

THE MORE COMFORTABLE YOU FEEL, THE MORE POWER YOU HAVE

- A STUDY ON MODEST STYLE
CONSUMPTION AMONG YOUNG WOMEN

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Sarah Lindgård
Aneta Machova

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THE SWEDISH SCHOOL
OF TEXTILES
UNIVERSITY OF BORÅS

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Author: Sarah Lindgård, Aneta Machova

Supervisor: Maria Fuentes

Abstract

As clothing is the most visible type of consumption, what we wear often says a lot about who we are. We buy what we consider in line with our identity and avoid what we consider as not. Our consumption is influenced by a number of factors, whether internal or external and throughout the years we adopt a certain way of style. As our style evolves, on it depended fashion consumption is also going through a major change.

In this master thesis, we present a study of young women from Generation Y, which adopted a style based on their personal needs, desires, and reflections on own body, and decided not to show their femininity in a predictable manner. Opinions on what is considered feminine vary across regions but in this research, we take an interest in Western culture consumers born and located in Europe. By adopting the modest style, women interviewed for the purpose of this study are perceived as challenging the stereotypical views of the female body, which is in the contemporary society and media often shown as an object of male desire, by wearing unisex, oversized, loose fit, deconstructed and even menswear garments. By the method of personal interviews, we asked nine young women about their opinions and reflections on their fashion consumption and views on communicating their self-identity and femininity through their individual take on the modest style.

The research has, in addition to literature introducing symbolic consumption and the concept of the self, its foundation in framework discussing feminine identity and relation of the dress and the body. Based on the findings, the thesis presents an analysis of young women's construction of feminine identity through modest style and reasons and clues influencing their fashion consumption. Through adaptation of modest style, young women purchase garments closely in line with their values and needs and are rarely influenced by opinions of their social groups. By dressing modestly, they demonstrate their femininity in an alternative way and priority in their fashion consumption is given to durable and timeless garments of high quality. In conclusion, we can see that participants are not only modest in their style, but also in the way they consume. Abandoning the presumption that Generation Y was "born to shop", they are likely to invest in brand concepts with added value in form of appealing brand aesthetics, inspiring retail environment, outstanding personal approach or sustainable production of garments. By repairing or reselling their garments, buying them in second hand or from brands that produce their garments in an ethical way, today's young women show that they are aware of environmental and political impacts of fashion, and their motivation to buy certain products is highly influenced by individual preferences and deeply rooted in their self-identity.

Keywords: modest style, identity, femininity, modesty, body

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Sarah Lindgård and Aneta Machova

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1 Introduction

“Modesty: the gentle art of enhancing your charm by pretending not to be aware of it”

Oliver Herford

In this thesis, we take an interest in exploring the opinions and reflections on self-identity, femininity and individual style among Generation Y female consumers, who have adopted a modest way of dressing, that challenges the stereotypical views on what is in Western world context considered feminine. We were interested in finding out more about the way they consume modest style garments and what meaning this consumption has to them

Our interest lies in discovering what stands behind the fashion consumption of Generation Y young women, born between 1980- 1995 (Eisner 2005). Generation Y, often called Millennials is the biggest generation since the Baby Boomers and as they were born to an era where shopping is considered as something more than just the act of purchasing (Bakewell and Mitchell, 2003), they are often attractive targets for many industries (Taken Smith, 2012), fashion being no exception. As a part of a Western society, females originating from the West, in particular, Europe and the United States (Oxford Dictionaries | English, 2017), have been for many years restricted what they are allowed and not allowed to wear, however clothing has been for many a way how to express their own identity (Bond, 2016). The word “modest” is of French origin “modeste” coming from a Latin origin “modestus” meaning ‘keeping due measure’. According to English Oxford Dictionary, word “modest” has three different meanings from which one of them defines it in a connection to woman: “dressing or behaving so as to avoid impropriety or indecency, especially to avoid attracting sexual attention” and clothing: “not revealing or emphasizing a person's figure”(Oxford Dictionaries | English, 2017). Thus, modest style as we see it can be interpreted as a way of dressing that is unpretentious and decent in colour and style as well as not revealing or emphasising the figure of the wearer. This as we understand it, puts emphasis on women’s personal need to feel comfortable, self-confident and not compromising on material and personal style while at the same time represents their search for clothing with simple, clear and minimalist cuts and silhouettes for their wardrobes.

1.1 Style and Identity

The style is something that all of us, whether consciously or unconsciously, start to form during teenage years when one’s begin to gain influence over the personal choices of the fashion consumption (Kamaruddin and Mokhlis, 2003). Individual style and appearance are both forming the relationship between the world and the body, serving as a bridge between one’s self and others (Entwistle and Wilson, 2001). Style, according to Entwistle (2000), is therefore characterised as a personal approach to one’s existence and perception of the world. As styles evolve and change during the years, our personal style is often put in question and adjusted or formatted due to a number of different clues.

Style as a part of identity is frequently perceived as crucial especially for young people. Using visual aspects of one style, such clothing, choice of accessories or hairstyle, people try to transmit and communicate the information about their self and social identity as well as their “subcultural capital” (Thornton, 1995). All these can be thus seen as relevant in building

identity and as Butler (1990, pp.179) writes: “The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self”. Products that we purchase often reveal stories about who we identify with and thus who we are (Wattanasuwan, 2005). By particular way of consumption, people buy certain products in order to build their body images coherent with their self-concepts (Thompson and Hirschman, 1995 in Wattanasuwan, 2005).

Clothing is known to perform a significant role in the construction of one’s identity and hence, garments we buy and wear are considered to be one of the most visible forms of consumption (Crane, 2000). In particular, a female way of dressing has been always a subject of discussion and what is acceptable for women to wear was often controlled by society (Bond, 2016). The fact that fashion is a fast changing environment, influenced by progress in thinking, discussion about gender equality, technology, and various social cues, consumers abandoned expected patterns of consumption and were given more power to make changes than ever before (Firat and Venkatesh, 1993).

1.2 Alternative way of displaying femininity

Feminine style is in contemporary Western media often presented in connection to stereotypical “ladylike” look related to high heels, cleavages, short skirts and sexualisation of women's body (Chou, 2009), but lately, we have been exposed to change not only in how women think, dress and perceive their femininity but as well in movement in society towards more often discussed theme of equality of genders. In the recent years, we noticed a significant rise among young women starting to dress more modestly and this way challenging the stereotypical view of what is feminine by choosing oversized, unisex and loose fit garments over apparel that is tight, short or exposing too much of naked skin. This movement does not mean that the women started to hide their bodies in order to suppress their gender, as according to Furman (1997), femininity as a set of attributes and behaviours is a thing socially constructed rather than sex, which is biologically based. The whole idea of dressing modestly might have arisen from women’s ideas to dress attractively rather than seductively, because they are aware that they have more to offer than just their bodies (Chou, 2009), or maybe from women that were unconsciously forced to change their buying and dressing habits due to number of external factors and life events¹. Such style has been spotted among established, but as well new brands in addition to women and influencers worldwide. It includes unisex, loose fit as well as menswear garments in addition to fashion apparel such as wide leg or palazzo trousers, maxi skirts, turtlenecks, kaftan dresses or oversized coats and sweaters. Movement towards modesty was moreover widely spread by various books, magazines, blogs and movies with Wendy Shalit’s *A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue* (first published in 1999, last edited in 2014) and *Girls Gone Mild: Young Women Reclaim Self-Respect and Find It’s Not Bad to Be Good* (2007) often referred to as manifestos for modest style supporters.

¹ from graduating at the university to giving birth or membership in certain subculture or group of people

1.3 Modest movement in fashion

By buying clothes that all have in common their minimalistic aesthetic and simple cuts, this style is not something completely new, but rather seems like a natural continuation of continuously evolving styles and their characteristic features. The modern modest style can be described as a mixture of different styles prevailing the fashion world during the 80s and 90s; Asian deconstructivism, minimalistic style, and style of modern luxury (Lapsanska, 2015). Moreover, the functionality and aesthetics of modest style can be seen as similar to what is characterised as “Scandinavian style” prevailing in Nordic countries which are known for their innovative, functional and minimalistic approach to fashion. As described by Christina Exsteen, creative director at By Malene Birger: “Scandinavian style now is about being comfortable and cool women. It gives us space to experiment as we have a lot of demands and demand a lot back from our clothes. I like the idea that it is possible for us to do everything we need to do, without losing our sense of style or self.” (Conlon, 2017).

A style direction created by Asian designers, with Yohji Yamamoto being one of the examples, was based on pillars such as sparse, anti-status and timelessness with colour black started to be widely used for daily wear (Loscialpo, 2011). Their revolutionary idea about the relationship between the body and garment shaped the perception of female body and laid the foundation for a new code of modesty. Furthermore, clean lines, simple cuts, luxurious materials and male fashion elements of “minimalistic style” represented by for instance Jil Sander, were combined with conformity, neutral colours, precise tailoring, functionality and the idea of luxurious but at the same time inconspicuous piece of apparel present in style of “modern luxury”, that made its debut in fashion mostly because of Italian designer houses such as MaxMara (Lapsanska, 2015).

While looking at the big designer names and their collections, this style direction seems to trickle down from high fashion and its prevailing influence on the world of fashion (Potter, 2016). Women designers such as Victoria Beckham, Phoebe Philo or Jil Sander are considered as masters of this style, creating garments from simple patterns that are functional and meant to be worn throughout the whole day (Potter, 2016). Italian MaxMara and French Céline are perfect examples of brands offering more modest style garments and showing that modest style is not being a recent “thing”.

Together with these world famous brands with high price points, there are other significant players on the market for modest style, including Swedish COS and Filippa K, Danish Ganni, British Finery or RUH Collective. Together with these, less famous and smaller brands started to emerge within the market for modest style, French Modestologie, Italian LAU Clothing, Slovak Nehera, Czech La Formela or Hungarian INQ Concept being few of the examples. Many of the brands mentioned above have a clear defined minimalistic aesthetic and styling, they put a lot of effort into the ethical production of their garments, quality and durability of materials, transparency of prices and overall support of slow fashion movement. Moreover, few of them started as an e-commerce only which allowed them to keep the garments on affordable pricing level. With clearly defined values rooted in timeless design, ethics, and sustainability, RUH Collective, for instance, believes in creating “killer clothes for women who believe modesty is empowering” and also “covering up isn’t about quieting down” (WGSN, 2016). Moreover, the modest movement can be spotted in the collections of young designers, currently graduating from famous fashion universities as well as a part of collections of mainstream fast-fashion chains such as H&M, Weekday or Zara.

Modern modest style as presented in this research paper, has together with the styles mentioned above some characteristic features that are similar to a phenomena “modest fashion”, which have arisen from needs of Muslim, Jewish and Christian women to dress fashionably but in line with the dress code norms respective to their religious beliefs (Women in the World in Association with The New York Times - WITW, 2017). We believe that dressing modestly should not be solely discussed across scholars in relation to religion, but rather include the views and attitudes towards dressing modestly by women who simply identify themselves with the more modest silhouette and style. Even though Western media often offer a view of the female body as an object of male gaze and portray femininity in connection to stereotypical female clothing elements, this movement among young women may be connected with more than just a “protest” against the picture constructed by the society. Whether is it because of their demands, needs, aesthetic and personal values or because of an overall shift in their lifestyles and views on their bodies, femininity, fashion and the world, women are nowadays encouraged to speak out loud and feel comfortable in their bodies and clothing more than ever before. As we recognise this “modest movement” as more of a style direction than a trend, we believe in discovering more about understanding and views on dressing modestly among female consumers from Generation Y, as their choice of dressing might have been influenced by other factors than just avoidance of over-sexualization of their bodies. Moreover, modest style is widely discussed over fashion-focused websites and we recognised an increasing number of girls and young women that are standing behind the statement that women should dress beyond “superficial girl stereotype” (Chou, 2009).

1.4 Purpose and aim

The aim and purpose of this research are to examine how modest style is consumed by Generation Y female customers and how it is used in a context of building self-identity and reflection on individual understanding of femininity. We want to get a better understanding of young females’ choices and reasons standing behind the adaptation of this particular style which as presented in this research, is seen as an empowering tool for women who do not wish to dress in line with what is by Western culture often presented as stereotypically feminine. As a form of self-expression, fashion has a strong place among Generation Y customers and therefore by interviewing our target group, our goal is not only to find out what stands behind their choice of modest style but also why they consume fashion the way they do. More specifically, our research is guided by the below-presented research questions:

- 1. How is modest style clothing consumed by Generation Y?*
- 2. Why is Generation Y interested in dressing modestly and what meaning does this consumption have to them?*
- 3. How is this style used to reflect their perception of femininity and construct their self-identity?*

1.5 Previous research

Within the literature touching upon modest style (Akou, 2007; Omair, 2009; Ramírez, 2014), limited research has been conducted regarding dressing modestly as new phenomena where

religious reasons are excluded. Our interest lies in the Western context of refusing stereotypical and often sexual views regarding the liberation of women and their bodies. Feminism has an important part in this discussion about ways in which representations of the female body constructs femininity. Women's fashion can be seen as a field of the portrayal of the female body and therefore, the construction of femininity and how it addresses the representation of women becomes an important part of our work. Women's choice to dress modestly and incorporate such elements in their style is not only grounded in their view of their own femininity, body, and self-identity but also in today's consumption society. These aspects will be further elaborated in the following sections.

1.5.1 The dressed body

Throughout every human culture, the body is dressed in one way or another. To be dressed does not only serve to protect our decency or reflect our identity, but it simply embellishes the body (Entwistle, 2000). One definition of the dress is "the total arrangement of all outwardly detectable modifications of the body itself and all material objects added to it" (Roach and Musa, 1980 cited in Workman and Freeburg, 2000, pp.47). Entwistle (2000, pp.325) further adds that "dress is an embodied practice... that is embedded within the social world and fundamental to micro social order". Our clothing is what marks the boundary between ourselves and the society, and as Entwistle (2000, pp.327) interprets it, our dress shapes the "visible envelope of the self". Furthermore, the dress can be seen as a powerful weapon of control and dominance (Wilson, 1992). Literature concerning identity formation emphasises that dress as a symbol is a helpful tool to understand how people represent and create themselves as individuals and as group members (Entwistle, 2000).

Foucault (1971; 153) describes the body as sculpted by "a great many distinct regimes", where the outcome of power has reached out to the people, touched their bodies and inserted itself into the peoples' actions, attitudes, and everyday life. Our body is no longer changing due to natural physiological processes, but we are responsible for how our body is designed today (Giddens, 1991). Giddens (1991; 102) also describes the body as it "has been transformed from biological fact into a project". He further adds that the possibilities for self-transformation have extended to sexual identity and that one's sexuality today is simply a type of lifestyle choice (Giddens, 1992 in Hancock et al., 2000).

The way we dress is moreover structured by social factors and is a subject to both moral and social pressures which make us stay within the borders of what is considered as an appropriate to wear in particular situations (Entwistle, 2000). It has been argued that because of this pressure, there are two bodies, one social and one physical. Douglas (1973, pp.69) explains that "the social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived". She also points out that the body is a restricted medium of expression, as it is mediated by culture and the social pressures, meaning that the body is a symbol of the culture in which it is present. Depending on the location and culture, there are certain sets of dress which are not appropriate to wear. It is not only the dress which is affected by the culture but also multiple ways of being masculine and feminine, for instance, some traits are instantly recognised as being feminine due to cultural knowledge and assumptions about sexual availability, physical strengths, and vulnerability. In this way, women have come to embody certain cultural ideals of femininity (Schiebinger, 2000). Thus the feminine behaviour is a 'task' of imitation (Craik, 1993), rather than inherent traits and skills which according to Bordo (1989, pp.14), is the obsessive pursuit of the "elusive ideal of femininity". These traits can also serve to highlight elements of

masquerade which is present in femininity, where cultural products and behaviour create “false identity on the surface” (Wilson, 1992, pp.4). Masquerade, explained by Holland (2004) highlights ways through so-called ‘natural’ femininity is constructed via a series of acts and items to create a surface effect. It also becomes a way of confounding and provoking the male gaze, which Mulvey (1975) explains as men being controlling subjects while women are passive objects of the male desire. It is even explained by Evans and Thornton (1991) that by taking control over the so-called mask and disguise is considered as the true essence of femininity.

