

Motherhood and blogs about children's fashion

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Abstract

This paper focuses on mother's views on children's fashion and their consumption patterns as expressed in blogs: Which aspects are discussed concerning children's fashion from age- and gender perspectives? Is it possible to distinguish different consumer patterns and types of consumers among blogging mothers, and if so, which ones? The text analysis is based on five parenting blogs with 245 blog posts. The theoretical framework is based on theories of consumer culture and identity and sociological theories about children and childhood. Bloggers contribute to the construction of style and identity, linguistically and physically. Children are constructed as both actors and objects. Through images produced on the web linked to various fashion companies, they turn into commodities. Mothers express their own style and taste through their children. Especially girls are given control over clothes at an early age. However, with the guidance of an adult, different strategies are developed to minimize their choices. Four different consumer types occur: (1) The child centred consumer, (2) The gender-conscious consumer, (3) The status- and quality conscious consumer and (4) The ethical and environmentally conscious consumer. The present study provides a starting point for further research regarding consumption patterns related to children's fashion and ethical discussions about children's being, becoming and belonging.

Keywords: Consumption, children's fashion, parental blogs, ethics

Topic: The family lives of child and teen consumers

1. Introduction

Parents often have economic and authoritative power over the purchase of children's clothes. The younger the child, the stronger the parental influence. Parents have an interest in presenting their children in a certain way, since the way the child is dressed also says something about the parent's life-style, economic status and views of childhood. According to Johansson (2005) parents can actively express their own taste and style through their children. She refers to this as "parents' extended selves". Also Rysst (2008) in research on gender constructions among girls in school classes 4 – 7 and 9 found that their clothes often display parents' preferences since "relevant others' voices" about clothes have been internalized and are important when girls choose clothes during shopping.

The contemporary market for children's clothes is fragmented into many different styles and price-ranges. Rubinstein (2000) brings up how different styles of children's clothing can be related to discourses about children today: the innocent and the competent child. The discourse of the innocent child argues that childhood should be separated from the dangers and problems of the adult world, including various consumption decisions. The discourse of the competent child emphasizes that children are inquisitive, knowledgeable and responsible enough to have influence even as small. Children themselves provide, within the peer-group, their own understanding of the part of the consumer society they become involved in (Juil, 2006; Brembeck *et al.*, 2004). Parents connect to the discourse of the competent child and contribute to "adult clothing behaviour" by dressing children in a style that signals success in the adult world; classic style, a fashionable "youthful" style, or a sporty style. On the other hand, parents may convey an urge for an innocent childhood and express the ambition to "let kids be kids" by dressing them in a "delightful" style, with childish patterns in soft materials (Rubinstein, 2000).

According to Boden *et al.* (2005), who investigated fashion in the UK among children 6-10 years, parents expressed worries about the adult style of children's clothes; especially girl's clothes, which they thought would contribute to sexualizing the young girl's body (*ibid*). The same anxiety concerning sexualizing girl's clothes has been expressed in a newspaper debate among adults in Sweden (Berggren Torell 2004, 2005). The word sex was also mentioned among children discussing thongs in the children's magazine *Kamratposten*, but girls first and foremost used this garment to process ambivalences about group identity, age and maturity and femininity (*ibid*). The role of fashion in sexualizing children's bodies has also been brought up by Vänskä (2011). She has extended the discussion by also analyzing fashion photos of boys.

Historically mothers have been seen as morally responsible for their children's well being. In marketing and advice regarding child rearing choosing suitable children's clothes has been proclaimed an important feature of that responsibility (Cook, 2004). In the 1930s the identity-position of the fashion-interested mother was opened up for middle-class and for an upper layer of working class mothers in Sweden, by articles and advertising in family magazines (Berggren Torell, 2007). Still today media connects motherhood, rather than parenthood, to the purchase of children's clothes. Magazines describe an interest in children's fashion as something natural for every mother. Today fashion-interested mothers communicate their views on children's fashion in personal blogs and share knowledge and opinions on children's clothes through web-communities.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to present empirical findings as regards mother's consumption patterns and attitudes towards children's fashion by analysing a number of mother blogs using theories on consumer culture and identity and sociological theories about children and childhood. The issues brought up in the paper are: Which aspects are discussed concerning children's fashion in the blogs from age- and gender perspectives? Is it possible to distinguish different consumer patterns and types of consumers among the blogging mothers, and if so, which ones?

