Behaviours and attitudes towards a sustainable consumption of fashion

by
Sara Habte Selassie
Supervisor : Olof Holm
Abstract

In the western society over consumption is common, as the market is saturated. Consumers have to adjust to the consumption society and follow new trends. The consequence of consumption is a topic that has been discussed more lately. Organisations, companies as well as consumers are starting to understand the importance of this issue and more eco-friendly materials and products are becoming available. Over consumption is however still a big problem that many people are not aware of. Consumers in the western society tends to buy an own a lot more than is needed, and are offered clothes to very low prices. Workers in the developing countries and the environment have to pay a high price to satisfy the needs of people in the west. When consumers come to buying decisions they many times act against their own cognizance. This happens when consumers become aware of something. The question is how consumers act in this situation and deal with the dissonance. The purpose of the report was to get a deeper understanding about how consumers behave and what causes their decisions. Two focus group interviews where made, which has given deeper understandings about what attitude, behaviour and knowledge western consumers have and the relation between these factors. The question is, if consumers are willing to sacrifice their own personal needs in order to protect the environment and improve the conditions of workers.

The results showed that when the respondents become aware of the consequences of consumption, they often do not reflect over their purchases. They ignore it or find ways to make their purchase acceptable. Furthermore, the respondents have a good attitude towards choosing better alternatives and reflecting more over the purchases they make. However, the respondents believed that the personal needs such as looking good, following trends, getting admiration from others, are many times prioritised over being considerate about the environment and other people. A person’s living situation also affects how he/she consumes and therefore this is important to consider. The conclusion is that, more knowledge is necessary to influence consumers and it will also make them aware that their actions have consequences. Through discussions more knowledge can be gained concerning the subject. Consumers need to know why they should choose an ecologic product over a regular one and how they can contribute. More information is also needed and companies have to inform about the alternatives and make such products more available.

Key words: Cognitive dissonance, Consumer behaviour, Eco-fashion, Sustainability
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In a saturated market like in our western society today, we have, as consumers, several options to choose between. We live in a world of over production were design is addressing customers’ wishes instead of creating new needs (Thackara, 2006). Fashion is used all over the world to create reactions both from producers, consumers, participants and viewers. What we decide to wear might say more than we actually are aware of (Ericsson, 2009). The western society is today imprinted by constant changes and as a consumer you have to adjust to new trends. The main consumer group which is exposed to new and fast changing fashion trends is the young ones. They are easily affected by the surroundings and consumption is a part of their lifestyle. Looking at Sweden as an example, the average Swede consumes 24 kilos of textile per year and women in the ages 16-24 consume the most. The global clothing industry is enormous and only in Sweden we buy clothes for 44 billion SEK each year (www.naturskyddsforeningen.se, 2009)

The impact consumption has on the environment and on people working in the industry, is a hot topic today as it is becoming more important for the future. Many organisations are aware of the importance of this topic. A number of companies are today working for social responsibility and companies that are only profit motivated are getting out of date (www.fibre2fashion.com). This issue has also emerged in different fashion schools where design students for example are taught how to develop eco-fashion (www.fashion.arts.ac.uk). The interest for eco-fashion has also increased among consumers thanks to more intense discussions about climate changes. Camilla Norrback is a Swedish fashion designer who uses eco-materials in her collections. She states that a lot has changed within the industry regarding eco-fashion. There are more available materials which are eco-friendly. Furthermore the interest for eco-fashion has increased and the attitude has changed, according to Norrback (Sievinen, 2007). Johanna Stål, who is the editor of the eco-lifestyle magazine Camino, also states that she has started to see a change among consumers. Consumers are getting disgusted with over consumption, and she believes that other values will be more important in the future (Lindsten, 2009). A study about attitudes among consumers made by Naturvårdsverket, shows that the number of consumers which are interested in buying products from companies that put less impact on the environment is increasing. At the same time the consumers require that it should be simple to be environmental-friendly (www.csrpraktiken.se, 2009).

However, over consumption is a big problem that many people are not aware of. In our western society we tend to buy and own a lot more than we actually need. Today it is possible to produce clothes to very low prices. This type of apparel is sometimes called fast fashion, and has a large impact on the environment and leaves a pollution footprint. Faster trends within fashion and interior design are increasing and contribute to more consumption of cheaper textiles, which in its turn have an impact on the environment. Of all the clothes we buy 50 % are made of cotton. Of the worlds cultivation area 2,4 % is cotton. 11% of the worlds pesticide and 25 % of all the insect control pesticides are used in the small area where cotton is produced (2,4%). WHO appreciates that each year around 40 000 persons die because of pesticides. To produce one kilo of cotton 10 000 to 17 000 litres of water is needed. Almost half of the water that is used to produce cotton comes from irrigation to enable the amount of water that is needed, the other half comes from rain. Irrigation can lead to salination and water-logging of the land and in the end this can lead to scarcity of water.
The second largest fibre that is used is synthetic and is made out of oil. This process is energy-intensive. When oil is extracted the production lets out heavy metal, greenhouse gas and solvent (especially when producing acryl). Within the textile factory there are a lot of procedures that affect the environment as well. In the production process of textile fibres several steps are included, such as spinning, carding, sizing, weaving, bleaching, washing, colouring etc. This process is very unhealthy for the workers as dangerous chemicals are used. To be able to process 1 kilo of fabric at least 350 litres of water and 1 kilo of chemicals are necessary. Several textile industries are not living up to the norms of health conditions and do not even have sewage cleaning, which leads to environmental toxins going straight out to the land and watercourse (www.naturskyddsforeningen.se).

Programs on TV and reports in magazines and newspapers about the downside of the textile industry have emerged lately. This is a way to inform people about this problem and show them the reality, which a lot of people are not aware of. Most of the clothes that are purchased in the west are made by millions of workers in developing countries in Asia. Korrespondenterna, which is a Swedish TV-program informed about the downside of the textile industry in Bangladesh and India. They examined the real price for the clothes that are available in stores in the west. Many big clothing chains claim that they can guarantee good working conditions and minimum wages, which they do not live up to. Lena Scherman and Tomas Hallstan who work at Korrespondenterna interviewed textile workers, cotton farmers and people working at trade unions in Bangladesh and India. They followed a seamstress who works in one of the textile industries in Bangladesh. Her working and living conditions were terrible, as she lived in a shelter next to a garbage mountain and worked 12 hours per day. Her monthly pay was 300 SEK, which is far from enough to live on in Bangladesh. To produce the textile and apparel a lot of cotton is produced that later becomes clothes in the factories in southern Asia. Korrespondenterna followed one cotton farmer who had worked with cotton production for a very long time, just as his brother and uncle. They have all developed cancer, as cotton needs a lot of fertilisation and pesticides to be produced. The production is not just dangerous directly for the workers, but also because of the poison that is found in the groundwater (www.svt.se, 2010).

Another report made by Naturskyddsföreningen (a Swedish company dealing with the effects that the chemicals have on the environment and the health) and Swedwatch, shows the effects the textile industry has on the environment. They examined the textile production in China, India and Bangladesh and also a few suppliers within the Swedish companies were studied. The study revealed that water tests and soil samples linked to these industries were heavily polluted. One example is Bangladesh where only 10 % of the companies have sewage installation and only a few of them use it as it is expensive. It is a devastating situation as the rivers change colour on a daily basis and environmental toxins in the ground which in its turn aggravates the agriculture. Mikael Karlsson who is the president for Naturskyddsföreningen, claims that the industrial development has increased very rapidly and the environmental consciousness has not followed (www.naturskyddsforeningen.se, 2008). The textile industry in Tiripur (a city in India), uses more than ninety million litres of water everyday. The emission has led to that most of the groundwater is poisoned down to a depth of hundred meters. At the same time as this is happening, the consumption in the western society is increasing. This is unsustainable and it is impossible to continue to produce this amount of apparel in a sustainable way, Per Rosander, environmental consultant, states. (www.naturskyddsforeningen.se, 2008).
To be able to understand consumers and the preferences they have when they purchase products it is of relevance to put oneself in the consumer’s situation. Many studies have been made within this field. Solomon & Rabolt, explains in *Fashion Consumer Behaviour*, that consumers make decisions on a daily basis regarding their purchases and they have different preferences and needs. An attitude towards an object can be linked to certain lifestyles and can determine a person’s consumption pattern (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009). Grunnert & Thorgersen also explain that it is important to regard that consumers are not always aware that their actions have external impacts, and therefore they do not take this into consideration in their decision making (Grunert & Thorgersen, 2005). Different people have different relations to consumption. There are consumers who try to contribute to a more sustainable future, but we also have to regard it as an important factor how the companies want to communicate their message to their consumers. It is not always easy for a consumer to know if a company is telling the truth or not in their marketing. However, it is important to see how consumers act in relation to what they know regarding consumption and what causes their decisions.

1.2 The problem discussion

To act against your own awareness might seem unrealistic. In fact, it is something that happens quite often. Many times when consumers purchase products, they buy the product because they like it and they do not reflect over their purchase. What happens when people become aware of something, would the awareness change their behaviour? Could one still buy the product and ignore the harsh reality that might lie behind it? When this dilemma arises cognitive dissonance appears, and we try our hardest to solve the problem and take a stand in the question. There are different ways in how consumers deal with their dissonance and relate to the consequences of consumption.

A problem we are facing today in the western world is that we live in a consumption society and over consumption is destroying our environment gradually. The society needs to move closer to a more sustainable future. Looking at the textile industry there are a lot of things that do not work according to acceptable norms. Many of the problems regarding this issue lie within the organisations and they are responsible, but consumers also have a big impact and are the ones that buy the products in the end. When we consume we make a statement, regardless of our awareness.

Consumers often do not think in long terms but only reflects over their needs. This contributes to environmental issues and horrible conditions for people working in the industry. If more people became aware of the consequences that their actions have, and reacted, the world would move towards a more sustainable future. In Sweden a great proportion of the population regard themselves as environment-conscious and according to a study made by Naturvårsverket, the attitude towards eco products has changed (www.csrpraktiken.se, 2009). When people are aware they have to start changing their behaviour and do something with their awareness. However, it is not clear, whether consumers are ready to change their consumption patterns and lifestyle in order to improve the world. Hence, it is of importance to understand how these consumption patterns develop, change and how they are affected, in order to reveal how consumers support or hinder a sustainable development. The question is how consumers react when they get aware of the downside of consumption, will the attitude against the issue change with new knowledge, and thereby their behaviour change?
1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this report is to examine what attitude, behaviour and knowledge consumers in the west (Sweden) have towards the products they buy within the fashion industry, and the relation between these factors. When consumers get knowledge and become aware of the downside of consumption, will their awareness change their behaviour, or will they find other solutions for solving and escape the problem? The question is if consumers are willing to sacrifice their own personal needs in order to improve for others as well as the planet. This will give a deeper understanding how consumers deal with their awareness.

