

Tackling Materialism and Overconsumption on a Finite Planet:

The Development, Implementation and Evaluation of an
Educational Intervention to Decrease Materialistic Values and
Excessive Consumption Behaviour



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Title of artwork: The glory of our sciences and militant alliances reveal their basic worth along the mounds of dead appliances (g)

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

.....

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Abstract

Despite the drivers of excessive material consumption being well documented, little research has examined if educational interventions can address consumption and its underlying materialistic values. This thesis explores if an educational intervention can decrease materialistic values and excessive consumption behaviour at the individual level. An intervention utilising a combination of two key strategies (emulating voluntary simplicity practices; and cultivating mindfulness) was developed, implemented, and evaluated.

The research consists of two phases. Phase 1 informs the design of the intervention through interview (n = 29) and survey (n = 443) data. Positive correlational relationships were found between materialistic values and variables such as ecological footprint and television consumption. A negative relationship was found between materialistic values and psychological well-being. No significant differences were found between voluntary simplifiers and non-simplifiers on a range of measures including ecological footprint, mindfulness and psychological well-being. In-depth interviews with voluntary simplifiers (n = 15) and non-simplifiers (n = 14) identified the key practices of voluntary simplifiers, which included thoughtful purchasing, limiting television consumption, avoiding processed foods, reducing (paid) work hours and avoiding shopping centres. These practices were encouraged throughout the intervention and combined with mindfulness training.

Phase 2 consists of a wait-list control design evaluation. The treatment effects of the intervention were evaluated using ANCOVA comparing post-test and pre-test scores, with a comprehensive set of variables as the covariate. Twelve-week follow-up data from treatment and wait-list groups determined if changes were maintained. The educational intervention significantly reduced materialistic values in the short-term but changes were not maintained at 12-week follow-up. This highlighted that it is challenging to maintain intrinsic values in a highly materialistic environment. The intervention influenced overconsumption behaviour, with a significant increase in participant adoption of simple living practices. These changes were maintained at 12-week follow-up.

The evidence suggests an educational intervention can be an effective strategy for decreasing materialistic values and excessive consumption in the short-term; however, ongoing support and structural changes are required to ensure maintenance of such shifts in values and behaviour.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“You begin saving the world by saving one man at a time; all else is grandiose romanticism or politics”

-Charles Bukowski (1983, p. 100).

The excessive consumption of material goods is commonly celebrated and rewarded in modern Western consumer cultures. Consumption has come to dominate people’s daily lives like never before, being hailed by various scholars as an opportunity for identity expression, social connection, gender identification and eliciting pleasure and fun (Avery & Keinan, 2015; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). With more resources at people’s disposal, many choose to spend their money on material goods that advertisers suggest will increase their happiness and success in life (Bauman, 2007; Ritzer, 2010). In the majority of the Western world, it is now acceptable for people to channel their life energy into gaining financial wealth and accumulating material goods in order to reach happiness (Baudrillard, 1998). It is also commonplace to associate better lives with the accumulation of more income and material possessions. Not surprisingly, it has been argued that consumerism has become the modern day religion practiced by many people, fulfilling needs to connect, belong, and engage in rituals (Ritzer, 2010).

Despite these various benefits, consumerism has a dark side that cannot simply be ignored. In recent years, a growing number of academics, as well as the general population, have questioned the idea that ‘more is better’ (Alexander, 2015; Wallman, 2015). No longer able to turn a blind eye to the serious costs associated with excessive consumption, more and more people are facing up to the reality of environmental degradation, lower levels of well-being, time poverty, growing debt, isolation, narcissism, and obesity and are choosing to do something about it. Voluntary simplicity is an example of a movement that has emerged in response to issues associated with consumer culture. People are voluntarily choosing to pursue countercultural, alternative ways of living that reject notions such as ‘more is better’ and ‘growth is

good'. Instead they are embracing simpler, less consumptive lifestyles in which they reclaim their time for more meaningful, non-materialistic pursuits and reorient their lives to address their environmental concerns (Elgin, 1993).

As will be discussed in the next section, it has been argued that excessive consumption and materialistic values are driving the destruction of our natural environment and adversely impacting on people's personal well-being and social relationships. What is less clear is whether an educational intervention can effectively reduce excessive material consumption and materialistic values at the individual level. This dissertation seeks to address the existing gap in the research literature by developing, implementing, and evaluating an educational intervention that aims to decrease materialistic values and overconsumption in a sample of mainstream Western Australians.

1.1 Consumption, the Planet, and Personal Well-being

While environmental issues cannot be connected to one single human behaviour, it has been argued that the unsustainable use of resources by high-income societies is a root cause or at the very least, a significant contributing factor to these problems (Newton, 2011). The UN conference on the human environment in Stockholm in 1972 identified affluence (i.e., levels of consumption) as the primary source of environmental degradation (United Nations, 1972). There is arguably no social or environmental problem that consumption, particularly consumerism (the practice of consuming as a way of life), does not exacerbate (Thorpe, 2012). Every purchase an individual makes, whether it is a burger from a fast food chain or an organic cotton t-shirt, has an impact on the natural environment (Schor, 1998). These items are produced from materials that are extracted from the Earth and leave a trail of pollution (Koger & Winter, 2010). The ecological damage that results from producing consumer items generally goes unnoticed and is invisible to most people in the Western world. This is largely due to the production of these material goods occurring in developing countries that offer cheap labour and low levels of taxes and regulations (Parker, Cheney, Fournier, & Land, 2014; Thorpe, 2012).

Patterns of consumption also highlight a number of growing inequalities in human society. For instance, the world's richest 500 million people (i.e., 17% of the population) produce 50% of the world's carbon emissions, while the poorest 3 billion people only produce 6% of the world's emissions (Assadourian, Starke, & Mastny, 2010). The ecological footprint of people living in high-income societies has been three times the global average since the 1970s (Newton, 2011). Similarly, an Australian study found that wealthy, well-educated people produced double the greenhouse gas emissions (approximately 58 tonnes) as low-income families (22 tonnes) (Oliver, n.d.). Therefore, in the interests of fairness, any intervention that aims to reduce overconsumption should focus on targeting the affluent consumer class.

Excessive consumption by the consumer class is problematic in a world in which more and more people in developing nations, such as India and China, use their increasing purchasing power to emulate the consumer lifestyles modelled by the West (Ehrlich & Ehrlich, 2013). If every person consumed like the average Australian, 3.76 Earths would be required to provide the necessary resources for the world's population (Grooten, Almond, McLellan, & World Wide Fund for Nature, 2012). Indeed, the current rate at which humans are using the Earth's resources and generating waste is resulting in nature being depleted faster than it can be regenerated (Wackernagel & Rees, 1998). Based on a number of future modelling scenarios, Turner (2011) concluded that economic and societal collapse is imminent if Australians keep buying and discarding material goods in a 'business as usual' fashion. This is due to the fact that people's current consumer behaviour undermines the fundamental resources of life: energy, water, food, and climate security.

While consumption behaviour is complex and shaped by a number of factors, it has been argued that the excessive consumption in Western countries is primarily driven by a capitalist system that requires endless growth through continuous consuming (Jackson, 2009; Parker et al., 2014). This system has fundamentally transformed who we are, the way in which we relate to others, and what we strive for (Verhaeghe, 2014). Kasser (2002) asserts that capitalist culture and modern consumer culture promote a set of materialistic values and beliefs that encourage people to consume excessively. Specifically, the central idea espoused by a capitalist system is that a

happy and successful life comes from accumulating financial and material wealth (Kasser, Cohn, Kanner, & Ryan, 2007). As Kasser (2011) states:

“This consumer mindset or materialistic value orientation increases the probability that people engage in behaviors that support consumer capitalism, such as: spending their time shopping, learning about available goods and services, replacing functional but older goods with ‘the latest thing’, paying other people for services that were once taken care of within the household, and buying on credit” (p.865).

Furthermore, capitalism produces individuals who tend to be more focused on themselves and maximising their own opportunities in relation to work and material consumption rather than on the needs of the wider community (Parker et al., 2014). The messages reinforced by capitalist culture have resulted in many people becoming locked in a ‘work-and-spend’ cycle (Schor, 1991). In other words, when people work more, they have more disposable income to spend. Having more disposable income often results in people’s desires for material goods increasing, which drives the need for people to work even longer hours (especially if they purchase items on credit). The implications of being caught in a ‘work-and-spend’ cycle is that people do not have the time and space to think about the consequences of their consumption behaviour, entertain notions of alternative ways of living, and develop the skills to engage in non-materialistic activities that involve the arts, music, their intellect, and culture (Grant, 2011). Time-poor individuals will often opt for convenience (e.g., take-away and dry cleaning), which tends to have a larger environmental impact (Wiedmann, Wood, Barrett, & Lenzen, 2011). Research shows that people who score highly on materialism measures tend to consume more resources, act in more environmentally damaging ways, and have less biophilia (i.e., love for the living world) than people who are less materialistic (Brown & Kasser, 2005; Hurst, Dittmar, Bond, & Kasser, 2013; Saunders, 2007). Similarly, long work hours have been associated with larger ecological footprints and less engagement with pro-environmental behaviours (Kasser & Brown, 2003).

Additionally, the strong emphasis on the pursuit of materialistic values has contributed to the *“individualisation of selves”* (Parker et al., 2014) and people becoming increasingly isolated from one another (Andrews, 1997). It is perhaps no coincidence

that as affluence has increased so have the stress levels, sense of isolation, and addictive behaviours of many in the Western world. Maté (2000) argues addictions, such as shopping, are a way for people to temporarily escape the pain they are experiencing in their daily lives. Advertisers play on human suffering by using a range of behaviour control technologies to sell products that their pitch claim will be the solution to life's problems (Grant, 2011). However, since many material products cannot properly fix a person's deeper problems, these products tend to be a distraction from people seeking genuine solutions to satisfy their core psychological needs (e.g., connecting with other human beings) (Maté, 2000).

When people orient their lives around materialistic values and work to consume, this leaves them with little time and space to spend with friends and family (De Graaf, 2003; Schor, 1991). In addition, empirical research has found highly materialistic people tend to treat people more like objects and are less empathic than others (Kasser, 2002; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995), thereby making it more difficult for them to form close connections that are critical to well-being. Research has found people who are highly oriented towards pursuing financial wealth, obtaining an attractive appearance and high status tend to have lower levels of vitality and are more likely to be depressed and anxious than others (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). People may endure this exhaustion and time poverty due to the strong belief that attaining money and possessions will result in increased happiness and success.

1.2 Questioning the Nexus Between Money and Happiness

Conversely, a growing body of social research suggests that obtaining material and financial wealth does not necessarily equate to increases in happiness (i.e., subjective well-being). Studies show a weak, curvilinear relationship exists between income and well-being (Ahuvia & Friedman, 1998; Fuentes & Rojas, 2001; Lever, 2004). This means that there is an inflexion point (usually associated with an individual satisfying his/her basic needs) after which obtaining more money does little to increase well-being (Guillen-Royo & Wilhite, 2015). One study found that beyond an annual income of \$75,000US, more money did not significantly increase people's emotional well-being (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010).

As a consequence, various solutions have been proposed that would result in individuals voluntarily reducing their work hours and consumption, and at the same time, experiencing increases in personal well-being ('Beyond the work family balance', 2015; De Graaf, 2003; Grant, 2011). It has been theorised that a double dividend may result from people choosing to consume less (Jackson, 2005). Lower levels of consumption are likely to lead to increases in well-being, as well as reduce people's ecological impact. If people worked and consumed less then they would have more time to engage in pursuits that are personally meaningful and enjoyable. Having more time would also allow people to feel more relaxed and gain greater pleasure from engaging in a range of care work duties, such as growing vegetables, looking after family members, and volunteering in the broader community, rather than outsourcing or neglecting to engage in these activities. Nedelsky ('Beyond the work family balance', 2015) argues that care work is often undervalued in our society. It can be seen as a chore, which brings little reward when people feel weighed down by work stresses. However, if people felt less time pressured they might enjoy these activities more. In addition, people would have more time to reflect on their lives and the things that are most important (Bertman, 1998; De Graaf, 2003). With more time, they may be able to reflect on their own consumption behaviour and tune into how certain consumption behaviours make them feel, as well as question whether certain items will bring value to their lives. In contrast, when people feel time-poor they are more likely to operate on automatic pilot and engage in mindless patterns of consumption that are often unsustainable (Amel, Manning, & Scott, 2009).

In fact, research on voluntary simplifiers (i.e., people who have made a decision to work less for less pay and presumably consume less) has found that these individuals tend to have smaller ecological footprints and be happier than their mainstream counterparts (Brown & Kasser, 2005). While many people believe that making the changes to live more sustainably would entail living a life of deprivation and making harsh sacrifices (Norberg-Hodge, 2011), the research on voluntary simplifiers indicates that a person's quality of life need not be compromised in making the transition to a less consumption-based society. The goals of achieving environmental sustainability and happiness therefore appear to be compatible (Brown & Kasser, 2005). Given the

mutual benefits, it is logical to think significant or large-scale effort would be made to tackle excessive consumption. This, however, is not the case.

1.3 What is Being Done to Address Overconsumption?

Despite the double dividend that is likely to result from people consuming less, and the clear role consumption has to play in exacerbating environmental and social issues, governments have largely ignored dealing with consumption as it conflicts with the primary goal of economic growth (Alexander, 2015; Hobson, 2003). As Hobson (2003) states:

“The structuring of economic systems makes consumption and economic growth probably the single most important objective of modern politics, more or less unquestioned right across the political spectrum’ (Jacobs, 1997, 47). In such systems the idea of reducing consumption, and trying to regulate citizens’ and businesses’ resource use practices, is both politically untenable and economically undesirable” (p.149).

The failure of government to act on this issue may also be due to consumption being central to the Western way of life (Hobson, 2003). Tackling such an issue in a society that values choice and freedom may be divisive and politically unpopular.

If government and the community at large were to address overconsumption to militate against the ecological and social destruction that is occurring, what sorts of solutions could be implemented? Grant (2011) proposes four classes of solutions:

- 1) Consumption-based solutions: purchasing items that are presumed to reduce a person’s ecological footprint;
- 2) Culture-based solutions: psychological solutions to shifting behaviour from energy-intensive to less energy-intensive;
- 3) Regulatory solutions: initiatives by government such as carbon taxes, cap and trade systems and consumption taxes on luxury goods; and

4) Dissemination solutions: building support for the various solutions to lower ecological impact.

Typically policymakers as well as many mainstream environmental groups have favoured consumption-based solutions as they allow for 'business as usual' patterns of behaviour (Grant, 2011; Maniates, 2001; Mont & Power, 2010). These solutions are also perceived as less contentious compared with policies that are directed at reducing or restraining people's consumption (Newton, 2011). The ideology that people should be able to consume whatever they like, whenever they like, and as much as they like makes it challenging to impose limits on consumption (Schor, 1998). Therefore, green consumption becomes the path of least resistance. As Grant (2011) states:

"Consumption-based solutions offer the promise of extending the consumer society into the future and solving environmental problems at the same time, making them politically popular and safe from any criticism that 'our way of life' might be in jeopardy" (p.251).

Although green consumption may be politically popular, there are a number of issues associated with it that cannot be ignored. Firstly, green consumption can be seen as a distraction from making the more radical lifestyle changes that are required to ensure a sustainable future and safe climate. It can falsely give people the sense that they are helping the environment through their purchase decisions, diminishing the likelihood of engagement with more difficult or dramatic measures to help the planet (e.g., reducing meat consumption, work hours and air travel) (Begley, 2010). In fact, one study found that people who purchased green products as part of a lab experiment were more likely to act less altruistically and to cheat and steal than people who purchased more conventional products (Mazar & Zhong, 2010). The authors of this study concluded *"purchasing green products may license indulgence in self-interested and unethical behaviors"* (Mazar & Zhong, 2010, p. 497). Secondly, green consumption increases the risk of the rebound effect, where people may ultimately use more energy due to adopting less energy-intensive technologies (Greening, Greene, & Difiglio, 2000; Sorrell, Dimitropoulos, & Sommerville, 2009). A need therefore exists for solutions that encourage people to consume less, not just differently. Refusing to purchase a product (even when it is a green product) is usually more beneficial for the planet than buying it (Grant, 2011).

Over the past few decades, various environmental education programs and campaigns have been created to influence the attitudes and consumption behaviour of individuals and households (Hobson, 2003). These initiatives are generally information-led and encourage people to make small-scale changes to their behaviour, such as recycling, switching lights off when not in use, and reducing the consumption of single-use disposable plastics (Australian Government, 2013). Csutora (2012) argues that targeting small-scale changes in behaviour is favoured by Governments due to being politically acceptable; however, such approaches fall short by failing to deliver significant reductions in emissions. The approach of targeting small-scale behaviours is often based on the assumption that these small-changes will lead to positive spillover effects, with individuals adopting more ambitious and much larger-scale changes in pro-environmental behaviour (Thøgersen & Crompton, 2009).

While positive spillover effects have been shown to occur as a result of psychological consistency effects such as ‘foot-in-the-door’ (Burger, 1999) and ‘cognitive dissonance’ (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959; Festinger, 1957), the adoption of small-scale behaviours can also lead to negative spillover effects (Dolan & Galizzi, 2015; Thøgersen & Crompton, 2009). An example of a negative spillover can be observed when an individual engages in an environmental activity and then uses this as an excuse to justify not engaging in other (more significant) environmental actions (Hamilton & Kasser, 2009). Even worse, some individuals have been found to act as if they have earned the right to reward themselves by engaging in bad behaviours (moral licensing effect) (Mazar & Zhong, 2010). As Dolan and Galizzi (2015, p. 7) state, *“Using the metaphor of a ‘moral bank account’, good deeds establish moral credits that can be withdrawn to purchase the right to undertake ‘bad’ actions”*. In addition, positive spillover effects are only likely to occur under certain circumstances such as when the underlying motives for the behaviours are the same and the motives are not financially driven (Thøgersen & Crompton, 2009).

Given the uncertainty surrounding the likelihood of spillover effects, Thøgersen and Crompton (2009) argue that the approach of targeting small-scale behaviours to address environmental concerns is dangerous given the scale and severity of the problems currently faced. They state:

“The comfortable perception that global environmental challenges can be met through marginal lifestyle changes no longer bears scrutiny. The cumulative impact of large numbers of individuals making marginal improvements in their environmental impact will be a marginal collective improvement in environmental impact. Yet we live at a time when we need urgent and ambitious changes” (p.6).

Subsequently, Power and Mont (2010a) recommend that policymakers focus people’s attention on making the large-scale changes that are necessary (e.g., reducing meat consumption and air travel).

While dealing with important environmental issues, the majority of environmental education programs appear to overlook the underlying critical issue of overconsumption. In an audit of existing environmental education programs in Western Australia, overconsumption of material goods was not listed as a topic being addressed by environmental educators (Environmental Education Advisory Committee, 2005). For instance, the award winning ‘Plastic Free July Challenge’ that was created by the Western Earth Carers aims to raise awareness of the amount of single-use disposable plastic consumed and take action to reduce this waste during the month of July. Participants are encouraged to *“sign up for a day, a week or the whole month and try to refuse ALL single-use plastic or try the TOP 4: plastic bags, water bottles, takeaway coffee cups and straws”* (‘Plastic Free July’, n.d.). The Facebook page promoting the challenge provides a range of ideas for plastic free living, including how to make your own reusable bags and toothpaste and buy in bulk using your own containers. With a clear focus on decreasing single-use disposable plastics, other high consumption activities, such as air travel, appear to be overlooked in the challenge. For instance, the ‘Plastic Free July’ team share various tips on ‘plastic-free travel’ and discuss the dilemma of how to fly plastic free and avoid over-packaged airline meals. The solution that is suggested on the Facebook page is for participants to fly first class (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Facebook Post by Plastic Free July (Source: Western Earth Carers, 2013)

Although possibly said in jest, this is a clear example of how taking such a narrow approach to targeting a specific environmental behaviour (i.e., eliminating single-use disposable plastic) fails to deal with the broader issues of overconsumption. One cannot overlook the fact that the emissions of travelling by plane, particularly first-class, dwarf any attempt to reduce one's ecological footprint by eliminating the plastic waste generated from an airplane meal. As Csutora (2012, p. 159) states, *"When individuals are involved in marginal green actions while missing the big picture, the environment falls victim to so-called escape strategies"*.

The need to engage people in deeper conversations about consumerism and link specific environmental issues back to the big picture is required. Maniates (2001) argues that by encouraging people to only engage in small-scale eco-friendly purchases or behaviours renders them under the illusion that they are being good environmental stewards whilst remaining apolitical. Subsequently, people fail to recognise the need to challenge the political and social institutions that perpetuate consumption in order to achieve the social change that is required.

Another criticism is that these educational initiatives that target small-scale behaviours predominantly target individuals who are already on board with sustainability and

understand the importance of reducing their ecological footprint. It has been argued that the word 'sustainability' may be off-putting and fails to engage mainstream individuals (Koger & Winter, 2010). Since behaviour change for sustainability programs are often framed around 'doing your bit for the planet' or sustainability, they are likely to be unsuccessful in engaging more mainstream individuals. This literature illustrates the need for environmental educators to link specific environmental issues back to the issue of excessive consumption, focus on encouraging large-scale shifts in behaviour and find ways to engage more mainstream individuals.

1.4 Moving Beyond Targeting Small-Scale Behaviours: Creating Large-Scale Shifts in Behaviour and Values

The IPCC's Fifth Assessment report states that global emissions need to be reduced by 40 – 70% by 2050 if the world is to stand a chance at staying within the 2 degree Celsius limit (Pachauri, Elinder, & Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2015). In light of these reduction targets, it has been proposed that every human would need to limit their emissions to 2 tonnes per capita to ensure safe climatic conditions (Stern, 2006). To put this figure in perspective, the United States currently emits 24 tonnes per capita (Gamble, 2014). Arguably, encouraging people to engage in small-scale behaviours, such as refusing a plastic straw, cannot possibly accomplish the reduction in emissions that needs to be achieved. As Mont and Power (2010, pp. 2245–2246) offer, small-scale change is insufficient and the focus needs to be on targeting "*entire ways of life that are currently based on normalised unsustainable consumption*". In order to combat unsustainable consumption, people will need to first examine the way they live and how and why they consume particular material goods. While this may seem ambitious in a world that is currently geared for economic growth, reducing consumption through voluntary behaviour change initiatives is a pathway that has the potential to achieve environmental benefits at a much faster rate than other avenues to sustainable development, such as implementing green infrastructure and eco-efficient technologies (Newton, 2011). Subsequently, given the need to address excessive consumption, it is worth exploring possible avenues to decrease material consumption through voluntary change at the individual level.

1.5 A Way Forward

There are a range of responses from government, planning authorities, and industry that could be utilised to tackle the challenges associated with consumerism. However, the adoption of such responses appear to be unlikely given that all governments in the developed world are pro-growth (Alexander & Ussher, 2012). If governments were to take the essential steps that are required to reduce excessive consumption and implement radical reforms, this would pose huge economic and political problems (Ehrlich & Ehrlich, 2013). Therefore, if change is to occur in relation to consumption in the near future it will need to come from the grassroots level by individuals and communities voluntarily changing their behaviour and/or acquiring identities associated with lower levels of consumption (Alexander, 2015).

The grassroots voluntary simplicity movement may be a promising way forward. This lifestyle that opposes "*the commodification of everyday life*" (Humphery, 2013, p. 78) has re-emerged and experienced renewed vigour over the last decade. The movement challenges the commonly held notion that happiness comes from consumption and legitimises people stepping out of the 'work-and-spend' cycle to take control of their lives. It also provides individuals with knowledge, inspiration, and support on how they can live radically different lives from the mainstream norm. Rather than staying narrowly focused on green consumption or small-scale environmental behaviours as a way to address environmental concerns, many people within this movement deeply reflect on questions such as, 'What is the good life?' and 'How can I live a more fulfilling life without harming the planet?' (Andrews, 1997).

According to the extant literature on this lifestyle, voluntary simplifiers embody a set of values and practices that appear to inoculate them against the forces of consumer capitalism. The lifestyle is characterised by values of sufficiency, thrift, and caring for nature and the local community (Elgin, 1993; Elgin & Mitchell, 1977). These values differ markedly from the values espoused by consumer culture that typically focus on enhancing physical attractiveness, popularity, and status (Kasser, 2002). In addition, mindfulness is a commonly reported practice of many simplifiers (Pierce, 2000). It has been argued that practising mindfulness may be an antidote to overconsumption due to the way in which it can enhance self-regulation, well-being, awareness and clarify

personal values (Ericson, Kjørstad, & Barstad, 2014; Rosenberg, 2004). Furthermore, research has found that a combination of being mindful and oriented towards intrinsic values is associated with lower ecological footprints (Brown & Kasser, 2005). Voluntary simplifiers transcend the pitfalls associated with green consumption and engagement with small-scale pro-environmental behaviours by refusing to engage in patterns of excessive consumption. Most importantly, voluntary simplifiers demonstrate to others that there is a viable alternative to the 'work-and-spend' cycle.

Despite the fact that one person turning his or her back on excessive consumption by making a radical shift in lifestyle may not seem like much, when done by thousands of people as part of a global movement it has the potential to transform consumer culture as well as the political system that encourages people to consume. Inevitably, when many people make the choice not to consume in frivolous and excessive ways and instead focus their energy on other intrinsic pursuits, it is possible that a deep cultural shift will take place. People who have adopted voluntary simplicity lifestyles and subsequently made large-scale changes to their lives are worthy of attention as they can provide valuable insights on how to step off the consumer treadmill (Maniates, 2002).

As this chapter highlights, there are significant ecological, social, and personal consequences associated with the adoption of materialistic values and overconsumption behaviours. Yet to date little has been done to: 1) address the need to reduce excessive patterns of consumption; 2) examine the effectiveness of interventions to decrease materialistic values and consumption behaviour; and 3) explore how to facilitate radical shifts to less consumption-based lifestyles. Although resources and study guides have been developed by simplicity advocates to assist others to simplify their lives (e.g., see Andrews, 1997), these programs have not been formally evaluated or tested on a mainstream Australian audience. The majority of interventions that have been tested to decrease materialism have been brief, one-off interventions (e.g., Chaplin & John, 2007; Lambert, Fincham, Stillman, & Dean, 2009), with the exception of one educational intervention that was run with adolescents and their parents (Kasser et al., 2014). Therefore, the objective of this thesis is to explore whether it is possible for an educational intervention to decrease materialistic values

and consumption behaviour in a group of mainstream materialistic Western Australians. To achieve the shift in values and behaviour, the program will be designed in such a way to emulate key aspects of the voluntary simplicity lifestyle and cultivate mindfulness.

1.6 Research Questions

The main research question this thesis sets out to answer is:

Can an educational intervention decrease materialistic values and excessive consumption behaviour?

To answer this question, the following sub-questions will be explored in the Western Australian context:

1. What are the relationships that exist between materialistic values, consumption behaviour and other constructs?
2. What factors perpetuate and reinforce materialistic values and consumption behaviour?
3. What educational and psychological strategies can be used to decrease materialistic values and excessive consumption behaviour in an adult population?
4. What are the key characteristics, values and practices of voluntary simplifiers?

The structure of this thesis is as follows:

Chapter 2 will focus on the various factors that perpetuate and maintain material consumption at both the individual and environment (i.e., societal/structural) levels. Particular attention will be given to the role materialistic values play in perpetuating consumption. Through understanding the root causes of excessive consumption and the underlying values that perpetuate it, effective solutions can be devised.

Chapter 3 explores two primary strategies that may decrease overconsumption and materialistic values at the individual level: mindfulness training and emulating a voluntary simplicity lifestyle. While solutions to address the problem at the societal level are needed, it is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Chapter 4 examines materialistic values and consumption in a Western Australian context. This preliminary research informed the design of the educational intervention through exploring the relationships between materialism and consumption with a number of important constructs, such as mindfulness, hours at work and time affluence.

Chapter 5 examines in-depth the lives of 15 Western Australians who have made a shift to a simpler, less consumptive lifestyle (i.e., voluntary simplifiers). Key lifestyle practices and values are explored that have the potential to be emulated in the educational intervention. The lifestyles and values of these voluntary simplifiers are contrasted against 14 highly materialistic non-simplifiers.

Chapter 6 presents the structure, underlying theory and content of an educational intervention designed to decrease materialistic values and consumption behaviour.

Chapter 7 focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of the educational intervention and presents the results from a wait-list control study with a 12-week follow-up component.

Chapter 8 is the final discussion and conclusion.

Chapter 2

Factors that Perpetuate and Maintain Consumption

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the forces that shape and influence people's consumption behaviour, particularly the materialistic values that underpin it. Through understanding these complex forces it is possible to gain insights into how excessive consumption behaviour can be challenged and subsequently changed. As Hobson (2003, p. 150) states, *"only when we know why and how individuals consume and how they link their consumption to the environment can we realistically set about changing consumption practices"*. Finding ways to decrease excessive patterns of consumption and shift people's materialistic values to a set of values that has less impact on the environment is of critical importance given the consequences outlined in Chapter 1. As Csikszentmihayli (2000) states:

"...ignoring the causes and consequences of consumer behaviour is dangerous. It would be unacceptable for neurologists to study an addictive drug without taking into account the pros and cons of its use. Similarly research that deals with consumer behaviour without considering the context in which it is embedded cannot claim to contribute to basic knowledge and remains little more than applied market research" (p.271).

To inform the design of an educational program to decrease excessive consumption behaviour, it is helpful to consider all factors that encourage consumption behaviour and the development of materialistic values. The factors that influence overconsumption examined in this chapter are divided into two main categories: 1) individual/human agency; and 2) environment. Figure 2 illustrates the range of external (environment) and internal (person) factors, which the literature reports can affect consumption behaviour. The first part of this chapter will focus on individual factors that influence consumption, such as an individual's values orientation, habits and identity construction. Since many of the factors that influence consumption at the individual level are also influenced by larger structural and social factors in the environment, the second part of this chapter will explore these forces. Understanding

both structural and individual factors is crucial to the design of an educational intervention to avoid over-simplified solutions to tackling this complex problem (Michie, van Stralen, & West, 2011). It also helps to gain a better understanding of what individual and collective action is needed to combat overconsumption.

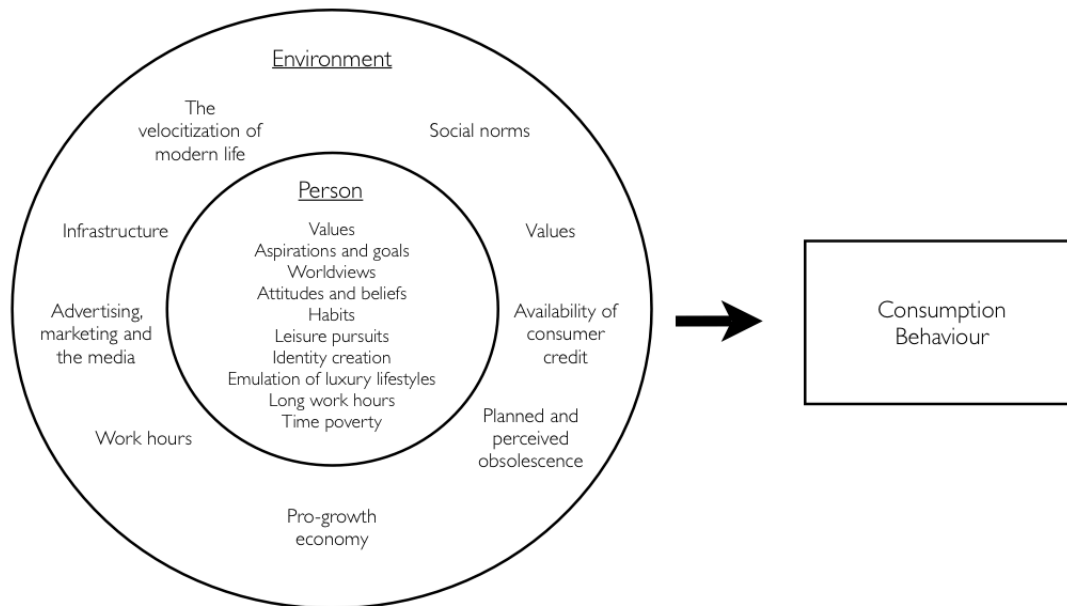


Figure 2. Factors Affecting Consumption Behaviour

Therefore, this study takes a social practices approach to the issue of overconsumption. It not only examines how structures and norms in Western society shape individual consumption behaviour and materialistic values but also how the behaviours and daily choices individuals make can bring about change in the social structures that perpetuate and maintain consumption behaviour and materialistic values (Kennedy & Krogman, 2008).

It should also be made clear from the outset of this chapter that consumption of certain goods, such as food, clothing, and shelter, is essential for human survival (Plassmann & Wager, 2014). While ordinary or mundane forms of consumption that satisfy basic human needs are a routine part of everyday life and can have a significant impact on the environment, the predominant focus of this chapter is on consumerism:

the practice of consuming as a way of life (Kennedy & Krogman, 2008), which typically leads to overconsumption .

Due to the complexity of overconsumption, the drivers of escalating consumerism cannot be captured by a single theory or theoretical framework. Academics across a variety of disciplines, including psychology, economics, sociology, anthropology, consumer studies and marketing, have put forward different theoretical explanations for what drives consumption behaviour. While commentators on materialism and overconsumption commonly argue that a materialistic mindset or consciousness primarily influences consumer behaviour (e.g., Hamilton & Denniss, 2005), these arguments fail to recognise that consumer behaviour is a complex phenomenon influenced by a range of social, economic, and political factors (De Wet, 2008; Humphery, 2010; Mont & Power, 2010; Power & Mont, 2010b). Before examining each of the factors listed in Figure 2 in more depth, brief clarification of several key terms and how they are related to this research is provided below.

2.1 Definitions of Consumerism, Consumption, and Materialism

Consumerism is commonly described as the modern way of living, with people no longer being citizens but consumers (Miles, 1998). While there are a number of different definitions of consumerism, Thorpe (2012) argues that most scholars recognise it as a social and economic pattern that focuses on two main aspects: 1) the pursuit of material wealth and material acquisition; and 2) constructing one's image and identity based on commercially driven norms and ideals. For instance, Smart (2010, p. 5) defines consumerism as *"a way of life that is perpetually preoccupied with the pursuit, possession and rapid displacement of a seemingly inexhaustible supply of things"*. British Economist Paul Ekins (1991, p. 245) defines consumerism as a cultural orientation in which *"the possession and use of an increasing number and variety of goods and services is the principal cultural aspiration and the surest perceived route to personal happiness, social status and national success"*. Similarly, Kasser (2008) states that consumerism is a particular set of beliefs that are associated with the idea that the most important thing in life is to work hard to make lots of money in order to purchase desired material goods. This belief system also entails the idea that a meaningful and successful life is filled with many possessions that portray a person's

status and appeal to others (Kasser & Kanner, 2004). With the shopping centre being described as the modern day cathedral (Ritzer, 2010), these ideas appear to have been adopted with fervour.

Materialism, commonly viewed as the counterpart of consumerism, has been defined as a value orientation as well as an individual trait. Kasser and Ryan (1993, 1996) define materialism as a set of aspirations and values that focus on acquiring financial success, social recognition, and an attractive appearance. In contrast, Belk (1984, p. 291) conceptualises materialism as *“the importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions. At the highest levels of materialism, such possessions assume a central place in a person’s life and are believed to provide the greatest sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction”*. Richins and Dawson (1992) measure materialism as being comprised of three fundamental components:

- 1) Success: the extent to which people believe what they own defines their success in life;
- 2) Centrality: how important people think having possessions in life is; and
- 3) Happiness: the extent to which people think acquiring material goods is essential to their happiness levels.

Despite the different conceptualisations of materialism, a higher-order factor analysis by Kasser and Ahuvia (2002) of three materialism measures (Ger & Belk, 1996; Kasser & Ryan, 2001; Richins & Dawson, 1992) yielded one factor accounting for 60.7% of the variance. This finding suggests these different materialism scales each tap some element of an extrinsic, materialistic values orientation. Therefore, selection of any of these materialism measures will be adequate for the present study.

While consumerism and materialism are viewed as modern day phenomena, consumption itself is different in that it has been present throughout all history (Smart, 2010). Humans have always needed to consume goods to meet their basic survival needs. The major difference with modern day consumption to that of past consumption is that items are now produced, purchased, discarded and replaced at an unprecedented rate, well beyond people’s basic needs. More often than not, products

are made to last for short periods of time with engineered death rates (section 2.10) and are being purchased not for their functional benefits but for the symbolic meaning they convey to the self as well as to others (section 2.3).

