

24) The Fascinating Psychology Behind Fashion and Consumption with Shakaila Forbes-Bell [TRANSCRIPT]

ELIZABETH

You're listening to the Conscious Style Podcast, where we explore what it will take to build a better, more sustainable and equitable future for fashion. I'm your host, Elizabeth Joy. Now let's dive into today's episode. Have you ever wondered what really drives consumption? What the motivations are on a psychological level that drive people to consume? Can psychology help explain this rapid increase in consumption that we've been seeing in recent years? And could it help us understand why it's so difficult to shift towards more conscious consumption habits? And then on the flip side of that, how could we potentially use behavioral psychology to help us communicate about sustainable fashion and the most effective way possible? These are big questions that I'm definitely not qualified to answer. But thankfully, today's guest is. I'm talking with Shakaila Forbes-Bell, a published fashion psychologist, writer, consultant, and owner of fashionispsychology.com, a platform dedicated to making academic research into fashion psychology more accessible. Shakaila is answering all of those questions that I just asked. Plus, she's going to explore with us how representation and fashion and media influences behavior and beliefs, what the impact of virtue signaling or performative inclusion in fashion is, and why people might actually buy more when they perceive something to be sustainable. Lots of fascinating topics in this one, and I cannot wait to share this interview with you. The transcript for this episode is available in the show notes at consciouslifeandstyle.com and the video version will be on YouTube on our channel Conscious Life & Style. As you may know, this entire season of the podcast is focused on consumption and circularity. So if you want to make sure that you do not miss any future conversations like this one, hit subscribe or follow on your favorite podcast app. And for lots more sustainable fashion content, you can subscribe to my free newsletter at consciouslifeandstyle.com/edit. This is a weekly newsletter where I share recommendations like articles I'm reading, podcasts I'm listening to, videos and documentaries I'm watching, campaigns I'm supporting, and more. Alright, now on to the interview. Shakaila is going to start us off here with what led to her interest in fashion psychology. And why she created her platform Fashion Is Psychology.

SHAKAILA

I had a pretty straightforward I think entry into the world of fashion psychology. So I studied psychology at university and while a lot of people were very interested in you know, clinical psychology, I was always more focused on the social psychology side. And growing up, I always had a huge passion for fashion. I used to make clothes on my dolls with my mom when I was younger. It was very strange because at uni, or before I went to uni, it was very much a toss up between, you know, going to university and studying psychology or going to university and studying fashion design. Like it was just a

massive toss up. And it seemed to be polar opposites at the time, but I was always very keen on both of those topics. And then when I was doing my research, I really started to see an overlap. I started to see how there were so many studies in social psychology that looked into how aesthetics and how we present ourselves and how we look and how that impacts impression formation. So how people receive other people, and how people can change depending on you know, the clothes that they're wearing, and social feedback and the importance of clothing to signify your place in the world. So then I started my blog. The first iteration of the blog was very makeshift, it was very hacky, but I just thought, you know, there's no way I can keep all of this good research information to myself. I think it's so interesting. So I think other people would find it interesting too. And then I did a few Google searches and I came across Kate Nightingale who is a style psychologist and I just emailed her out the blue asking if I could intern for her. And she said yes. And I just learned more about the business side of fashion psychology, how to integrate working with organizations, especially fashion brands and getting them to understand you know, how they can better communicate with their clients how to incorporate consumer psychology into what they do, which is really overlooked as well. And then I thought, you know what I really want to take this further. I did my final dissertation on something I called the Hoodie Project, which was actually after the week of the murder of Trayvon Martin, the young boy who was murdered for seemingly wearing a hoodie in an area that wasn't very acceptable accommodating to young Black men. And it made me think about how you know, streetwear how on one body, it can be seen as something threatening and something that you know, needs to be attacked. And then in another body, it can be seen as something cool or something edgy, especially on young white males, how it can be a pinnacle of like almost success, especially in certain industries, like in tech. And I really just wanted to explore that difference a bit further. So I went on to do my Masters, thankfully it was the first year that they were running the course at London College of Fashion, Psychology for Fashion Professionals. And I guess it just seemed like such a seamless transition for me to just continue the research I was doing continuing my blog, and I think since then, it's just been going from strength to strength. I've continued to put up research. Now working with some amazing contributors for the blog, partnering with some amazing brands just to continue to make research into fashion psychology more accessible. I don't want it to be bound behind the lines of academia, you know. These are tools and tricks that everybody should be made aware of, so that they can gain a better relationship with their clothing.

