

A Way Back to Secondhand Clothes - A Narrative Inquiry of Secondhand Clothes Purchasing Experiences-

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1. Introduction

One of the sustainable ways to shop is to choose secondhand clothing products. Second-hand clothes consumption is becoming popular considering economic and environmental aspects, especially among millennials (Kim, 2019). On the other hand, there is still a negative view on secondhand clothes. Therefore, the goal of this study is to analyze the experience of a person who continued to consume secondhand clothes even after having negative purchasing experiences, to explore ways to overcome the negative aspects and strengthen the positive aspects of secondhand clothes, applying a narrative inquiry method.

2. Research Method

A research participant who continued to shop for secondhand clothes even after the negative shopping experiences was interviewed. In November and December 2020, ZOOM online interviews were conducted twice, each ran for one to two hours. The participant had various experiences because she had purchased secondhand clothes while living in Korea and Germany. Field texts were composed using interview transcriptions and the field notes recorded during the interview. The interim texts were constructed by searching for narrative patterns, plots, and topics by reading the filed text repeatedly to conduct coding. The coded results were confirmed with the participant to be reorganized into research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). We tried to secure the validity of the study by applying the four criteria introduced by Guba & Lincoln (1981): truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality.

3. Results & Conclusion

The following four topics were extracted from the analysis results of the in-depth interviews with the participant according to the sequence of time: the experience of new world, the negative experience, a way back to secondhand clothes, and disposal.

1) Experiencing a new world

Limited types and sizes of secondhand clothes were considered as a new world of consumption rather than a constraint for the participant. It was an interesting first time experience. She said, *“When I go to the secondhand shop, I had to wear the size what was available... At the first time, it was a new way of consumption for me, regardless of whether it was negative or positive.”*

2) The negative experiences

The negative experiences of purchasing used clothes were concentrated into three sub-themes: hygienic problems, limited sizes, and inability to try on the clothes. Hygienic problems were mentioned when the participants said *“The smell is unavoidable. The smell of used clothes... That smell is a negative experience, and the lights in vintage stores are usually not that bright... The dim the lights... [so I] can't see stains well.”* The problem of limited sizes was mentioned when she said, *“First of all, used clothes themselves... not all the sizes are available... Usually, if the length is too long for me, I tend to wear it after repairing it [myself].”* The participant also pointed out the fact that she could not try on the garments by saying *“In Korea... They lay clothes on the floor mat... I just picked some clothes from there... And I can't try on [because they sell on the streets].”*

3) A way back to secondhand clothes

“A way back to secondhand clothes purchasing” means the process of repurchasing secondhand clothes despite the negative shopping experiences. The following five reasons for repurchasing secondhand clothes were mentioned by the participant: low price, addictiveness, natural look, the virtue of bargaining and open shopping environment. Baker (2014) and Roux (2006) also found the first two as the positive aspects of secondhand clothes.

Benefits of low price were mentioned when she said, *“I like it because I can buy at a much lower price if I know what I want to buy.”* She used the metaphor such as “addicted to game” when she mentioned, *“I think I'm a little addicted... Once I got what I want, then I want to go again right away. I think I can find [another favorite item] again.”* She also mentioned the natural look as a repurchasing reason by saying *“First of all, they are used clothes. So, should I say it's more natural? Rather than being tarnished...I don't like the clothes looking too new. I like clothes which don't look too new.”* She also loved the bargaining process by saying *“I can bargain in Korea... So in Korea, the reason why I go to the vintage stores despite inability to try on the clothes is because of bargains.”* In addition, she felt liberal when she shopped in the open environment of secondhand clothing shops.

When I go to the luxury stores in department stores... I'm so daunted... When I enter an expensive store, I feel timid of the staff and I can't see the clothes indiscreetly. It's a bit embarrassing to look in the mirror. But I don't feel such a thing in vintage shops.

4) Disposal

Reselling or exchanging were the ways to dispose secondhand clothes, since they are not refundable.

Usually, I just resell them. That kind of websites are really well-established. ... With friends, we do a lot of flea markets...In Germany, people put things on the streets...such as clothes. It says “zum Mitnehmen” which means to take it for free.

Overall, we can look for ways to reduce the negative aspects and strengthen the positive aspects of secondhand clothes referring to the participant's experiences found in this study. We should also pay attention to the eco-friendly ways to dispose secondhand clothes.

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