

**UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS LONDON**

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**Identity, Culture, and Belonging: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of  
Expatriates Navigating the Role of Fashion in Cross-Cultural Contexts**

by

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## Abstract

In today's globalised context, fashion plays a critical role in the expression of identity and belonging, especially for individuals navigating cross-cultural transitions. While much of the existing literature focuses on acculturation processes and fashion used to express identity, research on how expatriates, an often overlooked group in contemporary studies, use clothing to navigate complex layers of their identity and belonging is limited.

This study examines the lived experiences of six female expatriates, each having relocated at least twice. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) revealed three superordinate themes: (1) Fashion as a Tool for Identity Construction, (2) Fashion as an Emotional and Memory Anchor, and (3) Fashion as a Tool for Social Navigation.

The analysis revealed that while many participants maintained a stable sense of self by retaining essential aspects of their style during relocations, they also adapted to new contexts in response to identity disturbance. Fashion served not just as a means of expressing oneself, but also as an emotional anchor and preserving personal memories of people or places. Some individuals adopted local dress norms to fit in, while others fought conformity, utilising clothing to show their authenticity and individuality in diverse cultural settings.

The study highlights the role of fashion in expatriates' lives and offers valuable insights for brands seeking to better understand and engage with globally mobile consumers. These findings further reveal the complex layers of identity that expatriates navigate through fashion, contributing to the broader discourse on identity, fashion, and cultural adaptation.

## Table of Contents

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>AI USE DISCLOSURE</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>11</b>
BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE: .....	11
AIM AND OBJECTIVES .....	12
METHODOLOGY .....	12
OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION’S STRUCTURE .....	13
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	<b>14</b>
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM .....	14
UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY THROUGH FASHION.....	14
FASHION AS AN EXTENSION OF THE SELF .....	15
CULTURAL IDENTITY .....	16
CULTURAL IDENTITY FRAMEWORKS.....	17
ACCULTURATION AND ADAPTATION .....	19
RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND AIMS .....	20
<b>METHODS</b> .....	<b>21</b>
PARTICIPANTS .....	21
MATERIALS .....	22
PROCEDURE .....	23
DATA ANALYSIS.....	24
RESEARCH ETHICS.....	25
REFLEXIVITY .....	25
<b>RESULTS</b> .....	<b>28</b>
1. FASHION TO CONSTRUCT AND RECONSTRUCT IDENTITY .....	29
1.1. <i>Maintaining a stable identity</i> .....	29
1.2. <i>Responding to identity disruption</i> .....	30
1.3. <i>Expressing different sides of the self because of relocation</i> .....	32
2. FASHION AS AN EMOTIONAL AND MEMORY ANCHOR.....	33
2.1. <i>Clothing used to express emotions</i> .....	33
2.2. <i>Clothing are memory holders</i> .....	34
3. FASHION AS A TOOL FOR BELONGING AND SOCIAL NAVIGATION .....	36
3.1. <i>Adapting to fit in</i> .....	36
3.2. <i>Resisting and questioning conformity</i> .....	37
<b>DISCUSSION</b> .....	<b>40</b>
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS .....	40
<i>What role does fashion play in the identity construction of expatriates during cultural transitions ?</i> .....	40
<i>How do expatriates use fashion to negotiate belonging or resistance within new cultural environments ?</i> .....	41
STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE STUDY .....	42
IMPLICATIONS.....	43
CONCLUSION .....	44
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	<b>45</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b> .....	<b>53</b>

APPENDIX A: REFLECTIVE STATEMENT .....	53
APPENDIX B: DISSERTATION TIME PLAN .....	58
APPENDIX C: APPROVED ETHICS APPLICATION .....	59
APPENDIX D: EVALUATIVE COMMENTARY .....	76
<i>Reflexivity journal extract</i> .....	76
<i>Transcription and IPA coding</i> .....	77

### **List of Tables**

**Table 1** - Participant's relocation history

**Table 2** - Depiction of superordinate themes and their relevant subordinate themes

## **List of Abbreviations**

**IPA** - Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

**BPS** - British Psychological Society

**UAL** - University of the Arts London

**CFS** - Cultural Frame Switching

## Statement of Originality

I, *Valentina Libutti*, certify that:

- This is an original and individual piece of work and no part of this has been written by anyone else.
- I have acknowledged (appropriately referenced using the APA referencing system) all sources and citations.
- No section of this assignment has been plagiarised.
- This work has not been submitted for any other assessment.



03-05-2025

## AI Use Disclosure

### Acknowledgement Statement

*"I acknowledge the use of <https://chatgpt.com/> and <https://claude.ai/> accessed between February and May 2025 to help me organise my research for my literature review and cut down my sections when finalising my dissertation, and understanding IPA. The prompts used include: How can I structure my literature review [18-02-2025]? How can I define expatriates in my specific study [24-02-2025]? How can I add criticality in my literature review [15-03-25]? How can I be interpretative rather than just descriptive when analysing my data [29-04-25]? Where do I repeat myself in this section [2-05-25]?"*

*The output from these prompts were used to help structure the literature review of this dissertation, to understand IPA when analysing the data, and cut down the word count. All final written content and decisions were my own work.*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dilutti', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

13/05/2025

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## Introduction

### Background and rationale:

Fashion has long been a crucial aspect of human existence, offering a way for individuals to communicate their identities through their clothing choices. Clothing reflects personal tastes, values, and cultural backgrounds, allowing individuals to express themselves in various social settings. However, as individuals move to new places, their personal identity and sense of belonging face challenges from the expectations and norms of their new environment. This interplay between individual and collective identity is increasingly influenced by the forces of globalisation, transforming the fashion landscape and “creating a melting of styles, traditions, and influences from every corner of the globe” (Stéphane, 2024).

As globalisation is defined as "the widening, deepening, and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life" (Servaes & Lie, 2003), it has fundamentally altered how fashion operates across cultures. In today's world, fashion no longer exists in isolated cultural contexts; instead, it flourishes within global networks that connect diverse cultures and ideas. This interconnectedness has transformed fashion into an even more complex and nuanced tool for expressing identity, as individuals navigate local and global influences in their clothing choices.

This research focuses on individuals who have relocated multiple times, expatriates, who are defined by Shaffer et al. (2012) as individuals who move indefinitely abroad multiple times for diverse reasons. This study hopes to provide insights into how different levels of cultural exposure influence identity formation and belonging through fashion. While existing research has explored fashion's role in self-presentation and cultural expression (Crane, 2012; Kaiser & Green, 2021), there remains limited understanding of how mobility specifically shapes these dynamics.

Fashion, as an extension of individuality, offers a unique window into the ways globalisation creates both challenges and opportunities for personal expression and identity negotiation across cultural boundaries. This study seeks to contribute meaningfully to the ongoing academic discourse surrounding fashion and identity by examining a group of individuals who are often overlooked in traditional identity studies. By focusing on expatriates, this study aims to bridge the gap between established theories of identity and belonging in relation to fashion. Additionally, by exploring how expatriates use fashion to navigate their identities in new cultural contexts, this research offers practical insights that can guide fashion brands in appealing to a growing group of globally mobile consumers.

### **Aim and objectives**

The primary aim of this dissertation is to explore how fashion serves as a tool for identity construction among expatriates in an increasingly globalised world. Specifically, the study seeks to understand how lived experiences and cultural exposure shape expatriates' fashion choices and the meanings they assign to their clothing. The research will also examine how expatriates navigate social integration and belonging through fashion, focusing on the ways they use clothing to express both individuality and cultural affiliation in a global context.

### **Methodology**

This research adopts a qualitative methodology, employing semi-structured interviews to collect rich personal narratives of six female participants who relocated at least twice. The study utilises IPA to examine these narratives in depth, enabling detailed exploration of individual experiences and revealing the nuanced ways participants negotiate identity and belonging across different cultural contexts. This qualitative approach facilitates a profound investigation into personal experiences, allowing the emergence of unanticipated themes and meanings that might otherwise be missed in a more structured,

quantitative approach. Reflexivity is also integrated into the research process, enabling a transparent examination of the researcher's positionality, potential biases, and subjective influences.

### **Overview of the dissertation's structure**

The structure of this dissertation is carefully crafted to provide a comprehensive exploration of the research topic, with psychological concepts interwoven as a critical analytical thread throughout the entire research paper. Each section builds upon the previous one, ensuring to guide the reader through a logical progression of ideas while maintaining a strong theoretical foundation.

The study begins with the Introduction, which outlines the rationale and significance of the research, setting the stage for the in-depth exploration that follows. The Literature Review draws on classical and contemporary sources to examine relevant theories and debates. It identifies gaps this research addresses, highlighting the need for further study. Following that, the Methodology provides a transparent account of the research design. This section explains the research approach, participant selection criteria, data collection process, and ethical considerations. The Results present the findings of the study, considering each participant's account. In the Discussion, the research findings are critically interpreted, contextualised, and brought back to both the research questions and the existing literature. The Discussion goes beyond mere reporting, offering nuanced insights and acknowledging potential limitations and areas for further research. The Conclusion synthesises the dissertation's aims and reflects on the broader significance of the research.

## **Literature Review**

### **Statement of the problem**

Built upon established psychological theories, the significance of this study lies in its potential to shed light on the complex interplay between fashion, cultural identity, and adaptation processes in our increasingly globalised world. Understanding how expatriates navigate different cultural influences through fashion offers insight into modern identity formation and helps brands connect with consumers whose style goes beyond traditional cultural boundaries. The term expatriate has been used variably across disciplines. For the purpose of this research, expatriates are defined as individuals who have relocated multiple times for reasons including but not limited to study, family, or work. Unlike immigrants, whose moves may be permanent or driven by necessity, expatriates typically relocate voluntarily and temporarily (Sam & Berry, 2006). However, despite growing interest in expatriate adjustment (Haslberger et al., 2013; Lee & Kartika, 2014), less attention has been paid to expatriate acculturation (Lineberry, 2012) and identity formation (Kohonen, 2008), particularly in relation to fashion. This research contributes to that gap by exploring how fashion mediates identity and belonging for this often-overlooked group.

### **Understanding identity through fashion**

"The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled" (Berger, 1972). Clothing choices serve as expressions of identity, transforming fashion into a dynamic extension of the self. Identity comprises an individual's thoughts, feelings, and attitudes toward themselves (Goldsmith et al., 1999), and fashion, beyond its aesthetic function, operates as a psychological and cultural tool for expressing the self and their position within society.

To fully comprehend how fashion functions as an identity marker, it is important to explore its theoretical dimensions. Goldsmith et al. (1999) argue that consumers select products that reflect their self-image. Within this framework, the literature commonly distinguishes between ideal self-concept and real self-concept. Kaiser (1983) proposes that clothing decisions involve dialogue between the 'I' (creative self interpreting garments subjectively) and the 'Me' (social self concerned with others' reactions), aligning with Sirgy's (1982) concept of the social self. Grubb and Grathwohl's (1967) "situational self" further expands this, suggesting that identity is shaped by specific contexts. Since identities are fundamentally embedded in social relations (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992), the situational aspect remains critically important in understanding fashion choices. While these frameworks lay an important foundation for understanding identity, most of them reflect a view of identity that is not as stable and binary anymore. Contemporary literature argues that identity is fluid and context-dependent, shaped by ongoing interactions between the individual and their environment (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Gergen, 2016). This understanding is especially relevant for expatriates, whose repeated relocations require them to constantly negotiate and redefine their identity across shifting cultural settings.