3. Research design

3.1 Analysis of blog posts inspired by netnography

The research method is inspired by netnography; adaption of an ethnographic research methodology for studies of cultures and communities on the Internet (Kozinets 1998, 2002). Since information that is publicly available in online forums is used consumers views, shared information and word of mouth are brought forward. Kozinets (1998) claims that the methodology is valuable in different ways, of which one is: "As an exploratory tool to study general topics" (Kozinets 1998). By analyzing particular blogs the intention of this paper is to explore the general topic consumption of children's clothes. When doing netnography researchers has to choose to which degree the research shall be built on distant observation or participation. The choice here has been to do an observational study (compare Pihl & Sandström 2013). We have not posted contributions to discussions in the blogs. Neither have we contacted the editors of the blogs before using their posts as data. Our standpoint has been that when posting their messages to a public arena bloggers must be aware that their texts can be used in different ways and for different purposes, including for research.

A total of 245 blog posts regarding views on children's fashion and the purchase of clothes for children, have been extracted from three web-communities tied to different media-houses and from two Swedish parental blogs published by individual parents. To find the blogs we used the search words "blogs", "children's clothes" and "children's fashion". Blogs that only show photos of children and children's clothes with references to shops where the clothes can be bought have not been included in the sample since they did not contain the information we sought for.

The three communities are: Alltföräldrar.se - a Swedish media house that was started in 2004. It is directed at pregnant women and parents with small children. They present themselves as one of the biggest Swedish communities aimed at this target group. Allt för föräldrar also publishes two papers that are available at maternity clinics or is distributed by post (www.alltforforaldrar.se 2013-08-14). FamiljeLiv – which was opened in 2003 by some Swedish parents, according to themselves the biggest Swedish forum for "women in the family" (www.familjeliv.se 2013-08-16). FamiljeLiv media AB. Circle of Moms – which belongs to the American media network PopSugar and is intended at a female audience between 18 and 40 years old, owns this blog. It has a large amount of users. PopSugar started in 2006 (www.circleofmoms.com 2013-08-14).

On three of the blogs in the sample a blogger has posed a question or made a statement about children's influence and about constructions of gender and identity. These questions and statements has been answered or commented upon by readers who have made contributions to the discussion. In this way the material has come to consist of a large amount of answers to two questions and two statements. The questions are: At what age do you let your child decide what to wear? Should I give my child clothes with prints?

The statements are: You don't need to buy clothes at Polarn och Pyret to get gender-happy children, and Gendered clothing is all about money.

While analyzing two of the blogs we have only followed mothers who show pictures of their own children dressed in different garments and write about their children's clothes. This has enabled analysis of the mothers' opinions on children's fashion and on choice and purchase of children's clothes. Figure 1 below shows the material and the distribution of blog posts:

Fig 1: Description of material

Community/ Blogg	Forum	Category/Question/Statement	Comments
Circle of moms 29 juni 2011 – 19 mars 2013	Motherhood	Question: At what age do you let your child decide what to wear?	39 comments
Familjeliv.se 22 april 2013 – 3 maj 2013	Children's clothes/Parents	Question: Should I give my child clothes with prints?	27 comments
Ladydahmer.nu 31 januari – 7 februari 2013 13 augusti – 15 augusti 2013	Feminism & gender	Statement: You don't need to buy clothes at Polarn och Pyret to get gender-happy children Statement: Gendered clothing is all about money	90 comments 67comments
Alltföräldrar.se 29 maj 2013 – 7 augusti 2013	Children's clothes	Today's Outfit	Text and photos; no comments 12 contributions
Ettbättredu.se 23 februari 2012 - 19 juni 2013	Life as a mother	Archive of children's fashion	Text and photos; no comments 10 contributions

3.2 Theories on consumption and the sociology of childhood applied on the empirical material

Qualitative text analysis, with repeated readings of the material has been made. First the material was read through, in order to get hold of the context of the discussion and to categorize the content. Then thorough, detailed readings, aimed at interpreting how the blog-discussions relate to the specific questions of this paper were done several times. Quotes and excerpts are used in this article to increase the transparency of the analysis.