1.4 Limitations

This report mainly deals with sustainable development within the fashion industry. There are many actors working towards a sustainable development, and it is complex and difficult to understand where a problem might start. The main focus in this report will be on consumers’ consumption behaviour. I decided to focus on the consumer group, rather than companies, organisations or the government, as the consumers are the ones that drive the consumption. Without consumers there will be no demand, and therefore they have the power and ability to react and contribute with their wishes and preferences. On the other hand the other involved actors play an important role in their relation to consumers, and this will be discussed as well. The focus will be on consumers in the western society and their relation to consumption. The report is discussed from a western point of view as we live in a saturated market where we over consume. Two focus group studies with Swedish consumers aging from 20-30 years are included in the report, as relatively young people tend to consume more. As the study only contains Swedish consumers it might limit the meaning of the result, but I consider these consumers as the typical exposed group for consumption. To get a deeper understanding and see if the results in this report can be trustworthy and be applied on consumers in general, I have also looked at other consumer studies within similar topics to compare the results.
2. Consumer Behaviour

2.1 Need

In the 1950’s Abraham Maslow developed the model of Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1970). This theory is still applicable today for understanding human motivations. All humans are motivated by needs, and our most basic needs are inborn. The first stage in the model deals with the biogenic needs such as food, water, air, protection and rest, which one cannot do without and it is necessary for the survival of an organism. Psychogenic needs such as status, power, affiliation, play an important role in becoming a member of a culture or society (Solomon et al. 2002). The model of the Hierarchy of needs states that each need must be satisfied in turn. It is first when the lower needs of physical and emotional well-being are satisfied that we think of the higher order needs.

![Maslow's Hierarchy of needs](www.theskooloflife.com)

2.2 Attitudes and behaviour

There are many different reasons why people shop and consumers’ level of involvement differs, according to Solomon & Rabolt. The reasons can be that shopping is: recreation, enjoyable, time wasting etc. Consumers can get overwhelmed by all the choices that are available on the market. Our choices are based on all the information we get from people around us, the surroundings, by mass media and by observations. The opinions consumers make are constantly changing and evolving based on all the information received (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009). The rational consumption perspective considers that consumers carefully evaluate the positives and negatives, and compare the available options before they purchase. This is a decision-making process that Solomon and co-workers believe should be examined carefully in order to receive information that can determine the choice of certain purchases among consumers. They also regard it as an important factor for companies to consider that consumers do not always make rational decisions and can act impulsive in their purchases (Solomon et al. 2002).
According to Solomon & Rabolt it is important to understand motivations, to understand why consumers act the way they do. When people behave in a certain way it is because a need is aroused that the consumer wishes to satisfy, and all consumers have different preferences and needs. The products and services that consumers end up choosing are often associated with a certain lifestyle. A person’s lifestyle and consumption patterns can be described by the attitude and personality a person has. An attitude is not something that just comes and goes. Attitudes are seen as general as they tend to endure over time. In all the choices that consumers make attitudes play a big role. For example an attitude can determine whether you will re-cycle your old clothes or not. Apart from personality and attitude there are as well other variables that can determine a person’s lifestyle, such as: age, income, education, social class etc. Who a person is can be determined by the choices of goods and services made. Lifestyles can be linked to the pattern of consumption that one has, which reflects the choices of how money and time is spent (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009).

Most of the time researchers agree that attitudes consist of three components. These components are affect, behaviour and cognition. Together they are called the ABC-model of attitudes. Affect is how a consumer feels about an attitude object. Behaviour on the other hand refers to the intentions a person has to do something with regard to an attitude object. The last component is cognition which involves the beliefs a consumer has about an object. The model highlights the correlation between knowing, feeling and doing. Looking at a person’s beliefs for example, the beliefs cannot on their own determine the attitude a person has towards a product. Researchers might for example find that a consumer knows that a particular garment contains 45% cotton and 55% polyester, but this does not mean that they feel that these attributes are good, bad, distinct, or if they would in the end buy them. All the three components in the model are important, but their relative importance varies as a consumer’s level of motivation towards the attitude object differs. Researchers who work with attitudes have developed the concept hierarchy of effects. This model explains the relative impact the three components mentioned above have (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009).

**Figure 2. Standard learning Hierarchy**

When a consumer is deciding what product to buy it is called a problem-solving process. Firstly the beliefs about a product are formed, by gathering knowledge regarding relevant attributes. Secondly, the beliefs are evaluated and feelings or affects are formed about the product. The last step based on the evaluation, is when the consumer engages in relevant behaviour and buys the product. By carefully evaluating the products before purchasing them often leads to consumer loyalty (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009).
In this situation the consumer does not have a preference over one product or the other. Instead the evaluation of a product is based on limited knowledge. The consumer’s choices are strengthened by good or bad experiences with the product after purchase. Some consumers do not really care about what products they purchase. This implies that all the concern about influencing beliefs and with awareness communicating information about product attributes, may at large be wasted. These types of consumers only respond to simple stimuli, such as clothes on sale and after that they make a quick decision to purchase the product (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009).

Here the emotional response is in focus, and is seen as the central aspect of an attitude. Consumers are performing on the basis of their emotional reactions. This perspective points out that attitudes can strongly be influenced by intangible attributes that products have. Examples of this can be, package design and consumer’s reactions towards a company’s stimuli (brand names and advertising). How the product makes the consumer feel is central in the experiential Hierarchy. Fashion is seen as a high-involvement product, but it can still suit here, as fashion is linked to emotion (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009).

Beliefs or evaluations should be consistent to each other, for example you rarely hear someone say: “I love this new dress, it looks ugly on me”. The principle of consistency states that consumers value harmony in their feelings, thoughts and behaviour. Cognitive dissonance is a theory that deals with contradiction among attitudes and behaviours that a person faces, and the person will do something to resolve this dissonance. It can be that the person changes an attitude or adjusts the behaviour (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009). It was Leon Festinger who developed the theory in 1957, and changed the way psychologists look at decision-making and behaviour. Cognition is pieces of knowledge that can be related to values, thoughts, facts or emotions. Most of the cognitions a person has are not related to each other, like in the example mentioned above. Some cognitions, on the other hand, are related, possibly someone has a sweet tooth and likes ice cream. There are also cognitions that are related but they do not follow each other and can be completely opposite. An example of this can be that a person loves sweets but at the same time wants to loose weight, which creates a problem. If the person decides to eat the sweets there is a great chance to gain weight. The alternative is to avoid the sweets and hopefully loose weight. These cognitions are seen as dissonant.
Therefore people do everything they can to get away from this dissonance and this can be approached in different ways (Barker, 2003).

One of them is to totally ignore or eliminate the dissonant cognition. If one for example pretends that smoking is not bad, it is a way to ignore the dissonance and allow him to do it anyhow. Another way to conquer the cognitive dissonance is to adjust the importance of certain cognitions. It can be to decide that smoking tastes good and I would not survive without it, and my health is not that important, I will not die. This narrows the dissonance and it means that one can smoke without feeling bad about it. The third way to deal with the cognitive dissonance is, to add or create new cognitions. Smoking is bad for my health which I am aware of, so instead of quitting smoking I add new cognitions. Examples of this can be: joining a health club, or quit eating sweets etc. These several cognitions allow me to smoke and say that it is ok. At last, one of the most important ways to deal with the cognition is to avoid it in the first place. This is the easiest way to deal with it as it is new information and different from what you first knew. You avoid all kinds of information regarding the issue, such as reading studies or listening to programs about it (Barker, 2003).

2.3 Consumers policy and the environment

Today consumers in several European countries are given co-responsibility for solving environmental problems, by changing their buying decisions, consumption choices and everyday routines. This happens since changes in environmental politics, political participation in general as well as other societal developments have taken place. Consumer behaviour often reflects motives, attitudes and buying intensions. These are based on cognitive and affective responses to political aspects of what companies supply and how this is done, and also to politics in general (Grunert & Togersen, 2005).

During the eighties the environmental problems were mainly understood and taken care of by politicians, public authorities and other experts, but at that time they only dealt with limited problems like technical solutions, such as dilution, filtering and permit limits. Public authorities were seen as the ones to solve environmental problems and it was their task to regulate and control the actors considered as main sources for pollution. However the environmental situation changed in the end of the eighties, as public authorities began to view environmental problems differently. As there was an increasing attention on global environmental problems (climate changes, declining natural recourses, and widespread substances with toxic effects), public authorities adopted more complete ideas solving the environmental problems. Examples of these solutions were supporting the development of cleaner technologies and complex long-term risk analyses. Consumers are forced to relate to public aspects of consumption, when they are given co/responsibility for solving environmental problems, that before used to be solved by the institutionalised political system (Grunert & Togersen, 2005).

An important question for consumers’ protection agencies and organisations is how one can increase consumer knowledge about the consequences of purchasing, consuming and disposing objects. It is important to find out about those factors which turn some people into less reactive and motivated consumers than others. When a consumer goes through the process of problem solving of purchasing and consumption, apart from actively gathering information and identifying the problem, they may also take initiatives to interact with the surrounding world and voice their opinion. This enables them to enter into a dialog with other consumers and with producers. Producers should behave and markets should be designed in such a way that consumers have a real opportunity to come to buying decisions that guide them into choosing products according to their needs (Grunert & Togersen, 2005).
3. Method

3.1 Choice of method

Consumers have different preferences and needs which form their consumption pattern. In order to examine what causes certain behaviours among consumers and how they react to their awareness, the best way to approach this is by a qualitative method. The aim of a qualitative method is to examine what character a phenomenon has and how it can be identified (Wallen, 1996). A qualitative method makes it possible to study specific subject areas, situations or happenings on a deeper and more detailed level. The reason for this is that a qualitative method is not limited by predetermined analyse categories. The overall picture is more important here than the individual parts (Gustavsson, 2003). A qualitative method is also necessary when the topic discussed is vague, ambiguous and subjective. Examples of this can be feelings and experiences than can not be measured directly, which is the case in this report (Wallen, 1996). A quantitative method can also be used in order to get a broader picture and to reach a larger target group. However I decided not to do so, as I aim to reach deeper values. The main problem that is discussed within a qualitative method is to make the right limitations and to classify one certain phenomenon within the right category, if the study should focus on females or males, what age etc (Wallen, 1996).

