

Fast and ***Slow*** Fashions as seen through the Millennial Mindset

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ABSTRACT

The term slow fashion was coined by Kate Fletcher to counter the growing trend of the fast fashion industry. In recent years the clothing industry has been dominated by fast fashion that has spurred overconsumption whereby people buy more than they need. This study aims to develop a critical-creative thinking framework based on the understandings and insights of how Millennials view apparel consumption.

In order to understand the Millennial mindset with regard to apparel consumption, responses were collected from over a hundred Millennials through an online survey (Phase One), where they discussed their reasons for placing themselves along a scale from slow to fast fashion. The findings uncovered a new group of consumers, the undecided+exploring, who identified with both slow and fast fashion. Valuable insights extracted from the survey informed the development of a research toolkit that was used in a series of participatory workshops (Phase Two) with the goal to construct a conceptual model of Millennial apparel consumption.

Further understanding of slow fashion, as seen through the Millennial mindset, will inspire and guide designers, manufacturers, and consumers to make more sustainable decisions when developing, selling, and buying clothing items.

PHASE 1: SURVEY

The survey was sent out to Millennial participants. The survey consisted of closed, open, and dichotomous questions, as well a slider scale (Law, n.d.) that was used to understand where participants viewed themselves in terms of fast or slow fashion.

Although this research specifically studied slow and fast fashion consumers, a third category of fashion consumer, the undecided+exploring, emerged from the findings. They are aware of fast and slow fashions and can decide what avenue to go down. These undecided+exploring consumers are going through physical and economic transformations as they mature.

The number of wash cycles an item of clothing is put through in its life cycle greatly compromises the integrity of the fabric, breaking down the fibers, and accounting for most of the carbon footprint of clothing (Levi's, 2015). When it came to washing their clothes, 61.9% of fast fashion consumers washed their clothes once a week, slow fashion consumers 41.2%, and undecided+exploring consumers washed theirs 20% (Figure 1).

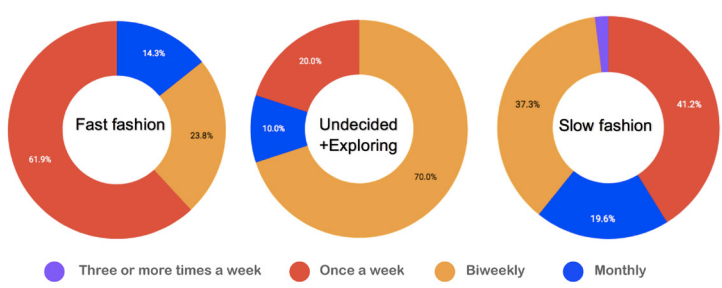


Figure 1: The frequency of washing for fast, undecided+exploring, and slow fashion Millennials

Slow fashion consumers tend to be older Millennials who spend more money on their clothing. 11.8% of this group of Millennials said they would hold on to their clothing items for 5 to 10 years while only 4.8% of fast fashion Millennials would do so for this amount of time. 10% of the undecided-exploring consumers said they would keep their clothing items for over 10 years (Figure 2).