### **Fashion as an extension of the self**

Research consistently demonstrates that fashion functions as an extension of the self. Rosa et al. (2006) suggest individuals use clothing to affirm and communicate their self-concept, choosing garments that reflect specific aspects of identity (McNeill, 2018). This process aligns with self-presentation theory, where fashion helps shape how one is perceived by others (Aku Amekplenu, 2024). While some use clothing as a creative outlet, others use it to express values or cultural ties. However, to fully grasp how fashion operates beyond the individual, Barthes (1968) provides a semiotic view, treating clothing as a system of signs where garments carry socially constructed meanings. These meanings are not inherent but

emerge through shared social codes; a suit, for instance, may signify professionalism in one context and rigidity in another (Xie, 2021), much like how traditional clothing changes significance depending on the cultural spaces where it appears. Barthes' idea of "mythologies" further reveals how clothing can reinforce or subvert cultural narratives, exposing the ideological forces embedded in everyday dress (Achille & Moudileno, 2016). For expatriates, who navigate different cultural contexts, this symbolic function of fashion becomes especially significant. Clothing can help them assert familiarity, adapt to new settings, or deliberately highlight differences.

Clothing also serves as a powerful mechanism for signalling group affiliation. According to Social Identity Theory, individuals derive part of their self-concept from group affiliations (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Clothing choices often signal these affiliations, reinforcing "ingroup favouritism" bonds through shared aesthetics (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). Hebdige's (1979) work examines how subcultures use fashion as a symbolic language to communicate both belonging and resistance, while Yuniya Kawamura (2013) provides a comprehensive analysis of how fashion functions as a mechanism for expressing alignment with social groups. Understanding these theoretical frameworks provides valuable insights into how different populations navigate identity challenges through fashion choices.

### **Cultural identity**

Culture shapes how individuals perceive the world, interact socially, and express themselves (Barker, 2015). Fashion operates within this cultural framework, and their relationship is bidirectional: cultural norms influence fashion choices, while fashion itself becomes a tool for reinforcing or challenging cultural identities. In fact, according to Aku Amekplenu (2024), "personal experiences, cultural background, and social influences shape how individuals perceive and utilise fashion for self-expression." This indicates that fashion is closely linked to identity and personal experience. Researchers highlight that in today's

multicultural societies, cultural identity is not fixed but constantly shaped through negotiation and adaptation (Aku Amekplenu, 2024). Cultural identity, often considered a form of social identity, reflects the interface between the individual and their cultural context (Padilla & Perez, 2003). It includes a sense of belonging to a group, as well as attitudes toward both one's own and other cultures (Arnett Jensen, 2003). For expatriates, this identity becomes highly fluid as clothing choices help them navigate these changes, allowing them to blend in, stand out, or combine elements from multiple traditions. However, scholars have questioned the clarity of the concept of culture itself. Bhatia and Ram (2001) argue that it is difficult to determine what defines a culture or where one ends and another begins. Gjerde (2004) warns against treating culture as a fixed category, as doing so risks reducing people to static stereotypes. These critiques are particularly relevant in globalised contexts where people are exposed to and influenced by diverse cultures simultaneously.

This global exposure leads to the hybridisation of fashion. Roche (2006) and Yuniya Kawamura (2004) describe how globalisation fosters the merging of diverse cultural influences into new fashion expressions. Under the backdrop of globalisation, fashion elements from different regions have begun to cross borders, and designers increasingly blend cross-cultural influences into fashion (Lin, 2024). Bosma and Kunnen (2001) argue that identity changes when internal values or external conditions shift. For mobile individuals, fashion becomes a practical and symbolic tool to manage these changes, supporting identity continuity while negotiating new cultural affiliations.

### **Cultural identity frameworks**

As individuals navigate multiple cultural environments, their fashion choices often reflect shifts in mindset and identity. CFS explains how bicultural individuals adjust their behaviour based on cultural cues. A person may adopt different styles depending on the context, leaning toward Western aesthetics in one setting and traditional ones in another (Benet-Martínez et

al., 2002). This reflects two internalised cultural systems activated by specific triggers like language or setting (Luna et al., 2008; No, 2013). In fashion, this manifests in changing style to align with different cultural expectations. Although primarily studied in psychology, CFS has significant implications for fashion. Clothing may function both as a cue for cultural mindsets and as an expression of those mindsets. For expatriates, style becomes a strategy: adapting, blending in, or asserting difference depending on the context. Yet, this flexibility and frequent shifting can obscure identity continuity.

Intersectionality offers another lens to understand cultural identity. Cho et al. (2013) argue that cultural identity must be viewed within a framework of intersecting social categories such as race, gender, and class that together shape how people experience belonging and exclusion. This shows that identity is shaped by many overlapping factors, which affect how people move through and relate to different cultural environments. Adding to that, Ong (2011) explores the concept of "cosmopolitanism," a cultural identity that moves beyond national boundaries and embraces a global outlook. This view challenges traditional notions of fixed cultural identities and connects directly to how fashion hybridity emerges in individual style choices. Expatriate identity is often linked to cosmopolitan identity, where individuals may become culturally detached. This refers to a situation in which a person does not feel strongly linked to any one culture but becomes skilled at navigating across many (Grinstein & Wathieu, 2012). In the acculturation literature, this state is described as individualism, where personal autonomy is valued over cultural belonging (Bourhis et al., 1997). Although these frameworks provide helpful cognitive models, they are primarily grounded in controlled psychological studies, which may not account for the emotional and situational aspects of fashion choice in real-world settings.

## **Acculturation and adaptation**

One of the central arguments advanced in the literature is that acculturation plays a key role in shaping and reshaping cultural identity. As previous sections have shown, fashion reflects how people express identity and negotiate cultural belonging. Acculturation adds another layer to this process, offering a framework to understand how individuals navigate new cultural settings. Acculturation refers to the cultural and psychological changes that occur when individuals come into contact with a new cultural environment (Gibson, 2001; Frogel, 2015). At its core, it involves two dimensions: adopting values and behaviours of the host culture and retaining elements of one's culture of origin (Phinney & Flores, 2002). This dual process shapes how individuals redefine their identity during cultural transitions. One dominant view in the literature is that acculturation drives fashion consumption (Das & Jebarajakirthy, 2020). While acculturation has been widely examined among immigrants and refugees, it has been less studied in relation to expatriates (Lineberry, 2012). Their relocation is typically driven by choice rather than necessity, affecting their approach to cultural adaptation and identity. Some adopt a cosmopolitan outlook, adapting flexibly across contexts, while others retain their original identity, making only superficial adjustments to local culture (Harvey & Novicevic, 2006). Berry's (1997) work on acculturation provides one of the most widely used models in cross-cultural psychology. It outlines four acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalisation, based on individuals' attitudes toward maintaining their original culture and engaging with the host culture. While this framework has been widely applied to immigrants and refugees, its relevance to expatriates remains unexplored (Lineberry, 2012). A complementary model by Berry et al. (1989) focuses on attitudes toward acculturation, suggesting that adjustment outcomes depend not only on individual preferences but also on the host society's openness to cultural diversity.

While acculturation describes the process of cultural and psychological change, adaptation focuses on its outcomes. It concerns how individuals achieve psychological well-being and adjust to daily life in a new environment (Gezentsvey & Ward, 2008). Including adaptation helps explain how people respond emotionally after relocating. In fashion, adaptation reflects how individuals use clothing to manage change and maintain stability, and immigrants may adopt local styles to blend in while maintaining elements of their cultural dress to preserve identity (Lestage, 2001). Immigrants often balance preserving heritage with fitting into the host society (Urquia & Gagnon, 2011). Expatriates might go through similar negotiations.

### **Research questions and aims**

This study aims to examine how fashion supports identity construction and social integration among expatriates in a globalised world. It investigates how lived experience and cultural exposure shape fashion choices, the meanings attributed to clothing, and how fashion is used to negotiate belonging or resistance in new environments. The research is guided by two research questions:

1. What role does fashion play in the identity construction of expatriates during cultural transitions?
2. How do expatriates use fashion to negotiate belonging or resistance within new cultural environments?

## Methods

### Participants

The inclusion criteria comprised any individual, male or female, who relocated at least twice in their life. However, only females responded to the invitation to take part in this research, and the final sample consisted of six participants aged between 22 and 53 ( $M=27$ ). This sample size aligns with IPA's emphasis on producing rich, in-depth accounts of individual experiences. The detailed demographic information about each participant is presented in Table 1 below. To protect anonymity, humanise the analysis, and enhance narrative clarity, all participants were assigned a pseudonym instead of a number for the results section. In line with the inclusion criteria, details regarding the countries participants had lived in, the duration of their stay in each, and their country of origin were also carefully recorded.

**Table 1***Participant's relocation history*

Participants	Pseudonym	Country of origin	Relocation history and years
Participant 1	Carlotta	Italy and Luxembourg	<i>Eight countries:</i> Italy (4y), France (7y), Mauritius (3y), Tunisia (4y), United Kingdom (5y), Luxembourg (1y), Belgium (1y), and Senegal (2y).
Participant 2	Deborah	Luxembourg	<i>Seven countries:</i> Luxembourg (18y), Italy (10y), Belgium (3y), France (7y), Mauritius (3y), Tunisia (4y), and the United Arab Emirates (9y).
Participant 3	Catalina	Puerto-Rico	<i>Three countries:</i> Mexico (2y), the United States (18y), and the United Kingdom (3y).
Participant 4	Fanny	Colombia	<i>Four countries:</i> Colombia (18y), Spain (3y), United States (1y), Italy (1y), and the United Kingdom (10y).
Participant 5	Mila	Spain	<i>Five countries:</i> Mexico (2y), Spain (3y), Belgium (2y), Switzerland (10y), and the United Kingdom (5y).
Participant 6	Emma	Russia	<i>Six countries:</i> Malawi (1y), Kenya (10y), Israel (4y), Italy (3y), and the United Kingdom (4y).

**Materials**

Given that IPA was used, semi-structured interviews were the most suitable method for gaining in-depth insights into participants' lived experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) argue that this approach fosters the generation of rich, in-depth data, which was essential for this study. The interview structure consisted of two parts: the first included demographic questions, while the second focused on participants' attitudes towards fashion. All questions were open-ended to ensure the interview was not

entirely directed by the researcher but instead gave participants the freedom to expand on the aspects they felt were most relevant to the question (Gillham, 2005). All interview questions are listed in Appendix C.

## **Procedure**

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling to ensure they met the inclusion criteria because “they can offer a research project insight into a particular experience” (Smith et al., 2009). All participants were recruited through the researcher’s personal and professional networks and were contacted via WhatsApp.

A pilot interview was conducted before data collection to assess how effectively questions elicited meaningful responses related to research objectives while providing insights into study feasibility. Although not included in the final analysis, it played a crucial role in strengthening the validity of the study.

Once participants agreed to take part in the study after reading the participant information sheet, a mutually convenient time slot was scheduled for the interview. The interviews were conducted and recorded online via Microsoft Teams and lasted between 30 and 45 minutes ( $M = 41$ ). Prior to the interview, participants were required to read, sign, and return the consent form to the researcher. At the start of the interview, each participant was assigned a unique participant number. The researcher explained the purpose of the study and reminded participants that the interview was a conversation aimed at exploring their relationship with fashion and examining how relocation may have influenced their personal style. Upon completion, participants were thanked for their time and asked to read the debrief sheet, which provided full transparency about the study and information about data withdrawal.

## Data Analysis

IPA was used to explore participants' lived experiences in their own terms and employed a double hermeneutic, meaning that “participants tried to make sense of their world while the researcher tried to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world” (Smith et al., 2009).

In this study, data analysis commenced with verbatim transcription of the interviews. As IPA prioritises the exploration of participants lived experiences, the focus during transcription was not on capturing every detail of speech but rather on representing participants' narratives in a way that supports deep interpretative engagement (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, the full Jefferson transcription system was not used, and selected elements were intentionally incorporated to highlight key non-verbal and paralinguistic features (see appendix D).

The analysis adhered to the structured stages of IPA (Smith et al., 2009): initially, transcripts were read and re-read to achieve immersion in the data. Exploratory comments were then written on each individual transcript (see appendix D) focusing on content, context, and interpretation. Following line-by-line coding, each transcript was analysed separately to preserve the idiographic nature of the study and allow for a more nuanced understanding of individual experiences. From these exploratory notes, emergent themes were identified, reflecting recurring patterns within participants' lived experiences. These themes were then clustered into superordinate themes, which represented shared experiences across participants. In the final stage of analysis, these themes were refined and organised in relation to the research questions. This analytical process facilitated the integration of both emic (insider) and etic (outsider) perspectives. The emic perspective captured participants' personal, subjective experiences, staying true to their unique viewpoints. Conversely, the etic

perspective, shaped by the researcher's interpretation, contextualised these experiences within broader theoretical and cultural frameworks (Morris et al., 1999).

