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# Shoppers on a ‘Diet’ Tame the Urge to Buy

By ERIC WILSON

IMAGINE that horrible though all-too-familiar feeling: You are standing before a fully stuffed closet and yet have nothing to wear.

Now, imagine something worse: Your closet contains only six items, and you are restricted to wearing only those six items for an entire month.

Now, if you can bear it, imagine something unspeakable:

No one notices.

Nearly a month into what amounted to just such a self-inflicted fast of fashion, Stella Brennan, 31, an insurance sales executive from Kenosha, Wis., realized last week that not even her husband, Kelly, a machinist, had yet figured out that she had been wearing the same six items, over and over, since June 21. The sad punch line is that Mr. Brennan is the one who actually does the laundry in the family.

During her experiment — something called a “shopping diet,” actually — which ended on Wednesday, Ms. Brennan made do with the following: a black blazer and pants from H & M; two button-down shirts, one black and one pink; a pair of Old Navy jeans; and one well-worn pink T-shirt.

How she settled on those items was complicated by the fact that she has two young children, a golden retriever and three cats, *and* that she was starting a new job last month with an hourlong commute. She said she needed “six items that are animal-hair-, kid-, food- and wrinkle-resistant. I need these items to be professional, but also work for playing football with my son and tea parties.”

She agonized the longest over the T-shirt — the button-down shirts and suit separates were for work, but the right T-shirt could be worn casually with jeans or dressed up with the blazer. Her

revelation at the end of 31 days, after her husband still had not noticed, even when she wore her floral-printed pajamas to do yard work: “Obviously, I didn’t need all of these clothes.”

This self-imposed exercise in frugality was prompted by a Web challenge called [Six Items or Less](#) ([sixitemsorless.com](#)). The premise was to go an entire month wearing only six items already found in your closet (not counting shoes, underwear or accessories). Nearly 100 people around the country, and in faraway places like Dubai and Bangalore, India, were also taking part in the regimen, with motives including a way to trim back on spending, an outright rejection of fashion, and a concern that the mass production and global transportation of increasingly cheap clothing was damaging the environment.

Meanwhile, an even stricter program, [the Great American Apparel Diet](#), which began on Sept. 1, has attracted pledges by more than 150 women and two men to abstain from buying for an entire year. (Again, undies don’t count.) And next month, Gallery Books will publish a self-help guide, called “The Shopping Diet,” by the red-carpet stylist Phillip Bloch. (“Step 1: Admit You’re an Overshopper”... “Step 9: Practice Safe, Responsible Shopping”... “Step 10: Make the Diet a Way of Life.”)

Though their numbers may be small, and their diets extreme, these self-deniers of fashion are representative, in perhaps a notable way, of a broader reckoning of consumers’ spending habits. As the economy begins to improve, shoppers of every income appear to be wrestling with the same questions: Is it safe to go back to our old, pre-recession ways? Or should we? The authors of these diets — including some fashion marketing and advertising executives, interestingly enough — seem to think not.

Sally Bjornsen, the founder of the Great American Apparel Diet ([thegreatamericanappareldiet.com](#)), said she was prompted to stop buying clothes for a simple reason: “I was sick and tired of consumerism,” she said.

Last summer, Ms. Bjornsen, 47, said she was thinking about how years of easy credit had led to overspending on cars, homes and luxury goods. Then, looking in her own closet, she realized that she was part of the problem, she said. For her job, as a representative of commercial photographers in Seattle and before that as a marketing executive at fashion companies like Nike and Nordstrom, she’d spent \$5,000 to \$10,000 a year on clothes.

“I was buying in an egregious way,” Ms. Bjornsen said. “I was just kind of grossed out by the whole thing.”

Independently, the “six items” experiment was conceived by two friends, Heidi Hackemer, 31, a

strategic business director at the New York advertising agency BBH, and Tamsin Davies, 34, the head of innovation at Fallon London, after an informal discussion about their desires to pare down their wardrobes. The idea snowballed into a creative challenge, Six Items or Less.

The rules were not hard and fast. If a person owned, for example, several similar black blazers — as Ms. Brennan, the Wisconsin executive, did — she could count them as one item.

“Our whole thing was not to put a philosophy behind it, and not be too preachy,” Ms. Hackemer said. The challenge has proved so popular that she said it would be repeated this fall.

Her six items were a black dress, a pair of black jeggings (a jeans-leggings hybrid), a black tank top, a black blazer, a gray skirt and denim shorts. The combinations she came up with were surprisingly diverse enough to get her through the month, “but once you hit Week 3, you think, You’ve got to be kidding me.”

Sixers, as Six Items or Less enthusiasts call themselves, have formed something of an online fashion support network, especially when they feel tempted to fall off the wagon.

Ms. Brennan did sound ripe for some kind of fashion intervention. In a recent interview, she spoke of a rack of clothes in the back of her closet that still had the tags on them, and clothes that she has not worn in 15 years but that she cannot stand to part with, and her 72 pairs of “active” shoes (meaning those that she actively wears, not the ones still in the boxes), and a closet full of clothes for her 3-year-old daughter, and, lest she forget, a wardrobe of clothes for her dog.

“My daughter doesn’t care what she wears, and I’m turning her into a monster,” Ms. Brennan said. “We’re ruining the next generation of girls with fashion.”

THE dieters’ comments reflect the complicated and sometimes confused relationships between consumers and their closets — which perhaps was to be expected in a nation where women, on average, own seven pairs of jeans but wear only four regularly, according to the September issue of Consumer Reports’ [ShopSmart](#) magazine. One in four women asked by the magazine said she owned 10 pairs or more.