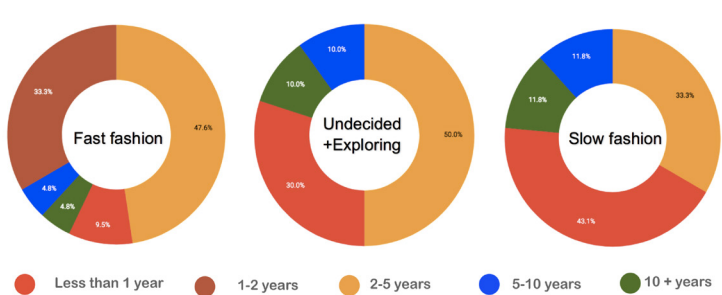


Figure 2: The amount of time Millennials hold on to clothing items

PHASE 2: PARTICIPATORY WORKSHOPS

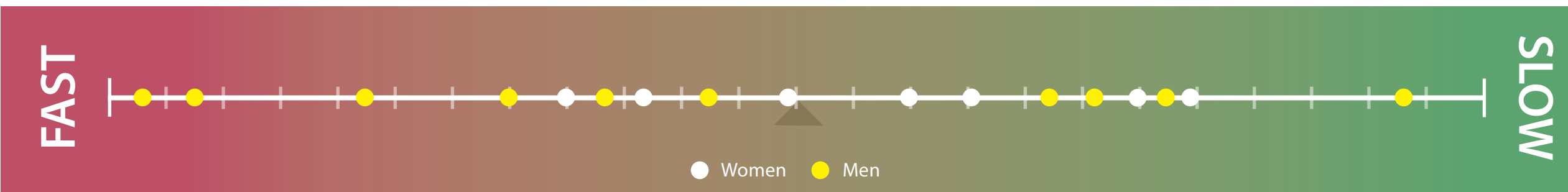


Figure 3: Preliminary Positioning Exercise

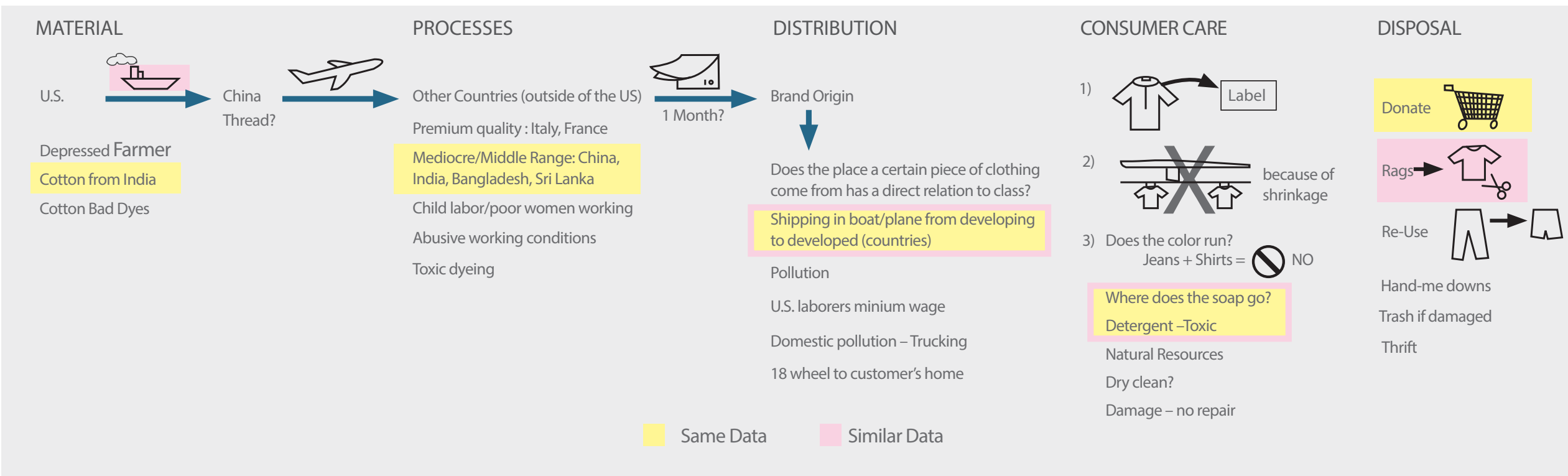


