Consumer personal sartorial style:
Creative consumption of aesthetic objects

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Abstract: Aesthetic and taste-related consumption is a significant part of everyday life, however, understanding it is difficult as it is typically intertwined with functional and symbolic aspects of consumption. Meanwhile, for companies, it is important to understand how taste-related consumption is structured and practiced. Nevertheless, we know little on how consumers use aesthetic objects on the day-to-day life, how they interpret and integrate them to create personal constellations of aesthetic, taste-related objects. This study looks into how consumers create personal sartorial style by connecting with aesthetic objects through processes and resources.

Theoretical framework in this study integrates conceptualisation of the consumer as a purposeful agent with certain resources at his/her disposal when interacting with the marketplace of symbolic and aesthetic objects. Personal style is defined as a certain personally meaningful constellation of aesthetic objects and a key resource in creating personal style is seen as taste. Meanwhile, aesthetic consumption is innately integrated with symbolic understandings of the aesthetic objects. Personal sartorial, i.e. clothing-related style is focused upon as one realm of aesthetic consumption. In that framework, the attempt is to investigate consumers' choice of clothing and creation of style that goes beyond its relationship with current fashion and the controversy between fast and slow fashion.

The empirical study included two online pre-studies with 25 and 46 informants, respectively. The main method of inquiry was phenomenological face-to-face interviews including a photo-elicitation section using Pinterest, in which 7 women aged 30-58 were interviewed about their personal sartorial style.

A model of how consumers create style is suggested in the paper: style is built through reflexive identity work based on perceptions of self, others and a particular context of aesthetic objects. Substance of style created in this way is then mediated by the consumer's resources, i.e. the style enablers, into a curated system of processes through which the consumer creates style in practice. Consumer self-knowledge, confidence, knowledge of the marketplace, ability to recognize quality and manage purchase decisions that help facilitate creating outfits are found as key enablers of creating personal style.

Keywords: taste, personal sartorial style, aesthetic objects, symbolic consumption, aesthetic consumption, cultural capital, fashion

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1 INTRODUCTION

> ...life doesn't simply happen to us, we produce it. That is what style is. It's producing life. Rather than accepting that life is something that we passively receive, accept, or endure, I believe life is something we generate. We use our capacities. And that all boils down to style. Style may be presented as theory, serendipity or happenstance. But fundamentally style is a decision about how we all live. Style is not superficial. It is a philosophical project of the deepest order. (Mau 2000, p 27, as quoted by Dobers and Strannegard 2005).

While consumption has become increasingly aestheticized (Dobers and Strannegard 2005) and companies increasingly need to differentiate their offering through aesthetic and visual elements (Salzer-Mörling and Strannegard 2004) we do not know much of how consumption of aesthetic objects is managed by individual consumers in terms of integrating taste and practices (Hoyer and Stokburger-Sauer 2011, Arsel and Bean 2013, Venkatesh and Meamber 2008, Peltoniemi 2015). Furthermore, although modern marketing research sees customer as the co-creator of value, the practical co-creative role of the consumer within particular consumption processes is relatively little studied (Xie et al 2008). By studying consumers' processes and logic relating to creating personal sartorial, i.e. clothing-related style, we can learn more about how consumers integrate and use resources and create meaning within taste-related consumption. This is useful for companies, brands and marketers to be able to better respond to consumer needs, dreams and practices.

Consumers' choice of clothing has been mainly regarded through its relationship to fashion. Clearly, also from the viewpoint of personal style, approaches to clothing can be analysed according to their social context and significance, in relation to fashion, subcultures, stereotypes, cultural norms and myths. Arguably, it is impossible for a consumer to build personal style without negotiating the meanings with larger cultural context, a process described in great detail by Thompson and Haytko (1997). In that respect, the key cultural meanings which consumers negotiate socially in their personal discourses on fashion are femininity and masculinity, authenticity and fakeness, endorsing and counter-endorsing beauty ideals and stereotypes relating to gender, nationalities and race.

However, the assumption that fashion as such is the key driver of consumers' sartorial style is arguable. First, consumer is a purposeful agent with limited resources and fashion may or may not be (consciously) relevant in acting out one's consumption projects. Secondly, fashion itself has become more diluted: in the era of social media and fragmented audiences, there is arguably no single trickle-down fashion regime. Finally,

besides fashion and the resulting anti-fashion (Davis 1994), there are many other factors that could be driving sartorial style, such as attitude to sustainability issues, own skills in putting together a wardrobe (in context of *trying* to consume and presumption as discussed by Bagozzi and Warshaw 1990), personal values or politics (Murray 2002), exposure to taste regimes (Arsel and Bean 2013), knowledge and previous experience (Hoyer and Stokburger-Sauer 2011). Thus, by looking at sartorial consumption from its "grassroots" level of how consumers create their personal style, we may understand more of how consumers structure their consumption choices beyond the issues of price and fashion-forwardness.

1.1. Research problem

In relation to sartorial style, i.e. choices relating to clothes and accessories, marketing research has primarily focused on studying consumer behaviour in context of fashion. Meanwhile, studies often do not even explicitly distinguish between fashion and personal style (for example, Thompson and Haytko 1997). Furthermore, sartorial style as a consumer behaviour issue has been studied in relation to subcultural identities (Kates 2002, Christiansen 2011, Moors 2007) rather than mainstream individualized consumption. However, arguably, in the western society of 2010-s, we can no longer observe single dominant fashions, but rather, a multitude of fashions, trends and movements are present simultaneously. Moreover, in the postmodern society, increasingly, the objective is to develop personal style, rather than to be fashionable according to some universal standard, a difference that can clearly be witnessed in popular press as well as recently published style guidebooks (Rees 2016, Doré 2015, Saukkola 2015). However, it is not clear how consumers create personal sartorial style.

Looking at sartorial consumption from the viewpoint of personal style thus emphasizes person-specific reflexivity (Giddens 1991; Arnould and Thompson 2005, Mick and Buhl 1992) and the importance of consumers' creative (prosumptive) role in a consumption (Xie et al 2008). Furthermore, the consumer's personal role in the process can be considered crucial especially for aesthetic items to become meaningful, for as Csikszentmihalyi and Halton (1981) concluded, with aesthetic objects, the meaningfulness of an object for a person rarely stems from the object's aesthetic qualities (its design) alone, but rather, by the person's ability to appreciate it. Similar conclusion was made by Venkatesh and Meamber (2008) who stated that as all consumption may be regarded as having an aesthetic dimension, it is the *consumer as an aesthetic subject*

who defines the scope of aesthetic experience in in a particular setting. However, we do not have studies on aesthetic consumption in particular consumption settings, e.g. in the context of creating personal sartorial style. Furthermore, although within consumer research, the consumer is viewed as a purposeful integrator (Mick and Buhl 1992), assimilator (McCracken 1990), negotiator (Thompson and Haytko 1997) and organizer (Schouten 1991, Miller 2001) of meaning, we know less of how consumers as purposeful agents with these subjective reference systems, structure specific areas of their consumption according to their personal systems of meaning.

Further emphasizing the consumer's role as an aesthetic subject as the starting point, consumption of aesthetic products is ultimately a practical process of using certain resources: tastes, skills, knowledge and practices. In previous research, these resources have been summarized under the term cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984, Holt 1998, Purhonen et al 2014). However, it has been argued that in practice, taste is an embodied process rather than a static technique (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981, Arsel and Bean 2013). Thus, even when it is studied as a series of individual preferences or interpretations, consumer taste is viewed as a resource that is practiced rather than owned. The same would apply to other aspects of cultural capital, such as knowledge, skills and practices. Therefore, arguably, the concept of cultural capital remains too vague to serve us in understanding how aesthetic consumption is structured and acted out, as we do not know what it consists of in an actual consumption setting, or how it could be potentially manipulated commercially (beyond the habitus of personal social context and upbringing, which was mostly emphasized by Bourdieu). Thus, in creating personal sartorial style, the contents of cultural capital could be extended by investigating what resources actually enable the consumer to create style and how such resources are influenced by interactions with the marketplace.

As Belk (1988) argues, only an ensemble of objects can characterize self. Thus, within sartorial context, the question is not as much how a person makes sense of single sartorial objects (which has studied in relation to sartorial taste: e.g. Eckman 1997), but on a larger context of outfits, wardrobe and approach to personal style. Furthermore, constellations of aesthetic objects pose a practical challenge for the consumers, due to the need for cultural consistency across items, also referred to Diderot unity (McCracken 1990). However, while Diderot unity makes intuitive sense, the concept itself is based on somewhat anecdotal evidence (a fancy morning gown was gifted to Diderot by a rich friend and resulted in Diderot seeing previous possessions as inferior and dissatisfying).

Thus, we would need further understanding on Diderot unity: how consumers consume, choose and manage constellations of sartorial objects and what is the role of individual pieces within the constellations.

Within the concept of extended self, a unified structure consisting of a person's core self and identity-related possessions (Belk 1988), the dynamics of how the self expands to possessions and how possessions expand the self (or both or either) and how this exchange is perceived and managed by the consumer remains unclear. Furthermore, Belk's article investigated the relationship between possessions and self from the viewpoint of the possessions: whether and how they contribute (into sense of identity, into sense of past), how they contribute to the person. However, this relationship could be studied also from the perspective of the individual: how a person puts together an ensemble of possessions, whether, where and how is meaning created and exchanged within the ensemble.

1.2. Research objective

Aim of this paper is to understand how consumers practice taste, create style and connect with aesthetic objects through processes and resources. This understanding is sought by posing three research questions:

RQ1: What is consumers' personal sartorial style based on?

RQ2: How do consumers create their personal sartorial style?

RQ3: How do consumers use design objects as aesthetic objects in connection to their personal sartorial style?

More particularly, RQ1 seeks to illuminate, what style draws from in terms of substance, i.e. what is being expressed when creating style. RQ2 focusses on processes and resources that are used in creating style. RQ3 highlights the role of objects and object-specific meaning as it is used by the consumer. The connections between research questions and interview questions is shown in Appendix 1 in connection to interview guide.

While the theoretical framework is placed in a larger context of aesthetic consumption and creating style, the actual research focuses on sartorial consumption as one avenue of such consumption. However, similar investigations could be undertaken regarding other pursuits related to aesthetic objects, such as home decoration.

1.3. Delimitations

Consumption of clothing could be studied from the perspective of (consumer) value and consumer value creation processes (Grönroos 2007, Holttinen 2010), differentiating types of value, e.g. functional, emotional, hedonic value (Kauppinen-Räisänen et al 2014) sought and created within sartorial style. This perspective would allow to evaluate the importance of different steps in terms of consumption success, i.e. what are the crucial parts of the consumption processes in terms of consumer perceiving (to have created) value for herself. This perspective is not included in the theoretical framework.

Furthermore, the study focuses on successful creation of style, i.e. consumers who do perceive having a subjective understanding of style, what they like and how they achieve that in practice. The informants were recruited on a voluntary basis, i.e. they themselves expressed interest in the topic. Arguably, there may be consumers who are less involved with the issue of sartorial consumption, and, furthermore, may themselves perceive as not even to have any particular personal style. The degree to which anyone has personal style is not addressed directly by this study.

Another limitation is a relatively small sample size in the qualitative interviews (7). Also, the study is placed mostly within the Finnish context and all but one informant live in Finland. Both of these issues may affect generalizability to other contexts.

Also, nearly all of the study's informants were women: 69/71 of respondents in the two pre-studies and all of the interviewees in the face-to-face interviews were women. Traditionally, men and women have been seen to differ in their practices of using clothing, fashion and style in their everyday life. For example, Simmel (2005) has argued that it is especially women have traditionally been sensitive to socially negotiated identity that is enforced by clothing, while men have their occupation as a grounding force in their social identity. However, different from the days of Georg Simmel, in the 21st century, both men and women typically work and may hold socially reputable occupations. Still, most magazines on fashion and style, as well as the sartorial offering itself is targeted to women. The question whether and to what extent men's thinking and practices differ in the realm of personal sartorial style is not addressed in the study.

The main method of inquiry was qualitative interviews. However, in creating style, the actual practical processes, purchasing, wardrobe management and creating outfits were not studied or evaluated within the actual, practical consumption context. Thus, the consumer's perceptions of what creating style is was studied, rather than creating style

in real time practice. To bridge that gap, all interviews included a photo-elicitation section, where actual outfits were discussed. However, participant observation could have opened up the issue from an additional perspective.

1.4. Research approach

The general research approach is based on McCracken's (1986) account on movement of meaning between consumer and the culturally constituted marketplace where the consumer adopts meaning offered by the cultural creators of the marketplace, such as designers. In context of the present study, the culturally constituted marketplace is specified as the aesthetically and symbolically loaded marketplace of sartorial, i.e. clothing-related objects. This view is opened up in Chapter 2.1 examining the connections between symbolic consumption, aesthetic consumption and personal style.

However, as McCracken's original model did not emphasize person-specific reflexivity or agency, his account is enriched with several concepts and theories, such as the constantly managed extended self (Belk 1988) and taste (Bourdieu 1984, Holt 1997, 1998, Holbrook 1999, Holbrook and Addis 2007), psychological resources (Eyal 2016) and knowledge (Alba and Hutchinson 1987) as consumption resources. Most importantly, as the focus is on aesthetic consumption, the consumers' resources in accessing the aesthetic and symbolic marketplace are focussed upon, particularly cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984) and taste (Holt 1997, 1998). However, these are not emphasized as forces that structure consumption socially or on a marketplace level, as they have been typically featured in sociological thought (Bourdieu 1984, Purhonen et al 2014), but as consumption resources on an individual, practical level. Furthermore, as style is seen as a continuous process of creation (Arsel and Bean 2013) rather than a static entity, consumer's processes in connection to style, such as buying, combining, managing and matching, are inquired about. That overall research approach is summarized in Figure 1 below.

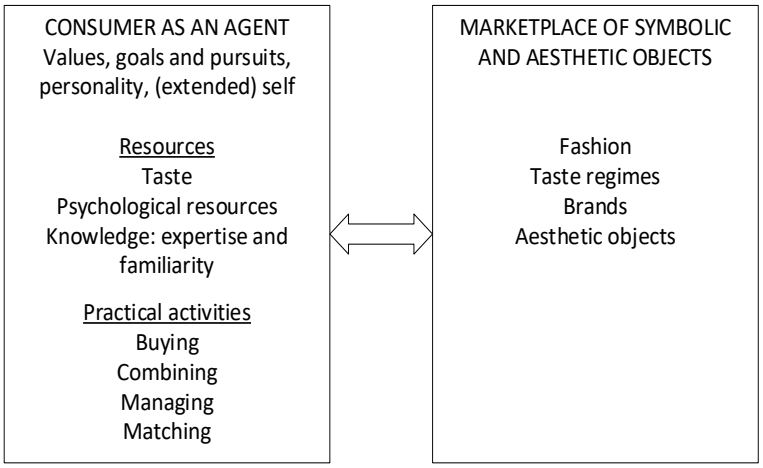


Figure 1 Consumer as a creator of personal sartorial style.

Methodology of the study is presented in Chapter 3. Two pre-studies were made in order to achieve better focus when discussing personal sartorial style and develop a wider understanding of how it may be seen and structured by different consumers.

Within the main part of the study, the face-to-face in-depth interviews, the underlying aim was to keep the discussion on sartorial style closely connected to practical choices and interpretations as seen by the consumer in everyday life. For that reason, interviews included a photo elicitation section, where consumers browsed a style-related Pinterest feed and discussed objects and styles that caught their attention as they put together a board of their own dream personal style. The photo elicitation part greatly contributed to the study as it allowed bridging general-level opinions and approaches with concrete objects, styles and outfits. Furthermore, the pictures often helped raise additional perspectives that the consumer had not thought of when having discussed creating style on a more abstract level. Thus, the pictures in particular helped bridge the abstract and practical dimensions of the topic of personal sartorial style.

Findings of the study are presented in Chapter 4. As there was no one theory that was used, but rather a collection of related concepts, the findings were structured to answer the research questions and abductively integrate the literature context covered in Chapter 2. New overarching terms (namely, style substance, style enablers, and style processes) were used in order to model the consumers' creation of style on a higher level of abstraction (Spiggle 1994).

While many findings clearly related to the issues covered in literature review, the particular way of combining previously known concepts to depict the integrated process

of creating style is a contribution of the present study. The particular ways how findings relate to previous studies and concepts are discussed in Chapter 5. Based on this, managerial implications are brought out in Chapter 5.1.

Appendices include general interview guide (Appendix 1), screenshot of pre-study 1 that featured and discussed different Terhi Pölkki shoe models (Appendix 2) and an example of a dream style board in Pinterest (Appendix 3).

Finally, while the research questions do not directly include sustainability, an important consideration within the research approach has been to seek a more balanced perspective on the connection between clothing and sustainability. Indeed, in the context of fashion, one of the major concerns we face is fashion's relationship with sustainability (Pookulangara and Shephard 2013, Joy et al 2012, Zarley Watson and Yan 2013, Clark 2008). Meanwhile, research on this topic has typically started from asking the consumer about her attitudes on sustainability (McNeill and Moore 2015) or fast fashion (Joy et al 2012) and deliberately characterizing consumers as followers of either fast or slow fashion (Zarley Watson and Yan 2013). However, approaching sustainability in such a direct manner, arguably, may be problematic. First, it might give rise to inner conflicts regarding what one thinks one should do versus what one actually does. Second, other aspects of sartorial choices may be downplayed when the debate is presented as a battle between fast and slow. Thus it may be more illuminating to study consumers' attitudes and processes without bringing in sustainability as a dividing issue. If not sustainability, what do consumers think about in regards to their choices, instead? By knowing at what instances consumers embrace sustainability spontaneously and out of own choice (vs when not), we could develop an understanding how does a person reach sustainability in practice. Furthermore, the very pursuit of developing personal style can be seen as a form of embracing sustainability, as a wardrobe that is truly managed well helps reduce waste (Saramäki 2014). Also, the question, at what point one's attitude to clothing becomes sustainable, is open to debate: whether sustainability stems from simply buying fewer and better quality clothing, or, should it include particular demands (and which ones) on fibres, technologies and production ethics (as is emphasized by Pookulangara and Shephard 2013). In that sense, sustainability is not a one-off issue (that there would be sustainable and non-sustainable choices), but rather a continuum. Therefore, sustainability aspect can be assumed to be present within one's sense-making, not in an absolute, exclusive, either-or manner, but inclusively incorporated into one's style, more

or less. Therefore, sustainability is approached as a potential within the style creating processes rather than a starting point.

1.5. Key terms

Aesthetic consumption - consumption of objects that have aesthetic qualities, including everyday objects, art and art-like objects (Venkatesh and Meamber 2008). In this study, aesthetic objects in question are sartorial objects: clothing, accessories and shoes. As argued by Venkatesh and Meamber (2008), all symbolic consumption that involves creating and negotiating past, present and future meanings, includes a potential aesthetic component, which is either embraced or rejected by the consumer. In the case of sartorial consumption, the aesthetic dimension of clothes can thus be recognized and embraced to a different extent.

Aesthetics - sensory experiences and conceptual categories relating to form and expression, harmony and order, symbolism and imagery, beauty, taste and feelings (Carroll 2001, Venkatesh and Meamber 2008).

Cultural capital - resource consisting of tastes, skills, knowledge and practices (Bourdieu 1984) that enables and facilitates aesthetic consumption (Holt 1998).

Personal sartorial style - constellation of sartorial, stylized objects along with the attached meanings specific to a person. The activity of creating style is thus the way an individual explicitly or implicitly conceptualizes and effectuates his/her own **sartorial choices** in terms of what to buy and what to wear, what fits what and what fits him/her and what the items communicate to self and others.

According to Simmel (2005), personal style derives its meaning from a particular way of combining objects. According to what the style is built around, it can express individuality (when the style expresses a unique individual) or commonality (when the style expresses a style that expresses something that is in its nature not unique to one person, e.g. an era). Individuality, meanwhile, is most often expressed by combining different styles of commonality in a way that makes it unique.

Symbolic consumption - consumption where the consumption object is understood to mean not only itself but also some other ideas or feelings (Levy 1959). Through symbolic consumption people consume abstract meaning in addition to the objects that carry such meaning. On a symbolic level, the act of consumption is seen as creating and

negotiating cultural meaning (Levy 1959, Mick 1986, Schouten 1991) and is mediated by the interpretive lens of the consumer. Taste can be seen as one interpretive lens relating to aesthetic objects.

Taste - interpretive mechanism, teleoaffective structure according to which individuals judge, classify and relate to objects (Arsel and Bean 2013). A particular taste emerges as a result of upbringing, education, occupation (Bourdieu 1984, Purhonen et al 2014), personality (Hoyer and Stokburger-Sauer 2011, Myszkowski and Storme 2012), life experiences and social milieu (Venkatesh and Meamber 2008). It is developed and influenced through interaction with market offerings (Arsel and Bean 2013), art (Venkatesh and Meamber 2008, Dickey 1971), knowledge and experience (Hoyer and Stokburger-Sauer 2011).

In context of sartorial consumption, taste can be viewed as a sense-making capacity and a key resource in creating constellations of objects (McCracken 1990, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). In relation to objects, taste as manifested preferences become objectified in possessions (McCracken 1990).

Taste is viewed as a main driver of hedonic value (Hoyer and Stokburger-Sauer 2011) as it determines what feels good, right, beautiful (Gronow 2002) and it can be considered central in creating consumer desire (Belk et al 2003).