Entwistle (2000) further discusses that women are more likely to be identified with the body than men, which argues for the likelihood that women develop a greater body consciousness and are more aware of themselves as embodied than men. This because the identity of the man is considered to be less situated in the body due to cultural associations. As mentioned above, the body is the main element of one's identity, Goffman (1971, cited in Entwistle 2000) even describes the body as the “vehicle of identity”. Besides, he speaks about the fact that this identity has to be managed as social situations impose particular ways of being and appropriate ways of dressing. Furthermore, he suggests that dress is used by people to convey information about themselves to others, making them able to engage in social interactions as well as placing them in social systems. Davis (1992) argues that our dress frames our embodied self and is the visible form of our intentions and identity, meaning that the way one dresses is read by the people around. Furthermore, Bourdieu (1984) sees the consumer choices as inscribed in the body and this is why the body is a site for both class and social differences. According to Bourdieu, we consume according to who we are.

Literature has stressed that the female body is always seen as a sexual body and that women are seen as located in their body despite if they were to wear a tailored suit. Women bring to their dress a baggage of sexual meanings as Entwistle (2000) interprets it, which is within the culturally established definition of femininity. To appear too feminine can mean the loss of credibility and in a workspace environment; women can be seen as sexual objects rather than professionals. As mentioned, the female body is objectified and fragmented in our contemporary culture and is being used as a casual commodity when it comes to representation in media and popular culture (Craik, 1993). Fashion has been in the centre of the critique around the issue of industry images of the female body, portraying unrealistic and unhealthy impressions. The female body is always seen as imperfect and Wolf (1990; 200) argues that “dieting is the essence of contemporary femininity” and that the “current successful and mature model of femininity submits to a life of self-denial in her body”. Furman (1997) further asserts that the clearest failure in the maintenance of an ideal femininity is overweight, and by being insufficiently feminine is considered a failure in the core sexual identity (Brownmiller, 1984).

The relationship clothing has to women's skin and body and how the clothing makes the female body move affects the identities women are able to construct. This embodied self-perception comes, according to Woodward (2007), from how women feel in their own bodies. When dressing, one does not only wonder if the clothing per se looks good but also whether it highlights or hide the body in a certain way. What defines the ideal body and how it should look, as well as how women are supposed to attain these bodies, comes from the cultural norms of femininity and beauty (Woodward, 2007).

1.5.2 Femininity and feminism

The feminist movement has during its history come to encompass a variety of ideas and theories related to gender inequality within society (Tyner and Ogle, 2009). It was Simone de Beauvoir (1952, cited in Tyner and Ogle, 2009, pp.98) who highlighted the “ways in which women are culturally constituted and represented”. She brought focus to discourses of biology and stated that “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman... it is civilisation as a whole that produces this creature” (de Beauvoir, 1965, pp.267). The attention she laid on the role of society in constructing gender, marked the way in which feminists started to explore how the female body served as a canvas on which cultural constructions of identity and difference have been inscribed, as Tyner and Ogle (2009) specify. De Beauvoir in her work describes the way how the Western society has made men superior and free from bodily concerns, while women have been entrapped in a material body. Connected to this is the concept of the “male gaze” which was introduced by Mulvey (1975). He argues that men have been portrayed as controlling subjects who are imbued with the agency, while women are passive objects of desire for the male to enjoy. The work by Mulvey has generated critique and debate among feminist scholars such as Tseëlon and Kaiser (1992).

The second wave of feminism in the 1970’s brought up the relationship between gendered appearance and gender privilege, at this time feminists promoted a fashion emphasising function and comfort (Chapkis, 1986). Brownmiller (1984; 19) in her book ‘Femininity’ describes femininity as “a powerful aesthetic that is built on a recognition of powerlessness.” McRobbie (2007; 173) claims that femininity is no longer the ‘other’ of feminism; instead, it incorporates many of those structures of feeling which emerged from the political discourse of feminism in the 1970s. It also, and perhaps most powerfully, exists as a product of a highly charged consumer culture which in turn provides subject positions and personal identities for girls through consumption.

In recent years, the appearance of the female body have been highlighted by scholars (Entwistle, 2000; Kaiser 1997; Bordo 2003; Tseëlon, 1995), providing a variety of accounts of the ways in which women’s self-presentations are culturally “situated bodily practices” as Entwistle (2000, pp.11) describes it. Further on, it has been argued that the body holds an appropriate place within clothing and textiles subject matter content (Rudd and Lennon, 2001). Tyner and Ogle (2009, pp.99) explain this that by “highlighting the centrality of the body to the discipline, one must look no further than to seminal definitions of dress, which invariably take the body as their starting point”. Entwistle (2001, pp.33) in her work also specify that all “human bodies are dressed bodies”. Kaiser (1997, cited in Tyner and Ogle 2009, pp.99) mentions that there are “fashions in bodies just as there are fashions in clothes”, which brings light to the link between the body and clothing, underscoring the impact of the body on the social construction of appearance as stated by Rudd and Lennon (2001).

Theory of the body has for postmodern feminists brought forward developments in the dressed or socially processed body by highlighting the constructed and unstable nature of binary oppositional thinking as Tyner and Ogle (2009) explain it. Due to this, the postmodern feminist theory of the body has allowed for reconstructing and reclaiming the female body (Price and Shildrick, 1999). This makes it possible to understand ways in which the body is associated with power and how the embodiment and the body are understood in social context, as well as how women’s bodies are subjected to various practices which by time construct femininity (Tyner and Ogle, 2009).

Feminism in our contemporary society is characterised by paradigms pointing to the performativity of gender, which “occurs in the context of normative expectations regarding gender roles” (Woodward, 2007; 17). Butler (1990; 140) argues that gender is shaped by social discourse and constructed actively through, what she calls “stylised repetition of acts”, which over time is taken for granted as sex. Sex and gender are according to Butler not separated but implicated in one another “in a discursive loop through gender performativity” (Howson, 2004; 62). Through gender performativity, one’s core identity is shaped and constructed through the performance, which Butler (1993; 2) refers to as “reiterative acts”. Gender² explained by Scott (1988) is a social category which is imposed upon a gendered body. Furman (1997; 192) further adds that a woman’s sex is biologically based, while her gender - her femininity, is socially constructed. Thus femininity is also a code of appearance and behaviour which is defined by do’s and don’t do’s (Brownmiller, 1984; 2). According to Butler (1990, 1993), clothes are part of the way gender is performed. In terms of women’s identities, Butler states that individuals are both ‘subjected’ to expectations of femininity as well as ‘subjectivated’ by them, as these norms of femininity also are potential domains for the agency.

1.5.2.1 Modest Style

The debate between modesty and feminism has during the last decades emerged, where modest dress have been discussed as reverence of the body and reserved dress, while on the other hand, feminists see modesty as a politic resistance. For instance, a number of feminists “denounce modest advocacy for peddling postfeminist politics” (Hahner and Varda, 2012; 23), claiming for instance that modesty prepares young women for marriage. Feminists also describe the modest movement as a nostalgic vision of womanhood and the fact that women should embrace patriarchy as Bean (2007, cited Hahner and Varda, 2012; 23) explains it.

The lines which modest movement is within are vague and varies as there is no shared definition in society, including those individuals which have deeply religious devotions to modesty and individuals who posit modesty as a preferable performance of womanhood and girlhood (Hahner and Varda, 2012). Shalit (1999 in Hahner and Varda, 2012) for instance, defines modesty as the development of oneself for the purpose of marriage, this in the context of religious views. In the more modern context, modesty is defined as “a collective of girls and young women who reject the ‘do-me’ attitude”, indicating that the virtues of modesty will give the women more control over selfhood and their sexuality (Hahner and Varda, 2012). Dressing modestly can also be framed through the discourse of revolution and choice, that women don’t need to impress men with their bodies to get certain things (Hahner and Varda, 2012). Similar is the statement that dressing modestly is the decision to reclaim women’s bodies and show society that women do not need to “sell” their bodies to feel worthy (Howell, 2009 in Hahner and Varda, 2012). In this way, modesty could also be an aesthetic that resists normative roles (Hahner and Varda, 2012).

Lewis (2013) describes that modest clothing can provide the wearer with ways of understanding community and ethnic forms present in today’s society. It can be a question of achieving social and geographical mobility and responding to changes in one’s life cycle such as becoming a mother or becoming older. Even the phrase ‘to be modest’ can have different meanings. Lewis (2013) explains it as equally used with the implication of humble self-

² that is, femininity and masculinity

effacement, in other words, the desire not to draw attention to one and to remain inconspicuous.

Concepts within the modest style do not only touch upon religion, sexuality, and womanhood but also feminism and identity (Hahner and Varda, 2012). By dressing modestly, young women and girls are promised the opportunity to control the objectifying gaze of others, this through the development of moral authority. Feminists though, see modesty as a postfeminist advocacy which uses the feminist language in order to promote aims which injure young women and girls as well as goals of feminist projects (Hahner and Varda, 2012)

1.5.3 Deconstructive Fashion

The term deconstruction entered the world of fashion suggesting a reversal of construction. It is described as a style of garments which are “unfinished”, “transparent”, “coming apart” and “recycled” (Gill, 1998). Deconstructive fashion illustrates how, what we now call ‘modest style’, was shaped in the past. The relationship between dress and body and displaying one’s gender as we see through modest style today had its start in the fashion revolution which took place in the 1980’s (Loscialpo, 2011).

Deconstruction is seen as an activity where one can put into question and rethink a series of opposing terms such as nature-culture, inside-outside, and subject-object. It has been embraced as a form of criticism by philosophers and literature specialists which see deconstruction as a method of “reading and writing to “uncover” the instabilities of meaning in text” (Gill, 1998, pp.26). Deconstruction has inspired architecture, filmmakers and media theories, but deconstruction and its ideas have also profoundly influenced fashion design (Loscialpo, 2011). Designers such as Yohji Yamamoto, Rei Kawakubo, and Issey Miyake, who were influenced by the minimalism of their own culture and art, made their appearance in fashion and became the pioneers of what can be considered a fashion revolution which occurred in the early 1980’s. Later in that decade, Martin Margiela, Dries Van Noten and Ann Demeulemeester contributed to this revolution (Loscialpo, 2011).

The deconstruction pursued by these designers questioned the understanding of what is invisible and unseen and challenged the relationship between modernity and memory. Every clichéd notion of what glamour should be, or how a silhouette should look like, was rejected (Loscialpo, 2011). The style which developed at this time challenged gendered stereotypes by offering alternative approaches to the structures of clothing and the style of femininity (Fawcett and Buckley, 2001). The restructuring of garments was followed by questions regarding the relationship between the garment and the body as well as the concept of “body” itself (Loscialpo, 2011). The style of clothing which was brought to the public by these “deconstructivist” designers was often labelled as “anti-fashion” or “the death of fashion” (Loscialpo, 2011; 5), and their style was in complete contrast to what the fashion of the 1980’s was. Style presented by them was all about sparse, anti-status, timeless, black and monochrome clothing and a revolutionary idea about the relationship between the body and the garment.

Through fashion, meanings and complexity become accessible and manifested, in the centre of this complexity we will find the body. The dressed body, therefore, represents the “physical and cultural territory where the visible and sensible performance of our identity takes place” (Loscialpo, 2011; 6). Fashion, which has been labelled as deconstructed, tends to show how

reproduction, dislocation, and absence affect the relationship between our bodies and the “frozen idealisation” of it, as Loscialpo (2011; 6) explains it. Therefore, the work of above-mentioned designers was seen as a direct attack on the Western ideas of the body shaping. Taking Kawakubo’s designs as an example, her clothing does not reveal any shape of the body and it is simply “neutral”. In fact, her designs draw the attention away from the body, suppressing both sexuality and sensuality. Kawakubo has explained it as a way of breaking away from controversial forms of dress “for the new women of today” (Sudjic, 1990; 81). Yohji Yamamoto’s designs can be seen as a new code of modesty, and by playing with the idealised body as Loscialpo (2011; 7) describes it, deconstructed fashion “challenged the traditional oppositions between a ‘subject’ and an ‘object’, an ‘inside’ and an ‘outside’”.

In deconstructivist designers’ work, fashion, art and critical reflections on consumer culture are intertwined, and they question the attitude towards time and the contemporary view on fashion. The work by Maison Margiela is for instance described as a “critique of fashion’s impossibility, against its own rhetoric, to be ‘innovative’, while at the same time showing its dependence on the history of fashion” (Gill, 1998; 31). This summarises a significant feature which all deconstructive designers have in common (Loscialpo, 2011).

1.5.4 Fashion consumption in postmodern culture

Deconstructive fashion and postmodernism are both concepts used when talking about transformational flows of trends, goods and images (Skov, 1996). Postmodernism is the concept which has been employed to diagnose contemporary culture in the environment of growth of media and increased globalisation, as well as blending between cultural forms such as popular culture and art (Huysen, 1986 in Skov, 1996); one of these art forms being fashion. Fashion embodies many of the concepts present in postmodernism and new designers are influenced by postmodernism by looking into the future but drawing from the past. Both deconstructionism and postmodernism are described by Skov (1996, pp.131) as “signify ideas and styles that travel, and hence decentredness and instability”.

In our postmodern consumer culture, consumers seek to surround themselves with material goods. From the 1950’s economic, psychological and sociocultural transformations were created mass consumer societies where consumers can choose between an overwhelming amount of products and services. From this time on, consumption has become a central role in today’s society (Dittmar, 2008). It has even been argued by Svendsen (2006) that fashion has become like a second nature for the consumers of today, and that the consumption of fashion goods holds a significant position in today’s society (O’Cass, 2004). Fashion goods, which are being consumed rather for their symbolic meanings than the functional utilities (Belk, 1988; Giddens, 1991; Firat and Dholakia, 2006), serve as key symbols for an individual’s attachments, personal qualities and interests (Dittmar, 1992). This fact creates the centre of postmodern theories where products become commodity signs, making the consumer purchase images rather than things (Elliott 1997).

Consumer culture described by Baudrillard (1998), is represented by the consumption code, the system of cultural meanings that the market inscribes in goods. Arnould and Thompson (2005) describe the term as a system of commercially produced text, objects, and images that different groups use through the construction of identities and meanings in order to make sense of the environments in which they are and to guide their members’ lives and experiences. The age of postmodernism can thus be called the age of symbol and spectacle

(Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Fashion clothing in this age is of significant social and economic value, in addition to occupying a focal position in consumers' lives (O'Cass, 2004). The fashion market is characterised by ever-changing demands where factors such as income, lifestyle, age and culture, all influence the increasingly fragmented market context (Hines, 2001, cited in Hines and Quinn 2007; 78). Consumer behaviours and needs are also becoming less predictable, as consumers abandoned expected patterns of consumption (Firat and Venkatesh, 1993). Hines and Quinn (2007) point out that identification and the importance of recognising multiple selves and social identities within the context of fashion consumption are of great importance for marketers, meaning that brands should not only fulfil the functional utilities for the consumers but also serve the symbolic ones. In relation to this, companies act like cultural engineers (Holt, 2002), meaning that the firms specify the identities and pleasures that can be accessed by consumers through their brands only.

Concerning the definition of fashion, Kawamura (2004; 1-18) points out that the terms 'fashion' and 'clothing' tend to be used synonymously, but fashion is rather the "conventional usage in dress and mode of life". Fashion is the usage of dress which has been adopted in society at that time being (Brenninkmeyer, 1963 in Kawamura, 2004). Thus, fashion is the result of the acceptance of certain cultural values. Furthermore, Kawamura (2004) explains that a dress or the way of wearing a dress is not 'in fashion' or even fashion before it has been adopted by a larger crowd. What individuals wear and what one believes and wishes in fashion is simply clothing. Fashion is not consumed. This belief comes from the socially constructed idea of fashion, which means much more than just clothing. The extra values fashion provides to clothing are as well only present in our imagination and beliefs. According to Simmel (2001), a characteristic of fashion is that it renders social conformity, which at the same time is a kind of individual differentiation. Fashion emphasises and expresses tendency towards equalisation and individualisation, likewise the desire for conspicuousness and imitation. McCracken (1990) views fashion as a language through which one can signal place and identity as well as perform social intercourse. Fashion clothing can also be seen as possessing a code. Hence, Davis (1994) has concluded that such a code is always shifting or in the process, and it would also be different in distinctive areas.

