Article

The Sustainability-Conscious Consumer: An Exploration of the Motivations, Values, Beliefs, and Norms Guiding Garment Life Extension Practices

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Abstract: Sustainability has increasingly become one of the single biggest issues requiring immediate global attention by both the retail industry and the consumer. As the end users of garments, consumers play a key role in reversing the current devastating environmental trends. For consumers to do this, there is a need to understand those motivating factors that would encourage them to increase their involvement in sustainability-related practices. This study, therefore, addresses the motivations, values, beliefs, and norms of the consumer’s sustainable consumption behavior (SCB). The value-belief-norm (VBN) theory was used as a framework to explain beliefs and behaviors which serve as predictors for attitudes and behavioral intentions. Data were collected through interviews with 14 female participants in six countries selected because of their environmentally-conscious behaviors. Findings indicate poor fit is a motivating factor to extend the life of clothing by providing participants with a sense of control and empowerment. Participants believed fashion was an unlimited reusable resource. Future research might explore connections among creativity, mental wellness, and empowerment. Both fashion industry and academic practitioners would benefit, as a need exists to update consumer behavior models, and increase understanding, based on the wants and needs of the sustainability-conscious consumer.

Keywords: values; beliefs; norms; sustainable consumption behaviors; fashion; motivations; cross-cultural; women

1. Introduction

In addressing sustainability, one of the biggest challenges in the global apparel and textile (AT) industry [1] is partly due to the consumer’s overconsumption patterns resulting in wasteful discard actions [2]. Most unwanted fully functional garments are needlessly tossed into trash bins, ultimately ending in landfills [3]. Global textile waste issues will continue as fashion consumption levels are expected to increase by 63%, from 62 million tons to 102 million tons by 2030 [4], the equivalent of more than 500 billion t-shirts. Although it appears AT waste issues are only environmental, the annual economic loss from premature fashion discard actions is USD 460 billion for the consumer and USD 500 billion for the AT industry [5].

Despite these wasteful behaviors, consumers are beginning to realize the negative environmental impact from excessive use of natural resources. Consequently, they are making decisions between sustainable (e.g., mending, repair) and unsustainable (e.g., discarding in trash) consumption behaviors. Most recently, 50% of consumers ranked sustainability as a top-five value driver and more than 63% have made modest to noteworthy individual behavior changes towards sustainable practices (i.e., reducing water usage, going carless) [6]. Sustainable consumption behaviors (SCBs) are defined as behaviors that attempt to satisfy current needs while also simultaneously limiting harm to the environment [7].
attention is also being placed on attitudes and intentions of sustainable consumption patterns and the associated impact on actual consumption behaviors [8]. Still, previous studies have failed to make a connection between motivating factors leading to SCB [9].

Limiting textile waste has become a problem, yet it can only be fully addressed when there is a clear understanding of factors motivating actionable behaviors to extend garment life [10]. Two common options to extend garment life (i.e., create more usable life) are (1) to serve the original purpose by repairing or mending or (2) serve a new purpose by repurposing. As an example, an individual might mend their favorite pair of jeans with a patch to both cover the hole and provide aesthetic appeal. They might also engage in repurposing practices by adding sleeves for warmth to a sleeveless shirt or use an old pair of pants to create an apron. Regardless of the differences, the remainder of this study will reference the aforementioned behaviors (i.e., repurposing, repair, mending, sewing/cloth-making actions) as garment life extension practices (GLEPs).

Understanding the consumer’s underlying values, beliefs, and norms driving motivations for SCB is of vital importance as a precursor to shift the consumption/discard paradigm and change the routing of textiles away from solid waste streams [11]. Motivation, the drive, or tendency to action [12] are often used in fashion studies to explain why people engage in SCB. Several theoretical models, norm-activation theory (NAM) [13], Ajzen’s theory of planned behavior (TPB) [14], and the VBN (value-belief-norm) model [15] have been used to closely examine SCB [16]. The TPB, an expanded version of NAM developed by Stern [15], more clearly justifies pro-environmental intentions and behaviors by including concepts such as values and ecological worldviews. While both TPB and VBN have exceptional explanatory power [17], numerous empirical works have found significant interrelationships between the constructs (e.g., awareness of consequences, ascription of responsibilities, personal norms, and behaviors), thereby confirming its effectiveness in predicting environmental behaviors [18]. According to Axelrod [19], values are instrumental in an individual’s environmental decisions. Compared to other behavior antecedents, such as beliefs and attitudes, they are better able to explain similarities and differences between people, groups, and cultures [20]. Therefore, VBN accurately assesses and describes the motivations for the behaviors associated with GLEPs.