The main task is to study why consumers behave in a certain way, and how their behaviour can be changed through awareness. To understand how consumers deal with their awareness the best way is to ask them and enable an open discussion where they can exchange thoughts. Therefore I have made focus group interviews, which will give me a deeper understanding of consumers’ relation to consumption and how they act and behave in their purchases.

3.2 Survey and limitations

To get a deeper understanding and analysis of how consumers act and think, I have decided to use focus on group interviews. This type of interview is called in depth interview. The purpose is to ask questions without any defined structure, listen and note the answers and ask leading questions to keep the conversation going. This type of interview requires the moderator to carefully listen and concentrate, in order to be able to understand other persons’ perspectives and way of thinking (Gustavsson, 2003). A focus group is an effective method for reaching several respondents at the same time. By gathering a group of persons an open discussion is enabled, where the respondents can share thoughts, opinions and influence each other. It is important as a moderator to let all the respondents participate. Another important task the moderator has is to be observant that the discussion is kept to the relevant issue (Olsson & Sörensen, 2001).

The rule of thumb regarding focus groups says that there should be a minimum of three focus groups to be able to deduce opinions and tendencies. After a few interviews the topic that is discussed gets saturated and no more information is added to the discussion (Wibeck, 2000). Therefore another interview at this stage is simply a waste. Therefore, I decided to start with two focus groups. After the second focus group interview I felt that the same type of discussion circulated around the topics, and therefore I did not continue with more interviews. Each focus group includes four persons. According to Wibeck, a focus group should not consist of more than four persons, in order to keep the attention among the respondents. Using
more respondents will be too complex and hard to examine and the discussion will not be as deep as when using less people. The discussion is based on both giving and taking, and in this way a true conversation will take place within the focus group (Wallen, 1996). My aim was to focus on fewer persons with more knowledge regarding the subject. Consumers who are more aware about consumption and the society in general will make the entire conversation more relevant. It was hard to collect persons who are well aware and to know beforehand exactly how the discussions would turn out. The second focus group tended to have less knowledge and consume more than the first focus group. Anyhow all of the respondents had some knowledge about the consequences of consumption and contributed with useful information.

I contacted different persons whom I know and who in their turn contacted other persons. In order to avoid underlying meanings that can occur when everyone knows each other, I decided to mix the focus groups with people who are not related to each other. The respondents are aging from 20 to 30 and have mixed genders. It could have been interesting to look at a wider range of ages, but as this age group tends to consume most when it comes to the apparel business, that is the reason for my selection. I have used four discussion topics as a guideline instead of specific questions to allow an open discussion (Wallen, 1996). There is no defined structure in a depth interview, as questions and answers are linked together in one discussion (Gustavsson, 2003). The four different discussion areas are: 1. Consumer needs, 2. Knowledge that the respondents have/how they received it, 3. The relation between attitude, knowledge and behaviour, and 3. Reasons for certain behaviours.

3.2.1 Focus group 1

The first focus group consisted of two boys and two girls. Johan was one of the respondents. He is a 28 years old Dental hygienist. Johan is interested in fashion, but does not purchase clothes that often. He considers himself to be a consumer who has awareness and reflects over his purchases at times. Hanna is a 28 year old Biologist. In her education she has taken courses about the environment. That has made her aware of the consequences of consumption. Malin is 25 years old and has graduated from social studies. She is very interested in fashion and likes to mix second-hand clothes with new ones. Arvid is a building engineer and is 30 years of age. He does not shop that often, and uses his clothes for a longer period of time. He believes that he has some knowledge about the effects of consumption, as he has read books and articles about the subject.

3.2.2 Focus group 2

The second focus group consisted of three girls and one boy. Annika is 25 years old, and is studying to become a teacher. She has taken a course that raises the environmental issues, and considers herself to be aware of the consequences of consumption. Annika purchases clothes once in a while, and she does not always reflect over her purchases. Kristina is 27 years of age and works as an accountant. Kristina has limited knowledge about the consequences of consumption and purchase clothes quite often. Mats is studying political science and is 28 years old. He is not that interested in fashion and does not purchase clothes very often. Mats considers himself to be relatively aware of the impact consumption has on the environment. Johanna is 25 years old and works as an Economy Assistant. She loves fashion and buys clothes very often without reflecting over her purchases. Johanna is aware that her actions have consequences.
3.3 Data processing

When data is collected it means that different features are identified and the numbers of objects with certain qualities are counted. It is possible to identify qualitative features, but they cannot be graded in the same way as with a quantitative method (Olsson & Sörensen, 2001). As a monitor I wrote down the whole interview, but to make sure that I have absorbed all the information, a recorder was also used. A recorder enables one to listen to tone of voice and choice of words (Gustavsson, 2003). After interviewing the focus group I collected all the information, both from notes and from the recording. In the next step I structured the discussion and the four different topics in order to make it a fluent text. Translating information is a fundamental thing when impressions, memories and different facts are observed, because it is meaningful and can lead to action. Translating data is also important because it helps provide complementary information (Wallén, 1996).

3.4 Data analysis

When one analyses the data it is important to examine if there is hidden and underlying messages. Is it possible that there is a difference in what someone thinks, says and actually does (Olsson & Sörensen, 2001). In the analysis answers from the respondents have been compared with the theories that are illustrated in the theory chapter and also with the background chapter. The analysis chapter is followed by a discussion and conclusion chapter. In addition to the theory, results from other studies are compared with the two focus group interviews in order to see if there is a similar pattern among consumers in general.
4. Moving closer to a sustainable future

4.1 Sustainable materials

Several organisations are constantly working for improving their environmental impact and improve working situations for people employed in the industry. Today, there are also companies that are only based on eco products. Eco fashion is starting to be developed more by manufacturers, as fast fashion has an environmental impact. There are different ways in how to move closer towards sustainability. One approach is to use sustainably grown cotton, bamboo, hemp as well as other fiber crops that have less impact on the environment, and require less irrigation and pesticides. Organic cotton is produced in more than 12 countries in the world and the sales of organic cotton have increased over the last years. Wal-Mart who is America’s largest retailer started to sell organic cotton in some of their products in 2004 in their women’s shirts for example. They are today the largest buyer of organic cotton (Claudio, 2007).

The number of companies which provide eco-fashion is increasing and there are several innovative options that consumers can choose between within this market segment, from casual clothing to haut couture. Another sustainable approach is to use polymers that are created from plant-based materials. An example of a material like this is Ingeo, and it is made of corn by-products that are fermented and transformed into polylactide. After this the polymer is spun into fibers and finally woven into fabrics (Claudio, 2007).

4.2 Organisations and companies working for fair conditions

Social responsibility has increased among companies and this means that the organisations should maximize their positive impact on society and minimize the negative ones. This does not only concern organisations, but also individuals and the government. The concept Social responsibility can be separated into two parts: environmental responsibility and human responsibility (www.fibre2fashion.com). The World Trade Organisation (WTO) is a global international organization which deals with rules for trade between nations. Their aim is to help producers of goods and services, importers and exporters to carry out their business (www.wto.org). WTO has taken several steps to improve the textile industry. Another organization which promotes justice when it comes to trade between countries, is the Fairtrade Foundation, which is a non-profit organization. They license the use of FairTrade Mark on products in the UK, along with internationally agreed Fairtrade standards (www.fairtrade.org.uk). By choosing products that are Fairtrade marked one contributes to improvement of the working and living conditions for farmers and other employees in the developing countries (www.fairtrade.se).

4.2.1 Patagonia

Yvon Chouinard is the founder of Patagonia, which is an outdoor clothing and equipment company. Since 1993 they have been selling fleece clothing made from postconsumer plastic soda bottles. The re-cycling process takes the bottles made of polyethylene terephthalate (PET) and melts and reconfigures them into fibers. These fibers are later woven into fabrics along with other applications. By re-cycling Patagonia estimated that they saved 86 million soda bottles from ending up in the land fill, between the years 1993 and 2006. Through an
Italian company called Calamai Functional fabrics, Patagonia also re-cycles cotton t-shirts, which saves 20 000 liters of water per kilogram cotton (Claudio, 2007).

Chouirnard’s business philosophy is based on breaking the rules of business. He states that he does not care about making profit, but instead about how the process is going. What ever products a company offers they have to think about creating the best products. This means to minimize the harm that the products bring on the environment. Patagonia questioned what fabrics their clothes should be made of without harming the environment and the people working with producing them. They learnt that the worst fabric was pure cotton. Chouirnard said that “I do not want to be in business if the cotton we use is conventionally grown”. The working environment should also be places were the workers feel free, and it should not be a burden to come to work everyday. They should work under safe conditions were their health is not put in danger. A business should be run in the most responsible way. The decisions should be based on the fact that our planet is the stockholder, he continues. After you educate yourself you are left with making the right choices. It is up to oneself to clean up your act and minimize the damages (Chouirnard, 2009).

Chouirnard points out that there is nothing that is totally sustainable and there is no such thing as a harmless product, and this is the cost of doing business. However, to move closer to sustainability 1 % of Patagonia’s profit goes to environmental improvements. This is a way to push the government into making changes, to influence other businesses to make as little harm as possible in order to save the planet. An example of this is Wal-Mart which is the largest retailer in the states. Patagonia is advising and helping them to use organic cotton and to put less impact on the environment. According to Chouirnard, to consume is simply to destroy. That is a reason why Patagonia in their marketing tell the customers not to buy a product if they do not really need it. Buy what you need instead of what you want. They challenge the consumers to re-use or re-sell their products. When a product is really finished the consumers can give it back to Patagonia and they will re-cycle it. A goal that the company strives to accomplish is to one day make all their products of re-cycled material. Furthermore the products should be composted (Chouirnard, 2009).

