

25) #SwapBeforeYouShop: The Many Benefits of Clothes Swapping with Nicole Robertson [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.

So, as you may know, I'm a big advocate of slow fashion, loving their closets, and wearing what we have more. But I also recognize that our personal styles evolve. Our lifestyles may change, our sizes might go up or down. Or sometimes we really just don't like certain things in our closets anymore, no matter what we do. And as we learned in last week's episode with fashion psychologist Shakaila Forbes-Bell, humans have an innate desire for novelty. So how can we marry all of these things sustainably? How can we slow down fashion, wear our clothes more, but also have clothes that fit us — literally and figuratively speaking — at the current point in our lives? Well, that's something that clothes swapping is ideal for. Wrapping allows us to responsibly rehome our existing garments that no longer suit us while also being able to access different pieces that might fit us better — size wise, color wise, style wise or otherwise. Swapping is a great way to extend the lives of our clothes.

So I knew that I wanted to cover this topic in the second season of the show, which is all about circular fashion and slowing down consumption. So in this episode, I am chatting with Nicole Robertson about all things swapping. Nicole is the founder of Swap Society, an online clothing Swap Shop for women and kids that makes it easy and affordable to switch up your wardrobe more sustainably. In this interview, Nicole is sharing the benefits of swapping from an environmental impact perspective, as well as the benefits in our own personal lives. How swapping might change the relationship we have with our closets and our personal style. The impact that evolving fashion trends have on the second hand market, including swapping, and what exactly online swapping looks like through Swap Society.

As always the transcript for this episode, as well as all of the links to connect with today's guest, Nicole, are available in the show notes over on consciouslifeandstyle.com. And if you enjoy this conversation, make sure to give the podcast a rating on Apple Podcasts and hit subscribe or follow on your favorite podcast listening app so that you do not miss any future conversations like this one. Finally, for more sustainable fashion content, you can subscribe to my free weekly newsletter, the Conscious Edit, where I share articles that I'm reading, podcasts that I'm listening to, videos and documentaries I am watching, and more. You can sign up by visiting consciouslifeandstyle.com/edit or checking out the links in the episode description. Okay, now

on to the show! Nicole is going to start herself here by sharing how she got into swapping and why she founded Swap Society.

NICOLE

So in 2010, I was doing a deeper dive into my personal consumption. And I learned about how polluting the fashion industry is. And I was really horrified. And then of course, once you start digging into it, you learn about the human rights abuses, and it's just an industry fraught with, you know, lots and lots of bad things you know, going on. So I really didn't want to be a part of that.

But at the same time, I really love clothes. I really love fashion. I love mixing up my wardrobe. And so I thought well, you know, what are the ways that I can do this more responsibly? And I didn't have time to try to sell my clothes online at the time, there weren't as many options as there are today, and I never liked going into those shops where they give you — you know, resale shops — where you know, they give you pennies on the dollar for what you spent for something and they hardly take any of your items. And you just feel really bad about yourself and your clothes. And I didn't I didn't want to do that. I didn't have time to sell on eBay. And I thought well, I want to mix up my clothes. I want to get new clothes. I like having new stuff. How can I do that and so I literally Googled "clothing swap Los Angeles" because I thought, well, what if I could just swap my clothes with other people? And there was a clothing swap in my neighborhood of all things.

So I went over there, I read their website, I saw how it worked. It was a little brick and mortar, you know, Swap Shop, basically. And I showed up with bags and bags of clothes, and I swapped it all out for something new. And I did that for years. And I remember when the the woman who was running it, she decided she didn't want to do it anymore. And I was gutted. I was devastated because I thought, this is so much better than the other options that are out there. I just really loved it.

And so, you know, a lot of my experience has been in the beauty industry and I don't know, I just in work, you know, and working for tech, you know, tech beauty companies. And I thought, well, what if there was a way to not only keep the swap going, but to make it scalable and make it something that could reach more people outside of my small community of fellow swappers that were in my neighborhood. And so that's when I just really started thinking about it and thinking about how can we bring this to more people? And so that's where it started.

ELIZABETH

I love that story. So online, secondhand shopping has definitely gained a lot of steam in recent years. But swapping online is not quite so common yet. So could you explain to us how exactly people can swap their clothes with Swap Society?