The majority of government policy initiatives and research projects to date aimed at promoting sustainable consumption have focused on reducing mundane forms of consumption, such as household energy and water use, and promoting green consumption (Hobson, 2003; Mont & Power, 2010). As discussed in Chapter 1, politicians and environmental educators have overlooked ways in which the practice of consuming as a way of life can be tackled. The consumption of everyday items, such as printers, coffee machines and mobile phones, that once would have been considered luxury items, is generally not addressed in educational interventions or by government policy (Mont & Power, 2010). It is therefore important for researchers to examine the ideology of consumerism in which people believe *“the meaning of life is to be found in buying things and pre-packaged experiences”* (Bocock, 1993, p. 50).

2.2 Materialistic Values

Several scholars argue that the predominant factor driving excessive consumption is the social norm and values that underpin mainstream consumer society (Kasser, 2002; Power & Mont, 2010b). At present the social norm in Western consumer cultures is one of unsustainable, materialistic lifestyles that are heavily promoted and reinforced via the media as well as governmental, educational and business institutions (Koger & Winter, 2010). The inescapable nature of materialistic messages as well as exposure to affluent celebrity lifestyles ultimately shapes what people value and aspire to achieve in life (Kasser, 2002). These messages activate and reinforce a set of materialistic values that drive people to over-consume and behave in environmentally damaging ways. People who are highly oriented towards materialistic values:

- have larger ecological footprints and are less likely to act in pro-environmental ways (Brown & Kasser, 2005; Gatersleben, White, Abrahamse, Jackson, & Uzzell, 2009; Saunders & Munro, 2000);
- tend to display more greedy behaviour in resource dilemma games (Sheldon & McGregor, 2000);

- are more likely to be compulsive buyers and spenders (Garðarsdóttir & Dittmar, 2012; O’Guinn & Faber, 1989); and
- have less biophilia (Saunders, 2007) than individuals who are oriented towards intrinsic values.

The dominant values of materialism that exist in consumer cultures have created a new social norm of excessive consumption, in which material goods are now mass produced and available to all. These values have also played a role in reinforcing the idea that it is people’s fundamental right to consume (Schor, 1999).

Therefore, interventions that target excessive consumption need to address the motivations and values that underpin the behaviour, rather than simply encouraging people to adopt specific pro-environmental behaviours (Crompton, 2010). As Kasser (2009b) states:

“At the same time our species must confront the looming ecological crisis that threatens to render profound changes in our external habitat, we humans must also personally confront a deeply internal crisis. This internal crisis is not one that will be easily addressed by switching our light bulbs from incandescent to compact fluorescents or by driving hybrid automobiles, for it is a crisis of values” (p.1).

Kasser and Ryan’s (1996) model of human values makes a distinction between two types of values: intrinsic and extrinsic. Extrinsic values can be thought of as materialistic in that they are focused on obtaining some external reward or praise (e.g., financial success, attractive appearance and popularity). In contrast, intrinsic values are focused on pursuing activities that are inherently rewarding to the individual (e.g., self acceptance, affiliation, community feeling and physical health). Figure 3 illustrates how the range of human values (also commonly referred to as goals and aspirations) can be empirically distributed on two axes: 1) Self-transcendence versus Physical self; and 2) Extrinsic versus Intrinsic.

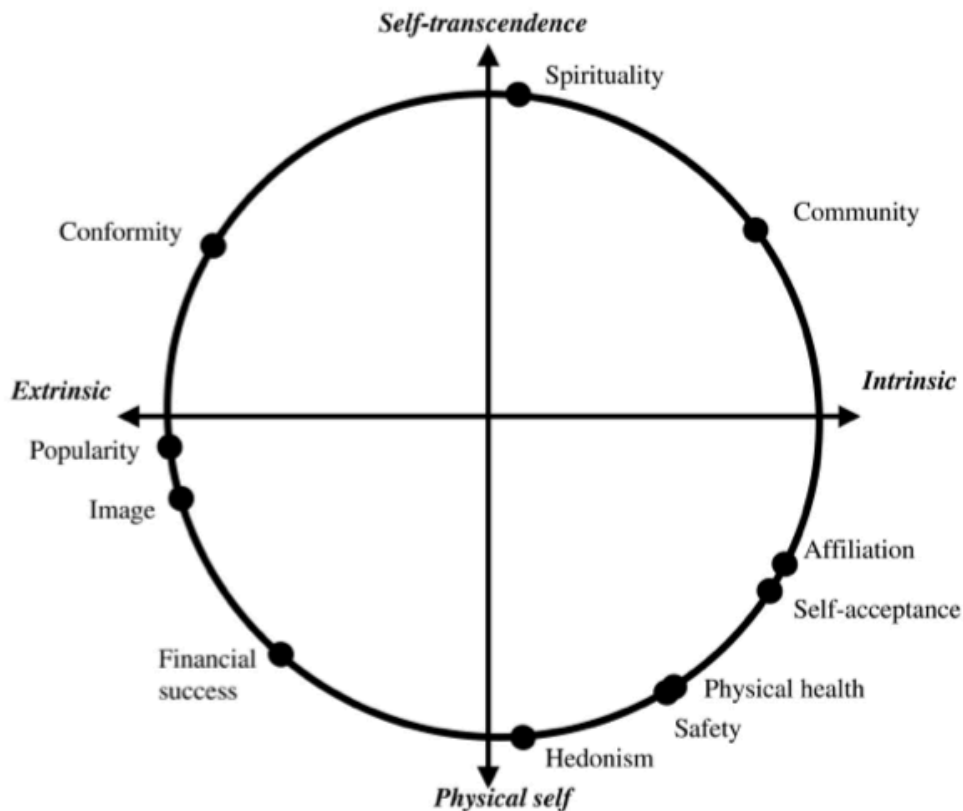


Figure 3. Circumplex Model of Human Values and Aspirations (Source: Grouzet et al., 2005)

Cross-cultural research conducted on approximately 1,800 university students across 15 cultures found that people’s intrinsic and extrinsic goals/aspirations are structured in a very similar manner to the values identified by Schwartz (1996), with some goals being related to each other and others opposing in a circumplex fashion (Grouzet et al., 2005). Grouzet et al. (2005) found that extrinsic aspirations of a desire for financial success, being popular, and having an attractive appearance all tend to cluster closely together. In other words, if an individual highly orients towards the aspiration of wanting financial success then he or she is more likely to also see the aspirations of having an attractive appearance and being popular as being highly important too. Kasser and Ryan’s (1996) values model is based on the assumption that all of these values and goals are inherent to the human motivation system.

Research shows that many of the values in this circumplex model as well as other similar values models are dynamically inter-related and form clusters of similar values

(Grouzet et al., 2005; Schwartz, 1996). Groups of values in the circumplex have been found to oppose other clusters of values, whereas some values have been found to be consistent with each other. Subsequently, researchers have proposed how human values can be strengthened and diminished. According to the large body of research compiled by *Common Cause* (Crompton, 2010), when a value is engaged (i.e., brought to a person's mind) this results in the following:

1. It strengthens a person's ability to act in line with the value.
2. The seesaw effect occurs: Competing/opposing values in the circumplex model become diminished (or de-activated).
3. The bleedover effect occurs: Compatible or neighbouring values in the circumplex become strengthened.

These three dynamics are important for designing an educational intervention to decrease materialistic values as they illustrate materialistic values are not set in stone. It follows that materialistic values could therefore be diminished in a number of ways, primarily through activating intrinsic values.

2.2.1 The Development of Materialistic Values

To understand how to diminish materialistic values it is important to understand how these values are developed in the first place. According to Kasser's theory of materialistic values (2002), materialistic values are developed via two fundamental pathways: 1) from exposure to social models that promote materialistic values; and 2) as a result of experiences that make an individual feel threatened and/or insecure. Each of these pathways is explored in further detail below.

1 Modelling of Materialistic Values

Materialistic values are predominantly modelled to people through exposure to advertising and commercial television programs that celebrate materialistic lifestyles. Empirical research has found that individuals who watch large amounts of commercial television are more likely to hold materialistic values and also care less about the

environment than others (Good, 2007; Saunders, 2007). An analysis of the content of mainstream entertainment programmes between 1991 and 1997 found that very little of the content (only 14%) related to environmental issues (McComas, Shanahan, & Butler, 2001). In addition, television programmes appear to distort people's perception of societal norms that exist around luxury and wealth. As Schor (2002) states:

“Television and the movies vastly over-represent the prevalence of the wealthy and super-wealthy, and they tend to depict the “average” household at a lifestyle, which is in fact at the upper middle (or above)” (p.7).

Consequently, this creates an 'Aspirational Gap' (i.e., the difference between what an individual has and what he/she wants), which often leads to a sense of dissatisfaction. Not surprisingly, research has found that more materialistic people tend to compare their lives to that of celebrities and wealthy people (Richins, 1995; Richins & Dawson, 1992). Increased exposure to celebrities via the television may explain why materialistic people strive to emulate the lives of the rich and famous through extrinsic pursuits. As a consequence of the dominant materialistic worldview that is promoted via commercial television and advertising, heavy-viewers of commercial television become acculturated to this worldview.

Materialistic values are also developed based on a person's social interactions with his or her broader environment: friends, family and work colleagues (socialization agents). Studies have found people who have been raised by parents who are materialistic are more likely to be highly oriented towards materialistic values (Kasser, Ryan, Zax, & Sameroff, 1995). If a person during childhood is exposed to the idea that possessions are the pathway to happiness, then he or she is likely to adopt this idea as an adult (Roberts, Manolis, & Tanner, 2003).

It follows that reducing exposure to materialistic models as well as helping people to critically reflect on the materialistic messages promoted by the media may assist in reducing materialism and excessive consumption (Kasser, 2006). While it may not be possible for people to change their materialistic friends and family, creating opportunities through an educational intervention to connect with more intrinsically oriented people who seek personal growth and development (rather than wealth and

status) may be a useful strategy. Additionally, being aware of the negative impact materialistic messages and models can have may help to empower people to limit their exposure to them.

2 Insecurity

A number of different studies have found that feelings of insecurity appear to be associated with people being more highly oriented towards materialistic values and therefore more likely to consume. It has been found that young people who have less nurturing mothers (Kasser, Ryan, Zax, & Sameroff, 1995), divorced parents (Rindfleisch, Burroughs, & Denton, 1997), lower self-esteem (Chaplin & John, 2007) and live in low socioeconomic circumstances (Kasser et al., 1995) are more likely to have higher levels of materialism than others. It has been argued that the reason for this is that when people have an experience that leads to their core psychological needs not being met, this results in feelings of insecurity which they attempt to satisfy through the consumption of material goods as well as pursuing other extrinsic goals (e.g., improving their appearance and trying to obtain high social status). Advertisers and marketers have a good understanding of these psychological mechanisms and work to manipulate people's emotional states with techniques that are deliberately aimed at lowering self-esteem (section 2.12).

Similarly, when a person reflects on his or her own death this can lead to feelings of insecurity and extreme anxiety, which has been shown to increase materialistic values and consumption behaviour. According to terror management theory reminding people of their own mortality triggers a dual coping mechanism to buffer against overwhelming anxiety and counter feelings of powerlessness and uncertainty (Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997). The two components of this dual process are: 1) the activation of a dominant cultural worldview; and 2) striving to enhance self-esteem. In the context of understanding material consumption, terror management theorists suggest that since materialism is a core part of Western cultural beliefs and values, and acquiring goods is perceived as a way to enhance self-esteem, when faced with 'existential terror' materialistic values and consumption increase (Arndt, Solomon, Kasser, & Sheldon, 2004a). A number of experimental research studies have shown that when mortality salience is activated, people are primed toward materialistic

thoughts, goal pursuits and tendencies (Kasser & Sheldon, 2000; Sheldon & Kasser, 2008). For example, in a study by Kasser and Sheldon (2000) participants in the mortality salience condition expected to be worth more in the future and spend more on pleasurable items (e.g., clothing and entertainment) than participants in the control group.

Acquiring material goods provides people with 'symbolic immortality' (Arndt, Solomon, Kasser, & Sheldon, 2004b). As Choi, Kwon and Lee (2007) state:

"When the ideology that the procurement of wealth and possessions will lead to a meaningful and happy life is culturally nurtured, consumption can signify that one is living a meaningful life by complying with the cultural standard. Such meaningful life continues to exist symbolically after death" (p. 3).

By shifting the focus towards these materialistic values that are embraced by Western culture, people *"can at least temporarily feel that they have been successful in life"* (Kasser, 2013). The word 'temporarily' is important to note because the acquisition of goods as a strategy to reduce anxiety and feelings of insecurity can only ever be a short-term fix. Material goods cannot satisfy a person's core psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kasser, 2002).

Terror management theory proposes that if people are not equipped with healthy coping strategies then there is the potential for them to shift towards extrinsic values and consume unnecessarily when faced with the onslaught of the 24-hour news stream: homicides, environmental disasters and terrorist attacks. In developing an educational intervention to combat excessive consumption, it is important to provide a space that allows people to feel safe and deeply reflect on their lives without triggering their insecurities. Facilitating the development of practical strategies to deal with negative emotions, such as overwhelming anxiety and existential terror, as well as creating a learning environment that elicits positive emotions, could assist people to be more open to pursuing alternative ways of living.

2.3 The Creation of Identity and Symbolic Consumption

The role that objects and material goods play in people's lives has also been extensively studied in sociology (Baudrillard, 1998; Bauman, 2007; Veblen, 1994). Objects seem to play a fundamental role in helping people to create an identity and express who they are to others. Since human identity is constantly changing and evolving over time and there is a wide array of products advertised to cater to a range of lifestyles and personalities, this drives people to continuously consume (Kennedy & Krogman, 2008). Advertisers sell the idea that people can be better versions of themselves through purchasing items (Dittmar, 2007). Subsequently, people's personal identity becomes entangled and confused with what they can afford to buy (Manne, 2014). No longer are material goods only purchased for their functional use, but arguably more often for the meaning and value they convey. Ownership of certain goods, particularly luxurious goods, displays to others that a person has status and power. This suggests that he or she must have greater control over their environment and life, and therefore, has achieved some degree of success.

In addition, certain objects such as fashion items can send strong messages to others of how up-to-date a person is. Depending on whether an individual is wearing a piece of clothing that is 'in season' or just recently 'out of season' can determine whether they are taken seriously or not by others. According to Corrigan (2011):

"If we cannot demonstrate that we are of our time, it will be difficult for our fellow-citizens to treat us seriously as social actors who would attend to the world as it is at the moment. We get left behind and give the impression that we have no stake in society. By opting out of fashion, we simultaneously opt out of society" (p. 75).

Due to mass retail markets, marketing and advertising, quick manufacturing, advanced technology, the use of cheap materials and low labour costs, the rate of new fashions being produced has accelerated over the past few decades (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006; Cline, 2012). The term 'fast fashion' refers to the process in which clothing *"designs are moved quickly from catwalk to stores and in to the mass-retailing market where an unprecedented amount of clothing is sold"* (Biehl-Missal, 2013, p. 251). Instead of new fashion lines coming out with the beginning of a new season, new

clothing items are being released every week and sometimes every day by some retailers (Cline, 2012). Subsequently, it does not take long for an item to lose its appeal because it is out of style or too many people have acquired it (Schor, 2010).

Material goods also play a role in connecting people to others with similar interests and tastes and avoiding social exclusion. Corrigan (2011) states:

“We recognise ‘people like us’ through the fact that they consume the same sorts of things in the same sorts of ways as we do: similar food, similar drinks, similar clothes, similar music, similar literature, similar newspapers, similar holidaying practices” (p. 79).

People’s desire to fit in with their social group and feel as if they belong also drives consumption for identity expression. In a series of experiments, Mead et al. (2011) showed that when participants experienced being socially excluded they used their financial resources strategically to feel included and accepted. In short, people want to fit in and do not want to stand out from the crowd in a negative, non-conforming way (Power & Mont, 2010b).

In Western consumer culture, the concept of identity has become trivialised by the strong focus on two central aspects: style and image (Lodziak, 2002). The question remains to be asked, how can people develop a sense of self and personal identity without relying on the consumption of material goods and the latest fashions? An educational intervention to combat excessive consumption could develop people’s identity through reflective exercises that cultivate an awareness of personal values, ideas, skills and talents. Additionally, it could help people to engage in new experiences (rather than material acquisition) that are less energy and resource intensive.

2.4 Emulation of Luxury Lifestyles

Various authors have theorised that consumption is driven by comparing ourselves to wealthier people (Schor, 2000; Veblen, 1994). This phenomenon is commonly referred to as ‘conspicuous consumption’, ‘competitive consumption’ and ‘comparative consumption’. In his book ‘The Theory of the Leisure Class’, Veblen (1994, p. 17) states,

“The motive that lies at the root of ownership is emulation...the possession of wealth confers honour; it is an invidious distinction”. Schor (1998) argues that people compare their lives and the things they have against the lives of people who have similar values, who they respect and want to be like. In the past, this group of people may have been a person’s neighbours (i.e., the Joneses); however, an expanded frame of consumer comparison now exists due to television programmes, advertising and other forms of media (section 2.2.11). As a result of being exposed to people who have significantly more material goods, there has been a significant increase in people’s desire for consumer goods.

Luxury goods appear to have become necessities for many people living in the West, especially people on higher incomes. Research conducted by the Pew Research Centre (2006) found that the more income consumers earned the more likely they were to view material goods (e.g., microwave, clothes dryer and television) as necessities rather than luxuries. Freezers were once considered to be novelty items but they are now owned by the majority of the population in the developed world and considered a need rather than a want (Hand & Shove, 2007).

It has also been said that we live in *“the era of professional makeover”* (Manne, 2014, p. 194) with many people dedicating hours of their lives to home renovation and decorating projects. Dale (2009) argues that the rise in household renovation and decoration is due to increased exposure to home improvement shows and aspirational magazines that promote a particular view of the ideal home as well as the availability of mass-produced consumer goods. Subsequently, it is common for people to invest their energy and savings in transforming aspects of their living space.

Furthermore, by renovating one room or purchasing a new item of furniture to beautify the family home, people make themselves vulnerable to experiencing the Diderot Effect, which further perpetuates consumption. Named after the 18th century philosopher Denis Diderot, the Diderot Effect posits that when an individual acquires a new product this may result in driving him or her to purchase more products to achieve conformity in his or her environment and lifestyle. In his essay ‘Regrets on parting with my old dressing gown’ (Diderot, 1875) Diderot describes the effect receiving a new scarlet dressing gown had on his consumption behaviour. Upon

receiving the new gown, he threw out his old gown; however, he noticed as he walked around his apartment in his new gown that everything else looked old and drab. Therefore, he replaced his old furniture with new furniture. He began to see how every purchase created disunity so he tried to seek rebalance by purchasing new items. In short, the Diderot Effect is people's desire for their items to match one another. But since every new purchase creates imbalance, a person can be forever consuming new items to achieve a state of balance. As Schor (2006) states:

“The purchase of a new home is the impetus for replacing old furniture; a new jacket makes little sense without the right skirt to match; an upgrade in china can't really be enjoyed without a corresponding upgrade in glassware. This need for unity and conformity in our lifestyle choices is part of what keeps the consumer escalator moving ever upward. And 'escalator' is the operative metaphor: when the acquisition of each item on a wish list adds another item, and more, to our 'must-have' list, the pressure to upgrade our stock of stuff is relentlessly unidirectional, always ascending” (p. 145).

Consuming one item often locks humans on a consumer treadmill that is difficult to get off as old items are continuously replaced with new ones.

Having an understanding of processes such as the Diderot effect may help individuals to think twice before renovating their bathroom or purchasing a new item for their home or wardrobe. Additionally, interventions that are designed to decrease consumption should aim to educate people on other mechanisms that drive elevated levels of consumption such as social comparison. Helping people to gain a better understanding of the science of happiness as well as the unrealistic expectations that can be developed from watching television could also assist to decrease materialistic values and consumption behaviour.

2.5 Hedonic Adaptation

Another problem with trying to keep up with fashion styles and trends is the tendency for people to adapt to and become bored with their possessions and circumstances, thereby propelling them to consume more, better and different items. The concept of hedonic adaptation purports that humans have a remarkable ability to adapt to changes in their circumstances. Research conducted on lottery winners found that

whilst individuals experience an intense emotional response following a lottery win, their emotional states quickly return to what they were before they experienced the win (Brickman, Coates, & Janoff-Bulman, 1978). This idea applies to consumption in that when an individual makes a new purchase it does not take long for him or her to get used to it or even bored of the purchase. When boredom sets in, humans seek out new products that appear like they will yield new experiences of pleasure (Smart, 2010). As Frank (1999) states:

“Our extraordinary powers of adaptation appear to help explain why absolute living standards simply may not matter much once we escape the physical deprivations of abject poverty” (p. 76).

Unless people realise that there is no end to their spending as a result of their ability to adapt, they may find themselves on the hedonic treadmill, which leads to little or no improvement in their overall well-being. The Wundt Curve illustrates the relationship between stimulation and satisfaction (Figure 4). When an individual is exposed to low levels of stimulation through consuming, the level of satisfaction experienced is relatively high. However, beyond a certain point of stimulation, habituation sets in and the returns start to diminish (Offer, 2006). As Elster (2000, p. 263) states, *“Up to a point more is more; beyond that point, more is less”*. The challenge in getting people to reduce their consumption lies in helping them to find the right level of stimulation through consumption. It appears that less stimulation is better than more. Therefore, educational interventions aimed at reducing consumption could help to build awareness of concepts such as hedonic adaptation and the hedonic treadmill. Furthermore, the virtues of values, such as thrift and self-restraint, could be promoted to help limit people’s stimulation through consumption. If people had an understanding that they are decreasing their well-being by consuming excessively, then perhaps they could be more inclined to exercise self-restraint when it came to purchasing new material goods.

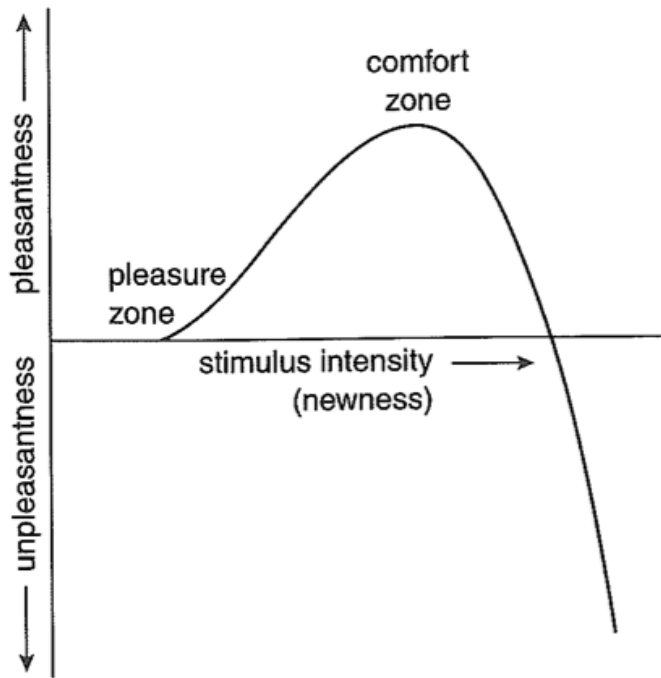


Figure 4. The Wundt Curve (Source: Offer, 2006, p.56)

2.6 Routinisation of Behaviours

While a great deal of modern day consumption is driven by people's desire to have high status and emulate other lifestyles, not all consumption behaviour is driven by extrinsic aspirations and values. Humphery (2010) argues that a great deal of people's everyday consumer behaviour, such as grocery shopping and energy use, is connected to particular routines and habits. While choice can be liberating to a certain extent, people living in the Western world can find themselves faced with too much choice, which can be debilitating and overwhelming (Schwartz, 2004). As Schwartz (2004, p. 19) states, *"Shopping in the modern supermarket demands extra effort only if we're intent on scrutinizing every possibility and getting the best thing"*. Habitual consumption behaviours assist people by allowing them to simplify the decision making process when faced with hundreds of choices in the shops, thereby saving energy and cognitive resources (Wood & Neal, 2009).

The only downside of this is that when people take these mental shortcuts they can get locked into engaging in unsustainable consumption habits (Amel et al., 2009). Research shows increasing people's awareness of everyday consumption behaviours

may help break weak-moderate habits, but raising awareness is usually not enough to break deeply ingrained habits (Verplanken & Wood, 2006). Disrupting deeply ingrained habits requires removing the triggers of the habitual behaviour (Wood, Tam, & Witt, 2005). For this reason, encouraging people to avoid large shopping centres and acquire basic items in new locations (e.g., farmers markets) may assist in reducing mundane forms of excessive consumption.

2.7 Consumption as a Leisure Activity

In recent decades, shopping has become increasingly popular as a leisure activity with many people deriving pleasure from engaging in the experience (Dittmar, 2007; Falk & Campbell, 1997). With modern shopping centres as well as other retail settings (e.g., fast food chains, cruise lines and theme parks) being designed to stimulate and enchant through entertainment shows and activities, people are attracted to frequent these places in their free time as they search for new experiences, pleasure and joy (Ritzer, 2010). Since people quickly habituate to these experiences on offer, new novel experiences are created to keep attracting people back to these consumption settings. Ritzer (2010) uses McDonalds as an example to illustrate how this particular retail landscape has succeeded in enticing its customers back into the restaurant by continuously releasing new competitions, themes and different toys in Happy Meals. Furthermore, many retail landscapes are carefully designed to nudge people towards making particular consumer decisions (Gladwell, 1996).

While it has been suggested that shopping is an effective strategy to distract oneself when feelings of boredom, loneliness or misery arise (Houder & Houder, 2002), according to Csikszentmihalyi (2000) humans have experiential needs to focus their attention on goal directed activities. He argues that when people feel bored, they are more likely to ruminate about themselves and the areas of their lives that are less than perfect, which can ultimately lead to depression. The antidote to this rumination is for a person to turn their attention to a goal directed activity, such as shopping, which helps to temporarily fill the "*existential vacuum*" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 270). However, shopping for material goods can only ever be "*a temporary replacement for a genuine solution to a problem*" (Luckins, 2011, p. 27).

Therefore, one possible solution to decreasing excessive consumption could involve assisting people to find enjoyment and ways to relieve boredom and other negative emotions without frequenting shopping centres. Helping people to tap into their interests and explore new, low impact leisure activities may act as a potential antidote to excessive consumption. Furthermore, educating people on the idea of the never-ending 'consumer treadmill' and the various ways in which retailers entice them to continually return to these consumption settings may empower people to stop frequenting shopping centres for fun and only do so out of necessity (e.g., to buy groceries).

2.8 Long Work Hours and Time Poverty

The longer hours people work, the more likely they are to spend and consume. This is partly due to the fact that long work hours result in increased income and spending power. Research has found that people on higher incomes tend to consume more, with the world's richest 20% making 86% of consumption expenditure (Fischer-Kowalski & Swilling, 2011). Long work hours are also associated with having less free time and locking people into unsustainable patterns of consumption (Schor, 2010). When an individual feels time-poor he or she is more likely to purchase their meals instead of cook them from scratch, drive instead of walk or ride a bike, and use a range of time saving devices that are typically energy-intensive (Wiedmann et al., 2011). In other words, humans opt for convenience, which is likely to act as a short-term reinforcer that maintains inappropriate and unsustainable behaviours (Koger & Winter, 2010). In addition, when overworked people have free time, it often involves spending money on expensive leisure goods and services. This is partly due to leisure time becoming increasingly commodified and associated with shopping (Dittmar, 2007; Schor, 2010).

Additionally, the consumption of expensive leisure goods amongst people who work long hours and find themselves with little free time may also be explained by the material goods representing a desired self-identity and lifestyle (Sullivan & Gershuny, 2004). As Sullivan and Gershuny (2004) state:

“...purchases of expensive leisure goods are made, but these goods are subsequently stored away due to lack of time – with, nevertheless, an intention to use them at some imagined future time when there will be time. In the meantime, satisfaction may be obtained by the mere knowledge of possession, which symbolizes this imaginary future” (p.88).

This symbolic consumption by time-poor people is likely to be a waste of resources unless radical changes are made to their lifestyles to free up more time to make use of the leisure goods.

Ironically, while humans have become increasingly time-poor as a result of working long hours, shopping as an activity has become a more time consuming task with the explosion of more products (Schwartz, 2004). If it takes significant amounts of time to shop, compare the prices of different products and learn how to operate new technologies, then why do people who are time poor engage in these consumptive behaviours? Schor (1991) suggests that long work hours can lock people into a cycle of ‘work-and-spend’ in which they try to compensate excessive stress and dissatisfaction with material purchases (section 1.1).

An educational intervention designed to reduce excessive consumption could focus on helping people to explore ways to reduce their work hours and reclaim their leisure time now rather than in the distant future when they retire. It is important that people face the finite nature of their lives in a non-threatening way and question whether they want or even need to work such long hours for pay. In assisting people to make the shift from full-time to part-time work, it could be beneficial for people to explore the relationship between time affluence and well-being. Could they be happier if they had more time to engage in personally meaningful pursuits? Helping people to gain clarity on what they need to live a satisfying life will assist in determining whether or not they can afford to work less for pay. Given that many people’s work is strongly connected with their personal identity, developing a sense of self through exploring personal values and engaging in new experiences will be of critical importance.

2.9 The Velocitization of Modern Life

The increasingly fast pace of modern life also plays a role in perpetuating consumption. Research that surveyed over 10,000 Australians found a high percentage of workers, particularly women, feel time pressured and rushed (Pocock, Skinner, & Pisaniello, 2010). A study on the walking speed of individuals (a measure for pace of life) in major city centres around the world revealed that people are walking on average 10% faster than they were 10 years earlier (Wiseman, n.d.)

This velocitization of modern life is partly due to technological advancements and the *“temporal imperatives of the global production-consumption system”* (Humphery, 2013, p. 26). Addictions expert Dr Stephanie Brown (2014) argues that due to technological advancements and the ability to work and be connected at all hours, many people have become addicted to fast-paced living: chasing after money, power and status. As DeGreeff, Burnett and Cooley (2010, p. 406) state, *“Instead of technology allowing us enough time to contemplate our true being, we lose ourselves in the technology itself”*.

This frenzied quality of life is further exacerbated by a cultural expectation that people need to look like they are leading busy, fast-paced lives. Mackay (2005) describes the current attitude held by many Australians in the following way:

“If you’re not busy, you must be dead or on the scrap heap. If you're not busy, you must have fallen victim to the demon drink or gone to the dogs. Not busy? Good grief, what a loser”.

As a consequence, people seem to fear being bored. For instance, one study found participants preferred to administer electric shocks to themselves instead of being left alone in a room with nothing to do for a 15-minute period (Wilson et al., 2014). Not surprisingly, it has been suggested that shopping is an easy goal directed activity that can help people to avoid experiencing boredom (section 2.7).

Fast-paced living may give people a sense of being productive and achieving, but it comes at a cost to the individual and society at large (Bauman, 2007). A major problem

with feeling constantly busy and time pressured is that it leaves people with no time and space to deeply reflect. As Pocock, Skinner and Williams (2012) state:

“...busyness is the enemy of thought, planning and perspective. We are often so busy that we cannot see what we are doing, remember why we are doing it, and keep our priorities clear. As long as we are spinning our wheels chasing our work lists, struggling to get enough sleep, work, holidays, money, and to keep our friendships and family running well, we lack time for thought and perspective” (p.9).

Busy people have a tendency to behave in mindless and habitual ways, which means they are more likely to engage in unsustainable behaviours and opt for convenience (section 2.6). Bertman (1998) characterises contemporary culture as a ‘nowist culture’, where the long-term has been replaced with the short-term, permanence with transience, and insight with impulse. The consequence of this new way of being is that consumption has increased. Any item that is new and fast is automatically celebrated and whatever is old and slow is discarded without much thought (Yarrow, 2014). Furthermore, living in a culture in which one is conditioned to expect things immediately prevents people from cultivating skills and virtues such as growing their own vegetables and patience respectively. This mindset of expecting instant results stands in direct opposition to an ethos of sustainable and simple living, which requires learning new skills, thoughtful deliberation, and planning for the future.

In reducing consumption through an educational intervention, there is clearly a place for conversations to be had in relation to slowing down the pace of life. Since many people may feel that there is a cultural expectation to work long hours and do so at maximum speed to increase productivity, they may need to be educated on the negative consequences associated with doing so (e.g., burnout and fatigue). Many people may have some resistance to ideas such as slowing down the pace of their lives or working fewer hours; however, having more quality time with family and friends and living a healthy, more peaceful lifestyle could be highly appealing. Bertman (1998) suggests that people can attain peace in their lives in a fast-paced world via two pathways: 1) by avoiding the sensory overstimulation that our ‘nowist culture’ generates; and 2) by discovering and engaging in simple activities that make them feel peaceful. If people can feel more peaceful and slow down, this may facilitate deeper

reflection on their needs. Subsequently, they may be less susceptible to misleading advertising messages (Rosenberg, 2004).

2.10 Planned and Perceived Obsolescence

The rate at which consumers replace new technologies is faster than ever before. As a consequence, people living in Western industrialised cultures have been characterised as being wasteful and having a throwaway mentality (Toffler, 1990). However, the disposal of technologies is partly due to the way in which industrial designers create these items to only last for a certain period of time (planned obsolescence). These engineered death rates and marketing campaigns that artificially limit the lifespan of a manufactured good (perceived obsolescence) result in a continual stream of production and consumption (Slade, 2009). For example, one corporation engineered the battery in its product to last for approximately 13 months (Slade, 2007). By making it difficult for consumers to replace the battery in these devices by creating its own screw (the pentalobe), the corporation effectively drives consumers to purchase new items rather than replace a battery (Trawick, 2011). If people were able to purchase products that were made to last and were provided with instructions on how to easily replace items such as batteries, then they may be satisfied with the product for a longer period and less likely to make a repeat purchase of that item (Smart, 2010).

As discussed previously, another factor that contributes to people's wasteful, 'buy-and-toss' behaviour is the need to upgrade to the latest model due to changes in product style and new fashion trends. Perceived obsolescence occurs when *"consumers are led to believe their product has become obsolete in light of a more recent, updated version"* (Doyon, 2015, p. 248). Marketing and advertising plays a critical role when it comes to creating the perception that a product needs to be replaced due to slight modifications in the way a product looks and the addition of a few new features. Since economic growth depends on the production and consumption of goods, planned and perceived obsolescence plays a vital role in driving the purchase of new products.

Additionally, strong financial disincentives exist that prevent even the most waste-conscious and frugal members of our society from repairing items. When an item stops

working or breaks in some way, it is often cheaper and easier for individuals to purchase a new product than it is to find out how to repair it or pay someone to repair it. For example, one study found that between 1981 – 1994 the cost of a new television increased by only 20%; however, the cost to repair a television increased by 150% (Consumers International, 1998, cited in Mont & Power, 2010). Even if people are prepared to fix an item, manufacturers often make it difficult for them to do so, as illustrated above.

Counter movements, such as 'I fix it' (iFixit, n.d.), can help individuals to overcome such barriers by creating and selling specially made screwdrivers at a low price and providing free repair guides. However, since material goods are cheap, labour costs are high and many people lack the time to learn how to fix an item, most people are likely to choose the quick and easy solution of purchasing a new item (Harper, 2009; Royte, 2013). This further demonstrates the need to help people slow down and reclaim their time so they can consider the impacts of their personal consumption and whether they wish to give their dollars to certain corporations that engage in promoting overconsumption through planned and perceived obsolescence practices. It would be wise for people to reflect deeply on questions such as, 'Is my current phone in good working order?', 'Do I really need to upgrade to the latest model?', 'Is there any way I can extend the life of this product?' and 'Do I want to support this company given their manufacturing ethos?'. In addition, it highlights the need to foster a culture of thrift and repair wherever possible.

2.11 Availability of Consumer Credit

Schor (1998) argues that access to easy credit is one of the leading causes of overspending and excessive consumption. Being able to draw on future income to acquire goods has allowed people to engage in excessive consumption behaviour in the short-term without considering the longer-term impacts (e.g., debt, relationship breakdown and bankruptcy). Research has found that people are willing to pay up to 100% more when they use a credit card rather than cash (Prelec & Simester, 2001). There are several explanations for why people spend more when they use a credit card, including a de-coupling of the purchase and the payment of that purchase, which results in less psychological pain (Prelec & Loewenstein, 1998), less time for reflective

deliberation ('Do I really need this item?') and the human tendency to think that we will be better versions of ourselves in the future (e.g., wealthier) (McGonigal, 2011). If an individual thinks that they will be better off financially in the future, then they may not see the point in saving for their future-self. For example, one study found that people who had a high future-self continuity (i.e., they saw their future-self as being similar to their current self) tended to save more money and have less credit card debt than people who had a low future-self continuity (Ersner-Hershfield, Garton, Ballard, Samanez-Larkin, & Knutson, 2009).

It follows that an examination of the psychology of credit card use in an educational intervention to decrease excessive consumption may assist participants to think twice before making purchases on credit. Additionally, encouraging people to experience the pain of payment by using cash to pay for goods may help to reduce consumption behaviour.