A key site for the delineation of postmodern and modern is the social and cultural definitions of gender. In the twentieth century, the lines between masculinity and femininity have been blurred and it has been recognised that gender identities are not fixed but rather in the constant process of making (Buckley and Fawcett, 2001). Fashion offers the opportunity for public and private pleasures and has been an arena for women to acquire power. Fashion is what defines gender and it is the visible social marker of one's sex (Buckley and Fawcett, 2001). Fashion is of huge significance for women and Braidotti (1993, cited in Buckley and Fawcett, 2001; 8) argues that the primary site from which women speak is the body, which she explains is "an interface, a threshold, a field of intersecting forces where multiple codes are inscribed". Due to the intimacy with the body, fashion is a critical tool for representing femininity (Buckley and Fawcett, 2001). Fashion is effective in the endless constructing and never fixed identities and it constantly rehearses and enacts the lines of femininity (Buckley and Fawcett, 2001). Brownmiller (1984; 83, 79) has a more critical opinion, describing the feminine fashion as fundamental to maintain gender difference and thus female oppression.

Through the processes of covering, adorning and embellishing, the body is shaped by culture and made meaningful. With its changing styles and innovations, fashion always reinvents the body offering new ways of revealing and concealing the body and new techniques of making the body visible (Entwistle and Wilson, 2001). Fashion in our postmodern society is seen as

offering endless possibilities for individual expression and draws a distinction to connections between genders, age, cultures and status. In today's consumer society there are “no rules, only choices” and “everyone can be anyone” as Ewen and Ewen (1982; 249-51) describe.

2 Theoretical framework

In the following section, the theoretical framework and concepts used in the study will be outlined. The framework highlights the construction and maintenance of identity and self through consumption, and how one's femininity relates to one's dress and body practices. The framework is used as a guide through the analysis and provides an explanation of the main concepts discussed throughout the research.

2.1 Symbolic Consumption

The relationship between the consumer's self, brands, possessions and their meanings have been widely discussed in the previous literature (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998; Belk 1988; Elliott, 1997; Escalas and Bettman 2005, Sirgy 1982; Fournier 1998). Relevant for presented study concerning brand symbolism and identity construction are studies done by Belk (1988), Dittmar (2008) Banister and Hogg, (2001), Elliott (1997, 1994) and Wattanasuwan (2005).

Belk (1988), has through his research highlighted the importance of possessions and how the consumer's feelings towards them are a key reflector and contributor to their identities. Dittmar (1992, 2008) has as well carried out research in this area of possessions, saying that “by buying goods, we magically acquire a different persona” (1992; 2). What is more, through our consumption choices we can, as described by Wattanasuwan (2005; 180), “accommodate our protean lifestyle”. According to Wattanasuwan (2005), consumption is the centre of meaningful practices in individuals' everyday lives, and that we consume in order to create and sustain the self but also to locate ourselves in society (Elliott, 1994). What we consume, not only products but as well activities and beliefs is telling stories about who we are and with whom we identify. In other words, not only do we satisfy our needs by consuming, but we also carry out our self-project (Wattanasuwan, 2005).

As we aim to consume certain products and brands, we also try to avoid certain consumption in order to create, maintain and advance the self. This negative symbolic consumption explains how consumers reject brands and fashion items, in order to avoid unwanted states of being (Banister and Hogg, 2007). According to Elliott (1997), symbolic meanings of products function in two different ways; one being outward, in constructing the social world together with social- symbolism, and the other inward in constructing the individual's self-identity and self-symbolism. Because of the importance of consumption and the central role it has in supplying meanings and values for creation and maintenance of consumer's personal and social world, advertising is recognised as being the main source for carrying these symbolic meanings (Elliott, 1997). Precisely these meanings, are according to McCracken (1987) transferred to brands, which in their turn are used as symbolic resources for consumers to construct and maintain their identity.

In the field of brand relationships, the strongly rooted relationships forming between consumers and brands have been during the recent years of extensive research (Pralhalad and

Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Fournier 1998). As important players in today's marketplace, informed, empowered, connected and active consumers (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004) can be spotted across the industries. From the traditional concept of the market being company-centric, consumers are now "subjecting the industry's value creation process to scrutiny, analysis and evaluation" (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; 6). The consumers of today choose the brands and companies which they want to have a relationship with, based on their own views and values they expect to be created for them (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). Fournier (1998), points out that consumers form relationships with brands, which help resolve life projects, important identity concerns or tasks, which individuals address in their daily life. For example, life projects concern the maintenance, construction and dissolution of key life roles, which adjust the self-concept; these could be role-changing events or stage transitions. Brands can also have several kinds of relationships with different consumers. These relationships influence the consumer's personality development, which in their turn have an influence on brand relationships (Fournier, 1998). It has also been shown that consumers have no difficulties in assigning personality qualities to brand objects as brands can be seen as animated, humanised or in some way personalised; this in order to emphasise the relationship between the consumer and the brand (Fournier, 1998). Fournier's study also reveals the inextricable character of categories and brand meanings and points out that "once a significant relationship is established, the meaning of the brand becomes inseparable from the value of the product class" (Fournier, 1998; 368).

The consumer-brand relationship has been for decades crucial for brands when building a relationship with their customers. Hence, this relationship is of significant importance when it comes to the individual's consumer behaviour and in terms of adding structured meanings to the consumer's life. This phenomenon has been well addressed in research, for instance in terms of consumer loyalty (Bhattacharya et al., 1995; Kim et al., 2001), brand preference (Tildesley and Coote, 2009) and psychological sense of brand community and brand commitment (Casaló et al., 2008).

2.2 Construction of identity through consumption

Consumption is a mean of searching for self-identity and as clothing is considered as highly symbolic, consumers will make assumptions about others based on their possessions and dress. Symbolic consumption is not only limited to buying and wearing fashion items, but it includes all social practices (Banister and Hogg, 2001). All our social actions are saturated with meanings and values, and these contribute to the consumer's sense of who they are and what they want to present, as well as who they are not and what they don't want to represent (Banister and Hogg, 2001).

According to Levy (1959), material objects are viewed as symbolic when individuals focus on meanings beyond their tangible, physical characteristics. Products can be as well seen as social tools through which individuals communicate with their significant reference (Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967). In order for consumer products and brands being able to function as communication symbols, different meanings have to be shared, produced and reproduced during social interactions (Dittmar, 1992). These meanings can either be positive or negative (Sirgy et al. 1997). Products can thus function as symbols of autonomy and social distinction (Simmel, 1904), individuality and uniqueness as well as affiliation and social identification. All these mentioned can be linked to the maintenance and enhancement of self-esteem (Banister and Hogg, 2004).

The self can be described as a symbolic project, in which the individual actively has to construct their identity through the available symbolic material (Thompson, 1995). These symbolic meanings are used by the individual when constructing, maintaining and expressing one's multiple identities (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998). Some of these aspects concern more private and personal identities, such as religion and personal history, other aspects refer to more social and public parts of identity as group belonging and social status (Dittmar, 2008).

Symbolic meanings of products are often linked with stereotypes, which are associated with the personal images of the product user (Sirgy et al., 1997). These stereotypes influence the consumer whether to purchase the product or not. Consumer associations with groups also affect their behaviour and purchase decisions. Due to this, consumers make judgments and consumption choices based on their opinions about the "typical consumer" of the products. This product-user imagery is an important component in self-congruity theory (Sirgy et al., 1997) and helps the consumers to give shape and meaning to their possible selves (Banister and Hogg, 2004). Advertising is the main carrier of this product-user image by creating "typical" consumers with a help of role models using their products in advertising. Hence, when a consumer perceives him/herself to be a member of a group and behaving in line with this social identity, he or she has engaged in self-stereotyping (Biernat et al., 1996). Identities and negative as well as positive stereotypes can be silent, and thus will affect the behaviour of individuals in some situations. As Reicher and Hopkins (1996) mention, conformity to group norms is dependent on the relevant social identity which is silent at that time.

According to the self-image theory, there is a connection between an individual's self-image and their consumption decisions (Erickson and Sirgy, 1992). Products and brands are not only used in order to improve the individual's self-image, but they are also chosen by the individual to show a positive image of him/herself. By purchasing a specific brand or product which is considered socially acceptable, one would hope that the qualities associated with that particular brand or product would be identified with the individual and communicated to the audience (Banister and Hogg, 2001). By purchasing products believed to be in line with one's identity, individuals seek to maintain their self-concepts. McCracken (1987) also points out that through consuming specific brands, one can succeed in conveying the desired impression. Consumers can signal significant things about themselves through consumption such as social status, belonging to groups, age and sex. This function of consuming in a self-expressive way relates to conspicuous consumption presented by Veblen (1899 in Han, Nunes and Drèze, 2010). But what individuals choose not to consume is as well an important aspect in identity construction in terms of individual and group identity. Negative symbolic consumption explains how consumers reject brands and fashion items in order to avoid unwanted states of being (Banister and Hogg, 2001).

2.3 Self, self-concept and self-identity

The self, defined by Dittmar (2008), is something a person actively creates, making the self-something which is created partly through consumption and not only an outcome of a social system or entity adopted by the individual. The self, according to Giddens (1991) is a reflexive project which the individual is responsible for and he argues that we are what we make ourselves.

When talking about consumers and their relationship with their possessions, the notion of self-concept should be featured (Banister and Hogg, 2001). Self-concept can be defined as the image the one believes others hold (Sirgy, 1982). Grubb and Grathwohl (1967) explain that the self-concept is of value to the individual, and one's behaviour is directed towards protecting and enhancing the self-concept. This is done through consumption of goods as symbols. Banister and Hogg (2001) mention that there are three dimensions of self-concept; these are the actual self, how a person perceives him/herself, the ideal self, how a person would like to be perceived and the social self, which is how a person believes others perceive him or her. The self-concept, explained by Banister and Hogg (2001; 219) is "essentially a dynamic structure that changes according to the nature of the social surroundings or situation". Furthermore, Banister and Hogg (2001) mention that the different selves, both what an individual fears and hopes of becoming, are of importance in consumption decisions and what an individual is striving for at the moment is as important as what he/she currently is. Thompson (1995) describes the self as a symbolic project which is constructed by the individual from symbolic materials which are available. These symbolic materials define who a person is and in this way, the self-identity is communicated. The definition of self-identity can be described as the subjective representation an individual has of himself, involving individual, rational and group levels (Sedikides and Brewer, 2001).

Concepts:			
Self	Something a person actively creates	Reflexive project, we are what we make ourselves	Created from available symbolic materials
Self-concept	Image one believes others hold	One's behaviour is directed towards enhancing and protecting the self-concept	Three dimensions: Actual self, Ideal Self, Social self
Self-identity	Subjective perception an individual has of him/herself		

Table 1

2.4 Feminine identity and its relation to dress and body

Clothing performs a major role in the social construction of identity and it is one of the most visible forms of consumption (Crane, 2000). In our postmodern society, consumption of cultural goods like fashion clothing has an important role in the construction of individual's personal identity. One individual's gender is communicated through social performances such as the adoption of certain styles of dress and types of makeup and accessories.

One's gender identity, femininity and masculinity (Spence, 1985), refer to the degree of which individuals see themselves as feminine or masculine. Femininity and masculinity are rooted in one's gender rather than in one's sex. Butler (1990) points out that the self is not inherently masculine or feminine, but it is the society and its members which decide what being female and male means. From here, females generally defines themselves as feminine and men generally respond by defining themselves as masculine (Sets and Burke, 2000). By the end of the twentieth century, Crane (2000; 7) explained that "hegemonic ideals of appropriate gender behaviour and appearance still remain very different from each gender". Hegemonic femininity and the way it is represented in fashion and media images of fashion is according to Crane (2000) in conflict. Different conceptions of female identity confront women, ranging from the expression of feminine empowerment and dominance to marginal sexuality as explained by Crane (2000). Hegemonic femininity is viewed by feminists as a conception of femininity, based on masculine standards for female appearance, where women are encouraged to look at themselves as men would look at them (Davis, 1997 in Crane, 2000).

Involved in gender identity are all the meanings which apply to oneself on the basis of one's gender identification. These self-meanings are formed in social situations from interactions with one's parents, peers and educators (Katz, 1986). The cultural conception of male and female in a society is transmitted to individuals through educational systems or religion (Sets and Burke, 2000). Femininity according to Bartky (1990) is an artefact, an achievement and a way of enacting and re-enacting received gender codes by changing and manipulating these acts. Butler (1990) points out that a subversion of identity is possible. Furthermore, Butler (1990; 139) describes gender as a series of performative acts and interprets the style as a language by which gender can be understood. She adds that be styled is not the same as being "self-styled" considering that styles have history "and those histories condition and limit the possibilities". Style functions as a proof of the self's fundamental society and not as a celebration of the self-overcoming the social. Foucault (see McWhorter, 1999, pp.190) explains that style not only involves trends in art and fashion and cultivation of taste but rather it involves all our practices of self-overcoming and self-transformation. Jolles and Tarrant (2012) describe that style includes tastes, codes, habits and practices, which all create what McWhorter (1999, pp.190) calls, "the lifelong project of giving shape to human existence". She goes on explaining that "style is the form that human existence takes, and it is the process of forming that existence". Feminism is, therefore, a powerful tool for decoding the political meanings of fashion and for acknowledging an individual's embeddedness in these systems of meaning (Jolles and Tarrant, 2012). Crane (2000) underlies the notion that clothing is about the social construction of identity, and that clothing plays an important role in gendering individuals. Individuals according to her do not choose to dress based on gender preference, but rather on the encouragement to wear clothing which will reinforce the gender roles society wants them to play.

The concept of 'femininity' refers to a set of gendered behaviours and practices (Holland, 2004) which are fluid and intangible (Thesander, 1997). Butler (1990; 140) describes femininity as a "stylised repetition of acts" that is shifting, fragile, contextual and never complete. Further on, Brownmiller (1984; 2) asserts that "femininity, in essence, is a romantic sentiment, a nostalgic tradition of imposed limitations". Glover and Kaplan (2000) discussed the idea of masculinity and femininity as unfinished and contextual, and they are referring to historical differences in gender ideals and the fact that there is a range of competing definitions of what it is to be a man or a woman. Due to these variations about what

femininity is and how it is “done”, femininity has been seen as a normative order, as a set of physiological traits, as a performance and as a process of interaction (Holland, 2004).

One of the key ways in which femininity have come to be understood and learnt is through what Furman (1997; 2) calls “the traditional practices of femininity and beautification”, which construct the phenomenon. The rules of femininity have come to be culturally transmitted through what Bordo (1989; 7) calls “standardised visual images”. Bordo explains that a result of this is that femininity itself has become a matter of constructing the surface presentation of the self, which Goffman (1959, cited in Bordo, 1989; 17) describes in his work. Smith (1988; 37) explains that femininity is created as a “distinctively textual phenomenon”. She further clarifies that addressing femininity is to address textual discourse, which is portrayed in television, advertising, magazines and so on. This discourse also involves the producing of oneself to realise these images, the talk women do in relation to these texts, and the skills involved in making a decision about styles, makeup and colours. These textual activities are according to Craik (1993; 73), the “recipe for femininity”. Craik demonstrates that media have provided means for promoting desirable icons and images of femininity, and these role models are offered to women as orientation for the realisation of the gendered self. Appearance is of great importance when it comes to the personal construction of femininity, meaning “being feminine” is the same as “looking feminine” (Brownmiller, 1984). The stereotypical way of performing femininity, displayed through advertisement and fashion is challenged by modest style. The style which leaves no emphasis on the female body shape, but rather constructs a neutral form and alternative ways of displaying femininity and gender are made possible.

3 Methodology

Research paper uses qualitative data collection in form of semi-structured interviews with nine women of Generation Y. Researchers adapted ethnographic approach with open-ended questions, giving the interviewees space to fully express their opinions and stands towards discussed topic.

3.1 Research method

Ethnography is the study of people in their natural setting and the collecting of data is captured in the participants’ social meaning and ordinary activities. The researcher is actively participating in the setting, but without meaning being imposed on the participants directly (Brewer, 2000, pp.10). Ethnography can be divided into “big” and “small” ethnography, where “big” ethnography can be understood as a perspective on research rather than a way of doing it (Wolcott, 1973, in Brewer, 2000, pp.18). Some define ethnography the same as “fieldwork”, which can be described as “small” ethnography, whereby ethnography becomes a particular way of doing qualitative research (Brewer, 2000).