Though previous studies have used the VBN framework to explore the consumer’s willingness to purchase eco-friendly fashion [21,22], there has yet to be a study that uses it to understand the characteristics of individuals practicing behaviors that extend the life of their garments. The economic fallout from the pandemic as well as the recent impact of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine have led to significant hardships including the loss of millions of jobs and high unemployment rates globally. Lack of financial resources caused some households to miss rental payments and even have trouble providing food for the family [23]. The consumer has indicated they will continue ‘less is more’ fashion consumption decisions in the future [24]. In response to the research gap identified, along with the consumer’s need for a more value-oriented fashion lifestyle, the purpose of this study was to identify the motivations, values, beliefs, and norms of the consumer engaging in SCB by extending the life of their garments through a single research question.

RQ: What are the characteristics of the individual who engages in SCB to extend the life of their garments as guided by motivations, values, beliefs, and norms?

This research is most notable for practitioners in both academia and fashion industry-related fields for varying reasons. First, the findings of this study can help inform and modify consumer decision-making models (e.g., Engel-Blackwell-Miniard model), guiding tools to understand the process by which the consumer arrives at a decision. While these models have evolved dramatically over the past 50 years, they have neglected to include GLEPs as a behavioral component. Second, a recent study by Dhir et al. [25] highlighted the importance of providing varying perspectives of SCB because social structure, economic environments, and cultures can vary among populations. Therefore, the findings of this study could provide international perspectives on motivations, values, beliefs, and norms to provide unique perspectives. Finally, the findings will inform fashion industry business
models and operational approaches by outlining specific consumer characteristics that allow the fashion industry (i.e., brands, retailers, manufacturers) to engage with consumers to advance sustainability practices.

To address the purpose, this study is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews past literature on SCB and the elements of the VBN theory, a guiding theoretical framework for this study. Section 3 explains research methods employed. Results and Discussion are presented in Section 4. Section 5 contains an overview of the main conclusions and implications. Finally, Section 6 concludes with study limitations and future research opportunities.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Sustainable Consumption Behaviors (SCB)

According to Evans [7], “sustainable consumption is a matter of consuming differently by consuming less, both in terms of the quantities of goods and services consumed (volume) and the environmental impacts of that which is consumed (composition)” (p. 551). Sustainable consumption behaviors include, but are not limited to, activities such as purchasing only sustainable and fair-trade goods, recycling household waste, or purchasing goods made with recycled or reclaimed materials. Sustainable consumption involves increasing consumption of environmentally friendly products while also decreasing consumption of natural resources. In many ways, the individual engaging in SCB will likely change their lifestyle to fulfill present-day needs and future desires [26]. In this study, SCB is defined as creating usable life for a garment by engaging in GLEPs.

2.2. Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) Theory

The value-belief-norm (VBN) theory was used as a framework to explain beliefs and behaviors which serve as predictors for attitudes and behavioral intentions [27,28]. Values have been found to play a critical role in explaining beliefs and behaviors. Compared to other behavior antecedents, such as beliefs and attitudes, they are better able to explain similarities and differences between people, groups, and cultures [20]. Thus, VBN theory was used as a theoretical framework for this study. In the following sections the components of VBN are detailed.

2.2.1. Values

It is assumed an individual’s values are internalized early in life and change only minimally during the later stages of life [13]. They are defined as “desirable trans-situational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or other social entity” ([13], p. 21). Values influence an individual’s actions when they are both relevant and important to the context of the situation [29].

There are several key features of values that have been agreed upon in preceding literature. First, values are abstract and can transcend situations. Second, they function as guiding principles in the selection of people and behaviors. Third, they are a “belief by which a man acts by preference” ([30], p. 454). Finally, when competing values are activated in specific circumstances, decisions are made based on those values which are most relevant to the individual. There is potential for an individual’s values to offer explanation for pro-environmental behaviors such as GLEPs.

Previous research proposed three different value orientations impacting pro-environmental beliefs: egoistic (i.e., self-interest), altruistic (i.e., care or concern for other human beings), and biospheric (i.e., care or concern for the environment [27,28]. (Note: It is important to acknowledge that these three value orientations/norms are not exhaustive as a construct, but serve as a structure for this study based on prior published research that aligns with and supports sustainable consumption behaviors, and further research that expands orientations is encouraged.) Whereas all three value orientations can provide some explanation for engagement in SCB, egoistic values are negatively related to environmental behaviors and beliefs [31]. This suggests individuals who are egoistic
care more about themselves rather than environmental issues. Conversely, de Groot and Steg [18] found both altruistic and biospheric value orientations are positively related to intentions to donate to environmental and humanitarian organizations.

2.2.2. Pro-Environmental Beliefs (PEBs)

Beliefs are formed when individuals become aware of the consequences of their actions (or inaction) on issues directly resonating with their value system. Environmental beliefs are defined as a system of values that determine an individual’s environmental behavior [32]. The strength of values and beliefs combined with influencing PEBs have been shown to increase environmental policy acceptance [33], conservation behavior [17], and household sustainability actions (e.g., energy use) [34]. An evaluation of the relationship between values and beliefs shows there is agreement among researchers that PEBs are determined by values [35]. Furthermore, behavior is influenced, either directly or indirectly, by attitudes and beliefs [13]. In addition, beliefs are also seen as a strong influencing factor on the consumer’s actions and behaviors [36], making them critical in understanding the consumer’s behaviors (e.g., garment life extension practices) in reaction to environmental challenges.