2.12 Manipulation by Advertisers, Marketers, and the Media

It is estimated that individuals are exposed to as many as 3,000 advertisements each day via the television, radio, magazines, Internet and in shops (Kilbourne, 2006). The vast majority of these advertising messages suggest the pursuit of financial wealth and material possessions are important goals in life that lead to happiness, success and a meaningful life (Dittmar, 2007; Kashdan & Breen, 2007; Kasser, 2002). According to commercial advertisements, people should not worry about trying to change the way they live, as quick and easy solutions lie in consuming material goods (Andrews, 1997). Mont and Power (2010, p. 2235) argue that the main driver for consumption is people seeing it as a "*proxy for well-being*", despite growing evidence that indicates this is not the case (section 1.2).

The job of advertisers and marketers is to construct a world that makes people desire material goods that they do not necessarily need. Rosenblatt (1999) states that advertisers effectively tap into people's acquisitive impulse to have more. However, advertisers also create new needs that may not have existed in the individual until the advertiser came along. 'Marketer-induced problem recognition' is a term given to describe a range of techniques that are aimed at making people feel insecure and

dissatisfied with their lives (Belch & Belch, 2015). For instance, early advertisements selling a mouth wash product were highly effective by making bad breath ('Halitosis') appear like a serious medical problem and associating it with being socially excluded. As a 1950s advertisement for this product states, "*Jane has a pretty face. Men notice her lovely figure but never linger long. Because Jane has one big minus on her report card – halitosis: bad breath*" (Peretti, 2014). Similarly, advertisers have used similar methods to sell vaginal hygiene products to women by promoting the idea that they could be perceived as dirty and smelly (Edwards, 2014). Since people do not want to be socially excluded (section 2.3), these ads play on people's fears and insecurities. By holding out the false promise that people's problems in life can be solved through acquiring a certain product, advertisers and marketers are able to successfully sell more products.

Advertisers, marketers and the media have played a key role in establishing a new norm of what people think they need to have to live a happy and fulfilling life, especially through the medium of television. The advent of popular reality TV home renovation shows, such as 'The Block', has further sparked people's desire to consume by creating new norms around what the perfect home should look like (section 2.3). These shows depict middle class ordinary Australians working long hours to renovate and decorate every aspect of a living space. Manne (2014, p. 195) makes the following observation of participants on these shows stating, "*it is hard to imagine them ever having time or energy for anything else. Freedom Furniture [an Australian furniture store] might be the closest they get to freedom*". These shows, as well as the advertisements that are aired during them, are used to entice interest, provoke desires and engage viewers' imaginations. Exposing people to countless images of perfect homes can distort how they perceive their own homes and lives should be. These shows and advertisements inflate people's perceptions of what others have and create aspirational gaps which people attempt to resolve through purchasing new products (Dittmar, 2007; Schor, 2000).

In an educational intervention to decrease consumption, helping people to reduce their exposure to advertising, marketing and television may result in them feeling more satisfied with what they already have. Assisting people to become more aware of

their experience before and after purchasing particular items could also be useful. McGonigal (2011) argues that often the promise of reward that marketers and advertisers create fails to match up to the reality, with people being left feeling dissatisfied with their purchase. If people are able to tune into their experience before and after making a purchase, they may realise that the advertising messages often fail to deliver what they promise. Finally, questioning the notion that acquiring material goods is a pathway to increased levels of happiness may assist people to reject advertising messages that implicitly make such claims.

2.13 The Pro-Growth Mindset and the ‘Business as Usual’ Economy

Deeply entrenched in the culture, the political process and corporate institutions of the developed world is a pro-growth mindset and model of progress that stipulates a growing economy takes precedence above everything else (Jackson, 2009). Hamilton (2003) states:

“Countries rate their progress against others by their income per person, which can rise only through faster growth. High growth is a cause for national pride; low growth attracts accusations of incompetence in the case of rich countries and pity in the case of poor countries” (p. 1).

Arguably, the reason for the sense of pride experienced with high growth is associated with the assumption that higher incomes result in people having more choice, richer lives and improved quality of life (Jackson, 2009). Guillen-Royo and Wilhite (2015, p. 302) state that people who grow up in capitalist societies are exposed to the idea that economic growth (i.e., income and quantity and size of items consumed) is positively associated with the idea of enhanced well-being *“in virtually every domain of life, from work, to home to public spaces”*. The pro-growth mindset and the ‘business as usual’ economy embodies the idea that in order to be successful, people have to be continuously growing financially and materially (Wachtel, 1983).

Neoclassical economics is largely to blame for these misguided ideas. Neoclassical economics proposes that continuous economic growth is a necessary and desirable goal, despite growing evidence that beyond a certain point there are marginal returns (section 1.2). Moreover, many scholars have also criticised the neoclassical economics

idea that constant growth is good for society since it is not possible to have constant growth on a finite planet (Alexander, 2015; Higgs, 2014; Meadows, Meadows, Randers, & Behrens, 1972). Continual economic growth is achieved through increases in productivity as well as the creation and sale of new, innovative products and services (Smart, 2010). To perpetuate growth, the current system is structured in such a way that it creates more needs than it satisfies in people. Subsequently, this often leaves people who are financially well-off compared to the rest of the world's population feeling deprived (Wachtel, 1983). People who adopt a pro-growth mindset may be more vulnerable to persuasive advertising claims to buy material goods, irrespective of whether an item is needed or not. An educational intervention to decrease consumption and materialism at the individual level could be designed to help people question the flawed assumptions of neoclassical economics (e.g., more income equates to increases in happiness) and educate people on the ecological problems associated with constant economic growth on a finite planet.

2.14 Infrastructure

In relation to environmental factors that influence consumption, the design of cities, communities, and houses can lock people into favouring unsustainable patterns of consumption (Figure 2). For instance, people living in isolated areas on the urban fringe often have limited access to public transport and live far from where they work (VicHealth, 2016). As a consequence, they are more likely to be more car-dependent than people living close to a train line or within walking distance from work. At the level of the household, a kitchen that is designed with a large space for a fridge and dishwashing machine encourages the owner to purchase a larger than needed fridge and other white goods that may not be necessary. This results in not only increased electricity consumption but also increased consumption of food and other material goods (Shove, 2003).

Furthermore, the fact that the majority of Australians occupy dwellings that are significantly larger than in other European countries, where higher-density, smaller apartment living is more common, makes them vulnerable to excessive consumption. As Burke and Ralston (2011) state:

“The ownership of a detached house enables a household to extend upwards or outwards, to put in a swimming pool, to build a garage or a carport for one, two or more cars, to put in an outdoor entertainment area based around barbecue, to have a large garden and landscape it” (p.127).

Australian houses have grown in size over the years, with the average floor space increasing from 162.2m² in 1984 to 215m² in 2009. The prevalence of owner-occupied dwellings in Australia arises from a cultural belief and a norm that home ownership and having external living space are key priorities (Burke & Ralston, 2011). Home improvement programs and magazines that display the homes of the middle to upper class fuel the extension of Australian households (sections 2.4 and 2.12). The rise of the ‘McMansion’ since the 1970s perfectly illustrates Australians’ desire for their houses to reflect their status and wealth, rather than satisfying basic needs for shelter.

Even though many of these design aspects are outside the individual’s sphere of control, it could still be beneficial to increase people’s awareness of how their surrounding environment can influence their consumption behaviour. Knowing that the location, size and design of a household can significantly increase consumption behaviour may dissuade some people from buying or building large dwellings on the urban fringe. Additionally, given the unaffordable and overinflated nature of housing prices in Australia (Janda, 2016), the time may be right to question the cultural idea that it is desirable for people to own their own home on a quarter acre block of land. In an educational intervention to decrease consumption, people could be encouraged to reflect on the role of the home, the concept of renting versus buying, and the dreams that are bound up in the family home. They could also be encouraged to develop a sense of identity that is not based on the presentation of their home. As Dale (2014) asks:

“Can we let go of our conventional dreams of ‘home’? Are we willing to develop different social identities, not based on self-expression through consumption and display?” (p.133).

In an Australian context, encouraging people to detach their identity from the home and rent smaller houses, units or apartments closer to where they work could help to significantly rein in consumption.

2.15 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the various psychological, sociological, economic, political and structural factors that drive individuals to consume excessively. Understanding the factors that perpetuate excessive consumption, both at the individual and structural level, can help to shed light on the different ways excessive consumption can be tackled through an educational intervention. Although many of the factors discussed in this chapter are beyond the individual's sphere of control and cannot be easily influenced (e.g., the design of communities and shopping centres), there is a lot that can still be done at the individual level to reduce materialistic values and consumption behaviour. Instead of waiting for the government to intervene, a more proactive approach can be taken to deal with these problems at the grassroots level.

By assisting people to take time out from their busy lives and create the space for deep reflection, they can begin to critically evaluate their lives, values, personal interests and personal consumption behaviour. If people's identity is based on their skills, interests and values rather than on their personal possessions, it is likely they will have better self-esteem. It follows that with better self-esteem they will be less likely to consume in frivolous and status-signalling ways. Raising people's awareness of the factors that drive people to consume and work long hours and the associated costs may be useful in empowering them to reclaim a sense of control over their lives and make changes where possible. In addition, an understanding of the environmental, social and personal costs of consumption, and the science of happiness, will assist in showing people that changes need to be made, and it need not compromise their quality of life.

It is likely that only once there is political pressure from the general public to address excessive consumption and the problems associated with it that governments will begin to look at wider policy change and legislating for reductions (Alexander, 2015; Alexander & Ussher, 2012). With consumption being endorsed by advertisers, corporations, government institutions, as well as friends and family, it can be enormously challenging to step off the consumer treadmill in modern society. Opting out of mainstream consumer culture means people place themselves at risk of being socially marginalised and negatively labelled. However, voluntary simplifiers have

successfully done this and subsequently reported overall life improvements. The next chapter will explore how the pursuit of a voluntary simplicity lifestyle and cultivating mindfulness can assist in decreasing excessive consumption and materialistic values.

Chapter 3

Facilitating a Shift to Less Consumption-Based Lifestyles

Since the aim of this thesis is to understand if an educational intervention can reduce materialistic values and overconsumption, this chapter will focus on exploring the leverage points for decreasing consumption and materialism that are within the individual's sphere of control. The countercultural movement of voluntary simplicity in which people freely choose to adopt simplified lives of reduced and restrained consumption will be examined as a pathway to shift people away from extrinsic lifestyle pursuits and overconsumption. Several scholars have suggested that mainstreaming this lifestyle could help tackle a number of environmental issues, since controlling consumption desires and reducing material consumption lies at the heart of the voluntary simplicity movement (Alexander, 2015; Kasser, 2009a).

The voluntary simplicity lifestyle, that adheres to a set of values focused around nurturing relationships, caring for the environment, practising frugality and self-restraint, and connecting to community, demonstrates that there are other ways to live than merely focusing on attaining wealth and material possessions (Alexander, 2015). This lifestyle provides a compelling alternative for people who are dissatisfied with their jobs and feel locked in a 'work-and-spend' cycle. In a culture where unrestrained consumption is the norm, an examination of the voluntary simplicity movement may provide valuable insights on how to: 1) tackle overconsumption at the individual level; and 2) facilitate similar shifts in lifestyle for mainstream individuals. As Maniates (2001) states:

“What (to put it bluntly) is with these people [voluntary simplifiers]? What, in other words, accounts for their ability to step back and ask tough questions about consumption and personal satisfaction? What has inoculated them against luxury fever and imbued them with a certain “consumptive resistance”? Are they just better people, or maybe just better off? Or has some combination of cultural, political, and social forces come together in their lives to extricate them from the tyranny of expectations? And could this

combination conceivably be fostered, and even recreated, for a significant portion of industrial and over-consuming North America?” (p.211).

The small body of research literature on voluntary simplicity has focused mainly on the philosophy of the lifestyle, motivations for adopting this lifestyle and the different categorisations and types of simplifiers that exist. To date, little empirical research has been conducted on how voluntary simplicity practices and values can be fostered in more mainstream individuals. This research project sets out to fill this gap in the literature by exploring how to cultivate aspects of the voluntary simplicity lifestyle in an educational intervention to reduce materialistic values and consumption behaviour.

An important value and practice of the voluntary simplicity lifestyle that will also be explored as an effective skill to reduce materialistic values and overconsumption is mindfulness training. In this chapter, mindfulness will be examined as a potential tool to shift mindsets away from materialistic sources of satisfaction to more intrinsic pursuits and decrease consumption. Popular literature on voluntary simplicity often discusses the importance of being mindful and encourages simplifiers to engage in mindfulness training and meditation exercises (Andrews, 1997; Burch, 1995; Pierce, 2003). Indeed, some research indicates that mindfulness is positively associated with the voluntary simplicity lifestyle (Ross, 2015). Although Brown and Kasser (2005) found no difference in the mindfulness levels of voluntary simplifiers and their mainstream counterparts, their study found that people who have high levels of mindfulness and are strongly oriented towards intrinsic values tend to have smaller ecological footprints and higher levels of subjective well-being than others. Therefore, it could be argued that a combination of assisting people to adopt elements of the voluntary simplicity lifestyle that resist consumerism as well as cultivating high levels of mindfulness may facilitate a shift to less materialistic lifestyles.

This chapter is divided into three major sections. Firstly, the voluntary simplicity lifestyle will be explored: what it is, what motivates people to adopt this lifestyle, common practices, categorisations and types of simplifiers, and the process simplifiers go through in making the shift in lifestyle. Most importantly, the green credentials of the voluntary simplicity lifestyle will be explored and whether making a shift to this lifestyle results in the significant uptake of ecologically responsible behaviours and

reductions in ecological footprints. Secondly, the practice of mindfulness will be examined as a separate skill to bring about shifts in materialistic values and consumption behaviour. The different ways in which mindfulness can be cultivated in people's lives will also be explored. Finally, key educational theories and strategies that may enhance the effectiveness of an educational intervention will be discussed.

3.1 The Voluntary Simplicity Lifestyle: Living More with Less

Voluntary simplifiers (also frequently referred to as downshiffters) are people who have chosen a countercultural way of life in which they reduce or restrain their material consumption in order to increase their quality of life (Alexander, 2015). Instead of seeking satisfaction through material acquisition, they focus their time and energy on pursuing non-materialistic sources of satisfaction and meaning (Boujbel & d'Astous, 2012; Elgin, 1993). Wachtel (1983) states that voluntary simplicity should be thought of as a complex set of attitudes and changes in goals and lifestyles. By taking the focus away from extrinsic pursuits (i.e., obtaining more material goods and status), simplifiers are able to develop stronger relationships and connections to their community and environment. In other words, they are able to step off the consumer treadmill to regain a greater sense of control over their lives.

Zamwel, Sasson-Levy and Ben-Porat (2014, p. 200) argue that this lifestyle *“stands out against the ethos of our era, wherein consumerism and consumerist behaviour are viewed as the norm, whereas abstention from consumption is perceived as eccentric and inexplicable”*. While simplifiers engage in a range of anti-consumption and consumer resistance practices that are countercultural, they do not completely reject mainstream culture (Etzioni, 1999). As Sociologist Mary Grigsby (2004) states:

“The voluntary simplicity movement advocates remaining in contact with the mainstream in some ways, such as through volunteer work, property ownership, investment, and buying goods and services from locally owned business” (p.6).

This connection that voluntary simplifiers have with the mainstream means this movement may have the potential to spread and influence the consumption choices and lifestyle practices of others.

Despite remaining in contact with the mainstream, voluntary simplifiers appear to question the status quo and reject the dominant cultural idea that 'more is better'. Concern for the damaging environmental and social effects of excessive consumption is commonly cited as a major reason for pursuing this lifestyle (Alexander, 2015; Grigsby, 2004; Huneke, 2005). Grigsby (2004) found three consistent themes emerged from her analysis of literature on voluntary simplicity. These were: 1) a sense of loss of meaning and fulfilment experienced by individuals in life; 2) environmental degradation and the impending ecological doom; and 3) the breakdown of communities. From her in-depth analysis of the voluntary simplicity literature, she argues that simplifiers perceive these environmental and social issues as being created by consumerist culture, which lock individuals in a 'work-and-spend' cycle.

Not surprisingly, many simplifiers perceive that the solution to ecological and social issues is to make a shift away from consumerist values through engagement with practices that promote lower levels of consumption and more environmentally conscious living. Grigsby (2004) states that within the movement there is a strong focus on the idea of people being agents of change through acting in ways that are in alignment with their values rather than targeting corporations to change the way in which they operate. Other studies have found voluntary simplifiers believe that through engaging in certain lifestyle practices and abstaining from purchasing products they can address a number of issues that they are concerned about (Lorenzen, 2012; Zamwel et al., 2014).

Although environmental and/or social concerns have been found to be important factors for simplifying, other motivations have been reported in the literature. These include: being dissatisfied with high stress lifestyles; lack of satisfaction with life; a desire for more time for oneself and family; pursuit of minimalist lifestyle; and wanting a healthier life (Alexander & Ussher, 2012; Grigsby, 2004; Hamilton & Mail, 2003; Huneke, 2005). Zavestoski (2002) found that although some simplifiers had adopted simpler lives through exposure to anti-material values, for many the shift in lifestyle was triggered by a personal or family crisis. The crisis arose *"as a result of years of stress, fatigue, and unhappiness; or as a result of disillusionment with the relentless pursuit of wealth for the purpose of consuming material goods in order to create a*

particular self image” (Zavestoski, 2002, p. 154). Similarly, Maniates (2001) argues that voluntary simplifiers adopt this way of life in response to primarily dealing with stress from work rather than due to environmental concerns.

Overall, the decision to simplify appears to arise due to a combination of both personal (e.g., desire for more time and less stress) and altruistic reasons (e.g., environmental and social concerns). At the personal level, people believe that they can improve their quality of life through reclaiming their time by working less and restricting their consumption (Lorenzen, 2012). Material items are perceived as not only using finite resources but also being a distraction from more important areas of life, such as fostering strong interpersonal relationships and contributing to one’s community (Elgin & Mitchell, 1977). Subsequently, simplifiers choose to focus their energy on engaging in lifestyle practices that add value and meaning to their lives. These practices are explored below.

3.1.1 Voluntary Simplicity Practices

There is a large body of popular literature, blogs, and online forums that provide a wealth of information on how to live simply. Thousands of voluntary simplifiers have referred to literature such as ‘Your Money or Your Life’ (Dominguez & Robin, 1992), ‘The Simple Life’ (Hetzl, 2014), ‘Voluntary Simplicity’ (Elgin, 1993) and ‘Radical Homemakers’ (Hayes, 2010) to help them simplify their lives. Common themes that emerge from these writings include: decluttering; buying locally produced food and products; limiting exposure to television; having experiences rather than accumulating material goods; how to break the ‘work-and-spend’ cycle; money management practices; and creating strongly connected communities (Huneke, 2005). A number of studies have also found mindfulness to be an important practice of many simplifiers’ lives (Alexander & Ussher, 2012; Pierce, 2000). The majority of simple living practices focus on people making behavioural changes to their lifestyles at the individual level, rather than working to effect systemic change (Grigsby, 2004).

Each simplicity practice is not just carried out in isolation but appears to shape the story simplifiers tell themselves about their lives and personal identity (Lorenzen, 2012). In Western culture, humans construct their identity and image through the

acquisition of material goods (e.g., clothes, car and house), which is arguably driven by commercially driven norms and ideals (Thorpe, 2012). It is well established that people in developing countries do not purchase items merely due to their functionality but as a result of what they symbolically communicate (Schor, 2010; Veblen, 1994). In short, individuals strengthen their personal identity and/or display the group they belong to (or wish to belong to) through acquiring material goods. However, this is not the only way in which a person's identity can be constructed. A person's identity can be based around ideas of resisting consumption and choosing not to consume. Lorenzen (2012, p. 97) argues *"what we do not buy or buy less of, can shape our identity as much as what we do buy, especially in the case of green lifestyles"*. Her research found that simplifiers gained a great deal of personal meaning from resisting consumption and engaging in green lifestyle practices.

A central aspect of simple living is time: an individual must have time to engage in self-reflection in relation to their consumption and daily living practices (Kronenberg & Lida, 2011). In our fast-paced culture, more people than ever before are increasingly time-poor and work long hours (section 2.8), thereby making it difficult to reflect on how they would like to live, what is most important and the ecological/social impact of various products. This is why many simplifiers choose to scale back the number of hours they work for pay. As a result of trading income for time, simplifiers are in a better position to engage in deep reflection.

Simplifiers do not just require time to think about their behaviour and what is best for the planet but they also need time to acquire new skills to carry out simple living practices. For this reason, the lifestyle is sometimes referred to as 'complicated' living rather than simple living (Wallman, 2015). For example, growing food requires a certain level of skill and knowledge (e.g., one needs to know what to plant and when, when the produce is ready to harvest, and how to cook the produce). This takes considerably more time and effort than buying a processed meal at a fast food franchise. Nevertheless, the lifestyle is 'simple' in the sense that it focuses on satisfying people's basic needs and moving away from the many aspects of modern day living that are associated with increased stress levels (e.g., overwork and excessive consumption).

3.1.2 The Ecological Impact of the Voluntary Simplicity Lifestyle

Many researchers claim that voluntary simplicity is not just less stressful but also less resource and energy-intensive (Alexander, 2015; Huneke, 2005; Kronenberg & Lida, 2011). Some scholars even go as far as proposing this lifestyle as a solution to a number of pressing environmental issues due to its anti-consumption and consumer resistance stance (Alexander, 2015; Andrews, 1997). Since ecological overshoot is being driven to a large extent by the Western consumer way of life (section 1.1), decreasing personal consumption is viewed as a way to have less ecological impact, conserve resources, and reduce waste.

The major themes that emerge in the voluntary simplicity literature on consumption relate to reducing and resisting consumption (e.g., decluttering, buying second-hand, and sharing) as well as ethical (e.g., buying fair trade) and sustainable forms of consumption (e.g., purchasing green products, recycling, and composting) (Ballantine & Creery, 2010). The voluntary simplicity lifestyle embraces practices that involve consuming less, consuming differently, and consuming more efficiently. Many simplicity practices, such as limiting television consumption and exposure to advertising, have a direct relationship to materialistic values and consumption behaviour. For example, by reducing people's exposure to advertising messages and television, they are in a better position to question the commonly held assumption that consuming material goods is the pathway to increased happiness and success (section 2.2.1). Subsequently, they may be willing to explore other pathways to satisfy their needs rather than through material acquisition.

Despite the strong focus the voluntary simplicity movement places on reducing consumption, little empirical research exists on the linkages between simple living and consumption. There is some evidence to suggest that voluntary simplifiers tend to consume in more sustainable and ethical ways than non-simplifiers. Ballantine and Creery (2010) found that voluntary simplifiers in the United States have a tendency to be guided by six factors when it came to making consumption-related decisions. These factors are: 1) considering how environmentally friendly a product is; 2) the quality of the product (preferring better quality products that last longer); 3) sharing items with others; 4) buying second-hand products; 5) purchasing products that come from

ethical companies; and 6) whether they can be self sufficient (e.g., make the product themselves). Similarly, a study found that the consumption decisions of 35 Israeli simplifiers were guided by a range of ethical and environmental considerations, with the authors stating, *“every act of consumption is bound up in the deliberation of the broader implications thereof”* (Zamwel et al., 2014, p. 207).

Other studies highlight that while simplifiers may still engage in consumption practices, their motivations for doing so differed markedly from the mainstream. An Australian study by Craig-Lees and Hill (2002) found that voluntary simplifiers and non-simplifiers owned the same material items (e.g., cars and household equipment); however, voluntary simplifiers were more concerned with the functionality of these items, how they were produced, and unnecessary packaging. They were also less concerned about brand names than non-simplifiers. In this study non-simplifiers linked the idea of status to their goods, whereas voluntary simplifier did not make such links. In addition, a survey of 2,268 voluntary simplifiers found that many were prepared to spend more money to purchase better quality items that would last longer and ‘green’ environmental technologies (e.g., solar panels and carbon offsets) that would reduce their environmental impact (Alexander & Ussher, 2012).

However, merely engaging in green and more ethical consumption practices may not automatically translate to voluntary simplifiers having a smaller ecological footprint than non-simplifiers. A study by Csutora (2012) found there was no significant difference between the ecological footprints of ‘green’ and ‘brown’ consumers. All that being said, some researchers have challenged the assumption that people are either ‘green’ consumers or not (e.g., ‘brown’ or ‘grey’ consumers) with research findings indicating that consumers tend to move back and forth between engaging in green and non-green consumption behaviours (McDonald, Oates, Alevizou, Young, & Hwang, 2012).

With this in mind, the question needs to be asked: do voluntary simplifiers have smaller ecological footprints and behave in more ecologically responsible ways than their mainstream counterparts? Or do their efforts to be ecologically responsible citizens stop at green and ethical consumption? If the lifestyle is based centrally around the idea of decreasing consumption and controlling consumption desires, it

follows that voluntary simplifiers would be more likely to live a less energy and resource-intensive lifestyle. Brown and Kasser (2005) found that people who scored higher in subjective well-being were more likely to engage in ecologically responsible behaviours. This was explained by two factors that are commonly attributed to voluntary simplifiers: a high intrinsic value orientation and mindfulness. This study also found that voluntary simplifiers were more likely to be intrinsically oriented and have smaller ecological footprints than non-simplifiers (Kasser & Brown, 2003). Furthermore, it has been reported that mindfulness is an important daily practice in the lives of simplifiers and high levels of mindfulness have been found to be positively associated with having a voluntary simplicity lifestyle (Alexander & Ussher, 2012; Ross, 2015). Since voluntary simplifiers are more likely to be oriented towards intrinsic values and many practice mindfulness, this combination of factors is likely to not only boost their well-being but also increase the likelihood that they will engage in ecologically responsible behaviours. The various ways in which people become intrinsically oriented and more mindful will be discussed later in this chapter (sections 3.1.5 and 3.6).

Much of the literature on voluntary simplicity advocates a lifestyle of frugality, sufficiency, moderation, and restraint. This suggests that this way of life is likely to have less ecological impact compared to the lifestyle of non-simplifiers. A central tenet of the movement is a shift away from accumulating money and material goods to satisfying core psychological needs through non-materialistic pursuits (Elgin, 1993). Kasser (2011) theorises that simplifiers could be potentially higher in thrift due to their restrained and limited financial resources. In order for simplifiers to get by, it is necessary for them to engage in thrifty practices and make the most of the resources that they already have. In fact, much of the research as well as popular 'how to'/self help style literature on voluntary simplicity illustrates that simplifiers engage in a wide range of thrifty practices such as growing their own food, budgeting, and purchasing items second-hand (e.g., Hetzel, 2014).

In addition, simplifiers' decision to work fewer hours for pay lends support to the idea that the lifestyle may be more ecologically sustainable. Studies show that the biggest contributing factor to the size of a person's ecological footprint is income as the more

one earns, the more disposable income he or she has to spend (Lenzen & Murray, 2001). When voluntary simplifiers cut back on their hours at work it means they have less disposable income to spend on material goods and energy-intensive activities (e.g., air travel) but more time for relationships and community (Alexander, 2015). Due to fewer work demands, they are able to live at a much slower-pace and spend time reflecting on what they need to live a 'good life'. In short, having more time may bring about greater levels of mindfulness in behaviour. A study by Kennedy, Krahn and Krogman (2013) found that downshifting (i.e., reducing hours at work to have more discretionary time) had a statistically significant effect on people's engagement with sustainable household practices, although this did not extend to downshifter's adopting more sustainable forms of transport. Kennedy argued that unless downshifter's have greater environmental concern and structural changes occur to make it easier for them to engage in other sustainable behaviours, then it was likely that they would only engage in practices that could be easily carried out. However, unlike downshifter's, many voluntary simplifiers are motivated out of concern for the environment to pursue this lifestyle (section 3.1). Therefore, they are more likely to engage in environmental practices that may require more time, skill, and effort to carry out.

Despite voluntary simplifier's best efforts to engage in ecologically responsible behaviours, it is uncertain whether the shift in lifestyle represents a genuine transformation in consumption behaviour. Are the shifts in consumption sufficient to ensure a sustainable future? Or are they only token, 'feel good' gestures that help to relieve simplifier's guilty eco-conscience for a short period of time? As Kronenberg and Lida (2011) state:

"Simple living as practiced in the developed countries may still not be sustainable enough in the sense of bringing the ecological footprint of consumers to sustainable levels" (p.72).

While simplifiers may engage in a myriad of pro-environmental behaviours to decrease their consumption, there is also research to suggest that they may overlook the impact of high consumption activities. Black and Cherrier (2010) found in a qualitative study of 16 women who engaged in anti-consumption practices that it was common for these

women to overlook unsustainable practices such as air travel. These women justified these high consumption behaviours to themselves by saying, 'I'm human' and 'I'm not perfect'. Money saved from not consuming frivolous items and engaging in thrifty practices may be spent by voluntary simplifiers on high consumption activities such as flying abroad, effectively negating any environmental benefits gained from the other environmental activities engaged in.

Even though simplifiers may not be 'perfect' environmental stewards and engage from time to time in high consumption activities, overall this way of life rejects the idea that money and material goods are a measure of life success and happiness in favour of reclaiming time: time for self, time for family/friends and time to live sustainably (McDonald, 2014). The movement challenges a range of norms, beliefs and practices of mainstream consumer society such as 'more is better'. This suggests that it has the potential to help people reduce their materialistic values and consumption behaviour. Nevertheless, it is also apparent that simplifiers may sabotage their efforts to reduce their consumption and decrease their ecological footprint by justifying to themselves ecologically damaging behaviours (e.g., air travel). These destructive behaviours cannot be ignored if significant reductions in consumption are to be achieved from this lifestyle.

3.1.3 Types of Simplifiers

The voluntary simplicity movement has been estimated at 200 million participants in the developed world (Alexander & Ussher, 2012); however, a large diversity of lifestyles exist within the movement. Despite the fact some simplifiers take steps to dramatically reduce their consumption (e.g., give up their car and forego air travel), others retain their affluence and simply wind back their consumption through decluttering efforts.

Table 1 illustrates how some researchers take a dichotomous view of studying voluntary simplifiers (comparing simplifiers and non-simplifiers), whereas others have proposed different subgroups of simplifiers.

Table 1. Different Categorisations of Voluntary Simplifiers in the Literature.

Proposed Categories	Definitions	Source
Sympathisers	sympathise with many of the values voluntary simplifiers hold; however, they do not act on these values.	(Elgin & Mitchell, 1977)
Partial simplifiers	make an effort to practice some of core ideas of voluntary simplicity.	
Full voluntary simplifiers	fully embrace and practice the core ideas of voluntary simplicity.	
Downshifters	make a superficial attempt to address consumption by consuming different products, but such reductions in consumption are limited in scope. Consumption oriented life is still maintained to a large extent.	(Etzioni, 1999)
Strong simplifiers	make changes to lifestyle by altering work situation in order to have more time for family and other activities that are meaningful. They are predominantly motivated by the idea of improving their quality of life.	
Holistic simplifiers	make substantial effort to live simply and adhere to the voluntary simplicity philosophy. They are motivated to make changes due to environmental, social and ethical values.	
Downshifters	choose to reduce their work hours and subsequently, earn and spend less.	(Schor, 1998)
Maintained consumption	purchase different products (e.g., more efficient and/or more ethical) but their consumption levels are maintained.	(Shaw & Newholm, 2002)
Reduced consumption	reduce consumption by engaging in practices such as car sharing and repairing items so they last longer.	
Shallow voluntary simplifiers	make superficial attempts to reduce consumption by engaging in activities such as decluttering.	(Zavestoski, 2002)
Voluntary simplifiers	make more effort to reduce consumption, become more self-reliant and focus on non materialistic areas of life.	
Downshifters	make a voluntary, long-term change in lifestyle that involves making significantly less income and consuming less.	(Hamilton & Mail, 2003)
Less committed simplifiers	make some changes to lifestyle but are not consistent in engaging in simplicity practices. The practices are limited in scope.	(Huneke, 2005)
More committed simplifiers	consistently engage in a wide range of voluntary simplicity practices and are more willing to keep adding to their repertoire of simplicity practices.	
Non-voluntary simplifiers	make no attempt to engage in practices to reduce consumption to benefit the environment.	(McDonald, Oates, Young, & Hwang, 2006)
Beginner voluntary simplifier	engage in some simplicity practices but not others. This category is further broken down into three other categories: <i>Apprentice simplifiers</i> , <i>Partial simplifiers</i> and <i>Accidental simplifiers</i> .	
<i>Apprentice simplifiers</i>	they are on their way to becoming a voluntary simplifier and are at the beginning of their journey of making lifestyle changes.	
<i>Partial simplifiers</i>	adopt some simple living practices but not others and settle with these changes. They do not progress any further or regress back to being non-voluntary simplifiers.	
<i>Accidental simplifiers</i>	adopt some simplicity practices by accident but not for the reasons shared by other voluntary simplifiers (e.g., environmental concerns). They may also adopt the practices out of necessity (e.g., lack of financial resources).	
Voluntary simplifiers	make an extreme lifestyle shift that has an anti-consumer stance. They reject the norms of consumer culture and adopt practices that are in line with the voluntary simplicity philosophy.	

At present, there is no unified definition for voluntary simplifiers. Most scholars agree that simplifiers fall on a continuum or are at different stages in terms of their level of commitment and depth of engagement with certain practices and embracing the voluntary simplicity ethos. For example, Etzioni (1999) makes the distinction between three types of voluntary simplifiers: downshiffters, strong simplifiers, and holistic simplifiers. He defines downshiffters as people who give up some consumer goods but still maintain most aspects of a consumer lifestyle. Strong simplifiers are comprised of people who leave high paying jobs and as a result, have to restrict their consumption. Holistic simplifiers change their entire lifestyle to align with a voluntary simplicity ethos.

1 Downshiffters Versus Simplifiers

Hamilton (2015) uses the term downshifter to describe people who have voluntarily reduced their income and consumption to reclaim a sense of control over their lives. Whereas Schor (1998, p. 23) describes downshiffters as people who have chosen to reduce their work hours and subsequently earn and spend less, representing “*a striking countertrend to the ideology of moving up, bettering oneself and rising in the social order*”. Others refer to downshiffters as being “*a close cousin of voluntary simplifiers*” (Kennedy et al., 2013, p. 765) and as a less radical form of voluntary simplicity. While both downshiffters and voluntary simplifiers reduce their consumption, the main difference between the two groups appears to be the motivations underpinning the decision for making the shift in lifestyle (McDonald et al., 2006; Shaw & Newholm, 2002). Downshiffters do not appear to share the same concerns about the environment and other social justice issues as simplifiers (Kennedy et al., 2013; McDonald et al., 2006). Their decision to work and consume less tends to be based on a desire to escape an unsatisfying and/or stressful work situation, acquire more time for oneself and to spend time with one’s family. On the contrary, concern for the environment seems to play a key role in motivating voluntary simplifiers to pursue this lifestyle (Grigsby, 2004). Regardless of the differences in defining voluntary simplifiers and downshiffters, the common thread through all the definitions is some attempt, whether it be big or small, to decrease consumption behaviour.

2 Synthesising Definitions of Voluntary Simplicity

McDonald, Oates, Young and Hwang (2006) attempted to synthesise these different conceptualisations by proposing three categories of simplifiers: 1) voluntary simplifiers; 2) beginner voluntary simplifiers; and 3) non-voluntary simplifiers. These researchers classified Etzioni's (1999) definition of downshifter as non-voluntary simplifiers, Schor's definition as beginner voluntary simplifiers and Hamilton's definition as voluntary simplifiers. This illustrates the vast differences in how each researcher defines what it means to voluntarily simplify. McDonald (2014) argues that due to the difficulty in defining simplicity this area lends itself to being perfectly suited to a qualitative research approach.

3 Moving Up the 'Simplifying Spectrum'

Research suggests that simplifiers' commitment to engage in ecologically responsible behaviours and anti-consumption practices can be strengthened by providing adequate support, increasing their level of environmental concern, and making it easier for them to engage in sustainable behaviours (Alexander, 2015; Kennedy et al., 2013). Conversely, without support or assistance, people may regress to being non-simplifiers or non-downshifter. McDonald et al. (2006, p. 531) argues that the different categorisations of simplifiers should be viewed and treated not as *"distinct, static, or coherent statements of lifestyle, but treated as overlapping, fluid, and inconsistent streams of purchase and/or non-purchase decisions"*. In fact, Lorenzen (2012) found that people who were in the process of greening their lifestyle (a number of which were classified as voluntary simplifiers) were constantly refining their practices based on new information and knowledge gained. The same applies for simplifiers and downshifter, regardless of where they may be placed on the simplifying spectrum. As one obtains new information and gains new skills they may move into a new category or further along the continuum of simplifying.

Since most simplifiers are change oriented and engaged in the process of constantly making small changes to their lifestyle (McDonald, 2014; Zamwel et al., 2014), it is likely that they will progress to higher levels of voluntary simplicity in which they keep expanding their repertoire of simplicity practices provided that they are given adequate support. Knowing where most people are located on the 'simplicity

spectrum’ may help to ensure educational interventions to decrease consumption are effectively targeted. A balance needs to be struck between preaching to the converted (i.e., voluntary simplifiers) and not putting off beginner voluntary simplifiers by presenting information that may appear too extreme.