2 CONSUMER AS A CREATOR OF PERSONAL SARTORIAL STYLE

In this chapter, the theoretical outlook of the study is presented. First, in Chapter 2.1. aesthetic consumption, of which sartorial consumption is a part of, and which is itself part of symbolic consumption, is discussed as the main background framework of the study. Then, in Chapter 2.2. the consumer is presented as an active co-creating agent with own identity-related narrative, dispositions, goals, needs, desires as well as contradicting interests of autonomy and connectedness, which has been brought out by major studies on consumers' approaches to fashion (Chapter 2.3.). In the context of the aforementioned, the consumer's resources which are needed to access to market offerings, physically and symbolically, are discussed in Chapter 2.4. and the marketplace's role in producing and offering taste resources is considered in Chapter 2.5. Then, in Chapter 2.6, the connections between the consumer and aesthetic objects is discussed in terms of types of connections. In Chapter 2.7, the marketplace for sartorial products and fashion is discussed along with concerns of sustainability. Finally, Chapter 2.8. presents processes and key themes that are involved in creating personal sartorial style as informed by a selection of style guidebooks written by style professionals.

2.1. Aesthetic and symbolic consumption

On a broad sense, the term aesthetics is connected to beauty, sense of beauty and related conceptual categories such as harmony and form (Venkatesh and Meamber 2008). Essentially, all consumption may include an aesthetic component (Venkatesh and Meamber 2008, Dewey 1934). As aesthetic experience is seen as a driver of hedonic value (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982) and aesthetic consumption conceptually related to hedonic products and art (Joy and Sherry 2003). In this study, aesthetic consumption signifies consumption in which personal relationship with beauty potentially holds a significant role for the consumer. Thus, more specifically, in sartorial style, personal understanding, perception, prioritization, integration of beauty can be seen as essential when creating style.

As aesthetic consumption experience connects to larger abstract understandings and feelings regarding beauty, culture, harmony, form (Venkatesh and Meamber 2008) it is also a part of symbolic consumption, where items mean not only themselves, but other, conceptually connected meanings (Levy 1959). For example, an aesthetic of femininity

may include components related to form (such as long hair or dresses), but through the specific qualities of the form (i.e. *what kind* of dress) and the specific way the aesthetic objects are combined, the aesthetics also entail certain symbolic meaning (e.g. showing femininity in the context of empowerment, romance, mystery or caring for others). Similarly, while modernist aesthetic is connected to clear, minimalist, streamlined shapes and forms (Kärnä-Behm 2011), the symbolic context behind has varied, e.g. initially it may have connected to democratic middle class values (*ibid*, Sarantola-Weiss 2003) while in another time and cultural context, it has come to mean sophistication (Wolf 2004). Thus, aesthetic and symbolic consumption is interrelated, while it is not clear how they are integrated and practices in an individual's consumption process. Arguably, the very aesthetic experience is related to understandings of symbolic qualities present in the experience. For example, in case of sartorial brands, the symbolic meaning of the brand and the aesthetic perception of brand's product become intertwined. As it has been concluded in earlier research, material, aesthetic and symbolic are embedded in each other (McCracken 1986, McCracken 1990, Csaba and Ger 2003).

Thus, aesthetic consumption is essentially connected to symbolic meanings and in this study, one of the major activity in aesthetic consumption is seen as integrating certain symbolic meanings with aesthetic objects. In sartorial style, clothes, shoes and accessories can be seen to have functional, aesthetic and symbolic levels, which is why they serve as the perfect area to study individual sense-making in regards to extent and types of aesthetic and symbolic connections that consumers may or may not make beyond the pure functionality of products. Thus, sartorial style is seen as embedded in aesthetic and symbolic consumption (Figure 2).

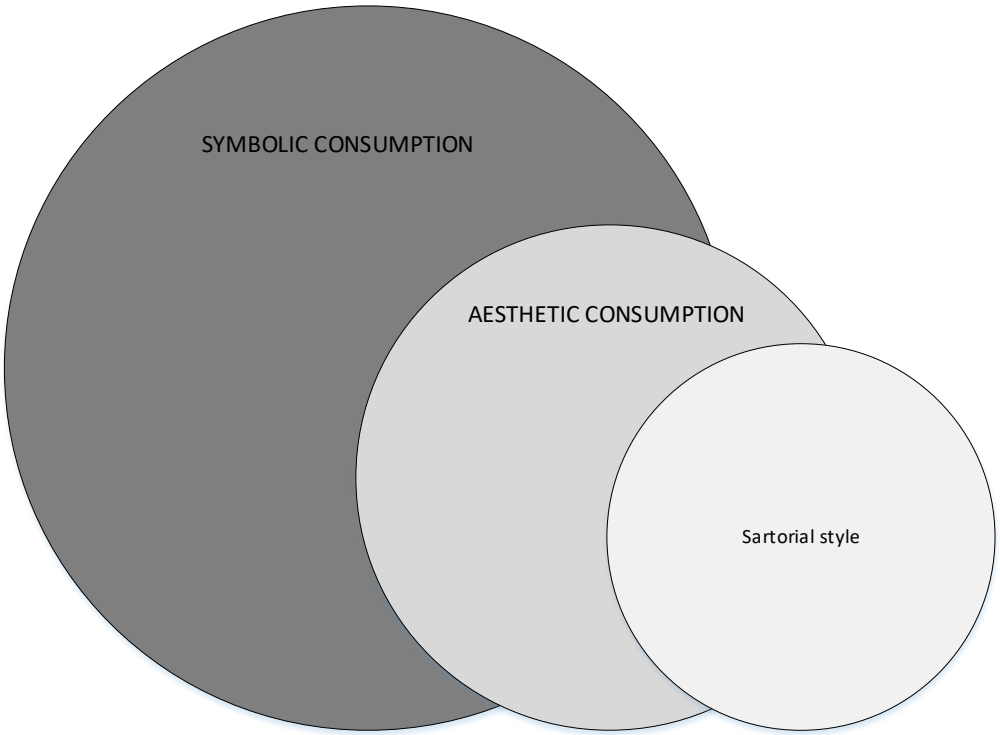


Figure 2 Sartorial style in the context of symbolic and aesthetic consumption

Furthermore, Venkatesh and Meamber (2008) argue that as (according to Dewey (1934) "ordinary" experience also has an aesthetic phase, then aesthetic experience depends very much on the person, his or her actions and dispositions, rather than the experience or consumption item as such. This implies that in aesthetic consumption, the question is not only how aesthetically meaningful a certain product is, but rather, how the consumer as an aesthetic subject perceives the object and how he or she connects with the object. Similarly, Fournier (1991) argues that an object's meaning is partly dependent on its capacity to evoke emotional involvement and symbolic bonds with a person. However, this connection is contingent on both parties: the person and the object.

This issue of aesthetic appreciation being dependent on both the person and the object is very well illustrated by studies on cultural capital (Bourdieu's [1984] term for "soft" cultural resources such as tastes, knowledge, skills, practices that are leveraged by consumers to build social distinction and through that, economic capital). However, instead of cultural capital's role in producing social distinctions, for practical purposes of aesthetic consumption, it is more crucial to understand its role in enabling consumption. Holt's (1997, 1998) studies about America has found that there are great differences not (only) in what is consumed by those with different levels of cultural capital, but most importantly, there are great differences in *how* goods are consumed,

with high cultural capital allowing more thorough differentiation and appreciation of goods. Furthermore, in that respect, it can be argued that the very question of what are cultural, aesthetic or symbolic goods vs purely functional ones can be tied to cultural capital. In Holt's (1997, 1998) account, consumers with high cultural capital were characterized exactly by the fact that an integral part of consumption is to appreciate, give opinions on and evaluate the qualities of what they consume and typically give very opinionated and lengthy accounts even on "mundane" consumption objects. Meanwhile, Bourdieu (1984) explains that low cultural capital way of consumption corresponds to a taste driven by necessity, by what is *needed*, and thus, revolving around functionality. Consumers with low cultural capital typically emphasize and appreciate quantity, while not being able to thoroughly appreciate and elaborate on quality, even in product classes they are strongly involved or financially invested in. This implies that treating objects as pure necessity vs as vehicles for making cultural distinctions are dependent on the minds of the consumer, regardless of product class as such (however, arguably, there are product classes that may be regarded as overall more hedonic vs more functional, e.g. Charters [2006] has proposed a continuum of aesthetics in consumer goods and services).

In summary, the borders between functional, aesthetic and symbolic consumption can be deemed blurry and are at least to some degree up to individual perception. Therefore, when looking at aesthetic consumption from the consumer's perspective, the person-specific pursuits, dispositions, capacities and resources need to be taken into account. Furthermore, it is the consumer as an agent who partakes consumption within her bounds of the functional, symbolic and aesthetic and the consumer as an agent is discussed next.

2.2. Consumer as a co-creative agent

Consumers are increasingly seen not only as passive recipients of marketplace offerings, but active agents with more or less structured self-narratives (Giddens 1991) goals, pursuits (Ligas 2000, Fournier 1991), hierarchical end-states (Bagozzi and Warshaw 1990), guiding ethics (e.g. romantic consumerism described by Campbell 2005) or interpretive meaning systems (Mick and Buhl 1992). This individualized consumption practice takes place in a certain social, practical and symbolic environment in which the person may engage in self-cultivation (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981, Miller 2001). Furthermore, Belk (1988) named having, being and doing as core states of

existence for a human, which ultimately help us define who we are and help structure our consumption processes as an ongoing process of experiencing, cultivating and defining self. However, while the three dimensions are clearly related, the dynamics between the three have been subjected to great philosophical differences, e.g. in discussions by Sartre, Marx and Fromm (Belk 1988). However, in a practical consumer behaviour context, both being and doing can be argued as to be are mediated by having.

Within the context of sartorial consumption, the extent to which the consumer is seen as an active agent representing own particular subjectivity, needs and goals rather than an purely social subject with socially driven desires (Simmel 2005), mirror the dichotomy of personal style and fashion. While fashion gives a common set of references and a social context, personal style consists of choices that are led by the individual as an agent. While the two cannot be completely separated and personal style is more or less situated in social context of fashion, they give basis for alternative approaches in analysing the formation of sartorial style.

When looking at the consumer as a co-creative agent, on-going consumption decisions (such as is the case in managing and creating sartorial style) are structured by an on-going self-narrative (Giddens 1991, Miller 2001). Previous experience and even childhood memories give an evaluative frame to current situations and expectations (Mick and Buhl 1992). Also, future-related pursuits shape current interpretations of objects (Ligas 2000). In this sense, the way a consumer evaluates consumption items are related to own developing self-narrative which includes different time dimensions: what kind of person I used to be, am currently and want to be in the future. In sartorial consumption, this ties into cultural myths about self-transformation such as the Horatio Alger “from rags to riches” myth or the more contemporary version, the path from anonymity to celebrity (Thompson and Haytko 1997). Thus, the self-narrative of a particular person becomes an integral part of consumption and style choices, in a sense giving an overarching storyline to the development of personal style.

Moreover, the consumer’s self-concept and possessions are seen as related. Belk’s seminal article on the extended self (1988) argued that possessions are essential to one’s self-concept and sense of self. However, from the perspective of agency, it has been left somewhat unclear: what are the dynamics of how possessions define self and vice versa in a practical consumption setting? For example, the ideas of contamination and contagion i.e. how objects' meanings are being shaped by the people who have physically handled, used or created them (Belk 1988, Bloom 2010) would imply that the self can

manipulate the meaning of objects. On the other hand, the very need to own objects can be seen as an attempt to expand the self (Belk 1988). From the viewpoint of agency, the question is, how much do consumers actively decide on their ensembles of self-defining objects vs let themselves be defined by objects they possess, and, how restricted or empowered they perceive to be within this process.

As Belk (1988) argues, only an ensemble of objects can characterize self. Thus, within sartorial context, the question is not as much how a person makes sense of single sartorial objects (which has studied in relation to sartorial taste: e.g. Eckman 1997), but on a larger context of outfits, wardrobe and approach to personal style. Furthermore, constellations of aesthetic objects pose a practical challenge for the consumers, due to the need for cultural consistency across items, also referred to Diderot unity (McCracken 1990). However, while Diderot unity makes intuitive sense, the concept itself is based on somewhat anecdotal evidence (a fancy morning gown was gifted to Diderot by a rich friend and resulted in Diderot seeing previous possessions as inferior and dissatisfying). Thus, we would need further understanding on Diderot unity: how consumers consume, choose and manage constellations of objects and what is the role of individual pieces within the constellations.

From the psychological perspective possessions have been shown to provide a necessary immediate symbolic as well as practical environment in which a consumer *cultivates* oneself and strives for harmony and order (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). Furthermore, the need to feel a certain harmony and order with own possessions described by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) is consistent with McCracken's (1990) concept of Diderot unity as well as Belk's extended self (1988) which views consumer self as a wholesome subject consisting of core self and extensions. This symbolic unity is arguably why studying consumption in the level of lifestyles rather than single objects allows useful insights for practical market segmentation. However, in context of the symbolically consistent consumption situations, it remains unclear what are the options for the person to reach that desired symbolic consistency. Namely, whether it is only by aligning and editing particular constellation of objects (for example by discarding or replacing items or buying new items), or (also) by connecting with them on another conceptual level, i.e. finding a new perspective to them (which do not necessarily include acquiring or discarding). In other words, how restricted or empowered the consumer perceives oneself as an independent agent in creating desired symbolic meanings within constellations of objects? In that sense, the consumer's ability

to create new symbolic meaning and combine aesthetic objects in a meaningful way could be seen as a capability for prosumption (Xie et al 2008), to which consumers as agents may be unequally motivated and equipped.

In addition to an identity-narrative leading consumption choices, another, perhaps even more fundamental issue relating to the consumer's role as an agent in aesthetic consumption is his or her personality: tendencies and dispositions and the particular way consumer desire (Belk et al 2003) is sparked in the consumption process. Levy (1959) has argued that as consumption has become more symbolic, what we buy is increasingly a result of where we want to invest our psychological energy, rather than being related to needs as such. Thus, building on Levy (1959), the driver for a person to buy something may be symbolic affiliation and immersion with symbolic or aesthetic qualities rather than functional need.

Furthermore, this dichotomy of desire and attraction versus need is an interesting aspect in discussion of consumer agency. In sartorial consumption, it is common to buy things one does not actually use more than a few times (Morgan 2015). For the consumer as an agent, the subjective perception, conceptualization and realization of needs and how they are managed and related to desire and attraction in the symbolic and aesthetic level is of crucial importance. Furthermore, as the success of consumer reaching desired end-states rests upon many factors, often times, instead of actually consuming something, consumers are only trying to consume (Bagozzi and Warshaw 1990). Thus, one may ask, how do consumers manage aesthetic consumption and constellations of aesthetic products in relation to needs and attractions?

2.3. Fashion discourses and personal style

One of the classic commentaries on fashion, style and personal style has been given by Georg Simmel (2005). According to him, style consists of a constellation of *stylised objects* each of which derives its meaning from how clearly it represents a particular, generally recognizable style. Furthermore, applied and fine art aesthetic objects are distinguished: applied art pieces are imitable and derive their meaning from sub-ordinating the item to its purpose from the viewpoint of the user, as opposed to fine art objects which are used for their own sake as they derive their meaning from being unique and inimitable. Meanwhile, within a style, the stylized objects revolve around a "center", which can be individual (e.g. in the case of a person's home, when the home expresses what is unique to the person) or general (a historically authentic building that is

characteristic to an era). In Simmel's view, style becomes individual through the way stylized items are combined: it is the particular combination centered by the uniqueness of the person that ties it to the individual. Meanwhile, the inclusion of different stylised objects to an individual style gives the style depth and roots.

> The residence, as furnished by the individual in accordance with his taste and needs, can by all means have the personal unmistakable tone that flows from the special nature of this individual, which would be nonetheless unbearable if every single object in it betrayed the same individuality. This might seem paradoxical at first glance. But assuming that it is true, it would first of all explain why living in rooms that are kept strictly in a certain historical style has a peculiarly unpleasant, strange and cold quality for us, while those that are composed of pieces in different but no less strict styles according to individual taste, which must of course be firm and consistent, seem most liveable and warm for us.
>
> An environment consisting entirely of objects in *one* historical style coalesces into a closed unity which excludes the individual who lives there, so to speak; he finds no gap where his personal life, free from any past style, could enter into it or join it. This becomes quite different, oddly, as soon as the individual constructs his environment of variously stylized objects; by his doing the objects receive a new centre, which is not located in any of them alone, but which they all manifest through the particular way they are united. (Simmel 1991, p 68-69)

Simmel also points out that individuality in style is considered as something that requires much strength, discernment and reflexivity from the individual compared to appropriating an outward style or following fashion: the individual aiming for personal style has to be rooted in his individuality strongly enough to be able to tie the stylised objects together.

> In great and creative people, the individual work from such an all-encompassing depth of being that it is able to find there the firmness and the foundation, the transcendence of here and now, which comes to the work of the lesser artist from an external style. Here the individual is the case of the individual law; anyone who is not that strong must adhere to a general law; if he fails to, his work fails to have style - which, as it is now easily understood, can only happen in periods with multiple style possibilities. (Simmel 1991, p70)

Meanwhile, fashion is to Simmel a social game of *imitation*, a system that presents its own choices and logic on how to combine objects that is based on commonality rather than individuality. Within the system of fashion, the time of *adoption* becomes a key differentiator between people. While earlier adoption allows the fashionista to perceive a certain type of uniqueness (until others adopt the same fashion), it is a less demanding way of personalizing sartorial consumption compared to having based it on *individuality* as such. According to Simmel, fashion relieves the individual from aesthetic and ethical responsibility and from the burden of creatively expressing a truly unique individuality.

> Imitation, furthermore, gives to the individual the satisfaction of not standing alone in his actions. Whenever we imitate, we transfer not only the demand for creative activity, but also the responsibility for the action from ourselves to another. Thus the individual is freed from the worry of choosing and appears simply as a creature of the group, as a vessel of the social contents. (Simmel 1957, p542-543)

Thus, Simmel sees personal style, impersonal but stylized style and the time-sensitive imitation game of fashion as sorts of alternatives that the individual navigates between when seeking connection to aesthetic objects. Style, according to Simmel, inherently revolves around such combinations making intuitive sense and being integrated to a center or logic. Meanwhile, to be unstylish, for Simmel, is to be random, disconnected and incoherent.

Another significant contribution on consumers' approaches to sartorial style has been made by Thompson and Haytko (1997) who investigated consumer's personal use of fashion discourses: how consumers negotiate personal and social meaning within the context of fashion. In that study, fashion was regarded as a lived hegemony, towards which a consumer may feel and act in different ways, often experiencing antagonistic feelings within one's self. The study brought out that by adopting and expressing a personal interpretation of fashion, a person expresses one's values (e.g. seriousness of purpose vs flimsiness), acts for or against social stereotypes relating to gender or race, affiliates with or disassociates from select social groups and creates a certain self-narrative of one's past, belonging, transformation and aspiration. The antagonistic feelings were portrayed as the controversies between what one thinks one ought to think and feel vs what one actually thinks and feels (what Thompson and Haytko called "I know, but all the same..." -pattern).

Thus, personal style as adopting a practical approach to sartorial choices and through that, also fashion, is known to have strong tension between personal and social and the achieved and desired self-directedness, both in Simmel's and Thompson and Haytko's accounts. However, Thompson and Haytko (1997) conducted their study on mainly 20something university students, a sampling choice that could lead to bias of overestimating the tension from a consumption perspective and downplay the strength of an individual's personal style.

However, it has been argued that our consumption system as a whole is built around cycles of fashion (McCracken 1990): new symbolic meaning is continuously produced and offered in the marketplace. This is especially evident in sartorial consumption, which has been dominated by fashion and the cycles of desire propagated by it (Faurschou 1987, Thompson and Haytko 1997). It is argued that, from the perspective of the general marketplace, consumers select and appropriate parts of the offered symbolic meaning more or less selectively and more or less successfully. Thus, ultimately, whether pursuing personal style or appropriating fashion, the consumer as an agent is very much tied to

his or her ability to grasp, appropriate and manage symbolic meaning within the fashion context and sartorial styles. This ability is presented in Chapter 2.4. in the context of consumer's resources.

2.4. Consumer's resources

As was discussed in the previous section, consumers act within different circumstance and hold different interests regarding consumption. However, even within the context of their own particular interests or desires, consumers as purposeful agents also have different resources which facilitate consumption to achieve goals and desired consumption outcomes and experiences (Bagozzi and Warshaw 1990).

Consumer resources as inputs into consumption process have traditionally been listed as time and money (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). Thus, in practical marketing, a common way to propose value for the customer is in relation to money or time, that is "saving" or "getting more out" of the consumer's resource. However, arguably, there are other factors, which essentially act as consumers resource which allow "getting more out of" a proposed good.

For example, willpower is acknowledged a possible success factor for consumption (Bagozzi and Warshaw 1990), i.e. in order to achieve something that was aimed for by taking on a consumption project, not only the purchased item (e.g. new sports attire), but also, consumer's own input of willpower is needed (to use the attire). Meanwhile, willpower has lately been seen as a controversial issue in psychology regarding whether it should be conceptualized as a resource or not (Eyal 2016). However, within consumption context, in a practical sense it can be regarded as a resource: at a particular time, one can have more or less of it and the level of willpower may fluctuate over time, it is to some degree trainable (it can be accumulated). Arguably, most importantly, to some degree willpower can be facilitated and leveraged upon by the marketplace. For example, by hiring a personal trainer one can arguably increase one's own resource of willpower by tapping into another person's/company's supporting regimens.

Furthermore, besides willpower, it could be added that knowledge of how to use and maintain a goal-related purchase (e.g. the sports attire) also determines the consumer's experience and outcomes. Thus, while consumer knowledge has been found to be of great significance in product search (Ratchford 2001), selection and evaluation (Sujan 1985,

Cordell 1997), its significance as a consumption enabler has perhaps been less focused upon.

Holt's (1998) studies about America has found that there are great differences not (only) in what cultural goods (which would include aesthetic goods) consumed, but most importantly, there are great differences in how the same goods are consumed, with some customers being able to make differentiations between goods, and thus, consume through *appreciation*. Furthermore, as was discussed in Chapter 2.1 the very question of what are cultural, aesthetic or symbolic goods vs purely functional ones can be tied to that ability to distinguish nuance.

