Article

A Social Practices Approach to Encourage Sustainable Clothing Choices

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Abstract: The literature on sustainable clothing covers five key thematic areas: problems associated with fast fashion; sustainable fibre production; sustainable design protocols; corporate responsibility; sociological and social–psychological understandings; and pro-environmental behaviour changes. This article interweaves these approaches in a study that assesses the potential of experiential learning in clothes making, mending, and modifying workshops to help generate new social practices. The workshop design drew on the five key thematic areas and purposively provided participants with infrastructures and equipment, facilitators, and peer-to-peer support and dialogue as means to help them collaboratively generate new skills, new senses of meaning, and more sustainable ways of thinking, feeling, and acting in relation to clothes. This article reveals that our social practices approach encouraged research participants to positively uptake pro-environmental clothing choices. Thematic qualitative analysis of a small sample of participants' wardrobe audit interviews, informal discussions, reflective videos, and reflective diaries illustrates nuanced and dynamic individual responses to the workshops and other project interventions. Nuances are contingent on factors including styles, creativity, habits, and budgets. We argue that, in order to mainstream the benefits of our approach, it is necessary to normalise approaches to clothing and style that sit outside of, or adjacent to, mainstream fashion, including clothes making, mending, and modifying practices.

Keywords: social practices; sustainable clothing; slow fashion; wardrobe studies; pro-environmental behaviour change

1. Introduction

Fast fashion has deleterious social and environmental consequences. On 24 April 2013, the Rana Plaza building collapsed, raising awareness of the serious human consequences of fast fashion. Garment workers were forced to work in the factory despite visible signs that the building was vulnerable to collapse, tragically killing 1000 employees [1]. Environmental implications of fashion are also serious. Distinct from many other products, clothes have exceedingly complex supply lines, with trails of environmental degradation and pollution at each level of production; soil, fibres, manufacture and dyeing of textiles; transportation of different components to assembly lines and global markets; and the subsequent creation of mountainous piles of textile waste [2]. Low-quality garments and fast-paced fashion perpetuate social and environmental issues by generating a 'buy now,

throw away tomorrow' culture [3], encouraging a race to the bottom in the industry [4]. The efforts of our project partner, Fashion Revolution, alongside Stacey Dooley's *Fashion's Dirty Secrets* (2019) documentary and UK's The House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee's (2019) report *Fixing Fashion* [5] are important initiatives that emphasise the need to urgently change clothing production and consumption.

In this article we write about the innovative and interdisicplinary multiple partner project S4S: Designing a Sensibility for Sustainable Clothing. This was funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). It represents a significant attempt to experiment with a promising strategy to contirbute to fixing fashion by encouraging pro-environmental behaviour (for more information about the project, please see our website, available here: https://s4sproject-exeter.uk/, accessed on 27 November 2023). It engaged around 40 volunteer participants in hands-on making, mending, and modifying clothes workshops, providing conditions to generate and develop new sets of social practices driven by fresh imaginaries.

We build on the existing knowledge base on sustainable clothing in three ways. First, we show how we used the different thematic strands of work in this field to design the workshops. Second, we outline the importance of social practice theory for encouraging pro-environmental behaviours. Third, we use the cognate literature to generate a set of expectations of our interventions on individuals with varying identities, creativity, styles, habits, and budgets. After introducing our research design, rooted in co-created social design and participatory qualitative inquiry, we evaluate our attempt to encourage pro-environmental clothing choices. We show that our approach has encouraged pro-environmental behaviour but that identities, deep-seated habits, emotions, and budgets result in varied and nuanced behavioural changes. The article concludes with ideas on how we could make our approach, trialled with a small group of participants, more mainstream.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Using Thematic Areas of Research on Sustainable Clothing to Design Workshops

Academics have been writing about the need to make fashion more sustainable for several decades. Sustainable clothing research has been developing steadily since 2008 [6]. We characterise it into six sub-disciplinary (and overlapping) approaches, each of which informs the present study: (1) identifying problems associated with fast fashion; (2) technological approaches for sustainable fibre production; (3) sustainable design protocols; (4) corporate responsibility; (5) sociological or social-psychological accounts of clothing consumption and dressing behaviours; and (6) pro-environmental behaviour change. Our characterisation fleshes out Mukendi et al.'s classification derived from a systematic review of 500 scientific articles on sustainable fashion [6]. Their classification of sub-bodies of sustainable fashion literature distinguishes between pragmatic (working with the current fashion system) and radical (departing from the status quo) forms of fashion consumption, production, and behaviours. Although the S4S project facilitated learning about a radically different alternative and slower form of fashion, it was open to participants finding their own feet in sustainable clothing practices anywhere between the radical and reformist ends of a continuum. Indeed, in one of our workshops, we explored the sustainability practices of well-known corporate brands, which could be seen as reformist. In others, we took broken garments and waste fabric and moulded them into new and radical styles. In our brief review, here, we include references to key research monographs missing from Mukendi et al.'s [6] account and cite more recently published work.

Kate Fletcher is probably one of the most well-known scholars working to raise awareness of the *problems associated with fast fashion*. Her ground-breaking book [2] introduces readers to the diverse impacts of fashion and textiles while also showcasing new design concepts and social innovations to reduce their impacts. Moreover, she points out the long history of sustainability initiatives in fashion [7]. In a similar vein, other scholars have shone a light on the environmental impacts that occur during the life cycle of fashion [8] and on the ethical issues of fashion from a consumer perspective [9]. Our workshops gently

pointed out the problems associated with fast fashion via the course of natural talk and the sharing of documentaries, including *The True Cost of Fashion*, which reveals ethical and environmental problems with the fast fashion industry.

Technological approaches to sustainabilising fashion are diverse. At the forefront of this strand of research is the notion that technology is central to making fashion more sustainable [10], although there is recognition that some technological processes are more environmentally damaging than others [11]. Gordon and Hill's book on *Sustainable Fashion* [12], for example, includes a chapter about the material origins of fibres, exploring trade-offs between using natural versus synthetic fibres and creating new synthetic fibres that are less environmentally damaging. Cross-thematic research by Rebecca Earley and Kate Goldsworthy at the Centre for Circular Design works with fashion producers on transmutable and adaptable product design and sustainable fibre procurement [13]. Among other things, they bring together designers and textile fibre specialists mimicking collaborative design in the motor industry (Earley et al. 2016) [13]. Our workshops helped shape participants' understanding of the trade-offs of different types of fibres and acted as sites for collaborative design.

