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New Young Writers on Wool: My Life in Jumpers**

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Abstract

New Young Writers on Wool: My Life in Jumpers is a short diaristic-style journal article focusing on the author's relationship to jumpers and wool within the context of sustainability and the Yorkshire region.

Eleanor Snare has been in love with the jumper since they were young and their changing experience with the garment inspired them to write about it. Taking a reflective and personal approach to consider the relationships between author, clothing, material and location; Snare's article highlights the intimate connection between people, clothing, place and material - a connection which forms the backbone of engagement with sustainable fashion production and consumption.

Increasingly, their interest in fashion is becoming twinned with their interest in the ways in which we can live more sustainable lives and own more sustainable wardrobes. Natural fibers, including wool, are just one way to do this. This article is a love letter to the garment, the material, and the social identities it represents.

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New Young Writers on Wool

My Life in Jumpers



Abstract

I've been in love with the jumper since I was young and my changing experience with the garment inspired me to write about it. Increasingly, my interest in fashion is becoming twinned with my interest in the ways in which we can live more sustainable lives and own more sustainable wardrobes. Natural fibers, including wool, are just one way to do this. This article is a love letter to the garment, the material, and the social identities it represents.

Keywords: sweaters, wool, natural fibers, sustainability, fast fashion, sustainable textiles, comfort, jumpers

New Young Writers on Wool

My Life in Jumpers

Looking back at our lives in fashion, we can quickly pick out the garment that best defines us. Mine is the jumper.

I currently own twenty-four: that's one for nearly every year I've existed. Viewing my life through these lovable drawer-dwellers, I see a recent and significant shift. Early jumpers included a harlequin-patterned cardigan in primary colors with fake gemstone buttons, and a school-stained pillar-box red V-neck, complete with gingham summer dress. Skip ahead and there are fistfuls of black fuzzy

acrylic, more polyester V-necks (this time in navy blue with a pleated skirt), and fancy Lurex-sprinkled sweaters glittering under disco lights.

With more than pocket money to spend just under a decade later, my love affair with kaleidoscopic synthetics lost its sparkle. I had discovered a fiber more fitting for a woman carving out her own style in a northern town. I had discovered wool.

Late to the party, perhaps, for the citizen of an island whose inhabitants have been protecting



Figure 1
Rebecca Snare, *Jumpers*, 2014.

themselves from the elements with wool for thousands of years. Especially late, too, living in Yorkshire, whose homes were built on the textile trade and whose exquisite woven woolens continue to be exported to design houses across the globe. But some of us haven't even got our invite, let alone joined the woolen revolution.

Wool has been part of our cultural and industrial fabric for generations, yet we're still not convinced of its benefits. We choose to buy our jumpers knitted from squeaky acrylic and our suits in cheap-looking polyester, rather than taking the time to look after wool and reap its rewards. It's not entirely the consumer's fault, however, as decades of lifestyle changes have contributed to the move from hand-knit jumpers that need TLC to machine-produced, "fast-fashion" synthetics that allow you to wash and go.

So why choose wool over the easier acrylic option? Although a higher initial outlay, wool has longevity. Its tough fibers, designed to protect sheep from vicious climates, are long-lasting and hard-wearing—think of furry woolen socks and coarse blankets patched and passed on through the generations. It's water-resistant thanks to natural oils, and when used in garments close to the skin—like jumpers—symbiotically breathes with us, keeping us warm in winter and cool in summer. Whether woven or knitted, fine-grade wool has a luxurious drape like no other fabric, while tweedier mixes give a substantial, hardy cloth. Choose wool, and you'll find a textile to fit any lifestyle and every life.

More than physically, wool gives us spiritual sustenance. Coddled in our first and final years, woolen blankets are a home comfort matched only by the slightly more socially acceptable big woolly sweater. We feel at ease in wool through its womb-like swaddling, simultaneously fulfilling our necessity and desire to be protected, loved, and swathed in safety. From the fisherman in his cabled Guernsey to the duchess in her twinset, woolen jumpers satisfy our id without letting the ego down in polite company.

Strange that it takes growing up to realize the childlike comfort of wool. But as the years progress, the intelligent consumer starts to see fashion unraveling. The cyclical nature of the fashion industry is exposed in pornographic rawness: you live through decades that become trendy again, compare copies of *Cosmo* from separate summers and see the same nautical fashion splashed across the pages. So instead of hunting down fashion, you pursue *style*—something that will outlast seasonal changes and fickle editors. You see the benefits of garments your nana loved, knowing you can be stylish *and* practical. You don't tell Anna Dello Russo, but you start buying simple, flattering denim and really good basic T-shirts. You discover wool.

The strength of wool's longevity is not only in its physical and spiritual qualities but in its multifaceted cultural significance. Built on rural industry and community life, wool and her animal sisters—alpaca, angora, cashmere, camel—have taken on contemporary meanings woven

from supposed dichotomies. Gender, class, profession, and geography all tie together in the sweater, from the angora bombshell to practical lambswool, punk mohair to old-money cashmere. Jumpers in natural fibers represent archetypal style; a longevity of self-assured sartorial credibility which fashion can't touch. *This* is what really turned me on to wool—not the physical benefits alone but the jumper's ability to morph into multiple identities while still retaining an almost stubborn style classicism.

Increasingly, wool and other natural fibers are taking over my jumper collection in the same way traditional materials and craft skills are reentering the wider fashion landscape. From my cloud-like Peebles of Scotland cream cashmere V-neck to the oatmeal-colored rough lambswool jumper, these garments are the signifiers of knowledge about the quality, history, culture, and physicality of dress. These jumpers are the realization that "style over substance" isn't inevitable but a choice—a way of dressing we've selected for apparent efficiency or economy.

Wool allows us style *and* substance through disrupting dichotomies long established in fashion: comfort or beauty, naivety or maturity, the city or the country. But it's only through experiencing these debates year after year, combined with a lack of material and visual longevity in fashion, that we turn back to materials (like wool) we've been using for millennia. It's only when we start to collect fashion experiences—or magazines, or jumpers—that we're

able to make informed investments in garments and fibers which benefit our physical and sartorial well-being, the fashion industry, and our surroundings. It's then that the definition of your life in fashion becomes something of which your nana would be proud.

