# Doing Good? Thrift Stores and Second-Hand Clothing Donations in Victoria, BC

by

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## Abstract

Do second-hand clothing donations ‘do good?’ Thrift stores promote the message that second-hand clothing (SHC) donations ‘do good’ when they solicit donations from individuals. I argue that this narrative of ‘doing good’ overemphasizes the social and economic value of donated clothes and conceals the negative aspects of overconsumption and the problems associated with the commercial export of SHC. The aim of this thesis is to better understand the relationship between fast fashion, clothing consumption and disposal patterns, and the global trade in SHC donations by examining what motivates individuals to donate SHC to thrift stores, and how thrift stores are linked to the international trade in SHC. I began to map SHC donations from households to thrift stores. I used a global production network (GPN) framework to examine the social, political, and economic relations that contribute to how value is created, increased, and extracted in this commodity chain. Using a case study approach, I conducted 30 interviews with individuals who donated used clothing and I conducted research at four different thrift stores that sell SHC in Victoria, BC.

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## Dedication

In memory of my father

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## Introduction

What happens to the endless piles of clothes that fill the donation rooms at thrift stores? What are the economic and environmental effects of fast fashion, and the related overproduction and overconsumption of cheap, disposable clothing? This thesis will engage with these questions. With the rise of fast fashion, new clothing is becoming less expensive and more disposable. Clothing consumption has increased significantly since the 1990s and has led to a high level of textile waste (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). For example, between 2000 and 2014 global clothing production has increased twofold (Cobbing & Vicaire, 2016) and, along with it, donations of unwanted items have risen. Such patterns are evident in Canada: the average Canadian purchases 1.2 garments per week and gets rid of 55 kg of unwanted textiles each year (Marsales, 2016, p. 12). Approximately 85 percent of all household textiles in Canada are disposed of in the garbage (Weber, 2016, p. 22), even though 95 percent of all textiles can be reused or recycled (SMART, 2017). But what happens to textiles once they end up in landfills? Biodegradable textiles such as cotton and bamboo decompose in landfills[1] and can produce harmful emissions and chemicals such as "acid leachate, methane, nitrogen gases and hydrogen sulphide" (Weber et al., 2017, p. 208). Further, synthetic materials such as nylon and acrylic may marginally deteriorate, but the majority of these materials will remain in landfills permanently (Weber et al., 2017, p. 208).

Linked to these disposal problems are the environmental problems associated with the dying of jeans and other processes linked to the production of clothing. The garment industry is the second largest industrial polluter (the oil industry is the largest polluter), accounting for 10 percent of all global carbon emissions (Conca, 2015, para. 2). The garment industry has a

[1] The majority of waste in Canada is disposed of in municipal landfills, less than 5 percent of solid waste is incinerated (Statistics Canada, 2012, p.16).

complex supply chain with a massive ecological footprint from start to finish, from resource production and extraction, the consumption of large amounts of water (for cotton cultivation, fabric dyeing which uses hazardous chemicals, and finishing) (Gould, 2014), global transportation, and disposal. Approximately 2,700 liters of water are used to produce one cotton t-shirt and between 11,000 to 20,000 liters of water are used to produce one pair of jeans (Marsales, 2016, p. 12).

In this thesis, I use the term 'fast fashion' in a broad sense. Fast fashion cannot exist without the overproduction and overconsumption of cheap disposable clothing. The term 'fast fashion' is used to describe the faster supply chain (from product design to its production and distribution) and the shorter fashion product lifecycle (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). In contrast to fashion product lifecycles that were historically based on two seasons (spring/summer and fall/winter), the shorter product lifecycle of fast fashion means that retailers can respond to changing consumer trends much more quickly; new clothing is released on a weekly basis (Whitehead, 2014). Fast fashion marks the convergence of "fashion" and "garments." Historically, clothes that were classified as "fashion" were priced higher and were for elites; "garments" were priced lower and were for the masses (Anguelov, 2015, ix). Fast fashion is largely a result of technological advances in production and the creation of synthetic fabrics. Such fabrics are generally cheap, and as Anguelov points out, "with very few exceptions such as silks, wools, and furs, there is no such thing as an expensive fabric" (2015, ix). Fast fashion retailers aim to convince consumers to purchase more and more clothing: the incentive is extremely low prices. As Gupta and Gentry contend, fast fashion retailers create a "perception of scarcity" in their stores to increase impulse purchasing (2016, p. 254). Because the product lifecycle is so short, fast fashion retailers can effectively "communicate both limited-quantity

scarcity and limited-time scarcity by offering high inventory turn-over, stocking limited quantities of products per style, and deliberately manipulating merchandise on the retail floor" (Gupta & Gentry, 2016, p. 254).

The consumption and disposal of fast fashion is highly gendered. Fast fashion is primarily consumed by women. Then, in the household, it is typically women who carry the burden of recycling or disposing of excess clothing. If excess clothing is donated to a thrift store, the staff member who sorts and processes the clothing will most likely be female. Further, at thrift stores that are operated by non-profit organizations the majority of staff members are unpaid – they are volunteers. The source of value in the second-hand clothing industry is unpaid (or underpaid) female labour. These workers are responsible for the time-consuming tasks of sorting, processing, and bundling clothing donations.

Fast fashion leads to increases in used clothing that is either disposed of in the garbage, sold (e.g. at consignment stores), or given away as second-hand clothing. Second-hand clothing (SHC) can be defined as worn articles of clothing that are donated or given away and are then repurposed or resold. SHC includes garments and other clothing accessories such as shoes, hats, and belts, as well as household textiles such as linens and bedding. In terms of international trade, SHC is classified as "Worn clothing and Other Worn Textile Articles" under the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HS). The HS is an internationally standardized system for classifying commodities used in international trade that is organized and run by the World Customs Organization (WCO) (Canada Border Services Agency, 2015). The HS code for SHC is 630900. The WCO classification of HS 630900 only covers the following items:

(a) Articles of textile materials:
    (i) Clothing and clothing accessories, and parts thereof;

(ii) Blankets and travelling rugs;
(iii) Bed linen, table linen, toilet linen and kitchen linen;
(iv) Furnishing articles, other than carpets of headings 57.01 to 57.05 and tapestries of heading 58.05;

(b) Footwear and headgear of any material other than asbestos.

In order to be classified in this heading, the articles mentioned above must comply with both of the following requirements:
(i) they must show signs of appreciable wear, and
(ii) they must be presented in bulk or in bales, sacks or similar packings (Statistics Canada, 2016).

There are three different forms of textile recycling: up-cycling, down-cycling, and reusing (Chan et al., 2015, p. 155; Laitala, 2014, p. 445). Up-cycling occurs when textiles are recycled into new products or materials. Down-cycling is when textiles are used for other purposes such as industrial rags, insulation, and sound-absorption materials (Laitala, 2014, p. 445). Reusing occurs when unwanted clothing is resold at thrift stores or consignment stores, is exchanged at swaps, or is gifted. Reusing is the most environmentally friendly method for recycling textiles. Up-cycling converts textiles into products with a higher value, whereas down-cycling results in products with a lower value. It should be noted that up-cycling, at the moment, is small in scope (Laitala, 2014, p. 445). While the technology exists to convert polyester and some types of nylon into new fibers, as Gould (2015) points out, the primary obstacle to textile recycling is "finding a way to separate blended fibre materials so they can be recycled according to their own system. It's this difficulty that means a T-shirt that's 99% cotton and 1% spandex can't be saved from landfill today" (para 5).

Limited research has been carried out on textile recycling in Canada, and specifically on how Canadians consume and dispose of textiles. Although the recycling of plastic, glass, paper, aluminum, electronics and other materials has become widespread and formalized across municipalities and provinces in Canada, textile recycling has received limited attention. Perhaps

the lack of regulation and oversight by municipal and provincial governments is a result of the high cost and low return associated with textile recycling. For example, new garments can be produced in the global South at low production costs and imported to the global North at a lower cost than recycling textiles (Joung & Park-Poaps, 2013, p. 109). Another possible reason for the absence of municipal textile diversion programs is the misconception that textile waste is not an issue for waste management because of the assumption that textiles are not toxic even though they are produced with harmful chemicals (Weber, 2017, p. 208). Further, Marsales (2016) suggests that municipalities offload the recycling of textiles to charities and non-profit organizations because of the "unique challenge" recycling these types of materials pose (p. 13). For example, curbside collection is not a simple solution to textile recycling because textiles produce mould if they get wet, and once they are mouldy they can no longer be recycled (Marsales, 2016, p. 12).

A 2014 study on waste management in Canada that was prepared for the Canadian Council of Ministers of Environment found that no jurisdiction in Canada has a formal recycling system for textiles. Instead, throughout Canada, charitable organizations act as an informal recycling system for collecting and reselling textiles and diverting textiles from landfills (Giroux, 2014, p. 33). However, little is known about this network and system because there are no nationwide statistics on the number of charities or the amount of textiles collected through informal recycling systems (Giroux, 2014, p. 33). As Marsales (2016) argues, "this hands-off approach by governments results in inadequate consumer education, limited diversion data, and little end-market accountability" (p. 12). There are also no nationwide statistics available for the percentage of textiles that comprise landfills in Canada. In the absence of concrete data, it has been estimated that textiles account for around 5-10 percent of the total amount of solid waste in

landfills in Canada.[2] From 2009-2010, textiles accounted for 5.5 percent of solid waste at the Hartland landfill (which is where the city of Victoria, BC disposes its solid waste) (CRD, p. 9, 2013).

As landfills reach capacity, environmental and social awareness about textile recycling increases. As such, some municipalities in Canada are beginning to investigate and implement plans for diverting textiles from landfills. For example, in May 2016, Colchester, Nova Scotia, implemented a program for curbside textile recycling (provided the items are not damp or greasy) (Gould, 2016; Williams, 2016). In April 2017 Markham, Ontario became the first municipality in North America to ban the disposal of textiles in the garbage (City of Markham, 2017a). Residents are now required to dispose of all unwanted textiles in donation bins that are located throughout the city and operated by the city in partnership with the Salvation Army and Diabetes Canada (City of Markham, 2017a). The Salvation Army and Diabetes Canada sort the items collected into three categories: "rewear, reuse or recycling" (City of Markham, 2017b). Items that can be re-worn are sold in Salvation Army Thrift Stores and Value Village stores (City of Markham, 2017a). Textiles that cannot be re-worn are sold to cloth graders (The City of Markham, 2017b).

In Canada, thrift stores and charitable organizations are the primary location where unwanted clothes are donated. SHC donations in Canada are increasing as more consumers either choose to donate unwanted clothing rather than disposing in other ways, and/or as consumption increases and therefore the volume of second-hand clothing increases. As such, thrift stores that sell SHC offer a temporary solution to overconsumption – an alternative to the landfill. However,

[2] This estimate is adapted from data from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and a study conducted in Nova Scotia by the Resource Recovery Fund Board (RRFB). In 2013, the EPA found that textiles account for 5.2 percent of the waste in landfills. In 2012, the RRFB found that textiles account for 10 percent of the waste in landfills (Weber, 2016, p. 22).

despite common perceptions, very little (only about 10-20 percent) of SHC donations made to charities and non-governmental organizations are actually sold in thrift stores (Giroux, 2014, p. 33). Partly because of limited capacity for clothing recycling nationally, the majority of SHC is sold to national or international clothing recyclers, or is exported to European non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and then sold to international buyers. A large percentage of these items end up in markets in the global South, such as African countries. Garments that aren't appropriate for the climate or are not in good enough shape for resale frequently end up in landfills in these countries.

Despite the increase in this global trade, there is limited scholarship on this trade and limited knowledge of what happens to SHC once it leaves thrift stores in the global North and enters the international market. The key scholars who have conducted research on the global trade in SHC are Andrew Brooks (2015, 2013, 2012), David Simon (2012), Simone Field (2007), Pietra Rivoli (2005), and Karen Tranberg Hansen (2004, 2000, 1999). These scholars have mapped some of the key nodes in the SHC commodity chain, beginning with the collection of donated clothes by charities and non-profits in the United States and the United Kingdom, to the sale of excess goods in the global South. For example, Brooks (2013, 2015) and Field (2007) have found that a large proportion of donated SHC in the United Kingdom is not sold domestically but, instead, is commercially exported to sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Similarly, Hansen (2000) and Rivoli (2005) have found that a large proportion of donated SHC in the United States is commercially exported to sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). However, there has not been a similar study that examines the collection of donated clothes by charities and non-profits in Canada and the sale of excess goods in the global South.

This thesis aims to better understand the relationship between fast fashion, clothing consumption and disposal patterns, and the global trade in SHC donations by examining what motivates individuals to donate SHC to thrift stores, and how thrift stores are linked to the international trade in SHC. Using a commodity chain analysis, I will begin to map the position and role of donated second-hand clothing in the global garment trade, beginning from the point of drop-off at local (Victoria, BC, Canada) thrifts stores, to the processing and sorting locally or nationally, to the sale of excess goods in the global South. My research focuses on the local component of the commodity chain by exploring the collection of used clothing in Victoria and the role of thrift stores in the collection, sale, and disposal of clothing donations. I used a 'case study' approach, or more specifically a 'case within a case': my geographic case study was Victoria and the selected stores that were used as case studies within Victoria were three local non-profit thrift stores (which will remain anonymous), as well as Value Village, an international for-profit thrift store. My project focuses primarily on two key levels of the commodity chain of second-hand clothing: individual consumers who donate excess clothes, and thrift stores who receive and then sell SHC. I conducted informal and semi-structured (in-person or by telephone) qualitative interviews with these two groups in order to explore the following questions: (1) What happens to second-hand clothing donations once they reach thrift stores? (2) How do thrift stores dispose of unsold second-hand clothing donations? Are second-hand clothing donations sold and shipped to countries in the global South, specifically countries in Africa? (3) What motivates individuals to donate clothing to thrift stores? Are they aware of what happens to unsold second-hand clothes? Although time and other limitations of my research made it difficult to map the link between local sellers, international buyers and global south markets for

SHC, my research also began to probe this additional question: What is the link between thrift stores in Canada, and international buyers who bundle and sell clothes to buyers in Africa?

My case study research is situated within broader debates about the link between second-hand clothing from North America and the sale of second-hand clothing in Africa. However, given that this is an MA project and my time and budget is limited, my primary research focuses on the role of thrift stores here in Victoria as one small window into the second-hand clothing industry in Canada and its position in the global trade of clothing.

Theoretically, this thesis builds on the small but growing body of scholarship that explores the gendered dynamics of commodity chains. Gender and gender relations are central to production, consumption, and trade in commodity chains, but gender and gender relations have largely been omitted in commodity chain research. Several scholars have pointed out this gap in chain/network research (see Bair, 2010; Barrientos, 2001, 2003; Carr et al., 2000; Dunaway, 2001, 2014a, 2014b; Nakazibwe & Pelupessy, 2014; Ramamurthy, 2004; Werner, 2012; Yeates, 2004). But very few scholars have connected social reproduction with commodity chain research, even though large bodies of scholarship exist on both of these topics. Scholars who have made this connection have added social reproduction as an important node in commodity chains (Wallerstein, 1982, 1986, 1977; Dunaway, 2014a, 2014b, 2001; Yeates, 2004; Ramamurthy, 2014, 2004; Clelland, 2014). As such, a key thread in this body of scholarship illustrates how the household is a hidden site for the extraction of surplus value. Further, as several feminist political economists point out (see Dunaway, 2014b; Federici, 2012; Mies, 2014; Picchio, 1992), capitalist accumulation relies on the separation of reproduction from relations of production in order to make invisible the economic value the household provides to the capitalist world-system.

While there is evidence to suggest that women play a dominant role in the SHC industry – as retail workers in the fast fashion industry, consumers and donators of clothing, receivers and sorters of SHC in volunteer-run social service organizations and other non-profits in Canada, buyers in the international market, and sellers in the formal and informal SHC sector in global south countries – most research on the topic has not incorporated a gender analysis. Although gender was not the central focus of my research, my research was informed by feminist political economy scholarship and I integrated a gender analysis into my empirical research. However, my thesis engages theoretically with scholars who have added social reproduction as an important node in commodity chains. As such, I address three themes in the concluding chapter that emerged from my empirical research that illustrate how the SHC industry is gendered.

This thesis is structured in the following way. The first chapter is split into two sections: section one outlines my theoretical framework and section two discusses my methodology and methods. The chapter begins with a literature review of commodity chain research, followed by an overview of research by scholars who have added gender and gender relations to commodity chain research, and then of scholars who have connected social reproduction to commodity chains. The aim of this chapter is to provide the theoretical framework for how I will conceptualize value, which is important for understanding the ways in which SHC is re-commodified. Chapter two explores two additional bodies of scholarship on second-hand clothing commodity chains: individuals' clothing disposal behaviour and the global trade of SHC. This chapter situates my own empirical research within these two bodies of scholarship and highlights the gap in scholarly research on the global trade of SHC, and how Canada's role and position in the global trade of SHC has not been studied. Drawing on scholars such as Brooks (2012, 2013, 2015, 2015b), I outline how the SHC industry reflects historical trading

relations between the global North and South that re(produce) relations of domination and dependency. Chapter three and four present my empirical research. Chapter three presents data from the 30 interviews I conducted with individuals who donate used clothing in Victoria, BC. The purpose of the interviews was to examine individuals' clothing consumption patterns, knowledge of and attitudes towards donating used clothing. A key finding was that the majority of participants were not aware of what happens to unsold clothing donations in thrift stores, and that only a small proportion of donated clothing is actually sold in thrift stores. Chapter four examines what happens to SHC donations once they arrive at thrift stores in Victoria, BC through a case study analysis of four different thrift stores. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the role and position that these thrift stores play in the collection, sale, and disposal of donated clothes. Of particular interest was mapping the sale of excess goods from thrift stores in Victoria, BC to the global South (in particular to Africa). This chapter adopts a critical commodity chain approach to explore this phenomenon. A key finding was that thrift stores receive a large volume of clothing donations, yet only a small portion of used clothes are sold in thrift stores, and then the stores sell the remaining clothes, by the pound, to other organizations or to commercial textile recyclers. In the conclusion I return to the theoretical discussion on the significance of adding social reproduction as a node in commodity chain research.

As noted, the purpose of this thesis is to investigate two nodes of the SHC commodity chain in Victoria, BC: individuals who donate excess clothes, and thrift stores that sell second-hand clothing. My research seeks to answer these key questions: What role and position do thrift stores in Victoria, BC play in the global trade in SHC, in terms of the collection, sale, and disposal of donations? What do donors of SHC know about the global trade in SHC? Is there a relationship between individual clothing consumption patterns and SHC donations? In order to

increase donation levels and the sale of second-hand clothes, thrift stores and non-profit organizations advertise that clothing donations 'do good.' However, this thesis challenges this narrative. I argue that the value of donated clothes as 'doing good' is misleading since the majority of donated clothes that thrift stores receive are not sold in the stores and do not remain in the local community. Further, while the revenues that thrift stores and non-profits receive from the sale of SHC are used to fund the organizations' philanthropic activities domestically, in the global trade in SHC, only a small fraction of the profits are accrued by thrift stores or non-profit organizations. Instead, commercial textile recyclers and clothing graders accumulate the majority of the profits (see Norris, 2012; Field, 2007). This thesis explores how the re/creation of the value of SHC by thrift stores is necessary to conceal the negative aspects of overconsumption. SHC is donated as a "gift" and then recommodified in order to be sold in thrift stores domestically, or commercially exported. I argue that the public image that thrift stores and non-profit organizations present is misleading. The ability of donated clothes to 'do good' is overemphasized and the negative aspects of the trade in SHC are concealed from the public.

# Chapter One

## Theoretical Framework & Methodology

This chapter outlines my theoretical framework and methodology. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section begins with a literature review of commodity chain research. I outline the four main variants of commodity chain research: commodity chains in world-systems research, global commodity chains, global value chains (GVCs), and global production networks (GPNs). Then, I proceed with an overview of scholars who have added gender to commodity chain research, followed by scholars who have connected social reproduction to commodity chains. The second section outlines my methodology and methods, which are influenced by dialectical social analysis, case study methods, and feminist research methods. In the third section, I describe my research design and approach. This chapter provides the theoretical framework for how I will conceptualize value, which is important for understanding the ways in which SHC is re-commodified.

## Theoretical Framework

Marxist and feminist analyses of value inform my theoretical approach. Using the analytical framework of commodity chain research, I will be drawing on the key concepts and theoretical underpinnings that emerge from this scholarship. There is a large and growing body of literature broadly termed 'commodity chain' research. Such scholarship can be broken down into four distinct variants: commodity chains in world-systems research (see Hopkins & Wallerstein, 1977); global commodity chains (GCCs) (see Gereffi, 1994; Gereffi & Korzeniewicz, 1994); global value chains (GVCs) (see Porter, 1986; Gereffi, Humphrey, & Sturgeon, 2005; Gereffi & Fernandez-Stark, 2016), and global production networks (GPNs) (see Henderson, Dicken, Hess, Coe, & Yeung, 2002; Coe, Dicken, & Hess, 2008; Neilson & Yeung,

2014). Unless I am making a specific reference to one of these four variants, I will use the umbrella term “commodity chain” to refer to this overall cluster of scholarship that includes these four different variants of chain/network research. Key to my research is the conceptualization of value. Guided by world-systems research, GPNs, and feminist analyses, I will draw on Marxist and feminist notions of surplus value to illustrate how value is added and extracted along the commodity chain of SHC.

The commodity chain construct emerged in the late 1970s as a way to examine processes of economic globalization, and relations of production and consumption. The commodity chain has been used as a conceptual or research tool, but it also describes a form of economic organization that has existed since the development of global capitalism (Hopkins & Wallerstein, 1977, p. 128). As a conceptual or research tool, the concept of a commodity chain has been used to map production and consumption relations between the global North and South. The commodity chain envisions a chain of activities within an industry, from the design of the product to its production, distribution, consumption, and to its final use (Gereffi & Fernandez-Stark, 2016). This sequence of activities may occur across geographical locations and across international borders. The commodity chain approach is important because it demystifies the complexities of globalization by mapping the chain of activities involved in commodity production and consumption onto concrete national sites and with reference to particular actors.

The first use of the commodity chain as a concept can be traced to an article published in 1977, which Terrence K. Hopkins and Immanuel Wallerstein introduced the concept of a commodity chain to world-systems research:

> Let us conceive of something we shall call, for want of a better conventional term, "commodity chains". What we mean by such chains is the following: take an ultimate consumable item and trace back the set of inputs that culminated in this item – the prior transformations, the raw materials, the transportation mechanisms, the labor input into

> each of the material processes, the food inputs into the labor. This linked set of processes we call a commodity chain. If the ultimate consumable were, say, clothing, the chain would include the manufacture of the cloth, the yarn, etc., the cultivation of the cotton, as well as the reproduction of the labor forces involved in these productive activities. (1977, p. 128)

Each stage or process of production along a commodity chain is mapped; each stage or process is referred to as a "node" or "box" in the commodity chain (p. 160). Mapping the chain of a finished commodity requires describing these activities: the processes within and between each node; how production is organized within each node; the social relations of production; and the geographical location and span (Hopkins & Wallerstein, 1986, p. 162). Embedded within the theoretical lens of world-systems theory, the commodity chain construct represents a critical approach to understanding the global capitalist economy and the relationship between core, semi-peripheral, and peripheral states. World-systems theory posits that capitalism is a global phenomenon; it is not confined to national borders. The international division of labour describes how global capitalism connects the majority of the world's population, "how economies, firms, workers and households" are integrated through their participation in the global economy that is marked by relations of "domination and dependency" (Yeates, 2004, pp. 374-5). In the mid-1970s a 'new international division of labour' emerged with the increasing mobility of global capital and the creation of a "global assemblyline" (Smith, 2012, p. 240). Whereas the 'classic' international division of labour described how periphery regions were primarily integrated into the global economy as sources of surplus value vis-à-vis raw-materials exports, the 'new international division of labour' describes how manufacturing industries have shifted from the core to the periphery, and how surplus value is now also extracted from periphery regions through low-wage and labour-intensive jobs **(**Fröbel, Heinrichs, & Kreye, 1978, p. 125**).** Dunaway (2014a) argues that the commodity chain is a form of global economic organization

that reinforces the unequal allocation of surplus value among the core, semi-periphery, and periphery (p. 72).

Several scholars and international organizations have employed this conceptual or research tool since its inception, and an abundance of scholarship on commodity chains now exists. While differences exist between different clusters in such research, an important conceptual overlap exists between the four variants of chain/network scholarship. Each approach traces the chain of activities within an industry, from the design of the product to its production, distribution, consumption, and to its final use (Gereffi & Fernandez-Stark, 2016). Each approach conceptualizes how value is created, increased, and extracted at different nodes of the commodity chain. As well, all four variants examine the power relations along the chain/network. But, as Bair (2009) highlights, each variant of chain/network research "has its own history, its own theoretical and disciplinary affinities, its own substantive emphases and empirical concerns, and, arguably, its own political valences" (p. 2). As such, the key difference between the four commodity chain approaches can be identified by its level of analysis and application. While GCCs/GVCs have tended to focus on firm governance and upgrading (Selwyn, 2012), world-systems and GPN frameworks have focused more on the organization of global capitalism (Coe, Dicken, & Hess, 2008).

A number of scholars have argued that the GVC approach tends to adopt an economistic approach because it has reduced relations of production and consumption to the economic sphere (see Neilson, 2014; Selwyn, 2012; Werner, Bair, & Fernández, 2014; Werner, 2012). In GVC research, the concept of governance describes the process by which lead firms "govern" or control the chain (Gereffi & Fernandez-Stark, 2016, p. 7), and the concept of upgrading describes how firms "upgrade" or "mov[e] to higher value activities in GVCs in order to increase

benefits (e.g. security, profits, value-added, capabilities) from participating in global production" (p. 12). Scholars such as Bair (2005) contend that GVC research has overemphasized the significance of the firm in global production by focusing on governance and upgrading, the latter generally focused on both economic and social upgrading. Further, Bair argues that the international business community has heavily influenced GVC research (p. 160). Similar to Bair's critique of GVC research, Werner (2012) argues that the focus on upgrading exaggerates how firms create, increase, and extract value along the chain and ignores the value of labour and the antagonistic relationship between capital and labour (p. 405). Bamber and Staritz (2016) agree with Werner that GVC research on firm governance and upgrading has mostly focused on the economic aspects of production, but they note that in the last decade social dimensions such as workers and social upgrading (p. 4) have been incorporated. However, as these scholars contend, these dimensions have not yet been "mainstreamed" (p. 17).

In contrast to the economic focus of GVC research, world-systems and GPN frameworks have focused more on the organization of global capitalism by examining the economic, social, and political dimensions of uneven geographical development. In comparison to GCC/GVC approaches that have tended to view commodity production and consumption as a linear process, the GPN framework maps "the flows of materials, semi-finished products, design, production, financial and marketing services" in order to demonstrate that these processes "are organized vertically, horizontally and diagonally in complex and dynamic configurations" (Henderson et al., 2002, p. 444). The GPN framework is most closely associated with the world-systems conception of a commodity chain; although it does builds on the work of GCC/GVC scholars, it also addresses a number of the criticisms associated with this field of scholarship (Henderson et al., 2002, p. 444). Scholars working within the GPN field argue that the concept of a network

offers a more holistic and heuristic approach to studying the different sets of actors and activities involved in economic globalization and related production processes (Coe, Dicken, & Hess, 2008; Henderson, Dicken, Hess, Coe, & Yeung, 2002). By approaching relations of global production as a network, and by examining the social and political aspects of such activities, GPN research moves beyond the narrow focus that GCC/GVC scholarship has tended to take with its emphasis on the firm and the nation-state. As such, the GPN framework includes local, regional, national, global, and social aspects of economic globalization (Henderson et al., 2002, p. 445).

The differentiation in level of analysis between GCC/GVC and world-systems/GPN research reflects how value is theorized in two distinct ways. First, world-systems and GPN theorists adopt Marxian notions of value, place more emphasis on surplus value (which includes profit, rent, and interest) (Marx, 1990, p. 42), and describe the antagonistic relationship between capital and labour. Marx defined surplus value as how capitalists produce profit through the "degree of exploitation of labour-power by capital" (Marx, 1990, p. 326). The GPN framework focuses on surplus value but also includes an analysis of economic value. In particular, a GPN approach examines how value is created (which explores both labour power and economic rent), increased (which explores technology transfers, local and lead firms, and national institutions), and extracted (which explores government policy, firm ownership and governance, and geographic location) (Henderson et al., 2002, pp. 448-9). In comparison, GCC/GVC theorists place more emphasis on economic value (or competitive advantage). Second, GCC/GVC approaches have focused on the power within and between lead firms, while ignoring the social and political dimensions of power, which GPN research focuses on. For example, GPN research has conceptualized three different types of power: corporate (how lead firms and other firms

impact the network); institutional (how power is exercised by national, regional, and local agencies and actors); and collective networks, such as trade unions and NGOs (how economic interests influence the network such as trade unions and NGOs) (Henderson et al., 2002, pp. 450-1). Further, the concept of embeddedness is used in GPN research to describe how firms "connect aspects of the social and spatial arrangements in which those firms are embedded" (p. 451). There are two types of embeddedness: territorial (referring to how GPNs are influenced and limited by the economic, social, and political dimensions of their geographical location) and network (referring to how GPNs build trust with both formal and informal actors such as government and non-government organizations) (pp. 452-3).

Several of the key concepts used in each variant of chain/network research have traveled between the different approaches (e.g., governance, upgrading, and embeddedness), but there is a growing theoretical and analytical divide between GVC and GPN research. For instance, Neilson et al. (2014) argue, "GVC-GPN analysis has been deployed for extremely varied, and indeed, oppositional, political intents" (p. 7). While the GVC approach is increasingly being used as a "technocratic means to 'solve' industry problems," the GPN approach is being used "to generate broad-based critical analysis on the dynamics of capitalism" (Neilson et al., 2014, p. 6). Neilson's research illustrates how the chain construct emerged from critical political economy, but was later subsumed by neoliberal interests (2014, p. 39). The use of this research tool by international organizations such as the World Bank, UNCTAD, the World Trade Organization, and the OECD (Neilson et al., 2014, p. 2) "demonstrates the persistent ability of dominant actors and organizations to co-opt critical social theory and perpetuate prior commitments to a neoliberal development project" (Neilson, 2014, p. 39). For example, research that adopts the GVC or GPN construct has been used in two contradictory ways to view international

development. The GVC approach has been used as a "project of intervention" in the global South. For example, Nielson (2014) describes how the World Bank has used the GVC approach to influence significant policy changes that promote austerity in Indonesia (pp. 53-4). In contrast, the GPN approach has been used as a way to map and understand the relationship between uneven geographical development and global capitalism (Neilson, 2014, p. 39). My work draws especially on the GPN approach as it examines second-hand clothing donations from households to thrift stores, and the social, political, and economic relations that contribute to how value is created, increased, and extracted in this commodity chain.

**Adding Gender to Commodity Chains**

Commodity chains are gendered. Gender and gender relations are central to production, consumption, and trade in commodity chains, but gender and gender relations have largely been omitted in commodity chain research. A number of scholars have pointed out this gap in chain/network research (see Bair, 2010; Barrientos, 2001, 2003; Carr et al., 2000; Dunaway, 2001, 2014a, 2014b; Nakazibwe & Pelupessy, 2014; Ramamurthy, 2004; Werner, 2012; Yeates, 2004). In her study on the inclusion of gender into chain/network research, Wilma Dunaway (2014a) found that less than two percent of all articles and books published between 1980-2012 incorporated gender, women, or households into their analysis (p. 64). But, as Penny Bamber and Cornelia Staritz (2016) argue, commodity chains are gendered, because they exist within local structures, they reflect gender differences in societal structures and "the differences between the positions and roles of women and men in the household, the community, the labour market and the economy" (p. 6). Gender differences persist in all countries to varying degrees; therefore, an analysis of how gender interacts with processes of production, reproduction, and consumption is imperative (Bamber & Staritz, 2016, p. 6). This gender gap in commodity chain research is

connected to the devaluation of women's work and social reproduction and to the separation of social reproduction from relations of production under conditions of global capitalism. Social reproduction consists of the unpaid (and increasingly paid) labour, that women are far more likely to perform, that is necessary for human subsistence (and the reproduction of the labour force), such as housework, childrearing, and caring. The conceptualization of the commodity chain by Hopkins and Wallerstein elucidated the structural underpinnings of global capitalism that are founded in "sexism, racism and surplus drains from worker households" (Dunaway, 2014a, p. 66). World-systems research highlighted the significance of reproduction and the household in commodity chain analysis, but subsequent studies that have adapted the commodity chain construct have lost sight of its critical roots, its critique of global capitalism and power relations based on domination and subordination and have failed to include an analysis of gender or social reproduction.

