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IS ETHICAL FASHION THE ONLY SOCIALLY APPROVED FASHION? A VISION OF ANTI-CONSUMERIST FUTURE IN THE BEHAVIOUR OF FASHION CONSUMERS

ETHICAL FASHION JAKO MODA JEDYNIE AKCEPTOWALNA SPOŁECZNIE? WIZJA ANTYKONSUMPCJONISTYCZNEJ PRZYSZŁOŚCI W ZACHOWANIACH KONSUMENCKICH NA RYNKU ODZIEŻOWYM

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Summary: This article presents a number of significant issues pertaining to how fashion consumers function in the field of ethical fashion. It is based on Polish and foreign literature of the subject and the findings of earlier qualitative studies – FGI, discourse analysis, and quantitative studies – the standardized interview questionnaire. Part one provides a discussion on the contemporary trends in consumer behaviour that fall within the spheres of anti-consumerism and deconsumption. Part two is based on the findings of a qualitative study conducted within the National Science Centre grant project, which explored how Polish fashion consumers perceive ethical fashion in the light of interdisciplinary fashion studies. Discourse analysis is also used to explore the sphere of fashion in Poland. For analysis purposes, respondents' statements were categorized according to certain strategies, which are indicative of their consumer behaviours in the context of ethical fashion.

Keywords: ethical fashion, consumerism, consumer behaviour, fashion studies.

Streszczenie: W artykule poruszono istotne kwestie związane z funkcjonowaniem konsumentów odzieży w sferze *ethical fashion*. Artykuł oparto na studiach literatury zarówno polskiej, jak i zagranicznej, a także wynikach badań pierwotnych jakościowych – FGI, analizie dyskursu oraz badaniach ilościowych – kwestionariuszu wywiadu o znacznym stopniu standaryzacji. Omówiono w nim współczesne trendy w zachowaniach konsumentów miesz-

czące się przede wszystkim w sferze antykonsumpcjonizmu, a także dekonsumpcji. Część tekstu oparto na wynikach badań jakościowych realizowanych w ramach grantu badawczego Narodowego Centrum Nauki, które dotyczyły opinii o *ethical fashion* i świadomości polskich konsumentek w tym zakresie w świetle interdyscyplinarnych badań mody. Posłużono się tu również analizami dyskursu dotyczącymi sfery mody w Polsce. Na potrzeby analizy wypowiedzi badanych skategoryzowano według pewnych strategii, które wskazują na zachowania konsumentek w kontekście *ethical fashion*.

Słowa kluczowe: ethical fashion, konsumpcjonizm, zachowania konsumentek, badania mody.

1. Introduction

Ethical fashion has begun to enter the discourse of fashion. People pay increasing attention to the stories behind particular t-shirts, dresses or pairs of trousers. Some of these stories are about the degradation of natural environment caused by garment production and the pollution it creates. Others tell a tale of developing countries where workers are exploited in clothes factories, or of the health risk posed for both those who manufacture clothes and those who wear them. Ethical fashion represents an approach to clothes design, supply and production that seeks to maximise the profit for individuals and communities, while also minimizing its adverse impact on the environment. Within this approach, the ethical aspect goes beyond mere idleness and refraining from causing harm, instead focusing on being actively engaged in fighting poverty, providing people with sustainable livelihood, and bringing adverse effects on the natural environment to the minimum. The key features of ethical fashion are [<http://www.ethicalfashionforum.com>]: countering fast, cheap fashion and damaging patterns of fashion consumption; defending fair wages, working conditions and workers' rights; supporting sustainable livelihoods; addressing toxic pesticide and chemical use; using and/or developing eco-friendly fabrics and components; minimizing water use; recycling and addressing energy efficiency and waste; developing or promoting sustainability standards for fashion; resources, training and/or awareness-raising initiatives; and promoting animal rights.

2. Disenchantment with consumption and anti-consumerist trends in the world of fashion

Growing numbers of consumers become disenchanted with the world of contemporary, excessive and unjustified consumption, and how it impacts on society. They are also increasingly taking a range of attitudes and behaviours against consumerism, including resistance, protest, boycott, involvement in countercultural movements and deconsumption [Shaw, Riach 2011 pp. 1051-1067].