4.2.2 People Tree

People Tree is a Fair trade and ecological fashion company, founded by Safia Minney in 1989. She is a British Fair Trade and environmental activist. The company offers clothes, accessorises, home-wares, bed lines and gifts, for all ages and genders. From start to finish the products that they offer are made to the highest environmental and fair-trade standards. The company wants to prove that it is possible to make fashionable products and at the same time show respect for the planet and for people. All the clothes that People Tree offers are free from azo chemicals, which are harmful to the environment. As much as possible the company uses locally and natural products, which includes handmade re-cycled paper products, products made from jute etc. They avoid using toxic and plastic substances. When the clothes are dyed low impact of dyes are used. The company works with 70 different Fair trade groups in 20 developing countries. This cooperation helps people that live in some of the most marginalized communities to use Fair Trade to move away from poverty. The producers that they work with are paid fair prices, provided technical and design assistance and are offered payments in advance. People Tree also support environmental welfare projects in different places in the world, such as schools, tree-planting schemes and hospitals. Furthermore they support organic cotton farming. In many developing countries cotton is a central good and a financial income for several of the poorest farmers in the world, and conventional produced
cotton has a devastating effect on textile workers, farmers and the environment. Therefore People Tree works closely with organic cotton producers and garment manufacturers and takes part in every stage of the production process, this in order to avoid the harsh impact conventional cotton production has (www.thedesignofprosperity.se).

4.2.3 Swedish organisations and companies

The ecological and fair trade marked products are increasing in the fashion industry. Looking at Sweden, there are many companies which work with environmental products and materials. Dem Collective is a fashion company which combines ecology, ethics, quality, and good design. The company was established in 2004 as a protest against how clothes are produced. The company shows that it is possible to run a business without harming environment and exploiting workers. The Swedish designer Camilla Norrback provides eco- products or materials in most of her collections. Even the big fashion companies have started to offer ecological clothes for all ages. Examples of these companies are H &M, Polarn & Pyret, Lindex and La Redoute (www.ekolifestyle.se).

Naturskyddsföreningen is a Swedish company dealing with the effects that the chemicals have on environment and health. They put a high pressure on the Swedish companies who import and deliver goods, to be aware of the circumstances in the developing countries. During the past years they have extended their organisations in Africa and focus on preventing toxic chemicals from spreading (Neiman, 2009). Naturskyddsföreningen’s environmental mark is Bra miljöval. (www.naturskyddsforeningen.se).

A new way of thinking in the fast changing fashion industry is on its rise, and a new sustainable concept within vintage and re-design has been established. During the last couple of years re-design has been established among charity organisations in Sweden (Myrorna, Stadsmissionen) and also among smaller Swedish fashion companies, like Acne and Filippa K (Camino, 11, 2009). Second-hand and vintage clothes are cheap and at the same time good for the environment. To reuse means to minimize the resources and to purchase less. In addition, using clothes for a longer period of time and exchange them with other people is sustainable. Recycle is another way of giving life to an item. Some second-hand stores collect clothes from people and the textile is later used to produce new clothes. Another aspect of ecology and fashion is how we take care of the clothes we own. Important factors are: how long we keep, use and treat the items during their lifecycle. There are several international and national eco-marks for both clothes and textiles. By buying ecological or fair-trade marked products one affects the environment less and the workers in the industry get paid fair prices (www.ekolifestyle.se).
5. Results

5.1 Focus group 1

5.1.1 Need

After the background was presented to the respondents, the conversation started with the concept of need, and how the respondents perceive that. Hanna opened the discussion with saying that we do not need as much as we buy, but we purchase any way. She mainly thinks it is because we get affected by the surrounding environment and media. The whole fashion industry is built on creating new trends that one should follow, and if consumers would not have felt that kind of pressure, she thinks that the same need would not exist. The rest of the respondents agree on this. Johan gives an example: “I do not only buy shoes when one pair breaks, I have for example 20 pairs of sneakers, and five of them are white. On the other hand I have had a few of them for a couple of years, he claims. “I have to admit that this is over consumption”, Johan states.

The whole society is a consumption society which cheats one into buying, according to Hanna. We might think that we get happier and feel better because we possess more, but in fact we do not feel better, she continues. All the respondents point out that they might not be the typical consumer group which consumes the most and never reflects over their purchases, as their friends might be. However they often make purchases and never reflect over their actual need. Johan claims that most of the times you have to tell yourself why you bought this certain product, to get away from the bad conscience. This bad conscience exists just because you know that the purchase was unnecessary, and you have to find reasons to make the purchase ok, he continues. An example that he gives is if you buy a pair of grey shoes instead of the white ones that you already have at home, you persuade yourself that the purchase is ok. Hanna also describes how the bad conscious many times makes you think twice before you purchase something, and it is because you know that you do not need the item.

In connection to the introduction that the respondents received, Arvid asked how it can be possible in countries like India to produce conventionally grown cotton that is a contributing factor to cancer for the people working in the production, and at the same time it is polluting the environment. Malin continued the discussion questioning where the problem actually begins and she believes that it is because of the needs we as consumers have in the west that has created and affected the situation in the east. As long as we have our need to buy products at for example H&M, the process will continue, Johan states.

5.1.2 Knowledge

How much knowledge the respondents have and also how they got this knowledge is interesting to look at. All of the respondents claim that they have knowledge about the consequences of consumption, even if it is limited. The knowledge that most people have mainly comes from news or TV-programs like Uppdrag Granskning, and media in general, Hanna points out. This is how one can get insight, into what reality looks like, she continues. Malin says that, as a consumer, she knows that workers in the textile industry are affected by the chemicals that are used in the production, but she does not know anything more specific about what really happens. According to Hanna this subject as been observed the last couple of years and through that she has gained more knowledge about the downside of consumption.
Malin declares that, one reason for lack of knowledge is probably that we do not want to know about the reality, because then we can escape from the bad conscience it creates.

All of the respondents explain that most of the knowledge they have comes from media. It happens very rarely that they search for information by themselves. Most of what you hear, you believe to be good or true, Hanna says. Arvid got a deeper understanding about the downside of the textile industry when he read a book about it, which explained the dirty truth about the industry. He claims that it was after reading this book that he became aware about the consequences of consuming in a totally different way. The first reaction was that he did not want to purchase products at all, or at least just buy alternative products. However this thought disappeared pretty quickly, even though it did not necessarily disappear from his memory.

Johan compared food and fashion, because he thinks that there is a big difference between the categories when it comes to knowledge and choosing the right products. According to him there is a larger possibility to choose sustainable and eco-friendly food, as the supply is bigger and more convenient. Eco-fashion is starting to enter the market more and more, but these are not the clothes that you prefer, Malin states. You get irritated because of the plain and boring look the clothes from the eco-lines have. Mainly basic items are available, both Hanna and Malin agree. They discuss H&M’s eco-line, but the clothes are not that exiting so that you would choose them over the original ones. Arvid and Johan have not seen that much of eco-clothes, but know that they exist. Another option that was discussed is Second-hand clothes. Malin claims, that it is fun and at the same time feels good to reuse old clothes.

All the respondents claim, that you never get information from the stores about how to consume. This information you have to find yourself, but often you do not do this, Johan states. The respondents question if salespersons have knowledge at all about alternative options for consumers. Malin who has worked in a store thinks that in a smaller store the salespersons are not as controlled as in bigger stores. Therefore they might have the power to influence customers and may also have more knowledge regarding alternative products. One store where Malin worked was all about pushing the consumers into buying more. If a customer liked a certain jeans model, why not buy them in another colour as well. This was a message that the company wanted to push on the salespersons’, but Malin claims that it did not feel right. What alternatives does she have if she wants to keep her job, she asked. “I am aware of my contribution to the consumption society, but if I would not do the job someone else would”, she claims.

### 5.1.3 Attitude – knowledge - behaviour

The knowledge that the respondents already had together with the background of the study they had received, what do they do with their awareness? The awareness is not always there but when you are aware you often do not act upon your awareness, Johan declares. He thinks that a reason for this can be that one is lazy or egoistic. If devastating news about a company are revealed you do not want to purchase your clothes from them any more, Hanna states. On the other hand you need a new t-shirt and you end up in the same store any way, she continues. Hanna believes it is because of not enough options. How can you trust another store then, which might do the same thing? Malin thinks that a reason for not choosing eco-clothes even if you are aware of their existence can be because they are too expensive. She thinks that a good solution is to mix old clothes with new, and buy second-hand clothes now and then. It is both fun and for a good cause to use old recycled clothes. The rest of the respondents agree and also purchase second-hand clothes at times.
How can consumers act in relation to their awareness? Johan believes that with more knowledge and convenient products it is easier for the consumer to do something with their awareness. It is possible to affect the consumption patterns we have as individuals, but something needs to happen in order to lift up the discussion to the surface and make people aware and do something with their awareness, Malin declares. She believes that the subject needs to be discussed more between friends and also in media, otherwise it is easy to forget. If someone talks about it you can not pretend that the issue does not exist. As a consumer you can search for alternative products, but the availability of ecological products must be present on equal level as the regular products, so that consumers can have a fair choice, Hanna states. Johan argues that there are some consumer groups which are well aware consumers and chooses sustainable products, but in order to reach the majority of consumers also he believes that more options are necessary. “If you are going to consume you might as well consume the best”, Johan says.

Arvid on the other hand claims that we can not do that much as individuals. The government has a big responsibility, and the whole consumption issue is a political decision, he continues. Arvid thinks that it is obvious that it should be forbidden to produce “cancer cotton”. Johan believes that if we as consumers push the politicians and do not support the production of certain products, this is a way to contribute. By expressing the view that we as consumers do not want to support consumption that fosters injustices and that has a negative impact on the environment, is a way to tell the politicians what we think, he continues. Hanna thinks that it is hard to influence the downsides of consumption when the problem is mainly found in other countries far away.

5.1.4 Reasons for certain behaviours

According to the respondents, the fact that one chooses certain products and over consumes, is not due to lack of knowledge. It is rather because you are selfish and only think about your own needs, Johan claims. People who are wealthy and are used to a high standard of living normally get whatever they want, and they rarely think about the consequences of consumption, according to Hanna. Many persons also put a lot of effort in looking good, which is often associated with owning the latest trendy clothes, Malin carries on.