Susan Joekes (1999) suggests that adding a gender analysis to value chain research must encompass three dynamics. First, a gender analysis must investigate how individuals are in/excluded from production at various stages along the chain (p. 1). Second, social relations of gender must be examined, including the ability of women to participate and advance their position as "both as entrepreneurs and as workers" along the value chain (p. 2). Lastly, gender differences must be examined in relation to "the reward to labour and effort" (p. 2). This includes investigating the gender division of labour and how "a general pattern of discrimination against women in wages" exists "within and between value chains" (p. 2).

Two scholars who have helped to advance this body of scholarship through their path-breaking research are Stephanie Ware Barrientos and Marion Werner. These scholars have illustrated how gender and gender relations have been underexplored in commodity chain

research and have integrated gender into their own empirical research. Barrientos' research highlights the importance of investigating the consumption and retail nodes of commodity chains. Much of the commodity chain scholarship has been focused on the firm level and on the geographical location where production takes place. The consumption and retail end of commodity/value chains has largely been unexplored. But as Barrientos (2001) points out, the consumption and retailing nodes of commodity chains are necessary for a full understanding of the functioning of the chain, as "changing consumption and retail patterns can affect global value chains, with implications through the chain affecting gendered employment in production" (p. 84).

Werner's (2012) research highlights the importance of investigating how industrial restructuring depends on flexible female employment and re/articulations of gender differences. By applying a feminist analysis of value to global commodity chain research on industrial restructuring, Werner argues that this scholarship "can better specify the causes and consequences of these changes, and the variable outcomes for those workers who are included in and excluded from new production arrangements" (p. 419). Research on upgrading concentrates on the competitiveness of firms and pays little attention to the social relations that result in the production of exploitable workers and their working conditions (p. 407). Several other scholars have argued that GCC/GVC and GPN scholarship not only ignores gender and gender relations, but also the dynamic relationship between capital and labour (see Coe & Hess, 2013; Barrientos, 2013). For these and other scholars, an important aspect of upgrading is the re-articulation of "labour's value to capital," which is altered vis-à-vis the re/production of social difference (particularly gender differences, but also through class and race) (Werner, 2012, p. 405). In short, a feminist analysis of value demonstrates how workers, managers, capitalists, and the state

"shape expectations and assumptions about what kinds of labor are valued in production and what kinds of bodies are suitable for that work" (Werner, 2012, p. 407).

Although a large body of scholarship exists on both social reproduction and global commodity chains, very few scholars have connected these two bodies of scholarship by adding social reproduction as an important node in commodity chains. However, scholars such as Immanuel Wallerstein (1982, 1986, 1977), Wilma Dunaway (2014a, 2014b, 2001), Nicola Yeates (2004), Priti Ramamurthy, (2014, 2004) and Donald A. Clelland (2014) have made this connection. A significant contribution to linking social reproduction to global commodity chains is Wilma Dunaway's (2014b) edited volume, *Gendered Commodity Chains: Seeing Women's Work and Households in Global Production.* For example, in Chapter Three, building on the work of world-systems research and feminist political economists such as Mariosa Dalla Costa and Giovanna Dalla Costa (1999), Maria Mies (2014), Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen (1984), and Claudia von Werlhof (1983), Dunaway outlines how capitalist accumulation relies on the separation of reproduction from relations of production in order to hide the economic value the household provides to the capitalist world-system (p. 58). As she correctly notes, the household is a hidden site for the extraction of surplus value (p. 61). As in most other research using a world-systems analysis, Dunaway defines the "expropriation of surplus value" as "the worker produces greater surplus than she or he consumes" (p. 61). This extraction of surplus value results in lower wage rates and the exploitation of household workers to which "both men and capitalists benefit directly from unpaid household labor" (p. 61).

Similar to Dunaway, Donald A. Clelland (2014) incorporates an analysis of households within a GPN framework. Clelland argues that commodity chains extract immense surpluses of value from households and women. Clelland conceptualizes two types of surplus value

extraction: *economic surplus* (which includes "firms, households, and the capitalist world-system as a whole") and *surplus drain* (p. 73). Clelland defines economic surplus as "the value of goods, services, and money that remains after the reproduction needs of any system have been met" (p. 73). According to Clelland, economic surplus is extracted from processes of production and reproduction, but also from the appropriation of land, resources, and technology (p. 73). In contrast, surplus drain describes how economic surpluses are transferred unequally: capitalists and core states extract economic surpluses from semi-peripheral and peripheral states (p. 76). Clelland introduces the concept of "dark value" to illustrate how the capitalist world-system depends on the invisible inputs of households, the informal sector, and other forms of unpaid or underpaid labour (p. 78). Clelland argues, "The starting point of a commodity chain is the extraction of surplus from unpaid household work, and that unpaid labor contributes to the "expanded value" of a commodity at every production step in the chain" (p. 81). Commodity chains extract surpluses of value from households and women, but because this labour is not incorporated into the costs of production, the actual costs of production are vastly underestimated. For instance, work that is necessary to reproduce the labour force (reproductive labour), such as unpaid domestic work which involves caring for children and the elderly, is primarily done by women (Federici, 2012, p. 107). Under capitalism, reproductive labour is devalued because this form of work is difficult to organize within a free-market economy (Federici, 2012, p. 110).

A feminist analysis of value elucidates what constitutes *productive labour* and why under capitalism "labor inside the household is devalued by the myth that it generates no surplus that can be appropriated" (Dunaway, 2014b, p. 64). As Dunaway and other feminist political economists have illustrated, household labour is *productive labour.* But, work under capitalism is

defined as labour outside of the household, “in the capitalist workplace or marketplace,” and this type of labour has a direct monetary and economic value (Dunaway, 2014b, p. 64). In contrast, social reproduction is not seen to have any economic value even though this labour is vital to the accumulation of capital (since it produces and reproduces workers). However, both feminist political economists and capitalists understand that the household produces economic value (Dunaway, 2014b, pp. 63-4). Feminist political economists such as Maria Mies (2014), Antonella Picchio (1992), and Silvia Federici (2012) argue that the foundation of capitalist accumulation is based on the separation of social reproduction from relations of production. Social reproduction is an important site of surplus value extraction by capital. But capitalists maintain the household as a hidden site of surplus value extraction in order to “externalize most of the real costs of commodity production;” the costs of social reproduction are not included in the costs of commodity production; these costs are “received free by capitalists and consumers” (Dunaway, 2014b, p. 63). Further, the household is maintained as an important site of commodity consumption. Wallerstein et al. (1982) argue that the very structure of the household is designed in such a way to “create an optimal market for waged-goods” (p. 441).

Like Wallerstein, Maria Mies (2014) argues that the household is where women become the primary household consumers. For Mies, the household is a site where the costs of social reproduction are separated from production, where the exploitation of labour is made possible through the exploitation of women’s productive forces. In particular, Mies (2014) explores the relationship between colonization and “housewifization.” Housewifization explains the process where the division of labour is based on women as housewives; women’s labour becomes “natural” and unpaid; it is separated from production, relegated to the private sphere; housework becomes a labour of “love” (Mies, 2014, p. 110). For Mies, the process of “housewifization” has

two primary goals: ensuring that the labouring population is reproduced in order to maintain capitalist production; and establishing the housewife as "an agent of consumption" (p. 106). Housewifization results in the mystification of women's role in reproduction and the separation of relations of production and consumption. The housewife becomes an invisible force of reproduction in both the global North and South. For instance, Mies argues, "the consumer-housewife in the West has to do more and more unpaid work in order to lower the costs for the realization of capital, the producer-housewife in the colonies has to do more and more unpaid work in order to lower the production costs" (p. 126). As she shows, the separation of commodity producers in the global South from commodity consumers in the global North reifies patterns of overconsumption in the global North. The geographical separation of relations of production and consumption obscures the range of activities necessary for commodity production and the exploitation of labour that occurs (p. 127).

The separation that exists between relations of production, reproduction, and consumption is both geographical and analytical. This analytical divide is erroneous (Dunaway, 2014a, p. 68). Production, reproduction, and consumption are all aspects of social production: they form a system. Processes of production cannot occur without processes of consumption, and "every social process of production is at the same time a process of reproduction" (Marx, 1990, p. 711). The relationship between these processes, between how labour and gender is exploited along every node of the commodity chain, is concealed by capitalism. In order to unravel the hidden complexities of economic globalization across long value chains, social reproduction must be reconnected to relations of production. However, social reproduction has been separated from relations of production, research on commodity chains have largely overlooked gender and gender relations. Indeed, mainstream approaches to political economy envision a false analytical

divide between relations of production and reproduction. As Dunaway (2014a) argues that commodity chains are "degendered" because they are entrenched in this false analytical divide (p. 68). As a result, commodity chains have primarily focused on relations of production (Dunaway, 2014a, p. 68).

Drawing on the work of Dunaway and Clelland, my thesis acknowledges the contribution and value of households and women to the processes of production, consumption, and reproduction. Although my research does not take households or gender as a variable (as this was beyond the scope of my thesis), I did interview individuals who donate excess clothing, which provided an insight into household relations. For example, the majority of individuals that I interviewed were women who were 50 or older, suggesting that women are primarily responsible for the disposal of unwanted clothing in households (this is discussed further in the Conclusion). Further, I recognize that mapping each node of a commodity chain requires an examination of the household as a node in the chain. Indeed, bridging the gap between scholarship on social reproduction and scholarship on commodity chains is a necessary step in reconnecting social reproduction to relations of production.

## Methodology and Methods

My methodology is informed by critical social analysis, specifically, by dialectical social analysis (DSA), case study methods, and feminist research methods. This section will provide a brief overview of each of these three approaches and how they have typically been applied in social science research.

### Dialectical Social Analysis

As a critical social approach, DSA draws on Marx and the Frankfurt School, and the idea that social relations can be transformed through praxis (Jay, 1973, p. 42; Carroll, 2006, p. 235;

Goff, 1980, p. 45). What is praxis? Joel Kovel (1998) describes praxis as "consciously chosen, transformative activity grounded in and reflective of a particular worldview. Praxis implies a dynamic unity of theory with praxis" (p. 476). Similarly, Tom W. Goff (1980) notes, DSA links the "analysis of ideas in relation to the social" (p. 44). The aim of DSA is to critique 'knowledge' formation and 'ideas' in order to "expose the reified or alienated aspects of consciousness as themselves an aspect of the overall 'system of alienation,'" (Goff, 1980, p. 45) and then to create the conditions necessary for social transformation.

The first step in the application of DSA is to ask a series of questions that will structure the research (Carroll, 2004 p. 110). The ontological foundation of DSA is that social reality is "relational, practical and emergent" (Carroll, 2006, p. 236). The epistemological foundation of DSA is to challenge dominant "truths," ways of knowing, and power structures by adopting a critical approach to inquiry (Carroll, 2006, p. 234). Practitioners of DSA are suspicious of knowledge that is positivist or based on general laws because these approaches do not allow for a social reality that is "open to various futures" (Carroll, 2004, p. 112). Scholars who use DSA draw on Marxian notions of how power and knowledge are shaped and sustained. These researchers recognize the interconnectedness of social issues while incorporating an analysis that is both "holistic" and "historical" (Carroll, 2006, pp. 235-236). A social researcher practicing DSA must:

> question and criticize commonly accepted beliefs and official "truths," to trace the history of the social issue at hand, to identify the key players who make decisions or benefit from the decisions or pay the costs of the decisions, to move with agility between the individual and collective aspects of the issue, and to view any given issue in the broader context of the "system" within which social, political, economic, and cultural structures overlap and interweave. (Carroll, 2004, p. 111)

Marx's concept of dialectics describes how society is in a continuous state of transformation (Carroll, 2004, p. 111). This view of society rejects modernization/mainstream approaches to social change/development that view the nation-state as a self-determining unit that advances in a comparable linear path of development (Hopkins & Wallerstein, 1977, pp. 111-2). As Carroll (2004) points out, "social reality is always in the process of being created through the practices of people whose human capacities, material technologies, and social relations have been shaped in the past" (p. 110). The two primary goals of Marx's method of dialectics are unmasking and transformation (Carroll, 2006, pp. 234-5). Unmasking reveals the hidden processes of capitalism that sustain social relations based on domination/subordination and allows the ruling class to expropriate the surplus that is produced by the laboring class (Carroll, 2006, p. 235). Transformation reveals the ultimate goal of DSA, to understand the social world and then to change it (Carroll, 2006, p. 235), which is based on a famous quote by Marx, "Philosophers have hitherto only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it" (Marx, 1845).

DSA is relevant to my research project because I explored relations of consumption and secondary production from a historical and relational lens by investigating what happens to second-hand clothing once it arrives at thrift stores and the ideologies and practices that motivate individuals to consume fast fashion and donate used clothing. As DSA seeks to reveal hidden processes, my project seeks to reveal how thrift stores dispose of second-hand clothing donations (something that is hidden from the public). Further, my research challenges dominant narratives of clothing donations as 'doing good,' as a socially and environmentally responsible way to dispose of unwanted clothing. In this way, my project seeks to begin the ultimate goal of DSA, transformation, by raising a number of questions about current clothing consumption and

disposal practices. What are the social and environmental outcomes of overconsumption, and how can we address these issues? My project aims to expose the ways in which second-hand clothing is recommodified and how the profits accrued from this commodity chain are unevenly distributed. Through the use of DSA, I explored the ways in which individuals, thrift stores, and the international trade in SHC challenge or conform to the pressures of capitalist accumulation.

**Case Study Method**

Case study research attempts to understand "a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals" through the individuals being studied (Creswell, 2009, pp. 8, 13). Case study research is "bounded by time and activity," such that one or more cases are examined over an extended period of time (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). Case study research involves qualitative data collection, which may include the use of observational data, interviews, or documents (Creswell, 2009, p. 63). Creswell (2009) has outlined five key steps to doing case study research. First, the researcher begins to describe the case by exploring the history and current components of the case (p. 63). Second, the researcher collects qualitative data (p. 63). Third, the researcher interprets and analyzes the data by organizing the information into "themes or categories" (p. 63). Fourth, the "researcher looks for broad patterns, generalizations, or theories from themes or categories" (p. 63). Fifth, the "researcher poses generalizations or theories from past experiences and literature" (p. 63).

The aim of case study research is usually not to produce generalizable hypotheses or statistical inferences, but rather to "make sense of (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world" (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). Because case studies often vary considerably from case to case, in terms of variables and contexts, producing testable outcomes is often not possible (Creswell, 2009, p. 74). Whereas researchers who apply a positivist approach frequently use a

deductive method, and move from theory to data, case study researchers apply a social constructivist approach, use an inductive method, and move from data to theory (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). Most case study researchers listen to what others say about the world and then, through interpretation, "inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning" (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). As such, an important component of case study research is the use of open-ended questions. Questions that are broad and open allow for multiple, and perhaps, unlimited responses. As Creswell (2009) notes, "The more open-ended the questioning, the better, as the researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in their life settings. Often these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically" (p. 8).

Because limited research has been conducted on the SHC industry, and because I was interested in researching thrift stores and individuals who donate SHC, a case study approach provided a useful framework for this research project. My objective was to observe and document the collection, sale, and disposal of SHC in order to better understand what motivates individuals to donate SHC and to investigate what happens to second-hand clothing donations once they arrive at thrift stores. Speaking directly with individuals who donate SHC clothing, and individuals who work at thrift stores was the best method for understanding and mapping the second-hand clothing industry in Victoria, BC.

**Feminist Research Methods**

Feminist research adopts a "synergistic" approach to epistemology and methodology by recognizing that epistemology and methodology are interconnected (Hesse-Biber & Leckenby, 2004, p. 224). Feminist research challenges power relations, social structures, and ways of knowing through its "engagement with subjugated knowledge" (Hesse-Biber & Leckenby, 2004, p. 224). Subjugated knowledge is "built on local knowledge, on the particular, on attention to

difference and, most vital, on multiple voices" (Hartman, 2000, p. 22). Subjugated knowledge challenges the scientific method and other dominant forms of knowledge production; it challenges the premise that an objective reality can be explained and predicted. For instance, Donna Haraway (1988) argues that feminist objectivity is 'situated knowledges' (p. 581). For Haraway, 'situated knowledges' is based on positionality, rather than universality, knowledge is political and partial (p. 589). Similarly, Sandra Harding (1995) argues for "strong objectivity" which she suggests is a way to practice "feminist objectivity." Harding conceptualizes "weak objectivity" as "the conventional notion of objectivity that links it to the neutrality ideal" (p. 338), whereas strong objectivity is grounded in standpoint theory (p. 336). Knowledge is not objective. All knowledge is partial and is influenced by social relations (p. 341). As Harding explains, "we each have a determinate location in such a social matrix, but that location does not determine one's consciousness" (p. 345). Strong objectivity requires the researcher to be self-reflexive, to ensure that their own perspectives do not enter *unknowingly* into the research process (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p. 10).

Sandra Harding (1987) describes three common characteristics of feminist inquiry (p. 29). First, feminist research takes gender as a variable and a category of analysis, as well as applying a critical lens to gender (Harding, p. 29). Second, feminist research incorporates the standpoint and lived experiences of women into the research process (Harding, p. 31). Third, the practice of reflexivity is applied to feminist research: the researcher situates their self within the research process by incorporating or pointing out their own positionality or views. "That is, the class, race, culture and gender assumptions, beliefs and behaviors of the researcher her/himself must be placed within the frame of the picture that she/he paints" (Harding, p. 31). The practice of reflexivity also takes into consideration how our own perspectives and experiences may

impact the research process, from the ways in which we develop our research question and problem, to the selection of methods, to how we analyze, interpret, and report our findings (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p. 25).

Adding women as a variable or analytic category ("add women and stir" approach) does not challenge hegemonic epistemologies, androcentricism, unequal power relations, or power structures. As Hesse-Biber and Leckenby (2004) point out, "Just *adding women* into research does not make it feminist, feminist research may not have women as its subject" (p. 214, emphasis in original). Feminist research incorporates feminist epistemological and methodological structures into the research design in order to produce research that asks new questions in an attempt to uncover previously hidden or unexplored perspectives or experiences (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p. 26). The aim of feminist research is social change and the emancipation of women and marginalized or oppressed groups (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p. 26).

Karen Beckwith (2010) argues that gender is a meta-concept and it also operates as an epistemological and ontological framework (p. 160). Gender is a universal category, but it takes on different values and meanings across time and space; gender cannot be separated from its cultural context (Beckwith, 2010, p. 160). Beckwith describes how gender manifests at multiple levels of analysis and "functions as a category marker as well as a process variable" (p. 160). Drawing on these scholars, gender in this thesis is defined as the social construction of masculinity and femininity, and the attributed power relations and discourses (Vickers, 2010, p. 420). Gender is not static; it is historically changeable; gender is made, not born. But the use of the term gender also signifies differences between biological sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Gender identity and gender expression may diverge from social constructions of masculine and feminine. I use the term gender in an inclusive manner; it includes gender

variance: non-binary or transgendered people. I also recognize that gender intersects with other oppressive ideologies and power relations such as race, class, and age.

Adopting feminist research methods is important because I understand that epistemology and methodology are interconnected, and ontology and knowledge are not objective. Positionality and social relations influence an individual's reality and knowledge and meaning making. Although my research does not include gender as a variable, I incorporated the standpoint and lived experiences of women into my research process, which Harding (1987) describes as a key aspect of feminist research (p. 31). Further, the purpose of my thesis was to begin to unravel the hidden processes of the global SHC trade, by listening to and documenting the perspectives and experiences of individuals who donate used clothing and who work in thrift stores. Finally, informed by feminist research methods and feminist scholarship on social reproduction, my interviews and data collection research did probe the gendered dimensions of SHC disposal, collection and sorting, including the gendered profile of donators and workers (mostly volunteer) in thrift stores who receive SHC.

## Research Design

Three non-profit thrift stores and one for-profit thrift store in Victoria, BC, Canada were used as my case studies. I gathered secondary data on the four thrift stores because all four thrift stores have extensive publicly available information. I also gathered primary research through qualitative interviews and my own observational data from visiting the thrift stores and volunteering at two of the thrift stores. I will refer to these stores as 'Thrift Store A', 'Thrift Store B,' and 'Thrift Store C' in order to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of the three non-profit thrift stores I studied. Value Village, a for-profit thrift store, was selected to compare and contrast its operating model with the three non-profit thrift stores, and to trace the flow of

donations in and out of the three stores. Including Value Village in my research was important because Value Village is the largest thrift store in Victoria and receives clothing donations from individuals and a number of different local non-profit organizations. Value Village pays the local non-profits for the items and refers to its relationships with non-profit organizations as "partnerships." Because Value Village is the only large scale, for-profit thrift store of its kind in Victoria, maintaining the anonymity of Value Village would most likely not have been possible.

The central phenomenon that was studied was what happens to second-hand clothing donations once they arrive at thrift stores. In order to study this phenomenon, I interviewed individuals who donate excess clothes and employees who work at thrift stores that receive, sell, and dispose of donated clothes. I interviewed people in positions of 'power' at each of the four thrift stores that I studied. For instance, I interviewed staff members such as managers or clothing sorters who were 'in the know' in regards to the collection, sorting, processing, sale, and disposing of unsold clothing donations. At Thrift Store B, I was required to keep the job position of the people I interviewed confidential, but each person that I interviewed was in a position of power or had specialized knowledge of day-to-day activities.

I selected the three non-profit thrift stores as case studies based on aspects of their comparability and proximity to one another, whereas Value Village was selected as a dissimilar case. For example, Thrift Store A and B are both operated by non-profit organizations that run multiple thrift stores in the Greater Victoria region. The revenue from the thrift stores funds the organizations' community-oriented social programs and services. Thrift Store A and B have a large number of volunteers that work in the thrift stores, and both sell a large amount of SHC. From 2015-2016, annual sales from Thrift Store A and the other thrift stores this charity runs amounted to $1.7 million (Thrift Store A, 2016). Annual sales from Thrift Store B and the other

thrift stores this charity runs amounts to $1 million ("Newspaper Article," 2015). Thrift Store C is operated as a for-profit privately owned business that contributes a percentage of revenues to the non-profit organization that it licenses the use of its name from (Thrift Store C, Charities official website, 2017). In BC, this non-profit organization receives over $100,000 a year from thrift store sales (Thrift Store C, Charities official website, 2017). Value Village is a Savers Inc. brand. Savers Inc. is a privately held for-profit thrift store chain that operates over 330 thrift stores with 20,000 employees in Canada, the United States, and Australia (Value Village, 2016a). Annual sales from Savers Inc. amount to over $1.2 billion (Lyman, 2015, para 5).

At Thrift Store A, I conducted informal and semi-formal interviews with the manager and the primary clothing sorter. I spent two days in the store working with the clothing sorter. I observed how clothing donations are received, sorted, processed, and disposed of. I also volunteered about once a week at the thrift store for two months. My duties included: accepting clothing donations, sorting, processing, pricing, and putting the clothing donations out on the floor. I also worked as a cashier for a few shifts. I conducted informal and semi-formal interviews with four different staff members at Thrift Store B (I was asked to keep their position with the organization confidential). I spent one day in the warehouse where I interviewed two staff members and observed how clothing donations are processed, sorted, and priced. I also volunteered for a full eight-hour shift at the warehouse where I processed and sorted accessories and clothing donations. I visited one of the store locations where I interviewed a staff member. I also interviewed a senior staff member. At Thrift Store C, I conducted an informal interview in the thrift store with the manager. At Value Village, I conducted a semi-formal phone interview with a former manager at the Victoria location.

In total, 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals who donate second-hand clothing. The type of sampling method used was criterion and snowball or chain sampling. Criterion sampling "establish[es] criteria for studying select individuals" (p. 128). This method of sampling is useful for case study research as the individuals who are studied "represent people who have experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, pp. 127-8). The criterion for my study was that only individuals who donate used clothing in Victoria, BC were sampled. Snowball or chain sampling "Identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich" (Creswell, 2007, p. 127). Snowball or chain sampling occurred when one individual (Participant # 23) referred three acquaintances to me that she knew donated used clothing and thought would be interested in participating in my study. The majority of individuals (27 or 90 percent) were recruited based on criterion sampling, and three (or 10 percent) were recruited through snowball or chain sampling. One individual approached me at a coffee shop and offered to participate in my research after overhearing me interview another individual. Initially, I had planned to recruit participants for my study by approaching individuals as they were dropping off clothing donations at Thrift Store A, B, and C, but unfortunately all three locations denied me permission to directly approach customers in their stores. Instead, individuals were recruited by advertising my project through poster placement, flyer handouts, and online. Individuals contacted me directly if they were interested in participating in my research. Posters were placed in local thrift stores, around the University of Victoria (UVic) campus, and on bulletin boards in community centres. I also spent one day handing out flyers in front of the Humane Society donation bin in the Student Union Building at the University of Victoria (one individual was recruited through this method). I posted an online advertisement on Used Victoria under the category, Community Notices, Information Wanted.

And I posted two online advertisements on Craigslist, one under the category General Community, and another under Volunteers. Of the 30 interviews that I conducted, eight (36.4 percent) were in-person, and fourteen (63.6 percent) were over the phone. Data collection included note-taking and audio recording (for in-person interviews only and with participant consent). The audio recordings and field notes were then transcribed, coded, and interpreted based on themes and categories.

The interviews lasted from five minutes to 45 minutes (the average interview was fifteen minutes). The interviews were semi-structured. Each participant was asked the same series of questions. At the beginning of each interview, the participant was informed that they could pass on any of the questions, and they were encouraged to ask questions, discuss their own experiences and perspectives, and guide the interview. The interview questions focused on individual clothing disposal and consumption patterns. I asked participants to share their knowledge about how clothing donations are sorted, processed, and disposed of at local thrift stores in Victoria, BC. Interview questions included: What are your motivations for donating used clothing? Where do you usually donate, and is there a reason why you donate to a particular location? How often do you donate used clothing? Of particular interest was the relationship between individuals' clothing consumption and donation patterns, and their knowledge of what happens to clothing once it has been donated. Participants were asked where and how often they purchase new clothing, if they were aware of how their SHC donations were sorted and processed, and if they knew what happened to donations that do not sell in thrift stores.

As noted earlier, large amounts of unwanted clothing and textiles end up in landfills, both in the country where individuals who dispose of these items are located, and also in global South landfills where second-hand imports that can't be sold or traded are disposed of. For example,

approximately 85 percent of all household textiles in Canada are disposed of in the garbage (Weber, 2016, p. 22). And, as is well documented, the fast fashion industry is characterized by poor working conditions in many global South countries (see Anguelov, 2015; Brooks, 2015; Claeson, 2015; Taplin, 2014). Given these trends, individuals were asked to discuss their views on the environmental and labour conditions associated with the clothing industry. In particular, I was interested in finding out why the participants in my study decided to donate clothing rather than dispose of it in the garbage. Further, I was interested in probing whether or not there was a misconception among the participants in my study about the kinds of textiles that can be donated and recycled. I asked participants if they were aware that stained or damaged clothing could be donated and recycled.

In the tradition of feminist research, I will make my own positionality known. As a white female from a middle-class background, and as a graduate student, I understand that my privileged position shapes the research process. I recognize that knowledge and meaning are political and partial. For example, the research questions that I selected, the way that I conducted the interviews, and the ways in which I interpreted the data and results are shaped by own positionality and social matrix. However, I believe that I practiced "strong objectivity" and reflexivity during all of the stages of the research process. During the interviews, I created an open dialogue. I ensured that the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee was based on horizontal power and knowledge production. I attempted to create a collaborative process where both parties had agency. In doing so, I also practiced active listening. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for flexibility and freedom of discussion. I believe I provided a safe space for individuals to openly discuss their own experiences, perspectives, and emotions. Further, one of my interests in this research project was to challenge and change my

own clothing consumption and disposal practices, as well as others. As such, during the interview process I made sure I did not place judgement on the participants clothing consumption or donation patterns and I openly shared my own experiences, perspectives, and emotions if the opportunity arose.

**Interpreting the Data**

Four factors must be taken into account when interpreting and analyzing my interviews with individuals: the sampling strategy, the sample size, the geographic location, and population demographics. First, the sampling strategy must be considered (see Table 4 for a profile of the respondents). Of the 30 individuals that I interviewed, 7 (23.3 percent) individuals were recruited from the University of Victoria (UVic), 10 (33.3 percent) were recruited from thrift stores, 5 (16.7 percent) from online, 4 (13.3 percent) were from community centers, 3 (10 percent) were recruited from another participant (snowball sampling), and 1 (3.3 percent) from a coffee shop. While I did not record the education level of participants,[3] recruiting individuals from the university may have resulted in a larger sample of individuals with a higher level of education than the general population. The 2016 Census found that in Victoria, 33.8 percent of adults aged 25 to 64 had attained a bachelor's degree or higher, while 22.5 percent "had a college, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma" (Statistics Canada, 2017b). In comparison, the 2016 Census found that 28.5 percent of Canadian adults aged 25 to 64 had attained a bachelor's degree or higher, while 22.4 percent had "a college, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma as their highest level of education" (Statistics Canada, 2017c).

[3] For instance, Participants 10, 12, 21, 24, 25 are university graduates who work at UVic and Participants 5 and 13 are students.

Second, the sample size must be considered. While the purpose of conducting qualitative interviews with individuals who donate used clothing was to document perspectives and experiences, and to look for themes among individuals who donate SHC rather than produce generalizable hypotheses or statistical inferences, the sample size is still of significance. Thus, while my sample size might not have been large enough to outline regional or national trends using this data on its own, I feel confident that my primary data combined with secondary data was enough to begin mapping local trends. As Mason (2010) points out, "more data does not necessarily lead to more information" in qualitative studies and what is important is reaching data saturation in a qualitative sample size (pp. 1-2). Mason (2010) defines the concept of saturation as "when the collection of new data does not shed any further light on the issue under investigation" (p. 2). After conducting 30 interviews with individuals who donate used clothing in Victoria, BC, a number of key themes were reiterated, suggesting that saturation was achieved. For example, no new motivations for donating used clothing were outlined, no new donation locations were identified (in total, 26 locations were identified), and no new data on individual knowledge on the SHC industry were identified. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), data saturation has likely been reached once no new data and no new themes emerge (p. 1409). Although the concept of saturation is difficult to both define and prove in qualitative studies, as there are no clear guidelines due the multitude of research designs (Bowen, 2008, pp.137-138), because my research design involved semi-structured interviews where participants were asked both specific and open-ended questions, claiming to have achieved saturation seems problematic, as the likelihood of individuals sharing original experiences and perspectives is highly probable regardless of the sample size. Creswell (2007) suggests that the concept of "purposeful sampling" should be used in qualitative data collection (p. 125). Purposeful sampling involves

sampling individuals and locations "because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). In my study, I selected individuals who donate used clothing to learn more about thrift stores in Victoria, BC, and to investigate what motivates individuals to donate used clothing to thrift stores. Further, I was interested in finding out from SHC donors what they know about clothing donations in thrift stores and their perspectives on the SHC industry in Canada.

Third, the geographic location must be considered. Is Victoria, BC a unique geographic location? For instance, are individuals in Victoria, BC more environmentally conscious than individuals in other cities in Canada? Shim (1995) defines an environmentally or socially conscious consumer as an "individual who pioneer[s] and support[s] environmental issues to upgrade and protect the well-being of others, and/or those who take into account the societal and environmental consequences of purchasing products" (p. 40). The Greater Victoria Regional Green Economy Initiative states that Greater Victoria has a "progressive and environmentally conscious civic culture and quality of life" (p. 11).

Fourth, population demographics must also be considered. Victoria has a much smaller population when compared to other major cities in Canada such as Vancouver. According to the 2016 census, the city of Victoria, BC has a population of 85,792 (Statistics Canada, 2016a), compared to the city of Vancouver, BC, which has a population of 631,486 (Statistics Canada, 2016b). In terms of the distribution of the population by age group, the city of Victoria has a larger percentage of older individuals than Vancouver. For example, Victoria's population by broad age group as of 2016 was: 0 to 14 years, 9.2%; 15 to 64 years, 69.7%; 65 years and over, 21.0%; and 85 years and over, 3.9%. The city of Vancouver's population by broad age group as of 2016 was: 0 to 14 years, 11.2%; 15 to 64 years, 73.4%; 65 years and over, 15.5%; and 85

years and over, 2.3%. The distribution of the city of Victoria's population by gender is: male 40,575 (47.3%) and female 45,215 (52.7%) (Statistics Canada, 2016c). The distribution of the city of Vancouver's population by gender is: male 308,515 (48.9%) and female (51.1%) (Statistics Canada, 2016d).

For the reasons noted above, the geographic location of Victoria, BC provides an interesting case study to examine the relationship between fast fashion, levels of clothing consumption and donation patterns. Victoria, BC is often imagined as an environmentally conscious city and my research seeks to unsettle this perception. The next chapter provides an overview of two bodies of scholarship on the second-hand clothing industry: individuals' clothing disposal behaviour and the global trade of SHC.