NICOLE

Sure. And you're right, we are we do have a novel business model. So there's really nothing else like it, you have your consignment and your resale and you have rental. And what we're

doing is pretty different. It's similar, but it's but it's inherently different. The way that it works is we're a members only platform. So you sign up, and we send you a welcome kit, which is basically a bag with a prepaid mailing label and instructions for getting started. And you use that bag to send us the clothes that you're done with, maybe it doesn't fit, maybe it's not your style anymore, you're bored with it, you bought it and never wore it, whatever the number of reasons could be.

Or we also take children's clothes, so it could also be clothes, that your children have outgrown. And then you send that to us, and we go through all of the garments. So we are a managed marketplace. So we do all of the work. So we check all of the garments for condition, we steam them, we photograph them, we list them on our website, we warehouse them, we ship out all the orders. So we do all of that. We're trying to make it really, really easy for people to do this. So there are almost no objections, right? It's like we have all of this wearable clothing that's winding up in landfills, you know, let's keep that clothing in circulation for as long as possible. And so ease of use was really important to us when we were kind of formulating the model. Once we process all of those garments, we created an alternative currency, we call it Swap Coin.

And it's basically the currency, the value of the garments. So as our team members are listing the garments onto the site, they enter in a certain number of data points. And then the algorithm that we developed generates the Swap Coin value. So it's not people sitting around and holding something up and saying, I'm going to give this 5 points, and I'm going to give this 100 points. It's actually algorithmically determined. And so what that does is it keeps everything really, really fair. So you accumulate your Swap Coin balance, and then you can spend that swap coin on anything on the site. Everything you order from the site is Swap Coin plus \$4.99. So what we've done is we've taken away markups, we've completely eliminated the concept of a markup. We've also become completely brand agnostic. So we take all brands, we even take garments that are missing the tag, so long as they're in excellent condition, if they're in good wearable condition, we will take it. And so that way, we also don't care if it's fast fashion. Or if it's a luxury brand, or something in between. That's all determined in the value of the Swap Coin. And the Swap Coin is basically the currency amongst the members. So the fees that we charge are the service fees for providing the service. And then the Swap Coin is how if you sent something in and then I liked that, I would use my Swap Coin to get that item. And it keeps it super fair. Because if you go to a swap party or a swap event, they're usually one to one, right? You know, bring an item, take an item, you know, bring five things take five things. But what happens is what if you go to an event and maybe you bring a designer dress that doesn't fit you anymore? Or you just don't want to wear it anymore? You're bored with it, and you walk out with something that's a lower tier brand, that you love, but do you feel like it was fair? Do you, you know, trading that designer dress for maybe a Gap dress.

So that was something that that really mattered as well, because we wanted people to feel like they could send us any type of brand. I think that most women have a mix of kind of that high low wardrobe, right? We'll have a lot of kind of mid range pieces. And then we'll occasionally splurge on a higher end item here or there. And so we can take it all, we don't have a brand list

that, you know, you, oh, we only take these brands or this type of thing. We take everything as long as it's in really good condition.

ELIZABETH

Yeah, because a lot of times with consignment stores, they will be kind of picky with the brands, and it can make it difficult to try to give your clothing another use. So yeah, that's really interesting. And I like that brand agnostic approach. So you talked about the Swap Coin and I really want to dive into more about how you determine the value of what people send in to be swapped. So you mentioned it's an algorithm, but how do the various factors like brand, quality fabric, maybe the original price if you can find it, and other elements come into play?

NICOLE

Sure. So brand is a big one. We have built and continue to build a massive database of brand new information. So you know, as garments are getting listed on the site, if there's a new brand that we get, for example, we just update the database, right? But it's pretty robust already. And the brand plays a role. That is a big part of it. Original retail value plays a part of that — that information is a part of our database.

So we do know, the average original retail value of a J Crew sweater which I happen to be wearing right now, for example. One of the biggest, biggest biggest ones, though, is condition. So if you send us something that is new with tags, you will get a lot more points for it, then if it's gently used. We also do you know, or if it's like new, that's a that's not something that happens very often. But sometimes we get something where it doesn't have the tags, but we can tell it's never been worn or washed, you know that like new condition. Most of what we get is what we consider gently used. And we did open up a new tier called "imperfect." And the reason we did that was, we were so picky. And you know, we wouldn't take something if it had an imperfection. But oftentimes, some of these minor imperfections don't really matter. And so I thought, well, what if we take, at our discretion, you know, missing a button or there's a tiny snag, or there's a little mark or just coloration or something that's very small and not really noticeable, then it gets a huge ding on the on the Swap Coin value.