Most people in Sweden have enough knowledge about the consequences of consumption to enable them to stop and think about the purchases they make, Johan claims. He does not think that we can complain over lack of knowledge and awareness. To make consumers react and change their behaviours, Johan thinks that one has to be affected before a change occurs. As long as the problem is too far away and will not affect us in Sweden for example, the mass of consumers will not change their behaviour, he thinks. Maybe consumers should be forced to visit textile factories and see the reality, Hanna says. Malin thinks that if a dangerous chemical from textile industries far away would blow to Sweden, then maybe people would react because it would affect them. If it would be discovered that a t-shirt they sell at H&M might produce cancer when you ware it, people would for sure stop buying it, Johan continues. All the respondents agree on that something which feels so close to the individual that it would affect him/her, the people around, or the next generation is needed before he/she reacts. It should be near both geographically and time wise to make people react, according to Johan. The respondents believe that the environmental impact and the working conditions are
a threat that is big and close enough to affect us. Therefore they believe that it is important that we act and change our habits.

If a person lives in a certain way it can be hard to break the consumption pattern, as the living situation many times is a contributing factor to the consumption pattern, Malin states. She believes that it is important to start thinking differently, and change habits such as recycling, grow your own vegetables etc. Johan believes that there is a greater possibility that a person who purchases second hand clothes also grow their own food, and go by bicycle, while a person who constantly purchases new clothes might drive a car and never save electricity.

According to Hanna H&M is a good option for people who can not afford to buy ecological products, as they offers trendy clothes to affordable prices. Hanna questions what options consumers in this situation have? Across the genders all the respondents agree that girls have a greater strive to follow trends than boys have, and a reason can be that the supply for girls is greater. Social media and fashion blogs write mostly about fashion for girls, and the respondents also believe that this is the consumer group which is more exposed. Arvid believes that it is easier for guys not to follow trends, as fashion is more timeless for males. However he realises that it is of course something that varies from person to person and not only between genders. He also believes that consumers in the ages between 20-30 care more about their looks and do not care as much about the consequences of consumption as the older generation do.

What options do the respondents consider that they have when it comes to choosing better products? It is hard for a consumer to know whom to trust, when one wants to make the right choices, Hanna claims. As a consumer you often feel small and powerless. She hopes for a brighter future when it comes to more options for environmental clothes. According to all the respondents it is hard to know where to go and find good alternatives. They can only think about a few stores like H&M, that provides eco-lines, or second-hand stores. Tailor-made clothes are an alternative that Arvid suggests. Really, the best thing is to weave and sew your own clothes, Hanna states. What is most important, she continues, is to ask yourself as a consumer if you really need this item before buying it. It is better to purchase products that you know will last longer and something you feel comfortable wearing for a longer time, instead of constantly buying new products, Malin claims. Even the most expensive stores and brands can be hard to trust, as their clothes can also be produced in such a way that workers and environment pay a high price, she carries on.

According to Malin, companies sometimes campaign certain things by motivating you as a consumer. For example, if you buy these shoes a child in Africa gets one pair as well. If Nike would make a big campaign like that, would they only think about making more profit, or are they thinking about helping the deprived and poor, Arvid questions. The other respondents believe that they are driven by pure profit making. The way people think needs to change, Hanna states. Malin who once worked in an Outlet, called Lager 157, says that the owner has totally changed the way he thinks and how he promotes his products. Lager 157s marketing now says “do not buy this if you do not need it”, instead of, “buy two and pay for one”. Does it really matter what reasons there are behind a company’s campaign as long as it is for a good sake, Arvid asks. The other respondents, on the other hand, believe that if the company does not have a genuine interest in working for a sustainable future, nothing will change in the long run.
5.2 Focus group 2

5.2.1 Need

All of the respondents agree that they often buy something new just to feel nice for themselves and also for others. Kristina claims that you cheat yourself that you need the item, even though you know that you do not. Both Kristina and Johanna agree that they do not reflect over certain products more than others, they just want to wear something new. Both of them mainly purchase impulsively. Annika states that you create needs that you did not have before in order to have a reason for purchasing. According to her certain items like buying a coat for the winter season is a purchase you reflect over, as you need a warm and comfortable jacket, which is long lasting and protects you against the cold. Johanna admits that she would choose a jacket that is not warm enough if it looks very appealing to her. Mats points out that regardless of what needs consumers have it is all about satisfying your own needs before you think of others. As most of the purchases that Kristina makes are impulsive, it is not before she comes home that she starts to reflect over her purchases and feels that they might be unnecessary. Annika agrees on this, and states that it is first then that you feel sick over all the purchases you made. You create certain needs to buy new good-looking clothes, Johanna continues, in order to get admiration from others. She also adds that if something does not cost that much, you get fooled into buying several items. With more money you also create a greater need and you have the possibility to purchase more without reflecting much, Annika states. She purchased clothes more often when she worked, but know as a student she has to reflect more over the purchases she makes. However the main reason for the reflections she makes is money.

5.2.2 Knowledge

The respondents do not have exhaustive knowledge about the industry, but they are aware and have knowledge at some level. Kristina claims that if a program about the downside of the industry is on TV, she would change channel or turn it off, as she feels bad about knowing about the reality. It is easier to ignore the problem, she continues. Mats also believes that the problem is ignored of egoistic reasons, because you get bad conscience and feel bad that you are not doing anything. Johanna states that she has heard of child labour, but it is hard to know which products and brands that support this kind of work. Therefore it is hard as a consumer to know if one should buy a certain product instead of another, because there is no information that informs about the process behind the product.

Annika states, that even though you know that there might be child labour or other terrible conditions behind the production, you do not know as a consumer which these products are. She continues by focusing on the issue regarding fur that was revealed a couple of years ago. Animals suffered terrible consequences so that we could create nice fur-coats for us humans, she carries on. When such an important issue is discussed by the media people get knowledge and become more aware, Mats fills in. Annika has taken a course about the environment and the impact of consumption. Therefore she has some knowledge about this, even though she admits that she does not always act and behave in accordance with what she knows. With the knowledge that Kristina has, she believes that she is not one of the worst consumers, there are other people who consume more, she states.
5.2.3 Attitude- Knowledge- Behaviour

All of the respondents do not believe that it is only with more knowledge that consumers will change their behaviour and purchase more ecological products. Most of the times I do not do anything with my awareness, Kristina states, I simply ignore it. Annika believes that we can not blame ourselves for not being aware, but at the same time she “would go nuts” if she thought about the consequences of consumption all the time. It is hard to make a big change as an individual, but we consumers can contribute a little if we act according to what we know, Johanna states. Kristina continues to point out that in everything she does she wants to do all or nothing. She also believes that with more money, you have more power to influence and buy ecological products.

Annika bought two ecological jumpers form a Swedish clothing-chain called Vero Moda. The main reason for buying the first jumper was because it looked good, but when she found out that the jumper contained ecological cotton, she felt good and bought another one. If the ecological products would not be as expensive as they are, Annika says she would definitely buy ecological products more. Even though the respondents are aware to some extent, Johanna believes that with more awareness about the consequences of consumption, one will probably consume less, or at least have the power to do so. Kristina thinks that the awareness, she and many other consumers have is not enough to make a change, as the desire to look good and purchase more clothes often dominates over the idea of being nice to the environment and consuming less.

To act according to what you know is hard, but Annika believes that if consumers constantly get reminded about the downside of consumption it will be easier. Mats agrees, and states that many times people have knowledge but not enough. Mats knows that there are downsides of the industry, but do not have real facts. If something drastically would occur, Annika believes that people would react and think twice. She brings up the fur-example again, which resulted in people buying less and not wanting to be associated with it. Mats also questions that if the stores offer eco-lines, why do they only offer one eco-line. Johanna agrees that there should be more stores which can provide only eco-clothes.

5.2.4 Reasons for certain behaviours

The respondents do not believe that certain behaviours are due to lack of knowledge. What you ignore, is something you imagine that you do not know at all, Kristina states. Mats claims that a lot of things have changed compared to many years ago, so that nowadays everyone consumes, regardless of if one is rich or poor. The society is built in such a way that people should own the latest piece and the industry has also created clothes that do not last very long, in order to make people purchase more often, Kristina continues. Annika believes that a certain lifestyle can determine your consumption patterns and what interest you have. If a person changes his attitude towards his or her living situation it will affect the way you look at consumption and clothes as well, she continues. According to her, there can also be a difference between countries and different people.

Johanna states that she does not know which the best alternatives are for buying better products. There is a lack of information, according to her. She knows that H&M provides eco-lines as well as Swedish fashion brands like Filippa K, but the information is not that much spread among consumers. Kristina continues by discussing if there is any guarantee that the products would be better and more trustworthy if they are more expensive. She questions if a designer piece is better to purchase and she thinks that it is hard to know whom to trust. An idea Kristina brings forward is that there should be certain rules forcing companies to inform
consumers about the products, production process etc. Mats agrees, and thinks that this would be a good way of pushing consumers towards choosing more sustainable products. If the information is right in front of you, you can not really ignore the problem, he continues. Similarly, Annika claims that in that case, it would be as if we had the option to choose a product that is harmful, or one which is not. She declares that, consumers would feel too bad if they knew that they supported this kind of product. Mats gives an example that was discussed a couple of years ago regarding crisps. Researchers found out that if you ate crisps you could develop cancer. When this topic was shown on the news people did not want to eat them anymore, Mats claims. His point is that when people become aware of something that would directly affect them they stop their behaviour and this is also true for the fashion industry.

Johanna thinks that it is the big companies that have to change their way of thinking and stop using child labour or unsustainable products. In relation to this, Kristina questions if it is the consumers who first need to change their way of thinking and behaviour in order to make the companies realise the new demand of consumers. Annika agrees, but at the same time she states that it is hard to work against obstacles and as a consumer you want to see positive results by contributing. She carries on the discussion by saying that she believes that people are actually willing to make a change, but they do not believe that they have the power to change. Kristina thinks that price rules over environmental factors, and if there is one item that is organic and a little bit too expensive the consumer will pick the other alternative and pay less. Johanna does not completely agree on this, as she states that if she would have two similar alternatives, she could buy the ecological one if the price difference was not too great.

