing to fulfill their need to produce physical items that can be seen and held (Hall & Jayne, 2016; Orton-Johnson, 2014). Media also have supported the resurgence, exposing individuals to garment sewing through popular television shows like *The British Sewing Bee* and *Project Runway* (Holson, 2012; Lewis-Hammond, 2014).

Although agencies vary in how the information is reported, it is clear that numerous people sew. It is estimated that people from 25.5 million U.S. households (20% of 127.59 million households) and 1.6 million Canadian households (11% of 14.1 million households) participate in home sewing, which includes garment sewing (Canadian Craft and Hobby Association, n.d.; Islam, 2018; Statistics Canada, 2017; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018a). A household consists of all the people who occupy a housing unit (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b). In the United Kingdom, it has been reported that 3.5 million people (or approximately 5% of the population) sew garments for themselves (Lewis-Hammond, 2014; Office for National Statistics, 2017). Industry sales have also served as an indicator in growing garment sewing interest, with fabric rising from 40% to 60% of products and services sold within the fabric, craft, and sewing industry segment (Haider, 2015; Islam, 2018). Home sewing machine sales have also increased, with sales growth of 1.5 million from 2002 to 2012 (Holson, 2012). Social media participation is also an indicator of the number of individuals interested in sewing, as popular Facebook sewing groups, such as Sewing Inspiration and Tutorials (n.d.), have nearly 60,000 members; online sewing communities, such as BurdaStyle.com, have nearly 1.5 million users (BurdaStyle, n.d.). Due to the resurgence of interest and participation in garment sewing—along with the significant societal changes in the roles of women both in and outside the home that have occurred since it was last studied—there is a need to explore this phenomenon. Understanding the reasons behind these women's sewing practices will provide valuable insights for the home sewing industry, the fashion industry, and academia. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand why women are choosing to sew clothing for themselves, including their perceived benefits and decision to resist typical consumer culture in the age of fast fashion, when clothing is cheaply and easily accessible.

Literature Review

There is a lack of academic research to understand the motivations for home sewing participation in the 21st century. Previous studies were mostly quantitative survey-based research that focused on reasons for all types of home sewing participation, with questions that were limited to economics, quality, fit, creativity, leisure, and psychological variables (Chan, 1975; Courtless, 1985; Dorhan, 1987; Kean & Levin, 1989; Schofield-Tomschin, 1994; Sutton, 1967; York, 1961). Qualitative studies conducted in the 21st century have been retrospective, focusing on the impacts and meanings of women's home sewing experiences prior to 1970 (Buckley, 1999; Burman, 1999; Gordon, 2004, 2009; Hackney, 1999; McLean, 2005).

The quantitative research on home sewing identified five reasons for women's home sewing participation: economics (Chan, 1975; Kean & Levin, 1989; York, 1961), better quality (Conklyn, 1981; Kean & Levin, 1989), improved fit (Kean & Levin, 1989; York, 1961), creativity (Chan, 1975; Christensen, 1995; Kean & Levin, 1989), and leisure and psychological reasons (Courtless, 1985; Dorhan, 1987; Kean & Levin, 1989; Schofield-Tomschin, 1994; Sutton, 1967). A review of these studies revealed that over time, the reasons indicated by participants for home sewing shifted away from economic to creative, leisure, and psychological motivations. Later researchers examined at-home sewing as a consumer market. Kean and Levin (1989) applied a prosumer conceptual framework (Kotler, 1986; Toffler, 1980) to identify sewing consumer segments based on their reasons for sewing participation. LaBat, Salusso, and Rhee (2007) looked at female home sewers' satisfaction with commercial sewing patterns, finding sewers dissatisfied and lacking the knowledge to alter patterns to fit their body measurements.

The qualitative retrospective research findings examining home sewing participation also revealed economics as a motivation. Sewing was found to be a way for women to possess items they were unable to afford, and it provided a way for them to present themselves and their families in socially acceptable clothing (Buckley, 1999; Burman, 1999; Gordon, 2004, 2009; Hackney, 1999; McLean, 2005). Additionally, it was revealed that sewing was an encouraged, useful hobby that allowed the women some control over their appearance and identity construction (Gordon, 2004, 2009; Hackney, 1999; McLean, 2005).