Sustainable design protocols, often the remit of academics working in Schools of Fashion, emphasise embedding sustainability principles into clothing design. With this body of work in mind, our workshops taught participants how to fix and alter documents. Durability, slowness [14,15], adaptability, and eco-chic [16] are key concepts guiding this work. There is, however, recognition that eco-fashion and eco-dress are not the same thing: the former might be a fad, whereas the latter explicates a more deeply grounded eco-consciousness. For this reason, we prefer to use the term 'sustainable clothing' rather than 'sustainable fashion'.

Other forerunners in sustainable design protocols include Sandy Black [17] and Dilys Williams [18], but the field is enlarging and gaining increasing credibility with producers and retail outlets seeking to improve *corporate responsibility*. Particularly since the Rana Plaza disaster, scholars have charted increased interest from businesses to improve their reputations. These may not always be genuine attempts to embed sustainability principles into their production lines [19]. In one of our workshops, we critically discussed the corporate responsibility policies and practices of key brands.

Sociological or social–psychological accounts of fashion try to understand what people buy and wear and why [20]. In her seminal wardrobe studies work, Woodward [21] reveals how women use the contents of their wardrobes to create and recreate their identities. The emotional connections that people have with clothes are central to this perspective, which recognises that clothes are much more than functional: they shape the wearer's identity [22–24], not always positively [25]. In our work, we used a version of Woodward's [21] wardrobe audit exercise. Our assessment of the workshops emphasised emotions and feelings towards garments, outfits, and making and mending projects.

Although consumers are central to many strands of research on sustainable clothing and significant attempts have been made to celebrate and encourage the making and mending of clothes, few studies have taken individual *behaviour change* in consumers as their central guiding principle. Kate Fletcher [26], for example, advocates for moving beyond the consumption of clothing towards deep engagement with wearing, altering, mending, and tending them. Similarly, Twigger Holroyd [27] sees significant potential for changing the fashion system by disrupting it with homemade clothing. Community groups are often seen as important points of contact for encouraging making and mending [28–30], a point further illustrated via the Stitching Together Network (https://stitchingtogether.net/, accessed on 27 November 2023). In our workshops, we purposefully mimicked the natural community group as a site to generate alternative knowledge and practices to disrupt participants' engagement in the conventional fashion cycle.

A related body of work has sought to understand the factors that encourage the uptake of sustainable clothing consumption. Some sustainable clothing consumers have compassionate values [31], strong anti-consumption beliefs, and a willingness to be different and creative [32–35]. Others have sufficient financial resources that enable them to

'vote' with them in the marketplace [36,37] by making long-term investments in local and quality products [38]. On the other side of the coin, barriers to the adoption of sustainable clothing purchasing are perceived unfashionableness [39,40], cost [41], visibility [42], and accessibility [43], which each intersect with class, race, gender, and power. These barriers to sustainable clothing practices [44] contribute to the pervasive value–behaviour gap that hampers many strategies targeting consumers to change. Indeed, many people with ethical values barely engage in sustainable clothing practices. The social practices approach deployed by S4S seeks to reduce the disconnect between values and behaviour by facilitating pro-environmental behaviour change (more on this shortly).

Individuals who engage most thoroughly in sustainable clothing practices are known as 'prosumers' [6]. Prosumers recognise that the most ethical way to consume fashion is to refrain from participating in conventional fashion [45], instead finding alternatives in second-hand, homemade styles that can be uniquely tailored to their identities [46]. Indeed, identities are oftentimes considered to be one of the most important factors in stimulating alternative, slower, sustainable fashion practices [47]. But how do we encourage prosumerism? Herein lies a research gap that we address in our study. It is known that prosumers exist, but there is little research into how different members of society can tap into these lifestyles to make them appeal to the masses [6].

One rare example of a study that sought to facilitate a shift towards prosumerism comes from Durrani [48], who, similar to the current study, considered how engaging non-professionals in clothes mending workshops—as vehicles for material and social practices—could be a means for pro-environmental behaviour shifts. Durrani's in-depth interviews with organisers and participants revealed that they learned how to identify quality garments, how to care for them, and how to mend them. Unlike our study, Durrani studied existing making and mending groups. Our study contrasts with Durrani's by purposively emulating a slow fashion cycle in the delivery of workshops and using reflexive research tools—videos, wardrobe audits, informal talk, and reflective videos—to understand how the workshops shaped the way participants think, feel, and act about the sustainability of their clothing choices. We return to detail our methodological approach after qualifying how this article ties together the diverse strands of literature on sustainable fashion, detailing our social practices approach, and outlining a set of expectations for nuances in our findings based on the extant literature.

Our project engaged around 40 participants in a series of 20 one-day workshops focused on all phases of the clothing lifecycle (see Methods Section) and assessed the extent to which and how this practice-based approach can encourage pro-environmental behaviour change. In tune with our thematic literature review (above), our immersive workshop series enabled participants to co-generate understandings of the *issues* with fast fashion. It introduced some alternative and more sustainable fibres, processes, and practices (natural wool, natural dyes, and *ethical standards in fashion*), alongside providing participants with a workspace and equipment to cultivate social practices, which enabled them to generate their own *design protocols* (as well as how to modify and repair garments more generally). Our additional exploration and enquiry into their *reasons for choosing the clothes* they buy and wear deepened their emotional connection to their clothes. For many of our participants, the process resulted in *pro-environmental behaviour change*. Some were touched in minor ways; others made radical shifts in their clothing practices [25].

2.2. A Social Practices Approach

Our work is rooted in the tradition of social practice theory, drawn from the variant by Shove and Pantzar [49]. Social practice theory posits that pro-environmental behaviour change requires the presence of assemblages of 'things' such as equipment and infrastructures, of 'competencies' such as knowledge and skills, and of 'meanings' such as emotional resonance and identity (see also [50,51]). The idea that simply changing attitudes automatically changes behaviour [52,53] is now very outdated and is contradicted by evidence of a pervasive value/attitude–behaviour gap [54]. It is now widely recognised that social

context, social norms, and social infrastructures act as barriers to behaviour change. Behavioural changes need to be re-enacted by practices to become facilitators for change. As we discussed above, the barriers to pro-environmental behaviour change are particularly difficult to surpass when it comes to clothing. It is perhaps only by embedding individuals in sets of practices (in our case, making fabric, as well as making, mending, and modifying clothes via the provision of things, competencies, and meaning) that individuals develop new ways of interacting with the world in more pro-environmentally friendly ways [55].

