Presenting a retro appearance through sewing for oneself: Motivations and methods

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Presenting a retro appearance through sewing for oneself: Motivations and methods

by

Charity Suzanne Armstead

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Apparel, Merchandising, and Design

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Ellen McKinney, Major Professor
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The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this dissertation. The Graduate College will ensure this dissertation is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

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“No to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory . . . forever and ever” (Ephesians 3:20-21, New International Version).
ABSTRACT

Retro sewers, defined for the purposes of this study as women who sew vintage-inspired or vintage-reproduction clothing for themselves for everyday use, are a group that has not previously been studied. Retro sewers represent a unique subset of the home sewing market that overlaps with the vintage clothing market. The purpose of this study was to understand the motivations and the methods for retro sewers and how their motivations and methods intersect. This study utilized a qualitative, grounded-theory approach with interviews as the primary data source. Eighteen retro sewers from English-speaking countries were recruited from the researcher’s personal network, Facebook groups dedicated to retro sewing, and snowball sampling. The participants were purposively sampled to ensure maximum possible diversity in age, race/ethnicity, geographic location, decades preferred, and types of sewing patterns used; these sewers participated in in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Participants were asked questions about why they value a vintage appearance and why they use sewing for themselves to create their desired vintage appearance, how they use sewing for themselves to create their desired vintage appearance, and how their motivations and methods intersect. Questions were also asked about their views on feminism and how those views impact their retro sewing.

The core theme emerging from the analysis of the interview data was that retro sewing is an expression of identity. The expression of identity through retro sewing is a postmodern fashion phenomenon, motivated primarily by nostalgia combined with a desire for uniqueness and mediated by symbolic interactionism. Retro sewing provides identity continuity through connection with family, one’s personal past, and a collective past; the aesthetics of historic clothing are a major reason that clothing, specifically, is chosen as an avenue for the expression of nostalgic identity.
This study provides information about this segment of the home sewing industry, which can be used by sewing pattern companies, fabric producers, retro clothing companies, and purveyors of nostalgic goods to produce products that will appeal to retro sewers. This study also provides a new context for the application of several theories, including nostalgia, symbolic interactionism, and expression of identity through clothing.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The clothes were exquisite – perfectly-cut suits, soignée ball gowns, beautifully-tailored jackets and skirts – detailed designs that required the finesse that can only be achieved through custom tailoring. Our offices have been flooded with letters requesting the patterns for these exacting designs.

—Vogue Patterns, September/October 1998

At some point, probably between the rise of vintage in the 1970s (Fischer, 2015, pp. 52, 54-55; Le Zotte, 2017, pp. 123, 140) and the upswing in sewing and crafting in the 1990s (LaBat, Salusso, & Rhee, 2007; Owens, 1997), some women began sewing retro clothing: their own versions of historic styles to wear as part of their everyday lives. In the antiques and collectibles world, “vintage” is commonly defined as items that are between 20 and 100 years old (“Listing requirements by lane,” n.d.; Seager, 2011). Since the 1990s, vintage sewing books and patterns have become popular collectibles; although some collected these items prior to this time, it seems that they were not widely recognized as collectible until the 1990s (Kirsch, 1997).

Motivated by customer requests and possibly also by the rising popularity of vintage clothing and/or the popularity of vintage patterns as a collectible, Vogue was the first mainstream pattern company to offer reprints of vintage patterns in 1998, followed by Butterick in 1999 (Emery, 2014; “Vintage Vogue,” 1998). Anne Marie Chaker stated that Simplicity’s introduction of a retro pattern line (reprints of vintage patterns) increased their suit pattern sales by 25% compared to the previous year, and that sales of reprinted vintage patterns by McCall (including McCall, Butterick, and Vogue patterns) rose 13% between 2005 and 2006 (Chaker, 2006). Even with the availability of reproduction patterns, some vintage patterns command high prices; one vintage McCall evening gown pattern reportedly sold on eBay in 2014 for $831, and the McCall Pattern Company reported in April 2017 that a 1965 vintage Vogue Paris Original pattern of
Yves Saint Laurent’s Mondrian dress sold for $1,850 on Etsy (Depew, 2014; McCall Pattern Company, 2017; Sheehan, 2012), reflecting a continued interest in vintage clothing patterns, whether original or reproduction.

Most people wear mass-produced clothing, which is easily available. Others choose to build a sartorial identity by utilizing unique clothing outside the mainstream (Cervellon, Carey, & Harms, 2012; DeLong, Heinemann, & Reiley, 2005; Duffy, Hewer, & Wilson, 2012; Fischer, 2015; Jenss, 2015; Reiley & DeLong, 2011). In previous decades, those with financial means may have used designer or couture goods to accomplish this differentiation; however, the ubiquity of knockoffs means that uniqueness is no longer guaranteed by using designer goods (Balsara, 2011; Beebe, 2010). However, vintage garments and custom or homemade garments are two remaining avenues for uniqueness. Retro clothing, which includes vintage reproduction and vintage-inspired clothing, is based on surviving originals, period sewing patterns, and/or stylistic elements of vintage clothing.

**Statement of the Problem**

Several researchers have conducted studies on the practice of wearing vintage clothing, including studies on the origins of vintage consumption, motivations for purchasing vintage clothing, the vintage community, and the portrayal of identity through vintage dress (Cassidy & Bennett, 2012; Cervellon et al., 2012; DeLong et al., 2005; Duffy et al., 2012; Fischer, 2015; Gregson, Brooks, & Crewe, 2001; Jenss, 2015; McColl, Canning, McBride, Nobbs, & Shearer, 2013; Peters, 2014). These studies have demonstrated that wearing vintage clothing is motivated by desires for authenticity, individuality, identity, and clothing quality, influenced by a sense of nostalgia and made prestigious by its exercise and display of cultural capital. They also revealed the problems and/or limitations of wearing vintage clothing: scarcity of vintage clothing (which
is also a factor in its desirability), its lack of durability, and its failure to meet modern standards of comfort in dress.

Researchers have also examined the motivations of home sewers from the early 20th Century through the present (Bain, 2016; Christensen, 1995; Ferguson, 1975; Gordon, 2004, 2009; Kean & Levin, 1989; Martindale, 2017; O’Brien & Campbell, 1927; Russum, 2016). These studies revealed a shift in sewing from an economic measure to a leisure activity, often used as an expression of individuality in opposition to mass-market fashion and cultural fashion dictates. The research shows that choosing to participate in home sewing shares some motivations with wearing vintage, including a desire for quality, expression of identity, and participation in a community (Martindale, 2017; Russum, 2016).

However, missing in the literature is the intersection of vintage clothing and home sewing: People who sew retro clothing. Some studies have included brief references to sewing retro clothing, but none has focused on the practice. Aleit Veenstra and Giselinde Kuipers (2013) noted that, although original vintage items are most important to vintage enthusiasts, they sometimes also “wear (limited edition) reproductions” (p. 356). Heike Jenss (2015) found that custom-made or homemade clothing has become a way to compensate for the scarcity of desirable vintage that fits one’s body shape and personal style, and that it is sometimes used as a measure to save money due to the high prices of high-quality vintage. Tracy Diane Cassidy and Hannah Rose Bennett (2012), in a survey of 224 vintage wearers, found that 46.9% of their participants purchase reproduction vintage clothing, and they observed that some people purchased vintage fabric and patterns at a vintage fair, but did not further discuss the practice. Despite the fact that consumer demand has warranted the production and sales of retro sewing patterns by mainstream pattern companies since 1998, no research has been published on the motivations and methods of the retro sewer.
Understanding the motivations and methods of the retro sewer would provide insight into this specific segment of the home sewing market that may, like wearers of vintage clothing, have additional motivations (e.g. authenticity, nostalgia, and prestige through display of cultural capital) not seen in home sewers that create non-retro clothing. Such knowledge would benefit pattern manufacturers, fabric sellers, and sewing machine manufacturers by helping them to create products that will appeal to the retro sewer market. Benefits of understanding the motivations and methods of retro sewers could also extend to vintage clothing dealers and companies that produce retro clothing. Their product offerings could satisfy unmet needs, which lead to sewing one’s own clothing.

Sewing one’s own clothing is a non-trivial pursuit, requiring investment of time, money, and skills acquisition (Martindale, 2017). Home sewers choose to sew their own clothing as a means of self-empowerment to control their appearance as well as a creative outlet (Martindale, 2017). The retro sewer is one who chooses to build a sartorial identity by creating unique clothing outside the mainstream. Understanding their motivations may lead to deeper understandings of why some women value and choose to build a sartorial identity outside of the mainstream and why sewing is chosen as a way to exercise control over their appearance. Such understanding may also provide a context for the role of nostalgia in postmodern fashion and to explain what type(s) of nostalgia motivate people to create retro goods. Theories of subject formation and symbolic interactionism may be applicable to explain retro sewers’ negotiation of meaning in the combination of personal style, historic dress, and cultural norms through their creative process.
Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is:

1. To understand the motivations of women who sew retro clothing for themselves
2. To understand the methods of women who sew retro clothing for themselves
3. To understand the intersection of the motivations and methods of women who sew retro clothing for themselves.

Research Questions

1. Why do retro sewers value a vintage appearance (e.g. individuality, identity, quality, nostalgia, prestige, authenticity, other)?
2. Why do retro sewers use sewing for themselves as a way to create their desired vintage appearance? (control, fit, choice of fabric, solve existing problems of scarcity, durability, and comfort with authentic vintage clothing?)
3. How do retro sewers use sewing for themselves to create their desired vintage appearance? (For example: What fabrics do they use and why? What patterns do they use and why? How do they use the patterns? Do they communicate with other retro sewers?)
4. What is the intersection of motivations for and methods of retro sewing? (How does one influence or inform the other?)

Limitations

The practices of vintage dress and vintage sewing are both heavily skewed towards women; as of January 2018, 97.6% of over 5000 members of the Facebook group Vintage Patterns Bazaar were women, and 98.2% of nearly 10,000 members of the Facebook group WeSewRetro Sew and Tell were women (Linzy, 2018; “Vintage Patterns Bazaar,” n.d.;
“WeSewRetro Sew & Tell,” n.d.). The lack of men in retro sewing may be due to the perception of sewing as part of a woman’s sphere, as well as that very few vintage sewing patterns exist for men. In addition, men and women have different approaches to appearance management, which would complicate efforts to include men in the study. Therefore, the study will focus on women. This study will be limited to participants in English-speaking countries.

**Definition of Terms**

**General terminology**

**Antifashion:** Dress worn as conscious opposition to mainstream fashion (Davis, 1994, pp. 161-162).

**Authentic:** “Conforming to an original so as to reproduce essential features,” or genuine, or “true to one’s own personality, spirit, or character” (“Authentic,” 2018).

**Cultural capital:** Social advantage conferred by knowledge, preferences, taste, communication style, deportment, and educational credentials (Andres, 2013; Chandler & Munday, 2011; Dumais, 2013).

**Fashion involvement:** The importance and/or personal relevance of dress to a person; level of interest in dress (Cervellon et al., 2012; Hourigan & Bougoure, 2012; Joo Park, Cardona Forney, & Young Kim, 2006; Manchiraju & Damhorst, 2016; Naderi, 2013; O’Cass, 2000, 2004).

**Identity:** A person’s self-conception, largely formed by personal values and preferences. Identity is multidimensional and can be affected by the roles a person plays in life and by the groups to which the person belongs (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). Many aspects of identity, ranging from gender to values, can be communicated through dress (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992).
Postmodernism: In fashion, eclecticism and diversity accompanied by questioning or discarding conventional clothing rules (Bernheim, 2009).

Vintage clothing terminology

Nostalgia: “A longing for the past, a yearning for yesterday, or a fondness for possessions and activities associated with days of yore” (Holbrook, 1993, p. 245).

Retro: Imitating or reviving past fashion or style (“Retro,” 2018; “Retro, adj. and n.2,” 2010). This term does not differentiate between a vintage reproduction and a vintage-inspired garment.

Vintage: Related to clothing, garments that are old enough to be valued for their “temporal difference” from ordinary clothing (Jenss, 2015, p. 140). Typically, this refers to clothing that is more than 20 years old but not older than the 1920s (clothing dated earlier than the 1920s is viewed as antique) (Cervellon et al., 2012; Fischer, 2015).¹ The definition of vintage clothing is difficult to pin down (McColl et al., 2013). Often, vintage is defined by what it is not – not historic dress, not new, not antique, not merely secondhand, not reproduction, and not just any old thing (DeLong et al., 2005; Fischer, 2015; Jenss, 2015). One reason for the difficulty in defining vintage is that, according to some authors, which decades are classified as vintage shifts over time (Fischer, 2015; Jenss, 2015; McColl et al., 2013; Romero, 2013). What is considered vintage is determined by vintage buyers and sellers; therefore, attempts to nail down a precise definition are defied by the shifting vintage market (Fischer, 2015; Peters, 2014). Jenss, perhaps, defined vintage best: Vintage refers to “clothes that are precisely valued for their materialization of time and ‘datedness’ and their capacity as memory modes through which new wearers can feel in touch with a former fashion time” (Jenss, 2015, p. 1). The time required for something to be

¹ Fischer describes vintage as being “20 years old or more.” Cervellon, Carey, and Harms describe vintage as dating between the 1920s and 1980s.
considered vintage varies, but generally this is considered to be enough time for something to be perceived as old and to have become less common, thereby enabling a change of status from secondhand to vintage (DeLong et al., 2005; Fischer, 2015; Jenss, 2015). Jenss (2015) stated that, often, clothes are first considered vintage when worn by a new generation.

**Vintage reproduction**: An article of clothing that “has been produced as a replica or . . . copy of an original” garment from an historic period (“reproduction, n.,” 2009). In this study, *vintage reproduction* clothing will be defined as clothing intended to replicate clothing of a past era.

Differentiated from historic costume in that it is worn “as part of [a person’s] routine, everyday dress” (i.e., at home, at church, at work, grocery shopping), rather than for specific events such as Halloween (Gregson et al., 2001, pp. 9-12).

**Vintage-inspired clothing**: A garment that incorporates one or more aesthetic elements recognizable from a particular historic period. *Vintage-inspired* clothing will be defined as clothing that is intentionally designed to incorporate design elements from a past era, but that is not intended to be an authentic replication of clothing from that era.

**Subcultural style**: Distinctive dress worn to indicate membership in a group outside mainstream culture (Calasibetta & Tortora, 2003, p. 437; De la Haye & Dingwall, 1996).

**Sewing terminology**

**Dressmaker**: Historically, a skilled sewer specializing in fitted garments (Parsons, 1998). Today, “one that makes dresses” (“Dressmaker,” n.d.).

**Seamstress**: Historically, one who does “plain sewing” such as undergarments, basic shirtwaists, and other less-challenging garments (Trautman, 1979).
Sewer: “One who sews” (“sewer, n.3,” 2018). Sewers may also be referred to, or refer to themselves, as dressmakers, seamstresses, tailors, or sewists. Historically, dressmaker, seamstress, and tailor have more limited definitions than does sewer.

Sewist: a term that is used by some sewers to describe themselves but that is not listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary* or *Merriam-Webster* (Miller, 2012).²

Tailor: Historically, one who sews men’s suits and overcoats and women’s coats and jackets (Trautman, 1979). Today, “a person whose occupation is making or altering garments (such as suits, jackets, and dresses) typically to fit a particular person” (“Tailor,” 2018).

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² “Sewist” is identified by *Threads Magazine* as a newer, but not universally-accepted, synonym for “sewer.” The term was not found in OED or Merriam-Webster as of February 9, 2018.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The retro sewer is one who chooses to build a sartorial identity by sewing unique clothing outside the mainstream. Sewing one’s own clothing is a non-trivial pursuit, requiring investment of time, money, and skills acquisition (Martindale, 2017). Understanding their motivations may lead to deeper understandings of why some women value and choose to build a sartorial identity outside of the mainstream and why sewing is chosen as a way to exercise control over their appearance. There has been no prior research focusing specifically on the practice of sewing retro clothing. To understand the motivations of women who sew retro clothing for themselves, it is necessary to consider why retro sewers value a vintage appearance and why retro sewers use sewing for themselves to create their desired vintage appearance. The limitations of authentic vintage clothing, which include its scarcity, its fragility, and the difficulty of finding vintage that fits comfortably, are possible motivations for sewing retro clothing, which may be employed to address all three problems. Thus, postmodernism in fashion, identity through dress, motivations for wearing vintage clothing, and motivations for sewing one’s own clothes will be discussed. It is possible that these motivations also apply to the retro sewer.

Retro sewers may be unique in their methods of home sewing. Understanding the methods of this specific segment of the home sewing market would benefit pattern manufacturers, fabric sellers, and sewing machine manufacturers by helping them to create products that will appeal to the retro sewer market. To understand the methods of women who sew retro clothing for themselves, it is necessary to consider the creative process (e.g. patterns, fabrics, social networking, etc.) that retro sewers use sewing for themselves to create their
desired vintage appearance. Thus, current knowledge about home sewers’ creative processes will be discussed and may be similar to or different than retro sewers.

Finally, it is important to consider the intersection of motivations for and methods of retro sewing. How does one influence or inform the other? Understanding the practice of sewing retro clothing necessitates familiarity with the reasons and the limitations for wearing original vintage clothing and with the practice of home sewing. As illustrated in Figure 2.1, the motivations found in the literature for wearing vintage and for sewing one’s own clothing overlap significantly, in that both are motivated by a need for uniqueness, expression of identity, and quality.

Several theories may be applicable to the practice of retro sewing; therefore, this study will be conducted using several theoretical lenses (shown in Figure 2.2). The portrayal of identity through dress is heavily affected by postmodernism, social expectations, and (in the case
of the vintage wearer and probably the retro sewer), nostalgia. It is widely accepted that postmodernism in fashion contributed to the popularity of vintage clothing; as a postmodern expression of identity, wearing vintage styles may help to shape identity and becomes part of the extended self. Postmodernism in dress prioritizes personal preferences and style over social rules and norms. Postmodernism makes alternative combinations of style and time period, frequently utilized in wearing vintage and retro clothing, more socially acceptable. Wearing vintage styles, however, seems to be limited by social norms (addressed by the theory of subject formation and Joanne Entwistle's theory of situated bodily practice) and by vintage wearers’ perception of their own perception by others, which is addressed by the theory of symbolic interactionism. One function of social norms is that they limit self-expression in clothing by contextualizing dress within time and space; this assumption is supported explained by symbolic interactionism, subject formation, and situated bodily practice. Nostalgia is a strong influence on people who wear vintage clothing (Cassidy & Bennett, 2012; Cervellon et al., 2012; Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013), and it is expected that nostalgia also influences retro sewers; however, it is currently unclear whether nostalgia for retro sewers takes the form of a long for the past or an aesthetic preference for past styles. The theory of the extended self can be applied to this research in the idea that dress both expresses identity and helps to shape the identity (Ahuvia, 2005, p. 171; Belk, 1988, p. 139). This research will seek to explain how retro clothing design negotiates the relationship between past styles and modern preferences; it is expected that this will vary depending on the individual’s desire to conform to social norms and her need for uniqueness. Furthermore, the practice of sewing shares several important characteristics with DIY feminism, so this research will also investigate the degree to which feminism plays a role in the practice of retro sewing. DIY feminism was a branch of third-wave feminism, including women calling themselves craftivists and those involved in the Riot Grrrl movement and music.
The portrayal of identity in dress is fluid and highly context-specific. Dress can be used to indicate a variety of social meanings, including gender, social class, religion, age, occupation, and a variety of other characteristics (Roach-Higgins, Eicher, & Johnson, 1995). The factors influencing one’s self-presentation in dress shift constantly, depending on one’s context, the people with whom one expects to interact, and which aspects of identity a person wishes to portray, among other things (Guy, Green, & Banim, 2001). Because most individuals have...
multiple roles or identities that require specific forms of dress, their sartorial identities tend to be fragmented into clothing that corresponds with these various roles (Anthony & Taplin, 2017, p. 44; Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013, p. 361). Identity functions both in terms of roles (explained by identity theory) and in terms of group membership (explained by social identity theory). Identity theory states that an individual’s identity consists of a “multifaceted social construct that emerges from people’s roles in society” (Hogg et al., 1995, p. 256). Social identity theory states that social groups or categories prescribe an individual’s behavior. Some roles or social groups are viewed as more important to the self than others, and these more salient roles or groups are the ones that are most likely to determine behavior (Hogg et al., 1995, pp. 259-260).

Entwistle (2000, p. 138) observed that dress can be used both to differentiate oneself from others (an example of the portrayal of individual identity) and to declare similarity to others (as part of a group membership). Clothing becomes a constantly-changing expression of the tension among individuality, the roles one plays, and the desire to conform to social groups and rules (Entwistle, 2000; Kaiser, 1990, 2012).

**Vintage clothing and identity**

Wearing vintage clothing is closely linked to the portrayal of identity through dress (DeLong et al., 2005, p. 39; Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013, p. 362). Because people recognize that they are being evaluated or read by their appearance, they attempt to link their appearance with identity to portray an “authentic” self (DeLong et al., 2005, p. 39; Entwistle, 2000, p. 73). Some people are content with mass-market clothing that is readily available; others deliberately seek out garments that construct a distinctive identity (Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013, p. 360). DeLong et al. (2005) found that vintage enthusiasts use vintage to construct a “distinctive and individual
look” that is in line with their authentic selves (p. 39). High fashion involvement has been shown to be a motivator in the purchase of vintage clothing (Cervellon et al., 2012, p. 965).

In terms of vintage fashion, it is probable that when one chooses to wear vintage fashion and what styles of vintage fashion one wears are determined by which identity is most salient at the time (Kaiser, 1990) and which group membership is most relevant. One’s dress at work in an office, for instance, is likely to conform much more to social norms than one’s dress at Viva Las Vegas, a large rockabilly event. Dress that is most closely tied to personal preferences could be argued to be the most expressive of identity. Vintage wearers may have different goals for their appearance that mediate the way in which they style vintage or retro clothing. Some vintage wearers are subtle in their use of vintage clothing, mixing elements of vintage into contemporary ensembles or ensembles that could pass as contemporary; on the other end of the spectrum, some vintage wearers prefer an overt period look (DeLong et al., 2005, p. 31).

Using vintage fashion as a means of identity expression is sometimes used as an avenue to escape the dictates of the fashion industry (Jenss, 2015, p. 111); vintage fashion thereby becomes a form of antifashion (Davis, 1994, pp. 161-162). The rapidly-changing fashion industry, according to Entwistle, can lead to “anxiety and a crisis in identity” (2000, p. 74). With vintage fashion, the wearer, rather than the rapidly-changing vagaries of the fashion industry, becomes the arbiter of style. “That’s the joy of it,” declared one vintage enthusiast interviewed by Gregson, Brooks, and Crewe, “declaring it good taste and bad taste yourself” (Gregson et al., 2001, p. 17).

Vintage or retro fashion may also be used as a form of aspirational identity. Postrel (2004) explained, “We may take on the identities that we want to own, hoping that surface will become substance, rather than accepting the ones we already have” (p. 117). Used in this way, vintage may become a way to shape identity rather than merely to express it.
Postmodernism

Modernism was characterized by a belief in linear progress created by advances in rational thought; this belief was expressed in fashion for decades as the idea that the latest styles were inherently superior to past styles, representing the progress of design (Morgado, 1996, pp. 42, 44). Because the idea of linear progress includes a concept of the “best” way to do things at any given time, there were definite right and wrong ways to dress, ranging from social rules to what silhouettes were worn. In the 1970s, however, postmodernism took hold, expressed through diversity in fashion, the triumph of personal choice over designer mandates, and the borrowing of many elements of past fashion (Farrell-Beck & Parsons, 2007, p. 209). Postmodernism broke down many of the rules and systems of dress, leaving individual preference as the ruling determinant of what is worn (Back, 2007, p. 404). Virginia Postrel (2004) explained, “We have replaced ‘one best way’ with ‘my way, for today,’ a more personal and far more fluid ideal. Individuals differ, and the same person doesn’t always want the same look and feel. . . . All these styles exist, sharing equal social status” (p. 9). The replacement of meaning with personal preference has led to a breakdown in stylistic communication: The relationship between the “signifier” (in the case of fashion, dress) and the “signified” (what is communicated through dress) “is now unstable, unpredictable, and unreliable” (Barnard, 2007, p. 446). Whereas before, old clothes meant that one did not keep up with the current style, that meaning was now open to reinterpretation and renegotiation. Postmodernism, in terms of fashion, can be defined as eclecticism and diversity accompanied by questioning or discarding conventional clothing rules (Bernheim, 2009). Postmodernism, according to Kimberly Miller-Spillman et al., has four major effects on consumer culture: Eclecticism, nostalgia, questioning of rules, and simulation (2012, p. 86). Eclecticism is expressed by mixing a variety of styles and influences, in single outfits and/or in an individual’s overall wardrobe (Miller-Spillman et al.,
Postmodernism in dress may explain the bending of dress norms that occurs in wearing past styles and in the way retro outfits often reconfigure retro influences into eclectic outfits that fit neither past nor present norms.

**Postmodernism and vintage**

It is no coincidence that vintage can be first identified as a distinct mainstream (as opposed to subcultural) trend in the United States beginning in the 1970s (Fischer, 2015, p. 54). The use of vintage as everyday dress, and, by extension, retro clothing, can be attributed to the effects of postmodernism on fashion. The term “vintage” first appeared for a short time in the late 1950s, becoming a widespread cultural phenomenon in the 1970s (Fischer, 2015, pp. 52, 54-55; Le Zotte, 2017, pp. 123, 140). All four effects of postmodernism on consumer culture are represented in the use of vintage clothing. Related to the use of vintage and retro clothing, eclecticism may variously be expressed by mixing decades and/or by mixing vintage with modern styles. Nostalgia is expressed both in wearing vintage and in creating garments that either closely imitate or are inspired by past styles. The questioning of rules is exhibited in mixing items that may not have originally been used together (for example, evening shoes with a day dress) or by wearing things in settings or ways in which they would have been viewed as inappropriate in the past (wearing a casual dress to a formal event or a sundress to church). Simulation is used as a replacement for things that may be rare (Miller-Spillman, Reilly, & Hunt-Hurst, 2012, p. 87); this applies directly to the reproduction of vintage garments, since they are often created to resemble original vintage garments when original vintage may be unavailable. Postmodernism, however, is insufficient to explain all the facets of why people choose to wear vintage clothing or vintage-style clothing. In a purely postmodern world, people could, perhaps,
wear anything they wished; the muddled nature of reality, however, sets certain limitations on what can be worn.

**Subject formation/situated bodily practice**

To address the tensions of living in a largely postmodern society that is still mediated to a degree by social rules and norms, Joanne Entwistle proposed an integrated theory that she terms *situated bodily practice* (Entwistle, 2000, p. 4). This theory proposed that “understanding dress in everyday life requires a consideration of the socially constructed categories of experience, namely time and space” (Entwistle, 2000, p. 32). Susan Kaiser (2012) also noted that time and space are both critical in how we dress, shaping how we dress in relation to our own identities and in relation to others (p. 172). The limitations imposed on dress by social constructions affect people’s choices of how they dress, rather than allowing a sartorial free-for-all as one might expect in a postmodern world. Entwistle (2000) stated, “The options open for the performance of identity are not unconstrained. How we perform our identity has something to do with our location in the social world as members of particular groups, classes, cultural communities. The clothes we choose to wear represent a compromise between the demands of the social world, the milieu in which we belong, and our own individual desires” (p. 114). This may help to explain why more people wear vintage clothing rather than antique clothing (for example, nineteenth century crinolines or bustles) in everyday life – vintage clothing bears enough resemblance to today’s clothing to look different, but not to look alien. Bustles and crinolines are too far outside today’s norm for most people to feel comfortable wearing them outside a costume setting.

Dress, therefore, involves a tension between the way people wish to express themselves and the strictures of social acceptability (Holliday, 2007; Kaiser, 2012). Elizabeth Wilson (2013b)
observed that “in dressing fashionably we aim simultaneously to stand out from and to blend in with the crowd.” The reason for this tension is that one’s dress is inevitably judged by others. Because people recognize that they are being read by their appearance, people attempt to link their appearance with identity to portray an “authentic” self (Entwistle, 2000, p. 73). Aesthetic preferences become the vehicle through which one expresses identity (whether or not one wishes to do so). Postrel (2004) explained, “The more choices we have, the more responsibility we face – whether or not we want it – to define ourselves aesthetically. Because others make similar selections, for similar reasons, I like this becomes I’m like this” (p. 103).

As previously mentioned, dress is constrained by social norms. Although Postrel (2004) argued that we live in a pluralist society and that aesthetics are adopted as an expression of personal identity, she added a disclaimer: “But we are not only aesthetic consumers. We are also producers, subject to the critical eye of others. And that makes us worry. We worry that other people will judge us by our flawed appearance, rather than our best selves. We worry that minding our looks will detract from more important, or more enjoyable, pursuits. We worry that we will lack the gifts or skills to measure up. And we worry that our stylistic choices will be misinterpreted” (p. 72). This is why not everyone wears vintage styles: Different people have a different range of comfort when it comes to dressing outside the norm, with some preferring a higher degree of conformity and others preferring a higher degree of uniqueness (Eicher, Evenson, & Lutz, 2000). This leads to different goals in vintage dress; DeLong, Heinemann, and Reiley (2005) found that some vintage enthusiasts like to wear vintage in ways that can pass as modern clothing, whereas others strive to reproduce an era perfectly, a pursuit that yields a look more removed from social norms (p. 31). It can therefore be concluded that people with a higher-than-average need for uniqueness are more likely to wear obvious vintage or retro clothing (Cervellon et al., 2012, pp. 960-961). The question remains of what aesthetic goals are
pursued by retro sewers: Do retro sewers pursue a pass-as-modern aesthetic, taking advantage of the flexibility afforded them by being able to customize their garments, or do they strive for an authentic, head-to-toe period look?