So that was something that plays a big role. Season plays a role. So right now it's fall/winter. So if you're clearing out your closet of all of the stuff you were wearing this summer, and you send that to us, you won't get as many points for that if you sent it current season. But we also have a lot of things that are kind of all-season. So not everything is one or the other. But obviously shorts right now, you're not going to get as much for a pair of shorts. And if you send us a sweater of you know, a warm, fuzzy sweater in the middle of summer, you won't get as many points. So it's actually pretty complex. There are so many different things that get entered in to kind of create that point amount, that Swap Coin amount. And so people sometimes ask Well, so is one Swap Coin like \$1? And the answer is no. It's not. It's more it's more complicated than that, if that makes sense. You know, our currency really only makes sense within the ecosystem of our site. It but it's basically, it just makes sure that you get a fair and equal swap out. So you can you can feel confident to send us something that's really kind of fancy, something you spent a lot of money on and splurged on and you might... I think a lot of women hold on to things that

they spent a lot of money on, because they worry in their minds about, oh, I spend so much on that. Maybe someday I'll wear it or I can't just get rid of that. Or oh, if I sell that Oh, but I spent so much more than that amount, you know, but the Swap Coin really gives people a lot of comfort in sending it in, because then they know Oh, I'll get a lot of I'll get a lot of Swap Coin for that. I can save it for something big and splurge or I can get a whole new seasonal wardrobe with it or what have you.

ELIZABETH

Yeah, definitely. So for the pieces that you can not accept what happens to those?

NICOLE

So we work with some local designers who will do some upcycling. We also work with some charities and we try to make sure that we're giving it to the appropriate place and person. But we really want to keep these garments going. So we pass it on, we'd never throw it away. Honestly, I wear a lot of things out of the reject pile. Because we're pretty picky. I mean, we do have that imperfect tear, but we're we're pretty picky. There's a there's a limit to how many imperfections something can have.

We just we want to make sure that our members feel like they're getting something really great. So it's sometimes there are those garments where it's a conversation of hm is this too far? Are there too many things wrong with it? What do you think? And then, you know, and we'll make a choice from there. Honestly, 30% of my wardrobe is stuff from the reject bin. On any given day, the sweater for example, this is a lovely J I know if you're listening, and you can't see. This is a lovely basic black J Crew sweater and has a few little moth holes in it. But it was a few too many for to put it on the site. And I thought well, maybe I'll do a visible mend. So I haven't done it yet. I just keep wearing it. Nobody notices. They're so tiny!

ELIZABETH

Right! Yeah, that's great that you consider everything. And even though you have very high standards for what you put up to be swapped, you also make sure that the things that aren't accepted, do still have a good home. Because that's a growing conversation in the secondhand space, as it should be. So something that comes up a lot is that the secondhand market is being flooded with higher quantities of lower quality fashion.

And this is making it more difficult for sorters, because there's so much to sort. For the stores because they may be not making a lot of revenue on these cheap pieces. And for secondhand shoppers who have to sift through all of that stuff. So is this something that you've experienced at Swap Society? Or is this not as much of a problem with the swapping model with the Swap Coin and all that stuff?

NICOLE

Sure. That's such a great question. I think that for us, because we accept all brands, it's not really an issue for us, right? We're not saying you know, we're not trying to make a higher markup per garment. We've created a model where we're saying, Okay, we'll take \$4.99 per

piece for everything. So we've kind of taken away that little bit of a worry. I totally understand why resale sites don't want fast fashion for the most part, because there becomes a point when you could almost buy it new for the same amount as if you were selling it secondhand, right? And so that's why designer and luxury brands are favored in that resale market. Orsola de Castro talks about this, as well, and I really agree with her very strongly on this. For those of you who don't know who she is, she's one of the founders of Fashion Revolution. Fast fashion clothing may be made more simply, and often with synthetic fibers, but so are mass produced luxury brands, in a lot of cases, right?

