COMMUNALLY LIVING THE POSITIVE ALTERNATIVE

Caroline Bekin
Prof. Isabelle Szmigin
Dr. Marylyn Carrigan

Birmingham Business School
University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
Birmingham
B15 2TT

Email: cdm142@bham.ac.uk
i.t.szmigin@bham.ac.uk
m.carrigan@bham.ac.uk

Tel: 0121 414 6690
Fax: 0121 414 6707

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Downshifting and other 'resistance' consumer behaviors have been examined according to varied perspectives, including political consumption (Shaw 2007; Shaw, Newholm and Dickinson 2006; Dickinson and Carsky 2005; Micheletti 2003), consumer activism and movements (Hermann 1970; Hilton 2003; Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Lang and Gabriel 2005) and resistance to consumer culture, the marketplace or marketing more broadly (Kozinets 2002; Giesler and Pohlmann 2003). Indeed, communities of alternative consumption involving radical forms of downshifting and/or ethical consumer behaviour have been largely positioned as anti- consumer culture and anti-marketing (Kozinets 2002; Giesler and Pohlmann 2003; Dobscha and Ozanne 2002; Dobscha 1998). But Juliet Schor (1998:23) suggests that past movements such as the "hippies" were "much more self-consciously anti-consumerist than most of today's downshifters"; that downshifters today "are not dropping out. They are not back-to-the-land types. They don't live together. And they don't share a religion."

In this chapter we examine whether downshifting behaviour is possible within alternative community lifestyles, how it is manifested, and whether it may be considered a form of resistance to consumer culture in such a context. To do so, we review a diverse body of cross-disciplinary literature on the question of resistance to consumer culture, comprising the perspectives mentioned above. We also examine six UK communities of consumers who at a first glance could be seen as current embodiments of the 'anti-' and/or 'resistance' phenomenon, but which instead have shown communally-held 'positive alternative' approaches to discourses and practices encompassing downshifting and ethical consumption. We consider the communities' relationships with the market and wider society from both the

community position and the views of individuals within, presenting the everyday realities of downshifting in a communal context. We (re)present the communities through data from three years of ethnographic research comprising participant-observation, depth interviews, websites, print documents, broadcast material, informal conversations and experience stories with participants in what we have termed New Consumption Communities (Szmigin, Carrigan and Bekin 2007; Szmigin and Carrigan 2003). New Consumption Communities are presented as beneficial in terms of consumer re-enablement; they have been conceptualized as communities providing alternative ways of engaging in consumption and negotiating with the marketplace to an increasingly varied range of individuals (Szmigin, Carrigan and Bekin 2007). New Consumption Communities are formed around a sense of community through consumers' reconnection to production, and maintained through engagement in boycotts, voicing of concerns and positive choices (Szmigin and Carrigan 2003).

The six distinct cases are presented throughout the text in order to diversely illustrate our arguments in this chapter. The first of these is Hockerton Housing Project (HHP), the UK's first ecologically sound, energy-efficient, earth-sheltered housing complex, launched in 1998. It was built by five resident families who produce 100% of their own wind energy, grow organic food, and manage their own sewage, water collection and filtering systems. Members are committed to a community business that comprises guided tours, educational and specialist workshops. HHP considers itself a best practice example and catalyst for sustainable living.

The second community is Fallowfields (pseudonym). Founded in 1950 as an educational trust, Fallowfields had eighteen members at the time of research (2004). Their values comprise learning to live life peacefully and in community. Some members live in shared and others in independent accommodation within the community. During fieldwork,

Fallowfields was undergoing an ethos-searching period, with environmental causes gaining prominence.

The third community is Spiritual (pseudonym), a pioneering, holistic enterprise whose aim is spiritual (non-religious) education. It comprises an eco-village with several communal buildings for workshops, housing, ethical shops and a hall used for conferences and performances. Spiritual is an inspirational example to other communities. It had around five hundred permanent and volunteer members at the time of research, and thousands of people visit them each year. It is set up as a non-profit charity with a body of trustees, and is holistically devoted to sustainability through its energy windmills, organic sewage system, eco-housing and local exchanges fostered through its own community currency and bank.

Stone-Hall (pseudonym) is also committed to holistic education. Its education centre is run by a resident cooperative group and administered by a trust. They are committed to environmental goals, rear livestock, grow vegetables, recycle, have their own water spring, reed-bed sewage, composting system and wood burners. All members work full-time for the community.

Sunny-Valley Community (pseudonym) and its eleven members celebrated the community's 10th anniversary in 2004. It is also a co-housing cooperative based in a shared house on rural land with members sharing maintenance responsibilities. Their ethos has a strong ecological focus and respect for diversity. They have good links with the local village, organize the local composting scheme and take part in the local community currency scheme.

Finally, Woodland (pseudonym) is a rural co-housing initiative formed some thirty years ago. It had fifty-eight members at the time of research, and volunteers supplement the community. Spaces were communal with shared kitchen, laundry, library and other social

rooms. Common values included self-sufficiency, cooperative living and low environmental impact.

Downshifting and Perspectives on Consumer Resistance

Multiple viewpoints on consumer resistance have been developed, and in this section we create a dialogue amongst this range of perspectives. The aim here is to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of downshifting through these diverse and cross-disciplinary viewpoints, and to examine whether downshifting may be seen as resistance behavior within the New Consumption Communities explored in this chapter.

The idea of simple living can be traced back to Plato's ideas in *The Republic* and to most of the world's ancient religions (Rudmin and Kilbourne 1996; Shi 1985). But in the 1960s and 1970s, the notion of simple living and downshifting gained prominence alongside the anti-corporate and nature-focused discourses of the counterculture (Etzioni 1998). However, some authors have argued that, in this period, simplicity and downshifting served to further establish and reinvigorate the capitalist system.

Hilton (2003), for example, highlights diverging academic discourses from a historical, 'consumer movements' perspective. He argues that while some discourses drew on old theories to conceptualize consumers and their movements as manipulated, others (i.e. cultural studies and early postmodern thinking) viewed the consumer as a liberated *bricoleur* (e.g. Firat and Dholakia 2006; Hewer and Brownlie 2007), for whom commodities, their uses, consumption, and even resistance strategies are cultural resources for self-expression or experimentation.