ELIZABETH

Yeah, yeah that's awesome. I mean fashion impacts all of us — we all wear clothes. So fashion psychology is obviously such a broad topic. I mean you cover such a range of very fascinating issues and topics on fashionpsychology.com. But before we get into some of those, could you just explain what fashion psychology exactly is and why it matters.

SHAKAILA

So fashion psychology is the application of psychological theories, principles and practices to every aspect of the fashion and beauty industry. So it explores various topics, as you mentioned: the psychological impact of clothing and beauty on the everyday person, external and internal motivations behind consumer behavior, the link between style and identity and so much more. And it is really important because you know, clothes, they act as our second skin. I mean, we're not a community of nudists — or most of us aren't. So we all use clothing and our decision of what we wear every day, you

know, it has a big impact on the way we kind of navigate our lives. So it can help us express identity, it can help us feel grounded in depending on the situation that we're in, it can bring out different sides to us. But psychology on the other side for like designers and the fashion industry, it can also be used to help designers understand how they can use their creativity to create more inclusive design and more conscious design that can infect people as well as the planet. And I think when we're talking about sustainability as well, which is such a big topic now, one thing that I do think is missing is people talking about the psychological aspect of it. So the relationship that people have initially with their clothing, the things that people are thinking about before they go into the shop, before they look at these brands, and before they make this purchase. If there's more education of this, if there is more understanding about how we can get people to create a stronger relationship between themselves in their clothing and understand a bit more about what goes into buying the club into dressing everyday, then they'll have a stronger relationship. And they'll make more conscious decisions about where they buy and how much they buy. And they'll be less likely to throw away these clothes because they've developed that attachment. And in a sense, they will, you know, contribute less waste, which of course helps the planet.

ELIZABETH

Yeah, totally. I think the psychological aspect of sustainable fashion isn't talked about enough, for sure. But we're going to dive into that today! So a really interesting topic that you talk about within fashion psychology is something called enclothed cognition. Can you explain what that is?

SHAKAILA

So enclothed cognition was a theory created in 2012 by two psychologists Adam and Galinsky. And essentially, they wanted to see how close impact the way people act in the way they feel. I think we all have, you know, like a lucky pair of socks or a special outfit that we wear. You know it has an impact on the way we act, it might make us happy and might make us feel a certain way, but they wanted to improve empirically if that was the case. So in this study, they got two groups of people to wear a white coat, but they told one group of people that the white coat was a doctor's coat, and they told the second group of people that the white coat was a regular painter's smock, and then they asked them to take some tests. And it was found that the group that was told that their coat was a doctor's coat actually performed better on the test. They were more focused, they were able to be just more focused on the task at hand. And I think they concluded to say that because they were thinking that this was a doctor's coat and they associated doctors with being astute, being aware, being cognizant, being focused that they embodied those traits when they wore that outfit. So essentially, it just goes to show that when you think about certain traits are associated with a dress, for example. If I think of a dress, and I think of it as sexy, alluring, something that someone who is, you know, powerful and dominant will wear, when I wear that dress, maybe from going on a date, if I wear that dress, and I have those associations with that dress if I wear it, I'm going to embody that. And that's something that I'm going to give out in the world. So it just goes to show that you really need to pay attention into really what you're wearing and what you associate with what you're wearing. If you can get something frumpy, something boring, or something that you know make that will make someone feel invisible if you wear it, you're going to embody those traits. So it's all about the feedback between our clothes and the way we act.