Conceptual Perspectives on the Home Sewing Motivations of Today's Consumer

In addition to the motivations revealed in previous studies, the theories of prosumerism (Kean & Levin, 1989; Kotler, 1986; Toffler, 1980), the craft consumer and DIY consumption (Campbell, 2005; Ritzer, Dean, & Jurgenson, 2012; Watson & Shove, 2008), and uses and gratification (UG) theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974) may be useful in understanding why women are choosing to sew clothing for themselves. Prosumerism (Kotler, 1986; Ritzer et al., 2012; Toffler, 1980) was used in Kean and Levin's (1989) study of home sewers. Sewing industry reports (Haider, 2015; Sewing, Needlework, and Piece Goods Stores, 2015) indicate that craft consumption (Campbell, 2005) and DIY consumption (Watson & Shove, 2008) may provide an understanding and insights into the motivations of female home sewers who sew garments for themselves. Stannard and Sanders (2015) successfully applied UG to previous research on psychological motivations for handcraft participation.

Prosumerism, Craft Consumption, and DIY Consumption

The concept of the prosumer was proposed by Toffler (1980) and later formalized by Kotler (1986) to describe how consumers' mind-sets were shifting around the way they acquired goods and services, resulting in an increase in individuals wanting to produce at least a portion of the products they consume. Although this idea dates back to preindustrial times, it is different today, as most people in developed countries work outside of the home and can readily purchase the items they need (Kotler, 1986). Today's prosumer is focused on individualism, not survival, with a desire to be independent of mass production in at least one aspect of their lives (Kotler, 1986). Individuals who sew their own clothing have been identified as prosumers in previous literature, as they produce products they consume (Kotler, 1986). Kean and Levin (1989) utilized prosumerism (Kotler, 1986; Toffler, 1980) to classify home sewers into five groups according to their sewing practices: *utilitarians*, *practicals*, *craft-oriented*, *upscales*, and *indifferents*. Individuals in all groups displayed some characteristics of a prosumer in that they sewed a portion of the products they consumed. The craft-oriented, practicals, and upscales, however, were found to personify the prosumer theory in their need for individualized garments based on personal requirements as well as a desire for control through what they made as a means to escape mass-produced garments (Kotler, 1986; Toffler, 1980).

Qualities and desires similar to those of prosumers (e.g., creating products for yourself) are seen in both craft consumption (Campbell, 2005) and DIY consumption (Watson & Shove, 2008). However, craft consumption and DIY differ in the consumption process. DIY consumers typically follow instructions to replicate a product or personalize existing products, whereas with craft consumption, the individual is involved in the designing, making, and using of the item (Campbell, 2005). Craft consumers exhibit the prosumer quality of desiring to make unique items and to gain control over the creation process (Kotler, 1986; Toffler, 1980). There is a link between craft consumption and successful project completion that leads to continued interest and participation. This evolutionary cycle of product purchasing (Watson & Shove, 2008) may be seen in today's garment

home sewers. Craft and DIY consumption (Ritzer et al., 2012) have been seen more in professionals who work to produce immaterial goods. This suggests that participation in craft consumer activities is a result of a need to escape from commodification by making at least a part of the products they consume (Toffler, 1980). The desire to be active in the creation process of their clothing and to escape mass-manufactured goods may explain why women are choosing to sew their own clothes.

UG Theory

UG theory was used as a conceptual framework to understand the women's psychological motivations to sew. UG was developed to explore how and why people use media and to understand the psychological needs that are met by the media (Katz et al., 1974). Yet UG has been applied to other leisure activities including social media involvement (Shao, 2009; Whiting & Williams, 2013), online shopping preferences (Cho, 2007), eLearning (Mondi, Woods, & Rafi, 2008), and knitting (Stannard & Sanders, 2015).

Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974) identified five types of motivation for the use of mass media: cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and tension release. Cognitive motivations are linked to acquiring knowledge and information, which may be met by learning how to sew and using sewing patterns. Affective motivations refer to the emotional aspects desired and could be achieved by fulfilling the desire to be creative. Personal integrative motivations are self-esteem-driven motivations such as the need to feel accomplishment by finishing a sewing project. Social integrative motivations encompass the need to socialize to improve bonds with friends and family. Social integrative motivations could be met by participating in online and in-person sewing communities. Tension release refers to stress release and an escape from reality (Katz et al., 1974). As sewing is a leisure activity, it could therefore be used for tension release and to relieve stress. Further, motivations with links to UG categories were seen in previous handcraft research on topics including creativity (Schofield-Tomschin, 1994), engagement with others (Johnson & Wilson, 2005; Schofield-Tomschin & Littrell, 2001), and tension release (Blenkarn, 1986; Owens, 1997; Schofield-Tomschin, 1994).