Fieldwork is in this method the most widely used, but examples can be found where research has relied more on interviews (Belk 1988; Penaloza 1994; Holt 1995). This has made possible to understand what participants say rather what they do in operationalising consumption phenomena and has also limited the ability to compare the two which, according to Spradley (1989, cited in Penaloza 1998), is the key strength of ethnography. Ethnography is positioned

between powerful systems of meaning; it places its questions on the boundaries of for instance culture, class, genders, and civilisations. Ethnography as a method both decodes and encodes, and setting the grounds for collective order and diversity, inclusion and exclusion (Clifford and Marcus, 1986). Ethnography also describes processes of both structuration and innovation, and at the same time, is itself part of these processes (Clifford and Marcus, 1986). Furthermore, the goal of ethnography is also to build social theory (Penaloza 1998, pp.358) and the main aim lies in providing the analysis with broad insight into participants' views and actions, by collecting the data via semi-structured detailed interviews. As stated by Reeves, Kuper and Hodges (2008), the aim of the ethnographic study is to "get inside' the way each group of people sees the world."

The method of ethnography was chosen because of the aim of the study, which was set to get an understanding of participants' choice of style and reasons standing behind their fashion consumption and preferences. Moreover, as ethnography is also a study of perception (Reeves, Kupe and Hodges, 2008), researchers aimed to explore the way females of Generation Y perceive constructing, but at the same time reflecting their personalities and self-identities through their style and clothes they wear.

3.2 Data collection

Prior to the empirical data collection, an extensive literature review has been done in order to get a better understanding of the topic studied. Summary of previous research conducted in the research area was done in order to form a theoretical framework of the work and interview guide used for the empiric observation. The interview guide (Appendix 8.1) was likewise based on the discussion between the researchers about the purpose and goals of the study. The empiric data was collected through semi-structured interviews with style-wise suitable female respondents from Generation Y, from and currently located in Europe. A sample of nine participants was specifically chosen to fit in the research based on their inclination to modest style, which is in this study perceived as not stereotypically feminine and not intended to expose much of the naked skin or emphasise the female body shape.

Interview questions were designed as open-ended, giving the interviewees an ability to further develop their thoughts with a possibility of additional questions asked by the interviewer as a follow up to the answers given. It was believed that this way, the atmosphere of the interview would feel more relaxed and comfortable, just as a normal conversation would be. Moreover, the questions were constructed using relevant literature and with an aim of the study in mind to ensure the relevance of the outcomes. The main focus while constructing the interview questions was to formulate them in order to get a deeper understanding of respondents' fashion choices and preferences as well as a reflection on themselves, their individual styles and identities.

The interviews were aimed to make interviewees feel as comfortable as possible to encourage them to answer freely and without any restrictions. Six interviews were conducted in English, two in Slovak, mother tongue of one of the researchers and two informants, and one by a combination of Czech and Slovak language. This could have an impact on provided answers as interviewees might have felt more comfortable and could express themselves without any obstacles while speaking in their native language. Interviews started with a short introduction of the topic and permission request to use interviews or their parts in the final document. Seven online interviews were conducted while both of the interviewer and researcher were at

their own homes, one of the personal interviews were done at researcher's home and one in a café in Prague. As most of the interviews were recorded while participants' presence in their home environment, it is believed that the surroundings did not have an impact on trustworthiness and accuracy of their answers. The interviewer did know four respondents beforehand, remaining five were selected after online research and approached through the social media platforms Facebook and Instagram.

All interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim to provide the research with organic reactions and possible uncertainty of the participants. In addition to transcribed documents, interviewer's notes were used as guidance throughout the analysis. Interviews that were done in another language than English were carefully translated in order not to abandon any information that might be of use.

Time needed for analysis and transcription of interviews (each approximately 70 minutes long) was seen as a challenge from the beginning, but researchers believed that by using this method, the purpose of the study could be fulfilled the best (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Each respondent was interviewed by only one of the researchers to ensure the consistency of the atmosphere and in order to make the setting of each interview as similar as possible. Due to physical distance, three of the interviews were conducted via Skype, four via Facebook Call and remaining two were done in person. However the majority of the interviews were not done in person, the technique of online calls still allowed a face to face encounter and therefore had no significant impact of relevance for this study.

Researchers put a great emphasis into finding participants from Generation Y with an inclination to modest style from various backgrounds. Even though aiming for a higher number of respondents, nine interviews were conducted at the end. This was due to the fact that researchers experienced difficulties in fitting the interviews into potential participants' working schedules and because the already conducted interviews eventually lasted from 70 to 90 minutes and therefore the amount of time needed for transcribing increased. Moreover, researchers started to see similar patterns throughout the interviews and therefore more attention was put into analysis and interpretation of the results rather than approaching new participants due to a tight writing schedule.

3.3 Sample

Selected and approached interviewees were based within several European countries: Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Netherlands, Italy, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Each one of the participants approached their interest in fashion and with that related consumption differently, which provided the research with interesting and rich data.

When approaching the potential respondents, the technique of purposive sampling was used. Purposive sampling is based on selecting the participants strategically rather than randomly, in order to ensure a relevancy to the question asked and great variety in terms of background and characteristic features of each sample at the same time (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Using purposive or "judgmental sampling" means selecting the informants in order to particularly serve the purpose of the study (Bernard, 2011). The respondents were chosen with the aim of the study in mind and therefore conclusions cannot be generalised to the whole population of Generation Y (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The sample of women from this generation was specifically chosen because, in a position of consumers, they were brought into fully

developed consumer culture and encouraged to express their personalities through clothing they wear. According to Auty and Elliott (1998), women are also more responsive to fashion cues and as all the participants were at the moment or in the past involved in the fashion industry, they were assumed to be a more likely able to connect their consumption with their personalities and provide the research with relevant answers. Moreover, age proximity with the researchers was considered as an advantage and enabled interviews to take place as an organic discussion rather than a structured interview.

The group of respondents was created from mixture of Generation Y women that researchers recognized as a suitable fit from their own network and women (fashion bloggers, photographers, designers and other fashion creatives discovered during online research) which style direction matched with the presented view on modest style by not being stereotypically feminine but rather more subtle, minimalist and simple. In order to form the second part of the sample, research has been done online using online platforms Instagram and lookbook.nu as well as other fashion style oriented web pages. The style of potential candidates was later evaluated by both researchers and they were approached by email or direct message on Instagram. The focus was put on finding respondents from different countries within Europe and with different ages and backgrounds to make the research reflect various experiences and approaches. To clarify the choice of respondents, visual documentation of participants' style is attached in the appendix. From the start, researchers aimed for a variety of participants in terms of their background and relation to fashion. Later on, based on their public appearance, approached and recruited women were all significantly related to fashion and therefore in order to keep the research consistent, researchers started to aim for interviewees currently or in the past involved in the fashion industry. This also due to assumed higher fashion consciousness and ability to research discussed the topic more in depth.

The generation of interest, Generation Y was born between 1980-1995 and is also called The Internet Generation, Nexters, Eco Boomers or Millennials (Eisner 2005). Generation Y is the first generation which has to spend their entire lives in an environment dominated by technological innovation, which has profoundly affected how they live and work (Benett et al., 2008 cited in Bolton et al., 2012). The frequent exposure to technology is a key formative characteristic for Generation Y and has both advantages and disadvantages in terms of cognitive, emotional and social outcomes; this as an outcome of relying heavily on technology in the purpose of interaction with others, entertainment and even for emotional regulation (Bolton et al., 2012). Social networking and globalisation are along with technology familiar to the majority of Generation Y members (Bolton et al., 2012).

3.4 Ethics

As qualitative research is based on exploring and describing people in their natural surroundings, in the form of interviews, participants' willingness and desire to take part in the research is to share and discuss their opinions and experiences (Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden, 2001), nevertheless, principles of ethics need to be followed. Before the start of each interview, respondents were informed about the topic of the study and were asked for permission to use parts of their photos and answers in, and for the purposes of the study as well as ensured about anonymity. The images used in Appendix 8.2 do not reveal the faces of the women interviewed and however they were asked for permission to use them as an illustration of the sample choice, all are publicly available online. All the participants were ensured of anonymity and their names have been for the purposes of the study changed.

3.5 Participants

The first respondent, Anneli, is a 27-year-old fashion and textile management student from Finland. Anneli is vegan and has a background in journalism. At the moment, she is finishing her master studies in Sweden and freelancing as a street style photographer and fashion journalist. Anneli has a strong opinion about thinking ethically while consuming not only fashion but as well food and cosmetics, and together with silhouette and brand aesthetics, these are some of the key factors influencing her purchase happening almost exclusively in store.

27 years old Brita just graduated from Industrial Design program in The Netherlands and was born and raised in Amsterdam. Her interest in fashion began with research for her master thesis project - denim jacket with touchable sensors which she constructed in collaboration with wearable technology studio in the Netherlands. Brita is committed not to buy any new garments from fast fashion chains stores and prefers to buy her clothes in second hands for the past one and a half year. She is concerned about the future of fashion industry and interested in finding new brands that produce their product ethically and with as low environmental impact as possible.

Camilla, the 28 years old woman from Venice, Italy, is a fashion designer with an interest in wearable technology and clever design. She used to work as a fashion and wearable technology designer for a few fashion studios abroad but at the moment, she is working near Venice and developing new materials to be used in fashion as an alternative to leather. Camilla dresses almost exclusively in black and interestingly points out her interest in layers and different materials, lengths and textures. She purchases her garments mainly from designer warehouses or via e-commerce which, as she claims, restrain her from the stores fulfilled with many different styles and garments.

Copenhagen-based Dorota is currently in her 29th year and originally from Slovakia, where she studied before she moved abroad to the Czech Republic for work and later to Denmark with her boyfriend. During the daytime, she works as a data analyst but her relation to fashion and interest in self-expression through her style is significant from fashion blog and the Instagram account she is running. Moreover, Dorota is also an editor for renowned Czech style portal and working as a freelance photographer with a particular focus on street style, event reports and fashion editorials. Dorota's priority while consuming fashion lays in its functionality, as she uses a bicycle for daily transportation and also stresses the needs for waterproof outerwear.

Enni, 25 years old childcare education student with Chinese and Finnish roots, currently lives in Helsinki and works as a teacher in local primary school. She used to work in fashion retail for a short time in her past but nowadays, her interest in fashion and way to get involved in a fashion related conversation is through her friends, who are currently studying or working within fashion. Enni describes her style as simple and relaxed and she prefers to buy her clothes online from UK based streetwear e-shops, which she labels as offering comfortable garments which can easily match with the rest of her wardrobe.

26 years old Frieda has German and Spanish roots, however, being raised in Germany before living abroad in France, USA and Sweden. After completing her master's degree in Sweden, she is currently based in Finland and working as a Marketing and Sales Manager at the Finnish high-end fashion brand. She has kept her blog combining sustainable alternatives in

fashion, music and own style made by involving unisex and menswear garments running for a few years now, and while travelling she often looks for local brands and concepts worth to discover.

Prague-based Greta, who is currently finishing her drama studies and will soon start her career as an actor, aims to keep her femininity as a part of her personality rather than showing it to the world through her clothes. She describes her style as simple and minimalistic with a subtle touch of menswear-inspired garments and emphasis on materials of good quality or recycled. Greta is 28 years old and in the past, she was running a successful fashion blog which gained her popularity not only because of her creative and inspiring style but as well because of her witty and friendly personality.

Hana, a 35-year-old married woman and mother of two children from Bratislava, Slovakia used to work in fashion retail in the past and at the moment, she is an editor in chief of an online magazine with a particular focus on kids fashion in addition to running her own blog about fashion and design. She puts a great emphasis on purchasing timeless clothing of certain quality after not being financially restricted and the way retail atmosphere and visual communication of the brands play a significant role in her purchase decision usually done in store.

Last participant, 35 years old Iris, is currently based in Stockholm and however has a background in interior architecture, she describes herself as a multidisciplinary designer, working mostly with set design and art direction and also as a photographer and a model via different collaborations through Instagram. As she is often working with aesthetics, she thinks about herself as a very visually oriented person, what reflects in her preference of buying garments and silhouettes rather aesthetically pleasing than functional.

Name	Age	Nationality	Current location	Occupation	Way of recruitment	Setting of the interview
<i>Anneli</i>	27	Finnish	Sweden	Student of Textile Management, freelance journalist	Researchers' network, approached in person	In person, at researcher's home
<i>Brita</i>	27	Dutch	Netherlands	Recent graduate from Industrial design	Researchers' network, approached via direct message on Facebook	Interview was done via Facebook call

<i>Camilla</i>	28	Italian	Italy	Fashion designer	Researchers' network, approached via direct message on Facebook	Interview was done via Skype
<i>Dorota</i>	29	Slovak	Denmark	Freelance fashion photographer, editor and blogger, data analyst	Direct message on Instagram	Interview was done via Facebook call
<i>Enni</i>	25	Finnish/Chinese	Finland	Child pedagogy student	Network of researchers' friends approached via direct message on Facebook	Interview was done via Facebook call
<i>Frieda</i>	26	German/Spanish	Finland	Marketing and sales manager for a high-end fashion brand	Researchers' network, approached via direct message on Facebook	Interview was done via Facebook call
<i>Greta</i>	28	Czech	Czech Republic	Actor, fashion blogger	Direct message on Instagram	In person while in café in Prague
<i>Hana</i>	35	Slovak	Slovakia	Editor-in-chief of kids fashion magazine, fashion blogger	E-mail	Interview was done via Skype
<i>Iris</i>	35	Swedish	Sweden	Multidisciplinary designer, fashion creative and architect, model	E-mail	Interview was done via Skype

Table 2

3.6 Qualitative analysis method

All interviews conducted, whether through internet calls or one on one, were recorded with Voice Recorder software coming as a part of a basic Microsoft package within the researcher's computer. Before the start of interviews, all participants were informed about the topic and the recording of the interview as well as ensured confidentiality. The transcribed versions of the recordings, together with the researcher's notes taken during the interviews made it easier to gather and analyse the data. The transcribing method used was verbatim; this in order to capture the entire character of the interview session. The data was not altered or selectively edited, as this would have influenced the way content was produced (Millward, 2006). The transliteration of data took approximately 20 days to complete.

Constant comparative analysis was used as a method when analysing the data obtained. This kind of analysis involves taking one piece of data (theme, statement, interview), and comparing it to other data gathered in the study, in order to see similarities or differences. In this way, it is possible to develop conceptualizations of the relations which can exist between different pieces of data (Thorne, 2000). The comparison is also the dominant principle of analysis method used in qualitative research. Strauss and Corbin (1998, cited in Boeije, 2002) state that the art of comparison is linked with the creative process and the interplay between researcher and data, when one is gathering and analysing the data. Constant comparison is commonly found in theory which is grounded in data and Tesch (1990, cited in Boeije, 2002, pp.392) explains comparison as the main intellectual activity which underlies all analysis in theory grounded in empirical data: "The main intellectual tool is a comparison. The method of comparison and contrasting is used for partially all intellectual tasks during analysis: forming categories, establishing the boundaries of categories, assigning the segments to categories, summarising the content of each category, finding negative evidence, etc. The goal is to discern conceptual similarities, to refine the discriminative power of categories, and to discover patterns".

When the coding was complete, codes which had similar elements were merged into categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1990 cited in Boeije, 2002). The main categories concern 'modest style consumption', 'personal style and the connection to femininity' as well as 'the dressed body'. Further, subchapters were established under the main categories. This categorisation was influenced by the emphasis samples addressed to the topics. Interpretation of the data took place in order to determine which categories answered the research questions (Millward, 2006), and data which was considered not relevant for the purpose of the research was deleted and the final themes and chapters were formed. The main themes and findings most relevant to the research questions, literature and theory were then formed and included in sections about findings and analysis (section: 4) and discussion (section: 5).

3.7 Limitations to study

Empiric data was collected during the weeks 11 to 16 in spring 2017, mainly through internet calls, leaving the physical interaction between interviewer and sample restricted. As a result of longer interviews, the transcribing of data was detained and the period of contacting further potential participants was therefore limited. By cause of a large amount of data obtained, the period reserved for analysis was exceeded and required more time than anticipated. Due to the scope of this study and the method used, the study cannot be generalised, but qualitative research is not meant to be representative of a population (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

Participants were contacted and chosen based on their appearance in social media or personal blogs. Furthermore, as five out of nine participants were of Scandinavian origin or currently living there, this fact might have influenced their interest in modest style and their choice to dress in this manner. Moreover, the study was conducted only on female participants with a particular interest in fashion and fashion industry, which also could have had an effect on their level of interest in individual style creation and sustainability.