Contemporary anti-consumerism is on the rise, which comes with a wide array of ethical and political attitudes, while also affecting consumers' everyday choices by

employing critical discourses on the market. It can be found where 'small, mundane decisions' are means to anchor the subjectivity in the constructed and strongly mediated narrative of life, community and identity [Binkley 2008, pp. 599-623]. The liquidity and uncertainty of this identity are symbols of a system governed by fast fashion and fast product marketability, which often give rise to anti-consumerist attitudes. In a world where commodities are in excess, identity is a personal matter more than ever before, a choice of one's 'self-image'. In the twenty-first century fashion becomes a means by which individuals shape their physical and social identities.

The relationship between fashion and identity stems from the fact they are grounded in two identical processes, which are to give the individual a sense of belonging to a given social group, while at the same time also reinforcing their conviction of being unique and distinguishable.

To be unique and esteemed, people need to follow socially approved identity scenarios, one of which entails using products that are deemed fashionable and desirable, and are thus socially sanctioned. A new quality has been introduced by the fact that consuming particular goods translates into acquiring specific lifestyles. Providing a framework for the functioning of the post-modern man, [Bauman 2005] the state of ambivalence and indeterminacy allows consumers to incessantly discover themselves anew, with many identities having been built around the continually developing styles engendered by 'fast fashion'.

Here lies the paradox: the very possibility of inventing the consumer anew works to disenchant them, revealing the potential for consumption to harm others and the environment; which is a type of information that can now get the consumer closer to ecologically sustainable fashion (see: [Annamma et al. 2008, pp. 447-68]).

In other words, the paradoxical situation is that consumerism is now accompanied by trends that subvert it, leading to the ecologization of consumption.

Contemporary ecologization manifests mainly in the development of movements that attack corporations accusing them of promoting unsustainable consumption, damaging the environment and destroying cultural diversity by popularizing identical products globally. With governments taking insufficient market regulation measures, consumers feel obliged to take initiative and introduce a range of norms and regulations to the functioning of the market. There is a range of tools that contemporary civil societies have developed for exerting pressure on companies and the market [Harris 2003, pp. 127-132]:

- conducting campaigns for raising consumer awareness, including boycotting of socially irresponsible brands;
- leading campaigns for raising investor awareness, including actions taken by shareholders;
- taking direct action, such as organizing blockades, picket lines and occupation;
- promoting the partnership approach.

It is worth pointing out that the attention directed to these issues (that is, the necessity and/or will to promote ecological and deconsumerist behaviour) may stem from certain 'fatigue' that consumerism has generated in the western, highly-developed societies, or may indeed be just another marketing ploy to boost the speed, volume and efficiency of selling products and services. Looking back at the difficulties experienced by global brands such as Nike, Shell and McDonald's, (For more on the problems encountered by the global brands of the nineteen-nineties, see: [Klein 2004, pp. 381-412]¹ which were 'caught red-handed' engaging in non-ethical market and social behaviour, the branding strategy based on the theory of sustainable growth and fair trade appears to be the only right way to improve corporate image and increase sales.

The level of social awareness is rising among consumers who prefer companies that are prosocially engaged. Under the principle of PYMWYMI [Forum Odpowiedzialnego... 2004, p. 69], ('put your money where your mouth is'), buyers are encouraged to choose brands that they share similar values with.

Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman and Thomas H. Eriksen, who represent the sociological thought that analyses contemporary consumption, put forward a number of theses evaluating how a change in the meaning of constitutive terms impacted on our understanding of who man is, or rather – was. Their conclusion is that traditional morality and ethics have been rescinded from the life of man–consumer, affecting in particular social responsibility.

Therefore, analysing examples of building marketing strategies based on the ethical dimension of products – in this case, garments – allows for the contention that such a choice may be conditioned by the necessity to draw people's attention to other forms of consumption, ones that may prove beneficial for both the producer as well as the said consumer [Perchla-Włosik 2014, pp. 117-122].