So I don't think that just because something is from a fast fashion brand automatically means that it's low quality. And, quite frankly, we've already bought that... we've already manufactured those garments, we've already bought those garments, I think that what we need to do is keep wearing those clothes for as long as possible. And so that's really a big part of our mission and why we've formulated this business model in the way that we have. Because the masses are buying fast fashion still.

So if secondhand is only focused on designer and luxury brands, that's a really big problem. And that's what's been happening. So that's why we say okay, we'll take we'll take it all we'll take any of it and then the value of the the you know the Swap Coin value is what fluctuates. In that way it's similar to maybe retail the way retail prices would be it's a little bit of apples and oranges right? Because we have created the can you know this currency that also takes into effect condition and season and, and all of that. But that being said, yeah, a fast fashion item on our site is going to be much lower Swap Coin value than you know, if we get a Chanel dress, which we've gotten. But we need to we need to wear those garments. So much clothing is getting landfills and incinerated every day. And you know, clothing utilization is going down. We're buying more clothes than ever wearing them for much less time. And so we really need to just keep wearing that stuff, regardless of what the brand is.

ELIZABETH

Mm hmm. Yeah, that makes sense with the Swap Coin model that it does sort of encourage — not reselling, but you know, I don't know the right word, but re swapping your fast fashion garments. Because that is a concern with reselling them. They're maybe not worth anything. And what do you do with these older fast fashion garments.

And sometimes fast fashion prices are getting even lower than what you can find at a thrift store. And so this race to the bottom in prices is making it less and less likely that those garments will be resold or that people will buy secondhand fast fashion garments, because the prices [of new fast fashion] are just getting like lower and lower. You know, it doesn't feel like they can go any lower, but then they do. So yeah, I think that swapping is a very interesting alternative to that to sort of keep those fast fashion garments in circulation.

NICOLE

Yeah and the other thing I just want to add is that part of the way that we've set up the model is also for accessibility. Because a lot of people buy fast fashion, because that's what they can

afford. And understandably, sustainably made brands with ethical labor where workers are paid well, all of those things drive up the cost of the garment — as they should. However, that does kind of take a lot of people out of this equation. And so our vision is really to provide this circular fashion for the masses, basically, to hopefully get people that are fast fashion shoppers, to shift away from buying those new fast fashion garments. And instead, you know, swap or focus on secondhand.

ELIZABETH

Mm hmm. Yeah. So, I would love to, again, sort of compare swapping and like the typical secondhand market here. So when it comes to trends, and secondhand and swapping, on one hand, people really want to rotate their closets more with trends, and maybe that encourages them to try swapping or secondhand shopping for more affordable access to these trendy garments. But then on the other hand, I think about how trendy fashion maybe won't be appealing so much in a few years, and then it loses value. So I'm curious, from your perspective, if you think that the trend cycle in fashion hurts the pre-loved movement? And if that's different with secondhand versus swapping?

NICOLE

Sure. I think that everything comes back, right? It maybe doesn't come back right away. But eventually everything comes back. So there's kind of that aspect of it. There's the element of trends versus personal style. So you know, yes, there are always going to be trends, because that's how the fashion industry gets people to buy new clothes. The model of fashion is to make people feel like they're perpetually out of style, so that they keep coming back into the store to buy new things. So I think that culturally, I would love to see a shift away from trendiness as much, right? I think that, however, there are so many things that we wear, that are outside of trends that are just basic. So you have your basics, you have the super highly trendy items, which kind of come and go.

And I think that for us [at Swap Society], we take it. We don't care if it's out of trend or out of out of date for us. And we're we're not curating style, and and I talk with the team about that a lot because sometimes we do get some things that are really kind of strange. And we think, I don't know what that's so weird. Is anybody going to want that, but I often say, someone designed it, and then manufactured it, and then somebody bought it, and then they sent it to us. So there is a chance that it's going to be someone else's style or jam, or they're going to be really excited about that. And so I think that, yes, you're always going to have your people in the world that are going to be more trend focused.