The problem with this 'celebration' of the *bricoleur* consumer, argues Hilton (2003:9), is that first, the *bricoleur* representation probably bears little, if any relation to the everyday realities of most consumers; secondly, it assumes that all consumers are empowered or able to subvert or devise acts of appropriation; thirdly, it resembles what marketing has been doing for years (that is, championing the freedom and agency of the 'sovereign' consumer); and fourthly, this "ideological convergence" has enabled many of the former counter-cultural activists to become foremost leaders in the current economic scene. Indeed, movements such as the back-to-the-land were mainly a professional enterprise (Rudmin and Kilbourne 1996). And like many other acts of consumer resistance in the sixties and seventies, downshifting and voluntary simplicity sought to change lifestyles by relying on markets, without challenging the key social structures that sustain them (Wachtel 1996).

Recently, the view of downshifting as a form of consumer politics enacted through the 'purchasing vote' (Shaw 2007; Shaw, Newholm and Dickinson 2006; Dickinson and Carsky 2005; Micheletti 2003) has become topical. Such a perspective seems to assume consumer sovereignty, as if consumers were able to individually challenge aggregate patterns of consumption (Newholm 2005) or fully determine what is and what is not marketed to them. However, consumers are not always fully aware of the issues involved due to complexity of information, lack of transparency, lack of interest and so on. Additionally, and as seen above, discourses of, and belief in consumer sovereignty may well work to rejuvenate the market (Hilton 2003; Holt 2002) and in a pre-emptive manner; if the consumer is 'sovereign', companies bear no real responsibility for any 'externalities', as they merely satisfy consumer needs and wants. This thus shifts responsibility for societal and environmental issues to individual consumers and government; the latter usually unwilling to intervene legislatively in markets (Berry and McEachern 2005). We are not proposing the 'consumers as dupes' view

here; however, we follow Hilton (2003) in saying that modern 'dupes' versus 'sovereign' dichotomizing brings no contribution to the discussion. Instead, we should remember that "the consuming body is imbricated in wider systems of power", in which consumer activism indeed plays a part, but not the only part (Hilton 2003:18).

As already mentioned, discourses on, and belief in the use of consumer power for change has led some scholars to position recent consumer resistance behaviors (Giesler and Pohlmann 2003; Kozinets 2002) and movements (Kozinets and Handelman 2004:692) against the "ideology and culture of consumerism". Although extremely relevant and well contextualized, this viewpoint is difficult to embrace unquestioned. Resistance behaviors and consumer movements have become increasingly multifaceted and fragmented, and although some individuals and groups may appear to be fighting consumer culture (this is contestable as will be further discussed below), others are still striving, for example, to further ascertain some basic consumer rights or provide money-saving information to consumers (e.g. *Which? Magazine* in the UK).

Arguably, this is a debate that concerns two distinct positions linking ethics and consumption. As put by Barnett, Cafaro and Newholm (2005), they are not disconnected from each other, and expose the constantly negotiated political and moral issues intrinsic to downshifting and ethical consumption issues. The first position concerns 'ethical consumption', and views consumption as a medium for political and moral action, comprising actions such as consumer boycotts and buycotts, which can in turn be viewed to change particular market practices (Barnett, Cafaro and Newholm 2005). Conversely, there exists a questioning of the 'ethics of consumption' more broadly, whereby consumption *per se* is problematized, and the morality of an entire (capitalist) mode of provisioning is questioned (Barnett, Cafaro and Newholm 2005). As put by Barnett, Cafaro and Newholm (2005), the

latter discourse is more aligned with radical environmentalism's views that a considerable reduction on current levels of natural resource consumption is necessary for sustainable development and consumption to become viable (see Cooper 2005; Jackson 2005). Barnett, Cafaro and Newholm (2005), and to some extent McDonald *et al.* (2006) suggest that this latter discourse is more in line with voluntary simplicity and downshifting. However, this does not mean that such behaviors operate 'outside the market' or can indeed 'escape the market' (Kozinets 2002), as they are still using consumption as the 'code' through which to achieve desired outcomes (Connolly and Prothero 2003). Additionally, we would suggest that downshifters may question the 'ethics of consumption' broadly, but not exclusively, and that an either/or theoretical approach to such practices would be equivocal.

At a micro level, consumer researchers have scrutinized downshifters' concerns, which have continued to comprise social and political issues (i.e. environmental degradation, unfair trade practices, animal welfare issues etc), but have also come to encompass more self-centered issues (i.e. long work hours, unrewarding careers etc). Some scholars have attempted to segment downshifters based on the nature and scope of their concerns. For example, Etzioni (1998) and Shaw and Newholm (2002) have devised typologies which distinguish between the most committed and least committed downshifters. In Shaw and Newholm (2002), this was done according to the degrees of simplification and aims, whereby simplifiers were sub-categorized into 'downshifters' (those who simplify their lives in order to attain, e.g., more free-time) and 'ethical simplifiers' (those who simplify due to ethical concerns). Etzioni's (1998) typology, on the other hand, comprises three differing degrees of simplification, 'downshifters', 'strong simplifiers' and the 'simple living movement', with downshifters as the lightest adopters in the spectrum. McDonald *et al.* (2006) develop these categorizations further, by conceptually linking extant literature and their findings. Rather

than viewing consumers who do not fully adopt a voluntarily simplified lifestyle with cynicism (as does, e.g., Brooks 2003), McDonald *et al.* (2006) propose that more attention should be devoted to the 'beginner voluntary simplifiers', who fall at the beginning of the non-simplifier/simplifier spectrum. In their view, this group may help us to understand the processes of adoption and non-adoption of such lifestyle.