Theories on consumption and the sociology of childhood have been applied when analyzing the empirical material. Bauman (2007) argues that individuals become more and more like goods that are to be bought, sold and marketed. To make ourselves attractive in the social life and at the labor market, we use various goods and demand for new products increases. He writes that we consume to be consumed and is consumed so that we can consume. Another sociologist,

Featherstone (2007), discusses how the "aesthetization of everyday life" is largely a matter of people working to make up their bodies and appearances to present themselves in tune with prevailing ideals. Fashion can be seen as a lifestyle statement to the extent that individuals through the clothes of a particular style or particular brand position themselves socially, or as a "postmodern play" where one by changing style or combining contrasting garments finds suitable looks for different situations. The latter points to an increasingly fragmented identity (Featherstone 1995, Featherstone 2010).

These sociological meta-texts do not bring up children though. Cook (2008) argues that children are invisible in theories of consumption. According to Martens et al (2004) the sociology of consumption pays little theoretical attention to children. However by bringing together the sociology of children and consumption they suggest four inter-related themes for further understanding of consumption; learning to consume; lifestyle and identity formation; children's engagements with material culture; and the parent-child relationship. Marton et al (2004) suggest that such a framework will develop understandings of how cultures of consumption impact on children, children and parents, and construct notions of childhood.

Since the views of blogging mothers are analyzed all the themes mentioned above are relevant for this paper. Furthermore the research question regarding different consumer patterns and types of consumers direct the attention at the fact that there are different types of consumption related to parenthood (Brusdal and Frønes, 2013). This is theoretically explained by parents' use of various capitals; moral, symbolic, economic and cultural. Economic capital can be used for consumption displaying status and wealth, "conspicuous consumption", according to Brusdal and Frønes (2013). The moral capital is not universal; instead its codes are contextualized and embedded in cultural and moral struggles by different societal groups. Furthermore, parents' purchases of children's clothes are aimed at individualization indicating transference into commercial codes for very young children. The distinctions of cultivated style have entered the markets for even the youngest children. Brands combine signals of social position with signals of individuality. The clothing style underlines parents' values and simultaneously shows their concern with shaping their children as unique individuals (*ibid*).

4. Findings

Four different consumer types show different perspectives and consumption patterns. (1) The child centred consumer, (2) The gender-conscious consumer, (3) The status- and quality conscious consumer and (4) The ethical and environmentally conscious consumer.

4.1 The child centered consumer

The child centered consumer discusses children's clothing based on the child either as a subject or as an object in need of protection. Here we present three different perspectives: Firstly emphasize on the skilled and unique child who at an early age should have a say in decision making. The second perspective concerns statements about parents' responsibilities to choose clothes. Here the child's early influence is seen as a lack of parental responsibility. The third perspective asserts that the child is affected by the environment and other children in the choice of clothing and brings up how the child can be protected from being socially excluded.

4.1.1 The competent and unique child:

Most mothers believe that children already at an early age can decide what to wear. Many children are participating in decisions as early as at the age of two, or as soon as they start to show interest and become aware of choices. However, it is important that the choice of clothing is made with the guidance of an adult. Various suggestions on how parents can minimize the children's choice of clothing are brought up. Strategies to facilitate for little kids to pick their clothes include for example to allow them to choose between 2-3 outfits. Other limitations are that the clothes should be appropriate to the situation and weather. Negotiations occur between

parent and child, where the parent puts practical limits. Children can choose what clothes they should have indoors but the parent chooses the clothes they're having outdoor. There is a balancing act where adults are in control and steer the choice of clothes while they at the same time let the child feel they have been involved in that choice. The discourse of the competent child is distinct here (cf Rubinstein 2000) but it is sometimes negotiated by parents who want to show care and moral capital by minimizing the children's choice of clothing (Brusdal and Frønes, 2013).

Arguments presented for the child to have a say in the choice of clothing is that it stimulates creative thinking and imagination. One parent believes that by giving children choices they develop important skills. They can learn how to create their own style and be unique. This is consistent with the idea about an ongoing aesthetization of everyday life (Featherstone 2007) and the perception of children in post-industrial society. The child's individual, unique potential is highlighted, and has become a norm in middle-class upbringing (Brusdal and Frønes 2013). A norm that according to Brusdal and Frønes (2013) is derived from the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The convention stresses the child's agency, which means that they in relation to age and maturity should be involved in determining the decisions that affect them (see Bartley 1998).

It is suggested that it is important to encourage independence and that dressing can be seen as a way for the child to experiment with identity. «I think ultimately clothing plays a huge role in self-expression. To explore who he is, what he likes, and eventually who he will become.» ([http:// www circleofmoms.com](http://www.circleofmoms.com) June 30, 2011).