Maybe those are those few pieces that they buy new each season, but they swap or shop secondhand for everything else. And then when they get bored with the trend, then they just put it back into that secondhand or swapping ecosystem. I think that people are hopefully starting to be more mindful, though, right? It's trends can be fun. I'm not going to say that I've never been excited about wearing something that's trendy. That being said, I do focus more on on personal style and things that work for me and, and not really so much about what's getting pushed right now.

ELIZABETH

Mm hmm. Yeah, totally. So, this season of the podcast is focused all on circular fashion and swapping is, of course, part of this movement towards circularity. So how do you think that swapping fits into the circular fashion and sustainable fashions sort of system?

NICOLE

Well, circular fashion is really thinking about from the creation of the fiber to the garment, to the end of its life: what do we do with that, right? And how do we make sure that that whole process is sustainable? So it's really hard to do that with a polyester garment, for example. You know, there are a lot of challenges: mixed fibers, et cetera. And so there are different types of businesses that are focusing on different pieces of that, perhaps... some brands are doing regenerative farming and then if it's all natural fibers, they can be easily recycled. Not that there's a lot of textile recycling at this point, that's all kind of just like a dream for the future still.

But from my perspective, one of the most important parts of this whole circle of circular fashion is to keep wearable clothing in circulation for as long as absolutely possible. So once we have all of this wearable clothing, we should really try to wear it until we can't wear it anymore. That means we should be mending our clothes, if it has a hole in it, or a tear — get it fixed. You can obviously turn some things into rags around the house, but if you have a polyester chiffon dress, obviously that's not going to work for it.

There are some really cool designers that are doing a lot of upcycling, and we're seeing more and more of that happening. But that's really complicated, right? You can't mass produce upcycled fashion, the way that you can, you know, traditional fashion, but I think that's a good thing also. I think that hopefully, all of these steps, and all of these shifts in the industry are just going to help slow down fashion more and more, because it's just gotten out of control.

ELIZABETH

Yeah, absolutely. And I just want to do a quick plug for listeners, if they want to learn more about upcycled fashion, I did do an interview with Natasha of The Consistency Project, which is an upcycled rework brand and she talked a lot about that with the inability at the moment for upcycled brands to scale.

And as you mentioned, why that's maybe not a bad thing. So going back to our conversation, a lot of sustainable fashion solutions also have other benefits. And I really always like to bring that into the fold. because not everybody's convinced by the pure environmental benefits. So what do you find to be the benefits of swapping beyond the planetary benefits?

NICOLE:

Sure, well, if you're a fashion addict, type of personality — I think I definitely fall into that category except I've swapped my shopping addiction for more of like a swapping addiction. [I am not sure if] addiction is the right word, but, but you can rotate pieces in and out of your wardrobe all the time. So if you're one of those people that thinks, oh, I can't wear that, again,

it's already on my Instagram. You know, swapping is great for just constantly refreshing your wardrobe if that's your thing, if you like that, whether it's because you just like wearing new things, and you get bored. I think that it's also a really great way to save money on clothes. There's literally no cheaper other than having maybe a free swap with some friends that you do on your own.

There's really no less expensive way to mix up your wardrobe. And you know, if you're a parent with young children, they grow so quickly. And so it's always a challenge to figure out, what do you do with those clothes? I have two kids. Sometimes all of a sudden there's just a crazy growth spurt, and then nothing fits anymore. And then suddenly they need all new clothes and shoes. And so swapping is great for families who have kids. And I think I see this problem. I'm very active in my local Buy Nothing group. And people are always trying to get rid of clothes that their kids have outgrown. But I think there it also it's sometimes even hard to do that though. People are saying oh I'll give this away for free. But if somebody in the group doesn't have a child, that's that gender and size at that moment, sometimes it can be hard for people to even pass things on. And so we make that really easy.

And then also some of our members, they send us their kids stuff, and they get themselves something new instead of for their kids. But I think that saving money and having fun with fashion, and obviously, the sustainability. And I consider the ethical part of fashion to be a part of sustainability, but also, I think that by not supporting the practices of the vast majority of these fashion businesses, and how they're really not paying their employees fairly, and all of that, I think that you can also if, if ethical and fair trade matters to you, this is a great way to do that also, without having to spend a ton of money.