2.2.3. Social and Personal Norms

Norms are behavioral rules generally held by the majority about how individuals should behave [37]. An individuals’ norms are activated when they believe violation of those norms would adversely impact those things they value. The literature often discusses two different types of norms that have been shown to influence PEBs—social norms and personal norms. (Note: It is important to recognize the interrelationship of personal norms and social norms is a complex relationship and worthy of further research through the lens of GLEPs, and this study provides a starting point to build deeper understanding in the future.) While social norms are the perceptions or guidelines of what is considered ‘normal’ (e.g., customarily shaking hands upon meeting another individual), personal norms reflect internal rules or standards of one’s own behavior [15]. As an example, an individual who chooses to mend their clothing to decrease overall textile waste to preserve the Earth’s resources would be an example of exhibiting a personal norm. Therefore, a personal norm acts as a moral compass that is less persuaded by social validations the stronger one’s moral beliefs are about a specific topic [38]. Further research also indicates the stronger an individual’s personal norms about PEBs, the stronger their behavior will be related to that personal norm [39]. Therefore, an individual who practices PEBs such as repurposing or mending (types of garment life extension practices) a fashion item might be less influenced by societal norms (i.e., overconsumption) based on their preceding strong values or beliefs about environmental issues [39]. This is further supported by the VBN theory that proposes an individual’s personal norms are influenced by values [27].

Involving the consumer as a key contributor in limiting textile waste through GLEPs is an overriding concern in tackling sustainability issues because of increased overconsumption. Furthermore, other research studies have demonstrated the influence of personal norms on environmental behavior [28]. Although the VBN framework has been previously used to explore the purchase of environmentally friendly fashion [22], it has yet to be used to understand the motivations, values, beliefs, and norms of those choosing to extend the life of their garments making it a worthwhile and underexplored area of research.

3. Materials and Methods

This exploratory, phenomenological study targeted participants who currently engage in GLEPs to share motivations for their pro-environmental behaviors, overall value and belief systems, and related personal norms with the goal of deriving meaning and understanding from their unique perspectives [40]. Fourteen semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with females, ages 18–50, who engaged in SCB. Participants were required to have previous knowledge of garment life extension practices (i.e., repurposing,
mending, sewing) to inform the decision-making process as well as the requisite skill set and resources to qualify as a participant in this study.

After securing Institutional Review Board approval, participants were identified using purposive sampling by recruiting from Facebook groups targeting individuals who engaged in GLEPs. The Facebook “groups” feature was especially effective as a recruiting tool as it allowed access to populations otherwise difficult to identify [41]. To qualify potential participants for the study, a pre-screening questionnaire was used to gather basic demographic information (e.g., age, income, marital status) and experience levels with GLEPs. Based on responses from the pre-screening survey, select participants were chosen for interviewing because they were most likely to practice sustainable consumption based on their environmental consciousness [42], decision-making power in the household [43], and motivations for participating in sewing-related activities [44]. While unintentional in the participant recruitment process, all 14 participants were from multiple countries including the United States, Sri Lanka, China, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Denmark, and Australia, which provided the opportunity to review data with an international lens, (although it was determined that difference in geographic location did not impact on GLEPs’ engagement and process).

Interviews (which averaged about one hour in length) were conducted, and audio recorded, via a virtual video call platform, Zoom (with informed consent), allowing for face-to-face communication. Video calls, as interview tools, were preferred because they allow the researcher to visually read both facial expressions and body language [32]. Interviews were scheduled eight hours apart to allow time to review notes and additional observations immediately following the interview. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect participant confidentiality. Only the audio file was transcribed. For security and privacy of participants, all audio recordings, interview transcripts, and data analysis were stored in a secured data cloud accessible by the researchers only. The interview guide (Appendix A) contained a mix of 15 open-ended questions modified from previous research [45]. Participants were asked about their process for engaging in fashion GLEPs, related maintenance skill set and resources, individual usership characteristics, and overall engagement with communities who practice garment life extension.

Each transcript was reviewed line by line using MAXQDA to organize and open code the data inductively into themes categorized under motivations, values, beliefs, and norms. Interviews were coded as the data were collected [46] and field notes were taken based on observations during the interview process to allow the researcher to reflect afterwards on additional subthemes [47]. Verbatim narratives from participants were used to strengthen and support the data analysis process [48].