3.8 Trustworthiness of the study

The terms validity and reliability are in qualitative research treated differently as it is in quantitative research (Golafshani, 2003). Therefore, when addressing trustworthiness in ethnographic research, criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1984) need to be met. Assessing trustworthiness is thus important for claiming both validity and reliability in qualitative research (Bryman, 2012).

The criteria of credibility lay in claiming internal validity of the research by comparing whether there is coherence between the empirical observations, and from them derived theoretical outcomes (Bryman, 2012). Ensuring that the answers of participants have been understood correctly, discussion between researchers and supervisor took place, in addition, to carefully evaluated researcher's notes taken during the interviews and including parts of transcribed interviews into the written text.

Transferability criteria in qualitative research should address a question of external validity, meaning the degree in which outcomes can be generalised to the particular social group (Bryman, 2012). As research was conducted on a sample of nine women while using purposive sampling as a method of selection, findings cannot be generalised to the wider public although the thick description of the participants' background is provided to the reader. This in order to give the opportunity to determine whether the outcomes might correspondent with the participants' background and can be applicable to Generation Y female consumers with an inclination to the modest style of dressing and consumption.

Dependability corresponds to the criteria of reliability which addresses the level to which the study can be replicated (Bryman, 2012). This, according to Lincoln and Guba (1984) can be evaluated via matter of auditing approach, where the researcher is encouraged to keep a detailed record of all the stages of the research process. During all phases of the process, close contact with the supervisor was kept in addition to participation in group sessions with fellow classmates. Both supervisor and participants in group session were in subsequent stages of the process asked to reflect on the formulation of the research problem and question, theoretical framework and methodology, transcripts of the interviews, analysis of the data and conclusion.

In a matter of confirmability, objectivity should lay in the analysis and conclusion in order to prevent the researcher from inserting personal opinions and inclination into the findings (Bryman, 2012). Even though criticisms of qualitative data analysis was presented in Bryman (2012) as well as in Moisander and Valtonen (2006) claiming that the interpretation by the researcher might be too subjective, discussion between both of the researchers and supervisor was held in order to prevent this case. Qualitative research as conducted should represent the understanding of the phenomena from the participants' point of view (Bryman, 2012) and therefore, researchers put a great emphasis into the objective interpretation of the data

according to literature framework and empirical observation done prior to the interviews. All this was done with an assistance and feedback from the thesis supervisor and prior knowledge acquired at the Swedish School of Textiles, the University of Economics in Prague and Istituto Europeo di Design. This was accompanied by extensive theoretical research done in fields of self-identity, femininity, symbolic consumption and concept of the dress and body during early stages of writing the thesis.

4 Analysis and findings

The following chapter uses previous literature to discuss the findings drawn from the interviews conducted with nine women. The main themes, ‘modest style consumption’, ‘personal style and the connection to femininity’, and ‘the dressed self’ are presented and further divided into sub-chapters.

4.1 Modest style consumption

“It all rests on a simple principle: if you are invested in the things you own, you’ll naturally need fewer of them. A win-win for the planet and people who make this industry possible.”

(RŪH COLLECTIVE, 2017)

As RŪH Collective, one of the brands offering modest style garments, states on their web pages, well thought through consumption and investment into the clothing of high quality just confirm the importance of the relationship between people and their possession, which acts as a crucial contributor to one’s identity (Belk, 1988). Even though our research is not focused on sustainability per se, the quote aptly illustrates the way how our participants consume or aim to consume fashion. In Hegel’s theory, the choice of dress is perceived as an external form of the self and it is clear that women may make use of clothing as a tool to build their perception of themselves and who they are. Fashion consumption, therefore, does not need to be an outcome of pre-existing self-desires as it is often assumed but rather used for its structure (Woodward, 2007). As our participants all expressed their concerns about sustainability issues, they try to address it through the effort to decrease their overall consumption and acquire a status of slow fashion customer.

In an age span from 25 to 35 years old, respondents interviewed are currently students at universities, recently graduates or working full time. Coming from different backgrounds, seven out of nine participants have an active relation to fashion, whether because of running a fashion blog, studying fashion design or management at the University or simply because of their work commitments within the fashion industry at the moment. Brita, one of two participants that are currently not involved in any aspect of the fashion industry, even considers herself as “the worst fashionista”. After her Industrial Design studies she had an opportunity to work on her master thesis project at one of the Dutch wearable technology studios, where she got a deeper insight into the production of garments and after seeing the craftsmanship behind it, she admits that she looks at fashion from a different angle than before. Child pedagogy student Enni confessed that even though she is interested in fashion, she have neither studied it nor followed any fashion related platforms and apart from working shortly in fashion retail in the past, she is involved in conversations about fashion mostly through her friends studying either fashion design or fashion management.

When asking our respondents if they perceive themselves as fashion conscious, all respondents except Dorota, who sees herself as an average customer with a bit of fashion knowledge, think about themselves as conscious in some way. What is different are the explanations behind their opinions. Frieda, Great and Brita think about themselves as conscious in a more sustainable and eco-friendly manner, while Anneli and Hana think about fashion consciousness as being informed and interested in latest fashion news and trends in general.

***Brita:** I am aware that you can buy a nice shirt for five euros but you always have to ask yourself, “why is this shirt only five euros?”. If you can buy something so cheap then at some point in the production chain, someone or some business has been exploited.*

Iris thinks that overall she pays much attention to fashion, but also adds that she is only a bit aware of the environmental impacts and issues that are present in the fashion industry. Camilla, the only fashion designer among our sample, observed that she is so conscious to the point, that she is against fashions’ whole philosophy of creating new trends and believes that fashion industry would go bankrupt if it was only for her.

To get a deeper understanding of how the modest style is consumed by our attendants, questions about their overall fashion consumption were asked as first. From the information derived from the interviews, we can see the prevailing pattern of thinking sustainable while purchasing fashion, which reflects on almost none impulsive purchases done among our participants in the last months and the frequency of buying new clothes. Some of our participants even mentioned that shopping is not their favourite activity and they prefer other activities even if travelling.

***Iris:** Not very often. I do not really like the shopping itself, for example, I never shop when I am travelling, I just want to be all set with outfits when arriving and do other things when I am in a new city or place.*

However Dorota admitted that she might be purchasing new clothes every week, she pointed out that high possibility of effectively disposing of her unwanted clothes is one of the factors considered when making a purchase. This shows that Dorota occasionally shops for clothing that she is may not aspire to create a deep personal relationship with. Mentioned this, we can see it as a contrast to Greta and Enni, who on the other hand, pick the garments they buy very carefully in order to keep them in their closets as long as possible. Camilla purchases approximately once every two weeks and the rest of the participants once in a month or even more sporadically. Moreover, the prevailing motif of purchasing clothes because of conviction that they will make a suitable fit into attendants’ individual style, confirms the belief that consumption of women participating in our study is often very well thought through and interest in fashion is rooted deeper than just in following and consuming latest trends. This being mentioned, we can see that our participants are not only being modest and decent in a choice of their dress but as well in the way how they consume them.

4.1.1 Views on sustainability

Sustainability is a topic that our respondents all think about, but admit their consumption is not always 100 percent sustainable. Whether is it because of financial situation (Camilla, Greta) or doubts if the company is not just creating a marketing strategy out of it (Dorota, Enni and Anneli). Anneli also relates her sustainable thinking to ethical issues as she is vegan and does not like to buy leather products, but rather look for more animal-friendly alternatives

such as a pair of vegan leather Dr Martens shoes that she purchased recently. Thus, we can see the motif of Anneli's ethical consumption not only throughout what she eats but as well what she dresses herself in. The fact that shoes were made out of vegan leather and hence in line with her identity just supported her decision to purchase as she could easily adapt them as "hers".

Enni, as well as Brita, have both unfavourable approaches towards fast-fashion and do not shop their clothes at fast fashion retailers, which might indicate their desire to avoid negative symbolic consumption of fast fashion brands as they do not wish to belong to their out-group (Banister and Hogg, 2007). Even though Brita admits that it is sometimes annoying to look for a particular garment knowing that she can easily find it at fast fashion chain, she feels good about her attitude and mentions that she would even feel guilty after making a purchase at this kind of stores. In Brita's case, she feels like her desired self is not being met when purchasing items from fast fashion retailers as her aspirations are to consume sustainable and high-quality garments. Frieda feels that sustainability is a very important criterion when purchasing clothes and she believes that it should concern every consumer regardless the particular interest in fashion. By herself working in fashion, she is committed to making a change in the industry for better and less polluted environment.

Frieda: I do not know like if I purchase something I really look for, that is for me, it is fine but it means to me that it is also good for the environment, a bit more friendly.

Iris thinks that her purchase is only sometimes influenced by sustainability as she claims that it is often too complicated to find trustable sources and obtain information about how the particular garment is produced. Hana is the only respondent that does not take sustainability as a factor when making a purchase and however she is aware of the sustainability issues, it is not her criteria to look for more sustainable products, and she considers the ethical and local production of her garments only as a nice bonus. From her words we might assume that Hana does not find sustainability issues to be a value close enough to her identity and moreover, she confessed that she rarely questions the sustainability statements released by the companies assuming that "it cannot be that bad".

All respondents except one unanimously agreed on preferring quality over quantity and the majority of them think about themselves as a certain type of slow fashion customer or on the way to becoming one. This indicates that they strive to present themselves in clothing which corresponds with their mindsets and reflect their opinions and attitudes. Iris had minor troubles with formulating her answer when asking about her preference of quality over quantity.

Iris: No, not really since you never know before years have passed. Some of my H&M garments have lasted longer than garments from WHYRED or ACNE.

Hana believes that for her, the slow fashion movement might have come with an age and better financial situation and sees her slow fashion involvement in giving out her old clothes to her daughters. On the other hand, Frieda mentions that even though she tries to be, she sometimes buys her clothes at low price point retailers such as Weekday because of her financial situation at the moment. She believes in herself as a slow fashion customer because she keeps her belongings longer, as well as Enni and Greta, who likes to care about her clothes and get them repaired when damaged. Purchasing quality clothing was not only perceived as better for the environment, but their value for the participants was significantly higher. According to Belk (1988), the more intimate the relationship between the person and the possession, the more care and attention tend to be invested into it.

***Enni:** I am really against fast fashion if I can say it out loud (Laughs). I also like to give away clothes or sell them but have not done that lately, I guess I choose my pieces so ... yeah, I get keen on them so I do not really get rid of them that often.*

Brita, Greta and Dorota consider their amount of clothes as too high for a slow fashion customer but point out that shopping at secondhand stores is something that they really enjoy. From their words, it is obvious that they are not particularly interested in vintage style clothing but rather persuade it as a form of sustainable consumption and like to mix original and one of a kind piece into their own styles (Gregson et al., 2001). Second-hand shopping can be therefore seen as a value close to the participants' self-concept.

***Brita:** I think I still have too many clothes to consider myself a slow fashion customer but if we also consider that most of it are second hand, then I would say... I do not know, is it also slow consumption? If yes, then I would say yes. I do not buy that many stuff anymore and when I do, I always look at the quality and where it is made.*

4.1.2 Trend engagement

Speaking about trends, Camilla felt that she does not follow them at all as she has not changed her style for approximately seven years, adding that since she discovers what she likes, she is not influenced by them very much. Frieda explains that her relation to trends is not very strong and she is not that easily influenced but she admits that she likes to adapt new menswear styles and features into her wardrobe. Similar to Dorota, she mentions that somehow, she even feels annoyed by trends because they can be seen on so many people and therefore she prefers not to wear them. This indicates that Frieda and Dorota both want to differentiate themselves from others who wear trends by rather dressing in a unique way that will more accurately reflect their personalities. Few of our participants were strict on the issue, that even though they follow trends, they do not compromise and adapt only trends or their parts, which fits into their individual styles.

However Iris mentioned that she has a few staple pieces in her wardrobe that she has been wearing throughout several years, she likes to mix them up with new ones and admits she is very influenced by trends, currently being “into” the whole 70’s vibe used as an inspiration for the latest Gucci collection. We can assume that Iris is interested in consuming the whole lifestyle and symbols that she perceives as trendy rather than particular pieces of clothing seen as latest trends. Therefore, she probably strikes for identification with overall themes influencing fashion that she tries to interpret them throughout her style and looks rather than particular garments. Adding the fact that she does not consider functional utilities as of great importance when purchasing, her consumption is seen as noticeably influenced by symbolic concepts created by brands within which she can recognise her multiple selves and social identities (Hines and Quinn, 2007).

Dorota’s wardrobe is very variable, but she stresses that she would not buy any trend if it did not suit her overall style, giving tweed suit jackets as an example of the trend she lately adapted. Greta, for instance, admits that in the past when she was more active as a fashion blogger, she recognised trends more easily than nowadays. What she still feels good about when speaking about trends are colours, as well as Hana and Anneli, who after seeing and documenting one of the fashion weeks, adapted bright red colour into her style and bought a pair of red designer socks. As Anneli is currently graduating from her fashion studies, she tends to follow and recognise trends but does not act upon them heavily.

Anneli: I follow fashion and I follow a lot of trends of course but I do not act upon them too much. But I can see that trends probably affect or have an impact on what I kind of find aesthetically nice when looking at people on the streets and when going to the stores. I can see that what have been at catwalks is now in retail and yeah, so I follow, I follow trends, I can say.

An interesting point of view was brought into the discussion when asking about trends in the interview with Brita. Together with Enni, she finds herself not so trend sensitive and does not read any fashion magazines or websites, but believes that everybody is somehow influenced by them. Brita mentioned the brand COS as a representative of the style that majority of women have nowadays in common and thinks that it is very easy to look fashionable nowadays compared to the past. She continues with a thought that it might be because of the fact that currently, it is not so difficult to find styles that are fashionable and appealing to a broader public at the same time.

4.1.3 Elements of personal value

For our respondents, individual personal values are of great importance when consuming fashion as they are deeply rooted in our identities and clothing as a non-verbal tool of communication is considered to be a representative of them (Workman and Freeburg, 2000). Individual forms of consumption of our participants have in common the way how they look at the clothes they purchase. From their responses is clear, that each one of them tries to think twice about the clothing they purchase and the majority of them look first at the quality of the material and finishing of the garment. Anneli and Camilla also mentioned colour black, which is very specific for their style and other participants as Brita or Hana are also prone to buy more subtle colours. Even though both Dorota and Enni prefer brighter colours, they still put a great emphasis on the chosen material, which should according to them be always of non-synthetic origin. Furthermore, fit, pattern design, style and silhouette as important factors are mentioned across the interviews.

Greta's fashion consumption is affected by the style she wears, adding that she always considers if the garment will suit her overall wardrobe. She often looks for the element that will somehow twist the garment and in some way characterise her witty and creative personality. For Greta, dressing in line with her identity is of importance as she carefully selects new fashion pieces which go along with the rest of her wardrobe and by doing it, she presumably tries to display a consistent image of herself.

Greta: Definitely I look if it is something that I am going to actually wear if it is a piece that will suit me and I will feel good in and that it is not some impulsive purchase or some trend that will not even suit me in the end. Then if it fits well into my wardrobe and it is of good material, which I have found out over the last two years ... that I need garments of good quality and of great patterns or something that adds value, that will enhance the garment that it is not just going to be a piece of fabric but rather something that will characterise me somehow.

Frieda is standing behind the movement for natural materials with an addition of buying garments that are not made out of a mixture of different fabrics. As mentioned above, Frieda is very concerned about sustainability and her argument lays in the explanation that apparel is, therefore, easier to dispose of and recycle. Frieda, as well as Hana, does not really care about the brand when being interested in some kind of fashion piece, however, she admits that in the

past, it was one of the factors she was looking at while purchasing. They both mention that price of the garment is not of great importance to them and they are willing to invest in a piece that they like and know will serve them well over years. This can be seen as an example of inconspicuous consumption, adding the fact that in contemporary society, the relationship between brands and conspicuousness is weakening and the brands are declining in power. This change could according to Chernev and Gal (2011) be attributed to the increase in alternative means of self-expression. By ignoring the price point when purchasing new fashion items and considering other factors instead, both Frieda and Hana take more into account their personal values such as quality of the material and desired fit.

Iris, for instance, does not feel as determining one value, taking the garment in a broader concept instead.

Iris: It is the whole appearance, hard to break that down into what is more important than something else. I would say ... something that does my eye happy and that would include colour, pattern, overall design and fit.