### **Research Ethics**

This study adhered to the ethical guidelines set by the UAL Code of Practice on Research Ethics (UAL, 2020) and the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (British Psychological Society, 2021) and was classified as minimal risk. The BPS code is structured around four key ethical principles: respect, competence, responsibility, and integrity, while the UAL code is guided by ethics of care, respect for persons, social justice, and beneficence. These principles informed the study's design, ensuring ethical rigour in participant recruitment, data collection, and analysis. Ethical approval was granted by UAL's Psychology Research Ethics Panel before data collection began. All participants took part voluntarily and received an information sheet outlining the study's aims, procedures, and potential implications. While not sensitive, some questions could prompt brief emotional responses comparable to daily experiences. Any distress was expected to be brief and comparable to everyday experiences and participants were provided with information about support services if needed. To uphold confidentiality and respect for persons, all interviews were audio-recorded and anonymised during transcription. Participants were given the option to withdraw their data within two weeks of their interview. After this period, audio files were anonymised and securely archived, in line with ethical data management protocols. By adhering to these principles, this study maintained the highest standards of integrity and ethical care, ensuring participants' well-being and the credibility of the research process.

### **Reflexivity**

Given the qualitative nature of this study, the researcher's background, experiences, and relationship with participants inevitably shaped the research process. Reflexivity was central

in maintaining awareness of potential biases and ensuring that the findings accurately reflected participants' lived experiences rather than the researcher's preconceived notions. This section addresses four key dimensions of reflexivity: personal, interpersonal, methodological, and contextual (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022).

To address personal reflexivity, the researcher acknowledged how their own experiences influenced the research. Having lived in seven countries, the researcher has personally developed an understanding of relocation complexities. This background provided valuable insight into the topic, particularly in relation to how individuals navigate identity through fashion in different cultural contexts. The researcher's academic background in fashion psychology shaped the study's approach, emphasising clothing's role as a psychological tool for adaptation and self-expression. This expertise informed the development of open-ended questions designed to explore participants' psychological relationships with clothing without steering them toward predetermined interpretations. However, this familiarity with the subject required careful reflection to avoid assuming that relocation necessarily impacts personal style or identity in a uniform way.

In terms of interpersonal reflexivity, all participants were known to the researcher through personal or professional networks, which may have influenced the depth and openness of responses. Familiarity with the researcher may have encouraged participants to share more personal reflections, but it also introduced the possibility that they omitted details they assumed the researcher already understood. To mitigate this, participants were encouraged to elaborate on their experiences fully, and follow-up questions were used to clarify responses without making assumptions.

For methodological reflexivity, several strategies were implemented to maintain objectivity during data collection and analysis. Bracketing was used to consciously set aside

the researcher's own experiences and expectations when interpreting the data (Gearing, 2004). Additionally, verbatim transcription ensured that participants' narratives remained central to the analysis. The researcher also engaged in reflexive journaling throughout the process, documenting thoughts and potential biases to critically examine their influence on interpretation (see appendix D)

Regarding contextual reflexivity, given their academic background, the researcher was particularly attuned to themes of self-expression, identity construction, and adaptation through fashion. While this expertise provided depth in analysing participants' narratives, it also required continuous self-awareness to ensure that findings were grounded in participants' lived experiences rather than being overly framed by theoretical concepts. By acknowledging these influences, the researcher remained committed to conducting an ethically sound and transparent study.

## Results

This chapter presents the findings derived from IPA of six expatriate participants' narratives. The analysis was guided by two central research questions: 1) What role does fashion play in the identity construction of expatriates during cultural transitions? and 2) How do expatriates use fashion to negotiate belonging or resistance within new cultural environments? Through this analysis, subordinate themes were developed within each account and later brought together to form broader patterns, which are presented as superordinate themes (see table 2). To preserve the idiographic nature of the analysis, each participant's experience is first explored individually allowing the reader to see how meanings emerged within each person's narrative before considering shared experiences across the group.

**Table 2**

*Depiction of superordinate themes and their relevant subordinate themes*

Superordinate themes	Subordinate themes
	Maintaining a stable identity
Fashion to construct and reconstruct identity	Responding to identity disruption
	Expressing different sides of the self because of relocation
Fashion as an emotional and memory anchor	Clothing used to express emotions
	Clothing are memory holders
Fashion as a tool for belonging and social navigation	Adapting to fit in
	Resisting and questioning conformity

## 1. Fashion to construct and reconstruct identity

Each participant is considered in turn, with the analysis focusing on how they used fashion to make sense of who they are. Three subordinate themes were identified across their accounts: (1) maintaining a stable identity, (2) responding to identity disruption, and (3) expressing different sides of the self because of relocation.

### 1.1. *Maintaining a stable identity*

This subordinate theme explores how participants used fashion to maintain a sense of self across different places and phases of their lives. Clothing became more than just a practical concern but became a way of expressing continuity in their identities.

Carlotta explained wearing clothes they already owned after relocating: *“It’s just clothes that I kind of already had from my style that work nicely here, let’s say.”* Rather than altering their style to fit new surroundings, they stayed rooted in what felt authentic. Items like shoes gained lasting significance: *“I still have like three pairs of these shoes to this date, I feel like they fit everything, they’re comfortable.”* The shoes that “fit everything” suggest a sense of pride in finding pieces that remain versatile without compromising who they are. They made small adaptations when relocating while keeping their core style intact: *“I try to adapt to the place that I’m in based on what I like but then I also like to keep something that makes me me and that kind of also shows like where I’m from.”* This shows they wanted to respect their new environment but still hold onto what felt true to them. The phrase “makes me me” shows how important it was that their clothes still showed who they were.

Deborah echoed this sense of long-term stable style. They recalled, *“Also, when I was young, I wasn’t much influenced. I’ve never been in a situation where I said, oh, have to buy this or that to be part of the group.”* Their approach to style was guided by personal taste from an early age, and even in new cultural settings, their style choices remained self-directed. Recalling their time in Mauritius, they said: *“I think the country where I changed*

*most but still keeping my own style was in Mauritius... you could buy your own fabric and have it tailored.*” Being able to design clothing on their own terms reflects a desire to stay in control of how they presented themselves, even when their surroundings changed.

Emma also maintained a consistent wardrobe across relocation but mentioned that how they wore their clothes evolved: *“My wardrobe itself didn’t change that much, but I think the way I put stuff together and the way I make it look has changed.”* This suggests subtle flexibility without compromising the core of their identity.

Fanny similarly described preserving individuality. Even when wearing clothes similar to others around them, they made sure to add something that aligned with who they were: *“I always need something a bit extra so I stayed with my own style ... I would always add a little something that was me”*

## ***1.2. Responding to identity disruption***

This subordinate explores how moving between countries or environments challenged participants’ sense of self, leading them to adjust or rethink how they dressed. For some, this meant holding back aspects of their usual style to fit in, while for others, it required completely adjusting to new climates or dress expectations.

Mila described how frequent moves disrupted their style: *“By the time that I’m happy with the outfit rotation that I have, I move country.”* Each move forced them to rebuild their wardrobe, creating a sense of instability. In Switzerland, they adapted to local norms: *“I maybe wear more black, more girly fitted and clean aesthetic clothes, even though I don’t think that’s like my personal identity.”* Local expectations did not align with how they would usually dress. The need to appear put-together is in conflict with Mila’s usual approach to fashion, which is more expressive and creative. When Mila tried dressing in ways that felt more authentic, they often felt out of place: *“Sometimes I feel like a bit of a clown when I’m*

*dressed too artistic, like out of the box.*” This discomfort suggests that external pressures can override self-expression, leading to internal conflict.

Catalina’s experience was different and moving away from home made them want to express their culture more openly: *“I think when I came to London, I wanted to embrace the Americana of it all, because this was me.”* For them, distance sharpened their connection to home, creating space to express something previously less visible.

For others, disruption came from environmental rather than cultural changes. Emma described leaving most of their clothes behind after moving to the UK: *“When I came to the UK for uni, most of my summer clothes stayed back home, because I don’t actually need them here.”* They added how adjusting to the climate meant changing the way they dressed altogether: *“I did a whole 360... I had to buy just warm clothing in general, which I didn’t have or didn’t need before.”* The phrase “a whole 360” suggests an abrupt shift not just in clothing but in how they presented themselves day to day where practicality overtook personal expression.

Deborah reflected on how they adapted, especially in terms of what materials they wore: *“The weather was a big factor when I moved... what changed was the fabric... I was more attracted to linen or cotton and then also... open shoes.”* This suggests a process of adaptation that didn’t feel emotionally difficult, possibly because it aligned with their own preferences and comfort.

Carlotta noticed a shift in their colour palette *“If it’s winter, I wear a lot of black since moving here, I barely do that. I wear a lot of colourful stuff, which in winter... I probably wouldn’t.”* Their reflection suggests that although their style evolved, they remained in control of the changes, embracing new influences while staying connected to their own taste.

### ***1.3. Expressing different sides of the self because of relocation***

This subtheme shows how clothing became a way to express different sides of themselves. Some participants changed parts of their style after relocating. Others used fashion to show their personal values. A few spoke about how travelling helped them expand their style.

Carlotta shared how they often brought those elements together in one outfit: *“I’ve really taken a bit from everywhere I went... for example here, I would wear jeans, which I love, but are very Western, with a local top with some wax patterns on it, and then some leather shoes that I got made in Italy.”* Their example reflects how each item is connected to a place, forming an outfit that reflects their complex identity.

Deborah spoke about how different styles carried different meaning depending on location and that living in different places made them more aware of what felt appropriate: *“I realise, for example, when I go back to my home country, there are certain things I would never wear there, because I said, wow, no, I can’t wear that there, that’s Tunisian or that’s too Mauritian.”* Both Carlotta and Deborah did not replace their style but instead carried pieces from each location to gradually create something of their own, shaped by exposure.

Mila explained balancing values and self-expression. On a daily basis, they prioritised sustainability: *“I care about sustainable shopping so that’s also a big part of who I am and why I don’t follow trends”* and in social settings, they leaned into creativity *“If I go out or if I have a party or an occasion, then I’ll make sure to add extravagances in my outfit.”* They also spoke about how their style mixes both masculine and feminine elements: *“I think I’m quite androgynous, so I wear a mix of feminine and masculine clothes.”* Rather than choosing one consistent look, they allowed different aspects of their identity to come through at different times. On one hand, their clothing choices were shaped by their beliefs and everyday routines. On the other hand, they also used fashion as a space for play and

expression, adding “extravagances” for special occasions and combining gendered styles in a way that felt true to them.

## **2. Fashion as an emotional and memory anchor**

Each participant is considered in turn, with the second theme exploring the meaning they assigned to clothing. In the context of relocation, clothing emerged as more than a visual expression of self, it became emotionally charged, often tied to participants' moods and memories. Two subordinate themes were identified across their accounts: (1) clothing used to express emotions and (2) clothing are memory holders.

### ***2.1. Clothing used to express emotions***

The following subordinate theme explores how participants used clothing to reflect, manage, and shift their emotional states.

For Carlotta, clothing was closely tied to emotional well-being. Wearing something they liked could “*really change my day*” and emphasised the importance of colours: “*it's really on having and wearing colors that I like that are quite neutral and that I know fit me well...*” Knowing what works and intentionally choosing it suggests a desire for emotional uplifting through their clothing choices. There’s an underlying belief in the affective power of clothing; if they feel good in what they wear, the rest of the day is likely to be impacted positively. They also reflected on what they observed in Senegal: “*I love how people dress in Senegal because you can tell that it's not really something that weighs on people, but ... that makes them feel good.*” Rather than admiration, this suggests a longing for that same ease and emotional comfort in their own style.