**Symbolic interactionism**

Symbolic interactionism is a social theory stating that the meaning of symbols is not fixed, but rather is constructed through interactions between people (Aksan, Kısac, Aydın, & Demirbuken, 2009, p. 902; Blumer, 1969, p. 4). Blumer (1969) identified three premises of symbolic interactionism: First, “Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them”; second, “the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows”; and third, “these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters” (p. 2).

Kaiser, Nagasawa, & Hutton (1991) applied symbolic interaction to postmodern dress (pp. 165-185). The constantly-shifting meanings of postmodern dress lead to confusion of symbols, which makes constructing meaning uncertain. However, the nature of symbolic interaction means that constant change is inevitable. Blumer (1969) explained:

Because of [symbolic interaction] human group life takes on the character of an ongoing process – a continuing matter of fitting developing lines of conduct to one another. The fitting together of the lines of conduct is done through the dual process of definition and interpretation. This dual process operates both to sustain established patterns of joint conduct and to open them to transformation. Established patterns of group life exist and persist only through the continued use of the same schemes of interpretation; and such schemes of interpretation are maintained only through their continued confirmation by the defining acts of others (pp. 66-67).
Other people, however, continually try to assign meaning to a person’s dress, so, as previously noted, people’s dress becomes constrained by what they think other people think about their dress (Kaiser, 1990). For most, their “concern lies primarily in the negotiation of what is desirable, appropriate, acceptable, attractive, tasteful, or modern (or postmodern), as opposed to what is viewed as a visual faux pas” (Kaiser et al., 1991, pp. 175-179).

The constraint of self-expression in dress by social norms, which counters the unfettered portrayal of identity implied by postmodern dress, is an assumption based in symbolic interactionism, subject formation, and situated bodily practice. Asking why and how women sew retro clothing for themselves addresses how retro clothing design negotiates the relationship between past styles and modern preferences; it is expected that this will vary depending on the individual’s desire to conform to social norms and her need for uniqueness.

**Vintage as subcultural style**

The characteristics of vintage as a postmodern style complicate any effort to view it as a subculture. Lauren Peters Downing (2014) states that, although vintage began as a subcultural form of dress, it moved into the mainstream in the mid-1990s (p. 218). Once a style moves into the mainstream, it tends to lose its subcultural meaning. When meanings break down, difference becomes the only meaning (Barnard, 2007, pp. 446-447). This leads to the inevitable appropriation and imitation of style, where it is used out of context, for its aesthetic value only (Morgado, 1996, p. 46). Subcultural dress, on the other hand, retains meaning beyond aesthetics; according to Dick Hebdige, subcultural dress is “an intentional communication” (Hebdige, 2007, p. 257). This is why framing vintage as a subculture can be tricky; rather using than vintage dress as a means to communicate membership in a subculture, people typically begin wearing vintage clothing on their own, only later becoming part of what is sometimes referred to as the vintage
subculture (Jenss, 2015, pp. 80-81). Veenstra and Kuipers (2013) argued that vintage is “a form of consumption, rather than an expression of subcultural identity,” stating that the communication of subcultural identity is the point of subcultural dress; therefore, it is questionable whether or not vintage fits the category of subcultural dress, as the goal may not be to express subcultural identity (pp. 355, 361). However, people who wear vintage dress tend to form a sort of vintage community due to their common interest in vintage clothing; vintage becomes a point of connection. Joanne Entwistle (2000) explained the tendency of dress to connect people: “We can use dress to articulate our sense of ‘uniqueness’, to express our difference from others, although as members of particular classes and cultures, we are equally likely to find styles of dress that connect us to others as well” (p. 138).

**Vintage as a reaction to fast fashion**

The rapid changes, lack of meaning, and increased number of choices brought about by postmodernism have varying effects on people’s fashion choices. The plurality of styles made possible by postmodern fashion made vintage socially acceptable; however, vintage is also a reaction against fast fashion, another incarnation of postmodern fashion. Elizabeth Wilson described postmodern fashion as “fast fashion with styles in such quick succession that one can get caught in a hamster wheel of change spinning so fast that it seems to be stationary” (E. Wilson, 2013b). One effect of the frenetic pace of today’s fashion may be a desire for stability, which is expressed in the choice of vintage styles or vintage clothing (Fischer, 2015, p. 63; Jenss, 2015, p. 143; Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013, p. 356). Jenss (2015) explained that “to focus on a particular era can, to some extent, immunize against the rapid change promoted by the fashion industry” (p. 111). This could explain why some vintage stylists choose to stick to a certain era
the perception of the 1940s, for example, may change over time, as may the particular styles adopted from the 1940s, but overall the styles of the 1940s remain the styles of the 1940s and are therefore impervious to significant change.

This is not to say that vintage enthusiasts are immune to change. Vintage and reproduction style preferences are influenced by in-person or online interactions with other vintage enthusiasts (Cassidy & Bennett, 2012, pp. 248-249; Duffy et al., 2012, p. 521; Fischer, 2015, p. 49; Jenss, 2015, pp. 80-81, 88, 127) and media influences such as movies and television shows (Cassidy & Bennett, 2012, p. 247; Jenss, 2015, p. 122). A desire for “new” vintage or reproduction clothes also plays a significant role (Jenss, 2015, p. 88). According to Jenss, the way vintage clothing is worn shifts over time: “Even if the style is maintained, it is updated, remembered, and reassembled over time,” Jenss said. “This is part of the social dynamics of clothes and fashion, bound up with the desire (and/or pressure) to look new to self and others, for example by avoiding the continuous wearing of the same clothes” (Jenss, 2015, p. 142). The ongoing shift is caused by the continuous process of subject formation; identity is not fixed, but continues to shift and change over time in response to life circumstances and culture (Kaiser, 2012).

**Postmodernism, nostalgia, and vintage clothing**

Researchers have generally agreed that nostalgia is a motivating factor in the choice to wear vintage or retro clothing (Cassidy & Bennett, 2012; Cervellon et al., 2012; Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013). Nostalgia was defined by Holbrook as “a longing for the past, a yearning for

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3. Several sources note that some vintage wearers tend to dress exclusively in one era; Jenss’s research, for example, focuses exclusively on people who wear 1960s vintage.
yesterday, or a fondness for possessions and activities associated with days of yore” (1993, p. 245). According to McColl, et al., clothing that represents “the zeitgeist of a specific era” is of particular value to vintage consumers, indicating that association with a particular era is important to vintage consumers (2013, p. 145). Nostalgia has been linked to the purchase of secondhand goods since the nineteenth century; Le Zotte identified the nineteenth-century rise of mass production as a catalyst for a nostalgia-based interest in handmade and antique items. Old clothing, however, was not viewed as collectible until later decades (Le Zotte, 2017). Although the literature agrees that nostalgia is a factor for people who wear vintage/retro clothing, there is some disagreement over what definition of nostalgia is applicable to vintage wearers: Does it refer to “a longing for the past” or simply “a fondness for possessions” from (or imitating) an earlier time (Holbrook, 1993)?

Davis (1979) classified nostalgia into three categories: First-order nostalgia is an “unexamined belief” that the past was better than the present; second-order nostalgia is a feeling of nostalgia that is mediated by questioning whether the past was actually superior to the present or whether it merely seems that way; and third-order nostalgia examines the feeling of nostalgia, questioning if nostalgia is at all legitimate (pp. 18-25). Goulding (2002) described “vicarious nostalgia,” defined as “aesthetic consumption and preferences for objects and experiences outside of the informant’s living memories” (p. 542). She found that an individual’s nostalgic preference usually solidifies at about age 15 and is further developed by that preference leading to increased consumption of and exposure to positive images of historic periods. Vicarious nostalgia is caused by “frustration in the present, compared with an idealized image of a perfect past” (Goulding, 2002). Like Goulding, Cervellon, Carey, and Harms differentiated between the nostalgia of “a personally remembered past” and nostalgia for a period in which a person did not live, but state that both these forms of nostalgia rely on an “idealized” past that is filtered by
“selective memory, which allows people to re-shape or screen out negative elements from their memories” (Cervellon, Carey, & Harms, 2012, p. 959). The differentiation proposed by Cervellon, et al. corresponds with Holbrook and Schindler’s findings that nostalgia can be associated with a sense of continuity or security based on a link with the past (Holbrook & Schindler, 2003). This idealized form of nostalgia tends to reduce the past to the images found in popular culture, picking the pleasing elements of the past and ignoring the broader picture (Cervellon et al., 2012; Jenss, 2015; E. Wilson, 2013a). People are selective about which elements of the past they choose to copy; they are more likely, for example, to emulate a 1940s movie star than a 1940s housewife.

The idea of nostalgia was further elaborated by Zhao, et al., who distinguish individualistic nostalgia, defined as “one’s own personal past,” and collectivistic nostalgia, which is “relationship-centered and revolv[ing] around a past time, by-gone era, or generation,” which may or may not be expressed as vicarious nostalgia (Zhao, Li, Teng, & Lu, 2014). Collectivistic nostalgia may be influenced by group membership (in vintage clothing, this could include membership in a reenactment group, a particular age group, or the online vintage community); according to Sierra and McQuitty, membership in a group related to a specific time period can influence attitudes about the past and can motivate the purchase of nostalgic consumer goods (Sierra & McQuitty, 2007).

Veenstra and Kuipers, on the other hand, stated that nostalgia as related to the consumption of vintage clothing is not necessarily “longing for the past,” but instead a “reappropriation and reinvention of consumer goods,” a more postmodern interpretation (Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013). A postmodern view would suggest that vintage is worn rather for an appreciation of the aesthetics or qualities that happen to be characteristic of earlier decades, rather than an actual longing for the past. Pickering and Keightley believed that nostalgia may
not be a desire to return to the past, but a recognition of “aspects of the past as a basis for renewal and satisfaction in the future . . . a means of taking one’s bearings for the road ahead in the uncertainties of the present” (Pickering & Keightley, 2006). They took issue with the postmodern idea of the loss of meaning of the past, suggesting that people may not “passively accept” a postmodern view that strips meaning from the past (Pickering & Keightley, 2006). Lyotard argued that postmodernism does not remove meaning, but that meaning is determined by one’s position in the social structure (Lyotard, 1984). Lyotard’s ideas on postmodernism would suggest that, rather than having no meaning, meaning is instead derived from one’s own experiences and social position, which would then mean that the role played by nostalgia in the practice of wearing vintage clothing would depend on the wearer’s background. Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998) found that most White Americans focus on the past in relation to their personal lives and their families rather than their communities or larger cultural narratives; whereas African Americans and American Indians, while also including their personal pasts and families, usually refer to a broader cultural narrative and a collective past as a guide for living in the present in a way that White Americans do not. Wilson (2014) stated that Caucasian Americans and African Americans have different perceptions of the past. She observed that her white participants did not tend to look at the past in terms of race and viewed race relations in the 1950s as “nonproblematic” and “separate, but equal,” whereas race and Jim Crow laws were “indelible” in the memories of African Americans (pp. 72-73). It is probable that the differences in the way different ethnic groups view the past affects whether or not certain groups engage in retro sewing and in their motivations for retro sewing.

Zonneveld and Biggemann (2014) stated that, instead of replacing meaning with aesthetics, nostalgia in collecting behavior may be caused by a “synthesis of aesthetics and nostalgia” (p. 327). Wilson (2014) identified three factors that motivate collectors: Associations
with family members, memories of childhood, and nostalgia for particular historical period(s) (p. 112). Wilson found that collectors have two goals: First, they want to keep the past from being forgotten, and they view their collections as a way to honor previous generations. Second, they “desire to imagine living in a different era,” a form of displaced nostalgia (p. 115). The collectors that Wilson studied believe that old things were made better, but they do not use the objects in their collection for their original purposes. Wilson further noted that collecting antiques often inspires individuals to learn more about history. Because there are multiple manifestations and meanings of nostalgia, this research seeks to define and explain the role of nostalgia for retro sewers.

**Postmodernism, authenticity and vintage clothing**

The search for authentic expression of the self through dress is a manifestation of postmodernism in dress. Authenticity of identity has been linked to vintage clothing since the first appearance of vintage in the 1950s. Jennifer Le Zotte (2017), discussing a 1950s fad for 1920s raccoon coats, stated that the coats’ authenticity was arguably their most important attribute; they “demonstrated consumer discrimination and originality” (p. 132).

According to Merriam-Webster (2018), authenticity can take on several different forms, three of which are relevant to the discussion of retro clothing. First, authenticity is the quality of “conforming to an original so as to reproduce essential features.” This definition could be applied as a measure of authenticity in historic reproduction garments and in retro sewing. Second, something that is authentic is “not false or imitation,” applicable to the notion that a true vintage garment is a genuine historic artifact rather than a reproduction. Third, something that is authentic is “true to one’s own personality, spirit, or character,” which could be applied to the idea of clothing as a true expression of self (“Authentic,” 2018).
Virginia Postrel (2004) delineated two different types of authenticity. The first is a type of authenticity related to the object; for example, authenticity as an “original form of something” or authenticity as patina or “showing the signs of history” (pp. 110-113). The second type of authenticity relates to a person’s identity rather than to an object; specifically, authenticity of self-expression (Postrel, 2004, pp. 115-117). Both the authenticity of original garments (related to the object) and authenticity of self-expression (related to identity) are factors in why people choose to wear vintage garments. Most of the literature on vintage wearers has not differentiated between the two, speaking of authenticity in more general terms. Amanda Koontz (2010) identified two expressions of authenticity in consumer goods, both of which related to identity and are applicable to vintage: “Otherizing,” which she defined as authenticity that results from a product being outside and differentiated from the mainstream, and “traditionalizing,” defined as “constructing authenticity by creating a sense of connectedness between products and consumers’ perceptions of the past,” a form of nostalgia (p. 978). “Otherizing” is linked to the idea of uniqueness or individuality in clothing, a way of expressing identity by consuming goods different from the mainstream.

The authenticity of a vintage garment as an historic original is linked to its authenticity as a symbolic statement against mass production (Fischer, 2015; Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013), which in turn is linked to authenticity as a form of self-expression. Fischer (2015) explained that consumers often attribute similar meanings to vintage clothing that they do to handmade goods, often “assum[ing] that vintage is ‘handmade,’ with a high degree of ‘integrity’ and ‘craftsmanship’ in its construction” (p. 63). This is one of the reasons that mass-produced retro garments, such as the ones produced by companies like Modcloth, are viewed as less authentic (in terms of self-expression) than original vintage garments. The emphasis is not just on the vintage look, but on how one obtains it (McColl et al., 2013, p. 141). According to Jennifer Le Zotte, the notion of
authenticity has been linked to secondhand clothing for decades (2017, p. 15). Set in contrast to mass production, then, the authenticity of vintage in terms of historicity becomes a mark of connoisseurship, “a means of demonstrating individuality, knowingness, knowledgeability and discernment, as an expression of their cultural capital, and as a way of constructing their difference from others” (Gregson et al., 2001, p. 16).

Which forms of authenticity are applicable to the retro sewer needs further research. The idea of authenticity in terms of being an original artifact, for instance, may or may not be applied to retro clothing; the garments themselves are not original artifacts of a period, but vintage patterns and fabrics used in constructing retro clothing are, complicating the notion of authenticity in retro sewing.

**Vintage as an expression of cultural capital**

Part of the exclusivity of vintage clothing is that identifying and wearing vintage requires cultural capital (Duffy et al., 2012, p. 522; Gregson et al., 2001, p. 16). The concept of *cultural capital*, originated by Pierre Bourdieu, refers to tastes, preferences, and education level that can be used to position oneself in society. Cultural capital includes *embodied capital*, defined by Bourdieu as “long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body”; *objectified capital*, or “cultural goods”; and *institutional capital*, or academic qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 47, 50). Antiques, including vintage clothing, serve as a marker of status (Belk, 1988, p. 149) for several reasons. First, the recognition and appreciation of vintage styles requires connoisseurship and expertise (Cervellon et al., 2012; DeLong et al., 2005; Jenss, 2015). It is important that vintage clothing enthusiasts be able to distinguish original garments from less-valuable reproductions, necessitating the study of period dress (DeLong et al., 2005, p. 23; Jenss, 2004, p. 390, 2015, p. 115). According to Entwistle (2000), even the recognition of quality, a motivator for wearing
vintage, requires cultural capital (p. 50). Second, vintage also requires knowledge of design and styling so that pieces can be combined in an attractive, socially-acceptable way (DeLong et al., 2005, p. 34). The practice of wearing vintage clothing is described as “clever dressing for knowing audiences; it is a performance of taste, knowingness and discernment acted out for an audience of those in the know” (Gregson et al., 2001, p. 12). Third, higher educational levels and higher income levels, both of which are connected to cultural capital, are linked to the purchase of vintage clothing (Cervellon et al., 2012, pp. 966-967, 969).

Cultural capital has been closely linked to the consumption of vintage since its origins in the 1950s. An ordinary person purchasing vintage items was not, in and of itself, enough to legitimize the practice. Instead, legitimizing vintage required “taste-makers with the necessary cultural capital to revalorize it” (Fischer, 2015, p. 50). Le Zotte (2017) identified the first vintage fad as a 1957 craze for 1920s raccoon coats started by a wealthy couple with sufficient influence to have the New Yorker run a story about their selling coats. The raccoon coat trend required social capital not only on the part of its originators, but also on the part of the participants in the trend. The raccoon-coat trend owed its status appeal not to the price of the garments, but to the scarcity of the coats, which “demonstrated the wearers’ obscure fashionability and up-to-the-minuteness” (pp. 126-133). Le Zotte also discussed the clothing choices of Jane Ormsby-Gore, a socialite who began wearing vintage in the late 1960s and who was instrumental in popularizing vintage. Ormsby-Gore claimed to mix vintage with other styles as a means of “break[ing] down class boundaries,” but her clothing choices required a keen knowledge of both current fashion trends and past design elements that would fit those trends. Le Zotte (2017) noted that the procurement of these particular types of garments “signaled privilege and opportunity . . . and perhaps a desire to distinguish oneself from affordable, working-class styles” (pp. 145-146). Celebrity endorsements further increased the interest in vintage beginning in the early 1990s.
(Cervellon et al., 2012; Schwartz, 2010). Blumer (2007) observed, however, that the endorsement of the elite is not in and of itself adequate to popularize a style; for a style to become popular, the style “has to correspond to the direction of incipient taste of the fashion consuming public” (p. 237). In other words, fashion already must be headed in a certain direction for a style to take hold. In the case of vintage fashion, the broader trend of postmodernism enabled vintage to become a socially acceptable style.

Le Zotte (2017) concluded, “Voluntary secondhand dress persists precisely because it suggests both cultural and economic distinction. It satisfies a desire to be seen as different than the average consumer dupe – as willing to invest time in the cultivation of originality supposedly without utilizing class and wealth privilege” (p. 243). In short, vintage fashion is an exercise in the display of cultural capital.

What is not known is if the concept of cultural capital extends to the wearing of retro clothing. Sewing retro clothing requires knowledge of both history and sewing and requires leisure time and money, making sewing retro clothing an exclusive activity.

**Quality**

Vintage clothing is perceived to have better quality than current clothing, which is a motivating factor in the decision to consume it (Cassidy & Bennett, 2012, pp. 244, 251; Fischer, 2015, pp. 50, 58; McColl et al., 2013, p. 144). Fischer (2015) elaborated that, in contrast to contemporary clothing, vintage clothing is perceived to have better design details, higher-quality fabrics, and better longevity in terms of wear (p. 58). Probably, fewer poor-quality garments have been preserved and/or to have survived, leaving a predominance of higher-quality garments on the vintage market. As quality is a motivator both for wearing vintage and for sewing, it is likely that quality is a motivating factor for the retro sewer. Which aspects of quality
are prioritized by retro sewers and what methods retro sewers use to achieve quality need to be answered by further research.

**Individuality/uniqueness**

The idea of cultural capital is closely linked with the desire for distinctiveness and individuality. A desire for individuality is a major motivating factor for people who choose to wear vintage clothing (Cervellon et al., 2012, pp. 960-961; DeLong et al., 2005, pp. 38, 40; Fischer, 2015, pp. 50, 58; McColl et al., 2013, p. 145). The scarcity of vintage, and the idea (whether accurate or not) that each piece is one-of-a-kind, lends a certain cachet to vintage that mass-produced clothing – even luxury goods – may be perceived as lacking (Reiley & DeLong, 2011). Jenss (2004) explained, “Today’s original vintage clothes function like designer labels, as markers of distinction” (p. 396).

Vintage enthusiasts tend to view new clothing as lacking in individuality. “Especially at H&M everything looks the same,” explained one of Jenss’s interviewees. “You can’t get anything else. . . . There’s no real variety in contemporary fashion” (Jenss, 2015, p. 110). Mass-produced retro clothing, although it sometimes fit their desired aesthetic, is often avoided by vintage enthusiasts because the items are not unique (Jenss, 2015, p. 114). In fact, some vintage wearers may even stop wearing a particular period if they perceive that it has become too mainstream (Gregson et al., 2001, p. 21).

In the search for uniqueness, however, a balance must be achieved. Anthony and Taplin (2017) explained, “A compromise between adherence to and differentiation from fashions must be found for individuals to consistently act out their presentations of self through consumption choices” (p. 43). According to Ayalla Ruvio (2008), being too similar or too dissimilar from others can be injurious to an individual’s self-esteem (p. 446). This, along with the theory of
symbolic interactionism, might explain why people choose to wear vintage clothing, which fits
cultural norms to some degree, rather than, for instance, a fantasy costume; it also explains why
vintage clothing, being somewhat outside the norm, is not universally sought-after. Ruvio (2008)
noted that some people, particularly individuals with “strong characters,” are more likely to
engage in behavior that departs from the norm. These individuals “avoid buying and consuming
commonly used products and brands,” even to the point of dropping brands that they perceive
have become too common (p. 447). For vintage-wearers, this means that the uniqueness of
vintage clothing makes it desirable; it also explains why some vintage enthusiasts will abandon a
period or style that becomes too popular.

A need for uniqueness is tempered by social norms. Ruvio (2008) stated that
“individuals generally prefer to exhibit uniqueness in a way that will not provoke social
punishment” (p. 456). Cervellon, Carey, and Harms (2012) stated that vintage enthusiasts “value
the exclusivity of possessing rare pieces which will enhance their sense of differentiation,” but
acknowledge that, although vintage may enhance one’s social image and self-image, it can also
result in social disapproval (pp. 960-961). This social disapproval may limit the adoption of
certain styles or aspects of vintage dress. The vintage market is influenced by outside trends,
movies, and television shows, which create demand for certain types of garments and contribute
to the avoidance of others (Cassidy & Bennett, 2012, p. 4; Fischer, 2015, p. 60; Jenss, 2015 pp.
118, 122; Wilson, 2013, p. 172).4 Herbert Blumer (2007), speaking of fashion designers but
equally relevant to the adoption of vintage styles, said, “They pick up ideas of the past, but
always through the filter of the present; they are guided and constrained by the immediate styles

4. Jenss notes that what is in style in vintage is influenced by trends and the media.
Cassidy and Bennett discuss the influence of the television show *Mad Men* and other films and
television shows on the vintage market.
in dress” (p. 236). Personal taste in vintage is heavily influenced by mainstream fashion trends, popular perception of a decade (which tends to change over time), and even by mini-trends within the vintage community, such as the current rage for Lilli Ann suits and Hawaiian sarong dresses (Cassidy & Bennett, 2012, pp. 248-249; Fischer, 2015, p. 49; Jenss, 2015, pp. 91, 117, 118, 136). The media, particularly movies and television shows, can also influence the popularity of specific vintage items (Cassidy & Bennett, 2012, p. 247; Jenss, 2015, p. 122; Romero, 2013, p. 6).

It seems likely that the desire for individuality affects retro sewers in two different ways: First, they may turn to vintage sewing as a guarantee of owning a truly unique garment. Second, they may use retro sewing as a way to produce a vintage-inspired item that falls within today’s appearance norms, thereby remaining unique while reducing the likelihood of social censure.

**Problems and Limitations of Original Vintage Clothing**

**Scarcity**

One of the factors contributing to the desirability of vintage – its scarcity – can also become a limitation of its use. The limited availability of vintage clothing means that it is extremely difficult to build up a complete vintage wardrobe. What has survived to be worn is biased by what people kept. Things were typically kept out of sentimentality (wedding gowns, prom dresses, hand-embroidered baby clothes) or because they were not worn out (slips or winter coats). This bias means that it is relatively easy to find wedding dresses, for example, and difficult to find period undergarments. Jenss (2015) noted, “Not all clothes desired are available

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5. The examples of mini-trends within the vintage community are based on my personal observations of the behavior of vintage buyers and sellers in the Facebook group Ooh La La! Vintage Swap and Sell Shop over time.
any longer – or may have ever existed in the past” (p. 113). Clothing of any decade becomes harder to find over time. Jenss explained, “In the 1970s and 1980s, when young people started to get interested in 1960s clothes, garments from this decade were by far more accessible to both men and women. . . . The situation is comparable to the current increased availability and interest in purchasing fashion from the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century” (p. 89).

Increasing demand from consumers has contributed to the scarcity of original garments (McColl et al., 2013, p. 146). As demand and scarcity both increase, prices go up (Jenss, 2015, p. 91). Because vintage is a limited resource, scarcity both causes and is exacerbated by increased demand (Worchel, Lee, & Adewole, 1975). Jenss found that the increasing prices and scarcity of vintage clothing were factors in the decision to have retro garments made (2015, p. 119).

Another contributing factor to scarcity is that the most-desired vintage garments are those that were unusual and uncommon to begin with. Studies show that vintage aficionados prefer to wear things that fit their personal taste, which is heavily influenced by trends (Jenss, 2015, pp. 91, 113, 122; Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013, p. 361).

**Durability**

A major problem with vintage clothing is a lack of durability. Fabrics deteriorate with age; silk shatters, colors fade, and garments are susceptible to stains, wear, and tear from use. Even a garment that is initially in good condition cannot be maintained that way indefinitely. Jenss (2015) noted that vintage wearers typically treat their garments very carefully, hand washing and repairing them, but that the clothing inevitably deteriorates over time (p. 108). The

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6. Worchel, Lee, and Adewole found that commodities perceived as scarce increase in desirability.
lack of durability contributes to the scarcity of vintage, as finding vintage in good condition is a significant challenge both for vintage dealers and vintage wearers (Jenss, 2015, p. 113; McColl et al., 2013, p. 146).

**Comfort and fit**

The scarcity of vintage is further exacerbated by the difficulty of finding clothes that fit well (Jenss, 2015, pp. 89, 115; Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013, p. 356). In a study of perceptions of clothing fit, Eonyou Shin (2013) found that consumers focus on five aspects of fit: Physical fit, aesthetic fit, functional fit, social context, and social comfort. *Physical fit* consists of the tightness/looseness of clothing and the length of sleeves and hems; *aesthetic fit* refers to the garment’s suitability for the proportions of the wearer’s body, including its conformity to current fashion trends and perceptions of what is attractive; *functional fit* refers to whether or not the clothing restricts movement; *social context*, which prescribes certain kinds of fit for different social situations (a wedding dress is subject to different fit requirements than athletic clothing, for instance); and *social comfort*, which refers to possible or imagined feedback/judgments from other people.

Vintage clothes are much more structured, more fitted, and have less give than the clothing of today. This makes a more precise fit necessary for the clothing to look good; the unyielding structure of a woven fabric draws attention to fit problems rather than smoothing over them as does a knit. In addition, vintage clothing was designed to fit over period undergarments, which are therefore necessary to achieve a good fit, but which are often rejected by vintage wearers for being “uncomfortable and ‘unnatural’” (Jenss, 2015, p. 117). Sadie Stein observed, “Without bullet-front bras and crinolines, a lot of [vintage] dresses look anachronistic – or, if authentically underpinned, somewhat costumey” (Stein, 2011). Vintage wearers tend to
look at vintage clothing through the lens of contemporary preferences and body ideals, which affects their perception of fit (Jenss, 2015, p. 117). For some vintage wearers, however, the fit of vintage clothing is an attraction rather than a drawback, as it suits their bodies better than today’s clothing (Fischer, 2015, p. 50; Holson, 2012). They perceive the clothing to have a better aesthetic fit, or, in some cases, physical fit (Shin, 2013); for example, women with a small waist and larger hips may prefer 1950s styles, which emphasized the hourglass figure, over 1920s styles, which feature a straight silhouette.

Complicating the issue of finding clothing that fits is that the average woman’s body size has increased over the decades (Christel & Dunn, 2017), making it more difficult for the average woman to find vintage clothing that fits. O’Brien and Shelton (1941) found, in a study of 10,042 white women, that the average white woman had a bust circumference of 35.62”, a waist circumference of 29.15”, and a hip girth of 38.82” (p. 27). More recent measurement surveys do not distinguish the measurements of white Americans from other races, and only waist measurements are given; however, the average for women of all racial groups in 2011-2014 was 38.15” (Fryar, Gu, Ogden, & Flegal, 2016), an increase of 9” from the 1941 survey. According to the 1929 Dress Pattern Commercial Standard, a 38” waist measurement corresponds to a 44” bust circumference and a 47½” hip, four dress sizes larger than the average of the 1941 study (National Bureau of Standards, 1929).