Research Question

There is a rising interest in home sewing garment participation. Female home sewers currently make up 67.6% of the home sewing market (Islam, 2018), and home sewing industry reports have indicated that women aged 20–40 years have increased interest in garment sewing (Haider, 2015; Sewing, Needlework, and Piece Goods Stores, 2015). Despite the wide variety of mass-produced garments available, more and more women are investing time and resources into sewing garments for themselves. There is a lack of understanding of the current reasons female home sewers sew garments for themselves. Therefore, the following overarching research question was developed: Why are women sewing garments for themselves? The study was limited to women aged 20–40 for a more accurate comparison to previous home sewing research (Blenkarn, 1986; Chan, 1975; Dorhan, 1987); this also reflects the largest female age-group in the United States (Howden & Meyer, 2011).

Method

To explore women's motivations to sew clothing for themselves, semistructured interviews with female home sewers aged 20–40 years were conducted. Saturation was met with 15 interviews (Francis et al., 2010). Upon approval by the human subjects' review board, English-speaking women from the United States and Canada were recruited through posts in three Facebook sewing groups (Sew Curvy Fashionistas, Capsule Wardrobe Sew Along, and Sew Divas). The post explained the

study and asked the women to complete a short survey or *face sheet* on which they identified their ethnicity, age, and sewing participation (e.g., fabric spending, pattern spending, sewing frequency, types of garments sewn). The face sheet was completed by 236 potential participants. Results were used to screen for a sample consisting of a diverse ethnic mix. An ethnically diverse sample was chosen to help us gain a broader understanding of why women sew clothing for themselves. The selected sample's self-identified ethnic composition was 26.7% ($n = 4$) White non-Hispanic, 26.7% ($n = 4$) Hispanic/Latina, 20% ($n = 3$) African American, 13.3% ($n = 2$) Asian, 6.7% ($n = 1$) Asian/White, and 6.7% ($n = 1$) East Indian.¹ The age range of the participants was 22–40 (mean = 31) years. Participants ranged in their sewing experience from *beginner* (less than 1 year) to *advanced* (for 20 years).

Individuals selected for interviews were contacted by e-mail and provided details about the study. Online video interviews were scheduled with those who chose to participate. The semi-structured interviews, which allowed for additional questions and conversation, (McCracken, 1988) lasted from 30 min to 1 hr and 15 min in length. Interviews were conducted by one researcher with a PhD in apparel design, who was familiar with textiles and apparel construction procedures. The researcher set aside all bias before the interviews to let the participant's experiences emerge. The participants were asked about why they sewed clothing for themselves, including questions regarding reasons and benefits. Example questions included (a) Can you tell me about how you learned to sew and why you chose to start sewing? (b) How much of your wardrobe would you say you have made for yourself? (c) How do you feel when you wear garments that you have made? (d) What are people's reactions when you wear the clothing that you have made? (e) Are you involved in any sewing communities, in-person, or online? and (f) How does sewing make you feel? As part of the interview, the women were asked to share garments they had sewn for themselves with the interviewer and tell her about the garments. The descriptions and dialogue around making the garments were analyzed, but the actual garments were not. Discussion of the garments allowed the participants to express why they made it, the experiences that they had making it, and how the garment made them feel when they wore it. The interviews were recorded and the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim.

Both deductive and inductive processes for developing codes add rigor to the data analysis process and expand the research findings (Creswell, 2014). The deductive processes were used to test the concepts and theories established in existing research. Inductive processes allowed themes to emerge from the interview data that would not have been exposed if deductive processes were used alone. Deductive coding processes were based on the literature review. The following a priori coding categories were developed to understand why women are choosing to sew clothing for themselves: (a) time investment (Campbell, 2005; Watson & Shove, 2008), (b) monetary investment (Campbell, 2005; Watson & Shove, 2008), (c) desire to make more (Watson & Shove, 2008), (d) cognitive investment (Katz et al., 1974), (e) approval and support of sewing (Katz et al., 1974), (f) sewing community (Katz et al., 1974), and (g) control (Kotler, 1986; Toffler, 1980).

Inductive processes were used during the coding process to allow additional codes to emerge from the data. These emergent themes were identified using a grounded theory approach that involves the construction of theory through systematic data collection. Grounded theory was used as an analytical approach to discover the repeated emergent concepts, ideas, or elements through a coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A three-stage data analysis process was used: first cycle coding, second cycle coding, and theory building (Saldaña, 2016).

During the first coding cycle, each transcript was reviewed and coded independently by each researcher. An open coding process was used, which allowed reoccurring codes to be identified (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Analytic memos were written after each interview to allow for connections between the codes to be identified (Saldaña, 2016) and to build the coding guide. Memoing

also served as a way for the researchers to bracket any preconceived meanings as they reflected on the data (Glaser, 1998).