Saturation [32] was reached with a sample of 14 women as no new themes or data were revealed [48]. The sample size was supported by Creswell’s [48] recommendation of 5–25 participants for qualitative studies conducted in a phenomenological tradition. Most (78%) participants were aged 35–50, married (64%), and had postgraduate degrees (79%). Every participant viewed GLEPs as a form of artistic expression and 64% did not view them as a means of economic gain (i.e., second income). Most participants in the study had formal sewing skills and more than half (57.14%) learned at an early age from family members or in primary school. However, of the 57.14% that responded when asked what skills were needed to engage garment life extension practices, such as repurposing and mending using sewing/cloth-making skills, 75% responded that minimal skills were needed and 50% were self-taught. Table 1 outlines some characteristics of the selected participants in this study.
Table 1. Study participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age Range (Years)</th>
<th>Annual Income</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Experience Engaging in Garment Life Extension Practices (Years)</th>
<th>Last Time Garment Modified?</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>35–44</td>
<td>30–39 K</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>11–15</td>
<td>Last week</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Ph.D. candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>45–50</td>
<td>40–49 K</td>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>16+</td>
<td>Last year</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Customer service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>35–44</td>
<td>50–59 K</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>Last week</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>18–24</td>
<td>&lt;10 K</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>6–10</td>
<td>Last month</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>35–44</td>
<td>150 K+</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>Last year</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Graduate student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>45–50</td>
<td>90–99 K</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>16+</td>
<td>Last year</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Graduate student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>45–50</td>
<td>20–29 K</td>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>Last week</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>25–34</td>
<td>100–149 K</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>Last week</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Mental health clinician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>35–44</td>
<td>60–69 K</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>16+</td>
<td>Last month</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>45–50</td>
<td>30–39 K</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>16+</td>
<td>Last week</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>45–50</td>
<td>&lt;10 K</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>16+</td>
<td>Last week</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>35–44</td>
<td>50–59 K</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>16+</td>
<td>Last week</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Founder of upcycling initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>35–44</td>
<td>150 K+</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>16+</td>
<td>Last week</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Corporate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>25–34</td>
<td>20–29 K</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>16+</td>
<td>Last week</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Ph.D. candidate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Results and Discussion

Several major themes emerged during the open coding process. These themes and their connection to GLEPs are outlined and discussed in the following sections. First, motivations for extending garment life are discussed followed by an exploration of beliefs and values. To conclude, the role of norms in extending garment life is investigated.

4.1. Motivations for Extending Garment Life

Participants were asked what prompted them to begin engaging in practices to extend the life of their garments as motivation is often a determining factor to explain why people engage in PEB [49]. Motivation, in this study, is defined as ‘the precursor for an individual to pursue a specific behavior’. Primary responses (Table 2) for GLEPs motivations included fit, longevity of use, and creativity. Other less frequent responses included admiration (i.e., receiving compliments), self-expression, limited budget, and interesting textiles.

Table 2. Motivations for extending garment life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% of Participants</th>
<th>Motivation Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fit</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>Different fit desired, body shape fluctuations, change in style, empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longevity of use</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>Looking for potential of use, keep the item moving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>Develops from process, dependent upon function, creative outlet, extend life of garment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.1. Fit

Fit issues were cited as the main motivator for modifying garments among 79% of participants, which has been confirmed as an issue mostly impacting women [50,51], specifically related to the lower parts of the body [52]. Participants desired a flattering fit not currently available in items available for ‘off the rack’ purchase in stores. Participants
also were motivated to make modifications to keep items that no longer fit because of body-shape changes (e.g., weight gain or loss). Lastly, some no longer desired the item they owned because they either had personal style change preferences or the item was no longer in style per ‘status quo’ standards in which social norms guide one’s sense of style. Despite style changes, most participants wanted to extend the life of their garment beyond its typical use and one participant “didn’t have anything she didn’t want”, indicating there was endless life in her garments. Several participants felt empowerment and in control when they were able to make fit modifications to their garments, similar to several previous studies [44,45] in which female millennials were positively motivated by sewing-related activities.

For example, Participant 3 felt empowered and in control after realizing she no longer had to purchase clothing to fit societal norms because there were no other options available to her. She could now make, or alter, garments best suited to her body type.

*Being plus size in our culture, in our society, everything is about being smaller. I think for the longest time I dressed in very minimalistic clothing, trying to be slim, a cigarette pant and a very narrow sweater. I thought to myself, I guess I can wear bell sleeves or a maxi tulle skirt. It’s okay, I’m fat, I’m not hiding anything. It’s no secret, so let me be cute and happy about it instead of being sad and looking like I’m going to a funeral or in mourning.*

4.1.2. Longevity of Use

Participants wanted to extend the life of garments by passing them on to friends or family. In some cases, consideration was given to other individuals before choosing traditional discard methods such as discarding the item in the trash.