With regards to downshifting practices, 'ethical simplifiers' (Shaw and Newholm 2002) adopt diverse lifestyle and consumption strategies that take under consideration a range of concerns. Shaw and Newholm's (2002) UK study, and Dobscha's US research (1998) present common patterns of simplifier behaviour, and reduction of work hours is a typical response. Indeed, Schor (2005) argues, based on substantial post-WWII OECD and other data, that work hours are a major issue affecting the achievement of (and even desire for) simpler and environment-friendlier lifestyles. Returning to Shaw and Newholm's (2002) and Dobscha's studies, other typical simplifier consumer behaviors included simplified diets or vegetarianism, increased consumption of organic produce, avoidance of processed or genetically modified foodstuffs, recycling existing products to extend their lifecycles, as well as reducing, modifying and avoiding consumption. The purchase of second-hand products was also a relevant practice, and alternative consumption spaces helped these consumers to achieve their ethical consumption goals. Williams, Windebank and Paddock (2005) and Williams and Paddock (2003) argue that, although in the past charity shops and other alternative retail outlets were viewed as the retailers of marginalised consumers, parallel accounts reveal that relatively affluent populations are the chief users of, albeit not the most reliant on, charity shops. For this group of consumers, economic motives play less of a role (Williams, Windebank and Paddock 2005). Examples of parallel accounts are Bardhi and Arnould's (2005) and Bardhi's (2003) work, which highlight the utilitarian and clever use of

resources, as well as the hedonic, fun, and social aspects of thrift shopping. Williams and Paddock (2003) call for an end to dualistic views and a reconciliation of both economic and cultural accounts, as their survey findings suggest that both co-exist within and across different socio-economic strata (albeit at varying degrees, and dependant on the type of outlets used and items purchased).

In Shaw and Newholm's (2002) and Dobscha's (1998) studies, transport was one of the most contentious items on the ethical simplicity agenda. Some participants chose public transport, cycling or walking over cars, while others would moderate their car usage or 'car-share'. Yet both studies highlighted the difficulty of totally avoiding car usage, and the challenges this created in their search for environmentally-friendly lifestyles. While not entirely removing themselves from the marketplace, individuals in past studies reported avoiding marketplace interactions wherever possible, either by not using certain products, cutting usage levels, or finding alternative solutions. This is particularly evident in Dobscha's (1998) in-depth US research of female consumers which identified profound skepticism towards marketing, and the view that business practices only increase problems such as waste, inefficiency and materialism.

Community-Based Positive Alternative

Our research with New Consumption Communities revealed a different picture at a collective level. Fallowfields, HHP, Spiritual, Stone-Hall, Sunny-Valley and Woodland all held communal discourses that reflected their 'positive alternative' approaches regarding the

impact of some of the practices of the marketplace and wider society. Both HHP and Sunny-Valley were broadly guided by their environmental concerns:

We live together because by sharing and co-operating, we manage to live more lightly on the land and our lives are enriched in many ways. Everything we do is developed with an awareness of the impact of our work and lives on the environment. [Sunny-Valley/Website*]

Equally, Woodland acknowledged its environmental concerns, but also acknowledged the diversity of individual commitments across the community:

There is no single purpose for living at [Woodland] - beliefs are as diverse as the individuals living here. Generally however, we share a concern for the environment and a desire to live a cooperative, healthy and self-sufficient lifestyle. We see ourselves as part of the wider community rather than separated from it - our children generally attend local schools and many people have jobs locally or in nearby towns. [Woodland/Website*]

Overall, the communities emphasized positive alternatives rather than 'resistance' to the mainstream society, the marketplace or marketing. This counters some of the consumer behaviour literature on the topic discussed above (e.g. Holt 2002; Kozinets 2002; Dobscha 1998), which address these types of behavior as 'resistance'. Indeed, resistance was never communally articulated. They tried and targeted the immediate effects of societal and market power relations in their daily lives (Smart 1985), and their efforts were attempts to positively redress the perceived shortcomings of society and the marketplace. This change of focus from 'resistance' to 'positive alternative' allows us to view these New Consumption Communities' purchasing and consumption behavior in a different light. It enables a renewed understanding of the alternative practices discussed next, which follow from this positive alternative view.

Varied Levels of Communal Engagement with the Marketplace

Many of their alternative lifestyle goals were achieved through differentiated modes of engagement with the marketplace, such as economic and bartering systems, varied levels of self-sufficiency, buycotting (Friedman 1991; 1996), as well as responsible disposal practices. These in turn were made possible through their reconnection with the production process of some of their consumption needs. It was by regaining some control and interest over the production of the products and services they consumed that the communities were able to live an alternative to some of the mainstream consumption codes and practices of the marketplace.

For example, by taking part in alternative exchange schemes (e.g. LETS - Local Exchange Trading Scheme, bartering, gift-giving) some of the communities were able to make their marketplace interactions less dependant on monetary exchange. Such schemes also made exchange interactions more personalized, helped them to re-localize their economies, and aided them to generate and keep wealth within their local communities. Re-localization is usually advocated by environmentalists, and this was an important practice for the communities. A Stone-Hall member downplayed the relevance of money in exchanges, and implied that non-monetary exchanges and the practice of giving could make people realize that exchanges should have an intrinsically positive social value:

During the fair there was no monetary exchange, and you could get all of those really nice things [cookies, face paintings, hair braids, palm reading, games, treats etc] for just a pebble… And what's a pebble? Nothing. [Stone-Hall/Jonathan]

The pebble, in his view, symbolized the emptiness of money; it placed value on that which was given, and the caring and social aspect of the transaction rather than on the means of exchange. The importance of gift-giving for communities of alternative consumption has been highlighted elsewhere (i.e. Giesler and Pohlmann 2003; Kozinets 2002). We believe that

by taking part in these alternative exchange schemes, the communities were reinstating some of the personalized social interactions which were sometimes viewed as lost in mainstream market exchanges; they were reproducing their 'sense of community' (Friedman, Abeele and De Vos 1993; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Nisbet 1970) within their geographical locations.

The communities also engaged positively with the market in other ways; all the communities had their own cooperative businesses. They either ran their own or hosted holistic courses that doubled as outreach strategy and sources of income. HHP, for example, offered consultancy services and sold their own publications and information packages. They ran paid community tours, targeting anyone interested in green living or in the technical side eco-building. They also ran specialist workshops for engineers and architects, and on the practicalities of setting up a sustainable community. HHP accounted for its business activities, through monthly e-newsletters outlining new developments, grants received and how budgets were spent. The most business-oriented of all communities was Spiritual. 'Core' members were in charge of running, teaching and leading a large proportion of the community's educational courses, workshops and conferences, in line with the community's goals and values, and attracted a huge number of diverse visitors each year. This core group also ran a consultancy service, a holiday caravan park, holiday accommodation eco-chalets, energy and water services, IT services, and a visitors' centre deemed an important first point of contact for outsiders interested in the community. Among the businesses run by this wider community were a publishing house, a Steiner school, an organic vegetables box scheme, a healing essences business, the eco-sewage system business, community shops (selling whole foods, books, crafts etc), a café, a pottery studio/shop, a weaving studio/shop, a boutique, an eco-building business, an alternative community bank, holistic games, holistic healthcare, and a local tree-restoring charity.