3.1.4 Process of Change: Creating a New Identity

Adopting a lifestyle of simplicity is considerably more complex than adhering to a list of 10 simple steps and/or getting people to adopt a range of small-scale environmental behaviours through a targeted approach (Cherrier & Murray, 2007). In recent years, the process of change that occurs when people voluntarily simplify or downshift has been studied. Table 2 illustrates the transformational process of living with less (Schreurs, Martens, & Kok, 2012). This process includes seven stages downshifter progress through when making a significant decrease in income and spending (Table 2).

Table 2. The Transformational Process of Living with Less (Schreurs et al., 2012).

Stage	What happens	Event
1. Prelude	The individual experiences some conflict in their life (e.g., they are dissatisfied with their job or have a shopping addiction) but the status quo is still maintained. He or she lives in denial.	Signals
2. Facing Reality	The individual is confronted with the harsh reality that change is required in terms of sorting out his or her financial affairs. He or she realise that he or she needs to learn to live on less and obtain an idea of how much is needed to survive.	Confrontation
3. Coming out	The individual tells others about their situation and asks others for help. He or she is often confronted with a negative reaction from others.	Disclosure
4. Restyling	The individual starts to cut back on expenses, develops new skills (e.g., growing own food and cooking from scratch) and discovers ways to ‘dollar stretch’ so they can live on a reduced income.	Lifestyle change
5. Repositioning	The individual starts to see their place in the world differently.	Social change
6. Redefining	The individual starts to develop a new image due to new behaviours being adopted to reduce spending. He or she experiences increased self-awareness. He or she seeks friendships with likeminded people (e.g., via online forums).	Self-image
7. Postlude	The individual continues to live in a simplified way even after his or her financial situation improves. This occurs as a result of his or her life being reorganised to a certain extent because his or her expenses have been reorganised.	Ongoing process

The authors argue that going through this transformational process requires a number of skills and character traits such as financial literacy, budgeting, DIY skills, resilience and independence. In making the shift in lifestyle, downshifter report having both positive and negative experiences. Positive experiences include a sense of pleasure and satisfaction from practicing new skills, and happiness due to deeper social connections with others. On the other hand, negative experiences include being marginalized by others as a result of deviating from mainstream consumer aspirations. This can result in downshifter developing a negative self-image.

In addition, Cherrier and Murray (2007) found that downshifter and voluntary simplifier progress through a Four-Stage Identity Negotiation Process in which they dismantle one consumption lifestyle and construct a new lifestyle and identity for themselves that is not focused on acquiring objects (Table 3).

Table 3. The Four-Stage Identity Negotiation Process (Cherrier & Murray, 2007).

Stage	What happens
1. Sensitization	People closely examine their lives. This reflection period is triggered by an event that interrupts their lives and provides the opportunity for deep reflection. Questions are asked such as 'Why am I living the life I am?', 'Is there a better way to live?' and 'What is the meaning of life?'.
2. Separation	People distance themselves from their social contacts and pre-established social norms/values in order to have the freedom and space to reflect.
3. Socialisation	People connect with others (i.e., an inspirational local) who provide an example of living and consuming differently
4. Striving	People try to reconcile their old and new identities. While they strive to live simply and have fewer goods, there are factors in their environment, which may make attaining this envisioned identity quite difficult and aspects of the old self end up being adopted.

This process shares a number of common elements with Schreurs et al. (2012) transformational process: the individual reflects on questions about how they wish to live; gains increased self-awareness; creates a new identity; and connects with people

who share similar values and lifestyle practices. Both models make clear that reflection and people being willing to confront their life circumstances appear to be critical first steps in making these shifts in lifestyle. These people actively question and reflect on their financial troubles, dissatisfaction with life, and/or how they wish to live. In contrast, non-simplifiers and non-downshiffters accept the norms and context they find themselves in, no matter how unbearable they may be. This is not surprising given taking time out to engage in deep reflection is a rare practice in our culture of busyness (Bertman, 1998).

Unlike Schreurs et al. (2012) process, the fourth stage of Cherrier and Murray's (2007) Identity Negotiation Process acknowledges that once a shift in lifestyle is made simplifiers may still regress to their old consumer ways. Despite the fact an individual may adopt new practices and habits, aspects associated with their old consumer identity are likely to reappear, thereby making it difficult to resist consumption.

Nevertheless, in the Four-Stage Identity Negotiation Process (Cherrier & Murray, 2007), one aspect that helps to strengthen the creation of a new anti-consumption identity is the dispossession of objects that are no longer needed. Letting go of items that are associated with an old identity and way of living can assist people to make the shift in lifestyle. The authors of this study (2007) note that:

"In the context of downshifting, the process of dispossession is used as a means of separating from undesired social norms and social shaping. As a means of separating from normative background, dispossession is a difficult process and does not allow to completely repudiate and escape from past selves and to incorporate new identities and new consumption lifestyle" (p.26).

This research gives legitimacy to popular literature on voluntary simplicity that discusses the importance of decluttering the home. Cherrier and Murray's (2007) work shows that although it can be difficult clearing out the old, simplifiers are able to create the space for a new anti-consumption identity.

These studies that attempt to conceptualise the process of lifestyle change that voluntary simplifiers and downshiffters experience illustrate that reducing consumption behaviour is a difficult process. One does not simply choose the simple life or follow a

series of easy steps to get there but as Cherrier and Murray (2007, p. 25) state, “...the actual process should be considered within a context of struggle and tension over the ability to shift away from past selves and mode of “having” and the possibility to adopt new selves and mode of “being””.

The process of simplifying is made even more challenging by the fact our environment rewards consumption behaviour and encourages competitive consumption (sections 2.14 and 2.4). All that being said, the large numbers of people who have already made a shift to more sustainable and simpler lifestyles worldwide demonstrates that radical change is possible despite the strong forces that exist to perpetuate excessive consumption (Figure 2). Strategies such as reinforcing the values that oppose consumer culture and cultivating mindfulness may help to fast track and streamline the process of simplifying and creating a new anti-consumption identity. The next section elaborates on these specific strategies.

3.1.5 Reinforcing Intrinsic Values

Voluntary simplifiers’ lives are predominantly focused around intrinsic values such as personal growth, caring for community, and affiliation. While the vast majority of literature on voluntary simplicity has focused on philosophising about the lifestyle, what is less clear is how voluntary simplifiers become intrinsically oriented in their values and remain intrinsically oriented in a culture that reinforces materialistic values. Kasser’s (2006) theory of materialistic values proposes that extrinsic (materialistic) values can be combatted via two fundamental pathways: 1) addressing the root causes that promote materialistic values; and 2) promoting a set of values that oppose materialistic values. The way in which the voluntary simplicity lifestyle can potentially tackle materialistic values via each of these pathways is discussed below.

1 How Voluntary Simplifiers Address the Root Causes of Materialism

Voluntary simplifiers can be seen to address the root causes that promote materialistic values in a number of ways including: restructuring their lives and jobs to create more time for reflection; forming new relationships that support and nurture their values and lifestyle practices; and limiting their exposure to materialistic messages promoted via television and advertising. Research has identified that when making the shift in

lifestyle voluntary simplifiers spend considerable amounts of time thinking deeply about what is important to them (i.e., their values) and the reasons why they hold such values (section 3.1.4). The key values simplifiers hold (e.g., frugality, gratitude, personal growth, and caring for community) stand in opposition to materialistic values, such as seeking a more attractive appearance, social status, and social recognition. The act of reflecting on these intrinsic values (e.g., affiliation and community connection) helps to strengthen these values (section 2.2). In addition, spending time with people who share similar values and distancing themselves from friends and/or family members who hold materialistic values helps to further limit their exposure to materialistic messages (Table 3, stages 2 and 3).

Simplifiers also report limiting their consumption of television and exposure to advertising (Huneke, 2005). Television and advertising play a critical role in reinforcing and perpetuating materialistic values and consumption in Western consumer cultures (section 2.2.11). Simplifiers have reported reducing their television consumption and exposure to advertising messages through employing a range of behavioural strategies such as placing the television in a less prominent position, getting rid of the television, and/or only watching commercial free television (Alexander & Ussher, 2013; Andrews, 1997). The decision to engage in these practices is often made due to people understanding the damaging effects television can have on their well-being and questioning the value gained from engaging in the activity (Alexander & Ussher, 2013).

Additionally, as a result of having more time, voluntary simplifiers are more likely to be in a better position to provide proper care (i.e., healthy meals, stability, presence, attention, and advice) to their children. As Psychiatrist Gabor Maté (2000) states:

“...many parents spend virtually no more than 5 minutes, if that, of meaningful contact with their child each day. If that snippet of time is to grow, parents need to create some space around themselves, and in order to do so they may have to reconsider their lifestyle” (p.175).

Studies that examine the motivations that underpin the lives of voluntary simplifiers show that many make the shift in lifestyle so they can have more time to spend with their family and friends (Alexander & Ussher, 2012; Hamilton & Mail, 2003).

This sense of having more time can allow for calm, attuned parenting which is critical for children's healthy development (Maté, 2000). This also reduces the likelihood of raising children who feel insecure and therefore try to get their needs met through consumption (section 2.2.12). As a result of feeling less time pressured, voluntary simplifiers can give their children better attention and enjoy engaging in care work duties without feeling the same degree of stress and pressure that others working full-time jobs may feel ('Beyond the work family balance', 2015). This in turn assists in stopping the perpetuation of materialistic values.

2 How Voluntary Simplifiers Promote a Set of Values that Oppose Materialism

The second pathway to reducing materialism (i.e., promoting a set of values that oppose materialism) is demonstrated through simplifiers' rejection of consumer culture and their focus on frugal living and acquiring material goods that satisfy needs, rather than unnecessary wants. Additionally, through focusing their attention on what they already have and feeling like they have enough (a sense of sufficiency), simplifiers may feel more grateful and experience a greater sense of satisfaction with their lives. Therefore, they are less likely to feel the need to consume and more likely to exercise restraint and pursue intrinsic goals.

Simplifiers' tendency to focus on what they already have could be explained by practising gratitude. Pierce (2003, p. 119) notes that gratitude is a major theme in the lives of voluntary simplifiers and it is something that "*naturally evolves when we reduce our material load to the things we truly need and cherish*". An important aspect of people practising gratitude is appreciating what they already have in their life, rather than focusing on what they do not have or what they wish to acquire (Lambert et al., 2009). An experiment by Lambert, Fincham, Stillman and Dean (2009) showed that inducing gratitude lowered materialism (i.e., extrinsic values) in a group of participants. The authors argued that the act of inducing gratitude helps people to focus their attention on what they have, which creates a sense of satisfaction with life.

In addition, when a person chooses to focus their attention on what they already have and expresses appreciation for those things, they are more likely to pursue intrinsic goals (Miller, 1996). Instead of striving to keep up with the latest fashion trends or

purchase a luxury vehicle, simplifiers prefer to invest their time and energy in their relationships, personal growth, and community (Andrews, 1997; Elgin, 1993). Through taking a stand to consume less in a world that is engineered to make people want (McGonigal, 2011), the voluntary simplicity lifestyle is a powerful alternative to the mainstream 'work-and-spend' cycle .

Furthermore, voluntary simplifiers activate intrinsic values by spending time out in nature and less time in urban environments. Research suggests that increasing contact with nature or living objects can help to strengthen intrinsic values, whereas exposure to artificial manmade environments can strengthen extrinsic values (Weinstein, Przybylski, & Ryan, 2009). While it is common for voluntary simplifiers to reside in urban environments, many voluntary simplifiers live in rural or country settings to have more space to keep chickens, goats, and grow vegetable gardens (Alexander & Ussher, 2013; Hayes, 2010). In addition, simplifiers commonly report spending time out in nature for leisure (Alexander & Ussher, 2013). The way in which the lifestyle orients itself to being outdoors (rather than stuck at an office desk) and immersed in natural settings means that simplifiers' intrinsic values are being constantly activated and reinforced.

3 Application to an Educational Intervention

As discussed so far, the voluntary simplicity lifestyle embodies a number of practices that enable people to inoculate themselves against the damaging effects of consumer culture. The literature reports that practices such as cutting back on television, increasing contact with nature, reclaiming time to engage in care work and deep reflection, gratitude, mindfulness, becoming friends with people who hold similar values, and embracing frugality all act to enhance simplifiers' intrinsic value orientation (section 3.1.5). In addition, these practices are likely to satisfy simplifiers' core psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and affiliation, which make them less likely to engage in consumption activities. Yet the following question still remains: how can more mainstream individuals be encouraged to adopt voluntary simplicity practices? The next section explores how various simplicity strategies can be encouraged through an educational intervention to decrease materialistic values and consumption behaviour.

Reducing Exposure to Advertising Messages

It is virtually impossible to avoid all forms of advertising in our environment (Jansson-Boyd, 2010). Nevertheless, people can significantly reduce their exposure to advertising by reducing the amount of television they watch. The average Australian spends 13 hours per week watching television (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). In terms of designing an educational intervention, it may be worth exploring why people feel drawn to watch large amounts of television. Subsequently, effective solutions could be devised to decrease people's television consumption.

It has been argued that watching television has become a default activity for people when they feel bored, exhausted from work, and/or are trying to avoid uncomfortable aspects of their life (Schulte, 2015). Therefore, it may be useful to encourage people to notice how watching television actually makes them feel and reflect on what motivates them to watch television in the first place. Encouraging people to reflect on other activities that they enjoy and when they could schedule these activities into their lives may help to reduce how much television is consumed (Schulte, 2015). Additionally, raising awareness of the negative effects of advertising on self-esteem as well as people's tendency to engage in upward comparisons when watching television shows that portray the lives of the middle to upper-class may encourage people to limit their exposure to advertising and television. For instance, getting rid of the television, placing a no junk mail sticker on a household's mailbox, installing Ad blocker plugins, and reducing the frequency of going shopping can limit exposure to advertising messages and thereby decrease the desire to consume unnecessarily (Ferguson & Kasser, 2013).

Connection and Exposure to Nature

Since exposure to nature helps to reinforce intrinsic values, it is important that people have access to green spaces and are encouraged to spend time in these natural settings. This may be difficult to achieve if people are time-poor as a result of working long hours or if they fear nature (Blackmore, Underhill, McQuilkin, & Leach, 2013). Educating people on the positive mental health benefits of spending time in nature and including pictures of natural settings in educational resources wherever possible can help to activate participants' intrinsic values. A possible solution to decreasing

barriers to spending time in nature is to increase participants' mindfulness levels. Cultivating mindfulness has been found to be associated with lower levels of stress and anxiety (Shapiro, Schwartz, & Bonner, 1998) and can give time-poor people a sense of having more time (Aaker, Rudd, & Mogilner, 2011). In addition, increased mindfulness levels can help to intensify participants' connection to nature, thereby further strengthening their intrinsic values (Howell, Dopko, Passmore, & Buro, 2011).

Reclaiming Time and Using Time Effectively

Since each of us only has 168 hours per week and for many people a large amount of this time is taken up by work (e.g., 40 hours), commuting (e.g., 5 hours) and sleep (e.g., 8 hours per night = 56 hours) this leaves most people with less than 70 hours of discretionary time per week. Rather than decrease the number of hours people sleep, a healthier way to reclaim time is to reduce work hours as many voluntary simplifiers have done. In order to arrive at the point where people can seriously entertain the idea of working part-time or living on less income, financial literacy skills are required (Schreurs, 2010; Schreurs et al., 2012). An educational program that aims to reduce materialistic values and consumption through emulating voluntary simplicity practices could facilitate conversations that question common assumptions around work (e.g., the need to work 40 hours a week), explore possibilities of working less by consuming less, and teach people skills on how to track their spending and create a budget. It is important to note that it may not be possible for some people to work less, particularly those who are less educated, have many children, and/or are single (Burchardt, 2010). Nevertheless, improved management of financial resources can give people a greater sense of mastery and control (Schreurs, 2010).

Research has found that experiences, particularly those that generate a sense of mastery, are more effective for meeting core needs and boosting self-esteem than the acquisition of material goods (For a review, see Burroughs et al., 2013). In order to develop skills that build a sense of mastery, people need time to invest in such experiences. Burroughs et al. (2013) argue that encouraging people to engage in activities that enhance self-esteem and self-confidence may result in decreases in consumption. They also suggest that a partial antidote to feelings of insecurity is investing time and money in experiences rather than material goods since experiences

are more likely to promote personal growth, be shared with others, and are more resistant to hedonic adaptation (section 2.5). Therefore, an educational intervention that promotes specific voluntary simplicity practices that build a sense of mastery (e.g., cooking meals) could help to combat materialism and overconsumption. Educating participants on the benefits of having experiences rather than material acquisition may also help to shift people's focus from materialistic to non-materialistic pursuits.

Embracing Frugality and Thrift

Frugality and thrift are commonly negatively associated with people being stingy and/or tight with their money (Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2011; Institute for American Values, 2012). Voluntary simplifiers do not view these concepts in this negative light and embrace frugal/thrifty living as a way in which they can 'dollar stretch', work less, and make the best use of their resources (Alexander & Ussher, 2013). By debunking common myths surrounding these concepts and encouraging frugality as a way for people to make better use of their money, time, and resources may help to promote an ethos of frugality in an educational intervention.

Cultivating Mindfulness

Mindful living is an important aspect of the voluntary simplicity lifestyle. Although it has been argued that mindfulness is suffering from a cultural hangover and is often associated with incense, robes, and chanting that can be off-putting (Harris, 2014), mindfulness could be promoted in a secular fashion to mainstream people as a strategy to decrease stress levels and improve well-being. Greater levels of mindfulness can be cultivated through regular meditation practice and helping people to restructure their environment so that they can focus their attention on one task at a time. Miller (1996) argues that the pathway to "*wanting what you already have*" is through practising compassion, attention and gratitude. He also acknowledges that cultivating these qualities can be achieved through regular meditation practice. The use of mindfulness and meditation as strategies to decrease materialism and excessive consumption and how it can be most effectively taught will be explored in more depth shortly.

Encouraging Reflection on Values, Materialism, and Consumption

Since reflection on life and personal values is a critical stage in the process of simplifying, participants in an educational intervention can be prompted to look at their most important values and reflect on the reasons why they hold these particular values. The simple act of people reflecting on a value has been shown to change the prioritisation of the value in their value system (Lekes, Hope, Gouveia, Koestner, & Philippe, 2012). In a study by Lekes et al. (2012) participants had to reflect and write about their intrinsic values, why they were important, the role they played and experiences they had that highlighted the value. It was found that the act of reflecting on such values over a 4-week period led to an increase in participants' intrinsic values. Participants placed in the control group did not experience increases in intrinsic values. This study shows that reflection on the importance of intrinsic values may be an effective way to counter extrinsic values that are strongly promoted by consumer culture.

Although in the study by Lekes et al. (2012) participants were directed to focus on a particular set of intrinsic values, it may be more effective to give participants the freedom to select from an extensive range of values, including both extrinsic and intrinsic values. The psychological theory of reactance (Brehm, 1966) states that if it is too obvious that a person is trying to change or restrict another's behaviour then there may be backlash. In the present study, any attempt to reinforce intrinsic values may backfire if learners sense an agenda on the facilitator's part in trying to push for a particular value orientation and outcome (i.e., anti-consumption). In taking this approach, there is a slight risk that people may choose to reflect on extrinsic values, but this is unlikely given most people state that they prioritise intrinsic values more than extrinsic values (Schmuck, Kasser, & Ryan, 2000).

If the aim of the educational intervention is to reduce materialistic values and excessive consumption behaviour, then do participants need to spend time reflecting on their own personal consumption behaviour and materialistic values? The way in which the topic of materialism and overconsumption are delivered in an adult educational intervention must be done in an exploratory manner that does not lay blame or punish any participants. Individuals do not like to view themselves as being

materialistic and fail to view themselves as consumers, particularly of the Earth's natural resources (Jackson, 2006, cited in Kronenberg & Lida, 2011). Indeed, studies have found that to avoid experiencing the discomfort that comes with perceiving oneself as being 'materialistic' or a 'consumer' of finite resources, individuals will actively downplay the seriousness of environmental issues in order to justify their consumption practices (Kilbourne & Pickett, 2008). It is important that participants do not go down this path of denying the existence of critical ecological issues, since the acknowledgement of environmental problems and how our behaviour connects to these issues appears to be one of the key reasons many simplifiers have made a shift in lifestyle (section 3.1).

For this reason, the way in which participants are guided to reflect on the issue of consumption and materialism in an adult education setting must be handled with great care. The study 'Yearning for Balance' by the Harwood group (1995) found that many Americans felt ambivalent about consumption. On one hand, they acknowledged the problems associated with materialism but on the other, they wanted a materially comfortable life and did not want to get 'left behind'. The study also found that there was a general feeling amongst the sample that people's priorities were misguided, they had become "*too materialistic, too greedy, too self-absorbed, too selfish*" and that other values, such as relationships with family and community, being responsible and generous, had to be reinforced to bring the nation back into balance. The authors of this study suggested five principles for having conversations about consumption. These principles were:

- 1) Frame conversations regarding consumption around people's concerns about the core values that are driving society;
- 2) Use children and future generations as an entry point and explore how people can create a better world for their children (create a vision);
- 3) Tap into people's yearning to have more time for family, friends, and community;
- 4) Help people to work through their ambivalence about materialism (Note: this needs to be resolved before people will be ready to make major changes to their consumption); and

5) Spark people's imagination about the possibility of change (i.e., leading a better life).

Interestingly, research also shows there are ways of activating values around caring for the environment that do not involve individuals directly reflecting on environmental values or issues. Research by Sheldon, Nichols and Kasser (2011) found that when participants were reminded (primed) of an intrinsic side of the American identity (i.e., generosity, willingness to pull together in times of need, and strong family values) they were more likely to recommend more sustainable behaviours be implemented as policy measures that would ultimately result in a lower overall ecological footprint than participants who were primed with an extrinsic American identity. In this experiment the value of care for the environment was not used as a prime, yet participants still supported policies to reduce citizens' ecological footprint. It was argued that this may have resulted from activating intrinsic values and features of a particular identity leading to an increase in the neighbouring value of environmental sustainability (section 2.2, the bleedover effect). At the same time, strengthening these intrinsic values may have decreased participants' extrinsic values (section 2.2, the seesaw effect) that encourage high levels of consumption. The researchers of this study concluded that a potential solution to the environmental challenges faced may be to activate and encourage intrinsic values, such as community contribution, personal growth, and close relationships, that are associated with pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours rather than making appeals to gain financial rewards which simply act to further reinforce extrinsic values that are associated with unsustainable behaviours (section 2.2). An educational intervention that aims to decrease materialistic values and consumption behaviour could focus on activating the intrinsic values that are most important and appealing to mainstream individuals, such as fostering close relationships, gratitude, and personal growth. In doing so, this could reinforce pro-environmental values and behaviours through bleedover effects.

It is important to ensure that values are not just engaged by making them salient but that people also reflect on the reasons the value is important to them. Research by Maio, Olson, Allen and Bernard (2001) found that participants who reflected on their reasons for having the value of equality behaved in a way that exhibited less in-group favouritism and more egalitarian behaviour than participants who just had the value of

equality activated by completing the task of unscrambling words such as equality, balance, and fair. Maio et al. (2001, p. 114) concluded that the act of *“generating reasons for a value motivated pro-value behaviour because individuals become convinced that the value is “rational” and not just ideological”*. Making the reasons salient in people’s minds means that the value becomes a more compelling guide for behaviour. Therefore, effective reflection activities to elicit a values shift could encourage participants to consider the reasons why certain values are of great importance to them.

According to value theory, intrinsic values are inherent to all people. These values can be engaged through reflective processes to influence level of concern towards environmental and social issues, even in people who are highly oriented toward extrinsic values (Crompton, 2010). A study by Chilton, Crompton, Kasser, Maio and Nolan (2012) took people who were highly oriented towards extrinsic values and made them reflect on the reasons why particular values were important. One group of participants were made to reflect on the importance of intrinsic values and another group reflected on the importance of extrinsic values. Activating these different sets of values in the two groups resulted in dramatic differences in how each group responded to various issues (social and environmental) in an interview. Participants who were primed with intrinsic values spoke about issues such as climate change using more intrinsically oriented language and felt a greater obligation and moral duty to address the problem compared to participants in the control group. This study clearly illustrates that intrinsic values can be activated and strengthened even in the most extrinsically oriented people given the right use of language.

In addition, educating people on the negative consequences of engaging in materialistic pursuits and orienting towards extrinsic values may help to diminish these values. Research shows that to achieve an increase in well-being it is not enough to simply set and achieve a goal but the type of goals people choose to pursue in life (i.e., whether they are intrinsic or extrinsic) determines to a large extent their well-being (Sheldon, Ryan, Deci, & Kasser, 2004). As it was discussed in Chapter 2, people who orient highly towards materialistic aspirations are more likely to have lower levels of well-being and vitality, and higher levels of anxiety and depression (Kasser & Ryan,

1996). This even seems to be the case when the social context endorses materialistic values. A study that examined the values of students in a Singaporean business school found students who were highly oriented towards materialistic values had lower levels of well-being than others (Kasser & Ahuvia, 2002).

Connecting Non-Simplifiers to Simplifiers

Part of the process of simplifying involves connecting people with others who hold similar values (section 3.1.4). This helps to strengthen simplifiers' commitment to their anti-consumption way of life. In order to get mainstream people to connect with voluntary simplifiers or people who hold the values of voluntary simplicity, participants firstly need to be engaged in a conversation about 'the good life' and have their intrinsic values activated in a group setting. By setting a particular tone from the outset of a program that endorses values around caring for others and the environment and personal growth, a new social norm can be created within the group. Although this social norm may be in stark contrast to what people face in their workplaces or in their usual social networks, it may help them to question the way they currently live. It also creates a unique space in which striving for intrinsic values is endorsed and considered paramount over striving for financial success and material acquisition. It is anticipated that new friendships will be formed within the group setting that are based on values such as caring for one another, generosity, commitment to personal growth, and self determination. Through these new friendships, participants may find the strength to adhere to non-materialistic lifestyles and engage in new intrinsically oriented pursuits.

3.2 Barriers to Mainstreaming Voluntary Simplicity

Alexander and Ussher (2012) argue that if the general population saw the voluntary simplicity lifestyle as a pathway to increased levels of happiness and subsequently, a large number of people adopted this lifestyle, significant pressure may then be applied to government to support people who wish to make similar shifts in lifestyle. Ultimately, the movement could become mainstreamed. Nevertheless, there are a number of structural constraints and misconceptions about simple living that act as significant barriers to mainstreaming this lifestyle. In terms of designing an educational

intervention, it is important to understand the barriers that inhibit people from adopting a voluntary simplicity lifestyle in order to facilitate shifts to non-materialistic and less consumptive ways of living (McKenzie-Mohr & Smith, 1999). Therefore, some of the major barriers to simple living will now be explored.

Elgin (1993) states that people can perceive simple lifestyles as being primitive ways of living that do not appreciate the value of beauty. In addition, there is an assumption that adopting a life of voluntary simplicity or lower levels of consumption involves people depriving themselves and having to make sacrifices, which many people believe the average person would not be prepared to do (Meyer & Maniates, 2010).

The negative reaction many voluntary simplifiers receive upon telling their friends and family that they are living with less and working less may deter non-simplifiers from pursuing this lifestyle. Research has shown that simplifiers report being negatively labelled as 'crazy', 'mad', and 'nuts' by friends and family as a result of making the shift in lifestyle (Breakspear & Hamilton, 2004). In another study, all voluntary simplifiers stated that they experienced negative reactions from others (Schreurs, 2010). As Schreurs (2010) states:

"Becoming a voluntary simplifier and limiting expenditures and choosing to live frugally on a minimal budget requires a great deal of social courage, considering the reactions that voluntary downshiffters are often confronted with. "My parents continue to bring me home equipment and other stuff; they don't want to accept that I have chosen to live minimally," one respondent explained. "My family always says that I have to stop dreaming and take responsibility," another voluntary simplifier mentioned" (p.63).

Several scholars have argued that voluntary simplicity is only available to middle class and affluent individuals to pursue as they are able to meet their basic needs (Etzioni, 1999). Upon analysis of people within the voluntary simplicity movement it was found that the vast majority of participants fit this criteria, with voluntary simplifiers being more likely to be middle class, white, with at least a college education, and generally older (Grigsby, 2004). Meanwhile, others have argued that voluntary simplicity can be practiced by the majority of people in the developed world as most people are considered to be materially wealthy when compared with the poor in developing countries who struggle to get their basic needs met (Alexander, 2015). People in

developed countries may be materially and financially rich but feel poor and deprived as a result of comparing what they have to others (Schor, 1998). What appears to be most important is not how much people have, but how much they have relative to others (Frank, 1999).

3.3 Limitations of the Voluntary Simplicity Movement

Despite being comprised of such a large number of participants, the strength of this social movement has been called into question. This is due to the fact that people who simplify their lives tend to not be willing to speak out about mainstream consumer culture and prefer to tackle the ecological and social issues in a highly individualistic manner (Sandlin & Walther, 2009). Simplifiers are generally not willing to recruit others to form part of the movement, with some not even perceiving themselves as being part of a wider social movement (Zamwel et al., 2014). Notwithstanding these limitations, aspects of this lifestyle (i.e., the values and practices) are worth promoting in an educational intervention since a central focus is on people limiting their consumption and pursuing intrinsically oriented, less materialistic lifestyles.

3.4 Voluntary Simplicity Programs

A number of voluntary simplicity programs have been created around the world (predominantly in North America) to assist people in adopting simpler lifestyles and to grow the movement. Table 4 provides a summary of voluntary simplicity programs created by Cecile Andrews (1997), Mark Burch (1995, 2012b), Linda Pierce (2003), and the Northwest Earth Institute (2008). No formal institutions, such as not-for-profit organisations or government departments, run these programs. In each of these programs, participants explore the voluntary simplicity lifestyle either on their own through self-directed study or in a small study group. Since simplifying has been described as a process *“that unfolds gradually over a period of months and years”* (Elgin, 1993, p. 73), it makes sense that these programs have been designed to run over an extended period of time. Participants require time to reflect on their behaviours and develop simple living practices that they can embed into their everyday lives (e.g., mindfulness).

Examination of these programs suggests a number of common topics that are relevant in educating people about the voluntary simplicity lifestyle. Key topics covered by these programs include: the definition of voluntary simplicity; exploring human desire and the factors that fuel excessive consumption (particularly the role of advertising and television); looking at people's relationship to money and questioning the nexus between money and happiness; decluttering and cutting back on consumption; the alignment of everyday actions with people's values; time and whether it is spent on what people value most; the fast pace of life and the need to slow down; cultivating mindfulness; how to care and connect more deeply with the natural environment and people's local community; discovering people's passion and exploring the possibility of turning that passion into a job; looking at changing people's work situation; and the need to work for societal and structural change. More recently created programs also include content on exploring people's relationship to technology (e.g., the Internet, mobile phones, and social media). Despite most of these programs predominantly focusing on making change at the level of the individual, in 'The Circle of Simplicity' program Andrews (1997) argues of the importance of simplifiers becoming politically active and lobbying for broader societal and structural change.

Table 4. Summary of Voluntary Simplicity Programs.

Source	Program & Duration	Session Titles	Example of Reflection Questions and Exercises
Andrews (1997)	The circle of simplicity, at least 10 weeks	Introductions Understanding study circles Transforming personal consumption Finding your passion Building community Living mindfully Transforming work Planning for the future	Why do we consume? When have you experienced community? What in our society discourages community? What activities do you enjoy doing? What are the consequences of rushing? What is one thing I could change for the better at work? When have you been greedy in your own life?
Burch (1995, 2012b)	Personal exploration, simplicity study circles and educators guide (no set time limit)	<u>Personal guide/simplicity study circles (1995)</u> Here and now The best things in life... Logging the daily round The uses of nothing I want it now! My planet for a cup of coffee To my children’s children’s children Where the money goes Visioning a well world <u>Teachers guide (2012b)</u> Introduction to Voluntary Simplicity Mindfulness Consumer culture Community/Relationships Environment Sufficiency Non-violence Time Money Vision	How would you describe the major problem areas in your life? In what areas do you feel the most need for growth, healing or development? In what areas of your life do you feel the most vitality, strength and reward? Keep a log of your daily activities (hour by hour) for at least one week. Review the activities you have logged. How many of them bring the kind of reward and sense of satisfaction that you associate with the “peak experiences” of your life? If some activities are not rewarding or satisfying, what are they for? What does society tell you about the relation between money, consumption, ownership and well-being? Exploring needs and wants. How did you develop this want? What exactly do you hope to experience if you acquire it? What do you predict will be the environmental, economic, social, spiritual and personal consequences, both positive and negative, or acquiring the thing you want? Do I consider the impact of my consumption patterns on other people and the Earth?
Northwest Earth Institute (2008)	Discussion course on voluntary simplicity, 5 sessions	The meaning of simplicity Living more with less Making a living Do you have the time? Living simply on the Earth	What is one ‘unnecessary complication’ you can remove from your life? What do you do to remind yourself of the basics of your life, the things

			<p>that are most important to you? Can you recall purchasing something that you didn't really need? Why did you buy it? What does community mean to you? How does this fit with voluntary simplicity?</p>
Pierce (2003)	Simplicity lessons: A 12-step guide to simple living	<p>Why simplify? Do you own your own stuff or does it own you? Making friends with money Home is where the heart lives Where did all the time go? Working with passion Moving about at home and abroad Awakening the spirit within you Minding your health and well-being Finding joy in friends and family Embracing community Caring for our home, the Earth Where do we go from here?</p>	<p>List 3 - 5 things that you own and feel burdened by. Think of an item you own that required a lot more time and energy to acquire, maintain and dispose of than you expected. Do you feel that your stuff is an expression of who you are, meaning is it a form of creative self-expression? Do you enjoy shopping? What does it do for you? Do you have certain consumption patterns that you would like to reduce?</p>

The voluntary simplicity programs listed above have similar aims in that they raise awareness of the voluntary simplicity lifestyle, encourage the adoption of a range of simplicity practices, and get people to deeply reflect on the negative impacts of consumer culture, as well as their relationship to money, time, work, and material goods. A common characteristic of each simplicity program is educating people on the factors that lead to personal well-being and questioning commonly held assumptions such as more money leads to greater happiness. This content is of considerable importance since research has found people have a poor understanding of the factors that lead to personal well-being and happiness (Gilbert, 2007). Studies also show people tend to overestimate the role financial wealth plays in increasing well-being (Aknin, Norton, & Dunn, 2009). Jackson (2005) argues that if people had a better understanding of the factors that resulted in true happiness and fulfilment, then they may not pursue acquiring more material goods and financial wealth. Through an examination of the science of happiness and exploring people's relationship to money and time, participants are able to re-prioritise the importance of extrinsic pursuits in their lives.

Another commonality of these programs is the strong emphasis on caring for the natural environment through fostering pro-environmental behaviours and values. Voluntary simplicity is presented as a way for people to tackle pressing ecological issues. It is therefore not surprising that each program educates participants on a number of environmental issues and encourages them to address these issues through adopting pro-environmental behaviours and resisting frivolous consumption to lower their ecological footprint. Rather than narrowly focusing on targeting small-scale actions to live lightly on the Earth (e.g., recycling and having shorter showers), each simplicity program encourages broader ideas around sufficiency, sharing, thrift, and ecological limits to growth.

A major difference that exists between some of the programs is the lack of discussion on particular topics such as modern technology. While older programs have a tendency to discuss the negative impacts of television consumption due to the era in which they were created, they fail to mention the Internet and the explosion of social media sites such as Facebook. In contrast, the recent work of Burch (2012b) encourages participants to reflect on their engagement with all forms of technology, the benefits and costs of engaging with technology, and the addictive aspects of some technologies. He states that through cultivating the practice of mindfulness, people are better able to tune into their experience whilst engaged with technology. Another area some simplicity programs have overlooked is food: simplifying people's diet (e.g., buying locally grown produce and cooking meals from raw ingredients) and healthy eating practices (e.g., plant-based diet). The lack of attention paid to this area appears to reflect the priorities and values of the voluntary simplicity practitioner. For instance, Andrews (1997) appears to gloss over the topic of healthy eating by stating she does not enjoy cooking and prefers to support local businesses by eating out each night.

While these simplicity programs have been carefully thought out and explore a range of ideas to help people improve their lives and step off the consumer treadmill, none have been formally evaluated for their effectiveness to date. There is no literature to show whether these programs are effective in helping people to reduce their consumption and shift towards simpler lifestyles. In addition, many of the programs were created in the mid 1990s and early 2000s with an American cohort in mind. It is

not known whether these programs would be appropriate for a mainstream Western Australian audience. It is possible that the way voluntary simplicity is presented by these programs may appear as being too radical or extreme for most Western Australians since little is known about how they perceive the concept of voluntary simplicity.