Comfort (or lack thereof) is an additional drawback to wearing vintage; the functional fit of the clothing is typically more restrictive for physical activity than today’s clothing. People today are more accustomed to knits, stretch wovens, looser-fitting clothing, and a greater range of motion than in previous decades, which makes vintage from the 1960s and earlier seem uncomfortable in contrast (Binkley, 2016; Jenss, 2004, 2015, p. 117). Vintage, said Veenstra and Kuipers, “has to meet contemporary demands regarding body size, body shape, and
Some possible solutions to the problems of fit and comfort in vintage include wearing period undergarments (which solves the fit but not the comfort), altering vintage to fit (a solution which is somewhat controversial among vintage wearers), or wearing custom-made or homemade retro clothing (“Ethical Dilemmas in Refashioning Vintage Clothes,” 2015; “How far should we go with vintage alterations?,” 2014; “Why Can’t I Find a 50s Dress That Will Fit Me?,” 2011; Jenss, 2015, p. 119; Rogers, 2012).  

**Home Sewing**

The history and meaning of home sewing is fraught with contradictions. Because of its historic relegation to the women’s sphere, sewing has often been viewed as anti-feminist, “a symbol of subjugation” (Chaker, 2006). The rise of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s occurred simultaneously with a decrease in home economics programs in schools and a decline in sewing. Recently, however, a more nuanced view of sewing has emerged. Sarah Gordon stated that sewing simultaneously symbolized and challenged traditional views of women’s roles, and Jessica Bain and Addie Martindale argued that today’s dressmaking is empowerment for women that enables them to reject societal norms (Bain, 2016, p. 63; Gordon, 2004, p. 84; Martindale, 2017). Although sewing slowly declined throughout much of the twentieth century, it was reborn in the 1980s as a hobby largely practiced by well-off women. Although motivations for sewing have remained much the same for over a century, they have shifted significantly in relative importance, transforming the perception of sewing from a money-saving tactic to a status symbol.

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7. Jenss discusses custom or homemade reproductions as a solution. “Why Can’t I Find a 50s Dress That Will Fit Me?” offers a list of solutions. “Ethical Dilemmas,” Emileigh Rogers, and “How Far Should We Go with Vintage Clothing Alterations?” all refer to vintage alterations as a dilemma and/or a preservation concern.
Sewing trends over time

Throughout the nineteenth century, the close fit of women’s clothing and the lack of mass production necessitated that clothing either be made at home or by a dressmaker (Parsons, 1998, p. 46; Scranton, 1994, p. 246). Changes in fashion in the 1910s and 1920s that simplified dress construction and fit aided the development of ready-to-wear for women, and consequently reduced the need to sew clothing at home (Amnéus, 2003, p. 137; Gordon, 2004, p. 70). Ready-to-wear items were widely available by 1910, and the dominance of ready-to-wear clothing was well-established by the 1920s (Amnéus, 2003, p. 137). Simultaneously, increasing numbers of women were entering the workforce, reducing the amount of time they had at home to sew and increasing their reliance on ready-to-wear clothing throughout the twentieth century (Gordon, 2004, p. 70; Russum, 2016, p. 4). For many women, however, home sewing remained an important part of the household economy. In rural areas, particularly, ready-made clothes were not always readily available (Gordon, 2009, ch. 1, para. 29). Even in areas where ready-to-wear was accessible, it was usually less expensive to sew one’s own clothing (Gordon, 2009). As a result, home sewing continued to be popular into the 1950s and 1960s (Christensen, 1995, p. 2). The increased prosperity of the 1950s led over time to a decline in home sewing; because home sewing was linked to financial necessity, many mothers stopped teaching their daughters to sew in the 1950s (Russum, 2016, p. 24). The decline in home sewing was further exacerbated throughout the 1960s and 1970s by the movement of clothing production overseas, which made ready-to-wear much more affordable, and by the trend towards more casual dress (Chaker, 2006; Owens, 1997). Margaret Ambry stated that a “major decline” was noticed in 1974 and continued until 1986 (Ambry, 1988, p. 36). On the other hand, Darlene A. Christensen found that there was an increase in home sewing product sales in the early 1970s, which she attributes in part to the increased price and poor quality of ready-to-wear in that period (Christensen, 1995,
Sources have agreed that the home sewing industry began to recover in the 1990s, a trend that has continued into the twenty-first century (Chaker, 2006; LaBat et al., 2007; Owens, 1997; Russum, 2016). According to the Sewing Fashion Council, quoted by Christensen, in 1992 approximately 60% of Americans owned sewing machines and over 150 million sewing patterns were sold annually (Christensen, 1995, p. 17). The American Home Sewing and Craft Association reported in 1997 that 30 million women were sewing (Owens, 1997). Laura Holson reported that sales of Singer sewing machines doubled between 2002 and 2012, from 1.5 million machines sold in 2002 to three million sold in 2012 (Holson, 2012). Due to societal changes, however, the women sewing in the 1980s through the twenty-first century were a very different demographic from the sewers of the first half of the twentieth century. As sewing become more expensive than most ready-to-wear, lower-income women largely stopped sewing, and 1980s women were no longer sewing to save money (Williams, 1988). Instead, home sewers became comprised primarily of college-educated, working women between the ages of 25 and 44 who sewed for pleasure (Ambry, 1988, p. 36; Christensen, 1995, p. 17; Owens, 1997; Williams, 1988, p. 2).  

Motivations for home sewing

As the demographics of home sewers shifted, the motivations for home sewing shifted as well. Some motivations for home sewing have remained constant for a century; others, such as financial necessity, fluctuated in importance or even disappeared during that time. These

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8. Ambry and Williams both state in 1998 that the majority of sewers are women ages 25-44; by 1997, the demographic seems to have shifted slightly, as Owens states that they are women ages 24-54. Christensen cites the Sewing Fashion Council as saying that sewers in 1993 were “college-educated, 25-45 years old, [have] a child at home,” and a household income over $35,000.
changes in motivation are attributable to changes in the fashion industry, the economy, social norms, and a revaluing of handmade items.

**Economic**

Economic reasons for home sewing, for many years, were arguably the strongest motivators for home sewing. Home sewing for economic reasons was multifaceted: Women mended clothing to extend the life of their garments, sewed to make extra income, and sewed because they could obtain better-quality garments for less expense than in ready-to-wear. Gordon explained “Sewing was for many a routine component of a household economy, usually (but not always) cheaper than buying items readymade” (Gordon, 2009, ch. 1, para. 3). O’Brien & Campbell (1927) found that 90.2% of women surveyed sewed to save money (p. 9). Beginning in the 1970s, however, studies show that economy, although still somewhat influential, was no longer the primary motivator for home sewers (Ambry, 1988, p. 36; Bain, 2016, p. 65; Christensen, 1995, pp. 1, 12-13; Ferguson, 1975, p. 1; Owens, 1997; Williams, 1988, p. 2). As previously mentioned, the shift from domestic production to cheaper overseas production led to ready-to-wear becoming a more economical option than home sewing for many sewers, particularly with the increased perceived value of women’s time as more women began working outside the home, both of which diminished the economic benefits of home sewing. Despite these changes, mending, updating, and remaking garments remained a staple of sewing books throughout the twentieth century, even into the 1980s (Art of dressmaking, 1927, pp. 252-255; Clothing care and repair, 1985; How to Mend and Refit: Instructions for Darning, Patching, Applique, Reinforcing, Refitting, Alterations, 1961; Making smart clothes: Modern methods in cutting, fitting, and finishing, 1930, p. 104; The dressmaker, 1916, pp. 134-135; Blondin, 1943, pp. 236-250). Kean and Levin (1989) found in that economics were still an important factor in sewing, and Russum
(2016) believed that the recession in the 2000s was a motivating factor in the revival of sewing and crafting (pp. 4, 34). Schofield-Thomschin (1999) and Martindale (2017), however, found that economy was less important than other motivations.

**Quality**

Closely linked to economy, quality is another factor that influences home sewing. For decades, many women have sewn because they could get better fabric and make longer-lasting garments than those offered in ready-to-wear (Christensen, 1995; Ferguson, 1975; Gordon, 2004; Martindale, 2017; O'Brien & Campbell, 1927). In retro sewing, quality may take a variety of forms, including higher-quality fabrics (most retro ready-to-wear manufacturers rely heavily on polyester), better construction, and unusual, time-consuming design details and embellishments that are not easy to find in ready-to-wear clothing.

**Fit**

Customizing garment fit has been a home sewing motivation for decades (Ferguson, 1975; Martindale, 2017; Martindale & McKinney, 2016; O’Brien & Campbell, 1927). This is a particularly common motivation for women whose bodies do not fit industry standards (Gordon, 2009). Ferguson (1975) found that over 56% of home sewers cited better fit as a motivation for home sewing (p. 43). LaBat, Salusso, and Rhee (2007) found that 96.2% of women adjust patterns for a better fit, an indicator that most home sewers are picky about fit and/or that their bodies do not fit industry measurements. Adjusting fit has historically been one of the most difficult and frustrating aspects of sewing for home sewers (LaBat et al., 2007; O’Brien & Campbell, 1927). The fact that many women sew for fit may help to explain the decline in sewing in the latter part of the twentieth century, as the unfitted garments popular in
the latter half of the 1960s and the 1970s, and the prevalence of stretch fabrics in the 1970s and 1980s, may have made it easier for women to find ready-to-wear that fit properly.

**Identity, individuality and creative expression**

Individuality and creative expression in clothing, albeit more subtly throughout the earlier part of the 20th Century, were drivers for home sewing long before postmodernism hit the scene in the 1970s (Gordon, 2004, p. 79; O’Brien & Campbell, 1927, p. 9). Gordon quoted one interview participant who described sewing as “the ability to express my own personality in clothes that are *mine* and not to be duplicated” (Gordon, 2009, ch. 2, para. 24). Blondin (1943) observed, “One of the major satisfactions of being able to make one’s own clothes is having a wardrobe styled to your own personality. . . . The woman who sews has more chance than most to express herself creatively” (p. 6). Individuality has increased in importance in the 2000s, identified by several sources as a primary motivation for home sewers (Bain, 2016; Grace & Gandolfo, 2014; Holson, 2012; Martindale, 2017; Martindale & McKinney, 2016).

Sewing, however, was not just a means of expressing individuality. Gordon (2009) explained, “While some women sewed to assert differences, others did so to demonstrate that they fit in” (ch. 2, para. 48). Some home sewers, particularly those of underrepresented groups or those in lower socioeconomic classes, used sewing as a way to fit into mainstream culture and to minimize class differences (Gordon, 2009). Gordon (2004) noted that sewing was particularly important to African Americans as a way to maintain a good image and a good reputation (p. 74). Between the early 20th Century and the early 21st Century, however, it seems that sewing has decreased among African-American women; Russum (2016) found that the online sewing community lacks diversity and is predominantly composed of middle-class white women (pp. 12, 27).
Pleasure

Another motivation for sewing is that many sewers simply enjoy sewing. Sewing for pleasure is by no means a new phenomenon; Gordon (2004) identified pleasure as a motivation even for lower-class women in her study of 1890s-1930s dressmaking, a finding that is supported by O’Brien and Campbell’s 1927 study, which shows that 50% of women “sewed because they enjoyed it” (O’Brien & Campbell, 1927, p. 10). Twentieth-century sewing manuals are often quite candid about sewing as an enjoyable hobby, while still giving a nod to the more-practical economic benefits (Blondin, 1943; Lynch & Sara, 1960; Picken, 1949). Beginning in the mid-1970s, however, researchers identified an apparent shift in the priority of motivations for home sewing, as pleasure displaced economics as the primary driver for home sewing (Ambry, 1988; Christensen, 1995; Ferguson, 1975; Owens, 1997; Williams, 1988). This shift from economy to pleasure (a shift in the social positioning of crafting, as well as in the social position of the crafter) helped to enable feminists to redefine sewing as a political statement. Pleasure and personal satisfaction are motivators for today’s retro sewers as well as mainstream home sewers; posts in retro sewing groups on social media regularly reference sewing as a leisure activity and a form of relaxation.

Third-wave feminism and sewing

Third-wave feminism rejects the idea that there is one best way to be a feminist; rather than focusing on either/or, third-wave feminism embraces both/and, acknowledging and accommodating different perspectives, preferences, backgrounds, and ways of being feminist (Buszek, 2006; Dicker & Piepmeier, 2003; Harde & Harde, 2003; Reed, 1997; Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2004; Tong, 2009). In a way, third-wave feminism is defined by its lack of definition. This does not mean that third-wave feminism is ineffective; rather, third-wave feminism focuses on
changing culture in smaller, everyday ways that add up to larger effects. Third-wave feminism focuses on empowering women (Chansky, 2010; Mandrona, 2012; Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2004), and empowerment can take different forms for different people. Dicker and Pepmeier (2003) explained, “Although a third wave commitment to political struggle may look different – it may focus on cultural productions and individual identity, for instance – this engagement with personal and political transformation remains the core of both waves of feminism” (p. 19). A common perception of second-wave feminism is that to be a feminist was to give up feminine characteristics; girls could do anything that boys could, but only if they gave up feminine qualities (Shoemaker, 1997, p. 105). Third-wave feminists counter the perception that feminism means giving up femininity by reclaiming feminine characteristics and activities as a form of power rather than as a symbol of oppression (Chansky, 2010). Although the results may look similar – women engaging in typical feminine activities such as child-rearing or sewing – the philosophical underpinning is different, as third-wave feminism puts women in control of when and how they use qualities typically perceived as feminine (Reed, 1997, p. 128). Although it may seem counterintuitive to designate a traditional feminine activity as feminist, third-wave feminism allows the reframing of sewing as a feminist pursuit.

**Sewing as opposition to gender norms**

Third-wave feminism also takes stereotypically feminine activities and recasts their purpose; one way in which this can be done is to use feminine activities to challenge cultural norms. It also possible that sewing has always contained some feminist undertones, whether or not they were recognized or acknowledged. Kempson (2015) argued that DIY has always been inherently feminist; although it is only recently that it has been labeled as such, DIY has historically embodied feminist characteristics. The idea that sewing can challenge social norms
of femininity is not new in sewing, according to Gordon (2004). She explained, “Freedom to make choices about how to make up a garment . . . was also a tool for defining or challenging standards of appropriate dress” (p. 82). Fiona Hackney (1999) suggested that, for young women growing up in the 1920s and 1930s, sewing was “a liberating, even subversive, activity enabling young women to define their appearance and identity without regard, or in direct opposition, to their mothers’ opinions.” However, the position of home sewing as an accepted part of feminine identity enabled it to maintain traditional appearances while, perhaps, subverting traditional ideas. The close association of sewing with traditional femininity, however, made sewing problematic for many feminists in the 1960s. McLean (2006) found that although sewing had enabled women to construct their own identities in previous decades, the association of home sewing with traditional femininity led some women to discard home sewing in the late 1960s; some later took it up again once they were able to reinterpret home sewing in a more feminist way.

Bain (2016) highlighted the importance of sewing as challenging both gender norms and fashion norms, arguing that sewing is a form of empowerment for women (pp. 63-64). Martindale (2017) observed that none of her interview participants identified themselves as feminists, but that their motivations for sewing were similar to the motivations of third-wave feminists: specifically, sewing as a creative outlet and to express individuality, rather than as a result of economic or social pressure (p. 88).

**Sewing as opposition to mass production**

Sewing has become a form of empowerment in that it enables sewers to oppose mass production (Bain, 2016; Chansky, 2010; Grace & Gandolfo, 2014; Martindale, 2017; Russum, 2016), to circumvent ready-to-wear fashion choices (Martindale, 2017), and to exert control over
their presentation of self in dress (Martindale, 2017). Although mass production and the consequent affordability of ready-to-wear had decreased the prevalence of sewing in the 1960s and 1970s (Chaker, 2006), sewing began an upswing in the 1980s as a way to express sartorial uniqueness in contrast to the sameness of mass-produced clothing. Chaker (2006) quoted one sewing student as having taken up sewing because “everyone’s starting to look like clones of each other.” Some engage in home sewing as attempts to counter the throw-away nature of fast fashion and the global exploitation of garment workers (Bain, 2016, p. 63). Bain described sewing as “slow fashion,” implying that handmade garments are valued more than mass-produced because of the expenditure of the owner’s time used to create them (p. 63). The idea that handmade clothes are more valued than inexpensive mass-produced clothes aligns with the theory of the extended self; handmade clothing, as an expression of home sewers’ time and values, is viewed more as part of the self than clothing that is obtained with less personal involvement.

Revaluing sewing

The shift away from economic motivations for sewing has increased the perceived value of home sewing beyond that of most ready-to-wear, visible in the reframing of home-sewn garments from homemade to handmade. If one is creating objects for pleasure or as a political statement, sewing is prestigious; if, however, economy is the primary motivator, sewing becomes merely an expression of poverty (Dawkins, 2011; Groeneveld, 2010; Myzelev, 2009). This is the distinction between homemade and handmade. As a ubiquitous economic necessity, home-sewn garments had somewhat of a social stigma (Buckley, 1999; McLean, 2006); as a symbol of leisure and skill, they have been transformed into a marker of status.
Using a retro appearance to leverage femininity

Feminine appearance and sexuality can be used, within certain limits, as advantages (Ross-Smith & Huppatz, 2010). Several vintage enthusiasts and retro sewers have noted that wearing retro clothing results in their being treated better and more respected by men (Cliff, 2015; Hirsch, 2010; Rogers, 2013). Rogers believes that wearing vintage communicates self-respect, which influences how she is perceived and treated by others (2013). Hirsch, a popular retro sewing blogger and pattern designer for Butterick Patterns, notes that wearing her retro creations changes her deportment and leads to better treatment from men (Hirsch, 2010). Ross-Smith and Huppatz (2010) observe that the advantage a woman can gain from her appearance “may mean that a groomed appearance is a powerful social signifier,” or, alternately, that a woman’s appearance is viewed as her most salient attribute (p. 561). In some instances, appearance can be used to manipulate certain situations; however, feminine capital is limited to “manipulat[ing] constraints rather than overturn[ing] power” (Ross-Smith & Huppatz, 2010).

Prosumerism

The characteristics of prosumerism have previously been applied to general home sewing (Kean & Levin, 1989), but it is unknown to what degree they are applicable to retro sewing. A prosumer (a word formed by the combination of ‘producer’ and ‘consumer’) is a person who produces goods or services for his/her own consumption (Kotler, 1986; Toffler, 1980). The idea of prosumerism was originated by Toffler (1980), who described prosumerism as the “invisible economy” that operates outside the business sector (pp. 265-288). Toffler stated that the norm prior to the Industrial Revolution was for people to consume what they themselves produced (“production for use”); the Industrial Revolution transformed the economy into
“production for exchange” rather than for personal use (p. 266). He predicted a second major shift in which prosumerism would become a norm.

Kotler (1986) described four characteristics of prosumption activities that make them likely to appeal to consumers: High cost savings, low level of required skill, little time requirement, and yielding a high level of personal satisfaction (p. 26). However, retro sewing may require more skill and time than ordinary home sewing, which may mean that prosumerism is only partially applicable. Vintage sewing patterns are perceived as “intimidating,” requiring more time and skill for sewers than modern patterns due to unfamiliar terminology in the instructions, the necessity of converting outdated yardage recommendations to modern fabric widths, unclear markings, variations in seam allowance, and changes in fit and sizing (Reynolds, 2008).

Craft consumption and DIY consumption

Similar to prosumerism is the idea of craft consumption, defined as the activity of designing and making the products that one consumes (Campbell, 2005). Whereas the concept of prosumerism applies to any activity done by an individual for himself/herself, including self-checkout at the grocery (Ritzer, 2015) or home pregnancy tests (Toffler, 1980, p. 265), craft consumption refers specifically to designing and making products for one’s own use. Craft consumption is linked to mass production in the sense that the materials for the craft (fabric, notions, sewing equipment, patterns) are mass-produced items that are recombined into a new object (Campbell, 2005). Campbell (2005) explained craft consumption as a reaction against commodification and mass production, a way for an individual to create something unique which is, as Elliot (2016) observed, “more than the sum of its [mass-produced] parts” (p. 19).
Watson & Shove (2008) explored the nature of do-it-yourself (DIY) consumption, specifically home improvement, as a subcategory of craft consumption. They found several characteristics of DIY consumption that may be applicable to retro sewing. First, they found that competence, rather than being a characteristic of an individual, is distributed between the individual, the tools and materials used in the project, and external sources of information such as other people and/or the Internet (Watson & Shove, 2008). In retro sewing, a person’s own competence could be a general knowledge of sewing and/or knowledge of dress history; the competence embedded in the tools/materials is the structure of a vintage sewing pattern and/or the directions in the sewing pattern; and external sources of information could include retro sewing groups, blogs and tutorials on retro sewing, vintage sewing manuals, and/or friends with knowledge of retro sewing. Because competence can be embedded in materials, the design of consumer goods can play a role in what types of DIY projects are selected; in retro sewing, therefore, it seems possible that reprinted vintage sewing patterns, which often contain updated and expanded directions, could be a catalyst for retro sewing.

Second, Watson and Shove found that DIY consumption is an “exploratory” practice achieved through “an iterative process of doing, reflecting and adapting” (Watson & Shove, 2008, p. 10), which then leads to the development of new projects based on skills learned from previous projects (p. 12). Learning new techniques, experimenting with them, and incorporating them into new garments could be a feature of retro sewing.

**Sewing as a social activity**

Sewing has been a social activity for centuries. From the 18th Century until the last few decades, American women have typically learned how to sew from their mothers or in school (Russum, 2016, pp. 47-51). Russum observed that the nature of sewing is inherently social, as it
is impossible to learn alone (Russum, 2016, pp. 20, 37). Gordon (2004) identified sewing as a “means of forming communities,” noting that sewing was linked to social identity regionally and/or ethnically (p. 80). Women frequently sewed in groups throughout the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century, whether it was in sewing circles, quilting bees, or home economics classes (Gordon, 2009; Russum, 2016).

Today, although some local sewing groups still exist in the form of the American Sewing Guild, church sewing ministries, and others, most sewing-related social interaction has moved online (Bain, 2016; Martindale, 2017; Russum, 2016). The online sewing community exists in a wide variety of social media forums, including blogs, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram (Russum, 2016, p. 28). The internet has facilitated the growth of sewing and other crafts, as sewers share ideas and resources, help one another troubleshoot sewing problems, and buy and sell sewing supplies (Bain, 2016, p. 62; Russum, 2016, pp. 4-5). These online forums not only act as outlets to express creativity, but also help to shape identity (Russum, 2016, p. 45), much in the same way that online vintage groups do. Through online sewing groups, sewers build social capital and connections by sharing information and helping other sewers with no tangible compensation (Bain, 2016, p. 62; Russum, 2016, p. 45). Online friendships between sewers usually start with sewing-related interactions (buying or selling sewing patterns, for instance, or giving advice or compliments on projects), but sometimes move beyond sewing into other areas of life (Russum, 2016, pp. 32, 72). One example of that in my personal experience is a long-term ongoing chat I have with the other three administrators for a vintage pattern buying and selling group. We “met” on business terms – just to moderate the group – but over time, online discussions have evolved from strictly business to discussions about our latest sewing projects, jobs, family issues, and other things completely unrelated to sewing. I have also met up in person with a few online friends – for example, my friend Tiffany, who lives about five hours
away, has met up with me several times to go antiquing and once for me to retrieve a pattern cabinet that she picked up for me when her local Hancock Fabrics went out of business. Online sewing communities exist for retro sewers; however, the role of sewing communities for retro sewers (and even the existence of physical retro sewing groups) has not yet been investigated.

Extended self

The idea of clothing expressing identity is linked to the idea of the extended self. Belk (1988) stated, “A key to understanding what possessions mean is recognizing that, knowingly or unknowingly, intentionally or unintentionally, we regard our possessions as parts of ourselves” (p. 139). Ahuvia (2005) took this idea a step further in asserting that the “things we love have a strong influence on our sense of who we are, on our self” (p. 171). Guy et al. (2001) found the link between clothing and one’s sense of self is very strong, often resulting in women’s keeping of clothing that they no longer wear if it is linked to their identity in some way. They found that clothing can provide a sense of continuity (or discontinuity) in women’s identities (Guy et al., 2001); clothing is, therefore, part of a person’s identity, whether past identity, present/continuing identity, or an identity beyond which one has moved. Campbell (2005) observed that, because of the personal choices involved in designing and making a product, the products of crafting are imbued with the producer’s “personality or self” (p. 27). Therefore, sewn clothing is more likely than purchased clothing to be part of the extended self.

If the theory of the extended self is applied to sewing retro clothing, this means that not only are retro clothes expressions of the identity, but also that they are viewed as part of identity, and furthermore that these garments help to shape the identity. If viewed this way, dress used to portray an aspirational identity may not be inauthentic – wearing “the identities that we want to own, hoping that surface will become substance” (Postrel, 2004, p. 117) – but may actually be
helpful in becoming who a person wants to be. Objects viewed as part of the extended self can therefore help to shape and maintain the identity, something that may be particularly important in a shifting postmodern world (Ahuvia, 2005, p. 171).

**Sewing and the extended self**

It seems likely that, if purchased ready-to-wear clothes are viewed as part of the self, clothing that a person designs or makes for himself/herself is even more so. Belk (1988) observed, “The idea that we make things a part of self by creating or altering them appears to be a universal human belief” (p. 144). Belk (1988) also observed that handcrafted items are valued by individuals more than mass-produced items because of the investment of time and thought expended in creating them; although he refers to handcrafted items made by others, it stands to reason that this would apply even more to items which one makes oneself (p. 149).

Nostalgia, previously discussed in this paper, also plays a role in the extended self. Belk (1988) observed, “Possessions are a convenient means of storing the memories and feelings that attach our sense of the past” (p. 148). The past may not necessarily be a person’s actual lived past (for example, wearing clothing styles that date from before your birth); Belk (1988) said that people may view antiques as part of “a desire to identify with an era . . . to which we believe a desirable set of traits or values adheres” (p. 149). The theory of the extended self can be applied to this research in the idea that dress both expresses identity and helps to shape or delineate the identity (Ahuvia, 2005, p. 171; Belk, 1988, p. 139).
Consumer Decision Making Applied to Sewing Retro Clothing

Decision making is choosing one of several possible options that will each result in one of several outcomes (Resnik, 1987). Decisions are a combination of acts, which are possible actions that a person may take; the state, or conditions, under which the act takes place; and the resultant outcomes caused by the combination of the state and the act (Resnik, 1987).

Consumer decision models

The Consumer Decision Process (CDP) model, also known as the EKB model, is the most commonly-used model for consumer decision making. The steps include (1) need recognition, (2) the search for information, (3) the pre-purchase evaluation of alternatives, (4) purchase, (5) consumption, (6) post-consumption evaluation, and (7) divestment (Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel, 2006). Martindale (2017) combined the CDP model, the decision-making process, and additional factors involved in home sewing to create the Sew or Purchase Decision Model for home sewers (Figure 2.3). Martindale (2017) found that the decision process for the home sewer differs from the typical CDP model in that the option to sew a garment introduces additional variables into the decision process (time, skills, cost, and availability) and leads to different outcomes (increased confidence in skills, control over the garment, and a greater investment in the garment) in Stage 7 if a garment is sewn rather than purchased.
Figure 2.3. Sew or Purchase Garment Decision Model (Martindale, 2017, p. 82)
Evaluation criteria for garments

The criteria for evaluating garments has not been explored for retro sewers. In the consumer decision process, items are evaluated during the Pre-Purchase Evaluation stage to determine which item to purchase, and in the Post-Consumption Evaluation stage to determine the consumer’s satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the purchase (Blackwell et al., 2006). The major types of criteria used by consumers in evaluating garments include aesthetics/physical appearance, usefulness, performance, expressiveness, and extrinsic cues such as brand, price, and country of origin (Abraham-Murali & Littrell, 1995; Eckman, Damhorst, & Kadolph, 1990). Martindale (2017) found that the same criteria were used in the planning and evaluation of home-sewn garments as in the evaluation of ready-to-wear, with the difference that evaluation was incorporated into the garment production process, and that most extrinsic criteria were not applicable to home-sewn garments (pp. 83-84).

Expressiveness in garment evaluation consists of the degree to which the garment looks good on the wearer in terms of body type, the interaction or harmony of the garment’s color with the wearer’s complexion, and appropriateness for age and for personality (Abraham-Murali & Littrell, 1995). Expressiveness differs from aesthetics or physical appearance of the garment in that expressiveness is an interaction of the garment with the wearer rather than the inherent physical qualities of the garment alone (Abraham-Murali & Littrell, 1995). Martindale (2017) observed that expressiveness in home-sewn garments was achieved by women’s designing the garments to suit their preferences (p. 83). The importance of individuality for vintage clothing wearers (Cervellon et al., 2012, pp. 960-961; DeLong et al., 2005, pp. 38, 40; Fischer, 2015, pp. 50, 58; McColl et al., 2013, p. 145) may indicate that expressiveness is a key factor for retro sewers; however, research is needed to ascertain to what degree this is the case.
As previously discussed, fit is a major motivating factor for home sewers (Ferguson, 1975; Martindale, 2017; Martindale & McKinney, 2016; O’Brien & Campbell, 1927) and a limitation in wearing vintage clothing (Jenss, 2015, pp. 89, 115; Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013, p. 356); therefore, it is probable that fit is also a motivating factor in the decision to sew a retro garment.