The second coding cycle generated the final coding guide based on deductively generated codes from the literature as well as inductively generated codes. The coding guide was entered in qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) NVivo 10 for Mac to add rigor to the coding process through the ability to efficiently manage and search the data to enhance the qualitative research validity (Siccama & Penna, 2008). Interrater reliability of 96.38 was calculated using NVivo 10 for Mac to generate the percentage of agreements, which exceeds the recommended threshold (Creswell, 2014; Saldaña, 2016). Due to the low rate of disagreement, the differences were not negotiated between coders. The QDAS software was used for code weaving (Saldaña, 2016) to search the coded data and connect the codes into categories of related codes, which were then grouped together into the central themes. For example, the code *sewing classes* was grouped with like codes into the subcategory of *learning to sew*. Then, the subcategory of *learning to sew* was grouped into the category of *cognitive investment*, which was then grouped, with other categories of investment, into the emergent theme of *investment*.

Finally, during theory building, theoretical coding was used to establish a core theme and then other emergent themes were integrated and related to the core theme (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A micro theory was then derived using the emergent themes and core theme. This theory helped to explain why the women in this study chose to sew clothing for themselves.

Emergent Themes

Analysis of the interview data resulted in the emergence of a central theme of personal fulfillment, as the reason why this sample of ethnically diverse women chose to sew clothing for themselves. Personal fulfillment consists of three emergent themes: investment, control, and empowerment. These three emergent themes consisted of 10 subthemes that revealed answers to the study's proposed research question, providing an understanding of why women sew clothing for themselves. Differences were not seen across participants by age, ethnicity, or geographic location.

Personal Fulfillment

Personal fulfillment is achieved by sewing one's own clothing through investment, control, and empowerment. All women expressed that sewing brought them joy and had a positive impact on their lives. Sewing provided these women a source of happiness that was completely their own. The positive sense of well-being provided by sewing offered participants an escape from reality that personally benefited them. The central theme of personal fulfillment answers the research question: Why are women sewing garments for themselves?

Sewing provided the women in the study something that was not available in other aspects of their lives by allowing them to create a tangible product of their own. This is captured well in one woman's quote:

At the end of it, I've got something. I can pick this up and say, "Look what I did." It kind of gives me a feeling of I'm not sitting here wasting my time. These are tangible results of what I've been doing, which is something that I often don't have. (P6)

The action of sewing was equally as important in providing the women joy as were the products they made. One participant disclosed how sewing provided this in her life: "I work full time as a scientist, so I feel like all day I'm having to be very analytical. When I get home it's kind of fun to do something creative" (P1).

At the center of all the women's sewing activities were the enjoyment and relaxation that it brought to their lives. Sewing was not a necessity for any of the women and was a choice made to "feel good" (P3) and to be "happy" (P12). This adoration for sewing came out of the feelings experienced while sewing, and women revealed that sewing made them "feel calm" (P5) and was "so therapeutic" (P4). When sewing, the women were not concerned with anything else; as one woman described, sewing time was "like a vacation" (P9) from day-to-day life.

Investment

The theme of investment comprised three subthemes: cognitive, monetary, and time investment. The three subthemes of investment were found to be interconnected with each other, and the women could not be successful in their garment sewing without all three. Additionally, it was found that as the investment escalated in each of these areas, so did the women's overall commitment to their sewing participation.

Cognitive. Sewing participation requires a person to be willing to learn new skills. This included learning how to operate a sewing machine, cut out a sewing pattern, and read sewing instructions. The women's cognitive investment was composed of the factor of learning to sew, which comprises various sources of learning, including growing up sewing, consulting the Internet, taking sewing classes, and using sewing patterns.

The factors for learning to sew varied among the women but included needing a hobby, receiving the encouragement of others, viewing social media, reading sewing blogs, growing up sewing, and wanting to make. The women needing a hobby cited learning to sew as a way to use excess leisure time, as captured in this quote: "I think I was just bored and I kind of wanted a hobby" (P13). Several of the women were drawn to sewing by reading social media and blogs, whereas others decided to sew out of a desire to make something. Several of the women were exposed to sewing as children, but only a few learned to sew as a child; these participants made remarks similar to "I didn't really like it. It was really boring" (P12). All of the women disclosed that the Internet was essential to their learning to sew; websites such as YouTube and Pinterest were sources to acquire the needed sewing skill. Facebook sewing groups were also used to connect with other sewers directly for sewing advice. Participant 14 disclosed, "I know that in any of my sewing groups, someone's up and sewing—at all times and I can have an answer in like 10 minutes." Sewing classes were attended by a few of the women as they were first beginning to sew. Sewing patterns were the way many of the women acquired their sewing skills, with the majority of the women explaining they gained sewing skills using portable document format (PDF), print-at-home, and independent sewing patterns that included more detailed instructions than commercial patterns did.

