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Women's Motivations to Sew Clothing for Themselves

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Significance and purpose. A resurgence is currently happening in home sewing participation that includes a growing interest in personal garment sewing among women (Haider, 2015). These women are choosing to spend their leisure time sewing garments for themselves instead of buying in the age of inexpensive, fast fashion. It is important to understand these women's perceived benefits of sewing, related behaviors, and use of leisure time, as they operate outside of typical consumer culture. The purpose of this study was to understand why women are choosing to sew clothing for themselves.

Related literature and relevant theory. From 1960 to 1995, six studies were conducted on reasons women participate in home sewing (e.g. Christensen, 1995). These studies typically had homogeneous samples and considered all types of home sewing. The most current research on reasons individuals sew is over 20 years old (Christensen, 1995) and the most recent academic research on home sewers was limited to the investigation of women's dissatisfaction with the fit of commercial home sewing patterns (LaBat, Salusso, & Rhee, 2007). The theoretical perspectives of prosumerism (Ritzer, Dean, & Jurgenson, 2012), craft consumer (Campbell, 2005) and do-it-yourself consumption and uses and gratification theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974) were identified as possible explanations for the motivations of these women.

Methods. An ethnically diverse sample of 15 female middle class sewers between 20 and 40 years old were recruited from the United States and Canada through Facebook sewing groups to participate in semi-structured video interviews. A grounded theory approach (Saldañ, 2016) was used to understand their experiences of sewing garments for themselves. Questions were designed to solicit information regarding why they choose to sew clothing for themselves, the benefits it provided them, their feelings attached to sewing, the reactions of others, amount of time spent sewing, and their sewing-related consumption. The transcribed interviews were independently coded by both the researchers. The agreement rate was 96.38%, which was above the threshold recommended by Saldañ (2016).

Results. The research revealed a central theme of *personal fulfillment*. This *personal fulfillment* attained through sewing garments for themselves was not experienced in other aspects of their lives. It provided them a sense of accomplishment, a creative outlet, and source of stress release. Within the central theme of personal fulfillment, three sub-themes emerged: *investment*, *control*, and *empowerment*. All three of the emergent themes are interconnected and were experienced by all of the women in the study.

The themes were experienced by sewers in a continuous reoccurring cycle that started with *investment*. The women invested in their sewing of their clothing through cognitive, monetary, and time aspects. Second in the cycle was *control* in which they gained increased power over their appearance through sewing their own clothing, providing them additional options as a consumer and a higher level of self expression. Third in the cycle was *empowerment*. Sewing their own clothing deeply impacted these women's confidence and self-esteem. The *empowerment* attained by the women through sewing was enhanced by the support and positive feedback from their family, friends, and sewing community. These benefits led to further *investment*, continuing the reoccurring cycle.

The women in the study were found to personify the mindset of the prosumer (Ritzer, Dean, & Jurgenson, 2012) and to be interested in more than customization with a desire to control the entire making process, exhibiting the craft consumer (Campbell, 2005) mentality. The psychological motivations of these women to sew aligned with uses and gratification theory, fulfilling all motivation categories including cognitive, personal integrative, social integrative, affective motivations, and tension release (Katz et al., 1974).

Implications. This research provides insights into a growing consumer market that operates outside of typical consumer culture. Their reasons for sewing garments for themselves may be relevant to understanding other DIY and craft consumers. Craft retailers may use the findings provide home sewing goods in line with the revealed values and experience cycle of home sewers. Retailers of ready-to-wear apparel should consider that when members of this group of consumers are not content with retail offerings, they are willing to create their own apparel, rather than purchasing. Campbell, C. (2005). The craft consumer: Culture, craft, and consumption in a postmodern society. *Journal of Consumer Culture* 5(1), 23-42.

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