The focus group also discusses the difference between food and clothes, and believes that there is a big difference in information between the two categories. Johanna states that she is well aware of all the different ecological options available when it comes to food. She believes that more ecological alternatives for the fashion industry and information about them is necessary. With more ecological products available shown all over the shop people would find them easier, as they would not need to search for them, Mats states. Annika has seen a rise in ecological thinking, but on the other hand she believes that to change consumers’ consumption patterns in a whole society is something that is not done over a day. There is no one who actually wants to buy products that are bad for the environment or the workers.

Furthermore the respondents believe that with more knowledge they can consume less in the future and when they do consume, they can buy more alternative products. Kristina states, that she does not know if she is willing to consume much less, but she definitely wants to purchase more sustainable products. Mats thinks that it is strange how companies can offer one eco-line in their entire collection that is good and the rest are clothes that more or less destroy the environment and the workers, he continues. This is something that Annika can agree with, but at the same time things have to start somewhere, and companies are starting to understand the importance of offering sustainable products, and hopefully more consumers are as well. It is becoming trendier to be ecological, “it starts as a trend and finishes as a necessity”, according to Annika. Johanna agrees, and claims, that trends can be very effective as people almost get fooled into wearing almost anything.
6. Analysis

6.1 Need

6.1.1 The consumption society

The respondents behaved in the way Solomon & Rabolt explain that people do when a need is aroused (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009). The focus group interviews showed that the respondents are aware that the need they have for buying a certain product many times is not really a need, as something they can not live without. The two focus groups differ somewhat from each other as the second focus group tends to purchase a little more than the first one. However, all of the respondents claimed that they do not always reflect over their purchases. Another thing that is coherent with the focus groups is that their needs are developed as an effect of the existing consumption society in the west. They are affected by the surroundings, media and other people. This strengthens Solomon & Rabolts theory, which states that our choices are based on all the information we get from people around us, the environment and by observations.

The focus groups discussed that the whole fashion industry is built on creating new trends, which in its turn creates new needs that affect consumers, who feel a pressure to look good and own the latest clothes. A reason according to one of the respondents is to get admiration from others. Without the pressure from the fashion industry this need would not exist in the same way, according to the respondent. This shows that the basic needs that Abraham Maslow discusses are already fulfilled and the respondents have moved up to higher order needs in the hierarchy (Maslow, 1970). The respondents have now reached the state of belongingness. Consumers create new needs and change opinions along with new trends. This is also what Solomon & Rabolt mean when they discuss that the opinions consumers make are constantly changing and evolving (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009).

6.1.2 Reasons for purchasing

All of the respondents claimed that they most of the time do not buy an item because they need it. The reason for the purchase is rather because they like the item and feel that they would look good in it. These types of purchases are examples of rational impulsive purchases that Solomon et al. describes (Solomon et al. 2002). According to one of the respondents one need can differ from another depending on what product one purchases. If it is winter outside for example, a winter coat is necessary to keep warm during the season. On the other hand one of the respondents claimed that a good-looking jacket that is not warm enough can be the option over the practical one, in order to look good. The respondents agreed that many of the purchases they make are unnecessary and many times a bad conscience appears because of that. To deal with the bad conscience you have to explain to yourself why you bought this certain product, according to one of the respondents. Furthermore, it was discussed that it is easy to believe that when you consume you feel happier, but if you reflect over it you realize that you do not.

6.1.3 Satisfying ones own needs

In the background of this report the downsides of the fashion industry are presented. For example it is revealed how conventional cotton is produced and what effects the chemicals
used in the production have on people working in the industry and on the environment (www.naturskyddsföreningen.se). One of the respondents questioned how it can be allowed to produce conventional cotton when it so harmful. In relation to this it was discussed among the respondents that as long as consumers in the west have the need to buy products form stores like H & M, the process will continue and people in the developing countries will suffer. One of the respondents pointed out that regardless of what needs consumers have in the end it is all about satisfying the needs of oneself before you think of other. These needs can be linked to the ego needs in Maslow’s hierarchy, which includes prestige, status and accomplishment. Several of the respondents believed that with more money a possibility is created to satisfy the needs and this result in more consumption. Also Solomon & Rabolt explain that income is one of the variables that can determine a person’s lifestyle (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009). One of the respondent’s consumption changed because of her living situation. The respondent purchased more clothes when she was working, but as a student she has a limited budget and reflects more over the purchases she makes.

6.2 Knowledge

6.2.1 The importance of knowledge

The hierarchy of effects is a model that deals with attitudes. The model consists of three levels of involvement. In the Standard Learning Hierarchy consumers decide what products to buy by gathering knowledge regarding relevant attributes in order to form beliefs (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009). Knowledge is a very important factor in this model as it is the first step which forms your beliefs and later the purchases you make. Knowledge is an important factor to regard among consumers in general, when it comes to the consequences of consumption. According to all of the respondents, they have some knowledge about the downside of the fashion industry even if it is limited. It is of relevance to notice that the knowledge they carry mainly comes from programs or newspapers that now and then reveal something terrible. Except from this source they do not read that much or search for information by themselves. Grunert & Togersen also discuss the importance of knowledge. They emphasise that it is important that consumers’ protection and agencies can increase consumer knowledge about the consequences of purchasing, consuming and disposing objects (Grunert & Togersen, 2005).

To realise the consequences of consumption it is important to have knowledge. According to the president at Naturskyddsföreningen Mikael Karlsson, the industrial development has increased rapidly, but the problem is that the environmental awareness has not followed (www.naturskyddsföreningen.se, 2008). This is something that can be noticed in the focus groups and the environmental awareness is not completely there. A difference that can be observed between the two focus groups is that the first focus group seems to have a little more knowledge than the second focus group and wants to act according to their knowledge. However, all of the respondents claimed that they do not have exhaustive knowledge about the downside of consumption. In the second focus group one of the respondents explained that to get a way from the bad conscience that the reality creates she does not listen to or read about information regarding the downside of the textile industry. The reason for this is because it is just too hard to face the reality and it is easier to pretend that you do not know the truth. It was discussed in both of the focus groups that it is common to ignore a problem and it is mainly because of egoistic reasons.
6.2.2 Consumers are often unaware

In The- Low- involvement Hierarchy consumers do not prefer one product over another, and the evaluation is based on limited knowledge. This is what we can see among several of the respondents as consumers who fit into this model often do not care about what products they purchase (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009). This is also something that Grunnert & Thorgersen discuss and they believe that it is important to regard that consumers might not always be aware that their actions have external impact. Therefore consumers do not take this into consideration when they make their buying decisions (Grunert, & Thorgersen, 2005). Besides, two of the respondents explained that they got deeper understanding about the downside of the industry when reading books and studying environmental subjects. Furthermore, these respondents explained that their first reaction when receiving more knowledge was that they started to question their consumption, but after some time this awareness was not in focus any more. This can be reflected in the Experiential Hierarchy, were the emotional response is in focus. The emotional response is seen as the central aspect of an attitude and consumers performance is based on their emotional reactions. This is exactly what the respondents did when they read about the downside of consumption, they reacted with emotions (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009).

6.2.3 Difficult to know whom to trust and what products choose

Furthermore it is discussed what impact consumption has on the environment and workers, and how this issue has emerged among organisations and companies (www.fibre2fashion.com). This has also been observed by the respondents and they have gained more knowledge because the subject has been discussed more lately. Even so, one of the respondents explains that it is hard to know the truth behind something as you often believe what you read to be true without knowing. In relation to this an article in the New York Times revealed that clothes from H & M was destroyed and found in their trash (Dwyer, Jim, 2010). At the same time H&M claims on their webpage that they work for sustainable development and improving their clothes in order to put less impact on the environment (www.hm.com). Several of the respondents believed, that more information is needed in order for them to get more knowledge. According to the respondents in focus group one, you can not get information from the stores on how to consume better. This is information that consumers have to search for themselves. Something that was discussed with all the respondents is that it is not always easy to know which the “right” products are, as information about the origin of products is lacking. One of the respondent’s thought that a good idea could be that companies set out information and inform consumers about the origin of the products, the production process etc. As it is a hot topic that has consequences for the future, students in different fashion-schools are taught how to develop eco-fashion (www.fashion.arts.ac.uk). This is one way to spread knowledge and educate different groups and people in society.

Furthermore, all of the respondents claimed, that they have more knowledge about alternative products when it comes to food than fashion. The assortment of food is larger and can be found in many places. Another respondent thought that it strange how companies only can offer one eco-line in their whole collection. In other words, this means that only a small part of their collection is good and the rest is bad for workers in the industry and the environment. There are big international companies like Patagonia and People Tree which work with production of sustainable materials in their collections, and they do not just offer one eco-line. Companies like these also exist on a local level in Sweden. Dem Collective is an example of a
Fashion company, among others, that only offers organic clothes. They developed their business as a protest against how clothes are produced (www.ekolifestyle.se).

6.3 Attitude - Knowledge – Behaviour

6.3.1 The ABC-model of attitudes

There is a relation between attitude, knowledge and behaviour. If one gets knowledge about something one might change attitude towards the issue and thereby change one’s behaviour. The ABC-model of attitudes consists of the components affect, behaviour and cognition (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009). An example of how all these components are related to consumers’ behaviour regarding a certain product is, that people changed attitude towards fur, after exposures about how the industry works and how the animals suffer. Behaviour refers to the intensions a person has to do something with regard to an attitude object. The respondents also discussed about how devastating news about a company’s products are revealed and that consumers probably consider not to continue to purchase products from that store. However, as one of the respondents claimed, you need a new t-shirt and end up in the same store anyway. The reason for this behaviour is that there are not enough available choices (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009).

6.3.2 When cognitive dissonance appears

With the knowledge that the respondents already had and the new knowledge they gained during the discussions, what actions do the respondents take as a consequence of their awareness? One of the respondents claimed that most of the times you do not do anything at all with your awareness and this comports with what some of the other respondents said. As mentioned earlier, Cognitive dissonance is a theory that deals with contradiction among attitudes and behaviours that a person has to relate to (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009). To resolve the dissonance that appears the person has to do something. As the theory of Cognitive dissonance states, when the respondents become aware that there is a downside to the fashion industry they behave in different ways and act with or against their awareness.