*I have a box in my closet right now of stuff that I don’t want anymore. They are not really auction items, but I need to decide what I can do with them. I don’t want to throw them away. Who else could use these before I put them in the trash?* (Participant 5)

Several participants made the conscious decision to save items to be used again in the future although they might not have had an immediate need or purpose for that item.

*I don’t always save things with an intended purpose. I save them because they are usable and at some point further down the line, I’ll think, ‘Oh yes, I’ve got exactly the right thing to do that task.’* (Participant 10)

4.1.3. Creativity

Although a connection exists between skill set and the ability to creatively alter garments [53], participants cited creativity as something that was inherent in everyone no matter the skill set. Participant 12 believed it was a trial-and-error process that improved after repeated practice.

*Creativity guides every project. For example, even if you don’t know the end goal of the project, you will see and try different things.* (Participant 12)

Based on this comment by Participant 12, the authors suggest a need for educational training (i.e., workshops, classes), in both an online and in-person format (for accessibility), on GLEPs to support the consumer engaging in SCB with their clothing and other soft-good/textile products. Womens’ consumption power/influence exceeds that of men [54], making them a valuable asset in tackling sustainability issues involving clothing and other textile-based goods. Social media, as a digital platform to deliver educational training, should be strongly considered as millennials are most likely to use one social media channel—78% of women vs. 66% men, and 81% of 30–49 year olds [55] report using it to educate themselves on a variety of topics.

Furthermore, intentionally designed GLEPs educational training would create opportunities for impactful learning [56] that can expand current actions of those who practice garment life extension tactics while also encouraging engagement in fashion SCB with
novice learners. GLEPs educational opportunities support the connection between VBN and motivations to engage in SCB. As stated early in manuscript, values are formed early in life and change only minimally during the latter stages of life. However, values can influence individual actions when they are both relevant and important to the context of a situation. Therefore, increasing educational opportunities related to the economic, personal, and environmental benefits of GLEPs may help to shape consumers’ future actions and behaviors.

4.2. Beliefs Related to Extending Garment Life

Behaviors are influenced, either directly or indirectly, by attitudes and beliefs [13]. To assess their belief systems, participants were asked questions about their viewpoint on sustainability issues as well as how they believed those actions have made an impact. The dominant belief themes related to fashion clothing, GLEPs, and waste and resources beliefs, and corresponding subthemes, are summarized in Table 3. (Note: It is important to recognize the interrelationship with personal norms and social norms is a complex relationship and worthy of further research through the lens of GLEPs, and this study provides a starting point to build deeper understanding in the future.).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beliefs</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% of Participants</th>
<th>Beliefs Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waste and resources</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>Reduce waste, overflowing landfills are an issue, resources are scarce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion clothing</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>Clothing is an unlimited reusable resource, clothing is unnecessary, invest in clothing you own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garment life extension practices (GLEPs)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>Creative process, self-expression, creates satisfaction, influences joy, reduces overconsumption</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.1. Waste and Resources

Some participants felt overflowing landfills were everyone’s problem while others were disturbed by the sheer number of textiles in the landfills. More education about the destination of recycled products based on fiber content might provide the consumer with a better understanding of the implications of their purchasing and consumption decisions. This is of paramount importance, as the fate of landfilled fashion waste will depend on the type of fiber material. Participant 11 noted the importance of valuing resources due to scarcity, a belief system that was impressed upon her as a child. Rationing, mandated to conserve resources during World War II, allowed for creativity by the consumer as they survived with multiple limitations. Clothing was considered a commodity and it was believed consumers had a personal attachment to their clothing because it was custom-made for them, and resources were limited [57].

*My mom was a World War II child so there was some sense that resources were scarce and should be valued. While she didn’t recycle fabrics, she instilled in us a sense of respect for resources.*

4.2.2. Fashion Clothing

Participants were not specifically asked their beliefs about fashion clothing and its impact on the future. However, more than half had viewpoints to share on the purchase, consumption, and future of fashion clothing. One participant noted all resources are unlimited and reusable, not just fashion. This is in stark contrast to the consumer’s most
current practices of keeping items half as long as they did 15 years ago [4] and discarding them after just seven or eight wears [38].

I view it all as an infinitely reusable resource. I think that’s key, thinking of resources and just fashion in general, infinitely. (Participant 5)

Some participants also believed one should invest in the clothing they currently own which would, in turn, reduce harmful overconsumption patterns while also allowing for the creation of new items with prolonged life. (Participant 3)

You realize you are more invested in the clothes you have. You begin to distance yourself from the culture of overconsumption and buying all the time just for the sake of having something new or retail therapy. You can actually create something new from what you have and these things last longer. (Participant 6)

4.2.3. Garment Life Extension Practices (GLEPs)

Almost half of participants believed engaging in garment life extension practices, such as repurposing, mending, and other sewing/cloth-making practices, was a creative process, but also cited the connection between creativity and joy.