Figure 4: Current Journey Map of a Clothing Item

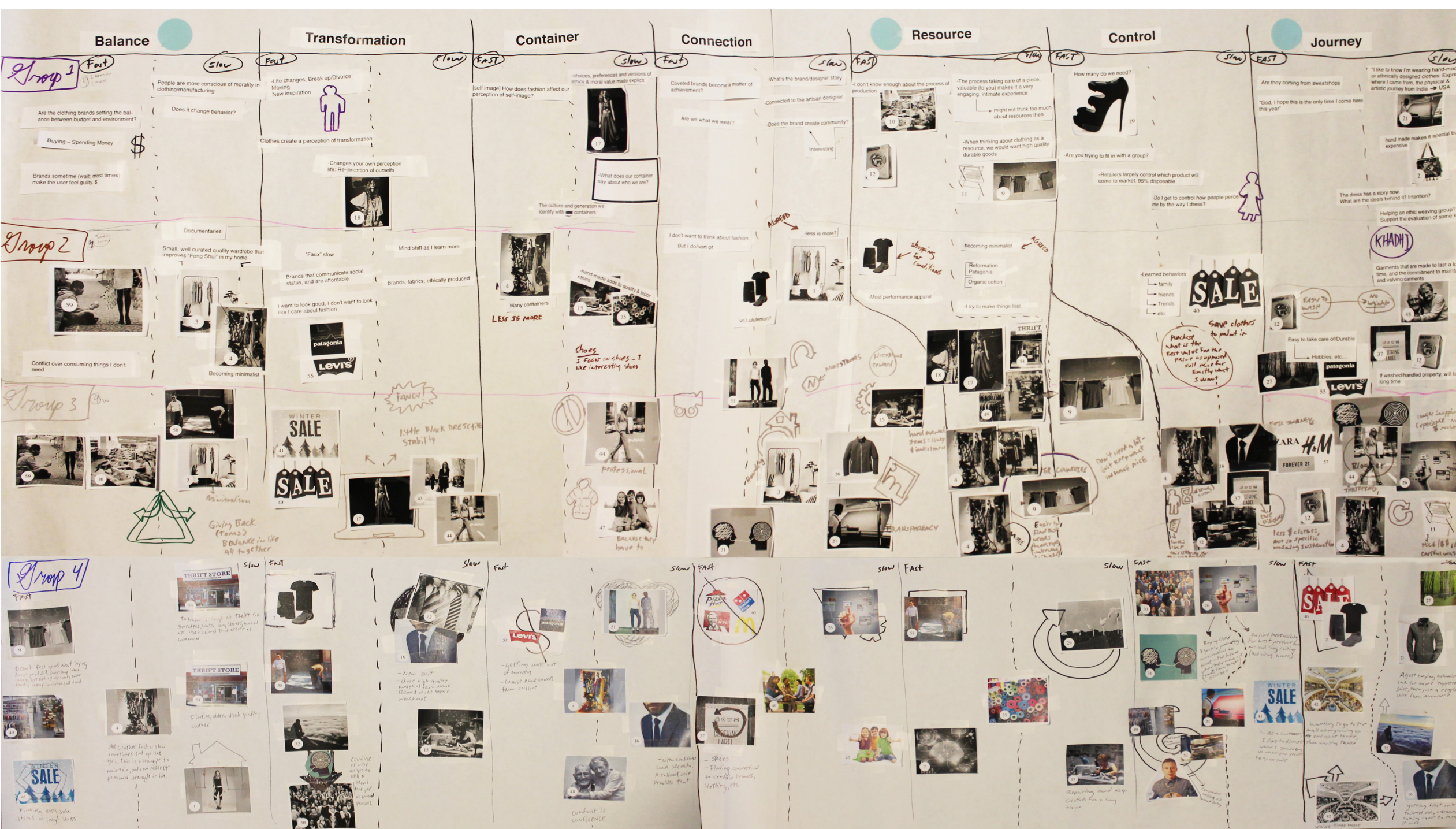


Figure 5: Collaging Exercise based on the Seven Deep Metaphors

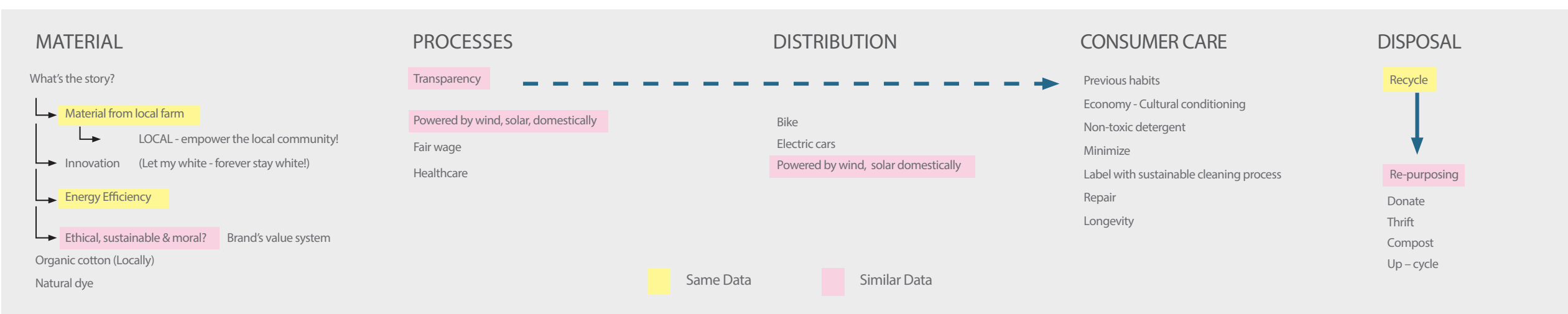


Figure 6: The Ideal Journey of a Clothing Item

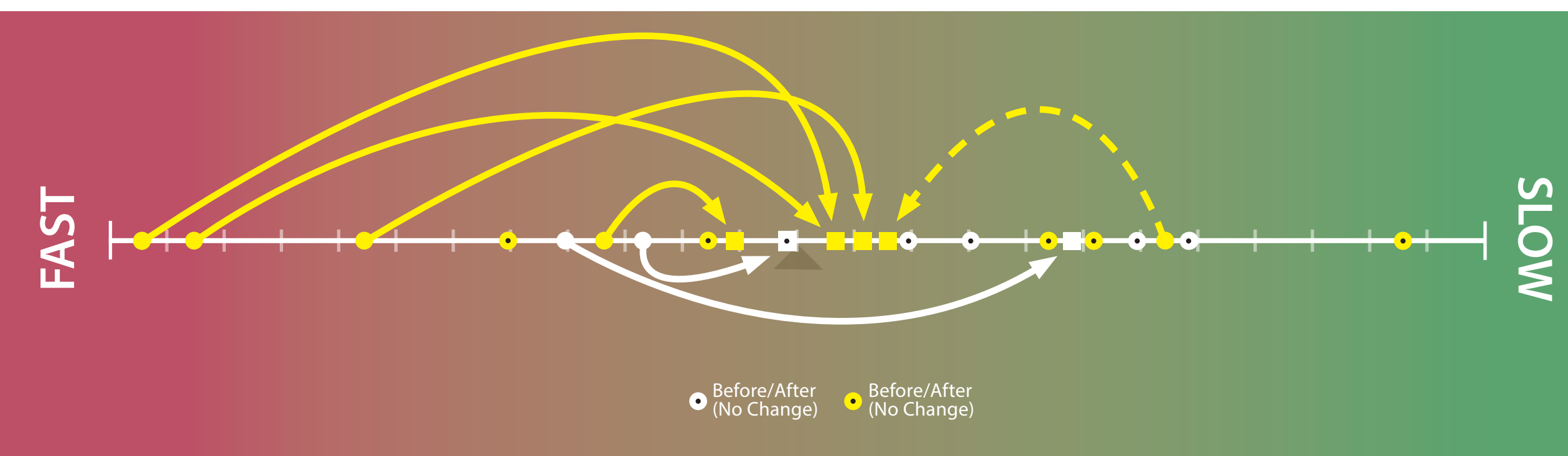
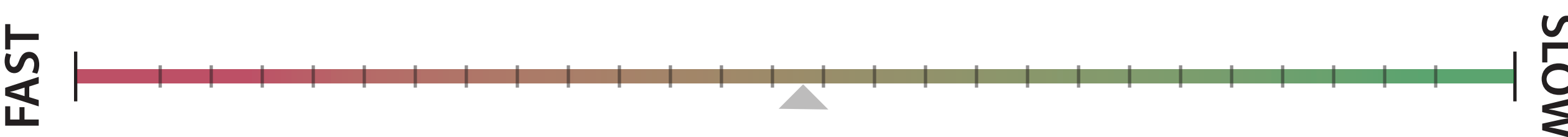


Figure 7: Post-Positioning Exercise showing the change in perception of participants at the end of the session

Fast and Slow Fashions as seen through the IASDR

Want to participate? Please mark an "X" where you perceive yourself to be on the scale from FAST to SLOW fashion.