ELIZABETH

That's so interesting to think about. And I definitely can relate to those feelings with what I'm wearing, or how I perceive what I'm wearing to influence how I feel. And in general, I find it so fascinating to think about how psychology plays such a big role in driving our fashion choices, and consumer choices in general. And, you know, these choices might be about our personal style to the trends we're following to consumption and what we choose to purchase and how often we purchase. So as a fashion psychologist, what have you found to be the main drivers or motivators behind our fashion consumption choices.

SHAKAILA

So there's a couple of motivators actually behind why we shop, essentially. The first one being We shopped to express ourselves. So there's this concept called product image congruity. And it essentially finds that if we see an object or we see an outfit, for example and we find that it has similar symbolic meanings that we can identify with, we are going to be automatically drawn to it because it's going to be a vehicle through which we can help express ourselves. And as individuals — especially with our desire to be unique, and to have our fun in the world — we're going to be drawn to buy things that help us to solidify that stamp. So that's one of the reasons why we buy. Another reason is because we're essentially just being duped by the psychological tricks that all brands actually use to kind of encourage us to shop. So if you go into a store, you'll notice that they all have their own kind of music, lighting, layout. And psychologists have found that all of that does kind of have a big impact on encouraging us to buy. For example, slow tempo music, it actually has been found to slow consumers down. So when you're in a shop, if you're slower, then of course you're more likely to spend more time in the shop. And the more time you spend in the shop is the more likely you're going to buy something. So think about those kinds of things as well. And even the layouts. A more kind of muted environment with muted colors and more organized store layout that's going to appeal to more introverted shoppers. But things with more bright, eccentric layouts, bright lighting colorful as something they're going to appeal to extroverted shoppers, and no brands know who their target shoppers are; they know the makeup of them. So they use all of these principles to kind of encourage them to buy. And of course, there's other psychological principles that impact us all. Things like scarcity, which we all know as FOMO. So you know, when they have limited edition connections, or you know, they show their sales or their signs that say one or two items remaining. It may be true, maybe not, but they all encourage us to have that fear that okay, we need to get it all out, we'll be missing out. And because we are all loss averse, so we don't want to think that we're going to lose out on something, we're going to be willing to purchase something in order to avoid that feeling. And then there's other things like reciprocity. So when you they give you those loyalty cards, and you get all these points in this, okay, here's 10 pounds off and then you feel compelled to use it and then you end up spending 50 pounds instead of the 10 pounds that they give you because of that need to kind of give back in kind what you have been given in return. So those are kind of like the principles of persuasion that retailers use to encourage us to buy. And then in another sense, another reason that we want to shop is to show our allegiance. So we have this thing called our social identity, which is our identity in relation to our group group association. So for example, our culture that we belong to, our sex, our age group. We want to buy things that help us to maximize those affiliations and to help us feel a bit grounded in where we are. So also, if you look at this theory called Maslow's Hierarchy, it shows like all the things that we need to kind of feel like a fully actualized

person, and in that hierarchy, it has our need to belong. So of course when we buy things that are in trend are in vogue, or it's part of the cultural zeitgeist. It helps to reinforce that identity; it helps us feel like a part of the moment. So again, that's going to be a strong motivator to get us to buy these things that help us feel a bit more secure. And those are kind of some of the main principles that encourage us to buy. But as you can see, there's a lot of things fighting against us. When we go into a shop, we get that rush of dopamine, we get that rush of adrenaline. That all happened before we even make a purchase. So it's almost the act of shopping itself that is really enticing for people. Which is always why I encourage mindful shopping for people. Well, I guess we'll discuss this later. But there's a lot of things to combat against before we go shopping. So that's why I don't believe in chastising people for buying so much, because there's a lot to contend with. And if you look into the research, shopping actually does have a positive impact. You know, retail therapy has been proven time and time again by psychologists. So it's about being mindful of how much you shop and how much you're using shopping as a way to boost your mood. And just making sure that what you're buying is truly things that you value that you'll cherish for a long time, so that you don't feel the ramifications of like overconsumption.