# Chapter Two

## Literature Review: Second-Hand Clothing Commodity Chains

### Introduction

This chapter explores two different bodies of scholarship on the second-hand clothing industry: individuals' clothing disposal behaviour and the global trade of SHC. This review illustrates the gap in research on Canada's role in the global trade of SHC. There are only a few scholars who have examined individuals' clothing disposal behaviour in the Canadian context, and to date, there is no research that has examined Canada as the starting point in commodity chain in the global trade of SHC. Existing research on individual disposal patterns and on the collection of SHC focuses on the United States and the United Kingdom.

This chapter begins by identifying and examining the main themes in scholarship on individuals' clothing disposal behaviour. In the next section, I address Canada's role and position in the global trade of SHC through an analysis of export data of the countries to which Canada exported second-hand clothing in 2016. I then provide a literature review of some of the key scholars and debates on the global trade of SHC. The chapter concludes by addressing how SHC is donated as a gift and then recommodified in order to be sold in thrift stores domestically, or commercially exported. Here, I begin to outline how the supply chain of the international trade in second-hand clothing is hidden from the public, which is a key component to my central argument. The public image that thrift stores and non-profit organizations present to the public is misleading. The ability of donated clothes to 'do good' is overemphasized, while the international commercial aspect of this trade and thus the negative aspects, including the environmental costs of clothing disposal of donated SHC, of trade in SHC are concealed.

## Individuals' Clothing Disposal Behaviour

There is limited research on individuals' clothing disposal behaviour. However, recently this body of scholarship has expanded rapidly (Laitala, 2014). Existing research has primarily focused on disposal patterns and consumer perceptions on disposal in order to understand (from a marketing perspective) what motivates individuals to donate used clothing to a charity or thrift store or to dispose of it in the trash (see Norum, 2015; Hibbert et al., 2005). Scholarship on individuals' clothing disposal behaviour has tended to focus on three areas: motivations, methods, and demographics (Laitala, 2014, p. 452). Motivations include the reasons why individuals dispose of unwanted clothing and why they select specific methods for disposal. Methods include the different ways that individuals dispose of unwanted clothing, including locations used for donations. Demographics are the factors that may influence disposal behaviour, such as gender and age. This body of scholarship has predominantly focused on consumer behaviour in the United States and the United Kingdom. For example, Laitala (2014) compiled a comprehensive list of research results on consumer clothing disposal behaviour that have been published in English and Scandinavian languages between 1980 and 2013. Of the 41 publications cited, only one study includes a Canadian context (see Phillips & Sego, 2011).

Weber et al. (2017) conducted one of the few Canadian studies on how consumers dispose of unwanted clothing. Using an online survey of 410 adults in Ontario, Canada, Weber et al. found that donating used clothing "appears to be a social norm among all consumers in Canada" (p. 214). However, even though donating clothes may be a social norm, this does not necessarily mean that the majority of individuals are donating their clothes. As noted earlier, and as Weber (2016) has highlighted in a previous study, approximately 85 percent of all household textiles in Canada are disposed of in the garbage (p. 22). Weber et al. (2017) identified five

different ways in which consumers dispose of unwanted clothing: resell, take-back, clothing swaps, donate, and garbage (p. 211). The purpose of their study was to determine if "fashion consumers" and "non-fashion consumers" dispose of textiles differently. They created a "fashion index," a composite scale to determine an individual's level of fashion interest, with fashion consumers at one end of the scale and non-fashion consumers at the other end. Age and gender influenced the fashion index, with women and young consumers scoring as "more fashion-trend sensitive" than men and older age groups (Weber et al., 2017, p. 209-10). While both "fashion consumers" and "non-fashion consumers" donated unwanted clothing, "fashion consumers" were more likely to engage in alternative methods of disposal such as: clothing swaps, take-back programs, and reselling (p. 207). The motivation for consumers with a low fashion index to dispose of clothing in the garbage was "a perceived lack of value in the garments," whereas for consumers with a high fashion index "the issue is more one of convenience and time" (p. 213). Weber et al. concluded, "increased consumption will increase the volume of unwanted garments, but not the tendency to 'throw-away' more of their clothes to landfill disposal" (p. 213). Further, the study found that almost 92 percent of respondents were aware of where and how to donate used clothing (pp. 212-3). Two interesting findings emerged from this study. First, respondents claimed to donate 50 percent of unwanted clothes. Second, "Clothing donations are not dependent on gender, age or fashion index" (p. 212). However, a 50 percent donation rate seems relatively high given the large percentage of textiles in landfills in Canada, and this may be a result of response bias. As these scholars note, the survey accounts for "self -reported behaviour reflecting the intended behaviour and not the actual behaviour;" the reported donation rate of 50 percent "may not accurately reflect reality" (p. 212). The disposal of textiles in the garbage is widespread, because individuals are either unaware or fail to remember that items such as towels,

linens, and bedding can be donated (Weber, 2016, p. 23). The finding that gender and age are not linked to donation patterns contradicts previous studies that have identified age and gender as relevant demographic factors.

A number of studies conducted in the United States and in the United Kingdom found that gender and age are important demographic factors that may influence individual clothing behaviour. In terms of gender, scholars have found that women dispose of higher volumes of clothing than men (see Lang et al., 2013, Hibbert et al., 2005, Norum, 2015). Hibbert et al. (2005) found that women's clothing was the most common used good disposed of by consumers (p. 833). Women are the primary donors of SHC, but a number of studies on individual disposal patterns have narrowly focused on young women and students (see Norum, 2015; Bianchi & Birtwistle, 2010; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). While women may be more likely to shop and donate used clothing, studies have engaged in selection bias by only sampling females. In a study conducted by Norum (2015), only women were sampled because women "spend more money on clothing" and "more time in clothing maintenance activities than males" (p. 27). Morgan and Birtwistle's (2009) study conducted focus groups with 71 women aged 17-25 in order to better understand clothing purchasing and disposal patterns. They selected this demographic because "young people purchase fashion garments more frequently than older people" (p. 193). Age has been identified as an important demographic factor that may influence individual disposal behaviour in these studies. For example, scholars have found that older individuals are more likely to donate used clothing (Domina & Koch, 1999, 2001; Hibbert et al., 2005). Similarly, Mitchell et al. (2009) found that younger individuals are more likely to shop at thrift stores whereas older individuals are more likely to donate to thrift stores (p. 260). In addition to age and gender, other demographic factors, such as education and income, are seen to influence

individual disposal behaviour. For example, in studies conducted in the United States, higher levels of education have been associated with the reuse and recycling of textiles (see Stephens, 1985; Domina & Koch, 1999; Harrell & McConocha, 1992). Both Norum (2015) and Domina and Koch (1999) have found that individuals living in households with higher incomes are more likely to donate used clothing to charities or religious organizations.

The second theme in this scholarship is 'method' of disposal. The common modes of consumer clothing disposal found in this body of scholarship are: reuse (e.g., giving clothing to friends or family members), repurposing (e.g., using as cleaning rags or sewing projects), donating (to charities or thrift stores), and disposing in the trash (Norum, 2015; Ha-Brookshire & Hodges, 2009; Domina & Koch, 1999, 2001). Thrift stores and charities are the most popular locations where individuals donate unwanted clothing. For example, Domina and Koch (1999) found that in the United States, non-profit organizations were the primary location where individuals donated second-hand clothes (p. 347). Participants identified two the Salvation Army and Goodwill as the two most common donation locations (p. 351). Similarly, Bianchi and Birtwistle (2010) found that the majority of unwanted clothes are donated to charities in both Scotland and Australia (p. 354). Not surprising is that Hibbert et al. (2005) found that women's clothes are the most common item donated to thrift stores in the United Kingdom (p. 823). Convenience and supporting charities are the two most commonly cited reasons why individuals selected certain locations to donate used clothes (Domina & Koch, 1999, 2001; Joung & Park-Poaps, 2013; Norum, 2015). Alternative methods of clothing disposal (though less commonly used) include: clothing exchanges/swaps, garage sales, reselling, and take-back (Weber et al., 2017). Weber et al. (2017) found that "swapping is a new way of shopping or a new method of recycling and reusing" that is overlooked in studies on consumers' clothing disposal behaviour

(p. 209). Individuals bring their unwanted clothing to a swap and can find clothes to exchange; often, clothing that remains after a clothing swap is then donated to a charity (Weber et al., 2017, p. 209).

In terms of the third theme, motivations, the most commonly cited motivation for disposing of unwanted textiles in this body of scholarship are: cleaning out closet/freeing up space; items no longer fit; out of style; damaged/worn-out; and helping people in need (Domina & Koch, 1999; Lang et al., 2013; Ha-Brookshire & Hodges, 2009; Norum, 2015). Ha-Brookshire and Hodges (2009), who conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with individuals, concluded that the primary reasons participants donated used clothing was to clean out the closet (p. 185) and that donating was "just one part of the entire clothing consumption process, one that created space for future clothing purchases" (p. 193). An interesting finding by Ha-Brookshire and Hodges (2009) was that although thrift stores and charities present a narrative of clothing donations as 'doing good,' as a 'socially responsible' way to dispose of unwanted clothing, "social responsibility emerged as a weak motivation for used clothing donation" (p. 192). However, this finding contradicts other studies that have found that altruism or charity concerns is a primary motivating factor for donating used clothing is altruism or charity concerns. For example, both Domina and Koch (1999) and Joung and Park-Poaps (2013) have found that individuals donate used clothing for altruistic reasons such as helping others and funding the programs that charities provide (Domina & Koch, 1999; Joung & Park-Poaps, 2013). Non-profit organizations actively promote the message that clothing donations help support the philanthropic activities that these organizations provide. As decades of provincial and federal cuts to social programs have occurred, the costs of social programs have been increasingly downloaded to families and communities. As their funding base is shrinking, many non-profit

organizations have adopted business models to raise money to support their programs, such as opening thrift stores and advertising and marketing themselves as social enterprises. In part, this explains the rise and importance of thrift stores.

In contrast, in Domina and Koch's (1999) study, the most common reason for disposing of textiles was 'not wanting to waste' and 'did not fit' (p. 351), and for participants who selected religious organizations as their donation location, their motivation was "helping the needy and not wasting the garment" (p. 355). Domina and Koch's (1999) study sampled 396 households in a community in Michigan through a mail questionnaire and asked participants to select as many reasons, from the eight options provided, for why they disposed of clothing and the method used for each (p. 351). The reasons provided included: "not wasted, did not fit, valuable, convenience, out of style, tired/bored, damaged, helps needy" (p. 351). The methods of textile disposal included: consignment, Salvation Army, religious organizations, garage sales, passed on, rags, and modified and reused (p. 351). Respondents indicated that 'out-of-style' was a reason for disposal in five of the methods of disposal: Consignment (50%), The Salvation Army (57%), Religious Organizations (41%), Rags (28%), and Modified and Reused (41%) (p. 351). Similarly, in Norum's (2015) study that sampled 502 women from the United States through an online survey, participants could select multiple reasons, from the seven options provided, for why they disposed of clothing. The reasons provided included: "size too big or too small, no longer like, out of style, to replace by new purchases, running out of space, wanting to donate, lack of interest" (p. 30). 'Out of style' was selected by 41.3 percent of respondents (p. 30).

Investigating individual clothing disposal behaviour is important in order to develop solutions to increase the recycling of textiles and to change consumption patterns. While awareness about the labour exploitation and working conditions that are entailed in the

production of clothing is quite widespread, awareness about the environmental impact of the clothing industry is limited. Only a few studies have identified environmental concerns as a motivation for donating clothing (see Park et al., 2017; Joung & Park-Poaps, 2013; Bianchi & Birtwistle, 2012). Individuals are aware of the importance of recycling products such as glass, plastic, and paper, but the reusing and recycling of textiles has not yet been mainstreamed. Morgan and Birtwistle (2009) write: "there still appears to be little awareness of the impact of the disposition of high volumes of textile waste" (p. 192). Morgan and Birtwistle's (2009) work demonstrates this lack of awareness. The results of their study found that "young female consumers are unaware of the need for clothing recycling" and "there is a general lack of knowledge of how and where clothing is disposed of, or even how it is made, such as the environmental consequences of artificial fibers and intensive cotton production" (p. 196). Limited public awareness about textile reusing and recycling seems to be a result of the failure of municipalities and provinces to adopt formal methods for textile recycling. Joung & Park-Poaps (2013) argue, "Because prices of new garments imported from low-wage countries are cheaper than the cost of recycling, textile recycling has been discouraged" (p. 109). In Canada, charities and non-profit organizations are the primary collectors and "recyclers" of textiles. Marsales (2016) has argued that municipalities download the cost of recycling textiles to charities and non-profit organizations because of the challenges and high costs of recycling these materials (p. 13). Another possible reason for the lack of textile diversion programs in Canada is the misconception that textile waste is not environmentally harmful. Harmful chemicals are used to produce textiles and these toxins leach into the environment once these materials end-up in landfills.

The following section further develops an analysis of the role of charities and non-profit organizations in the international commercial resale of second-hand clothing. I outline Canada's position in the global trade of SHC by examining the value/volume of SHC that Canada exported in 2016. Further, this section illustrates the hidden and negative aspects of this trade.

## Canada & the Global Trade of SHC

What is Canada's position in the global trade of SHC? No previous studies have explored links between Canadian thrift stores, national buyers and international buyers and 'bundlers,' and end-markets. Indeed, very few scholars have examined what happens to SHC after it has been donated to thrift stores. Scholars such as Andrew Brooks (2015, 2013, 2012), David Simon (2012), Simone Field (2007), Pietra Rivoli (2005), and Karen Tranberg Hansen (2004, 2000, 1999) have traced some key aspects of SHC commodity chains, but there has not been an equivalent study in Canada. Their work has focused on the international end-market and power nodes along the chain for SHC collected by charities and NGOs in the United States or the United Kingdom that is not sold domestically but is instead sold to buyers and other international intermediaries for sale in various global South countries. Both Brooks (2013, 2015) and Field (2007) have found that a large portion of SHC from the United Kingdom is commercially exported to sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), and Hansen (2000) found that the majority of imports of SHC in SSA come from the United States and northwestern Europe. Similarly, Rivoli (2005) found that a large portion of SHC from charities in the United States are sold to Trans-Americas, a US textile recycling which bales and sells used clothing by the pound to a number of different countries in SSA (p. 183). Rivoli's (2005) research focuses on a t-shirt from production, consumption, to the end market. Beginning with the cultivation of cotton in Texas, she

determined that the cotton is then shipped to China "spun into yarn, knitted into cloth, cut into pieces, and finally sewn into a T-shirt" (p. 61). Finished "Made in China" t-shirts are then shipped back to the US where they are sold in retail stores such as Walmart (p. 150). While Rivoli focuses on the production and consumption of a t-shirt, Hansen (2000) explores the global trade in SHC by investigating the end market of SHC: the consumption of SHC in Zambia. She traces the flow of SHC from individual households in the United States and northwestern Europe, to donations to charitable organizations where upon arrival the clothes are sorted and processed, sold in thrift stores or sold by the pound to clothing graders or textile recyclers where they are transported by truck to "warehouses/sorting plants near major port cities" (p. 18), and to the end-use of SHC in Zambia.

Determining the precise amount (in terms of weight or dollar value) of SHC that is sold in thrift stores, disposed of in landfills, recycled commercially, or exported is difficult. The difficulty in identifying the volume and value of SHC is twofold. First, global trade data collected and published by the United Nations Statistics Division provides only a partial lens on the global trade in SHC. Second, the problem with identifying the amount of SHC that is donated to charities, sold in thrift stores, disposed of in landfills, recycled commercially, or exported is compounded by the unwillingness of the individuals or companies involved in this industry to disclose this information (Hansen, 2000, p. 18). Statistics on SHC are based on self-reported data from individual countries (Hansen, 2000, 114). While some trade statistics measure the amount of SHC in US dollars, other statistics measure the amount by weight, which Hansen (2000) argues, "introduces problems not only of consistency and comparability but also of changes in exchange rates" (p. 114). Some countries fail to report or are slow to report on the import/export of SHC. This is evident when viewing import data on SHC on the UN Comtrade Database. For

example, Kenya and Ghana have not reported any import data for HS 630900 since 2013 (UN Comtrade, 2017); yet, Canada has reported exporting this commodity to these two countries in 2014, 2015, and 2016 (see Table 3) (Statistics Canada, 2017a). Hansen (2000) argues, "even if they are available, country-specific statistics on imports of used clothing are not very accurate because of a variety of illegal practices surrounding the import, including smuggling across international borders" (p. 114). A high volume of unreported second-hand clothing from the global North makes its way to countries in Africa such as Nigeria and South Africa where the import of second-hand clothing for commercial resale is illegal (Brooks & Simon, 2012, p. 1271). The ban or restriction on imports of second-hand clothing is meant to protect local clothing industries, especially in countries that produce for a local or regional market. However, as Brooks notes, the displacement of local textile manufacturing has still occurred since such bans have been put in place and illegal imports still reach Nigeria and South Africa (2015, p. 130).

In relation to the second component, the problem surrounding the secrecy of the second-hand clothing industry and the general unwillingness of individuals or companies involved in this industry to share their experiences or knowledge, this is something that I experienced in my own fieldwork and will be addressed later in greater detail (see Chapter Five). This secrecy seems to be linked to the business models that thrift stores and non-profit organizations engage in versus the contradictory image they present to the public.

The United States is the largest exporter of SHC, and the United Kingdom is the second largest exporter of SHC. As such, the United States and the United Kingdom have been the primary geographic locations where research on the export of second-hand clothing has focused. Why has Canada not been examined as a case study? Is Canada an insignificant actor in the

global trade in SHC? When SHC exports are measured by trade value in US dollars, Canada was the seventh largest global exporter in 2016 (see Table 1) (United Nations, 2017). The amount of SHC that Canada exported was valued at US$126,428,417 (United Nations, 2017). The United States is the largest exporter of SHC followed by the United Kingdom, Germany, the Republic of Korea, Poland, Belgium, Canada, Italy, Malaysia, and Japan. When measured by volume, Canada drops to the eleventh largest global exporter of SHC in 2016 (see Table 2) (United Nations, 2017). The net weight of SHC that Canada exported was 104,821,182 kilograms (United Nations, 2017). When measured by volume, the United States remains the largest global exporter of SHC, followed by Germany, the United Kingdom, the Republic of Korea, Japan, Poland, France, Belgium, Italy, Malaysia, Canada (United Nations, 2017). The United States and the Republic of Korea are the only countries that remain in the same ranking order when the amount of exported SHC in 2016 is measured by weight (United Nations, 2017).

**Table 1** Top 10 Countries that Exported Second-Hand Clothing in 2016 by Value

| Rank | Country | 2016 | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Value US$ | Value US$ | Value US$ | Value US$ |
| 1 | USA | $575,656,879 | $705,798,136 | $708,658,431 | $688,298,387 |
| 2 | United Kingdom | $481,847,135 | $481,217,263 | $563,438,105 | $612,241,032 |
| 3 | Germany | $394,490,282 | $429,753,724 | $500,513,201 | $492,428,487 |
| 4 | Republic of Korea | $270,095,313 | $317,038,957 | $357,296,121 | $364,071,762 |
| 5 | Poland | $161,980,271 | $134,209,923 | $147,731,002 | $140,984,192 |
| 6 | Belgium | $139,572,607 | $144,325,717 | $175,430,208 | $189,240,784 |
| 7 | Canada | $126,428,417 | $140,547,209 | $169,538,205 | $174,485,450 |
| 8 | Italy | $118,590,598 | $128,868,691 | $145,912,195 | $140,644,246 |
| 9 | Malaysia | $107,622,153 | $111,275,560 | $122,391,721 | $111,452,449 |
| 10 | Japan | $94,082,023 | $113,181,240 | $127,485,590 | $119,581,514 |

*Note.* This data is for commodity code HS 630900, "Worn Clothing and Other Worn Articles" and shows the annual global exports of this commodity for 2016, ranked by the largest trade value in US dollars, adapted from the United Nations (2017).

**Table 2** Top 10 Countries that Exported Second-Hand Clothing in 2016 by Volume

| Rank | Country | 2016 | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Net weight (kg) | Net weight (kg) | Net weight (kg) | Net weight (kg) |
| 1 | USA | 752,714,139 | 718,791,354 | 773,817,679 | 780,276,071 |
| 2 | Germany | 504,537,168 | 536,710,438 | 494,773,100 | 476,995,310 |
| 3 | United Kingdom | 351,525,843 | 351,178,761 | 351,788,545 | 350,986,152 |
| 4 | Republic of Korea | 277,612,408 | 284,584,759 | 307,798,388 | 298,043,103 |
| 5 | Japan | 239,276,575 | 246,124,232 | 239,941,734 | 216,234,289 |
| 6 | Poland | 163,170,834 | 142,453,220 | 126,160,087 | 125,638,738 |
| 7 | France | 154,784,875 | 138,094,622 | 133,021,957 | 114,549,253 |
| 8 | Belgium | 144,943,533 | 140,448,873 | 140,598,255 | 157,782,138 |
| 9 | Italy | 135,160,253 | 142,091,730 | 129,856,189 | 127,000,310 |
| 10 | Malaysia | 119,876,346 | 132,051,718 | 144,080,726 | 130,049,036 |
| 11 | Canada | 104,821,182 | 101,367,027 | 119,622,379 | 125,603,515 |

*Note.* This data is for commodity code HS 630900, "Worn Clothing and Other Worn Articles" and shows the annual global exports of this commodity for 2016, ranked by the largest net weight in kilograms, adapted from the United Nations (2017).

When measured by trade value in Canadian dollars, Kenya received the largest amount of Canadian exports of SHC in 2016, followed by Ghana, India, United Republic of Tanzania, Tunisia, Pakistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nicaragua, United Arab Emirates, and Angola (see Table 3) (Statistics Canada, 2017a). Statistics Canada only provides export statistics on SHC measured by trade value in Canadian dollars; statistics on the amount of SHC exported by volume are not provided. From 2013-2016 Canada exported the largest trade value of second-hand clothing to Kenya. This is interesting because Brooks (2015) and Field (2007) both find that a large portion of SHC from the United Kingdom is exported to Kenya. Indeed, one of the few detailed studies on the global trade in SHC has traced links between European NGOs and the second-hand trade in garments in Kenya (Field, 2007). Research in Africa on the topic has tended to focus almost exclusively on Kenya, perhaps for good reason since Gikomba Market in Nairobi is the largest second-hand clothing market in East Africa (Goldberg, 2016). For instance, Field (2007) found that from 1998-2002 imports of SHC in Kenya increased by 32 percent and

the main countries exporting SHC to Kenya are the United States, Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom (p. 23). Where previously imports of SHC to Kenya predominantly came from Europe or the United Kingdom, Field suggests, "that buyers are now favouring low-cost US and Canadian product, due to the Europe/UK:US/Canada currency parity. A US consignment amounts to approximately £17,000-18,000, whereas UK product can cost up to £22,000" (2007, p. 24). SHC clothing is baled and shipped in containers. The containers hold approximately 450-500 bales and weigh 25 tonnes (Field, 2007, p. 23). Around 100 tonnes of used clothing produces 3 consignments (Field, 2007, p. 23). Field (2007) found that Oxfam's Wastesaver[4] bales and ships one consignment every 2-3 days (p. 23). Further, importation costs of SHC are increasing while the quality of SHC is deteriorating (Field, 2007. p. 27). The result has been a decrease in the number of consignments per month, with the cost per bale increasing (Field, 2007, p. 27).

[4] Oxfam UK operates about 650 thrift stores in the United Kingdom. Wastesaver is the recycling centre where clothing donations that do not sell in the stores are sorted and recycled. According to Oxfam, "Wastesaver sells around 15% of its clothing to Frip Ethique, a social enterprise in Senegal, with profits used to fund livelihoods programmes in Senegal and elsewhere in West Africa. Other clothing is exported through our trade partners across Europe and Asia, in line with our ethical supply policy" (Oxfam, 2017). Lucy Norris (2015) describes Oxfam's ethical supply policy as "innovative": Oxfam does not sell SHC to countries that have local textile manufacturing industries or to markets that are near countries that have a ban on imports of SHC (Norris, 2015, p. 185).

**Table 3** Top 10 Countries Canada Exported Second-Hand Clothing to in 2016 by Value

| Rank | Country | 2016 | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Value CAN$ | Value CAN$ | Value CAN$ | Value CAN$ |
| Total | World | $166,325,564 | $178,225,274 | $186,120,661 | $178,534,269 |
| 1 | Kenya | $22,289,060 | $22,743,779 | $23,469,698 | $21,065,623 |
| 2 | Ghana | $15,885,515 | $17,471,017 | $13,831,408 | $11,809,528 |
| 3 | India | $11,774,833 | $12,726,541 | $14,522,323 | $11,778,660 |
| 4 | United Republic of Tanzania | $11,166,491 | $15,808,885 | $18,894,048 | $15,791,320 |
| 5 | Tunisia | $9,584,402 | $7,491,398 | $5,577,230 | $6,149,192 |
| 6 | Pakistan | $9,477,854 | $9,957,794 | $9,102,915 | $10,099,331 |
| 7 | Democratic Republic of Congo | $7,399,976 | $9,985,856 | $10,983,183 | $10,197,472 |
| 8 | Nicaragua | $6,108,242 | $3,712,727 | $2,834,032 | $2,451,239 |
| 9 | United Arab Emirates | $5,506,342 | $7,452,210 | $8,623,306 | $8,070,593 |
| 10 | Angola | $4,822,093 | $6,519,699 | $16,093,268 | $16,490,150 |

*Note.* This data shows the top ten countries that Canada exported commodity code HS 630900, "Worn Clothing and Other Worn Articles" to in 2016. This domestic export is ranked by the largest trade value in Canadian dollars, adapted from Statistics Canada (2017).

**Unraveling the Hidden Processes of the Global SHC Trade**

Mapping the commodity chain of second-hand clothing from the consumer, to the thrift store, to its end use is important for a number of different reasons, three reasons of which are highlighted in this thesis. First, the global trade in SHC highlights the historical and contemporary trading relations between the global North and South that are based on relations of domination and dependency. Second, mapping the commodity chain begins to unravel the hidden processes of this trade. What is hidden from the public is that a large proportion of SHC in the global North is not sold in thrift stores and instead is commercially exported. Third, and closely related to the second point, is that research on the global SHC trade tends to present a narrative that the overall impact on global South countries, the main recipients of imported SHC, is positive. These points are explored below.

First, cheap disposable clothing is widely available in the global North mostly because the majority of garments are produced in the global South at low production costs. For instance,

over 98 percent of all clothing sold in Canada is produced in the global South (Marsales, 2016, p. 12) where workers are exploited and wages are low (e.g., the labour exploitation and working conditions that led to the Rana Plaza tragedy[5]). Clothing in the global South is produced for export, where a large section of the local population cannot afford to purchase these articles of clothing (Norris, 2015, p. 184). This reproduces a "global division in consumption" (Brooks, 2015, p. 13). Although the consumption of new clothing predominantly occurs in the core, the consumption of used clothing predominantly occurs in the periphery. As Brooks (2015) points out, "Fast-fashion consumption in the North generates a surplus of unwanted used clothes, which are then exported back to the global South, sometimes to the very same locations that manufacture new clothes for export, such as Kenya" (p. 195). Since the 1990s, there has been an increasing awareness in the Global North of the labour exploitation and poor working conditions that necessitate the production of clothing (and other commodities). Anti-sweatshop campaigns and commodity chain research have brought to light the social relations that result in the production of exploitable workers and their working conditions, but it seems that this awareness has not impacted fast fashion production or consumption patterns. In fact, "sweatshop production is rapidly expanding" (Ngai, 2003, p. 471), clothing consumption has continued, even increased, while protests and organized oppositions to sweatshop conditions have decreased. As clothing consumption has increased, so too have clothing donations to thrift stores and charitable organizations.

Second, thrift stores and other key actors in the global SHC trade conceal important information about this trade from the public. Thrift stores depend on the revenue they get from

[5] The supply chain of Loblaw, a Canadian Company, was traced to the Rana Plaza Factory, where the manufacturing of its clothing line, Joe Fresh, was subcontracted (CBC, 2015).

accepting SHC and selling it in their stores and to international buyers. But, this business model tends to contradict the model that is presented to the customer. In the global North, there is a common misconception that the majority of SHC is sold or reused locally, when in fact, a large proportion of SHC is commercially exported. For example, Norris (2015) argues that two-thirds of donated SHC is commercially exported to the global South and this transaction is framed "as a freely-traded commodity that it is claimed to grow markets and support livelihoods in the global south, rather than a fairly-traded product" (p. 183). Further, Norris contends that donated used clothes "have no direct agency to 'do good' by clothing bodies or providing warmth through charitable efforts, they are simply a means to an end" (p. 400). Like Norris, Hansen asserts, "there is no doubt that a rhetoric of giving and helping hides a very profitable business both from public view and from scrutiny" (p. 254). Further, another hidden component of this trade is that only a small fraction of profits is accrued through the sale of SHC in thrift stores. Who really benefits from SHC and from donations to thrift stores? Commercial textile recyclers and clothing graders accumulate the majority of the profits in the global trade in SHC (Norris, 2012; Field, 2007). Not only do thrift stores and actors conceal important information from the public, as Hansen (2000) points out, the actors themselves are often hidden from the public, in both the global North and South (p. 254). For instance, some thrift stores in the global North (e.g., Value Village and the Salvation Army) promote the fact that some of their clothing donations are sold to countries in the global South (Value Village, 2016b; Salvation Army, 2016a). But what is hidden from the public are the specific companies and actors involved in these transactions, and what is not made clear is the percentage of donated clothing that these thrift stores sell to global South countries or what happens to the SHC once it arrives in its final destination. While thrift stores, charities, and commercial textile recyclers highlight how the SHC industry provides

clothing to people in need in countries in the global South, this narrative perpetuates a common misconception that donated clothes are provided for free, as a form of foreign aid.

As well, the social, economic, and cultural impacts of the importation of SHC in Africa and other regions in the global South are ignored. As Ericsson and Brooks (2015) have noted, "second-hand-clothing imports have different impacts upon African economies and societies, which are much disputed" (p. 92). They argue that the economic value of exporting SHC to Africa should be "critically considered" (p. 93). SHC imports reproduce unequal trading relations between Africa and the global North, and contribute to the displacement of local textile manufacturing industries. According to these scholars, SHC imports

> represents a net out-flow of money from poor countries, contributing to balance-of-payment deficits, which are hampering economic growth in many African countries. Importers in developing countries use valuable foreign exchange on shipments of second-hand clothes; this currency goes to economies in the global North, exacerbating existing trade imbalances. This is especially so in sub-Saharan Africa, where second-hand clothes are frequently the largest consumer import by volume and account for over 50 per cent of the clothing market in many countries. (p. 93)

Third, and closely related to the above discussion, scholarship on SHC commodity chains tends to overemphasize the positive aspects of the global trade in SHC. Job creation, poverty alleviation, and providing clothing to the poor are frequently cited benefits. For the most part, this body of scholarship has not critically examined the everyday lives of the people involved in or affected by the SHC trade in Africa and other regions in the global South. For instance, establishing reliable employment figures for the jobs created or lost through the importation of SHC is not possible (Brooks, 2015; Rivoli, 2005). Brooks (2015) argues that statistics on the impact of SHC are difficult to come by and it is hard to estimate the number of people employed in the SHC in countries such as Kenya, Ghana, and Mozambique due to the "weakness in employment statistics in many African states" (p. 143). Brooks argues that Simone Field and the

Salvation Army have overestimated SHC employment figures. For example, according to Brooks (2015), Field claims that the SHC industry in Kenya is responsible for employing and providing income for 5 million people, 13.5 percent of the population (Brooks, 2015, p. 143). Similarly, the Salvation Army claims that 20 percent of the workforce in Ghana is employed in the SHC industry (Brooks, 2015, p. 143). As Brooks notes, in both cases the source of these estimates has not been cited.

Rivoli (2015) makes a similar point that reliable employment figures are unattainable but, unlike Brooks, claims that the SHC industry in Tanzania has resulted in more jobs than apparel manufacturing provided (p. 200). Rivoli argues that the import of SHC "presents no threat at all to African export markets" because "producing for export rather than domestic production is the more effective industrial development ladder" (p. 200). She argues that the demise of local apparel manufacturing industries in Africa is a result of "corruption, political risk, low education levels, insecure property rights, macroeconomic instability, and ineffective commercial codes – in a phrase, bad governance" (p. 200). According to Rivoli, "state ownership and control [of cotton production] excluded and impoverished those at the bottom of the power structure" during the era of import substitution in many African countries (p. 204).