Monetary. The hobby of sewing requires one to make a monetary investment, as one must purchase a sewing machine and supplies needed to make projects, which includes fabric, thread, patterns, and notions (thread, zippers, buttons, etc.). This subtheme covers the topics of sewing spending, fabric spending, sewing pattern spending, sewing equipment spending, and spending-related feelings.

Sewing-related shopping was revealed to be just as important as the act of sewing. Most of the spending associated with sewing was not planned, and even those who budgeted for sewing did not have plans for what they intended to purchase. Even though the women were confident in their purchasing decisions, there was a level of guilt associated with their spending. The majority of spending was done on fabric, and fabric purchases were made without knowing what would be created. Many women discussed their fabric stashes that consisted of fabric they had purchased and not sewn. As one woman revealed, "There's no auditioning process for fabric; there's no planning-a-garment process for fabric. There's if I think it's pretty it's . . . and if it's not super

see-through, and if it doesn't need a lining, I will buy it" (P8). The women spent far less on sewing patterns than on fabric and read reviews and sought peer advice before purchasing. Many preferred PDF, independent designer patterns and chose patterns that could be adjusted and sewn many times. As the women's sewing skills improved, they disclosed purchasing additional sewing equipment, as exemplified by one woman, "I'm now on my second machine. I have two sergers. It's all-encompassing" (P9).

Time. A significant amount of the women's leisure time was invested in their sewing, with finding time to sew as the biggest obstacle the women faced to their sewing participation. Most of them disclosed they spent as much time as they could sewing, which was dependent on their obligations and the complexity of their schedules. This subtheme reflects how the women incorporated sewing into their schedules, including the amount of time spent sewing and times of the week they sewed.

The women's sewing time per week varied greatly, ranging from 1 hr to 40 hr a week. Many of the women were able to sew daily and as part of their daily routines. This incorporation was evidenced in comments such as "Usually every evening I'll sew for about an hour" (P1) and "I usually sew about 2 hours in the morning" (P10). The majority of the women sewed at times with no other obligations, which varied from daytime to nights, and some sewed only on the weekends. The more time available in the women's schedules, the more time that they spent sewing. When they could not sew, it was revealed they still engaged in sewing social media such as Facebook groups and Instagram.

Control

The theme of control presents how sewing their own clothing provided these women increased power over their appearance. Sewing provided an opportunity for these women to present themselves in clothing they had made instead of purchasing; therefore, these women gained more control over their clothing choices. Although control (Kotler, 1986; Toffler, 1980) was indicated in previous research, three new subcategories emerged that were not indicated in the literature review. The theme of control includes control over appearance, control over clothing selection, and control over ready-to-wear consumption.

Control over appearance. The women in the study revealed many ways that sewing allowed them more control over their appearance than their nonsewing peers were allowed. This control was reflected in the amount of clothing that the women sewed for themselves and the control they had over their apparel style, quality, and fit. The amount of clothing the women had sewn for themselves ranged from a few garments for beginners to "everything except underwear and two pairs of jeans" (P11) for experienced sewers. The majority had sewn 50–75% of the clothing they routinely wore. Most of the women stated that sewing gave them control over their clothing style, and they enjoyed having the ability to choose the colors and fabric of their garments. The participants also indicated that their sewing skills allowed them to possess clothing that better reflected their personality. A few women used their sewing to create high-end designer looks, while others were interested in construction quality. Improved garment fit was important to all of the women, as many had never experienced ready-to-wear garments that fit their bodies. They delighted in "being able to fit in something exactly your size" (P13). All but one of the women made alterations to their sewing patterns to attain a more accurate body fit.

Control over clothing selection. The ability to sew one's own clothing provides an opportunity to carefully plan garments instead of purchasing clothing from a preexisting selection. Sewing allowed the women almost unlimited possibilities for garments that they could make for themselves. This

subtheme includes the common factors for the selection of a garment to sew, including wardrobe gaps and garments for events, and inspiration for garment sewing, which includes observations of fashion trends, peers' sewing selections, and high-end designer looks.

Many of the women discussed assessing perceived needs in their wardrobes when selecting what to sew, such as "I needed some new fall kind of things to wear" (P1). A few of the women disclosed that upcoming occasions or events such as church, weddings, parties, anniversaries, and other special events determined their sewing plans. Many of the women were inspired by fashion trends and sewing-related social media. Sewing peers also had an impact on what was sewn, with many looking for peer recommendations for patterns. The women's skills and time greatly influenced the garments they chose to sew, as the garments had to be able to be completed with the time and skills they had.