Catalina’s experience showed that their connection to clothing felt more expressive: “*What I love about fashion is that I love it as a form of self-expression, and I love its storytelling capabilities.*” The use of the words “storytelling capabilities” suggests that their

clothing choices are part of a narrative. This expressive approach is especially clear when they say, *“I feel like I exert fun, playful energy if I'm in a fun, playful outfit.”* The repetition of the word “playful” reflects how important this feeling is to them. Catalina also used clothing to influence how they felt and this link is even clearer when they talked about wearing clothes that did not feel right: *“It like didn't really make me feel good about myself, I kind of felt like a slob.”* Their use of the word “slob” suggests that wearing the wrong clothes completely disrupted how they felt, highlighting how central fashion is to feeling good.

Emma’s experience resembles the previous ones: *“I think when I dress up nicely, it makes me feel good.”* Unlike Catalina’s creativity, Emma’s experience was more about taking care of themselves because *“makes me feel good”* is repeated across their reflections, suggesting that how they dress has emotional value. Emma was the only participant that made it explicitly clear that they dressed for themselves and not for others: *“So I think I don't feel the pressure in that way but I just want to put an effort because it makes me feel good.”* This shows that their motivation does not come from external expectations but is purely for their individual well-being.

## **2.2. Clothing are memory holders**

The second subordinate theme explores how certain garments held personal meaning because they reminded participants of loved ones, experiences, or specific environments they left behind. In the context of relocation, clothing became a way to hold onto memories and preserve continuity across change.

Catalina described strong emotional ties to family through clothing: *“A lot of my clothes are from my grandmother and... from other relatives that I like, I absolutely love them.”* The use of “absolutely love” reflects how much the clothes mean to them, as they are not just garments but treasured links to loved ones. This emotional closeness also appears in their reflection on jewellery: *“I just like wearing jewelry that's like from like my family, like just*

*such a nice way to like carry them with you*". Jewellery becomes a tangible way to feel close to family while living apart. Catalina also described how clothing connected them to home: *"I wear like denim skirts and boots and denim makes me feel connected to home in a way because I was born in the Midwest and it feels very homey."* Here denim holds symbolic value tied to their cultural background. The word "homey" reflects a sense of comfort and familiarity, suggesting that clothing can help them stay connected to home.

Emma had the same experience: "I'm always wearing the same necklaces... they make me feel closer to home in Kenya." It is important for them to feel connected to home, and they perfectly explained this idea when they say, *"I always want to have an element that reminds me of home, I want to feel within myself somewhere connected."*

Fanny also experienced memories through clothing: *"my Louis Vuitton bag... the first time I got a designer bag, it's like bringing me back to Spain and that time."* Here the item holds memory not just because of its value but also because of the specific time and place it recalls. Additionally, they spoke about their connection to Colombia, their home country: *"I have a couple of pieces from Colombian designers that I really like because they're very sustainable... and it makes me feel connected with my heritage."* This comment demonstrates how wearing these garments helped them to exhibit pride in their heritage while also supporting values they believe in.

Finally, Deborah also gave meaning to clothing that they had tailored in the past: *"I have two dresses I had tailored they're more than 20 years now, but I still have them, and I kind of treasure them."* The word "treasure" suggests something precious that might get lost or damaged while moving. The act of preserving these garments shows how valuable they are, not just as clothing but as emotional objects and in the context of relocation and change, these treasured items become anchors.

### 3. Fashion as a tool for belonging and social navigation

Each participant is considered in turn, with the final theme focusing on how clothing became a social tool for expatriates as they tried to adapt into new cultures. While some participants claimed purposefully changing their style, others expressed ambivalence about social conformity. Two subordinate themes emerged from their accounts: (1) adapting to fit in, (2) resisting and questioning conformity.

#### 3.1. *Adapting to fit in*

Participants mentioned instances in which clothes became a means of blending into new contexts, either intentionally or through more subtle, gradual adjustments. For some, this adaptation was inspired by perceived local dress adjustments or a desire to feel socially accepted in unfamiliar environments.

Carlotta's account demonstrates an understanding of local dress conventions and a conscious approach to adopting them. In West Africa, people recognise the value of "wax" fabric as a cultural staple, noting, *"there's this local fabric called wax and I like to, for example, do a scrunchie with that or make a t-shirt where the pocket is in wax."* Their language implies a desire to honour local traditions while keeping their identity. However, they also expressed a sense of distance from complete adoption: "I don't feel like I've adapted, like I don't dress like the people here... I've just taken some little things that I think look nice" Carlotta observed higher pressures in their home country, Italy: *"In a place like Italy, the traditions are so strong... there's a very clear thing about what should be done... how one should be dressed."* Their experience demonstrates that adjusting through fashion is dependent on national standards.

Fanny provided an example of adapting to feel accepted: *"In Spain, they had kind of like this uniform that you needed to wear and like the certain brands that were accepted... I did follow more trends because I did want to be accepted."* Their use of the word "uniform" is

metaphorical, pointing to an unspoken dress code that made people dress the same. They added: *“in my kind of like unconscious, I think it was like okay I just want to be accepted,”* suggesting that their adaptation was driven more by the desire to belong than by personal preference. They reflected on how their time in Spain continued to influence them: *“Since I moved from Spain, I really care more about brands, which maybe wouldn’t have happened if I didn’t live there.”* Their experience suggests that the pressure to conform left a lasting effect, shaping their relationship with fashion.

Emma described a noticeable shift in their outfits, adjusting style to match what they perceived as London’s style when they moved there: *“in London I try to dress it up a bit and try to always add something bit more elegant to kind of fit into the whole London routine, you know?”* This sentence suggests that they perceive a social standard around appearance, even for everyday tasks: *“here... even if I’m just going to the supermarket, I will very often change my trousers, like to something a bit more appropriate.”* This contrasts with their experience in Cardiff: *“In Cardiff, I felt much more casual in the way I dress, I didn’t really pay that much attention.”* The comparison highlights how relocation prompted them to adjust their style, not because of national culture, but in response to their perceived social atmosphere and norms of a new city.

### **3.2. Resisting and questioning conformity**

While some participants recounted changing their fashion choices to fit in with new surroundings, others used relocation to examine how much of their fashion identity was genuinely their own. Instead of merely fighting standards, they considered if they should change or remain authentic.

Carlotta shows a clear contradiction between recognising the logic of dress codes and questioning their rigidity: *“I think that if it’s something like an event like a wedding, I understand that there’s maybe a specific dress code, but I still think it’s sometimes taken too*

*far.*" They acknowledged the logic of dress norms but resisted their rigidity. For them, fashion should protect self-expression: *"I do feel like everyone should be allowed to just be however they like and wear whatever they please."* Clothing, in this sense, becomes a right to authenticity, not just a tool for belonging.

Deborah adopts a similar independent stance: *"I understand that there are people who want to buy this flashy but I'm not into that, but it doesn't affect me... my social network here is the same as me."* Their tolerant attitude demonstrates confidence in themselves, and being among individuals who share their values allows them to feel safe not following trends.

Fanny had a similar experience, especially after moving to London: *"What I love since moving to London is that everyone has their own style. I think that's really nice."* The emphasis on individuality as something they "love" suggests a strong appreciation for an environment that contrasts with their past experience in Spain, where conformity was expected. They described a gradual realisation: *"In London, it took me a while to adapt and understand that I'm going to be accepted either way. And it's not what I do for a living nor what I wear. It's just like how I am as a person."* This suggests that resistance wasn't instinctive, but emerged through exposure to a more accepting environment. Yet, they also acknowledged the complexity of forming an entirely unique identity *"I think it's very difficult to have just like your proper own style because you always get influenced by the outside."* This remark may also imply that frequent relocation makes it difficult to build a consistent or distinct style, as each new place introduces different influences.

This is seen in Catalina's experience, where they associate their sense of style with mobility and exposure to many cultures: *"I think it is because being able to move to different places has made me realise I can wear whatever I want."* They continue: *"Also, like travelling, I think when you go places, it expands your perception of how garments are perceived differently."* This insight demonstrates that relocating allows individuals to

experience fashion in new ways and recognise that clothing may imply various things in different places.

## Discussion

### Discussion of findings

The present study set out to investigate how expatriates employ fashion in building identities in cultural transition and negotiate belonging or resistance during relocation. Three superordinate themes were revealed in participants' accounts using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

#### *What role does fashion play in the identity construction of expatriates during cultural transitions ?*

The main themes related to this question are (1) fashion to construct and reconstruct identity and (2) fashion as an emotional and memory anchor. The findings showed that participants used fashion as a tool to maintain a consistent sense of self when relocating. By preserving certain elements from their wardrobe, they created continuity in their identities despite changing environments. This aligns with Bosma and Kunnen's (2001) concept of identity continuity during change and supports McNeill's (2018) assertion that individuals choose garments reflecting specific aspects of identity. However, the data challenged traditional models of identity and demonstrated that participants developed a more fluid approach to identity, consistent with contemporary understandings of identity as context-dependent (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Gergen, 2016). In fact, expatriates used fashion to express multiple facets of their identity. The data showed a pattern not fully explored in the literature, rather than simply switching between cultural identities as suggested by Cultural Frame Switching theory (Benet-Martínez et al., 2002), expatriates created entirely new hybrid identities. While this hybridity partially aligns with Ong's (2011) concept of cosmopolitanism, the research extended this understanding by showing that expatriates

developed more complex fashion identities than current literature describes, incorporating elements from all places they've lived rather than just balancing between two cultures.

An unexpected finding was the emotional dimension of fashion adaptation, the research showed that clothing choices were deeply connected to expatriates' emotional well-being.

This emotional aspect, largely overlooked in rational models of acculturation like Berry's (1997), adds onto our understanding of expatriate identity construction during transitions.

Additionally, the research revealed that disruption stems not just from cultural differences but also from practical considerations like climate and weather conditions. This extends Gergen's

(2026) work by highlighting how identity is influenced by both the individual and their environment. A notable gap in the literature concerns the emotional anchoring function of

fashion for expatriates. The research found that clothing items often serve as memory

holders, connecting expatriates to their homes and families. Specific garments become valued items that embody what Barthes (1968) could refer to as the mythological role of clothing.

***How do expatriates use fashion to negotiate belonging or resistance within new cultural environments ?***

The main theme related to this question is (3) fashion as a tool for belonging and social navigation. The data showed that expatriates employ various fashion strategies to integrate

into new social environments. This ties into Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) that presumes individuals derive part of their self-concept through groups and adjust their

appearance to indicate preferred group membership. However, findings showed that

adaptation occurred not just between countries but between cities within the same country.

This adds nuance to acculturation models by suggesting that adaptation operates at multiple geographic levels, a distinction not well-articulated in current literature. Importantly, the

research revealed that adaptation wasn't just about conforming to the dominant culture. Many

expatriates demonstrated more selective forms of adaptation than typically described in

acculturation literature, incorporating elements of local fashion while maintaining their personal style. This shows that Berry's (1997) integration strategy might be more complicated for expatriates, who can selectively appropriate components of host societies without adopting them in full. The literature has not adequately addressed this selective, nuanced approach to fashion adaptation. Another key finding not adequately addressed in existing frameworks was how mobility itself becomes a form of resistance against fixed cultural norms. The research demonstrated that repeated exposure to different environments gave expatriates a broader perspective that allowed them to transcend local norms and develop more fluid approaches to fashion. This extends Gjerde's (2004) warning about treating culture as fixed by showing how multicultural experiences fundamentally change expatriates' relationship with fashion norms.

### **Strengths and weaknesses of the study**

The study's primary strength lies in its methodological approach. IPA enabled deep exploration of lived experiences, capturing nuances often missed in quantitative studies. The focus on expatriates rather than broader immigrant groups allowed for detailed understanding of voluntary mobility's unique challenges. The study also fills a significant gap in acculturation literature, which has largely overlooked the role of fashion in identity negotiation and acculturation processes.