Rivoli's (2015) research on the SHC industry paints a very different picture of the industry than does Brooks' (2013; 2015). For instance, Rivoli's central argument is that the excess of unwanted clothing in the global North has "shift[ed] the balance of market power to the African customer" (p. 224). Rivoli considers the global trade in SHC to be a form of "economic democracy" (p. 204) as it provides opportunities for "the masses rather than the elite" (p. 204). The solution, according to Rivoli is "not in closing the doors to American used clothing but in opening the doors to the American market" (p. 202). Rivoli's study on the SHC industry is

framed through a neoliberal lens of "free" market capitalism and trade liberalization, and a false assumption that "*a rising tide lifts all boats.*" Rivoli's analysis and conclusions cannot be separated from her worldview, one in which modernization theory and neoliberal globalization are seen as the paths to "progress" and "development" in the global South. But, it should be noted that Rivoli's interpretation that the global SHC trade is beneficial to Africa and other global South regions reflects the narratives presented to the public by thrift stores and charitable organizations that collect, sort, and sell SHC in the global North (this will be further discussed in Chapter Four). In other words, the way in which Rivoli portrays the global SHC trade reflects and reinforces dominant discourse: it is the mainstream approach. In contrast, Brooks is careful not to make bold unsubstantiated claims like those made by Rivoli in terms of the social, economic, and cultural benefits of the SHC industry for global South countries. Brooks provides a critical examination of the SHC industry and of global economic relationships in general. For Brooks, the SHC industry reflects historical trading relations between the global North and South that re(produce) relations of domination and dependency. An analysis of the global SHC trade, according to Brooks, demonstrates "how the poor, such as individual second-hand clothing traders in Maputo, are disadvantaged in capitalist trade" (Brooks, 2015b, p. 20). Rivoli's research and Brooks' research illustrates two opposing views of economic globalization, and therefore on the effects of SHC trade within more globalized trade. Where Rivoli sees the processes of trade liberalization and the opening up of markets in global South countries as a form of "economic democracy," Brooks argues that neoliberal globalization has resulted in an increase in uneven geographical development. For instance, Brooks (2015b) points out that African countries "under political pressure from banks and governments in the West, were forced to liberalise their economies in the 1980s and 1990s," leading to a shift from garment manufacturing produced for

local populations to export-based. The result, as Brooks (2015b) highlights, is that "Many in Africa are too poor to afford clothes other than imported second-hand ones, whereas 30 years ago they could buy locally produced new clothes" (para. 6).

The negative impacts of the importation of SHC are exemplified by the fact that a number of global South countries have banned the importation of SHC due to health concerns or to protect local textile economies from the influx of cheap used clothing (Norris, 2015). Garth Frazer's (2008) study on SHC donations and apparel manufacturing in SSA found that SHC imports have resulted in a 39 percent annual decrease in apparel production and about a 50 percent annual decrease in employment (p. 1781). Similarly, Brooks (2015) found that legally imported SHC in Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, and Tanzania have displaced domestic clothing manufacturing, as well as in Nigeria where illegally imported SHC is traded (p. 132). Clothing that is manufactured domestically in these countries cannot compete with the cheap prices of SHC imports. For example, Baden and Barber (2005) report that the cost of SHC in SSA is 10-20 percent of the price of new clothing (p. 5). Brooks and Simon (2012) found that the cost of SHC in Maputo is approximately 37.7 percent less than the cost of purchasing similar new articles of clothing (p. 1279). Problematic too is the fact that items that cannot be sold or reused in the global South are then disposed of in landfills, adding to local environmental problems in these countries.

As the scholarship discussed above shows, the overconsumption of clothing in Canada and other global North countries has far reaching effects. It is too naive to assume that our unwanted clothing can be exported to global South countries without negative consequences. Arguably, in many cases, the export of SHC can be viewed as "dumping." Baden and Barber (2005) report that approximately 25 percent of SHC imported to Kenya cannot be sold due to the

poor quality of the items (p. 12). Field's (2007) research demonstrates how low-quality items reach global South markets. When used garments arrive at textile recycling companies they are sorted into six different categories: "jackets/coats, shirts, trousers, knitwear, silks and cottons" (p. 22). From here the clothing is graded into about 100 different categories based on "quality, gender, size, material and weight" (p. 22). The clothing is then put in a baler that compacts the clothes into 45kg bales (p. 22). To offload the lower grades of clothing into international markets, the textile reclamation industry forces buyers "to purchase a consignment on a predetermined packing list" (p. 22). In order to purchase a desirable item (e.g., "two bales of bras") a Kenyan buyer must also purchase 20 bales of undesirable garments (e.g., knitwear and winter clothing) (p. 22). Field's research challenges claims put forth by certain charities, non-profit organizations, and for-profit thrift stores (such as Value Village) that SHC exports from the global North are valuable commodities in the global South. Indeed, Field's research begins to unravel the hidden cost of the global trade in SHC.

## Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the body of scholarship and key debates on second-hand clothing commodity chains. The first section reviewed scholarship on individuals' clothing disposal behaviour and illustrated how there is limited research on this topic, but recently this body of scholarship has expanded rapidly. The geographic focus has been on consumer behaviour in the United States and the United Kingdom. In general, research on individuals' clothing disposal behaviour has focused on three areas: motivations, methods (locations), and demographics (Laitala, 2014, p. 452). The main motivations for donating SHC in this body of scholarship are: cleaning out closet/freeing up space; items no longer fit; out of style; damaged/worn-out; and helping people in need. Non-profit organizations and thrift stores are the

main locations where individuals donate used clothing. Gender and age are identified as the key demographic factors that may influence individual disposal behaviour in this body of scholarship. I explore gender and age in my research (see Chapter 3).

The second section reviewed scholarship on the global SHC trade and also illustrated how there is limited research on this topic. Scholars such as Brooks (2015; 2013; 2012), Simon (2012), Field (2007), Rivoli (2005), and Hansen (2004; 2000; 1999) have traced some key aspects of SHC commodity chains by focusing on the international end-market and power nodes along the chain for SHC collected by charities and NGOs in the United States or the United Kingdom that is not sold domestically, and instead, is sold to buyers and other international intermediaries for sale in various global South countries, but there has not been an equivalent study in Canada. This section also reviewed UN Comtrade data in an attempt to situate Canada's role and position in the global SHC trade. The data shows that when SHC exports are measured by trade value in US dollars, Canada was the seventh largest global exporter in 2016, but when exports are measured by volume, Canada drops to the eleventh largest global exporter of SHC in 2016 (United Nations, 2017).

Guided by the work of Brooks (2015; 2013) and Norris (2015, 2012), and the analytical framework of commodity chain research, I will explore how value is re/conceptualized in relation to SHC. My work aims to fill gaps in current scholarship on this topic. In particular, existing work fails to address empirically and theoretically the ways in which value is added and extracted to used clothing "through secondary processes of production" (Brooks, 2013, p. 11). Brooks and Norris both examine how used clothing is discarded as waste, donated as a 'gift,' and then recommodified in order to be re-sold (Brooks, 2013, p. 10; Norris, 2012, p. 389-90). The SHC global commodity chain begins and ends with the consumer. It is the consumer who

determines the value of SHC at the disposal stage, at the repurposing stage, and at the re-commodification stage. Women and households play a dominant role in the global trade of SHC – as consumers and donators of clothing, as volunteers in non-profits and thrift stores, and also as retailers of SHC in the global North and South, but research on the topic has failed to incorporate a gender analysis.

In the global trade of SHC, the majority of used clothing originates in the global North from donations made to charitable organizations (Hansen, 2000, p. 100). But, the complex supply chain of the international trade in second-hand clothing is hidden from the public. For instance, Brooks research reveals how the global trade in second-hand clothing highlights the "hidden professionalism" of charity organizations (Brooks, 2015, p. 84). Non-profit organizations in the United Kingdom such as Oxfam, the Salvation Army and the YMCA, and similar organizations in the United States and Canada, "have highly organized corporate business models, of which donors are frequently unaware" (Brooks, 2015, p. 84). Many people who donate SHC to charities in the global North are unaware of the end market; a large portion of donated SHC is exported to countries in the global South (Norris, 2012, p. 394; Brooks, 2013, p. 10-11). Recipients of SHC in the global North, charities and textile recyclers, commercially export used clothing to the global South, which is "overwhelmingly retailed for profit in the global South and are not freely distributed" (Brooks, 2013, p. 11). Further, people who purchase SHC in the global South are often unaware of the origin of the clothing (Brooks, 2013, p. 11). The global commodity chain of SHC reveals "different power relations between charities, firms and individuals, which enable them to extract more or less value from second-hand things" (Brooks, 2013, p. 10). For example, charitable organizations are "paid very low rates by

commercial buyers [of used clothing]" (Norris, 2012, p. 400). How value is added and extracted along this chain, for the most part, goes unchallenged (Norris, 2012, p. 400).

With these issues in mind, the next chapter investigates individuals' knowledge of the global SHC trade by interviewing SHC donors. Some of the themes addressed in the next chapter are consumer knowledge of what happens to donated clothes once they arrive at thrift stores; consumer motivations for donating unwanted clothes; and consumer knowledge of the environmental consequences of the overproduction and overconsumption of cheap clothing.

# Chapter Three

## Fieldwork: Individuals' Clothing Disposal Behaviour

### Introduction

This chapter explores the relationship between individuals' clothing consumption and donation patterns, and their knowledge of what happens to clothing once it has been donated. As noted in the introduction, I interviewed 30 participants in order to examine their clothing consumption patterns, knowledge of and attitudes towards donating used clothing. The majority of participants that I interviewed were unaware of what happens to their clothing once it is donated and what happens to clothing donations that do not sell in thrift stores. I was also interested in documenting clothing consumption patterns to probe the relationship between fast fashion, levels of clothing consumption and donation patterns.

Three reasons why individuals donate used clothing emerged from my interviews that have not been sufficiently explored in the scholarship on individuals' clothing disposal behaviour. First, a number of participants were motivated to donate used clothing due to environmental concerns. However, while a number of participants stated that one of their primary motivations for donating SHC was environmentally driven or to prevent these items from ending up in landfills, participants demonstrated a lack of knowledge about the type and condition of clothes that can be donated or recycled. Second, cultural factors emerged as one issue that influenced clothing disposal behaviour. For instance, a few individuals mentioned that their upbringing motivated them to donate their unwanted clothing rather than dispose of it in the garbage. Third, similar to existing research on the topic, a number of participants attributed the value of 'doing good' to donating clothing.

This chapter begins by providing a profile of each of the participants in my study and by comparing demographic factors such as age and gender to previous findings on individual clothing disposal behaviour in order to see how patterns here line up with existing research on the topic. The following sections examine motivations, and methods for donating SHC, followed by individuals' clothing donation and consumption patterns, consumer knowledge of clothing donations, and donating stained or damaged items. Finally, I explore the question of whether individuals considered or were concerned about the environmental problems and poor labour conditions associated with the clothing industry. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how individuals perceive clothing donations as 'doing good' and how perhaps this increases/sustains consumption patterns, as consumers are under the impression that unwanted clothing is reused or repurposed domestically.

## Sample Characteristics

Table 4 provides a profile of each of the participants in terms of their age, gender, occupation, where they were recruited from, along with their motivations for donating, where they donate, and how often they donate used clothing. These findings suggest that gender and age are demographic factors that influence an individual's clothing disposal behaviour. As noted earlier, several studies have found that women dispose of higher volumes of clothing than men (see Lang et al., 2013, Hibbert et al., 2005, Norum, 2005). Women are the primary donors of SHC, but a number of previous studies have engaged in selection bias by only sampling women (see Norum, 2015; Bianchi & Birtwistle, 2010; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). In my study, I did not engage in selection bias by sampling only women, but still, the overwhelming majority of people who responded to my recruitment calls were female (see Table 4). Out of the 30 people I interviewed, 25 (83%) of the respondents were female and 5 (17%) were male.

**Table 4** A Profile of All Respondents (n=30)

| Participant | Age | Gender | Occupation | Recruited From | Motivations For Donating | Donation Locations | Frequency of Donating (per year) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 40-49 | Male | Unknown | Thrift Store | Cleaning out closet/ freeing up space; helping people/charities | Beacon; various non-profit organizations; homeless shelters/direct to a person in need | 12 |
| 2 | 40-49 | Female | Student | UVic | Cleaning out closet/ freeing up space; not wearing/don't like; environmental/ preventing from landfill | Free Store; donation bins; Value Village | 52 |
| 3 | 60+ | Male | Retired Armed Forces/ Corrections | Online | Cleaning out closet/ freeing up space; not wanting to waste usable clothing; lack of fit/weight change | Big Brothers Big Sisters | 3-4 |
| 4 | 50-59 | Female | Government Researcher | Thrift Store | Environmental/ preventing from landfill | Beacon; online | 2 |
| 5 | 60+ | Female | Realtor/ Artist | Online | Cleaning out closet/ freeing up space; out-of-style; lack of fit/ weight change | Big Brothers Big Sisters; Value Village | 12 |
| 6 | 50-59 | Female | Support Worker | Thrift Store | Not wanting to waste usable clothing | James Bay United Church; "New to Me" South Park Elementary School Clothing Sale; Value Village; donation bins | 4-5 |
| 7 | 30-39 | Female | Business Analyst | UVic | Not wearing/ Don't like; lack of fit/ weight change | WIN; Value Village | 2 |
| 8 | 30-39 | Male | Career Educator | UVic | Grew up donating; not wearing/ don't like; cleaning out closet/ freeing up space | Salvation Army | 1 |
| 9 | 50-59 | Female | ESL Teacher | UVic | Cleaning out closet/ freeing up space; helping people/charities | Big Brothers Big Sisters; Garage Sales | 4-5 |
| 10 | 30-39 | Female | Student | UVic | Lack of fit/ weight change; Cleaning out closet/ freeing up space; | Parent's Donate; Donation Bins; gives to family or friend; homeless shelters/ direct to person in need | 1 |
| 11 | 20-29 | Female | Community Engagement | Online | Cleaning out closet/ freeing up space; helping people/charities; Environmental/ preventing from landfill | Salvation Army | 3 |
| 12 | 30-39 | Female | Resident Coordinator | UVic | Cleaning out closet/ freeing up space; helping people/charities; Environmental/ preventing from landfill | Donation bins; clothing swaps | 3-4 |
| 13 | 60+ | Female | Retired Nurse/ | Thrift Store | Helping people/charities; Not wearing/ Don't Like | Donation bins; consignment; gives to a family or friend | 4 |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Property Manager | | | | |
| 14 | 60+ | Female | Retired Teacher | Thrift Store | Helping people/charities; Not wearing/ Don't Like | Beacon; St. Vincent de Paul | 8-12 |
| 15 | 50-59 | Female | Admin in Government | Community Centre | Helping people/charities | WIN; Donation bins | 2 |
| 16 | 20-29 | Female | Support Worker | Online | Cleaning out closet/ freeing up space; Environmental/ preventing from landfill | SPCA; Beacon | 2 |
| 17 | 60+ | Male | Retired | Thrift Store | Environmental/ preventing from landfill; Not wearing/ Don't Like; Out-of-Style | Bibles For Mission; Value Village; Salvation Army | 6 |
| 18 | 60+ | Female | Accountant | Online | Helping people/charities; Grew up donating | SUCCESS; WIN; Consignment; Donation bins; Online; Salvation Army | 3-4 |
| 19 | 20-29 | Male | Student | Coffee Shop | Not wearing/ don't like; Environmental/ preventing from landfill; Cleaning out closet/ freeing up space | Donation bins; clothing swaps | 1-2 |
| 20 | 60+ | Female | Retired Teacher/ Church Minister | Thrift Store | Environmental/ preventing from landfill; Helping people/charities; Grew up donating; Lack of fit/ weight change; Not wanting to waste usable clothing | St. Aidan's; Our Place | 2 |
| 21 | 30-39 | Female | Admin at UVic | UVic | Cleaning out closet/ freeing up space; Helping people/charities | Consignment; Salvation Army | 2 |
| 22 | 50-59 | Female | Writer/ Speaker | Thrift Store | Helping people/charities; Not wearing/ don't like; Lack of fit/ weight change | St. Vincent; Salvation Army; Compassionate Warehouse | 3-4 |
| 23 | 60+ | Female | Retired Journalist | Community Centre | Cleaning out closet/ freeing up space | WIN; Our Place; Wear to Start | 2 |
| 24 | 60+ | Female | Retired Teacher | Thrift Store | Helping people/charities | Salvation Army | 24 |
| 25 | 60+ | Female | Retired Teacher | Snowball Sampling | Helping people/charities; Not wearing/ don't like; | WIN | 3-4 |
| 26 | 60+ | Female | Retired Teacher | Snowball Sampling | Not wanting to waste usable clothing | Food Bank; Big Brothers Big Sisters; Donation bins; Salvation Army | 3 |
| 27 | 60+ | Female | Retired from Business | Snowball Sampling | Not wearing/ don't like; Not wanting to waste usable clothing; Environmental/ preventing from landfill | WIN; Salvation Army | 1-2 |
| 28 | 60+ | Female | Retired Education | Community Centre | Environmental/ preventing from landfill; not wanting to waste usable clothing | Homeless shelters/direct to a person in need; Consignment | 3-4 |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 29 | 30-39 | Female | Student | Thrift Store | Helping people/charities; Environmental/ preventing from landfill | WIN; Transition House; Online | 12 |
| 30 | 60+ | Female | Planner for the City of Victoria | Community Centre | Cleaning out closet/ freeing up space; helping people/ charities | Transition House; WIN; Friends or family; SPCA | 12 |

In previous studies, age has been identified as a demographic factor that influences individual clothing donation behaviour. Mitchell et al.'s (2009) study found that older individuals are more likely to donate to thrift stores, while younger individuals are more likely to shop at thrift stores (p. 260). Of the 30 individuals that I interviewed, 14 (46.7%) were 60 or older, 5 (16.7%) were 50 to 59 years old, 2 (6.7%) were 40-49 years old, 6 (20%) were 30-39 years old, and 3 (10%) were 20-29 years old (see Table 5). Thus, my research contradicts studies by Norum (2015) and Domina and Koch (2001). Norum (2015) found that "respondents who were under the age of 35 were more likely to donate clothing to second-hand clothing stores compared to respondents over the age of 55" (p. 31). My research suggests that older individuals (55 and up) are more likely to donate SHC to thrift stores. Domina and Koch (2001) found that "compared to younger individuals, older adults viewed textile recycling as time consuming, a hassle, and a material that was convenient to throw away" (para. 21). However, and similar to my own findings, they also found that older individuals were more likely than younger individuals to donate SHC to religious organizations (para. 22). A few participants in my study indicated that shopping for clothing at thrift stores was time consuming, but only one participant mentioned that donating clothing was too time consuming and that was in relation to donating stained or damaged articles of clothing (which will be discussed later) and this participant was in the age group 30-39. When I asked Participant 27 (who is female and over 60) if she shops at thrift stores, she responded, "No, I did try once or twice but I'm not that mobile, so I can't just wander around." She donates the majority of her used clothing to WIN and commented, "There

is no point in throwing clothing in the garbage if someone else can use it. It makes sense to pass along." The results of my study also highlight the variety of options available for donating clothing, from thrift stores to donation bins. A number of participants indicated that the reason they donate to particular locations was due to their convenient location. The difference between Domina and Koch's (2001) findings and my findings is most likely a result of the age of the study. The prevalence of donation bins and other methods of informal textile recycling have grown rapidly in both Canada and the United States since their study was published.

**Table 5** Age Range of SHC Donors (n=30)

| Item | Responses | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| **60 or Older** | 14 | 46.7% |
| **50-59** | 5 | 16.7% |
| **40-49** | 2 | 6.7% |
| **30-39** | 6 | 20% |
| **20-29** | 3 | 10% |

## Motivations for Donating Used Clothing

What motivates individuals to donate used clothing? The 30 participants that I interviewed were asked this question and their answers are summarized in Table 6. Individuals were not provided with pre-selected responses to choose from; instead, the question was open-ended. Because individuals may have multiple reasons for why they donate used clothing, multiple responses were recorded for this question. The majority of participants outlined two or more motivations for donating SHC and this is why the responses in Table 6 do not add to the sample size of 30.

The four most common responses were helping people or supporting charities (15 individuals, 50%), cleaning out the closet or freeing up space (14 individuals, 46.7%), environmental or preventing from the landfill (11 individuals, 36.7%), and not wearing or don't like (10 individuals, 33.3%). Other reasons why participants claimed they donated SHC included

lack of fit or weight change (6 individuals, 20%), not wanting to waste usable clothing (7 individuals, 23.3%), grew up donating (3 individuals, 10%), and out-of-style (2 individual, 6.7%).

**Table 6** Motivations for Donating SHC (n=30)

| Item | Responses | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| **Helping People/ Charities** | 15 | 50% |
| **Cleaning Out Closet/ Freeing Up Space** | 14 | 46.7% |
| **Environmental/ Preventing from Landfills** | 11 | 36.7% |
| **Not Wearing / Don't Like** | 10 | 33.3% |
| **Lack of Fit/ Weight Change** | 6 | 20% |
| **Not Wanting to Waste Usable Clothing/ Use Value** | 7 | 23% |
| **Grew Up Donating** | 3 | 10% |
| **Out-of-Style** | 2 | 6.7% |

*Note:* The majority of participants identified two or more reasons why they donate SHC and this is why the responses do not add to 30.

In general, these findings confirm previous research regarding individuals' clothing disposal behaviour. Recall from the previous chapter that the most commonly cited motivations for disposing of unwanted clothing in previous studies are: cleaning out the closet/freeing up space; items no longer fit; out of style; helping people in need; not wanting to waste usable clothing; and damaged/worn-out (Domina & Koch, 1999; Lang et al., 2013; Ha-Brookshire & Hodges, 2009; Norum, 2015). In my study, participants reported all of the above reasons for donating used clothing, except for 'damaged/worn-out.' None of the participants that I interviewed mentioned that their motivation for donating used clothing was because the items were damaged or worn-out. In fact, a number of participants indicated that they would not donate damaged or worn-out clothing (this will be examined further). This difference may be attributed to studies that have more broadly profiled individuals' clothing disposal patterns and studies such as my own that have more narrowly examined clothing disposal patterns among thrift store donors.

Only two participants in my study claimed that their motivation for donating used clothing was 'out-of-style.' Participant 17 (who is a man over 60) described the clothing that he donates as being "between 1-2 ½ years old, but most is not worn that much and is slightly out-of-style." Participant 5 (who is a woman over 60) described her reason for donating as "the outfits become obsolete or the clothes don't fit as well." In contrast, Participant 4 (who is a woman in the age group 50-59) stated, "I won't donate clothing that is out-of-style." Because 'out-of-style' is frequently cited as one of the main reasons why individuals donate SHC in studies on individuals' clothing disposal behaviour, it is surprising that only two participants listed this as a motivation for donating.

As noted earlier, three reasons why individuals donate used clothing emerged from my interviews that have not been sufficiently explored in the scholarship on individuals' clothing disposal behaviour: environmental concerns; cultural factors; and the value of 'doing good' which is associated with donating clothing. First, in terms of the environment, although 12 (40%) participants in my study responded that environmental concerns or preventing clothing from entering a landfill was a motivation for donating used clothing, only a few participants discussed the environmental impacts of the production and disposal of clothing. A large portion of participants shared a concern about the environment and the amount of waste in landfills, but this did not necessarily correlate with an individual's knowledge about the environmental problems associated with the production, consumption, and disposal of clothing. Further, participants viewed their own actions, that of donating clothing, as a pro-environmental behaviour that contributes to sustainability, even when their own clothing consumption patterns could be considered unsustainable. Only a few individuals were critical of their own consumption patterns or felt embarrassed about the amount of clothes they purchase. A finding that surprised me was

the frequency of donating clothing that participants reported, suggesting that participants consume large quantities of clothing (see Table 9). For the most part, participants were unaware that only about 10-20 percent of donated second-hand clothing is actually sold in thrift stores (Giroux, 2014, p. 33). While several participants speculated on what happens to unsold clothing donations, only 3 (10%) participants were aware that the majority of clothing donations that thrift stores receive are not actually sold in the stores. These findings support previous research on individuals' clothing disposal behaviour. For example, Morgan and Birtwistle (2009) found that individuals are "concern[ed] about the environment, but there is no correlation between awareness of the environment and textile disposal behaviour and the attitude to textile reuse and recycling" (p. 196). Similar to Morgan and Birtwistle's finding, Connell and Kozar (2014) note that "most individuals do not consider the associated environmental impacts of their clothing purchases and other consumption behavior" (p. 43). Further, Bianchi and Birtwistle's (2010) found that "the environmental consequences of production and disposal of fashion textiles were poorly understood concerns among respondents" (366).

In comparison to other studies, clothing consumption and donating patterns seem to be influenced by social and cultural factors in Victoria. In my study, three participants mentioned that their motivation for donating SHC was influenced by cultural factors. For instance, they noted that their upbringing motivated them to donate their unwanted clothing rather than dispose of it in the garbage. Participants 8, 18, and 20 discussed their motivations for donating used clothing:

> Because it's something I have always done, partly because my parents did it, and I would not throw them out (Participant 8).

> The way that I grew up, it made sense to donate. I grew up in the 50s and 60s. We made things; we reused things (Participant 18).

> I was brought up in an age when you never threw things out (Participant 20).

Participants also discussed how culture and family norms impacted their shopping and purchasing patterns of both new and used articles of clothing. For example, Participant 4 commented, "The only reason I buy new clothes is because my daughter keeps buying me gift certificates. Shopping connects me to my daughter and friends." Participant 11 described how as a teenager she bought all her clothing from Guy's Frenchys (a for-profit company that operates a chain of second-hand clothing stores in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick):

> As a teenager, I bought all of my clothing from Guy's Frenchys. Back East, mostly women would go on family trips, road trips that last for two days before school starts and hit up all of the Frenchys thrift stores. I come from an average income family, so we didn't need to shop there. There is a cross section of shoppers there and it doesn't have the same stigma as shopping at certain thrift stores in Western Canada. (Participant 11)

Participant 14 described the social stigma associated with shopping at thrift stores and how this form of clothing consumption tends to contradict cultural norms:

> I used to live in Kingston, Ontario and about 30 years there were no real thrift stores until the Salvation Army opened up and then there was a real stigma around shopping at thrift stores which still exists to some extent today. Some of my friends are shocked to discover that my outfits are from thrift stores and some of them are critical about shopping at thrift stores, where others are supportive. (Participant 14)

Participant 21 discussed how her clothing consumption patterns are influenced by her Russian background and by her mom who is a tailor. I asked her if there were fast fashion retailers in Russia and she responded:

> Well, for sure there is. But overall, I think clothing in Russia is pretty expensive, even t-shirts. If you compare the price of a t-shirt to the average salary, it would be pretty expensive, it will be a chunk of salary, so my mom doesn't often buy clothing, so she will shop at thrift stores…. My experience in Canada is that you can buy a shirt for five bucks at Old Navy and H&M…. My cultural perspective is different. I guess it can be different from other people from Russia, I don't know maybe it's just my perspective, having a mom who's into making clothing and I don't know, sometimes I just think I am old fashioned. But you know, I do appreciate it, I appreciate this approach because whenever

> I buy something from fast fashion place, the shape is not the same, and the quality is not the same after a couple of washes, no matter what you do to other clothing, let's say made in Italy, which I bought online on sale or from My Sister's Closet, made of fine fabric, it lasts forever. (Participant 21)

An interesting finding by Joung and Park-Poaps (2011) is that environmental issues and 'doing good' by helping charities are reasons why individuals donate used clothing and these motivations are shaped by their families, and not by friends (p. 110). Even though there is a variety of ways in which individuals can donate used clothing, Joung and Park-Poaps (2013) concluded that individuals "may choose to discard textile products anyway. In order to prevent discarding behaviours, it is necessary to develop a culture of recycling (e.g. behavioural norms) during early childhood stages of the life cycle" (p. 110).

Similar to existing research, participants in my study associated the act of donating unwanted clothing with 'doing good.' Participants mentioned two specific ways in which they felt that their clothing donations 'do good.' First, used clothes have economic value. Organizations and thrift stores sell SHC in order to raise money for their activities and programs. Second, donated clothes provide people in need with low-cost or free clothing. For example, Participant 1 felt that, by donating large amounts of clothing to various non-profit organizations he was helping the organizations raise money for their programs. A number of participants indicated that they donate to specific thrift stores was for altruistic reasons, because the money raised from the sale of SHC was used to support programs they felt were important and beneficial to individuals and the community. For instance, participants who donated to WIN stated that their reason for donating to this organization was because they wanted to support a local business. Participant 30 commented that she donates to WIN because she knows that her clothes "will benefit women, either through the sale in the store or through giving to women

directly." A number of participants mentioned that they felt that by donating clothing they were "giving back" and that their clothing donations were directly helping people in need. Several people mentioned both the environmental and social benefits of donating used clothing. For example, Participant 22 stated that donating clothes "benefits Mother Nature and people who can't afford to buy new items."

The results of my study suggest that participants are aware or feel that donating used clothing is an ethical method of disposing of unwanted clothing. Although, none of the participants in my study specifically mentioned that donating clothing is an ethical method of disposal, a number of participants did mention that using the garbage as a disposal method is not ethical, unless it is for damaged or stained clothing (which will be discussed further). These results support Ha-Brookshire and Hodges' (2009) study, which found that individuals view donating used clothing as a "socially responsible" method for disposing of unwanted clothing; however none of the participants in their study indicated that "social consciousness" was a main reason for why they donate used clothing (p. 186). Similarly, Weber et al.'s (2017) study found that donating clothing is a social norm among Canadians (p. 214) and that "consumers are aware that gently-used garments should be donated to charities" (p. 208).

**Donation Locations**

Given that individuals may donate used clothing to multiple locations, multiple responses were recorded. The majority of participants listed two or more locations where they donate SHC (see Table 6). Of the five participants that only donate to one specific location, three participants donated to the Salvation Army, one to Big Brothers Big Sisters, and to WIN. In total, participants listed 26 different locations where they donate SHC (see Table 6). The ten most popular locations that participants donated SHC to were: the Salvation Army (9 participants); donation

bins (9 participants); WIN Resale Shop (8 participants); Value Village (5 participants); consignment store (4 participants); Big Brothers Big Sisters (4 participants); Beacon Community Services Thrift Shop (4 participants); a homeless shelter or directly to a person in need (3 participants); giving away to family and friends (3 participants); and online (3 participants). Of the nine individuals who responded that they use donation bins to dispose of unwanted clothing, three of the participants were unaware of the organization or company that operates the donation bins that they use. Two different organizations, the Humane Society and Big Brothers Big Sisters, operated the donation bins that participants used. Canadian Diabetes also operates a number of donation bins throughout Victoria, but none of the participants in my study mentioned that they use these bins.

**Table 7** Donation Locations (n=30)

| Item | Responses |
|---|---|
| Salvation Army | 9 |
| Donation Bins | 9 |
| WIN | 8 |
| Value Village | 5 |
| Consignment Store | 4 |
| Big Brothers Big Sisters | 4 |
| Beacon Community Services Thrift Shop | 4 |
| Homeless Shelter/ Gives Directly to a Person in Need | 3 |
| Giving Away to Family or Friends | 3 |
| Online | 3 |
| Clothing Exchanges/Swaps | 2 |
| SPCA | 2 |
| Our Place | 2 |
| Transition Houses | 2 |
| St. Vincent de Paul Society Thrift Store | 2 |
| Compassionate Warehouse | 1 |
| SUCCESS | 1 |
| St. Aidan's United Church Thrift Shop | 1 |
| James Bay United Church Thrift Shop | 1 |
| Food Bank | 1 |
| Bibles For Missions Thrift Shop | 1 |
| Free Store | 1 |
| Wear to Start | 1 |
| "New To Me" South Park Elementary School Clothing Sale | 1 |
| Garage Sales | 1 |
| Parents Donate | 1 |

*Note:* The majority of participants identified two or more locations where they donate SHC and this is why the responses do not add to 30.

Although less commonly used, Weber et al. (2017) outline four alternative methods of clothing disposal: clothing exchanges/swaps, garage sales, reselling, and take-back (p. 209). Three of these methods were identified by participants in my study: exchanges/swaps (2 individuals), garage sales (1 individual), and reselling/consignment (4 individuals). None of the participants in my study listed take-back as a method of clothing disposal.

I asked individuals if there was a reason why they donate to a specific thrift store or location as opposed to others. Of the 30 individuals that I interviewed, 18 people selected their

donation method based on altruistic reasons (e.g., helping people in need or supporting charities), while 4 people selected their donation location based on convenience, and 8 participants selected their donation method based on both convenience and altruistic reasons (see Table 7). Unsurprisingly, a large number of individuals who responded that one of their primary motivations for donating SHC was helping people or supporting charities also responded that their reason for selecting their donation method was based on altruistic reasons (9 out of 15 individuals). For example, Participant 14 responded, "I admire the charitable work of certain thrift stores and so much money floats around clothing, so I choose carefully which thrift stores to donate to." Participant 1 described how he donates SHC to various non-profit organizations that sell SHC, but that he also donates clothing directly to people in need:

> Sometimes I will go right up to a person that is sort of my size and that I feel could use 3 or 4 decent outfits, clean outfits that I have laundered, and I hand it to them personally. I go down to Open Door and I look for a guy about my size and I go, can you do me a favour? Can you take this stuff, and if you can't use it can you take it inside? (Participant 3)

Of the 4 participants who responded that convenience was their reason for selecting their donation location, 1 indicated that helping people or supporting charities was one of their motivations for donating SHC. The participants who responded that convenience was the reason why they donate to specific thrift stores or locations selected Big Brothers Big Sisters (Participant 3, 5), the Salvation Army (Participant 11), and donation bins (Participant 19) as their donation locations. Participant 14 donates SHC to the Salvation Army "because it is close to my house" and because "you get a coupon when you donate for $10 off your next purchase of $25. Instead of donating on Sundays when they are closed, I will wait until Monday, so I can get the coupon." Participant 11 and 19 are aged 20-29, and Participant 3 and 5 are over 60. Of the 18 participants who mentioned altruistic reasons for selecting their donation method, 13 were 50 or

older. These findings suggest that older donors of used clothing are more likely to select their donation location based on altruistic reasons. This finding supports Mitchell et al.'s (2009) study that found that "younger donors were more likely to value 'convenience' while older donors were more likely to use 'confidence that their donations are being put to good use' as a choice criterion" (p. 267).