Control over ready-to-wear consumption. Despite their ability, none of the women sewed all of their clothing. Sewing provided them with the control to make a decision of when to participate in ready-to-wear consumption, which resulted in a nontypical apparel consumption mentality. The women developed a set of guidelines for themselves regarding when to purchase ready-to-wear or purchase materials or supplies to sew an item based on garment complexity, cost, specialness, and time. Several were committed to reducing their ready-to-wear consumption.

The women's dissatisfaction with the way that ready-to-wear fit their bodies was a key reason for their ongoing garment sewing, resulting in decreased ready-to-wear purchasing. The women shared immense dissatisfaction with the fit of ready-to-wear clothing and revealed how it was not made for their bodies. They shared how they "have a hard time finding stuff that's just going to fit off the rack" (P6). In discussing their fit issues, they talked about their "petite" frame (P1, P11, P13), having "no butt" (P5), or having a "smaller torso to a larger bottom half" (P10). All of the women stated that making their own clothing provided them a better fit than ready-to-wear, but all still purchased some amount of ready-made items such as bras and pants.

Empowerment

The theme of empowerment reveals how sewing participation enabled these women. Sewing provided empowerment through increased skills and pride in their accomplishments, which resulted in continued garment sewing participation. Support received through social approval of their family, friends, and sewing community additionally contributed to the women's gained empowerment. This theme encompasses the subthemes of confidence, approval and support of sewing, sewing community, and the desire to make more.

Confidence. The impact that sewing had on the women's confidence was an important aspect of sewing participation that emerged from the interview data. The women's sewing skills and the way that the women felt wearing clothing that they had made for themselves had a positive impact on all the women's personal confidence. They discussed how the clothing they made increased both their physical and psychological comfort with their appearance. One woman shared in detail the impact that sewing had on her appearance:

I feel like when people look at me I don't look crazy anymore. I look good enough to look at. I'm not self-conscious anymore. I think when I post my pictures online for people to look at my clothes and I see the response . . . I used to think when people were staring at me, they were just staring at me because I looked bad. I'm so awkward. Now I have a lot more confidence in my clothes. (P5)

The data revealed an excitement and pride about the accomplishment the women felt in the execution of their skills, which provided them with confidence and increased self-esteem. Some women were initially nervous wearing the clothing they had made but were elated when they were complimented. One woman shared how she felt the first time she wore an item she made: “I [had] a mix of ‘I hope people can’t tell that I made this’ and . . . it feels good when people are like, ‘Oh, that’s so cute, where’d you get it?’ and you’re like, ‘Oh, I made it’” (P14). Another woman, when asked how she felt about the clothes she made, emphasized her pride in her skills by stating that she was “impressed that it looks like something you could buy in a store or even better because it fits perfectly”(P13).

Approval and support of sewing. The approval and support that these women received for both their participation in sewing and the garments they made greatly influenced their sewing participation. The majority of the women were encouraged by their families to sew, with spouses understanding how important their sewing time was and ensuring that time was provided for them to sew. As one participant revealed, “My husband knows that . . . he watches the kid while I do this thing, and it makes me happy” (P13). The compliments and approval were important as they positively influenced their self-esteem and their desire to sew. While sharing this approval, many women made remarks such as “I love it! Especially when I’m somewhere random and somebody is like, ‘Oh, I love your shirt’” (P3). These repeated compliments were empowering experiences that the women positively anticipated.

Sewing community. A sense of community in sewing was a theme conveyed by all of the women, as they were all involved in sewing communities, the majority of which were online. These communities positively influenced their participation and empowered them to be successful in their sewing and beyond. For most of the women, these groups were their primary source of engagement and support related to sewing, as many revealed that they did not know anyone offline interested in sewing. In some cases, these groups were strict about sewing, but for most, these communities provided a place to create very close friendships that provided support beyond sewing. One woman shared:

I think some of the best friendships I have are through the sewing community. So many questions get answered. I get to answer so many questions. I feel useful. As a stay-at-home mom, I go crazy with no adult interaction. (P8)

Desire to make more. The validation that the women received from others, along with the support of their sewing community, positively influenced the women’s desire to make more. This desire included both increasing their sewing skills to try more complex garments and make items using methods in addition to sewing. The experience of sewing provided women with increased independence and self-sufficiency. The most profound effect that sewing success had on a participant was captured in this quote:

I think it inspires me to be more independent and self-sufficient. The thing that I love about sewing is that it inspires me to sort of go out and do my own thing and not have that fear of experimenting. Sewing is definitely—I’m a very shy person, and it has definitely pushed me out of my boundaries, my shyness, and I try to present myself a little bit more. I kind of dream bigger. I’m like, if I can make my own clothes, I can make my own shoes. I can build my own house; you know? It’s kind of like that. (P4)

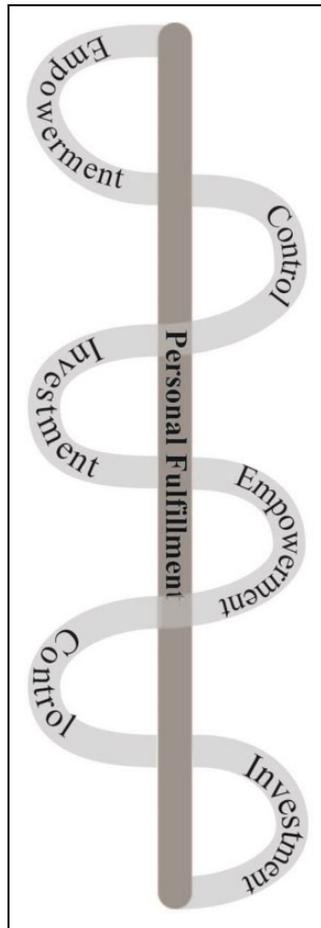


Figure 1. Model of sewing motivation for female garment sewing.

Model of Sewing Motivation for Female Garment Sewing

The model of sewing motivation for female garment sewing (Figure 1) visually depicts the emergent themes found in the data that motivated these women to sew clothing for themselves. These motivations were interconnected and dependent on each other. All of the emergent themes of investment, control, and empowerment form a recurring spiral of activities contributing to the overarching theme of personal fulfillment. Each of the stages is equally important in their contribution to the women's personal fulfillment, with the cycle recurring each time the women make a garment for themselves.

The cycle begins at the investment stage, with activities that include learning to sew or advancing sewing skills, monetary investment on sewing-related supplies and equipment, and the use of their time to sew. Each of these investment components is connected and must take place before the next stage. After investments have been made, the control stage is where the participants use their skills and investments to control their self-presentation to others. The control stage illustrates the participants' ability to make clothing that more accurately represents their personality. Additionally, control over their garment selection process allows the women to decide whether to purchase or sew a garment. Next is the empowerment stage that represents the empowerment achieved from the

ability to sew and the feeling derived from the gained control over appearance. Empowerment felt by the sewers resulted in confidence in appearance and skills, validation and support of others, and a sense of belonging to a community. These three theme stages recur as these women continued to invest in their sewing, attain increased control, and feel empowered. Through each of these stages, personal fulfillment was experienced by the women, which provided the reason for them to sew their own clothing.

Discussion

Over the 20th century, the reasons for women choosing to sew evolved. Women's reasons for sewing shifted from economics and need (Chan, 1975; Kean & Levin, 1989; York, 1961) to a decision of how to spend their leisure time (Christensen, 1995; Schofield-Tomschin, 1994). Even though more recent researchers (Christensen, 1995; Schofield-Tomschin, 1994) found leisure, creativity, and psychological factors to be more important than economics, money-saving was still considered in women's sewing participation.

Unlike these previous studies, in the current study, there was no indication of money-saving motivations in the women's choice to sew for leisure, as many indicated overspending on sewing supplies. Findings of previous studies of sewing providing a source of enjoyment and relaxation (Christensen, 1995; Conklyn, 1981; Kean & Levin, 1989; Sutton, 1967; York, 1961) were validated. Also confirmed was the finding that psychological factors are principal reasons for sewing (Schofield-Tomschin, 1994). Further, connections are drawn with previous researchers who found that sewing provided a source of creativity (Chan, 1975; Christensen, 1995; Courtless, 1985; Dorhan, 1987; Gordon, 2004; Kean & Levin, 1989; McLean, 2005; Schofield-Tomschin, 1994).

Prosumerism, the Craft Consumer, and DIY Consumption

The sewing practices of the women in this study were found to be indicative of the behavior proposed by Toffler (1980) because of a need to escape from commodification. The women sought alternatives to mass-produced clothing by producing a portion of the clothing they consumed (Kotler, 1986). The prosumer mentality varied among the sample, but the majority of the women produced 50–70% of the clothing they regularly wore. These behavioral traits were similar to Kean and Levin's (1989) findings that their craft-oriented, practical, and upscale sewing consumer categories had prosumer inclinations in their sewing practices. However, due to the determination of the women in this study to replace ready-to-wear and increase the production of their own garments, they were found to embody the prosumer logic to a greater degree than the previous studies' participants did.

