



**Dr. Elena Karpova**  
Putman & Hayes  
Distinguished Professor

## IS THIS SUSTAINABLE?

Growing up in a small town above the arctic circle in Soviet Russia, UNC Greensboro Bryan School professor Dr. Elena Karpova says she was drawn to clothing from an early age. That curiosity stemmed from a shortage of apparel options, lack of brands, and market competition under the centrally-planned economy in the country – so as a teen, she decided to make her own clothes.

Now the Bryan School’s Putman & Hayes Distinguished Professor in the Department of Consumer, Apparel, and Retail Studies, Karpova is in the midst of an impressive stretch of research on the topic of consumer sustainability, logging articles not only in top academic journals but also frequently in *The Washington Post* featuring titles such as “Why you should almost always wash your clothes on cold” and “Why should you air dry your laundry? Let’s count the ways.”

Karpova earned her first PhD from St. Petersburg University of Technology and Design before landing in the United States by way of a competitive program administered by the U.S. Department of Education. She received her second PhD from UNCG, and her academic journey took her to Missouri and Iowa before she returned to North Carolina. However, her interest in a world full of brands and consumers never wavered, subjects that were foreign to her as a child.

About a decade ago, she recalls, the focus of her consumer research gradually became greener.

“At the time my son was little, and I thought of what type of life he was going to have, what, as parents, we are leaving for our children in terms of the environment. That made an impact on me and my own consumption habits,” she says.

Consumers are not solely responsible for turning the tide against rising global temperatures, Karpova says, acknowledging that there is a significant role for the public and private sector to play in helping to incentivize greener social norms. But in lieu of opening a browser and beginning to comb through her recent impactful work, Karpova says there is one place we can all start the next time we’re shopping.

“When you want to buy a garment, think about how much you like it on a scale of one to 10. I really recommend you only buy 9s and 10s, and be honest with yourself. You deserve to wear 10s, and you don’t need more 7s and 8s in your closet,” she says. “Wear what you love, take good care of it, and keep it as long as you can. You will be the most sustainable consumer!”

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