**Table 8** Reasons for Selecting Donation Method (n=30)

| Item | Responses |
|---|---|
| **Altruistic Reasons** | 18 |
| **Convenience-Oriented** | 4 |
| **Convenience & Altruistic Reasons** | 8 |

Aside from Participant 17 who stated that he primarily donates to Christian thrift stores, none of the other participants mentioned that their reason for selecting a particular thrift store was based on whether or not the thrift store was operated by a religious organization. However, two participants did raise concerns about donating items to the Salvation Army. Participant 11 commented that the reason she had donated to the Salvation Army was for convenience, but then "looked into the policies of the Salvation Army and found out that they have some sketchy policies such as excluding LGBTQ groups due to their religious affiliation." Participant 16 stated, "I don't donate to the Salvation Army because they have said anti-queer stuff in the past," and instead, she donates to Beacon Community Services Thrift Shop or the SPCA Thrift Store.

When thrift stores are classified as either a religious thrift store or a non-religious/non-profit thrift store, there was no difference in popularity, as 9 participants donated to religious thrift stores, 9 participants donated to non-religious/not-for-profit thrift stores, and 3 participants donated to both religious and non-religious/non-profit thrift stores. There were five religious thrift stores that participants donated to: the Salvation Army Thrift Store (9 individuals), James

Bay United Church Thrift Shop (1 individual), the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul Thrift Store (2 individuals), St. Aidan's United Church Thrift Shop (1 individual), and Bibles For Missions Thrift Shop (1 individual). There were three non-religious/non-profit thrift stores that participants donated to: Beacon Community Services Thrift Shop (4 individuals), WIN Resale Shop (8 individuals), and the SPCA Thrift Shop (2 individuals).

These findings suggest that non-profit organizations, either religious or non-religious thrift stores, are the primary locations where used clothing is donated. Domina and Koch (1999) also found that non-profit thrift stores are the main location where SHC clothing, but what is inconsistent with my study is their finding that "a sizable portion is sold at garage and yard sales or brought to resale and consignment shops" (p. 347). In my study, only 1 participant mentioned garage sales, and 4 participants mentioned consignment stores as their donation locations. In addition, my findings suggest that used clothing donors are not committed to a single donation location.

**Individuals' Clothing Donation and Consumption Patterns**

Is there a relationship between individuals' clothing consumption patterns and clothing donation patterns? Do individuals who purchase new clothing on a regular basis donate SHC more frequently than individuals who consume less new clothing? Frequency of donating SHC ranged from a minimum of once every 2 years to a maximum of once a week (see Table 9). The most common responses for how often do you donate used clothing were 2 times a year (7 individuals), 3-4 times a year (6 individuals), and once a month (4 individuals). Participant 10 is a student who donates clothing about once every two years. She recently used the donation bin at UVic, which is operated by the Humane Society, but she states, "I usually make packs of my clothing and my parents decide where it should go." Participant 2 is a student who volunteers at

the Food Bank and Free Store and donates clothing about once a week. She described her donation patterns:

> I live in a condo so I told everybody that I work at the Food Bank and Free Store so people have been giving me lots and lots of clothing and other household items to bring down here and share with the students and to divert from the landfill, which is what our goal is. (Participant 2)

Clothing items that are not taken or cannot be used at the Food Bank and Free Store are put in the Humane Society Donation Bin located in the Student Union Building at UVic (Participant 2).

**Table 9** Frequency of Donating SHC (n=30)

| Frequency | Responses | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| **Every 2 Years** | 1 | 3.3% |
| **Once a Year** | 2 | 6.7% |
| **1-2 Times a Year** | 2 | 6.7% |
| **2 Times a Year** | 7 | 23% |
| **3 Times a Year** | 2 | 6.7% |
| **3-4 Times a Year** | 6 | 20% |
| **4 Times a Year** | 1 | 3.3% |
| **4-5 Times a Year** | 1 | 3.3% |
| **5 Times a Year** | 1 | 3.3% |
| **9-12 Times a Year** | 1 | 3.3% |
| **Once a Month** | 4 | 13.3% |
| **Twice a Month** | 1 | 3.3% |
| **Weekly** | 1 | 3.3% |

The majority of participants in my study indicated that they purchase clothing from thrift stores (24 or 80 percent). Of the 6 individuals that responded that they do not shop at thrift stores for clothing, only two participants gave an explanation. Participant 13 stated, “I don’t shop at thrift stores. I don’t have to. Thrift stores should be for people who need them.” Participant 27 responded, “No, I did try once or twice, but I’m not that mobile so I can’t just wander around. I have to go to a specific store. I’m pretty focused.” In contrast, 4 participants mentioned that they only purchase used clothing; they do not purchase new clothing, except for undergarments. Participants 1, 6, 16, and 24 describe their shopping patterns:

> I don't purchase new clothing anymore…. I buy large quantities [from thrift stores] over the course of all the seasons and I get to the point when I have too much stuff and it's a good way to give back to all, because if its gently used or slightly worn and has some value to someone then I donate or recycle it, if you will, back to various non-profit organizations, and I let them resell it. (Participant 1)

> I purchase thrift store clothing several times a year, but I only buy socks and underwear new. (Participant 6)

> I don't buy new clothing; the closest to new clothing that I buy is when I buy clothing from garage sales. (Participant 16)

> Almost all of my clothes are bought at the Salvation Army, I keep them for about a year and then I bring them back. I only purchase lingerie new. (Participant 24)

Frequency of purchasing new clothing ranged from a minimum of once every two years to a maximum of twice a month (see Table 10). Participants identified a number of different stores where they purchase new clothing. The most popular response was The Bay (nine individuals or 30 percent). The majority of locations that participants identified purchasing new clothing from can be classified as fast fashion retailers or locations where fast fashion items can be purchased such as The Bay, Walmart, Sears, Le Château, Forever 21, The Gap, Ardene, Tommy Bahama, Reitmans, Penningtons, and Winners. A number of participants indicated that they try to buy clothing that is local, Made in Canada, or ethical, but only two participants listed a location that sells locally made or ethically sourced garments as a place where they purchase new clothes. Participant 27 shops at Smoking Lily, a store in Victoria that sells locally produced clothing (Smoking Lily, 2017), and Participant 29 shops at Peace Freaks, a store in Victoria that only sells clothing that is produced locally or under fair trade conditions (Peace Freaks, 2017). In contrast, Participant 7 shared her views about 'buying local':

> I see a lot of efforts to buy local or 'Made in Canada' and that confuses me in a way because I know it gets away from the human rights problems you may find with products produced elsewhere and does it mean that you are getting better quality? Just because it is

> made in Canada, is it actually as good of a thing as we think it is? Is it designed in Canada, but made elsewhere and in the end, it may not be that important? Where is the cotton coming from? Look at something that is more expensive, is it because it is ethically produced, is it because it's a better quality, or is it because it's a fancy brand that's just trying to mark it up because it has a designer involved? Not being able to separate those things out, sometimes it has driven me towards the sort of cheaper, faster stuff, because I know I am not spending a lot of money on it, so I don't have to make those decisions. (Participant 7)

An interesting finding was that 4 participants mentioned that they try to purchase "classic styles," clothing that is not based on the fast fashion life cycle of low quality, high volume, and short-lived fashion trends. These four participants described the types of clothing they purchase:

> I try to buy classical lines. A blazer or a well-made pair of pants, don't go out of style. (Participant 20)

> I have all these gorgeous clothings that I am sure I will have them forever, all these skirts and they are matching because it is all classic style, so right now I am not really shopping. (Participant 21)

> I tend to buy fairly classic clothes so they have a longer shelf life. (Participant 25)

> My way of dressing is not fad dressing. It tends to be more classical. If I were donating a t-shirt that is 10 years old, for instance, it would still be wearable. (Participant 27)

In terms of age range of the 4 participants who described their clothing purchases as "classic styles," Participant 20, 25, and 27 were over 60, and Participant 21 was 30-39.

A finding that is not surprising, is that a comparison of each participant's frequency of donating clothing and their frequency of purchasing new clothing suggests that there is a positive relationship between donating used clothing and the consumption of new clothing. For instance, 8 participants responded with the exact same frequency of donating SHC as that of purchasing new clothing per year (Participant 4, 5, 13, 15, 20, 23, 25, and 30). Participants who purchased more new clothing per year tended to donate used clothing more often. As Joung and Park-Poaps (2011) found, the revenue from the sale of second-hand clothing in charitable stores is

"increasing because fashion-conscious consumers frequently purchase updated clothing and donate outdated styles" (p. 109). In the last thirty years, with the rise of the fast fashion industry, clothing consumption has significantly increased, and this has led to an increase in textile disposal.

**Table 10** Individuals' Clothing Donation Patterns Compared to Consumption Patterns

| Participant | Frequency of Donating SHC (per year) | How 'old' are the average age of clothes you donate (in years) | Buys Clothing at Thrift Stores | Purchases New Clothing | Frequency of Purchasing New Clothing (per year) | Stores Where New Clothing is Purchased |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 12 | 2-10 | Yes | No, I don't purchase new clothing anymore | N/A | N/A |
| 2 | 52 | 2 | Yes | Yes | Once every 2 years | Walmart |
| 3 | 3-4 | "recently bought" | "Yes, I've gone to thrift stores but the odd time I get clothes" | Yes | 12 | Walmart |
| 4 | 2 | "I donate clothing that is recently bought, within one season" | Yes | Yes | 2 | Penningtons or BC Ferries |
| 5 | 12 | "Most of what I donate is clothing that I just bought" | No | Yes | 12 | Tommy Bahama, Holt Renfrew, Nordstrom, The Bay |
| 6 | 4-5 | "Most items I buy are second-hand so it's hard to tell how old the clothes I donate are" | "Yes, I purchase thrift store clothing several times a year" | No | N/A | N/A |
| 7 | 2 | 2-5 | No | Yes | 3 | Stores downtown and in the mall |
| 8 | 1 | 8 | Yes | Yes | Once every 2 years | Mayfair Mall |
| 9 | 4-5 | 1-5 | "once in a blue moon" | Yes | "I purchase new clothes when I need them" | LL Bean Online, Northern Reflections, The Bay, |
| 10 | 'once every two years" | Unknown | No | Yes | 1 | Le Château or warehouse sales |
| 11 | 3 | 3-5 | Yes | Yes | 6 | Forever 21 |
| 12 | 3-4 | 2-5 | No | Yes | 12 | GAP Tall and Freddy Livify |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13 | 4 | "max 2 years" | "No, I don't have to" | Yes | 4 | The Bay and lady stores downtown |
| 14 | 8-12 | "some were bought in the last year, most were bought between 3-5 years" | Yes, "I purchase 90% of my wardrobe at thrift shops" | Yes | 6 | Shopping Channel and stores downtown |
| 15 | 2 | 1-5 | "Yes, I buy used clothing monthly" | Yes | 2 | The Bay, MEC, Ardene |
| 16 | 2 | "I usually buy second-hand clothes, then in about a year I give them back" | Yes | "No, the closet to new I buy is when I buy clothing from garage sales" | N/A | N/A |
| 17 | 6 | 1-2½ | Yes | "Yes, but only if on sale, like 50% off" | 3-4 | The Bay |
| 18 | 3-4 | "Sometimes I will donate right away if I buy something and it's not suitable or not what I expected" | Yes | Yes | 2 | The Bay or Naturalizer Shoes |
| 19 | 1-2 | 1 | Yes | Yes | Rarely | Sears during Sears Days, band t-shirts from concerts |
| 20 | 2 | 3 | Yes | Yes | 2 | Northern Reflections and Tan Jay |
| 21 | 2 | 5 | Yes | Yes | 4 | Online at YOOX |
| 22 | 3-4 | 2-5 | Yes | Yes | 2 | Walmart, Reitmans, Bellissima, La Vie en Rose |
| 23 | 2 | 15-20 | Yes | Yes | 2 | The Bay |
| 24 | 24 | "Clothes that I donate are 2 or less years old but they were bought second-hand" | Yes | Yes, I usually only purchase lingerie new | 2 | Sears or The Bay |
| 25 | 3-4 | 2-5 | Yes | Yes | 3 | Melanie Lyne, The Bay |
| 26 | 3 | 2-5 | Yes, "I look, but occasionally buy" | Yes | 4 | Robertsons, Pacific Trekson, and MEC |
| 27 | 1-2 | 3 | "No, I did try once or twice but I'm not that mobile so I can't just walk around" | Yes | 2-3 | Baden-Baden Boutique |
| 28 | 3-4 | "It's a mixed bag. Some clothes I've had for 15 years" | "I buy most of my clothes at a local consignment | Yes | 2-3 | Smoking Lily, "I try to buy from local places" |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | store, My Sisters Closet" | | | |
| 29 | 12 | 1-2 | Yes | Yes | 24 | Sport Chek, Winners, or Peace Freaks |
| 30 | 12 | 2-5 | Yes | "Yes, but it has to be on sale" | 12 | Stores downtown, Winners, Dots |

## Consumer Knowledge of Clothing Donations

Are individuals who donate used clothing aware of how their donations are sorted and processed? Do they know what happens to unsold clothing donations in thrift stores? Are they aware that large amounts of household textiles are disposed of in the garbage, and that a large portion of SHC donations that thrift stores receive are not sold in the stores? These are some of the questions I was interested in exploring in order to probe the relationship between individuals' donation and consumption patterns and their knowledge of what happens to clothing once it has been donated. Over half of the participants in my study had no knowledge of how used clothing donations are sorted and processed in thrift stores (17 out of 30), 8 participants claimed to know how clothing donations were sorted and processed, and 5 participants responded that they had some knowledge. Of the participants who claimed to know how clothing donations were processed and sorted, only 3 participants described how clothing donations are sorted and processed. Seven participants mentioned that they have experience volunteering at thrift stores. Of the 8 individuals who responded that they were knowledgeable about how clothing donations are sorted and processed, 3 have volunteered at thrift stores (Participants 6, 14, and 20). Participant 6 and 14 described the sorting and processing of used clothing donations:

> I volunteer at the James Bay Thrift Store, which is only open on Fridays and Saturdays…. We wash and sell, sort on the spot. Stuff that is no good we bag again. (Participant 6)

> I volunteered for 5 years at the Hospice Thrift Store. We would sort the donations and sometimes we would take home items and wash and steam the high-quality items. The

> items that wouldn't sell or were in poor condition would be bagged and Big Brothers would pick up and then sell them to Value Village. I think this is what happens at a lot of the thrift stores still. (Participant 14)

The only other participant who described how used clothing donations are sorted and processed was Participant 24. She described what happens when she drops off used clothing donations to the Salvation Army:

> They put it in a bin and I get a coupon where if I spend $25 I get $10 off. The bins go to the back room, people will look at the quality of the donations, if they are dirty or have holes then they will discard, and if they are good quality they will price and put on the racks. They have people who just work in the back sorting clothing. (Participant 24)

The other participants who responded that they were aware of how clothing donations are sorted and processed did not describe the procedures; rather, they just responded with a yes.

Participants who had some knowledge of how clothing donations are sorted and processed responded in a similar manner as Participant 7, who said, "vaguely," or they responded no, but then went on to discuss some aspect of sorting and processing. Participant 25, who only donates to WIN, and Participant 7 who primarily donates to WIN responded:

> No. I know WIN sorts and pulls out some for clients, so they will cull and make sure that women have clothes who have just the clothes on their backs. (Participant 25)

> Vaguely, but not specific details, because WIN in particular, you go in the place where you donate them, you see the room where they do the sorting. When you go in to drop off the clothing, you see the people there sorting the clothes, so it's very direct, but in the past I didn't. When you do a donation bin, it's very much a black box of what goes on, so I never knew before. (Participant 7)

Participant 11, who only donates to the Salvation Army responded, "I'm aware on a basic level of how clothing donations are sorted and processed. I assume they get resold." Participant 28 who primarily donates to My Sisters Closet, a consignment store, commented that she knew how clothing donations were sorted and processed where she takes her donations, but not at other locations:

> I'm careful about where I donate. I get calls from Cystic Fibrosis and Big Brothers Big Sisters and other organizations. I don't like to donate to these because I don't know where they are going …. If I take them to the consignment store I go to, if they don't sell in about 3 weeks I have the option of picking them up or they can donate them for you to The James Bay Community Centre or to the Single Parent Resource Centre. (Participant 28)

I asked the participants in my study if they were aware that only a small percentage of donated second-hand clothing is actually sold in thrift stores. I also asked participants if they knew what happens to SHC that does not sell in thrift stores. While a number of participants speculated on what happens to unsold clothing donations, only three (10 percent) participants were aware that a large portion of donated SHC is not sold in thrift stores, and they responded with the following:

> Yes, and some can be made into rags. I know the SPCA likes old t-shirts or towels for this reason. (Participant 4)

> I wasn't sure exactly how much, but I'm not surprised mostly because I have become aware in the last few years of fast fashion and how much clothing there is and the market can't be that big and a lot of the clothing is low quality so it doesn't have a lot of resale value to start with so I've not so much not been aware of it but I've suspected it, so I 've felt that that's probably the case, so I've tried to change my buying habits to buy less and buy better and more specific stuff and make sure I like it before I buy it so I am not taking the risk of not realizing I don't actually like it and having to pass it on and knowing that the chances of it actually being resold are not 100 percent. (Participant 7)

> I knew that was the case but didn't know statistic. I know it's a concern and that's why I don't do it…. I don't donate clothes unless I know where they are going. (Participant 28)

Of the 30 participants I interviewed, three claimed to know what happens to unsold clothing donations in thrift stores, fourteen had some knowledge, and thirteen had no knowledge. Participants who speculated or guessed what happens to unsold clothing were coded as having some knowledge of what happens to unsold clothing donations in thrift stores, even if their responses were incorrect. Interestingly, the three participants who were aware that a large portion

of SHC donations that thrift stores receive are not sold in the store, were not aware of what happens to unsold clothing donations in thrift stores; rather, they speculated on what happens:

> I suspect that the majority of clothing gets thrown out. (Participant 4)

> Specifically, no, but I have read some books, seen some documentaries, and some news things about what supposedly happens to it but the thing with that is that is it's very general and sometimes even America and your never quite sure if what's happening, if what they are describing, is actually happening here in the local stores. So, I've heard that sometimes they just throw them out, sometimes they just package them up and sell them to another company that ships them somewhere else or sells them but that's all sort of speculation. I don't know, I wonder sometimes what's actually happening. (Participant 7)

> At Value Village, I have my suspicions that they are often sold in bulk to the Third World, which concerns me. (Participant 28)

The other eleven participants who had some knowledge of what happens to unsold clothing donations in thrift stores, in general, speculated that some clothing is shipped overseas. For example, Participant 24 responded, "I've always wondered what happens to all of the clothing in thrift stores. I've heard that it gets packed up and sent to poorer countries." Five of these eleven participants mentioned that they think Value Village ships clothing overseas. Participants 1 and 11 commented on what they think happens to unsold SHC donations at Value Village:

> I think clothing that doesn't sell they rag it out and they sell it to foreign countries, like Value Village has some program where they send it to Africa, if it's not good enough for this market, it's probably good enough for a third world country, they get paid by the pound. (Participant 1)

> It probably ends up in the landfill and some get sent to Africa and other countries to people who need the clothes. There is a documentary on Netflix about this topic, fast clothing, which describes how so much excess clothing is ending up in Africa that the landfills there are full of clothing. (Participant 11)

Interestingly, only one participant mentioned that they had asked what happens to unsold clothing donations at the place where they donate (Participant 28 who donates SHC to a consignment store). In general, the majority of participants who claimed to have some

knowledge of what happens to unsold clothing donations did not know what happens to unsold clothing donations at thrift stores such as WIN or smaller, locally oriented non-profit thrift stores. For example, Participants 17 and 25 stated:

> I'm partially aware of what happens to clothing donations, recycle and sell at Value Village, material that can't sell goes to Africa, but smaller thrift stores, where the prices are low, I'm not sure they have the ability to sell and ship to other countries. (Participant 17)

> I think they [thrift stores] probably sell to Value Village, which gets baled and turned to rags. I have no idea what WIN does with unusable clothing. I know there's a mechanism to resell, but I have never bothered to check. (Participant 25)

Of the three individuals who claimed to be aware of what happens to unsold clothing donations in thrift stores, one participant stated, "Sometimes clothing donations [from Big Brothers Big Sisters] end up in Value Village and from there they are shipped to Africa" (Participant 9). Participant 26, who donates to a variety of different locations including the Salvation Army and donation bins, stated:

> I know some of the clothing that goes in the [donation] boxes is sent overseas if they don't have a local use for the items. I know the Salvation Army sells the items in the store. I know that some thrift stores will send unsold clothing to developing countries, they sell by the pound, and that sometimes they will be used as rags. (Participant 26)

Participant 29 who donates SHC to WIN, transition houses, and online, responded:

> At the places that I donate to, unfortunately, it ends up being given away or in some cases ends up in landfills, which bugs me, but I'm not really sure how to fix that. (Participant 29)

Ten participants mentioned, speculated, or had heard that unsold clothing donations are shipped to countries in the global South. Of these ten participants, only three were critical of the export of SHC, whereas four participants described the export of SHC as positive, and three

participants did not comment on how they felt about this. Participants 9, 23, and 27 were critical of the export of SHC:

> Sometimes clothing donations [from Big Brothers Big Sisters] end up in Value Village and from there they are shipped to Africa, which isn't good because of the carbon footprint, and people can buy used clothing for cheaper than new clothing and it displaces local textile industries. (Participant 9)

> I would like to think they are bundled and sold to the rag trade. I hope they do not send them to the Third World. I know Value Village sends to Africa. I saw this for myself in marketplaces in Africa. I think I knew this from the packaging. I may have read an article in a Seattle paper. Before I moved here I hadn't heard of Value Village. I'm from Toronto and in Toronto Goodwill is the big thrift store. Value Village is a big American corporation that uses the scheme of collecting for the Canadian Diabetes Association. (Participant 23)

> I've heard some horror stories. Particularly, ripped and soiled, un-wearable clothing would probably be used for rags and then some international stuff goes on that's not ethical. It turns out a lot is sold on the streets. I would never send clothes internationally, for instance, if I were donating internationally. I have friends who work for international organizations or non-profits such as the Red Cross in Africa and India, who work in these countries and it costs them money to house and sort the clothes and they would rather receive money so that they can buy clothing locally which will facilitate employment and etc. It is not appreciated for people to donate clothes internationally but having said that I'm sure there are clothes that make their way to the commercial market. I'm not sure what WIN or the Salvation Army does with clothing, maybe they do sell it internationally. (Participant 27)

Four participants felt that shipping SHC to global south countries had a positive impact on the countries of import because it provides people with clothing who require it. For example, Participant 11 stated that she believes unsold clothing donations at thrift stores are sent to landfills or to countries such as Africa, "to people who need the clothes" (Participant 11). Participant 22 stated:

> I have heard that Salvation Army goes overseas. I hope so. I would like more people to be sent off island because we have too much here. There is an abundance of stuff. I really believe in sharing with countries with people who need more than we do. (Participant 22)

I asked participants if they were aware that approximately 85 percent of all household textiles in Canada end up in landfills. Only five participants were aware that a large percentage of household textiles are disposed of in the garbage, whereas four participants mentioned that they were not aware, but were not surprised to hear this. Participant 7 commented, "hearing that stat, it doesn't surprise me because of the lack of clarity about what you can do with it all." Participant 8 wasn't aware of the amount of clothing that ends up in landfills, but he described how he used to work for 1-800-GOT-JUNK and how they would pick up large quantities of clothing from people's homes:

> I would sometimes keep some of the clothes because we would take it from the persons home and it was our job to either take it to a recycling depot or a landfill and it was pretty shocking how much clothes people were paying a company to haul away for them. (Participant 8)

Participant 29 also wasn't aware of the amount of clothing that ends up in landfills but commented:

> It makes sense given the fast fashion industry and the way that many of pieces of clothing are deemed disposable. A lot of people will buy clothing that is only designed to be worn 3 or 4 times. It drives me crazy. Honestly, part of why I started shopping at thrift stores is because I can buy higher quality clothing for the same amount of money. I buy a lot of brand name things because I know it's going to last, but I am paying a third of the price. (Participant 29)

The participants in my study reported that they donate used clothing to a variety of different locations, but a number of participants also mentioned that they throw out clothing.

### Donating Stained or Damaged Clothing

In general, participants mentioned that they dispose of stained or damaged clothing in the garbage or they use them for rags. A common feeling among participants was that it is ethically wrong to donate used clothes in bad condition, but participants also felt guilty about throwing clothes in the garbage. A number of participants made statements similar to this: "If I knew of a

place to donate stained or damaged clothes or a place to recycle them I would do so, instead of throwing these items in the garbage" (Participant 4).

In my study, seven participants were aware that stained or damaged clothing could be donated and recycled. Only two of these seven participants stated that they would donate stained or damaged clothing to thrift stores. Participant 26 responded, "I guess I would probably take these items to the Salvation Army. I don't tend to do that with much. Sometimes I will put them in the garbage." Participant 3 donates stained or damaged items to Big Brothers Big Sisters. He noted that he just donated a thermal blanket, which "may be cut-up and used for something else." Participant 11 mentioned: "I know that the Salvation Army doesn't turn away donations and will take whatever is in the bag you drop off." Another participant was aware that stained or damaged clothing could be donated but stated:

> I try to donate usable cleaner clothing that is stain free, but I'm aware that clothing in worse shape can serve other purposes on the secondary market. I do not contribute to that cause. (Participant 1)

Participant 29 commented that if she has clothing that is stained or damaged she tends to try and give it away online:

> Items that I would deem questionable, I would be more likely to give away privately, like through a posting than I would be to donate it to an organization, simply because I don't want to see things end up in a landfill, so I might say, like, say I have an old thing of t-shirts that don't really work as t-shirts, I might create a posting that says, bag of clean rags, and give them away that way. (Participant 29)

Participant 23 was aware that stained or damaged items can be donated but did not know how to donate these items. She remarked, "If I knew how, I would donate these items. If I have stained clothing, I turn them into dusters or rags." Of the 23 participants who were not aware that stained or damaged clothing could be donated and recycled, two participants mentioned that they donate clothing that is stained or damaged to thrift stores. Participant 17 noted, "I might donate if there

is a small hole in an item, but for me personally, I wouldn't buy." Participant 18 responded, "I usually just put those separate in a bag and donate to the Salvation Army; it keeps it out of landfills." Participant 15, whose method of disposal for SHC is clothing swaps or donation bins, wasn't aware that stained or damaged clothing could still be recycled, but stated, "I wouldn't have the time to donate stained or damaged clothing."

There was a misconception among participants about how clothing donations are used by thrift stores. For instance, most participants assumed that only clothes that were wearable (i.e., sellable and therefore valuable) were acceptable for donation. Participants were concerned about the type of clothes and the quality of items that they donate, and this was demonstrated by the following statement, "I only take in quality stuff that will pass" (Participant 13). The majority of participants felt that it was ethically wrong to donate clothing in bad condition. A number of participants made statements similar to the following:

> I don't feel right sending something I wouldn't wear. (Participant 20)
>
> I wouldn't donate stained or damaged items. I would throw them out. I just think that's wrong, unless these items are being used for rags. (Participant 22)
>
> I would feel embarrassed donating stained or damaged clothing. I usually use for cloths if I can't mend. (Participant 14)

Another participant noted, "I won't donate common items like socks to thrift stores…. I won't donate clothing that is out of style or is stained or damaged." This same participant explained that she's careful about what she donates because "I recently read an article about the amount of garbage clothes charities were receiving and that they were becoming a dumping ground" (Participant 4). Participant 10 stated that she throws out her undergarments but donates other articles of clothing.

Clothing that is stained, damaged, or worn out still has value. As long as the clothes are not wet, mouldy, or greasy they can be recycled (Cave, 2016). However, as noted earlier, there are limited facilities for recycling stained or damaged clothes at the local and national level. Consequently, some thrift stores and organizations will accept stained or damaged clothes or textiles because they can sell them by the pound to other organizations or to textile recycling companies. None of the thrift stores that I researched advertised this service to their customers. As noted earlier, one problem of mixed bundle textiles sold internationally is that some of these items end up in clothing or textile bundles in receiving countries, such as African countries, and cannot be used or sold locally and therefore end up in landfills in these countries. The central issue is not that individuals are ill-informed about where and how to donate stained or damaged clothing. The issue is that most municipalities in Canada lack the capacity to recycle these items. At the local and national level this leads to an excess of textiles ending up in landfills. However, the issue of what items can and cannot be donated, and individuals' knowledge levels is still an interesting one. The misconception among participants in my study about the type and condition of donated clothes that are accepted at thrift stores is understandable, given that there is no formal system for recycling textiles in Victoria and since most thrift stores and organizations request "gently used" clothing donations. Recently, a number of news articles have described how most clothes can be donated, because the majority of items, regardless of their style or condition, can still be recycled (see Cave, 2016; Corfu, 2017). One participant in my study, who read one of these articles, captured the problem of donating clothes that are not "gently used" in the following statement:

> I saw an article and I'm not sure if it was in a local newspaper or the CBC, it was a catchy headline and I went oh you can [donate stained or damaged clothing], so I wasn't aware until that point, but still after reading the article I didn't trust it because my experience with the actual donation recipients, the organizations that are asking for

> donations, are asking for gently used or unsoiled clothing. But if they are asking for that, then where or who is asking for the soiled clothing, where can you take it? (Participant 7)

Not all thrift stores or organizations will accept stained or damaged clothes. Thrift Store A will accept stained or damaged clothes or shoes, as long as they are not wet or mouldy, and as long as they are in a separate bag that is labeled so volunteers can send those items directly for recycling instead of having to sort through the items. Thrift Store A does not advertise that they accept these types of donations. Thrift Store B has accepted stained or damaged clothing donations in the past, but at the moment they are not accepting these kinds of donations. The Salvation Army, Big Brothers Big Sisters, and Value Village will accept clothing donations that are stained or damaged, but none of these organizations advertises that they accept these types of donations.

I called the Hartland Landfill to further investigate on how to dispose of clothes that are stained or damaged. I was directed to the Capital Regional District (CRD) website which addresses the overconsumption of clothing through the mantra of reduce/reuse/recycle. Consumers can "go green" by: *reducing*, (purchasing fewer, higher quality, and ethical/sustainable items); *reusing* (shopping at thrift stores or by repurposing unwanted clothing into household items such as rags); or *recycling* (donating textiles to charities or thrift stores) (CRD, 2017a). The website provides a list of charities and thrift stores that accept clothing donations, and stipulates that the items donated have to be resellable: "clean, dry, not smelly and gently used to be suitable" (CRD, 2017a). There is a note to call the charity or thrift store before dropping off donations to ensure that they will accept what you have. But consumer knowledge about where and how to donate "gently used" articles of clothing is widespread, and this was illustrated by the fact that participants in my study listed 26 different locations where they donate

their used clothing. What is not common knowledge is how to dispose of textiles that are perceived to have no economic value (e.g., clothing or shoes that are stained, damaged, or worn out). Does an individual have to start calling the locations listed on the CRD website until they find a location that will accept these items? In this and other ways, the fast fashion industry 'downloads' the problem of high consumption and waste onto individuals, often women in the household or female volunteers at thrift stores.

The employee I spoke with at the Hartland Landfill mentioned that some of the materials that can be recycled at Hartland are paper, metal, plastic, glass, and household hazardous waste, but textiles cannot be recycled, and there is no program for producer responsibility for textiles as there is with products such as tires and paints (CRD, 2017b). Producer responsibility would mean that fast fashion brands would be responsible for the costs associated with recycling their unwanted clothes. The employee noted that at the salvage drop-off area, there are donation bins that are run by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and the Canadian Diabetes Association at the salvage drop-off area, but textiles disposed of in these bins have to be "good clothes for re-sale" because these items are sold to Value Village, and items that Value Village cannot sell in the store are baled and shipped overseas (CRD, 2017b). The employee stated that individuals frequently call the Hartland Landfill asking how to dispose of stained, damaged, or worn out textiles and are angry that the CRD cannot provide answers. She stated, "the best answer that I can provide is to call the list of charities or thrift stores on the CRD website to inquire whether or not they will accept these items." As to why there is no clear answer on how to recycle damaged clothing and shoes, she commented, "maybe it's because they [the thrift stores or organizations] don't want to be overwhelmed with these items" (CRD, 2017b). Another option she provided (which is not listed on the website) is to drop off these items at H&M. H&M offers a "take-back"

program for recycling. Customers can drop off unwanted clothing and shoes (regardless of the brand or condition) at H&M stores, and they are provided with a $5.00 coupon that can be used in the store (CRD, 2017b). The items are picked-up by I:Collect (I:CO), a Swiss company that operates take-back clothing programs for major clothing brands such as Puma, Footlocker, and Levis Strauss (Balch, 2013). The H&M website describes how I:CO sorts these clothes into three groups: rewear (sold as second-hand clothing), reuse (used as rags and other products), and recycle (converted into textile fibres and used for products such as insulation) (H&M, 2017). To date, there is no research available on what this company actually does with donated clothing. One might conclude that providing customers with a coupon simply encourages more consumption by drawing individuals into stores.