Summary

The literature review indicates that due to a perceived lack of uniqueness in mass-produced clothing and a desire to express a unique identity through dress, vintage wearers are attracted to vintage as a more authentic form of self-expression. However, the limited availability of authentic vintage clothing means that it may still not be a truly authentic form of self-expression, as they are confined by the strictures of the items, sizes, and styles that are readily available and in good enough condition to wear. It is then reasonable that they might move to sewing their own clothing as a form of self-expression, as it allows more freedom and creativity than does vintage. Sewing retro clothing is also a way to adjust fit according to individual standards of comfort that may differ from the standards of past decades, thus enabling a vintage look while maintaining the preferred level of comfort. It is likely that vintage sewers, although seeking uniqueness, are constrained by social perceptions and expectations. Because the literature shows a wide variety of factors that could be motivators for sewing vintage clothing, this study will explore the meaning for women of sewing their own retro clothing. Because the creative processes of sewing vintage are likely, by the nature of selecting styles and probably fabrics and other supplies that are outside the norm, to differ from ordinary home sewing, an inquiry into the design processes of sewing vintage clothing will also be part of this research. The high fashion involvement required in wearing vintage and in home sewing, as
well as the probability that vintage and home-sewn styles are more expressive of identity than mass-produced clothing, means that this study will also address how these women negotiate their identity through sewing retro clothing.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The purpose of this study was:

1. To understand the motivations of women who sew retro clothing for themselves
2. To understand the methods of women who sew retro clothing for themselves
3. To understand the intersection of the motivations and methods of women who sew retro clothing for themselves.

A qualitative, grounded-theory approach was used for this study. Because the practice of sewing retro clothing has not been adequately articulated in the literature, it was determined that the formation of hypotheses related to this topic could unduly limit the results of the study; therefore, a qualitative approach was used so that a greater number of possible meanings could be explored (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research is focused on words, meanings, and the description of experiences. Rather than limiting the research findings by examining specified variables and numerical data, as would be done in quantitative research, the rich description of qualitative research is more suitable for understanding complexities of meaning; as such, it is the best choice for this study (Creswell, 2014, p. 4; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013, p. 11; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013, p. 2). This was an exploratory study intended to generate detailed analysis and descriptions of personal motivations and context, so in-depth interviews were deemed an appropriate choice for data collection (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Ritchie et al., 2013; Saldaña, 2011). Qualitative research has been criticized as being less objective than quantitative research; however, incorporating strategies such as documentation of the research process, triangulation, and member checking into the research design can increase the reliability of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). A limitation of
qualitative research is that, because the results cannot be replicated, it cannot effectively be
generalized to an entire population; however, follow-up research could use quantitative methods
such as surveys to test the conclusions of this qualitative study (Creswell, 2014). Grounded
theory is a research methodology focused on developing new theories from collected data
(Corbin & Strauss, 2014). It is characterized by the development of theory after collection of
data, rather than the development of hypotheses prior to the collection of data, and by the
simultaneous collection and analysis of data that continues for the duration of the research
process (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

This research relied on in-depth, semi-structured interviews as the primary form of data.
As part of the interview process, as time permitted, participants were asked to show and discuss
a few retro garments that they have made and to provide and discuss photos of some of their
work to provide additional insight into their methods and to help as a memory prompt. Some
participants provided photos for inclusion in the research. The research questions included:

1. Why do retro sewers value a vintage appearance? (e.g. individuality, identity, quality,
nostalgia, prestige, authenticity, other)

2. Why do retro sewers use sewing for themselves as a way to create their desired vintage
appearance? (control, fit, choice of fabric, solve existing problems of scarcity, durability,
and comfort with authentic vintage clothing?)

3. How do retro sewers use sewing for themselves to create their desired vintage
appearance? (For example: What fabrics do they use and why? What patterns do they
use and why? How do they use the patterns? Do they communicate with other retro
sewers?)

4. What is the intersection of motivations for and methods of retro sewing? How does one
influence or inform the other?
Credibility and Trustworthiness

There is some debate among authors as to how reliability and validity, two terms used in quantitative research, apply to qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003). Some use the terms validity and reliability (Creswell, 2014; Ritchie et al., 2013), but it is unclear what aspects of credibility in qualitative research fall into which category. Other researchers prefer to use the terms “credibility” and/or “trustworthiness” (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Golafshani, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Saldaña, 2011). Although qualitative studies, due to the complex nature of the data, cannot be duplicated to check their reliability, there are several ways to ensure that the study is rigorous and trustworthy (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013, pp. 354-359). One method that was employed by this study was triangulation, defined as using multiple sources of information to support the findings (Creswell, 2014, p. 201). Member checking, or getting feedback from the study participants, was used as an additional test of credibility (Creswell, 2014, pp. 201-202; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013, p. 309).

Triangulation

There are several different kinds of triangulation in qualitative research, including triangulation by data source, triangulation by theory, and triangulation from multiple researchers (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013, p. 299). Triangulation by data source was accomplished by interviewing people with different backgrounds, which will be achieved through purposive sampling. Triangulating by theory, which is defined by Cohen and Crabtree (2006) as “using multiple theoretical perspectives to examine and interpret the data,” was also used. As discussed in the review of literature, this research was informed by the theories of postmodern dress, authenticity, nostalgia, the extended self, subject formation, situated bodily practice, symbolic interactionism, identity theory, and social identity theory. Rather than entrenching myself firmly
in any theory, which could unduly limit my research findings, I preferred to keep an open mind so that my findings can be determined by the data rather than forcing my findings to conform to a preconceived theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

**Intercoder agreement**

One method of triangulation from multiple researchers is *intercoder agreement*, or the degree to which multiple researchers agree on how data should be coded (also known as cross-checking). To check for intercoder agreement, my major professor and I coded the data separately so that we could examine the coding to see if we reached similar conclusions (Creswell, 2014, p. 203; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013, pp. 84-85; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013, p. 278). To ensure consistency in the coding process, a codebook was developed with definitions and examples of each code when the first interview is coded; this codebook was continually revised throughout the data analysis process (Creswell, 2014, p. 199; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013, pp. 84-85). Intercoder agreement was calculated by the percentage of shared codes (the number of agreements divided by the total number of agreements and disagreements); this should be between 80% and 90% (Creswell, 2014; DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011; Miles et al., 2013, p. 85; Saldaña, 2015, p. 37). The intercoder reliability process was completed several times to refine the codebook. Our final intercoder agreement was 92.12%.

**Member checking**

Member checking (also known as member validation) checks the accuracy of the findings by showing the interview transcriptions, themes and/or final document to the research participants to see if they agree with the accuracy of the data interpretation (Creswell, 2014, pp.
Prior research has indicated that member checking full interview transcripts can embarrass participants or risk compromising data if participants make too many edits to the transcripts (Carlson, 2010); therefore, transcripts from this study were not reviewed by the participants. Instead, participants were asked to review themes that emerge from coding all the interviews (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). For each theme, the participants were asked if the theme applied to them and were given the opportunity to make additional comments, which were then integrated into the study (Birt et al., 2016). Thirteen of the 18 participants responded to the member checking survey.

Sample

The population that was investigated was women in English-speaking countries who sew retro clothing for themselves that is used for everyday life, either from vintage sewing patterns or reproduction sewing patterns, as one of their primary preferred leisure activities. Approval of the project was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to recruiting participants and collecting data (APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL. Purposive sampling, combined with snowball sampling, was used to identify potential participants for this study. A face sheet survey (APPENDIX F:) was used in the participant recruitment process to select participants who meet the study goals. The survey was completed by 103 retro sewers; of the 103 respondents, 18 retro sewers were interviewed. They were chosen using purposive sampling based on a sampling matrix, discussed below.
Sampling strategies

Purposive sampling is the deliberate selection of participants that fit certain criteria (Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 131). It is used in qualitative research to purposefully select participants who are likely to provide important information (Creswell, 2014, p. 189; Gray, 2014, p. 217; Miles et al., 2013, p. 31). Purposive sampling can also be used to ensure an adequate level of diversity in a sample (Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 113). Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2013) explained that this type of sampling is beneficial to see if the patterns discovered are also applicable to outliers, which helps “to increase confidence in conclusions” (pp. 32, 33, 36).

A sampling matrix (APPENDIX G) was used to ensure diversity in the sample (Ritchie et al., 2013, pp. 134-138). The sampling matrix criteria included what decade(s) are sewn, what types of patterns (vintage, reproductions from mainstream pattern companies such as Butterick, or reproductions from smaller pattern companies), race/ethnicity, and geographic location. Research in vintage clothing wearers has shown that many people prefer clothing of a particular era (DeLong et al., 2005, p. 31; Gregson et al., 2001, p. 21; Jenss, 2015, p. 141), which may be influenced by other vintage enthusiasts (Cassidy & Bennett, 2012, pp. 248-249; Duffy et al., 2012, p. 521; Fischer, 2015, p. 49; Jenss, 2015, pp. 80-81, 88, 127), by popular media (Cassidy & Bennett, 2012, p. 247; Jenss, 2015, p. 122), or by body type (Fischer, 2015, p. 50; Holson, 2012); therefore, it was necessary to include people involved in different decades to determine what similarities and differences may be related to decade preference. The type of patterns used gave insight into methods and reasons for retro sewing. Race/ethnicity and geographic location were both identified by Gordon (2004) as areas of social identity that were linked to sewing, so it seemed reasonable to explore what similarities and differences people may have in retro sewing based on those factors. Participants fit more than one category for some of these criteria. Minimums were set for some categories in the sampling matrix; for some categories (particularly
some racial/ethnic groups and some geographic locations) it was unknown if participants can be located who fit the criteria, so they were included in the matrix with no minimums. Because sampling occurred until theoretical saturation was achieved, maximums were not set for any category. In addition to the categories included in the sample matrix, participants were selected to provide a wide age range (ranging from 19 to 73 years old) and a range of education levels; the education level of the participants ranged from a high school education to graduate degrees.

Snowball sampling is to ask participants to identify people of their acquaintance who fit the selection criteria as possible participants (Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 129). Snowball sampling is often used when studying a group that may be difficult to identify (Gray, 2014, p. 223). In a study with many people involved in a recognizable group (for instance, if I were to interview members of a local chapter of the American Sewing Guild), snowball sampling would have been unnecessary; however, in my experience, retro sewing enthusiasts tend to be spread apart geographically and not necessarily associated with any kind of official organization or group, so snowball sampling was used as an additional method to find interview participants.

**Participant qualifications**

To qualify for the study, a participant must sew retro clothing that is used for everyday life rather than period-specific events (i.e., not for a reenactment or Halloween), which the participant self-described as one of her primary preferred leisure activities. By specifying that the clothing is used for everyday life rather than events, people who only sew for period events (i.e., reenactors) were not included, as the study required participants who are likely to incorporate retro clothing into their identities. Specifying that retro sewing be a primary preferred leisure activity helped to eliminate sewers who merely dabble in retro sewing.
For this study, I interviewed women who sew styles of various decades, use different pattern sources (vintage or reproduction), live in different geographic regions, and are of different races and/or ethnicities to find what commonalities and differences they have in relation to vintage sewing (see APPENDIX G). According to Ritchie et al. (2013), making the sample as diverse as possible allows the researcher to identify which factors are consistently associated with a particular group and helps to explain differences among the participants’ experiences (pp. 116-117).

**Participant recruitment procedures**

I am involved in several retro sewing groups online and have built a personal network of people involved in retro sewing, which was used as a starting point for identifying and recruiting participants. To recruit participants, I contacted potential participants in my network and posted in several Facebook groups dedicated to retro sewing. Participants were asked to fill out a qualifying survey. Those willing to participate were listed in the sample matrix, and remaining quotas in the sampling matrix were filled using referrals from the initial contacts (snowball sampling).

Facebook can be an effective tool for recruiting because of its “groups” feature, which allows researchers to access populations that could be otherwise hard to identify (Bhutta, 2012). Unlike Instagram, Twitter, or Snapchat, Facebook users can join interest-based groups to communicate with other like-minded individuals. Several Facebook groups exist for retro sewers, including WeSewRetro, Vintage Patterns Bazaar, Vintage Capsule Wardrobe Sewing, Vintage Pattern Nerds, and Vintage/Rare Sewing Pattern Exchange. The sizes of these groups ranges (as of February 2018) from about 1000 in Vintage Capsule Wardrobe Sewing to over 12,000 members in WeSewRetro. To recruit individuals from the groups, I contacted the
administrator(s) for each group (with most of whom I was already acquainted) and requested permission to post a recruitment letter (APPENDIX C) in the group, including a link to the Qualtrics survey used as a screening tool to help me to fill the sampling matrix.

Of the 103 retro sewers who replied, some potential participants were contacted but never replied to schedule interviews. I interviewed a total of 18 retro sewers, a size appropriate for this type of study. If the sample were too small, then the data could be inadequate to effectively analyze the similarities and differences among participants (Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 119). For a qualitative study, if the sample were too large, then it would have been difficult to ensure the quality of the data for an in-depth study, as too many participants and too much data would have hampered in-depth interviews and detailed analysis (Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 119). As recommended for grounded theory, I continued interviewing based on information found in the data until theoretical saturation, defined as “the point in data collection when no new or relevant information emerges,” (Saumure & Given, 2008, p. 195), was reached (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Creswell, 2014, p. 189; Gray, 2014, p. 59). Each participant was given the option to use her real name or a pseudonym when signing the consent form to participate in the study.

Data Collection

Interview procedures

Semistructured, in-depth interviews, based on the interview protocol in APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL were used for this study (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Ritchie et al., 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2004). Semistructured interviews are useful for qualitative research because they maintain flexibility in the research while ensuring a focus on the research questions (Daly, 2007, p. 144; Miles et al., 2013, p. 39). It is likely in qualitative research that, as themes
begin to emerge from the interviews, that some interview questions may need to be edited, eliminated, or added through the course of the study (Creswell, 2014, p. 186; Daly, 2007, p. 45; Rubin & Rubin, 2004, pp. 34-35); therefore, pilot interviews were conducted with two participants, and the interview protocol was revised based on the results of those interviews. The pilot interviews are included in the data. A responsive interviewing model was utilized, focusing on the specific topics outlined in the interview guide, but modified depending on what was important to the participant (Rubin & Rubin, 2004, p. 15). In addition to the main questions listed in APPENDIX B:

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL, probes were used to encourage the participant to elaborate further or give more detail on a particular topic, and follow-up questions were asked based on key words, themes, or ideas brought up in the course of the interview that may be significant to the research (Rubin & Rubin, 2004, pp. 13, 134-144).

Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and two hours. Two interviews were conducted in person; the rest were conducted via Zoom, a video chat program. Gray (2014) notes that video calls are preferable to telephone interviews because they allow better communication, as the facial expressions and body language can be read both by the interviewer and the participant (p. 405). The interviews were recorded to ensure accuracy (Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 172) and transcribed verbatim.

**Data Processing and Analysis**

Grounded theory, used as the research framework for this study, is a procedure that analyzes meaning from a set of data (in this case, the interviews) to build a theory directly from the data. Accepted procedures in grounded theory require the analysis of data throughout the data collection process, rather than after all data has been collected (Corbin & Strauss, 2014;
Creswell, 2014, p. 195; Miles et al., 2013, p. 70). The simultaneous collection and analysis of data allowed the monitoring of theoretical saturation and to determine if additional questions should be asked or existing questions revised (Creswell, 2014, p. 195; Rubin & Rubin, 2004, p. 16).

Analytic memos (defined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña as “brief or extended narrative[s] that [document] the researcher’s reflections and thinking processes about the data”) were written throughout the data collection and analysis processes to clarify and record thoughts about the data (Creswell, 2014, p. 197; Gray, 2014, p. 604; Miles et al., 2013, p. 95; Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 297; Saldaña, 2011, pp. 98-99, 102).

After transcription, a CAQDAS (Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software) program was used to facilitate coding and analysis (Miles et al., 2013, p. 48; Saldaña, 2011, pp. 136-137). Coding refers to labeling sentences or phrases within the data; a code is defined by Saldaña (2011) as “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (pp. 95-96). Codes help to identify patterns and to organize and classify data (Miles et al., 2013, pp. 72-73; Saldaña, 2015, p. 95). As opposed to merely recording the impressions of the researcher about the data, which tends to impose the researcher’s views on the study rather than the participants’ meanings, coding is more objective and helps to ensure that the views of the participants are accurately presented (Paoletti, 1982; Ratner, 2002).

**First-cycle coding**

After transcription of each interview and before the next interview is conducted, each interview was coded using in-vivo, process, and descriptive codes (Miles et al., 2013; Saldaña, 2015). In-vivo coding, as defined by Miles et al. (2013), “uses words or short phrases from the participant’s own language in the data record as codes” (p. 74). In-vivo coding maintains the
participants’ phrasing in the data analysis and can be used to find patterns in the data (Miles et al., 2013, p. 74). Process codes, used to indicate action and process, are composed of gerunds, words that end in “-ing” and are important for grounded theory research (Miles et al., 2013, p. 75). Descriptive codes are used to “summarize . . . the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data,” usually as a noun, and are used to identify topics and to categorize data (Miles et al., 2013, p. 73; Saldaña, 2015, p. 104). To differentiate the in-vivo codes from the descriptive and process codes, in-vivo codes were placed in quotation marks (Miles et al., 2013, p. 74). Simultaneous coding (applying multiple codes to a single segment of the data) was used when the data contained more than one meaning (Miles et al., 2013, p. 80; Saldaña, 2015, p. 94).

**Second-cycle coding**

Second-cycle coding was conducted iteratively during the data collection process and following the collection of all the data. The goal of the second cycle of coding is to take the codes generated during the first cycle and organize them into categories or a hierarchy, facilitating the identification of connections between codes (Miles et al., 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2004, pp. 220-221; Saldaña, 2015, pp. 234-235). *Focused coding* and *axial coding* were used in this stage (Saldaña, 2015). Focused coding is used to locate the most frequently-used or most significant codes to develop preliminary categories of codes (Saldaña, 2015). Axial coding links the categories developed in focused coding and identifies the properties of each category, elucidating the categories through memo writing (Saldaña, 2015, pp. 244-245).

**Developing the codebook**

During the second cycle of coding, a codebook was developed. A codebook is a guide for coding, used to help ensure consistency in the coding process, that contains code names,
definitions, and examples for each code (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011; Saldaña, 2015). Developing a codebook is an iterative process, and the codebook was therefore continually revised as needed throughout the data analysis process (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). To calculate interrater reliability, the codebook was used to code interviews in CAQDAS software, and the percent agreement was calculated.

**Theory building**

The final stage of analysis was theoretical coding, or looking for overarching patterns, themes, and relationships in the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2014, pp. 188-190; Miles et al., 2013, pp. 276-277; Saldaña, 2015, pp. 250-255). In this stage of coding, the second-level codes were further condensed to find overarching themes and relationships in the data (Miles et al., 2013), which were then condensed into one core category, or overarching idea that links all the categories together (Corbin & Strauss, 2014, pp. 188-190). Matrices and diagrams were used to help condense the meanings within the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Miles et al., 2013, pp. 275-293). Following the development of a core category, the theory was reviewed for internal consistency by comparing the theory to the interview data to make sure the two align (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

During the theory-building stage, the findings from the research were also compared to the proposed theoretical frameworks discussed in the review of literature to determine to what degree existing theories are or are not applicable to the practice of sewing retro clothing.

Member checking was completed during the theoretical coding stage. A survey containing the findings, illustrated with quotes from the interviews where necessary, was emailed to the interview participants (Birt et al., 2016). Each participant was asked to review the themes, comment on how well (or not) each theme described her experience, and make any additional comments (Birt et al., 2016). Thirteen of the 18 participants responded to the member checking
survey, and the additional data collected from member checking was incorporated into the final analysis.

**Reflexivity**

In qualitative research, although every effort is made to be unbiased, both data collection and data interpretation are shaped by the researcher’s perspective (Creswell, 2014, p. 186; Daly, 2007, p. 189; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013, pp. 22-23). Reflexivity is the acknowledgement of how the researcher’s background may influence research; this influence may be expressed as bias or in the way the study is designed (Creswell, 2014, p. 186). I am interested in this particular topic because I am part of the phenomenon of sewing retro clothing, having sewn vintage reproduction clothing since I was in high school.

I have been interested in historic dress from an early age. I was a Civil War reenactor beginning my freshman year of high school, which triggered my interest in sewing historic and vintage clothing. Civil War dress was worn as a costume but was also my gateway to wearing vintage clothing. I started sewing retro clothing when I was a sophomore or junior in high school, beginning with late 1970s/early 1980s Gunne Sax outfits and coinciding with my beginning to wear authentic vintage (which also began with Gunne Sax, purchased on eBay). I discovered reprinted vintage sewing patterns as a senior in high school; my first garment from a reprinted pattern was a Vintage Vogue 1950s formal gown that I wore to a banquet. I began collecting vintage patterns at the same time that I started sewing retro clothing, and my collection currently consists of over 2000 vintage patterns ranging from the 1890s to the 1990s. I joined Vintage Patterns Bazaar (VPB), a Facebook group for buying and selling vintage patterns, in 2014 to unload some of my surplus patterns, which led to my involvement in the online vintage sewing world. Until I joined VPB, I do not recall being aware of any other people who
sewed vintage clothing. My knowledge of the existence of a vintage sewing community on Facebook led to my seeking out and joining other groups. I noticed that many of the same people were in the same groups, so I became Facebook friends with some of them since we interacted regularly. Several of these online friendships have developed into “real life” friendships based on a mutual interest in vintage and retro sewing.

To help minimize the effects of bias, interview questions and topics have been planned in advance to avoid leading the interviewee to any particular conclusion (Rubin & Rubin, 2004, p. 32). I will focus on the experiences of the participant rather than my own and attempt to minimize discussion of my own experiences in the interview process. Rather than assuming that I understand what a participant is talking about, I will ask follow-up questions and probe for more information about anything that may be ambiguous or that may assume prior knowledge of the topic. During data analysis, bias will be countered by having a second researcher (my major professor) also code the data and by considering multiple theoretical perspectives rather than my personal experience.

**Summary**

Qualitative research using grounded theory methodology was used for this research, rooted primarily in interview data and supplemented by photographs and participants’ showing retro garments they have sewn. Eighteen participants, comprised of women in English-speaking countries who sew retro clothing used in everyday life, were recruited using personal networking, snowball sampling, and recruiting through Facebook groups for retro sewers. Triangulation by data source, data type, theory, and multiple research, as well as member checking, were used to help ensure the credibility of the study. The interview data was coded and theory developed from the coding process.
CHAPTER 4

THE ROLE OF NOSTALGIA IN RETRO SEWING

Paper to be submitted to *Fashion Theory*

Charity Armstead⁹ and Ellen McKinney¹⁰

Abstract

This research investigated nostalgia as a motivation for retro sewing and the ways in which nostalgia shapes the practices of retro sewing, using qualitative analysis of interview data collected as part of a larger study. Retro sewers create clothing that replicates or is inspired by styles from the past, to be worn for everyday use rather than as a costume; as such, the practice of retro sewing is inextricably linked to one or more forms of nostalgia. There are many forms of nostalgia. The forms of nostalgia that motivate retro sewers include both connecting with the past and using the past in the present. Retro sewing is often motivated by an interest in history and personal nostalgia for childhood and family. Some retro sewers would like to live in the past, whereas others are content to enjoy past fashions in the present. Retro sewers value aspects of the past as useful tools in the present, illustrated by their collecting vintage items, maintaining knowledge, referring to history as a guide for the present and future, and by using and reinterpreting the aesthetics of the past in their clothing. The methods used in designing and sewing retro clothing vary depending on which types of nostalgia are most salient for the retro sewer for any given project.

KEYWORDS: nostalgia, retro clothing, home sewing, vintage style, home sewers

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Retro sewing is the practice of creating clothing that either replicates or is inspired by fashions of the past (typically the 1920s through the 1980s), to be worn for everyday use. Because it is an interpretation and recontextualization of past styles, retro sewing is a postmodern fashion choice motivated by nostalgia. For this study, 18 retro sewers participated in in-depth interviews about their practice of sewing retro clothing, and the interviews were transcribed and coded to find themes; a predominant theme of the interviews was nostalgia. This research seeks to provide a context for the role of nostalgia in postmodern fashion and to explain what type(s) of nostalgia motivate people to create retro goods.

**Review of Literature**

Nostalgia was defined by Holbrook as “a longing for the past, a yearning for yesterday, or a fondness for possessions and activities associated with days of yore” (1993, p. 245). Nostalgia has been linked to the purchase of secondhand goods since the nineteenth century; Le Zotte identified the nineteenth-century rise of mass production as a catalyst for a nostalgia-based interest in handmade and antique items. Old clothing, however, was not viewed as collectible until later decades (Le Zotte, 2017). According to McColl, et al., clothing that represents “the zeitgeist of a specific era” is of particular value to vintage consumers, indicating that association with a particular era is important to vintage consumers (2013, p. 145). Researchers have generally agreed that nostalgia is a motivating factor in the choice to wear vintage or retro clothing (Cassidy & Bennett, 2012; Cervellon et al., 2012; Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013). Although the literature agrees that nostalgia is a factor for people who wear vintage/retro clothing, there is some disagreement over what definition of nostalgia is applicable to vintage wearers: Does it refer to “a longing for the past” or simply “a fondness for possessions” from (or imitating) an earlier time (Holbrook, 1993, p. 245)?
There are multiple definitions and classifications of nostalgia, and which definition(s) could be applicable to retro sewers is unclear from the literature. Nostalgia may be expressed as identity continuity, displaced/vicarious nostalgia, individualistic vs. collectivistic nostalgia, or aesthetic nostalgia. In addition, it is possible that one’s social position may influence nostalgia. The connection between nostalgia and collecting is also discussed. Finally, nostalgia may be classified in terms of emotional and cognitive involvement.

**Nostalgia as identity continuity**

Nostalgia may be a result of the fast pace of today’s society; it provides a means of maintaining identity continuity, with a perception of the past as stability in an ever-changing present (Davis, 1979, p. 197; J. L. Wilson, 2014). This reaction to instability and the fast pace of modern culture may be expressed in the choice to wear vintage styles or vintage clothing (Fischer, 2015, p. 63; Jenss, 2015, p. 143; Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013, p. 356). Jenss (2015) explained that “to focus on a particular era can, to some extent, immunize against the rapid change promoted by the fashion industry” (p. 111).

**Displaced/vicarious nostalgia**

Davis (1979) argued that nostalgia is only applicable to times from an individual’s own life (p. 8); however, other researchers have since argued that one can also be nostalgic for times that one has not personally experienced, a phenomenon known as displaced nostalgia (J. L. Wilson, 2014) or vicarious nostalgia, described by Goulding (2002) as “aesthetic consumption and preferences for objects and experiences outside of the informant’s living memories” (p. 542). Goulding found that an individual’s nostalgic preference usually solidifies at about age 15 and is further developed by that preference leading to increased consumption of and exposure to
positive images of historic periods. Vicarious nostalgia is caused by “frustration in the present, compared with an idealized image of a perfect past” (Goulding, 2002). Like Goulding, Cervellon, Carey, and Harms differentiated between the nostalgia of “a personally remembered past” and nostalgia for a period in which a person did not live, but state that both these forms of nostalgia rely on an “idealized” past that is filtered by “selective memory, which allows people to re-shape or screen out negative elements from their memories” (Cervellon, Carey, & Harms, 2012, p. 959). The differentiation proposed by Cervellon, et al. corresponds with Holbrook and Schindler’s findings that nostalgia can be associated with a sense of continuity or security based on a link with the past (Holbrook & Schindler, 2003). This idealized form of nostalgia tends to reduce the past to the images found in popular culture, picking the pleasing elements of the past and ignoring the broader picture (Cervellon et al., 2012; Jenss, 2015; E. Wilson, 2013a). People are selective about which elements of the past they choose to copy; they are more likely, for example, to emulate a 1940s movie star than a 1940s housewife.

**Individualistic nostalgia vs. collectivistic nostalgia**

The idea of nostalgia was further elaborated by Zhao, et al., who distinguish *individualistic nostalgia*, defined as “one’s own personal past,” and *collectivistic nostalgia*, which is “relationship-centered and revolv[ing] around a past time, by-gone era, or generation,” which may or may not be expressed as vicarious nostalgia (Zhao et al., 2014). Collectivistic nostalgia may be influenced by group membership (in vintage clothing, this could include membership in a reenactment group, a particular age group, or the online vintage community); according to Sierra and McQuitty, membership in a group related to a specific time period can influence attitudes about the past and can motivate the purchase of nostalgic consumer goods (Sierra & McQuitty, 2007).
Aesthetic reappropriation of the past

Veenstra and Kuipers, on the other hand, stated that nostalgia as related to the consumption of vintage clothing is not necessarily “longing for the past,” but instead a “reappropriation and reinvention of consumer goods,” a more postmodern interpretation (Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013). A postmodern view would suggest that vintage is worn rather for an appreciation of the aesthetics or qualities that happen to be characteristic of earlier decades, rather than an actual longing for the past. Pickering and Keightley believed that nostalgia may not be a desire to return to the past, but a recognition of “aspects of the past as a basis for renewal and satisfaction in the future . . . a means of taking one’s bearings for the road ahead in the uncertainties of the present” (Pickering & Keightley, 2006). They took issue with the postmodern idea of the loss of meaning of the past, suggesting that people may not “passively accept” a postmodern view that strips meaning from the past (Pickering & Keightley, 2006).