Some of the communities made extensive use of marketing tools – and acknowledged it. Spiritual held an open discourse about marketing and positioning their courses and services, and made wide use of their website as a targeted communications medium. Spiritual also talked about improving their guest facilities and extending existing services, while HHP used research to develop new services.

It was necessary to undertake a formal feasibility study in order to better understand the needs of the groups we would target, the most effective way of involving local communities and agencies, and the financial viability of such a centre... This included an extensive survey of previous visitors to HHP, workshops with key local partners and visits to other eco-demonstration centers. The [2003] study confirmed the need for improved facilities and endorsed the concept of a Sustainable Resource Centre. It has also enabled community members to prioritize actions to deliver such a facility. [HHP/Newsletter]

All communities used the internet as a means to advertise products and services. Some sent monthly e-newsletters and mailing lists on new developments and courses to willing subscribers, while Spiritual kept an online community and bulletin boards. Stone-Hall, Spiritual, HHP and Fallowfields used their websites for direct bookings and sales, and Stone-Hall, Spiritual and Fallowfields also used them for fundraising purposes. The communities' businesses were relevant aspects of communal life, as they provided varied employment opportunities for members, and contributed, to varying degrees, to their achievement of diverse levels of instrumental autonomy (McBride 1990) from the marketplace – but not in a reclusive or resistant manner.

By reengaging in the production of some of what they consumed, the communities regained partial control over their own lives; the aim was not to gain economic advantage from producing their own goods and/or products. Their practices helped them to outflank

some of the perceived shortcomings of the marketplace including alienation, environmental impact and a lack of availability of desired ethical alternatives. Indeed, some of the communities achieved a fair degree of autonomy through practices that were in line with their communal values and core voluntary simplicity values discussed in extant literature (Leonard-Barton and Rogers 1980; Leonard-Barton 1981; McDonald *et al.* 2006; Shaw and Newholm 2002). As seen above, the respect for nature was a common and focal aspect in all communities; it was this environmental concern that drove much of their production efforts. Values such as self-sufficiency and human-scale structures were clearly influential in their production efforts and indeed their lives. However, the communities remained within the mainstream system of policies and regulations, which made emancipation elusive at best (not that emancipation was ever the aim of the communities).

For example, both Spiritual and HHP communities carried out their own ecological housing construction. Spiritual employed several non-toxic construction methods, namely straw-bale building, reuse of scrap materials and structures, and turf-roofed houses. HHP, however, used a more technological approach to achieve their goal of 'zero emissions' living. Some of the communities also catered for their own water, sewage and energy needs. Woodland, Spiritual, Sunny-Valley and Fallowfields all had compost toilets. Spiritual, Stone-Hall and HHP also had their own water and reed-bed sewage systems, which reduced their dependency on the local authorities' services and allowed for environmental soundness. At HHP rain water was collected and water treatment was done without chemicals, in sand barrels pipe-connected to the houses. Importantly, although HHP's water system contributed to their autonomy, it was achieved through a community-university partnership. This highlights their willingness to engage with mainstream institutions, which is something not considered at Stone-Hall or Woodland. Spiritual and HHP produced their own wind and solar

energy, and at the time of research (2005) Stone-Hall had installed solar panels, and Sunny-Valley used wood burners for heating.

All the communities apart from Woodland made use of government funding for the installation of solar panels and wind turbines or, in Fallowfields case, land conservation. Indeed, they took advantage of available funds whenever possible. Spiritual, for instance, had been studying ways to fit the ecovillage into the government's legal structure, and part of the reason was eligibility for available grants. HHP received government funds as well as varied forms of support from educational and private institutions, while Fallowfields sought funding from the Arts Council to support art workshops.

All communities apart from Fallowfields were dedicated to the production of some of their own food. HHP, Woodland, Stone-Hall, Sunny-Valley and Spiritual had large vegetable allotments, orchards, and green houses. All apart from Spiritual kept livestock; the diversity of which varied across the communities and included chickens for the provision of fresh eggs, and cows and sheep mainly for milk and occasionally meat and wool. HHP had its own farmed fish and apiculture, and geese (property guardians) were also found in some communities. All apart from HHP processed most of their own foods. Woodland made flour for bread, cheese, butter, cream, yogurt, jams and tofu, and were the most self-sufficient food producers.

The communities' reengagement with food production encompassed diverse purposes, and the most externally-oriented concerned the minimization of environmental impacts from food miles and excessive packaging.

Everything we do is developed with an awareness of the impact of our work and lives on the environment. We recycle as much waste as we can and strive to reduce our

consumption of energy. We grow our own vegetables and fruit organically. [Sunny-Valley/Website]*

As seen above, the communities' engagement in self-sufficiency varied, and council services, water and energy are still procured in most communities. However, this is done collectively, with marketplace interactions and basic living costs kept to a minimum.

Despite the communities' varied living arrangements, facilities such as living rooms, libraries, kitchens, laundry rooms and their equipment are shared at Spiritual, Woodland, Stone-Hall, Fallowfields and Sunny-Valley. This reduces the need to purchase, say, one washing machine per family, thus limiting the need to individually own household goods. This echoes Cooper's (2005; 1994) views on more sustainable and less wasteful use of resources and consumer goods. At HHP, however, each member family has its own separate house and household goods. The only shared facility is the workshop/office building, where interactions with visitors take place.