Ethical and ecological awareness in Poland have been gaining in popularity, with first signs becoming visible of ethical trends entering the world of fashion. A number of non-governmental organizations in the country have been involved in promoting the ideas of fair trade, responsible consumption, corporate social responsibility, improved working conditions and building social support for sustainable growth in the clothing industry. The most significant bodies include the Alliance of Associations – Polish Green Network, which operates in several larger cities; the Polish Humanitarian Action; the Warsaw eFTE Group; and the KARAT Coalition. Since 2009, these organizations have been operating within the Clean Clothes Poland Coalition (a member of the Clean Clothes Campaign) with the aim of improving cooperation, coordination and efficiency of actions by organizing

¹ The author describes the adverse impact that brand-oriented marketing strategies have had on the life of societies in developed countries, and the adverse influence that corporate activities have exerted in the poorer ones, contributing to their further impoverishment. Both of these phenomena have become to be symbolized by the Nike corporation and its swoosh.

conferences, workshops, lectures, and social campaigns, issuing appeals (the most important of which include: ‘Modnie i Etycznie/Fashionably and Ethically’; ‘Kupuj Odpowiedzialnie/Buy Responsibly’; ‘Bezpieczeństwo w Bangladeszu/Safety in Bangladesh’; ‘Godna Płaca dla Wszystkich/Fair Pay for All’), as well as distributing leaflets, reports, guidebooks and other publications, running websites and social media sites, and creating a guide on responsible shopping in Poland – with a division into particular cities and product categories, including ‘responsible fashion’ [Raciniewska 2014, p.168].

3. Is fast fashion ethical?

By definition, the system for creating fast fashion collections (low-cost fashion) based on the current offer of luxury fashion (high-cost fashion) is one of fast responses that encourages purchasing and possessing garments in large numbers and changing, or disposing of them, quickly [Fletcher 2008]. In Europe, fast fashion sale and profit rates are higher than in the whole of the remaining fashion retail taken together. Low production costs, ‘fresh’ design and fast response time make it possible to efficiently respond to and influence the fashion consumption demands. It is then a system that is highly economically viable, although this comes at a high moral and ecological cost. Companies like H&M and Zara, which have created and mastered this system to perfection, need no more than several weeks to complete production and introduce a new collection to the market, compared with roughly six months of the standard time needed previously to move a collection from catwalk to store.

A collection is executed based on the conception of fast cycles: fast prototyping, linking small but diversified batches of clothing products and ensuring more efficient dispatch and delivery [Tokatli 2008, pp. 21-38]. Important to note, fast fashion is mainly aimed at young consumers, in whom a desire to possess is coupled with increasing purchasing capacity. Fast fashion exploits this crucial market segment, and its preference for immediate gratification as well as constantly changing identities. Young consumers are rarely willing to wait for the reward of owning a fashionable garment, therefore fast fashion replaces exclusiveness, glamour, originality and luxury². Binkley claims that the key to winning the hearts and minds of fast fashion devotees is to multiply the evolutions (that is, identities) themselves [Binkley 2008, pp. 599-623].

Also Polish fast fashion companies take account of the conditions that shape the mass market, and having to deliver to consumers who constantly demand new goods that come in large quantities and are available at a low cost. They are faced with enormous competition by big players, such as Inditex, which owns some of the key brands of the segment, or the Scandinavian multinational, H&M. Fast fashion

² The affluent customers of selective brands, such as Chanel, Hermes, and Louis Vuitton, are patient enough to wait several years for new, specific models of handbags and other accessories.

companies undertake the various sorts of activities in order to tackle the negative associations these brands evoke, and to shift the public attention to actions that demonstrate clothing brands' social responsibility.