In this respect, it can be argued that taste as a certain ability and disposition for aesthetic consumption is also a resource - something that can be managed, developed, leveraged and exchanged, but without which the consumption of an aesthetic good is not possible, even if a transaction between the buyer and seller would take place.

The view on taste as a resource that enables certain kind of consumption has been recorded in literature manifold. For example, Holbrook's concept of "little taste" (Holbrook and Addis 2007) implies that taste for cultural products can be seen as a continuum ranging from novice to expert and that the novice-tasted consumer does not "hold access" to the same product categories as the expert. Also the much investigated issue of differing tastes between social strata (Bourdieu 1984, Purhonen et al 2014, Halle 1996) shows that taste is something that allows access to certain constellations of offerings and enables forming different links to them. Moreover, arguably the concept of taste and cultural capital are similar. While tastes for different cultural goods are considered part of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984), taste as a concept is more concrete and individual-oriented, as it does not rely on a sociological analysis of stratification, but simply, the aesthetic orientation of a particular consumer.

However, the conclusion that it is cultural capital that structures and enables consumption (Bourdieu 1984, Holt 1997, 1998, Halle 1996, Purhonen et al 2014) is problematic, since the concept remains as an abstraction, a unified term for taste, skills, knowledge and capacities. While it has been found to correlate with family background and upbringing, occupation, income and most of all, level of education (Purhonen et al 2014, Bourdieu 1984), the correlations do not explain how cultural capital specifically is accumulated. This is why, in this study, taste and knowledge rather than cultural capital are looked upon as the customer's symbolic consumption resource, as 1) they are more

concrete and 2) they allow making more intuitive connections to the processual nature of consumption.

Also, while the studies on cultural capital have effectively demonstrated the importance of *knowledge and taste* as consumption enablers, there are different layers of consumer knowledge. Alba and Hutchinson (1987) have distinguished familiarity as related to *experience* (having done something many times) and expertise as related to *ability* (doing something well). Namely, the latter has been proposed as the significant enabler of aesthetic appreciation, while the dynamics between taste and knowledge as such are highly unclear within current theoretical understanding (Hoyer and Stokburger-Sauer 2011). Thus, using a general term such as cultural capital does not help distinguish the role of different types of resources (taste and knowledge, familiarity and expertise) consumers use to facilitate their processes of aesthetic consumption.

Thus, while the terms taste and knowledge are separate, it is possible that they form a certain symbiosis or organic connection as proposed by Hoyer and Stokburger-Sauer (2011). For aesthetic consumption, taste is considered as a more significant tool, as it is considered deeply embodied and manifested in practice (Arsel and Bean 2013), which makes it highly relevant for sartorial style.

Works by Holt (1997, 1998) imply that taste as a distinguishing competence is both abstract as well as field-specific. Above all, it the consumption style of making, wanting and being able to make thorough distinctions while consuming (regardless of the object) which characterize a “developed” taste. According to Holt, a consumer has a general ability to draw cultural distinctions as well as having more particular cultural sensitivities regarding concrete consumption categories like wines, antique carpets, golf or modern literature. Thus, according to Holt, connoisseurs of different fields have a lot in common in the *way* they appreciate aesthetic objects.

Furthermore, taste as a consumption resource has a controversial relationship with money. While, for example, cultural and economic capital are generally considered correlated from a sociological perspective (Bourdieu 1984, Purhonen et al 2014), they are by no means directly interchangeable in an individual consumption setting. Moreover, it is education rather than economic wealth which correlates most greatly with various taste hierarchies sociologically (Purhonen et al 2014, Bourdieu 1984). It even looks like it is imperative for good taste to keep the two separate: adding dollar values to taste-related choices has been considered a taboo (Kron 1983). Thus, this is another reason

taste needs to be considered as a completely separate input to consumption, beyond economic considerations.

Thus, the consumer as an agent uses different resources to access and use goods and meaning within consumption, including taste, knowledge and psychological resources. While those resources are as such non-monetary, their connection to money is discussed next.

2.5. Market as mediating and leveraging consumers' resources

There are many ways the marketplace may help consumers in leveraging or building up their resources. For example, in the previously discussed issue of willpower and exercise goals, paid service from a personal trainer may help the person gather or use one's willpower. The logic is similar behind the business models of Weightwatchers or AA.

In relation to style, there are a number of paid services that aim to facilitate it, such as guidebooks, personal stylists, personal shoppers and magazines. Thus, the fact that taste and economic capital are not interchangeable as concepts, does not mean that they are not constantly traded for one another in the marketplace.

In the case of consumption of home decor, Arsel and Bean (2013) showed how market actors may facilitate and guide consumer taste and thus, increase consumer taste as a resource consisting of knowledge, processes and aesthetic repertoire practically available for one's consumption interests. In addition to internet websites (such as Apartment Therapy which was studied by Arsel and Bean, 2013), media on the whole can be, from the consumer's perspective, considered as a potential taste "regime" (*ibid*) to be tapped into. In marketing, this recognition has, arguably, led to selling lifestyles and constellations, ways of thinking, combining objects, rather than individual goods. Moreover, by becoming a taste mediator, a taste role model to the consumer, a company or brand is able to offer a whole curated solution to aesthetic consumption rather than just pieces in a puzzle to be solved by the consumer on her own.

Consumer taste, knowledge and links to market mediated regimes can all be viewed whether as snapshots in a certain time, or processes that continue and change the interrelationships between these particular aspects over time. For example, knowledge about a consumption field may be accumulated over time, which in turn may affect consumer's taste and consumption choices. Therefore, within the context of creating

sartorial style, a particular style approach is looked upon as a snapshot of the current moment that comes with a particular history and outlook on the future.

Overall, from the consumer's perspective, the marketplace can be seen as a mediator that opens up and helps to increase one's non-monetary consumption resources such as taste and knowledge. Taste and knowledge, on the other hand, are needed in order to form links between the self and the aesthetic objects. That connection is looked into next.

2.6. Connections between consumer and aesthetic objects

It has been conclusively argued that there are strong links between the consumer and her possessions (Belk 1988). Possessions facilitate human development between life stages, create an identity narrative that connects past, present and future and helps to mark and manage identity across different (social) settings.

Belk (1988) argues that a possession's relevance as part of self stems from the issue of control: either the self is able to control the object or the self is controlled by the object. However, the practical processes of perceiving and establishing control in a particular consumption setting have not been recorded or categorized clearly, i.e. it is not clear how the ensembles of possessions are experienced, and managed by the consumer. Based on previous research, at least the following types of exchange between self and possessions may be distinguished:

1) Mirroring. The self mirrors possessions, possessions mirror the self. Reflectively managed possessions need to reflect "who one is" (Giddens 1991), the possessions and things need to be "in balance". In this way, possessions support the self and back it up.

2) The self adding new meaning onto possessions. In the study of meaningful possessions in the home, Csikszentmihaly and Rochberg-Halton (1991), state that home objects become meaningful due to what the person ("self") has done with it, in terms of facilitating daily activities or as symbols of the past. In that sense, it is not the object itself that holds the meaning but the specific conditions and context where the item is placed. Furthermore, the possibility of contagion and contamination (Bloom 2010, Belk 1988), i.e. the object changing its meaning or financial value depending on who has physically touched it (e.g. Britney Spears' bubble gum) implies that owners add new meaning to his/her possessions just by the mere link of ownership or physical contact.

3) Possessions add new meaning to self. This connection is evident in case of status purchases: through acquisition, the self is expanded, even transformed. In sartorial consumption, Thompson and Haytko (1997) refer to Foucault's "technology of self" to emphasize the objects' potential to transform self. In this respect, possessions help to define, distinguish and add new meaning to self. Holt (1995) has called this process *re-orienting self-concept to match an outwardly perceived identity* from a perceived "social world".

Of course, boundaries between these sets of linkages may overlap (perhaps for maximum satisfaction even need to): a business suit for the business student may be both reflecting one's identity (category 1)), reinforcing it (relating to category 3)), while owning and/or using the suit also transforms the object and loads with particular experience and memories (category 2)).

One could argue that categories 3) and 2) are different as the former requires buying and owning (where money suffices), while category 2) requires personal integration, input of time and human investment (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982) and thus becomes harder to achieve and control and more scarce if only due to the limited time and psychic attention humans have (compared to which financial resources may be practically unlimited in comparison). This aspect is emphasized by various researchers that stress the importance of culture over finance when it comes to successfully consuming symbolic goods (Dubois and Duquesme 1993). This is what Bourdieu (1984) also underlines when concluding that having millions is not enough to consume like a millionaire.

Furthermore, as category 2) requires an individual effort and is contingent on the person's ability to interpret, integrate and use the object, it is thus perhaps the most relevant for the practical process of using aesthetic objects to create style. This relates closely to what Holt (1995) described as one of the major processes within consumption, *integration*, through which the consumer makes a valued object a part of himself in order to be able to use the object symbolically.

More specifically, Holt (1995) demonstrates that *integrating* can, more particularly, be achieved through *assimilating, producing* or *personalizing*. Assimilation involves becoming a competent participant in the field of consumption, developing a degree of competence in the three experiential practices, developing specialized knowledge and the tastes that flow from this knowledge. Integration by producing means, in an imaginary or real way, taking control of how the consumption object is produced or by establishing

a personal link to producers. Personalizing a particular consumption object is achieved by bringing in a personal touch from a broader reference group outside the particular category of the object.

In the case of owning aesthetic objects, the importance of integration in aesthetic consumption was also well illustrated by in the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1991) and Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981). They revealed that even art objects such as visual art or sculptures at home were told to be meaningful not for the formal aesthetic qualities, but the objects' relationship to self, through which the individual was able to become a participant in the meaning of the object. "*In the relatively rare occasions in which a person was sensitive to the formal qualities of a painting or sculpture, the object was special because the owner recognized its aesthetic value. By actively appreciating the object, the owner joins in the act of creation, and it is this participation, rather than the artist's creative effort, that makes the artefact important in his or her life*." (Csikszentmihalyi 1991, p 28). Thus, art objects may not be appreciated as much for the abstract internal qualities they entail, but more by how they signify what the individual has achieved by having successfully interpreted such qualities. For example, the use of visual art in decorating varies accordingly. Halle (1996) studied homes in New York City area, looking for differences on how upper class, upper-middle, working-class urban and working-class suburban area residents incorporated art into their homes. Statistically, the upper class more frequently displayed abstract art (which was non-existent in the working class homes). Consistently with Csikszentmihalyi (1991), this implies that one's *ability to interpret abstract art* and the *conviction* that one has in such ability is what makes abstract art meaningful for its owner.

In addition to *creating* meaning, possessions are found also to *manage* meaning in structuring different aspects of one's self in different contexts: Tian and Belk (2005) showed workplace possessions help negotiate the person's self-image as who he is at home vs who he is at work and how much the two are allowed to mix. By the level of displaying or personalizing "personal" items at work the person manages self between the domains. Similarly, it can be argued that sartorial style is a way of managing different aspects and roles of self: the aforementioned example of a business suit, is one possible role for the self, which can be more or less central compared to another. Furthermore, it is an interesting question, to what extent people have a stable and unified sense of self vs fragmented or multiple ones and what are possessions role in regulating or unifying them.

2.7. The marketplace for sartorial items: fashion, style and sustainability

Research concerning sartorial consumption has been dominated by the perspective that it is above all fashion that structures consumption, resulting in dividing the consumers, according to their position in the fashion system, into change agents and followers (Workman and Kidd 2000). However, as was discussed in Chapter 2.3. Simmel (2005) proposed that the individual needs to center one's style-related choices around something, whether personal or impersonal. Participating in the imitation game of fashion is just one way and one aspect of managing such choices. In the light of this, the assumption that *everyone ultimately adopts fashions*, is somewhat simplistic. At least nowadays, from the consumer's perspective, fashion also could be interpreted as more of a choice than a mandate (Clark 2008).

However, focusing on consumers' speed of adopting fashion as a key issue in sartorial consumption has resulted in a great emphasis on the speed of response to bring "high fashion" into fast fashion stores (Cachon and Swinney 2011, Bruce and Daly 2006, Bhardwaj and Fairhurst 2010) as a key business strategy issue. Accordingly, from the consumer behaviour perspective, much attention has been put into controversies between (fast) fashion and sustainability (Pookulangara and Shephard 2013. Dobers and Strannegard 2005, Joy et al 2012). When the studies on fast fashion or green consumption have come to the conclusion that consumers in practice do not live up to their stated "green" values, two major reasons have been given 1) that consumers do not have the economic resources to pay for "sweat free" clothing (Pookulangara and Shephard 2013), and 2) consumers are highly attracted to the latest fashions (Joy et al 2012). In these respects, consumers' sartorial style has been simplified into questions of fashion and price, while the "grassroots" level of how a consumer creates her sartorial style has been treated as a non-issue. Furthermore, the assumption that it is price and appeal of the "newness" of fashion that prevents consumers from acting according to their values, is questionable. There may be other factors that structure consumption of sartorial products: it is possible that consumers buy fast fashion not because they desire to imitate the catwalks of Paris, but just because of its availability, habit, low prices or inability to manage style in any other way? As shopping fast fashion with its cheap prices has been shown to be a way to reduce buyer's remorse (Zarley Watson and Yan 2013), the difficulty of making satisfying choices may be a plausible explanation as it lowers the risk of making a bad purchase. Furthermore, fashion-sensitive purchasing paired with price-sensitivity may be especially characteristic to young consumers based on whom most of the consumer research on fast vs slow fashion has been produced (Joy et al 2012,

Pookulangara and Shephard 2013, Zarley Watson and Yan 2013). Thus, other significant age groups are largely ignored, even while their importance is increasing significantly (Kozar and Damhorst 2008). Also, it is possible that lack of money is not the true barrier to embrace sustainability. For example, Saramäki (2014) points out how average spending on clothes would be enough to build a sustainable and fashionable wardrobe, if one has a plan and vision to do so. Thus, one might argue, especially for non-adolescent consumers the issues behind sustainable sartorial consumption may be more complex than money or fashion-forwardness. For these reasons, the current study takes a step back from fashion and price per se in approaching the issue of style and instead, focusses on how consumers create style in terms of ways of thinking and processes.

2.8. Processes of creating style

While academic research has not addressed the practical processes of creating style (with Arsel and Bean's [2013] conceptualization of home decoration practice being a noteworthy exception) there is an abundance of viewpoints offered by practitioners. Style consultant and academic Mirva Saukkola argues that style is based on something more permanent than fashion. She implies that style needs to have layers (of meaning) and (personal) stories. The variety of where and what one shops for has been connected to personal style, e.g. mixing one's buying between new, vintage, pre-used and travel souvenirs. Furthermore, understanding the role of *classic pieces* in the wardrobe have been connected to style (Saukkola 2015).

Also, many popular articles focus exactly on the list of classics one must have in the wardrobe, either permanently or within a certain season. However, the number of these "essential" items varies and some argue that there are no universal essential must-haves (Rees 2016). However, personal essentials relative to a particular author are typically brought out in style books (e.g. Doré 2015)

Knowing self has been often been pointed out as the basis of personal style (Doré 2015, Rees 2016). More specifically, some argue that style is above all based on achieving the right fit for one's body (Freer 2015, Farr 2004), some emphasize mastering the overall silhouette rather than specific fit (Saukkola 2016, Rees 2016). Overall, understanding of own body is seen as an integral part of style in tandem with the aesthetic appeal of items as such (Doré 2015).

Besides style on the item-level, guidebooks also focus on managing style in terms of processes and principles: how to put together outfits and how to achieve combinability within a wardrobe (Saramäki 2014, Rees 2016). Style having to cover one's lifestyle needs is also emphasized (Saukkola 2015, Saramäki 2014, Rees 2016).

Often authors emphasize tailoring, editing and taking care for clothing as an essential part of great style (Saukkola 2015, Freer 2015). Materials and their qualities are considered in terms of how well they serve a particular wardrobe purpose on an item level (e.g. optimum material for the little black dress, Saukkola 2015) or on a more general level in terms of which fibres to choose and which to avoid (Saramäki 2014, Rees 2016).

To sum up, according to popular style books, style revolves mainly around 1) knowing self and own body, 2) (interpretations of) classic pieces and their role within one's own wardrobe 3) managing style on the wardrobe level, i.e. facilitating combination, covering needs 4) practical activities (buying from a variety of sources, matching items with the wardrobe, creating outfits, accessorizing), 5) technical understanding of quality, materials, cuts and fit.

2.9. Summary of theory

The chapter has examined studies and central concepts that relate to creating personal sartorial style as structured by the research approach described in Chapter 1.3. In particular, aesthetic and symbolic consumption, consumer as an agent and the consumer's processes and resources for symbolic consumption were discussed. However, we do not yet know how these concepts are related to one another and in practical, field-specific consumption processes such as when a consumer creates her personal sartorial style.

3 METHOD

This chapter gives a description of the methodological approach and the research process including sampling, interpretive approach and data analysis.

In order to study how consumers practice taste, create style and connect with aesthetic objects, the main method of data collection in the study was personal in-depth open-ended interviews (Patton 2015, McCracken 1988). However, in order to reach a broader understanding of the topic (Patton 2015) and achieve purposeful sampling based on information-richness, two pre-studies were conducted as online surveys.

Philosophical research approach is discussed in Chapter 3.1. Next, in Chapter 3.2. research process is described including explanations on sampling strategy and process as well as the researcher's pre-understanding. Then, in Chapter 3.3. the two pre-studies are described in terms of process, method and findings. Next, in Chapter 3.4. interpretive strategies in connection to the main study, i.e. the face-to-face qualitative interviews is opened up, including processes and stages of data analysis. Finally, in Chapter 3.5. quality of the research is addressed.

3.1. Research philosophy and research design

As the research questions enquire about the consumer's processes, the research approach is interpretivist (Saunders et al 2011), i.e. the objective was to understand the perspective and considerations the consumer's own subjectivity within sartorial consumption.

Ontologically, the philosophical approach taken in both formulating the research question as well as gathering and analysing data is subjectivist (Saunders et al 2011), meaning that instead of assuming an objective fashion-dominated social reality, the emphasis is on the consumer as a subjective agent who interprets and creates style. Epistemologically, i.e. what is acceptable knowledge in regards to the research question, a pragmatist philosophy is adopted (Saunders et al 2011). Furthermore, in modern social science, interview data as such is regarded as knowledge constructed in interaction of interviewer and interviewee (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009) and the researcher's interpretive role is acknowledged throughout the processes (Gummesson 2003).

There was no single theory employed and tested in the study, but rather, there were a multitude of theoretical discussions as well as insight from popular guidebooks used as a background to illuminate the background on the research questions. Thus, the objective was bringing various theoretical discussions together by answering the research question. The research approach used was abduction (Bryman and Bell 2015), i.e. it included both questioning previous theories in the light of the research question, as well as developing a synthesised view on creating style based on findings and previous theoretical discussions.

For the previously discussed philosophical and practical considerations and due to the fact that no single theory was used to deductively approach data collection, multiple methods were employed in research design (Saunders et al 2011, Patton 2015, Bryman and Bell 2015). Two online self-completion questionnaires (Bryman and Bell 2015) and semi-structured face-to-face interviews (Patton 2015, Silverman 2011), while the questionnaires acted as tools for analytical sampling of face-to-face interview participants (Patton 2015).

Online self-completion surveys (Bryman and Bell 2015) included both open-ended qualitative questions as well as some multiple-choice questions. Both types of questions were put together based on research questions, researcher's pre-understanding and in the case of pre-study 1, collaborating designer Terhi Pölkki's input.

The face-to-face interviews included a Pinterest-based photo elicitation section (Patton 2015, p 484), where informants created a dream style board in the online pinboarding site Pinterest.

3.2. Research process

Data collection started with pre-study 1, which addressed loyal customers of a Finnish designer shoe brand Terhi Pölkki. From pre-study 1, two informants were purposefully sampled for further qualitative interviews. Based on pre-study 1, pre-study 2 was developed as a survey addressing a more general audience rather than customers of a specific brand. From pre-study 2, five informants were selected for further in-depth personal interviews.

Online surveys were conducted using online survey platform Typeform. Personal interviews were conducted as face-to-face interviews in workspaces of public libraries in

Töölö (4), Tikkurila (1) and Tapiola (1) and in one case where the informant was an earlier acquaintance, in the researcher's home (1). The interviews lasted from 36 minutes to 1h17minutes. While all interviews were recorded (Silverman 2011), in many instances relevant discussion casually continued after the interview. These conversations as well as researcher's impressions and own observations from interviews were added to interview data as additional field notes immediately after the encounter (Bryman and Bell 2015, Patton 2015).

Interviews were conducted as in-depth, open-ended semi-structured conversational interviews, broadly following an interview guide (Patton 2015). However, rather than specific questions, emphasis was put on ensuring a natural flow and progression of the conversation (Kvale and Brinkmann 2008), so interview guide was not followed word-for-word, but rather flexibly, and building on what the informant had brought up by herself, which made the interviews lean on a conversational approach while still being focused in terms of topics covered (Patton 2015). All interviews started with establishing rapport (Silverman 2011, Patton 2015) by opening the interview with a "grand-tour"-questions (Thompson and Haytko 1997) regarding the informant's lifestyle, occupation, background, personality and hobbies. After that, the discussion was led into discussing personal sartorial style, starting more broadly on "what do you like to wear" and then covered the topics of buying and selecting clothes, brands, elements of clothing according to the interview guide (can be found in Appendix 1). The final part of interviews included a photo elicitation section (Patton 2015) in which a board of one's "dream style" was created by browsing Pinterest photo feed. This part of the interview was used as a further tool to build and specify on the themes raised or not raised in previous conversation and use specific pictures as conversation-builders. After conducting interviews, all interview data was carefully transcribed. While analysis emerged and informed inquiry throughout the research process (Patton 2015), the conclusive processes and stages of analysis is elaborated upon in section 3.6.