ELIZABETH

For sure, yeah. And definitely, there is a lot to contend with. I mean, I've been on my slow fashion journey for many years and there are still things that tempt me because they look so beautiful, they're displayed in such a great way, they say the right words. I don't need it, but it just looks so good. And so yeah, it's really, really challenging. There's a lot that we are up against, which kind of leads me to my next question. So clothing production has been increasing rapidly in recent decades, and we see all these statistics about clothing utilization going down, wastage going up. Primarily coming from consumers in the Global North buying more clothes and wearing those clothes less. It feels like we, as a society, can never have enough clothes. We always have to have fresh outfits, fresh pieces in our closet. So what do you think, on a psychological level might be driving this increase in production and, and speed of consumption?

SHAKAILA

Well, I think as humans, we are hardwired to be attracted towards novelty. So that instant gratification that we feel when we buy something new, that's not something that I think it's going to go away overnight. We're always going to be attracted to new things. And it's always going to increase the demand to have these fashion items. But I think one thing that we can do is to encourage more mindful shopping. So you know, I think if you get people to really deep dive into what they already own — and I think that's kind of the best way to be sustainable is to shop what you already own. But look at what you have, and think about how you can work with that. And also, before you even go shopping, make sure that it aligns with what you already own. Because there's so many studies that show that if you buy something and you come home and it doesn't align with your wardrobe, instead of just returning it, you're just more likely to just buy more things to go with your like initial purchase. So it's about deep diving into what you have and cherishing that. One thing I always think about is the history of my clothing. So say I got an item but say it's from a fast fashion brand. Like I think about how I can tear a shirt, how I can keep it for a long time, the implications are is going to be involved in getting repaired if I want to pass it down to maybe a family member, or if I want to do clothes swapping, or sell it. You know thinking about all the ways that you can give your clothes meaning. And if you give your clothes

meaning, then you're more likely to kind of give it another life and give it a better chance of being more you know, circular rather than going into the waste heap. And I think one great way that people can think about this before they go shopping is to do a simple sum which is called CPW. So that is like clothing costs plus maintenance divided by number of times worn. So that gives you the cost per wear analysis. So I always ask people say you want to get a nice dress. You got a cheap one for like 50 pounds, but you've done no maintenance to it, and you've worn it once and then you throw it away. So that just cost 50 pounds, right? But say you spend more on maybe a luxury or a sustainable dress that costs a bit more. Say it costs 100 pounds. You maybe want to take it to the tailor or the dry cleaner to get it fixed, to make it a bit more you, to create that attachment to it, which helps you create more ownership to it. You do that okay, now it's cost you 110 pounds. But now because it's so you, it's fitted, you've taken care of it, you've worn it 10 times. Actually, when you do the cost per wear, you find out that dress is only 11 pounds, so it works out cheaper in the long run. So it's about getting people to do all of this thinking before they make their purchases to help them be more mindful and more conscious, and in the long run, develop a stronger attachment to their clothing, which will in turn reduce the wastage.

ELIZABETH

Yeah, absolutely. I love those tips. And that sort of twist on cost per wear, like adding in the maintenance. Because sometimes we might be hesitant to pay for a tailor or something like that, but if it gets us to where the piece more it all works out in the end. So thinking about the drivers of consumption, I think it would be interesting to talk about sort of the flip side, so to speak, as well. So what do you think are some of the deterrents to more conscious consumption. So buying less, fewer better things, choosing maybe more sustainable brands over fast fashion brands? What deters us from doing that?