Many people are discovering, especially in the past one-and-a-half years, that creativity actually is a source of joy that they have not yet discovered. (Participant 13)

Practices associated with garment life extension were also considered a form of self-expression which aided in self-satisfaction by allowing one to create a new item. This behavior had dual purposes for one participant: sharing the feeling of joy with others as a source of encouragement to engage in the process and for relaxation purposes.

I recommend people try upcycling and mending. There are emotional and psychological reasons to have it as a hobby. It is something joyful to do for relaxation. (Participant 12)

Finally, the impact of practicing garment life extension was viewed as another way to reduce the endless cycle of overconsumption patterns.

I think that it really helps in subtracting ourselves from this trap of buying. When you realize that you can make clothes last longer, then the corollary of that is that you buy fewer clothes, right? (Participant 6)

To aid and support the consumer’s beliefs in clothing as an unlimited reusable resource, fashion brands should consider using high-quality fibers for future production activities as poor quality (i.e., pilling, shrinkage, cheap fabrics) is the primary constraint in making fashion modifications [59,60].

4.3. Values Related to Extending Garment Life

Two values were evident among participants: altruistic and biospheric (Table 4). Some of the biospheric values included choosing sustainable fibers and materials that were less harmful to the environment.

Table 4. Participant values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values</th>
<th># Responses</th>
<th>% of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Altruistic</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biospheric</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over the years, I’ve learned about natural materials, sustainable fibers… things that are breathable and generally have something of value that are less harmful to the Earth. (Participant 14)

One participant also made a commitment to only engage in GLEPs to repurpose presently owned clothing instead of purchasing cheaply made mass-produced products.
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I made a deal with the planet. If I make stuff, it will be reused. Mass production, anything packaged in plastic, made many for cheap... not my story anymore. I want to live light. This is just me trying to walk my talk. (Participant 11)

Decisions were made to donate high-value items rather than sell based on the belief that it would bring happiness to the intended recipient.

I gave a huge amount of clothing to friends, especially if I had higher value pieces that were more expensive, like hundred-something-dollar dresses. I would just hand those down to someone I knew that would love them. I wouldn't even sell them because I don't care about money. I don't, that's not for me. (Participant 1)

Finally, the idea of donating to others in the general community that need similar items that the participant has used before was appealing.

It just kind of stays in the community too, I guess, and it's more affordable. And I don't know, I feel like I'm doing good that way because maybe something that I have, somebody else that's starting their profession might be able to use. (Participant 3)

To allow the consumer to keep items ‘in the community’, retailers and brands might consider collaborative consumption business models allowing for GLEPs such as swapping or rental. Furthermore, previous literature suggests values are consistent throughout an individual’s life [20]. However, some participants indicated a change in their overall value system once they learned of the detrimental impacts caused by overconsumption of fashion items and the harsh impacts of fashion industry production. This suggests the potential to shift the mindset of the consumer who does not currently engage in SCB by influencing their value system, ultimately changing motivations and actions. Almost half of participants in the study exhibited altruistic values by either donating to charity or others. Purchase decisions, if made, were often based on the company’s support of the participant’s value system. They also were concerned about who made their clothing, sparking consideration for the fashion industry to take more actionable steps towards transparency in all aspects of the supply chain from production to manufacturing.

4.4. Personal Norms Related to Extending Garment Life

Participants in this study exhibited personal norms rather than social norms. One consistent theme from participants was a change in personal norms once they more clearly understood the impacts of harsh chemicals in clothing production and overconsumption patterns. Practicing using out of necessity also extended to grocery items, indicating these personal norms extended to other areas outside of fashion. For this study, there were four dominant personal norms that emerged from participant interviews (Table 5).

Table 5. Participant personal norms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Norms Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% of Participants</th>
<th>Personal Norms Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General clothing norms</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>Buying new unnecessary, fast fashion unsustainable, no brand names, self-expression/empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLEP norms</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>Satisfaction, sense of control, responsibility, wear what you own, fit, skill set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing disposal norms</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>Appeal of donation, multiple modes of disposal, recycling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General environmental norms</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>Waste is a problem, pursuing eco-behavior</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4.1. General Clothing Norms

Most participants provided responses on their thoughts around fashion clothing when asked about their customary behaviors and why they chose to engage in sustainable consumption practices. This category described the participant’s individual thoughts around fashion clothing in general. Out of the ten women that provided personal norms in
this area, five of them made the conscious decision not to purchase new clothing unless they either wanted to support certain companies that aligned with their values, out of necessity, or for a specific function or task.

*I almost never buy things new. When I do it is mostly t-shirts, socks, and underwear. That is pretty much the only thing that I’ll buy new at this point, unless it’s from a company that I really want to support.* (Participant 14)

Participants could not justify purchasing new fashion items because they felt they either had more than enough to either create new items or wear what they already owned in its original form. In addition, if new items were purchased, a conscious decision was made to purchase items that were of high quality so they could implement garment life extension practices, such as repurposing and/or mending at a future date. This is most closely related to the next major emerging subtheme—fashion has endless life.