Crucially, it is justified to argue that the advertised message of given brands being socially responsible has so far been reaching only the most conscious consumers, who take an avid interest in these kinds of issues. Still, these are the seeds that will eventually help spread the new patterns and trends in consumption, even if at the moment only motivated by the popularity of 'being eco' and 'feeling responsible' for the lives of future generations. While marketing specialists still prefer strategies based on encouraging fast sales and deepening pro-consumption behaviours than on promoting social responsibility and ecologization, these have recently grown to pose a challenge to companies that profit from cheap production and high collection turnover. H&M concentrates its campaigning efforts on Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, that is, the main sites of its production activities, while also setting itself ambitious goals that are defined as nothing less than 'ethical fashion'. It appears interesting to observe, however, that not all of the company's production is of an ethical character, and drawing the public attention to such actions is aimed at improving H&M's standing on the ethical brands arena, as this is nowadays one of the most effective ways of promoting fashion brands. H&M, Zara, Adidas and Nike, to name just a few such-oriented companies, are often associated with activities that are characteristic of ethical fashion brands even though they fail to meet the norms set out by the EFF and IFAT [Perchla-Włosik 2013, pp. 31-43]. Likewise, Zara's ethical fashion endeavours seem to be merely a response to the issue of toxic substances believed to have been used in their garment production, some of which kinds have also been discovered in clothes bearing the brands of Calvin Klein, Levi's, GAP, Esprit, Diesel, Only, Vero Moda, Benetton, Emporio Armani, and Mango. Following a nine-day period of pressure put on clothing manufacturers by social activists, bloggers, fashion enthusiasts and social media, Zara along with other INDITEX brands including Pull & Bear, Massimo Dutti, Bershka, Stradivarius, Oysho, Zara Home, and Uterqüe all joined the Detox campaign, aiming for eliminating hazardous substances from the clothing delivery chain. Since then, some of the fast-fashion brands have also followed suit, namely Nike, Adidas, Puma, H&M, M&S, C&A and Li-Ning (More information at: [<http://www.greenpeace.org...> (access 3 November 2013); Perchla-Włosik 2014]. The last several years have witnessed the Polish media, both fashion-oriented as well as of a wider scope, paying increased attention to the issues of ethical fashion and abuses by the textile industry. This is especially the case when the issue offers a connection to currently hot topics, celebrities, and remarkable events. One of those undeniably included the accident in a garment factory in Bangladesh, in April 2013, that left 1,132 people dead [Hossain 2013]. The greatest disaster to have ever befallen the clothing industry, it drew the attention of media and audiences worldwide, offering a unique opportunity to introduce the issue of ethics and responsibility in the garment industry into the Polish public discourse.

This was made highly relevant by the devastating death toll as well as by a Polish lead in the case, as tags bearing the name of Cropp, one of the brands owned by the Polish LPP company, were discovered among the collapsed factory rubble. Since this information was disclosed in May 2013, the Polish media were awash with comments on that fact and on LPP's response for months to come. The disaster was also the first event to trigger a major discussion on the ethical dimension of fashion as well as customer and corporate social responsibility in Poland [Raciniowska 2014, p. 172]. Pressed by public opinion, LPP decided to join a programme for improving the fire safety in Bangladeshi factories, which also includes an absolute ban on employing children and an obligation to respect minimum wages. LPP acceded to the European *Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh*, a decision that an LPP representative interviewed by the business website *wyborcza.biz* on 8 June 2015 described as one the company had consciously taken. 'We were accused of an unnecessary delay in reaching our decision, but there were plenty of factors we had to take under consideration before making such a long-term commitment. For example, we had to discuss whether it would be more effective to join the American programme, or the European one. We eventually chose the latter, and we are now the only Polish clothing company who makes donations for improving labour conditions in Asia. This organization brings together over 200 companies globally. We have also published a modified code of conduct for our overseas suppliers that we get to manufacture our clothes, who are now prohibited from employing minors under 15 years of age. We have also just opened our office in Bangladesh and successfully run first audits in our factories, which are also being monitored by Accord workers [<http://www.wyborcza.biz/biznes>]. In an interview for another Polish business website, *Bankier.pl*, LPP's CFO admitted that the situation involving their Bangladeshi factories, and the scandal that had broken in relation to the company's transferring their taxes to Cyprus³, had both tarnished LPP's image. However, as he was also careful to mention, this did little to change in any meaningful way the consumption choices of LPP's customers [<http://www.wyborcza.biz/biznes>]. Significantly, the company was forced to pay their taxes in Poland owing to an amendment to the tax law that entered into force on 1 January 2015, setting out regulations that levy tax on Polish taxpayers' profits they earn through controlled foreign corporations [<http://www.biznes.pl/kraj...> (access 6 July 2015)]. This allows for the observation that LPP's actions aimed at transferring their taxes back to Poland were required by law rather than motivated by a need for improving their image, much less by the company's realizing how unethical their earlier behaviour might have been.

³ This was done by entering into a so-called sub-license contract with a Cypriot company called Gothals for using word and figurative marks: House, Mohito and Sinsay. Gothals later transferred the marks to Jaradi Limited, a company operating under UAE law, with its registered office in Dubai.