One mother puts it as follows:

I absolutely love the creativity and imagination that goes with dressing up! So I think as soon as your child would like to choose their own clothes let them. Putting different fabrics, textures and colors together does promote creative thinking so go for it I say!!! My son is now 2 and he absolutely loves to dress up and has already started to choose his favorite pieces!! ([http:// www circleofmoms.com](http://www.circleofmoms.com) June 30, 2011).

However another parent writes that age is just a number and that it is never too late to develop your own style.

4.1.2 The dependent child:

In some cases mothers are against children choosing their clothes at an early age. They view giving the child early influence as equivalent with abandoning their parental responsibilities. This could be interpreted as an expression of moral capital, but also a confirmation of that the parent has the authoritative and economic power over the children's fashion choices (cf. Johansson 2005):

Personally I think that children up to 6 years of age just have to wear whatever the parent chooses. If we let kids decide what to wear, when to go to bed and when to hit the shower, we can pack up. ([http:// www circleofmoms.com](http://www.circleofmoms.com) June 30, 2011).

One mother says:

This idea that children should be allowed to determine the wardrobe all by themselves is strange and insane, and above all a MODERN invention. In the past you got the clothing available and were grateful.

The same mother writes that «as long as I pay for the clothes the children have to be content» (<http://ladydahmer.nu> January 31, 2013).

The responses also reveal some gender differences. Boys are considered less "difficult" since they want to decide to a lesser extent than girls. Therefore, it is more important to guide girls. A mother with a boy responds as follows: «Girls have definitive ideas and are far more opinionated about what they want to wear at a younger age» ([http:// www circleofmoms.com](http://www.circleofmoms.com) June 30, 2011). However, some mothers with younger boys claim that there are no such gender differences.

4.1.3 The exposed child:

What is also mentioned is that surroundings and other children affect the child's choice of clothes from early on. A mother writes that when the daughter was around 2,5 years, she refused to wear the clothes that she had bought:

So I had to start buying things she also liked and now I only buy pink and lilac clothes with princesses and Hello Kitty since otherwise they are not used. Her own will as regards clothes started when she began in a new day care center where the girls go around praising each other for their nice clothes. From one day to another she went from loving the colors I love (I gladly dress colorful and preferably in blue, green and yellow so it was what she also got) to instead love the colors her mates love (<http://www.familjeliv.se> April 22, 2013).

The pink and lilac clothes with prints on are transformed to tie-signs, symbols which express similarity and create group identity (Goffman 1971). The girl chooses the group's clothing style, instead of the style her mother prefers, not to be excluded from the group. The mother's taste is no longer decisive and she protects the child by no longer imposing her own taste on the daughter.

4.2 The gender conscious consumer

The gender-conscious consumer is discussing the gender norms that clothes express. Fashion companies' ranges of clothing are perceived as gender-normative by the gender conscious consumer. Clothes' colours, shapes and decorations differ depending on whether the clothes are labeled boys or girls clothing, limiting mothers' choices of clothing. Especially the sexualisation of girls' bodies, which the designs contribute to, is discussed among mothers. But also the dilemma with gender neutral clothes is brought up in the blogs.

4.2.1 The gendered child:

The mothers problematize the cut and colour of boys and girls clothing and also the choices of printed patterns and the prices. A mother brings up the difference between boys and girls clothing by showing pictures of shirts with Angry birds prints (Lindex and Kappahl). On the boys' shirts characters look angry and the message is "Angry is the world" and "Angry faces". On the girls' sweaters however, the birds are happy with texts such as "Sweetie Bird" and "Cute & Bubbly". Boys' shirts are dark and girls sweaters bright. She writes that girls' sweaters have narrower shoulders and narrower arm openings and are slightly narrower in width. She argues that the images indicate that boys fight while girls create relationships (<http://ladydahmer.nu> August 13, 2013).

A mother of a little boy writes: «What I find the worst is that a girl can wear boys' clothes and be seen as tough... while if a guy wears something girlish, he is regarded ridiculous!» (<http://ladydahmer.nu> August 13, 2013) She too complains that girls' clothes are tight and that the colors are limited. She notices that boys' bodies have a straight cut with straight sleeves, while the girls' bodies are narrow with a hint of waist and puff sleeves: «And by the way: puff sleeves?? How nice is that to be lying on?» (<http://ladydahmer.nu> August 13, 2013). There is also a discussion about whether girls' clothes adorned with ruffles and sequins prevents active play.