However, there are notable limitations. First, the small sample size prevents generalisability of findings to the wider expatriate population. Additionally, the interpretative nature of IPA introduces subjectivity. While efforts were made to ground interpretations in participants' language and context, different researchers may reach different conclusions from the same transcripts. Moreover, concerns persist about the role of language in phenomenological research and whether participants and researchers possess the communicative ability to fully convey nuanced experience (Ashworth, 2003). While this

study attempted to mitigate such concerns through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, it acknowledges that the richness of participants' experience may be limited by articulation. Finally, sampling limitations should be acknowledged. The use of snowball sampling poses risks for selection bias, particularly as all participants had voluntarily relocated often to culturally compatible environments. This means findings may underrepresent more dissonant or challenging acculturation experiences.

To address the limitations of this study, future research should consider using random or stratified sampling to reduce bias and improve representation. This would help include expatriates with a wider range of backgrounds, especially those who have relocated to culturally unfamiliar or challenging environments. Including male and non-binary participants would also offer insight into how gender influences fashion and identity during relocation, which this study could not explore. Comparing expatriates to non-expatriates could help identify whether the use of fashion in identity construction is shaped more by mobility or by broader cultural factors. Additionally, future research could use a longitudinal design to explore how fashion's role in identity and belonging develops over time, especially across multiple relocations. Visual methods, such as wardrobe analysis or fashion diaries, could also help capture aspects of identity expression that may not emerge through interviews alone.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study have several key implications. First, they contribute to advancing fashion psychology research by offering a deeper understanding of how individuals use clothing to negotiate identity and belonging in diverse cultural contexts, particularly within the underexplored population of expatriates. Second, the study refines acculturation theory by demonstrating that fashion functions as a meaningful tool through which individuals express adaptation, resistance, or hybridity, extending beyond traditional. Additionally, the study

challenges traditional identity models that view identity as fixed or location-bound, highlighting instead the fluid, evolving nature of self-expression among globally mobile individuals. Finally, these insights offer practical guidance for fashion brands, encouraging the development of marketing strategies that acknowledge the complex and shifting identities of mobile consumers who seek both cultural relevance and personal authenticity in their fashion choices.

### **Conclusion**

This research aimed to explore how expatriates use fashion in their identity construction and navigate belonging during cultural transitions. The rationale for this study emerged from a significant gap in acculturation literature, which has largely overlooked expatriate experiences and the role of fashion in identity negotiation. This study's implications lie in its potential to inform fashion brands about the values as well as contributing to a more profound understanding of identity formation in an interconnected world. In a contemporary world, where more people live between cultures, these insights highlight the meaningful role fashion plays in navigating who we are and where we belong.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Reflective Statement

The following reflective statement explores my personal and academic journey while completing my undergraduate dissertation, which focused on how expatriates use fashion to construct identity and navigate belonging in new cultural contexts. Reflection is a critical part of experiential learning, and as Dewey (1933) argued, “we do not learn from experience, we learn from reflecting on experience.” To guide this reflection, I will use Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1988), a six-stage model that structures reflection through Description, Feelings, Evaluation, Analysis, Action Plan, and Conclusion. This framework provides a systematic approach to unpack the complexities of my experience.

Throughout my studies, I began to reflect on how culture is often overlooked in broader social and economic conversations, despite being a crucial force in shaping identity, behaviour, and meaning. Because culture is not easily quantifiable, it is often left out of models and decision-making frameworks, especially within economics. Reading David Throsby's *Economics and Culture* made this point particularly salient: his argument that culture is under-represented because it is hard to measure resonated deeply with me. This realisation pushed me to reflect on my own lived experiences and how cultural context had shaped my sense of identity in ways that were hard to articulate but impossible to ignore. Having lived in multiple countries, I've navigated new environments my whole life, and fashion has always been a way for me to feel grounded. I began to notice how personal these processes were and how absent such personal stories were from mainstream discussions in the fashion industry. While there is growing interest in data-driven consumer research, the real-life experiences of globally mobile individuals, what fashion means to them, and how they use it to adapt, connect or express their identity are still rarely heard. I saw a clear gap in research and its potential value not only for individuals to understand themselves more but

also for the fashion industry and its economic strategies. This became the motivation behind my dissertation

My dissertation was a qualitative project based on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, which required me to interview a small number of participants, including friends and family. The topic was not only relevant academically but also held strong personal significance. In fact, exploring the relationship between fashion, identity, and relocation has always intrigued me. This process allowed me to investigate questions I've carried throughout my life while applying rigorous analytical methods to them. This was my first major independent research project, and I approached it with both excitement and a sense of responsibility. I tend to delay substantial projects when I know I have a lot of time ahead of me, and I could not truly comprehend how much work my dissertation would be until I started immersing myself in it. When our tutors suggested creating a time plan, I found the idea useful, and it helped me feel organised and confident about what needed to be done and when. However, unforeseen responsibilities and competing academic pressures meant that not everything progressed as smoothly as expected and that even the best-laid plans require flexibility.

Having a timeline helped me stay grounded. However, as time progressed and I encountered challenges, I began to feel stressed and overwhelmed. Naturally, I had anticipated that the dissertation would be a stressful period. I've always experienced anxiety in my day-to-day life, but especially during deadlines. Staying in contact with my therapist was crucial. I developed personalised coping strategies that helped me stay balanced. One of them was not compromising on my social life because of my dissertation; therefore, I managed to integrate study time with social interactions. This meant studying with friends in cafes and libraries, which not only prevented feelings of isolation and guilt around not

working but also allowed me to enjoy early spring in London, my favourite season in the city. In addition, maintaining physical activity became just as important. Regular phone calls with my dad served as consistent reminders of how vital it was to move my body, something he always encouraged. His words stayed with me throughout this process and inspired me to keep active, whether through walks or workouts. I was able to share these moments with my flatmate, and not only did it support my well-being, but it also strengthened my sense of routine. Although I had to stop working my part-time restaurant job of nearly two years, something I loved but could no longer manage alongside my dissertation, I found a job tutoring an elementary student twice a week. This was necessary not only for financial reasons but also to structure my weeks and give me breaks from my dissertation. I dreaded the pressure, but looking back, I am proud of how I managed to take care of my mental and physical health.

In terms of the dissertation process, I was particularly apprehensive about the interview stage. Interviewing friends and family was a very unnatural experience, as interviews needed to be quite formal, yet the relationships I had with the participants were informal and personal. Therefore, keeping a reflexive journal helped me separate myself from the researcher. One of the strongest aspects of my project was the early development of my literature review. In previous academic work, I had often found literature reviews overwhelming and difficult to organise. But in this case, my interest in the topic made the process enjoyable and informative. I was able to frame strong research questions and develop thoughtful interview guides, which made talking to people very interesting and gave me confidence in my research ability. However, several challenges stood out, especially during the data analysis stage. I had previously found analysis straightforward, but working with a different analysis method I was not familiar with often made me feel unsure of my work, and I often doubted whether I was "doing it right." As Finlay (2002) notes, qualitative researchers

often find themselves navigating a swamp of subjectivity. I certainly experienced this as the emotional and intellectual demands of IPA were much greater than I had anticipated.

Furthermore, as I mentioned previously, my closeness to the topic and participants made it difficult to remain objective. Berger (2015) highlights how a researcher's positionality can significantly influence the research process, and I found that managing this influence required constant awareness and self-checking, hence, I kept a reflexive journal throughout all my interviews.

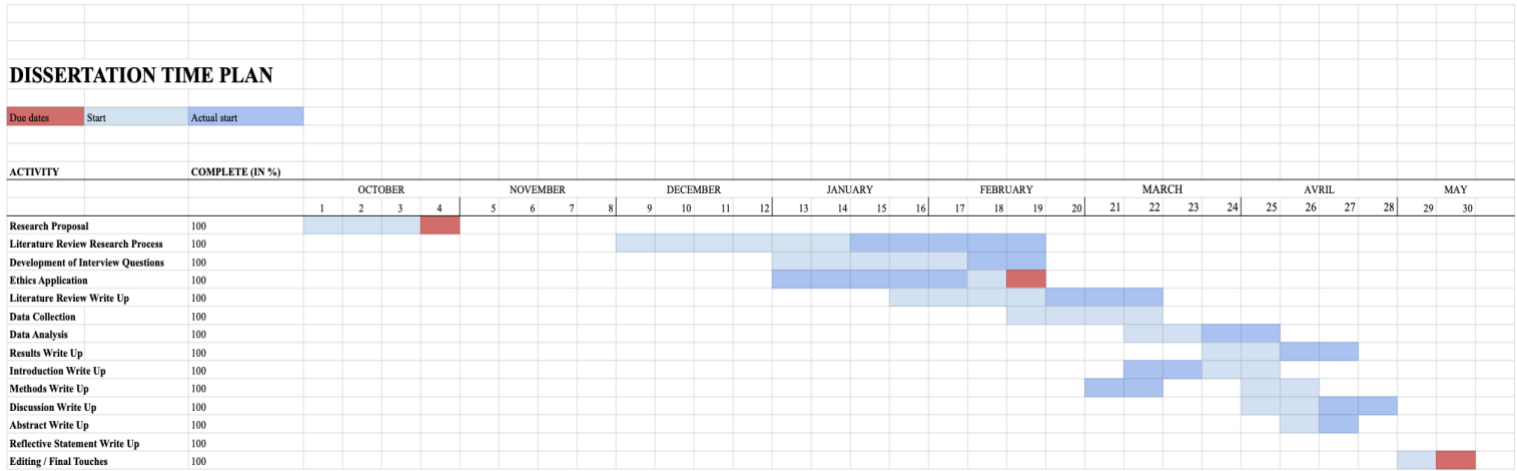
When analysing why certain parts of the process felt more difficult, I realised that the challenges I experienced were not just about learning a new method but also about the nature of qualitative inquiry itself. IPA requires researchers to interpret personal meaning, which naturally involves a level of subjectivity. Because of my personal ties to the research topic, I struggled with achieving interpretive distance. As Pillow (2003) argues, authentic reflexivity means sitting with discomfort and questioning our own assumptions and positions. I found this especially true when interviewing people I knew. The blurring of personal and professional boundaries added an emotional weight to the process that I had not anticipated. My struggles with IPA forced me to rely on my own judgement, which in turn helped me become a more independent researcher. I saw firsthand how difficult it is to separate the 'self' from the researcher, especially when the topic reflects one's lived experience.

Another significant challenge arose from my initial research design. I originally planned to compare expatriates with non-expatriates, believing this would provide richer insights. However, when I reached the data analysis stage, I realised this comparative approach would be difficult to execute while maintaining IPA's depth of analysis within the dissertation's word limit. I faced a critical decision: either remove my comparative group and focus solely on expatriates, which meant that I lost a lot of valuable time interviewing/coding a group I

would not use after all, shift my methodology from IPA to thematic analysis to accommodate both groups, or keep both groups but risk a superficial analysis. I chose to focus on expatriates only, which I believe was the right decision for preserving the integrity of the IPA approach. In hindsight, I might have reduced my participant number, as analyzing six participants in depth created significant challenges in managing my results section, which consumed half of my word count allocation, subsequently affecting the depth of my discussion.

Writing this dissertation has allowed me to consolidate the knowledge and skills I developed over my three years of study. Concepts that once felt abstract became tangible as I applied them in practice, deepening both my academic understanding and my confidence in using them independently. Above all, this process also gave me space to reflect on my own cultural identity, shaped by years of moving between countries. The nature of my study not only revealed insights from others but also helped me recognise how my own experiences influence my attitudes towards fashion, identity, and belonging. Having been exposed to so many different fashion norms and cultural diversities has made it challenging to define a singular sense of self, yet this complexity is part of what made the research personally rewarding. The opportunity to explore a topic I was genuinely passionate about has been a privilege and made the process incredibly rewarding, especially during difficult moments. While the workload was intense, I learnt to balance pressure with care, drawing strengths from my support system and my own resilience. As the project concludes, I feel a deep sense of growth and accomplishment, not just in my work ethic but also in how I approach responsibility and what I am capable of. I will forever hold and cherish what I have had the privilege to learn throughout this process. Learning is not something I take for granted; it is a gift, and one I will carry with me as I continue to grow, both personally and professionally.