Lastly, participants viewed clothing as an investment and, therefore, believed quality and classic designs were most important to extend the garment’s life to create usable life in future fashion seasons where trends might change. For each of these participants, there appeared to be a connection between purchasing high-quality items, viewing clothing as an endless resource, and investing in clothing, as participants considered potential garment life extension actions for the future.

*I also try to encourage people to look at clothing as an investment. If you spend USD 1000 every year on clothing and the clothing is stretched, you cannot wear it, so you throw it away, you basically throw your money away, and then you have to buy clothing again and it becomes a never-ending cycle. Instead, invest in good quality garments that are classic and timeless. I’m not talking about trendy patterns and colors that are nice looking today, but off trend tomorrow. No, just good quality fabric, something that you will be proud of wearing, something that will look nice and will be well maintained for years to come.* (Participant 12)

4.4.2. GLEP Norms

Nine of the 14 participants communicated feeling satisfied by engaging in garment life extension practices (GLEPs). Those feelings of satisfaction were attributed to multiple factors from having a sense of control to doing something good for the environment or even making something new that was unique to the participant. There was also a sense of joy, or happiness, that was a result of engaging in the GLEP process that contributed to self-care for the individual.

*I’ve learned repurposing [one form of GLEPs] is a craft… it’s an activity. I’m not doing this for anybody else. I’m not looking to build a fashion brand. I’m not looking to sell things. It’s literally just something that makes me happy.* (Participant 3)

4.4.3. Clothing Disposal Norms

One strategy towards practicing SCB is reducing the harsh impact on the environment of continuous disposal of fashion and fashion-related products. Therefore, participants were asked what they do with their unwanted clothing. They either sold, donated, or gave items away but no one chose to dispose of their garment by throwing it away in the trash. Accessibility and convenience of the bin were also factors in determining if items would be donated. Lastly, one of the appeals of donation was keeping items within the community for the benefit of others, a concept that has yet to be explored in current research and might present itself as a future social norm.

*It just kind of stays in the community too, I guess, and it’s more affordable. I don’t know, I feel like I’m doing good that way because maybe something that I have, somebody else that’s starting their profession might be able to use. And it’s just going from my town to the next town over from the store that I work at.* (Participant 3)
4.4.4. General Environmental Norms

Making contributions to reduce waste or ending the cycle of overconsumption was a major subtheme that emerged after participants were asked how they viewed sustainability issues and their existing behaviors. There was a conscious effort to reduce waste footprints by consuming less to preserve the environment. Many were also bothered by the amount of textile products in landfills and made decisions to practice more eco-friendly behaviors.

5. Conclusions

The single objective for this study was to determine the characteristics of the individual who engages in SCB to extend the life of their garments as guided by their motivations, values, beliefs, and behaviors with the goal of limiting consumer wasteful discard actions. Findings connected to motivations show poor fit is a major motivation for the decision to extend the life of garments. The reasons varied from changes in body shape due to life circumstances such as having kids or gaining/losing weight to style change preferences. On some occasions, a different fit was desired based on individual preferences. Finally, creativity expressed in various ways was a motivation for engaging in extension of life practices. In some cases, GLEPs were creative outlets allowing participants to experience joy. Creativity was viewed as a learned process that became better with experience. Although participant interviews indicated creativity was inherent in everyone, the level of creativity was still dependent upon the function and complexity of the project.

Furthermore, the findings of this study indicated participant purchase decisions were often based on brand transparency and the company’s support of their value system, as the impact of their actions on the environment was of utmost concern. This was supported by the fact that some participants had concerns about who was making their clothing. Therefore, practitioners in the fashion industry can use this study to inform and refine new and existing collaborative consumption business models and operational approaches (i.e., brands, retailers, manufacturers) to engage with these consumers to advance sustainability practices. Collaborative consumption models should include practices allowing for renting, sharing/swapping, or even secondhand purchase. Collaborative consumption models should also involve some form of informal education that allows for discourse on the impact of behaviors as well as ‘how-to’ demonstrations or training to encourage garment life extension practices. In addition, although this study largely discusses fashion, collaborative consumption across other product categories (i.e., vehicles and travel) should also be considered in future business models, because 60% of participants believed resources in general were scarce and buying new was unnecessary.

From a consumer perspective, major findings of this study show more than 70% of participants were motivated to pursue garment life extension practices for three main reasons: (1) change the fit of the item, (2) pass the item on to friends or family, (3) and explore creativity. An overwhelming majority also discussed the psychological and emotional benefits (e.g., joy, relaxation, and empowerment) they derived from engaging in GLEPs. Based on the findings, there is potential for these practices to serve as an outlet to increase mental wellness. However, further research is needed in this area to understand what, if any, potential barriers exist for those who do not engage in GLEPs. Is their skill set lacking? Materials? Is cost a factor? Is more education needed around the impact of unsustainable fashion consumption behaviors? Addressing these questions might help determine how to encourage GLEPs in the wider population, as this study focused only on those who currently engaged in these behaviors.