3.2.1. Sampling

A combined purposeful sampling strategy was used in the design of the research (Patton 2015). Pre-studies I and II used comparison-focused intensity sampling, to find cases that would be information-rich but not extreme and allow capturing both similarities and differences between the informants (Patton 2015). Additionally, two informants were recruited based on analytical considerations. One was purposefully invited to the survey

to represent someone who has lately experienced a big lifestyle change of going back to work after spending 7 years home with children. The other informant was invited based on her personal, non-commercial blog Ehdoton Ehkä (http://ehdoton-ehka.blogspot.fi), in which she has written extensively about her processes relating to wardrobe management and philosophy. Due to this rigorous investigation and self-reporting about own sartorial consumption, she was considered as an excellent informant to discuss creating sartorial style.

As was mentioned in delimitations (Chapter 1.2), the research addresses informants who are overall interested in the topic of personal style, found it relevant for themselves and could be considered overall successful, aware and experienced in creating personal style. This type of sampling has been chosen for two reasons: first, those who are successful and experienced and have thought about creating style are better able to articulate their thoughts and experience in the subject and thus they are able to reflect back on the path that has enabled them to advance to that point, which might illuminate the question, how to help or facilitate that process for consumers who are less successful or able. Secondly, previous research in the topic of fashion consumption has typically based research on young consumers (Thompson and Haytko 1997, Joy et al 2012, Pookulangara and Shephard 2013, Zarley Watson and Yan 2013) and thus, a purposeful, information-rich sample of more experienced consumers is more valuable to further advance the knowledge in the area.

Backgrounds of informants interviewed in-depth are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Interview sample

First name	Duration of interview	Language of interview	Recruitment	Age	Residence	Occupation
Terhi	59 min	Finnish	Pre-study I	46	Oulu, Finland	Teacher
Sirje	1 h 10 min	Estonian	Facebook group	56	Espoo, Finland	Nurse
Rita	47 min	Estonian	Pre-study II/ Facebook group	58	Espoo, Finland	Kindergarten caretaker

Avely	1 h	Estonian	Pre-study II/ Facebook group	50	Espoo, Finland	Chef
Silja	36 min	Estonian	Pre-study II/ Personal contact	32	Tartu, Estonia	Photo corrector
Saara	58 min	Finnish	Pre-study II/ Blog	38	Helsinki, Finland	Manager
Minna	1h 17 min	Finnish	Pre-study I	31	Kuopio, Finland	Medical student

3.2.2. Pre-understanding

In qualitative interpretive research, researcher as a whole person is viewed as a research instrument (Sherry 1991) as he/she interacts with data as a whole person. Furthermore, knowledge created in an interview can be regarded as constructed in interaction with the particular interviewer (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). In that perspective, researchers pre-understanding is an especially important factor influencing the questions posed, research process as well as the type of links seen within the data.

In order to increase understanding on views on personal sartorial style, about thirty style books were read, including both books for men and women, with some offering advice with a culture-specific nuance (e.g. French chic). Authors' background varied, including American, French, Swedish, Finnish and British perspectives, written by style connoisseurs, fashion bloggers, stylists and personal style consultants.

Personal effort of learning how to sew and knit undertaken during the previous couple of years greatly opened up the technical details and elements of clothing and style.

Furthermore, having a previous B.A.Sc. degree from jazz music and having spent many years on practising, studying and listening to music, the issues of style and aesthetic nuance have always been of special interest to me. I have been intrigued by the fact that the same piece of music opens up differently to different listeners, but also, differently for the same listener as she becomes able to distinguish further nuance.

3.3. Pre-studies

In order to reach a broader understanding of how consumers see and approach creating style, besides qualitative face-to-face interviews, two pre-studies were sequentially carried out. The research processes and findings related to pre-studies are discussed next.

3.3.1. Pre-study 1

As the question of how consumers create personal style is very broad, the initial approach to structuring the inquiry was to focus in on a particular subset of consumers. However, instead of focusing directly on social identity (as in studies about sartorial style of social minorities, e.g. Kates 2002, Moors 2007), a sample based on aesthetic, style-related boundaries was sought by approaching customers of a particular designer brand. With this reasoning, co-operation was sough with a particular Nordic contemporary shoe brand, Helsinki-based shoe designer Terhi Pölkki. Customers in her email list were contacted in Pre-study 1 sending out survey invitations were sent out to 384 private customers, resulting in 27 filled questionnaires.

The questions included were exploratively combined based on theoretical outlook of the paper, own pre-understanding as well as particular business and marketing -related interests of Terhi Pölkki as a designer and business owner. Great focus was put to the user-friendliness of the survey (Bryman and Bell 2015): the aim was to create a survey that was intuitive, interesting and as easy as possible to answer for the respondent and would take maximum of 10 minutes.

The survey included (mainly open-ended) questions about

a) Connections to the brand: spontaneous brand image, which shoe model(s) the informant owned, what has been the last shoe model bought from Terhi Pölkki and perceived fit between own style and Terhi Pölkki –brand.

b) Opening up one's own personal style through description of own dream style, style role models, own principles when buying shoes and clothes and other brands used in clothing, shoes and accessories (besides Terhi Pölkki) and what kind of demands the informant's work life is perceived to make for one's personal style.

c) Social media and print media usage, follow-up questions about Instagram and blogs.

d) Hobbies, with follow-up questions about preferences relating to music, visual arts and home decoration.

Finally, e-mail address was asked in case the respondent would be willing to participate in a face-to-face interview to open up more about one's personal style, in exchange for a 100€ gift card to Terhi Pölkki's shop. 19 out of 27 were willing to participate and left their contact info. Survey data was summarized and differences as well as commonalities was looked for within the cases (Bryman and Bell 2015). Two respondents were selected based on purposeful sampling based on the criteria of information-richness and typicality (Patton 2015).

The study was conducted in Finnish, which may have limited the number of people having participated in it, as the brand also has international customers and its website at that point (June 2017) was in English only. However, as most of the brand's private customers are Finnish-speakers, Finnish was selected as the language of the survey, in order to facilitate more open answers and easy participation.

Pre-study 1 findings

All respondents were able to provide details about own dream style, giving information in more or less detail on materials, cuts, key items, colours, values, general impression aimed for. Most (18/27) named a concrete style role model/source of inspiration. In terms of other brands used, most respondents gave a concrete list of brands they use as part of their core style. All but two respondents listed principles they have when shopping for clothes and/or shoes. Thus, in general, Terhi Pölkki -users were well aware of their style ideals, taste and principles as consumers.

In terms of the answers given, dream style was often connected to minimalism, high quality, natural materials, clear cuts and balancing being up-to-date with timelessness and femininity with masculinity.

In terms of other brands used, there was a subset within the group who clearly used mostly Finnish design brands (such as Marimekko, Samuji, R/H, Arela, Uhana, Poola Kataryna, Ivana Helsinki) as their brands of choice.

Principles when buying emphasized natural materials, quality and durability, Finnish design and preferably local production in small quantities.

Most respondents had several hobbies/interests, most common ones being practicing sports/physical activity, music (with stylistically most common genres being rock and classical music), literature and home decoration/interior design.

From the respondents, about half were between 24-39 and the other half 40+ (with 68 being the oldest respondent) in terms of age, with all age brackets being quite even within that range. This was somewhat of a surprise to Terhi Pölkki herself, as she saw her core customers being within the age group of 35-44. Most (16/27) of the respondents owned one pair of Terhi Pölkki -shoes, 3 owned none, 7 owned two pairs and 1 owned four pairs.

Within the particular models owned (a screenshot presenting different models of Terhi Pölkki shoes can be found in Appendix 2), the data gave a hint that within the Terhi Pölkki brand, there are several different customer groups in terms of taste and connections to the shoes. For example, the model Mila (lace-up oxford-style flats) seemed to be connected primarily to customers who were Finnish design oriented and looking for classic modern Scandinavian minimalist style. Sandals and clogs -owners included a variety of customers with diverse backgrounds, implying that sandals and clogs may be the most "impulsive" and harder to define as a style piece, and possibly fashion-related products out of the range. The leather boots (such as Ola, Hero and Chelsea) seemed to be the models most likely connected to values of sustainability and durability, with owners of these also possibly being the ones most likely owning several pairs of Terhi Pölkki -shoes. While these observations (made based on Terhi Pölkki shoe models owned, description of dream style and buying principles and other brands used) cannot be validated quantitatively due to small sample size, these were confirmed by Pölkki's own experience in marketing the shoes - she said she has often gotten the impressions that she is selling two different shoe brands to two different groups of people - the "leather" buyers versus the wood (clogs)-buyers.

In relation to the research questions, based on the data and discussing the interpretation of these with Terhi Pölkki, a possible division of how people come to buy such design brands (what makes up the connection between the brand and the consumer, what creates the attraction) could be proposed as the following:

a) A more spontaneous, "falling-in-love" -type of affective relationship, based on just seeing the shoes.

b) Being convinced by the values and quality behind the product, the quality of work, materials, craftsmanship, ethics (being made in Europe)

c) The brand being a representative of Finnish design

These three routes to the brand would imply different marketing approaches might be called for, for example, for a), it would be important to have the shoes on display effectively, for b) it would be most important to communicate the story and values behind the brand and for c) it would be most important to tie it as closely as possible into the ecosystem of Finnish design.

Naturally, the three aspects are not independent factors, however, it is interesting whether individual consumers are led mostly by one or some aspects of these and whether loyalty to the brand requires a certain mix of these.

3.3.2. Pre-study 2

As pre-study 1 concentrated on specific, specialized consumers that have previously bought designer shoes within one brand's offering, the next step was to design a survey to a broader public without any assumption of stylistic constraints. Therefore the contents of pre-study 1 were modified to allow a more generalized profile of "normal" consumers, but in a way that would allow comparison and complementation to the results from Terhi Pölkki customer survey. Some questions were added ("in your view, what makes a person stylish") and some omitted. Similarly, user-friendliness and brevity was aimed for. While generally the pre-studies were planned to be used as background information and basis of sampling for further interviews, the questions about one's own dream style, criteria of selecting clothes and clothing brands used were common in both pre-studies and allow additional insight in terms of data analysis.

Pre-study 2 was distributed through purposeful recruitment through email correspondence and sharing the survey link in social media. The survey was available in three languages: English, Estonian and Finnish. Altogether 39 answers were collected. About half of the responses (20/39) came from through the Facebook community of Estonian women who live in Finland.

Findings from Pre-study 2

In answers to the question, “What makes a person stylish?”, a question aiming to cover what the consumer see as the essence of personal sartorial style (thus contributing to Research question 1) as well as how it can be achieved (contributing to Research question 2) respondents saw style as achieved by 1) satisfying certain outward standards or conditions 2) possessing particular qualities as a person 3) reaching harmony between the clothing and person.

In the first category, style was seen as a result of following a certain logic of good taste (“*tastefulness in selecting clothing*”- R23, “*well-matched quality garments*”-R1), covering certain tangible aspects of style (“*clothes and make-up*”-R7, “*clothes and hair*”-R6) or simply putting sufficient effort into one’s style (“*When someone has thought about what to wear.*”-R9, “*A person who is well-groomed is stylish.*”-R19).

In the second category, the person’s internal being was named as the source of style (e.g. being confident, courageous, strong personality, being oneself, being unique). These qualities related to the person’s being were often named without any reference to outside criteria, e.g. as in making the point that a confident (enough) person can be stylish wearing whatever.

Thirdly, there were answers that emphasized the harmonious connection between the clothing and the person (“*When the clothes fit the person's body and soul*”-R38, “*own personal style*”-R24).

In addition, there were answers that included combinations of the categories, such as following certain outward standards and remaining true to self (“*Good posture, confident being, clean hair and skin, the way of wearing clothes and the clothes themselves*”-R8).

Thus, consumers typically saw style springing forth from meeting certain outward criteria, holding certain qualities internally and establishing a connection between oneself and one’s appearance.

Furthermore, as consumers, informants had certain principles when buying clothes, shoes and accessories. Clearly present were economic considerations, particularly in relation to quality (“*Get the best quality one can afford!*”-R1, “*I have noticed it's no good to pay over a certain sum, one doesn't get more quality. Not to buy the cheapest, nor the most expensive*”-R9, “*worth the money*”-R7, “*I don't overpay*”-R36), which were also sometimes used to rule out offerings (“*no cheap textiles*”-R5) and in connection to quality

(“*pay less get more*”-R2). Also, there were considerations on what was owned previously (“*Matching what I already have*”-R23), fitting own style, comfort, intuitive liking (“*Comfort, whether it feels "like me" when I try it on*”-R37), predicted use (“*That I would actually wear those things*”-R28), considerations on timelessness and fashion (“*Have to be in fashion and beautiful. Absolutely must work with other things*.”-R16, “*Classical fashion*”-R17). These “rules” or generalizations revealed that consumers hold certain principles and/or logics when approaching style-related purchasing.

Contribution of pre-studies to general findings

In the context of the whole study, pre-studies contributed to the style creation model (presented in Chapter 4) especially in regards to 1) the substance of style, i.e. what style is for a person and 2) curation logics and principles regarding the style processes (buying, managing wardrobe and putting together outfits).

Next, data analysis of face-to-face interview data is described.

3.4. Data analysis

Altogether the seven face-to-face interview transcriptions as the main data source of the study consisted of about 49200 transcribed words. Due to the interviews having been rather open and conversational, they became also more challenging to analyse (Patton 2015), which is why the processes and stages related to data analysis and inference are especially crucial to reflect upon and open up.

In interpreting the interview data, cross-case insight was recorded immediately after each interview by summarizing and detecting patterns and themes that repeated throughout the interview (Patton 2015). Throughout the transcription process, the material was further reflected upon as a way of re-evaluating both the informant’s answers as well as the interviewer’s role in developing the conversation (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). Furthermore, transcription also allowed to revisit what had seemed important during the interview and which topics were raised by me and which were raised by the informant (this relates to refutation, as discussed by Spiggle 1994).

After completing all interviews and all transcriptions, data was analysed inductively (Patton 2015), by first categorizing it into themes (Spiggle 1994). Initially, one interview at a time was interpreted, while each of the following interview was contrasted and compared with previous ones (Patton 2015, Spiggle 1994). The themes identified were

further abstracted and the whole process was iterated by going back and forth between within-case insight and across case insight (Spiggle 1994). Consumers with different approaches to the topics of the interview guide were contrasted (e.g. ways of shopping, the role of brands in one's sartorial choices, how certain items were selected into one's wardrobe, what was considered easy and what difficult [Spiggle 1994]). Across these topics, more general level differences in the consumer's approach to sartorial style was detected, for example, the different usage of intuition and self-control within the processes. Also, the implicit skills, principles and choice criteria was looked for across the topics, in order to understand how a particular consumer structures her personal style beyond the individual themes. Also, the interpretive part on commenting on particular items in one's own wardrobe (e.g. by presenting the outfit worn today) as well as together with board creation in Pinterest, allowed understanding the interpretive lens through which how consumer evaluated the items and outfits (e.g. some noticed quality of material, some femininity, some evaluated timelessness of the outfits etc.).

Informants' connections of elements and topics concerning sartorial consumption with personal meanings were detected (e.g. dresses and feeling feminine, talking about the style of a TV star as deeply impressive and exemplary for a particular age group etc.). Themes such as femininity, revealing, covering, being true to self, understanding quality, using brands to help organize buying, role of intuition etc. were detected in the interview data. For each theme, its presence in other interviewed were looked for, in order to expand, clarify or contrast the theme by other informants' perspectives (Spiggle 1994).

After initial inductive analysis of the material (Patton 2015), the developed abstractions, themes and categories were deductively associated with frameworks covered in the theoretical framework (Patton 2015).

From the beginning, inductive analysis pointed to the direction that the data has instances that concern the informant's relationship and understanding 1) of self (i.e. how they saw themselves) and 2) others (i.e. how they saw the world). Furthermore, some of the themes involved one's being and becoming (who the person considers oneself to be and wanting to be), significant others in one's life, but also, practical processes of how sartorial consumption is managed.

In the deductive process of connecting findings with theoretical understanding, initially, it looked like the data would be consistent with the model of being, having and doing (Belk 1988, Sartre 2012). However, using it became problematic as that model did not

include other people nor the marketplace in a direct manner. Also, the level of doing was also initially posed by Belk (1988) as an abstract way of defining self through doing (e.g. through one's vocational work or a hobby), while in this study, doings concerned practices. While the style enablers could have been seen as a bridge between being and doing, all put together this interpretation started to seem too flexed from the original. Thus, the abstracted categories were evaluated again to detect how they are connected within the informants' practices, rather than any the particular theoretical models covered.

Thus, the model summarizing findings presented in Chapter 4 was developed by combining inductive and deductive analytic procedures (Patton 2015).

3.5. Quality of the data

Regardless of research philosophy, a key challenge in qualitative research is making sense of qualitative data in a systematic and transparent way (Spiggle 1994, Wallendorf and Belk 1989). Therefore, the issue of quality needs to be addressed. According to criteria posed by Wallendorf and Belk (1989), his section aims evaluate, to what extent are the findings, i.e. represent reality, whether they could be applied to other contexts, whether a similar study could repeat the findings and whether the findings emerged from informants rather than the researcher.

In regards to **credibility**, i.e. how adequate and believable are the findings as representations what was studied, prolonged engagement (Wallendorf and Belk 1989) was enhanced by deepening pre-understanding over a long period of time (described in more detail in Chapter 3.2). Furthermore, practical expertise and relevance of the framework was influenced by including the designer Terhi Pölkki in the study as well as going through several style guidebooks and discussing the topic casually with a variety of people.

Transferability, i.e. the extent to which the findings could be employed in other contexts (Wallendorf and Belk 1989) was increased by the fact that the project initially started from the topic of home decoration as a domain of creating style. Furthermore, the context and literature about home decor consumption has contributed to how creation of style has been framed in this study. Also, the combined sampling strategies and multiple data collection formats (two pre-studies and interviews) helped to raise the context that was captured by the research and thus improve transferability.

Dependability, i.e. the extent to which interpretation remains stable across social changes, is especially difficult to address as the study touches upon fashion which is known to be built on constant change (McCracken 1989). Furthermore, it has been argued that a shift is emerging from fast fashion to slow fashion (Clark 2008, Joy et al 2012, Pookulangara and Shephard 2013) and that our society as a whole is aestheticizing constantly (Dobers and Strannegard 2005). Furthermore, it is possible that the informants in the study constantly change their outlook on the issues. However, by including many informants within different stage of life, it can be argued that again, the variety of contexts and generational and cultural backgrounds captured gave an overall stable picture of the topic area.

Confirmability, i.e. ability to trace how the conclusions of the study is enhanced by recording and all data electronically along with time labels on the iterative data analysis process made possible by electronic labelling. Furthermore, stages of the research are recorded in the form of working versions of the theoretical understanding and findings.

Integrity, i.e. the extent to which the informants were truthful was enhanced by ensuring respondents anonymity and focusing on establishing rapport and trust throughout the data collection process.

4 CONSUMERS AND THEIR PERSONAL SARTORIAL STYLE

This chapter presents findings of the empirical study.

In terms of what is personal sartorial style based on (RQ1), a three-way, mutually interactive substance is proposed, consisting of self, aesthetic objects and "others" (discussed more depth in Chapter 4.1). Then, processes of creating style are discussed in Chapter 4.3, answering the question how consumers create style (RQ2) and use aesthetic objects in creating style (RQ3). Style enablers (resources beyond money) as a core aspect of how consumers create style (RQ2) are discussed in Chapter 4.3.

In summary, creating style is argued to be a process of integrating style **substance**, i.e. what is being expressed and aimed for through one's personal style, with consumption **processes** (such as buying, creating outfits and managing wardrobe) through the mediating filter of style **enablers**, i.e. the resources that enable translating the substance into processes. The model proposed of how consumers create style can be found in Figure 3 below. Next, each of the steps within the proposed model is presented in more detail.

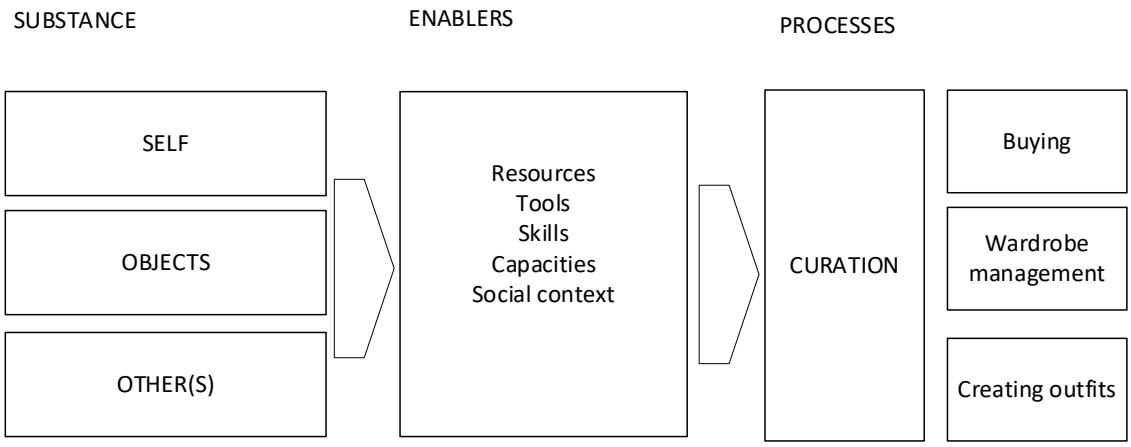


Figure 3 Model for creating style based on findings

4.1. The substance of style

In the context of personal style, it is rather self-evident that the basis of style is the person in question, i.e. the person, whose personal style is in question (Simmel 2005). However, within that one particular person, we may ask further, what is a style actually based on (RQ1), where does it originate, what does it draw from, what does it include and what does it serve? Findings of the study propose that personal sartorial style is in part based

on a person's "core self"'s implicit liking and feeling at ease, happy or satisfied with certain aesthetic qualities and objects. However, in addition to that, style draws from self-perceptions within a particular social context as well as particular understandings of others and aesthetic objects. For the consumer as a purposeful agent, these factors form intentions related to 1) managing self-perceptions and 2) connecting self with others (e.g. through pleasing or forming connections to others). These identity-related substantial aspects of style are presented in the following sections.