Thus, we purposefully provided our participants with the *things*, *competences*, and *meanings* to facilitate pro-environmental behaviour change. In terms of *things*, we provided them with access to community spaces, equipment, and materials to learn how fabric is made from fibre and how clothing can be made, mended, and modified. In relation to *competencies*, we helped to facilitate co-created workshops that enabled them to learn a variety of skills and provided spaces for casual conversations about clothing in our workshops to facilitate co-created learning about multiple approaches to sustainable clothing. Finally, we helped to generate *meaning* by encouraging participants' emotional connection to their clothes (i.e., via the wardrobe audit—see Methods Section) and by fostering intergroup solidarity, allowing for new social norms to be developed and/or reinforced. The sharing of difficult emotions, experiences, and group support among trusted peers can encourage both deeper engagement with environmental issues and pro-environmental behaviour, as Büchs et al. [56] found in relation to Carbon Conversations.

Practices are generally considered to be assemblages that bring together individuals. They therefore usually play out at the community or societal level. Here, however, we depart slightly from the standard foci of social practice theory by looking at how *individuals* in community settings developed in response to the emergent social practices that our workshops and methodologies fostered. To our knowledge, research using a social practices approach to encourage pro-environmental clothing choices is rare. Shittu and Nygaard [57], writing from a marketing perspective, considered that fashion marketers should see people as carriers of social practices, but few have sought to encourage social practices from the bottom up [58]. Our research addresses two key questions:

(1) In which ways do workshops that mimic sets of social practices around the making, mending, and modification of clothes encourage participants to think, feel, and act more sustainably in their clothing choices?
(2) How do individuals respond differently to these workshops, and why do they do so?

2.3. Expectations Based on Extant Literature

Our primary expectation was that the social practices-oriented workshops would have a significant effect on the ways in which participants thought, felt and acted in relation to their clothing choices, improving their sustainability. This is because the development of social practices circumvents the value–behaviour gap by changing not only thoughts via knowledge generation but also feelings by providing meanings and actions via facilitating competencies using meaningful equipment and infrastructures [49].

However, we also anticipated that our non-prescriptive co-created workshops would allow different individuals to generate their own nuanced individual practices. As we already established in our literature review, the uptake of sustainable clothing varies according to identities [47], styles [39,40,59], and budgets [60,61]. We expect these same factors to generate nuances in individuals' responses to the workshops. Brand-savvy consumers who identify with quality garments are likely to be less willing to adopt a new style than fast fashion shoppers, but small budgets will restrict some fast fashion shoppers' ability to purchase more affordable but more sustainable and higher-quality garments.

We also anticipated variance in relation to creativity and habits. Creativity refers to the human ability to think in a divergent way when faced with a stimulus. In relation to clothing, one's imagination and competencies provide ideas and processes for the upcycling or re-envisioning of clothing [62]. Psychographic approaches to fashion illustrate that people vary in the extent to which they can think creatively and/or practically make

things [63]. Creative thinking may shape cognitive change and shopping practices, but most fundamentally, being a creative maker opens up many more opportunities for making, mending and restyling. Habits generate repeated and not always conscious patterns of clothing consumption, such as going to the same shop, routinely shopping in the sales (despite need), or throwing old clothing out [64]. It is important to note that identity, styles, budgets, creativity, and habits intersect heavily with social class. Clothes have, for centuries, been a key marker of class, bound not only in cost but also to identities such as the 'bottom-up' fashion styles of punk and chav. Appleford found that people from the working class buy clothes more cheaply and are led by trends, whereas those from the middle classes tend to purchase more durable, practical, and quality styles [61]. Working-class citizens have less money and are therefore more likely to be utilitarian—focused on needs rather than wants—in their clothing selection. Given that new environmentally friendly clothing is often expensive [41], we anticipate a shift towards more quality and durable items of clothing being more common among those from higher social classes.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Design and Philosophy

Our research philosophy is interpretivist and phenomenological: we were keen to examine participants' lived experiences on their terms in a situation over which they had some agency. Our overall approach can be characterised as co-created social design [65] and participatory qualitative inquiry. This approach develops action-reflection methodology to self-reflexively build critical thinking via collective praxis. It is ideal for promoting agency for change in thoughts, feelings, and actions in relation to clothing. There are four key reasons why we used social design to encourage sustainable clothing: (1) Fashion is a complex problem, requiring nuanced and novel approaches to finding sustainable solutions which balance the desire and destruction integral to fashion; (2) since fashion has significant externalities, governments are aware that new creative grassroots solutions are required to foster pro-environmental behaviour change. (3) the importance of co-creative arts/craft practice for informing policy is emergent, requiring a serious test bed; and (4) political scientists have, for decades, recommended drawing on multiple sources of knowledge to solve policy problems [66]. True to the diverse themes identified in our literature review (see Section 2.1), we drew on multiple cannons of knowledge delivered via co-created workshops.

Qualitative participatory research involves using qualitative and reflexive methods in participation with research participants. We outline our qualitative research tools below. Due to space constraints, we would like to draw readers' attention to our website, where we provide more information on our philosophy and research methods, including a researcher toolkit (see: https://s4sproject-exeter.uk/researcher-toolkit/, accessed on 27 November 2023). Note that we worked on a range of methodologies, including in-depth observational work over 40 full days of workshops. The researchers' in-depth engagement with and participation in the workshops and research process allows us to have certainty that the data we report in this article capture the experiences of our participants in general. The small qualitative sample of participants examined in this article (32 with questionnaire data and 4 interpretively) is illustrative of the broad shifts in the ways our participants changed their thinking, feeling, and acting about clothing. Interested readers can see similar shifts in thoughts, feelings, and actions illustrated in our twenty-nine reflexive project videos, available on our YouTube channel (https://www.youtube.com/@SSProject-rr7hr, accessed 27 November 2023).