In addition, the world is markedly different from that which existed 10 (or even 5) years ago with the rapid uptake of new technologies such as the Internet, mobile phone technology, and social media (Bertman, 1998; Brown, 2014; Greenfield, 2014). These technologies have made people's lives easier in many ways, but they have also changed the way people connect and interact with one another. Indeed, some scholars argue that modern technology has led to more superficial relationships and ways of learning information (Carr, 2011; Turkle, 2012). It is therefore unclear whether the content of older simplicity programs (created in the 1990s and early 2000s) is still relevant today. For this reason, research needs to be conducted on how others perceive this lifestyle, the barriers to adopting this lifestyle, as well as content that would be relevant to Western Australians.

3.5 Mindfulness: Present Moment Awareness

An important practice of simple living that deserves attention in its own right as a potential solution to combating overconsumption and materialistic values is mindfulness. In a study involving 200 voluntary simplifiers, Pierce (2000) found many simplifiers felt simple living was about living mindfully and consciously. Another study on the antecedents of voluntary simplicity found a positive relationship between mindfulness and the voluntary simplicity lifestyle (Ross, 2015). Large-scale survey research found a spiritual practice of some sort is a regular part of the lives of over 50% of voluntary simplifiers (Alexander & Ussher, 2012). Although the proportion of simplifiers who are engaged in regular meditation/mindfulness training as their spiritual practice is not currently known, a number of advocates of simple living suggest cultivating mindfulness is an integral part of this intrinsically oriented, non-materialistic lifestyle (Burch, 1995, 2012a; Elgin, 1993). It is therefore not surprising that some researchers have argued mindfulness may help people to live more sustainably and reduce their consumption behaviour (Ericson et al., 2014; Rosenberg,

2004). The founding father of the modern day mindfulness movement, Jon Kabat-Zinn (Sounds True, 2014), even goes so far to suggest that mindfulness has:

“...the potential to ignite a universal or global renaissance that...would put even the European and Italian Renaissance into the shade...[and] that may actually be the only promise the species and the planet have for making it through the next couple of hundred years”.

In this section, the concept of mindfulness is explored as well as its potential to act as an antidote to consumerism and bring about shifts in environmentally responsible behaviours.

The concept of mindfulness has been around for centuries with its roots firmly embedded in Buddhist traditions and philosophy (Harrison, 2015). It has only been in the last few decades that interest in mindfulness has *“quietly exploded”* (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007, p. 211) and its application to medicine and health contexts has occurred. Today mindfulness is one of the most widely researched and practiced psychological concepts with peer reviewed publications increasing by an average of 30% per year over the past five years.

The different scales that exist to assess mindfulness illustrate that this construct has been defined in a number of ways (Sauer et al., 2013). The most commonly cited definition of mindfulness is *“the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment”* (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145). The majority of conceptualisations of mindfulness contain two main factors: 1) paying attention to the present moment; and 2) an attitude of being open, curious, and non-judgemental (Bishop et al., 2004). Shapiro, Carlson, Astin and Freedman (2006) elaborate on this two-factor conceptualisation of mindfulness by positing an additional factor: intention. Intention involves knowing why one is paying attention. Other academics conceptualise mindfulness as a one-dimensional construct focusing exclusively on the attention component of mindfulness. For instance, Brown and Ryan (2003, p. 822) define mindfulness as *“enhanced attention to and awareness of current experience or present reality”*. From this perspective, mindfulness is viewed as a quality of consciousness. While there is no unequivocal operational definition of mindfulness to date, there is

general agreement that mindfulness is the ability to pay sustained attention to the present moment. This includes people paying attention to their internal experience (e.g., thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations) and external experience (e.g., sights and sounds).

In contrast, Langer's (1989) concept of mindfulness focuses on how humans cognitively process new information. She defines mindfulness as "*a state of alertness and lively awareness*" (Langer, 1989, p. 138). According to Langer, a person is mindful when they are open to new information. In contrast, 'mindless' people have a tendency to get stuck in categories created in the past or certain habits of thinking, behave in an automatic fashion (failing to pay attention to the process of carrying out a task), and have an outcome orientation. Instead of asking the question 'How do I do this?' they ask themselves questions such as 'What if I fail?'. Langer argues that when people free themselves of rigid habits, mental categories, and an outcome orientation, they open themselves up to new perspectives and aspects of a situation. In addition, a greater sense of choice and control become available to people.

While Langer's concept of mindfulness is not synonymous with the definitions of mindfulness proposed by most other researchers in this area, there is overlap in that it involves paying attention to a person's present experience in a flexible way. Subsequently, this can break the automaticity of thoughts and behaviours. Her strong focus on creating new mental categories is what sets her work apart from other mindfulness researchers. In addition, the exercises Langer prescribes to increase mindfulness involve working with material external to participants (e.g., problem solving) rather than participants exploring their internal experience (Baer, 2003). For the purposes of this research project, mindfulness is simply defined as the ability to pay attention to what is happening in the present moment.

Compared to the large body of research on the psychological benefits of mindfulness training, very little research has been conducted on the relationship between mindfulness and material consumption. Nevertheless, the research literature suggests that there are a number of positive psychological benefits associated with mindfulness that may result in decreasing people's ecological footprint and the degree to which they focus on materialistic pursuits. These benefits include: an improved ability to self-

regulate (Alberts, Thewissen, & Raes, 2012; Chatzisarantis & Hagger, 2007); increased levels of well-being (Brown & Ryan, 2003), satisfaction with what one has (Brown et al., 2009), and psychological resistance to manipulative advertising messages (McGonigal, 2011; Rosenberg, 2004); helping to clarify values (Shapiro et al., 2006); an enhanced connection to the natural environment (Howell et al., 2011); and decreased automaticity in thinking and behaviour (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Langer, 1989; Moore & Malinowski, 2009). Each of these aspects and how they may contribute to decreasing consumption is explored in further detail below.

3.5.1 Improving the Ability to Self-Regulate

Mindfulness has been found to increase people's ability to resist instant gratification and self-regulate their emotions and behaviour. The ability to self-regulate has been described as humans "*number one success strategy*" in life (Joachim de Posada: Don't eat the marshmallow!, 2009). When people can self-regulate they can modify their behaviour to achieve their goals (Watson & Tharp, 2014). In every moment humans have a choice: to give into temptation and gain a short-term reward or resist and gain some long-term payoff in the future. For instance, an invitation to attend social drinks after work may motivate a person to want to enjoy a beer and create an impulse to accept the invitation. However, a person with a goal of losing weight may stop and consider how the act of drinking beer may undermine this goal. Subsequently, he or she may choose to decline the invitation. In short, the ability to self-regulate acts as a brake to carrying out impulsive behaviours, such as excessive spending and overeating (Brown, 2014).

It has been established that attention and awareness are critical factors when it comes to self-regulatory behaviour (Brown & Ryan, 2004; Watson & Tharp, 2014). If people are able to stop and reflect on their impulses and articulate their feelings, this can weaken the intensity and need to act on the impulse (Brown, 2014). Since mindfulness is a form of mental training that focuses on enhancing awareness and the ability to pay attention, it may enable people to make better decisions when faced with the choice of engaging in tempting unsustainable behaviours. For instance, a study by Alberts, Thewissen and Raes (2012) found an 8-week mindfulness based intervention helped participants with problematic eating behaviours (e.g., overeating and stress related

eating) to significantly decrease their food cravings compared to a wait-list control group. The authors of this study argued that this was due to participants being able to better self-regulate as a result of increased mindfulness levels.

Mindfulness training has also been shown to be particularly helpful to people who suffer from compulsive buying. Compulsive buying is characterised by the uncontrolled urge to buy goods and services. It is associated with depression, anxiety, and consumer debt (Black, 2007). Developing mindfulness was one of the key skills taught in the 12-week 'Stopping Overshopping' program that aimed to help people break the cycle that leads to compulsive buying (Benson & Eisenach, 2013). In a wait-list control study that trialled the efficacy of this program, significant improvements were found and maintained at 6-month follow-up on all compulsive buying measures, the amount of money and time spent on shopping, and the number of compulsive buying episodes (Benson, Eisenach, Abrams, & van Stolk-Cooke, 2014).

It is well established in the literature that people often fail to act in line with their values and goals (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996). This is commonly referred to as the intention-behaviour or value-behaviour gap. This failure may be due to a number of factors commonly associated with modern life including exhaustion/fatigue, stress, and/or being surrounded by temptation (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996). Mindfulness has been found to bridge the intention-behaviour gap by helping to foster self-regulation (Chatzisarantis & Hagger, 2007). A study by Chatzisarantis and Hagger (2007) in the area of physical activity found more mindful people were more likely to carry out their intentions to exercise. It follows that through increasing mindfulness (and therefore people's ability to self-regulate), people who have intentions to adopt lower impact lifestyles and decrease their material consumption may be in a better position to do so (Ericson et al., 2014).

3.5.2 Resistance to Manipulative Advertising Messages

Mindfulness training may also help people to develop psychological resources to make them less susceptible to manipulative marketing messages. People often consume goods impulsively in response to an environment that is manufactured to make them 'want' certain things (McGonigal, 2011). Advertisements infiltrate nearly every aspect

of people's lives as they are bombarded with an estimated 3,000 advertisements every day (Kilbourne, 2006). These advertising messages do very little to encourage people to engage in deep reflection (Burch, 2012a). Instead they direct people's attention towards objects that are outside the self (i.e., products) by using a vast array of attention grabbing strategies. McGonigal (2011) states that if people paid closer attention to how they felt before and after purchasing an item (i.e., became more mindful of the present-moment experience), they may become aware that what the advertiser's pitch promises is actually not a real reward but a false, illusory one. Subsequently, this may make people more resilient and less likely to make impulse purchases.

Similarly, Rosenberg (2004) argues that people who are mindful are more likely to be aware of the underlying sources of dissatisfaction in their lives and the way in which material goods often do not fulfil the needs that the advertising pitch claims the product will deliver. In contrast, when people are in 'mindless' states they are more susceptible to advertising messages and the effects of priming (Rosenberg, 2004). Advertisers cater effectively to mindless states by taking advantage of the fact people often process information automatically without critical reflection (Langer, 1989). Therefore, if people become more mindful of their true needs they could resist advertising strategies and consuming items unnecessarily as a result of realising that they do not need the items advertised (Rosenberg, 2004).

Mindfulness can help people to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of desire, thereby decreasing consumption. Burch (2012a) proposes that as a result of people paying close attention to their desires through practising mindfulness, they can begin to notice that:

- 1) desires come and go (just like thoughts);
- 2) acquiring objects does not result in desires going away because new desires simply appear; and
- 3) fulfilling desires may not be the best way to achieve well-being as it just leaves them with the experience of being on a consumer treadmill.

He also states that mindfulness can change the nature of a person's desires, leading him or her to want less and pursue a simpler life. He states, "*As we cultivate mindfulness, a taste for simpler surroundings, fewer possessions, less clutter, a more spacious and tranquil way of life, can spontaneously accompany the development of our [mindfulness] practice*" (Burch, 2012a, p. 19). This explanation of the way in which mindfulness is cultivated implies that mindfulness can assist people to seek out simplicity and less consumer oriented lives.

3.5.3 Wanting What You Already Have

Mindfulness training may help people to feel satisfied with what they already have (rather than what they do not have). One study found that participants who received mindfulness training and who increased in mindfulness decreased their financial desire discrepancy (Brown, Kasser, Ryan, Alex Linley, & Orzech, 2009). In other words, they were more content with their financial situation after participating in the mindfulness intervention. While this study only focused on individual's level of contentment with their financial situation and overlooked other areas of their lives, such as their contentment with material possessions, it suggests that mindfulness may be an effective way to help people feel like they have enough. It follows that this may put a halt on excessive consumption. Not surprisingly, studies have found that practising gratitude helps people to focus their attention on what they have which creates a sense of satisfaction with life, thereby decreasing materialism (Lambert et al., 2009).

3.5.4 Boosting Well-being

There is a plethora of research on the benefits of practicing mindfulness on people's psychological and physiological well-being (for a review see Brown & Ryan, 2003). Therefore, it has been argued that if people feel better about themselves and satisfied with their lives as a result of practicing mindfulness then they may be less reliant on buying material goods as a way to boost their well-being (Ericson et al., 2014). Additionally, when people experience positive emotions they are more likely to have an open mind (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). With a more open frame of mind people may be able to see new pathways for getting their core needs

met instead of engaging in extrinsic pursuits (e.g., purchasing luxury goods and undergoing cosmetic surgery to enhance physical attractiveness).

When people are psychologically healthy, they may be in a better position to take an interest in the state of the environment and a range of other worldly issues. It has been suggested that stress and depression make it difficult to consider bigger than self problems, such as biodiversity loss and climate change (Ericson et al., 2014). One study found that clinically depressed individuals tended to have higher levels of self-focused attention compared to participants in a matched community control sample (Ingram, Lumry, Cruet, & Sieber, 1987). Through cultivating positive emotions and a broader outlook, mindfulness training may help people to explore large-scale societal and ecological issues such as overconsumption.

All that being said, the state of the world's ecological problems can be overwhelming and a source of worry and concern for many people. While worry can be adaptive and often mobilises people to devise solutions to pressing problems, too much worry (known as 'Catastrophising') can lead to paralysis (Davey, Hampton, Farrell, & Davidson, 1992). A study by Verplanken and Fisher (2014) found that mindfulness helped to mitigate the negative consequences of habitual worrying. The skill of distancing oneself from their worries and being able to see them objectively may help people to focus on what they can do in their everyday lives to address major social and ecological issues of concern.

Studies have also found that a positive relationship between subjective well-being and engagement in sustainable behaviours (Brown & Kasser, 2005; Corral-Verdugo, Mireles-Acosta, Tapia-Fonllem, & Fraijo-Sing, 2011). Possible explanations for why this may be include: 1) people being less likely to pursue materialistic goals which may undermine well-being; 2) people being happier and therefore acting in more sustainable ways; and 3) people feeling liberated from breaking out of "*conditioned habits of consumption, competition, and inequity practices*" (Corral-Verdugo et al., 2011, p. 103). A study by Brown and Kasser (2005) found participants who reported engaging in more ecologically responsible behaviours had higher levels of subjective well-being. This relationship appeared to be mediated by mindfulness and intrinsic values. They concluded that sustainable living depended on whether people were

“living in a conscious, mindful way and with a set of values organized around intrinsic fulfilment” (Brown & Kasser, 2005, p. 40).

3.5.5 Clarifying Values

Mindfulness may help people to get clear on their values as a result of engaging with the process of objective reflection. In a fast-paced world, people often do not take the time to consider what is most important to them (Bertman, 1998). Instead they adopt the values and ideas of mainstream consumer culture, friends and family, which tend to be materialistic in the Western world. As Ericson, Kjonstad and Barstad (2014, p.76) state, *“this conditioning makes it harder to critically evaluate and choose what exactly is valuable to us”*. Studies have shown that practising mindfulness enhances self-regulated functioning (e.g., Alberts et al., 2012) which means it *“sensitizes individuals to intrinsic needs, allowing people to better regulate themselves towards meeting those needs”* (Howell et al., 2011, p. 167). Shapiro and Carlson (2009) argue that mindfulness helps people to reflect on their values with greater objectivity and decide whether their values are beneficial or whether they are based on cultural and familial conditioning. Subsequently, people can choose whether to activate more beneficial and meaningful values and diminish non-beneficial values.

In short, practising mindfulness helps people to gain clarity around their own personal values by increasing their ability to pay attention to their direct experience. Individuals may come to realise that they obtain greater satisfaction and well-being from engaging in intrinsically oriented pursuits (e.g., spending time with family and caring for the environment) rather than extrinsic pursuits. Cultivating mindfulness may assist people to obtain some distance and perspective from their usual stressful thought patterns and *“opens their eyes to the needs and values that are truly important to them”* (Hunecke, 2013, p. 30).

When people clarify their values and develop greater awareness through mindfulness training, they may see a disconnect between what they say they value and their everyday behaviour. This may lead to experiencing cognitive dissonance. To resolve this psychological tension, people may make changes to their lives such that they alter their behaviour to align with their values. In addition, studies have found that when

people consciously think about a particular value they are more likely to act in line with the value (Maio et al., 2001). In short, mindfulness may lead people to clarify their values, shift closer toward intrinsic values, and make the behavioural changes that are necessary to live less materialistic lives.

3.5.6 Decreasing Automaticity: Breaking Habits

It has been found that approximately 45% of people's behaviour is habitual and carried out with little conscious effort or awareness (Wood, Quinn, & Kashy, 2002). Studies show mindfulness reduces automaticity by helping people to become more aware of their thoughts and behaviour (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Langer, 1989; Moore & Malinowski, 2009). Helping people to pay closer attention to their thoughts, feelings and emotions through mindfulness training is useful as it creates *"an interval of time within which habits of meaning, thought, behaviour, or emotion are suspended, reconsidered"* (Martin, 1997, p. 292). Experimental studies by Wenk-Sormaz (2005, p. 53) found that practising meditation led to a reduction in habitual responding *"by increasing the number of response alternatives"*. Indeed, mindfulness training has been found to be an effective treatment method for smoking cessation (Brewer et al., 2011).

It follows that practising mindfulness could assist people to break habitual modes of behaviour in relation to material consumption. 'Retail therapy' is a term commonly associated with people trying to repair a negative mood through purchasing self-treats. Indeed, research shows that 'retail therapy' can be an effective coping strategy people use to repair a bad mood, which is not associated with negative emotions such as guilt, anxiety, or buyer's remorse post purchase (Atalay & Meloy, 2011). The lack of negative reinforcement associated with retail therapy means that people may develop a habit of consuming material goods every time they find themselves in a negative mood. Assisting compulsive shoppers to suspend their habitual behaviours may help them to consider other ways of repairing a bad mood (e.g., going for a walk or calling a friend).

3.5.7 Increasing Nature Connectedness

Studies have found that mindfulness is positively associated with nature connectedness (Howell et al., 2011). Nature connectedness has been defined as

“individuals’ experiential sense of oneness with the world” (Mayer & Frantz, 2004, p. 504). When people are more mindful their experience of nature may become enhanced as a result of having greater awareness of their surroundings (Howell et al., 2011). As a result of this enhanced sensory experience, mindful individuals are likely to feel more connected to the natural environment. Therefore, if people become more mindful and have the opportunity to connect deeply with the natural environment they may be more likely to want to protect nature through carrying out pro-environmental behaviours.

A study by Vaske and Kobrin (2001) found that teenagers working in Colorado on natural-resource-based work programs who felt a sense of connection with the place engaged in more environmentally responsible behaviours. The personal connection that these teenagers formed to the natural environment may have resulted in them becoming more aware of environmental issues. Another study found that developing an emotional affiliation with the natural environment predicted environmentally protective behaviour and behavioural intentions (Kals, Schumacher, & Montada, 1999). These studies suggest that if people have access to the natural environment, then mindfulness may help to nurture a greater connection to it. Subsequently, this may lead to engagement in more pro-environmental behaviours.

The examination of the literature on the benefits of mindfulness shows that it is a skill that can play a role in shifting people’s values and behaviours away from materialistic pursuits. Through enhancing well-being and positive emotions, fostering a deeper connection to nature, better self-regulation and clarifying values, people may be empowered to take charge of their lives and live according to their most important values rather than the values imposed on them by consumer culture. The next section of this thesis will explore how mindfulness can be cultivated in people’s lives to bring about the benefits discussed above.

3.6 Cultivating Mindfulness

Bodhi (2011, p. 28) states, *“mindfulness does not occur automatically; it is a quality to be cultivated”*. There are two central pathways people can cultivate increased levels of mindfulness in their lives: 1) through formal meditation practice/mindfulness training;

and 2) environmental restructuring to minimise distractions and enhance attention. Each of these pathways will now be examined.

3.6.1 Meditation and Mindfulness Training

Mindfulness is most commonly cultivated through formal meditation practices. This may involve regularly carrying out meditation practices over a period of time or participating in a training program such as Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) which goes for 8-weeks and covers a range of meditations (e.g., sitting and body scan meditations) and yoga exercises (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). The majority of formal meditation interventions are secularised adaptations of traditional Buddhist practices and therefore have been stripped of their religious and cultural ideas (Gordon-Finlayson & Sheffield, 2014).

Meditation is defined as a way to rapidly relax the body and focus the mind (Harrison, 2015). Research has found that engagement in formal meditation practice cultivates mindfulness (Shapiro, Oman, Thoresen, Plante, & Flinders, 2008). There are two main types of meditation practices that exist: 1) mindfulness meditations; and 2) concentrative meditations. Mindfulness meditations involve focusing on becoming aware of sensory and cognitive aspects of the present moment, whereas concentrative meditations involve focusing on an image or a mantra. Both meditation types involve paying focused attention and minimising distractions. It is generally accepted that the key to deriving benefits from meditation is to practice on a regular basis (Harris, 2014). A study by Fredrickson et al. (2008) found that participants who practiced a loving kindness meditation over a 9-week period experienced an increase over time in mindfulness and a range of other personal resources (e.g., purpose in life, self acceptance, and improved physical health).

3.6.2 Environmental Restructuring to Enhance Attention

The majority of literature on cultivating mindfulness focuses on practising meditation and appears to overlook other methods of enhancing people's ability to pay attention. For instance, there is little discussion in the mindfulness literature on people restructuring their environment to minimise distractions that inhibit attending to the

present moment. Behavioural psychologist Paul Dolan (2014) encourages individuals to set up their environment to make the most of their attentional resources. Just as many experts recommend that people who wish to lose weight change their home environment by restricting access to bad food choices, he suggests people use behavioural psychology to cultivate mindfulness. He states:

“...much of what we do simply comes about, rather than being thought about. Whether or not you buy that big bar of chocolate depends largely on whether it is on display at the till and much less on any real, conscious decision to devour a giant candy bar” (Dolan, 2014, p. xix).

He argues that formal mindfulness meditation practice may require too much effort for most people and therefore structuring people’s home and work environment so that they can pay greater attention and minimise distractions may be a more effective approach. Since many people spend a large part of their workday engaged with technology, they are susceptible to digital distractions. Technology, particularly social media and online gaming, can be highly addictive (Greenfield, 2014). When people are online they can become easily distracted by addictive sites, email, and web links, rapidly changing their attention from one thing to another (Harris, 2014; Powers, 2010; Zhu, 1999). Working this way requires ‘switching costs’. A switching cost is a term given to describe how much attentional energy is required to switch from one task to another (Meiran, Chorev, & Sapir, 2000). Every time the human brain shifts attention it uses precious mental resources. Working in this way increases people’s likelihood of making mistakes (Altmann, Trafton, & Hambrick, 2014), increases their stress levels (Mark, Gudith, & Klocke, 2008) and decreases productivity (Czerwinski, Horvitz, & Wilhite, 2004; Rubinstein, Meyer, & Evans, 2001). In short, multitasking can lead to multi-problems.

Yet in our fast-paced society, the ability to multitask is seen as an important feature of being productive and successful (Brown, 2014). The downside of this is that mindful states are difficult for people to achieve if they are switching rapidly from one task to another (i.e., multitasking). It takes time for the human mind to focus on and immerse itself in a task (Harrison, 2015). If an individual’s attention is being constantly pulled away from the task at hand, he or she cannot pause and reflect in any depth on what is

happening in the present moment. Encouraging people to 'single task' and educating them on the negative impacts of multitasking may lead to enhanced mindfulness levels.

In addition, it may be beneficial to assist people to implement strategies to mitigate the effects of being distracted as well as implement barriers to being distracted. Strategies to help minimise technological distractions include: developing greater awareness of distractions in the environment; restricting access and placing limits on Internet use; using Internet blocker applications; and turning off chat functions and email alerts (Dolan, 2014). As Dolan (2014) states:

"It will be much easier to design your way out of distraction by preventing distractions from getting to you in the first place, than to use your willpower to counter them when they occur" (p. 165).

In order to place limits on technology use, it could be useful for people to acquire a sense of how much time they spend engaged with technology. This is where a 'Technology Audit' can be a useful exercise: an individual tracks how much time they spend engaged with technology over the course of the day (Pang, 2013). In addition, the idea of taking 'Digital Detoxes' or 'Digital Sabbaths' has become increasingly popular in recent years (Sturmer & Roy, 2015). A 'Digital Sabbath' mimics the idea of the Sabbath, which was a day of rest and a time for family and reflection. It works by people taking time out from their technological gadgets and the Internet to reconnect with activities that are personally meaningful and are typically of a slower pace.

Placing limits on how and when people interact and engage with technology may help people to cultivate mindful ways of being without having to engage in formal meditation practice. However, minimising technological distractions does not mean people will be able to fully attend to the present moment, as they may also have their own distracting internal thoughts to deal with (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010). Since studies have found that meditation practice can help to deal with chronic worrying (Hoge et al., 2013), utilising both approaches to cultivating mindfulness (i.e., formal meditation practice and environmental restructuring) could be beneficial in an educational intervention.

3.7 Limitations of Mindfulness

Nevertheless, increasing people's mindfulness levels is no guarantee that they will reduce their consumption and materialistic values. There are a number of limitations of mindfulness training that need to be acknowledged such as the possibility it may lead to narcissism and passivity, and the challenge of engaging in formal meditation practice in a fast-paced culture. Each of these factors is addressed below.

3.7.1 Breeds Narcissism

Despite the fact mindfulness has existed for many years, it is often perceived as a 'New Age' phenomenon. With this comes the risk that mindfulness is interpreted as a practice that focuses purely on the self and doing 'inner work'. This may breed narcissistic tendencies. As Hedlund-de Witt (2011) states:

"As the basic goal of a lot of inner work and therapy is to help people to get in touch with themselves, that is with those parts that have been alienated or suppressed, not only profound spiritual insights and experiences may arise, but also frustrations, pains, anger and narcissistic or child-like impulses and tendencies" (p.1061).

She argues that this focus on doing inner work may result in people failing to engage in important outer work to challenge *"the systems, structures, and hierarchies that disempower people and make it difficult to become conscious 'agents of change' in the first place"* (Hedlund-de Witt, 2011, p. 1061). Some people may dangerously come to believe that their contribution to the planet and broader systemic change lies in simply meditating and manifesting positive thoughts (e.g., Centred Meditation, 2016).

3.7.2 Increases Passivity

The accepting, non-judgemental nature of mindfulness may also lead people to become passive in relation to responding to pressing ecological issues that demand humans alter their behaviour (Hedlund-de Witt, 2011). Instead of making the radical shift to a simpler lifestyle, people may instead maintain the status quo and use mindfulness as a strategy to decrease stress levels and increase personal well-being. This may especially be the case in Western countries where mindfulness is taught in a

secularised way, decontextualized from its original context and stripped from its ethical frame (Greenberg & Mitra, 2015). Indeed, the term 'McMindfulness' refers to the corporatisation of mindfulness, which aims to increase productivity and lull employees into more passive, compliant states (Krupka, 2015). In order to achieve deeper change and shifts in perspective, it may be necessary for people to adopt the broader principles and ideas that are connected to mindfulness, rather than simply using mindfulness as a relaxation strategy (Van Dam, Hobkirk, Sheppard, Aviles-Andrews, & Belch, 2014). For this reason, mindfulness should be combined with conversations and practices that encourage people to reflect on their lives, the assumptions they hold about success and materialism, and what drives them to consume.

3.7.3 Difficulty Implementing Practice into Daily Life

Another limitation to using mindfulness as a strategy to combat overconsumption and materialism is that it may not be easy for many people to practice. Although meditation has been described by several practitioners as being easy to learn (Budilovsky & Adamson, 2002; Roche, 2009; Valone, 2009), it is common for people to start meditating and give up due to not seeing instant benefits or change in their lives (Harrison, 2015). Kabat-Zinn (2005) articulates five obstacles people face in engaging in meditation practice: 1) craving; 2) anger; 3) boredom; 4) restlessness; and 5) doubt. Many people in a fast-paced culture may not feel like they have the time and/or energy to engage in the practice. Subsequently, encouraging people to meditate in a culture where they expect to see instant results, seek novelty, and experience time poverty may be challenging. It is therefore important that the practice of teaching mindfulness is situated inside a conversation about the need to slow down and make 'quiet time' for the self.

3.8 The Process of Learning

So far this chapter has examined two key approaches that can be utilised in an educational intervention to reduce materialistic values and consumption behaviour: 1) promoting the practices and values of the voluntary simplicity lifestyle; and 2) cultivating mindfulness. In designing an educational intervention it is also important to

carefully consider educational theories and strategies that can help participants to engage in effective learning processes. D’Onofrio (1992) argues that applying theory to educational interventions can assist practitioners by strengthening program justification, promoting the effective use of resources, establishing professional credibility, and improving accountability. In the next section, key educational theories and their strategies will be examined as they relate to the development of an educational intervention to decrease materialistic values and overconsumption. Underpinning the educational intervention are four primary educational theories: 1) humanistic learning theory; 2) self-determination theory; 3) behaviourism; and 4) self-regulation of learning theory.

One of the founding fathers of humanistic learning theory Carl Rogers (1983) posited that the point of learning was to grow personally and develop as a human being. In addition, learning should be a personally fulfilling and meaningful experience in which people make progress in discovering their ‘true self’ (i.e., increase awareness of their lived experience). Through Roger’s work as a teacher and psychological counsellor he observed that many of the people he worked with were trying to figure out who they were. People would ask themselves questions such as ‘Who am I?’, ‘Can I ever discover or get in touch with my real self?’ and ‘Will I ever feel any assurance or stability in myself?’ (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994).

Some of the goals of humanistic learning theory include: 1) satisfying people’s psychological needs; 2) helping people to develop better self-control (i.e., impulse control); and 3) clarifying people’s values. These ideas and goals sit well with the core values of voluntary simplicity, two of which are self-determination and personal growth (Cherrier & Murray, 2002). As Rogers and Freiberg (1994, p. xxiv) state one of the aims of education is *“to create an awareness that for all of us the good life is within, not something that is dependent on outside sources”*. One of the key aims of the educational intervention will be to help facilitate participants to reflect on the ‘good life’, who they are and their values. In addition, participants will be prompted to question the nexus between material/financial wealth and happiness, thereby helping them to see that the ‘good life’ is not dependent on material and financial acquisition.

Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory is also relevant and applicable to the development of the educational intervention. This theory suggests that people have psychological needs for autonomy, a sense of competence, and relatedness to others. According to this theory, if people fail to get these fundamental needs met they will struggle to reach their goals and will not grow. The educational intervention will aim to help participants satisfy these specific needs as well as clarify their personal values through facilitating reflection activities, fostering close connections, and developing skills that generate feelings of mastery and competence.

Adult learners tend to prefer a self-directed and self-paced learning experience (Burns, 1995). However, since the educational intervention aims to reduce materialistic values and excessive consumption in a large group of participants, a combination of both didactic and socratic teaching approaches will be utilised in the present study. While Rogers (1983) argues that this approach is not an ideal way to engage students and excite them about learning, a trade-off has to be made due to the large number of participants that are needed to obtain statistical power ($n = 40$) and the limited time frame to deliver the educational intervention.

The socratic approach to learning involves directing the learner towards a particular conclusion by asking a series of logical questions (Burns, 1995). In asking questions, Burns (1995, p. 267) states that the learner is able to "*express the knowledge they hold but never really crystallise in their own minds*". The questions asked throughout the program provide participants with the opportunity to reflect on various areas of their lives. Methods used will include pair sharing and guided group discussions in which participants share their feelings, ideas, knowledge and experience, as well as brainstorming exercises.

To facilitate and encourage sharing and learning, nurturing relationships between the lead facilitator and participants will be fostered to create a safe environment. Rogers (1983) proposes that the teacher's attitude toward their students is critical when it comes to developing a supportive relationship. In order to foster this attitude, three conditions have to be met:

1. The teacher has to be real/genuine with the students;
2. The teacher has to accept the students for who they are and trust that they have the capacity to learn and solve their own problems; and
3. The teacher needs to have an empathic understanding of the student.

If these conditions are met (particularly the first condition), Rogers (1983, pp. 43–44) found that *“a constructive process was initiated”* in which students *“began to develop clearer and deeper self insights, they began to see what they might do to resolve their distress and they began to take actions that made them more independent and that solved some of their problems”*. Therefore, it is important that the facilitator accepts the stage participants are at on their simplifying journey and is willing to share their own personal stories to help facilitate insights and learning.

It is also important to provide an outline of the goals for each session and what participants can expect to get out of the program. One of the most commonly reported barriers to adult education is a lack of time (Burns, 1995). If people feel like their time is being wasted, they are unlikely to continue with the educational intervention. In the present study, information obtained from interviews (phase 1) and pre-course surveys (phase 2) in relation to various topics will be used to make the program content personally relevant to participants.

Making the information relevant and capturing participants’ attention will not only assist in reducing participant attrition but it will also help with memory retention and recall of key ideas (Hillard, 2010). Additionally, the careful use of visual aids (i.e., a keynote presentation) to illustrate key points throughout each session will help participants to retain information. Research shows that the presence of visuals along with spoken words can help improve memory retention (Clark, Nguyen, & Sweller, 2006). Furthermore, sharing personal stories can be effective in terms of retaining information as stories tend to stick in our minds since they have a framework and are told in a sequential, logical manner (Dirksen, 2012). For this reason, the facilitator will share personal stories from her own life and other simplifiers’ lives to illustrate various concepts covered in the program.

Repetition of information deepens learning and strengthens neural pathways in the brain (Rathus, 2012). Therefore information, certain practices/skills, and values will be reinforced on a number of occasions throughout the program. For example, meditation will be practiced at the beginning of each session and as part of participants' weekly challenges (i.e., homework exercises). In addition, a weekly email will be sent out between sessions to prompt participants to think about the content of each session and encourage them to complete the homework exercises.

Elements from behaviourism will also be implemented throughout the program to assist in value change as well as cultivating mindfulness. Behavioural learning theories look at how human behaviour is controlled by the external environment (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). By examining and modifying the environmental conditions that elicit certain behaviours, it may be possible to achieve change for the better. While providing rewards and incentives (positive reinforcement) will not be used in the intervention due to the effect these extrinsic reinforcers can have on lowering intrinsic motivation (Kohn, 1999), participants will be encouraged to restructure their environment to decrease their exposure to materialistic values and increase their ability to pay attention. For instance, a 'commercial media fast' in which participants attempt to avoid exposure to advertising messages for a week could involve restructuring the home environment (Ferguson & Kasser, 2013). Participants will also be taught strategies to limit their use of potentially distracting technologies such as mobile phones.

Participants will be encouraged to become active participants in their learning experience. This will be achieved by providing them with the skills and knowledge to better self-regulate. Self-regulation implies *"the ability to control ourselves, to exert control over our own acts and inner processes"* (Watson & Tharp, 2014, p. 2). In the context of an educational setting, people who are self-regulated learners have an awareness of their own thinking, are strategic, and modify their behaviour to achieve desirable outcomes (Montalvo & Torres, 2004). Research has found that students who engage in self regulatory processes, such as goal setting, strategic planning, self monitoring, self experimentation, and attention focusing, are more likely to succeed at learning (Zimmerman, 2002). Self-regulatory processes have been structured into

three cyclical phases: 1) Forethought; 2) Performance; and 3) Self reflection (Figure 5). It is a cyclical process in the sense that “*self-reflections from prior efforts to learn affect subsequent forethought processes (e.g., self-dissatisfaction will lead to lower levels of self-efficacy and diminished effort during subsequent learning)*” (Zimmerman, 2002, p. 68).