ELIZABETH

Yeah, right. And we often talk about fewer, better things. And if you know, you get most of your wardrobe with swapping, you are saving a lot of money, maybe you can invest in that really special, ethically made, artisan-made dress or regeneratively made dress that's definitely at a higher price point. Exactly. So how have you seen swapping change the relationship that people have with their clothes and their closets? And maybe their style, too?

NICOLE

Yeah, I can speak about myself. And I think I definitely see this with our members as well. I know that since I've started swapping, a few key things have happened. One is I've become much less attached to my clothes, emotionally speaking. A lot of the reasons I would hold on to something was if it was something I'd splurged on, and I felt that...

Oh, you know, I'll never forget I had this Marc Jacobs dress that I loved. It was amazing. It was a black strapless dress. It had a cute lining underneath, and no one could see, but I like that I like little hidden surprises that only I know about in the garment. And I wore that dress so many times, and in so many ways. I mean, I styled it a bunch of different ways. But eventually I just thought, oh my god, I'm so tired of wearing this dress, but I kept it in my closet because I felt like well, I spent a lot of money on that. So I'm just gonna keep it and then you know, I don't have a

huge closet or a ton of space that I was kind of jamming things in there. That was one of the first things that I swapped. And I was so excited about it. I have no idea what happened to that dress afterwards. I hope somebody else really loved it and enjoyed it — there was nothing wrong with it. But I let it go.

And so I think it's helped me become much more of a minimalist with my wardrobe. I think also, it's made me a lot more experimental. When you have to buy something at full price, you're not going to buy it if you're not sure about it. But if you feel kind of curious about something, you can swap it and try it where it once... wear it to dinner or to a party and you don't have to feel committed. I think that when we make a purchase — well, some people especially if you're buying something higher end, obviously, you know, part of our problem is this was like disposable fashion idea. But I think a lot of people, we invest money, we invest time we invest our feelings into acquiring this garment. And so, you want to be really careful about what you get or what you don't get.

And so I think that I've become much more experimental. It allows also for a lot of serendipity. Because you never know what you're going to get a lot of our members tell me that they visit our site every day, because they want to see what's new, and snap up brands and types of garments that they really like. And it's so there's kind of that fun element too. You never know what you're going to get. It's kind of like a little bit of a surprise holiday every day, whether you're looking at the site, or for us here in LA you know that work with the business.

ELIZABETH

Yeah, for sure. I feel like pieces that I've bought secondhand, some of them are pieces that I wouldn't have maybe bought if I was buying new from a sustainable brand and it was a bit more of an investment. And there have been sort of surprises like pieces that I've loved more than I thought that I would and pieces that I just haven't worn as much as I thought I would. So I can definitely see that experimentation aspect coming into play for sure.

NICOLE

Well, and for me, I always... I loved thrifting I was a thrill of the hunt person but I always shopped. I had a mix of kind of low end and high end and thrifted. And that was just how I always built my personal wardrobe. And I loved finding funky, unique one of a kind pieces that you just stumble upon in the thrift store.

I think that's so much fun. Yeah, every time I talk about that, I think, wow, I should just go thrifting sometimes just for fun. But I really don't need to go thrifting like, I have I have so much clothing at my fingertips. But I think that there's that element of that fun. Oh, what is that? Oh, that's so interesting. I wouldn't have thought to maybe look for that. But that's so cool. I'm gonna, I'm gonna get it. And I'm gonna wear it.

ELIZABETH

Yeah, yeah, totally. I find it very exciting to be on that hunt as well. So could you dive a little bit more into how swapping can help make sustainable fashion more accessible?

NICOLE

Absolutely. So yeah, it really is our vision to scale and to be accessible to women of any size, also, not just have any kind of socioeconomic status. So obviously our pricing is really affordable. We would love to be more size inclusive. To be perfectly honest, we have some plus sizes, but most of our sizing is size extra small through extra large. And we don't have a very robust plus size offering yet. And that's something that we really want to have. It just hasn't kicked off on its own. I think though, probably, if a plus size person sees our site, they see that we have some plus sizes, but we don't have very much.

So they probably don't feel super included, yet. We accept all sizes, we just haven't gotten enough of those. So it's something that we're working on, because I think it really matters. And I think that there are so many women, I'm sure that would love to swap with us. We've tried a few things, and we've gotten some stuff, but yeah, we really need to focus on it a little bit more.