SHAKAILA

I think it's just about, it's hard for people to want to change their habits, right? I think people are very stuck in their ways, and they just want to do what works for them. Especially with the pandemic, it's been such a tumultuous time, people are looking at easy ways just to make themselves feel better. Although at the same time, people have become a bit detached from their wardrobes. And they haven't time to think about do I really need all this stuff? The opportunities to wear, a lot of their wardrobes have almost been cut in half. But at the same time, they want that pick me up, they want to experience the positive impact of dopamine dressing. They want to experience the positive impact of novelty. They want the dopamine rush. So it's really hard to combat, especially in the troubling times that we're in. So I think if you just encourage people to just take a second and to really do a bit more thinking before they shop or before they buy, I think that will be a big help in to changing that behavior and into breaking that habit. So one thing I've kind of recommended is to do first to do some wardrobe, ethnography. Wardrobe ethnography is all about diving deep into your wardrobe and figuring out you know, do these items really signify who I am now? Are they going to help me into the next phase of my life. And that's what I call the continuing identity. If you can find clothes that fit into that continuing identity, these are things you want to keep a nice will give you an inclination of what you need to buy in the future. And these are clothes that have kind of a long shelf life as well. And I think that's what we need to think about, how giving your clothes as long as your life as possible. And then look at clothes that are in your

discontinued identity for clothes that maybe don't fit, clothes that are falling apart, clothes from brands that you don't really align with anymore, if you really think about your beliefs and where you stand. And it's interesting because especially with Gen Z and Millennials, studies show that they are so socially conscious, but then they do tend to be the biggest buyers of fast fashion. So there's a lot of cognitive dissonance going on there. So I think if you actually take the time to do a deep dive and a bit of introspection, you'll start to make the changes towards buying and dressing in a way that aligns with your core beliefs, which will at the end make you happy. And then when you do go shopping, I advocate the four, three, two one rule, which is what I'm calling it. So think about think about what your what you have, and are you going to wear it four years. So look in the future, think about is this going to be in line with my continued identity? Is this something for the future person? Is this going to help me in four different scenarios? If yes, then you wear it. Then think about three is it going to be something that you can wear three different outfits, or at least three different occasions. A lot of time that we buy something we think about for the Insta post or for the TikTok or for you know, just for that one shot occasion. If it's not going to be something that you can wear in the future, it's not for you. And two. Always take two deep breaths, just to calm down that sympathetic nervous system that is firing when you think about shopping or that dopamine, adrenaline that's flooding you that allows you to have a bit more control over your decisions. If you have that control, you're less likely to be persuaded by you know, all of the persuasive tricks that I mentioned earlier that retailers use to encourage you to just buy. And then have one night sleep. I think one that's a good rule we can use for everything, whether you're about to be sucked into a really terrible purchase, or you're about to send your ex like a bad text. Just give it one night sleep. And you know, you're coming to your sense in the morning. So if people are willing to take this more steps, it will help them to really battle all of these persuasive tactics and all of that all the chemicals that are rushing in our brain when we're contemplating buying something that we really probably shouldn't.

ELIZABETH

That's such a great trick. That 4321. I love that. I'm going to definitely remember that. So when it comes to marketing sustainability: either sustainable fashion brands or brands trying to look sustainable. It's all uncharted territory, and we talk about it a lot in terms of the lack of regulation, the lack of standardization, but I think it would be really interesting to also talk about what sorts of things are actually effective. So what can behavioral psychology potentially teach the sustainable fashion community about effective communication?

SHAKAILA

Yeah, I think one of the first things that would be great to do is to encourage an emotional attachment to their clothing. So like I mentioned before, if you have that connection with the items that you own, or that you're planning to own, you're going to be more likely to give it a longer life. And I think that's one of the best things about sustainability. It is about giving your clothes that nearly supply for encouraging circularity. So you know, and the best way to encourage attachment as well is to give your customers like the information that they need to give your clothes that extra bit of life. If your clothes need to be dry cleaned, if it needs to be washed in a certain way, let that be known so that your customers can make the most informed decisions possible. Let them know exact sizing or use more inclusive model so that they can fully like see themselves in the clothes that they're planning to buy. And really let them know if