In understanding how their actions and behaviors affect the environment, participants in the study largely believed clothing was an unlimited reusable investment and should only be purchased out of necessity. Fast fashion, often labeled as ‘disposable fashion’, is made with poor quality material and construction standards [61], potentially making it difficult to create other items from it or modify items to extend their life. Therefore, it is recommended fashion suppliers consider high-quality fibers and fabrication techniques for
future production to allow and encourage the consumer to practice longevity and extend the life of their apparel.

Lastly, existing research and industry terminology often uses terms such as ‘upcycling’, ‘downcycling’, ‘repurposing’, and ‘reuse’ to describe how and what methods the consumer (or brand) chooses to extend the life of fashion. However, the authors of this study would like to propose new terminology, or language, to uniformly describe the methods used to extend garment life—‘garment life extension practices’ or ‘GLEPs’—to encompass all related behaviors and ensure consistency across academic research and business practices.

6. Limitations and Future Research

Because this was an exploratory study, a small participant sample was used to address the research question. However, quantitative research with a larger population set is recommended to validate findings. It is unknown if these findings would yield similar results for those with no prior knowledge, as all participants in the study were required to have previous knowledge of GLEPs.

In addition, future research might explore the connection between creativity and mental wellness, as several participants discussed the importance of these SCB activities as a creative outlet that gave them a sense of empowerment and control. Creativity is often discussed in the literature but is not well defined. Therefore, a more in depth look at what it means to be ‘creative’ through the lens of extending garment life and how that translates to skill sets is necessary to identify the skills individuals have or lack to perform complex projects that extend the life of their clothing.

Furthermore, GLEPs are not currently reflected in traditional consumer behavior decision models (e.g., Engel-Blackwell-Miniard model) as a formal phase. This research provides the foundation for another consumer decision-making component—GLEPs— which would allow for a more expansive and informed view of the decision-making options available. The decision-making process, unique to each consumer, continues to be of interest in research given its complex and dynamic nature. It is also influential in determining their ultimate consumption decision to either purchase, discard, or engage in GLEPs with their fashion product(s).

Finally, consumers are moving away from complete ownership and towards models that allow newness, affordability, and sustainable options. Pre-ownership, rental, and refurbished products are also projected to gain increased importance in the marketplace as customers are seeking these options moving forward [1]. Retailers and brands should review, adjust, and implement new practices to best meet the needs of today’s sustainability-focused consumer. Potential new practices might include services such as mending and repair, and consumer-focused education promoting these behaviors.

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Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

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### Table A1. Interview Questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Garment Life Extension Process (10 Questions)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you do with your unwanted fashion?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you tell me about how you learned to repurpose fashion? (Martindale 2017) [45]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much of your wardrobe would you say you have repurposed? (Martindale 2017 [45]; Martindale and McKinney 2020) [44]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What function did the item serve for you after repurposing? (Lamb and Kallal, 1992 [62])</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did the function expand or change? (Lamb and Kallal, 1992 [62])</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell me about the three fashion items you have repurposed yourself that you bought here today. (Martindale, 2017) [45]</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Where do you get inspiration for your designs?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What look were you going for? (Follow up to Q7), (Lamb and Kallal 1992 [62])</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you feel when you wear the fashion you have made? (Lamb and Kallal 1992 [62]; Martindale 2017 [45])</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are people’s reactions when you wear the fashion you have repurposed that you bought here today? Or any other items? (Martindale 2017) [45]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fashion Maintenance Skill Set and Resources (3 Questions)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you describe the specific skill(s) and/or resources you need to repurpose fashion?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much did you spend on repurposing related resources in the past 12 months? (Martindale 2017) [45]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you do not have money to spend, if necessary, on resources related to repurposing fashion how does it make you feel? (Martindale 2017) [45]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual Usership Characteristics (Values, Beliefs, Norms, and Motivations) (2 Questions)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What benefits do you believe your repurposing actions have on others? The environment?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has your engagement in this activity caused you to practice other related behaviors that were different from what you practiced prior to this activity?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engagement with Community Who Practice Garment Life Extension (4 Questions)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What repurposing communities are you involved in? Tell me more about that experience. (Martindale 2017) [45]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which individuals have you made a connection with who also practice these behaviors (or similar)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What motivated you to engage with these repurposing communities or the individuals with which you made connections?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What will you do to engage others in these behaviors?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: To ensure participants were familiar with terminology in the interview process more commonly used and cited terms such as ‘repurposing’ and ‘reuse’ were used throughout questioning.

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