3.2. Methodology

Our research methodology had three main phases: (1) co-created workshops; (2) a survey of participants with a quasi-experimental (i.e., pre- and post-treatment) design; and (3) a package of qualitative methods consisting of interviews about wardrobe content, reflective diaries, natural talk, and reflective films.

3.2.1. Co-Created Workshops

In January 2018, we held launch events in the West Midlands and Cornwall in the UK. Over 100 participants attended altogether. The launch event participants completed a pre-participation survey (see more below), which we also used as a tool to recruit a smaller number of participants to our workshops. We purposively sampled workshop participants from the workshop attendees, selecting those with a range of social class backgrounds, with differing monthly clothes spending, from different age groups, and with different levels of experience in making, mending, and modifying clothes. The last criterion was important for ensuring that some participants were on hand to knowledgeably co-create workshops and, in some instances, co-deliver the workshops to help develop competencies. In Cornwall, we had 10–12 regular participants in our workshops; in the West Midlands, we had nearly 30 participants, some of whom became regulars. Note that the research design purposefully trades large sample sizes for the depth of a wide range of qualitative data.

Between February 2018 and October 2019, we ran four sets of five-day workshops in the West Midlands (coordinated by our University of Wolverhampton/University of Manchester Metropolitan team) and the same number in Cornwall (coordinated by the University of Exeter team). In total, we ran 40 one-day workshops. The overall themes were set out by researchers, building on the literature on sustainable clothing, but the exact content was shaped by our participants.

The workshops were designed to mimic a slow and alternative version of the lifecycle of clothing, from the cradle to beyond what might usually be conceived as the grave. The workshops iteratively built upon each other and were focused on (1) Fluff to Fibre: spinning, dyeing and weaving yarn (Cornwall); (2) (De)Constructive/(Re)Constructive Knitting: un-picking and re-making garments (West Midlands); (3) Towards Zero Waste: learning about the problem of global textiles waste (Cornwall); (4) Vintage Pattern Cutting: making patterns and garments using 1940s techniques and waste materials (West Midlands); (5) Make-Do-And-Mend: learning and applying sewing, darning, and repair techniques (Cornwall); (6) (In)Visible Mending: using stitch techniques such as needle weaving and gold work to embellish stains, rips, and tears in clothing (West Midlands); (7) Second-Hand and Ethical: charity shopping, adapting, and re-making garments (Cornwall); and (8) Re-Make, Re-Purpose, Upcycle: upcycling, repurposing existing garments, and making new artefacts from waste leather (West Midlands). The Cornwall and West Midlands groups additionally worked together by exchanging and enhancing a set of artefacts and engaging in online discussions. Full details of our workshop series can be seen on our website here: https://s4sproject-exeter.uk/workshops-2/, accessed on 27 November 2023 and in our project leaflets, available here: https://s4sproject-exeter.uk/leaflets/, accessed on 27 November 2023. Note that the workshops were a co-created and co-designed set of activities that acted as an emergent and organically evolving experimental treatment rather than a methodology per se.

3.2.2. Pre- and Post-Survey of Participants

The survey had three purposes. It acted as (1) a screening questionnaire to allow us to recruit an appropriate range of participants to our workshops (see above); (2) a tool to measure changes in the ways our participants thought, felt and acted in relation to clothing choices via a quasi-experimental design; and (3) a further and more refined screening device to select a small number of participants to reveal their S4S project journeys in more detail via qualitative material.

We designed a quasi-experimental questionnaire, which asked our participants for self-reported assessments of the ways in which they think, feel, and act in relation to clothes before and after participation in our workshops. Although the sample size is small (n = 26 for the post-participation survey and n = 24 for completion of both the before and after surveys), this enables us to provide a quantitative interpretation of the effects of participation in the project, which we have cross-validated with reference to our broader qualitative interpretations. Our own deep engagement in the research project's processes

and workshops allows us to be confident that our survey results capture the changing thoughts, feelings, and actions of our most committed and regularly attending participants. Table 1 shows the demographics of the 33 workshop participants for whom we collected demographic data.

Table 1. Demographics of participants selected for workshop participation.

Variable		Frequency	Valid %
Gender (female)		32	97
Age (years)			
	17–24	14	42.4
	25–34	2	6.1
	35–44	5	15.2
	45–54	5	15.2
	55–64	5	15.2
	65+	2	6.1
Self-identified social class			
	None	3	9.1
	Working class	10	31.3
	Lower middle class	15	45.5
	Upper middle class	3	9.4
	Upper class	3	9.4
Education			
	Secondary to age 16 years	1	3.1
	Secondary post-16 years	1	3.1
	Undergraduate	2	62.5
	Masters or PG professional	10	31.3
Employment situation			
	Full-time work	6	18.8
	Part-time work	3	9.4
	Self-employed	8	25.0
	In education	16	50.0
	Unemployed	1	3.1
	Retired	1	3.1
	Home-keeper	2	6.3

We also used the survey to select four participants to illustrate qualitatively the different journeys of participants, and to tease out the reasons for the notable differences. These four participants are referred to here by pseudonyms: Bianca, Jennifer, Christine, and Susan. These participants were chosen because they had significantly different responses to the pre- and post-participation survey from one another, even though they all claimed—after participation in the project—that they were thinking more carefully about the clothes that they buy and have exhibited some pro-environmental behaviour changes.

3.2.3. Qualitative Methods

We use qualitative methods in this article to understand more about the context of the behaviour changes that we can identify from our pre- and post-participation surveys and to discover nuances in respondents' thinking, feeling, and acting. In particular, this allows us to validate and then search for explanations for the different responses of some contrasting participants.

