



The education of sustainable consumers:
An analysis of sewing education and disposal activity

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Sustainable consumption has been an area of research since the 1990s (Jackson, 2004) and researchers have examined the acquisition, maintenance, and disposal of apparel products (Winakor, 1969). Consumers' motivations vary for why they consume new products. However, there has been a trend in reusing and re-purposing apparel products with the popularity of social media sites like Pinterest. The awareness, exposure, and education of how to sew may affect consumers' sustainable disposal of apparel products. However, many family consumer science or home economic classes in secondary schools have seen severe budget cuts (Washington Post, May 17, 2010). Because of these budget cuts, high school graduates may not have been exposed to basic sewing skills. These ongoing curriculum changes may affect Baby Boomer, Generation Y, and Generation X's basic sewing skill that may lead to different sustainable disposal activities. The increase of throwaway fashion and overconsumption of apparel products has contributed to the cost reduction and overall expansion of cheap fashion, which leads to damaging environmental and societal global implications (Stern et al, 1997).

Sustainable consumption has been investigated as an aspect of consumer behavior from pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase (Jacoby et al, 1977). However, the disposal component and consumers' motivations is still a relatively new area of research. The final stage of post-purchase for consumer behavior involves the re-use, re-cycle or discard or destroy (Jacoby et al, 1977) of apparel products. The specific objectives of this study were to investigate the following (a) to determine if consumers' machine and hand sewing skills are affected by sewing education, owning a sewing machine, and/or generational age group, (b) to determine if sewing education and owning a sewing machine are affected by generational age group, (c) to determine if disposal activities are affected by consumers' sewing education, machine or hand sewing skills, and/or generational age group. The results of this study could be enlightening and have implications for education. Thereby slowing down the consumption of new apparel products and extending the life of consumers existing apparel products.

Data were collected from a national online survey collected in July 2012. A demographically balanced, representative panel of U.S. households was recruited by a marketing research firm, specializing in consumer survey data collection. The marketing research firm screened for females, ages 18 and older, as women tend to spend more hours per week performing unpaid household work, especially in laundering and sewing activities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). An email was sent out to the panel asking to participate in the online survey with incentives provided and 502 usable surveys were returned. The descriptive statistics of the study's sample and U.S. population were comparative.

The data were analyzed using both chi-square and regression to achieve the study's objectives. First, a chi-square analysis was used to examine the dependent variables of disposal activity (repurposing or using as rags), sewing education, and owning a sewing machine and the independent variable of generational age group (baby boomers, generation Y, and generation X). Next, a regression analysis was used to examine the dependent variables of machine sewing skills and hand sewing skills (sewing on a button, hemming a garment, and repairing a garment) and the independent variables of sewing education, owning a sewing machine, and generational age group.

Significant differences were found for disposal activity, sewing education, and owning a sewing machine for baby boomers using chi-squared analysis. The regression analysis indicated sewing education, owning a sewing machine, and age groups were significantly related to machine sewing skills, sewing on a button, and hemming a garment. However, sewing education and owning a sewing machine did not have a significant effect on repairing a garment.

The findings indicate that both baby boomers and generation X practice sustainable disposal practices of repurposing apparel products and/or using as rags. This may be related to both baby boomers and generation X's positive relationship to sewing education, owning a sewing machine, and higher machine and hand sewing skills. Generation Y had a negative relationship with machine and hand sewing skills. Implications from the study's results support the importance of family consumer and home economic education in schools, so that students can learn basic sewing skills in order to practice more sustainable disposal practices of repurposing apparel products and/or re-using for rags. There are generational indications from baby boomers and generation X, who were given basic sewing skills, were more likely to practice sustainable disposal practices, where generation Y who were most affected by family consumer and home economic budget cuts were less likely to practice sustainable disposal practices.

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