Study participants were found to exhibit more craft consumer than DIY consumer traits (Campbell, 2005) by doing more than just personalizing or customizing the items they made. The women sought to control the entire garment creation process. Despite beginning with sewing patterns designed by others, the women carefully select the fabric and notions for their garments, with all but one altering the patterns for aesthetic and physical fit. The investment and level of sewing participation of the women were connected. The more invested the women were in their sewing the more competent they became, which led to even more investment in sewing, confirming previous findings indicating that successful participation leads to a cycle of more craft-related consumption (Watson & Shove, 2008). These women also used sewing as a way to reduce their participation in mass consumerism and a source of creativity when their jobs and lifestyles only produced immaterial goods (Ritzer et al., 2012).

UG

The women's motivations to sew and the benefits they received from it were interconnected. These motivations and benefits occurred in a series of recurring stages that kept the women engaged. Part of this recurring process are psychological motivations that an application of UG theory can explain. The overarching theme of the study—personal fulfillment—as well as the key emerging themes of investment, control, and empowerment were found to be supported by the UG categories proposed by Katz et al. (1974).

Applied to the findings of this study were the UG categories of cognitive motivation, personal integrative, social integrative, affective motivation, and tension release (Katz et al., 1974). The cognitive needs of the women were fulfilled through the components of learning to sew and the development of new skills. Personal integrative motivations were achieved through the sense of accomplishment the women felt with clothing that fit their bodies and the positive validation they received about their appearance and skill from others. Even though garment sewing can be viewed as a single-person activity, the women in this study felt sewing was a social activity; social integrative motivations were met through sewing community engagement, similar to previous handcraft research findings (Johnson & Wilson, 2005; Schofield-Tomschin & Littrell, 2001; Stannard & Sanders, 2015). Affective motivations came from the women's need to be creative and their desire to make something, which provided them the opportunity to create something tangible when the majority of their time was spent on intangible outcomes. Sewing provided the women in this study tension release by providing them an escape from reality (Katz et al., 1974).

Conclusion

The motivations of and perceived benefits for women who sew clothing for themselves were the focus of this study. The grounded theory approach (Saldaña, 2016) in analyzing the qualitative interview data revealed three emergent themes: investment, control, and empowerment, which were interconnected within the overarching theme of personal fulfillment as the women's motivation to sew clothing for themselves. The theories of prosumerism (Kean & Levin, 1989; Kotler, 1986; Toffler, 1980), the craft consumer and DIY consumption (Campbell, 2005; Ritzer et al., 2012; Watson & Shove, 2008), and UG (Katz et al., 1974) were used to interpret the findings. The study participants were identified to embody the mentality of a prosumer. Theories of craft consumer and DIY consumption revealed that the women's desires to sew reached beyond customizing and personalizing clothing as the women sought to control the entire garment design process. The identified motivations fulfilled all the UG categories defined by Katz et al. (1974) of cognitive, personal integrative, social integrative, and affective motivations, as well as tension release.

The significance of this study first lies in that it updates existing sewing motivation research that is quite dated. Significant social and technological changes have occurred that have influenced the motivations women have for sewing clothing for themselves. This study provides an ethnically diverse look at handcraft participation that provides a more inclusive understanding of women's motivations to participate in these practices. We provide research into the behaviors of consumers who operate outside of typical clothing consumer culture in an age where clothing is widely and cheaply available. The benefits found in this study validate the women's decisions to spend their leisure time sewing clothing for themselves and provide evidence that motivations to sew have shifted. By utilizing a qualitative grounded theory approach, we allowed the women's experiences to be revealed in a way that quantitative research could not enable.

The findings of this research will be of interest to those involved in the home sewing industry, academia, and the apparel industry. For academics in apparel-related fields, these findings expose

a new potential career path in the home sewing industry for apparel design and merchandising professionals. Projects can be incorporated into existing curricula that can prepare students in these areas.

Limitations and Future Research

This study was limited to English-speaking women located in the United States and Canada, and therefore the findings cannot be generalized to all female home sewers. As there is very limited current research available on home sewing, research should be conducted in a variety of areas including collecting data from a larger sample and more encompassing geographic area. Research is also needed to understand whether sewing motivations and benefits are derived when sewing items other than clothing or sewing clothing for others. The women in this study were recruited from Facebook sewing groups, and social media were very important to the women in the sample. Even though the role of the Internet has been found to increase interest in garment sewing, research is needed to understand whether women who do not engage in Internet sewing-related practices have different motivations.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Note

1. The percentages on these lines equal 100.1 due to rounding.

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