Still, the month has been grueling. One Sixer from Venice, Calif., confessed online to splurging on T-shirts at a James Perse sample sale. Addy, from Milwaukee, wrote that she had become so bored with her six items “that I don’t even have a desire to get up in the morning,” and she complained of mood swings.

But others describe a life-changing experience. Sneha Lakshman, 32, a founder of Dig Design, a

Web and mobile products company in Bangalore, said by phone that she had decided, “That’s it, I’m going to wear only black from now on.”

Kelli Bauman, 24, a visual communications student from Indianapolis, said she was facing up to her compulsive-shopping habits. She described herself as the type who gets excited about buying cleaning products; a thrice-weekly shopper at Target. “I feel like I am programmed to want to buy new things,” she said. “When my jeans got a hole in them, I wanted to buy new jeans that instant.”

Just look at how far she has come. “I’ve only been to Target twice this whole time.” On one visit, she bought wasp spray and toothpaste for herself, but splurged on gifts for a bride-to-be — buying for someone else was like a “gateway drug,” she said.

Another Sixer, Dean Kakridas, 42, the director of business development at Frog Design, an innovation firm in Austin, Tex., said that he was obsessed with efficiency. “I kind of question everything,” he said, including why he was spending 20 minutes every morning figuring out what to wear.

He wanted to identify the clothes that made him happiest and fit his lifestyle. He chose a pair of G-Star jeans, two button-down shirts, two short-sleeve polo shirts and, cleverly, a pair of shorts from Life After Denim that are reversible (one side is solid charcoal; the other is plaid).

Speaking like a programmer, he said: “Anything that removes complexity or cycles from your day is really valuable. I have freed a lot of bandwidth in my head.” (After three weeks on the program, however, he was quoting Coco Chanel: “I don’t do fashion. I am fashion.”)

The most interesting thing to many of the Sixers was how few people noticed what they were doing. Except, that is, for those who did. Mr. Kakridas said that his wife disapproved.

“My wife jabs at me almost on a daily basis,” he said. “She tries to get me to waver from the commitment and get me to cheat. She hid my Febreze from me.”

As with any diet, abstinence is not for everyone.

Of the 150-plus-people who signed up for the Great American Apparel Diet, about half have given up. Ms. Bjornsen’s own sister quit after four weeks. And she has herself cheated twice, once when she realized she had forgotten to bring her workout clothes to the gym, a second time when her husband told her that her pajamas looked worn out and gross. Though she said she feels no guilt about those indulgences, Ms. Bjornsen said that she was looking forward to the end of the diet on Aug. 31.

She had thought about ways to make money off the diet, she said, but instead she plans to pass on the management of the Web site to continuing and future participants.

“It’s taken about 10 to 20 years to build up the idea that nothing is good unless it is new,” Ms. Bjornsen said. “Five years from now, if the diet is still going, it would be interesting to see how that changes.”

*This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:*

***Correction: July 29, 2010***

*An article last Thursday about a fashion movement to wear the same six items for 31 consecutive days misspelled the name of a product used to eliminate odors from fabrics. It is Febreze, not Fabreze.*

A British Dietetic Association (BDA) spokesperson said supermarkets had a "duty of care" to their customers. "It is unhelpful and confusing to the consumer, and supermarkets should avoid doing this," they added. "They should be promoting and educating people to buy foods that actually are healthy - not just marketed as being so." image captionTrading standards representatives said they would be speaking to supermarkets. Morrisons' own brand lentil hotpot contained almost a third of the recommended maximum daily amount of salt - almost 2g - but was stocked in Start reading The Maker's Diet Shopper's Guide on your Kindle in under a minute. Don't have a Kindle? Get your Kindle here, or download a FREE Kindle Reading App.Â like others stated, if you have the makers diet you do not need this. the shopping list is a copy/paste of the foods to enjoy. it does have recipes for all 40 days , 3 meals, so if you do not know how to cook or want other recipe ideas w/ the foods you can eat than its worth it but other wise. do not buy. I did a quick skim and I think there are more food choices in the recipes but a lot of them I think if you do not live in a good market you may not even find the food in your local grocery store. but you really don't need the shoppers guide if you have the makers diet book. Read more. 10 Supermarket bosses have urged shoppers not to start panic buying, while Asda is bringing in 1,000 safety marshals, as the industry braces for a potential change in shopping habits ahead of new lockdown restrictions. Tesco boss Dave Lewis said stockpiling was "unnecessary" as there was no disruption to product supply chains as a result of new government measures to tackle rising Covid-19 infection. Giles Hurley, the boss of discounter chain Aldi in the UK, wrote to customers saying: "There is no need to buy more than you usually would. I would like to reassure you that our stores remain fully s English News Lesson on Panic Buying: Panic buying sparks toilet paper shortages - FREE worksheets, online activities, listening in 7 Levels...Â Psychologists say panic buying is an "irrational" behaviour that is part of a condition called FOMO - the fear of missing out. Dr Katharina Wittgens said a herd mentality sets in during disasters that causes people to copy the actions of others. People watch the news of items being bought in bulk and immediately rush out to the stores to do the same. She said people were overestimating the risks of dying from the coronavirus. She said: "Far more people die in car accidents or household accidents per year but we don't panic about these things in the morning before we go to w SHOPPERS are being urged to buy local and put pressure on supermarkets to support farmers to ensure that the Island is kept supplied with fresh Jersey vegetables.Â And with an independent survey of consumer trends showing that the number of Islanders wanting to buy local at its highest since the recession began in 2007, Mr Garton is hopeful the plan will succeed. 'Ultimately the more people who ask retailers and restaurants for local produce, the more we are going to see it on the shelves and on menus,' he said. 'It is about people power and we know that there's a larger proportion of people looking for local produce, so shoppers should vote with their pockets and support local producers.'