4. Polish consumers' opinion on and awareness of ethical fashion in the light of interdisciplinary fashion research

Emerging as a subsequent step in ecologization and deconsumption, ethical fashion is a relatively new phenomenon. Marketing and communication activities undertaken by garment producers are the result of increasing consumer awareness, influence of the media, and improving detectability of the various sorts of irregularities that occur in the garment production process worldwide. However, research has showed⁴ Polish consumers have very low awareness of issues related to ethical fashion and slow fashion, and only rudimentary knowledge of the subject. The young people under examination demonstrated a weak perception of the communication activities undertaken by clothing producers, and regarded service or product price to be the key factor determining their consumer choices. It appears that the declared increase in consumer awareness of unsustainable consumption fails to translate into corresponding consumer behaviours, which, according to research, are largely under-represented [Perchla-Włosik 2013; Raciniewska, 2014] (see also reports by GEMIUS and gemiusAdHoc, and further: [Ciemniewski, Buszko 2009; Ćwik 2013]).

Ethical fashion is among the most significant issues covered by research within the National Science Centre grant project entitled 'Economic and social dimensions of brands in the fashion sector'⁵. The research comprised six focus group interviews conducted in the three Polish urban agglomerations of Poznań, Warsaw and Wrocław. Study participants were stratified by age and included 2 groups of females aged 18-24 in Poznań and Wrocław, 2 groups of females aged 25-34 in Poznań and Warsaw, and 2 groups of females aged over 35 in Wrocław and Warsaw.

Due to the discrepancy between the declared awareness of issues related to ethical fashion and the de facto consumer behaviours, we decided to conduct in-depth group interviews with people with above-average interest in fashion and related phenomena.

The findings obtained in the youngest age group confirmed the thesis about participants' low awareness of both ethical fashion and corporate social responsibility arising from it. Participants forming this group were mainly interested in fashionable clothes available at a reasonable price, which gives grounds to identify them mainly as customers of fast fashion. These findings corroborate the underlying theses of this article. Participants in this age group were unable to elaborate on the subject of

⁴ Research project entitled 'Young citizens' opinions on everyday life in big cities' was supervised by A. Perchla-Włosik and J. Wardzała, and carried out at the Institute of Sociology, Wrocław University. Using the tool of the interview questionnaire, we examined 200 people aged 15-19, who were selected by quota sampling.

⁵ Research grant no. NCN 51104-88, supervisor: dr hab. Jacek Kall.

ethical fashion. The two 18-24 focus groups showed significantly lower dynamics compared to the remaining age groups (25-34 and 35+).

A. Respondents often had difficulty defining the term ‘ethical fashion’:

This means dressing appropriately to the circumstances, right? (B., 18-24, P).

Several of the participants in this age group also attempted to define ethical fashion:

I’ve seen this note in one of the H&M stores saying that some of the pieces in their collection were made from organic cotton’ (B., 18-24, P).

B. They are unsure what to think about ethical fashion, whether to believe what the media is saying about it or not, treating the issue superficially, simply as a fad:

But I don’t believe it! I simply refuse to believe these clothes are manufactured in appropriate conditions, and that they aren’t made in Taiwan, or somewhere (B., 18-24, P).

C. They have little interest in the subject:

I can’t say I give it a lot of reflection, or much attention, for that matter (M., 18-24, W).

D. They point out clothing companies’ actions that turn out to be a sham:

I have it somewhere in the back of my mind, that this is happening, all those disasters in Bangladeshi factories, and the like, and you can’t really find much evidence for following these policies, except maybe for H&M. But still, you find yourself going into the shops and buying those things’ (H., 18-24, W).

The older age groups (25-34 and 35+) demonstrated significantly higher awareness of the ethical issues in fashion, giving grounds to the thesis that the two 25-34 age groups comprised the most conscious and pro-active consumers of all those under examination. All of the respondents making up those two groups (in Warsaw and Poznań) were familiar with the term ‘ethical fashion’, and were aware of the scandals related to unethical actions of the fashion industry: they had heard about the Bangladesh 2013 disaster because, as one of them put it: *virtually all the media was abuzz with commentary on that event (A, 35+, Wa)*. The respondents also mentioned the scandal involving the acquiring of angora wool in a way that cause animals much suffering, and the case of Reserved (an LPP brand), which had their garments made in Bangladesh and chose to pay their taxes in Cyprus. *I’ve been avoiding the Reserved stores for some time because of that scam with tax avoidance (...). They just lost me with their lack of loyalty, as I was previously very happy and proud to buy clothes from a Polish brand (E., 25-35, Wa).*

To conduct further analysis, individual statements were categorized according to certain strategies that included the vantage points of companies, social groups and individuals, which we believed best captured respondents’ declarative behaviour. Rather than a clear and a priori-defined structure of action, a strategy is often beyond the conscious reach of the person implementing it. What is more, strategies can also

be inferred ex post from regularities occurring in empirically observable behaviour (after: [Berger, Luckmann 1983; Child 1972, pp. 1-22; Crozier, Friedberg 1982]).