it's going to be something that works for them or not. Arm them with as much information as possible so that they make the right decision so that they don't have to return or then keep it for a long time and then chuck it away. So just let them know all of the facts, so that they can really buy clothes that are going to be perfect for them. And another thing is, like I mentioned before about that sense of belonging being so important for our social identity, and for our need to belong to specific groups. Give people that sense of belonging. Create more communities. I'm aware of a lot of post swapping apps as well, that allows you to connect to different people to share your beliefs and discussions. I think that's so powerful, because it gives people that group where they can feel that that connection, and it will encourage their shopping habits in the future. And it will allow people to share ideas and to share tips and tricks, and to share information. Because as you mentioned, there's still a lot to learn about sustainability. There's even a few people who think fashion and sustainability are kind of oxymoron so as much as people can be informed. And it can help them make more mindful and thoughtful practices in the future, the better. And if you can create that group space and the dynamic to do that, that'd be great. And I also think that people in general do want to be more sustainable, especially Gen Z and millennials. They are some of the most conscious people going so far. And they do want to be more mindful about how their actions are impacting the planet on a global scale. So I think that you need to stop chastising, I think it's more about you know, understanding that there is a difficulty there. As I mentioned earlier, there's so much to contend with, and to battle before you even enter a shop that is all persuading you to buy and to break away from your beliefs. But if you chastise them, what's that going to do, right? It's all about letting people know that we know this is typical, but we want you to help you be more in line to your actions and your beliefs so that you can avoid the cognitive dissonance and that you can feel better. Dopamine dressing is such a huge trend right now. And it focuses on a lot about how certain clothes and hairstyles can make you feel happy. But it also makes you feel happy if you know that you're buying something that is aligned with your core beliefs. So if you can encourage that or promote that through your marketing and your field of communications, I think that would be incredibly effective.

ELIZABETH

Mhm, yeah. Yeah, to help people see how this habit or supporting this versus that is aligned with their beliefs, instead of coming at it from a sort of shaming approach or something along those lines. So when we're talking about sustainable fashion, and encouraging people to make more sustainable fashion choices, of course, we also have to talk about the barriers. And a lot of your work has focused on representation and inclusivity, or lack thereof, in fashion and in fashion media. So can you tell us how you have found that the lack of representation in fashion media influences individual behavior and beliefs?

SHAKAILA

Yeah, so actually my paper that was published is that she on this topic, so I was just investigating how a lack of representation especially for young black girls, how that impacts them. And you know, a lot of my research found that it does impact their self concept. So how they view themselves and their position within the world. So if you fail to see a positive representation of yourself in the media, especially in representations that are hailed as the pinnacle of beauty and like the ideal aesthetics. If you don't see yourself replicated in those ideals, you're going to internalize that and think that that's not

something that you can achieve, that's not something that you can aspire to. So it does have a damning impact. And you know, on the flip side of it, it is not really good business sense. If you look at it just like from a monetary perspective ethnic minorities are more likely to spend more money and to engage more with brands that showcase them and that reflect them. You're going to put your money where you feel represented. And I think we're seeing that, especially over here in the UK, we have black pound day, where people are encouraged to not just look at the clothes, but look at who is making these clothes. Who are the brands that are driving it. I think last year, there was the pull up or shut up campaign by Luma beauty when they were asking, different brands to make their shelves 15% occupied by Black owned businesses. And I think people are really using that, like I mentioned before that product image congruity, trying to align their core beliefs with their product purchases, and I think that's something that we're seeing a lot. So really, by failing to have that representation, brands, especially sustainable brands, who don't really have that great of a reputation for being very size inclusive, or just inclusive in general. They're going to miss out. And it's a way to really engage people and to you, like I said, foster that sense of community. I think the future is all about being inclusive. Everybody wants to feel like they have a place, that they can belong. They want to buy into your brands, but they're going to have that hesitancy if they don't think that your brand is for them. So you know, make sure that you are being not just representative, but inclusive. Not just in a very, you know, tokenistic way, but include diverse voices, especially behind the scenes. I think that way, it just makes for a stronger and a better product in the long run.