The quotations above show attempts to get away from fashion companies' standardization and commercialization of children as gender stereotypes. And it is not only fashion companies ranges of clothes that are discussed in the blogs but also the interiors of the stores are considered gender-normative. One mother complains about the clear division of boys and girls clothes:

I'm also getting mad that the clothes are either too cute or monsters. Our daughter gets clothing from both departments, and is allowed to play in all she has, regardless of sequins or camouflage. Luckily, the daughter, who is soon two, is not yet aware that girls should not get dirty, so she looks almost as if they've dipped her in cement every time we pick her up from daycare (<http://ladydahmer.nu> August 14, 2013).

The fashion companies most often mentioned in blogs as gendered, are Lindex, H & M and Kappahl. They are criticized among other things for being gender stereotyped in terms of both color and shape. A mother wonders: «Why cannot the chains catch on and run unisex as well? Well, money of course, but there should be a demand?» (<http://ladydahmer.nu> August 14, 2013). Another mother argues:

Everything is structured so that you should not be able to get/give away/inherit clothes anyway, since they are gender-coded to such a large extent. It's no coincidence that especially cheap brands that sell large volumes at cheap prices have extremely gender-coded clothing (<http://ladydahmer.nu> August 14, 2013).

4.2.2 *Sexualisation of girls:*

The blog posts also contain opinions on the sexualisation of girls. Several mothers write that it is important with age-related clothing. However, it is hard when the kids get a little older. A mother with a girl of 7 reacts to the grown-up style of girls' clothes:

She has outgrown 122/128 so now I need to look at the bigger children's departments, where.. I can't even find the words for it. I don't know how many times I have been in a store and sworn loudly. The girls must have clothes that accentuate and show skin. For children. They are dressed in doublet and short skirts and I freak out every time. Boys' department is so extremely tough and hard that it's too much, I'll buy some shirts there every now and then to my daughter. I want happy colours to the children, with a comfortable fit, I do not want girls to be dressed as little adults (<http://ladydahmer.nu> August 14, 2013).

The quotation shows that the mother reacts against the sexualisation of the young girls' body (cf. Boden et al., 2005; Berggren Torell, 2004; Vänska, 2010) and the macho-style on boys' clothes. Instead she proposes that "children should be children" (Rubenstein, 2000; Brusdal and Frönes, 2013; Rysst, 2008).

4.2.3 *The gendered-neutral child - a dilemma?:*

But even unisex clothing can cause problems. It is seen as a problem that such clothing makes it difficult for outsiders to determine the baby's sex, and also that adults themselves hereby are involved in the gendering process. A mother with a daughter of 20 months writes that she dresses her child in one color clothes, stripes, reds, brown and lilac and tries to avoid clothes with big prints on. «And yes, most people believe that my daughter is a boy. I guess it has to do with the lack of the cat, since she mostly is dressed in "girls' colors". The cat means Hello Kitty (<http://www.familjeliv.se> April 22, 2013).

Another parent writes that she decides what her nine-year-old girl should wear to school, but that in weekend her daughter gets to decide. Then usually she dresses in shirts with prints and sequins, etc. The daughter accepts that the mother decides during the week as long as she is able to wear "girlish colors" in school and may determine hairstyle herself. The mother adds: «It may be sensitive to children if people make mistakes regarding their gender» (<http://www.familjeliv.se> April 22, 2013). The excerpts show that the gender norms are so

fortified that they are difficult to change. Pink clothes are, by definition, for a girl and dark clothes for a boy. One mother writes:

Yes, we adults teach our children what is sweet, tough, girlish and so on. It also takes place via media, films, stories, TV, newspapers, friends, day care centres, books and other adults /.../ Gendered cloths often cause a gendered response” (<http://ladydahmer.nu> January 31, 2013).

Different strategies to escape the gender stereotyped thinking also emerge though. Parents give each other advice on how to mix boys and girls clothes, how to make girly clothes less girlish so that even boys can wear them etc. However, there is ambivalence, in that it is more accepted that girls can have boy clothes, but it's not as easy for a boy to have girls' clothes. The fear that the boy should be seen as feminine persists.

4.3 The status and quality conscious consumer:

The status- and quality conscious consumer uses the child as a status mediator while expressing their own status, style and taste through their children, which may be significant for the mother's as well as for the child's identity formation and individuality. This is done by buying designer clothes and branded garments. There are however arguments against this. Some mothers distance themselves from expensive designer clothes for economic reasons.