These findings support previous studies by Bianchi and Birtwistle (2010) and Weber et al. (2017) who found that participants tend to throw out clothing that is stained, damaged, or worn out. Individuals are aware that "gently used" clothes should be donated, but they are unaware of the type and condition of clothes that are acceptable for donation (Bianchi & Birtwistle, 2010, p. 364; Weber et al., 2017, p. 208). For example, Bianchi and Birtwistle (2010) found that participants "tend to throw away clothing that is damaged or of 'no use' to other people (e.g. clothing which is especially unfashionable or cheap)" (p. 364). Similarly, Weber et al. (2017) noted that many individuals dispose of damaged, stained, or worn out clothes in the garbage because they are not aware of the "value of fibres to the recycling industry, nor that this value extends beyond whether the garment itself is reused or not" (p. 364). In my study, the majority of participants were not aware that damaged, stained, or worn out clothes have

economic value. As Hawley (2006) noted, stained or damaged clothing still has economic value as shoddy[6] or mungo, wiping rags, or for export to global SHC markets (pp. 262, 268). Although most of the participants in my study indicated that they dispose of stained or damaged garments in the garbage, they also mentioned that if they knew how to, they would prefer to donate these items instead of throwing them out.

**The Production and Consumption of Clothing: Labour & the Environmental**

The clothing industry is the second largest industrial polluter in the world (the oil industry being the largest polluter) (Conca, 2015). Both natural and synthetic fibers pose significant environmental problems in terms of the production and end of life of clothing. Clothing that is made from both types of fabrics uses harmful dyes, chemicals, and additives that leach into the environment and affect humans and wildlife by contaminating drinking and groundwater. For example, formaldehyde, which is a carcinogen, is added to clothing, bedding, and curtains for colour fastness and stain resistance, and to stop wrinkles and mildew from forming during the shipping process (David Suzuki Foundation, 2014). Natural fibers such as cotton require large amounts of water to produce, and fibers not grown organically are cultivated with harsh chemicals and fertilizers. Synthetic fibers such as polyester are 'man-made;' they are produced from coal and petroleum and require large amounts of energy to manufacture (Cherrett et al., 2005, p. 21). Synthetic fibers tend to be cheaper to produce and are more durable than natural fibers. As noted earlier, natural fibers such as cotton and bamboo are biodegradable, but they can produce harmful emissions and chemicals as they decompose in landfills (Weber et al., 2017, p. 208). Synthetic fibers such as nylon and acrylic may marginally deteriorate in landfills,

[6] Shoddy describes the process whereby knitted textiles are returned to their "fibrous forms." Mungo describes the process whereby woven garments are returned to their "fibrous forms." Both shoddy and mungo are used for "stuffing, automotive components, carpet underlays, building materials such as insulation and roofing, felt, and low-end blankets" (Hawley, 2006, p. 269).

but the majority of these materials will remain in landfills permanently (Weber et al., 2017, p. 208). Further, new research is shedding light on how our clothes are polluting bodies of water and poisoning wildlife and contaminating food by releasing microfibers into waterways, which occurs when synthetic fibers are washed in washing machines (Messinger, 2016).

Given the environmental problems associated with the clothing and textile industry, I was interested in finding out whether participants in my study were aware of these issues, and if so, whether such issues shaped their consumption or disposal patterns. In general, participants in my study were not aware of the harmful impacts that the production and end of life of clothing has on the environment, which is probably a result of the lack of media coverage on this topic. Participants tended to be more aware of or concerned about the labour conditions associated with the production of clothing. This awareness was illustrated by the three participants who stated that they were concerned about the labour conditions in the clothing industry, but not the environmental issues associated with the production, consumption, and disposal of clothing. For example, only four participants responded that environmental issues were among the reasons why they purchase SHC (Participants 6, 8, 17, 24). A few participants mentioned that they do think about their own role as a consumer of clothing and as a donator of SHC and responded similar to Participant 2, who commented that "I try not to buy new clothing very often." Participant 16 who does not purchase new clothing and only buys SHC, questioned whether she was supporting the fast fashion industry when she purchases these brands from thrift stores.

In contrast, only three participants commented that they do not consider either the environmental problems or labour conditions when purchasing or donating clothing. Participants 12, 17, and 19 stated:

I base my purchases on price and I realize that this isn't ethical. (Participant 12)

> I'm more concerned about if I'm getting a good product at an affordable price. (Participant 17)

> No, because I like to buy shirts from bands for two reasons, one because I like the bands an, two because the bands I like are usually pretty small so it supports them, but I know that I read in your title that your research has to do with fast fashion, but I feel as though it doesn't really apply to me because I don't really ever buy new clothes." (Participant 19)

Other participants, namely Participants 10, 13, and 30, indicated that they were concerned about the labour conditions associated with the production of clothing, but not the environmental issues associated with production, consumption, and disposal of clothing:

> I've never been worried about the environmental impact of the clothing industry…. because I am from Pakistan and people have cotton fields and they would produce clothes, I have never felt bad about buying clothes because of the environmental reasons, but I do feel very bad because of what I have heard about buying clothes due to labour standards in those countries of production. (Participant 10)

> I'm not concerned about the environmental impact, but I am about labour conditions…. that's why I try to buy local or Canadian made. (Participant 13)

> It's troubling, not so much the environmental impact, but more the socio-economic, who's producing and how, and the news of the terrible factory fires. I think about it, but then when I'm shopping I don't. When I am donating or passing on to friends or my daughter I feel like I am being more responsible. (Participant 30)

Participant 1 felt that, by donating clothing, he was "making the situation better, if anything I think in my mind, I am reducing my carbon footprint by not just tossing it in the garbage and letting it sit in a landfill, I will let someone try to use it." He explained his position:

> Although I understand that sweatshops exist and the proletariat and labour used in the production of articles in the garment industry may be unfair and oppressive especially in Third World countries, unfortunately it does not dissuade me from purchasing those items… I purchase the highest quality goods for the cheapest amount of money possible. (Participant 1)

Interestingly, four participants discussed the type of fabric in terms of the environmental impact. Participant 3 stated that he mostly purchases "man-made materials," which he considered

more environmentally friendly. He mentioned that he has one leather jacket that his son bought for him. Participant 21 noted that she only purchases clothing made from natural fibers:

> I don't like synthetic fibers. I prefer natural fibers, so in that way, probably, I care about environment. I don't really have anything made of polyester; I think it's either silk, wool, cotton, or rayon. I think, well probably, my approach is first you think about your health concerns, you know, because contact with polyester might bother your skin, irritate your skin, so actually I think it's a very ecofriendly approach because I am avoiding synthetic fabrics. (Participant 21)

Participant 25 mentioned, "I hate synthetic fabrics, they don't breathe, but processing for cotton is pretty hard on the environment, in terms of production and water consumption." Participant 25 and 30 were amongst the few participants who mentioned how certain fabrics do not decompose in landfills. Participant 30 made an interesting observation:

> When people look at the fiber content when purchasing new clothes, they are looking at it in terms of maintenance, washing and dry-cleaning, and not in terms of the end of life of that clothing. (Participant 30)

In short, participants tended to be more concerned or aware of the labour conditions associated with the production of clothing rather than the environmental factors.

## Conclusion

This chapter explored the relationship between individuals' clothing consumption and donation patterns, and their knowledge of what happens to clothing once it has been donated. The results from my interviews with 30 individuals who donate SHC suggests that donors tend to be women who are 50 or older and who select their donation location primarily based on altruistic reasons. The main motivations participants listed for donating used clothing were helping people or supporting charities, cleaning out the closet or freeing up space, environmental or preventing from the landfill, and not wearing or don't like the clothing. Participants listed 26 different locations where they donate used clothing, and the majority of participants donated to

two or more different locations, which suggests that SHC donors in Victoria, BC are not tied to a specific donation location. The individuals that I interviewed demonstrated a lack of knowledge about the type and condition of clothes that can be donated or recycled. Participants were aware of the many options available for donating “gently used” clothing, but they were not aware of how to donate and recycle used clothing that is damaged, stained, or worn out. In general, participants disposed of garments in the trash if they considered these items as having no economic value (e.g., clothing that was out of style, stained, damaged, or worn out). Participants indicated that they felt that it was unethical to donate items in bad condition to organizations or thrift stores. While a number of participants claimed to have some idea or speculated on what happens to unsold clothing donations at thrift stores, only three participants responded that they were aware of what happens to unsold clothing donations in thrift stores. Only one participant had inquired at the store where she donates SHC to find out what happens to unsold clothing donations. Most participants were unaware that only 10-20 percent of donated SHC is actually sold in thrift stores. As well, participants were not aware that a large percentage of household textiles are disposed of in the garbage.

An interesting finding was that a number of participants attributed the value of 'doing good' to donating used clothing. Perhaps this is a result of media campaigns by prominent organizations that collect clothing donations. For example, Big Brothers Big Sisters has a video on their website about donating used clothing that advances the idea that “Your Donations Do Good” (Big Brothers Big Sisters of Victoria and Area, 2014). The video associates clothing donations (“your old clothes”) with altruism (“helping a vulnerable child”) and protecting the environment. The video describes how Big Brothers Big Sisters uses clothing donations to

support its programs by selling these donations to local thrift stores. The video concludes by stating:

> Who knew there was so much potential in your closet? Your old clothing can ensure that children are supported and when you pass it on the environment is protected for their future. Be thoughtful about recycling and put your clothing to work. (Big Brothers Big Sisters of Victoria and Area, 2014)

Montgomery and Mitchell (2014) describe how a number of organizations and thrift stores use the concept of a triple bottom line "to address the trend of sustainability" (p. 1). The triple bottom line encompasses the following three goals: (1) the financial goal of earning profits through the sale of used goods; (2) the social goal of helping people and communities by selling items at a low-cost and also by raising money for philanthropic activities; and (3) the environmental goal of recycling and reusing by preventing items from ending up in landfills (Montgomery & Mitchell, 2014, p. 1). Big Brothers Big Sisters has adopted the concept of the triple bottom line, which is captured in the video on their website and with the slogan, "Your Donations Do Good" (Big Brothers Big Sisters of Victoria and Area, 2014).

However, as this thesis has begun to probe, the issue with attributing the value of 'doing good' to donating used clothing is that it raises the following questions: Are continued high consumption patterns driven by the myth that our unwanted clothing can be reused or repurposed? Or, are consumption patterns maintained because, in part, because of the 'hidden' aspects of waste and disposal of clothing? If individuals were aware that only 10-20 percent of donated SHC is actually sold in thrift stores, would they still purchase similar amounts of new clothing and continue to donate used clothing? Would consumption patterns change if consumers were aware of the waste and the fact that such a large percentage of unwanted clothing ends up in landfills? Moreover, as noted in Chapter Two, thrift stores and organizations that collect and sell donated SHC earn only a small fraction of the profits that are accrued through the

commodity chain of SHC. Large for-profit companies (commercial textile recyclers and clothing graders), not thrift stores, accumulate the majority of the profits in the global trade in SHC (Norris, 2012; Field, 2007). As both Hansen (2000) and Brooks (2015, 2013) point out, the idea that donating used clothing is an altruistic act – that clothing donations help people and that by donating clothing individuals are protecting the environment – conceals important information from the public. The global trade in SHC is a profitable business that thrift stores participate in and the end market of SHC is deliberately hidden from the public (Hansen, 2000, p. 254; Brooks, 2015, p. 84; Brooks, 2013, pp. 10-11) (this will be discussed further in the next chapter). If consumers were aware that the majority of SHC is exported and sold to countries in the global South, would this impact clothing consumption and donation patterns? Further, attributing the value of 'doing good' to donating used clothes hides the fact that the actual problem at hand is the overconsumption of clothing in the global North.

My interviews with participants demonstrated that individuals were concerned about the environmental problems associated with the fast fashion industry and the problems with managing textile waste but being concerned about the environmental impact of the clothing industry did not necessarily translate to a participant's consumption patterns being more environmentally sustainable. While a number of participants listed one of their main motivations for donating used clothing as environmentally driven or to prevent these items from ending up in landfills, the majority of participants in my study shopped at fast fashion retailers and purchased new clothing on a regular basis. The results of my study suggest that there is a correlation between participants' frequency of donating used clothing and their frequency of purchasing new clothing. Participants who purchased more new clothing per year tended to donate used clothing more often.

The results of my study illustrate how the burden of recycling textiles in Victoria, BC is on the consumer. It is the consumer who must search for information regarding the different options available for reusing or recycling textiles. It is the consumer who decides the value of used clothing. Typically, it is women who carry the burden of recycling or disposing of unwanted clothing in households.

As consumers in the global North purchase more and more clothing believing that their donated clothes have economic value and can be reused by other people, could the framing of the donation and sale of SHC as 'doing good' be a contributing factor to the increase of clothing consumption patterns in the global North? The next chapter explores this idea further.

# Chapter Four

## Fieldwork: Thrift Stores, Unwanted Clothing, and the Re/creation of Value

### Introduction

This chapter explores what happens to SHC donations once they arrive at thrift stores. The central research question of my thesis, and the primary focus of this chapter, is what role do thrift stores in Victoria play in the global trade in SHC, in terms of the collection, sale, and disposal of donations? Is it possible to trace used clothing donations from thrift stores in Victoria to the sale of excess goods in Africa? In this chapter, I argue that by attributing the value of 'doing good' to clothing donations, thrift stores overemphasize the social and economic value of donated clothes. Using a commodity chain analysis, this chapter maps the role and position of four different thrift stores in Victoria.

Through my own observations and interviews with staff members and managers at thrift stores in Victoria that collect, sort, and sell clothing donations, I discovered that thrift stores receive a large volume of clothing donations, yet only a small portion of used clothes are sold in thrift stores. The stores sell the remaining clothes, by the pound, to other organizations or to commercial textile recyclers. This finding supports Giroux's research that found that only about 10-20 percent of donated clothing is actually sold in thrift stores in Canada (see Giroux, 2014, p. 33). Similarly, Brooks (2012) found that the majority of clothing donations in Britain are commercially exported (p. 7).

Here, a GPN framework is ideal for examining how value, power, and embeddedness inform relations of secondary production. Figure 1 provides a simplified version of a used-clothing GPN with individual donors in Victoria, BC as the first node in this commodity chain, and thrift stores (my four case studies) as the second node. Individuals either dropped off their

clothing donations to one of the four thrift stores in-person, or in the case of Thrift Store A or C they may have called the thrift store and had the donations picked up from their house. As well, other organizations such as Big Brothers Big Sisters and Canadian Diabetes offer a door-to-door collection service for SHC, and then the clothes are sold (by the pound) to Value Village. In summary, the end market of used clothing donations from each thrift store location is as follows: Thrift Store A sells it unsold clothing donations (by the pound) to another charity organization; Thrift Store B sells its unsold clothing donations (by the pound) to a textile recycling company in Maple Ridge, BC that then sorts, grades, bales and commercially exports the clothes to Africa (sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly through international buyers); Thrift Store C re-donates (note the backwards arrows in Figure 1) its unsold clothing donations to other thrift stores, (one of which is Thrift Store A), or they dispose of the clothes in donation bins operated by the Victoria Humane Society and; unsold clothing donations at Value Village are baled and shipped to the Savers Distribution Center in Fife, Washington, and from here the items are resorted, graded, baled, and commercially exported to Africa.

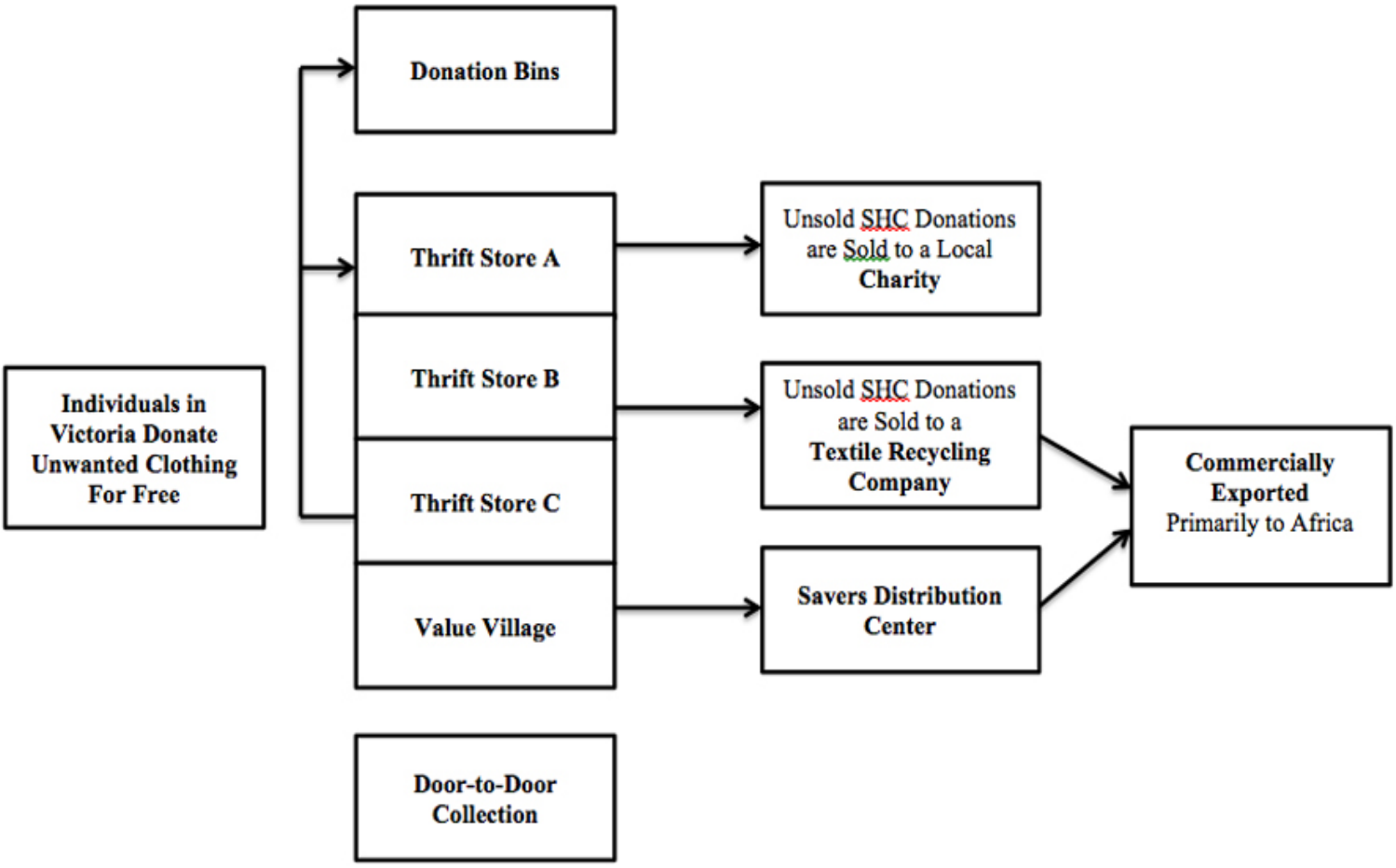


*Figure 1.* Simplified Version of a Used-Clothing GPN in Victoria, BC. Kathryne Gravestock, 2017. Copyright 2017 by Kathryne Gravestock.

Thrift stores act as an important node in the global commodity chain of SHC. Unwanted clothing is discarded as waste, donated as a 'gift,' and then recommodified by unpaid workers – often women – in order to be re-sold (Brooks, 2013, p. 10; Norris, 2012, p. 389-90). Thrift stores in Victoria are connected to the global trade in SHC, as unsold clothing donations are commercial exported to the global South. The global trade in SHC reifies uneven exchange and uneven geographical development. Discarded clothes, which were donated for free and have been deemed to no longer have value to the consumers who donated them, and also to the thrift store workers or shoppers who decided not to sell or purchase these items, are sold and shipped to countries in the global South. Some thrift stores such as Value Village frame the sale of excess goods to Africa and other global South countries as an ethical transaction. As the Value Village website explains, "Providing items to developing nations also creates jobs, helping people earn a living wage and reinvest earnings into their local economy" (Value Village, 2017e). However, the actual political, economic, and social costs of exporting and importing used clothing (which is beyond the scope of this thesis) are hidden from the public. The global trade in SHC represents historical and contemporary trading relations between the global North and South, power relations that are based on domination and dependency. For example, 98 percent of all clothes sold in Canada are produced in the global South (Marsales, 2016, p. 12), where workers are exploited and wages are low. Once consumers in the global North have decided that their clothes no longer have value, they are disposed of or donated to thrift stores. The majority of clothes that arrive at thrift stores are then commercially exported to global South countries, and as Brooks (2015) points out, "sometimes to the very same locations that manufacture new clothes for export, such as Kenya" (p. 195).

In order to conceal this unequal North-South exchange, the role and position that thrift stores play in the global trade of SHC must remain hidden from the public. As Brooks (2012) has pointed out, thrift stores hide the commercial aspect of their business from the public, and the ways in which thrift stores advertise and market their public image is similar to how fast fashion retailers hide the labour and environmental aspects of clothing production (p. 15). For example, thrift stores are socially and spatially embedded within the communities where they are located. In order to increase clothing donations and consumer perceptions that clothing donations 'do good', thrift stores advertise and market themselves as social enterprises. Through the collection and sale of donated clothes, thrift stores advance three distinct narratives. First, thrift stores support individuals in the community by selling clothing at a low cost, helping individuals who cannot afford to buy new clothing. Second, the sale of used clothing raises revenues that fund philanthropic community programs. Third, donating and selling used clothing protects the environment by preventing these items from ending up in landfills. But since only a small portion of donated clothing is actually sold in thrift stores in Canada, thrift stores are misrepresenting the value of clothing donations and their ability to 'do good.'

Through interviews with staff members and managers at thrift stores that collect, sort, and sell used clothing I began the process of mapping the role and position of thrift stores in Victoria, BC in the global trade in SHC. This chapter is divided into four sections with each section focusing on one specific thrift store. Each section begins by briefly describing the operating model of the thrift store. Each case study is organized around three main areas of inquiry: (1) how do thrift stores receive clothing donation and who does this receiving and sorting work; 2) how are clothing donations sorted and processed; and (3) how are unsold clothing donations disposed of.

## Thrift Store A

### Organizational Structure

Thrift Store A is operated by a not-for-profit society that runs multiple thrift stores in Victoria and the Greater Victoria area. All of the employees are volunteers, except for the manager, who is a paid employee. The majority of volunteers are female, and the store manager is also female. The number of volunteers working each day fluctuates from approximately 4-10 volunteers. After operating costs, 100 percent of the proceeds from the sale of donated items go back into the community and are used to support a number of different social services that the organization provides (Manager, Thrift Store A). In 2016, the total revenue from the organizations thrift stores amounted to $1.7 million, which represents only a fraction of the not-for-profits yearly revenue; the majority of their revenues are from government contracts (Thrift Store A, Official Website, 2017).

My field research on Thrift Store A is focused primarily on one particular thrift store that this organization runs, which is located in the city of Victoria. I interviewed the store manager and the main clothing sorter at this location. I spent two days at the store conducting field research, which included interviews and observing daily procedures, and then afterwards I volunteered about once a week for six weeks. As a volunteer I worked in the back room sorting and processing clothing donations, organizing clothes in the front of the store, and working as a cashier.

### Donations

The majority of SHC donations at Thrift Store A come from individuals. Occasionally, a group in Oak Bay donates clothing (usually a few times a year, after they have special events around Halloween and Christmas) (Manager, Thrift Store A). Clothing donations are accepted at

all of the thrift store locations. Customers can drop off donations to the store in-person or, if they live in the Greater Victoria area, the organization has a truck that will pick-up donations from customers' houses. The delivery truck is situated in Sidney and all of the clothing donations it picks up are taken to one of the thrift stores in Sidney where they are sorted. Volunteers quickly sort the clothing donations by tossing the clothing into black plastic garbage bags, labeling them with a sticker that has the date, and setting them aside. Once a week the donation truck drops off these black garbage bags full of SHC to the other thrift store locations. The volunteers at Thrift Store A call this "truck day." Each week, the manager at Thrift Store A orders a certain amount of bags of clothing to be delivered to her store. I volunteered at the store on a "truck day" and the store received 30 bags of clothing donations.

Initially, when I first approached the manager at Thrift Store A, she stated that the store had too many clothing donations. But during the interview she mentioned that the amount of clothing donations fluctuates, with increases in the summer when students leave Victoria. She noted that at times the amount of SHC the store receives is "overwhelming," but at other times there is a shortage. The quality of clothing donations also fluctuates. "Some clothing is actually brand new, but the other extent is people bringing in old, dirty laundry" (Manager, Thrift Store A, 2017). For example, they just received a brand-new wedding dress, two leather coats, and a donation bag full of damp, smelly clothing. In the past, they have received mink fur coats (Manager, Thrift Store A, 2017).

The garbage bags full of SHC that are dropped off on "truck day" are unloaded and piled up against the back wall of the store. The manager described the contents of the bags: "We don't know what's in the bags, sometimes they are labeled 'men's suits' or 'kid's clothes,' but nine out of ten times the items are just thrown into the bags, tied, and then sent to us" (Manager, Thrift

Store A, 2017). There is a parking lot behind the store where the donation truck and customers can park and drop off donations. Donations are sorted and processed in the back of the store, which is divided into two rooms: the room closest to the storefront is where the donations are sorted and processed; the very back room is where large donations are dropped off; this room is split in two; the office is on one side and on the other side is where donations coming in and going out of the store are stored.

**Sorting and Processing**

I interviewed the primary clothing sorter at Thrift Store A and I worked with her for two days. The first step to sorting the SHC is to grab a bag from the back room, bring it to the sorting room, and place it on the table. The bags are slowly torn open from the side. Both the manager and the clothing sorter warned me not to stick my hands in the bags and to be careful when opening a bag. Both the clothing sorter and manager recommended wearing gloves. In the past, they have found needles, blood, broken glass, and dirty laundry inside donation bags (Clothing Sorter, Thrift Store A, 2017). If the bag has a date on it, they know it came from the Sidney store, but they still open it carefully since volunteers sorted the clothing quickly. Items are pulled out of the bag one-by-one, laid out on the table, and examined. First the clothes are checked for quality: are they stained, dirty, or too worn? Then they are sorted based on season and brand. The clothing sorter described how the store is merchandised like a clothing retailer, where items change with the season (Clothing Sorter, Thrift Store A, 2017). Brand names and vintage clothing are tagged as boutique items and priced higher. Vintage or a brand name clothing that is slightly damaged or worn out will be priced “as is” and put out on the floor; whereas, regular items that are damaged or worn-out will not be sold in the store. After the items have been sorted based on quality, season, and brand, the pockets are patted, and the zippers, collars, and buttons

are checked. The clothing sorter was not wearing gloves, and she reiterated the importance of patting the outside of the pockets, ensuring that you "don't put your hands in the pockets of the clothing" (Clothing Sorter, Thrift Store A, 2017). If she suspects that there is something in the pocket, she puts on gloves to carefully inspect the pocket. She has found needles and marijuana in the pockets of clothing before (Clothing Sorter, Thrift Store A, 2017). If an article of clothing is too stained, dirty, or worn out, if it is out-of-season (a small number of out-of-season items are kept depending on floor space), or if the zipper or buttons are broken then the item is tossed in one of the two waste bins that are kept beside the sorting counter. Once these bins are full, the garbage bags of unsellable clothing are tied and taken to the very back room where they are stored. If an article of clothing meets the sorting criteria then it is priced and put out on the floor for sale.

Clothes are priced based on the type of item and if it is a boutique item. For example, men's short sleeve shirts are all priced the same unless they are considered a boutique item (brand name or vintage), in which case they will be priced higher. Different coloured price tags are used to keep track of how long clothing is on the floor for. There are four different coloured price tags. One colour is for boutique clothing and the other three colours are for regular priced items. Clothing is rotated every two weeks, with the exception of boutique items (which are not rotated). For example, between May 1st and 14th all of the clothing items that enter the store will be priced with a yellow tag; between May 15th and 31st all of the clothing will be priced with a red tag; and between June 1st and 14th all of the clothing will be priced with a green tag. If the clothes do not sell in two weeks they will go on sale (everything from that colour tag will be half-price) and the clothing that was priced with the colour tag that was previously on sale, but did not sell will be "recycled." The manager noted, "We sell a lot of clothing in the store,

because the prices are very low. They have been the same for about 4-5 years" (Manager, Thrift Store A, 2017). She estimated that only about 10 percent of the clothing that goes out on the floor does not sell and is "recycled" (Manager, Thrift Store A, 2017). The Manager and the volunteers at Thrift Store A used the term "recycled" to describe the clothing donations that are unsellable or that simply do not sell in the store.

In terms of the quality of donations, Thrift Store A requests that individuals donate "gently used" clothes. I asked the manager if they will accept clothing donations that are stained, damaged, or worn out, and she responded, yes, they do. But, they request that individuals put these kinds of donations in a separate bag and label it, this way the clothing sorter does not have to go through the bag and inspect each item and can "recycle" the entire donation bag (Manager, Thrift Store B, 2017).

**Disposal**

At Thrift Store A, if the donated clothes do not pass the sorting criteria they are tossed in one of the two waste bins beside the sorting counter. Once these bins are full, the garbage bags of unsellable clothing are tied and taken to the very back room. These garbage bags are picked up once a week by a local charitable organization (Manager, Thrift Store A, 2017). The organization's website states that "unsold goods are donated to other local charities" (Thrift Store A, Official website, 2017), but what I discovered was that unsold clothing donations are not donated, they are sold by the pound to a local charity. I asked the manager if she could tell me the name of the charity that picks up the stores unsold clothing donations and she responded, "its confidential," but she did inform me that the charity that picks up the unsold SHC donations from the Victoria locations is different from the organization that picks up the unsold donations from the Sidney locations. The organization that picks up the unsold clothing donations from the

Sidney stores pays more per pound than the Victoria organization does. The manager estimated that the store receives around $500 a year in revenues for selling unsold clothing donations by the pound to this organization. For the last five years, the same organization has been picking up unsold clothing donations from Thrift Store A. The manager stated that they are in the process of negotiating a higher rate per pound, but they are also considering switching to a different company or organization in order to increase their profits on the sale of unsellable clothing. I asked the manager if she knew what the organization does with the clothing that it purchases from Thrift Store A, and she replied, "They sell the clothing to other places." I asked if she meant to other thrift stores, and she replied, "Probably, I don't really know."

Once a week the local charity picks up the unsellable clothing donations from Thrift Store A. On the first day of my field research, the space where the garbage bags full of unsellable clothing were stored was completely packed, from the floor to the ceiling. As I was observing the clothing sorter work, I was also helping her bag and bring the unsellable clothing donations to the back room. Each time I had to bring a bag into the back, I had to strategically place the garbage bag on top of the others and ensure that the whole stack did not come toppling down. I would estimate that there were at least 100 garbage bags full of outgoing clothing. The weight of each bag varies, but I would estimate that each bag weighed around 20 pounds.

As a volunteer, I worked a few shifts sorting and processing clothing donations in the back room. I would estimate that approximately 70 percent or more of the clothing that I sorted never made it out onto the floor and these items were tossed in the waste bins for "recycling." The donated clothing was not sellable due to damage (torn, stained, zipper broken, etc.), damp, dirty, or smelly, or the items were out-of-style or season. A surprising observation was the large proportion of clothes that were donated that were in bad condition, especially in terms of

cleanliness. A lot of the items that I sorted had not been washed first, smelled bad, and were covered in animal hair. The amount of clothes that Thrift Store A receives that are dirty seems to be an ongoing problem. The clothing sorter stated, "You have to be really really careful…. We've had people who have put their wet wash in there and thrown it in the bag and got rid of it, and you open the bag up, and it's unbelievable" (Clothing Sorter, Thrift Store A, 2017). Thrift Store A does not wash or disinfect clothes; if they are dirty or stained, they are sent for "recycling."