4.1.1. Embodied preference - the "core self" as a point of departure in creating style

When discussing personal sartorial style, typically reference was made to "natural" preference for certain aesthetic elements or items. This included consistent likings (e.g. having always liked stripes), urges (e.g. as the spring/ summer arrives, always feeling the urge to wear dresses) and feeling deeply at ease and satisfied wearing certain items ("feeling like me", "feels good"). This aspect, perhaps the core of stylistic and aesthetic consumption is an embodied, silent reality, which appears to be a mystery even to consumers themselves.

> I can't even say where it has come from that I like stripes so much. I don't know. Already back at school was that, I like, when I needed to do something at the sewing class, I did stripes. (Avely)

It has been argued before that aesthetic taste may be to some extent inborn and biological (Hoyer and Stokburger-Sauer 2012). Whether biological or not, there is indeed an aspect of taste that seems to go so deep that the consumers are not even aware of its origin and can be thus deemed unconscious.

Furthermore, it is plausible that the very reason why consumers continuously seek connections and relationships with aesthetic objects is an attempt to get to know, experience and act out this silent reality. This argument was made by Belk (1988) that possessions actually allow the consumers to get to know self and act as a mirror to the core self.

Similarly, the importance of aesthetics in one's life also implies an internal, somewhat involuntary aptitude. The consumers interested in personal style in many cases admitted to consider oneself to be an aesthete (Saara), having "*always had a liking for beautiful things*" (Silja) or having always had an interest in clothes (Minna, Saara). This implies that the "core self" structures not only what we like, but how extensively and how intensely we like. Therefore, this internal aptitude often manifests itself across

categories. For example, Terhi feels the need to lay the table beautifully even at regular weekday meals.

> Yes, I think some kind of visuality and aesthetics is in everything [for me]. Just like, in these, at home... For example that I like when on Tuesday we have sausage soup, then I like to lay the table, so that the table is laid beautifully and.... When the mother-in-law comes to visit and puts the [plastic] bag with bread, so the bread in the bag... [shows using hands], then [I'm like] "could I put a basket or cutting table underneath it" [laugh] (Terhi)

Similarly, Rita feels she *must* wash her hair every day, dress well even when she is home alone and iron all clothes, including bedsheets.

> [.]. Although I live alone now, I, even at home I dress so that when I accidentally look at myself in the mirror, then I, kind of feel good. And if, for some strange reason, I wash hair every morning, and I, for some reason, I sleep in or, that I can't wash my hair, then I feel lousy the whole day. (Rita)

> Yes. I feel good when I have [...] neat clothes and I can't stand wrinkled clothes, that means, I iron, I iron even the bedsheets. My grandmother has done that, my mother has done that and I can't not do it. (Rita)

This intuitive need for certain things also manifest in certain style elements which one feels should *always* be incorporated to any outfit.

> Scarves I use a lot. That, one thing is that, -today [the scarf] is blue-, but when I have a pink thing on, then I always have to have a scarf along with it. A scarf and a watch I always need to have. (Sirje).

4.1.2. Embodied intuitive states

Another aspect that does not render itself to further analysis at this point, but is mentioned as a core point of departure in sartorial style is *mood*, as a certain emotional state at a certain point in time. In a way that the "core self" can be viewed as something that remains more stable over time, this "mood" aspect can be viewed as a, possibly related, "momentary" side of the core self. Often-times the informants report just feeling like wearing a certain piece, intuitively feeling at ease in a certain outfit on a particular day or occasion, but not in another one. Also these feelings can be more or less stable, i.e. some consumers report that what they feel comfortable in changes by day and others report continuously using the same few pieces of clothing over a longer periods, e.g. throughout a summer.

> Sirje: Sometimes when I put something on then I immediately feel anxious, bad and that...somehow. Then I just forget about the whole thing and take another outfit. Yes, that I just think like that and see that this doesn't....
>
> Interviewer: Just going by the feel, then...

> Sirje: Yes, by feel. And then, another time, it feels so good to be in a skirt and in a dress and at another time.... I don't know what it is about.

However, while the core self and intuitive moods-matching remain open for further research, the aspects related to the consumer identity, the level of "being" discussed in this chapter do not end there. There are multiple other being-related aspects that factor into the creation of style which do render themselves to analysis.

4.1.3. Self-perceptions and identity work

Beyond the unconscious aspects of the embodied "core self" (whether seen on a more stable or momentary level), the identity-related foundations of style also revolve around the more conscious perceptions, narratives and mental models about self. While not as inaccessible for analysis as the core self they can still be considered as deep and embodied. Although still subjective, these perceptions are also are subject to interaction with others and form the basis for more or less conscious identity work on the part of the consumer, as she manages self and connects to objects and others.

4.1.3.1. Femininity

While femininity as an issue guiding sartorial choices was emphasised more by some informants and less by others, as an issue it seemed as being of fluctuating importance for consumers, depending on life stage. For example, relationship status (being single) and menopause had brought up the need to rethink and consider the role of femininity in many instances.

> I have always wanted to be feminine, but since I've had such a life that I've had to be both a mother and a father to my children, that I've raised three children alone. Then you can't just, say, that, when you pick up the children from the kindergarten or go rushing to the store, a children at the hand, go with a skirt or heels. That you put pants and... just that. That now I have only now started to wear skirts again. Although they fit me really well. (Avely)

> Well, hey, if you go in pants all the time and do such hard work, as I have done all my life, then you can't be such a.... flower there. That you just do, well, just the work has been such. (Avely)

Meanwhile, femininity was brought typically in connection to clothing categories: dresses and skirts rather than pants was still a major signifier of femininity to the respondents. The youngest informant, Minna (31), however, did express a dislike for too "classic cuteness" when reviewing classic women's items such as pencil skirts and sheath dresses. Thus, Thompson and Haytko (1997) found, femininity and masculinity are themes the consumers seek a personal approach to.

4.1.3.2. Age

Another big "demographic" type of theme for the informants when talking about their sartorial style was managing one's age and finding a way to feel at ease with it. This included finding social references for oneself of what it means to be of a particular age and how to dress.

Through creation of style consumers were able to bridge the perceived gap between one's "actual" age and desired reference groups. This aspect included dressing "to appear older", "to appear younger", but also simply, acting out a new idea of what it means to be of a certain age group. This aspect is further illustrated in Chapter 4.3.3.2. in connection to using object-specific meaning.

4.1.3.3. Own body shape, perception of body shape and attitude towards own body

Mental models about one's body shape were clearly present in nearly all accounts of personal style. The mental models on one's own body shape very clearly directed and filtered items and silhouettes the person felt comfortable wearing. While possibly to some degree related to objective measures (no objective measures were taken within the process), the mental models still seemed highly subjective. For example, one informant believed she should hide her waist as did not perceive having one, while other informants insisted on always emphasizing the waist. Meanwhile for the outside observant, showing or hiding the waist may have not seemed as such a categorical issue.

4.1.3.4. Perceptions of one's actual lifestyle and dream lifestyle

Mental models about self include one's understanding, schema of one's lifestyle. Also here the "objective" reality and mental models about it seemed to become a matter of subjective perception. For example one respondent expressed that working as a doctor in a hospital, sports attire would suit her lifestyle needs best, while "the linen pants" towards which she felt drawn to aesthetically, seemed unusable for her in that context.

> Minna: But then, if these clothes are so exorbitantly expensive, and then, do I really have a need [for them], if I think for example, that what Samuji has, then, I'm pretty... I may be pretty, as I said earlier, that I easily think that, wouldn't it be nice, and I may click on them and look [at them]. But then I start to think that, hey, really, what is my life [like], that I wake up in the morning, take the dogs out, most likely bike to the hospital, bike back, go to work out, so... How many linen pants do I need for that kind of life?
>
> Interviewer: [laugh]

> Minna: That, if [I] really think [about it], with reason think about these things, then... I can imagine living the linen-pant-life but... I don't actually live it. [...] I try to somehow think reasonably, [about] that, what do I get [myself]. This is why it is so silly that [I] so easily notice the types of clothes that I could not actually use in my own life, so...
>
> Interviewer: Mhmhm. But, have you noticed that it is so that, that you notice those that you could not use. Or do you still notice more of what you could use, or...
>
> Minna: Notice more of those that I could not use. I don't know what causes that. For some reason it is [so]. That would I like that life would be like that, that I could live somewhere... in totally different kind of clothes. Or... And would rather live somewhere completely, like, in the Italian countryside or, why that is, but... But for some reason it is that it takes... that it excites me more. In a way, that if [I]really start to think what would be most reasonable to use in my own, this kind of, day-to-day life, then so, for instance in winter, then, would be sports attire. That would be so much easier for me. To go [about] in the sport attire. But then, it is not at all, this kind of, feeling like myself, that when I am even for one day in that sports attire, because I have decided to go straight to the gym from here... Then I have this unpleasant feeling, constantly. This kind of, strange feeling. (Minna)

Meanwhile, another informant Sirje, a nurse, said she always wants to look presentable at work, wears skirts and high heels and recalled incidents of deep shock and confusion after seeing colleagues whom she considers higher in status compared to her, at work in less presentable clothing.

> That the [person's] appearance and how he acts and is... completely.... [at odds]. Then I have had doctors who come to the unit. I ask that, who are you, do you have a permission to come here. And then (s)he says that (s)he works as a doctor and... That, one should be very careful, one can go really wrong with that... [here in Finland] (Sirje)

Even if not evident from the outside, the problem of sensing a mismatch between one's actual lifestyle and dream sartorial style was an important barrier to expressing and following one's dream style.

In fact, many informants felt they cannot wear the clothes they are drawn to stylistically because it does not suit their actual lifestyle, or because they felt their own life somehow does not match up to the style they actually like. For example, an informant felt that she is unable to use certain kind of feminine clothes until she has the right partner beside her.

> Avely: yeah, I've been thinking myself that if [...] I would [...] find someone next to me, I could wear more dresses and be more feminine. That he would bring all of this [out] in me, this partner, [bring] to the front. That I could be feminine and...
>
> Interviewer: So you feel that you couldn't be [feminine] now?
>
> Avely: Well, I think so, in the sense that, look, every person like... Certainly I could, but let's say I don't even have a chance to go, let's say, to the....
>
> Interviewer: ...romantic dinner...
>
> Avely: yes, with whom would I go, right? I would sit alone at the table, waiting, aha, that someone would come, right... Well that... I do think that if I were to find such a person next to me, then... I've had instances like that. Let's say, some short, sort of affair. But well, let's say, I do start to feel

> myself more feminine than I am now. Then one starts to wear dresses and skirts and the sort of things that belong in a woman's wardrobe. Yes. This kind of powerful feeling. You feel that you are alive. [Laughs]
>
> Interviewer: That when you feel feminine, you feel you are alive?
>
> Avely: No, I mean, when you feel wanted, or something like that.... That... yeah, somehow you just feel more feminine.

Thus the mental models about one's lifestyle and how worthy or suitable it is for expressing their dream style is interestingly laden with controversy. Furthermore, these contradictions pose a barrier to buying luxurious or special items that goes beyond money.

4.1.4. Identity-related needs, intentions and objectives in personal style

In the context of personal style as an ongoing creative consumption project, a particular identity can be considered dynamic, as it brings forth needs, intentions and objectives in what the person wants to achieve through the sartorial consumption. These may relate to expressing self (e.g. the person may want to act out different roles or be "true to self") or connecting to others and connecting the two by following or reinventing a social stereotype.

4.1.4.1. Repertoire of self: being true to oneself vs acting out roles

There were informants who particularly liked the identity-related role-play enabled by dressing in different ways, while others were extremely sensitive about being always completely "true to self".

> Well, perhaps this good feeling [*mukava olo*, Finnish] comes from... having clothes that feel like [my]self. Maybe most of all that, [I] don't feel dressed up like someone other than [my]self, that it is not like some kind of costume-feeling. And [I] get that feeling easily... when [I] feel that have dressed into not my own clothes, not in the kind of clothes that portray me. (Minna)

Meanwhile, others particularly liked dressing according to roles defined by the outside. For example, Rita said she practices burlesque for the very reason that it allows her to explore and impersonate different personas.

4.1.4.2. Revealing and covering self

Revealing and covering was mentioned in several cases as an integral, even definitive part of one's sense of style, both in the sense of *how much* to reveal, *what* to reveal of

one's body and *to what extent* to adorn or cover the body. There is a certain comfortable level both of nakedness and coverage that the consumer is ready to embrace, whether in terms of makeup, clothes or accessories.

> [...] That if someone says, she can't leave home without putting on make-up, then, I can, easily. More often there is that, if [I] have for example big earrings or... then [I feel like I have] put on too much. That when I have big earrings, can I still put on that kind of piece of jewellery or something. (Terhi)

> But then, these autumn clothes and colours are such that, yes!, I can knit sweaters again, put on knitted sweaters [*neulepaitoja*, Finnish] again. [...]. That maybe there is a certain coverage in these clothes. Clothes of autumn cover better than summer clothes. (Terhi)

4.1.4.3. Expressing unique personality

An important theme within creation of style revolved around differing from "ordinary" by endorsing a certain element of unusualness and generally following a sense of personal style that goes beyond attractiveness or beauty. Interestingly, the informants chose words that could also have a negative connotation to them, such as weird (*outo* in Finnish) or whacky (*kiiksuga* in Estonian). These commentaries emphasized that a certain "weirdness" is essential in order to be authentic and personal, but the level of that desirable weirdness is managed extremely carefully. Of course, also here, the "objective" level of weirdness is difficult to monitor outwardly.

4.1.4.4. Need for control over one's style

In terms of style related needs, some respondents needed considerably bigger amount of control over their style, while others expressed willingness to tolerate "style misses". There were also differences in how much intuitive, creative matching would typically take place when putting together outfits versus how much outfits were pre-coordinated.

4.1.5. Connecting to others

4.1.5.1. Forming bonds, connecting to others through style

In several instances, style connected the informants to relevant social groups and facilitated in forming connections with strangers. Style and especially receiving feedback and recognition for one's style choices made the informants feel connected to a community [Terhi and the distant work colleague, Rita and burlesque community, Silja and work colleagues].

> Or one colleague and one friend. I thought it was really cool, with that friend, of whose style I like, we may buy the same or same type of clothes without knowing, that, "Ah, you have that, I have that too" [laugh]. And then I have [girl]friend to whom I once said that, yeah, when someone asks sometime if I have a style role-model [*pukeutumisidoli* in Finnish], then I say, Heli is. And Heli said, aha, well you are mine. [laugh]. (Terhi)

> Well, in a way, that is nice that, if [one has] studied many years with people, then, that one gets to know someone better through some other way, as one can't know every one of the 140 people that well. And then, when one gets to know someone through a common course or some other way then one may well talk about clothing as well. And, maybe not otherwise, but, [style] is like any other hobby that connects people at the point when... their paths cross somehow. (Minna)

Meanwhile, in social settings, style is also used to avoid undesired attention.

> [There is, yes, that] maybe [in Estonia] it is more like matter of courtesy that you have to look good. That more like an ethical question, that you have to be good and look clean and neat, that you would have the other, that the other person would feel better when communicating with you and go somewhere with you and.... It is very much about communication. That, if you go like... Well, come on, imagine yourself that take this typical Finn and go walk with him in the streets of Pärnu, that.... It will be so visible right away. Of course, no one would say anything, but it still bothers. That you don't want to go just anywhere with him. In Estonia, it is general that, you [dress so that] you can go anywhere, whether you go to the night club or concert or just walk in the street... So that... [going with the typical Finn] in the summer, [who is] wearing black, in sneakers, with a backpack.... That, to go with such a person... that you don't really want to see a friend like that next to you. No, it's just that, it makes it so that, later, people will start asking that, who was that with you. That he kind of gets this... kind of negative attention, from my friends. (Sirje)

4.1.5.2. Pleasing others

In some cases, personal style was significantly influenced by preferences of significant others. For example, an ex-husband of one informant had a liking for black pantsuits and dislike for flowery dresses, which resulted in the wife's wardrobe changing accordingly over time, as she said, she liked to "make the husband happy" by wearing the clothes he liked.

> Then I, haven't been wearing any longer but earlier I wore a lot of pantsuits. Because my ex-husband just loved pantsuits. Then I wore a lot of darted trousers, blazers, even vests underneath... and lots of white shirts, lots of white shirts. Because he just loved black and white. [...] I mean, we had such a great relationship, we never argued. And since I knew that he likes it so much, then I just, I just wore these types of clothes and that actually didn't bother me. Because he couldn't stand flowery dresses and at that time I really didn't have flowery dresses. When I was alone in Estonia, then I put on a flowery dress and that was enough for me. All this other life was, we were just so happy and when you are happy and love the other person, then you, like, do something for that... you do things for that person. (Rita)

4.2. Processes of creating style

In practice, creating style consists of finding and buying (new) clothes, managing and using existing wardrobe and putting together particular outfits (Rees 2015). As the consumer needs to manage and create desired meaning within these processes, they become implicitly **structured** as the consumer decides what kind of stores, brands, shopping channels would be considered, how they would be used, what resources would

be used. That logics by which the style processes are structured is here called **curation**, in order to emphasize that the consumer selectively makes choices on what to include and consider and what not to.

First, the processes of style (buying, wardrobe management, creating outfits) and their curation logics are discussed in Chapter 4.2.1. Then, curation by principles is discussed in Chapter 4.2.2. Finally the impact of arbitrary, i.e. non-style related factors in the structure of creating style is discussed in Chapter 4.2.3.

4.2.1. Style processes and curation logics

Creating style essentially revolves around creating outfits, which, in turn, is closely interconnected with buying clothes and managing the possibilities within one's wardrobe. All of these processes are accompanied by a certain selectivity in usage of items and creation of meaning. While the processes could be analysed separately, they are all subjected to the consumer's logic of curation on how she in particular aims to connect the different style processes and achieve style.

One strategy used to curate one's buying, was to resort to a type of **"magical thinking"** by believing that there is an unseen order in how one finds the right items for oneself. For example, Avely insisted she feels that if something is "meant to be", she will sooner or later "just find it".

> But when I see that this shirt, or something, that, it has already... been so long at that store, that it's as if it's waiting for me... And with some things it is so that it already calls for you from afar, that, "come-on, come-on". It is so strange, I cannot explain it. And, that means, well, that is a thing for me and... sometimes it really is like that, that it is fantastic (Avely)

> And some thing is like, that it keeps coming back to you and, when I go to the store and it has been bought already, then, ohh! [a sigh of relief]. That means it was not for me. But another thing just keeps waiting for you. Actually, it is like that. It is really weird to talk about this, but it is true. (Avely)

Another common way to curate buying was case-by-case, on-the-spot **intuitive consideration** of single items: whether they are "right" or not.

> I pretty much rely on the feeling that I have at that point [when buying]. And I have often thought that if I really need to think about it so much, that do I take it or don't I take it, then I don't really need to take it. Then it is [later] that maybe I shouldn't have taken it after all. (Terhi).

Besides that, consumers also used more **analytical** approaches to curating shopping decisions. For example, one informant specifies the items she would need or want in an Excel sheet and then proceeds to acquire them. However, also in a seemingly analytical format, the actual choice of items was ultimately more or less intuitive.

> Saara: So, as you might know from the blog, I have this kind of clothes-Excel, where I write down, well, most all I write down my purchases, but there I also write down all my needs. I have sheets divided by the year. There is, for starters, what I have bought, for example in 2017, that what I have bought so far. But then there is still this kind of long list, that these kinds of things I have noticed having a need for. And then I try to buy those things.
>
> Interviewer: That you continuously map that, when you need or look for something... that you put it in [the list]
>
> Saara: [When I] need, or have a craving. I may have a craving, that now I want a silk scarf. For example. And then I put it on the list and then I may start looking at them. That I might be in the city, so I might go past the scarf store, so I go inside to see if there would be such [scarf]. But I aim not to buy right when I get the craving. But only later. And that craving may be something that I can't really explain it to myself, but when I've had it for long... I can be quite sure that I actually do want it. Be it a silk scarf.

According to the way consumers curated their shopping, in other words, how they approached the path to acquiring the "right items", whether more intuitively or analytically, they also used different methods of **search**. There were those whose normal purchase process consisted of casually browsing items and seeing if "they liked something". Some approached shopping by brand (especially when the brand already had a connection to a style image and category, e.g. a consumer knew to be able to find high quality jersey patterned shirts from Nanso), while some approached by strictly defined descriptive item search only really enabled by centralized internet shopping marketplaces (such as Zalando).

> Interviewer: That your buying nowadays is mostly [such] that you have the search, criteria and [then you see] who offers the most suitable [item]
>
> Saara: Yes, and I have it very-very strict, that, I may have that I want a summery cotton flowery dress. Which is knee-length. And then I search for it. Instead of going randomly about shops looking for some *summer clothes*. (Saara about shopping in Zalando)

Buying was also curated by economic logics, different methods of **estimating acceptable price** for potential acquisitions. Also here, there were more intuitive approaches of assessing individual items whether it is actually worth spending the money on (Minna), and more analytical structures of having rather particular price points for different categories of clothing.

> Sirje: That, if my outerwear, the uppermost layer is already like, 300 euros, then.... I hardly would buy a T-shirt with a 100 euros or so. That, coat, jacket, outerwear 300-350, that should already be quite okay...
>
> Interviewer: Mhmh
>
> Sirje: And then, boots also something like 150-200, because these last very long. That, right now I have 1,2,3 pairs of boots and they have all cost something like, 150-200 euros, but I've had them for quite long... like 5 years one pair and another something like 10 years or... I don't know. All are black. They are all of leather, black, with different height, and-and... All shoes are black, with different height. Is with low heel, thin heel, thick heel, that, these would go with all... with all the things. And then I have one pair of white sneakers and... a sandals, a few pairs. These are also all black. But there can be some zippers and... this kind of things.