4.3.1 The child as status mediator

That parents express their own view and style via their children (cf. Johansson 2005b) is evident in the blogs. The blogs also exemplifies how parents describe their own social position and the creation of their own and the child's individuality through the clothes they buy (cf. Brusdal and Frönes, 2013). Social position is shown by references to various brands such as Ralph Lauren, Chloé, Baby Dior and Gant. A mother writes: «Ralph Lauren makes stylish, practical and durable clothing for small children with parents who love shopping children's clothing» (<http://ettbattredu.se> Archive for "Barnmode" March 27, 2013). The same parent emphasizes how her child will be unique:

At last the little one's feet have become large enough to fit into Hunter wellies. A pair of classial black.../ she will be the coolest kid at Södermalm as she splashes in the puddles (<http://ettbattredu.se> Archive for "Barnmode" March 6, 2013).

According to Brusdal and Frönes parents purchase of exclusive merchandise to their children not only signals the parent's desire to buy: "The baby, in his or her designer outfit, represents more than a display of the mother's interest in expensive fashion; the baby indicates the parents' active endeavours in supporting their child's future development of individuality and taste. The right style signals both economic and cultural capital, and a moral awareness of the needs of the unique, little individual" (Brusdal and Frönes, 2013 p. 161). Clothing and other attributes are hereby transformed into important lifestyle markers (Featherstone 1995), both for the mother and child. The mother in above example is transforming her economic capital to symbolic capital by buying branded rubber boots to her child. Via her blog other mothers belonging to the same group show her their appreciation. Here we can talk about conspicuous consumption (Brusdal and Frönes 2013).

However, some mothers emphasize their preference for quality since such clothes last longer and can be inherited by their siblings later on. One mother writes that she is buying most of her clothes at Polarn and Pyret (PoP):

I like them a lot but they are rather expensive. My child is not the kind of child who tears her clothes, they hardly even get dirty. Her little sister will inherit them... otherwise I would have considered cheaper alternatives (<http://ladydahmer.nu> January 31, 2013).

However, as Bauman (2007) and Lury (1996) point out, the ability to choose in the consumer culture is unevenly distributed and a class issue. Some mothers therefore distance themselves on economic grounds from expensive designer clothes (compare Bourdieu 1984). They give advice on how to find good and cheap clothes at second hand and eBay. A mother writes: «If you don't have so much money you naturally should go to second hand stores!!!! Where you can find EVERYTHING!!!!» (<http://ladydahmer.nu> January 31, 2013).

Advice from other parents, regarding only buying gender neutral clothes, is also criticized from an economical point of view:

You write things like "How can you buy clothes from shops that divide gender? Why not simply boycott and just buy from unisex shops?" You have such a terrible middle-class perspective that it is not true. There are quite many who cannot afford to shop on PoP, Chaos, Molo, etc. (<http://ladydahmer.nu> January 31, 2013).

4.4. The ethical and environmentally conscious consumer

The ethical and environmentally conscious consumer emphasizes the value of unisex fashion and the lack of prints and advertising on clothing. Environmental and health issues are discussed, both from a child- and a workers perspective. Here it is obvious that the mothers use moral, economic and cultural capital (Brusdal and Frønes, 2013). One mother emphasizes the importance of buying clothes that are not gender normative. She puts it this way:

It is important for me to support the businesses and brands that invest in a unisex range. I refuse to put my foot in H & M's children's department. For me it's a matter of principle and a desire that stores promoting unisex shall be maintained and for new ones to start (<http://ladydahmer.nu> January 31, 2013).

Another mother claims that she would never dress her child in clothes with prints. In addition to finding them terribly ugly it would make her son a live advertisement, which she strongly opposes. These attitudes can be regarded as simultaneous ways of using and showing moral, cultural and economic capital (Brusdal and Frønes, 2013). However, there are mothers who point to the fact that it is expensive to buy clothes that are both ecological and fair trade:

Uh, I get a little bored as regards discussions on ecological and fair clothes. And H&M simply disappears in these discussions. Then you should know that not everyone can afford to make that choice, economy governs (<http://ladydahmer.nu> January 31, 2013).