Seeds, gardening materials, maintenance tools cleaning products and above all food stuffs are bulk-bought across the communities. HHP members bulk-bought from cooperative wholesalers:

We purchase quite a lot of stuff from Suma, who are wholesalers, cooperative... They supply a lot of organic, fairly traded products. Items from toilet rolls through to walnuts and dates. So we bulk-buy those for ourselves and we took a delivery on Sunday and it was split between three houses from here, two houses from the neighbors, one person who's friends with the project, so it's about six people involved... Our community seems to be growing at the moment! [HHP/Nick]

At Spiritual the 'Kitchen Departments' were in charge of the food inventory, and both Woodland and Sunny-Valley had food pools:

We have a food pool to which we contribute weekly and in return get fruit and vegetables from the garden and other basic ingredients for a vegetarian whole food diet. [Sunny-Valley/email]

Stone-Hall tried to buy as local and organic as possible, and fruit procurement was considered the biggest food mileage challenge. Although usually local and bought from wholesalers (which reduces packaging and food miles if compared to individualized purchasing at supermarkets), bulk bought foods were not always organic or the most ethical alternatives around. This was acknowledged in some communities. For example, Sunny-Valley's Nicky argued that organic/ethical were sometimes too expensive to be bought, and at Spiritual a 'Kitchen Department' member acknowledged that they were not 100% organic. In sum, the communities presented varied levels of commitment to ethical bulk-buying. While interactions with the marketplace were still needed and not eschewed, they were altered by the living arrangements and lifestyles of the communities, and by their diverse production and procurement practices.

Their reconnection to production has a significant impact on the way they consume. The communities' appreciation of the resources involved in producing goods seemed to impact their consumption choices. This is not to say that communal life and their production practices had completely changed the way members consumed. This varied across and within each of the communities, and personal approaches will be discussed in the next section. Nevertheless, through material simplicity (another value advocated by voluntary simplifiers according to Leonard-Barton 1981; McDonald *et al.* 2006; Shaw and Newholm 2002), most of the communities seemed to challenge the status-quo of mainstream consumer society. An exception was HHP, who chose technological options over simplified ones.

For example, similar to Dobscha's (1998) respondents, Fallowfields's members diluted cleaning products in water prior to use, as only 'small amounts' were perceived to be required for effective cleansing. At Stone-Hall windows were cleaned with vinegar, and at Fallowfields washing machines only washed with cold water. All had line hangers for the washing. In their collective efforts, the communities created their own reduced usage standards. Water was considered precious at Stone-Hall: because it came from their own wells and water shortage was possible during dry seasons, water wastage through unnecessary toilet flushing and long showers was discouraged. HHP eliminated the need for heating due to its highly insulated and energy-efficient houses. Internal temperatures varied between 18°C and 23°C throughout the year.

These consumption restraints did not portray suffering or 'colder and darker places' (Connolly and Prothero 2003); rather their altered consumption practices seemed to liberate them from marketplace norms. For example, during an informal conversation Woodland's Hugo started to play his guitar and roll-up a cigarette. He told the researcher about his background and criticized his family for being fixated with careers, possessions and 'living to work'. For him, Woodland was 'heaven on earth' because he did not need much to live and enjoy the community's landscape. But there were other forms of simplicity. For instance, meals were often uncomplicated and simple; a lunch at Stone-Hall might consist of potatoes sprinkled with nuts and salad. At Spiritual and Stone-Hall the kitchens were fully vegetarian. Other communities had vegetarian and non-vegetarian members, so meat was still consumed albeit in reduced amounts. Provenance and responsibility for what was consumed were important; if meat was to be consumed, those eating it would be in charge of taking the livestock to the slaughter house (Woodland; Sunny-Valley). But simple did not mean boring meals, with food prepared with care and attention.

Consuming more ethically did not always mean going without, radically reducing or eschewing consumption in all situations. This may be viewed as reflective of their overall preference for 'ethical consumption' (most of the communities' practices) rather than a questioning of the ethics of consumption (Barnett, Cafaro and Newholm 2005; Shaw and Newholm 2002) more generally. It may also be interpreted as a manifestation of fragmentation (Firat and Dholakia 2006) and what residual modernist thinking (Bauman 1997) would see as inconsistencies. All communities used some canned foods (chopped tomatoes were a common item) and other convenience solutions such as custard powder. And sometimes they would use the ingredients they wanted to use, whether simple or not. An example was Steve's lamb stew, which required a bottle of red wine for the sauce. While HHP reduced food mileage and the consumption of excessively packaged goods, 'green' as a product attribute seemed to come after taste, quality and possibly convenience, which seems counter to most discourses on environmental footprint reduction:

It's about making good use of our resources rather than being deprived… [HHP/Nick]

HHP houses are equipped with fridges, freezers, large-screen TVs and stereo systems, and their consumption strategies are more about positive choices than attempts at radical frugality.

Purchases of second-hand products are common consumption practices in the communities; they play an important part in their overall environmental strategies and sense of accomplishment. This again echoes Cooper's (2005; 1994) recommendations for an environment-friendlier economy. The communities were willing to creatively reuse all types of materials. At Fallowfields and Stone-Hall, containers for storage of food and cleaning products are re-used and at Woodland, glass jars are refilled with home-made jams and compotes. Containers are reused to store food and store and germinate seeds, while old,

damaged hoses are used as irrigation pipes in the sweet corn fields. HHP turned the carcass of an old van into a garage for their tractor, and used large, cylindrical juice containers as water tanks for each house. Spiritual Community went even further, and transformed used whisky barrels into houses. As argued by Dobscha (1998), consumer creativity with 'new products from old' avoids the marketplace for many things, and reinforces alternative ways of consuming.

Commitment to recycling was also high in all the researched communities, and 'outsiders' who did not recycle were criticized:

When you go and cook at someone else's house everything is so wrapped up, I feel horrible! They use jars, don't recycle or compost because it's too much work... [Sunny-Valley/Hannah]

Used packs, jars and containers that could not be reused were recycled, usually through the local authorities' recycling collection services. Stone-Hall kept four color-coded waste bins (compost, food remains for the chickens, recycling and landfill) in the kitchens and dining rooms, and asked visitors to recycle the insides of toilet rolls through hand-made signs posted next to toilet bins.

If food remains cannot be eaten, reprocessed or fed to livestock, composting is the first option. All kitchens have bins to collect for the garden compost piles. Clearly, there is a strong commitment to recycling and composting, but these practices are only pursued once 'reducing', 'reusing' and 'repairing' are no longer options, with landfill waste a last resort. Common to all is a continuous drive to reduce their environmental footprint, and this was reflected in a constant willingness to improve buildings, production processes and consumption habits.