Nostalgia filtered by social structure

Lyotard argued that postmodernism does not remove meaning, but that meaning is determined by one’s position in the social structure (Lyotard, 1984). Lyotard’s ideas on postmodernism would suggest that, rather than having no meaning, meaning is instead derived from one’s own experiences and social position, which would then mean that the role played by nostalgia in the practice of wearing vintage clothing would depend on the wearer’s background. Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998) found that most White Americans focus on the past in relation to their personal lives and their families rather than their communities or larger cultural narratives; whereas African Americans and American Indians, while also including their personal pasts and families, usually refer to a broader cultural narrative and a collective past as a guide for living in the present in a way that White Americans do not. Wilson (2014) stated that Caucasian
Americans and African Americans have different perceptions of the past. She observed that her white participants did not tend to look at the past in terms of race and viewed race relations in the 1950s as “nonproblematic” and “separate, but equal,” whereas race and Jim Crow laws were “indelible” in the memories of African Americans (pp. 72-73). It is probable that the differences in the way different ethnic groups view the past affects whether or not certain groups engage in retro sewing and in their motivations for retro sewing.

**Nostalgia and collecting**

Zonneveld and Biggemann (2014) stated that, instead of replacing meaning with aesthetics, nostalgia in collecting behavior may be caused by a “synthesis of aesthetics and nostalgia” (p. 327). Wilson (2014) identified three factors that motivate collectors: Associations with family members, memories of childhood, and nostalgia for particular historical period(s) (p. 112). Wilson found that collectors have two goals: First, they want to keep the past from being forgotten, and they view their collections as a way to honor previous generations. Second, they “desire to imagine living in a different era,” a form of displaced nostalgia (p. 115). The collectors that Wilson studied believe that old things were made better, but they do not use the objects in their collection for their original purposes. Wilson further noted that collecting antiques often inspires individuals to learn more about history.

**Classification of nostalgia**

Davis (1979) classified nostalgia into three categories in terms of the levels of cognition and emotion present. *First order nostalgia or simple nostalgia* is the unexamined idea that the past is better than the present. *Second order or reflexive nostalgia* questions how one would actually feel if transported to the past; when engaging in reflexive nostalgia, one realizes that the view of the
past may be idealized and counters that impulse. *Third order or interpreted nostalgia* questions the very feeling of nostalgia objectively (pp. 17-29). Because there are multiple manifestations and meanings of nostalgia, this research seeks to define and explain the role of nostalgia for retro sewers.

**Methods**

As part of a larger study, 18 women from English-speaking countries were interviewed about their practice of retro sewing (see Table 4.1). This manuscript reports on one of the major themes – the role of nostalgia in retro sewing for oneself. Participants were recruited from the researcher’s personal network, from Facebook groups dedicated to retro sewing, and via snowball sampling; 103 potential participants filled out

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Geographic Region</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abby Hinds</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>US – Northeast</td>
<td>Black, Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antonietta (Etta) Iannaccone</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>US – West</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April Rhain Byassee</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>US – South</td>
<td>Native American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carla Woodson</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>US – West</td>
<td>Black/African-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassidy Percoco</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>US – Northeast</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demi Spehar</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eve-Lynn (Evie) Skelton</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>US – South</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felicity Rackstraw</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane M. Kieffer-Rath</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>US – Midwest</td>
<td>Caucasian, Native American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenn Sider</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>US – Northeast</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy Tan</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
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<tr>
<td>Julie Burnsides Diaz</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>US – Midwest</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lana Waldron</td>
<td>73</td>
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<td>Lauren Maringola</td>
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<td>Micah Walsh</td>
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<td>Sandra Bryans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tiffany Saint</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>US – South</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
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</table>
a prescreening survey. The participants were purposively selected to participate to provide the maximum possible variation in age, race/ethnicity, geographic location, education level, preferred decades, and types of patterns used for sewing. Each participated in an in-depth interview that was transcribed verbatim and coded to find themes in the data. Participants were given a choice to use their real names or pseudonyms, and all participants opted to use their real names for this study.

Findings

Nostalgia was a major theme of the interviews, corresponding with previous studies that identify nostalgia as a motivator for wearing vintage clothing (Cassidy & Bennett, 2012; Cervellon et al., 2012; Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013). Nostalgia, as related to retro sewing, took two primary forms, as shown in Figure 4.1. Forms of nostalgia found in retro sewing The first primary form of nostalgia was connecting with the past. For these retro sewers, the past is integral to their identities and provides a sense of security and continuity, supporting Wilson’s (2014) findings about nostalgia. Connecting with the past was expressed in several different ways. First, many of the retro sewers interviewed have a strong interest in history. Second, retro sewing may be used as a connection with the sewer’s personal past, although that connection is usually not expressed as sewing clothes that one wore as a child. The connection with one’s own past was usually more derivative or indirect, as will be discussed. Linked to connections with one’s personal past are connections with family, which were described by most of the participants as being integral to their beginning retro sewing. Third, the participants’ relationships with their place in time are discussed. Some would prefer to live in the past; others are content with living in their own time and connecting to the past in alternate ways.
The second primary form of nostalgia is that of *valuing the past in the present*. Retro sewers tend to value objects from the past, exemplified in the collections that all the participants maintain. They also value knowledge from the past, as illustrated by the types of collections they create and the ways in which they use their collections. Many retro sewers view history as a roadmap that enables more successful navigation of the present. Finally, an aesthetic preference for styles of the past also informs the decisions made in retro sewing. These two themes and their related subthemes are discussed below.
Connections with the Past

The participants in this study showed strong connections with the past, which are expressed in different ways depending on the individual. One form of connection with the past is an interest in history, focusing on individuals and events to which the participants think that they can relate. Another is connection with their childhood and their families. Some participants wished they could live in the past; others were content to connect with the past from their present circumstances.

“History on a human level”: The everyday stories of people and clothes

Many of the participants indicated an interest in history that focuses more on everyday events and ordinary people than on grand narratives and notable historic figures. Julie observed, “It’s fun to relate to history on a human level.” Lauren noted that “finding something within history that I can really relate to on a personal level is what makes history so interesting. Clothes are very much a tangible part of the history of who we were. And that’s why I like it.” For some, interest in history specifically resulted from an interest in historic fashion, corresponding with Wilson’s (2014) findings that collectors are sometimes inspired to learn more about history because of their collecting interests. Sandra commented, “To me, clothing and history have always been tied together very tightly. So when I think of historical events, I can actually put them in order because of what clothes were being worn at the time.” Lana recalled being bored in history class – “it was dry and dull and dense as far as I am concerned. . . . I was not doing well.” When Lana told her teacher that she found only the clothes interesting, he redirected her to look at history using the clothing as a reference point; “he said, ‘Fine, think about the clothes and what they were wearing when this happened or that happened; that’s all you have to do.’” For Lana, this was the gateway into becoming interested in history. Lana explained, “You think
about the clothes, and then you get involved in [the other aspects and] it snowballs.” Later in life, Lana ended up working with museums.

I liked it as a kid: Nostalgia as connection with one’s own past

A nostalgic connection with one’s own past is one type of nostalgia found among retro sewers. Rather than wearing clothing from their own pasts, however, the connection of retro sewing with sewers’ personal pasts seems to be more indirect. The majority of participants indicated that they do not sew clothing from decades in which they have lived; Joy noted, “I can’t wear 70s or 80s, ‘cause it always seems like a costume to me, rather than just clothes are, you know, cool-looking.” Cassidy linked her preference for 1950s dresses to her “princess girl” childhood infatuation with poofy skirts in the early 1990s. Eve-Lynn observed, “I find myself looking back nostalgically at all the stuff from the early 90s” and “reconnecting . . . with actresses that I really liked when I was a kid.” However, Eve-Lynn noted that the actresses she idolized as a child were Sophia Loren, Bette Davis, and Jean Harlow rather than actresses from early 90s movies. Several participants referred to connections with their grandparents or great-grandparents in referencing their personal past. Nina said, “I was raised by my great-grandmother [on a] big dose of Old Hollywood movies, so I think at some point that aesthetic must have just gotten stuck in my head.” These findings corresponded to the literature on nostalgia for one’s personal past (J. L. Wilson, 2014; Zhao et al., 2014); however, they differed in that these retro sewers connect with aspects of their childhoods in ways that lead to sewing and wearing clothing characteristic of eras that predate their own lives.
Dress like your grandma: Connection with family

The most frequently-discussed aspect of nostalgia was connection to family, most frequently grandparents. In some cases, sewing retro clothing is a way of replacing lost family heirlooms. Jane began sewing retro clothing when she discovered that her grandmother’s 1932 wedding gown had been lost; although Jane said that her wedding dress was very different from her grandmother’s, it was of the same period as the lost heirloom. Lauren enjoys making clothing similar to what her grandmother wore: “She didn’t keep any of her personal clothes, so creating stuff of her era is kind of a way that I could enjoy her type of fashion.” Sewing garments inspired by lost family heirlooms corresponds with Wilson’s (2014) observation that collecting is often linked to family and that some collectors try to restore lost collections (or, in this case, lost garments).

Lauren cited her family history and connection with her grandmother as a motivation for her retro sewing, “to create something inspired by the fashions that she would have been inspired by when she was younger. . . . Seeing what she was like [in old family photos and home movies] when she was young was – just – really happy for me. So that’s why I enjoyed making things like that.” For some participants, retro served as a point of mutual interest and connection in interactions with older relatives. Lauren said that her grandmother “loved” seeing her sewing projects. Abby Hinds “started digging in Granny’s stuff” as a teenager and later transitioned into sewing retro clothing. Abby’s grandparents enjoyed reminiscing with her about the clothing; “it was a link between me and them and my great-aunt Rose.” Tiffany Saint commented that her grandmother was the first person to show her how to sew, and that sewing makes her feel close to her grandmother.

For Carla, a Black woman from San Diego, retro as connection with family is part of a larger cultural narrative. In Black culture, the personal past is inextricably linked to Black
history, and memory serves as a roadmap for navigating the present (Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998, p. 147; J. L. Wilson, 2014). Carla linked her retro clothing to the Civil Rights Movement:

I just want to honor my family’s legacy and the legacy of all the black people that came before me, in regard to dressing wonderfully and looking my best. . . . My grandmother said that style was used as a sort of survival. . . . Even if they hate you, they’ll treat you a little bit nicer just due to how you’re dressed.

Carla applies this principle in her own life, noting that she is treated with more respect and receives better service when dressed in retro style. For these retro sewers, connection with family is expressed in retro sewing through physical objects that remind the sewers of family members and serves as a point of connection with family members who are still living.

“T’im not in the right time at all”: Living in the past

A few of those interviewed expressed a desire to live in the past, a reaction to the perceived unpredictability, complexity, and fast pace of today’s world. The desire of these participants to live in the past corresponds to Wilson’s findings that nostalgia may be motivated by a desire for continuity and security and may be expressed as displaced nostalgia (J. L. Wilson, 2014). Other studies have also found that wearing vintage or retro clothing can be a stabilizing reaction to the rapid changes of society (Fischer, 2015; Jenss, 2015; Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013). Tiffany and April both expressed that living in certain periods would provide them with a sense of “comfort.” April said, “I can’t just be happy existing in a modern world.” She would prefer to live in the 1970s – she views the period as a time when society had moved to an acceptable point (“Civil rights have pretty much taken over”) but before the rise of mass-production and electronic technology, which she views as drawbacks rather than progress. Tiffany observed, “I don’t feel like I’m in the right time at all,” and would prefer to live in the late 1870s or early
1880s. She said, “I’d be totally happy, stay at home, baby on my hip, that sort of thing” and notes, “I think I would do better without all of the modern appliances and that sort of thing.” Lana said she would prefer the simplicity of living in the 1880s. Jane is slightly leery of living in the past, but concluded that she would be willing to live in the 1930s if she were in the life circumstances of her grandparents: “You would have to own your own house” and live on a farm; weathering the Great Depression in other circumstances would have been very difficult. Demi is ambivalent about living in the past; she would like to be in a world in which she could “stay at home and sew all day,” but would not want to live in a period in which she would be expected to have children. A desire to live in the past corresponds to the idea that nostalgia often involves an idealized version of the past (Cervellon et al., 2012; Jenss, 2015; E. Wilson, 2013a)

It is worth noting that a desire to live in the past does not necessarily mean that the sewer would prefer to live in the period(s) that they use in their retro sewing. Tiffany primarily sews clothing from the 1970s, although her favorite period is actually the 1870s/1880s. In Tiffany’s case, she does not sew the 1870s because she prefers to express her personal style while fitting within social norms, and wearing the 1970s is a compromise between social norms and self-expression.

“I would have died of appendicitis”: Enjoying the fashion without living in the era

The majority of the retro sewers interviewed decisively stated that they do not want to live in the past. One reason given was the availability of technology, both as a convenience and as a life-saving measure. Two participants gave medical reasons for preferring to live in the present; both cite life-threatening medical events (appendicitis and pneumonia) that could have been fatal. Julie explained, “I don’t wanna live in a period where I would’ve died at 24! You
know, I’ve done cool things since then!” Technology was also cited as an advantage that makes life easier; Lauren noted that she enjoys having a computerized sewing machine, a vacuum cleaner, and a dishwasher.

Several of the participants stated that the racism and sexism of the past are a concern to them. Several participants noted that they would feel limited in the prescribed social roles for women in past decades. Etta observed that her current level of independence might not have been possible in the past, stating, “I love being able to vote. And, you know, be an independent person. And get my master’s and be able to support myself, and not have to feel a societal pressure to marry and have kids.” Felicity believes that people who say they were “born 50 years too late” have not thought through the ramifications: “Really? Really? No. No. Women don’t have the vote, women don’t have access to birth control, you are your husband’s property, you don’t have access to your own land, you can’t vote, you can’t have a job, really? Why would you want all that crap? Now is good!” Carla and Etta both cited civil rights and racism as a problem. Carla observed that her grandparents’ situation in southern California was better than the racial issues encountered by Black people in the eastern United States, but said that socioeconomically, being Black in the 40s was not an ideal situation. These findings contrasted with other studies that found that wearing vintage or retro clothing involves an idealized view of the past (Cervellon et al., 2012; Jenss, 2015; E. Wilson, 2013a); although these participants engage selectively with the past and only use elements that they find appealing, they are well aware of the less-appealing aspects of past decades.

Demi and Cassidy noted advantages to living in the past but ultimately concluded that the advantages would be outweighed by disadvantages. Although Cassidy stated that she would prefer to stay in the present, she noted that, as an introvert, there might be advantages to living in the past: “There are times when [I think] I would be much more socially successful in the
past. Where you’re not expected to be as gregarious and outgoing.” She added that she believes her fine hand sewing would have been more valued in the past.

A few participants noted that the freedom to experiment with self-expression in dress is a characteristic of the present that they would not like to give up. Cassidy observed, “I’m happy to live now and have the ability to go to all sorts of reenactments and recreations . . . and wear my kooky 50s dresses without people thinking I’m too crazy.” Evie explained, “I’m like a magpie. I like to be able to jump from style to style, from decade to decade, you know. . . . I like having those options.” Julie commented that “I can wear all the historical clothes that I want, now, and still have the right to open a credit card in my own name. There is no reason to go back in time just to wear the clothes.”

The participants varied in their optimism about the future. Evie stated, “We still have plenty of issues to deal with, but in the grand scheme of things, I feel like we’re hopefully on an upward swing.” Nina questioned whether there is a significant difference, given the current political climate: “Would it really be that different? Maybe it would be fine.” Felicity summed up the general reaction of most of the participants to living in the past, saying, “All of things I think make today good wouldn’t be here. So I will stay firmly in 2018 thank you very much. And I will just enjoy the past from afar but without the rose-tinted glasses.”

Visiting the past briefly, however, was something that several participants indicated they would like to do. One reason for this is a desire to visit as a sort of historical tourism. Cassidy expressed surprise that anyone would not want to visit the past – “Don’t you wanna just visit it and see what it’s like for a day or two and then come back?” Nina, whose great-grandmother grew up in Nazi Germany, said that she would like to see Weimar Germany in the late 1920s “right before the Nazis ruined everything.” The desire to visit the past is also motivated by the scarcity of vintage clothing and sewing patterns. Micah said that she would like to go shopping
for clothes in the 1950s and then come right back home. Carla would like to visit to see her grandparents as young people and “to stock up on clothing and patterns.”

Although the possibility of living in the past is a purely hypothetical situation and could therefore include any parameters the participant chose, the participants did not discuss the idea of being in the past in situations other than their current identities. They assumed that they would live in the past with their current understanding of race and gender, in their own race and gender, perhaps because these factors are so integral to their own identities that if they would not consider themselves to be themselves otherwise. Felicity was the only participant who indicates any possibility of having some other identity, stating that living in the past might be preferable if one “were a straight white male who was middle-class or upper class.”

**Valuing the Past in the Present**

In addition to using retro clothing as a connection with the past, the participants in this study also expressed different ways in which they value the past in the present. First, they value objects and/or knowledge from the past. Second, they use history as a guide for the present and the future. Third, they have an aesthetic appreciation for fashions from the past that translates into their retro sewing.

**“I buy it because it’s the good stuff”: Valuing objects from the past**

Every participant interviewed indicated that she values objects from the past, and every sewer interviewed maintains some type of collection related to clothing and/or sewing, regardless of whether or not they consider themselves to be collectors. Pattern collections for those interviewed ranged from 20 patterns to 2500 patterns. Some collect sewing and fashion-related objects because they enjoy sewing. Jenn said, “I buy a fabric and I know it’s got a pattern
that goes with it – I just haven’t found that pattern yet.” Others started using their collections (i.e., sewing with vintage patterns) as a way to justify the existence and continuance of the collection. Tiffany explained, “I would buy all of the vintage patterns, and I had to justify them, so that’s when I started sewing with them.” The use of these collections contrasts with Wilson’s (2014) findings that collectors typically do not use collection objects for their original intended purposes; in many cases, these retro sewers are using collectible sewing patterns to cut out vintage fabric to be sewn on vintage sewing machines and finished with vintage buttons and zippers.

One reason that the participants value objects from the past is that they perceive that things are not made like they used to be (usually regarding the quality of the objects), corresponding with Wilson’s statement that collectors believe antiques to be better-made (2014, p. 114). Lauren explained, “The quality of old stuff exceeds the quality of things you can get today.” This idea was discussed in relation to furniture, buttons, zippers, sewing machines, and even style details in sewing patterns. Cassidy enjoys sewing on an 1891 Singer treadle sewing machine. She explained, “With the treadle, it’s very easy to control the speed. . . . And then also it’s all metal. Things don’t break. You don’t have plastic parts on the inside. It’s pretty easy to . . . fix stuff that needs to be fixed.” Some participants acknowledged that the quality of old things may be a result of survival bias – Etta observed that “it’s the stuff that was made better that’s still here.”

Some studies of collecting have shown that antiques are sometimes viewed as having “an aura” or meaning and/or sacredness beyond their actual purpose (J. L. Wilson, 2014). April views vintage items as having “character and genuineness” that is lacking in today’s goods, stating that modern clothing “sends a cold chill up [her] spine”; she says that “it’s a heart and soul kind of thing.” Sandra stated that she “collect[s] stuff with meaning,” particularly treasuring
items that belonged to her Nana. Jane was delighted to find a copy of a book that she had read as a child at her grandmother’s house and described it as “like finding an old friend.” The participants’ collections also link to their sense of identity. Jenn observed, “When we lose those things, it’s part of deleting part of your past. And you should celebrate history. And I think that’s what the retro community does; we’re sustainable because we want to preserve those pieces for future generations.” Objects may be valued for a sense of connection with their original owner, regardless of whether or not the current owner knows who the original owner was. Nina said that finding vintage patterns with their original owner’s handwritten notes is “just really fascinating and just a really big joy to me.” In some cases, there was a sense of continuing the life of a person or the purpose of an object. Abby said, about wearing vintage garments, “I felt like I was bringing new life to it, and it was kind of like coming alive again.” Jenn said that she uses her vintage accessories and household goods “because [they were] made to be carried” and made “to be enjoyed.” These findings corresponded to Wilson’s findings that collectors are motivated by a sense of connection with family and/or a desire to honor past generations through their collecting (2014, pp. 112-115).

Most of the participants indicated that they feel a sense of responsibility toward objects from the past, even if the items are not necessarily rare or valuable. Jane avoids wearing her vintage hats for fear of damaging them: “I don’t wanna wear something antique that I might ruin . . . I’m kind of a preservationist at heart, really.” Most of the participants take special care with their vintage patterns – they often copy the patterns to avoid damaging the originals, store them in comic book sleeves with buffered backing boards, and/or keep them separate from modern patterns. Julie, in discussing her treatment of her vintage sewing patterns, said that, although she uses her vintage patterns and recognizes that they are replaceable, she nevertheless tries to preserve them: “You know how it goes. I’m like, ‘No! I must preserve this for future
generations! It’s not rare, it’s not unusual, it’s not special, but must preserve!” She views herself as a “custodian” of her sewing patterns and her vintage clothing, storing them in archival-safe boxes and acid-free tissue. She observed, “It’s a little overkill, but in a hundred years, some conservator’s gonna thank me. Like, they won’t know it, but they’re gonna thank me because those pieces will be intact and a lot of stuff hanging in closets in direct sunlight won’t be.”

Several participants indicated that they purchase vintage or antique items to rescue them. Jenn has a piece of 1940s silk that is starting to shatter that she keeps although she admitted that she intends never to sew anything from it: “I get it out and I look at it and then I put it back away.” Julie buys things that she finds interesting, stating, “I know that I can take as good of care of it as anybody else, if not slightly better.” Preserving antiques may give a sense of stability; April said that preserving history is “comforting” for her.

Objects from the past are also valued because of the techniques and skills that they contain. Julie maintains a collection of antique garments to show her students for several reasons. First, showing extant garments illustrates the proper use of specific stitches and techniques more effectively, Julie said, than telling the students what to do. Second, Julie uses the garments to show her students that their struggles with correct sewing technique are not unique –

Until you show them things with crooked seams, and unpicked and resewn seams, they don’t believe you. . . . It makes it very relatable for people. . . . And having a way to connect it back to a real person makes the students feel like they can do it.

Lauren collects objects with “a very high level of craftsmanship” to motivate her to improve her sewing skills. She explained, “I think I’m a pretty good sewer, but I think that they have the upper hand on me, still. . . . And that’s a motivator for me. To keep progressing and learning more.”
Learning what others have forgotten: Valuing knowledge from the past

Many of the retro sewers view themselves as keepers of past knowledge and their retro sewing as a way to continue the existence of that knowledge. Jenn said, “I think that’s part of the retro community, is we learn about this stuff that people have forgot about.” Joy believes that sewing retro clothing is important so that collective knowledge of past techniques is not lost; she said, “It is part of history, and what’s great about it is that it’s not just American or North American, it’s international, and it’s a shared history that we have.” Lauren described learning old sewing techniques a sort of “practical archaeology”; she observed, “There’s so many treasures in these old sewing books that people probably haven’t done in ten years, fifteen years. . . . You can find something and rediscover the way our ancestors did it.”

Because the sewers’ collections of books about sewing and pattern design, patterns, and other fashion ephemera are actively used in constructing the sewers’ knowledge, these collections are a crossover between valuing objects and valuing knowledge. Preserving the written record is a way of preserving knowledge. Sandra enjoys using her collection of antique pattern drafting manuals to research the changing shapes in pattern design throughout the decades: “As mass-production got going, everything got super-simplified. And we’ve lost a lot of that knowledge, so I like to go back and look at the older stuff to try and work it out.”

Valuing knowledge from the past, in some cases, is linked to feminism. Etta said that retro sewing is “a reclaiming of something that was an expectation for women to be able to do. . . . It’s no longer required, but that doesn’t mean it’s not something that’s valuable.” Nina observed that sewing “makes me feel quite connected to a skill that women have traditionally always held but have always been not given the same amount of reverence, perhaps, other skills have been given.” For Nina and Etta, reclaiming sewing as a valuable skill not only affects their views of their own sewing, but also honors the skills of women from past generations.
“The past repeats itself”: History as a roadmap

Many of the participants believe that past can be used to help navigate the present and the future, corresponding with Pickering & Keightley’s (2006) observation that nostalgia may be a “means of taking one’s bearings for the road ahead in the uncertainties of the present” (p. 921). Jenn stated that she is interested in history “because the past repeats itself, and you learn from it,” adding that “the only way you can plan for the future is to know your past.” For Jenn, examining patterns and problems from the past is necessary to facilitate appropriate strategies for handling present and future problems. She observed, “I always tell my kids, if the driveway floods a certain way, and we know we need to drain it on the other side, why would we keep having it drained wrong without fixing the problem?” Sandra cited trend forecasting as an example of being able to use the past for predicting the future. She explained, “If you can see patterns, then you can make predictions.”

Evie believes that understanding “old ways of doing things” enables better understanding of newer methods. Lauren enjoys trying out historic techniques in her sewing to evaluate their effectiveness, noting, “Sometimes you find out there’s a reason why things got forgotten, like they were a real pain in the butt to do and there’s an easier way, but sometimes it’s just really fun to just discover a way to do something new – that’s really old.”

“Achieving a look”: Aesthetic preference for the past

Many of the participants indicated that an aesthetic preference for the past was a motivating factor in their retro sewing, corresponding to the idea of nostalgia as aesthetic appreciation and reinvention (Goulding, 2002; Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013). Many participants
choose a favorite period based on body shape, combined with an appreciate for specific style
details. Carla said,

Fifties, I like the silhouette. [laughs] I first started sewing 50s clothing for myself. I don't
sew it as much as I used to, but I love the nice nipped-in waist, the nice flare that goes
on, the beautiful little shoulders and necklines and whatnot. And the early 60s, just that
carryover from the 50s, before it starts to become sort of Mod-ish. It just -- I dunno,
something about it just screams 'adorable' to me.

Although the sewers expressed an aesthetic preference for the past, their aesthetic
preference seems to be linked to one or more of the other forms of nostalgia, similar to
Zonneveld and Biggeman’s (2014) finding that collecting is based on a combination of aesthetics
and nostalgia; in most cases, retro sewing seems to be a result or expansion of other historic
interest or nostalgia. The findings of this study contrast with Goulding (2002) and Veenstra &
Kuipers (2013), in that the reappropriation and reinvention of vintage style is typically
intertwined with other types of nostalgia rather than disengaged from them. Only one
participant, Demi, indicated that her interest in the period she sews is limited to the aesthetic
appeal of the clothing; she explained,

I don't actually know that much about the era at all. Not even -- not at all. Not -- I
couldn't tell you anything about it, honestly. I know that it's a period that's often
romanticized a lot. Because there were some, like, hard times for colored people and for
women in 50s and whatnot. But, you know, what can I say, I just look at the fashion
there, I don't get bogged down in details. I try not to, at least.

Retro sewers who express an aesthetic preference for the past were more likely to value
personal style over historic authenticity in their retro sewing choices. Etta noted that she likes to
use vintage patterns with modern fabrics, explaining that, “It's not about creating necessarily a
historically-accurate garment, because you’re not creating a costume and you’re not being a reenactor. You’re being inspired by the aesthetic that you like.” Julie enjoys using retro sewing as a means of uniqueness; she sews retro silhouettes in novelty print fabrics to differentiate herself from others. She described her personal style as “subverting the vintage norm and also subverting modern fashion at the same time,” explaining:

I don’t like to dress like everybody else, obviously, and I don’t follow trends. I like what I like. And I’m a giant nerd, and I love animals, and I love really kitschy things. And so I have fabric with kitchen appliances, and I made a lobster dress. . . . So it’s a lot of fun to have people do a double-take in the grocery store and say, “Are those penguins in hot air balloons on your dress?” And yes, yes they are. And nobody else has one like this in the state of Ohio, I will bet you.

For Julie, self-expression is more salient than historic authenticity, leading to an aesthetic that is neither current nor entirely historical, yet is informed by the aesthetics of past decades.

In addition to affecting fabric selection, a focus on the aesthetics of the past affects which types of sewing patterns are used. Micah stated that her choices in sewing patterns are determined by her focus on the look of the finished product: “If it gets me to the end result of the style that I want, reproduction’s fine, you know.” Micah also noted that she will use modern sewing patterns that have elements of the 1950s aesthetic that she prefers. Demi focuses on the style details of historic garments, and she prefers the look of Modes Royale and Vogue Couturier patterns that tend to have complex construction and unusual styling. Neither of these lines has been reproduced, and so Demi prefers using the original patterns, as most reproductions tend to be simpler designs. She explained,
I want something that you can’t make from another pattern, you know. Like [Vogue 817], with all the ruching down the side and the flowers [see Figure 4.2]. [I prefer] something really crazy. . . . I don’t want ‘insert dart here, insert dart here, side zip, pleat.

Figure 4.2. Vogue Couturier Design 817. Courtesy of Beverly Yvette Jennings, VSPC Galleria. Used by permission.

Although she prefers vintage sewing patterns, Demi does not necessarily use historic construction techniques in her garments; she clarified:

I know that there are now better ways of doing certain things. Like, there'll be certain instructions on vintage patterns, and you'll be like, 'What the hell, why would they even
ask you to do that? when there are better methods, better tools, whatnot, for the job nowadays. And for me, the end result is just achieving a look. I'm not -- I'm not too worried about how that look is achieved, so long as it's not completely a train wreck on the inside. I like making my insides very neat. So if it's not a train wreck on the inside, and if everything is structurally sound and fitted well, then I don't mind how that is achieved. So generally that means I almost never follow the instructions on the pattern ever. [laughing]

Another way in which aesthetic preference for the past is expressed is in the choice of styling one's retro look. The participants who prioritize historic authenticity typically dress head-to-toe in one era per ensemble; those who prioritize personal expression tend to mix and match eras to achieve their desired look. Mix-and-match may be expressed either as mixing historic periods or as combining retro clothing with modern clothing. In some cases, retro sewers mix things up depending on the situation; for events, historic authenticity may take priority over self-expression. At other times, self-expression and aesthetic preference are more salient than historic authenticity. Carla explained,

I'll mix and match every so often unless, like, it's a specific event. But I'll take elements from the 30s, 40s, and 50s and mix 'em all together and go on about my day. Or . . . some days if I'm just feeling glum I'll just put on a hat.