The qualitative methods we used are three-fold. First, we interviewed our participants about their clothing practices in their homes in front of their wardrobes for 1.5–3 h at both the start and end of the project. This was important because one of our participants had said to us, 'it would be great if maybe at the end of the project you could come back and maybe have a look over my wardrobe then and see the differences, because . . . I'm coming along' (Christine). The wardrobe interview [67] was combined with a discussion about the results of a preparatory exercise in which participants guessed how many items of clothing they had and then counted them. We asked them if they were surprised about any discrepancies

between the number of items they guessed they have in their wardrobe vis à vis what they actually have. They told us stories about what they were wearing at the time of the interview, their favourite outfits, and which outfits were the oldest and newest as well as the cheapest and most expensive. We also asked them about their clothing choices and favourite clothes stores, their interpretation of sustainable fashion and what, if anything, had changed in their practices since participating in the workshops. Based on previous research work, we collectively call this combination of methods a 'wardrobe audit', an approach we have adapted from 'wardrobe studies' [68,69]. Heinze [70] conducted a study using a similar method that she called 'wardrobe examinations', which enabled her to illustrate how people emotionally experience their clothes and their ways of self-fashioning. Although she had not attempted to chart the effects of a behaviour initiative as we do, this approach allowed Heinze to show how shifts in clothing practices are individualised and complex.

Second, our participants completed reflective diaries. Participants were provided with blank hard-backed sketchbooks and invited to use these to write/draw/collage/photograph anything to do with their clothing. Central to these diaries were written reflections on: 'new (to you) clothes–tell us about your new clothes!'; 'making and mending clothes–what's your latest project?'; 'today's outfit–what are you wearing today?'; and 'workshop reflections'. Open questions were tailored to the theme of the diary entry sheets, but we constantly asked participants to reflect on what this made them think about, how it made them feel and whether they thought it would change the way that they act. Participants also used their diaries to sketch out plans for their practical projects, to attach samples of their work, and to record details of processes and procedures related to skills they had learned.

Third, we recorded and analysed informal group conversations and the content of reflective videos. The qualitative analysis focuses on four participants' in-depth journeys through the project, distilling changes in their actions and relating this to changes in their thinking and the ways in which they felt. We thematically analysed [71] the material to identify both commonly occurring as well as individually nuanced themes. We also included an indication of the stage of the project at which participants raised particular themes to capture the dynamism of participants' responses to the workshops.

4. Results

4.1. Pre- and Post-Workshop Surveys

Overall, our survey results suggest that, post-participation, our participants thought considerably more deeply about their clothes purchasing and engaged in a more ethical and environmentally oriented set of practices, even if their preferred style remained relatively fixed. We asked our participants to provide a list of their top five shops for purchasing clothes. We then characterised these as high street, charity, online, vintage, and reused. The majority of the 22 participants for whom we have valid pre- and post-participation answers preferred to list high street sources both before (on average 2.8 out of 5) and after (on average 2.2 out of 5) workshop participation, with a very slight shift away from the high street towards charity shops (mean before = 0.6, mean after = 0.7).

Most of our participants (16 of 20 valid answers) reported that they would 'not continue to buy fast fashion' in general except for essentials, like underwear. This marks a significant change from the claim made by 19 of 23 that they had, prior to the workshops, purchased clothes from a fast fashion retailer in the past 2 years. However, a minority reported that they would be tempted to purchase fast fashion in a sale (only 4 of 18 said they would do so). Their overall spending on clothes appeared, on average, to have increased from pre- to post-participation.

Of our 22 participants with valid answers to the question on clothing spend in both the pre- and post-survey, 9 had increased their monthly clothes spending, 8 had remained the same, and 5 had reduced it. Of the 12 spending less than GBP 20 per month at the start of the project, four had maintained a low spend, and 7 had increased to GBP 20–50. Of the five participants who spent GBP 20–50 at the start of the project, three had remained

the same, one had increased to GBP 100–200, and one had reduced her spending to GBP 5–10. One participant spending GBP 50–100 kept her spending constant, but another had reduced from GBP 50–100 to less than GBP 20 per month. All three of our participants who used to spend more than GBP 100 a month on clothes had reduced their spending: one to less than GBP 20 per month, another to GBP 20–50, and the third to GBP 50–100.

That some participants had increased their clothes spending seems to be related to their more discerning tastes post-participation, as they increasingly sought more ethical—and presumably more expensive—clothing items. In Table 2, we show the mean scores (where 1 = not at all and 5 = very much) for a range of factors that influence decisions to purchase clothes. After participation in the workshops, our participants were markedly more influenced in their decisions about clothing purchases by the quality of the fibre, the quality of construction, the brand, and local production. They were also slightly less concerned about what their peers think about thought about their clothing choices and never, overall, seemed that fussed about being fashionable.

Table 2. Factors that influence clothes purchasing choice before and after our workshops.

Factors That Influence Purchasing Choice (n = 26)	Mean Score before (1–5)	Mean Score after (1–5)
Quality of fibre	3.6	4.6
Country of origin	2.0	4.1
Quality of construction/manufacture	3.9	4.4
Price	4.3	4.0
Brand	2.6	4.1
Locally produced	2.6	4.1
Being in fashion	2.1	2.0
What peers think	2.0	1.6

A battery of agree–disagree (5-point Likert scale) questions further revealed the impacts that our workshops had upon our participants in relation to thinking carefully about what they bought, their acquisition of new skills, buying fewer items, finding new meaning, sourcing clothes ethically, thinking differently about how they dress, and being more likely to fix their clothes (Table 3). Strikingly, few reported that they had changed their style, suggesting an enduring emotive connection with a style, perhaps related to the sticky nature of identity, despite shifting preferences towards more ethically sourced clothing. We also found that less than half of our participants acquired new equipment during the course of the project. Some may have already owned equipment, but for those that did not, this could mean that the effects of making and mending were limited after the workshop series had ended and the 'things' that facilitate behaviour change were no longer readily available for our participants.

Table 3. Thinking, feeling, and acting impacts of our workshops.

Category	Impact (n = 26)	Number Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing
Think	I think more carefully about the clothes I buy	23
Feel	I feel more empathy for the people who make my clothes	22
Act	I am more likely to fix my broken clothes	22
Act	I have learned new skills	22
Feel	I feel I have made new friends	21
Act	I buy fewer new items of clothing	20
Act	I try to find out who made my clothes	19
Act	I increasingly source my clothes ethically	19
Feel	I find different meaning in the clothes I wear	16
Think	I think differently about how I dress	15
Act	I have acquired new equipment	12
Act/feel	I have changed my style	8

4.2. Tracing the Journeys of Key Selected Participants

4.2.1. Summary of Key Participants' Survey Data

In this section of the article, we explore the differences between our four carefully selected participants: Bianca, Susan, Christine, and Jennifer. By way of introduction, Bianca was aged 36, had upper secondary education, was self-employed, and did not identify with any social class, although she later told us she was from a poor background. She labelled her style as 'artistic'. Her clothing spending remained low (GBP 5–20 per month) from the start to the end of the project, and she had less than 100 items in her wardrobe (it is important to note that the 'before' and 'after' surveys were both conducted in the winter, which allows us, in this comparison, to control for seasonal effects). She claimed she did not think differently about how she dressed since before the workshops started, but that by the project's end, she was buying fewer clothes.