ELIZABETH

Right. And you mentioned tokenism, and when it comes to representation in fashion media, we do see quite a lot of performative actions or virtue signaling in fashion when it comes to diversity and inclusion. For instance, a brand having a diverse marketing campaign, but then still profiting off of the exploitation of largely women of color. So what's the impact of that like having that tokenism or virtue signaling, but not following that through your supply chain?

SHAKAILA

I think now, like, as you mentioned, like, people are becoming a lot more wise and we have a lot more access now. I think one of the great things about social media is that it's given us the opportunity to have more understanding of what's going on behind closed doors, and to have people like you who are like spreading the word into what these brands are doing behind these campaigns. Which on the surface, you know, is going to appeal to our sensibilities, it's going to appeal to our needs to belong. But it's all about taking that deeper look. And I think people are really spreading the word about this. And I think sooner or later, brands will start to really feel the negative impact of it. Right now, like I mentioned, there's so many things to contend with. So many people aren't going to want to do that deep dive; they're not going to want to do that research. But with more people coming together and championing sustainable initiatives and talking about the impact of the supply chain, I think it's going to be something that brands simply can't ignore. And I'm really excited to see that unfold. And I hope that, fashion is something that doesn't have to be demonized; it doesn't have to be this way. Like if we just act more fairly and pay people what they are due and what they are owed. And realize a garment it's not supposed to cost like so it's not supposed to be so cheap. It is supposed to cost as much because people who are making are making it lovingly and they're making it under fair practices, and they're

able to showcase their creativity and thinking more about our clothing as the works of art or as the cherished items that they should be, then that will encourage change, I think across the board.

ELIZABETH

Yeah, absolutely. So when we are talking about performative actions, I also think about greenwashing. And circularity seems to be the latest greenwashing scheme from fast fashion brands who are trying to appear more sustainable. They'll have take back programs, recycling programs, use recycled polyester and call that circular sustainable. But there was a really interesting study that found that when people have the option to recycle, they consume more. And there's a concern that that will happen with recycled fashion as well. I mean, some of these CEOs of these fast fashion brands have even come out and said that, yes, it will cost us more to do this circularity initiative or this sustainability initiative, but we expect to get more sales as a result of these initiatives. So can you explain what dynamic might be causing this based on your knowledge about fashion psychology. Like, why might we buy more when we perceive something to be sustainable?

SHAKAILA

Yeah, I think it speaks to what I mentioned earlier about buying things that we actually don't know if it suits us or it doesn't suit what we already own. So if we have an item, and it doesn't fit into how we can, how we want to present ourselves, and how we can work with different outfits that we are already in our possession, we're just going to buy more in order to suit this new item that we have. So it all goes back to the fact of people not really making that mindful and that fully thoughtful decision before they buy. They're just jumping on the fact that this is something sustainable. Oh, so it's good. It aligns with my beliefs. I want to feel that positive impact. And if I buy this item that aligns with my belief, I'm going to feel good. But if you actually do your due diligence, and look at these items that you're buying, if it's not really something that you truly love, if you haven't done the work that you need to do to make that mindful decision, you're going to have to buy more because it doesn't fit in. And that's how we end up in a place where we buying more and more and more. And then we still claim that we have nothing to wear, because we haven't done that wardrobe ethnography process. So I think as much as it's difficult to contend with all of the persuasive tactics by these brands, we do have a lot of powers of consumers. So it's about utilizing that power and giving yourself a second to really do your work and to think about what you're buying. Even if I know like, for example, economically, it can be quite hard for some people to want to buy into sustainable paths, that is a barrier for some people. For some people, fast fashion brands is the only kind of brands that they can afford as well. So I think it's about making sure that you are making the best decision. I know some people who have clothes that are from really like buy from H&M or Zara, but they've done the maintenance with them, they've kept them for a long time, they've customized it, they've dyed it, they styled it, and that is something that they've had it for a long time. And they haven't bought more and more and more. And you know, they haven't, they've used their money wisely. And they've developed that attachment with their clothing. And I think that's another way that people can own the power that they have to make their clothes last a bit longer and not to really give into these tactics, which aren't that useful if you're not doing your due diligence in the first place.