The cognitions a person has are most of the times not related to each other, but some are related. An example of this can be “I like clothes therefore I shop”. These cognitions can be found among the respondents. An example of cognitions that are related but do not follow each other and can be opposite, is if a person loves to purchase clothes but at the same time has realized the consequences of consumption. The alternative is to purchase fewer clothes and hopefully contribute to a more sustainable future. This creates a problem and this cognition is seen as dissonant (Barker, 2003). A pattern that can be found amongst the respondents is that most of the time when they purchase products they just ignore the fact that consumption in general might be harmful and/or that this specific product is not good. Just as the respondents behave when they purchase the theory explains that one way to get rid of the dissonance is to totally ignore or eliminate the dissonant cognition. If the respondents for example pretend that it is not harmful at all, “I believe that this purchase actually is sustainable”, they can ignore the problem.

Another way to deal with the dissonance that is presented in the theory is to adjust the importance of certain cognitions (Barker, 2003). Several of the respondents said that the reason for purchasing is mainly that they want to look good. The fact that you look good in the new dress is so important that you persuade yourself into believing that you will feel
really bad and almost not survive if you do not buy this dress. The idea of looking good and purchasing more clothes is often prioritised over being nice to the environment and consuming less, according to one of the respondents. Furthermore, the respondents claimed that the fact that they might contribute to pollution of the environment is not that dangerous. Three of the respondents also mentioned that it is hard to feel that you, as an individual, can make a change. In other words, this means that they believe that their individual actions (purchasing this dress) will not make a great difference. A different way to get rid of the dissonant feeling is to avoid it in the first place (Barker, 2003). This is exactly what one of the respondents explained is happening as new information appears. The way to deal with it is then simply to avoid the information and stick to what you first knew. These examples are different ways to deal with the dissonance and continue with the consumption pattern without feeling bad about it.

6.3.3 How to act in accordance with awareness

As explained, these are all examples of ways of how the respondents and consumers in general deal with cognitive dissonance. How do the respondents then believe that they can act in accordance with their awareness, instead of doing everything in their power to get away from the dissonance? The respondents claimed that, it is important with more knowledge in order to understand the consequences of consumption and to be able to act according to their awareness. If we compare the respondents reasoning with what Solomon & Rabolt explains about attitudes, we can see that with more knowledge attitudes can be changed. As the authors explain, in all choices that consumers make attitudes play a role (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009). By this they mean that attitudes can determine if you for example will re-cycle your old clothes or not. With more knowledge it is easier to search for alternative products, the respondents stated, but at the same time these products need to be more convenient. According to one of the respondents the discussion must also spread and more discussions among friends and also in media are necessary, to remind people of the reality. The respondent believes that, with more discussions consumers can not ignore the issue any more.

6.3.4 Is it the individual’s responsibility or the government’s?

Several of the respondents discussed the possibilities to contribute to change, but as mentioned, three of the respondents believed that an individual does not have much power to make a change. Instead, one of the respondents thought that it is up to the government, which has a great responsibility for the matter. According to him the consumption issue is a political decision. Grunert & Torgeresen explain that when looking back at the eighties the environmental problems were mainly taken care of by the politicians and other public authorities (Grunert & Torgersen, 2005). It was their task to solve and control the actors considered as the main sources of pollution. Their point is that this changed along with more complex environmental issues. Therefore, the consumers were given co-responsibility for solving environmental problems, and by that they were forced to relate to public aspects of consumption. Even though, as one of the respondents claimed, the problems must be taken care of by the politicians and public authorities, Grunert & Torgersen mean that it is becoming a necessity for consumers to be more involved in the process, as the problem is so complex. Another respondent asserted that it is important to put pressure on the politicians in order to show that one does not support the production of certain products. “By expressing that we consumers do not want to support consumption that fosters injustices and harms the environment, we can tell the politicians what we think”, Johan stated.
6.4 Reasons for certain behaviours

6.4.1 Egoistic reasons and living conditions control our purchases

In both of the focus groups it was discussed that we can not put the blame for a certain behaviour on lack of knowledge in the western society. It is rather because of egoistic reasons and that people only think of their own needs, according to the respondents. As mentioned the respondents also believe that people want to look their best, which often is associated with owning the latest trendy clothes. In accordance with Solomon and Rabolt, three of the respondents believed that the consumption pattern a person has can be determined by lifestyle, and that the living situation many times is a contributing factor to the consumption (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009). An example that one of the respondents gives is that it is a greater possibility that a person who purchases second-hand clothes also re-cycles and grows his/her own vegetables, than a person who constantly purchases clothes without reflecting over it.

It was discussed within both of the groups that one’s lifestyle is created around consuming because the western society is created around constant consumption. According to the three respondents who believed that the living situation affects the consumption pattern, a person who changes attitude towards his or her living situation can affect the way he looks at consumption and clothes as well. According to Solomon & Rabolt several variables like age, income, education and social class can determine a person’s lifestyle. Furthermore the identity of a person can be determined by the choices of goods and services made (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009). Four of the respondents believed that a reason for not choosing ecological products is that it is more expensive than regular products. Because of this, it is not strange that consumers end up buying trendy clothes from H&M, which offers affordable prices, one of the respondents claimed. According to another respondent, price rules over environmental issues and consumers are not willing to pay more for an organic product. Another respondent argues that it depends on how much more the organic item would cost; if it is just a little more the organic options is an alternative. However, for several of the respondents money is a reason for not choosing ecological clothes.

6.4.2 What affects one personally change behaviour

As described in the introduction, the consumer group which is very affected by overconsumption are young consumers (www.naturskyddsforeningen.se, 2009). This is also the opinion among the respondents in focus group one. Moreover, they point out that girls have more inclination to follow trends than boys and the reason probably is that the supply for them is bigger. All the respondents agreed that, to make people react and change their behaviour something needs to happen which affects them, the people around them or the next generation. One of the respondents meant that there needs to be a problem which is close both geographically and time wise. The respondents have given several examples of what is needed for people to react. For example, if a company would sell a t-shirt that can produce cancer when you wear it, people would stop buying the t-shirt immediately, because it would affect them. Furthermore, the respondents in focus group one believed that the consequences of consumption is a threat that is big and close enough to affect us and therefore it is important that consumers change their habits. This opinion is in accordance with Per Rosander, environmental consultant, who claims that the consumption in the western society is increasing in an unsustainable way and it is not possible to continue to produce this amount of apparel (www.naturskyddsforeningen.se, 2008).
6.4.3 More choices and information needed for the future

The respondents were asked what options they consider that they have when it comes to choosing better products. All of the respondents hope for a future with more choices when it comes to eco-fashion, and they claimed that, at the present time they do not really know where to look for it. Five out of 8 respondents mentioned that they have heard that H&M offers an eco-line, but it is only one of the respondents that mentions Swedish designers like Filippa K. As described in chapter 4, there are several Swedish fashion companies that have established re-design such as Acne and Filippa K, which comports with what the respondent claimed (Camino, 11, 2009). One respondent did not only question whom to trust, but also if a product is better just because it is more expensive. According to Dana Thomas, a fashion and culture correspondent at Newsweek, it is more than right to question designer companies. She claims, that the top brands many times deny outright where their goods have been produced. It can be a certain good that is made in Italy, but is often produced in factories where the workers are Chinese migrant laborers. Thomas has also observed a knitwear factory in Mauritius where one of their production lines made a department store’s own label, such as Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren (Grant, 2008).

6.4.4 Consumers can put pressure on the companies

In both of the focus groups it was discussed weather it is the companies or the consumers which first have to change their way of thinking. Several of the consumers believed that the companies have the power to make a change but at the same time the consumers are the ones who can put pressure on the companies and decide what products they want to support. According to Grunert & Togersen, when a consumer goes through the process of problem solving concerning consumption, they may take initiatives to interact with the surrounding world and voice their opinion (Grunert & Togersen, 2005). In relation to what the respondents said, Grunert & Torgersen mean that this enables the consumers to enter into a dialog with other consumers and with producers. Furthermore, the authors discussed that producers should behave and markets should be designed in such a way that consumers have an opportunity to be guided in their buying decisions. On of the respondents, however, claimed that it is hard to contribute when you do not see any effect. Another respondent believed that there has been a change in consumers’ attitude and that they are willing to change. The problem might be that consumers do not believe that they can do anything as individuals. This is in accordance with a study made by Naturvårdsverket, which shows that there is an increasing number of consumers which are interested in buying products that affect environment less, but the consumers require that it should be simple to be environmental-friendly (www.csrpraktiken.se, 2009). Johanna Stål, the editor of Camino, also believes that consumers’ attitudes are changing and other values are becoming more important (Lindsten, 2009).
6.4.5 Changing the way of thinking

In the end you have to ask yourself if you need the item before purchasing it, one of the respondents claimed. This is something that most of the respondents do not do today, if they reflect over their purchases they do it afterwards. In focus group one, they discussed that it is better to purchase clothes that will last for a longer period of time instead of purchasing new items all the time. Even though the respondents claimed that lack of knowledge is not the main reason for certain behaviours, they anyhow believe that with more knowledge people can learn how to consume less and consume the best. As discussed earlier, the environmental awareness is on its rise, and one of the respondents claimed that it takes time to change a whole society’s consumption pattern and companies are starting to understand the importance of offering sustainable materials (www.csripraktiken.se, 2009). According to one respondent companies sometimes campaign certain things that motivate consumers to buy. An example is if Nike made a campaign: “if you buy these shoes a child in Africa gets one pair as well”. This was discussed in focus group one and they questioned if Nike would only think about making more profit, rather than helping the deprived and poor. To one of the respondents it did not matter as long as it contributes to something good, while the other three respondents in the group believed that the way people think needs to change. This is also what the founder of Patagonia Chouirmard believes. Instead of thinking about making profit, one should think about how the process of the business is going. Companies should create the best products so that they minimize the harm that the products bring on the environment (Chouirmard, 2009).

In focus group 2 it was also discussed how a trend can contribute to something important. People get so affected by following new trends, and two of the respondents claimed that, as eco-fashion is starting to establish more people will buy those products if eco-fashion will become a trend. “It starts as a trend and finishes as necessity”, Annika stated.
7. Discussion

7.1 Discussion of results

7.1.1 Willingness to change

Even if the respondents differ when it comes to their knowledge about the downside of consumption and to how much they consume, similar patterns and behaviours can be seen among all the respondents. From the interviews in this report and from other studies, it is obvious that people are willing to change and they have a positive attitude towards better consumption. Naturvårdsverket for example, made an attitude study which showed that the number of consumers that are willing to buy products from companies which promote climate changes are increasing (www.csripraktiken.se, 2009). At the same time it seems as if consumers have not changed their behaviour in accordance with their attitude. A reason for this can be that the respondents believe that it is hard as an individual to make a change. Another problem that can be found is that the respondents and also consumers in general tend to believe that they need something that they actually do not. If we look at the different levels of needs, described in the hierarchy of needs, and compare them with the consumption patterns of the western society, we can easily understand that as we live in a saturated market with all our options people consume way beyond their needs. The basic need has been forgotten and we are overwhelmed by our choices of looking as good as we can. This is an important issue when it comes to changing the consumption patterns.

