

# Looking *vanlig*; neither too much nor too little

A study of consumption of clothing among mainstream youth in a Swedish small town

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Academic dissertation for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Fashion Studies at Stockholm University to be publicly defended on Wednesday 3 May 2017 at 10.00 in föreläsningssalen, Filmhuset, Borgvägen 5.

## Abstract

This thesis studies consumption among young people who identify as mainstreamers in a Swedish small town. In order to map patterns of clothing consumption and to understand what was central in the young people's self-identification, the research was conducted using a mix of ethnographic methods and wardrobe studies. This is an inverted study of the subcultural, that problematizes the assumption that the majority (the mainstream) and the minority (the countercultural) are opposites when it comes to identity creation. The central concepts used here are ordinary (*vanlig*), mainstream, and subculture. One of the main findings is that the youth studied self-identify as ordinary. This finding is used to problematize not only the traditional markers of masculinity and femininity as they present themselves in this context, but also what is characterized as new patterns of consumption. There are two main conclusions. First, being mainstream and ordinary was not a static identity position, as the literature would have it; instead, being an ordinary mainstreamer required constant work in order to stay within certain culturally negotiated boundaries. Second, the ethnographic findings contribute in the field of subcultural studies by questioning the convention of portraying the mainstream and the subcultural as polar opposites: contrary to the literature, it is argued that neither is so very different from the other, making it an unhelpful dichotomy in understanding young people today.

**Keywords:** *Consumption, Denim, Mainstream, Subculture, Ordinary, Youth.*

Stockholm 2017

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:su:diva-131047>

ISBN 978-91-7649-445-5

ISBN 978-91-7649-718-0

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