The first exercise (Figure 3) consisted of a **preliminary positioning**, where participants marked on a line where they see themselves in terms of fast or slow fashion. Many women posted themselves in the undecided+exploring section as well as in the slow fashion section, while men positioned themselves in the undecided+exploring and the fast fashion sections.

Then the participants were asked to work together on creating a **current journey map** (Figure 4) for a clothing item utilizing the Transforming Fashion Product concept as a baseline (Fletcher & Grose, 2012). The participants questioned a lot of their collective knowledge. There was uncertainty about where materials were grown and how they were processed, which can be seen in the number of questions marks present in the activity. While they questioned where a lot of the products came from, they were very aware of the negative aspects of the industry overall: from sweatshops and poor working conditions, to the use of toxic chemicals in the manufacturing of clothes, to the amount of natural resources wasted in the caring of clothes, to the possible discarding of the clothes in landfills.

A **collaging exercise** was conducted after the preliminary positioning activity. The collaging toolkit included visual materials to help participants to express what they were thinking and feeling. Gerald and Lindsay Zaltman's "Deep Metaphors" was used as a viewing lens to reveal Millennials' rational and emotional states of mind on sustainable fashion. The seven Deep Metaphors—Balance, Transformation, Journey, Container, Connection, Resource, and Control—are universal drivers of human behavior that shape what people think, hear, say, and do (Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008). Participants were asked to fill the posters (Figure 5) with visual images and written statements regarding fast or slow fashion in relationship to the Deep Metaphors.

Most of the participants gravitated towards three of the metaphors: Balance, Resource, and Journey. When filling out the Balance metaphor, participants talked about both the environment and their own ideas of consumption. They expressed awareness of the environmental effects of fast-fashion and overconsumption in Resource. For the Journey metaphor, participants were most interested in thinking about discussing the life cycle of clothing items.

Participants envisioned the **ideal journey** (Figure 6) of a future clothing product utilizing Fletcher and Grose's Transforming Fashion Product concepts as the baseline. This mapping exercise allowed the participants to take their shared knowledge and collaborate on a more sustainable and transparent journey map for a clothing product.

Participants expressed a desire to move towards more sustainable materials such as organic cotton. They preferred a more localized production process, which is one of the themes of slow fashion, in expressing the need for locally made products and community engagement. Most groups mentioned a need for transparency in the sourcing of materials and labor, to ensure safer clothing products and production environments. They also demanded more innovative materials that encourage less washing and reduce the carbon footprint. Overall, most participants wanted to see all clothing products being recycled or biodegradable.

Participants were again asked to mark on the line where they saw themselves in terms of fast or slow fashion (Figure 7). This was used to document any changes in perception from the beginning of the session to the end. A number of participants moved their positions from fast fashion to the middle (undecided+exploring) section which reveals that the workshop exercises caused them to question their consumption habits.

NEXT STEPS

The author will continue to analyze and summarize all the data obtained including the survey responses and the results of the collaging exercise of Deep Metaphors. The final outcomes of this study could be applied to identify new mindsets for educating and inspiring people to embrace slow and sustainable fashions.

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Fletcher, K., & Grose, L. (2012). *Fashion & sustainability: Design for change*. London, England: Laurence King. | Fletcher, K. (January 01, 2007). THE GREEN PAGES - Slow fashion - It's quality not quantity that counts, says eco textile designer Kate Fletcher. *The Ecologist*, 37, 5, 71. | Pookulangara, S., & Shephard, A. (March 01, 2013). Slow fashion movement: Understanding consumer perceptions—An exploratory study. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 20, 2, 200-206. | Zaltman, G. & Zaltman, L. (2008). *Marketing Metaphors: What Deep Metaphors Reveal About the Minds of Consumers*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.

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