Besides prices being important as barriers to what is acceptable (being limited both ways, that is having a price that was considered too high as well as too low), they also served as pointers for recognizing quality (elaborated on in Chapter 4.3.2)

Thus, on a very broad level, style processes are structured by different kinds of logics by which consumers curate their style-related processes.

4.2.2. Curation of style by principles

Beyond the way of making decisions, the curation logic, style was structured by more concrete principles that the consumer may have had specific to her style. The principles acted as filters which ruled out some and highlight some of the possible choices and made creation of style easier for the consumer by capturing the key things that are sought for in one's style. In a purchase situation, such curation principles could also be called purchase criteria, however, by using the term principles, it is emphasized that the curation principles apply also in the other steps of wardrobe management and outfit creation besides buying. Therefore, they are not criteria as such but rather principles in of what kind of style the person wants to create and essentially, what the consumer even perceives as relevant and useful in creating her style.

The following principles were brought out by the informants:

4.2.2.1. Timelessness

The filter of timelessness, ruling out "surface fashion" was mentioned by several informants. However, there were different ways of effectuating that filter: for example, ruling out something that was considered trendy just now, or, by insisting on classic pieces that may have just as well been worn decades ago.

> And then, my clothing is definitely conservative. That is maybe more because I want my clothes to be more long-lasting. So if it is not conservative, then that is harder to achieve. That if there is much of surface fashion then it may be that in two years or three years it isn't appealing anymore. (Saara)

> Or, from these choices, that from out of these what might go out of fashion, then this [shows a garment] might go. But that leather jacket never will. Already Marlon Brando had it, that same jacket. 50 years ago, 60 years ago. And then, this could be from the 50s, that dress. Almost all the other ones as well. (Saara discussing her choice of clothes in the Pinterest dream style board)

4.2.2.2. Looking for certain cuts and fit

Based on "core" preferences and (perceptions of) body type, many informants said they would consider certain cuts while not even considering others.

> Neckline is pretty specific [issue] for me. That what the neckline is like. It is either this kind of round or a small v-neckline, not too deep. I do have a summer dress with a deeper v-neckline, but that is only a summer dress. Or a boat neck, neckline. In sleeves I favour sleeveless. Or with shorter sleeves. Or 3/4-sleeves. [...] It has been probably the mirror that has brought these [cuts].... That, I do feel, myself, that these fit me well. (Saara)

Furthermore, classical rules of good fit were also used to manage one's choices.

> Sirje: That, we were thought these standards, in the 19th [high school in Tallinn], when it was so that, that the Fashion house [Moemaja, a fashion design house] sort of dictated it, there were even articles that, any kind of horizontal wrinkling... and that, for example, the length of the sleeve, that how long it must be and.... And the length of pants, that how long it must be and.... That this was all, like a standard. And the length of the skirt that, for example, for whom would fit [a] longer [skirt] and for whom shorter, and for whom a mini.. That it was all, kind of restricted, that you couldn't just... and the colours were also...
>
> Interviewer: so, you still have those rules in the back of your mind
>
> Sirje: yes, those rules I have, yes. That the bottom button in a jacket should remain open and... that a sleeve must be so that when I put my elbow then it must be until here and... [shows with hands].
>
> Interviewer: Mhmhmhmhmh.
>
> S: And that the length of pants must absolutely be until the heel, from where the heel begins and...That when we did those things, then the standards were for classical dress. I think these still are.
>
> Interviewer: Yes...
>
> Sirje: And that there shouldn't be any horizontal wrinkling. And this kind of things.
>
> Interviewer: Yes, that you sort of like have this classical philosophy of dress in your head all the time.
>
> Sirje: Yes-yes, that this has definitely maybe influenced me from that school, this. And, a coat for example, that how it should fit and...
>
> Interviewer: That fit is something that you follow very closely then...
>
> Sirje: The fit, yes, fit, that it would fit well on the body. Clothes are actually for that they would hide your flaws and make you more beautiful, that you would feel good in them, that... That the result should be such that would kind of hide your flaws and you could manipulate with them, that.... There are actually no ugly people. Well, you do see here, in Finland women who are dressed ugly. (Sirje)

4.2.2.3. Quality of material and sewing

Namely in the pre-study 1 focusing on Terhi Pölkki shoe brand users consumers regarded matters also central to sustainability and ethics clearly as a significant part of personal style choices in terms of materials, durability, size of wardrobe, country of origin etc.

Meanwhile, it was still the vision or definition of style as such that connected the choices to sustainability: the ethical considerations were only incorporated into personal style, but were not typically determining or dominating it as a style philosophy. Such views were emphasized in the personal interviews as well. For most mainstream consumers, sustainability did not appear as a leading motivation in one's pursuits, but was incorporated into one's choices through realizations, namely regarding quality (sewing, material) and price-quality (items' durability).

For quality and price-and-quality -related reasons consumers said to have started to avoid certain brands or whole categories of brands. For example, Sirje avoided the brand Vila as she claimed its sewing quality to be unacceptably low. Meanwhile, she did not tie such a choice to considerations of sustainability or ethics. Similarly, Saara said she has stopped buying fast fashion brands altogether because she perceives the whole offering to be 1) of unacceptably low quality and 2) deciding just by the price tag, unethical, as a shirt costing 5€ cannot be anything but. However, she did not tie her style choices as such to sustainability or ethics, nor did she perceive the issues to define her choices.

Similarly, most informants had clear demands on the types of fibres they buy, for example, by preferring natural fibres. "*Often synthetic fibres remain in the shop just because they are synthetic fibre*" (Terhi).

Such considerations clearly relate to the issues of sustainability, however, for consumers seeking personal style, it was more a matter of quality.

Moreover, one informant who stated buying practically all of her clothing from one of the biggest second-hand chain UFF, did not connect such a choice to sustainability at all. However, her ability to achieve her desired style from buying from second-hand sources only relied very much on her ability to find the items she liked (i.e. actually go to the store and look through racks) and also sew, repair, clean and modify her purchases.

4.2.3. Structure given to style by "arbitrary" factors (habits, perceived ease and enjoyment of shopping)

Besides curation logics and principles, buying is also structured by habits. Informants typically had processes in place in terms of where to shop and where not to. For example, internet shopping may have been perceived as uncomfortable, some never bought anything from unknown brands over the internet as not to take the risk of having to send it back, while some did nearly all buying from the net and returned most of it, considering

it to bring ease as one is able to try on clothing in their own home. Furthermore, some said they never actually go shopping but tend to stop by from certain stores casually from time to time. One informant specifically avoided a category of shops (specialty lingerie shops) due to perceiving the service to be too pushy. On the whole, everyone had a process in place of how and where to buy from and clear preferences on what is easy. Pre-curated selection was important to some, in order not having to browse through too much selection. Thus, there were great differences in terms of perceived ease of different ways to shop, which may explainable in the very differences in curation logics. While in terms of actual style choices, these factors of habit and ease may seem arbitrary, practically, they are very relevant and also, to some extent dictate how one is able to actualize one's personal style.

Another aspect that influenced the type of shopping one did was a natural preference and satisfaction from certain categories of clothing (such as work outfits or dresses) as opposed to others (such as clothes to use at home). This resulted informants often expressing more content with a particular area of the wardrobe as compared to another.

> Well, I have clothes and shoes for work in pretty good order. They are such that... I like to buy them, it is nice [*kivaa*, in Finnish]. But then, this kind of, home clothing, or then, underwear. Or sports attire or such. Buying those is not that nice [kiva]. That, for example, these college-pants I only got bought only in the beginning of this year, although they had been on that list of mine for three years. And they had holes in them, the ones I had [before]. At home. But somehow I thought that, these will do, that I just use [them], that no-one will see them and... And that, with those it is that, [I] do not want to pay for these as much, but conscience also doesn't give in that I would buy for a twenty-[euro] from somewhere. (Saara)

Furthermore, in terms of visiting brick-and-mortar shops, consumers are sensitive in not only the service and range of products in display, but whole business models and concepts behind the stores.

> As I am on vacation now, then, yesterday, as my husband was at work, then I went by myself, around all those places, I went to stores, such big brand stores like Cos and, &Other Stories and... other similar, then, those are....There can be many nice things there but, there is this side that, how ethically are they produced if they are such.... But also that side that, if there is just so much stuff, then, I how do I find the item that is for myself. That one should put a lot of time in it. To go around the whole place. I get this kind of... herd mentality [*laumasielu* Finnish] feeling there. When I have to go through the racks along with everyone else there. I get this kind of feeling as if I would be... I don't know, some kind of pig there. Amongst others. (Minna)

> [...] and then in my opinion it strongly tells of that here only that is thought about, how to get as big sales as possible and not the whole picture, that, this is actually not that interesting, even. If one thinks only from the consumer's perspective, not thinking about any ethical values or such, it is somehow really uninteresting that they have only thought about how to get as much [out of it] as possible, by small contribution as big profits as possible. This can already be seen from [the fact] that if enormous quantities are being sold really cheaply, that is just, well, there isn't any personality. Behind it. Maybe. If one thinks purely from a consumer's perspective. (Minna)

Particular shops from where one buys is an important structuring element within one's style.

> I have bought everything from UFF. [Laughs]. That, there are really fantastic clothes there when you really... and then when those sales arrive, those days, you know, what were they, those days of discounts... I go immediately there, you know, just to see what they have there and I have bought for my children and everyone, you know, who have asked for it, then I go and buy because they know, they trust my taste. (Avely)

4.2.4. Wardrobe management

When it comes to managing the wardrobe in order to facilitate day-to-day dressing, consumers had in principle two different strategies. One was to maximize the amount of combinations between individual items in the wardrobe and the other, to own such an extensive wardrobe that would cover all possible styles and combinations desired. The first strategy involved matching items with what was owned previously as a prerequisite for adding something new to the wardrobe (Minna, Saara) or refraining to certain cuts and colours to keep the wardrobe unified (Sirje, Terhi, Saara, Avely). The other strategy, going for an extensive wardrobe was opted for when the wardrobe was curated mainly by intuitive feeling rather than careful analysis and when the *repertoire of self* (discussed in Chapter 4.1) was more extensive (Rita). Putting together outfits within the wardrobe was also facilitated by keeping a certain aspect of one's style contained to very particular items, e.g. Sirje having all her boots and shoes in black.

Overall, the approach to wardrobe management differed with pre-matching being the more analytical and curation by feeling the more intuitive approach. The former relied on the consumer precisely knowing everything that is owned, while the latter relied on the consumer finding special items that "resonated" with her when shopping.

4.2.5. Creating outfits

Outfit creation was typically subjected to practical considerations such as weather and the usage context. However, the subjective, intuitive feeling, connection to "core self" and mood also influenced the choices, as was presented in Chapter 4.1. in connection to substance of style.

A further theme that emerged in connection to creating outfits was the amount of effort applied to getting dressed. Specifically, some respondents were very sensitive as not to appear having too much on, while not having as little as to feel "half-naked" was also

brought up. This aspect can be tied to the self's need for revealing and covering as was shown in Chapter 4.1.4.2.

> Well, maybe it could be such, that it would give this kind of stylish impression, but that it wouldn't be, I don't know if forced would be the right word, but.... That it would be this kind of casually stylish. That one would have stylish clothes but would look as if had only brushed teeth in the morning and had just grabbed something from the wardrobe. (Terhi)

> ...sometimes I use big earrings and then, I may out on, of course, even a few bracelets, along with these big earrings, but this kind of, typical [option] for me is that I have small earrings and something on my wrist. When I have nothing [on], then there is this kind of naked feeling, or, feeling half-dressed. So, earrings and something on the wrist is most typical. (Terhi)

> Yes. And then, maybe it is a little of bit of that, that one wouldn't be too, this kind of, stylish or... looking like a bank clerk... that there is a little bit of... well, I don't use, this kind of torn [trousers]... or, I do have one pair of such trousers, really old so they are torn, but then.... [one needs] something that tears [the impression] apart a little bit, that one wouldn't be... too chic... or too [polished].... (Terhi)

Sometimes consumers solved the issue of too much or too little by dividing aspects of their clothing where they are bolder versus where they are more reserved.

> Well, in shoes I do not restrain myself so particularly. That, my scale [of choices] is much broader. I may buy high heels and lean shows if I have a use for these. Or I might buy quite bulky shoes. And... I am in a way, bolder. Or then, more open with shoes [compared to clothes]. (Terhi)

4.3. Enablers of style

The substance of style, that, what is being expressed was presented in Chapter 4.1, and the processes of how the creation of style takes place, was discussed in Chapter 4.2. However, the connection between the substance and expression is not automatic or self-evident. This chapter discusses the prerequisites, resources, tools and capacities which enable putting that substance into practice, i.e., what the transition from substance to expression is contingent upon.

4.3.1. Identity work and maturation: working with core self and self-perceptions

Accessing and working with core self and self-perceptions can be considered as the key ways that allow developing personal sartorial style. Sartorial style is reported to have changed in different life stages, and often times a certain process of maturing, self-acceptance or self-knowledge is reported as being the cornerstone of personal style that feels good.

> Terhi: There is, probably if... Well, I am from Oulu, and then I studied at Rauma and then worked for a couple of years in Tallinn and then moved back to Oulu. Then I think at the point when life started to take shape a little bit, when [I] found this kind of, own place, then maybe... Not right away, but little by little.

> [Interviewer: So that it [finding own style] in a way connected to finding yourself... that if you found the other things in life, then it's as if [own style] comes [as well]...]
>
> Terhi: Yes! I perhaps started to rely on myself and be in good terms with myself, that, hey that, I am me and I am such and... that I didn't need to try so hard or try to pose as someone... That I found the way I feel good, what I am like and accepted it, so....

An important development brought out by those who expressed content with their current style was starting to **differentiate between liking something on others versus liking it on oneself.** This aspect was connected to gaining confidence.

> This, on the other hand, makes [one] too clumsy. For me, yes, these big sweaters don't work. I know, they are beautiful on others. But I myself don't want them. I just feel myself as a... snowman. Don't feel good. (Sirje)
>
> Probably it is that, there has been more of this kind of confidence, that maybe (I] do not listen to others anymore, not as much. That do not follow, what someone else has. That maybe I have also learned that, on that [other person] that looks good, but on myself maybe it wouldn't, or that, I do not enjoy myself in such clothes. (Terhi)

Meanwhile, identity work can also result in an understanding that seeking own style or satisfaction in one's clothing is altogether undesirable.

> [People] our age, they just, like, [for them] it is some sort of vanity or, something to hide your personality behind or... some inferiority complex that you have to adorn yourself or... being vain or...like, the culture is such that, I don't know. (Sirje)

This means that the connection to core self and self-perceptions can either facilitate expression of identity through sartorial style or hinder it.

4.3.2. Skills and capacities

As the informants reflected back on the development and organization of their personal style, much of it came down to developing one's knowledge, skills and capacities related to the different aspects of style.

4.3.2.1. Recognizing quality

The consumer being able to recognize quality that they are after is an important assumption in market economy. However, the ability to recognize and appreciate technical quality in clothing in terms of sewing and materials was not self-evident for the informants. It was often deemed as an especially important challenge for consumers for whom high quality materials was an important part of style (e.g. as part of style principles covered in Chapter 4.2.2). While this study did not measure such skills and knowledge per se, some informants clearly referenced classical rules of estimating fit of clothing and

had built their own style in connection to these rules. Some also evaluated brands based on their understanding of quality of their sewing.

> I [look] inside the garment as well, what it looks like from the inside. Because I know how to look, one who cannot sew, doesn't know how to look. I look what kind of seams there are inside. Just someone showed me, bought a dress, right, from Hansa Days in Tartu, that inner seam, the seam allowance was so small, that, it immediately breaks. A knit fabric, it just breaks. Well, I wouldn't have bought it, but she did, she was somewhere on the other side, quite far and just bought the dress, only at the hotel started to look and then, it was already too late. That, she should have showed it to me right away, I would have told her that the seam allowance was too small, that it would just break. (Rita)

> For sure it has an effect, that [I] like to do much by hand, that I generally have something, a knit work, at least one knitting project going on, or crocheting or something. Now sewing has really been cut back. When one has a small kid then there is not so much time for such. That one would have to sew at night. Then... I used to sew a lot more. And then, for sure when one... knows that... or let's say a seam, that what it would have to be like, it does for sure matter, when looking [at clothes] in the store, that has threads hanging about, then one does not feel like buying it. Also that that one knows the materials a little bit [more], then... (Terhi)

4.3.2.2. Ability to combine items and imagine whole outfits

Another important capacity for the consumer creating style is the extent to which she is able to use contents of current wardrobe in connection with new purchases, i.e. the ability to combine and match items. The sizes of wardrobes (although not explicitly asked for as such, but discussed in most cases) between the informants varied greatly: some saw it as ideal to own a large wardrobe and some, the opposite. However, the extent to which the person was able to use current wardrobe in connection with new purchases seemed to be very important to one's capacity to create outfits she felt good about. This skill included being able to put together time-relevant meaning of items, to play with fashion contexts (Chapter 4.3.4), time and timelessness (Chapter 4.2.2.1).

> But, for example, I bought this dress from the fifties, this kind of flowery, last summer, and I had some really beautiful red patent leather shoes, bought a long time ago, fit there perfectly. And I had bought from somewhere a really big wide sun hat. Also fit there perfectly. And I also had a pashmina, so that... I had, I bought a dress, but everything else I already had at home. (Rita)

The ability to combine was an important part of excitement and satisfaction some consumers expressed in relation to their style. For example, when commenting upon an attractive item seen on the Pinterest feed, a respondent immediately started to imagine possible combinations to use it with:

> Wow, such cool shoes! Really. Cool! Can you imagine, with white pants or white skirt. Wow! And I have like, this kind of, when I see something, I have everything starting to flow, that aha, what to wear it with or so (Avely commenting a pair of shoes that she picked for her board of dream style in Pinterest)

Connected to the ability to combine is the ability to imagine and execute whole outfits, piece by piece, by incorporating own skills, contacts, knowledge, imagination within the budget available.

> I like vintage, so that... I dressed myself like that, these I have sewn myself [points to elements in her outfit], this is from a vintage store in St. Petersburg, these gloves have been bought from a vintage fair, and the bag is from Spain. And it kind of fit the fifties style. That, in general I just mix, I sew myself, I buy more of those vintage pieces, these are, of rather high quality and in good condition re really expensive. Dresses are already like 100 euros and the larger numbers are quite rarely available. And then, some clothes and kind of this repro-clothes, made like, in the 50s style, or so, sometimes one can find them even in Estonia. In the summer I bought myself this flowery dress, which was completely a dress of the fifties. I like the style of the fifties and I like the style of the twenties, Charleston and that time. That I have sewn, by hand completely, one can say as haute couture, this Charleston dress from the twenties, which is of silk and it has tassels, it has rows of pearls, that this fabric is very expensive. Luckily I got it from Estonia, for sure a bit more cheaply. Then I asked, sewing it would have cost 300 euros. But since it could not really have been sewn by machine, then I just had to sew it with small stiches by hand. (Rita)

4.3.2.3. Ability to make good purchases

Furthermore, consumers repeatedly distinguished good purchases, which they are happy with from bad purchases that they (almost) never used or ended up not liking after all. Being able to make good purchases actually relevant for the consumers was seen as the central part of building a style. In relation to that, separating, structuring and managing one's purchases as useful versus not useful in serving the style was emphasised.

> Interviewer: Do you think your style changed... that [...] you completely renewed [...] your wardrobe after maternity leave or...
>
> Saara: [Let's say] not as much changed, but crystallized. That there was more of such that, I started to seriously ponder, what is me. And what I like, what I don't like, what I feel good in and what I don't feel good in. And then more and more I started to find what is mine. When earlier, I maybe had not really given it a thought. And for that reason, it had been this kind of a mess [*sekamelska* in Finnish].
>
> Yes, I would say the taste has remained the same, I just could not always execute it, in my own clothes. That I had more of those, that, I had been in the city shopping, and there had been such frustration that I just can't find anything, that I will just buy *something*. Then, because of that, there was no truly good purchases [*nappiosumia* in Finnish]. More of, kind of good, almost [the right thing]. And now I have actively tried to get rid of those. But this kind of, certain style or a red line or a taste has remained, I would say, the same. Now it only gets actualized more. (Saara)
>
> That I have now maybe become a little bit more effective, that, who I am, what do I do, what do I need it for, what do I want to get. That I have these kind of clear bounds that... when I am choosing something, then I think that – where would I go in it and can it be connected to other things and where does it fit and.... It can be beautiful, but then if.... If there are no places to go in it where... the style is such. (Sirje)
>
> Nowadays when I have as many clothes in the wardrobe that I pretty much remember them all, then I generally start to think the previous night what I will put on the next day. I do it when I wash teeth or the face or when going to sleep or... I mean, without going to the wardrobe. Just in the head go through combinations that what would I put and try to think what I have planned for the day, what would fit with those plans and then sometimes in the morning I have to think again, for example today since it was raining. (Saara)

> And this has been one of the greatest things that has happened after I started to rationalize my wardrobe, that I can do [putting together outfits] without actually going to the wardrobe, not to mention having to go through options in front of the mirror. (Saara)

> Earlier sometime before I had to do so, now I don't have to, now I can, just in my head figure out [*funtsia* in Finnish] what I put on and... I know what go together and I know most things go together. I don't even have to think that those pants and that shirt. I can just start by, for example, that I want that top and what bottom would I take with it. [Saara]

Meanwhile, being selective and dedicated to making "good buys" was achieved in different ways, sometimes simply by experience.

> But generally, I buy so, like the Finns say, *heräteosto* [spontaneous purchase]. That I just see. And then I think, do I need it. But I never go to the store that, now I'm buying or so... And then, when I see, I really do sometimes see something and I see it for the first time and I know that yes, this is for me, this is something I should have. (Rita)

Similarly, the scope and level of control over one's wardrobe differed greatly, while the extent to which the person was aware of what they owned greatly influenced their ability to make use of it.