The findings of this study are that retro sewers have a high level of aesthetic appreciation for the past, expressed in their clothing. This corresponds to the findings of Veenstra & Kuipers (2013) insofar as the participants do enjoy the aesthetics. However, for most of the participants, an appreciation for the past was combined with other forms of nostalgia, corresponding to the idea that nostalgia cannot be reduced to mere aesthetic appropriation of the past (Pickering & Keightley, 2006; Zonneveld & Biggemann, 2014).
Conclusions

Retro sewing is a practice that is motivated by nostalgia. For retro sewers, nostalgia is expressed as connection with the past through an interest in history, personal nostalgia, connection with family, or a desire to live in the past. Nostalgia in retro sewing is also characterized by the active use of the past in the present; this is expressed by using objects from the past, using knowledge or techniques from the past, using history as a roadmap to navigate the present and future, and using aesthetics from the past in a way that may or may not be connected to other aspects of nostalgia. The specific effects of nostalgia on retro sewing practices are dependent on which type(s) of nostalgia are most salient, and nostalgia salience may vary at different times depending on the goals of a specific sewing project; the same sewer may use different techniques depending on the motivation for and purpose of a garment. Nostalgia can be expressed in multiple ways in retro sewing and has a variety of different effects on the retro sewer’s choices in the design, construction, and use of retro clothing, ranging from the choice of a sewing pattern to the styling of a completed outfit.

References


CHAPTER 5

“SO WEIRD AND SO FABULOUS”:

EXPRESSION OF IDENTITY IN RETRO SEWING

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Abstract

Retro sewing is an expression of identity rooted in nostalgia and enabled by
postmodernism; therefore, the practice of retro sewing contains inherent contradictions. The
purpose of this study was to examine contradictions and tensions between themes found in retro
sewing. This study used grounded theory methods to analyze semi-structured, in-depth
interviews with 18 retro sewers. The participants in this study use retro sewing as a means of
identity portrayal in a variety of ways. First, retro sewing is a visual expression of identity.
These home sewers consider their retro clothing to be part of their identities and an extension of
themselves. The nostalgia involved in retro sewing, often linked with family, is part of the
participants’ identities and provides identity continuity. The portrayal of a retro visual identity is
enabled by postmodern fashion, through the reinvention of period styles for today’s use,
allowing the participants a variety of options for self-expression. Second, retro sewing functions
as a way to enact personal values; participants discussed retro as opposition to the fashion
industry, although they show high fashion involvement, and some use retro sewing as an

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expression of feminism. These findings provide additional insight into a specific segment of the home sewing market.

KEYWORDS: Retro clothing, home sewing, nostalgia, postmodernism, identity, vintage style, uniqueness

Retro sewers, who sew their own versions of historic styles to wear as part of their everyday lives, represent a unique intersection between the vintage clothing market and the home sewing market. Home sewers choose to sew their own clothing as a means of self-empowerment to control their appearance as well as a creative outlet (Martindale, 2017). The retro sewer is one who chooses to build a sartorial identity by creating unique clothing outside the mainstream. Understanding their motivations may lead to deeper understandings of why some women value and choose to build a sartorial identity outside of the mainstream and why sewing is chosen as a way to exercise control over their appearance. Understanding the motivations and methods of the retro sewer provides insight into this specific segment of the home sewing market that has additional motivations (e.g. authenticity and nostalgia) not seen in home sewers that create non-retro clothing. Such knowledge could benefit pattern manufacturers, fabric sellers, and sewing machine manufacturers by helping them to create products that will appeal to the retro sewer market. Benefits of understanding the motivations and methods of retro sewers could also extend to vintage clothing dealers and companies that produce retro clothing. Their product offerings could satisfy unmet needs that lead to sewing one’s own clothing. This research also provides a perspective on how personal values are expressed through sewing one’s own clothing outside the mainstream.

This research explores retro sewers’ negotiation of meaning in the combination of personal style, historic dress, and cultural norms through their creative process. The research
questions for this study included: (1) Why do retro sewers value a vintage appearance? (2) Why do retro sewers use *sewing for themselves* as a way to create their desired vintage appearance? (3) How do retro sewers use sewing for themselves to create their desired vintage appearance? (4) What is the intersection of motivations for and methods of retro sewing? (How does one influence or inform the other?)

**Review of Literature**

**Identity portrayal in dress**

Because people recognize that they are being evaluated or read by their appearance, they attempt to link their appearance with identity to portray an “authentic” self (DeLong et al., 2005, p. 39; Entwistle, 2000, p. 73). The portrayal of identity in dress is fluid and highly context-specific. Dress can be used to indicate a variety of social meanings, including gender, social class, religion, age, occupation, and a variety of other characteristics (Kaiser, 2012; Roach-Higgins et al., 1995). The factors influencing one’s self-presentation in dress shift constantly, depending on one’s context, the people with whom one expects to interact, and which aspects of identity a person wishes to portray, among other things (Guy et al., 2001; Kaiser, 2012).

Wearing vintage clothing is closely linked to the portrayal of identity through dress (DeLong et al., 2005, p. 39; Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013, p. 362). Some people are content with mass-market clothing that is readily available; others deliberately seek out garments that construct a distinctive identity (Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013, p. 360). DeLong et al. (2005) found that vintage enthusiasts use vintage to construct a “distinctive and individual look” that is in line with their authentic selves (p. 39). *Fashion involvement* is the degree to which an individual is interested in dress and finds it important and/or personally relevant (Cervellon et al., 2012; Hourigan & Bougoure, 2012; Joo Park et al., 2006; Manchiraju & Damhorst, 2016; Naderi, 2013;
O’Cass, 2000, 2004). Fashion involvement has been shown to be a motivator in the purchase of vintage clothing (Cervellon et al., 2012, p. 965).

The way identity is portrayed shifts depending on one’s situation at any given time; therefore, it is probable that the situations in which vintage is worn and the style(s) of vintage fashion chosen are determined by which identity is most salient at the time (Kaiser, 1990, 2012) and which group membership is most relevant (Hogg et al., 1995). One’s dress at work in an office, for instance, is likely to conform much more to social norms than one’s dress at Viva Las Vegas, a large rockabilly event. Vintage wearers may have different goals for their appearance that mediate the way in which they style vintage or retro clothing. Some vintage wearers are subtle in their use of vintage clothing, mixing elements of vintage into contemporary ensembles or ensembles that could pass as contemporary; on the other end of the spectrum, some vintage wearers prefer an overt period look (DeLong et al., 2005, p. 31).

Using vintage fashion as a means of identity expression is sometimes an avenue to escape the dictates of the fashion industry (Jenss, 2015, p. 111); vintage fashion thereby becomes a form of antifashion, which Davis (1994) defines as “oppositional dress . . . which takes place in response to the currents of fashion” (pp. 161-162). The rapidly-changing fashion industry, according to Entwistle, can lead to “anxiety and a crisis in identity” (2000, p. 74). With vintage fashion, the wearer, rather than the rapidly-changing vagaries of the fashion industry, becomes the arbiter of style. “That’s the joy of it,” declared one vintage enthusiast interviewed by Gregson, Brooks, and Crewe, “declaring it good taste and bad taste yourself” (Gregson et al., 2001, p. 17). Vintage or retro fashion may also be used as a form of aspirational identity. Postrel (2004) explained, “We may take on the identities that we want to own, hoping that surface will become substance, rather than accepting the ones we already have” (p. 117). Used in this way, vintage may become a way to shape identity rather than merely to express it.
The role of nostalgia in vintage style

Nostalgia has frequently been identified as a motivation for wearing vintage or retro clothing (Cassidy & Bennett, 2012; Cervellon et al., 2012; Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013). Nostalgia has been defined as “a longing for the past, a yearning for yesterday, or a fondness for possessions and activities associated with days of yore” (Holbrook, 1993, p. 245). Although agreeing that nostalgia is a motivator for wearing vintage or retro, researchers disagree on what type(s) of nostalgia are applicable to the practice of wearing vintage clothing. For retro sewers, the question remains whether nostalgia is “a longing for the past” or “a fondness for possessions and activities” from the past, or some combination of the two (Holbrook, 1993, p. 245).

Davis (1979) classified nostalgia into three categories: First-order nostalgia is an “unexamined belief” that the past was better than the present; second-order nostalgia is a feeling of nostalgia that is mediated by questioning whether the past was actually superior to the present or whether it merely seems that way; and third-order nostalgia examines the feeling of nostalgia, questioning if nostalgia is at all legitimate (pp. 18-25). Nostalgia has also been categorized in terms of whether or not the nostalgic person lived in the time about which he/she feels nostalgic; nostalgia can be either personal, for a time in which one has lived, or vicarious, nostalgic for a time that predates one’s own remembrance (Cervellon et al., 2012; Goulding, 2002; J. L. Wilson, 2014). Nostalgia has been further classified as individualistic nostalgia, personal nostalgia that is particular to an individual (i.e., nostalgia about one’s childhood home) or collective nostalgia, which is common to an entire generation (i.e., nostalgia for music that was popular in the 1980s) (Davis, 1979; J. L. Wilson, 2014; Zhao et al., 2014). Nostalgia often occurs in times of perceived instability and rapid change, providing a sense of continuity and stability (Davis, 1979; Pickering & Keightley, 2006; J. L. Wilson, 2014).
Veenstra and Kuipers (2013) argued that nostalgia linked to the consumption of vintage clothing is, rather than a “longing for the past,” a “reappropriation and reinvention of consumer goods” (p. 356). This postmodern view of nostalgia suggests that vintage clothing may be worn purely for its aesthetics rather than any actual desire to return to the past. Opposing the postmodern view that nostalgia may be purely aesthetic, Pickering and Keightley stated that people may not “passively accept” a postmodern view that strips meaning from the past (Pickering & Keightley, 2006). Zonneveld & Biggemann (2014) proposed that nostalgia for collectors may be a “synthesis of aesthetics and nostalgia” (p. 327), which may apply to retro sewers.

**Postmodernism and vintage style**

Modernism was characterized by a belief in linear progress created by advances in rational thought; this belief was expressed in fashion for decades as the idea that the latest styles were inherently superior to past styles, representing the progress of design (Morgado, 1996, pp. 42, 44). Because the idea of linear progress includes a concept of the “best” way to do things at any given time, there were definite right and wrong ways to dress, ranging from social rules to what silhouettes were worn. In the 1970s, however, postmodernism took hold, expressed through diversity in fashion, the triumph of personal choice over designer mandates, and the borrowing of many elements of past fashion (Farrell-Beck & Parsons, 2007, p. 209). Postmodernism broke down many of the rules and systems of dress, leaving individual preference as the ruling determinant of what is worn (Back, 2007, p. 404).

Postmodernism, according to Kimberly Miller-Spillman et al., has four major effects on consumer culture: Eclecticism, nostalgia, questioning of rules, and simulation (2012, p. 86). Eclecticism is expressed by mixing a variety of styles and influences, in single outfits and/or in
an individual’s overall wardrobe (Miller-Spillman et al., 2012, p. 86). Postmodernism in dress
may explain the bending of dress norms that occurs in wearing past styles and in the way retro
outfits often reconfigure retro influences into eclectic outfits that fit neither past nor present
norms. Related to the use of vintage and retro clothing, eclecticism may variously be expressed
by mixing decades and/or by mixing vintage with modern styles. Nostalgia is expressed both in
wearing vintage and in creating garments that either closely imitate or are inspired by past styles.
The questioning of rules is exhibited in mixing items that may not have originally been used
together (for example, evening shoes with a day dress) or by wearing things in settings or ways in
which they would have been viewed as inappropriate in the past (wearing a casual dress to a
formal event or a sundress to church). Simulation is used as a replacement for things that may
be rare (Miller-Spillman, Reilly, & Hunt-Hurst, 2012, p. 87); this applies directly to the
reproduction of vintage garments, since they are often created to resemble original vintage
garments when original vintage may be unavailable.

Symbolic interactionism and vintage style

The theory of symbolic interactionism states that the meaning of symbols is not fixed,
but rather is constructed through interactions between people (Aksan, Kısac, Aydin, &
Demirbuken, 2009, p. 902; Blumer, 1969, p. 4). Blumer (1969) identified three premises of
symbolic interactionism: First, “Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings
that the things have for them”; second, “the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises
out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows”; and third, “these meanings are
handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with
the things he encounters” (p. 2). Kaiser, Nagasawa, & Hutton (1991) applied symbolic
interaction to postmodern dress (pp. 165-185). The constantly-shifting meanings of postmodern
dress lead to confusion of symbols, which makes constructing meaning uncertain. Other people, however, continually try to assign meaning to a person’s dress, so self-expression in dress becomes constrained by what they think other people think about their dress (Kaiser, 1990, 2012).

**Uniqueness and self-expression**

A desire for individuality is a major motivating factor for people who choose to wear vintage clothing (Cervellon et al., 2012, pp. 960-961; DeLong et al., 2005, pp. 38, 40; Fischer, 2015, pp. 50, 58; McColl et al., 2013, p. 145). Vintage enthusiasts tend to view new clothing as lacking individuality (Jenss, 2015, p. 110). Mass-produced retro clothing, although it sometimes fit their desired aesthetic, is often avoided by vintage enthusiasts because the items are not unique (Jenss, 2015, p. 114). In fact, some vintage wearers may even stop wearing a particular period if they perceive that it has become too mainstream (Gregson et al., 2001, p. 21). A need for uniqueness, however, is tempered by social norms. Ruvio (2008) stated that “individuals generally prefer to exhibit uniqueness in a way that will not provoke social punishment” (p. 456). Cervellon, Carey, and Harms (2012) stated that vintage enthusiasts “value the exclusivity of possessing rare pieces which will enhance their sense of differentiation,” but acknowledge that, although vintage may enhance one’s social image and self-image, it can also result in social disapproval (pp. 960-961). This social disapproval may limit the adoption of certain styles or aspects of vintage dress.

In addition to being a motivation for wearing vintage styles, uniqueness is a motivation for home sewing. Individuality and creative expression in clothing, albeit more subtly throughout the earlier part of the 20th Century, were drivers for home sewing long before postmodernism hit the scene in the 1970s (Gordon, 2004, p. 79; O’Brien & Campbell, 1927, p.
9). One of Gordon’s interview participants described sewing as “the ability to express my own personality in clothes that are mine and not to be duplicated” (2009, ch. 2, para. 24). Blondin (1943) observed, “One of the major satisfactions of being able to make one’s own clothes is having a wardrobe styled to your own personality. . . . The woman who sews has more chance than most to express herself creatively” (p. 6). Individuality has increased in importance in the 2000s, identified by several sources as a primary motivation for home sewers (Bain, 2016; Grace & Gandolfo, 2014; Holson, 2012; Martindale, 2017; Martindale & McKinney, 2016).

**Authenticity**

The search for authentic expression of the self through dress is a manifestation of postmodernism in dress. Authenticity of identity has been linked to vintage clothing since the first appearance of vintage in the 1950s. Le Zotte (2017), discussing a 1950s fad for 1920s raccoon coats, stated that the coats’ authenticity was arguably their most important attribute; they “demonstrated consumer discrimination and originality” (p. 132).

According to Merriam-Webster (2018), authenticity can take on several different forms, three of which are relevant to the discussion of retro clothing. First, authenticity is the quality of “conforming to an original so as to reproduce essential features.” This definition could be applied as a measure of authenticity in historic reproduction garments and in retro sewing. Second, something that is authentic is “not false or imitation,” applicable to the notion that a true vintage garment is a genuine historic artifact rather than a reproduction. Third, something that is authentic is “true to one’s own personality, spirit, or character,” which could be applied to the idea of clothing as a true expression of self (“Authentic,” 2018).

Postrel (2004) delineated two different types of authenticity. The first is a type of authenticity related to the object; for example, authenticity as an “original form of something” or
authenticity as patina or “showing the signs of history” (pp. 110-113). The second type of authenticity relates to a person’s identity rather than to an object; specifically, authenticity of self-expression (Postrel, 2004, pp. 115-117). Both the authenticity of original garments (related to the object) and authenticity of self-expression (related to identity) are factors in why people choose to wear vintage garments. Most of the literature on vintage wearers has not differentiated between the two, speaking of authenticity in more general terms.

**Retro sewing as opposition to mass-production**

The authenticity of a vintage garment as an historic original is linked to its authenticity as a symbolic statement against mass production (Fischer, 2015; Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013), which in turn is linked to authenticity as a form of self-expression. Fischer (2015) explained that consumers often attribute similar meanings to vintage clothing that they do to handmade goods, often “assum[ing] that vintage is ‘handmade,’ with a high degree of ‘integrity’ and ‘craftsmanship’ in its construction” (p. 63). This is one of the reasons that mass-produced retro garments, such as the ones produced by companies like Modcloth, are viewed as less authentic (in terms of self-expression) than original vintage garments. The emphasis is not just on the vintage look, but on how one obtains it (McColl et al., 2013, p. 141). Set in contrast to mass production, then, the authenticity of vintage in terms of historicity becomes a mark of connoisseurship, “a means of demonstrating individuality, knowingness, knowledgeability and discernment, as an expression of their cultural capital, and as a way of constructing their difference from others” (Gregson et al., 2001, p. 16).

Like vintage clothing, home sewing enables the opposition of mass production (Bain, 2016; Chansky, 2010; Grace & Gandolfo, 2014; Martindale, 2017; Russum, 2016), to circumvent ready-to-wear fashion choices (Martindale, 2017), and to exert control over their presentation of
self in dress (Martindale, 2017). Although mass production and the consequent affordability of ready-to-wear had decreased the prevalence of sewing in the 1960s and 1970s (Chaker, 2006), sewing began an upswing in the 1980s as a way to express sartorial uniqueness in contrast to the sameness of mass-produced clothing. Chaker (2006) quoted one sewing student as having taken up sewing because “everyone’s starting to look like clones of each other.” Some engage in home sewing as attempts to counter the throw-away nature of fast fashion and the global exploitation of garment workers (Bain, 2016, p. 63). Bain described sewing as “slow fashion,” implying that handmade garments are valued more than mass-produced because of the expenditure of the owner’s time used to create them (p. 63). The idea that handmade clothes are more valued than inexpensive mass-produced clothes aligns with the theory of the extended self (Belk, 1988; Campbell, 2005; Guy et al., 2001); handmade clothing, as an expression of home sewers’ time and values, is viewed more as part of the self than clothing that is obtained with less personal involvement.

**Third-wave feminism and retro sewing**

Third-wave feminism rejects the idea that there is one best way to be a feminist; rather than focusing on *either/or*, third-wave feminism embraces *both/and*, acknowledging and accommodating different perspectives, preferences, backgrounds, and ways of being feminist (Buszek, 2006; Dicker & Piepmeier, 2003; Harde & Harde, 2003; Reed, 1997; Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2004; Tong, 2009). In a way, third-wave feminism is defined by its lack of definition. This does not mean that third-wave feminism is ineffective; rather, third-wave feminism focuses on changing culture in smaller, everyday ways that add up to larger effects. Third-wave feminism focuses on empowering women (Chansky, 2010; Mandrona, 2012; Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2004), and empowerment can take different forms for different people.
Sewing as opposition to gender norms

Third-wave feminism takes stereotypically feminine activities and recasts their purpose; one way in which this can be done is to use feminine activities to challenge cultural norms. It is possible that sewing has always contained some feminist undertones, whether or not they were recognized or acknowledged. Kempson (2015) argued that DIY has always been inherently feminist; although it is only recently that it has been labeled as such, DIY has historically embodied feminist characteristics. The idea that sewing can challenge social norms of femininity is not new in sewing, according to Gordon (2004). She explained, “Freedom to make choices about how to make up a garment . . . was also a tool for defining or challenging standards of appropriate dress” (p. 82). Hackney (1999) suggested that, for young women growing up in the 1920s and 1930s, sewing was “a liberating, even subversive, activity enabling young women to define their appearance and identity without regard, or in direct opposition, to their mothers’ opinions.” However, the position of home sewing as an accepted part of feminine identity enabled it to maintain traditional appearances while, perhaps, subverting traditional ideas.

Bain (2016) highlighted the importance of sewing as challenging both gender norms and fashion norms, arguing that sewing is a form of empowerment for women (pp. 63-64). Martindale (2017) observed that none of her interview participants identified themselves as feminists, but that their motivations for sewing were similar to the motivations of third-wave feminists: specifically, sewing as a creative outlet and to express individuality, rather than as a result of economic or social pressure (p. 88). Because home-sewn retro clothing typically involves very traditional portrayals of feminine identity while simultaneously operating as a mode of self-expression resisting mass-production and the dictates of society, this research examines whether or not retro sewing should be viewed as a feminist practice.
Revaluing sewing

The shift away from economic motivations for sewing has increased the perceived value of home sewing beyond that of most ready-to-wear, visible in the reframing of home-sewn garments from homemade to handmade. If one is creating objects for pleasure or as a political statement, sewing is prestigious; if, however, economy is the primary motivator, sewing becomes merely an expression of poverty (Dawkins, 2011; Groeneveld, 2010; Myzelev, 2009). This is the distinction between homemade and handmade. As a ubiquitous economic necessity, home-sewn garments had somewhat of a social stigma (Buckley, 1999; McLean, 2006); as a symbol of leisure and skill, they have been transformed into a marker of status.

Using a retro appearance to leverage femininity

Feminine appearance and sexuality can be used, within certain limits, as advantages (Ross-Smith & Huppatz, 2010). Several vintage enthusiasts and retro sewers have noted that wearing retro clothing results in their being treated better and more respected by men (Cliff, 2015; Hirsch, 2010; Rogers, 2013). Rogers believes that wearing vintage communicates self-respect, which influences how she is perceived and treated by others (2013). Hirsch, a popular retro sewing blogger and pattern designer for Butterick Patterns, notes that wearing her retro creations changes her deportment and leads to better treatment from men (Hirsch, 2010). Ross-Smith and Huppatz (2010) observe that the advantage a woman can gain from her appearance “may mean that a groomed appearance is a powerful social signifier,” or, alternately, that a woman’s appearance is viewed as her most salient attribute (p. 561). In some instances, appearance can be used to manipulate certain situations; however, feminine capital is limited to “manipulat[ing] constraints rather than overturn[ing] power” (Ross-Smith & Huppatz, 2010).
Method

The purpose of this study was: (1) To understand the motivations of women who sew retro clothing for themselves, (2) to understand the methods of women who sew retro clothing for themselves, and (3) to understand the intersection of the motivations and methods of women who sew retro clothing for themselves. A qualitative, grounded-theory approach was used for this study. Because the practice of sewing retro clothing has not been adequately articulated in the literature, it was determined that the formation of hypotheses related to this topic could unduly limit the results of the study; therefore, a qualitative approach was used so that a greater number of possible meanings could be explored (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Creswell, 2014; Miles et al., 2013; Ritchie et al., 2013).

Participants

The population for this study was women living in English-speaking countries who sew retro clothing (clothing inspired by or replicating clothing from a past fashion era) for everyday wear, as one of their primary leisure activities. After IRB approval was obtained, participants were recruited via the researcher’s personal network, Facebook groups dedicated to retro sewing and vintage patterns, and snowball sampling. Potential participants filled out a pre-screening survey; from the 103 retro sewers who filled out the survey, 18 participants (see Table 5.1. Participant Information) were purposively selected using a sampling matrix (Ritchie et al., 2013) to ensure the maximum possible variation in age, geographic region, race/ethnicity, decades sewn, and types of sewing patterns used (Creswell, 2014, p. 189; Gray, 2014, p. 217; Miles et al., 2013, pp. 31-36; Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 131). The participants ranged from age 19 to
age 73 and have education levels ranging from high school to graduate degrees. Participants were given the option to use either real names or pseudonyms for this study.

Table 5.1. Participant Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Geographic Region</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abby Hinds</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>US – Northeast</td>
<td>Black, Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antonietta (Etta) Iannaccone</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>US – West</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April Rhain Byassee</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>US – South</td>
<td>Native American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carla Woodson</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>US – West</td>
<td>Black/African-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassidy Percoco</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>US – Northeast</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demi Spehar</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eve-Lynn (Evie) Skelton</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>US – South</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felicity Rackstraw</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane M. Kieffer-Rath</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>US – Midwest</td>
<td>Caucasian, Native American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenn Sider</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>US – Northeast</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy Tan</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie Burnsides Diaz</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>US – Midwest</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lana Waldron</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>US – Midwest</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren Maringola</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>US – West</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micah Walsh</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>US – South</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nina Sidney</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Caucasian, Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra Bryans</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiffany Saint</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>US – South</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data collection**

This was an exploratory study intended to generate detailed analysis and descriptions of personal motivations and context and thereby build theory; therefore, this study used semi-structured, in-depth interviews as the primary source of data (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Ritchie et al., 2013; Saldaña, 2011). The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and two hours and were conducted in-person or via Zoom, a video conferencing program. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. Some participants also provided photographs to be used as part of the study.
Data analysis

The interviews were coded as data was collected, and the interview guide was revised as new themes were discovered (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Creswell, 2014, p. 195; Miles et al., 2013, p. 70). A codebook with definitions for each code was developed to ensure consistency in coding (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011; Saldaña, 2015). Intercoder agreement was calculated by the percentage of shared codes (the number of agreements divided by the total number of agreements and disagreements), which should be 80-90% (Creswell, 2014, p. 203; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013, pp. 84-85; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013, p. 278); after repeating the process several times and refining the definitions in the codebook, the final intercoder agreement calculation was 92.12%. Towards the end of the analysis process, the themes from the interviews were sent to the participants for member checking (Birt et al., 2016; Creswell, 2014; Miles et al., 2013), and the participants were given the opportunity to indicate which themes were and were not applicable to them and to comment on the findings; 13 of the 18 participants (72.2%) responded to the member checking survey.

Findings and Discussion

The participants in this study use retro sewing as a means of identity portrayal, similar to vintage clothing enthusiasts (DeLong et al., 2005, p. 39; Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013, p. 362). First, retro sewing is an expression of personal style, based in nostalgia. These home sewers consider their retro clothing to be part of their identities and an extension of themselves. The nostalgia involved in retro sewing, often linked with family, is part of the participants’ identities and provides identity continuity. The portrayal of identity is enabled by postmodern fashion, through the reinvention of period styles for today’s use, allowing the participants a variety of options for self-expression. Second, retro sewing functions as an expression of values;
participants discussed retro as opposition to the fashion industry, although they show high fashion involvement, and some use retro sewing as an expression of feminism.

**Identity portrayal in retro sewing**

Identity portrayal is a major factor in the practice of sewing retro clothing, corresponding with the literature that discusses portraying an “authentic” self through clothing (DeLong et al., 2005, p. 39; Entwistle, 2000, p. 73). For retro sewers, clothing functions as an extension of their identities (Ahuvia, 2005; Belk, 1988). When asked to describe her personal style, Jenn said, “I like unique lines and prints. Vintage, I guess would be one way to describe my style. Unique, feminine, vintage. I don't think there's really one word to narrow down to describe it. It's me” [emphasis added]. The descriptions given by the participants of their personal style indicated that their retro clothing is both an expression of and part of their identities.

Identity tends to shift over time, and changes in identity are translated into clothing. Several of the retro sewers, particularly those involved the longest in vintage and retro, described changes in preferences over time, often relating to changes in the decades they choose to wear. Nina explained,

> Obviously everybody wants to express themselves through their clothing, and everybody wants somebody to look at their clothes and know exactly who they are. But, you see, you as a person are constantly changing, so it makes sense for your clothes to evolve as well.

Retro clothing may be used as a form of aspirational identity. Micah, who described herself as an introvert, said that vintage helps her to be more outgoing:
I think it was sort of this evolution of, like, as I became a more confident adult, I was willing to kind of -- stand out a little more, and not be uncomfortable with that. And that, in and of itself, made me more -- a little more extroverted, maybe, than I used to be.

Demi uses vintage to boost her mood – less a permanent change of identity, but a way to help her be who she wants to be in periods when she doesn’t feel her best. She said,

Sometimes it feels like my clothes are sort of representative of who I want to be, rather than who I am. . . . It can help pull you out of a funk and make you happy, so I dress for the day I want to have, not the day that I’m having, you know.

Retro clothing, therefore, is used by some sewers as a way to shape their identities, which applies Postrel's (2004) description of aspirational identity to retro sewers.

Dress may be modified depending on identity salience and which identity the participant wants to display at a given time, corresponding with Kaiser (1990). Etta, who had recently started an internship at the time of her interview, expressed some concern about wearing retro in a work environment in which she did not know anyone very well. She said,

So, I really like dressing up. But my job, I work with kids and I work with horses, and so the people I work with don't dress up at all. So recently, as in last night, I was going out with my friends from work, and I was like, 'Okay, so I really want to dress up, because I'm going out. But I don't want the conversation -- and I'm still getting to know these people -- I don't want the conversation to only turn to what I'm wearing, and I don't want that to be all they talk about.' So I wanted to find something that felt like something I'd like to wear and in my retro style, but without being like, too over-the-top. That said, when I'm with my friends that I know really well and whatever, I'll wear anything. [laughs] Like, whatever I feel like. But it's -- it's in this process of getting to
know new people, where I don't just wanna be known as the girl who wears, like, weird clothes or retro clothes or over-the-top clothes. Although Etta did not abandon her retro aesthetic in her identity as an intern, she modified it slightly so she would not stand out as much, keeping it “low-key” and “casual” instead of wearing a more extreme retro style.