Transport was still an issue as the communities tend to be in rural locations, often without appropriate public transport links. There is some car-sharing, and although not the norm communities still try to use their cars 'consciously'. Members, however, often faced other trade-offs in consuming responsibly. For instance, cleaning with eco-friendly products usually meant more scrubbing, and the use of eco-paints meant more frequent redecoration. Nevertheless, the trade-offs seem to be overcome by the satisfaction and differentiated sense of identity derived from everyday consumption and production activities.

Personal Views: Resistance versus Positive Alternative

Similar to the communities' collective discourses of 'positive alternative', most individuals within the communities talked about alternative ways of living and consuming, rather than resisting consumer culture or the marketplace. However, there were a few members who voiced their radical positions and viewed themselves as resistors, while others felt somewhat alienated from society at large. These views can be seen as related to individuals' personal histories and motivations for joining the communities; some of these aspects of personal approach are discussed below.

Alternative or Resistance? A Personal Choice

Within the examined communities, resistance discourses comprised a few individualized constructs rather than communally supported positions. Individuals often have their own views on what, if anything is resisted. In the communities, individually held positions ranged from positive living and positive choice through to radical anti-capitalism.

For instance, several Stone-Hall members viewed their lifestyles as what we have labeled 'positive alternative':

Maybe resistance isn't my word, but it is some example of a new way of living... Or not a new way... People have been doing it for ages! It's just a choice... I wouldn't say, 'what you are doing is wrong'; we're saying, 'our way is a really good way of living'. [Stone-Hall/Cynthia]

I'm sure it could be seen as resistance, but the way I see it is... The foundation of life is the polarities, what some people call yin and yang... These polarities are at one level in conflict with each other, but can also be seen as working together in harmony, and I think you can apply it to your question as well. It could be seen like a conflict, as resistance and...it is, but it's also extremely necessary, unless you are just gonna blasély go along with it like so many people, and just never make a change, never try and make things better, never try and evolve... I think it's a positive step forward, basically! (…) If we were out on the streets campaigning and petrol-bombing Tesco's, that kind of thing; that would be an evident resistance. That would be an actual conflict coming up against...hum, which obviously is going on as well, but my preferred method would be just for people just to get on with it to the extent they can... It can be a way of inspiring people without going and destroying that which you don't agree with as a statement for the people you are trying to inspire, like 'we have to destroy this before we can get on with how we should be living'. [Stone-Hall/Jonathan]

Key words such as 'good way of living', 'positive step forward', 'inspiration', and the view that there is no need to 'destroy' what exists in order to live 'ethically', 'greenly' and to downshift, in our view reflects Stone-Hall's way of living and their disinterest in campaigning. Norman also viewed his lifestyle within this community as positive, and

although he did not see his motivations as political, he articulated a critical view of material accumulation:

I suppose I'm not really coming from a particularly political place. I think I'm coming more from a kind of heartfelt place where when I'm walking through the city or when I'm working at Tesco's, it all looks completely mad, and it's kind of for that reason really. I like reading and I like doing meditation, and... I'm not interested in a semi-detached house, really. I look at them and I think, well somebody actually had £300,000 pounds and that's what they did with it... It's crazy, or that's what I think. So I guess there's resistance in that sense. But it's not particularly any more a sort of 'yes, we can change the planet like this'. [Stone-Hall/Norman]

All Stone-Hall participants thus viewed their lifestyle as positive alternatives but not resistance, although they had diverging views regarding how engaged the community should be in campaigning and outreach activities.

Similarly, HHP's Nick criticized the word 'resistance' and preferred to view the project as an alternative way of living, less focused on consumption:

The word 'resistance' is probably too strong a word, but I guess it is a subtle form of resistance - by showing/demonstrating an alternative. I suppose I prefer to see it as a constructive resistance, i.e. here is an alternative to our consumer-driven society that can actually provide a better quality of life. [HHP/Nick]

There were, however, a few more radical views. For example, Sunny-Valley's Raymond had published a book independently (making use of community funds), on the 'anti-capitalist struggle'. And during an informal conversation, Stone-Hall's Martin criticized people who were 'too accustomed with the accumulation process.' Some members also

suggested that life in the communities could be alienating, which we shall discuss further in the next section.

Issues of Personal Alienation and Escapism

When Daniel was a Fallowfields member, he argued that one could find varied personal approaches to life in the community, including escapism:

Some people were using [the community] as an escape. Some people were genuine; for some it was their way of living, particularly Mrs. F., when she was alive... She'd met her husband there, she'd married there, their children were born there, and I think at least one of the grandchildren was born there, so... They had deep roots in the community. So I think it was a mixed bag... There was always this gas trapped about 'isn't it wonderful to be back in [Fallowfields]!' And to begin with I joined in with it, and then it would go on for year, after year, after year. And I'd think, oh... So it's a bit like protesting a bit too much, isn't it? [And] you can resist whether you live here in North London or down in a beautiful place like [Fallowfields]. I think it's one of attitude, and you can create a kind of personal environment which includes not eating this, not eating that, only eating this, not going anywhere where anyone smokes, you know. You can create a very rigid personal set of rules, and set rules for other people. That I think we can all do without being in a community. [Fallowfields/Daniel]

In Daniel's view, personal approaches to community living included those who made it their homes and lifestyles, those who were resisting particular behaviors, as well as those who desired to escape the world. Indeed, we believe there are different individual perceptions regarding personal relationships with their communities and society, within and across the communities. While some members choose to see themselves and act as 'part of the wider

society' (i.e. Nicky at Sunny-Valley, Nick at HHP), others choose to remain personally disengaged. Stone-Hall's Martin, for example, stated that he was 'trying to avoid the outside world'. By staying away from the mainstream, Martin avoided the types of alienation created by market-driven relations, which in turn resulted in his own seclusion. This was not communally encouraged, but could be individually adopted. Norman was critical of this type of attitude:

In terms of how much the community mix with visitors...I think less than the optimum level. I appreciate people do need space and time and stuff like that, but... I've particularly noticed it in the deep ecology [course], where some of the community was saying well, we don't want to eat with them, we just need our space and we'd like to do everything separately, and that's the way that it's generally done. But when I was linking this course I was thinking gosh, the community really needs to be around these people and would hugely benefit from these people for all sorts of reasons. [Stone-Hall/Norman]

Community life was also portrayed by individuals at Spiritual Community as a 'safe shell'. While for Nadia this was a positive aspect, for Kate it became too comfortable:

When I think that something very dramatic could happen to me, then I always say, you can always go to [Spiritual], the people there would help you. So, I have found a kind of 'safe place', where I would always be welcome in times of deep trouble. And this is so heart-warming, because I have never had that before. Let us hope that nothing will happen to me of that kind, but, [Spiritual], thank you. [Spiritual Community Visitor/Nadia]

Being here is very safe and comfortable and cozy, and sometimes I actually forget that there is a world out there and there's people and amazing countries to visit... I've got itchy feet now. [Spiritual/Kate]

Stone-Hall's Cynthia also felt somewhat isolated, and argued that keeping in touch with friends had become much more difficult since she joined the community. At Spiritual and elsewhere (i.e. Sunny-Valley and Woodland), some members found outsiders' estrangement of their mode of living frustrating:

I hate it when people think they know what it's like to live in community when they don't even want to hear about it and just assume that they know what it is like. I once met a woman who said, 'oh, I know what it's all about, I've been to boarding school'!! [Sunny-Valley/Lorna]

I enjoy cleaning, I enjoy making beds…why is that not a proper job? (…) It's because you don't get a company car. [Spiritual/Kate]

These are all individual experiences of community life and while some intentionally chose to resist or escape the market (or at least perceived to be doing so), others felt an undesired social alienation due to their alternative choices. Such experiences may depend on individual attitudes toward their communities and society at large, which ultimately may arise from members' backgrounds and motivations for joining their communities.

Personal Trade-Offs

Individual participants also acknowledged some of the personal trade-offs intrinsic to their ethical consumer lifestyles and identity. These could relate to the process of downshifting, producing and consuming ethically, or to community life and engagement. Stone-Hall's Cynthia and Norman felt that self-sufficiency was not the priority in their community:

My priorities are different. I'd be much more green, much more ethical… So I'd say that the community would put the education side of it, the house…before all the things that I

would... If we were doing more education work in the garden, if we were doing gardening courses, wow, that would be great, wouldn't it? Well, at the moment it would be a bit embarrassing... Is this how to garden, or is it how not to garden? [Stone-Hall/Cynthia]

I'll be honest and say that my feeling is that people come here and it's kind of an easy, really easy life. And it's fine and everything is alright, you know, and there's no real drive to sort of change things, sort of locally or nationally, globally or whatever. I don't feel that in the air at all, not remotely. But there's other stuff going on really, and people will wear that as a kind of 'green veneer'... [Stone-Hall/Norman]

In some cases, members would be required to perform tasks or roles they disliked, even when their skills could be used elsewhere:

Certainly, I'd love to be in the garden more and that's not possible because I have to do cleaning in the house or something, because that's where we are geared... We need to make the house really lovely for people staying... And that's certainly something that irritates me, I suppose. Yes, it's a trade-off, I guess... The community is prioritizing my time in a different way to what I would love to do... [Stone-Hall/Cynthia]

The issue of restricted personal choice, in Norman's view, was critical:

It's funny, maybe it's because of our consumer culture or whatever it is, but there are times when I'll go into the local town, and I'll just go into the shop and buy different kinds of foods. Not because I'm short of food... But there's something about being able to select for myself and handing over the money that is almost part of my identity now, having done it all my life... And that can be quite empowering. [Stone-Hall/Norman]

Rachel also complained about the issue of restriction on personal choice and voice within the community:

When I cook there are things that are just not there that I'd like to use (laughter)... Like more olive oil, more sesame oil, more soy protein... Just all sorts of little ingredients they don't have. I put them on the list and I still don't get them (laughter)... [Stone-Hall/Rachel]

A kind of "choice editing" (Mayo and Fielder 2006:151) occurs to make it easier for members to consume ethically, and Sibyl, a Stone-Hall volunteer, also found the slower pace of the community hard to cope with:

The time it took to do things I must say was very difficult for me. I would not consider myself an impatient person, but I have lived in cities for most of my life and I am much more used to immediate gratification. Even doing the laundry was mind blowing for me. [Stone-Hall/Sibyl]

At HHP, examples related to the process of producing and consuming more ethically, particularly regarding price, convenience and information search:

You have to do far more explaining, you have to do far more research, you have to challenge yourself a lot more... It can be more stressful because it's not as easy... It's much easier to push that trolley around the supermarket and just chuck a load of stuff in it, not worry about where it's come from and go for the cheap 3 for 1. [HHP/Nick]

For most individual participants, their lifestyles were alternative ways of living rather than 'resistant' modes of being. There was a general critique of materialism, however, and while a few members voiced their radical positions as resistors, others felt alienated from friends and society. Through their reconnection to production and experiences of community life, participants articulated their identities as downshifters and ethical consumers, even when tough personal trade-offs were involved.

Conclusion

It is important to base this concluding discussion on a contrast between the communal and the individual realms of the New Consumption Communities presented in this chapter. Firstly, while 'positive ways of living' were addressed by individual participants, their meanings varied considerably, with a few voicing resistant stances. Individual positions ranged from radical anti-capitalism through to alternative living, although all individuals who took part in this research through depth interviews voluntarily defined their approaches as 'positive alternative'. Through their verbal articulations, participants voiced their critical views of some of their communities' own practices, as well as the practices of mainstream society and businesses.

Issues of personal alienation and escapism were also reported. Thus, while the communities may be seen as eliminating, say, alienation regarding the disconnect with production and the product of one's own work (Fine 1984; Bocock 1993), they could also be viewed to be re-creating a form of societal alienation. Again, this feeling of alienation varies across individuals, and the extent to which this impacts individuals' sense of self (Zavestoski 2002; Szmigin and Carrigan 2003), if at all, also varies considerably. Compare, for example, Stone-Hall's Cynthia feelings of empowerment and Norman's views of (monetary) exclusion, and Sunny-Valley and Spiritual members' frustration with outsiders' lack of understanding of their mode of living. Therefore, individually, there seemed to be space for all the contrasting theories on resistance discussed in the first section of this chapter, where an either/or approach would misrepresent the diversity of individual participants' views.