A. Taking action (i.e. boycott, resistance, avoidance, ‘buying Polish things’, localness), ethically-oriented consumer choice, taking action to promote ethical fashion;

I believe everybody's voice counts. I've been trying to make informed consumer choices since I stopped eating meat. I've also developed an interest in other things related not only to food, but also cosmetics, clothes, etc. I avoid buying products that might have been tested on animals or produced by people working in degrading conditions (J., 25-35, P).

B. Anti-consumerism

I think it's already here, and I think it has affected boys more than girls. There are plenty of blogs where guys just sit and marvel at a leather glove, for example... they're also returning to tailoring, making coats and suits in the traditional way [...] (S., 25-35 P).

C. Shifting the blame to ‘others’, self-justification, rationalization versus belief in individual consumer choices

The ethical aspect is also important, but it's hard to come up with any reasonable ideas because I suspect all the companies do in fact operate in the same way, exploiting people in the backwoods of the Far East. I don't approve of it, of course, but what can I do? (M1, 25-35, Wa).

D. Although they are aware of the problems that afflict the fashion industry, respondents choose not to have their consumer choices guided by ethical reasons

It all started with food bearing the Fairtrade logo, then there was a collection from organic cotton in Cottonfield [...] I like natural things, you see. But I don't buy them and I'm not an ecologist. It's all PR, if you ask me, the sort that gets promoted by H&M. It's not a necessary criterion for me (P2., 35+, W).

E. Respondents do not believe that ethical fashion exists

I have this strange impression that ethical fashion doesn't exist at all! Think about the massive overproduction, think about our wardrobes: Do we really need to buy new clothes all the time? This would make it unethical even to put any new garment to your wardrobe. Even if it's made of organic cotton and in decent working conditions, you can't make a piece of clothing without producing waste [...] without polluting the environment in one way or another' (K., 25-35, P).

F. They point to economic determinants limiting their ability to buy ‘ethically’

It depends on the stage of life I'm currently at: when I'm doing well, I try to buy ethically, when I'm broke – I don't give a damn (S., 24-35 years, P).

Apart from the above strategies, the analysis performed helped us to distinguish some key elements shaping and influencing respondents' attitudes to ethical fashion vs. fast fashion:

A. Awareness increased by media

Now everybody's talking about that expedition of bloggers, you know, a bunch of girls having great time running a fashion blog get on the plane and go to see how their pretty clothes are made. An then, they just can't believe it. And it is all about drawing our attention to the misery of those hard-working people. I even saw a discussion about it on TVN Style (a Polish fashion channel) this morning (M., 35+, Wa).

B. Fear of carcinogenic and toxic textiles: respondents fear for their own health, and for the workers in developing countries who manufacture fast-fashion clothes

I'm more terrified by the fact that the cotton I wear may cause cancer. But it's hard to verify which cotton is good and which is bad. Benetton had a cotton campaign and used the very worst kind of the material (B., 35+, W).

C. Respondents emphasize the issues of employment and wages in the clothing industry

All the multinationals have their HQs in skyscrapers, say, in New York, but have their stuff manufactured somewhere in China, and we can't be sure what's happening in those factories. No-one knows if these brands should be regarded as American, Chinese, or anything in between. I generally prefer European brands, it seems to me that people in Europe are more aware of their workers' rights, it's not such a huge mass of people forced to work for starvation-level pay in conditions that cast shame on human civilization. I think things look differently here in Europe (M., 35+Wa).

D. Ethics vs. ecology

I believe more in ethical than ecological clothes [...] it's probably such a complicated process that no-one is really able to control it (S., 25-35, P).

You can have ecology without ethics, but you can't be ethical without also being ecological (K., 25-35, P).

It is worth mentioning that none of the respondents had declared to be guided in their consumer choices by ethical aspects before the discussion actually took place. They believed ethical issues were important, although they had not followed such principles in their everyday lives. Respondents in this study were selected based on the criterion of having an interest in fashion, which is why the present findings differ from those obtained in studies among random or quota samples.