Jennifer, who identified as working class, had a Master's degree and was aged 35. She was in full-time employment and, like Bianca, had stable monthly clothes spending from the start to the end of the project, but hers was higher at GBP 50–100 per month. She claimed that her style is smart/casual with a hint of the 1990s, and she had around 180 items in her wardrobe. Unlike the other participants we examined closely, she strongly disagreed that she had changed her style and answered 'neutral' in response to the question asking whether she seeks more ethical garments.

Our two other closely examined participants, Susan and Christine, had reduced their clothing spend significantly since the start of the workshops. Their survey responses suggested that the project had a significant impact on the way they thought, felt, and acted in relation to clothing. Susan, aged 34, was in full-time work and identified as upper middle class. During the course of the project, she reduced her monthly clothes spending from GBP 50–100 per month to GBP 5–20. At the start of the project, Susan characterised her style as 'preppy' and driven by quality and brand. At the end of the project, she had dropped quality and brand from her characterisation but added denim and white, blue, and red. She had around 290 items in her wardrobe.

Christine, unlike Susan, strongly agreed that the workshops have caused her to rethink her style. However, she continued to define her style as 'casual'. Christine had a Master's degree, was aged 44, and was in full-time employment. She identified as working class and reduced her clothes spend from GBP 100–200 to GBP 50–100 per month over the course of the project. She had an uncountable number of items in her wardrobe, stretching into multiples of 100.

4.2.2. Thematic Analysis of Key Participants' Thinking about Sustainable Clothing

Four themes are common across the four participants' shifts in thinking throughout the workshop series: (1) making and mending clothes is difficult; (2) clothes should be more expensive; (3) I have too many clothes; and (4) sustainable clothing choices are complex. Participants first noticed how difficult it is to make clothes at the start of the project in the fluff-to-fibre series, and this theme persisted as they continued to reflect on the workshops. Christine, for example, commented during month 2 of the project that 'I found it really interesting . . . indeed, how much work is required, and not only in terms of time, but really the amount of skills and, you know, experience'. Bianca found both knitting and crocheting challenging. Jennifer and Christine struggled with knitting. In an interview, in month 5, Jennifer told us that 'it's been really insightful of how difficult it is to knit. It's not easy. It takes patience and practice'. Susan wrote in her reflective diary in month 6 that she would not take up crocheting not only because she found it difficult but also because her grandmother was already very good at it and could supply their family with crocheted garments.

Challenges with grasping skills might be part of the reason why participants considered that clothing should be more expensive. Christine, for example, commented in an interview after the fluff-to-fibre workshop series that 'it makes me really understand why good clothing are so expensive; now that I know the work behind it, I think they are not

expensive enough, to be honest'. This thread of discussion often emerged in informal group conversations throughout the course of the workshop series.

Key participants also each thought they had too many items of clothing. During her first wardrobe audit interview (month 2), counting everything in her wardrobe was challenging for Christine. She said, 'this is insane, there is no way I can count this, I mean, it will take me 3 h'. Jennifer similarly claimed that 'the first time [I counted my clothes] it was a bit more dread, I knew I had a lot of stuff'. Susan showed us her flip-flop collection and expressed mixed senses of pride and shame at the number of pairs. Bianca claimed in month 2 that she had 'may be too much, because . . . I only wear a few of them'.

The theme of the complexity of sustainability choices was also shared, developing in different ways by participants over time. Christine said the following:

> . . .sustainability is really, really hard. It's much harder to understand and the more you learn about it then the more you know that you don't know because there are implications on any front. So any time you think you have found an alternative . . . you think you fix a problem and then you create another one.

Jennifer claimed to have learned a lot about 'the whole process' of fashion. For her, the bottom line was 'considering what it's made from and how it's made, where it's come from and who's made it, and then what are you going to do afterwards or can you recycle it?'. Bianca, already environmentally aware, claimed to have been enlightened about sweatshops and the environmental implications associated with the production of cotton and vowed to use only organic cotton when making new clothes. At the end of month 5, she told our filmmaker that she 'knew something bad was happening, but had no idea it was that bad'. Bianca and Jennifer expressed compassionate values [33] in response to watching *The True Cost of Fashion* in month 4. Bianca claimed that 'it broke my heart'. In summary, the four key participants have a significant amount of overlap in their knowledge and attitudes, but we note that this does not translate into shared feelings and actions resonant with the literature on the value–behaviour gap [53,54].

4.2.3. Thematic Analysis of Key Participants' Feelings about Sustainable Clothing

In contrast to similarities in ways of thinking, feelings were more variable across participants. The themes identified are (1) the benefits of group work; (2) comfort in their varying senses of style; and (3) joy and excitement. All four participants reflected on the benefits of working together, mostly for support and advice (Christine, Jennifer, and Susan). The skills element of our practices approach [49] was of central importance. According to Christine, 'The sharing of skills was really fundamental for me because I feel comfortable with someone by my side. Because, you know, one day you ask and another you find yourself teaching your friend'. Friendships developed organically over the course of the project and were seen as therapeutic. Bianca was delighted to spend time in a new friendship group with 'amazing women'.

Bianca and Susan both talked throughout the course of the entire workshop series about the comfort they find in their own styles. Bianca's style was very artistic and self-styled. She told us, 'I feel that I am myself when I wear my homemade clothes' (month 2 reflective diary). Bianca's diary was notably different from others in that it contained many free-form sketches that later materialised as items of clothing. We can therefore identify Bianca as a creative [33–35]. She was also aware that she was different from other participants, especially when she realised the significantly smaller size of her wardrobe compared to others. These differences came to light during informal conversations among newly emergent friendship groups.