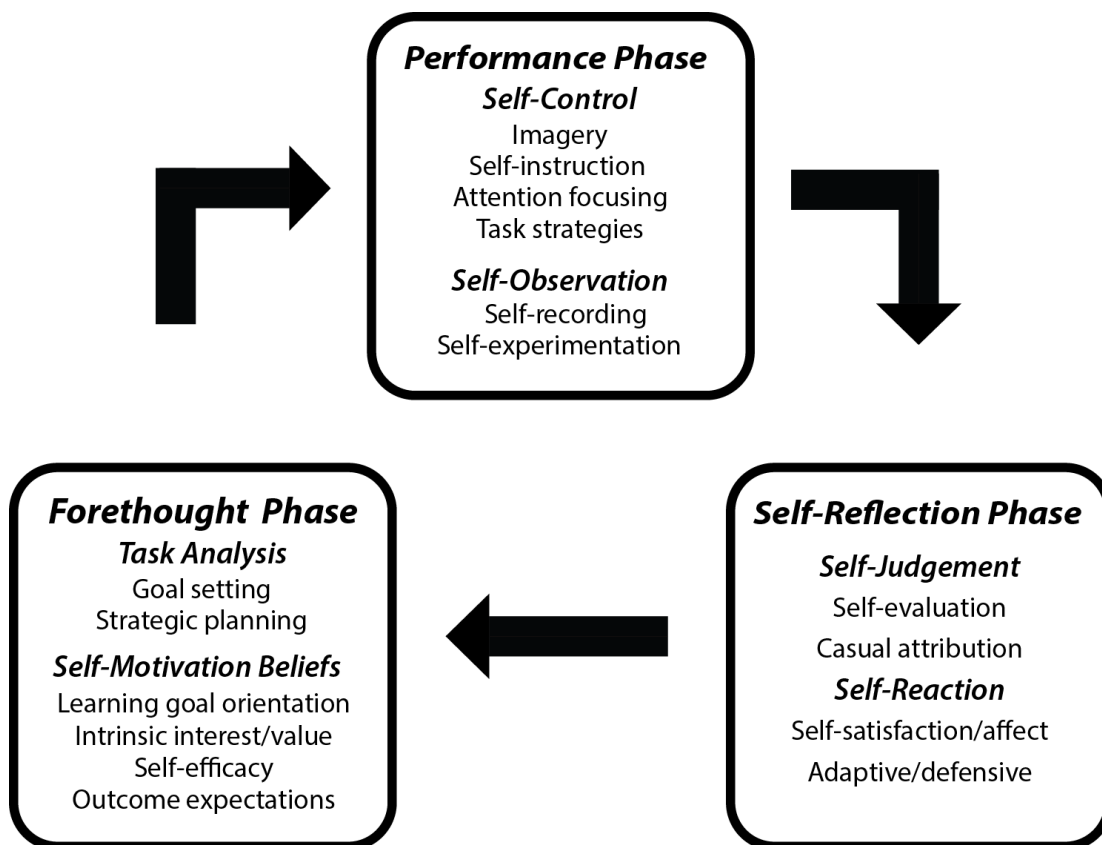


Figure 5. Phases and Subprocesses of Self-Regulation (Source: Zimmerman, 2002)

Mindfulness training has been shown to enhance several of the processes that occur within each phase of self-regulated learning. For instance, there is growing evidence that mindfulness training can improve attention, self-awareness, and intrinsic motivation (Baer, 2009; Carmody, 2009). By teaching participants mindfulness as well as other strategies to restructure their environment to pay better attention, they can become more proficient at being self-regulated learners. Intrinsic values in the forethought phase of self-regulation can also be reinforced through discussions on the problems associated with pursuing extrinsic goals/values and the benefits of intrinsic goals/values on well-being. The educational intervention will also utilise self-regulation

of learning theory by providing participants with opportunities to reflect on their beliefs, goals, values, and behaviour. As a consequence of participants feeling more in control of their own learning, they are more likely to have a more effective learning experience and continue to learn about concepts covered in the intervention once it ends.

3.9 Conclusion

Through an examination of the literature on voluntary simplicity and mindfulness, there is sufficient evidence to show that an educational program could be designed and implemented to decrease materialistic values and overconsumption. The strong emphasis voluntary simplifiers place on reclaiming their time, decreasing stresses, and enhancing psychological well-being/quality of life may make this lifestyle appealing to mainstream people who feel a sense of dissatisfaction with their lives (Kronenberg & Lida, 2011). It is currently unknown whether voluntary simplicity educational programs are effective, as none to date have been formally evaluated. Most of the content also appears to be aimed at people residing in North America who have already started to question consumer culture, have an awareness of the problems associated with overconsumption, and are willing to explore alternative ways of living. Consequently, these programs may not be suitable for a mainstream Western Australian audience.

For this reason, new program content will be developed to appeal to this specific audience depending on their needs and what is relevant and meaningful to them. It would not be in the spirit of humanistic learning theory to impose a set curriculum that has been created for a foreign audience on a group of Western Australians without first exploring the lived experience of a sample of people in this location. Therefore, it is important to obtain data on the relationships that exist between key variables that the program is attempting to change (i.e., materialistic values, consumption, and mindfulness). It is also necessary to get a sense of the lived experience of voluntary simplifiers in Western Australia and how others perceive this lifestyle, as no research has been conducted on this countercultural movement in this locality. The next two chapters focus on obtaining and analysing this important baseline data.

Chapter 4

Exploring Materialism, Consumption, and other Lifestyle Factors in Perth, Western Australia

The main purpose of this chapter is to present data on materialistic values and consumption behaviour to explore the relationships that exist with associated variables such as mindfulness, television consumption, hours at work, and time affluence. As discussed in Chapter 3, most voluntary simplifiers manipulate these variables to some extent to pursue a more satisfying and ecologically responsible lifestyle. For example, voluntary simplifiers are motivated for a range of reasons to reduce their hours at work to reclaim more discretionary time. Since the purpose of this thesis is to create an educational intervention that emulates aspects of the voluntary simplicity lifestyle, this way of life will also be examined, specifically the value orientation, mindfulness levels, and consumption behaviour compared to a more mainstream sample (non-simplifiers). In addition, key differences that exist between other groups (e.g., male and female; young, middle aged, and old; low education and high education level) in relation to materialistic values and consumption will be explored.

To date, no empirical research has been published on materialistic values and the lives of voluntary simplifiers in a Western Australian context. The vast majority of research on materialism and voluntary simplifiers has been conducted in the United States, with a few studies being conducted in the Eastern states of Australia (Breakspear & Hamilton, 2004; Chhetri, Khan, Stimson, & Western, 2009; Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002; Saunders, 2007; Saunders, Allen, & Pozzebon, 2008; Saunders & Munro, 2000). Only one study on materialism and life satisfaction has been conducted in Western Australia (Ryan & Dziurawiec, 2001). In addition, little empirical information has been gathered to characterise and differentiate between voluntary simplifiers and non-simplifiers, particularly with respect to ecological sustainability. Therefore, studying the voluntary

simplicity lifestyle and how people's values are structured in Western Australia is warranted.

While the Perth metropolitan region of Western Australia (WA) has much in common with other parts of the Western world (both within Australia and abroad), it also has some significant differences that may mean previous research findings on materialistic values and voluntary simplicity are not consistent with characteristics of this region. WA is similar to the United States and other Australian states in that all have free market economies, democratic governments, individualistic and consumer cultures, and share the same language (English).

In terms of differences, the capital city Perth is the most remote urban centre in the world. It has been argued that Perth's remoteness makes it unlikely to be indicative of trends and tendencies that exist elsewhere (Weller, 2009). Perth is geographically closer to the urban populations of Malaysia and Indonesia than it is to other Australian Eastern states such as New South Wales. At the time the baseline data for this research was collected, Perth was in the midst of a booming economy based on the mining of resources such as natural gas, iron ore, and gold. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012), unemployment rates in WA were the lowest in the country at 3.8% (the national rate was 5.2%). This was in sharp contrast to the United States in which 8.3% of the population was unemployed in 2012 (United States Department of Labor, n.d.)

WA also differs from these other places in terms of the general population's relationship to the natural environment and their engagement in sustainability behaviours. The State of the Environment report (EPA Western Australia, 2007) found that Western Australians have one of the highest per capita rates of consumption in the world. Western Australians also have the lowest recycling rate in the country, recycling only 33% of their waste (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010b). In addition, Western Australians have a preference for large houses and fewer people per household compared to other parts of the world (Weller, 2009). ABS data (2010c) shows that 84% of Perth households live in separate houses which is the highest in Australia (the average across Australian capital cities is 74%). The average floor area of new residential dwellings in WA was 244 square metres in 2008-2009 (2010a). To put

this figure in perspective, the average size new home in the United States and United Kingdom in 2009 was 202 and 76 square metres respectively (Burke & Ralston, 2011). It has been argued that the large form of Australian households is “*perfectly suited to consumptive lifestyles*” (Newton, 2011, p. 11).

Since Perth is in a unique position in terms of its remoteness, low unemployment rates, strong economy, and high ecological footprint of its residents, it is important to obtain data on key constructs to inform the program design. This will allow for a comparison to the larger body of research literature on materialistic values and voluntary simplicity.

4.1 Methodological Design

An explanatory sequential mixed methods design was employed to collect and analyse in-depth data for the preliminary research phase (phase 1). Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) define a mixed methods research design as a procedure for collecting and analysing both qualitative and quantitative methods in a single study to gain a better understanding of a particular research problem. An explanatory sequential mixed methods design is commonly used to identify individuals with extreme scores on dependent measures (via quantitative data collection) and then conduct interviews with these individuals (via qualitative data collection) (Caracelli & Greene, 1993).

In the quantitative phase of this study, surveys were collected from a range of people residing in Perth, WA. The aim of this was to ensure the classification of intrinsic and extrinsic values existed, examine the relationships between materialistic values and a range of constructs (e.g., consumption, psychological well-being and mindfulness), and establish key differences between various groups of people such as voluntary simplifiers and non-simplifiers. The qualitative phase involved conducting in-depth interviews with two subgroups of participants who were identified from survey data and recruited via purposive sampling on simple living online forums (Chapter 5). The two subgroups were: 1) participants who scored high in materialistic values (non-simplifiers); and 2) participants who scored low in materialistic values and indicated they had made a voluntary shift to a simpler lifestyle (voluntary simplifiers).

Both types of data were used in phase 1 of this study as quantitative data provided a general picture of the nature of materialistic values and consumption in a large sample of Western Australians. It also allowed for similarities and differences that existed between different groups to be explored. Further analysis of the voluntary simplicity lifestyle was; however, needed through qualitative data collection as McDonald (2014) argues quantitative measures cannot capture the diversity of motivations for adopting a simpler way of life. The lived experience of simplifiers was then compared to a sample of non-simplifiers. Potential entry points and barriers to adopting this way of life were also examined.

As is common with utilising a mixed methods approach in the social sciences, this study takes a pragmatic stance in that it is problem centred. It focuses on finding solutions to helping people to shift to less materialistic and consumption-based lifestyles, and thereby draws on the research methods that will most appropriately understand the problem at hand (Alasuutari, Bickman, & Brannen, 2008). Creswell (2003, p. 12) states that pragmatism *“opens the door to multiple methods, different world views and different assumptions as well as to different forms of data collection and analysis in the mixed methods study”*. Subsequently, paradigmatic differences and epistemological location of quantitative and qualitative research have been set aside in order to make use of the best range of research methods for this study.

4.2 Hypotheses

While Perth is a unique place, it is characterised by a consumerist and individualistic Western culture that shares a number of similarities with other parts of Australia and the United States. Grouzet et al. (2005) found that across 15 different cultures, including an Eastern state of Australia (New South Wales), a core set of values existed with distinct intrinsic and extrinsic values being structured in the same way. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

H1: There will be a clear distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic values in Western Australia, with two clusters of values forming: extrinsic values (social recognition, attractive appearance and financial success) and intrinsic values (self-acceptance, affiliation, community feeling and physical fitness).

The literature shows that people who are oriented towards materialistic values are increasingly likely to use more resources than others (section 2.2). Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

H2: Materialistic values will have a positive relationship with consumption behaviour.

As discussed in Chapter 2, materialism and consumption behaviour are perpetuated and maintained by a number of complex factors including long work hours, feeling rushed and time-poor, and exposure to materialistic messages via the television. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Materialistic values will have a positive relationship with television consumption.

H4: Consumption behaviour will have a positive relationship with television consumption.

H5: Materialistic values and consumption behaviour will have a positive relationship with hours at work (i.e., paid work) and income.

H6: Materialistic values and consumption behaviour will have a negative relationship with time affluence.

According to a number of scholars, orienting one's life around the pursuit of acquiring material goods is a poor way for individuals to satisfy their core psychological needs (section 1.1). Therefore:

H7: Materialistic values will have a negative relationship with psychological well-being.

Mindfulness is a core value and practice of many voluntary simplifiers and a potential strategy to decrease materialistic values and consumption behaviour (Chapter 3). It is therefore hypothesised that:

H8: Mindfulness will have a negative relationship with materialistic values.

H9: Mindfulness will have a negative relationship with consumption behaviour.

H10: Mindfulness will have a positive relationship with psychological well-being.

H11: Voluntary simplifiers will have higher levels of mindfulness than non-simplifiers.

As the literature reports time affluence is a critical factor in influencing consumption and shifting to a simpler lifestyle (Chapters 2 and 3). The perception of more discretionary time may lead to deeper reflection, engagement in more sustainable behaviours, and meaningful pursuits. Therefore:

H12: Time affluence will have a negative relationship with consumption behaviour.

H13: Time affluence will have a positive relationship with mindfulness.

H14: Time affluence will have a positive relationship with psychological well-being.

H15: Voluntary simplifiers will have higher levels of time affluence and mindfulness, and will work fewer hours in paid work than non-simplifiers.

The way in which voluntary simplifiers reject mainstream norms of consumption and focus their energy on fostering community and close relationships lends support for the idea that they will be less materialistic and live less energy and resource intensive lifestyles. Therefore:

H16: Voluntary simplifiers will have smaller ecological footprints and hold less materialistic values than non-simplifiers.

The methods used to address these hypotheses (H1 to H16) will now be presented.

4.3 Methods

4.3.1 Sampling Procedures and Participants

Electronic and hardcopy surveys were collected via a number of recruitment methods, including promotion via social media (i.e., a Facebook page), posters placed in community centres, emails to various professional networks, and recruitment at

community events in the Perth metropolitan area (Appendix I). Participants were encouraged to fill in and return the survey within a 2-week period.

A total of 498 surveys were filled in, of which 55 were eliminated due to large amounts of incomplete data. Respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 84 with the mean age being 38 ($SD = 14.82$). A total of 35% of respondents were male. Personal income was measured in terms of income bands. The distribution of total annual personal income before tax showed that 47.4% earned less than \$39,999, 39.3% earned between \$40,000 and \$99,999, 9.9% earned between \$100,000 and \$150,000 and 3.8% earned over \$150,000. In total, 61.5% of respondents had attained a university degree.

Compared with ABS data (2011) of the Western Australian population, the sample was over represented by females (Table 5). This was not surprising as Underwood, Kim and Matier (2000) found in their study on survey response rates and respondent characteristics that females have a tendency to respond at greater rates on both electronic and paper surveys than males. The sample was also under represented by people aged 60 years and over. Only small differences were found between the WA population and study sample in relation to median age, the age categories for 29 years and under and between 30 and 59 years, the types of dwellings occupied, and average number of people per household. Based on these measures, the sample was considered to be a reasonable representation of the WA population.

Table 5. A Comparison Between Western Australian Population and Study Sample.

	WA Population	Study Sample (n = 443)
Male (%)	50.3	34.9
Median age	36	34
29 years and under (%)	40.9	37.6
Between 30 – 59 years (%)	41.4	45
60 years and over (%)	17.7	11.4
Average people per household	2.6	2.81
Separate house (%)	80.4	78.9
Semi detached, row or townhouse (%)	10.6	15.6
Flat, unit or apartment (%)	7.9	6.0
Other dwelling type (%)	0.9	1.6

4.3.2 Materials

Materials consisted of a survey package containing a survey, a cover letter, and a reply paid envelope (Appendix II). The survey was also made available online via Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com).

4.3.3 Measures

Six measures were incorporated into the survey: 1) materialism; 2) psychological well-being; 3) ecological footprint; 4) time affluence; 5) mindfulness; and 6) self-reported lifestyle change. The measures are described below.

Materialism. Materialistic values (i.e., extrinsic values) and intrinsic values were measured using the Aspirations Index (AI) (Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996). The AI measures the importance that people place on a variety of goals they may have for the

future across seven life domains. Participants were presented with 32 different goals and asked to rate how important each one was to them on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely). Specifically, participants indicated how much they valued the extrinsic values of social recognition (5 items, *"You will be famous"*; Cronbach's alpha = .86), attractive appearance (5 items, *"You will have people comment often about how attractive you look"*; Cronbach's alpha = .83) and financial success (4 items, *"You will have a lot of expensive possessions"*; Cronbach's alpha = .79). In addition, intrinsic values of self-acceptance (4 items, *"You will be the one in charge of your life"*; Cronbach's alpha = .78), affiliation (5 items, *"You will have good friends that you can count on"*; Cronbach's alpha = .79), community feeling (5 items, *"You will donate time or money to charity"*; Cronbach's alpha = .88) and physical fitness (4 items, *"You will be physically healthy"*; Cronbach's alpha = .82) were assessed. This index has been utilised in a number of studies and has been shown to have adequate internal reliability (Kasser & Ryan, 1996).

The total importance of all seven domains was calculated by averaging ratings for each subscale. To calculate the relative centrality of each domain of goals, this total score was subtracted from each individual subscale score. This resulted in mean-corrected subscale scores for each dimension. This procedure of mean correcting the scores is necessary as it controls for participants' general rating tendency to view all goals as very important or a little important (Kasser, n.d.). The mean corrected subscale scores for community feeling, physical health, affiliation, and self-acceptance were then averaged to compute an intrinsic goals score. In addition, the attractive appearance, financial success, and social recognition domains were averaged to create a score for extrinsic goals. A relative extrinsic orientation score (i.e., materialism score) was then computed by subtracting each participant's intrinsic goal score from his or her extrinsic goals score. High scores reflected a person who was highly oriented towards materialistic goal pursuits and low scores reflected a person who was highly oriented toward intrinsic goal pursuits.

Psychological well-being (PWB). Well-being was examined from a eudaimonic perspective, which defines well-being in terms of optimal human functioning rather than just pleasure attainment and pain avoidance (i.e., hedonic perspective).

Participants were asked to complete Ryff's (1989) PWB scale. This comprised of 54 items that measured the dimensions of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Responses were made on a 6-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 6 (Strongly agree). A composite score was calculated with higher scores indicating greater PWB.

Ecological Footprint. The ecological footprint is a tool that assesses the sustainability of current human activities and overconsumption (Wackernagel & Rees, 1998). Participants' ecological footprints were assessed by asking questions taken from the EPA Victoria's Personal Ecological Footprint calculator that related to food, transport, housing, and waste (EPA Victoria, n.d.). From these questions, the amount of land needed to provide the participant's needs and absorb their carbon dioxide emissions was calculated in global hectares.

Time Affluence. Participants' time affluence (i.e., the perception of having sufficient time to engage in activities that are meaningful) was assessed with the Material and Time Affluence Scale (MATAS) (Kasser & Sheldon, 2009). Responses to the 8-items were made on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). Higher scores indicated greater time affluence.

Mindfulness. Mindfulness levels were assessed using the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) (Brown & Ryan, 2003). This 15-item scale assesses dispositional mindfulness. Participants indicated how frequently they had the experience described in each item (e.g., "I forget a person's name almost as soon as I've been told it for the first time") on a 6-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (Almost always) to 6 (Almost never). Higher scores indicated greater dispositional mindfulness. The MAAS has been shown to be a reliable and valid measure in both university student and adult populations (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

Demographics & self-reported lifestyle change. The demographic questions included items relating to gender, age, education, and income. In addition, questions were asked to assess whether participants had made a shift to a voluntary simplicity lifestyle. Upon analysis of the voluntary simplicity literature, Brown and Kasser (2005)

concluded that the two characteristics that set voluntary simplifiers apart from mainstream individuals are that they have made: 1) a voluntary reduction in monetary spending; and 2) a voluntary reduction in income. They also found that the majority of people who self identified as voluntary simplifiers in their study met these two criteria. For this reason, participants were asked 'Have you voluntarily made a long-term change in your life that has resulted in you spending less money, whether or not your income has changed?' and 'Have you voluntarily made a long-term change in your life that has resulted in you making less money other than retirement?' to identify whether they had made a long-term shift to a simpler lifestyle.

General lifestyle factors. A range of questions relating to aspects of participants' lifestyles were asked such as the number of hours spent watching television and surfing the Internet, as well as the hours spent working for pay, for childcare and other household necessities each week.

4.4 Procedure

From April to May 2012, hard copy and online surveys were distributed to a wide range of people residing in Perth, WA. The cover letter stated that individuals over the age of 18 and who currently lived in WA could complete the survey by either returning it via the reply-paid envelope or submitting it online. Respondents were given the opportunity to indicate if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview and/or go into the prize draw to win four movie tickets to a cinema of their choice by providing their contact details on the final page of the survey. To ensure participant anonymity, this page was later removed from the surveys once data was entered into SPSS (version 20), interview participants were selected, and interviews were scheduled.

4.5 Results

4.5.1 Data Screening and Preparation

Prior to analysis, participants' data were initially screened to ensure the accuracy of data entry and the assumptions of parametric tests were met. Field (2009) states that cases of standardised scores in excess of ± 3.29 are significantly different from other

cases at $p < .001$ and can be classified as outliers. Seven cases with extremely high z scores on the ecological footprint measure were found to be univariate outliers. In addition, two univariate outliers were identified for each of the measures of the Aspiration Index (Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996), with the exception of the domain financial success. One case was eliminated for the mindfulness score on the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (Brown & Ryan, 2003) and personal growth measure of the Psychological Well-being scale (Ryff, 1989).

After removing the univariate outliers, a series of plots were generated to assess for normality. A positively skewed distribution was found for the ecological footprint measure. To reduce this skewness, the ecological footprint measure was transformed (square root). Upon analysis of various correlations, only marginal statistical differences were found between the original ecological footprint measure and the transformed measure with a number of variables. For this reason, the original ecological footprint measure was retained for statistical analyses.

Categorical variables were created to examine the difference in materialism levels and a number of other variables between voluntary simplifiers and non-simplifiers, different age groups (Young: 18 – 28; Middle aged: 29 – 42; Old: 43 years and over), high and low educated individuals (University degree or higher and no university degree respectively) and people on different personal income streams (Low: Below \$24,999; Medium: \$25,000 - \$69,999; High: \$70,000 – over \$200,000).

4.5.2 Factor Analysis

To support the classification of values into intrinsic and extrinsic categories, higher order factor analyses were conducted. The seven subscale scores of the Aspirations Index (AI) were subjected to principal components analysis (PCA) with direct oblimin rotation using SPSS (Table 6). Prior to performing PCA the suitability of the data for factor analysis was assessed. The correlation matrix revealed the presence of many coefficients of .3 and above. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was .75, which exceeded the recommended value of .6 (Kaiser, 1970; 1974). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) also reached statistical significance, supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix.

Principal components analysis revealed the presence of two components with eigenvalues over 1, explaining 43.13% and 22.04% of the variance respectively (a total of 65.17% of variance). The scree plot revealed a break between the second and third components (Table 6). Oblimin rotation revealed that each variable loaded strongly onto one of the two factors. The interpretation of the two components was consistent with previous research on the distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic values, with intrinsic values loading strongly on component 1 and extrinsic values loading strongly on component 2. There was a weak positive correlation between the two factors ($r = .29$). This finding supports previous cross-cultural research findings on extrinsic and intrinsic aspirations (Grouzet et al., 2005; Kasser & Ryan, 1996) and shows this value classification is applicable for the WA population.

Table 6. Pattern and Structure Matrix for PCA with Oblimin Rotation of the Aspiration Index Subscale Scores.

Item	Pattern coefficients		Structure coefficients		Communalities
	Component 1	Component 2	Component 1	Component 2	
Affiliation	.833	-.073	.812	.169	.664
Self acceptance	.829	.098	.858	.339	.745
Physical fitness	.788	.053	.804	.282	.649
Community feeling	.711	-.040	.700	.167	.491
Appealing appearance	.003	.830	.244	.831	.691
Social recognition	-.030	.813	.205	.804	.647
Financial Success	.037	.810	.271	.820	.674

4.5.3 Correlational Analyses

Pearson's correlation was used to explore the relationships between a number of variables (Table 7). According to Cohen's (1998) criteria, a small effect size is .10, medium effect size is .30, and large effect size is .50 or more. There were weak, positive correlations between materialistic values and the following variables: consumption ($r = .12, n = 393, p < .05$); television consumption ($r = .14, n = 371, p < .05$); and time spent surfing the Internet ($r = .13, n = 359, p < .05$), with high levels of materialism being associated with higher levels of ecological impact, television consumption and time spent surfing the Internet. Weak, negative correlations were found between materialism and mindfulness ($r = -.12, n = 421, p < .05$) and materialism and psychological well-being ($r = -.27, n = 422, p < .001$), with high levels of materialism being associated with lower levels of mindfulness and psychological well-being. Extremely weak, negative relationships were found between materialistic values and time affluence ($r = -.05, n = 421, p = .33$) and materialistic values and hours at work ($r = -.008, n = 328, p = .88$), indicating that virtually no relationship existed between these variables.

Strong, positive correlations were found between mindfulness and the following two variables: psychological well-being ($r = .51, n = 431, p < .001$) and time affluence ($r = .45, n = 434, p < .001$). Although weak relationships were found, people who spent more time surfing the Internet had lower levels of mindfulness ($r = -.12, n = 370, p < .05$), whereas people who spent more time watching television were more likely to have higher levels of mindfulness ($r = .18, n = 383, p < .001$). An extremely weak, negative relationship was found between mindfulness and consumption ($r = -.03, n = 405, p > .53$).

There were small to medium sized relationships between time affluence and the variables psychological well-being ($r = .26, n = 431, p < .001$), television consumption ($r = .17, n = 384, p = .001$) and age ($r = .11, n = 430, p < .05$). A medium, negative relationship was found between time affluence and the number of hours spent at work per week ($r = -.30, n = 337, p < .001$). No relationship was found between time affluence and consumption ($r = .006, n = 406, p > .90$).

Finally, there was a weak, positive relationship between the amount of television an individual watched and their consumption behaviour ($r = .13, n = 363, p = .017$), with higher levels of television consumption being associated with greater levels of consumption. Higher levels of consumption were also associated with longer hours spent at work ($r = .11, n = 321, p < .05$).

Table 7. Pearson's Correlations for Measures.

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	1							
2. Materialism	-.07	1						
3. Consumption	.06	.12*	1					
4. Mindfulness	.25**	-.12*	-.03	1				
5. Time Affluence	.11*	-.05	.01	.45**	1			
6. Psychological well-being	.11*	-.27**	.06	.51**	.26*	1		
7. Hours at work	.07	-.01	.11*	-.03	-.30**	.04	1	
8. TV consumption	-.31**	.14*	.13*	.18*	.17**	.08	.00	1
9. Surfing the Internet	-.23**	.13*	.10	-.12*	.01	-.14**	-.13*	.00

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

4.5.4 Group Differences

A number of independent samples t-tests and one way independent ANOVAs were performed to identify whether significant differences existed on a range of variables between the following groups: 1) voluntary simplifiers and non-simplifiers; 2) males and females; 3) individuals on low, medium, and high incomes; 4) young, middle aged, and older people; and 4) high and low educated individuals. Chi square for independence tests were also run to explore whether voluntary simplifiers were more likely to have obtained higher levels of education, earn less income, engage in more

pro-environmental behaviours, and work in part-time employment than non-simplifiers.

1 Voluntary Simplifiers and Non-Simplifiers

To compare voluntary simplifiers and non-simplifiers, a series of independent samples t-tests were performed, which are reported in Table 8. The voluntary simplifiers (VS) scored lower in terms of materialism (VS $M = -2.07$, $SD = .68$; Non VS $M = -1.96$, $SD = .69$), consumption (VS $M = 7.19$, $SD = 2.40$; Non VS $M = 7.38$, $SD = 2.19$), television consumption (VS $M = 8.89$, $SD = 7.61$; Non VS $M = 9.47$, $SD = 7.13$) and hours spent at work (VS $M = 34.07$, $SD = 24.93$; Non VS $M = 36.01$, $SD = 23.75$) and higher on mindfulness (VS $M = 3.98$, $SD = .81$; Non VS $M = 3.96$, $SD = .77$), time affluence (VS $M = 2.89$, $SD = .86$; Non VS $M = 2.77$, $SD = .87$) and psychological well-being (VS $M = 4.53$, $SD = .67$; Non VS $M = 4.46$, $SD = .63$) measures than the non-simplifiers (Non VS). However, no significant differences were found between the voluntary simplifiers and non-simplifiers on these measures.

Table 8. Means, Standard Deviations and t-tests Comparing Voluntary Simplifiers and Non-simplifiers on Different Variables.

	Voluntary Simplifiers (n = 108)		Non-Simplifiers (n = 325)		t
	M	SD	M	SD	
Materialism	-2.07	0.68	-1.96	0.69	-1.42
Mindfulness	3.98	0.81	3.96	0.77	0.22
Consumption	7.19	2.40	7.38	2.19	-0.74
Time affluence	2.89	0.86	2.77	0.87	1.20
Hours at work	34.07	24.93	36.01	23.75	-0.63
Psychological well-being	4.53	0.67	4.46	0.63	0.91
Television consumption	8.89	7.61	9.47	7.13	-0.66

Note: * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Chi square tests for independence indicated no significant association between lifestyle choice (i.e., voluntary simplifier or non-simplifier) and level of education attained ($X^2 (1, n = 431) = 1.56, p = .21, phi = -.07$), personal income ($X^2 (1, n = 426) = 1.38, p = .24, phi = .06$), amount of animal products consumed ($X^2 (5, n = 434) = .94, p = .97, Cramer's V = .05$), distance travelled on public transport each week ($X^2 (5, n = 434) = 5.68, p = .34, Cramer's V = .11$), distance travelled by car each week ($X^2 (5, n = 433) = 9.56, p = .09, Cramer's V = .15$) and amount of flying per year ($X^2 (4, n = 433) = 4.17, p = .38, Cramer's V = .10$).

There was a significant association between lifestyle choice and current work situation with a lower proportion of voluntary simplifiers being engaged in full-time work and a higher proportion being unemployed, employed part-time, and self-employed full-time than non-simplifiers ($X^2 (7, n = 433) = 27.28, p < .001, Cramer's V = .25$).

2 Males and Females

Independent samples t-tests revealed a number of significant differences between males and females. Table 9 shows that males ($M = -1.80$, $SD = .70$) were more materialistic than females ($M = -2.10$, $SD = .67$; $t(415) = 4.28$, $p < .001$, two tailed), scoring higher on a number of extrinsic values and lower on intrinsic value subscales. In relation to the importance of various values, significant differences were found between males and females on a number of the intrinsic subscale measures of the Aspirations Index with males indicating lower importance for self-acceptance ($t(424) = -4.7$, $p = .001$, two-tailed) and affiliation ($t(424) = -2.72$, $p = .01$, two-tailed) than females. Males placed greater importance on the extrinsic goals of financial success ($M = -.58$, $SD = .66$) and social recognition ($M = -1.15$, $SD = .61$) than females respectively ($M = -.78$, $SD = .60$; $t(426) = 3.18$, $p = .002$, two-tailed and $M = -1.54$, $SD = .54$; $t(424) = 6.80$, $p < .001$, two-tailed). No significant differences were found between males and females for the life domains of community feeling ($t(424) = -1.35$, $p = .18$, two-tailed), physical fitness ($t(248.34) = -1.39$, $p = .17$, two-tailed) and attractive appearance ($t(424) = -.74$, $p = .46$, two-tailed). Males also had higher consumption levels than females ($t(402) = 3.35$, $p = .001$, two tailed).

Males reported having significantly higher levels of time affluence ($t(429) = 2.24$, $p = .03$, two-tailed) and lower levels of psychological well-being on measures of positive relations with others ($t(428) = -2.01$, $p = .04$, two-tailed), personal growth ($t(427) = -2.24$, $p = .03$, two-tailed) and purpose in life ($t(429) = -2.06$, $p = .04$, two-tailed) than females. Furthermore, males were more likely to spend more time surfing the Internet each week ($t(369) = 2.77$, $p = .006$, two-tailed) than females.

Table 9. Means, Standard Deviations and t-tests Comparing Materialism and Other Variables of Males and Females.

	Males (n = 151)		Females (n = 280)		t
	M	SD	M	SD	
Materialism	-1.80	0.71	-2.09	0.67	4.28**
Self Acceptance	0.86	0.44	1.06	0.42	-4.70**
Affiliation	0.96	0.51	1.09	0.45	-2.72**
Physical Fitness	0.86	0.55	0.93	0.43	-1.49
Community Feeling	0.39	0.66	0.48	0.63	-1.35
Financial Success	-0.58	-0.66	-0.78	0.60	3.18*
Appearance	-1.30	0.63	-1.25	0.60	-0.74
Social Recognition	-1.15	0.61	-1.54	0.54	6.80**
Mindfulness	4.05	0.69	3.92	0.82	1.54
Consumption	7.84	2.38	7.07	2.12	3.35**
Time Affluence	2.93	0.85	2.73	0.88	2.24*
Hours at Work	35.02	21.66	35.94	25.42	-0.34
Psychological Well-being	4.41	0.63	4.52	0.65	-0.01
Television consumption	9.43	7.09	9.28	7.34	0.19
Surfing the Internet	11.93	8.64	9.41	8.23	2.77

Note: For two tailed test, * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

3 Difference in Personal Income Level

A one-way between groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to explore the impact of income level on a number of variables such as materialism, time affluence, and consumption. Participants were divided into three groups according to their level of personal annual income (Group 1 (Low): \$0 - \$24,999; Group 2 (Medium): \$25,000 – \$69,999; Group 3 (High): \$70,000 – over \$200,000). Statistical differences were found at the $p < .001$ level for psychological well-being ($F(2, 418) = 9.97, p < .001$), hours at work ($F(2, 332) = 49.20, p < .001$) and consumption ($F(2, 395) = 21.94, p < .001$). Post-hoc comparisons using Tukey HSD test showed that the mean psychological well-being score for Group 3 ($M = 4.65, SD = .53$) was higher than Group 1 ($M = 4.34, SD = .66$) and Group 2 ($M = 4.42, SD = .69$). Although Group 2 scored higher on the measure of psychological well-being than Group 1, the difference was not significant. The mean scores for the number of hours spent at work each week differed significantly between all groups (Group 1: $M = 19.10, SD = 21.81$; Group 2: $M = 38.88, SD = 23.44$; Group 3: $M = 46.25, SD = 18.56$), with lower income earners working significantly fewer hours than higher income earners. In relation to consumption, statistical differences existed for the mean scores between Group 3 ($M = 8.30, SD = 2.47$) and Groups 1 ($M = 6.69, SD = 1.97$) and 2 ($M = 6.97, SD = 1.94$). No statistical difference was found between Group 1 and 2.

4 Different Age Groups: Young, Middle Aged, and Old

A one way between groups ANOVA was conducted to examine the impact of age on variables such as materialism and consumption. Participants were divided into three age groups: Group 1 participants were between 18 and 28 (young); Group 2 between 29 and 42 (middle aged); and Group 3 were 43 years and over (old). A significant difference was found at the $p < .05$ level for age and materialism: $F(2, 413) = 4.04, p < .05$. In addition, significant differences were found at the $p < .001$ level for age and mindfulness ($F(2, 426) = 10.06, p < .001$), hours spent at work per week ($F(2, 334) = 13.94, p < 0.001$), hours spent surfing the Internet ($F(2, 367) = 12.29, p < .001$) and hours spent watching television ($F(2,380) = 14.49, p < .001$). Post-hoc comparisons using Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for materialism of Group 1 ($M = -1.86, SD = .73$) was significantly different from that of Group 2 ($M = -2.09, SD = .72$),

with younger participants (18 – 28 years of age) having significantly higher levels of materialism than middle aged participants (29 – 42 years of age); however, no significant differences were found for participants 43 years and over ($M = -2.01$, $SD = .61$).

In terms of mindfulness scores, Group 3 ($M = 4.18$, $SD = .80$) was significantly different from Group 1 ($M = 3.77$, $SD = .78$) and 2 ($M = 3.95$, $SD = .72$), with older participants being more mindful than younger participants. The mean score for hours spent at work of Group 1 ($M = 26.46$, $SD = 20.93$) was significantly different from that of Group 2 ($M = 41.48$, $SD = 21.11$) and Group 3 ($M = 39.19$, $SD = 26.92$), with younger participants working on average over 10 hours less per week than older participants. In terms of time spent surfing the Internet, Group 1 ($M = 12.51$, $SD = 8.90$) spent significantly more time surfing the Internet than Groups 2 ($M = 10.93$, $SD = 8.36$) and 3 ($M = 7.40$, $SD = 7.32$). However, the inverse relationship was found in relation to hours spent watching television per week with younger participants in Groups 1 ($M = 7.39$, $SD = 6.24$) and 2 ($M = 8.53$, $SD = 6.63$) watching significantly less television than older participants in Group 3 ($M = 11.96$, $SD = 7.99$).

4.6 Discussion

The aim of this preliminary research was to establish baseline data for materialistic values and consumption behaviour in Perth, Western Australia. Firstly, the research set out to establish the structure of people's values orientation and whether the distinction between extrinsic (i.e., materialistic values) and intrinsic values existed in the WA community. Secondly, the relationships between materialistic values, consumption behaviour, and a number of associated variables (e.g., television consumption, hours at work, and mindfulness) were explored. Thirdly, differences between various groups such as voluntary simplifiers and non-simplifiers were examined. As very little research has been conducted on materialistic values and voluntary simplifiers in Perth (WA) it was important to obtain this baseline data given Perth's unique characteristics such as geographic isolation, high per capita rates of consumption, and booming economy, particularly at the time this research was conducted (2012).