> Saara: Well, maybe is not interested to the same degree as me. That for sure... maybe it was a little bit bluntly said that not everybody has their own style, that for sure everyone has something of their own, that what kind of colours and patterns and materials one has and from what types of stores one buys, this is something that most have just even for practical reasons. But then, I have given it a lot of thought that what kind of colours I have in my closet, what colours I don't have in my closet, and that, this colour would be cool to have but it doesn't fit anything I already have then I skip buying it and... all this kinds of things. Or, that one would count the clothes, or the money spent on clothes, or such. Or would even remember what one has. In one's own closet.
>
> Interviewer: Yes, so it is somehow very unconscious, on average, that....
>
> Saara: Yes. And probably similar to what I had before. That you just buy when you buy, what you happen to buy and then may forget, that hey, I already had this.
>
> Interviewer: That, at some point you got fed up with that, that it is so random....
>
> [Saara: Yes. Interviewer: The whole thing that...]
>
> Saara: Yes, I got fed up with that I have badly fitting clothes in my closet, I got fed up with that there is a lot of that I don't like, and such that don't with the other things and...

4.3.2.4. Ability to find items from the marketplace

Another thing that enables style for the consumer is her ability to find particular items from the marketplace. While this is largely contingent on what the shops actually have in their selection, it is also contingent on the person's ability to find it, by finding the appropriate sales channels.

> I just had a friend who said she was looking for near dark trousers for herself, but couldn't find them from anywhere. Out of tight fabric, well-fitting, the main set that there is, pants-skirt-jacket, you know. That you got to have those three things, but she said, she can't find. [That they are like... that something you can shorten the shirts and things with]. Stores are full of some kind of knits and sweaters, t-shirts, full of, some kind of tunics.... (Sirje)

Also the ability to spot suitable items from a particular store is different – and sometimes one's skills of editing finds makes a great practical difference.

> [...] Interviewer: And you just find...these things
>
> Avely: Yes, I find
>
> Interviewer: That, many do not...
>
> Avely: Yes, I have a good nose. I really do.
>
> Interviewer: That, it is very interesting that this... that those, concerning UFF that it is so different [for different people]. It is so incredible how people have it so differently...
>
> Avely: Yes, it is. "How do you find and I don't". I said, I don't know, that I just look so, for example, the length of pants, I look so that, since I have long legs, then I never find the right pants. O have to look around a lot and see... and, like that. But since I am also sort of like a seamstress that I look, okay, there is a hole here, that I can fix, you know. But I still ask for discount, that they again (give me a] discount [of] some 2-3 euros. With that bag it was the same [shows shoulder bag], a Tommy Hilfiger bag. That, wow, I am so pleased. I don't know, there was some kind of stain or what was there and I said, well hey, that, you see, this can't be washed off. "Joojoo, let's do it" [the deal]. And since I'm a [loyal] customer also, then I said, have my card, "no-no, we don't need the car, we know you". And once they said, we stayed to chat, they said that, yes, you could very well be a walking advertisement for UFF, like a model or so... [laughs] I said, well you see, everything is from your store. [Laughs]. That "wow"! This is so funny, yes. And we greet with the manager and... I always go to Malmi, they have the best choice, there.

Thus, ability involves a number of other issues such as the person's familiarity with brands, taste regimes, their own body measurements and preferences on cuts and silhouettes.

4.3.3. Knowledge of aesthetic objects and others

Besides identity work, understanding core self and working with self-perceptions, being aware of aesthetic objects and social stereotypes and meanings related to them also enable consumers to create style. This knowledge and context is typically given to consumers by media (e.g. TV-shows, style magazines), own social surroundings (e.g. work colleagues), brand communication and advertising, style role models and *taste regimes* (Arsel and Bean 2013). However, simply observing everyday life, for example in the street, was emphasized as an important source of meaning when creating personal style.

Furthermore, taste regimes as curated collections of market offerings and conceptualizations of aesthetic products (for example, style blogs or Instagram influencers) become very important for the consumer to understand *what would be possible for her*. This includes the question of what is available (brands and styles) but also, how to dress for a particular age or cultural context.

4.3.3.1. Interpretation of others' style

All informants stated to be interested not only in own style, but constantly paying attention to the way others dress, be it people on the street or in a work collective. Although for practical reasons, expressing own style, connecting to others and interpreting others' style are located in different sections within the current chapter on findings, it is argued that these are all interconnected. Furthermore, the things that are noticed on others govern what people expect others to notice on them, and thus, in creating style, interpreting and expressing can be seen as two sides of the same coin.

For example, in context of Sirje's own sartorial style, she stated she likes to use heels as "she is no barn woman", and a small handbag as "she is no housewife", making a certain distinction in her own social identity. Similarly, she reported multiple cases where she, as well as her friends (involuntarily, even accidentally, just by the "natural" way of looking at the social world) have interpreted a person's social position based on his or her appearance.

> I have myself failed by, you know, that there came with sweatpants and slippers some kind of.... well, it was my son's school director. I thought to myself, who is that ragamuffin [*pultsar* in Finnish] and I was look like down at him, and only when he greeted and said hi and opened his mouth, that what... it was embarrassing. To judge another person by the looks like that, is not quite right. (Sirje)

This means, as she herself differentiates herself socially through objects, she implicitly expects others to do it, too. The same connection can be seen not only in terms of status messages, but aesthetic outfits that grab one's attention in a positive way.

> And I did, use this, right in the beginning [of the style management process] this exercise when I tried to crystallize my own style. That, perhaps then I started to think that, people with what kind of style catch my attention in the street. And I used that as one signal showing what my own style could be like, then for example I paid attention for example people dressed in black or in very unadorned [*vähäeleisiin* in Finnish] outfits. Then I thought, maybe this is it. That if it interests me on the street that much, then maybe this is what I should have in my own closet as well. (Saara)

Meanwhile, interpretations of what meanings particular style elements may hold, can be rather subjective. For example, people who think or have experience of colours and what they might represent in their own clothing, see the connection between colour and mood intuitively.

> I remember from somewhere that the colour of one's clothes kind of tells about the person, what is internally like, how do I say, well, I give examples of myself. That when I do feel kind of sad and I've had a lot of difficulties, and hardships, then, I want to wear black, I want to be invisible... or so... But then, sometimes you just want to go and wear something beautiful, something that attract a little more attention, that is completely about what is.... How you feel or, what emotions you're having in you. That it all goes hand-in-hand, everything. I think so. (Avely)

4.3.3.2. Aesthetic objects and object-specific meaning

Ultimately, sartorial style is achieved by combining and using individual objects. In the study, consumers typically tended to discuss individual items as representatives of a well-known "classic" clothing category (e.g. a sheath dress, pencil skirt or a trench coat) and comment upon them through stereotypes and meanings related to those categories.

Cut, colour, material and the quality of material as the picture conveyed it also triggered interest. Besides category-related meaning, concrete pieces of clothing that were mentioned in the conversational interviews also drew meaning from brand, material, origin, price, colour, design language, all of which contributed to the item's ultimate meaning and feelings it provoked.

However, items and especially constellations of items (whole outfits) were both liked and disliked as they referenced social stereotypes relevant for the consumer (what Simmel would perhaps characterize as an *impersonal style*). For example, Sirje saw a small handbag as a means to associate with the stereotype of a lady, and disassociate from the stereotype of a housewife who needs to cook and shop for groceries for the whole family.

> Sirje: [...] Then, I am no housewife, I don't like to cook, and, I don't like to shop [for groceries] and then I have gone to eat at a set table for 20 years already. We have really healthy food there, and everything. Then, when I have a day off, then I just go eat out, so... That I don't need a big bag, where I would carry milk and bread home in. Interviewer: [*Laughing]* Yes. Sirje: That, in this way, it's like a *lady's handbag*.

Also, outfits worn by others were interpreted through familiar cultural stereotypes: an outfit worn by another person often grabs attention through the way it references a stereotype and helps to modernize or "reinvent" it. For example, Sirje as a woman in her fifties, especially likes how a character her age in a TV-show (Sirje from *Pilvede all*) dresses: and through her outfits implies how fiftysomething women nowadays are still young, active and adventurous.

> She's kind of minimal and very... feminine and sexy and... like one should be.... And these people are no young chicks. No one has a crop top and leggings or... or [maybe even] has, but they are matched so tastefully that.. I think this [character] Sirje, how she is dressed, is completely top notch. [...] Then I look that, phuff, cool! That, hey, a fifty-year-old woman is not old yet. Nowadays especially. That no one knits a sock or babysits grandchildren at home. That they travel, mingle, go out. (Sirje)

Meanwhile, some outfits were disliked for the very reason that they were too strongly connected to a stereotype, for example a full suit with no "personal touch" was perceived to make one "look like a bank clerk" (Terhi). For the most part, the informants did not want to mimic any cultural ready-made stereotype (Simmel's [2005] conceptualization

of *impersonal style*), but similarly to Simmel's theorization, the ideal was rather, to transcend or mix them.

Objects with shared meaning were also used to connect to others, for example, by using certain brands to make an impression within a social group where those brands are clearly appreciated. Meanwhile, for the informant, it was an issue of finding a common ground between what she herself liked or at least found acceptable and what those significant others liked.

> Silja: If there are people whose decisions and things matter, and you see that they are like.... like gravitate towards some style, then you sometimes just have to represent that, to be in the same boat with them. I can't explain it in any other way.
>
> Interviewer: Do you have something concrete in mind that would characterise this, what you just said, give an example... which helps you to... step into their boat. Some garment.
>
> Silja: There are some brands. Which are not, that I don't feel that if I were to look at these brands' collections that they would be like, of mine [my kind]
>
> Interviewer: For example?
>
> Silja: Some single items, yes.
>
> Interviewer: An example
>
> Silja: Well, for example some Ted Baker or French Connection or Michael Kors. That, this kind of things, something not mine at all, but some single items which I have found which I have bought myself. Tommy Hilfiger or... This kind of things. Something.
>
> Interviewer: So more like mainstream things, compared to what you yourself are...
>
> Silja: Yes. If I could afford myself anything in terms of money. If I didn't have monetary limits. Then I would buy all things from some small designers. Who make some cool whacky stuff. I wouldn't even look at the mainstream things. Still, those other things cost even more than the expensive brands. *(*Silja*)*

4.3.3.3. Meanings related to brands

Furthermore, particular meaning associated with particular brands was emphasized in various ways. Brands became personally relevant after owning and using certain items, which implies that strong connections form through experience rather than just image. Design and the brand was viewed as a certain type of unity and symbiosis, making brands relevant as curated style regimes. Brands also served as practical markers for quality (discussed in Chapter 4.2.2.3) and fit. The meanings associated with brands included the level of origin (for example, Marimekko was regarded by several informants to derive meaning from its Finnish origins) and its connection to fashion (Sirje viewed Susanne as a shop selling brands of *Parisian fashion*).

4.3.4. Fashion as a context and enabler of certain style elements

For the consumers, fashion was seen as providing a certain social context for one's style choices. Consumers perceived not being led by fashion, e.g. by sometimes consciously allowing own taste to contradict current fashion (e.g. an informant said to have chosen *the unfashionable* glasses, because she liked these more than the fashionable ones). Several informants reflected that they used to be much more driven by fashion in their youth.

> And then, at times it was so that, if others had something, then I absolutely had to have it as well and... That every decade I have dreamed about things that I wanted to have and tried to sew them myself and... but this... now I'm like, I have given up all those things. (Sirje)

Meanwhile, consumers saw that a broader fashion context either made it possible or impossible to wear certain more special, time-specific rather than timeless, items. Thus, fashion was seen as a sort of "intermediary filter" bringing in some style elements which one may choose to endorse at a particular point or which may deny other style choices altogether..

> At some point there were those trumpet-trouser legs, that I liked pants that were slim on the upper part and wider on the bottom. And now I feel that I just wouldn't know how to put such pants on. (Terhi about influences of fashion).

The impact of fashion was speculated upon, but not necessarily understood as a conscious influence.

> This is one of those mysteries that, is it going to be in fashion, currently in fashion or what, why do I pay more attention [to it] now than before. Earlier I, well, have just avoided all [things] flowery but now it just somehow attracts me. More. (Saara)

4.4. Personal sartorial style as a unity of clothing and person

Within the proposed model of creating style, it has been argued that style can be meaningfully analysed as substance, processes and enablers. However, for the consumer, this is a wholesome, continuous project, where all aspects connect naturally to others through attitudes and practices. In pre-study II it was asked from the consumers' perspective on what makes a person stylish. The findings (summarized Chapter 3.5.1) showed that for different people, different parts of the style model presented in this chapter are emphasized explicitly.

Thus, within their own accounts, consumers see the focus of style in different parts of the process - in the person, in the clothes, or in the connection between the person and the clothes. However, for practical considerations, for marketers interested in facilitating

consumers' personal style, it may be most useful to concentrate on what consumers express as bringing them satisfaction with style. In these regards, the interviews revealed that the "goals" of desirable personal style could be above all achieving 1) unity between clothing and person 2) covering lifestyle and identity needs 3) achieving ease in creating style. Furthermore, reaching unity between clothing and person often times was seen as bringing intuitive satisfaction and ease.

> Avely: This has come over time, kind of gotten reassurance that I do wear the right things, those that I like and suit me. That, I have thought that if something doesn't suit me, then I will not wear it. Yes. That a person has to carry things out. The same with jewellery. Yes. I can have all those rings and bling and everything I can have, but if it's too much then... well, my opinion again. That, yes.
>
> Interviewer: What is this carrying out for you?
>
> Avely: Well this carrying out is just so that, let's say, this stripe, if you put it on, it's not good. But when I put it on, it's just so right. This is carrying out. That you have to sort of, how do I put it... the clothes are like something characteristic to a person. Or something like that. That many already know that I don't have many other things in the closet but the dots and stripes. That this has come over the years, this kind of, individuality. But at the same time, black and white also suits me. That, again, it depends on where to go and all this. That, what kind of events and....
>
> Interviewer: Mhmh. Eeee. This carrying out, it something like the person and clothing getting together.
>
> Avely: Yes. That it's like a balance. Not like... you know. When I put on something pink and look in the mirror, I would think, horrible!
>
> Interviewer: Although, looking from afar, just from appearance, I would think it might suit you quite well-
>
> Avely: Yes, but I don't like it. Maybe also because I have just gotten used to my colours. But, I think I don't like. That it's just that, they have to be in balance, the person and her clothes and.... This is this, about the way a person carries the clothes out.

Even though entering at different parts of the process, ultimately, a considerable role within the style creation was played by intuition and the resulting style also rested upon sensing an intuitive unity.

One thing that was common for those who felt content with their style was that they considered achieving it every day to be easy. They had developed processes, rules and combinations which enabled them to enjoy their own wardrobe and getting dressed. Many reflected back that over time, through distilling style and their sartorial processes, achieving style has become *easy* over time.

> Sirje: Yes, [I have been looking], but it was not hard at all to put it together. I was packing the suitcase yesterday and I had all white, blue, black, some scarves to go along... I took some. One grey, one white, one darker [pair of] pants. And then I took all kinds of shirts.
>
> Interviewer: And everything fits

Sirje: Yes. And along some scarves to wrap and... [that's it].

5 DISCUSSION

While the connection between the material items, aesthetic qualities and symbolic meaning is nothing new in consumer research (Levy 1959, Csaba and Ger 2013, McCracken 1986) nor in common knowledge, the findings of the study above all illuminate how these connections are formed from consumers' individual sartorial consumption perspective. Compared to the fashion-centered view on sartorial consumption, the consumers' perspective emphasizes the importance of personal intuition (at various stages of consumption), developing personally meaningful processes and solutions that would organize consumption (what was called curation in the model presented in Chapter 4) and the role of psychological resources such as confidence. The fact that consumers develop different focus points to their processes by relying on different aspects of creating style, makes it a challenging practice for marketers to understand and build upon in a systematic way.

It has been brought out in research that self-narratives structure consumption (Giddens 1991, Miller 2001, Arnould and Thompson 2005) and that consumers have several hierarchical end-states towards which they consume (Bagozzi and Warshaw 1990), even if not always successfully. Still, consumption enablers have received less attention beyond the self-evident need for time and money. The style enablers as brought out here are closely related cultural capital, since both concepts include knowledge, taste and skills. However, cultural capital as a concept originally included practices (Bourdieu 1984), while it can be argued that taste in connection to practices should be considered dynamic and evolving rather than fixed and static (Arsel and Bean 2013). Furthermore, cultural capital when only focusing on knowledge about the social world and the taste hierarchies in it (as it was originally presented by Bourdieu), the individual reflexive self-knowledge and identity work does not fit under the term. Furthermore, arguably, cultural capital as a lens of understanding of the social world can still not be separated from understanding the self: the findings of this study also pointed that interpreting and evaluating the self and interpreting and evaluating others are very much connected.

Taste as an interpretive mechanism that can be built upon and leveraged through marketplace offerings was discussed in Chapter 2 and it was a key objective of the study, to understand how taste is practiced. However, in the interviews, the taste aspect itself within creating style was not particularly emphasized by consumers, but was treated as something natural, embedded in oneself, that one has just by definition. Rather, it was

emphasized by the informants that the challenge is not as much as not having *enough taste*, but rather that it is hard to 1) really listen to own taste 2) separate what one likes on self and others and 3) actualize taste in practice by organizing and managing practical processes (such as buying, for example not resorting to compulsive behaviour or, the challenge of having a clear enough structure in one's wardrobe). While sociologically, philosophically and aesthetically there concepts like poor taste or good taste may be useful, for an individual consumer, the valence of taste as such did not appear to be particularly problematic. The process of creating style revolved around being able to embrace one's taste (rather than others') rather than to submiss it under a certain understanding of "good" which the person may find outside of oneself. Similarly, consumers treated fashion more like an opportunity (that enables wearing certain outfits), rather than authority, or, as Thompson and Haytko (1997) describe, a lived hegemony.

In Chapter 4, a three-way model was proposed to create the substance of personal sartorial style, i.e. interaction and integration of the self, others and objects. This model is somewhat parallel to the interpretation of Simmel (1957, 2005) who regarded fashion as a mediator between self and others. However, Simmel's perspective presented it on an abstract philosophical level, without a clear model or data behind it. Furthermore, he looked at it from a sociological angle, on how fashion connects and affiliates individuals with groups. Here, the emphasis is on the person as an agent, i.e. how a person may or may not do so and what the tools are for doing so.

Another way of looking at present findings is in context of being, having and doing (Belk 1988, Sartre 2012). The substance of style (relating to RQ1, i.e. what style is based on) is mostly concerned with being, the question of who am I, in connection to what one knows about self, objects and others. Meanwhile, managing the wardrobe answers that same question in terms of doing and having (i.e. from the perspective of RQ2 and RQ3, how the consumer creates personal style and how he uses aesthetic objects in doing so). However, being, having and doing was not used as a central theoretical underpinning in this study, because 1) it did not have a place for style enablers, i.e., the question what makes it possible to build a bridge between being, doing and having 2) doing has been mostly used as to represent the (types of) activities one undertakes that define self, rather than everyday practices, which was more aimed for when inquiring about creating style. However, it can be argued that based on present findings, the being and doing aspects might still be used and extended based on current findings: to include layers. For

example, the being level might include layers such as core-self, self-perceptions, social self or persona (e.g. being a lawyer) while the doing level might include both lifestyle-level doings (e.g. working as a lawyer), as well as everyday practices (e.g. dressing as a lawyer). Furthermore, in context of studies on extended self (Belk 1988), it can be argued that the connection between self and possessions (which as such relate to all of the three, being, doing and having) is mediated 1) by the consumer's resources, i.e. what else she has, knows and 2) reflective work on self, others and objects. Furthermore, the latter can be seen as what Csikzentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton called *self-cultivation* that is the ultimate pursuit of the consumer (1981). However, the extended self as a concept of its own, without any connecting processes that describe how the self is extended and how the extensions are managed, arguably, is too static to understand consumption, which consists of processes and activities (Holt 1995).

A further theoretical issue touched upon in this study in the theoretical framework was the question of Diderot unity (McCracken 1986), as coordinated, symbolically consistent constellations of consumption objects. While it was not inquired about directly in this study, the issue of unity came very much into question when discussing individual outfits as an issue of having just the right amount of a particular style-related nuance, e.g. of neatness vs bohemia, right amount of coverage, of jewellery etc. Indeed, the question of balancing individual items within a given constellation can be seen as the central challenge in creating style and what the final result is most contingent upon – a viewpoint also emphasized by Simmel (2005). While the Diderot unity as a concept has been used to imply matching items under one lifestyle, type, or level of exclusivity (McCracken 1986), for individual consumers it seemed to be more about an issue of managing stereotypes and cultural meaning, such as avoiding a certain look (not looking like a bank clerk) or endorsing an alternative take on an old debate (what it means to be a woman). Therefore, Diderot unity from the perspective of personal style is not primarily about owning and using items with a similar status-profile, but rather, putting together constellations of objects that would liberate self from unwanted social stereotypes or help reinvent them against such stereotypes. That interpretation is very close to Thompson and Haytko's (1997) conceptualisation of consumers' individual fashion discourses that negotiate between personal and social meaning. Even more so, Simmel's (2005) argumentation about fashion versus style points to the same understanding: fashion is about reproducibility (stereotypes), while style, in the case of an individual, a system of meaning with the person creating it in the center. Therefore, Diderot unity within personal style seems more centered around the individual's own systems of meaning

than status. Also here, there may be several layers of unity, such as the unity within the context of an outfit or unity in context of a wardrobe. In the light of this, one might argue, that status as such is only one aspect within such cultural stereotypes and it is rather short-sighted to focus just on status when interpreting consumer's consumption projects within constellations that strive for symbolic consistency.