Additionally, there were still personal trade-offs and what could be viewed as inconsistencies. But as argued above, rather than viewing moderate forms, or the variation in

forms of downshifting and ethical purchasing as fragmented, inconsistent or as having gaps, and rather than trying to justify these 'gaps' by seeing participants as ethical or simplifier consumers 'in the make' (McDonald *et al.* 2006), we would suggest, in line with McEachern, Carrigan and Szmigin (2007) that their flexible but nonetheless considerate and conscious approach to consumer choices and consumption, as well as their reconnection to production and community living, helped them to overcome the difficulties and issues of accommodating their multidimensional ethical concerns with their limited budgets and 'wants'.

However, the communities' collective discourses reveal their concerns with the impacts of systemic issues, namely environmental degradation, lack of respect for diversity and spiritual values, lack of cooperation and some degree of self-sufficiency, as well as a lack of educational and personal development opportunities. Values and orientations are diverse and vary across the communities; they seem to address the concerns mentioned above, and to communally echo the values of voluntary simplifiers (Etzioni 1998; Gregg 2003; Huneke 2005; Leonard-Barton 1981; Leonard-Barton and Rogers 1980; McDonald *et al.* 2006; Rudmin and Kilbourne 1996; Shaw and Newholm 2002; Wachtel 1996; Zavestoski 2002). Additionally, the communities offer the collective spaces for varied degrees of downshifting and simplification (Etzioni 1998; McDonald *et al.* 2006; Shaw and Newholm 2002).

Echoing some of Lang and Gabriel's (2005) views on consumer movements, the communities present a questioning of perceived inadequacies of the marketplace and marketing practices. They seem to be redressing a wide variety of consumer issues, and consistent with Hilton (2003), the communities could be said to be constantly reinvigorated by their members' everyday interactions (reduction or alternative interactions) with consumer goods and markets, which in turn makes them malleable. As suggested by Hilton (2003), the communities did not reveal inclinations for totalizing ideological proscriptions, and aimed to

respect diversity in their explorations of solutions to the perceived shortcomings of the marketplace. Of course, diverging views within each of the communities still exist, but to focus on the de-unifying aspects of any community formation is to question the very existence of the concept of community (Harris 2007; Lugosi 2007).

Collectively, emphasis is placed on positive modes of living and agency rather than 'resistance'. 'Resistance' is not a part of the communities' discourses, but through their varied alternative practices (cooperative organization, engagement in alternative economics and local bartering systems, community businesses, varied levels of self-sufficiency, positive purchasing and green disposal practices) a reconnection to production (Szmigin and Carrigan 2003) and in some cases (i.e. Futurefarms) even a blurring of producer and consumer roles (Lang and Gabriel 2005) are achieved. They are all aware of the issues, and through their alternative practices, these New Consumption Communities act in their daily lives to take more control and responsibility over the impact of their consumption through a partial reengagement with production.

The communities do engage with local communities and the larger society. Their businesses played a major part in raising funds and linking the communities to 'the outside world'; it was through their businesses that visitors, guests and volunteers came to know and interact with them. Therefore, to say that the communities totally eschewed marketplace interactions would be, at best, equivocal. Although the communities' businesses helped them gain varied levels of autonomy from the marketplace, they remained businesses nevertheless, and as such, even if non-profit, were dependent on markets and marketing to exist.

Indeed, all the communities made extensive use of the internet as a medium to communicate their products and services and, in some cases, to foster community links. This is consistent with Berry and McEachern's (2005), Shaw *et al.*'s (2004) and Szmigin's (2003)

views that interested consumers have experienced an increased ability to exchange information on the internet. However, the extent to which this has been used as a campaigning tool for consumer activism is debatable. Although Spiritual actively campaign for social change as a community and have a huge impact on visitors' lives, and while HHP engage in conservation projects, other communities do not, and their outreach activities seem limited to their interactions with visitors, guests, locals and volunteers. This is not to say that their impacts are limited, as they usually manage to raise visitors' and volunteers' awareness about environmental and other ethical concerns.

With regards to community purchasing and consumption practices, bulk-buying and the shared use of facilities inherently implied a reduction in household goods ownership, although HHP was an exception. Despite the communities' efforts to purchase from wholesalers and reduce, reuse and dispose responsibly, bulk-buying of 'organic' and 'local' was still impacted by price and availability, and communal commitment to ethical purchasing varied. Nevertheless, the communities acted as alternative consumption spaces (Williams and Paddock 2003; Williams, Windebank and Paddock 2005), and their very living arrangements and lifestyles, as well as their reconnection to production, facilitated the consumption of positive alternatives and buycotting (Friedman 1996).

Overall, and at communal levels, there seemed to be a focus on ethical consumption more than a questioning of the ethics of consumption (Barnett, Cafaro and Newholm 2005), and although trade-offs and transport still represent contentious issues in their lifestyles, there was a constant effort to car-share and improve. Thus, despite Barnett, Cafaro and Newholm's (2005) argument that a questioning of the ethics of consumption is more in line with radical environmentalism (and by extension radical downshifting behavior), we would support Rudmin and Kilbourne's (1996) view that downshifting and voluntary simplicity are about

becoming better people (the meaning varying for each individual) in spite of the complexity of current post-industrial existence; that it is a practice of living within capitalism and market systems, and may indeed serve to rejuvenate the market (Hilton 2003; Holt 2002) in a 'drop in the ocean ripples out' sort of way.

By conceptually viewing these UK-based New Consumption Communities as 'positive alternatives', we can understand their production, consumption, consumption avoidance as well as their disposal practices not as attempts to escape (Kozinets 2002), resist or subvert (Giesler and Pohlmann 2003) the market, but as collective efforts to redress what they perceive as the shortcomings of the marketplace and its effects on their everyday lives. This perspective also allows us to view the communities' use of marketing tools and business services not as inconsistencies or paradoxes (Boulstridge and Carrigan 2000; McDonald *et al.* 2006), fragmentation (Bauman 1997; Firat and Dholakia 2006), or even hypocrisy (Higgins and Tadajewski 2002), but as means toward achieving preferred and coherent overall lifestyle projects (Newholm 2005) and preferred consumer choices. It allows us to view the communities' move toward finding positive solutions as aligned with a 'positive psychology' approach, whereby the focus on the desired positive outcomes will improve the meaning and quality of life (Giacalone, Paul and Jurkiewicz 2005; Seligman 2005) of those involved in downshifting projects.

* The communities' websites will not be disclosed as they would reveal the communities' real identities and thus breech the confidentiality agreements made when the researcher was granted research access.

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