ELIZABETH

Yeah. Thank you for your transparency there and being open about that and where Swap Society wants to improve in the future, in terms of accessibility. I think that sizing, particularly plus sizes, that's definitely a barrier in secondhand fashion in general. And I am planning to interview a plus size vintage shop owner in a future episode, hopefully for this season, to talk more about that.

But I'd like to talk about another barrier, which is the styling element. So I think that a lot of people feel overwhelmed with shopping pre love to because they might not know how to style various brands, maybe various seasons, different materials, prints, colors. It's maybe not as easy as buying a full outfit right off the rack at a retail store. So can you tell us a bit about Swap Society's styling services? And how that can help people with that obstacle?

NICOLE

Sure. Well, that's all of the things that you described. That's exactly why we decided to offer styling services because we really wanted to be able to address those. Those people it can be tricky. Not everybody gets it. I think a lot of the fashion companies, they tell you what to put with what, right? I's kind of like, okay, here's this blouse and then these are the pants and the belt and the jacket and the shoes, and here's the whole outfit.

And a lot of people have gotten used to shopping that way. And it is much harder to do that if you're shopping secondhand. For us, what we do is we've created a kind of an a la carte service for our members where they can get a 10 piece capsule wardrobe and it's basically just an extra \$35, which goes to the stylist, plus the normal per item fees. And that way somebody can build a 10 piece capsule for you. I find that that's really helpful, especially for new members, or people that do feel like they need a little bit of help.

Even a seasonal capsule wardrobe. You know if it feels too daunting to comb through — not only our site but any site, any secondhand site, right? There are so many things, so many

options and so many items available. So we'll do that work. We have stylists that we work with and they'll there's a style quiz, you fill out the quiz, and they'll pick out the items for you and send them to you. The great thing is, is if something doesn't fit, or you don't love it, or whatever it may be, you can just swap it back So, we handle returns the same way we would handle getting a new garment. It's just all just incoming incoming clothes for us. I think that's... building a capsule wardrobe is a really great way just to kind of keep your wardrobe in control, too. I like to have my basics for every season, the things that I kind of mix and match and wear all the time. And then obviously, it's fun to throw in something kind of wacky and weird. But it's nice to just have some kind of neutrals and basics.

But if you're not, if you're not a minimalist, it doesn't have to be a minimalist capsule wardrobe, it doesn't have to be beige and navy blue and, and black. If somebody is really into loud, splashy prints and bright colors, we can work with that, too. So that's where the style quiz comes into play. We also do a lot of curation on our own to make it easier. So different seasonal collections of clothes that are really great.

Or cocktail dresses if it's wedding season or holiday season. So we'll often do little collections too where we help make that easier for people so that they don't have to comb through thousands of things every time they're looking through the site. Especially as a new person. If you've been a member for a while, and you're kind of you kind of know what there is, and you're checking every day or every other day, you get a sense of kind of what's there, but it's fun. I really love having a capsule personally.

ELIZABETH

Yeah, very cool. Well, for anyone who wants to check out Swap Society, I will have all of the links in the episode description. And Nicole, I have one final question for you, before we wrap up this conversation that I asked to all the guests that come on the show. And that is what does a better future for fashion look like to you?

NICOLE

So a better fashion future for me is people loving everything that's in their closets. So really only having things that you love, that make you feel good, that fit, that you're excited to have that you're excited to wear on a personal level. And then on an industry level, I would really love to see the industry, slow down, focus on more sustainable practices, more ethical practices, that garment workers are paid fairly. SB62 recently passed in California, and we were very supportive of that and I'm so excited to see that happening.

And I mean, it's just here in this state. So it's there's still a lot of work to do. But the people who make our clothes, they're, they're human beings just like us, you know, and they deserve to be paid fairly, to work in a safe and clean environment and to be treated with dignity and respect. And so I'd love to see the Earth treated more respectfully. I'd love to see a system that's less extractive. I'd love to see people focusing on wearing clothes that they already have, and mending what they have, and really taking care of their clothes. And and opting for a secondhand. Our hashtag is swap before you shop, I don't think people are going to totally stop

buying brand new things. But I think that we can buy a lot less brand new stuff. We can work with what's already there in the world, and be really mindful about the things the new things that we do purchase.

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.

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