As we already mentioned, Susan's style was what she called preppy. She commented that 'I feel not completed without my watch or ring' (month 3 reflective diary), both of which were cherished gifts. Susan made the most frequent references—throughout the whole of the workshop series—to her comfort in her style, her affection for particular outfits, and her love of particular brands (in interviews and reflective diary accounts in months 2, 3, 4, 8, and 10). Neither Bianca nor Susan changed their styles during the project. Christine,

however, began to see the beauty of imperfectly tailored clothing during the workshops on towards zero waste (in this series, we watched documentaries and learned to knit with yarn reclaimed from old and otherwise useless jumpers; month 4). By month 6 of the project (during the make-do-and-mend workshops), she commented that she no longer felt so compelled to comply with the social norms of the country in which she was born, where there was more pressure on women to dress smartly. Jennifer began experimenting with a capsule wardrobe in month 3, carefully thinking through a slight modification of her style that would allow her to have fewer well-used items in her wardrobe. A capsule wardrobe allows for a mix-and-match of outfits carefully selected to minimise the amount of clothes stored, worn, and purchased [72]. She evaluated her attempt at a capsule wardrobe towards the end of the project (month 10), listing items not yet worn (mainly due to the unseasonable warm weather) and items she felt she needed to purchase to complete the style.

Bianca and Christine frequently expressed joy and excitement at learning new knowledge throughout the course of the whole project, starting in the first workshops. Christine, for example, expressed amazement at how wool moves from being ragged to a fine fibre (month 2) and Bianca claimed in the dyeing workshop (month 3) how it was wonderful 'to know these things and how amazing knowledge was developed by humanity'.

4.2.4. Thematic Analysis of Key Participants' Reported Actions on Sustainable Clothing

The key themes identified for actions on sustainable clothing are: (1) repairing or modifying clothes; (2) caring for clothes; (3) buying better quality items; and (4) buying less. The first two actions were shared across all four participants; others were adopted differentially.

Bianca had been consistently modifying clothes from a young age, but the others were now newly (re)engaged in the practice. In month 8, for example, Jennifer wrote in her reflective diary that she had turned a dress into a skirt and sewed up a rip in a top. Susan reported that she had found a cheap Roxy Quick Silver skirt in a charity shop, which she adapted to make it longer. As she put it 'it was so short you could literally see your pants' (month 10, in interview). By the end of the project, all participants were engaged more deeply in clothing care. Susan claimed to always carefully follow the care labels in her garments but had moved away from 'wash and wear, wash and wear' (month 8), and all the others were beginning to practice the advice care labels more carefully—particularly after the clothes washing experiment in month 9 of the workshops. Clothing care also led to group discussions on ways of avoiding micro-plastic pollution in the laundering of clothes.

Buying better quality and fewer items was not an option for Bianca, who had a much lower budget. Participants who did make this shift did so immediately after the first wardrobe audit interview. Christine went to lengths to reduce the number of items in her wardrobe when she realised that her bulk purchase of cheap products was leading to a hoard of many unworn items. Susan continued to make only careful purchases that fit her style. Jennifer sought to reduce her clothes spending, with a five-point plan:

> (1) Identify colours that work for me; (2) make sure 'new' items fit with my capsule wardrobe; (3) spend more on high quality basics; (4) shop for my body shape and size' and (5) know and stick to my 'style'. (Jennifer, reflective diary, month 7)

In contrast, Bianca tried to think of creative ways to make use of garments she never wore 'because otherwise they are useless' (month 9 interview). She designed new items from them. She continued occasionally to buy items at the fast fashion retail outlet Primark 'because of the budget'. She reported in her reflective diary that she does not feel guilty about having a total of 11 items from Primark because 'it is only 11 pieces and I wear them a lot'. She also believed that removing jobs from sweatshop workers is a worse alternative to the workers' lives than what they currently face. To express her concerns, she had written a letter to Primark to persuade them to treat their workers more fairly.

4.2.5. Understanding Differences

In this section, we assess our expectations from the literature (see Section 2.3). Can we understand key participants' different responses to the workshops by identity and style, habits, creativity and budgets? We find that the intersection of these factors shaped responses to the workshops rather than a single factor alone.

Each key participant identified with fashion and style differently. Susan continued to love fashion, including her own wardrobe ('oh my God, I love it', interview in month 3), remaining a committed endorser of particular quality brands. Her style persisted, despite her reducing overall fashion spend. It is plausible that she refrained from adopting a more radical approach to slow fashion adoption and self-made style because of her perception of its unfashionability [41,42]. In contrast, Christine and Jennifer were ambivalent about fashion and brands apart from Christine's passion for Levi jeans. They shifted towards buying fewer items of better quality, presumably with the budget to be able to comfortablydo so [41]. Bianca, who hardly spent much on clothing from the start, expressed distaste for fashion:

> ... the fashion is that everyone are [sic] the same, they have three colours: that's black, white and grey right? And umm, that's the main fashion out there ... And I find that very boring ... This fashion is stupid. Sorry.

In contrast to other respondents, Bianca can be categorised as a creative [62,63]. Bianca's creative response to clothing—making her own wherever possible—was a direct reaction to her relatively deprived upbringing. She remembers being bought only around six new items of clothing for 10 years of her life (aged 9–19 years of age) and making her first dress with the guidance of her neighbour at 9 years of age. We note here the intersection of creativity and budget with social class [41,61]. Her creative nature, sense of style, beliefs about fashion being 'stupid', and aptitude at making clothes, as well as her upbringing and the constraints of a low budget, intersect in affirming her habits, practices, and beliefs. Together, these led to her spending little money at fashion outlets. She continued to buy old curtains and bedding from which to make new clothes but was making a conscious attempt to avoid fleeces that pollute the environment with micro-fibres.

Making clothes has become habitual for Bianca, rather like shopping in the sales was for other participants. Christine, Jennifer, and Susan found the seasonal sales to be a huge temptation. Christine explained 'I just went through the most dangerous time of year which is in the ... end of season sales'. In month 6 of the project, Susan was unable to stop herself from buying a Benetton T-shirt in a sale, which was still on offer one week after she first resisted the temptation. Christine became more likely to buy a quality garment for GBP 50 than several low-cost items that will not last, although she recognised that it was her relatively socially privileged position that made this possible for her. Although Grace had a 5-point code for purchasing clothes, which we reproduced above, she told us, 'I still love shopping ... But I've definitely had a change to just take a bit of break from just buying things and not considering what it is made from'. In contrast, someone on a low budget is likely to have a much more utilitarian approach to procuring clothes and will be less likely to find it a joy [41].