The manager declined to report on the approximate amount of donated clothes that the store receives that are unsellable. The manager claimed that, once clothing donations make it out onto the sales racks, only about 10 percent of these items do not sell in the store. However, my own observations from volunteering at the store seem to indicate that this percentage is much higher. For instance, I worked a shift on a day that the stock was being rotated and we "recycled" many bags of unsold clothes that were priced with a yellow tag. We kept a few of these items and placed them on the dollar rack. In terms of the clothing donations that are received and sorted, a high percentage of these items never make it to the storefront and are recycled. When I asked the manager if they receive more clothing donations than they can sell in the store she responded, "Sometimes we have a lot of clothing to be recycled, sometimes we don't" (Manager, Thrift Store A, 2017).

## Thrift Store B

### Organizational Structure

Thrift Store B is operated by a non-profit organization that runs multiple thrift stores in Victoria and the Greater Victoria area. The store works with a particular demographic of the population and has a unique organizational structure. Thrift Store B has a Donation Centre that is

attached to one of its store locations, but the Donation Centre has a separate entrance. At this store there are four retail employees and four donation employees. In total, the organization has 45 permanent staff members, 27 of whom are full time, four temporary staff members, and there are usually about 30 volunteers at any given time (Employee 4, Thrift Store B, 2017). The wage for retail associates, donation station attendants, and warehouse workers is $12.50 an hour, and managers earn $17.50 an hour (Employee 4, Thrift Store B, 2017). Female and male employees earn the same amount (Employee 4, Thrift Store B, 2017). Approximately 90 percent of the organizations staff members are female (Employee 4, Thrift Store B, 2017). In 2016, the gross revenue from the organizations thrift stores amounted to $1.7 million (Employee 4, Thrift Store B, 2017). Employee 4 reported that "98 percent of the revenue is from the sale of donated items, those revenues are used for programs, leases, to pay staff, and for creating the environment for people to access the programs. It's the means to deliver the programs" (Employee 4, Thrift Store B, 2017).

I interviewed four staff members at Thrift Store B. I was asked not to identify the staff members by their job position with the organization. Instead, I will refer to these four participants as: Employee 1, Employee 2, Employee 3, and Employee 4. I spent one full day in the warehouse conducting field research, which included interviews and observing daily procedures. I also interviewed two staff members at two different thrift store locations. As well, I volunteered for one full day in the warehouse where I sorted, processed, and priced clothing donations.

**Donations**

The majority of donations come from individual donors (Employee 4, Thrift Store B, 2017). Sometimes Thrift Store B will receive donations from organizations or companies

(Employee 4, Thrift Store B, 2017). For example, as Employee 4 mentioned, sometimes organizations or businesses will donate items: "A shoe store recently went out of business and donated a bunch of shoes to us" (Employee 4, Thrift Store B, 2017). Thrift Store B also receives financial donations from individuals and organizations, as Employee 4 pointed out, "We don't solicit. We have one donation drive in December" (Employee 4, Thrift Store B, 2017). Financial donations are used to support the programs that the organization provides to individuals.

I asked Employee 1 and Employee 3 how easy or hard it was for Thrift Store B to receive similar amounts of clothing donations each year, and they responded:

> It's really difficult. We see these spikes throughout the year with donations, ebbs and flows…. It's really hard to keep the donations flowing in at a steady pace. The peak donation times are when people clean up their houses in the springtime, just before Christmas, and after Christmas. (Employee 3, Thrift Store B, 2017)

> It's a challenge, but we always work through it. I remember when I started, almost every summer we would have to close our doors at our Donation Centre because we were full up, and there was nowhere else to put the stock anymore. But for the last at least three years we haven't had to close at all. And it's just from the way that we are able to organize things, put things in bins, labels those bins, get them to the storage center…. through marketing and our ability to organize we are able to maintain. (Employee 3, Thrift Store B, 2017)

In terms of the quality of donations, Thrift Store B requests that individuals donate "gently used" articles of clothing. In the past, Thrift Store B has accepted stained, damaged, or worn out clothes, but when I asked Employee 4 if they accept these kinds of donations she responded, "Sometimes we have said yes, sometimes no, and we have accepted material scraps in the past, but not right now. It's because the Donation Centre used to be across the street so then we would accept textiles, but now that we have a separate location we aren't. We have to pay to transport them by truck to the warehouse" (Employee 4, Thrift Store B, 2017). She also

mentioned that they receive calls frequently from donors asking if they accept stained, damaged, worn out, or material scraps.

Thrift Store B offers a pick-up service for furniture, but not for clothing donations. They do not have donation bins. The organization requests that individuals drop off their clothing donations to the Donation Centre, but if someone brings in a clothing donation to one of the other locations, they will still accept it and they will send it to the Donation Centre to be processed. When the clothing donations arrive at the Donation Centre, they are placed in textile bags (Employee 3, Thrift Store B, 2017). The textile bags are large white waxy bags, which are better for stacking and more durable than regular garbage bags. Each bag holds approximately 20 pounds of clothes (Employee 4, Thrift Store B, 2017). The clothes are not sorted at the Donation Centre; they are placed in the textile bags and shipped to the warehouse. Clothing donations are not disinfected or washed at Thrift Store B.

**Sorting and Processing**

Clothing donations are sorted and processed at the warehouse. The warehouse is divided into three sections. On one side of the warehouse is where all of the new clothing donations are unloaded, stored, and processed, this is also where household items and some vintage items are stored for vintage fairs and other events. The middle room of the warehouse is where household items such as linens, kitchen items, and electronics are sorted and processed. The far room is where clothes and accessories that have passed the sorting process are priced and shipped to the thrift stores.

I worked an eight-hour shift at the warehouse where I was able to observe how clothing donations are sorted and processed firsthand. I spent the first two hours of my shift pricing clothing accessories, and the remainder of the shift sorting and processing clothing donations. In

the room where the clothing donations are sorted and processed, there are four floor-to-ceiling cages against the back wall. Each cage is full of donation bags. There appears to be hundreds of donation bags in each cage. The first cage on the far left of the warehouse is where all of the 'incoming' clothing donation bags are stored. Each day a truck drops off the clothing donations that were received at the Donation Centre, which are unloaded into this cage. There is a narrow walkway, and then on the other side of the walkway is another cage. This cage is where the overflow of donations are stored; these donations are waiting to be sorted still. Beside this cage is where winter clothing donations are sorted. And the last cage on the far right is where summer clothing donations are stored. In front of the three cages that are on the right side, there are a number of bins that are labeled with other organizations names. Employee 1 described how Thrift Store B saves some its donations for other organizations, "through the warehouses we will sort of stream specific goods to different organizations that need specific things" (Employee 1, Thrift Store B, 2017). For example, two of the organizations that Thrift Store B is saving clothes for are Compassionate Resource Warehouse and Peers Victoria Resources Society.

There are two long tables in the warehouse for sorting and processing clothing donations. The table closest to the cage where the incoming donations are stored is where the initial sorting takes place. Employee 2 described this job, "We have first sorters who have gloves and other safety precautions and they go through and separate out the items that we think are appropriate for the stores and also the items that we can recycle or send for textiling" (Employee 2, Thrift Store B, 2017). One or two people work at each sorting table. A donation bag from the cage is placed on the table and the contents are dumped out on the table. Each item is inspected one-by-one, and laid out on the table, on top of the last item. Employee 3 described the sorting criteria:

> No stains, no rips, no tears, no odors, no animal hair, so they are smelling it and they are looking in the high wear areas, like the crotches, the armpits, the neck area. They are

> inspecting it really carefully. The only exception to this is if it is a retro or vintage item and it says it right on the tag, if you turn over the tag it will say why the item is priced that way…. retro or vintage can be from the 90s, from another culture, these items are truly one of a kind and we allow for some flaws. (Employee 3, Thrift Store B, 2017)

Beside each sorting table there is a poster on the wall with a diagram of a pair of pants and a shirt. The poster directs workers where to look for the high wear areas on clothes. For example, the poster shows the areas that are most likely to have issues: the collar and armpits of shirts, the bottom hem of pants, and hardware such as zippers and buttons. Clothing is also sorted based on the content or message. For example, as Employee 1 described, "if it is a promotional t-shirt for an event we typically won't put it in our stores, or if there is violence, like blood and guns, or drugs, it's not really the message we want to send to our customers and clients when they are shopping in our stores" (Employee 1, Thrift Store B, 2017).

If the donations pass this first initial stage of sorting they are then placed on the second sorting table. At this table, the clothes are inspected a second time, more thoroughly, and under better lighting conditions. If the clothes pass this second stage, they are then hung up on a portable clothes rack. Each rack holds approximately 100 items (Employee 3, Thrift Store B, 2017). Once this rack is full it is taken to the other room where the clothes are priced and then shipped to the thrift stores.

There are four different categories of price tags: vintage/retro items, boutique items, specialty items, and regular priced items (Employee 3, Thrift Store B, 2017). The pricing is based on the retail value of the items, with vintage/retro, boutique, or specialty items having a higher retail value (Employee 3, Thrift Store B, 2017). For example, "Vintage or retro items can be from the 90s or from another culture" (Employee 3, Thrift Store B, 2017), boutique items are "better quality, more expensive brands" (Employee 2, Thrift Store B, 2017), and specialty items are "wedding dresses, Armani, or Gucci" (Employee 3, Thrift Store B, 2017). Once regular items

have passed the sorting process they are then shipped to one of the stores, where they are priced in the store since all regular priced items are priced the same. A manager at the warehouse prices vintage/retro, boutique items, and specialty items, as these prices vary depending on the item and its condition. When the items are priced, the date is written on the tag in order to keep track of how long the item has been on the floor for; clothing is rotated in each store once every three weeks (Employee 3, Thrift Store B, 2017).

The warehouse receives a large amount of donations every day, from Monday to Friday. Typically, the warehouse receives about 150 bags of clothing donations each day; sometimes they receive upwards of 200 bags a day (Employee 1, Thrift Store B, 2017). Since each bag of clothing donations weighs about 20 pounds, this means that Thrift Store B receives approximately 3,000 pounds of clothing a day. In terms of the amount of time it takes to sort clothing donations, Employee 1 stated that they try to spend about five minutes or less sorting each donation bag. Each workday is 7.5 hours; each day they sort approximately 90 donation bags (Employee 1, Thrift Store B, 2017).

I asked Employee 1, 2 and 3 to discuss the quality of the donations that Thrift Store B receives. Employee 2 pointed out, "fast fashion brands don't hold up to the test of time. We see a lot of things from Forever 21, H&M, and UK2LA" (Employee 2, Thrift Store B, 2017). Employee 3 described how, "the general quality of the donations that we sell in the stores is amazing," and she explained how she is so confident with the quality of the items that they sell that when she buys something she will even wear it right away without washing it (Employee 3, Thrift Store B, 2017). Further, Employee 3 commented that she has noticed a shift in the quality of clothing donations that Thrift Store B is receiving:

> Up until a year ago we had no problem filling our vintage section… we had so much of it. This year I've noticed it's a lot emptier, and I think fast fashion has something to do

> with this. These items that are now ten years old that are being bought at Forever 21, H&M, and all those places, they are not holding up and they are not around anymore, so fast fashion is really killing our retro section. (Employee 3, Thrift Store B, 2017)

Employee 1 commented:

> I think overall, we aren't able to sell the majority of it. I would say probably 75 percent of the donations that we receive we can't sell and they end up going into our textiling, which then ends up in Maple Ridge. This is a company that we fill up a trailer with unusable clothing and accessories and then I call someone to come pick it up and that trailer ends up in Maple Ridge. (Employee 3, Thrift Store B, 2017)

If an item does not pass the sorting process it is tossed in one of the bins beside the tables. These items are sent for "textiling." Textiling is the term the staff use to describe the items that are unsellable that are sent to a Textile Recycling Company in Maple Ridge.

**Disposal**

Clothing donations that are unsellable are sold and shipped to a Textile Recycling Company in Maple Ridge (Employee 1, Thrift Store B, 2017). Unfortunately, Thrift Store B could not share the name of the company with me, but I was informed that this company is not a rag dealer; rather, it is a global trader in SHC (Employee 4, Thrift Store B, 2017). Once the clothes arrive in Maple Ridge "they are divided into different grades and then those are sent for use in markets in Africa" (Employee 4, Thrift Store B, 2017). Employee 4 stated, "Of the stuff we send to the textiler, we are told it's all sent to Africa" (Employee 4, Thrift Store B, 2017).

The Textile Recycling Company pays Thrift Store B by the pound for unsellable clothing donations. Each year, Thrift Store B receives a large percentage of revenues from the sale of unsellable clothing to this company. In 2016, according to Employee 4, Thrift Store B received 956,000 pounds of clothing, and 300,000 pounds were recycled (Employee 4, Thrift Store B, 2017). Employee 4 reported that approximately one third of the clothing donations that they receive are sent to the Textile Recycling Company (Employee 4, Thrift Store B, 2017). This

figure contradicts the amount of donated clothing that the other three employees reported were sent for "textiling." Employee 1 stated that approximately 75 percent of the clothing donations that they receive are unsellable and are sent to the Textile Recycling Company in Maple Ridge (Employee 1, Thrift Store B, 2017). Similarly, Employee 2 stated, "between 20-25 percent of the clothing donations that we receive make it out onto the store floor" (Employee 2, Thrift Store B, 2017). And Employee 3 mentioned that about 60 percent of the donations that they receive are unsellable, whereas "about 10 percent will be boutique or vintage items, and 30 percent will be regular items" (Employee 3, Thrift Store B, 2017). Due to the positions that Employee 1, 2, and 3 hold with the organization and from my own observations, I believe that the estimates provided by Employee 1, 2, and 3 are more accurate than the estimate that Employee 4 provided. Further, the trailer that Thrift Store B uses to store and ship unsellable clothing donations is really quite large. The trailer is a shipping container that is approximately 40 feet. About every two weeks when the shipping container is full, it is picked up from the warehouse by the Textile Recycling Company and a new container is dropped off (Employee 1, Thrift Store B, 2017).

According to Employee 1 and 3, the only types of clothing that the Textile Recycling Company will not accept are high heels, boots, pillows, and clothing that is soiled or stained with bodily fluids (Employee 3 & 4, Thrift Store B, 2017). Employee 4 pointed out that:

> None of the textiles we receive go to waste. We do have challenges recycling some items: pillows, and heels that are more than 2 inches, because the heels puncture the bags. We try to refuse these items at the door. Sometimes Compassionate Resource Warehouse or Peers Victoria Resources Society will take these items. (Employee 4, Thrift Store B, 2017)

The items that are not accepted for "textiling" are put in a garbage dumpster that is located in the back of the warehouse. I took a peak in the dumpster, and the objects inside did not resemble what you would typically find in a dumpster. What I saw was mostly shoes and boots, some

articles of clothing, and what stood out the most was a framed picture of a sailboat that was leaning against the side of the bin.

Employee 4 explained how Thrift Store B had a researcher look into the impact of the Textile Recycling Company commercially exporting SHC donations to Africa. She informed me that "The report indicated on balance, it was a positive impact. It cited a particular report from UNICEF"[7] (Employee 4, Thrift Store B, 2017). Further Employee 4 mentioned, "For quite a long time, we have been working with this particular company. There aren't a lot of opportunities for other options and it's hard for other places on the island." All four of the staff members that I interviewed at Thrift Store B seemed uneasy or concerned about the organizations relationship with the Textile Recycling Company.

## Thrift Store C

### Organizational Structure

The manager at Thrift Store C declined to answer any questions about the stores organizational structure. After further investigation, it became clear why he refused to answer these questions. Because of its name, Thrift Store C appears to be operated by a not-for-profit charitable organization that runs multiple thrift stores across British Columbia. However, after looking at the not-for-profit's website, I discovered that all of the thrift stores are actually operated as for-profit privately owned business. Under a licensing agreement, the thrift stores are permitted to use the charity's name in exchange for a certain (undisclosed) percentage of the stores' gross revenue (Thrift Store C, organizations official website, 2017). In terms of the profits the charity receives through the licensing agreements, the charity's website states that

[7] Employee 4 could not remember the name of this report. I asked her if it was perhaps a report published by Oxfam, and she said it could be. I believe she was referring to an Oxfam report titled "The impact of the second-hand clothing trade on developing countries," by Baden and Barber (2005).

each year they receive over $100,000 from the thrift stores in BC, and that this money is used to fund the charities daily operations (Thrift Store C, Charities official website, 2017). This amount seems very low, considering there are a number of thrift stores operating under this licensing agreement across British Columbia, and when compared to Thrift Stores A and B, where the gross yearly revenue for each of these organizations is over $1 million.

The employees at Thrift Store C are all paid employees (Manager, Thrift Store C, 2017). On the day that I visited the store, there were four employees working, all of whom were female. The manager is male. I visited the store a number of times, and each time I visited all of the employees were females. I inquired about volunteering at Thrift Store C, and the manager stated that they did not have volunteers at the store, but if I could find out how he could go about legally hiring volunteers, he would consider hiring me.

**Donations**

At Thrift Store C, the majority of SHC donations come from individual donors (Manager, Thrift Store C, 2017). Individuals can drop off clothing donations in person or they can call the store and they will pick up the donations from the donor's house (Manager, Thrift Store C, 2017). Thrift Store C does not have a donation centre, donation bins, or a recycling center (Manager, Thrift Store C, 2017). The amount of clothing donations that the store receives fluctuates (Manager, Thrift Store C, 2017). In terms of the quality of the donations that Thrift Store C receives, the manager stated that, "it's up and down. Sometimes we will receive ten bags of awesome stuff, sometimes only one bag of bad stuff" (Manager, Thrift Store C, 2017). Thrift Store C requests that individuals donate "gently used" clothes. They do not accept clothing donations that are stained, damaged, or worn out (Manager, Thrift Store C, 2017).

**Sorting and Processing**

The back room of Thrift Store C is where clothing donations are stored and sorted. The room is very disorganized. The floor and countertops are full of donated items and clothing. As I make my way to the office to interview the manager, I have to be careful not to trip on donated items and garbage, because there is no clear walking path to the office. A staff member and the manager apologized for the mess. In the tiny office, strange items are scattered on the desk and floor; clothing is strewn over the desk and chairs. I presume these are items that have been donated. Once the store receives the clothing donations, they are stored in the back room before they are sorted. If they receive clothing donations that are sealed in a bag they will put it on a shelf in the back room until it is time to put out new stock on the floor. Clothing is only sorted once it is time to rotate stock. The manager explained that there is no exact timeline for when clothing items are rotated in the store. He described the stores method for sorting and rotating stock: "it's like a supermarket, we rotate stock, and it depends on what sells" (Manager, Thrift Store C, 2017). Older items are sold before the newer items are placed on the floor for sale (Manager, Thrift Store C, 2017).

Clothing donations are sorted based on quality and style at Thrift Store C. According to the manager, his store has a very high standard for the style and condition of the clothing that they sell. He stated that they are looking for clothing "similar to what you would wear" and he described the clothes that they sell as "high quality for low prices" (Manager, Thrift Store C). He mentioned that other thrift stores in the area do not have as high of standards. He named one store in particular and exclaimed how this store will put clothes out on the floor that have holes or stains. At Thrift Store C, when they are sorting and processing the clothes, they are looking

for “rips, tears, or stains” in order to ensure that these items do not make it out onto the floor for sale (Manager, Thrift Store C).

The manager explained how and why they wear gloves when sorting the bags of donations. He stated, “You have to watch for heroin needles. Someone [in the store] put their foot in a shoe with a heroine needle. We have to think about whether or not we will put these out for sale” (Manager, Thrift Store C). Clothing donations that pass the sorting process and go out onto the floor for sale and “sell fairly quickly” (Manager, Thrift Store C, 2017). The Manager estimates that approximately 50 percent of the clothing donations that Thrift Store C receives are unsellable in the store.

**Disposal**

Depending on the quality of the item, there are two different ways in which unsold clothing donations are dealt with. The manager describes both of the methods as his way of “paying it forward.” If the clothing is in poor condition, he will put the clothing in a donation bin operated by the Victoria Humane Society. For example, he commented, “if I receive a bag of clothing that is dirty, I will just take the whole bag and put it in the donation bin” (Manager, Thrift Store C). For clothing that is not as damaged, he will deliver it in person to other local thrift stores in the area. He mentioned that he often brings these donations to Thrift Store A. Thrift Store C does not have a relationship with other charitable organizations, but the Manager noted that he is building a relationship with the other thrift stores in the area, especially Thrift Store A, just from donating clothing to them on an almost daily basis.[8] A surprising finding from

[8] An interesting aside is that from my field research at Thrift Store A and C, it became apparent that there is an antagonistic relationship between these two thrift stores which are in close proximity to each other. The manager at Thrift Store A commented that Thrift Store C “is a business which only gives 10 percent back to community. The owner is a bit insecure. He has been coming into our store and checking us out and putting flyers in our store. It doesn’t bother us because we are non-profit and we are just here to help the community and improve people’s lives” (Manager, Thrift Store A, 2017).

my interview with the manager of Thrift Store C was that he was unaware that unsold clothing donations could be sold by the pound to textile recycling companies, to other charitable organizations, or to clothing banks. Further, I was surprised to learn that Thrift Store C re-donates unsellable clothing donations that it receives either by using the Humane Society Donation bins or by dropping it off to other local thrift stores. Considering the manager was not aware that stained or damaged clothes have economic value (since they can be recycled and used for other purposes such as industrial rags or insulation), I was surprised that he viewed his method of re-donating clothing in bad condition as "paying it forward."

## Value Village

### Organizational Structure

According to the website, "Value Village, a Savers brand, is a for-profit, global thrift retailer offering great quality, gently used clothing, accessories and household goods" (Value Village, 2017a). Savers, Inc. operates thrift stores in Canada, the United States, and Australia. There are over 330 thrift store locations and the company has 22,000 employees (Savers, 2017a). Savers Inc. headquarters are in Bellevue, Washington. The Savers brands include: Savers (in the U.S), Value Village (in the U.S. and Canada), Unique (in the U.S.), Village des Valeurs (in Quebec) and Savers Australia" (Savers, 2017a).

The company was established in 1954 when the founder, Bill Ellison, opened his first thrift store in San Francisco, California (Savers, 2016, p. 7). Until 2000, the company remained a family-owned business under TVI, Inc., doing business as Value Village, Savers, Unique, and Village des Valeurs (Kim, 2000, para 3). In 2000, in a move to recapitalize the company, TVI. Inc. sold a 50 percent stake to Berkshire Partners, a private equity firm (Kim, 2000, para 1). In 2006, Berkshire Partners sold its share of the company to a private equity firm "in a

recapitalization led by Freeman Spogli & Co., Savers' Chairman Thomas Ellison and senior management" (Canada NewsWire, 2006). In 2012, in another move "to recapitalize the company in partnership with Savers' Chairman Thomas Ellison and the management team," Freeman Spogli & Co. sold its share of the company to two private equity firms, Leonard Green & Partners, L.P. ("LGP"), and TPG Capital (PR Newswire, 2012, para 1). Interestingly, several participants who I interviewed believed that Walmart owns Value Village, which is a rumor that was started about seven years ago according to the manager I spoke with at Value Village (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017).

Value Village is the largest for-profit thrift store in Victoria, and Savers is the largest for-profit thrift store chain in Canada, the U.S., and Australia (Freeman Spogli & Co., 2017). Annual sales from Savers Inc. amount to over $1.2 billion (Lyman, 2015). Value Village describes its business model as a "successful social enterprise" (Value Village, 2017c). There are about 150 Value Village locations in Canada (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). At the Victoria, BC location, there are approximately 100 employees. Most of the employees work fulltime in the back of the store and are called, "production": they "sort, price, and roll clothing donations" (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). There are more female employees than male employees at the Victoria location, but the manager couldn't comment on the exact ratio.

I conducted an hour-long phone interview with a manager at Value Village, who has worked for Value Village in a number of different positions for the last ten years. In 2014-2015 she worked as a manager at the Victoria Value Village location, since then she has worked at both the Kamloops and Kelowna locations.

**Donations**

Value Village receives donations from individuals and non-profit organizations. Individuals can drop off donations to any Value Village location, as each store has an onsite "Community Donation Centre" (see Figure 2) or individuals can donate items to one of Value Village's non-profit partners (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). Regardless of whether the SHC donations are made directly to Value Village or to a non-profit partner, Value Village pays the local non-profits for the items (Value Village, 2017a). The amount paid per item to local non-profits is not public knowledge, but in 2015, Savers Inc. claimed it paid over $140 million to their non-profit partners (Savers Inc., 2015, p. 6), and in 2014, Savers Inc. claimed it paid over $200 million to their non-profit partners (Savers Inc., 2014, p. 7). The money that the non-profits receive from the sale of donated items to Value Village contributes to the charity activities of these community groups (Savers Inc., 2015, p. 4). Value Village refers to its relationship with non-profit organizations as "partnerships." Some of the non-profit organizations that Value Village has partnered with in Canada are Diabetes Canada, Big Brothers Big Sisters, YWCA, and Inclusion BC (Value Village, 2017b).

Outside of the Victoria Value Village location, there are two large posters, one at the front entrance and one at the Community Donation Centre Entrance (see Figure 2). The two posters are the same and contain three images with text underneath each image. There is an image of a mentor reading to a youth, with the text**:** "Do Good Do Favors Do Something Great." There is an image of the Big Brothers Big Sisters logo with the text: "Do A Good Deed Do Your Part DONATE." The third image has "Community Donation Centre" in a large font, and underneath it is written: "Value Village pays local nonprofits every time you donate. Thank you!"


*Figure 2.* Value Village Community Donation Centre, Victoria, BC. Kathryne Gravestock, 2017. Copyright 2017 by Kathryne Gravestock.

Several consumer complaints have been filed against Value Village/ Savers. For example, in 2013, Charlotte E Hunter filed a consumer complaint in which she argued, "My problem is perception. The impression any donor or customer receives is that Value Village (Savers) is a non-profit giving most of their profits to xyz charities" (Hunter, 2013, p. 68). In 2015, after receiving a number of consumer complaints against Value Village (Pioneer Press, 2015a), the Minnesota Attorney General filed a lawsuit against Savers alleging that Savers had deceived its customers about the extent that their donations benefit charities (Pioneer Press, 2015b). The Attorney General stated, "Donors need transparency and disclosure to make informed choices about whether and how to donate" (Bjorhus, 2015). A settlement was reached

that required Savers to pay its local charity partners $1.8 million, and "to prominently display and disclose the actual amounts it pays charities when the retailer sells donated goods in its stores, and to label and track the items" (Bjorhus, 2015). Critics of Savers' business model argue that the company disguises itself as a non-profit organization and that its charity partners receive only a small fraction of its revenues. It has been estimated that only about "8 percent of Savers' revenue is going to charity" (Lyman, 2015). In response, several U.S. have required Savers to register as a for-profit commercial fundraiser (Lyman, 2015).

I asked the manager I spoke with to explain the relationship that Value Village has with its non-profit "partners." She explained how every Value Village location has one non-profit partner, and Big Brothers Big Sisters is the non-profit partner at the Victoria store (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). All of the clothing that is donated to Big Brothers Big Sisters in Victoria is sold to Value Village, who pays Big Brothers Big Sisters for the clothing by the pound (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). "If customers bring in donations to the store, Big Brothers Big Sisters is still paid by the pound, but the amount is less because there is no overhead" (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). The manager described how the non-profit partners are paid for the items: "the charity is paid based on weight before the items are sorted and are not based on whether they are sellable" (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). For example, Big Brother Big Sisters will accept stained or damaged clothing donations, which it then sells to Value Village by the pound, regardless of the condition of the items. The manager explained how Value Village's relationship with its non-profit partners has changed overtime:

> The only charity that is paid is Big Brothers Big Sisters in the Victoria store. The stores in the lower mainland used to split the money evenly between Big Brothers and Canadian Diabetes, but the charities didn't like that so now every store has one charity partner. (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017)

For example, at the Kamloops store, Big Brothers Big Sisters is the charity partner, and in Prince George, Inclusion BC is the charity partner (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). After speaking to the manager, I was still confused about Value Village's relationship with its charity partners.

What I found puzzling was what happens to all the clothing that is collected in the donation bins throughout Victoria? I was under the impression that the charities operating these bins were selling these donations to Value Village. I tried contacting the Victoria Humane Society and Diabetes Canada, the two main organizations that operate donation bins throughout Victoria, to try and solve this puzzle. Interestingly, I learned that Diabetes Canada does sell all its clothing donations in Victoria to the Victoria Value Village location. I was informed that Diabetes Canada has a national contract with Value Village, in which it receives about $1.5 million a year in revenue from the sale of SHC to Value Village stores (Employee, Diabetes Canada, 2017). The employee I spoke with at Diabetes Canada commented that they are "paid by the tonnage and that it is less expensive than running our own charity shop" (Employee, Diabetes Canada, 2017). I also called the Victoria Value Village location and spoke with a manager who corroborated this information. The manager stated, "We pay both Big Brothers Big Sisters and Canadian Diabetes the same amount per pound for donations received at our store…. We just weigh everything on a cart, we don't sort it first, and they get paid" (Manager 2, Value Village, 2017). I was still confused as to why the Victoria Value Village location advertises that its only charity partner is Big Brothers Big Sisters, if Canadian Diabetes is also receiving revenue from the sale of donated clothing at this location. I asked the manager this question a number of times on the phone, and the only response she could provide me with was, "It's because they are the bigger part of the charity" (Manager 2, Value Village, 2017). I think she meant that Big Brothers

Big Sisters provides this location with the majority of its donations. Unfortunately, I did not hear back from the Victoria Humane Society.

At the Victoria Value Village store, approximately 11,000-12,000 pounds of clothing are donated every day, five days a week (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). I asked the manager how much Big Brothers Big Sisters is paid per pound for clothing, and she replied, "The charity doesn't want us to tell you. If people knew, then they wouldn't think they need their donations" (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). I also inquired about how easy or hard it was for Value Village to receive similar levels of clothing donations each year, and she responded:

> Value Village is trying to increase the amount of donations, which are relatively the same each year. Quotas are agreed upon at the beginning of the year, and each store is supposed to process a certain amount of cloth each week from individuals and from the charity partner. Every store has a quota that must be brought in each year directly by individuals and by the charity. (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017)

The majority of clothing donations that the Victoria Value Village store receives come from Big Brothers Big Sisters (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). The manager noted that at most of the Value Village stores, "about 75 percent of the donations come directly from the charities and about 25 percent of the donations come from individuals who bring the items directly to the store" (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). Value Village does not have donation bins aside from the ones located outside of their stores (see Figure 3). Value Village does not pick up donations directly from individuals because, as the manager pointed out, this would put them "in direct competition with the charities they work with" (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). Big Brothers Big Sisters of Victoria and Area will pick up clothing donations for free from individuals' houses, or donations can be dropped off at the Victoria office, at Value Village, or at the attended donation station located in the parking lot at Tillicum Mall (BBBS, 2014). Big Brothers Big

Sisters does not sort or process the donated items that it receives; they go directly to Value Village where they are then sorted and processed (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017).


*Figure 3.* Donation Bin in Front of Value Village Store, Victoria, BC. Kathryne Gravestock, 2017. Copyright 2017 by Kathryne Gravestock.

**Sorting and Processing**

Donated items that arrive at Value Village stores are stacked onto carts where they are weighed (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). The items are weighed first before they are sorted in order to keep track of the amount per pound that is to be paid to the charity partner. Items that are made of cloth, which includes clothing, shoes, towels, bedding, and belts, are weighed together, and household items are weighed separately (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). Each cart holds 920 pounds of cloth (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017).

Clothing donations at Value Village are sorted based on condition (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). I asked the manager if the type of clothing or the brand is considered during the sorting process and she responded:

> Right now because we are in summer, winter items that are in good condition are saved, it's called "back stock" and vice versa in winter, summer items are saved for back stock. When sorting we don't really consider brand, but that comes in when determining the price. (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017)

In the store, clothes are rotated every six weeks, and new items are placed on the floor daily (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). The manager stated, "Every day, in every Value Village store, we go out to the floor and remove stuff to make way for new stuff" (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). After clothing has been on the floor for about three weeks, the manager stated, "only 2 percent will sell. The longer they are on the floor, the less chance they will sell" (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). Similar to Thrift Store A, Value Village uses different coloured price tags to indicate the week that the items were priced and placed on the floor for sale (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). The manager described how the price tags work:

> If you go into a store this week, silver tags will be at the front, that's what was put out this week. Purple tags from the previous week, then blue, green, etc. For in season items, for example, summer tags, there may be three or four different colours of tags out on the floor, where some categories might just have one colour of tags. (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017)

In terms of the quality of the donations that Value Village receives, the manager of Value Village mentioned that the quality of donated items has remained the same since she has worked for the company (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). But she commented that, "People don't realize they can donate stuff like a t-shirt with a stain on it" (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). Value Village advertises on their website that: "We proudly accept donations of gently used clothing and items on behalf of our nonprofit partners" (Value Village, 2017d). If you scroll further down on the same page, there is a smaller image of a sock with a hole in it that reads:

"We'll take it! We repurpose single socks and tattered clothing into rags for insulation" (Value Village, 2017d).