Together with above-mentioned elements, the functionality of the clothing worn by the participants is seen as important and takes various shapes throughout the interviews. Frieda, for instance, mentions that she appreciates jackets with pockets inside which, as she points out, are not commonly found in womenswear. The issue with pockets is one of the early examples of gender dress divisions. Burman (2002, pp.460) explains that "in a self-fulfilling embodiment of gender difference, women's delineation and management of their own bodies in social space was limited by their lack of opportunity to touch their own bodies, by proxy, through their pockets."

Dorota, on the other hand, often considers the functionality of the garments in relation to wearing them while biking or in the rain. This made her, for instance, give up on buying skirts, as they were not practical in terms of performing her everyday tasks. Hana and Enni have similar answers, pointing out that clothing which gives their body free movement is of great importance. From the discussion is clear that the majority of the participants value functionality when dressing, and focus on clothing which does not restrict their bodies or actions but give them the ability to act and do things which they like.

Timeless in relation to clothing which is defined as "not affected by the passage of time or changes in fashion" (Oxford Dictionaries | English, 2017), is a term that most of our participant can relate to as they talked about timelessness being one of the features that they like their clothing to obtain. Again, the emphasis is put on the material of high quality, the durability of the garment in general and styles that they can wear for more than just one season. Some people may relate timelessness with widely recognised examples such as little black dress, white shirt or nude pumps. In contrast to this, women in our respondents group perceive timeless clothing as a quality that is subjective and may differ from person to person. Especially Dorota starts with an assumption that timeless clothing as recognized by public is something that is not important to her, and she usually wears her white shirt only to job interviews and in the past, to school exams³. Moreover, she is aware that her wardrobe is made of clothing for different occasions but admits having garments that she defines timeless according to her own style.

³ the exams at Slovak universities are often oral and therefore students are encouraged to dress more representatively

For Greta, timelessness is a decisive criterion as she thinks that trends are often “made with hot needle”, meaning that the material is very often of poor quality. Therefore, she prefers to buy timeless clothes from more exclusive materials as she believes that the garment will last her longer. This also applies to Brita, who finds timeless clothing as important and she appreciates that the pieces themselves are of better quality rather than trends, which are often produced from cheap and not very durable fabrics. Here, she also argues that one of the reasons she likes to buy second-hand clothing is that the quality of materials is often higher.

Brita: ... what I do like about vintage clothing is ... that those nice materials and textiles like silk or whatever are hard to find nowadays or you need to pay a lot of money for them if you want to buy them new ... but you can buy very nice vintage silk pieces or garments with embroidery which are more expensive to get in the store.

Timeless pieces instead of trends is also a theme in the interview with Camilla, who is very convinced about her style and considers the clothes that she bought five years ago as still very contemporary to her.

Camilla: I am very convinced about the style. It is not about a trend anymore, so ... I made a study on myself and I really focus on what I like so every combination of what I do, even with clothing that I bought five years ago, it is still very contemporary for me, of course, not for ... not in relation to anything particular. Just for me and for my taste, I would have bought the same things even a month ago.

In terms of timelessness, Anneli and Frieda agree on leaning towards more staple, classic silhouettes and cuts, which can be worn anytime throughout their lives and will never be outdated. Iris thinks about timeless garments as created in terms of eternal elegance and good design, seeing herself being interested in timeless clothing more and more throughout the years.

From words of our participants, it is obvious that timeless clothing is something they all value. They are ready to invest more in fashion garments that come from eternal, yet stylish patterns and are made out of high-quality materials that will last and they can, therefore, enjoy them for a longer time. As previously mentioned, we can see a pattern of modesty not only in our participants' style but as well in their consumption as they strive towards adding rather less, but more durable garments into their wardrobes.

4.1.4 Participants' perception of brands

Brands play an essential part in our consumption and fashion industry in general. Already McCracken (1987) explained the powerful impact brands have when used as carriers for symbolic consumption and how they assist the consumers with constructing and maintaining their identity. Hence, questions about brands and participants' views on their role in their fashion consumption could not be abandoned in our research.

The majority of our respondents admitted that they follow particular brands and fashion designers on social media and often use Instagram as an inspiration for their fashion consumption. Iris as well as Anneli, who follow their favourite brands COS and Acne Studios on Instagram as well as Facebook, point out that overall brand aesthetics and visual communication of a brand play an important role for them.

Iris: Yes, very, since it is what creates the whole vibe around a brand.

Anneli does not see herself just buying her clothes but rather identify herself with the values she perceives from the garments and thinking about every element of their presence on the market from marketing communication to store setting as very appealing.

Anneli: ... all the marketing campaigns ACNE is doing I really like so I think it is the whole package not only the clothing but I really want to consume these brands I especially like because they have done the whole thing so well.

On the other hand, when asking about her presence in any of the brand communities, she noticed that apart from following their activity online, she does take part neither in discussions or marketing campaigns directed to customer nor using branded hashtags on social media. The only way that she can see her contributing to brand communities would be when she would have negative feelings towards a company that is being very unethical in their production process. When discussing involvement in brand communities with the rest of the participants, none of them expressed any particular interest or needs to belong or participate in them. Therefore, we can conclude that being part of a certain group or community is not a personal value of great importance to any of them.

Another participant with a strong relationship to the COS brand is Hana, who describes her feeling when first entering the COS store as a “revelation”. According to her, everything from presentation in store to the branded magazine to the way of packaging appeal to her, and she can feel herself identifying with the brand without even investigating the brand’s values or history.

Overall, our participants seem to have a positive relationship with brands offering minimalistic and “Scandinavian style” clothing as COS, Acne Studios, Filippa K and Ganni, but as well to Asian fashion designers like Issey Miyake and Rei Kawakubo. Greta, Dorota and Hana, who all have in common running a fashion blog, mentioned that they often shop from selected exclusive collections from fast-fashion chains such as H&M Conscious and Zara Studio, which are usually made from recycled or higher quality materials than the rest of the garments offered by these brands. Their inclination to retailers that commonly offer newest trends might be an unconscious indicator of their desire to present new trends through the more environmentally friendly way to their readers. Furthermore, both Dorota and Iris who expressed their inclination to different colours agreed on &otherstories and Henrik Vibskov as definitely being the brands they like to consume. What is interesting, Camilla and Anneli also mentioned designer Henrik Vibskov, who is known by using bold and often bright colours in his collections and marketing communication, even though both participants almost exclusively dress in black clothing. From their answers is obvious that both of them are strong about the argument over their choice of dressing in black, and by accepting and even favouring the brand that does not particularly matches their way of clothing, they show a very open-minded and liberate view on fashion.

Frieda and Brita, whose consumption is very influenced by sustainability and who are interested in finding out more about each step in brand’s value chain, rather picked small local brands as their favourite, mentioning, for instance, German 22/4 Hommes Femmes, US Reformation or Dutch Nobody Has To Know. Enni is the only participant that apart from Acne Studios and Rei Kawakubo’s brand Comme des Garçons, mentioned street style brands such as Gosha Rubchinskyi or Daniel Palillo.

4.1.5 Other clues influencing consumption

Brita, even though she is not so much aware of branding or marketing of the mentioned brands, finds the store atmosphere and interior of the store as an important factor for her purchase decision and pointed out that she likes when there is a great amount of space in the retail area. Well-designed interior and overall brand presentation in the store is something that our respondent agreed on with Dorota mentioning &otherstories as an example of a brand taking the whole shopping experience to another level. Hana stressed the fact that she cannot even see herself entering the store that does not appeal to her from the outside. Greta, as she does not like to spend that much time shopping, tries to carefully select the stores she visits and thinks that simple and clear visual communication is something that brands offering clothes that she is interested in distinguishing themselves from the rest.

Greta: I do not spend that much time shopping nowadays so I select where to go and which stores to visit. I prefer the ones with soul, which have a higher individual value for me as for instance Misenska 10⁴, where you know that all the products are produced locally. These are the stores that even though you go there without any particular need of spending money, you know that you are going to buy something because these products will last and you are not harming the environment that much. Moreover, I feel that every customer is an individual for them and you can have a conversation with the retail personnel which reminds me of my childhood when I was growing up in the village and everybody knew each other and almost all the products sold were produced locally.

Greta, as well as the rest of our participants, seems to have a very positive relation to brands that are not only serving her with functional utilities but also with the symbolic ones and therefore we can see an importance of recognizing multiple selves and social identities of our respondents in the context of their fashion consumption (Hines and Quinn, 2007).

4.2 Personal style and the connection to femininity

Clothing is a part of the construction of an individual's identity and plays an important role in gendering individuals (Crane, 2000). One's external appearance is also thought to provide information about an individual's internal self (Crak, 1993). As today's society becomes increasingly visually mediated and commodified, it also means that having one's own style is compulsory. Jolles and Tarrat (2012) describe it as being the core component of our self-expression and self-realisation. By only looking at television, we are met by contemporary mythologies about expression, transformation and identity as evidence of their cultural influence. Cronin (see Jolles and Tarrat, 2012, pp.2), describes this cultural mandate to self-express as the ideology of "self as project", in "which consumerism and self-styling make possible the ... enlightenment ideal of personal authenticity".

Concerning the style of the participants, they could all describe it in similar ways, for instance, oversized, minimalistic and timeless were all important characteristics of their personal style. Anneli, for example, stated that she likes relaxed and oversized clothing and explains:

Anneli: I want to feel comfortable in the clothing and the way that I feel comfortable is that I have some air you know, it is not skin tight.

⁴ concept store with selected second-hand pieces, locally produced cosmetics and accessories in Prague

To not wear tight clothing draws the attention away from the body, making no feminine body shapes emphasised. Through Anneli's dress, she communicates her personality and showcases her identity, as well as distinguishes herself from the traditional feminine appearance. Brita explains that she does not have a "girlish" wardrobe and that she does not consider herself as a girlish person, even in relation to make-up she is more subtle. Brita through not only her choice of clothing but also in her usage of make-up does not try to match the ideal of femininity but rather has a liberating approach. Concerning her expression of not perceiving herself as a girly person, Young (2005, pp.6) makes a distinction between being "female" and being "feminine", in the sense of complying with the social conventions and constraints of femininity. Brita does not perceive herself as being feminine but rather "boyish" and she goes on explaining that as she is currently not in a relationship, she feels the need of dressing more feminine. Despite Brita being aware of the gendered aspects of her way of dressing, this last account suggests that she moves between dressing more and less feminine and that her choice of dress is context-dependent. The fact that in this situation, she feels the need to dress more feminine can be related to the male gaze, the power relations which are inscribed within the gendered act of looking (Mulvey, 1975). This can also be discussed in relation to how females construct their own appearances in a way a man would consider sexual desire to look like (Holland, 2004). The term Brita used to describe herself, not "girlish", symbolises the more traditional feminine, used to describe women in rather outdated stereotyped versions. It also suggests that Brita's way of dressing is an important factor in the construction of herself as less feminine. Enni also used the term "girly" when referring to that she has never dressed in anything skin-tight or "girly". Her style is more inspired by street style with the usage of t-shirts with logos and sweatshirts. Enni also described that her style changes depending on her mood and that she always incorporates a touch of something interesting to her looks as well. Enni further points out that she is not easily influenced when it comes to her style of dressing:

Enni: ...I always had my own style and was not easily influenced; I wanted to be different than others.

Enni expresses a desire of being different than others. By others she means women dressing in stereotypical ways as portrayed in fashion, such as dressing in skin tight, flashy and "girly" clothing. Enni chooses specific brands and clothing items to differentiate her from certain women and unfavourable groups, creating for herself a feeling of uniqueness.

During a discussion about the participants' style, the choice of colour was brought up, where the majority of the participants expressed comfort of dressing in black clothing. Camilla, for instance, whose style of dressing is characterised by layering, describes her usage of black clothing as a way of enhancing the shape and material of the garment, while Anneli states that she found herself feeling more comfortable in black. To be taken more seriously, Brita and Enni found darker colours to be suitable. Black and dark colours create a barrier between itself and the world, creating comfort for the wearer. Dressing in black also constructs a certain image to others, which is in contrast to the traditional feminine pink which Williamson (2001, pp.145) found in her study. Williamson further argues that women are not "immobilised by the paradox of femininity", but rather chose to draw attention to their differences instead.

People's clothing and other style markers contain various messages as self-image, attractiveness, class and status, which are being transmitted through a number of interlocking

sets (Hebdige, 1979). The participants' style and choice of dress communicate an attitude that is not associated with the ideals of normative femininity.

4.2.1 The body and the choice of modest dress

Camilla's choice of dressing modestly was due to her feeling of not being satisfied with her clothing, and by studying herself, her body and personality, she found the modest style in terms of minimalistic, dark clothing and layered approach as right for her. In Camilla's case, she recognised that she had grown out of certain kind of clothes, which no longer could sustain particular images. The clothing of Camilla can also be seen as a material mean through which Camilla brings aspects of the self to the surface. Through the process of layering and making different combinations, it is possible for Camilla to mobilise different facets of the self through one outfit as Woodward (2007) describes it.

Frieda explains her choice of modest style as following:

***Frieda:** I have never really shown any skin, I always liked boy clothes more. I was even dressing mostly as a guy when I was a teenager... I still buy my pants from menswear because I just like the cut better and I have smaller, more narrow hips so they fit me. And why not. They are mostly even cheaper and higher quality than womenswear.*

Frieda's style is a mix of both masculine and feminine elements. By incorporating feminine elements into her rather "boyish" look she will still appear feminine and she is in control over what feminine side she would like to show and in what extent, for instance through make-up, hairstyle, shoes and other details in her overall look. The usage of menswear for women is connected with gaining masculine characteristics and with conveying a political or cultural statement about gender equality. The usage of masculine clothing can also be used to express individual identity as in the case with Frieda, Anneli and Greta. To dress cross genders can be likewise seen as an example of norm violation.

Anneli brings forward the aspect of starting to dress in a modest style as she became older, in connection with her search for minimal and timeless pieces as she does not enjoy purchasing new items too often. She continues that this way of dressing and the choice of dress based on its materials and functions have come with age and the knowledge that it has an impact on her comfort and the environment. Hana explains her reason for adopting the modest style as a natural evolvement due to her age and financial situation. Furthermore, although she feels like she has nothing to hide, she discovered that clothing which is not tight or necessarily exposing the parts of the female body can also obtain attractive features. In this sense, modest type of clothing was chosen in terms of coping with the transition in age and subsequently finding ways of taking control of her self-image. To change one's style of clothing can offer individuals the realisation of themselves in new ways.

Brita's choice to dress in this style was due to the comfort it offers and the fact that she does not see it as a current trend but rather something widely accepted. The freedom of movement that these types of garments offer the body was as well mentioned in the discussion.

***Brita:** Like not too tight, not putting a lot of attention to watch your feminine shapes ... and modest fashion is like fashion that is acceptable in a different context and it is comfortable...*

Greta explains her reason for adopting modest style as a desire to showcase her personality rather than her body. When she was searching for her place in the society and looking for her style, the stereotypical showing of femininity through cleavages and emphasis on the waist was never “her” as she explains. Greta rather wanted to make a statement about the person she is and the personality she poses. She goes on explaining that she sees herself as a strong individual and that she therefore never had the urge to emphasise her femininity through her dress, which is also a reason why she incorporates menswear into her style. Greta takes distance from the traditional feminine look by borrowing elements of masculine traits and models of appearance. As she describes, this choice of hers can create a feeling of power and strength. In Sheppard’s (1989) study, a similar situation was described as woman’s choice of wearing a suit and blouse with long sleeves and high neck in order to not “provoke or play” on her sexuality, stating that she does not want to “use” the fact that she is a woman in her favour. In the same study, a number of women referred to techniques to de-emphasize their breasts with help of tailored jackets and high-neck blouses in order to hide their femininity and display more masculine traits.

The choice to adopt modest style was among our participants not made due to their insecurities about their bodies, as clothing can be used as camouflage to hide a collection of sins (Chapkis, 1986). Participants claimed that they have nothing to hide and they found the modest style clothing creating, revealing and concealing aspects of their identity. Clothing was among the participants used to reflect and initiate changes in their self-perception or their bodies. The participants also expressed a great deal of control and care over their looks.