In terms of Holt's (1995) consumption processes of experiencing, integrating, producing and play, sartorial consumption touches upon all of these categories. In creation style, there is an element of experiencing – just observing, tying objects with categories and stereotypes. Particular owned aesthetic objects are integrated with self. Putting together outfits and wearing them was for some consumers a process of play of reaching out to others. Furthermore, creation of style as such was ultimately a process of producing (outfits and meaning), sometimes literally (consumers sewing their own clothes). However, the study showed that instead of seeing all of these activities as a given, a natural part of a consumption process, each of these has some pre-conditions for success – the more one knows, the more one can experience, etc. Furthermore, these activities, although categorized in great detail by Holt (1995), are only the final result of how a consumer as an agent 1) wants to consume and 2) is capable of consuming. Thus, within a consumption process, activities outlined by Holt (1995) can be considered as final-stage phases, how consumption is being "expressed", while it is preceded by other activities such as gathering knowledge and influences and working on the self.

In this study, taste was looked at in a broad and inclusive level, that is, it was viewed as an interpretive mechanism that is in continuous interaction and development throughout consumption, contingent upon upbringing, education and occupation (Bourdieu 1984, Purhonen et al 2014), personality (Hoyer and Stokburger-Sauer 2011, Myszkowski and Storme 2012), life experiences and social milieu (Venkatesh and Meamber 2008), market offerings (Arsel and Bean 2013), art (Venkatesh and Meamber 2008, Dickey 1971), knowledge and experience (Hoyer and Stokburger-Sauer 2011). However, this study also found that besides the unifying structure given to consumption by taste, taste is supported by analytical processes (managing one's wants and needs), intuition and psychological resources such as confidence. Thus, while taste determines the inner likings and resonance with certain types of consumption objects, there are many supporting factors which enable putting that taste to practice. Thus, taste on the one hand, enables consumption, but on the other hand, needs to be enabled by further capabilities and resources.

Another aspect of taste that was revealed in the study was its connection to (calendar) time: taste should not be considered as a consumer-specific, independent mechanism, but as Hoyer and Stokburger-Sauer (2011) bring out, taste includes a connection to a certain time-and-place -specific shared *Zeitgeist*. Therefore, a certain creative connection to the present moment is required of taste to be able to achieve meaning. This came out especially with the consumer's discussions on (surface) fashion and timelessness and how fashion makes certain meaning possible. Furthermore, consumers connected meaning in relation to shared cultural stereotypes and self (such as being a fifty-something woman in Finland in 2017) to *processual* or time-related aspects in one's own life, such as evolving (understanding something), maturing (as a person), changing (of what feels good, appropriate or desirable). Thus, taste, in addition to being a cumulative instrument that is shaped by the totality of one's previous experience, seems also to be particularly time-sensitive and grounded in time. Time is important both in terms of outward, shared calendar time, as well as one's own changing within and interaction with it.

While aesthetic and symbolic consumption has been shown to be interrelated (Venkatesh and Meamber 2008), how they are integrated in an individual's consumption process is less understood. The very aesthetic experience is related to understandings of symbolic qualities present in the experience: for example, in case of sartorial items, such as dresses or skirts, various meanings about where to use it with, with whom, and what kind of message it would give, were all considered in tandem. In the light of these findings it would seem that the consumer considers an item aesthetically in an intuitive, implicit way. In the case of (fashion) brands, the symbolic meaning of the brand and the aesthetic perception of brand's product become intertwined.

Another interesting aspect are various contradictions for the person as agent, in terms of what is strived for in one's personal style. Consumers need both acceptance and certain feedback of others as well as uniqueness and the autonomy of building their style "on their own terms". An example of uncompromising striving for uniqueness and breaking out of the ordinary and its implications for the consumer is given by the popular blog Manrepeller (mentioned as a style inspiration source by one of the respondents in pre-study 1), in which the concept relies on the idea that women nowadays, for themselves, may like styles that men "by instinct" may find unappealing, thus creating an challenging conflict of interest for the women who do also want to be liked by men as well. These kinds of tensions were well evident in the consumers' accounts of creating personal style,

e.g. when an informant expressed the conviction that she wears only what she likes and does not care for what others think, but ended up changing her wardrobe to make the husband happy. Furthermore, it can be argued that when creating personal sartorial style, the consumer needs to manage and solve such conflicts in by careful balancing and fine-tuning: having just the right amount of the particular desired meanings, of very particular nuance and combinations. This makes a personal style a very precise process of seeking balance between opposites, e.g. in terms of revealing and covering or bohemia and neatness.

Finding new insight towards sustainability was brought out as part of research approach. Consistent with previous research (Pookulangara and Shephard 2013, McNeill and Moore 2015), consumers did not present sustainability as the primary choice governing their consumption, but rather, their consumption itself supported and was integrated sustainability-related issues in various ways, e.g. by emphasizing quality of sewing and materials and being very selective about pieces and styles that are bought, being able to mend and alter clothes. Thus, sustainability in relation to style was not necessarily sought directly, but rather, carried out through related principles and skills. Furthermore, based on current findings, it is argued that the actual behaviour versus what was said or not said about sustainability should be clearly differentiated. There may be consumers that actually consume in a highly sustainable way but not emphasizing it at all, while it is possible that others think they are trying to be sustainable and even identify themselves as highly ethical and conscious consumers but actually produce more negative environmental and social impact. The difference does not come from words, but actions.

5.1. Managerial implications

The implications of the study for practitioners include both pointing out some particular problem points of consumers in connection to market resources but also new conceptual insight in how to manage offerings related to sartorial consumption.

First, consumers are very much interested in achieving ease when creating their personal sartorial style. Just offering a wide selection of fashion puts the burden of reduction to the consumer, which increasingly pushes the consumer to consider only relevant offerings and limit oneself in terms of brands and stores. This means that conceptually, understanding particular customers and pre-curating the offering accordingly becomes especially important. Not every customer wants to see the whole range of products, but rather, the system of how to apply consumer-specific filters and curation criteria is

crucial. The filters proposed here include levels of principle (ethics of sourcing and production), practical consideration (cuts) as well as time context (how fashion sensitive a particular consumer is).

Another implication is the need to understand and manage offering by category. Consumers are selectively interested in different categories and hold preference for categories within their own wardrobe. Thus, not all categories are equally appealing, and it would be smart to distinguish oneself according to category and use appealing categories to build a strong connection to own customers.

However, as was pointed out by Levy (1959), as consumers intuitively gravitate towards to what they like, not towards what they need, there are plenty of uncovered needs within wardrobes. This is especially relevant, as the consumers most of all restrict their buying based on their perceived needs. Furthermore, needs become needs i.e. unfulfilled slots in the wardrobe, because they are categories that are ignored. In relation to differential treatment of categories within their own wardrobe, there are further opportunity to be able to offer the consumer items that they need but are for some reason not able to pro-actively seek out (e.g. in this study, rainy weather apparel, underwear and home wear were given as examples). Furthermore, understanding own needs is tricky, and even that could be perhaps systematically facilitated by market consultants. In this case, an estimation of needs, the lacking aspects of one's wardrobe and things one considers having enough of, would be mutually beneficial starting point within a consumer-seller relationship setting.

However, when offering the work of stylists or style consultants, it is important to keep in mind the fact how precise, sensitive and deeply intuitive a person's connection with own sartorial style may be. Thus, instead of offering general, outward solutions or combinations, it is crucial to leave room and give attention to the personal perception of what is "just right". Furthermore, the view developed in context of this study implies that complete sudden makeovers could not be a solution for creating a satisfying personal style, as creating style is a deeply integrative and intuitive process that develops and matures along with the person herself. However, "makeovers" may still be attractive in context of expanding the "repertoire of self", i.e. it may help the consumers to believe that a greater variety of styles is possible for her in addition to what she is aware of. However, for developing personal style, the work of stylists could focus more on opening up technical details of style, expand and leverage the consumer's style enabling resources, rather than do the work of creating style *for* her. Furthermore, stylists could

possibly help distinguish what consumers like on self versus what consumers like on others, a key capacity mentioned as contributing to creating personal style.

In terms of brand relationships, a very important strategic goal is to be able to sell individual pieces that which the consumer consider as a successful purchase. This creates the strongest feeling towards a brand and entices to keep following the brand's future offerings and collections. For that, it might be helpful to do post-purchase follow-up research and keep better track of which items successfully served the customer in his/her life after purchase, and then, develop insight on how to match specific objects and consumers. Furthermore, the role of post-purchase insight and service could be of crucial strategic importance in becoming more integrated to the consumers' style creation processes.

Another implication is to use possibilities to create situational meaning for consumers in connection to individual items that allows consumers to create stories of the objects specific to themselves. For example, a consumer regarded the name day of Terhi (as she shared that first name with the shoe designer Terhi Pölkki, from whom she wanted to buy the shoes) as a factor which made the shoe purchase and the shoes purchased more meaningful for her, as the designer had added a greeting card with her name in the box. Thus, such, to some extent arbitrary connections (in terms of the items as such, can be used to leverage the personal connection to the consumer is a source of meaning.

Moreover, one of the barriers that keep consumers on actualizing personal sartorial style is a conflict of how one perceives one's current lifestyle versus what one thinks it should be in order to wear the clothes one likes. Related to this, it is worth questioning, whether an over glamorous imagery of clothing makes customers perceive it as not appropriate for their own "real life". Therefore, marketers should approach depicting glamour and real life through careful consideration.

As consumers with different types of curation logics approach search for new products in completely different ways, it is very important to follow how consumers find their way to brands, shops and items not only as through the often-asked question on "where did you hear from us", but how customers shop and search for clothes in general. Some customers know exactly what they are looking for, while for others, browsing and forming spontaneous intuitive connections is an integral part of search. Thus, different customers would benefit from different service.

Overall, sartorial consumption can be viewed as a long term process of learning about a field, similar to food, nutrition and recipes. Involving learning about self, learning about clothes, brands and social context. As in food, many people might agree that food should be tasty and nutritious. In clothing, many would agree clothes need to be beautiful and of high quality. So, emphasizing quality as such, understandably, sounds like a cliché. Instead, what is more important is how consumer perceives it would be possible for her to actually achieve quality, how easily, at what cost, how realistic is it for her to master quality (similar as in food, arguably, the healthy and nutritious has become easier, trendier and more widespread in the Western world as the supply side has made it easier to achieve through innovations and conceptual changes). The consumer's own route to quality varies and sometimes consumers give up on quality because they perceive it to be too difficult (similarly as with nutrition). Thus, the ability to communicate and facilitate the route to whatever a customer perceives as quality, is crucial, also to build the connection of clothing and personal style. Thus, one of the most promising ways of becoming a valued, powerful partner for the consumer creating personal sartorial style is to become integrated to the consumer's style enabling resources (such as knowledge about a product category). For example, a shoe brand selling premium quality Chelsea boots could become a reference point on what good Chelsea boots are by opening up what is premium quality in that category: what kind of stitching, materials and details to look for when evaluating a pair of Chelsea boots. In that sense, it is important to crystallize for the consumer what a product really entails, in the same way wine expert can see red wine is not just *red wine*, but can also be evaluated in terms of grape varietal, origin, year, producer, taste nuance etc. While consumers may perceive subtle differences in more or less detail intuitively, becoming conscious of such distinctions makes one more clearly perceive the value and thought processes behind products.

5.2. Limitations and future research suggestions

The processes of creating style such buying, creating outfits and managing the wardrobe were not studied directly and thus, it is possible that some relevant information is missing or presented inaccurately by relying on the consumers' own accounts of it. Actual situations of purchase and post-purchase, factors like the extent of wardrobe, need for different styles across different life situations were not investigated. Thus, while this study used interview as the main method of inquiry, studying actual concrete choices related to style (in shopping, wardrobe management and creating outfits) would give a more practical understanding of how consumers create style.

This study considered style as a subjective consumer-specific issue and no particular measurement of the degree or kind of personal sartorial style was used. However, style could be looked at against or in context of some external standard, for example by including interpretations of style professionals or in comparison to fashion magazines of the time, or, within subsets of consumers from different generations.

Also, while this study approached style through a single snapshot in time, longitudinal research on development of personal style could be highly relevant. This would enable studying more specifically processual aspects of style: the maturation of self, increase of knowledge, as well as the relationship between fashion and personal style, all of which were of great importance in creating style.

Furthermore, as this study argued that consumers selectively build style based on different inter-relationships within the style creation process (presented in Chapter 4), but the study included a small subset of customers, a larger quantitative survey could be formed to understand whether different approaches to style creation can be detected across consumers, which could be a useful basis for market segmentation and creating actionable style typologies.

Another avenue for further research would be to illuminate how are aesthetic goods interrelated, i.e. sartorial style's connection to home decoration, art, music etc. other aesthetic categories (Hoyer and Stokburger-Sauer 2011: cross-category aesthetics, field-specific vs general taste, Peltoniemi 2015) and the connection between everyday aesthetics vs art aesthetics (Venkatesh and Meamber 2008) could be illuminated further. While this study did indeed point that the categories are interrelated, also in this matter, market segmentation beyond sociological taste hierarchies could be useful.

Also, sartorial consumption as a form of aesthetic consumption could be further connected to the studies on value. Aesthetics on the whole has been typically been associated with hedonic value (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982, Hoyer and Stokburger-Sauer 2011). However, as there are links between aesthetics and consumer values (Desmet et al 2003), aesthetics and identity (Miller 2001) as well as aesthetic and social status (Bourdieu 1984, Purhonen et al 2014), the types of value aesthetic goods may provide seems to be broader. Therefore, it might be useful to inquire how taste and style facilitate the creation of these complex types of value from the individual's perspective. Furthermore, by including questions of money and satisfaction, as well as consumption among consumers with different budgets would bring further understanding regarding

creating style, what enables it and what creates value or satisfaction from the viewpoint of the consumer.

In connection with *repertoire of self*, i.e. the consumer's need to be "true to self" versus to act out roles and expand stylistic possibilities of self, it would require further research, to what extent these motivations conflict or connect.

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APPENDIX 1 INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview guide

1) Introduction/warmup/"grand tour" question: informant telling about herself

   - How would you describe yourself and your life now? (English)
   - Miten kuvailisit itseä? Voisitko kertoat vähän itsestä, omasta elämästä (Finnish)
   - Kuidas kirjeldaksid iseennast ja oma elustiili? (Estonian)

2) Starting discussion on style with a lead-in question

- Describe your personal style: how do you like to dress? (English)
- Miten kuvalisit oma tyyliä, mitä tykkäät pukea päälle? (Finnish)
- Kuidas kirjeldaksid oma stiili - milliseid riideid Sulle meeldib kanda? (Estonian)

3) Conversation following the topics

   BUYING

   INSPIRATION

   INFLUENCES, DEVELOPMENT

   SATISFACTION

   BRANDS

   STYLE DETAILS AND ELEMENTS

   TODAY'S OUTFIT

4) Creating Dream Style board in Pinterest and discussing the feed and selections

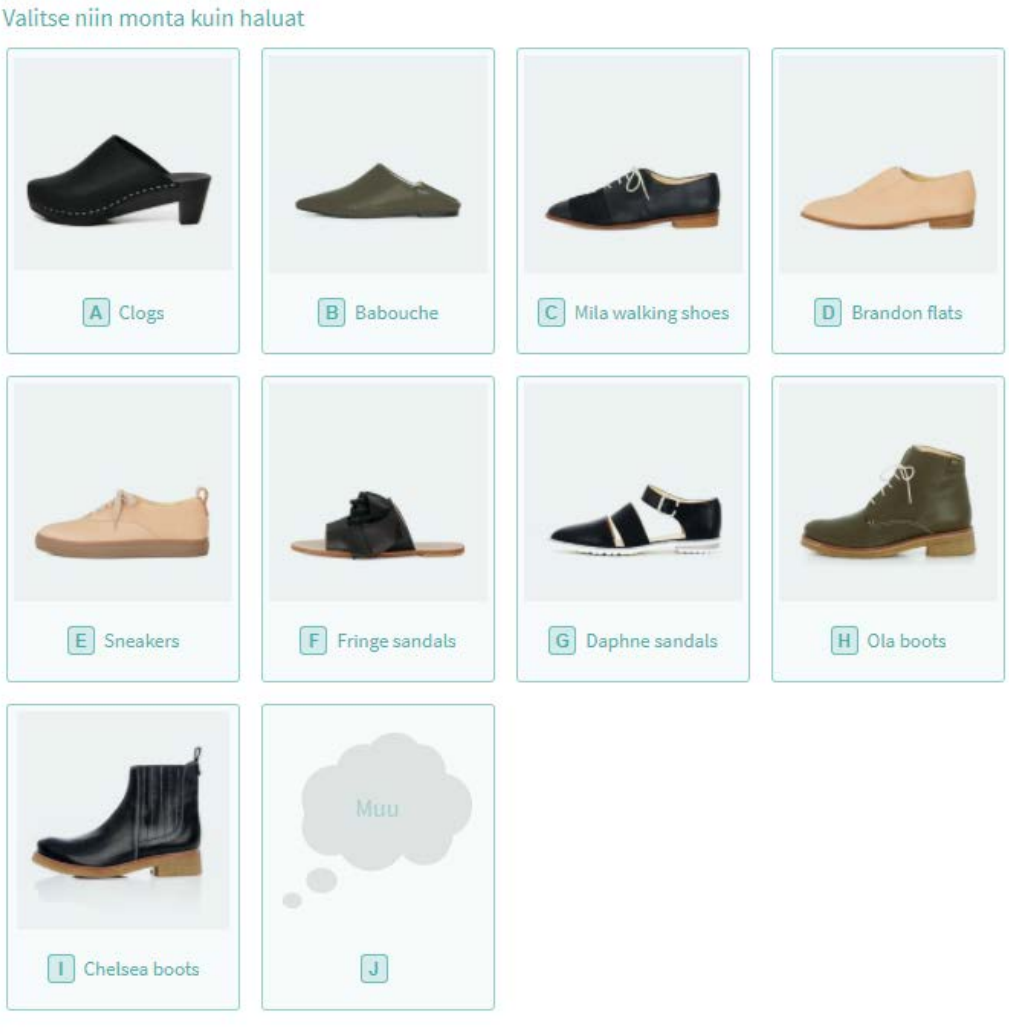
RQ1: What is consumers' personal sartorial style based on? RQ2: How do consumers create their personal sartorial style? (resources used, taste role models, inspiration, practices)	What do you typically think of when you buy clothes (shoes, accessories)? How do you usually buy clothes? Where do you shop for and how? Where do you find inspiration regarding what you want to wear? Who do you admire in terms of style? How often do you notice what other people wear? What have other people said about your style (compliments)? What has influenced your style as it is now? What are you happy with, what are you struggling with in relation to your style? How happy are you with your wardrobe, what makes it work or not work for you?
RQ3: How do consumers use aesthetic objects in connection to their personal style?	Which brands do you typically buy? (going into detail) What brands do you like (why)? What kind of cuts do you like? (going into detail) How do you use accessories? Is there some style element in particular that you like to wear? If you think about what you are wearing today, how did you put this outfit together? Where is it from? How do you see the elements in the outfit? What is your dream style? Selecting and commenting items and outfits in Pinterest. Discussing selected items and outfits technically (cuts, fabrics, silhouettes etc.) and in terms of meaning (message, appeal, story etc.).

APPENDIX 2 TERHI PÖLKKI SHOE MODELS

Screenshot from pre-study I online questionnaire (carried out through Typeform at ineskuusik.typeform.com)

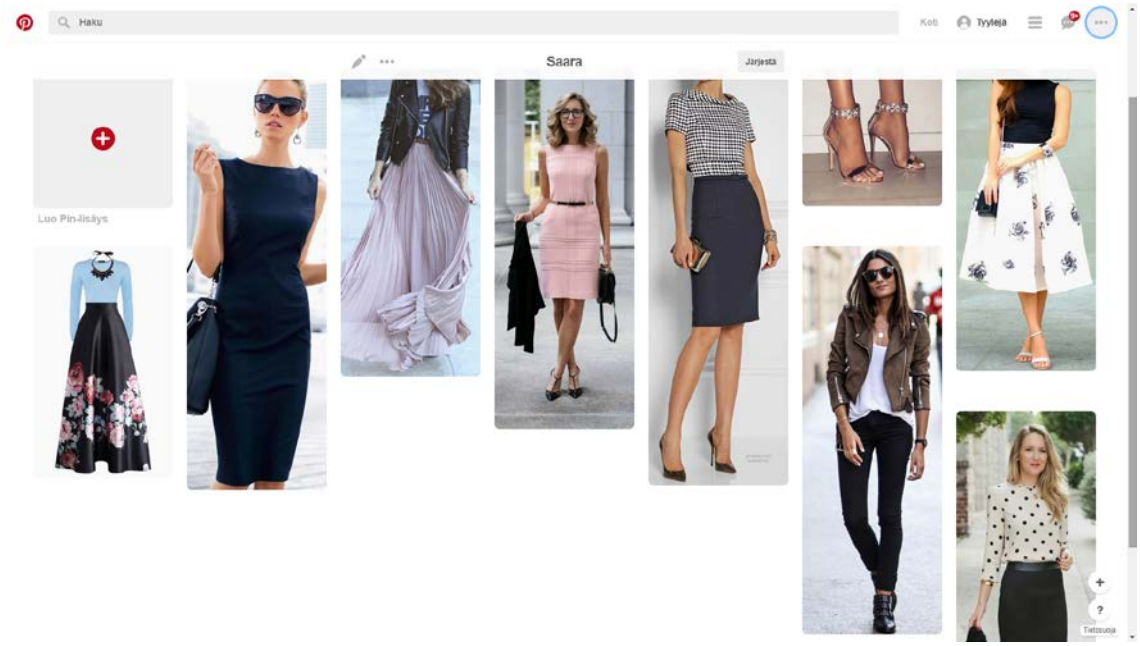
2 → Mitä Terhi Pölkki -kenkiä omistat?

Valitse niin monta kuin haluat



APPENDIX 3 DREAM STYLE PINBOARDS

Example of a dream style board on Pinterest



Rest of the style boards can be found at https://fi.pinterest.com/tyylej/