## Appendix B: dissertation time plan



## **Appendix C: Approved Ethics Application**



## Research Ethics Approval Form – Student Research

Psychology Research Ethics Panel (PREP)

Guidance:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Please ensure that you have read the UAL Code of Practice on Research Ethics, UAL Code of Practice on Educational Ethics, and the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics before completing this form.</b></li> <li>● Please complete this form electronically. While completing it, delete all the text in green font, which is meant to guide you.</li> <li>● <b>Section A</b> is to be completed by the student and Supervisor / Unit Leader.</li> <li>● <b>Section B</b> is for PREP and UAL Sub-Committee use only.</li> <li>● Once Section A has been completed, the form should be submitted to the relevant staff member (e.g., Unit Leader, Course Leader) by the student. Instructions on who to submit the form to will be given in each unit.</li> <li>● <b>Incomplete applications which are missing question responses, signatures, documents for the participants (Participant Information Sheet, Consent Form, Debriefing Sheet), or relevant appendices (e.g., study advert, questionnaires, instructions, interview questions, tasks, stimuli such as images) will be returned to the student for completion. This will delay the review and approval process.</b></li> </ul>

### SECTION A

### TO BE COMPLETED BY THE STUDENT

<b>Name:</b>	Valentina Libutti
<b>College:</b>	London College of Fashion, UAL
<b>Course and year (if applicable):</b>	BSc Psychology of Fashion, Y3
<b>Unit for which this study is being conducted:</b>	Final Major Project
<b>Study title:</b>	Fashion experience: Qualitative comparison between expats and non-expats

The UAL codes of practice set out four key areas for ethical consideration. Which one or more of these ethical principles does this application for ethical consideration relate to?	
a. An <b>ethics of care</b> is supported by the Educational Ethics Sub-Committee as a positive ethic that is the University's responsibility to foster in relation to students, educational content, educational process including material resources, and in students' relations with anyone who participates or interacts with their work.	<b>Yes</b>
b. The principle of <b>social justice</b> obliges the student to identify the risks and benefits of participation in creative or investigative practice. Any risks to persons participating should be weighed against any potential benefits – to the participants or the student, and also the wider benefits to society of the knowledge gained. As with the principle of respect for	<b>Yes</b>

Last Updated: 09/09/2022

persons, there is a need to promote equality and racial justice and protect vulnerable groups.	
c. <b>Respect for persons</b> recognises the capacity and rights of all individuals to make their own choices and decisions. It refers to the autonomy and rights to self-determination of all human beings, acknowledges their equality, dignity, freedom, and rights. An important component of this principle is the need to provide special protection to vulnerable persons, both students and in student activity involving others.	<b>Yes</b>
d. <b>Beneficence</b> is the principle of acting for the good and well-being of others. It requires students to serve the interests of others. In so doing, students comply with the principle of neither doing, nor permitting, any foreseeable harm as a consequence of creative or investigative practice. This is the principle of <b>non-maleficence</b> , it is the principle of doing no harm.	<b>Yes</b>
The specific duties of promoting equality and good relations are assumed under these principles, as defined by the Equality Act 2010.	

**1. Please provide the rationale behind your study, including a brief literature review, the gap in the existing literature that the study will address, study aims / research questions, and hypotheses (if the study has a quantitative component). Indicate whether the study is qualitative or quantitative and what design it will use. (600 words max, excluding references)**

Fashion is a powerful medium for self-expression and identity formation, especially in today's globalised world, where individuals navigate multiple cultural and social influences. Globalisation and digitalisation have enabled greater mobility, allowing individuals to live and work in diverse cultural contexts. However, despite this increasing mobility, there is limited research on how relocation influences personal fashion choices. In particular, the question of how expatriates adapt or maintain their style across different cultural environments remains underexplored.

Existing literature demonstrates that fashion plays a crucial role in identity. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) posits that individuals use visible markers, such as clothing, to signal group membership and a sense of belonging. Clothing is also linked to well-being, self-esteem, and confidence. Masuch and Hefferon (2014) found that individuals use clothing to manage mood, negotiate selfhood, and enhance everyday well-being. However, the process of relocation introduces unique challenges, as individuals must adapt to new cultural dress norms while maintaining their sense of identity.

While research has explored cultural dress norms and fashion as a tool for identity within individual cities or regions, there is little focus on how frequent relocations shape personal style. Research often focus on general consumer preferences or cultural adaptation broadly (e.g., Berry's acculturation theory, 1997) but rarely apply these frameworks to fashion. Moreover, there is limited comparative analysis between expatriates, who navigate multiple cultural influences, and non-movers, whose style is shaped by stable cultural contexts. This gap may exist because expatriates represent a relatively small and niche population. Additionally, while psychological theories of identity and self-expression are well studied, the specific relationship between cultural adaptation and fashion identity remains underexplored.

The aim of this study is to explore how frequent relocation influences personal fashion style consistency. It seeks to examine whether moving often leads individuals to adapt their style or maintain a stable fashion identity across different cultural environments. The study will employ a qualitative design by conducting semi-structured interviews and analysing the data, an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) will be used to explore participants' lived experiences with fashion adaptation and identity. IPA is particularly suited for this study because it focuses on understanding how individuals make sense of their personal and social worlds (Smith et al., 2009). It emphasises subjective experiences and the meanings individuals attribute to those experiences, making it an ideal approach for exploring the deeply personal relationship between relocation, cultural adaptation, and fashion identity. Individuals who have relocated multiple times (at least twice) will be recruited, allowing for insights into how mobility influences personal style and cultural adaptation. It is expected that frequent movers will demonstrate a more adaptable style, integrating elements of local dress norms. This study will address critical gaps in understanding how frequent relocation influences personal fashion identity and style consistency, focusing on the intersection of mobility, cultural adaptation, and self-expression. This study will shed light on how individuals navigate cultural dress norms while maintaining their sense of self, advancing knowledge in fashion psychology and cultural adaptation studies. Beyond academic contributions, this research will provide actionable insights for fashion brands to understand and adapt to a new wave of globally mobile consumers. By exploring how these individuals balance global and local influences, brands can tailor designs and marketing strategies to meet the needs of hybrid fashion identities.

## 2. Does your research involve participants?

	No*
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Yes

**\*If you answer 'No', you do not need to complete Questions 3 to 11. Instead, please go to Question 12 and continue from there.**

## 3. Who will the participants be? Please tick as appropriate.

	Students at University of the Arts London
	Staff at University of the Arts London
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other*

**\*If you answered 'Other' please specify below.**

The participants for this study will meet the following criteria:

- Age: Participants must be 18 years or older. There is no upper age limit.
- Relocation Experience: Participants must have relocated at least two times to different countries
- Gender: There are no gender restrictions; individuals of all genders are eligible to participate.
- Nationality: Participants may come from any nationality

- Profession: There are no specific professional requirements; participants may come from any profession or field.

The majority of participants will be individuals known to the researcher through personal or professional networks. This method is being used due to the specific and niche nature of the study's inclusion criteria, which are easier to meet through direct recruitment from the researcher's network.

#### 4. How will participants be recruited and how many will be involved?

Participants will be directly selected by the researcher from personal and professional networks, mainly by purposive sampling and by snowballing sampling method if needed. The aim is to recruit 6 participants who have relocated at least two times. This approach ensures that participants have lived experiences relevant to the study's aims.

There will be no general advertisements or open recruitment since participants will be selected directly. However, an email or direct message will be sent to potential participants, explaining the purpose of the study and inviting them to participate. This message will include:

- A brief overview of the research topic.
- Assurance of confidentiality and voluntary participation.
- An attached participant information sheet and consent form.

6 participants are sufficient to achieve depth and richness in the qualitative data while being manageable within the scope of the research timeline. This sample size is appropriate for identifying recurring themes and ensuring the quality of insights through in-depth interviews.

#### 5. What will participants be asked to do and for how long? Describe the entire study procedure, including the measures (e.g., questionnaires) or the interview questions that you will ask them to complete or answer.

The study will be conducted by doing one-to-one semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 30-45min minutes, conducted online via MS Teams to ensure convenience and data security. The supervisor will be informed via email of the interview times. Beforehand participants will begin the study by reading the Participant Information Sheet, which will explain the study's purpose, their role, and how their data will be handled. Afterward, they will sign a Consent Form to indicate their voluntary participation. Participants will be notified when recording begins, and the laptop (password secured) will start recording. During the interview, participants will be asked open-ended questions about their personal experiences with fashion.

Participants will first be asked to introduce themselves (demographic questions), then will be asked general questions about their relationship with fashion. Demographic data, including age, gender, nationality, and

relocation history, will also be collected. After that, the question will be around themes such as **Fashion Adaptation and Transition** (based on Toloza, Cho & Terrell, 2021), **Immigration and Clothing Choices** (Based on Loscialpo, 2019), **Fashion and Hybrid Social Identities** (based on Kaiser and Green, 2022 and Boland, 2020) and **Cultural Memory and Identity** (based on Safdar, Goh and Choubak, 2020). The researcher will have specific questions to ask (approximately 15, excluding demographics questions); however, the interview will be semi-structured and not every question will have to be asked.

At the end of the interview, participants will be presented with a Debriefing Sheet, thanking them for their time and providing additional information about the study as well as contact information.

**6. What potential risks to the interests of participants do you foresee and what steps will you take to minimise those risks? How will you inform participants of the risks and the steps you are taking to address them?** The BPS defines risk as the 'potential physical or psychological harm, discomfort or stress to human participants that a research project may generate.' It includes risks to participants' well-being, self-esteem, social standing, values, privacy and reputation, beliefs, employment / livelihood, personal relationships, freedom, commercial interests (e.g., intellectual property), and so on.

Based on the University of the Arts London (UAL) and British Psychological Society (BPS) ethic codes, this study is considered minimal risk. **This study is based on the research my supervisor Jekaterina Rogaten is conducting with migrants from Africa, India and China. Her research has already been approved by College research ethics committee. The main difference with her project is the sample as this study is using different sample of participants.**

Each participant will volunteer to participate in this study. They will be provided with the information sheet and will have to provide informed consent before taking part in the interview. The questions that will be asked are about navigating a new wardrobe as expats in a new country and in new cultures, so they are not considered to be sensitive. It does not pose any risks to their daily livelihood, reputation, or commercial interests. However, as unlikely as it seems, the questions may trigger some negative feelings that should pass shortly, as those are not considered to be greater than feelings experienced in daily lives. However, if the feelings persist, participants will be able to contact organisations providing support with emotional distress and challenges.

Mind charity support resources: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support>

Samaritans helpline: 116 123

Accessing counselling or therapy through the NHS for UK-based participants: <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/Pages/free-therapy-or-counselling.aspx>

Self-help resources: <http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk>

Progressive muscle relaxation exercise: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=912eRrbes2g>

All the interviews will be audio recorded and anonymised to conceal any identifying data about the participant during the transcription. Thus, participants will be given pseudonyms. Once the interviews are completed, participants will have the option to withdraw for a period of two weeks. After that, the audio files will be transcribed, anonymised, and archived. Only anonymised transcripts will be used in the data analysis.

Compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the audio data and transcripts collected by Valentina Libutti will be stored on University of the Arts OneDrive, which is password protected. Both Valentina Libutti and Dr. Jekaterina Rogaten will have access to the audio and transcript data for the period of data analysis and publication preparation. The data will be analysed by Valentina Libutti. The raw data will be archived in UAL OneDrive in June 2025 through the anonymous identifiers. **After the dissertation grade has been confirmed by the Exam Board, all audio recordings and the Consent Forms containing participants' names will be permanently deleted from UAL OneDrive. The anonymised transcripts of the interviews will be**

archived by supervisor on the UAL one drive for 10 years. The results will be part of the researcher's dissertation and may also be published in an academic journal or presented at conferences.