7.1.2 Money can determine the consumption pattern

Some of the main factors behind why the respondents consume emerge from the focus group discussions; they want to look good, follow trends and get admiration from others. All these factors contribute to the fact that many consumers do not question their consumption, instead they just continuously purchase clothes. One of the respondents stated that she consumed more when she worked than as a student. If we compare this respondent with two others who are working, we can see that they consume more as they earn more money. This shows that factors like income and occupation can effect your consumption. With more money you can fulfil your desires and purchase more. The respondents also claimed that with more money one can consume in a better way and buy ecological products, which tend to be somewhat more expensive. However, if a person earns more money it will not necessarily lead to better consumption. It is rather a question of how he/she looks at consumption and also of the living situation of that person. Nevertheless, a few of the respondents who are working do not consume more because they earn more money, so the consumption pattern is individual. To change the way one consumes one has to change the way of thinking as well.

7.1.3 With knowledge comes responsibility

During the discussions, the respondents claimed that they believe that with more knowledge people might change behaviour, even if lack of knowledge is not the main reason for over consumption. Additionally, two respondents mentioned that their behaviour actually changed after they gained more knowledge about the subject. More knowledge helps you to get rid of the dissonance of conflicting desires and it can change people’s attitude towards something. It also enables respondents to search for more and better alternatives. As Yvon Chouirnard said, when one has education it is ones responsibility to make the right choices (Chouirnard, 2009).
When you have knowledge there is not any excuse why you still consume without any control and do not reflect over your purchases.

7.1.4 Egoistic reasons overshadow awareness

What was found amongst the respondents and what can be seen as a general thing is, that regardless of how aware they are, at times they find solutions to get away from the dissonance. The reality is sometimes simply too harsh and it is easier to ignore this, or to find reasons for believing that your consumption is OK. These are ways to escape from the bad conscience it creates, as the respondents claimed. I believe that the only way to get rid of the bad conscience is to change your behaviour instead of finding ways to escape from it. Reasons for the respondents to behave the way they do can be lack of interest, egoism and laziness, but it can also be that they do not know how to change their behaviour and what alternatives they have. However, it is interesting to discover that the respondents believe, that something that affects them is needed, in order for them to change their behaviour. People are mainly being selfish and think of their own needs before they think of the needs of others. This idea is also supported by another study made by Catrin Joergens, which includes young adults ageing from 18-26 in England and Germany (Joergens, 2006). The majority of the consumers in this study were mainly interested in their own personal needs. Furthermore, the consumers did not think that they have any alternatives when buying products, and they believed that they can not affect the production process in the developing countries by their purchases. Joergens claims, that this does not mean that the consumers think that companies’ unethical behaviours are OK, but they just consider that it is hard for an individual to contribute. This is also supported by the respondents in the present report as they believe that since the problem is so far away it is hard to really make a change. In my view people do not believe that they can contribute as individuals, because the problem is too complex. According to the respondents it would be easier to choose the “right” products if companies provide more information or alternative products.

7.1.5 Difference between the food and fashion industry

Several of the respondents have more knowledge and also buy more of ecological food than fashion because it is more available. Fashion companies that provide eco-fashion do exist, the consumers just need to notice them. At the same time these companies need to expand and be more available, I think. The study made by Joergens (2006) showed that consumers are willing to buy ecological products within the food industry as it can affect them and their health directly. This is something that I believe to be true for the respondents of this report, as they tend to buy more ecological food than fashion. This shows how important it is to inform consumers and show them that these products do exist. Ecological products need to be mixed up with the regular products and not just in one corner of the store, as one respondent states. Consumers will not go and search for the information by themselves if it is not convenient.

7.1.6 Consumers and companies must meet half way

The respondents have converging thoughts about weather the problem with consumption starts with the consumers or the companies. One respondent claimed that consumption is a political issue and that it is hard for an individual to make a change. I believe that this reaction can be a way to deal with the dissonance and find a reason to continue with the same behaviour, even if the opinion of the respondent can be easily understood. Consumers feel powerless and it can be hard to know how to act at times, but there are alternative products,
and consumers can contribute if they just are willing to. If consumers start to demand fair and sustainable products, companies will understand the importance of honesty and also the importance of working towards sustainability. Companies, politicians and other authorities have to meet the consumers and inform them about how to consume in a more sustainable way. Lack of information can also lead to consumers ending up buying products that they might know are harmful, and the reason is that they do not know which options would be better. I also believe that it is easier to go to stores that you are familiar with and to follow your old habits. The fact that some companies, fast fashion as well as designer companies, sometimes lie about the origin of their products makes it harder for consumers to know whom to trust. The consequences of this is that consumers do not feel that it matters which products they buy, even if the companies in their marketing state that they work for sustainability and justice among workers.

7.1.7 More information and alternatives are necessary

Something that also can be seen as a general opinion among the respondents is, that if something terrible about a company is revealed, they would probably stop purchasing products from that store. This means that with more information they are actually willing to change behaviour. The problem is mainly that the information is not really available yet, according to the respondents. One respondent thought that it would be good if companies were forced to set out information about their products. I believe that this is a good solution, and also Joergens (2006) discussed that, to inform consumers about the products the clothes should be marked with ethical information from reliable source. On the other hand there are products that are eco-marked, such as Bra miljöval and Fairtrade. To buy these products consumers however, need to know that they exist.

If consumers get information and understand that there are consequences with their consumption for the environment and the people working in the industry, they would hopefully change their consumption pattern. (Camino, 11, 2009). This is actually something that one of the focus groups was aware of. When one realizes this threat it is easier to change the habits, I believe.

Even if it has been discussed that the awareness and attitude regarding ecological products have changed, consumers still need to change their behaviour and not just support the idea. Trendwhatching (a consumer trend firm) has nominated the eco-easy trend as the number one trend for 2010 and both companies and consumers have good intensions regarding ecological products (www.csripraktiken.se, 2009). However, it is not enough with good intensions but consumers need to start choosing better alternatives. Some companies have realised this by excluding regular products and by only offering sustainable products. This is a good solution for guiding consumers to an ecological world. This, however, needs to increase, as the respondents still feel that they have to search for these alternatives. According to Trendwatch this trend seems to be rising, and trends are made for consumers to follow. As one of the respondents claimed: “it starts as a trend and finishes as a necessity” If this is what it takes to make people change, I believe that it will probably work (www.csripraktiken.se, 2009).

7.1.8 The living conditions and values affect the way one consumes

I definitely think that it is important to question your living situation, as it is linked together with your consumption patterns. Something that was discussed during the interviews was, that if one re-cycles and grows ones own vegetables, there might be a possibility that one has changed behaviour regarding consumption and does not consume that much. I also think that
it is a matter of interest and how one looks at society, and nature. What values a person has also determines ones consumption patterns. As far as I know people are not willing to change their consumption pattern extensively, but they can reflect more over purchases they make, and ask themselves if they really need this item or if it is just another want, and thereby shop more wisely. As described in chapter 4 it is important how we treat the clothes we have during their lifecycle, and to use an item for several years is more sustainable (www.ekolifestyle.se). With more knowledge and information it is also easier to choose better products which have been produced in a sustainable way. Looking at the western society, there is a lot that needs to improve in order to reach sustainability. According to a study described by Solomon and co workers, materialism is generally perceived as something negative. Consumers are either justifying materialism or excusing it. If you realise that you do not need so many objects you do not need to justify or excuse materialism anymore (Solomon. et. al, 2002). To be able to change the way of looking at consumption it is important to influence the individual and his/her intentions, and it is important that people learn from each other. One respondent claimed that consumers do not really get happier when they buy clothes, they just fool themselves into believing that. Even so, consumers continue to purchase more products. Each individual needs to stop and think of real values and look into themselves. Where is this world going, do I want to contribute to destroying this planet and people living in it? We have to look at what is beyond consumption. The choices that we make today will affect the next generation and I do not think that we want them to suffer because of our actions. Instead we should work towards sustainability within the fashion industry and support workers and the environment.

7.2 Conclusions

The purpose of this report was to find out how consumers behave in relation to what they know about the consequence of consumption and what they actually do with their awareness. Furthermore, I wanted to find out what is required of consumers to change their behaviour in accordance with their awareness. Are consumers really willing to give up their own personal needs in order to think about the consequences of their consumption? Through the studies I have gained a deeper understanding of how consumers behave.

- Consumers are willing to change their consumption pattern in accordance with their awareness of environmental issues, but factors such as looking good and thinking of their own desires may at times be more important than being considerate of the environment and other people.
- In order to react, not only when it affects you as individual, consumers need to understand the consequences of their consumption pattern and how harmful it can be. Through more discussions among friends, in media, by politicians etc. more knowledge can be gained concerning the subject.
- Companies should also set out information so that consumers know what alternatives they have. Otherwise consumers do not know why it is better to choose ecological products. A good idea would be to mark ethical clothes with reliable sources.
- The alternative products must be more available and mixed with regular clothes. Furthermore, ecological clothes with larger series and variation should be produced to satisfy consumers’ preferences. This could boost the ecological fashion further.
- Individuals must also believe that each and everyone can make a change and not put the blame on someone else. Hopefully this can lead to other values becoming more important and to less focus on consumption.
7.3 Future studies

- It would be interesting to examine if consumers’ awareness will increase in the future regarding the consequences of consumption, and if consumers will realise that they have responsibility and act accordingly.

- It would also be of interest to follow the development of eco-fashion and see if this trend is here to stay, and if it will change people’s behaviour into choosing better products.

- Furthermore it would be important to compare different ages as well as cultures and see how they reflect on consumption.

- As this study has focused on consumers, it would also be interesting to look at how the companies meet the consumer demands, and if they offer more and reliable information about their products in the future.
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