The group of fashion consumers aged between 25 and 34 is by far the most conscious and active in terms of verbal behaviours related to ethical fashion. Although not all of these women declared to have their fashion choices guided by ethical criteria, most of them at least took these issues into consideration. Several respondents in this age group were actively involved in promoting the ethical attitude to fashion among their friends and on their blogs, believing that individual choices of single consumers may give rise to something bigger, that this is how revolutions are brought about, and that people's thinking about the way they buy things may 'change the world', slowly but surely, also urging fashion producers to change their ways as

well. They believe that Polish society is not yet as spoiled with hyper-consumption as, for instance, American society is, which makes it possible to take collective action and raise people's awareness of these issues in order to change their consumer habits, thus also becoming an example to the rest of Europe.

As well as pointing out the significance of ethics in fashion, some respondents, including those in the 35+ age group, also underlined the fact that, unfortunately, buying clothes in chain stores was cheaper and more accessible than buying garments branded by ethical fashion designers. Other respondents admitted to having insufficient strong will and perseverance to act ethically with respect to fashion and the various other areas of consumption. They think it demands greater temporal resources to look for such products, verify their origin and organize their purchase, which is the sort of actions they rarely have time for and feel like doing.

Respondents in the 25-34 and 35+ age groups typically generated arguments that are often raised in the debate on ethical fashion. Most of the women rationalized the issue and pursued various forms of self-justification, pointed to the necessity of organizing preventive activities on a much larger scale, and emphasized the need to make companies accountable for their actions.

Some of the respondents claimed they were willing to pay more for their clothes in the future as long as this would help improve the ethical standards of the whole industry and raise the prices of clothes globally. Others expressed opinions to the contrary, arguing that consumer behaviour in Poland was still largely determined by product price, and ethically-made garments were significantly more expensive. It was precisely the limited budget, they maintained, that made ethically-produced clothes unaffordable to many people.

Respondents in these age groups also demonstrated critical attitudes towards ethical fashion, expressing their disbelief as to whether such a phenomenon in fact existed in the fashion industry at all.

In their discussion about ethics in fashion, study participants underlined mainly the fact of the industry's underpaying and exploiting its workers, as well as the issue of toxic textiles being used in garment production.

Furthermore, they boycotted brands they deemed unethical, which is characteristic of civil societies that 'take the matters of market regulation into their own hands', as is also the resistance and reflection about socially irresponsible actions of clothing companies.

In turn, the 35+ age group was characterized by the respondents' emphasis on environmental problems and the impact of the fast fashion industry on people's well-being and health. These respondents declared to be taking particular care of their health, which made them also pay attention to the composition of their garments, the conditions in which they were produced, and their impact on the wearer's health. In the course of the discussions, ethical issues were raised several times and in various contexts, the main of them being the toxic qualities of dyes and textiles used in garment production. This issue emerged at the very beginning of the meeting, when

respondents were asked about what motivated their choice of clothes and how they affected their skin, health and well-being. The issue was also raised in the context of ethical and ecological fashion in reference to the toxicity of the garment production process and increased cancer incidence among those engaged in textile production. Respondents voiced their concerns whether it was indeed possible to verify the ethical and ecological background of a given brand, with a majority of this group also seeing little use in familiarizing themselves with research findings, reports, and other such publications on the fashion industry put out by independent companies and NGOs. Respondents also indicated that the reason for their taking an interest in ethical fashion usually lay in a personal problem they wanted to understand and address properly.

5. Conclusions

This article has presented a number of significant issues pertaining to how fashion consumers function in the field of ethical fashion. Contemporary consumption is based on the two polarized approaches of consumerism and anti-consumerism. Clothing companies' becoming increasingly socially responsible can be seen as a response to the negative image of the fast fashion industry associated with the exploitation of cheap workforce in developing countries, toxic clothes production process, and degradation of the natural environment. At the same time, consumers often pay little attention to the issue and operate on the fashion market using a variety of behaviour strategies. The current research suggests that only selected groups of individuals are aware of the existing problems, and that ethical behaviour of fashion consumers may serve to counter consumerism in the future. At the present moment, however, ethical action is only infrequently taken by both consumers and producers of fashion.

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