ELIZABETH

Yeah. And do you have any ideas for how we can use what we know about human psychology to encourage a more sustainable, ethical, circular fashion industry?

SHAKAILA

Yeah it is all about just like, understanding what your core beliefs are, and trying to find different ways to align them with what you're doing. So if you do believe in true sustainable practices, you're not going to do like \$100 haul on Shein, right? Like, if you, you're gonna feel bad about doing that. And you might push that to the side, because you're thinking about how it might look or you're creating your content. But if you take that time to really think about how ways you can align your beliefs with what you're doing, then you will take a second look, and it will stop yourself from doing that. So it's all about being more mindful, and just making sure that everything you buy is a conscious thought or decision. But if you act in that way, then you'll end up with clothes that you really love and buying something else. It won't appeal to you as much because you're so in love with everything that you already have.

ELIZABETH

Right. Yeah, the cognitive dissonance as you were talking about before, I really felt that when I was at the beginning of my slow fashion journey, learning about all of these things, but then maybe still buying a bunch of clothes I didn't need from a fast fashion brand. I didn't feel right.

SHAKAILA

Yeah, and I think it is about giving yourself a break as well. I think everybody's on a different journey. Like you said, You've been on it for many years, but I'm sure there's still more things that you need to learn. And I know a lot of people feel like they're kind of curious, they're finally realizing that hmm this is quite bad. And they're starting to do their due diligence. You know, giving consumers time. I think a lot of time with sustainability, the onus is put to almost too much on the everyday like consumer and everyday shopper. And we need to direct some of that focus more to the politicians as well for allowing these practices to be put into full effect. And you know, and the brands, they do have power as well. So you know, don't be so hard on yourself and just give yourself some power over your everyday decisions. But understand and give yourself a bit of grace to know that you're still on your journey. And there's just so much that you don't know yet.

ELIZABETH

Yeah so true. I think at the beginning of a slow fashion journey, it is easy to be hard on yourself and feel guilty. And while we do have power as individuals, as you said, we're also fighting against so much. Like at every level this fashion system has been designed to get us to consume, you know on a psychological level as you laid out earlier in the interview. So this has been such a very insightful conversation. I've learned so much and you've given us so much to think about as well. And I will be putting all of your links in the show notes, episode description, so people can check out your work and learn more about fashion psychology because there is even more to this field. So I do have one final question for you to close out this interview, and that question is: what does a better future for fashion look like to you?

SHAKAILA

A better future looks like one where everyone is dressing exactly like how they want to they're not bound by social norms. They are just dressed in a way that fully allows them to express their identity. And they have water with both that they truly love that expresses who they are from brands that they admire. And yeah, they're able to use the clothes as the tools they are to help them navigate life and to help them ultimately feel good.

ELIZABETH

And that's a wrap for this episode. Be sure to take a look at the episode description in your podcast app for the links referenced in this episode, as well as the various links to learn more about today's guest. For the full transcript of this episode, you can head on over to consciouslifeandstyle.com and navigate to the Podcast section of the site. The link to the full show notes should also be linked in whatever podcast app that you are listening on. If you would like to spread the word about this show and help the content reach more people. You can share the episode or podcast with a friend, screenshot this episode and share about it on Instagram Stories tagging [@consciousstyle](https://www.instagram.com/consciousstyle). And if you are listening on Apple Podcasts, something that really helps is to leave a rating and review. Thank you in advance for supporting the show in whatever way that you can. For more conscious content, you can subscribe to our weekly newsletter the conscious edits. In this newsletter I share recommendations for reading, listening to watching and much more. To get on that list. You can head to consciouslifestyle.com/edit and the link to subscribe will also be in the episode description. Thank you for tuning in to the conscious style podcast and sticking around until the very end. I'll see you again, same time, same place next week.