None of the sewers expressed that they dress to please anyone but themselves, highlighting that retro sewing is a personal expression of identity, more about the wearer than about people around her. Jenn explained, “This is me. I dress as I feel I look my best. It’s never about standing out or fitting in.” Demi joked that she sometimes asks her partner for design advice and then “ignore[s] it half the time.” The sartorial identity produced through sewing retro clothing, then, is very personal; although sometimes modified for certain social situations, the choices of what to sew rest ultimately with the sewer rather than relying on outside influence.

**The role of nostalgia in retro sewing**

For the retro sewers interviewed, nostalgia takes a variety of forms; typically, more than one type of nostalgia is applicable. Two forms of nostalgia seem to be motivations for retro sewing. The first is *connection with the past*; retro sewing can be used as a means of connection with relatives (either living or dead) or to give the retro sewer a connection to the past as a form of stability. Nostalgia can either be vicarious or personal (Cervellon et al., 2012; Goulding, 2002; J. L. Wilson, 2014), or sometimes a combination of the two. Many of the participants discussed relatives, usually grandparents, that influenced their decision to sew retro clothing. Creating a fusion of vicarious and personal nostalgia, Lauren said that she enjoys sewing clothing similar to what her grandmother wore as a young woman – she explained, “I always had a really strong
connection with her as a person.” Sandra enjoys using her grandmother’s patterns and magazines, saying, “It’s kind of a connection to my Nana.” Retro sewing also provides a connection with some sewers’ personal pasts; Evie, for example, is inspired by actresses she enjoyed as a child in the 1990s – the actresses she admired, however, are from old movies and include Sophia Loren and Bette Davis.

The second way in which nostalgia motivates retro sewing is that retro sewers value the past as a tool for the present. Retro sewers value objects from the past, viewing themselves as “custodians” and “preservationists” of antiques. They collect vintage sewing items, but they also use them as tools in constructing retro ensembles. They also enjoy preserving past knowledge. Lauren explained, “I really get a big kick out of learning things that have been forgotten by -- by time. . . . [Using old sewing techniques] is like doing this practical archaeology.” They view the past as a guide to the future. Jenn observed, “The only way you can plan for the future is to know your past.” Evie stated, “Learning the old ways of doing things [helps me] to then better understand the newer ways of doing things.” Finally, retro sewers have an aesthetic preference for the past that is expressed in their clothing. Carla explained her love for 1950s fashion: “I love the nice nipped-in waist, the nice flare that goes on, the beautiful little shoulders and necklines and whatnot.” Etta said, “I just really like the aesthetic. It’s all about that. [laughs] I love the way they look. I really like how detail-oriented they can be.” Typically retro sewers are influenced by aesthetics and at least one other form of nostalgia, which means that Zonneveld & Biggemann’s (2014) observation that collectors are motivated by a combination of aesthetics and nostalgia is also applicable to retro sewers.
Postmodernism versus modernism

Retro sewing is an expression of postmodern fashion. Many of the participants described mixing and matching elements from different periods to create a look that is entirely personal, corresponding to the postmodern idea of *bricolage*, or recombining disparate elements into a new look focused on individuality rather than fashion rules (Farrell-Beck & Parsons, 2007, p. 209; Morgado, 1996). Evie described herself as a “magpie”:

I like to be able to jump from style to style, from decade to decade, from, you know. Sometimes -- sometimes I walk to the grocery dressed in a 17th-Century Russian peasant dress, and sometimes I go in, like, my torn-up 1990s jeans and my husband's T-shirt. But I like having those options.

Sandra, working on a graduate degree in fashion, described her retro sewing as postmodern (a characteristic she had not identified prior to being interviewed):

[I’m] assembling and recombining to present something new that is separate from its original context, and possibly gains a new context in which to present and have new meaning. . . . Yeah, it’s postmodernist. Oh gosh. Yeah. I didn’t know I was a postmodernist.

Corresponding with the idea of postmodern dress as the questioning or bending of rules (Miller-Spillman et al., 2012; Morgado, 1996), Sandra noted that she takes elements from a very prescribed, modern context and remixes them to achieve a completely new postmodern style:

The original context for the jacket that I made out of scuba [fabric] was, it was a plus-size jacket, and it was all buttoned up and very nice, and it came with a nice little skirt, and it would all be very neat, and there was a little matching hat. So the context would've been that . . . it's very much from one of those how-to-dress books in the 60s. You know, the suit. This is something you go into the city to do your shopping, you know,
and this is what you would wear. Or if you're meeting the girlfriends for lunch
somewhere, then you dress up, or if you've got a meeting at the Horse Club or whatever
ladies who lunch do. . . . Whereas for me, I wear it over jeans, 'cause I've grabbed it on
the way out the door. . . . It's not a formal thing that I [facetiously, hoity-toity] put on, do
up, and wear the gloves, and the whole bit -- it's taken out of context completely and
remixed it, because it's scuba rather than a nice wool tweed. . . . It's the whole --
loosening up the style from the original context.

Julie enjoys combining historic silhouettes with novelty prints to create a new look. She said,

It's also really fun for me to play with altering the historical styles, and using something
totaly unexpected, like a fabric with balloon animals on it. Or I just picked up one that
has Batman surfing with palm trees, that I'm gonna do a little 40s playsuit out of. And
just kind of subverting the vintage norm, and also subverting modern fashion at the
same time, is really fun for me.

The tension between modernism and postmodernism in retro dress is that many of the
retro sewers maintain the original look and rules of vintage dress, focusing on historic
authenticity, which means that they are operating within a modern system of dress. However,
the translation of vintage style into today's context makes it entirely postmodern. Jane said,

I am trying as much as possible to get the clothing to look right by wearing the
undergarments that are correct. And that's true in all three of them, but the 30s it's the
30s style bra, it's the 30s girdle, it's the 30s underwear. It's the hose. It's the, you know,
the shoes, the dresses, the accessories. It's everything. I wanna actually look like I
stepped [out of the 1930s].

Because Jane portrays the 1930s while living in the 2010s, however, and because she uses 1930s
dress as a subversive feminist tactic (discussed later in this paper), Jane and the other retro
sewers are operating outside the modern view of fashion as a linear, progressive process as discussed in the literature (Morgado, 1996, pp. 42, 44). The very nature of retro clothing as a style from the past reinterpreted in the present makes it postmodern.

**Uniqueness tempered by symbolic interactionism**

A desire for uniqueness is one of the most persistent themes in the interviews; in the member checking survey, 100% of the respondents agreed with the statement, “I sew/wear retro clothing because it allows me to have unique garments that no one else has.” This finding aligns with previous studies that indicated that uniqueness is a motivation for wearing vintage (Cervellon et al., 2012, pp. 960-961; DeLong et al., 2005, pp. 38, 40; Fischer, 2015, pp. 50, 58; McColl et al., 2013, p. 145). A surprising number of the interview participants, in fact, described themselves as “weird.” Tiffany explained, “I just feel like I've always been different than everybody else, and so I don't -- I don't feel like I need to conform and wear all the same stuff that everyone wears.” She added, “Some people, you know, I think hide behind normal clothes, polo shirts and jeans.” Many of the sewers use the uniqueness of their clothing as a conversation starter. Sandra, who uses retro elements in a subtle way that is not overtly historic, noted,

I don't want to look like other people. I don't think like other people, so I don't wanna look like other people. I want people to notice and have a conversation. . . . And I quite like it when my clothes actually start the conversation.

Jenn said,

Any seamstress knows the feeling - you go . . . to the grocery store and somebody stops you like, "Oh my God, I love your dress - where did you get it?" And it's like, "Oh, I
made this!” And they’re like, "Get out, really?" And you're like, "Oh, yeah, it's a 1940's pattern." And they're like, "Really?" Like, not all pieces look like Grandma's wardrobe.

The desire for uniqueness impacts choices made in sewing patterns. Patterns with unusual style details are highly sought-after. Jenn observed, “I like Hollywood patterns because they’re unique. They typically have the giant sleeves that you don’t see on any of the Big Four patterns.” Joy explained that she loves the 1930s because of “the sleeves and collars and how the skirts are put together; they are -- you can't find that off the rack. You can't find that in the stores. It is so beautiful.” Twelve of the thirteen participants in the member checking survey said that style details or design features of retro clothing are a reason that they do retro sewing. Jane described a dress that she found inspiring from an old movie as “so weird and so fabulous” – weird and fabulous style details are what retro sewers emulate.

Retro sewers also add touches of their own to make their clothing more unique. Carla likes to include “little details” on her clothing that differentiate it from ready-to-wear. She explained,

I'll put a monogram on a pocket. I'll put bound buttonholes somewhere. I'll cover buttons in a certain way to make them look -- just to have that extra pop to the garment. I've even embroidered tiny little hearts to cover four buttons. It's just that personal touch that makes it mine. But it's even more obvious that it is mine.

Although some of the participants discussed people that they like to emulate, several of them expressed that they prefer to do their own thing. Sandra said, “I'm not usually a follower. I tend to kind of follow my own path and let others tag along.” Cassidy observed, “Maybe I should have style icons. . . . [but] I just pick and choose what I like more than anything.” Julie stated, “There's a huge component of I'm not like everyone else and I'm not trying to be like everyone else,' and I've really never tried to be like everyone else.” Supporting the findings of
Gregson et al. (2001), several of the retro sewers indicated that their need for uniqueness is such that they will drop a style or period if they perceive that it is becoming too popular. Lauren explained, “I'm so stubborn that if I see something getting popular, I'm like, 'I don’t wanna do that anymore! I’m gonna do this now!’ [laughing.]” Felicity expressed some concern that retro might be getting too popular, which would compel her to change her style completely to maintain her uniqueness: “I want the mainstream fashion magazines to stop writing about vintage ‘cause then it can go back to being special and not a ‘sheeple’ thing.” Uniqueness is part of these retro sewers’ identity expression, and ubiquity is seen as cheapening their sartorial identity. Felicity expressed strong dislike of retro clothing retailer Lindy Bop: “The stupid prints and the bad fit and the bad cutting and the bad construction, everything. And it’s all just so generic. A cliché of what they think the 1950s housewife wore, and it’s absolutely wrong.”

Because Felicity, who works for a Savile Row tailor, expends considerable effort in creating her own high-quality, unique retro ensembles, she views Lindy Bop as a bad knockoff, cheapening the retro look by mass-producing it, which, in her view, defeats the purpose of retro altogether.

In opposition to their desire to dress to stand out, some retro sewers expressed that their retro style is sometimes a compromise between what they would like to wear and what is socially acceptable. Tiffany said,

If I could be as eccentric as I wanted to be, I would totally make nothing but Natural Form [19th Century] clothing and wear it everywhere, all the time. Seeing as I have to be a somewhat normal human being . . . I don’t see that happening anytime soon.

Cassidy said that she would wear Victorian and Edwardian clothing everyday if she could, but she does not because “it would come off as a little bit more than eccentric. I think it would . . . come off as completely crazy.” Cassidy believes that 1950s clothing is much more socially acceptable.
Several of the retro sewers interviewed had transitioned from goth style to retro. Tiffany’s transition was due to a change in career; she explained,

I sold corsets for a living; I was very goth then. And then once I got out of that and started getting into antiquing and selling antiques, I had to be a little more presentable for other people, and that’s really where the transition came from.

Felicity’s transition from goth to retro was prompted by needing to find a job but became a personal style choice as she explored other styles and realized that she enjoyed them. She said,

I realized that turning up to work in a tailcoat and top hat probably wasn’t gonna get me hired. [C laughs] But I thought, ‘No, I need to find something,’ so I kind of moved towards kind of the more vintage styling, but it was still all black, so you know, it was little t-shirts and wide trousers, and – I think looking back on it, it was quite thirties looking, but it was all black so I kind of kept my comfort zone of goth. And then as I got more and more into exploring retro clothing, I rediscovered that I actually quite liked wearing color. And so yeah, so now I classify myself as a sort of semi-retired goth.

Like Felicity and Tiffany, Julie transitioned from goth to retro for professional reasons, noting that retro clothing helped her with a sales job because she still stood out but was more approachable than she would have been as a goth. She observed,

I still don't wanna look like everybody else, but I also don't necessarily wanna look like a vampire anymore. It's nice to be a little more approachable and a little less dangerous to people. I was working in sales, doing sewing machine sales, for a couple years, and it was a great conversation starter for that. It probably made me a lot more money than my coworkers, because it was 'Oh, what about the girl in the cute dresses? Where's she?' People would remember me and that helps a lot.
By enabling the expression of self while still fitting social norms, retro sewing represents an intersection between uniqueness and social acceptability.

**Historic authenticity versus personal authenticity**

For these retro sewers, although their clothing is historically influenced, much of their style tends to be a negotiation between historic authenticity and personal authenticity, with one often being set against the other. Similar to people who wear vintage clothing (DeLong et al., 2005, p. 31), retro sewers are situated at different points on a continuum from a modern look with subtle retro elements to head-to-toe period ensembles. Although both historic authenticity and personal authenticity are important to the participants to at least some degree, typically either one or the other is given priority. For their everyday retro clothing, most of the sewers prioritize personal authenticity. Evie commented,

> For me, authenticity to myself and my own personality and needs is of greater importance. You know, which is -- which is why I jump around from decade to decade and why, you know, I am totally cool with wearing all of my vintage stuff with a shaved head. [laughs] It's more important to me to maintain my own personal style authenticity, I guess, in that sense, than period correctness.

Personal authenticity is linked to an aesthetic interest in the past, interpreted in a way that makes it personal; this sometimes means sacrificing historic authenticity. Etta explained,

> I guess it's authentically me, but it's not historically accurate. And those are two different things. And they're both valid and important, and I like both of them, and I value both of them. And they aren't mutually exclusive; they don't always have to go together, either. Like I've said a couple times, it's not about creating necessarily a historically-
accurate garment, because you're not creating a costume and you're not being a reenactor. You're being inspired by the aesthetic that you like.

Demi uses modern techniques for her garments, including invisible zippers. Focusing more on self-expression and aesthetics than historic accuracy, Demi said, “For me, the end result is just achieving a look. I'm not -- I'm not too worried about how that look is achieved.”

Lauren and Jane, on the other hand, prioritize historic authenticity to the point of portraying specific personas. For Lauren, it is a matter of consistency: “I know a lot of vintage enthusiasts who do different decades for different things; I like to try to be consistent within the time period I'm representing, when I do head-to-toe vintage.” For Lauren and Jane, historic authenticity is also related to their love of learning and trying to experience in the present how a person might have lived in the past. Lauren explained,

Authenticity is, I think, because I geek out over the studying so much. I like to try to pinpoint within a specific time period what someone would have actually worn. . . . I generally prefer to portray an average type of person, so I can wear things within a specific timespan.

Jane explained that her wardrobe is based on what I think a normal person in the 30s would've had. So, like, if I'm gonna be a normal person in the 30s, I would have shoes, I would have hose, I would have undergarments, I would have slips, I would have, you know, all the things, gloves.

The focus on historic accuracy is not the same as it might be in reenacting, in which one is trying to fit specific guidelines so as not to mislead the public; instead, historic authenticity is more of a personal challenge and an opportunity to learn. Lauren clarified,

Honestly, people that exist now would not be able to tell you whether these shoes are from 1936 or 1942. Like, most people just don't know the difference. So -- so in the
end, I'm pleasing myself first. I don't feel like I have to match this expectation of anybody else, but I'm a hard critic on myself [smiling], so if I know something is right, I want to do it the best way I can.

Some retro sewers begin to prioritize historic accuracy more over time. Nina began sewing retro for the aesthetic, but as her style has developed, it has become much more focused on historic accuracy. She explained, “When I first got that sewing machine, it was a lot of very retro-inspired stuff, so it was a lot of 50s, maybe 60s, *Mad Men*-esque things, but always with quite modern hemlines and things like that.” Historicity became more a focus than personal expression; Nina noted that “1950s clothing stopped exciting me as much because the frugality of clothing excited me more than the froufrou and the big skirts.”

In some cases, however, the order of priority depends on the purpose of the garment or the event to which an ensemble is being worn. Flick feels a responsibility for accuracy in historic reenactment, whereas she will mix and match eras in everyday retro:

I think if you're going as part of a reenactment group, then your obligation is to get it right. But for the public, perhaps not as much. If I'm going as Joe Public, then I would not be quite so strict with myself as far as mixing and matching my eras. But I wouldn't wear a 20s coat with a 1960s dress probably. But it depends on whether the two things go together. If they look right together, then wear it. But yeah it depends what the event is largely.

Retro clothing, then, is a fusion of historic authenticity with personal authenticity, with one or the other being assigned higher priority depending on the sewer’s preferences and/or the event for which the ensemble is being worn.
“Antifashion” versus fashion involvement

For many retro sewers, their retro sewing is a reaction against fast fashion and consumer culture. Nina explained, “I guess I got really, really frustrated with consumer culture.” April believes that society is too focused on “how fast and convenient and cheap” things are. Retro sewing opposes the fashion industry in several ways. First, retro sewing provides trend immunity, which facilitates continuity of identity. Corresponding with Entwistle’s observation that the fast pace of today’s fashion is linked to instability of the sartorial identity (2000, p. 74), wearing retro clothing helps to maintain the stability of one’s sartorial identity, allowing the retro sewer to maintain control of her personal style as noted by Gregson et al. (2001, p. 17). Julie said, “You don’t have to worry about being out of style if you’re already eighty years out of style. That it’s a distinct look that you’re not trying to follow trends. I definitely think there’s a lot of the kind of studied antifashion about it.” Julie’s comments corresponded with Davis’ assertion that antifashion, rather than being indifference to fashion, instead indicates an awareness of fashion and reacting against it (Davis, 1994, pp. 161-162). Sandra explained, “By mining the past, you can get something that is timeless almost. Sort of that says ‘now’ but it isn’t.” Abby observed, “I never look at my high school pictures and, like, shrieking, ‘What was I thinking?’ I knew. Whatever I was wearing was gonna last the test of time.”

Second, retro sewing enables opposition to the dictates of fashion, corresponding with Bain’s (2016) finding that sewing can be a means to challenge fashion norms; by creating styles dramatically different from mass-produced garments, retro sewers provide themselves with a way to step outside the limitations of what is commercially prescribed. Felicity explained,

It’s incredibly liberating to be freed from what society says we ought to be wearing in any particular year or what the fashion magazine says we ought to be wearing, and to be able to dress for yourself rather than dressing to please other people.
Julie said, “I don’t follow trends. I like what I like.” Retro sewing can also be used to oppose the fashion industry’s restrictions on clothing for certain body types and proportions. Cassidy feels empowered by sewing clothing:

I’m constructing my own image. . . . [by] making clothing that fits my body . . . rather than going by what the fashion industry thinks should be my proportions for somebody with my basic size. . . . I’m denying them the power over me.”

Jenn observed that size inclusion is one of the defining characteristics of the retro sewing community, and that becomes a form of empowerment:

I think that's one of the joys of retro dress, and when you get into the retro community, so many sizes are celebrated. There's a lot of girls, you know, one of my friends liked to joke, she's like, "We're all tiny waists but a bunch of us have big butts, and nobody cares." And I think there is, there's this level of confidence, and we own it -- we don't dress like everybody else so we already own it, and once you -- it's you. And I think if you are dressed or feeling a certain way, you become unstoppable.

Third, quality is a major concern for retro sewers; sewing their own garments is a way to obtain high-quality clothing that may not be available on the mass market or that may be prohibitively expensive if purchased readymade. Julie stated,

I refuse to participate in fast fashion. I tried to buy a couple of dresses from Old Navy, and I was just so appalled by the quality and the wastefulness of it, where -- okay, I'll spend $20 on this, and that's great, but I'm gonna wear it twice and it's gonna fall apart. . . . I think that's important to me, too, to buy quality over quantity.

One focus for retro sewers is the quality of their fabrics. Micah said, “As sort of a textile snob, I don’t always like the ready-to-wear fabrics. . . . I think that my stuff is generally better in terms of my choice of fabric.” Another focus is in the techniques used in the garments. Tiffany said
about her garments, “The quality is a lot better. I do a lot of hand finishing. So the garments last longer, and they just hold up a lot better.” Evie explained,

    Rather than buying a $35 dress from Target that is gonna fall apart . . . [I prefer] making something that I have put together, so I know how to alter it . . . or it can be easily repaired.

Nina said that her retro clothing tends to have a lot more slow fashion details. So there'll be hand-sewn hems, and I'll take care to do things like lapped zips and things like that. If I'm going to be doing stripes, they will be matched up, whereas the ready-to-wear clothing that I do have, things tend to not be completely on grain when you look at them, things like that. And I mean, it's nobody's fault; it's just how the industry works. But I think that when I am taking the time to make a garment and spend that much time on something, then I do want to do it as well as I can.

Fourth, these sewers value retro clothing (and other clothing) because of its handmade nature. This finding aligns with previous research that indicates that handmade items are valued because they are viewed as part of the self (Belk, 1988; Campbell, 2005; Guy et al., 2001). Sandra owns a couple of dresses that she has entirely hand stitched; she views these dresses as part of herself. Sandra explained,

    But what I've found with those ones, is that they become inseparable from me. The dress is so intensely personal that -- to the extent that -- I told someone a funny story about my son. I overheard him telling my daughter about the concept of budding, where an organism splits. And what I overheard was him saying, 'Yeah, imagine it's Mum. It's even funnier then.' And one of my friends, I told her that, and she said, '[gasp] I just imagined you and your blue dress splitting into two!' I thought, isn't that funny that this
dress is so me that other people recognize it as being me. Like, it's -- it's almost -- yeah, it's almost me without me being there. It's -- you don't get that with ready-to-wear. You don't develop the same relationship.

Because their handmade items take so much time to produce and are valued as being part of the identity, several participants discussed mending their garments. Evie explained that she maintains her clothing as well as possible and “for as long as I can, because I have put work into them.” Carla, Jenn, and Nina all referenced the World-War-II-era Make Do and Mend movement as something that they admire and try to incorporate into their lives. Valuing handmade objects extends beyond the things they make themselves; Sandra observed,

If I find something in an op shop that's been hand sewn, I always feel like I've won a lottery. Because . . . you can see the hand of the maker in it. And you don't with factory stuff. With factory stuff, it's [sigh] you can feel sadness in it. Or stress. Or something. It's -- it's hard to describe. It's just not right. I don't like it.

Many of the participants indicate a high level of fashion involvement. Several of the participants indicated that they have extensive wardrobes. Evie observed, “I've always been a clotheshorse,” and April said that she owns “too many clothes” – about 50 dresses, 30 pairs of pants, and 20 skirts; Sandra has slowed down on sewing for herself because she lacks space to store more clothes. Although retro clothing operates outside the mainstream fashion industry, participants say that fashion is important to them – albeit their interest in fashion is not expressed in the same ways as the average person. When asked how her clothing expresses who she is, Joy observed that it shows her interest in fashion: “What I want it to say about myself is that I do . . . enjoy fashion and I do like it.” Rather than following current trends, retro sewers said that they feel confident “doing their own thing,” which is linked to their need for uniqueness and their distaste for following trends. Felicity explained,
It's an unwillingness to conform to what modern society says we ought to look like, or what the fashion magazines say what we ought to be wearing. And I've never really gone down the high-fashion route. I look at some of the stuff and think 'What the f--k? I am not wearing that!'

The findings of Cervellon et al. (2012) that vintage aficionados have a high level of fashion involvement are also applicable to retro sewers. Although retro sewing is a refusal to participate in the mainstream fashion system, it by no means follows that retro sewers are not interested in fashion; rather, retro sewers are interested in fashion on their own terms, and their individual style is prioritized over following others. Retro sewing, therefore, gives these women the power to step outside what is prescribed for them by the fashion industry.

**Feminist sewing versus traditional feminine norms**

Whether or not retro sewing is feminist is a matter about which retro sewers strongly disagreed. Some believe that retro sewing is neutral or that it reinforces feminine norms; others said that they are asserting the value of their femininity, and their sewing is therefore feminist; others said that they are not feminists but find retro clothing empowering. Evie observed,

> I think that there are large swathes of the community who are drawn to it because of their own self-proclaimed loathing of modern capital-F feminism. [pause] And then I think there is an equal number of people who are embracing it as, you know, a sort of reclamation of the feminine as something powerful and acceptable and not something that should be denigrated.

As shown in Table 5.2, there are four possible options for the expression of feminism in retro sewing. First, a retro sewer may identify as feminist and also have feminist characteristics in or motivations for her retro sewing. Second, a retro sewer may classify herself as a feminist but her
retro sewing is not feminist. Third, a sewer may say that she is not feminist; however, her
description of her motivations for retro sewing include feminist characteristics. The fourth
possible option is that neither the participant nor her sewing is feminist. It should be noted that
these characteristics, although presented in a table format for clarity, operate more as a spectrum
and may be applicable to different degrees depending on the sewer.

Table 5.2. Possible options for retro sewing as feminist or not feminist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retro sewing is feminist</th>
<th>Retro sewing is not feminist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participant self-identifies as feminist</strong></td>
<td><strong>Participant is feminist but sewing does not contain feminist characteristics</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sewing contains feminist characteristics and participant identifies as feminist</td>
<td>Nina: “I think the maker will generally always influence the craft. No matter what it is. I think glassblowing can be feminist. I think cross-stitching can be feminist, as we've seen in loads and loads of craftivism movements and things like that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participant does not self-identify as feminist</strong></td>
<td><strong>Neither participant nor sewing is feminist</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sewing contains feminist characteristics but participant does not believe it is feminist</td>
<td>Tiffany: “I am not a feminist in any sense. But when I say that, I'm not a hundred percent for, like, patriarchy either. But I do feel like women have a place in the home and men have their place. Outside of the home.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenn: “I don't view myself as a feminist but I do view myself as a strong woman.”</td>
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</table>

Unlike the home sewers interviewed by Martindale (2017), several participants in this
study described themselves and their sewing as feminist. Because they are using classic styles
and traditional feminine pursuits (i.e., sewing) in a non-traditional way, some of the participants described their retro sewing as “subversive.” Some retro sewers believe that retro sewing is not inherently feminist, despite their personal feminist leanings. Demi observed,

> I don't think [retro sewing and feminism] are necessarily relevant to each other. But there has been a big cultural shift to label anything and everything as feminist if a woman chooses it. . . . So it's hard to tell whether the retro movement is romanticizing the era or reclaiming it. . . . In a world of third-wave feminism, “sewing yourself pretty” exemplifies the ethical and philosophical ambiguity of how a person making their appearance more physically attractive could be equated to “empowerment.” In the words of Diane Nguyen on *Bojack Horseman*: "But I do wonder as a third-wave feminist if it’s even possible for women to ‘reclaim’ their sexuality in this deeply entrenched patriarchal society. Or if claiming to do so is just a lie we tell ourselves so we can more comfortably cater to the male gaze." Based on my experience with people's reactions to how I dress, it's a worrying combination of delighted nostalgia from older people to thinly-veiled slut-shaming and anti-woman sentiments about OTHER women (sometimes FROM other women!), while simultaneously putting me up on a pedestal, neither of which are ideal from a feminist perspective.

Any of the positions on retro sewing and feminism shown in Table 5.2 may be valid; whether or not retro sewing is feminist depends on one’s motivations for engaging in it. Therefore, it is possible to participate in feminist retro sewing without classifying oneself as a feminist; it may also be possible to have anti-feminist reasons for engaging in retro sewing, such as sewing 1950s clothing because of a belief that the stereotypical gender roles associated with the 1950s represent an ideal way of life (no participants were found who expressed this viewpoint, but their existence is plausible).
Empowerment

Both sewing and wearing retro clothing are described by participants as a form of empowerment. Possessing the knowledge necessary to sew retro clothing is a form of empowerment. Micah stated that “to feel I have that knowledge, you know, makes [me] feel powerful.” Sandra described teaching sewing as a means of “empowering” other people by freeing them from the dictates of the fashion industry. Others view their retro appearance as a form of empowerment. Jenn described a difficult meeting in which her retro clothing gave her confidence:

I wore two crinolines with a big skirt . . . and I had the hair done, and the lipstick on, and I knew I looked intimidating and confident . . . and he had this attitude and he was going to tell us how things were going to be, and that's not what he got. There was a level of confidence there of ‘okay, I'm looking my best right now,’ and I noticed the other girls did it too that sit on the Board of Directors. Everyone came with their hair done. And before he got there . . . one of the girls was like, “Can I just sit there and look hot because I just feel amazingly powerful today and I just feel like I should just give him the ‘look, like we're not buying your crap, dude.’” And it is, it's our war paint; it's our armor. When we put on something that we feel beautiful or confident or strong in, we exert, we exude that. . . . In this case we were all dressed retro/vintage and had the hair in vintage styles, and had the makeup on in a vintage style . . . we were all laughing about it – and the heels, and whole nine yards, and sitting there in front of somebody else, and dealing with them, it was like, “Oh, I'm not squashable; you're on my turf, this is our organization, this is what we built; this is what we do for women; you don't get to make these decisions, and we're not going to take it any more.” [emphasis added]
Both the practice of sewing retro and the practice of wearing retro clothing are forms of empowerment – in some cases, as in Jenn’s description of clothing as armor and Sandra’s goal of freeing people from the fashion industry, retro sewing is deliberately chosen as a form of empowerment. In cases like Micah’s, empowerment may be an unexpected byproduct of the acquisition of knowledge.