4.3 The dressed self

To feel comfortable in the clothing one wears is brought up when asking if the participants dress according to the occasion and in case, whether they always dress in line with their style. Frieda mentions that in order for her to feel comfortable in her clothing, she has to “stick to herself”. She usually puts on clothing which fits her rather than dressing according to an occasion. Dressing in clothing you know you look good in and feel comfortable in, is a way of establishing “ontological security” as explained by Giddens (1991); this as a sense of security in who we are as an individual's and knowledge that the particular clothing item is “us”. In this case, the relationship between dressing and identity becomes apparent (Goodman, Knotts and Jackson, 2007) with a linkage between the tangibility of putting on clothing and the intangible of one’s identity. While talking with Camilla, she mentions that attending events where she cannot wear her usual clothing she rather “escapes” from, adding that dressing in line with her style is of great importance for her. This is an example of how important clothing is when performing identity, as particular styles and textures form a part of a woman’s sense of who she is as well as who she can be through her clothing. To dress uncomfortably, individuals develop what Eco (1986) describes as “epidemic self-awareness”. We become aware of the limits and boundaries of our bodies when wearing clothing that is not so comfortable. Tseëlon (1997, pp.61) notes that women’s sense of self is a fragile one, and certain dress can either bolster confidence or make one acutely self-conscious and uncomfortable. When we experience clothing we wear as comfortable and when the relationship between the body and dress is “normal”, the dress becomes an extension of the body and is like a second skin.

On the other hand, Iris and Dorota expressed that they wear different clothing depending on occasions. Iris confesses that she tend to adjust her dress according to the situation but at the

same time she likes to have her “own take on it”. Dorota wears different clothing to work and events than she normally does in her spare time. This could be seen as a split between two identities which she is managing daily. Banim and Guy (2000, pp.203) argue that women “use clothes to integrate various aspects of their identities and bodies in order to create the identities they felt were appropriate to the perceived demands of any given situation”. Even when Dorota toned down her clothing for work, she adds that sometimes her colleagues find her dress still too experimental. In this case, the social pressure encourages Dorota to stay within the bounds of what is considered “appropriate” dress for situations as work and social events. Choice of the dress is made within the specific context (Tseëlon, 1997), where different occasions and situations constrain dress choices, which make us calculate and deliberate in the way we dress.

Dorota, who nowadays lives in Denmark but originally comes from Slovakia, expressed that during her visits in her home country, people were due to her style looking at her “like she would come from another world”. Meanwhile, she continues that people in Denmark are more open to different styles and ways of expressing one’s self because of the great amount of tourists and expats living in the country. One’s dress and body is a symbol of the culture in which is it present (Douglas, 1973), and as Dorota currently lives in Denmark, she feels that her way of dressing does not cohere with the way of how people dress in Slovakia.

Greta describes that she dresses according to the occasion and that her change of dress has a connection to her professional life as an actress, where she plays different roles while wearing different costumes, which makes her see every occasion as an opportunity to put on a “costume” and therefore create a different look. Through different “costumes”, Greta can express her different identities. De Beauvoir (1952) explains that how women see their own bodies is dependent upon what their project is; meaning that the person they hope they can be is dependent upon the occasion they are dressing for. Dittmar (1992) explains that by purchasing goods, individuals acquire a different persona. Through Greta’s choice of “costume” she chooses an assortment of the self and by dressing in particular clothing, she can become a different person.

Woman’s sense of self can become closely entangled with how other individuals see her, and she can start to associate herself only with the external self (Tseëlon, 1995, pp.38). This was not the case in our study, as the majority of participants admit that different activities and occasions did not influence their style and their way of dressing that much. They were not concerned about how other people would perceive them, but were confident and secure in their identity and found their choice of dress as of expressing themselves and their lifestyle.

4.3.1 Choice of dress in order to be taken seriously

Brita mentions that she has adopted the colour black in her dress when she strives to be taken more seriously. This was after working for a wearable technology brand, where she became influenced by her colleagues and the subtle colours of the collections. Another example extracted from the interview with Brita, where the environment has had an impact on her way of dressing, was when she went on a trip to Colombia. As she explains, the style present in the country characterised by short and tight clothing influenced her in a way that she felt a desire to start dressing in more sexy and colourful clothing.

Dorota explains that when she wants to be taken seriously, she dresses in more masculine clothing, wearing for instance suit jacket and white shirt. Dorota brings up that she likes combining more serious clothing items such as suit jacket with jeans or t-shirt. Adoption of tailored clothing for women has to do with the orientation of women's bodies to the context of the male workplace and its habitus (Entwistle, 2000). The suit works in order to cover the female body and reduce its sexual associations, and the jacket which Dorota wears, covers the most sexualized zone, the breasts. Wearing a suit does not entirely reduce the sexual associations as women bring to their style a baggage of sexual meanings, which are part of the culturally established definition of femininity (Entwistle, 2000). As brought forward by Brownmiller (1984, pp.101), women desiring to be taken seriously have difficulties dressing, as feminine clothing is not usually designed to project a serious attitude, and over-sexuality takes away one's authority (Toth, 1997).

Iris expresses that she sees herself as her own brand, so to take herself serious and dress appropriate and consequent with her working life is of importance for her. In her case, clothing she wears projects values which are of importance in her work environment, as well as appearing confident and in control (Banim and Guy, 2000). Enni, who describes her style as more casual, aims to dress more formal when wanting to be taken seriously by leaving out printed t-shirts and sweatshirts. She would not wear a formal jacket she says, but rather dress in *"fresh jeans and maybe some Dr Martens shoes and white t-shirt and a nice sweater."*

The majority of the participants in relation to the discussion mentioned that one's behaviour and body language is of great importance when aspiring to be taken seriously; this as when one chooses to dress in a certain item, one has to look and act in an appropriate manner in order to make the body meet the expectations of the clothing.

4.3.2 Dressing for self-confidence and power

For the wearer, a certain way of dressing can give a sense of power and self-confidence. This has been addressed by feminist scholars (such as Bordo, 2003) stating that women can "achieve empowerment by accommodating dominant cultural norms of beauty" (Tyner and Ogle, 2009, pp.108). An opposite view to the issue is that women can achieve liberation and empowerment through transgressive appearances, whereby women reconstruct aesthetic practices and codes which are considered mainstream (Tyner and Ogle, 2009). In this case, power is gained through manipulation of one's appearance to symbolically illustrate one's so-called "otherness" as Tyner and Ogle (2009, pp.110) specify. Furthermore, clothing can be seen as a powerful weapon of control and dominance (Wilson, 1992) as power is inscribed in objects and clothing, and in turn to their owners and wearers (Baudrillard, 1981; Tseëlon, 1994). Frieda explains how the choice of her style makes her feel.

***Frieda:** I feel that when I have found a piece I like, I am much more self-confident. The more comfortable you feel, the more power you have.*

Feeling comfortable in certain clothing reflects Frieda's way of expressing herself and being perceived by others. An individual's behaviour is directed towards enhancing and protecting one's self-esteem and doing so by purchasing products which are believed to be in line with one's identity (Banister and Hogg, 2001). As clothing can signalise a significant amount of meanings, the wearer can be perceived, as in this case, more powerful.

Anneli: *I do not like to show my skin and I do not even want to show my arms if I do not need to. So like, the more I cover, the more comfortable I feel.*

Anneli points out that her choice to cover her body is not due to other people's opinions but rather for her own comfort. By dressing in a modest style, one can feel to be given more control over their selfhood and their sexuality. Hana explains her way of seeing modest style as a way for women to look elegant and operate comfortable in clothing which is not necessary tight and exposes parts of the body.

Hana: *... sometimes I feel even sexier when I am wearing a shirt buttoned up to the highest button.*

She moreover explains that she feels equally comfortable in a man's shirt and wide pants. Clothing does not only allow women to express their inner selves but it as well enacts as an internal and behavioural change in women. Wearing a tailored suit, for instance, can help to create a confident, in-control and powerful woman (Woodward, 2007) but as Hana has found comfort in a masculine dress while wearing it, her body and gender will always be outside the norm "masculine" (Entwistle, 2000). On the other hand, Brita showed an opposite view regarding this matter.

Brita: *I think if you want to feel better then it is always a good thing to dress more feminine. It really has an impact, unconsciously ... if you wear an outfit that you feel good in, that fits and suits you well, then you are much more empowered.*

Dressing the body in more feminine matter frames the body as a powerful form of physical and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Dressing "more feminine" as Brita says, might mean different things as dressing in a matter in which women use their sexual attractiveness can be a channel to achieve social empowerment.

Brita explained that she sometimes enjoys dressing more feminine, pointing out that to dress in a more "sexy outfit" does not make a woman "a slut". She feels respect towards women who dare to wear what they like, especially if the clothing is more revealing and sexy. She moreover adds that if one is happy with their body, it is no shame to show it. When attending different occasions, Brita explains that she will change her dress from what she normally wears:

Brita: *... if it is a formal occasion then I will dress more properly and also if I go out, I would maybe dress more fancy and sexy?*

Dressing in provocative and sexy clothing is the opposite of dressing in a modest way. Britta's choice of dressing in more feminine and revealing clothing can be seen as a tool of liberation for her, as well as the pleasure of being seen and attracting attention, as she otherwise dresses rather "boyish" and modest. The provocative dress can also be related to showing the female body in order to get the feeling of being a woman (Dickson and Pollack, 2000).

4.3.3 Behaviour of others depending on one's dress

In connection with the previous question, participants had been asked if they have been treated differently in various occasions depending on the way they dress. Anneli points out that due to her style, people occasionally found her “scary” as she dresses in dark clothing, and that they sometimes even find her unapproachable. Greta has met with similar reactions, where men have instantly become scared of her because of her way of dressing to later see, that despite her looks and lack of femininity in her dress, she is rather friendly than egoistic and self-confident as her modest style according to her words might indicate. Though characteristics of different clothing, the modest style, in this case, the wearer can be “transformed” as Greta opens up new possibilities for her feminine self. The external appearance of Greta resisted many ideas about the traditional femininity but she continued to use other accoutrements of it in order to maintain her own feeling of femininity.

Another interesting aspect brought to the discussion is Camilla's answer, whereby she describes how people have approached her asking if someone forces her to dress the way she does if she is going to a funeral or even if she is a Muslim. Camilla's way of dressing is linked with the stereotypes which people who have expressed these thoughts about her dress might hold. To cover the body and dress in subtle colours is stereotypically linked with the religious dress of Islam, for instance, where one's dress to hide the female body from the male gaze. Frieda also brings forward reactions the way she dresses has caused. While staying in Sweden, she received positive comments while her family in Spain reacted in an opposite way by not understanding her way of dress and seeing her choice of clothing the same as “an old grandpa”. Frieda, in addition, describes this part of her family as more conservative. From the discussion, it is clear that her family shows a more traditional view of femininity and how it should be expressed, as different cultures and societies have different preferences on how gender roles should be played out. Entwistle (2000) describes that the degree to which the body can express itself is dependent upon the location; in a more conservative setting, there are more constraints set around the body and dress. Even though Frieda's family has a certain preference of dress, Frieda does not feel influenced by their comments, except from one time when she was younger and as a result of her cousin misunderstanding her clothes, she started to question her style and further her identity. This matter was as well brought forward by Greta, who felt pressure during her school years to dress like everybody else. She felt that it was expected from her to adjust her style to suit the rest of her peers. As one's peers are part of an individual's in-group, their use of clothing and fashion brands resembles their need of belonging to a certain group. This happens especially during one's teenage years when peers start to gain influence over the individual's clothing choices (Kamaruddin and Mokhlis, 2003).

4.4 Participants' thoughts about the future of modest style

The participants could all agree that the modest style was not just a current trend but rather a form of style, which will during the upcoming times become even more widely adopted and embraced. This was also due to the fact that modest style is connected to other areas within the society and fashion industry, which are at the moment going through significant change.

Frieda: ... I think it is also maybe a bit connected to feminism and also, the music movement, like the electronic scene is kind of, in my eyes, embracing or changing the society, like girls

wearing more sneakers recently or actually since a few years, to go out and all this. I think it is a bigger thing and it will take us even more modest maybe.

Frieda expresses ideas about how the society has changed and how women started to express themselves more freely, and that other areas such as music, embrace these changes and encourage women to be freer in their choice of dress and lifestyle. Brita expressed a similar idea about the future of modest style.

Brita: ... *Women here (in the Netherlands) are more independent and sophisticated in a way and wearing modest clothing, so not very feminine, equalise the differences between the genders more so I think it will continue.*

Anneli has a similar view regarding the matter:

Anneli: *Already Coco Chanel was wearing trousers and this kind of things so I think these are the steps, in Western culture at least, towards this kind of timelessness and maybe unisex, more unisex way of dressing. So, I really do not think that it is just something that is going to be gone in some years...*

Greta sees the modest style as a conscious movement for women just as when they started to wear trousers. She points out that the increased wave of feminism and the fact that women do not need to prove their position in a man's world anymore is also adopted by fashion. In addition, fashion has lately become a tool to express one's personality rather than being just an accessory. She adds that in a "world full of ruffles and glitters", she sees modest style as a clean and simple option which more people might feel comfortable in.

What is as well brought forward is the fact that the lines between masculinity and femininity are blurring. Both fashion design and retail are adapting to these changes and the participants have a hopeful attitude towards the development in the future.

5 Discussion

The area of interest of this research was to get a better understanding of Generation Y female consumers' fashion preferences as well as how modest style is used when constructing their self-identity and the perception of their femininity. The research was divided into three research questions which will be addressed in the following sections.

From the conducted study it is clear that the participants' choice of adopting a modest style is grounded in their desire for comfortable clothing of high quality, which gives them mobility but also expresses their self-identities. Some of the women even expressed their desire for distancing themselves from traditional femininity, and therefore adopted menswear elements into their styles. Their style was found important for their identities, and the majority stated that they would dress in line with their style for all occasions, as well that their style was not a result of a current trend but rather an outcome of a natural evolvement in their lives.

Modest style as a term was not familiar to the participants from before, but they all agreed that the term as used in the context of our thesis, described their style of rather loose fitted, relaxed and minimalistic clothing. Therefore, we can conclude that they do not consume it as any previously defined direction in terms of different styles and trends, but rather as an

outcome of their personal preferences and intuitive choice. In general, the women were fashion conscious and well aware of their selection of dress, distancing themselves from negative consumption and undesirable brands, materials and fits. Thus, their choice of modest style was not due to insecurities about themselves and their bodies, but rather a way of expressing their personalities and self-confidence.

5.1 Consumption of modest style

The overall modest style consumption patterns among our participants show that it is not only their style but as well the way they choose and purchase products which can be considered as modest and moderate. However according to Lundblad and Davies (2015), there is no industry standard in sustainable fashion definition, the pattern in which they purchase can be according to subjective views of respondents as well as objective conclusions of researchers seen as sustainable, considering the variety of different personal values and desires standing behind their consumption.

In a study about sustainable consumption from 2012 conducted by Jägel et al., the surprisingly low amount of respondents connected their self-identity, product quality and style as of importance for their sustainable consumption. As throughout the years, significant growth in ethical consumption has been spotted among consumers (Lundblad and Davies, 2015), this was not the case in our study as the women in our group expressed opposite point of view when asked about reasons standing behind their consumption. On the other hand, research by Jägel et al (2012) was conducted on a sample of 98 participants while more than half of them was aged 35 and older.

From the answers of our respondents, we may conclude that their choice of style and sustainable consumption are both driven by values and preferences closely related to their selves, such as being comfortable and feeling of self-confidence, and are not compelled by any pressure felt from their peers or sense of belonging. Their desire to stand out and express their personalities through their style and consumption comes from the needs of self-expression rather than looking good for others which indicate that their individual selves are guided rather internally than externally (Lundblad and Davies, 2015).

The motif of very well thought purchase corresponding with participants' individually defined styles, together with an emphasis on durability and quality of the garments' material, and therefore the garment itself confirms findings from the study about sustainable consumption by Lundblad and Davies (2015). In this particular study, participants mentioned these attributes as of importance, and likewise standing behind their preference of sustainable way of shopping. This study was moreover also conducted by the method of semi-structured interviews with 39 respondents, specifically chosen for the purpose of the research. Participants were chosen based on their actions, recommendation from the shop personnel and researchers' own observation in sustainable fashion outlets. Similarities between our study and the one by Lundblad and Davies (2015) can be also found in participants' opinions that this kind of consumption will eventually lead to buying fewer garments in the long run. However, three of our participants mentioned that they still possess more garments that they would like to, overall consumption of all of our respondents can be characterised by preferring quality over quantity and even aim to restrict their fashion purchases in the future. Although most of them admitted that they are very much interested in fashion, they do not consider shopping as a desirable way of spending leisure time and do not have a feeling of

being “enslaved” neither by the need of constant consumption of latest trends nor by the garments they own. The term “enslaved” is in this context used on purpose as the feeling of having might from some people create a feeling of being “slave of own possession” (Fromm, 1976 cited in Wattanasuwan, 2005, pp.183). In addition to this, some of them are already during their purchase thinking beyond their purchase decision, considering the matters in which the garment can be used, as well as reused and disposed of (Bly et al., 2015 in Lundblad and Davies, 2015).