In a written response to a consumer complaint, Director of Corporate Communications at TVI, Inc. /Value Village Sara Gaugl (2013) described how donated items are sorted and processed and how the stores select only the "highest quality merchandise," and items that do not sell or that "are not suitable for resale, are responsibly recycled" (Gaugl, 2013, p. 82). Value Village claims to "operate one of the largest recycling programs in the world, preventing more than 600 million pounds of reusable merchandise from ending up in landfills each year" (Gaugl, 2013, p. 82). The manager I spoke to mentioned, "one of the things I really like about the company is the amount of textiles they keep from landfills" (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). She stated, "We are the #1 recycler of textiles, it's part of our business – it's not a hindrance" (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017).

**Disposal**

Value Village describes its business as a "community champion and a revolutionary recycler" (Value Village, 2017a). The manager I spoke with stated that approximately "one percent of clothing donations end up in landfills, probably even less." When I asked her what types of clothes are disposed of in the garbage she responded:

> If there's a threat of infestation, something Value Village doesn't like us to talk about. If there's any kind of possibility of an infestation then we might throw out a large amount of cloth…. Clothes are not washed by Value Village. If you look at the amount of clothing that we receive, it's not feasible. We don't put out clothing if it doesn't seem washed. We recommend that our customers wash items when they take them home. (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017)

The website claims that Value Village works with recyclers who turn unsold clothing donations into rags and insulation (Value Village, 2017e). Donated clothing items that cannot be sold in the store or that do not sell are recycled locally or shipped to countries in the Global South (Value

Village, 2017e). The Value Village website describes what happens to the merchandise that cannot be sold in stores:

> Most of the goods we purchase from our nonprofit partners are sold, repurposed or recycled locally, but some of the unsold items are sent overseas so that small business owners can supply their local marketplaces. Providing items to developing nations also creates jobs, helping people earn a living wage and reinvest earnings into their local economy. (Value Village, 2017e)

However, according to the manager I spoke with, unsold clothing items from the Victoria store are not recycled locally; they are sent to Savers' recycling centre in Fife, Washington. In fact, this is where all of the unsold clothing donations are sent from all of the Value Village stores in Canada (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). The recycling centre is operated by Savers, and it is called the Savers Distribution Center.

The manager I spoke with estimated that approximately 60-65 percent of the donated clothes that the Value Village store in Victoria receives are not sellable due to "holes, tears, or damage that makes it not fit for reuse" (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). Gaugl has stated that almost 75 percent of the donated items that Savers receives are not sellable in the stores (Gaugl, 2013, p. 83). Before shipping unsold or unsellable clothing donations to the Savers Distribution Center, balers are used to compact the cloth items together into 1,000 lbs. bales (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). At the Distribution Center the clothes are resorted and then they are either sent to other stores or they are sold and shipped to countries in the global South. I asked the manager if clothing that is sent to the Distribution Center is sold to international rag dealers and she responded, "From the Distribution Center it might be sold from there." The manager described what happens to the clothes that are shipped to the Distribution Center:

> They will put all of the white shirts in one pile, jeans in another, and there's a need for those items in certain countries like India and other Third World countries. They may get sent to other stores. Any book that can still be read can be recycled. Books are baled and

> shipped to the Third World. The recycling distribution center puts purses in their own box, belts in their own box, jeans, t-shirts, sports equipment, lots goes to Africa and tropical countries, so winter items aren't sent there. (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017)

I asked the manager if she knew the names of the countries and companies where clothing is shipped, and she responded, "I don't know exactly and I can't tell you who the specific companies that items are sold to, these are our trade secrets" (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). She also could not comment on the amount that Value Village sells these items for. However, there is a map on the Value Village website that is labeled, "Helping the world," that shows the countries where unsold merchandise is exported (see Figure 4).


*Figure 4*. Helping the World. Reprinted from Value Village, 2017, retrieved from https://www.valuevillage.com/donate/how-your-donations-help Copyright 2017 by Savers.

Value Village donates some of its unsold or unsellable textiles to local communities. For example, the manager described how in Vancouver, Value Village "gives out blankets, linens, and coats" in the Downtown Eastside (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). Value Village also

donates items to homeless shelters and schools. The manager stated, “99 percent of all textiles can be recycled, unless it’s completely soiled or has bodily fluids that are identifiable or mud-caked, it needs to be relatively clean” (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017). A surprising finding was that while items that are stained, damaged, or soiled are not donated to local communities, they are still commercially exported to global South countries (Manager 1, Value Village, 2017).

## Conclusion

Early on in my research, it became apparent that staff members and managers at the four thrift stores I conducted research at were unwilling to openly discuss what happens to unsold clothing donations. What I discovered was that the SHC industry in Canada and abroad, is shrouded in secrecy. The end market of SHC is deliberately hidden from the public. If thrift stores informed donors of the high proportion of donated clothing that is commercially exported to global South countries, donation levels would most likely decrease and their business models would be in jeopardy. As the previous chapter highlighted, a number of donors that I interviewed in Victoria attributed the value of ‘doing good’ to donating clothing. The majority of participants were not aware that only about 10-20 percent of clothing donations that thrift stores in Canada receive are actually sold in the stores.

Unfortunately, I was not able to uncover the name of the charity that picks up unsold clothing donations from Thrift Store A, although I have my suspicions that it is either Big Brothers Big Sisters or Canadian Diabetes since these are the two main local charities that collect clothing donations in Victoria. As well, I was not able to uncover the name of the textile recycling company to which Thrift Store B sells and ships their unsold clothing donations. However, I did confirm that unsold clothing donations from thrift stores in Victoria, BC do make their way into the global trade in SHC. As my interviews with staff members at Thrift Store B

and the manager at Value Village illustrated, clothing donations are commercially exported to Africa. Thrift Store B sells and ships their unsold clothing donations to a Textile Recycling Company, which then sorts, grades, bales, and commercially exports these items to Africa. Value Village ships its unsold clothing donations to the Savers Distribution Center and from here the items are resorted, baled, graded, and commercially exported primarily to Africa. Further, I suspect that unsellable clothing donations from Thrift Store A and Thrift Store C end up at the Victoria Value Village location. In terms of the amount of clothing donations that the four thrift stores received, Value Village by far receives the largest proportion of donations, followed by Thrift Store B, Thrift Store A, and lastly, Thrift Store C.

Through interviews with staff members and managers at thrift stores, my findings demonstrate how thrift stores in Victoria, BC contribute to the global trade in SHC by reifying uneven exchange and uneven geographical development. Unwanted clothing donations, which are the result of the overconsumption of fast fashion in the global North, are re-commodified in order to be resold internationally. Because thrift stores are spatially and socially embedded within their geographic location, the re/creation of the value of SHC by thrift stores is necessary to conceal the negative aspects of overconsumption. In turn, donors are misled to believe that their donations only 'do good.' Further, the commercial aspect of the trade is hidden from the public, as thrift stores overemphasize how clothing donations support the local community. Here, Norris' critique of the role and position of thrift stores in the global trade in SHC is fitting:

> The cast-offs given freely to charities have become a standard vehicle for raising funds for their primary goals. These do not necessarily include either providing affordable clothing for poorer local people nor international development, so the charity must maximise their monetary value; the garments themselves as material objects have no direct agency to 'do good' by clothing bodies or providing warmth through charitable efforts, they are simply a means to an end. (Norris, 2012, p. 400)

The re/creation of value of unwanted clothes, in turn, results in a lucrative commercial enterprise. But, the majority of the profits accrued in the GPN of used clothing are received by textile recycling companies, and not by charities. For example, in Field's (2007) study on the global trade in SHC between the UK and Kenya, she found that the main "financial beneficiary" in the SHC commodity chain were UK textile recycling companies who earned 94.7 percent of the profits (p. 30).

It is difficult to comprehend why clothing donations that are not suitable for re-wear in Victoria, BC are deemed suitable to be sold and exported to countries in the global South. This is especially concerning considering that at all four thrift stores where I conducted research, large amounts of donated clothes that were dirty, damaged, stained, or worn out were received. Each thrift store mentioned that only a very small portion of SHC donations are disposed of in the garbage, and the rest are re-donated or sold to another charity or to a textile recycling company. Not only does the commercial export of clothing pose environmental problems, it is also a health hazard. None of the four thrift stores I studied washed or disinfected the clothing donations they received.

Unfortunately, one missing component of my field research is whether or not unsold clothing donations from Thrift Store A, B, C, or Value Village are sold to rag dealers. I was unable to find out this information because the staff members and managers that I interviewed were not aware if their thrift stores sold unsellable clothing donations to rag dealers either directly or indirectly. While the employee that I spoke to at Thrift Store B stated that the company that they sell unsellable clothing donations to was not a rag dealer, this company may still repurpose or sell these items to rag dealers. The Value Village website states that clothing donations such as socks with holes are repurposed as industrial rags or insulation (Value Village,

2017d), but the manager I spoke to was not aware if unsellable clothing donations are sold to rag dealers. Two areas for future research would be to look into the relationship between thrift stores and rag dealers, and also to investigate and trace the amount of clothing that is in bad condition that is donated to thrift stores and then commercially exported to countries in the global South.

Although I do not intend to downplay the environmental and social benefits of donating SHC, the aim of my research is to shed light on the role and position of thrift stores in Victoria in the global trade of SHC. My intent is similar to that of Norris (2012) who argues that the global trade in SHC is "largely unknown" and "unchallenged" (p. 394, 400), and that by conducting field research on this topic, at the very least, we are providing a critical lens on an understudied research area. The purpose of this thesis is to challenge the dominant narrative that thrift stores put forth, that clothing donations 'do good.' My argument is that this narrative overemphasizes the social and economic value of donated clothes and conceals the negative aspects of overconsumption and the problems associated with the commercial export of SHC.

## Analysis and Conclusion

To end this thesis, I would like to return to the theoretical discussion on gender and how social reproduction is an important node in commodity chains. To do so, I will describe three themes that emerged from my fieldwork that illustrate how the SHC industry is gendered and how the household is maintained as an important site of commodity consumption and where the costs of social reproduction are separated from production. I will then reflect on the main barrier that I encountered in my fieldwork to unraveling the hidden processes of the global SHC trade. I will conclude by restating my central argument and by summarizing my key findings.

### Gendered Sites of Consumption and Work

Through my interviews with individuals who donate SHC, staff members and managers at thrift stores, and my own observations, three key themes emerged that illustrate some of the ways in which the second-hand clothing industry is gendered. First, women are the main donors of SHC and also tend to be responsible for recycling and disposing of unwanted household items such as textiles. Second, women are socialized and targeted as the primary household consumers. Third, the majority of workers at the thrift stores I researched were female.

In general, it is women who carry the burden of recycling or disposing of unwanted clothing in households. For example, Shim (1995) found that gender was a demographic factor that influences individual clothing disposal behaviour (p. 46). Shim found that "females were more likely to choose environmentally friendly disposal patterns and were less likely to discard old garments than were males" (p. 46). Shim attributed this finding to two possible factors. First, Shim suggested that "because females are traditionally more knowledgeable about how to handle old clothes than are males and may therefore choose a different disposal method than simply throwing them away" (p. 46). Second, because his study found that "females were more likely to

hold a stronger environmental attitude than were males," he suggested that this is perhaps why females were more likely to select an environmentally friendly method of disposal rather than throwing unwanted clothing in the garbage (p. 46). Shim concludes by stating that if men do indeed have "weaker environmental attitudes" than women, then the solution is to educate men about the different options for recycling and reusing unwanted clothes (p. 46). But Shim ignores the structural mechanisms that reify gender differences in social structures. For instance, as noted earlier, commodity chains are gendered because they exist within local structures that re(produce) gender differences in households, local communities**,** and labour markets (Staritz, 2016, p. 6). Under capitalism, the household is maintained as an important site of commodity consumption. The very structure of the household is designed in such a way to "create an optimal market for waged-goods" (Wallerstein et al., 1982, p. 441). Women are socialized to be the primary household consumers, and as a result, it is also women who tend to bear the burden of disposing or recycling of unwanted textiles. Not only were women found to be the primary donors of second-hand clothing in my research, the main item sold at all four of the thrift stores I researched was female clothing, and women were by far the largest demographic of consumers. As such, my fieldwork suggests that women are the primary donors and consumers of SHC in the household.

What constitutes a household? Dunaway (2014) defines a household as "a unit in which members inequitably pool and redistribute labor, resources, and survival strategies that are grounded in both unpaid and paid (nonwaged and waged) income sources" (p. 57). It is important to think of a household outside of the stereotype of the heterosexual nuclear family. What constitutes a household is changing in Canada. For instance, the 2011 Census demonstrates that from 2006 to 2011 there has been a "decline in households comprised of couples with

children" and an increase in multiple-family households and 'other' households. The Census defines 'other' households as "consist[ing] of two or more people who share the same private dwelling, but who do not constitute a census family" (Statistics Canada, 2015). The traditional heterosexual nuclear family of one husband, one wife, and children now reflects the reality of only a quarter of Canadian households (Campion-Smith, 2012). But even as the make-up of households is shifting, the household is still the site for the reproduction of the labour force, and under conditions of capitalism, the household is intricately linked to social reproduction and commodity consumption, and under neoliberal globalization, the household takes on the role of a privatized family. For example, feminists and feminist political economists have pointed out that social reproduction has been separated from the public sphere and from relations of production. Lisa Adkins and Maryanne Dever (2016) identify how post-Fordism has rearticulated patriarchal notions of women as housewives and mothers alongside notions of women as workers and entrepreneurs (p. 3), entrenching the ideology of the double burden as a female phenomenon. Statistics from the 2010 General Social Survey show that on average women spend 50.1 hours per week on unpaid childcare, while men spend 24.4 hours (Statistics Canada, 2011). The study also found that in couples where women are the only wage earners, women still spend more time on unpaid childcare than men; in couples where both partners work full-time, women still spend on average 49.8 hours per week on unpaid childcare (Statistics Canada, 2011).

The majority of workers at each of the thrift stores I researched were female. There was a very visible gender division of labour at all four of the thrift stores. For example, at Thrift Store A, there were a few male volunteers who worked in the back receiving stock and checking and fixing electronic items. All of the female volunteers were responsible for sorting and processing clothing donations, working in the front of the store helping customers, or they were cashiers. At

Thrift Store B, about 90 peercent of the workers were female, and the few male employees that work for the organization were delivery truck drivers. At Thrift Store C, (according to my own observations) all of the workers were female and the manager was male. The way that the manager interacted with the female employees reinforced societal gender differences. From my own experience interacting with the manager, he made me feel very uncomfortable. At Value Village, the majority of employees were also female, but unfortunately, the manager couldn't comment on the exact ratio.

These three themes that emerged from my research highlight how the SHC industry is gendered. My findings support Clelland's (2014) concept of "dark value," which he uses to describe how the capitalist world-system depends on the invisible inputs of households, the informal sector, and other forms of unpaid or underpaid labour (Clelland, 2014, p. 78). Beginning in the 1980s, neoliberal policies have resulted in the erosion of the welfare state. Families, communities, and the non-profit sector have become tasked with providing increased social services. As such, the importance of social reproduction, unpaid, underpaid and volunteer labour has increased. Social services, non-profit, and thrift store workers are primarily women. At thrift stores that are operated by non-profit organizations the majority of staff members are unpaid – they are volunteers. The source of value in the second-hand clothing industry is unpaid female workers. These workers are responsible for the time-consuming tasks of sorting, processing, and bundling clothing donations. The "dark value" in the second-hand clothing commodity chain is unpaid female workers in thrift stores. This is where value is being added, but few profits are accumulated at this node in the second-hand commodity chain. As noted earlier, only a small fraction of profits are accrued through the sale of SHC in thrift stores. Commercial textile recyclers and clothing graders are the actors who benefit the most from

unpaid female labour in this industry. Commercial textile recyclers and clothing graders accumulate the majority of the profits in the global trade in SHC (Norris, 2012; Field, 2007).

Commodity chains extract surpluses of value from households and women, but because this labour is not incorporated into the costs of production, the actual costs of production are vastly underestimated. Additional research is needed that adds the household as important node in SHC commodity chains and explores how gender and gender relations are central to production, consumption, and trade in commodity chains.

**Do Second-hand Clothing Donations "Do Good?"**

The purpose of this thesis was to better understand the relationship between fast fashion, clothing consumption and disposal patterns, and the global trade in SHC donations by examining what motivates individuals to donate SHC to thrift stores, and how thrift stores are linked to the international trade in SHC. Using a commodity chain analysis, I mapped two key nodes in the SHC commodity chain in Victoria, BC: individuals who donate used clothing, and thrift stores that collect, sell, and dispose of SHC. Through my interviews with 30 individuals who donate used clothing, and individuals who work in thrift stores, I constructed a simplified version of a used-clothing GPN in Victoria, BC (see Figure 1). I documented what happens to second-hand clothing donations once they reach thrift stores. At each thrift store, I learned how clothing donations are collected, sorted, processed, and disposed of. At Thrift Store B and Value Village, I discovered that unsellable clothing donations are commercially exported to Africa. Unfortunately, at Thrift Store A and Thrift Store C, I was not able to trace what happens to unsellable clothing donations. At Thrift Store A, unsellable clothing donations are sold by the pound to a local charity, but the manager would not tell me the name of the charity and stated that it was "confidential." At Thrift Store C, the manager described how unsellable clothing

donations are either re-donated to a nearby thrift store (often to Thrift Store A), or he disposes of these items in a Humane Society donation bin. Due to the secrecy of the second-hand clothing industry, I was not able to answer one of my four research questions: What is the link between thrift stores in Canada, and international buyers who bundle and sell clothes to buyers in Africa? Because Thrift Store A, Thrift Store B, and Value Village refused to disclose of the name of the organization/company that they sell unsold clothing donations to, I was unable to research the relationship between thrift stores in Canada and international buyers.

Through my interviews with individuals who donate used clothing, I explored the relationship between individuals' clothing consumption and donation patterns, and their knowledge of what happens to clothing once it has been donated. My empirical research suggests that individuals who donate excess clothing in Victoria, BC tend to be women who are 50 or older and who select their donation location primarily based on altruistic reasons. The main motivations participants listed for donating used clothing were helping people or supporting charities, cleaning out the closet or freeing up space, environmental or preventing from the landfill, and not wearing or don't like. In general, the majority of participants in my study indicated that they were concerned about the environmental impact of the fast fashion industry and the overproduction and overconsumption of clothing. But, my findings illustrated an inconsistency between participants' attitudes, practices, and knowledge of the clothing industry in relation to their consumption and donation practices. While participants were concerned about the environmental impact of the clothing industry, this did not necessarily translate into more environmentally sustainable consumption patterns. For example, only eleven participants listed environmental or preventing from landfill as one of their primary motivations for donating SHC. The majority of locations that participants identified purchasing new clothing from can be

classified as fast fashion retailers or locations where fast fashion items can be purchased. Not surprising was that participants who purchased more new clothing per year tended to donate used clothing more often, suggesting that there is a correlation between donating used clothing and the consumption of new clothing. I learned that the individuals I interviewed, in general, demonstrated a lack of knowledge about the type and condition of clothes that can be donated or recycled. In terms of individuals' knowledge about what happens to unsold second-hand clothes, many participants claimed to have some idea or speculated on what happens to unsold clothing donations at thrift stores, but only three participants responded that they were aware of what happens to unsold clothing donations in thrift stores in Victoria, BC. Further, the majority of participants were unaware that only 10-20 percent of donated SHC is actually sold in thrift stores. However, my fieldwork at the four thrift stores in Victoria, BC suggests that perhaps the amount of donated SHC that is actually sold in thrift stores is closer to 30 percent.

A major barrier to unraveling the hidden processes of the global SHC trade is the unwillingness of the individuals, organizations, or companies involved in this industry to share their experiences and knowledge (see Hansen, 2000, p. 18). Attempting to trace what happens to unsold clothing donations that do not sell in thrift stores was a difficult task, as staff members and managers were reluctant to discuss certain topics with me. Over the course of four months I tried to contact Sara Gaugl, the Director of Corporate Communications at Value Village, for a phone interview. Initially, I had contacted the Value Village store in Victoria directly to try and schedule an interview, but the manager at this location informed me that I would have to contact Gaugl for permission to interview staff members. I called many times; I left voicemails; I emailed. Gaugl never returned any of my calls or emails. The only reason why I was able to finally interview a manager at Value Village was through a connection I made with a friend of a

friend who used to work for Value Village, and who put me in contact with someone they knew who had previously worked as the manager at the Victoria location, and is now a manager at a different Value Village in BC. Although this individual was willing to talk to me about their experiences and knowledge about how clothing donations are received, processed, sorted, and disposed of at Value Village, there were many questions that remained unanswered. For instance, I learned that clothing donations that do not sell in the thrift stores are baled and shipped to the Savers Distribution Center in Fife, Washington, and from here the items are resorted, graded, baled, and commercially exported to Africa. But, the manager would not disclose of the names of the companies that Value Village sells the clothes to, or the specific countries in Africa where these unsold clothing donations end up. Further, the amount that Value Village sells these items for was not disclosed, and the amount that Value Village pays local non-profits for second-hand clothing donations was not revealed.

The secrecy surrounding the SHC industry is linked to the tension between the business models that thrift stores and non-profit organizations engage in versus the models they present to the public. For example, an interesting outcome of my research was that it inspired one of the thrift stores I researched to learn more about their organizations role in the global trade of SHC. The thrift store requested a follow-up interview with me in which previously made statements and statistical information (which I believe to be accurate) were redacted. In my opinion, this information was redacted because of the tension between the operational model that the thrift store engages in and the model that is presented to the public. I believe that by learning more about what happens to unsold clothing donations, the ethical narrative that the organization portrays to the public was ruptured. For example, specifics about how the organization disposes

of unsellable clothing donation, and the amount that the organization receives per pound for unsellable textiles was redacted.

Thrift stores and non-profit organizations that collect and sell second-hand clothes create and sustain narratives of donated clothes as 'doing good.' Take, for example, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Victoria's marketing slogan: "Your Donations Do Good" (BBBS, 2014). On the Big Brothers Big Sisters website there is a video that outlines why individuals should donate clothing to Big Brothers Big Sisters. The video emphasizes how clothing donations 'do good,' since they raise money to help fund the organization's philanthropic activities. In the video, clothing donations are directly linked to the organization's ability to match a vulnerable child in Greater Victoria to a mentor (BBBS, 2014). The video concludes with the message: "Be thoughtful about recycling and put your clothing to work" (BBBS, 2014). Similarly, on the Value Village website the notion that donated clothes 'do good' is emphasized in this statement: "Your stuff is our hero. The impact your goods make touches lives in your community, reaches developing nations abroad and keeps the planet healthy" (Value Village, 2017e). Thrift Store A, Thrift Store B, and Thrift Store C, emphasize that clothing donations 'do good' in two distinct ways. First, each thrift store describes how clothing donations provide low-income individuals and families in the community with clothing that is available at a low-cost. Second, each thrift store stresses how the proceeds from the sale of donated clothing are used to support the philanthropic activities that the organizations provide. However, through my interviews with staff members and managers at thrift stores, and my own observations, I found this narrative to be misleading. I argue that by attributing the value of 'doing good' to clothing donations, thrift stores overemphasize the social and economic value of donated clothes.

My fieldwork at four thrift stores illustrates how a large proportion of donated clothes are not sold in these thrift stores. The manager at Thrift Store A declined to report on the approximate amount of donated clothes that the store receives that are unsellable. Although, once donated clothes make it out onto the store floor, the manager reported that approximately 10 percent of these items do not sell. But, from my own observations during my fieldwork and from my experience volunteering at the store, this percentage appeared to be much higher. I would estimate that at least 70 percent of the donated clothes that Thrift Store A receives are either unsellable or do not sell in the store. At Thrift Store B, I received contradictory information about the percentage of second-hand clothes received that are unsellable. Three of the employees that I interviewed reported similar amounts. Employee 1 stated that about 75 percent of clothing donations that the store receives are unsellable, where Employee 2 stated that about 75-80 percent of clothing donations are unsellable, and Employee 3 stated that about 60 percent of clothing donations are unsellable. The amount that Employee 4 reported varies significantly from the amounts that the other three employees estimated. Employee 4 stated that about one third of the clothing donations that the organization receives are unsellable and are sent to a Textile Recycling Company. From my own observations, and from my experience volunteering at the warehouse for a full eight-hour shift, and from the positions that Employee 1, 2, and 3 hold with the organization, I believe that their estimates more closely captured the actual amount of donated second-hand clothing that is unsellable. Taking the average of the estimates that Employee 1, 2, and 3 provided would mean that approximately 70 percent of SHC donations that Thrift Store B receives are unsellable.

Finally, the manager at Thrift Store C reported that approximately 50 percent of all of the clothing donations the store receives are unsellable. The manager I spoke to at Value Village

estimated that approximately 60-65 percent of clothing donations that the Victoria, BC location receives are unsellable. Because large proportions of donated clothes are not sold in thrift stores, this supports my argument that thrift stores overemphasize the social and economic value of donated clothes and their ability to 'do good.' Attributing the value of 'doing good' to donated clothes conceals the negative aspects of overconsumption and the problems associated with the commercial export of SHC are hidden from the public.

Through my interviews with 30 individuals who donate second-hand clothing, it was apparent that individual donors have uncritically adopted the idea that clothing donations 'do good.' The majority of individuals that I interviewed indicated that one of their main motivations for donating used clothing was "altruistic." Individuals felt that by donating unwanted clothes they were helping people or charities. An interesting finding was that only one person I interviewed had inquired at that thrift store where she donates second-hand clothes to find out what happens to unsold clothing donations. Although, a large number of participants speculated on what happens to unsold clothing donations at thrift stores, one participant in particular captured what a number of other participants implied in their responses: "It's kinda like once I get rid of it it's not my problem anymore" (Participant 30). As well, participants shared a strong belief that donating clothing, regardless of the end-use, was a preferable and more environmentally friendly method of disposal than throwing unwanted clothing in the garbage.

Municipalities and provinces need to increase consumer knowledge on the environmental problems associated with the overproduction and overconsumption of clothing in order to change individual clothing consumption patterns. Media campaigns that address the environmental problems associated with the production of clothing and the end of life of clothing are needed.

Further, municipalities and provinces need to implement formal textile recycling programs. The burden and cost of recycling textiles should be transferred to fast fashion retailers.

Additional research is needed on the relationship between individuals' donation and consumption patterns and their knowledge of what happens to clothing once it has been donated. Future studies might investigate the relationship between an individuals' environmental attitudes and knowledge and their clothing consumption and donation patterns, or the type and condition of clothing that individuals describe donating, versus the actual type and condition of items that they donate. As well, further research is needed on the relationship between unsold clothing donations in thrift stores and the sale and export of SHC to global South countries.

Non-profit organizations and thrift stores that collect and sell SHC play an important role in preventing large amounts of clothing from ending up in landfills and the revenues raised through the sale of donated clothes fund the valuable philanthropic activities and programs that non-profit organizations provide. Although, I do not intend to downplay the environmental and social benefits of donating SHC, the aim of my research is to provide a critical lens to begin to understand and challenge the role and position that thrift stores in Victoria, BC play in the global trade of SHC. For the most part, research on the global SHC trade tends to present a narrative that the overall impact on global South countries, the main recipients of commercially exported SHC, is positive. However, large amounts of unwanted clothing and textiles end up in landfills, both in the country where individuals who dispose of these items are located, and also in global South landfills where second-hand imports that can't be sold or traded are disposed of. The notion that clothing donations 'do good' is problematic considering the fact the majority of these items do not remain in the communities where these items were 'gifted.'

Does the narrative that non-profit organizations and thrift stores present – that clothing donations 'do good' – contribute to increasing clothing consumption patterns? If thrift stores are not the primary end market for donated clothing in Canada, then we really need to question our clothing consumption and disposal practices.

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# Appendix A

## Interview Schedule for Individuals who donate Second-hand Clothing

Date:
Name of Interviewee:
Title/Position of Interviewee:
Name of Thrift Store:

What is your occupation?

What age group are you in: under 20; 20-29; 30-39; 40-49; 50-59; over 60?

What are your motivations for donating second-hand clothing (e.g. cleaning out your closet or out-of style)?

How 'old' would you say the average age of the clothes you donate are? (e.g. bought within the last year; bought a year ago, bought two years ago, bought between 2-5 years, bought more than 5 years ago).

How often do you donate second-hand clothing?

What thrift stores do you usually donate to? Is there a reason why you donate to these thrift stores and not to others?

Where do you normally purchase new clothing?

How often do you normally purchase new clothing?

Are you aware of how your second-hand clothing donations are sorted and processed? Do you know what happens to second-hand clothing that does not sell in thrift stores?

Are you aware that clothing that is stained or damaged can still be donated and recycled (e.g. used clothing is recycled into industrial rags, insulation, or carpet padding)?

Are you aware that approximately 85 percent of all household textiles in Canada end up in landfills and that only about 10-20 percent of donated second-hand clothing is actually sold in thrift stores?

Do you ever think about your role as a consumer of clothing, and donator of used clothing in terms of any problems associated with the environmental impact of the fast-fashion industry and

the problems associated with the overproduction and overconsumption of clothing? (If the person has no idea of the problems, note that the garment industry is a major contributor to carbon emissions (through resource production and extraction, the consumption of large amounts of water (for cotton cultivation, fabric dyeing which uses hazardous chemicals and finishing), global transportation, and disposal… and ask them for their reaction).

Appendix B

Interview Schedule for Thrift Store Staff Members

Date:
Name of Interviewee:
Title/Position of Interviewee:
Name of Thrift Store:

**1. Background information on the Organization**

Where is your organization's head office or headquarters located?

When was your organization founded?

Can you briefly describe the organizational structure of your company?

Is your organization a registered charity in Canada?

Does your organization describe itself as a "social enterprise"? (If so, why and what does it mean to be a 'social enterprise' and a charity?)

What is your organization's mission statement and goals?

How many thrift stores does your organization own and operate in Canada and internationally? In what other countries does your organization operate?

What is the organization's relationship with other charitable organizations?

**2. Background information on the interviewee**

What is your job title?

Please describe your area of responsibility?

For how long have you worked with this organization?

What is your academic training (or qualification)?

How many people do you have working with you in your team? What are their responsibilities?

**3. Employees**

How many workers are employed with this organization? How many workers are employed at this specific thrift store?

What are the percentage or number of workers that are volunteers, casual, temporary, part-time, and full-time employees?

What are the average wages for retail associates, donation station attendants, and store managers?

Do male and female workers in the same job receive the same wage? Give rates or average earnings of male and female workers:

Is the workplace unionized?

How many workers in the thrift store are members of unions (what proportion)?

**4. Competitors**

In terms of the thrift store, what companies do you regard as your closest competitors? Where are their stores located? In terms of your yearly profits, how well does this store do in comparison to your closet competitor?

What does your store do to try to improve its market position?

What is the greatest challenge the organization faces today; in the coming year; and in five years from now?

**5. Second-hand Clothing Donations**

Where do second-hand clothing donations come from? (e.g. directly from individuals? From non-profits that are not part of your organization?)

How long have you had this relationship (with other NGOs)?

Does your organization have a donation center separate from the thrift store?

Does your organization have donation bins? How many donation bins does your organization have and where are they located?

Does your organization have its own recycling center?

Are there any other ways that you receive second-hand clothing?

How easy or hard is it to receive similar levels of clothing donations each year?

What is the general quality of second-hand clothing that your store receives? Do you receive more female clothing items than male? More adult than child?

Does your thrift store receive more second-hand clothing than it can sell?

### 5.2 Sorting and Processing

Please describe what happens to second-hand clothing once it arrives at your thrift store from the moment it arrives (outline each step, and who does what in each step).

What are the criteria for sorting second-hand clothing donations? Is it based on quality of the item or what is sold in the store?

Please describe the sorting process. How is the clothing sorted? Who sorts the clothing? Based on what criteria?

What criteria is used to decide what clothes are sold in the store?

## 6. Proceeds

How are the proceeds from the sale of second-hand clothing in the thrift store channeled back into the organization itself?

## 7. Disposal

What is the percentage of second-hand clothing donations that you receive that are sold in your store?

Please give me an idea of the quantity: how many pounds / tons of clothing did your organization receive each year in the last 5 years?

What happens to second-hand clothing items that are not / cannot be sold in your store? (Probe: where do the items go in terms of level - regional, national, international; probe who gets the clothing in terms of name of organization or intermediary; probe how long that relationship has existed, how it was established, and whether it can change from year to year).

a) Are the second-hand clothes sold to local or international rag dealers? What is the approximate percentage of second-hand clothing that is sold to rag dealers? How much does your company receive per item for the sale?

b) Are the second-hand clothes sold to local or international textile recycling firms? What is the approximate percentage of second-hand clothing that is sold to textile recycling firms? How much does your company receive per item for the sale?

c) Are the clothes sold and shipped to any African countries? What countries are the clothes sold and shipped to? What is the approximate percentage of second-hand clothing that is shipped to African countries? How much does your company receive per item for the sale?

d) What is the percentage of unsold second-hand clothing that ends up in landfills?