4.6.1 Value Orientation of Western Australian Sample

Firstly, the preliminary research found empirical support for the hypothesis (H1) that there would be a clear distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic values in a WA sample. Factor analysis of the Aspiration Index revealed the sample of Western Australians' values fell into two distinct categories – intrinsic and extrinsic (i.e., materialistic). This finding supports research by Grouzet et al. (2005) that demonstrated extrinsic and intrinsic aspirations formed a single bipolar dimension across 15 different cultures with over 1,800 participants. Subsequently, this meant the extensive body of values research could be applied to the design of the educational intervention.

4.6.2 Exploring Correlational Relationships Between Key Variables

1 Materialistic Values and Consumption Behaviour

Secondly, there was empirical data to demonstrate a significant positive linkage between materialistic values and consumption behaviour (H2). Although this positive relationship was only weak ($r = .12$) this finding supports the proposition by Kasser (2002) that people who are highly oriented towards materialistic values are more likely to organise their lives in ways that strive for the acquisition of material goods as a way of attaining happiness and success. It also reinforces previous research that has found highly materialistic people are more likely to behave in environmentally damaging ways, such as failing to recycle, buy second-hand, and conserve resources, compared to more intrinsically oriented people (section 2.2). While correlation does not equal causation, it demonstrates that a reduction in materialistic values (achieved by promoting aspects of the intrinsically oriented voluntary simplicity lifestyle as well as teaching mindfulness) is related to decreases in consumption behaviour.

2 Materialistic Values and Television Consumption

This study also found that Western Australians who watched more television were more likely to have higher levels of materialistic values (H3) and consumption behaviour (H4) than those who watched fewer hours of television. This finding is consistent with previous research that demonstrates people who consume large

amounts of television tend to be more materialistic than others (Good, 2007; Saunders, 2007). This may be because individuals who watch more television (particularly commercial television) are likely to be exposed to advertising messages that perpetuate materialistic ideas as well as television shows that promote higher standards of living for people to emulate (Kasser, 2002; Koger & Winter, 2010) (section 2.2.11). Bertman (1998) argues that exposure to materialistic messages via the television (e.g., material goods increase happiness and social standing) may result in people adopting the idea that non-materialistic pursuits, such as caring for the community and fostering relationships, do not matter. As a consequence, they are likely to spend their time thinking about and searching for the next product to acquire. Good (2007) found that materialism mediates the relationship between television viewing and attitudes about the environment. In other words, the materialistic messages that are internalised by watching television are incompatible and conflict with pro-environmental attitudes and values. This finding is important to note as television consumption appears to be a key factor in perpetuating and maintaining materialistic values. Therefore, attempts that are made to encourage people to seek out more creative activities (other than watching television) as well as question the messages they receive from advertising and television shows are warranted. As Good (2007, p. 378) offers, *“Maybe the time has come when we should view television as a social drug, much the way we view alcohol consumption: enjoyable in small doses but particularly problematic in large sustained quantities, and positively dangerous for the young”*.

3 Consumption Behaviour and Work Hours

The data supported the hypothesis that long work hours have a positive relationship with consumption (H5). Longer work hours were also associated with less time affluence. These findings reinforce arguments by Schor (1991) that long work hours drive people to consume more by locking them into a cycle of ‘work-and-spend’ (sections 1.1 and 2.8). They also support findings of Kasser and Brown (2003) that showed people who work fewer hours per week are more likely to engage in pro-environmental behaviours and have smaller ecological footprints. In contrast, people who work long hours are more likely to feel rushed in their daily lives and therefore may get locked into unsustainable patterns of consumption that favour convenience

and time saving commodities and services (e.g., driving to work, dry cleaning, and buying takeaway) (Pocock et al., 2012). These time saving measures are typically more energy-intensive and have a larger ecological impact than other 'simpler' and more effortful behaviours (e.g., cycling to work and cooking meals from raw ingredients) (Wiedmann et al., 2011).

In addition, individuals who work long hours are likely to have higher levels of consumption because they do not have the time and space to consider the impact their behaviour has on the environment, explore alternative ways to behave, and make changes to their routine to live more sustainability (Pocock et al., 2012). If people are time-poor and rushed, they are more likely to revert to mindless habits and are less likely to engage in activities such as critically reflecting on life (Bertman, 1998; Langer, 1989). Instead, any spare time is likely to be invested in activities that do not require much energy, such as watching television or going shopping, thereby further reinforcing materialistic values.

4 Consumption Behaviour and Time Affluence

For the reasons outlined above, it was hypothesised that time affluence would be negatively associated with consumption behaviour (H12). This hypothesis was not supported as virtually no relationship was found between the two variables. This may be due to people's different lifestyles and motivations producing mixed results. For instance, people with lower levels of consumption, such as committed voluntary simplifiers, often spend considerable time and effort engaged in pro-environmental behaviours. For example, buying a loaf of bread may take only a few minutes to carry out; however, making bread from raw ingredients can take one to three hours. In short, despite people (i.e., simplifiers and downshifter) taking steps to reclaim their time by cutting back on paid work, they may still feel time-poor due to the physical work and effort that is required to live 'simply'. In contrast, other people who have too much time on their hands may experience boredom and therefore, attempt to fill the 'existential vacuum' with goal directed activities promoted by consumer culture such as shopping (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Further research is needed to explore the complex relationship between time and different lifestyles. It would be overly simplistic to assert that no relationship exists between time affluence and

consumption behaviour based on the findings of the present study, especially since a number of scholars have argued that reducing work hours is critical to decreasing consumption and lowering greenhouse gas emissions (Pullinger, 2013; Schor, 2010).

5 Time Affluence and Psychological Well-Being

All that being said, time affluent individuals were more likely to have higher levels of psychological well-being (H14). This finding supports research by Kasser and Sheldon (2009) that found having sufficient time to do enjoyable and fulfilling activities was an important factor to achieving well-being. In addition, Kasser and Brown (2003) surveyed Americans in relation to the hours they worked and their satisfaction with life. The data from their study showed that people who work longer hours have lower levels of life satisfaction than those who work fewer hours. Although hours at work is not exactly the same as time affluence (i.e., people's sense that they have enough time to engage in meaningful activities), if an individual works a standard 40 hour week and has to commute long distances to work, they are left with little discretionary time. Therefore, they are more likely to feel time-poor. Feeling rushed and busy often leads to increased stress levels, cognitive overload, and little time for intrinsic pursuits, which can reduce a person's psychological well-being (Pocock et al., 2012).

6 Time Affluence and Television Consumption

Interestingly, the current study also found that time-poor people were more likely to watch more television (arguably a time wasting activity). This finding may suggest that time-poor people lack basic self-awareness of where their time is going, particularly in the domain of watching television. For this reason, helping participants to explore how they use their time and whether this time is being spent on activities that are most important to them may be useful in an educational intervention to decrease consumption and materialistic values. In other words, participants will look at whether they are living in accordance with their most important values.

7 Materialistic Values and Psychological Well-Being

It is not only time poverty that contributes to lower levels of psychological well-being in a WA sample, but also a materialistic mindset. The hypothesis that materialistic

values would be negatively associated with psychological well-being was supported (H7). It was found that the less materialistic an individual was the higher their composite psychological well-being score. This result builds on and extends the findings of previous studies that have found materialism to be negatively associated with subjective well-being (Brown & Kasser, 2005; Kasser & Ahuvia, 2002). This research was the first to explore the relationship between materialism and psychological well-being as measured by Ryff's (1989) scale. A meta-study on the factors that support people's psychological well-being identified five key themes: 1) physical activity; 2) awareness (i.e., curiosity of the world around you); 3) connected social relationships; 4) learning new skills; and 5) giving to others (Aked, Marks, Cordon, & Thompson, 2009). These activities are all arguably intrinsically oriented because they are inherently rewarding and satisfy an individual's innate psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). On the other hand, it has been found that when a person focuses on engaging in extrinsic pursuits, such as beautifying their appearance and striving for financial success, this is a poor way to satisfy their core psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kasser, 2002).

8 Materialistic Values and Mindfulness

The data showed that lower levels of materialism were significantly associated with higher levels of mindfulness (H8). This finding is consistent with the research literature that has established mindfulness as a skill that can help people clarify their values, shift towards intrinsic values, and become better attuned to their needs (section 3.5). It follows that mindfulness training could decrease materialistic values in a sample of Western Australians.

9 Consumption Behaviour and Mindfulness

An extremely weak, negative relationship was found between mindfulness and consumption levels (H9). This finding suggests that mindfulness on its own may not be enough to decrease excessive consumption. It is possible that many mindful individuals only engage in small-scale environmentally friendly behaviours that can be easily adopted (e.g., recycling) and overlook other high consumption activities such as flying. Alternatively, this may be an example of the effects of 'McMindfulness' (section 3.7.2). 'McMindfulness' is where workplaces utilise mindfulness as a simple workplace

tool to increase employee productivity and decrease stress levels, while decontextualizing it from its deeper origins and philosophies (Purser & Loy, 2013). Subsequently, people may engage with mindfulness training in a superficial way and fail to reflect deeply on their lives, values, and the impact of their consumption behaviour. For these reasons, other strategies such as activating intrinsic values and facilitating conversations that connect personal consumption behaviours to ecological destruction may be necessary to bring about shifts to less consumptive lifestyles.

10 Mindfulness and Psychological Well-Being

Not surprisingly, mindfulness was found to be positively associated with psychological well-being (H10). This finding adds to a large body of empirical research that has found mindfulness is associated with a range of positive psychological benefits, such as self-regulated behaviour and positive emotional states (Brown & Ryan, 2003). This finding also demonstrates that mindfulness has the potential to improve Western Australians' well-being, thereby decreasing the desire to consume unnecessarily (section 3.5.4). It also increases the possibility that they will be open to pursuing alternative lifestyles and new practices, as positive emotions have been found to expand and broaden a person's outlook (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Fredrickson et al., 2008). The results of this preliminary research suggest that mindfulness may be a skill that can help decrease people's materialistic values and increase their psychological well-being. In terms of how the intervention is framed and promoted to the general public, the benefits of mindfulness training could be emphasised to appeal to stressed out, time-poor Western Australians who are searching for a more balanced lifestyle.

11 Mindfulness and Time Affluence

This research found having higher levels of time affluence was strongly associated with higher levels of mindfulness (H13). This may be due to the fact that if people feel like they do not need to rush through the day, then they are in a better position to attend to the present moment. In contrast, if people are time-poor they may find themselves engaging in rapid 'task switching' and not fully immersed in the task at hand. Time-poor people are also likely to be distracted by thoughts to do with the future, thinking about the next thing they need to do, and then the next thing after that (Schulte, 2015). Research has shown that paying attention to the present moment can slow

down the subjective passage of time and decrease the extent to which people feel rushed and hurried (Rudd & Aaker, 2011). This finding is of considerable importance as it shows mindfulness training may help people to avoid the consequences of living fast-paced lives and may assist them to feel like they have sufficient time to engage in sustainable living practices.

4.6.3 Group Differences

1 Voluntary Simplifiers versus Non-Simplifiers

The results of this research showed that a higher proportion of voluntary simplifiers were likely to be unemployed, engaged in part-time work, or self-employed on a full-time basis than non-simplifiers (H15). This was to be expected as a key element of voluntarily simplifying involves people reclaiming time by reducing their hours of paid work (Alexander, 2015; Andrews, 1997; Hamilton & Mail, 2003).

While Brown and Kasser (2005) found voluntary simplifiers had smaller ecological footprints than their mainstream counterparts, in the present study no significant difference was found in the ecological footprint size of voluntary simplifiers and non-simplifiers. However, this finding was consistent with previous research by Csutora (2012). Csutora (2012) found there was no significant difference between the ecological and carbon footprints of 'green' consumers (i.e., people who were voluntarily engaged in pro-environmental behaviours such as driving a car less and cutting down on energy use) and 'brown' consumers (i.e., people who were completely inactive or not interested in engaging in pro-environmental behaviours). This 'behaviour-impact gap' between 'green' and 'brown' consumers may be explained by a number of factors such as the rebound effect and contextual factors (e.g., infrastructure and social norms). The attempts of voluntary simplifiers to tread lightly on the Earth are likely to be constrained to a certain extent by both of these factors. As Thøgersen (2005) argues:

"...although individual consumers...have some discretionary power over the consumption pattern...limited abilities and restricted opportunities in combination with norms and incentives...make it difficult even for highly motivated individuals to do anything radical to improve the sustainability of their lifestyles" (p.167-168).

In a culture that celebrates and rewards overconsumption, it may not be surprising that simplifiers still consume unsustainably. In the present study this was illustrated by the finding that the ecological footprint of Western Australian simplifiers was larger than the average Australian's ecological footprint of 6.56 global hectares, which is more than three times the world average (Wiedmann et al., 2011). Indeed, a study by Craig-Lees and Hill (2002) revealed that simplifiers still consume many of the same material goods as non-simplifiers (e.g., cars and household equipment), but differences exist in the considerations and criteria simplifiers impose on their consumption decisions (e.g., favouring functionality over status of goods).

Alexander and Ussher (2015; 2012) argue that mainstreaming the voluntary simplicity lifestyle may be the solution to issues such as overconsumption. However, the findings from this preliminary research show it is questionable as to whether voluntary simplicity as it is currently practiced in Western Australia will be enough to bring about significant decreases in consumption. The results indicate that WA voluntary simplifiers may not be as ecologically sustainable as the broader research literature seems to suggest. It appears that they may not have made the radical changes in lifestyle that are urgently required to significantly reduce environmental impact.

Nevertheless, the preliminary research findings were likely to have been affected by the fact that there are many different types of voluntary simplifiers that exist with varying levels of commitment to sustainability practices (Chapter 3, Table 1). Some simplifiers are committed to living in ecologically sensitive ways and have altered their travel and consumption patterns to adhere to the voluntary simplicity ethos. Whereas others may have adopted only a few behaviours to simplify (e.g., decluttering) but still engage in high consumption activities such as air travel. The criterion that was used in the current study to classify simplifiers was whether they had made a long-term change in their lives that resulted in making less money (other than retirement) and spending less money. Given the many different types of simplifiers that exist, this criterion was inadequate. It was unclear whether individuals who met the criteria had reclaimed their time and slowed down the pace of their lives to pursue non-materialistic activities. This criterion may have also captured people who were still

living lives that did not reject the norms of mainstream consumer culture or had adopted some simple living practices but not others.

In addition, the ecological footprint measure may have failed to capture subtle shifts in consumption behaviour. The ecological footprint is commonly used to measure eco-efficient consumption behaviour in the areas of food, transport, housing, and waste rather than the many times an individual refuses to engage in consumption (Luckins, 2011). Since the voluntary simplicity lifestyle is based on satisfying essential needs and is characterised by a rejection of frivolous consumption, this measure failed to capture differences in relation to the consumption of everyday material goods.

2 Differences in Income

Not surprisingly, it was found that people on higher income levels had higher levels of consumption (H5), with people earning \$70,000 to over \$200,00 per year having significantly higher ecological footprints than those on middle (\$25,000-\$69,999) to low incomes (below \$24,999). This finding is consistent with previous research that shows income is a major (if not, the most important) contributing factor to the size of a person's ecological footprint (Lenzen & Murray, 2001). While households and individuals on higher incomes are more likely to purchase products that are better quality and have less environmental impact, the benefits of this green consumption behaviour is often overridden by the tendency of people on higher incomes to consume more overall and engage in high consumption activities such as air travel (Wiedmann et al., 2011). In fact, research has found income plays the largest role in contributing to an individual's consumption of air-travel (Burke & Ralston, 2011). In the present study, the lowest income earners (earning below the minimum wage) had the lowest consumption levels. This finding is consistent with previous research by Csutora (2012) who found that underprivileged families have smaller ecological footprints than wealthier families due to a lack of financial resources, thereby restricting their ability to consume.

The present study found that people on higher incomes worked significantly longer hours than lower income groups. The highest income earners had significantly higher levels of psychological well-being than the middle and low-income earners. However,

it is important to note that although significant, only marginal differences existed on the average psychological well-being score for each income group (Low income $M = 4.32$; Medium income $M = 4.42$; High income $M = 4.65$). This finding supports research that shows once a person's basic to moderate needs are met, increases in income have diminishing marginal returns (Aknin et al., 2009; Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, & Stone, 2006).

3 Differences Between Age Groups

Younger participants were found to be significantly more materialistic than middle-aged participants, but not older participants, suggesting that materialism may be influenced not just by upbringing and values, but also by stage of life. The significant difference between younger participants and middle-aged participants may be due to the fact that middle-aged people may be more settled and focused on raising children than on acquiring goods to attract a mate. From an evolutionary perspective, all people have ancestral motives, such as to make friends, attain status, and acquire a mate (Griskevicius, Redden, & Ackerman, 2014). When one is younger they are likely to be more concerned with wanting to fit into the social group, seek status within that group, and impress a potential mate (Mittal, Griskevicius, & Ellis, 2014). For this reason, they are likely to be more sensitive to advertising messages and subsequently focus on acquiring branded goods to signal their desirability and uniqueness to achieve these goals. On the other hand, people who have already acquired a mate and are raising children will direct their resources towards raising their family (e.g., paying for good educational opportunities). For older individuals, clothing tends to be far more sensible and functional, whereas younger people want to display their individual and group identity through their clothing attire (Griskevicius et al., 2014). The finding that older participants had higher levels of materialism than middle-aged participants was surprising given people tend to become less materialistic as they get older (Belk, 1985) and live frugally during retirement (Davey, 2016). Although it is important to note that in the present study 'older' participants included people who were still a long way off retirement (in their forties, fifties, and sixties).

4 Gender Differences

Gender differences were also present with males being found to be more materialistic than females. This finding is consistent with previous research (Beutel & Marini, 1995; Browne & Kaldenberg, 1997; La Barbera & Gürhan, 1997; Ryan & Dziurawiec, 2001) and suggests that men prioritise extrinsic values to a greater extent over intrinsic values than women. This may be due to men being conditioned by society to feel that they need to be the main 'breadwinner' for the family (Harris, 1995). Subsequently, males may prioritise attaining financial wealth more than females. From an evolutionary perspective, this extrinsic values orientation may be explained by social signalling. Men are more likely to attract and retain a mate if they are able to display their status through the acquisition of unique and scarce goods that symbolise wealth (Griskevicius et al., 2014).

4.7 Limitations

This preliminary research has a number of limitations that are common in self-administered surveys. The results are self-reported and therefore may not accurately reflect participants' consumption behaviour. It has been argued that participants commonly overstate their practice of environmental behaviour (Csutora, 2012). Consequently, the survey findings may be biased. In addition, all of the data in this study were correlational in nature. Therefore, any attempt to assign causality must be done cautiously.

The use of several measures may have been problematic in terms of their construct validity. As discussed, Brown and Kasser's (2005) classification criterion of voluntary simplifiers may not have accurately reflected genuine shifts to simpler lifestyles. It is likely that this measure captured mainstream shifts in lifestyle rather than more radical shifts that challenge the dominant paradigm of consumer culture. In addition, the ecological footprint measure was also problematic in that it did not measure the subtle shifts in consumption behaviour that voluntary simplifiers make. The extent to which voluntary simplifiers invest their time and energy contributing to their local community, volunteering to help others, providing proper care for their children, and refusing to consume certain items may also yield significant social and ecological

benefits, which cannot be captured by the ecological footprint measure. The selection of these measures may explain why no significant relationships were found between consumption behaviour and a number of variables (e.g., time affluence and hours at work) and no differences were found between simplifiers and non-simplifiers on the ecological footprint measure. More sensitive measures may be required to determine whether people have made genuine long-term shifts to simplify their lifestyles and the ecological implications of doing so.

Finally, television consumption was measured by simply asking participants the question, 'How many hours do you watch television per week, on average?' Participants were not asked to indicate how much commercial and non-commercial television (i.e., public broadcasting) they consumed. This is important to note as commercial television contains significantly more materialistic messages and advertising than non-commercial television.

4.8 Conclusion

Overall, the results from the survey provide solid baseline data for a sample of the WA population. The results also demonstrate that materialistic values play out in a similar fashion in WA as they do in North America and other parts of the world. Western Australians who oriented more strongly towards materialistic values were more likely to have higher levels of consumption, indicating that a reduction in these values may lead to a reduction in their consumption behaviour.

These preliminary findings suggest many Western Australians may be locked into a 'work- and-spend' culture as demonstrated by their high ecological footprints and long work hours. Higher levels of consumption were associated with longer hours at work. In addition, the findings that low levels of materialistic values were associated with higher levels of mindfulness and lower levels of television consumption respectively were promising. Although causation cannot be shown between these variables, it will be useful to test out through the implementation of the educational intervention whether encouraging people to work fewer hours and watch less television, as well as cultivating greater levels of mindfulness in their daily lives, decreases participants' materialistic values and consumption behaviour.

While time affluence was not strongly associated with lower levels of materialism and consumption, it appears to be a critical factor that cannot be overlooked in reducing excessive consumption. This study found that time affluence was associated with higher levels of psychological well-being, fewer hours at work, and higher levels of mindfulness. The research literature suggests that increased well-being and mindfulness levels may result in benefits such as people broadening their outlook and having greater awareness of their behaviour and the underlying sources of dissatisfaction in their lives (section 3.5.4). Subsequently, consumption behaviour and materialistic values may decrease as a result of experiencing increases in these variables. For these reasons, when designing an educational intervention to decrease materialistic values and consumption, it may be important to help people increase their time affluence.

The lack of significant difference between voluntary simplifiers and non-simplifiers in relation to measures such as consumption, materialism and mindfulness needs to be explored in further detail with qualitative research. The research literature and findings of this preliminary research highlight the voluntary simplicity lifestyle, which is practised in a myriad of ways, cannot easily be classified by simple criterion. In the next chapter, in-depth semi-structured interviews with voluntary simplifiers and mainstream materialistic individuals are analysed. The purpose of doing this is to gain a better understanding of the voluntary simplicity lifestyle as it is practised in WA and the role it can play in decreasing materialistic values and consumption behaviour in an educational intervention.

Chapter 5

Exploring the Lives of Voluntary Simplifiers in Western Australia

Given the lack of significant difference found between simplifiers and non-simplifiers in relation to a number of key variables associated with consumption in the quantitative component of phase 1 of this research project (Chapter 4), it is important to explore the nature of simplifiers' and non-simplifiers' lives in more depth. Since it can be difficult to capture differences in these lifestyles using quantitative measures (McDonald, 2014), it is necessary to investigate the subtler, qualitative aspects of the lived experience of simplifiers contrasted against a group of mainstream highly materialistic, non-simplifiers. Gaining an in-depth understanding of the key characteristics of a voluntary simplicity lifestyle may provide insight into how it would be possible to encourage others to emulate and adopt this way of life. This task is the aim of the current chapter.

The first part of this chapter focuses on exploring the following key questions relating to voluntary simplicity lifestyles:

- a) What factors lead to the adoption of a voluntary simplicity lifestyle?
- b) What are the key characteristics, practices, and philosophy of the voluntary simplicity lifestyle?
- c) What challenges and obstacles do voluntary simplifiers face in adopting this lifestyle?
- d) What benefits do voluntary simplifiers experience in making the shift in lifestyle?

The second part of this chapter focuses on the perceptions others (i.e., materialistic non-simplifiers) have towards the practice of voluntary simplicity. This is to obtain a better understanding of the barriers and misconceptions mainstream materialistic Western Australians hold about this way of life so they can be dismantled. In addition,

the potential entry points for materialistic people in adopting a simpler way of life are explored. Finding out how others perceive this lifestyle is critical to informing how the intervention is designed, framed, and marketed to the mainstream population.

5.1 Methods

5.1.1 Sampling Procedure and Participants

Potential participants were primarily recruited from a pool of people who had previously filled in the lifestyle survey and had expressed interest in being interviewed. Materialists were selected based on scoring highly on extrinsic (materialistic) values. Voluntary simplifiers were selected based on the following criteria:

- a) Scoring highly in intrinsic values relative to the rest of the sample (i.e., one or more standard deviations away from the mean); and
- b) Having made a voluntary decision to work less for pay and to spend less.

There was, however, a shortage of people who met this criteria for being a voluntary simplifier in the pool of people who had filled in the lifestyle survey. For this reason, more participants were recruited via online communities that focused on the topic of simple living and voluntary simplicity in Australia. These included: The Simplicity Institute (Alexander & Ussher, n.d.); Aussies Living Simply Forum ('Aussies Living Simply', n.d.); and The Down to Earth Forum (Hetzl, n.d.). It was assumed that the people accessing these sites would be living simply. Once permissions had been obtained from the website hosts, messages were posted in these forums outlining the research project. Western Australian members were invited to contact the researcher for further information if they were interested in being interviewed.

Each interview took place in a location where participants felt comfortable and at a time that was convenient for them. Consent was obtained before the interviews commenced (Appendix III). Voluntary simplifiers who had been recruited via online communities focused on simple living were asked to complete the original lifestyle survey (Appendix II). Participants were assured that interview content would be treated in a confidential manner and a pseudonym was assigned to each participant to ensure anonymity. Each

interview followed a semi-structured interview format (Appendix IV) and took approximately one hour to conduct. Participants could withdraw from the study at any time. The interviews had a phenomenological focus (i.e., they were from the perspective of the participant). Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim and imported into NVivo (version 10) for thematic coding. The themes were recurring concepts described by the participants. These themes were coded into a range of different nodes. Key themes were mind mapped out in relation to each participant to assist in organising the ideas and gaining further insight into the qualitative data (Figure 6 and Figure 7) (Brightman, 2003).

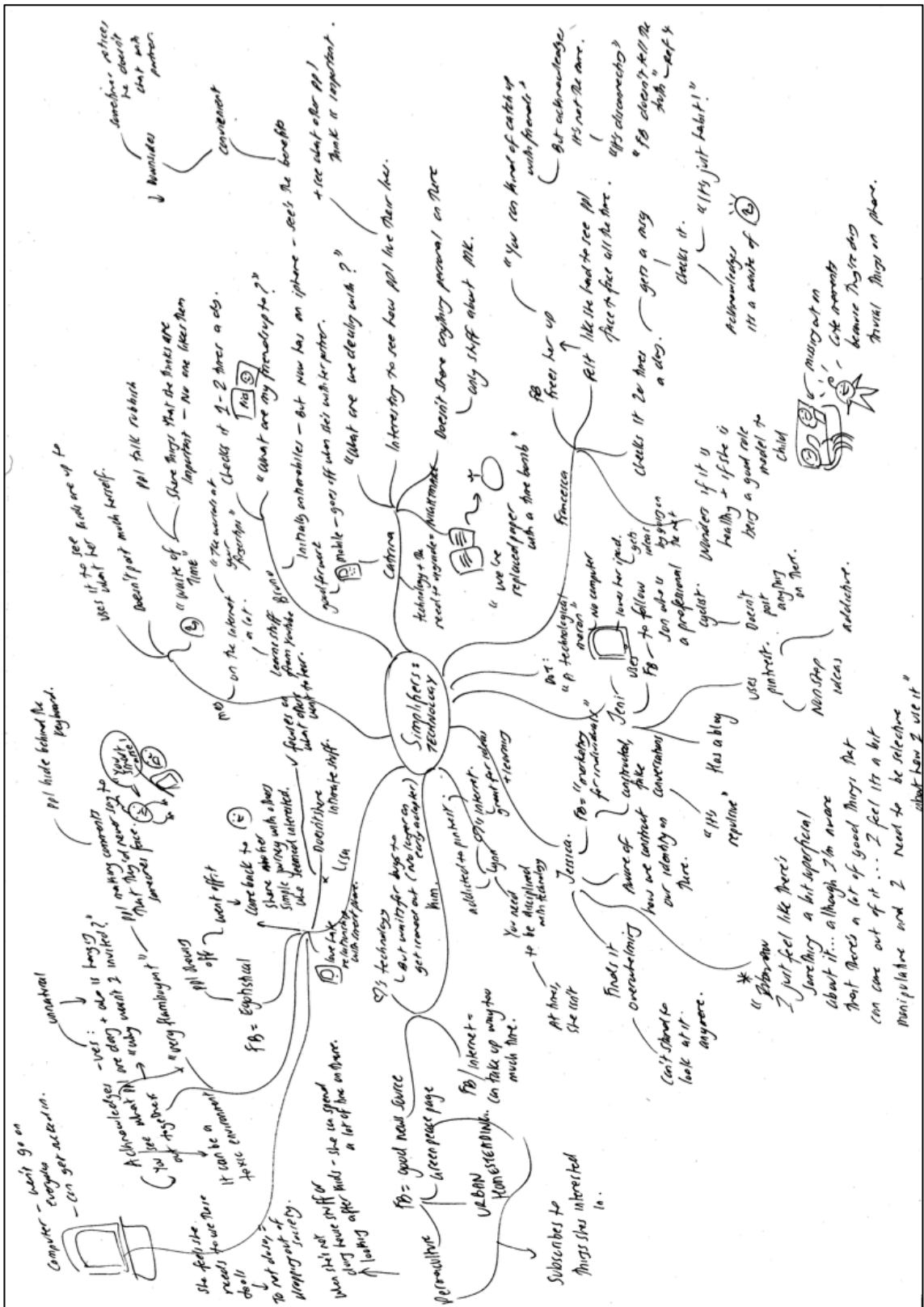


Figure 7. Mind Map for Theme 'Technology' for Voluntary Simplifiers

5.1.2 Demographics

Participants who were interviewed lived in Western Australia, primarily in the Perth metropolitan area. Materialists' ages ranged from 19 to 64, with a mean age of 36.79. Nine materialists were female and five male. Voluntary simplifiers' ages ranged from 28 to 77, with a mean age of 45.38. Thirteen simplifiers were female and two male. The demographics for each group are summarised in the table below (Table 10).

Table 10. Participants' Demographics and Scores on Lifestyle Measures.

Variable	Mean (SD)	
	Materialists	Voluntary Simplifiers
	(n = 14)	(n = 15)
Age	36.79(11.34)	45.38(13.85)
Gender (Female)	64.3%	86.7%
Unemployed	14.3%	13.3%
Employed part-time	28.6%	46.7%
Employed full-time	57.1%	40%
Time affluence	1.82(0.60)	3.00(0.28)
Mindfulness	3.57(0.94)	4.53(0.55)
Psychological well-being	4.19(0.70)	4.91(0.38)
Ecological footprint	7.95(4.14)	5.27(0.70)

With an improved operationalisation of voluntary simplicity (i.e., participants' self identifying as voluntary simplifiers in addition to meeting the voluntary simplicity criteria) clear differences can be seen between the two groups in relation to the following key variables: ecological footprint; psychological well-being; mindfulness; and time affluence (see Table 10).

5.2 Triggers for Shift in Lifestyle

All voluntary simplifiers discussed why they had decided to make a shift in lifestyle to work and spend less. The shifts that occurred were due to multiple factors including: a) following a deep sense of dissatisfaction with life and/or consumer culture which led to a period of reflection; b) a disruptive event that forced the individual to take time out and reflect on life; c) following the adoption of certain behaviours which brought various lifestyle benefits (e.g., less stress, more energy, and vitality); and d) concern for the environment. Each of these factors is discussed in further detail below.

5.2.1 Deep Sense of Dissatisfaction and Concern

The majority of simplifiers expressed having gone through a period where they felt dissatisfied with their lives. The dissatisfaction may have arisen from the work they engaged in, an unsatisfying relationship, and/or particular aspects of Western consumer culture. Jasmine, an artist, summarised the dissatisfaction she felt in the following way:

"I gradually realised that I was dissatisfied and it was nothing to do with what I was doing or who I was or what I was able to do. It was the fact that my culture sucks" (Jasmine; L77).

Feeling dissatisfied led simplifiers to reflect on their lives (e.g., what their life was about and what they wanted out of life). Several younger female simplifiers described this period as a 'quarter life crisis' in which they questioned what their lives had been about and what success was. Jasmine typified many of the young female participants in this study when she observed:

"It didn't matter how much I did...or how many accolades I got...or what measure of success I achieved and doing all the things that you're supposed to do to become successful...I did them all and I had some measure of success and

celebrity even within my community...I did lots of things...had a gallery...it was very successful and yeah...I've done lots but just feeling completely removed from all the things that are now seen to be the things that make you happy which is those really simple things about being connected to place and community and all those really basic things like food and shelter" (Jasmine; L84).

Through experiencing this dissatisfaction and emptiness, she came to realise the shortfalls of 'achieving success' as commonly promoted by Western consumer culture. Subsequently, she created a new definition of success to live by based on being connected to her environment and community.

Simplifiers spoke of feeling like they had been living on automatic pilot before making the shift in lifestyle and had experienced a disconnect between their values and behaviours. Nancy, an administrative assistant at a not-for-profit organisation, described her life before making the shift as follows:

"For years I just lived with my head in the sand...occasionally stuck it out going 'aww, there's so many issues in the world. Oh it's all too hard, I can't change it. I don't know what to do. I can't save the whole world like poverty and hunger and all that stuff going around' and I just thought it was too hard so I'll just go back to my happy little life and then I started realising my life wasn't actually happy" (Nancy; L215).

Making the shift in lifestyle came with simplifiers gaining greater awareness and aligning their thoughts and values with their behaviours. Rebecca, a mother of three young children and part-time assistant in a bookshop, stated:

"I was finding I wasn't happy in life because my actions weren't matching what I was thinking and what I valued as good so that's when I started reading up on Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy and stuff like that and it was really around the content about mindfulness and learning about how we do so much to entertain our egos and really whenever we do whatever our ego wants us to do it always leads to suffering so I spent six months to a year just testing that out and just observing every decision I made and I'd be mindful and I'd question myself...I'd say well why have I done that and it's so I can look better or so I can...it was always I I I and nothing about for others" (Rebecca; L22).

Many simplifiers were seeking a more fulfilling life in which they had time to engage in the activities they found enjoyable. Lucy, a professional organiser, spoke of her fast-paced lifestyle in Sydney as being the catalyst for reflecting on her priorities:

“We just had crazy lives...Alice was in day care before and after school...we both worked full-time..David was leaving at 5.30 in the morning to travel even though he was only travelling 45 kilometres...the traffic was getting worse and worse and we were just at the point where we went ‘you know what? This is ridiculous..we cannot continue like this...what do we want out of our lives?’” (Lucy; L36).

This deep sense of dissatisfaction and longing for a better way of life is what appears to have led the majority of simplifiers to make a shift in lifestyle, which to friends and family appeared as sudden and dramatic. Changes included simplifiers leaving their partners, moving to a new state or to a rural/country area, quitting their jobs and starting new careers, going back to study, as well as significantly reducing their work hours. All of these changes occurred after simplifiers had engaged in a process of deep reflection on what they wanted out of life. Simplifiers who fell into this category of feeling deeply dissatisfied felt like they had no other choice but to make the shift in lifestyle. A particular job, area (e.g., the city), or relationship meant they would continue to feel dissatisfied. In order to make the changes required, these simplifiers felt they had no other choice but to leave.

5.2.2 Disruptive Event Forces Period of Slowing Down and Reflection

Some simplifiers spoke of making the shift in lifestyle as a result of becoming ill and therefore being forced to take time off work and rest. Taking time out freed them up to a certain extent to think about what they wanted out of life and re-examine their priorities. For example, Barbara was at home on sick leave when she discovered a simple living website. She stated:

“My heart was filled with longing for something I couldn’t quite identify and then when I found this blog...it was an ‘Ah-Hah’ moment...this is what I’ve been looking for...longing for the simple life...suddenly all my longings made sense” (Barbara; L231).

This longing Barbara felt for a more satisfying life typified the experience of a number of simplifiers. Having the opportunity to slow down and take a step back from her usual work life gave her the time and space to explore alternative ways of living.

Having a child was another event that appeared to disrupt people's lives and trigger the adoption of a simpler lifestyle. In order to care for their child, female simplifiers could no longer work full-time or socialize to the same degree that they once did. Rita, a young first-time mother, found that having a baby that did not sleep much forced her to slow down from a high-intensity social life, which involved frequenting multiple cafes with friends on a daily basis. She said:

"He didn't sleep so it kind of gave us a really good period to go...well we don't really need this as much as we thought we did...whereas if we had a good sleeper we might of still tried really hard and then gone 'we can't afford this' and got ourselves into a hole...so in a way it was a blessing in disguise"(Rita; L180).

Losing one income also made the mothers question what they really needed and led to reduced consumption patterns in particular areas. In Rita's case, she stopped spending money on clothes and expensive restaurants, and started buying good quality, organic food for her child.

5.2.3 Adopting Specific Practices Results in Lifestyle Change

Shifts in lifestyle also came about through adopting practices that are commonly associated with simple living (e.g., tracking spending habits, cycling instead of driving, and discovering permaculture principles). These practices led to a range of positive health benefits and increased awareness of certain behaviours associated with simple living. One positive benefit led to another and more lifestyle changes were adopted. For example, PhD student Dave's decision to start cycling to university to save money led to a range of other positive benefits such as becoming fitter, happier, and less stressed. He said:

"With cycling...no money on petrol...no money on parking...it's quick...it is sometimes quicker than a car if you have traffic...you're squeezing your exercise for the day even if you don't get to do anything else later...it's awesome" (Dave; L511).