**7. What potential risks do you foresee to yourself as the researcher and what steps will you take to minimise those risks?** For example, does your research raise issues of personal safety for you or others involved in the project, especially if taking place outside working hours or off University premises?

There are minimal risks for the researcher in conducting this research. The participants in this interview are likely to be already known to the researcher. However, if through snowball sampling a new participant who is not personally known to the researcher is recruited, researcher's university email address will be used in communicating with participants, and the personal information (name, occupation, and employer) will be shared with the participants to make them more comfortable. It is expected that all the interviews will happen virtually. Although this research is a minimal risk, in case of unforeseen distressing events, the research will take steps to mitigate the negative impact through either contacting UAL counselling services or a GP.

**8. Please attach a copy of the Participant Information Sheet, Consent Form, and Debriefing Sheet you plan to give participants.**

Please tick here if the Participant Information Sheet, Consent Form, and Debriefing Sheet are attached in the appendix at the end of this form.

**9. Does your project involve children / minors (anyone under the age of 18) or vulnerable adults?** The BPS states that vulnerable populations include 'children, persons lacking capacity, those in a dependent or unequal relationship, people with learning or communication difficulties, people in care, people in custody or on probation, people who have suffered physical or psychological trauma and people engaged in illegal activities, such as drug abuse.'

No. Go to Question 10

Yes\*

**\*If you answer 'Yes', you may need to obtain a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check and seek ethical approval from the relevant UAL ethics sub-committee. Discuss this with your Supervisor, Unit Leader, or Course Leader. Please be aware that a DBS check normally takes 4 weeks, but can take longer.**

I confirm that I have obtained a DBS check.

I understand that I need to go through the PREP review and the UAL ethics review process.

**Please Note:**

It is a presumption of academic research that, wherever possible and feasible, the information on which the research is based should be preserved, so that it can be made available to future researchers. However, the privacy of participants must be respected. Please refer to the UAL and BPS ethics codes before answering Question 10.

**10. Will you be obtaining personal information (e.g., name; postal, email, or IP address; recorded images or audio; date of birth) from the participants?**

No. Go to Question 11

Yes\*

**\*If you answer 'Yes', please give details. In your response, please indicate:** Why do you need to collect personal information from participants? How will you store and use this information during the course of your research in line with the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)? What parts of this information will need to be confidential? How will you ensure that no one can link participants' identity to the rest of their data? Will you exhibit or publish the information? Who will have access to the data? Will you retain information after the research is concluded? If yes, how? If information is to be destroyed, explain why this is appropriate.

Personal information such as name, age, gender, country of origin, personal opinions (quotes), and recorded audio will be collected. However, once the information has been collected, pseudonyms will be used to protect participants' identities. For data storage, the names will not be included in the stored files, only pseudonyms. The information will be stored in the University archives (UAL) using anonymised identifiers for the transcripts (10 years) and the audio files [and Consent Forms \(until Exam Board confirmation of grade\)](#).

**11. Will payments to participants be made?**

No. Go to Question 12

Yes\*

**\*If you answer 'Yes', please state amount and whether payment is for out-of-pocket expenses or a fee.**

**12. If the project is to receive financial support from outside the University, please give details.** Include any restrictions that have been imposed on the conduct of the research by the funding body or sponsor. Both financial propriety and the protection of commercial rights are important for you, the University, and other third parties (e.g., sponsors, participants).

N/A

13. Will any restrictions be placed on the publication of results?	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No. Go to Question 14
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes*
<b>*If you answer 'Yes', please state the nature of the restrictions (e.g., details of any confidentiality agreement).</b>	

### Student Declaration:

**15. I confirm my responsibility to deliver the project in accordance with the Code of Practice on Research Ethics and the Code of Practice on Educational Ethics of the University of the Arts London (the University), as well as the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics. In signing this form, I am also confirming that:**

- a) The form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.
- b) There is no potential material interest that may, or may appear to, impair the independence and objectivity of the researchers conducting this project.
- c) I understand that I cannot start data collection until I have received ethical approval from the relevant ethics body (e.g., PREP).
- d) I undertake to conduct the study as set out in this application unless deviation is agreed by the University and to comply with any conditions set out in the letter sent by the relevant ethics body (e.g., PREP).
- e) I understand that, if I decide to make substantial changes to the study method (e.g., the design, participant recruitment method, procedure), I will need to submit a revised ethics form.
- f) I will store data on UAL-managed systems and will follow the [data protection principles](#) at all times.
- g) I understand and accept that the ethical propriety of this project may be monitored by the relevant College Research body and/or Educational Ethics Sub-Committee.

**Signature of Student:**



**Date (dd/mm/yyyy):**

27/01/2025

### Unit Leader or Supervisor Declaration:

**16. I support this project and have reviewed and approved the current ethics application.**

**Name:**

Dr Jekaterina Rogaten

**Signature of Unit Leader or Supervisor:**




**Date (dd/mm/yyyy):**

30-1-2025

**SECTION B****FOR UAL COMMITTEE USE ONLY****Approval of Psychology Research Ethics Panel:**

- The Psychology reviewers recommend that:

- This student's Ethics Approval Form is approved as **minimal ethical risk**.
- This student's Ethics Approval Form is approved as **more than minimal ethical risk** and so will be forwarded to the University's Educational Ethics Sub-Committee for final approval.
- This student's Ethics Approval Form must be resubmitted after the student has made the **required** modifications indicated in the PREP's feedback.

<b>Name of Reviewer 1</b> (Psychology Team Member / Unit Leader / Supervisor)		<b>Date</b> (dd/mm/yyyy)	
<b>Name of Reviewer 2</b> (PREP Chair / Deputy Chair)	Dr Soljana Çili	<b>Date</b> (dd/mm/yyyy)	05/02/2025
<b>Signature</b>	<b>Reviewer 1</b>	<b>Reviewer 2</b>	

**Approval of University's Educational Ethics Sub-Committee (EESC):**

All 'more than minimal risk' documents will be sent to EESC.

- The Educational Ethics Subcommittee (EESC) recommends that:

- This student's Ethics Approval Form is approved as **minimal ethical risk**
- This student's Ethics Approval Form is approved as **more than minimal ethical risk**
- This student's Ethics Approval Form must be resubmitted, and the following modifications should be made (see below):

<b>Required Modifications List</b> (if applicable)	1)		
<b>Suggested Modifications List</b> (if applicable)	1)		
<b>Name</b>		<b>Date</b> (dd/mm/yyyy)	
<b>Signature</b> Chair of EESC			

## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Version 1, Dated 27/01/2025

### **Study title: Fashion Experience: Qualitative Comparison between expats and non-expats**

#### **Introduction**

My name is Valentina Libutti and I am a student at London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London (UAL). You are being invited to take part in the above research study. Before you decide whether you would like to take part or not, it is important that you understand what the study involves. Please read the information below carefully and ask questions if anything is not clear or you would like more information. If you are happy to take part, you will be asked to provide consent before engaging with the study.

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

Fashion has been found to serve as a form of self-expression and identity construction, thereby influencing people's self-perception and psychological well-being. In this study, I am interested in understanding if relocation influences personal fashion identity and style consistency by comparing experiences of individuals who relocated several times with those who have never moved.

**This study is open to** anyone above the age of 18. However, you must have either relocated to a different country at least two times.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You do not have to take part if you do not wish to.

#### **What will I be required to do if I take part?**

You will be asked to take part in an online interview. The interview questions will centre on your experience of fashion and how you have adapted to different fashion cultures. There are no right or wrong answers. The interview will take around 30-45 minutes and will be audio recorded.

#### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

According to the British Psychological Society's ethics guidelines, this study presents only minimal risk. Some of the questions may elicit discomfort or distress in some people. This discomfort is likely to pass quickly. You are not obliged to answer all the questions if you prefer not to, and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. You will also be provided with a list of support services at the end of the survey.

#### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

By participating in this study, you are contributing to the scientific understanding of the role of fashion in the adaptation to a new culture. Furthermore, the study may provide you with the opportunity to self-reflect upon some of the topics that will appear.

#### **How will my information be used?**

Any data obtained will be used solely for research purposes. This also applies to personal data, which will be used with your consent.

You can stop taking part in the study at any time while completing it, without giving a reason, and without experiencing any detriment. You can ask for your data to be withdrawn and destroyed within 2 weeks after completing the study by emailing the researcher at [v.libutti0720221@arts.ac.uk](mailto:v.libutti0720221@arts.ac.uk). However, after that, the data will be analysed, and you will be unable to withdraw.

All data will be accessible to me and my research supervisor. The data will be analysed while stored on UAL-managed systems. The anonymised data (transcripts with pseudonyms) will be stored on systems managed by UAL for 10 years. Personal data (name, contact details and audio recordings) will also be stored on UAL-managed systems, separately and will be deleted once this research project has been assessed and the grade

has been confirmed by UAL. No one except me and the relevant staff at the London College of Fashion will be able to link any identifying information to the rest of your responses.

You can find more information about UAL and your privacy rights at [www.arts.ac.uk/privacy-information](http://www.arts.ac.uk/privacy-information).

**What will happen to the results of the study?**

The results will be written as part of the researcher's dissertation for the BSc (Hons) Psychology of Fashion at London College of Fashion. However, there will be no information that may lead to your personal identification. The summary of the results may be presented at academic conferences and published in an academic journal.

**Who should I contact for further information?**

If you have any questions, require more information about this study, or would like to receive a summary of the study results when they are ready, please email me, the researcher, at [v.libutti0720221@arts.ac.uk](mailto:v.libutti0720221@arts.ac.uk).

**What happens if there is a problem?**

This study has been approved by the Psychology Research Ethics Panel at London College of Fashion, UAL. If you have any concerns about the study, you can contact Dr. Jekaterina Rogaten at [j.rogaten@fashion.arts.ac.uk](mailto:j.rogaten@fashion.arts.ac.uk). They will do their best to answer your query. If you have further concerns or wish to complain about the study, please contact [researchethics@arts.ac.uk](mailto:researchethics@arts.ac.uk).

**Thank you for reading this Information Sheet and for considering taking part in this research.**

**CONSENT FORM**  
Version 1, Dated 27/01/2025

**Study title: Fashion Experience: Qualitative Comparison between expats and non-expats**  
**Researcher's name: Valentina Libutti**

Please complete this form after you have read the Participant Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to participate.

If you decide to participate, please tick each of the boxes below to consent to different elements of this study. Please note that you may be deemed ineligible to participate if you do not consent to any of the elements.

Item no.	Item	Tick
1.	I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and asked questions, which have been answered satisfactorily.	
2.	I confirm that I am 18 years old or older	
3.	I confirm that I have lived in 2 different countries (in addition to my native country)	
4.	I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary.	
5.	I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to 2 weeks after my interview without giving a reason and without suffering any adverse consequences or penalty.	
6.	I understand how my data will be stored and consent to the processing of all data for the purposes explained to me.	
7.	I understand the potential disadvantages and risks of participating and the support that will be available to me should I become distressed during the course of the research.	
8.	I understand that confidentiality will be maintained, and it will not be possible to identify me in any reports or publications.	
9.	I consent to my interview being audio recorded.	
10.	I consent to my data, including anonymised quotes, being used in written up or published work resulting from this research.	
11.	I understand that honesty is important to the research and will do my best to answer the questions accurately and honestly.	
12.	I agree to take part in this study.	

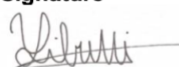
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Name of Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

**Valentina Libutti**  
**Name of Researcher**

**27/01/2025**  
**Date**

  
**Signature**

## DEBRIEFING SHEET

Version 1, Dated 27/01/2025

**Study title: Fashion Experience: Qualitative Comparison between expats and non-expats**

**Researcher's name: Valentina Libutti**

**Researcher's email address: v.libutti0720221@arts.ac.ukk**

Thank you for taking part in this study! Below is some more information about the aims of the study and what happens next.