More than half of the women in our study mentioned that they strive for minimalistic and timeless silhouettes. They are willing to make an investment into a quality piece of apparel rather than purchasing fads and trends from fast fashion chains, often made out of synthetic materials of poor quality. One of the participants even mentioned a feeling of guilt if she was about to purchase something from a fast fashion chain; this is again connected with the sustainable concern that our participants maintain throughout the interviews. Above mentioned attributes were as well communicated by our respondents in the connection of perceiving themselves as slow fashion consumers or on the way to becoming them.

Few of the women in our group described themselves as being rather “boyish” in terms of style and sometimes even behaviour since their teenage years or even childhood. We tend to integrate what we perceive as “ours” into ourselves and our way of consumption, using meanings that we consider as able to symbolically construct a sense of who we are (Wattanasuwan, 2005). Therefore, consumption of modest, in this case together with unisex and menswear garments, is seen as a way of constructing their body images in order to match their self-concepts (Thompson and Hirschman, 1995 in Wattanasuwan, 2005).

On the other hand, in some cases, we can notice a motif of “consumption resistance”, explained by Hogg and Michell in Wattanasuwan (2005) as an avoidance of certain way of consumption, towards purchasing garments that are too “girly” or come from fast fashion retailers. This might indicate antipathy of our attendants towards particular social groups as well as the lack of symbolic consumption in brands used by many different types of people (Escalas and Bettman 2005).

In connection to symbolic consumption, the participants expressed interest in brands with well-developed concept including visual communication, brand aesthetics, store settings, marketing tools as well as a presentation on the social media. Almost all of them admitted to following one or more brands on different social media; these being not only their favourite but as well the brands that are carriers of certain symbols and in a way match with our participants’ view of themselves and their identities. As brands can be considered a part of extended self as presented by Belk (1988), consuming their products and following their activities attendants seem to identify themselves not only with the material possessions produced by brands but as well symbolic ones (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). As explained by Escalas and Bettman (2005, pp.378-379): “... meaning moves from goods to consumers as consumers construct themselves through their brand choices based on congruence between brand image and self-image”.

5.2 Modest style, an alternative way of displaying femininity and self-identity

Addressing the remaining two research questions, what is clear from the previous research is that identity is constructed through consumption and that we consume in order to create and sustain the self (Elliott, 1994). In today's postmodern society, having an own style is crucial, as an individual's style is the core of one's self-expression and self-realisation (Jolles & Tarrat, 2012). Style can be moreover described as the interplay between an individual and his/her different identities. To mind about one's appearance also enables the visually embodied representation of "who I am and who I am becoming". This process makes it possible to understand the self in relation to others, consumers and media cultures (Kaiser, 2001).

All the participants in the study aim to construct an alternative picture of femininity through their appearance and were well aware of their preferences in terms of fit in order not to emphasise their body shapes, and as one described, not to touch her skin. Rejecting stereotypical feminine norms and beauty ideals may signify a claim of power. In Carr's (1998) study, rejecting femininity was the main theme. Women were selected through a snowball approach and were further on asked to fill out a questionnaire, the results of the study indicated that some women, who rejected femininity, did so due to the "toughness" masculinity offered as well as because feminine attire was perceived as vulnerable to them. This can be linked to the case with one of the women, who has, according to her own words, a strong female personality and therefore does not have a need to display her body or dress feminine. Another participant's choice of distancing herself from traditional femininity created for her a feeling of being different. In this case, her choice of style was a central element in her actual and ideal self. Despite their usage of masculine elements and loose fitted clothing, according to Entwistle (2000) women will always carry sexual meanings to their dress as being feminine is already culturally established.

The opposite of modest style, the provocative dress was touched upon as one of the participants felt that as being single at the moment, she currently inclines to dress more feminine rather than in her usual "boyish" look. Codes of being feminine and masculine are encoded into the culture in which we are present, and stereotypically the female beauty is to attract the male attention. Wolf (1992, pp.179) has even mentioned that women's' dress only have two functions in addition to covering the body; these are to "create beauty for the eye and attracting the admiration of the male sex". This can be discussed in the context of masquerade as Tseëlon (1995, pp.39) notes, "Some professional women ... flash their femininity to signal that they are not really so threatening, and to reassure that their power is just a charade. Femininity is thus a disarming disguise: it is donned, like masquerade, to disguise the female's desire ... [for] power ... The woman deflects attention from her desire for power through its opposite: constructing a very feminine, non-threatening image of herself". Tseëlon further discusses this matter in relation to professional women, but it can be taken into account in the case as the change of appearance when being single can create a non-threatening image of a woman, and can be seen as a way of attracting male attention.

The relationship between the body and the wearer is crucial for the identities women are able to construct. The self-perception, as Woodward (2007) describes it, comes from the way women feel in their bodies. In her study, she came to the conclusion that clothing in terms of material which one can feel and put on one's body, gives women a sense that they have a self and that they have the possibility to change it. This theme was commonly mentioned

throughout the discussion with the participants, as all of them stressed the comfort of clothing they wear need to offer them. Comfort was put in context when speaking about clothing as a tool to make them feel self-confident and powerful. This issue is as well brought forward by Giddens (1991), whereby he describes clothing in which one know they look good in and feel comfortable in, as a way of establishing a sense of security in who you are as an individual, and knowing that this clothing item is “me”. Dressing uncomfortable also makes the wearer aware of the limits and boundaries of the body, which was also an issue discussed in the interviews. Furthermore, modest garments were among the participants described as the clothing of high-quality. By wearing particular textures and styles, a woman can form a sense of who she is and who she can be, thus her desired self. As the sense of self is a fragile one for women (Tseñon, 1997, pp.61), wearing clothing of comfort is of high importance. This sort of clothing also becomes an extension of the self which can be seen as embodied, and the material items, in this case, clothing and make up, for the extended self. Our possessions, in terms of being part of the extended self, help others to form impressions about us (Belk, 1988). Few of the participants mentioned that due to their possessions, they have sometimes received negative comments; this for instance comments regarding religion, egoism or unapproachability.

Women in our study actively engaged with their clothing in order to create images which were consistent with their identity. This made the majority to express that they are not willing to compromise on their appearance, no matter the occasion. In this case, the participants felt that they already have become “the woman they want to be” (Guy and Banim, 2000). When dressing, women are enfolding their bodies around aspects of themselves such as ethnicity or personality traits (Woodward, 2007, pp.153–158), making the act of choosing one's dress an act of “surfacing” particular aspects of the self (Goffman, 1971 cited in Woodward, 2007, pp.153–158). In Strathern's (1979, pp.249) study he describes this usage of clothing as material means as “drawing out traits from within”.

By dressing in masculine clothing and using its elements, some of the participants expressed their individual identity, rather than following the norm of what is set as women's and men's clothing. Furthermore, as masculine clothing reduces one's femininity and sexuality, this was also brought forward in Sheppard's (1989) study where women would use methods to de-emphasise their femininity through, for instance, turtleneck sweaters and subtle colours. In the study conducted by Holland (2004), women felt anxiety about being perceived as ‘masculinised’ (and therefore, seen as unattractive) because of their appearance, even though in this case, their choice of dress was a way of “resisting and breaking away from negative connotations which frequently follow a woman's appearance” (Holland, 2004, pp.71-94). This is in contrast to what we found in our study, as our participants embraced masculine clothing, one even expresses that she feels equally sexy in wide pants and buttoned-up menswear shirts. Moreover, women interviewed also expressed a preference for male clothing as it offered different shapes, functionalities and sometimes even came at a lower price. Dressing cross genders can be seen as a norm violation but as Giddens (1992, cited in Hancock et al., 2000) explains, every individual has the opportunity to design their own body and that one's choice of gender simply has become a choice of lifestyle. The fact that the lines between genders are blurring in today's society is shown in the participant's answers and their belief in the modest style, which they do not see as a current trend but rather a reflection of how society is changing and taking fashion with it.

To be taken seriously as a woman is, according to Brownmiller (1984), very difficult as their sexuality is always present. Despite that, our participants did not find themselves being taken

less serious due to their choice of style but rather discovered that their clothing has given them more self-confidence and feeling of power. Baudrillard (1981) has also stated that power is inscribed in clothing and in turn to their wearers which was proved right. All of them also had the fortune to work and study in such places where the alternative choice of dress was accepted.

6 Conclusions and recommendations

The presented study gives a better understanding of female consumers from Generation Y and their choice of adapting modest style, as well as how their self-identity and femininity is reflected in their choice of dress. Previous research has neither touched upon modest style in a context excluding religion nor in relation to the construction of self-identity and femininity and therefore, this study contributes to a better understanding of this phenomenon and contributes this way to further research.

The participants were aware that their choice of dress communicated their personalities and showcased their identities. Their values concerning sustainability and quality were of great importance when consuming fashion products, as they are deeply rooted in our identity and clothing is a way of displaying the internal self. Therefore, it was possible to see a pattern in the women's choice of style and consumption habits, as they not only dress in a modest manner but also consume fashion in a modest way.

By dressing in modest style, the participants expressed their choice based on preferences such as comfort and actual realisation of their individual self-identity. Through modest style and its elements, they were able to construct their sense of self as well as ideal self. As feeling comfortable in the certain dress makes the item a part of the extended self (Belk, 1988), an important aspect was brought forward in discussion with women in our sample that distance themselves from a traditional portrait of femininity by incorporating masculine elements into their styles. In one case, a complex approach to identity was seen by a participant who occasionally desires to dress according to stereotypical views on femininity, meaning in a more seductive way. By dressing in modest style, the participants also strive to differentiate themselves from others; this also in relation to trends as they did not show a desire to act upon them while buying their clothes. For the majority, purchasing sustainable clothing and items were of high value and they tried to avoid negative consumption by not purchasing apparel that was not in line with their self and ideal self. Choosing modest style was as well due to the fact that a lot of the fashion brands described as modest put an emphasis on their sustainability approach throughout various stages of their work.

All the participants expressed a stable sense of self-identity as none of them was influenced by negative comments regarding their looks and appearance. Furthermore, the majority would not change their style and dress according to different situations but rather display their authentic self by staying true to themselves and their natural preference. This as their performance of self was lived up to their conceptions of their idealised self (Goffman, 1971 in Holland, 2007).

The study brings a greater understanding of how modest style is used when displaying alternative feminine appearance and how it is related to self-identity. The study illustrates the blurring of gender roles and how the traditional feminine look is being challenged by deconstructivist, loose-fit and oversized garments. As modest style was in this study

perceived as a reflection on the evolvement of individual preferences, style and society rather than being just a current trend, participants view on future of modest style was positive and supportive.

6.1 Managerial Implications

Concerning managerial implications, this research can provide an understanding of how Generation Y consumers can be targeted for new aspiring brands. As shown in our study, female consumers of Generation Y that have adopted the more modest style often put emphasis on buying minimalistic fashion created from timeless cuts and materials of high quality. They also like to be inspired by lifestyle concepts of inspiring brands, unisex silhouettes and deconstructive fashion.

With sustainability issues rising and the fashion consumer of today being aware of their impact on the environment, consumers want to find trustworthy information about brands which present themselves as ethical and environmentally friendly. In order to make it more convenient for the consumer, brands could offer easily accessible information for their potential customers through their websites or specifically designed apps. As caring for both nature and one's wallet is "in fashion" today, the potential is as well seen in brands offering repair and recycling services of garments and goods.

From answers of the women in our study, it was shown that only two of them frequently purchase their clothing items online, while the rest usually find them in stores. These women emphasised that the store setting and overall atmosphere in the retail area was of great importance. One respondent discussed the fact that she avoids stores where too much merchandise is on display, making the retail area crowded and unorganised. Indicating that, today's customers might prefer retailers with spacious areas and well-organised merchandise. Today's consumers are also more than ever prone to desire an experience while shopping and therefore, the brand's message and values should be clearly translated not only into the offered garments but as well into clearly defined aesthetics, customer service and spacious and inspiring shopping environment. Even though recent fashion news informed that retailers are forced to close down their stores due to the increase of online shopping (Rupp, Coleman-Lochner and Turner, 2017), this was not the case in our study, showing that traditional retail is still relevant for the majority of our respondents.

6.2 Future Research

Several interesting topics for further research emerged during the course of this study. Few of the suggestions which could evolve in interesting findings could be to perform a similar study with a higher amount of participants, including other age spans and/or both sexes as well as people not related to the fashion industry. This would result in findings offering different views on modest clothing from different individuals and contribute to the lack of literature concerning the phenomena.

This research indicates that modest style was in some cases adopted in order not to come across as too feminine, and thus it would be interesting to study how modest style is used for the purpose of suppressing one's gender. Crossdressing through modest style could also be an area to focus on. Participants also expressed a feeling of self-confidence while wearing

modest clothes, which could be elaborated into a study about the way modest style could be used in order to express power, both in social settings and professional environments.

This research showcases how important one's choice of dress is in the construction and expressing of self-identity as well as how complex the relation between dress and body is. As one's self has not inherited femininity or masculinity (Butler, 1990) but rather becomes one or the other due to cultural and social definitions, it is necessary to research into the emerging area of blurred gender lines, and how certain clothing, such as the modest style, can contribute to constructing and maintaining one's desired self.

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8 Appendix

8.1 Interview guide

1. Could you tell me something about yourself, what is your background and relation to fashion?
2. Where do you usually buy/get your apparel?
3. How often do you purchase new clothes?
4. Do you follow trends? Do you think you are influenced by them?
5. Is timeless clothing something you value/is important for you?
6. What are the most important elements when buying new clothes? Price, quality, fit, brand values, colour, comfort?
7. What does quality in terms of fashion mean to you?
8. When purchasing clothing items, do you consider quality over quantity?
9. If quality over quantity, do you consider yourself as a slow fashion customer?
10. Do you consider yourself as fashion conscious? Why?
11. What platforms do you use when searching for fashion inspiration?
12. Are you aware of the issues that are present in the fashion industry? Such as poor conditions for workers in fashion production, usage of dangerous chemicals, usage of non-renewable sources during fashion production, overproduction and the amount of clothing waste?
13. Is sustainability something that you think of when purchasing fashion?
14. What is your favourite brand and why?

15. Do you consider brand aesthetics and visual communication important?
16. Are you interested in finding out more about the brands you consume? If yes, how and if not, why not?
17. Do you pay attention to the brand values of the brands you consume? Is it important that you can identify with them?
18. Do you take part in brand community/is? If yes, how and why? If not, why not?
19. How would you describe your style?
20. When searching for a new wardrobe piece, do you consider functional utilities as of great importance?
21. Do you think that your wardrobe represents your overall lifestyle choices? In how you consume other products but as well in relation to your leisure activities e.g travelling, going to the gym etc.
22. Do you dress according to the occasion? If yes, do you always try to dress in line with your style? If not, why not?
23. How do you dress when you need to be taken seriously?
24. Does the way you dress make you feel empowered and self-confident?
25. Have you had any experience of being treated differently in various occasions depending on the way you dress?
26. Have you received any comments on the way you dress? Both positive or negative
27. Do you reflect on the way that female body is portrayed in fashion and fashion advertising? Does it affect you in your own way of dressing?
28. Are you aware of the phenomena 'modest style'?
29. If so, how did you come in contact with the expression?
30. What does dressing modestly mean to you?
31. What was your initial reason/influence behind the decision to incorporate, start to dress more modestly?
32. Do you think that modest fashion is just a current trend?
33. How do you think the "modest movement" will look like in the future?
34. Do you think that the view of the female body is changing as well because of this movement? Do you think it might be reversed?
35. Do you have something more to add?

8.2 Participants



Photo credit: Personal blogs and archives of the participants



Photo credit: Pasi Liesimaa, personal archive of the participant, Lorenzo Busato



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THE SWEDISH SCHOOL
OF TEXTILES
UNIVERSITY OF BORÅS

Visiting address: Allégatan 1 · Postal address: 501 90 Borås · Phone: 033-435 40 00 · E-mail: registrator@hb.se · Webb: www.hb.se