In summary, Bianca's restricted budget and creativity and Susan's brand loyalty and careful purchasing have somewhat locked them into existing clothing practices. In contrast, Jennifer and Christine have been freer to let items go and had the budgets to make more careful and expensive purchasing choices over the course of the project. Their relative social privilege affords them the opportunity to buy more expensive and durable clothing that is out of reach for those with lower budgets [36,37,41].

5. Conclusions

5.1. Summary of Findings

The project sought to generate social practices around the making and mending of clothes by providing participants with equipment, skills, and senses of meaning [55] to

foster slow and more sustainable clothing practices. Our approach was successful, in aggregate, at generating pro-environmental behaviour. This is evidenced by our analysis of pre- and post-survey responses in which our participants generally reported broader and deeper engagement in pro-environmental behaviours at the end of the project compared to at the start. However, an in-depth qualitative analysis of a small selection of participants shows that pro-environmental behaviours were differentially distributed across participants, which we attribute to the interplay of factors related to identity and style, habits, creativity, and budgets.

5.2. Contribution to the Literature

This article therefore makes a significant contribution to research on sustainable clothing by looking deeply at ways in which interventions designed to generate new sets of social practices can encourage more sustainable clothing choices. Despite participating in the same workshops as one another, the participants developed different interpretations of sustainable clothing and different responses to their newfound (or updated) knowledge. Although we prefer to use the term 'sustainable clothing' rather than 'sustainable fashion', our work resonates with Mukendi et al.'s [6] consensual definition of sustainable fashion derived from their systematic review of published scientific work. They emphasise that sustainable fashion is difficult to pin down but is based on perceptions of being more environmentally friendly and ethical. This definition, they say, is useful for its malleability: it allows the consumer (and the producer) to select which approach they wish to take. Certainly, our participants developed a range of interpretations of sustainable clothing contingent on personal and social factors, ranging from Bianca, a creative prosumer [6] with occasional functional purchases of fast fashion, through to Christine, initially an avid consumer who dramatically tamed her purchasing. In this sense, our social practices approach resonated with pragmatists as well as radicals and with avid consumers as well as prosumers. Our work also contributes to the body of literature on barriers to pro-environmental behaviour change. We identified financial, identity-based emotional and habitual barriers to the deeper uptake of pro-environmental clothing practices at the individual level. The existing literature has shown that these factors may prevent the uptake of sustainable clothing practices, but none have yet found that they also help to explain the different sustainability strategies that individual consumers adopt in response to a social practices-styled set of experiential workshops.

5.3. Study Implications

Our study implies that individuals can and do change their clothing practices after participating in a set of activities mimicking a slow fashion cycle, but the extent to which they do so is conditioned by individual factors. A further implication that there has not been space to explore in the present study is that these individual factors interact with broader meso- and macro-level factors. At the meso level, styles are often adopted by social groups or subcultures, which add pressure on individuals to conform to certain ways of dressing. At the macro level, some of the barriers to the adoption of sustainable clothing practices are propped up by dominant social norms and infrastructures. Advertising tropes for clothes and the continuation of business-as-usual for the global fashion industry allow for individuals' habits and emotional resonances to consumerism-as-usual to be maintained. As long as there are cheap fashion outlets and bargain annual sales, it will be difficult for individuals inclined to shop a lot to escape entrenched buying habits. Thus, fixing fast fashion requires not just changing individual behaviours but changing practices and processes at every stage of the life cycle of fashion at every level. One concern is that, as long as dominant fashion tropes persist, attempts to change social practices via workshops like the ones we ran will remain niche. The challenge, then, is to attempt to mainstream our approach to groups, subcultures, and society at large.

5.4. Future Research Avenues

Our work therefore suggests the need and the potential for moving S4S-style workshops beyond the participation of small groups of participants in community halls and art spaces to a normalised practice on the high street. If it became impossible to walk down a high street without encountering making and mending stations or running into workshops teaching hands-on skills that familiarise diverse audiences with alternative fashion cycles, then the infrastructures to sustain widespread social practices would provide the building blocks for real change. These could be tailored to meet the styles of particular social groups or subcultures or to people with different cultural traits [58]. In our contribution to the UK government's Environmental Audit Committee Report [5], we argued that high street retail outlets should include stations for mending and modifying clothing in their stores. Clothing available for purchase should be made with regard to environmental and human principles and designed with durability and adaptability in mind. Infrastructures that allow people to work on adapting (changing style, fit, or fixing) clothes should be commonplace. Without continued workshops that become a part of everyday life, the pro-environmental behaviours developed among our participants may not be sustained by them, nor will they spread to others. A future research initiative might mimic our approach but assess its effects and its reach when placed in prominent locations on high streets. It might investigate the value of a multi-partner approach working with, for example, fashion brands and charity shops.

It was clear that, for the huge majority of our participants, social interaction was as important in shaping their views and behaviours as the learning of new knowledge and skills. Social interaction should be an integral part of any attempt to increase the life of our work or to upscale our work. We encourage scholars to have a solutions-oriented approach to finding ways in which to expand our work from a small niche to a mass market. Making, mending, and individual senses of style need to break free from dominant senses of fashion and become social norms. For that, we need to mainstream the availability of infrastructure and equipment for creating alternative fashion cycles, to widely share new senses of meanings and to help people develop new competencies in style and making. At the same time, our findings suggest the need to remain attuned to the need for individuals to develop their own styles in ways that fit their identities, their culture, their socio-demographics, and their budgets.

It is important to additionally note that the workshops took place before the COVID-19 pandemic when it was possible to shop on the high street and engage in face-to-face workshops. Changes in society since 2020 have been dramatic—not only have there been lockdowns, but also there have been significant international conflicts (in Russia and Ukraine and in Gaza), significant effects from the UK's exit from the EU, and an associated cost-of-living crisis. In light of such significant societal changes, it is crucial that future studies take into account the macro context in which behavioural interventions take place. One major shift might be towards online shopping as high streets find themselves beleaguered. Mainstreaming S4S workshops can only serve to bring much-needed life back into shopping malls and town centre retail outlets.

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