But, to dress ones child in gender neutral and ecological clothes is not necessarily a question of economy. At the blogs alternatives to H&M and other multi-national companies in the clothing industry are brought up. Second hand, Tradera, donate-/exchange pages or eco-stores when they have sales, are suitable substitutes. Another possibility is to sew clothes oneself made of echo/second-hand fabrics and to mend torn clothes and if you cannot do it yourself, it is considered more environmental friendly to get them fixed by professionals: «If you acquire good quality, it is more environmental friendly to pay someone to mend the clothes than to buy new ones» one mother writes (<http://ladydahmer.nu> January 31, 2013).

Additional factors that restrict the purchase and choice of clothing is when mothers take into account the environmental and health aspects, which can be seen as moral capital (Brusdal and Frønes, 2013). Mothers point out that clothing companies are using chemicals in their clothing, which is not considered to be good for kids. Therefore one should shop clothes at second hand:

All companies use chemicals in their clothing, which is not good for children. So it is good to buy clothes at second hand since all toxic substances are washed away. Parents should think about what we physically expose our children to (<http://ladydahmer.nu> January 31, 2013).

Cheap dozen clothes, writes a mother, are often made of low price quality fabric and are more like throwaway clothes or so-called "designed for the dump". Here again we see examples of moral and economic capital (Brusdal and Frönes 2013). Other blog posts bring up the harmful cultivation of cotton for both humans and environment and the fact that it takes about 2000 liters of water to produce one t-shirt. Weakness in corporate responsibility is also discussed. A mother points out that a company on several occasions demonstrated questionable working conditions for workers « [...] recently the Anti-Slavery International encouraged H&M to stop buying cotton from Uzbekistan, which according to the organization makes use of forced and child labor» (<http://ladydahmer.nu> January 31, 2013).

5. Discussion

Consumption culture creates the conditions for mothers and children's identity formation. Most parents believe that children, especially girls, at an early age should be involved in selecting what clothes to wear. The discourse of the competent child is clear (Rubinstein, 2000). This is consistent with the view of the child in the post-industrial society. The child's individual, unique potential is highlighted, and has become a norm in middle-class upbringing (Brusdal and Frönes, 2013). However, parents also show care and moral capital by minimizing children's choice of clothing.

A gender stereotype in colour, shape and design is deeply rooted and minimizes the mother's choice of clothes for their children. It also turns into a class issue, as more unisex clothing is more expensive. Relatives, friends and other kids influence mothers by their opinions about what is appropriate clothing for a boy or a girl. These values also seem to be deeply rooted in some children's fashion companies. To avoid these, mothers find various strategies to make the clothes more gender neutral. However, it appears that girls can have boy clothes, but boys cannot wear girls' clothes.

Blogs and blogging in itself is a way to influence and educate each other as parents. Blogging helps to find out what other moms think, affecting mothers' choice of children's clothing. Children's clothes and other accessories discussed on the blogs show that mothers want to belong to certain lifestyles. Children's fashion is communicated both through writing and pictures. Bloggers contribute to how style and identity are constructed, both linguistically and physically. Linguistically, by what is written on the blogs, and physically through the pictures of children wearing clothes. One question we ask is whether this leads to increased social conformity or not.

Children can be seen as both actors and objects. They receive influence from an early age, but in some blogs photographs of children in various outfits are published linked to clothing companies, and we believe that children in this way can be transformed into commodities (see Bauman, 2007). This raises an ethical discussion on children's being, becoming and belonging.

Furthermore, this study shows how cultures of consumption (Martens et al, 2004) can have an impact on children such as creating a fear to be excluded from the day care groups if they wear clothes which distance them from other children. In that way the parent child relationship can be affected depending on how parents choose to react to their children's wish to alter the way of dressing chosen by the parents. Consumption of clothes also reflects and impact children's identity formation by showing membership of a particular group, subculture or lifestyle.

Finally, four different consumer patterns were clearly distinguishable, indicating how mothers construct themselves and thereby their children i.e. to portray themselves as either a child centered consumer, a gender conscious consumer, a status and quality conscious consumer or as an ethical and environmentally conscious consumer

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Webblogg 2/ Community

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Webblogg 3

<http://ladydahmer.nu/konade-klader-handlar-bara-om-pengar/> [16/8/2013]

<http://ladydahmer.nu/man-behover-inte-kopa-klader-pa-polarn-o-pyret-for-att-fa-genusglada-barn/> [16/8/ 2013]

Webblogg 4

<http://ettbattredu.se/blogg/?cat=130> [16/8/2013]

Webblogg 5/Community

<http://blogg.alltforforaldrar.se/liniz/category/barnklader> [14/8/ 2013]