Subverting traditional ideas about gender

A few of the participants intentionally use society’s view of retro and/or sewing as “traditional” to overturn traditional ideas. The words “subversive” or “subverting” were used by five participants. Nina explained,

I think for me personally [retro sewing is an expression of feminism], because I think the way I live my life is quite subversive. I'm a queer woman living in Brighton, so I think thus undertaking something that is a traditionally feminine skill is automatically subversive and thus automatically feminist combined with those other details.

Carla said,

You are taking what was seen as a subversive act -- yeah, a subversive act -- and saying, 'Well, you know what, yes, this is how women were expected to look back in the day; I'm showing my individuality in dressing in that particular manner. But I'm also not taking your crap. Yes, I sat and spent many hours sewing this, and yes I can also probably, you know, make you cry in a debate. So. Don't try me today.' [laughing] So yeah, I would see it as an act of feminism, definitely.

Jane uses wearing retro clothing as a subversive strategy in three ways. First, Jane uses her dress to “get a quick read on people” based on their reactions to her appearance. She elaborated,
I intentionally confuse very conservative right-wing people. And I totally mean to do this. It really messes with their heads. So when I'm wearing a very conservative-looking, older-looking outfit, ooooh you can find the misogynists in a hot second. [sighs, laughs] They are pretty sure that it means something that I am not meaning for it to convey. So I get a really quick read on people based on how they react. And how they think that they should treat me based on the way that I'm dressed.

Second, Jane manipulates people’s assumptions to her advantage; she is a liberal political activist, and she has found that people will often assume, based on her 1930s clothing, that she is conservative and will speak with that assumption in mind. She explained,

I use this when I am working on redistricting reform, out in the world talking about healthcare, childcare, welfare, all of that. I use this uniform as my kind of -- stealth mode, with all the right people. I go and visit politicians, and they have one opinion of me based on how I'm dressed. And then [dramatically] the most liberal things come out of my mouth! And you can see their faces go 'Whoaaaaa.' So it's -- it's intentional. I spend this time looking like this because I have very specific ideas about how the world is supposed to work now, and what we're going to do to make it work that way, and that's how I get people to listen.

Third, Jane manages several rental properties, and she said that her retro dress helps her in dealing with the male electricians and plumbers that she employs. She said,

I've got an electrician on my team who is very stuck in the 50s . . . with his ideas about women. But he's also very clear that I'm the boss, and he respects me based on how much I know about what I'm doing. And I don't think he would have worked for me if I hadn't intrigued him, in a way. Does that make sense? So it is feminist for me.
Reclaiming feminine activities

Several of the participants discussed reclaiming traditionally-feminine activities as valuable pursuits, changing the perception of sewing from something that is expected of women and used as an economic measure to something that has value as a hobby and significance as a choice (Dawkins, 2011; Groeneveld, 2010; Myzelev, 2009). Evie said,

Gender equality . . . requires the acceptance of and the respect for the traditionally feminine as something powerful and not something that should be pushed by the wayside in preference for the traditionally masculine, because that in and of itself is rooted in patriarchal ideas of what is desirable and what is powerful and what is worthy.

Etta said that retro sewing is feminist because it's a reclaiming of something that was, like, an expectation for women to be able to do, and provide for their families. It's no longer required, but that doesn't mean it's not something that's valuable, or something that we can do if we want to.

Lauren does not believe that sewing should have been classified as women's work in the first place. She said,

I think that a lot of the masters of fashion in the past have been men, and a lot of the masters in present fashion are men. So I don't really think that sewing is a sex-oriented pursuit; I think that if anything, there should be more men that get into sewing. So although traditionally it's classified as women's work, I don't really think that that classification is something that needs to stay. I actually think it would be more freeing if we appreciated that all sexes can be extremely gifted. And in some ways, it is a form of self-expression. So in a way, I think that the perspective of it being women's work is kind of limited.
Jenn does not consider herself a feminist because she views feminism as devaluing traditional feminine pursuits; her negative perception of feminism seems to be linked to the deficiencies of second-wave feminism, and Jenn seems to hold a third-wave feminist perspective without recognizing it as feminist. She explained,

With the feminist movement is there is a lot of "Oh, well, she's a stay at home mom," and I've been on the receiving end of that. . . . To me, it's just women should take care of each other, and, you know, if a mom works outside the home, then she's doing what she needs to do to be the best person she can be. . . . And we should celebrate that.

These findings indicate that retro sewing can have characteristics of third-wave feminism whether or not sewers are cognizant of that fact; the intent of the activity determines its feminism, rather than the labels that are applied to it.

**Using a retro appearance to leverage femininity**

Linked with the theory of symbolic interactionism (Aksan et al., 2009; Blumer, 1969), several of the participants intentionally use a retro, ultra-feminine appearance to their advantage, aligning with Cliff, 2015; Hirsch, 2010; Rogers, 2013; and Ross-Smith & Huppatz, 2010. Julie explained that she noticed a difference in the way she was treated based on her clothing, and she now leverages that difference. She said,

I was a T-shirt and jeans girl; I just kind of faded totally into the background. It's really nice to suddenly feel pretty. Because I never did before I started paying attention to clothing. I mean, I'm not a different person, but people relate to me very differently, generally in a better way than in the past. It's fun. It's almost my own little bit of social engineering. Where I can -- I can literally change how people treat me based on what I wear. . . . You know, people didn't used to open doors for me and things like that, and
now it's very common that they will. . . . People are more polite to someone in retro.

And there's no reason for it besides the clothes.

Jenn related that she “rarely” has to pump her own gas when wearing retro:

I get out of the car and I walk around and somebody's like, "Oh, no, let me get that for you - you don't want to get dirty putting gas in your car." Or people hold the door for me. . . . The way you dress affects how people perceive you.

Some of the participants use retro to keep from being harassed. Abby, talking about dating, observed, “People assume a lot about you by the way you dress and assume that I want to be treated with a sort of ‘old-fashioned’ respect.” Julie noted,

I find that I get catcalled a lot less, and I don't know why that is, 'cause -- socially, you know it's not about what you're wearing, but I think it maybe puts people in a different headspace, that the grossest thing I've ever had said to me while wearing a retro dress was 'damn, girl don't play.' And I'm like, I can live with that.

Carla learned from her grandmother to use her appearance as a defense against racism:

My grandmother said that style was used as a sort of survival. You dressed beautifully and nicely, people would treat you with kindness and respect. Even if they hate you, they'll treat you a little bit nicer just due to how you're dressed and looking, in their eyes.

The different treatment they receive in retro makes some of the participants uncomfortable, because they think it is sometimes patronizing or puts down women who do not wear retro.

Micah explained, “Especially since we live in the South, I think there's a preconceived perception when people see me wearing these styles. I think especially since it's 50s styles. . . . Like, almost like they're patronizing, without realizing it.” Felicity commented,

Sometimes the older men will say, ‘Oh it's nice to see women dressed like women.’ And then they get the kind of squinty-eye look. It's like, women still dress like women. What
do you mean by that? . . . ‘Okay, well, do women now not dress like women? Do we
dress like pandas? Aliens?’

Some retro sewers use their femininity as a deliberate means of influencing their interactions
with others; other retro sewers seem uncomfortable with the dynamic that their clothing
introduces. All of them, however, acknowledge the impact that their clothing has on the way
they are treated and respond accordingly.

Conclusions and Implications

Because of the contradictions inherent in retro clothing, it is a complex expression of
identity. Retro clothing is used as a portrayal of identity linked to nostalgia and negotiated in a
postmodern society that, despite allowing more options for self-expression than in the past, is
mediated by interactions with others. Sewing their own clothing enables retro sewers to balance
their own aesthetic preferences, interest in and application of history, and values in tension with
social expectations and their various roles. The goals of the retro sewer determine the methods
and materials used for any given project, particularly whether the sewer desires an entirely
period-accurate ensemble or a project that fuses modern fashion with a retro aesthetic.
Designers of retro patterns could appeal to a broader range of retro sewers by providing sewing
patterns that include multiple versions of a garment, including a completely period-accurate
version as well as options for modifying and customizing the patterns. Because retro sewers
place a high value on uniqueness and personal authenticity, it is likely that customizable retro
clothing would be in higher demand among retro sewers – although Eshakti currently offers
customized fit with retro styling, there are no known options other than custom dressmaking for
customizing the aesthetics of a retro garment. Providing customization options would be a
viable tactic for improving the appeal of ready-to-wear clothing for the retro sewing market.
This study was limited a small group of retro sewers in English-speaking countries; further research will be required to generalize the findings.

References


O’Brien, R., & Campbell, M. (1927). *Present trends in home sewing*. US Department of Agriculture. Retrieved from http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=336xVBIDJ-MC&oi=fnd&pg=PA2&dq=%22of+textile+yardage+by+home%22+%22piece+goods+increased+rapidly+from+1911+to%22+%221921+through+1925+was+generally+up+ward.+On+the+other%22+%22Fifteen+of+these+families+made+no+clothing+in+t+h+e+home,%22+&ots=s7b6YtJUmf&sig=0CpDyKb1HmSQa7fvv-zW1Q0EQnI


CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSIONS

This study found that retro sewers value a vintage appearance because it allows the expression of a nostalgic identity within acceptable social norms, while maintaining a sense of uniqueness. Retro sewing allows complete control over the creative product, unlike vintage clothing or mainstream mass-produced clothing, and allows retro sewers to combine their personal aesthetic with historic inspiration. Retro sewers use a variety of techniques for their sewing, ranging from using an original vintage sewing pattern as a guide to sew vintage fabric with period-accurate techniques, to designing their own patterns and using completely modern fabrics and prints to make personalized clothing with a subtle retro look. The motivations and the methods for retro sewing intersect to determine every aspect of the garment or ensemble.

In grounded theory, it is necessary to distill the findings of a study to one core category (Corbin & Strauss, 2014, pp. 188-190); the core category for this study is identity. For retro sewers, identity is anchored by nostalgia, and postmodern fashion enables the socially-acceptable sartorial expression of a nostalgic identity in the form of retro clothing. Every theme found in the data was linked in some way to identity, including themes that are not discussed here but will be further explored in future studies based on this data. Additional themes that may be the focus of future publications include: the role of retro sewers’ collections and sewing stashes in the expression of identity, the role of home sewing as a means of maintaining mental health, modesty as an expression of feminism, the design processes involved in retro sewing, how and why retro clothing becomes the chosen expression of identity, and the role of the retro community in the practice of retro sewing and the formation of a retro identity (see
APPENDIX J:

CATEGORIES AND CODES).

Retro sewing facilitates the continuity of identity in what many perceive to be an unstable world, by enabling the sewer to connect her clothing with her personal past, her family, her interests, and her preferred aesthetic with limited reference to the vagaries of the fashion industry. Retro sewing is often a pursuit linked to other nostalgic and historic interests, including reenacting and historic costuming, collecting antique and vintage objects, and studying history. The motivations for retro sewing represent a fusion of the motivations for home sewing and the motivations for wearing vintage clothing, including uniqueness, expression of identity, quality, nostalgia, authenticity, fit, and pleasure or enjoyment. Joy summed up the motivations for retro sewing thus: “I think retro sewing is a way that we can make our own choices about what we wanna wear. And if it's not available, it's a nice thing to have the freedom to just make it.”
REFERENCES


O’Brien, R., & Campbell, M. (1927). *Present trends in home sewing*. US Department of Agriculture. Retrieved from http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=336xVBIDJ-MC&oi=fnd&pg=PA2&dq=%22of+textile+yardage+by+home%22+%22piece+goods+increased+rapidly+from+1911+to%22+%221925+through+1925+was+generally+upward.+On+the+other%22+%22Fifteen+of+these+families+made+no+clothing+in+the+home,%22+&ots=s7b6YtjUmf&sig=0CpDyKb1HmSQa7fvv-zW1Q0EQnI


APPENDIX A:
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
Office for Responsible Research
1404 Science and Technology

Date: 04/05/2018

To: Charity Calvin Armstead

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: Presenting a Retro Appearance Through Sewing for One Self: Motivations and Methods

IRB ID: 18-151

Submission Type: Initial Submission

Review Type: Full Committee

Approval Date: 04/05/2018

The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University according to the dates shown above. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- Use only the approved study materials in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.
- Retain signed informed consent documents for 3 years after the close of the study, when documented consent is required.
- Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes to the study.
- Inform the IRB if the Principal Investigator and/or Supervising Investigator end their role or involvement with the project with sufficient time to allow an alternate PI/Supervising Investigator to assume oversight responsibility. Projects must have an eligible PI to remain open.
- Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.
- Stop all human subjects research activity if IRB approval is lost, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Human subjects research activity can resume once IRB approval is re-established.
- Submit an application for Continuing Review at least three to four weeks prior to the date for continuing review as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as the date approaches.

IRB 03/2018
APPENDIX B:

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

- Research question 1: Why do retro sewers value a vintage appearance?
  - What about vintage styles appeals to you?
  - Do you consider yourself a vintage collector? Why or why not? If so, what do you collect and why?
  - Besides the garments you sew, what other aspects of vintage dress do you adopt?
  - What does authenticity mean to you?
  - How would you describe your commitment to authenticity?
  - What elements of vintage style are the most important to you and why?
  - Describe your level of interest in history.
  - How would you feel about living in one of your favorite fashion eras?
  - How would you describe your style?
  - Who are your style icons and why?
  - How do your clothes relate to your sense of self?

- Research question 2: Why do retro sewers use sewing for themselves as a way to create their desired vintage appearance? (For example: Control, fit, choice of fabric, solve existing problems of scarcity, durability, and comfort with authentic vintage clothing?)
  - How did you get started sewing vintage and/or vintage-inspired clothes?
  - What periods do you sew, and why?
  - How do the clothes you sew express who you are?
  - For what reasons do you sew vintage clothes?
What are your goals for your vintage sewing?
What kinds of garments do you make and why?
What limitations do you face in sewing retro clothing?
Describe your involvement in non-vintage sewing.

- Research question 3: How do retro sewers use sewing for themselves to create their desired vintage appearance? (For example: What fabrics do they use and why? What patterns do they use and why? How do they use the patterns? Do they communicate with other retro sewers?)

- How and where do you source your supplies? Why?
- What kinds of patterns do you use and why?
- Describe your involvement with other vintage sewers.
- How does the retro sewing community influence you?

- Research question 4: What is the intersection of motivations for and methods of retro sewing?

- What is your favorite thing you have made and why?
- What do you like best about the things you make?
- How do your handmade retro clothing compare to your ready-to-wear (modern and vintage)?
- Could you show me a couple of the items you have made? Describe how you feel about them.
- Tell me about your process for planning and creating a retro garment. (May also relate to RQ3.)
- What influences your decisions in the creative process? (May also relate to RQ3.)

- Additional questions
How do you care for things you have made? How do you care for your ready-to-wear garments? (Relates to extended self theory)

Some people say that sewing can be a feminist practice – what do you think about that?

Do you happen to think retro sewing is an expression of feminism? Why or why not?

Tell me how people react to your wearing retro clothing you have sewn.
I am conducting a research study for my doctoral dissertation on sewing retro clothing. If you are a woman who, as one of your primary preferred leisure activities, sews clothing for yourself for everyday wear that you consider to be retro, vintage-inspired, or reproduction, then you are eligible to participate in this study. This would require that you take a brief (approximately 10-15 minute) prescreening survey, participate in 1-2 interviews, each 1-2 hours long (which may be conducted in person or via Skype, FaceTime, or a similar video chat program), and that you read and comment on (via email) the major findings from the research. If you are interested in participating in this research or have any questions about the research, please send me a Facebook message, email me at charitysuzannecalvin@gmail.com, or call me at [931.434.1759]. To take the prescreening survey, click here:

https://iastate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_89cU7GKSDbc6sv
Title of Study: Presenting a Retro Appearance through Sewing for Oneself: Motivations and Methods

Investigators: Ellen McKinney, Charity Armstead

This form describes a research project. It has information to help you decide whether or not you wish to participate. Research studies include only people who choose to take part—your participation is completely voluntary. Please discuss any questions you have about the study or about this form with the project staff before deciding to participate.

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to learn more about sewing retro or vintage reproduction clothing for oneself. Specifically, this study is to understand: (1) the motivations of women who sew retro clothing for themselves, (2) the methods of women who sew retro clothing for themselves, and (3) the intersection of the motivations and methods of women who sew retro clothing for themselves.

Why You Are Invited to Participate
You are being invited to participate in this study because you sew retro clothing and filled out the screening survey—you are being invited to participate in interviews based on your responses to that survey. You must be over the age of 18 to participate.

Description of Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to:

- Participate in two interviews, each lasting between 60 and 120 minutes. The interviews will be either video recorded or audio recorded so that we can review the interviews for accuracy and make sure that we have correctly portrayed your ideas. Examples of questions that may be asked in the interviews include:
  - How did you get started sewing vintage and/or vintage-inspired clothes?
  - How do the clothes you sew express who you are?
  - What elements of vintage style are the most important to you and why?
- Provide photographs of yourself wearing retro clothing that you have sewn (you may still participate in the study even if you do not wish to provide photographs).
- Review and comment (via email) on the major findings of the research to see if you agree with the accuracy of our interpretation of the data.

Your participation will last for a total of approximately five hours, including one to two hours for each interview, and one hour to review the research findings. Your participation will require that we contact you approximately four to six times.

Use of Photographs
I may want to use some of the photographs that you may provide in public presentations related to the research. There is a Media Records Release Form attached that outlines several possible uses and asks for your specific consent to use these items in each way. If you agree to allow these items to be used after this research study is over, please read, initial, and sign the Media Records Release Form in addition to this consent form. I will not use any photographs, recordings, or other identifiable information about you in any future presentation without your consent.

**Risks or Discomforts**
We do not anticipate any risks or discomfort from participating in this research.

**Benefits**
If you decide to participate in this study, there will be no direct benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by explaining women’s experiences in sewing retro clothing.

**How Information Will Be Used**
The interviews that you provide will be transcribed, reviewed, and coded by the researcher. Any or all data that you provide, including photographs, may be used to complete research for a doctoral dissertation, potential conference presentations, and publication.

**Costs and Compensation**
You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**Participant Rights**
Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in the study or to stop participating at any time, for any reason, without penalty or negative consequences. You can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115.

**Confidentiality**
Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy study records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

Audio and/or video recordings of the interview(s) will be used to make sure we record your ideas and thoughts accurately; the interviews will be transcribed, and the original recordings will be stored electronically in CyBox (a password-protected cloud storage system) for the duration of the study in case we need to refer to them. The recordings themselves will not be published.

You have the option to either use your real name for the study or to use a fictitious name. If you choose to use a fictitious name, we will assign a fictitious name at the start of the interview.
process to ensure confidentiality, and documents containing the information that you give us will not contain personally identifying information at any time. Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law.

Please initial one:  
_____ I agree to have my real name used in the study  
_____ I prefer that a fictitious name be used in the study

Because photographs that you provide may be published as part of the research, it is possible that other people may recognize you from your photograph(s), and you may be identified even if a pseudonym is used.

Questions  
You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information about the study, please contact Charity Armstead at charitysuzannecalvin@gmail.com or [redacted]. You can also contact the supervising faculty member, Dr. Ellen McKinney, via email at emckinne@iastate.edu.

Consent and Authorization Provisions  
Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study. If you have received this form via email, please remember to print a copy of the informed consent for your own files.

Participant’s Name (printed) ________________________________  
Participant’s Signature ________________________________ Date
As part of this project you may provide photographs as part of your participation in the research. Please indicate below by initialing what uses of these records you consent to. This is completely up to you. We will only use the photographs in the way(s) that you agree to. In any use of these records, your name will not be identified.

1. _______ The photographs can be studied by the research team for use in the research project.

2. _______ The photographs can be used for publications (including, but not limited to, books and/or academic journal articles).

3. _______ The photographs can be shown at academic conferences.

4. _______ The photographs can be shown in classrooms to students.

5. _______ The photographs can be shown in public presentations to non-academic groups.

I am 18 years of age or older and hereby grant Charity Armstead permission to use the provided photograph(s) for publication. I certify that I am the legal copyright holder of the images.

I acknowledge that including the photographs as part of this research may mean that I will be identified by others even if a pseudonym is used.

I have read this form and give my consent for use of the records as indicated above.

Participant’s Name (printed) ____________________________________________

___________________________________________  ______________________
Participant’s Signature                              Date
1. Name:
2. Email address (for contact purposes):
3. Age:
4. Which of the following best represents your racial or ethnic heritage? Choose all that apply.
   a. Caucasian
   b. Black/African-American
   c. Hispanic/Latino
   d. Asian or Pacific Islander
   e. Native American
   f. Other: ______________________
5. Occupation:
6. Highest educational degree completed:
7. City, State/Province/Territory, Country
8. Approximately how many years have you been sewing?
9. Approximately how many years have you been sewing retro clothes?
10. Which decade(s) best describe the retro clothing you sew? Choose all that apply.
    a. 1920s or earlier
    b. 1930s
    c. 1940s
    d. 1950s
    e. 1960s
    f. 1970s or later
11. Which type(s) of sewing patterns do you use for retro sewing? Choose all that apply.
    a. Vintage sewing patterns (original to the period)
    b. Retro/reprinted patterns from the Big Four (Butterick, McCall, Simplicity, Vogue)
    c. Retro/reprinted patterns from companies other than the Big Four (please specify)
       ______________________________________________________________________
    d. Other, please specify: ___________________________________________________
12. Approximately how many vintage and/or retro sewing patterns do you own?

13. Do you participate in historic costuming and/or reenactment?

14. Approximately what percentage of your clothing fits each of the following categories?
   a. Retro clothing that you have sewn
   b. True vintage
   c. Commercially-produced retro clothing
   d. Mass-market clothing
   e. Non-retro clothing that you have sewn

15. How did you hear about this research study?
## APPENDIX G:
### SAMPLING MATRIX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Participants</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decade(s) Sewn*</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920s or Earlier</td>
<td>Min. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930s</td>
<td>Min. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940s</td>
<td>Min. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>Min. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>Min. 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970s or Later</td>
<td>Min. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type(s) of Patterns Used*</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vintage (Original)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reproduction (Big Four)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reproduction (Other)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African-American</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>No quota**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<tr>
<td>Geographic Location</td>
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<tr>
<td>US – South</td>
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<tr>
<td>US – Midwest</td>
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<td>US – West</td>
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<td>Canada</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>No quota**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>No quota**</td>
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</table>

*It is expected that some participants will fit more than one of these criteria.

**A quota is not set because there may not be many available participants that fit this category.
**APPENDIX H:**

**COMPLETED SAMPLING MATRIX**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade(s) Sewn*</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1920s or Earlier</strong></td>
<td>Abby Hinds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April Rhain Byassee</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eve-Lynn Skelton</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jane M Kieffer Rath</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lana Waldron</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lauren Maringola</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nina Sidney</td>
</tr>
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<td>Tiffany Saint</td>
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<td><strong>1930s</strong></td>
<td>Abby Hinds</td>
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<td></td>
<td>April Rhain Byassee</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carla Woodson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eve-Lynn Skelton</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Flick Rackstraw</td>
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<td>Jane M Kieffer Rath</td>
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<td>Jenn Sider</td>
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<td>Joy Tan</td>
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<td>Lana Waldron</td>
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<td>Lauren Maringola</td>
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<td>Nina Sidney</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1940s</strong></td>
<td>Abby Hinds</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Flick Rackstraw</td>
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<td>Nina Sidney</td>
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<td>Jenn Sider</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type(s) of Patterns Used*</td>
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<td>Lauren Maringola, Tiffany Saint, Micah Walsh, Jenn Sider, Julie Burnside Diaz, Flick Rackstraw (40)</td>
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<td>40s</td>
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<td>Abby Hinds, Sandra Bryans</td>
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<td>80s</td>
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*It is expected that some participants will fit more than one of these criteria.  
**A quota is not set because there may not be many available participants that fit this category*
## APPENDIX I:

**PARTICIPANTS ALPHABETIZED BY FIRST NAME**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Geographic Region</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Decades Sewn</th>
<th>Types of Patterns Used</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Abby Hinds</td>
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<td>US – Northeast</td>
<td>Black, Italian</td>
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<td>1930s 1940s 1950s</td>
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<td>Antonietta (Etta) Iannaccone</td>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>1940s 1950s</td>
<td>Yes Yes -- Self-drafted</td>
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<tr>
<td>April Rhain Byassee</td>
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<td>Native American</td>
<td>1920s/earlier</td>
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<td>1930s 1940s 1950s</td>
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<td>Carla Woodson</td>
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<td>US – West</td>
<td>Black/African-American</td>
<td>1930s 1940s 1950s</td>
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<td>Cassidy Percoco</td>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>1940s 1950s</td>
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<td>Demi Spehar</td>
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<td>1950s 1960s</td>
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<td>1930s 1940s 1950s</td>
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<td>Jane M. Kieffer-Rath</td>
<td>47</td>
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<td>1920s/earlier</td>
<td>Yes Yes Yes Drafting, draping</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1930s 1940s 1950s</td>
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<td>Jenn Sider</td>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>1930s 1940s 1950s</td>
<td>Yes Yes Yes --</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Geographic Region</td>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>Decades Sewn</td>
<td>Types of Patterns Used</td>
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<td>Joy Tan</td>
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<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
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<td>Julie Burnsides Diaz</td>
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<td>US – Midwest</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>1940s, 1950s</td>
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<td>Lana Waldron</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>US – Midwest</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>1920s/earlier, 1930s, 1940s</td>
<td>Yes, Yes -- Janet Arnold’s Patterns of Fashion; own patterns made from extant garments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lauren Maringola</td>
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<td>US – West</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>1920s/earlier, 1930s, 1940s, 1950s</td>
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<td>Micah Walsh</td>
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<td>US – South</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>Yes, Yes, Yes Self-drafted, draped</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nina Sidney</td>
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<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Caucasian, Black</td>
<td>1920s/earlier, 1930s, 1940s, 1950s</td>
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<td>Sandra Bryans</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>1950s, 1960s, 1970s/later</td>
<td>Yes -- Original drafting books</td>
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<td>Tiffany Saint</td>
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<td>US – South</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>1920s/earlier, 1960s, 1970s/later</td>
<td>Yes -- Yes --</td>
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## APPENDIX J:

**CATEGORIES AND CODES**

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<tr>
<th>Primary Topic</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Codes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Nostalgia</td>
<td>Connections with the past</td>
<td>Interest in history&lt;br&gt;Childhood&lt;br&gt;Family&lt;br&gt;Living in the past&lt;br&gt;Visiting the past&lt;br&gt;Experiencing history in the present</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Valuing the past in the present</td>
<td>Valuing objects from the past&lt;br&gt;Valuing knowledge from the past&lt;br&gt;History as a roadmap&lt;br&gt;Aesthetic preference for the past</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negotiating Identity</td>
<td>Expression of personal style</td>
<td>Uniqueness&lt;br&gt;Postmodern fashion&lt;br&gt;Symbolic interactionism&lt;br&gt;Aspirational identity&lt;br&gt;Extended self&lt;br&gt;Authenticity&lt;br&gt;• Historic authenticity&lt;br&gt;• Personal authenticity&lt;br&gt;Transitions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Expression of values</td>
<td>Fast-fashion reaction&lt;br&gt;• Quality&lt;br&gt;• Trend immunity&lt;br&gt;• Slow fashion&lt;br&gt;Feminism&lt;br&gt;• Empowerment&lt;br&gt;• Subverting traditional ideas&lt;br&gt;• Reclaiming feminine activities&lt;br&gt;• Using a retro appearance to leverage femininity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Home Sewing &amp; Mental Health</td>
<td>Using sewing to manage mental health</td>
<td>Anxiety&lt;br&gt;Depression</td>
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<td>How sewing manages mental health</td>
<td>Flow&lt;br&gt;Feelings when sewing</td>
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<td>Primary Topic</td>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Codes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
|               | Learning | Building/improving skill set  
A challenge is fun  
Teaching others |
| Retro Clothing as the Chosen Expression of Identity | Entry point into retro | Childhood (see “Nostalgia”)  
Costuming  
- Renaissance Fairs  
- Reenacting  
- Cosplay  
Home economics classes |
| Personal philosophy of retro | Components of retro appearance |  
- Hair/makeup  
- Accessories  
- Undergarments  
Style icons  
Pinup (for or against)  
Authenticity (see “Expression of personal style”) |
| Benefits of retro | Improved appearance  
Attitude changes based on one’s own clothing  
Dresses are easy |
| Downsides of retro | Takes longer to get ready  
Looking “costumey” |
| Goals | Design my own things  
Improve skills  
Learn new skills  
Sew more/all of the patterns I have  
Sew faster/be more productive  
Go into business  
Sew majority of wardrobe  
Handmade from the skin out  
The Ballgown |
| Role of the Retro Community | Location of community | Online  
In-person |
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Topic</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Codes</th>
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<td>Influences of community</td>
<td>Mini-trends in retro/vintage</td>
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<td>Other people support my habit</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Stash and the Design Process in Retro Clothing</td>
<td>Design process for retro clothing</td>
<td>Priorities in garment design</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Comfort</td>
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<td>• Fit</td>
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<td>• Practicality</td>
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<td>• Quality (see “Fast fashion reaction”)</td>
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<td>• Versatility</td>
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<td>• Style details</td>
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<td>Learning as a design motivation</td>
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<td>• A challenge is fun</td>
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