### **What are the aims of this study and what are we expecting to find?**

This study aims to explore how the experience of relocation impacts personal fashion identity and style consistency by examining and comparing the experiences of two groups: individuals who have relocated multiple times and those who have always lived in the same country. By investigating how mobility affects the way people navigate cultural norms and maintain their sense of self through clothing, this research seeks to uncover the relationship between relocation, personal style, and identity in an increasingly globalised world.

### **What are some of the benefits that may result from this study?**

This study offers several benefits across academic and practical domains. Participants will contribute to a deeper understanding of how personal identity, cultural adaptation, and mobility influence fashion choices, an area with limited existing research. The findings will enrich the fields of psychology and fashion studies by exploring how individuals use fashion as a tool for self-expression and cultural navigation, providing valuable insights for both disciplines. Additionally, this research could have practical implications for the fashion industry, helping brands understand the needs and preferences of globally mobile individuals and adapt to a new wave of culturally diverse consumers. Participants can feel confident that their experiences will help shape knowledge in this emerging area of study and may inspire future research.

### **What should you do if you need support at the end of the study?**

The following are resources that may be helpful in the unlikely event that you experience persisting negative emotions during or after the study.

1. Please contact your GP or family doctor and explain the difficulty you are facing. They will be able to direct you to local psychological services.
2. If you are based in the UK, you can also contact:
  - a. MIND, which is a charitable organisation helping people to deal with mental health issues, to obtain suitable support for a range of situations [https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/?gclid=CjwKCAiAp4KCBhB6EiwAxRxbpl2KnCoyR5hAUt-Fo2gBFrW0zC8LTVenFHYSiyUmetOjTG8xCiYA\\_BoCNikQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/?gclid=CjwKCAiAp4KCBhB6EiwAxRxbpl2KnCoyR5hAUt-Fo2gBFrW0zC8LTVenFHYSiyUmetOjTG8xCiYA_BoCNikQAvD_BwE)
  - b. Samaritans helpline: 116 123
  - c. Resources for accessing counselling or therapy through the NHS: <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/Pages/free-therapy-or-counselling.aspx>
3. Self-help resources: <http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk>
4. Progressive muscle relaxation exercise: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=912eRrbes2g>

### **Contact details**

If you have more questions about the study or would like to request a summary of the findings when they are ready, please contact me using the email address provided above. If this study has harmed you in any way or you wish to make a complaint about the conduct of the study, you can contact [researchethics@arts.ac.uk](mailto:researchethics@arts.ac.uk).

Thank you once again for your contribution to the study!

## APPENDICES

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### Demographics Questions:

Tell me about your background

1. Name
2. Age
3. Gender
4. Country of origin (have you lived there?)
5. Current country/city of residence
6. How many times did you move countries ? (List them)
7. How long have you lived in the same country?
8. Occupation

#### Main Questions:

1. How interested are you in fashion? Why yes or why not? What is fashion to you? How important it is for you to be fashionable? How do you ensure you are dressed fashionably?
2. What do you found/find most difficult when:
  - Shopping for clothes
  - Deciding what to wear
3. How would you describe your personal style or clothing choices? Has that changed in any way over the years?
4. How do you feel when you choose clothing that differs from current fashion trends or popular styles?
5. What do you find is different about the fashion of your country of residence compared to the one of your country of origin? What do you like more, or what do they like less?
6. Can you describe how your clothing choices changed/did not change after relocating?
7. Are there specific items of clothing or fashion elements that evoke personal or cultural memories for you?
8. How do your fashion choices reflect a sense of belonging to a particular cultural or social group?
9. Do you find that certain styles or pieces help you feel connected to your heritage (if so, why?)
10. Can you share an example of a time you shifted your style to fit a new environment?
11. Have you found yourself buying clothing more frequently since moving to a new culture? (Do you feel this is connected to trying to adapt or feel more comfortable?)
12. Do you feel any pressure to conform to the fashion norms of your new environment? Please can you give more reasons for this?
13. How do you balance maintaining elements of your cultural identity through clothing while adapting to a new culture?
14. In what ways do you express your personal or cultural identity through your clothing choices?
15. Have you found yourself blending different cultural or social identities in your personal style? Could you share an example?

## Appendix D: Evaluative Commentary

### Reflexivity journal extract

Reflexivity for interviews ☺.

participant 1 - Carlotta.

Started very awkwardly because I literally just called them a few hours before so was strange to get into the research place + my first interview!!

Started the interview in French haha!!!. Then they reminded me. Asked them where did they live but they just stated the cities so I had to ask again and be specific that I was curious to know about the countries in general (because I knew that they lived in France and Italy at different moments of their lives!) Then had to ask how long in each place.

Asked them what they do in life and they talked a lot about their job I might remove that part in the transcript because it is not relevant to the study.

participant 6 - Emma.

Very interesting to see how Kenya was so different to all the places they've lived in. Unexpected experience that they saw such a big change in their style when moving within the UK (London - Cardiff).

### Transcription and IPA coding

CONTENT      CONTEXT      INTERPRETATION

**Participant 1**      23/02/2025      *suggests lack of fixed geographical rootedness*

*Lived in 8 countries + 12 moves*  
*Describes life of repeated move due to studies jobs + parents*  
 Participant 1: I'm 26 years old and I come from Italy and Luxembourg but I'm currently living in Dakar, the capital of Senegal. I've been living here for two years and a half almost and now because of my job and previously because of my studies or because of my parents job I basically moved around my entire life every three to four years sometimes even less. I've changed countries basically since I was born. I've lived in Italy for a year when I was born so I don't think that even counts and then for one year when I was 15 and then in Luxembourg I've only lived there for like six months and it was during Covid so (.)

*Participant frames themselves as highly mobile*  
 Me: How many times did you move countries? If you can list all the places you've lived in.  
 Participant 1: So France, no, Italy, France, Mauritius, Tunisia, France, Belgium, Italy, because it was in a different place. Wales, London, Paris, Senegal. Lived in 8 countries and I moved 12 times. (laughing)

*Longest time in country was France (early childhood)*  
 Me: And what's the longest time you've stayed in one country?  
 Participant 1: It would be France because I was there at three different times but for once it was for like six years but I was very very young it was from like one to seven years. And I stayed 5 years in the UK. And now I live in Senegal.

*Expresses strong emotional connection to clothing - says they're made BUT far from brands*  
 Me: So how interested are you in fashion?  
 Participant 1: It's not like I don't care, I'm far from not caring, I really care about what I wear and looking nice, it matters to me, it makes me feel good, and it can really change my day if I'm nappy with my outfit, but I'm not one of those people who like spends crazy amounts on that. I don't really care about brands. I really, what I care about is when I see something and I like it. So if it happens to be from a brand, then okay, but if it doesn't, it doesn't really matter. It's more about, yeah, what I like when I see it. Okay.

*Describes color preferences and how they shift with local season (Senegal)*  
 Me: This is maybe a hard question to answer, but what makes you like or not like something?  
 Participant 1: Yeah, I think color really plays a part. I really like all of those tones like that are either beige, brown, white, green. So if it's something like that, (really, really like it) But I've noticed as well that it depends where I am or the time of year. Like if it's winter, I wear a lot of black since moving here, I barely do that. So it depends on the season as well, what I'm attracted to and where I am, definitely. I wear a lot of colorful stuff which in winter somewhere else I probably wouldn't. Overall, I think I also care a little bit about where it comes from. I'm learning to care more about that than I used to, especially here actually. So when I see that it's you know, something that is made by a woman here and that it's giving them a job and that excites me even more than going to Zara or H&M. (reflexive) (reflexive)

*Attitudes interaction between climate, geography, fashion*  
 Me: How would you describe your fashion sense your style how you dress?  
 Participant 1: I think, as I said, it's really on having / wearing colors that I like that are quite neutral and that I know fit me well, like I know that green suits me well, things like that. It's rather simple.

*Growing awareness of ethics (Senegal espe)*  
 Me: So do you prioritize comfort over?  
 Participant 1: I think, as I said, it's really on having / wearing colors that I like that are quite neutral and that I know fit me well, like I know that green suits me well, things like that. It's rather simple. *guided style by what suits them*

*sequence of places is slightly disorganised, maybe shows hard to remember. Moving feels normal for them.*

*Repeated corrections might indicate how blurred and non-linear their memory of place became*

*long-term sense of belonging might be weak because of early stage*

*for them fashion is a form of emotional regu and self express -> inward-facing relationship w/ fashion*

*Environment directly influences their clothing choices*

*The way they engage with color suggests adaptive sensibility rather than fixed subo styles.*

*emotional and sensory sensibility to places and apparel*

*Hybrid growth influenced by direct exposure of ethical issues*

Denies prioritising comfort over style

Aims for a mix of both in life but sacrifices comfort in occasions.

Participant 1: No, I really like to dress actually and how it can make you feel so I think I like to find things that I think are both comfortable but that also fit you well so I would say I usually try to find a mix of both but then it also depends that's for like everyday life but if I'm thinking of like I don't know going to a wedding or a bigger event then I get really excited about wearing something that I think that it's maybe less comfortable, but that is really like, wow! So I also do dress up. I just don't do it often.

excitement about special moments where they can dress up

Duality shows flexible approach to fashion.

Clothing can be fun but still rooted in self awareness

Me: Okay, and when you started working, so full-time job, did you kind of change up your closet, did you buy new things just because obviously there's a dress code you have to have when you go to work or was your style before working kind of similar to what you're wearing now?

Describes adjusting their wardrobe to fit in Senegal especially regarding modesty

Climate change winter clothes seem easier to adapt to office considered to summer

Participant 1: It was a bit similar. I had to adapt it a bit, but mostly because of the country I'm in it's like warm all the time, but you can't really wear like shorts or ~~two~~ short dresses and things like that. So in that way, a lot of like the summer clothes I had, which I could wear somewhere else at the office. This is mainly because of like the culture of the country, you can dress casually here, it wouldn't have fit the context, let's say. So I did have to adapt a little bit. But yeah, in general I noticed, and this is very specific, if it's like winter clothes, I think most of my winter clothes could fit up the office as well. But it's usually my summer clothes, which what I wear here are a bit more not the type of stuff that you would wear at the office. I definitely had to adapt regarding that and also, you know, longer, but you don't sweat in, so a lot of linen, things like that that I didn't necessarily have

Workplace norms in new culture gender dress codes + climate are relevant

They adjust without resistance

Emerging awareness of how climate and social norms interest with expectations

Me: So you said you moved to Senegal two years ago. Do you think since you moved there your fashion sense or your style has changed a lot?

Acknowledges changes in their fashion sense attributes this change to growth

Their style doesn't fully mirror local styles

Participant 1: I think a little bit mainly because I like to wear colors more since I've been here but overall I think it has changed but mostly because I'm growing up basically that's the reading that I have. So yes it's a bit the country but there's a lot of white people here who go crazy with their local fabric and all the colors and they get crazy stuff made by the tailors. I'm not really like that I like to have like a few pieces and maybe like a nice color for necklace or headband or something like that I don't go all out. I've still, I don't feel like I've adapted, like I don't dress like the people dress here. I've just taken some little things that I think look nice without being too heavy. So I think the biggest change has mainly been, yeah, as I said, because of me growing up and so just being interested in a bit different clothing than I was when I was 15, for example.

(laughs)

Resists full cultural assimilation but is more selective

Describes integral elements of local style in subtle ways

everything seems intentional - they belong in their own terms

Me: So you said two things you like to take like little things from where you are now that you like try to implement in your style. Can you give me an example or like list of few things that you did?

Examples of incorporating Senegalese elements into their style

Participant 1: Yeah, so there's this shop here that does really nice earrings like gold color earrings that are quite big. So that I really love, women here often have like really nice earrings. So that is something that I ~~like~~ like doing, or there's this local fabric called wax, where a lot of people here, they use it to make dresses or everything. I like to, for example, like a scrunchie with that, or make a t-shirt where like the pocket is in wax.

(excitement)

Seems to be able to enjoy and appreciate without completely changing their style

These items symbolise their way of situating themselves in a new place

Me: Is there can you maybe like pinpoint a moment in your life or like a place where you move that made you like realize that your style changed?