Although it was rare for participants to make the shift in lifestyle without experiencing a sense of dissatisfaction or a disruptive life event, a small number of participants like Dave successfully managed to do so.

5.2.4 Concern for the State of the Environment

Concern for the environment appeared to be a significant factor in driving people to pursue simpler lifestyles. Environmental issues were the biggest concern for simplifiers, with the majority expressing sadness and anger about the destruction that has/is being caused to the natural environment due to the Western consumer way of life. Specific issues mentioned included: the wasteful nature of consumer culture (e.g., items being used once and then sent to landfill); climate change; loss of habitat; the breakdown of local communities; capitalist culture's obsession with growth; excessive consumption; genetically modified crops; the need to upgrade technology constantly due to planned and perceived obsolescence; pollution; and the mining of uranium and fossil fuels. These issues were not spoken about in isolation but as issues that were interconnected and inextricably linked.

A couple of simplifiers spoke of feeling embarrassed and alarmed upon learning more about issues such as where their food came from and depleting fish stocks. After having read the book 'Animal, Vegetable, Miracle' (Kingsolver, 2007), Lucy stated:

"I was embarrassed to realise I had got to that stage of my life and hadn't given much consideration about where my food came from...I just started to realise I hadn't given much thought to where our food came from...how it was produced...where things came from and the whole thing of where it goes" (Lucy; L193).

Becoming a grandparent was the catalyst for Linda to reassess her life and confront a number of environmental issues that she had previously not considered. She stated:

"When I had the grandchildren it just really highlighted to me where I was in life and I looked and I thought gosh how did I end up here? I don't know how but suddenly all this information about peak oil and umm...you know I could just see it everywhere and I thought I'm going to have to do something about it...finding out that there would be no more fish in the oceans completely traumatised me because I couldn't believe that was true and I thought how could I leave that to my grandchildren?" (Linda; L18).

Rather than viewing these ecological issues as being separate and far removed from their lives, simplifiers saw how their personal everyday actions connected to various

environmental issues. Subsequently, they felt a sense of responsibility to do something to address their environmental concerns. Bart said:

“There’s a dreadful feeling of guilt if you think about the way we live in the Western world...when you flick a switch and a light comes on it’s just so easy to do..you flick another switch and the air conditioner comes on and the house temperature cools because you know it was one degree above what I found optimal and you push the button on the toilet and my waste disappears and often screws up some other part of the environment” (Bart; L217).

Like many other simplifiers, Bart had installed a composting toilet and solar panels to lower his ecological impact. In most cases, seeing the connection between their personal behaviour and environmental harm led simplifiers to focus their energy on finding ways to lessen their environmental impact. Several simplifiers said they were trying to *“get my own backyard in order”* (Bart; L629), *“live a more sustainable life”* (Rachel; L318) and be *“more integrated with the environment and have less impact”* (Jasmine; L523).

It was therefore of no surprise that the majority of simplifiers prioritised the value of living sustainably (i.e., having a low ecological footprint) and caring for the environment. Some participants even mentioned that they valued the environment more than other people and their family. Samantha, a general practitioner, stated:

“If it means jobs or a species extinction...probably we’d try and protect the species rather than the job” (Samantha; L540).

In contrast, when non-simplifiers were asked about issues of concern, only two participants mentioned they were concerned about the environment. Non-simplifiers values also reflected this, with not a single non-simplifier stating that they valued the environment. For the two non-simplifiers who stated they felt concerned about the environment, there was a disconnection between their concern and willingness to take action to address their concern. University student Emma discussed the barriers she faced to starting a native garden, stating:

“I think probably I could...but then I’ve got to actually put the effort in and have the time to do it and you know...next holidays it’s the middle of summer and everything will probably die anyway” (Emma; L417).

Unlike simplifiers who took actions through their own lifestyle to address their environmental concerns, non-simplifiers who felt some concern for the environment doubted whether their personal actions would make a difference. Therefore, they tended to refrain from taking action.

When asked the question 'Are there any issues that you feel strongly about?' a number of non-simplifiers said there were no issues that stood out for them, illustrating key differences in awareness and knowledge of particular issues between simplifiers and non-simplifiers. One non-simplifier, Penelope, responded with:

"you know I'm a middle aged white Australian...there's nothing wrong in my life...what am I going to complain about really?" (Penelope; L634).

Overall, non-simplifiers did not appear to have a good understanding of ecological issues and saw them as being separate from social justice issues. Lawyer Charlie illustrated this point when he stated:

"I just think that people need to back off...ease up...like you know...being environmentally responsible you know I don't think we should do it at the expense of people" (Charlie; L635).

Another non-simplifier illustrated how she perceived environmental and social justice issues as being separate when she stated:

"I'm probably more interested in community services...social justice sort of stuff than the environmentalist stuff...sort of I'm interested in but I also know when I haven't got the knowledge to back it up" (Maria; L714).

It is interesting to note that this non-simplifier expressed some level of concern and interest in environmental issues; however, she admitted that she was ignorant in relation to these issues. In contrast, several other non-simplifiers mentioned the issue of climate change and acknowledged that they were sceptics or it was not an issue they were concerned about. Fashion retail manager Rebecca made the following comment about environmental issues:

"I'm not concerned with that and I honestly...I don't really care...I'm probably a sceptic"(Rebecca; L416).

In contrast, simplifiers educated themselves on environmental issues not via the mainstream media but by watching documentaries, reading books, and/or browsing the Internet. Key resources that made a difference to their understanding of environmental issues included:

- Short videos/documentaries: 'The Story of Stuff' (Story of Stuff Project, 2007), documentaries on environmental issues such as peak oil, climate change, and plastics in the oceans.
- Books on topics such as permaculture, food choices, 'affluenza', downshifting, and how to feed your family on a budget.
- Blogs on simple living: 'Frugal Queen' (Frugal Queen, n.d.), 'Life After Money' ('Life after money', n.d.), 'The Simplicity Institute' (Alexander & Ussher, n.d.) and 'The Down to Earth Forum' (Hetzl, n.d.).
- The anti-consumption magazine 'Adbusters' ('Adbusters', n.d.).

Understanding these complex environmental issues and how they were connected to social issues and human behaviours seemed to be what most strongly differentiated simplifiers from non-simplifiers.

5.3 A Combination of Factors

While environmental issues appeared to be a driving force in the lives of simplifiers, they were not the primary motivator for pursuing this lifestyle. In most cases, a shift in lifestyle was brought about by an on-going sense of dissatisfaction and/or a disruptive life event, which triggered a period of deep reflection (e.g., 'How do I want to live?') and questioning mainstream social norms. It was often the case that simplifiers were driven by a desire for freedom and a better life rather than wanting to live a life that was in harmony with the environment. Living in a way to address environmental concerns appeared to be important but it was secondary to the desire to have more time for self. Certainly having more discretionary time enabled simplifiers to engage in pro-environmental behaviours and consider how they could live more sustainably.

In most cases, simplifiers made the shift as a result of experiencing a combination of the factors listed above. Selene summarised the factors that led to her shift as follows:

“It was stress, some time out...enough for the creative juices to get flowing again...like enough of a break then that pivotal kind of information and new ideas that led to the creative spurt that set us up” (Selene; L570).

All simplifiers were similar in that the shifts they made in lifestyle were gradual. They did not happen overnight or as the result of a sudden epiphany. Some participants felt dissatisfied with their lives for several years; however, it was not until they had a baby or fell ill that they finally committed to making a lifestyle change. For others, no single disruptive event occurred but the sense of dissatisfaction was so unbearable that they felt they had no other choice; they had to make the decision to change for their own satisfaction, peace of mind and health. As Jasmine commented:

“I feel like it came from within somewhere...I don’t feel that it was an event so much as just deciding that I had to do something about being dissatisfied and knowing the things that I wanted but not being able to get them in the city...I just had to leave” (Jasmine; L142).

She went on to further explain why she felt she had to leave, stating:

“Five years ago it was the kind of first step that I didn’t know what I was doing so I left my husband and..because I could see that I just couldn’t make the changes that I wanted to make in that situation and those friends as much as I loved them...but I just felt like it was destructive and I couldn’t see any light to it..I just felt like it was going to be like that for the rest of my life in the same merry-go-round”(Jasmine; L208).

This suggests that the shift to a simpler lifestyle is not a rapid or quick process that can be forced. It begins with seeds of new ideas being planted in people’s minds and people being willing to look at their lives and reflect on some critical questions (e.g., ‘Am I doing what I want to do?’ and ‘Do I feel fulfilled?’). It also requires people being courageous enough to get off the ‘merry-go-round’ as Jasmine phrased it and make changes to improve their lifestyle.

5.4 Foundations Laid Early in Life

Critical foundations appeared to be laid early in life for simplifiers. The majority of simplifiers reported being exposed as children to simple living practices by family members. Most commonly it was simplifiers’ parents who had lived through the Great

Depression and/or were migrants who had helped to mould their attitudes towards money and resource use from a young age. Rachel typified a number of simplifiers when she spoke of her stepfather who modelled and taught her a number of thrifty practices. She said:

“My step-father was Italian...he was quite a lot older than my mother so he was from a similar era to my grandmother...he’d been through hardship...one of seven children...very very frugal...grew his own food you know...kept birds and he was a taxi driver...you know this is how you clean your radiator with OMO [washing powder]...you don’t take it down to that rip off merchant down there whose going to charge you an arm and a leg when you can do it yourself with some OMO [washing powder]! You know what I mean he taught me how to change the spark plugs and you know kill king pigeons and we’d eat them and I’d be plucking them and stuff and we grew our own spinach...so he gave a bit of an example of being frugal to us” (Rachel; L575).

Caitlin shared about the influence her mother had had in shaping her money values and simple living practices, stating:

“I don’t need a lot of money to operate...I think that comes from my mother that philosophy. I mean even today with the cake there were three bananas that were rotting...I got some eggs that I was given as a gift and I just whipped up a cake and that was how we lived...we used all the food in the fridge...we didn’t throw things out...we went on family holidays but we always knew that there was give and take...you either went on the family holiday or you had the dress you wanted to wear to the ball” (Caitlin; L141).

Similarly, Lucy spoke of how her parents and her partner’s parents came from a different era and had embodied the simple living practices and philosophy that she had adopted. She stated:

“My dad was born in 1911 so he came from a very different era and same with my mother...so they’d been through the depression...my mother learnt to cook because there weren’t enough spare ingredients to teach children to cook in those days and David’s father has always grown veggies and they used to get chickens and cut the heads off the chickens and put them in the freezer and so he’s always had a very basic kind of life like that so it was pretty easy for us” (Lucy; L232).

In contrast, most non-simplifiers said they did not know anyone who had simplified their life. Only one non-simplifier mentioned having a key person in her life while growing up

who engaged in the simplicity practices of volunteering and buying goods second-hand. As a child, this non-simplifier had spent time volunteering with her mother in a second-hand store. Subsequently, a passion for frequenting second-hand stores to get a 'bargain' had continued into adulthood.

5.5 Life Values

As a result of having gone through a period of deep reflection, simplifiers could easily articulate their values (i.e., the things that were most important to them). Simplifiers' values tended to focus around the importance of strong relationships with family and friends, not harming the planet and having a small ecological footprint, being generous and helpful, and living an honest life. Caitlin typified simplifiers when she spoke of her value of caring for nature, stating:

"I have an absolute series of values that are based around Earth care and I find it overrides family sometimes and it goes beyond the individual...you know the values I place on flora and fauna are a driver for who I am" (Caitlin; L537).

In contrast, non-simplifiers found it considerably harder to articulate their values. They tended to state that they had adopted the values of a particular religion (e.g., Christianity) or their workplace. Rebecca spoke of adopting the values that were encouraged by her workplace (a large fashion retailer):

"Our ethos because we're a retailer is SHIRT...so it's service... humility...integrity...respect and trust...so that's how we have to be with one another...with our customers but also with our team members and our superiors with us...so we've got that open culture and I suppose the morals in our work...that's what we strive to achieve...so we're always talking about being SHIRT with each other so that's being humble...even though I'm the first [in sales] I try not to shout it too much because that's not being very SHIRT" (Rebecca; L357).

Non-simplifiers values generally centred around notions of being a 'good person' (i.e., not doing the wrong thing), being honest, and having integrity.

5.6 Key Lifestyle Practices and Changes

Simplifiers reported making a number of changes to their lives. The most common voluntary simplicity practices related to areas such as food, mindful money management (e.g., budgeting and tracking spending), decluttering, and developing a range of skills to become more self-reliant. Specific changes made in relation to each of these areas are outlined below.

1 Food

Food was central to the lives of most voluntary simplifiers, as a source of entertainment, good health/medicine, and relaxation. Most simplifiers spoke of eating out less and purchasing less processed food as a result of making the shift in lifestyle. Eating out at restaurants and fast food stores was replaced with cooking more meals from raw ingredients at home. This change in eating habits was largely due to simplifiers thinking more about their connection to food, the quality of the food they consumed, as well as an opportunity to be healthier and save money. Simplifiers acknowledged that it took more time to cook meals from raw ingredients; however, they engaged in the practice because it was intrinsically rewarding. As Caitlin said:

“I really like to cook but I really like to cook for people...I think it’s probably the cornerstone to family life and life with friends so I really enjoy doing that” (Caitlin; L5).

In contrast, non-simplifiers generally did not enjoy cooking (either for themselves or others) and did not grow their own food. Non-simplifier Stephen spent considerable amounts of time playing the online game ‘Farmville’ where he would grow virtual crops. However, he stated that he did not enjoy gardening in the real world.

Most simplifiers were aware of the problems associated with food waste and subsequently, took action to reduce food waste in their lives. Simplifiers took either one of two approaches when it came to eliminating food waste: 1) they planned their meals for the week in advance; or 2) they based meals around what was available in their fridge and/or garden. Saving food from going to landfill was not just seen as being good for the planet but also as a way to save money.

Simplifiers who were further along their journey reported making their own bread, preserving food, stockpiling food for food security, keeping chickens, and growing their own food. Food seemed to be a huge source of fulfilment in simplifiers' lives, especially growing food. Barbara spoke of her love of growing vegetables, stating:

"I love growing vegetables...even as a kid I loved allotments...my dad had an allotment and we used to go and I loved that so now it's like I wake up in the morning and I think oh I've got to go look at my plants and see how many bean seeds have come up and how many baby zucchinis there are...I don't know it's just fulfilling something in me" (Barbara; L67).

The rewarding nature of engaging in these activities helped simplifiers to continue on their journey to live simply.

5.6.2 Money Practices

All simplifiers acknowledged that they needed money to get by. While simplifiers appeared to be significantly less driven to earn money than non-simplifiers, they did not ignore the issue of money in their lives. Money enabled simplifiers to buy food staples and resources so that they could carry out projects around the home and garden. However, compared to non-simplifiers, most simplifiers had carefully considered how much they needed to work for pay and ways to make their money go further by engaging in a range of thrifty practices. Simplifiers appeared to use strategies to help them better organise their lives so they could live within their means, save for the future, and not have to worry about their finances. As Rebecca stated:

"I don't think it's fair to label downshifters or simplifiers as hippies...I think that's absolute rubbish...you have to be more organised because you don't have money at your fingertips just to pay a cleaner to clean your house or you know get someone to mow your lawn for you but in saying that you're organised in using your skills...you're doing things for yourself so it's really rewarding" (Rebecca; L581).

If simplifiers had the skills to carry out a task or were able to learn the skills (e.g., via a book or the Internet), they preferred to perform tasks around the home and garden themselves. Not only did this help them to save money but it also gave them a sense of satisfaction and confidence in their own personal abilities.

Many simplifiers expressed being more mindful about the way in which they spent their money since making the shift in lifestyle. Several simplifiers stated that they no longer purchased items that they did not need. When making a purchasing decision, they considered a number of questions such as 'Do I really need it?', 'Can I get it second-hand?', 'Has it been ethically made?' and in some cases, 'Can I make it myself?'. Rebecca summarised the thought process she and her husband went through when looking at replacing broken items for the family home, stating:

"If something breaks we first think 'do we really need it?...is it essential?' and if it is then we fix it or we use our own resources and then we tap into our local gift economy which is Freecycle and try to obtain it through there and then if we have to buy it we definitely go down the second-hand path so Gumtree [online second-hand store]...yeah all those kind of places...if we have to buy something brand new then we have the long-term in mind and quality so it is something that can even be handed down to the kids...so we do find more often than not whenever we buy anything it's good stuff which kind of gives us the illusion that we're wealthy and I get a lot of people shocked when we say "oh no we're only on whatever income"...and they're like 'you've got a nice house' and we're like 'well...we don't buy crap!'" (Rebecca; L133).

By not buying "crap", getting clear on what their needs were, and questioning social norms (e.g., the need to take an overseas holiday every year), simplifiers were able to live on a limited income without feeling deprived.

1 Why Simplifiers are Less Worried about Money

Despite having limited financial resources, most simplifiers stated that they felt in control of their financial situation. Subsequently, these simplifiers did not worry about money. Being less worried about money appeared to be linked to two dominant factors: 1) being debt free; and/or 2) the act of tracking spending habits and keeping a budget.

1. Debt Free

Being debt free enabled simplifiers to make major lifestyle changes with considerably less risk involved. Not having a mortgage or credit card debt gave simplifiers more choices and the freedom to go back to study, scale back from full-time employment to part-time employment, or quit their jobs altogether. Rachel described how she perceived the trap people can fall into when they get themselves into debt, stating:

“When you’re working your butt off to make money and you know you’re just worried about where the next dollar is coming from and how you’re going to pay for this that and the other and all that story of stuff it’s just me me me and you can’t be bothered thinking about anything else except maybe the football or whatever” (Rachel; L322).

By not having the stress and burden that comes with financial debt, simplifiers were able to focus on other pursuits and activities rather than on solely making money.

2. Tracking Spending Habits and Budgeting

A large number of simplifiers were disciplined in the practices of tracking their spending and keeping a budget. Simplifiers mentioned a number of benefits from engaging in these practices including: increased awareness of where their money was going; peace of mind; the ability to align spending habits with their values and readjust where necessary; and the ability to save money. By working out how much money was being spent on key areas (e.g., clothes, food, entertainment, and rent/mortgage) simplifiers could adjust their spending habits to ensure that they aligned with their values and goals.

In addition, the act of tracking their spending and implementing a budget helped simplifiers to calculate how much they had to work to meet their needs. Victoria spoke about how budgeting gave her the freedom to choose how much she wanted to work. She stated:

“I’ve got spreadsheets setup to do all the budgeting...it means I can go ‘well I can take six months off...I don’t have to go back full-time’ because I can see what our spending is and I know without a doubt that I can make that commitment and I don’t need to exceed it” (Victoria; L87).

Another simplifier Selene mentioned she had experienced a shift in her mindset in relation to money:

“It’s a matter of changing this mindset of ‘I need to earn this much money’ to ‘What is it that I actually need in life? And how am I getting that need met?’” (Selene; L240).

By getting clear on their physical, social, and psychological needs, simplifiers were less likely to be susceptible to advertising messages that encouraged them to consume.

While it could be considered burdensome and stressful for many people to have a budget of \$50 a week to feed their families, most simplifiers viewed this as a positive and exciting challenge. Living on a tight budget forced simplifiers to draw on a range of personal resources and their own creativity. Barbara explained how reducing food waste translated to saving money. She said, *“If I can make the most of every scrap of food we have then I can stick to our budget and save us money”* (Barbara; L60).

5.7 Turning their Backs on Consumption

Most simplifiers disliked going shopping at big stores and chose to avoid the shops as much as possible by making only a few trips a month to stock up on food. A number of simplifiers said that they felt like they had enough possessions and did not desire to have much more in their lives. They had removed themselves from the ‘hedonic treadmill’ of consumption or at least felt more in control of their consumption behaviour. This freed simplifiers up to focus their time and energy on other intrinsic pursuits (e.g., getting involved in the local community and gardening).

Simplifiers had a greater awareness of the negative consequences and false promises associated with consumer culture. They were concerned about the use of material items to express personal identity, how companies create items to have a short lifespan (planned and perceived obsolescence), the general wastefulness of society, manipulative marketing techniques that manufacture desires, and how these issues led people to end up on a never-ending ‘consumer treadmill’ and locked in a ‘work-and-spend’ cycle. As Jasmine said:

“We’re encouraged to be part of this capitalist system where you’ve got to go to work to earn money to buy more stuff to go to work to buy more stuff so I think it’s something that’s happened that’s terrible and it’s a treadmill and somehow you’ve got to get off it” (Jasmine; L602).

It seems that having an understanding of these issues associated with consumerism, the way in which they are connected, and the implications of overconsumption, allowed

simplifiers to turn their backs on excessive consumption and feel comfortable in their decision to do so. Most simplifiers questioned the happiness derived from consumption and had an understanding that it was short-lived. They also kept in mind whether the cost of an item was worth the amount of time it took to earn the money to buy it. Bart, a sculptor (previously a geologist), illustrated this point when he stated:

“I certainly enjoy the feeling of sitting in a new car...the smell of the fresh upholstery and there’s something about a well-made machine...it’s not something I want to spend a lot of money on...that sort of feeling departs quickly as it deteriorates..I kind of always thought in terms of I just spent three weeks in Summer at Marble Bar..and this suit I’m looking at buying...will wearing that make up for heatstroke out in desert somewhere? Probably not...no” (Bart; L390).

When considering purchasing an item Bart thought of it as being an exchange of not just his money, but his time and energy. Engaging in this way of thinking and reminding himself of the hedonic adaptation that occurs when he purchases something new, forced him to reassess his purchasing decisions.

In addition, simplifiers appeared to have a good understanding of the factors that enhance well-being and did not view consumption as being a critical factor. In fact, many simplifiers viewed consumption as an impediment to their well-being. Nancy stated:

“There’s so much out there and it’s awesome that we can have these opportunities but is it really making us happier? I don’t think it is...we can buy all these things and we can experience a lot of things but they say...I don’t know where I read this...when they talk about what people really care about it’s always family, spending time with friends, it’s like so what are people doing? The opposite” (Nancy; L614).

A number of simplifiers acknowledged that the happiness derived from acquiring material things was short-lived and that sustained happiness came from being connected to community, family, food, and friends, and having a sense of purpose. Selene typified how many simplifiers felt about consumption and personal well-being when she said, *“I find if I’m spiritually happy, creatively happy, I don’t feel the need to go and spend”* (Selene; L671)

Feeling content with life and having their psychological needs met seemed to decrease simplifiers' cravings to consume. Rebecca described the pull she felt to consume was not as strong as it once was, stating:

"Look the temptation is always there but I don't think it's got that much of a pull where it used to where you dip into money that you don't have to be able to buy it..like a brick wall seems to come up sooner and the reality kicks in and awareness just goes 'You don't need it!' And you're going to get home and wish you didn't buy it because you dipped into something else to make that happen" (Rebecca; L217).

Several simplifiers stated that the short animated video 'The Story of Stuff' (Story of Stuff Project, 2009) had shifted their thinking and increased their awareness of the costs of overconsumption. Lucy, a professional organiser, expressed an understanding of the constant cycle of consumption from watching this video, stating:

"Things are cheap...our economy...the story of stuff comes back to that you know we're built on this cycle of consumption. They want us to buy more things and marketing has done a really really good job at selling us that so houses are filled with stuff. I mean Howard's storage world...home storage...those businesses didn't exist fifteen years ago...twenty years ago...how many people have offsite storage for more stuff so it's an industry that has come about...self storage and organizing and decluttering...I mean how many people say 'Oh my house is a mess! I've got to declutter...I've got to get rid of stuff' because we have just consumed and consumed because they told us that if we bought more stuff it would make us happy" (Lucy; L494).

The wastefulness of Western consumer culture was an issue that concerned many simplifiers. Subsequently, simplifiers tried to limit their consumption and waste wherever possible. Barbara stated:

"I certainly didn't grow up in that wasteful society and I really think...like I'll be 63 in the new year...it seems to me that it's only been in the last sort of few years that society has sort of reached this fever pitch of everything you know...you chuck out your phone...you chuck out this...and I know those people have to have jobs in those countries but it just seems wrong to me that they work in such terrible conditions so that people can shop shop shop" (Barbara; L340).

Despite voicing these concerns, it was unclear whether simplifiers' consumption was restricted mainly by their lower income or by a genuine concern to be less wasteful. As Barbara went on to state:

"I'm concerned about waste...and you know like landfill and all that stuff but I'm not...I'm not like crazily concerned but I think about it...like my son's fiancé the other day...we were talking about our furniture and how old fashioned it was...I mean she's young and kind of saying when you get a new house why don't you just budget some money and buy all new furniture and I thought well...I guess if we were mega millionaires I would love to do that but some of my furniture is nice solid...it's old fashioned but it's well-made and I don't want to swap that for junky trendy stuff so even though I might not love the look of it part of it is that environmental thing too" (Barbara; L849).

Barbara felt uncomfortable with the idea of getting rid of her furniture that was still in good condition but she also acknowledged that if she was not restricted by money she would love to buy new furniture. Her son's fiancé's comment also highlights the idea and commonly held expectation that when people buy a new house they must also upgrade and buy all new furniture to match (section 2.4). A number of participants (not just simplifiers) mentioned how their friends and family members had made comments that demonstrated an expectation to buy new furniture when moving into a new home and how they resisted to a certain extent the pressure to do so.

One simplifier, Caitlin, spoke of how she felt money and affluence had made many Western Australians mean and less caring. She stated:

"I went to this place the other day and there were no glasses out...and I was told that I had to bring my own and I just found it...I actually walked out of this house and it was an extremely wealthy family and I just couldn't reconcile myself with that level of ill...you know ill manners...I just thought it was bizarre because I was told...it was on the invitation you know you need to bring your own glass and I thought oh for goodness sake...I mean I've got fifty glasses in my cupboard if I was having a BYO everything I'd put glasses out there...you know and I mean tight...it's an example of the lack of care...when people come into your house they are coming into your space...they're seeing you for who you are...read any book about any culture and my casa you know...you come in and we take care of you and I just...I was just so appalled...I left" (Caitlin; L167).

The values of the hosts of the 'BYO everything' party clashed with those of Caitlin, who had a more generous and giving nature. In fact, many simplifiers told similar stories of how they found it difficult to relate to others at times because their values and what they wanted out of life seemed to be so different to the mainstream norm.

While non-simplifiers had a poorer understanding of the negative aspects associated with overconsumption, several non-simplifiers took issue with various aspects of affluent living and consumer culture. They spoke of their discomfort in relation to people working to consume *“insignificant crap”* (Charlie; L237), acquiring stuff but never using it, a culture of never-ending desires, the overwhelming degree of choice in shops, and the unhealthy competition in affluent areas. For instance, non-simplifier Emily spoke of how she felt the Western suburbs (an affluent part of Perth metropolitan area) was not a place she would want to live due to the extreme competitiveness. Emily stated:

“I think it’s too competitive...you know whose got the biggest BMW...I’m not up for that. It’s just all about who goes to the best school...who has the best car...who has the best overseas trip...you know all of that” (Emily; L325).

Despite these issues, a number of non-simplifiers said they loved shopping, particularly for clothes. When asked to articulate why they enjoyed shopping, reasons offered included: *“it satisfies that desire to do my own thing...it’s lovely”* (Emily; L102) and *“it’s nice to walk around and look at things”* (Emma; L84). Unlike simplifiers, they seemed unaware of the complex issues associated with overconsumption or were not concerned about these issues.

Non-simplifiers did not view themselves as materialistic and thought that it was other people who were caught up in a ‘work-and-spend’ cycle. Charlie, a young lawyer who worked long hours, spoke of other people working to consume *“shit”* (L238). He said:

“I do think that we spend way too much time working for insignificant crap for a fucking 57 inch instead of a 54 inch TV and I don’t have any of that shit at home but I think that it is immoral to work for that sort of shit and all this...you know you get caught up in a capitalist system like productivity...like work harder so you can have a softer type of toilet paper or a better type of pasta...it’s just bullshit! And I’d hate to think that I’m caught up in it and I don’t think I am luckily” (Charlie; L237).

In addition, Maria stated:

“I’m not materialistic as far as you know I’ve got a nice car...the only reason I’ve got a nice car is that I kept on having people run into me and in the end my

husband said 'With your bad luck it's much better to have a really safe car'"
(Maria; L555).

5.8 Cutting Back on Clothes Consumption

Clothing plays a large role in displaying wealth and status in Western consumer cultures (section 2.3). Therefore, it was not surprising that many simplifiers rejected high fashion. Simplifiers spoke of placing limits on how much they spent on clothing attire and purchasing clothes from second-hand stores at a fraction of the price. Nancy stated:

"It takes a bit of time because you know getting second-hand things...it does take a bit of time but I think it's worth it because it saves you money...you can work less" (Nancy; L333).

Some simplifiers had strategies to limit their consumption of clothes. Strategies included: restricting oneself to one to two new items each year; not entering clothing stores that would be tempting; and taking a 'No New Clothes Pledge'. Selene described the benefits of making a pledge to not buy any new clothes. She stated:

"I've been on a five year no new clothes pledge and I find that so liberating so I don't look at clothing stores at all and what happens is it restricts your choice and by restricting your choice you get less stressed about it. If you want to go and buy the perfect pair of jeans there are twenty-five shops you can go to. They're all going to have...you'll be a twelve in one, a fourteen in another, a ten in...you know it will totally like...it can play with your mind. Whereas if I need a new pair of jeans I have to go to a Good Sammys [second-hand store] and I'll go in Good Sammys and then there will be three and I get a choice of those three and that's it and it's great" (Selene; L662).

By limiting her choice, Selene was limiting her stress as well as conserving her energy for more important activities. In fact, several non-simplifiers mentioned that having too much choice in their lives was a source of stress. Selene typified simplifiers in the way in which she proactively took action to minimise this source of stress in her life.

However, not all simplifiers felt comfortable about frequenting second-hand clothing stores. While Jasmine had initially been keen to frequent and purchase items from second-hand stores, she had come to view buying items second-hand as feeding off the

waste of society and trying to fill a feeling of emptiness. She summarised her concerns about second-hand store shopping in the following way:

“I used to do a lot of shopping in second-hand shops...I thought it was OK because I was in a second-hand shop so that’s fine but in the end it still felt like the same thing when I started to really look at it hard...I was still wanting stuff to fill some void”(Jasmine; L327).

By deeply reflecting on what was driving her to frequent second-hand shops, Jasmine identified that she was still on a consumer treadmill, which ultimately left her feeling dissatisfied.

5.9 Dispossession Practices (Decluttering)

Reducing clutter helped simplifiers to obtain further peace of mind, get clear on what they valued, and shift away from their old consumer identity. In relation to the issue of objects relating to personal identity, Jasmine stated:

“I just became sick of the relationship with stuff...physically moving it around so much in the last few years was one of them...but also how it became a way to express myself and define myself...and knowing how I could create an image which is what you do as an artist and in the gallery so you build something through stuff to communicate to whoever that this is who I am...aren’t I fabulous...and that’s who I was and I was fabulous and people would come in and go ‘Wow that’s amazing and creative and original and you’re fabulous’ and it just felt hollow and it was..it was just a pile of crap that I’d collected and I felt like I was completely suckered into it and had created my own versions of why it was OK because it was me expressing my creativity and all that stuff...but now I just don’t want to know about it” (Jasmine; L338).

Jasmine no longer wanted to be defined by the ‘stuff’ in her studio space and subsequently got rid of it. Other simplifiers spoke of going through a similar process of getting rid of things they no longer needed. This had a liberating effect and gave rise to a feeling of control over their space and life.

Although simplifiers acknowledged that keeping their possessions to a minimum through decluttering efforts was ideal and in line with the simple living philosophy, this practice was difficult for some simplifiers to carry out. Some simplifiers struggled to declutter as resources scavenged from verge collections were viewed as being saved

from going to landfill and could one day be useful. Since some simplifiers also lived on large properties, they had plenty of space to store these materials. However, problems often emerged when simplifiers said they had scavenged so many material goods that they had trouble finding them when they were needed. When it got to this point, simplifiers admitted that the costs of rescuing things from landfill outweighed the benefits.

Several non-simplifiers seemed open to the idea of decluttering and mentioned this was a simple living practice they were currently engaging in, particularly non-simplifiers who had just moved house or were in the process of moving house. To Penelope, the idea of minimalism had great appeal in that having less stuff meant having to do less work. She stated, *“I feel oppressed with things”* (L380). But it was only certain things she felt oppressed by. She said:

“I like things...like I like lamps and I like cushions and stuff...its hard for me to explain what I don't like...I don't like paperwork clutter...I don't buy newspapers...I don't have any junk mail...it's stuff like that...I just don't want around” (Penelope; L350).

Penelope illustrates that people can declutter and appear to have a ‘minimalist’ lifestyle but they can still be stuck on a consumer treadmill and not living life of reduced consumption. Decluttering and the idea of minimalism may not be enough on their own to shift people towards lifestyles of voluntary simplicity. The practice of decluttering needs to be supported by conversations on the reasons why people need to reduce consumption, how to prevent more clutter from entering their homes, and the limitations of consumption in terms of yielding long-term benefits for personal well-being. Without these conversations, people may fall into the trap of discarding their old goods, only to simply replace them with more fashionable items.

5.10 Social and Leisure Activities

Simplifiers had a tendency to engage in low cost or free activities such as spending time outdoors (e.g., going on bush walks), gardening, cooking, reading, making crafts and gifts for others, being physically active (e.g., cycling and playing tennis), spending time with family and friends, and attending free seminars and courses. As mentioned

previously, simplifiers spoke of going out less for dinner at restaurants and cafes, as well as consuming less alcohol as a result of making the shift. The leisure activities of simplifiers seemed to be centred around creating things in their lives, whether it was growing their own produce, making a toy for a grandchild from recycled materials, or preparing a home cooked meal to share with others. They spoke of how they reflected on life and their personal journey while engaged in these activities.

In contrast, non-simplifiers had a tendency to spend considerable amounts of money on passive forms of entertainment. The most common activity materialists enjoyed was watching Australian Rules Football (AFL) and attending concerts. In some cases, non-simplifiers stated that they would fly interstate and internationally to attend a football game or a particular music concert. Other activities non-simplifiers enjoyed included: watching television; YouTube videos and movies; sewing; working; studying; going to the gym; playing poker and computer games; reading; decorating their home; and socialising with friends and family. Only two non-simplifiers mentioned that they enjoyed spending time outdoors and in the garden. Not one non-simplifier mentioned that they enjoyed cooking.

Although simplifiers were not jumping on planes to attend music concerts or football games like non-simplifiers, a number of simplifiers stated that they enjoyed travelling abroad to see things they normally would not see and/or visit relatives. At the same time, many simplifiers acknowledged the ecological impact of flying and that it did not align with an ethos of voluntary simplicity. Despite expressing guilt over the ecological impact of flying, most simplifiers did not seem willing to give up this part of their lifestyle.

5.11 The Importance of Community

The idea of building a strong sense of community was particularly important to most simplifiers, with the exception of simplifiers who had small children. Several simplifiers spoke of the breakdown of local communities and how they felt disturbed that many people did not know their neighbours. Subsequently, they had a tendency to introduce themselves to their neighbours and try to foster a sense of community. Rachel stated:

“Someone new would come and we’d go and introduce ourselves with a bottle of wine...we help each other out and we have parties here and invite everybody and we try to foster that feeling of we belong together in this place” (Rachel; L425)

Besides getting to know local residents, simplifiers also belonged to a number of other communities of interests, particularly environmental or sustainability groups. Bart discussed his involvement in the local Transition Town group:

“the good thing about Transition Towns I think is building community...that’s something that has deteriorated in the Western world particularly in cities the community breakdown is dreadful...people living beside each other who have never met and they’ve been living beside each other for years...and you can have a lot more rewarding life all around just by a little more community building and support structures within communities” (Bart; L673).

In contrast, many non-simplifiers were connected to a church or sporting community; however, they were disconnected from their local community. The main reasons stated for not getting more involved in the local community were lack of time and the built environment preventing community connections from being formed (e.g., large walls built around houses).

5.12 Skilling Up

As one progresses further along their simplicity journey, the adoption of a wide range of skills occurs. Rather than being dependent on the shops and others for goods and services, simplifiers took pride in being able to create things themselves. Simplifiers mentioned knitting their own dishcloths, making soap and laundry detergent powder, mending and sewing clothes, and growing fruits and vegetables. Simplifiers obtained a sense of joy and satisfaction from being able to do things for themselves. For instance, Barbara typified other simplifiers when she described her experience of making bread. She said:

“It is time consuming to make cheaper meals like to make my own bread and I grind the wheat as well I buy wheat in bulk but it’s nice...it’s very satisfying to do it” (Barbara; L81).

Learning and developing new skills is an ongoing journey for simplifiers, with one participant describing it as having a “snowball” effect (Jasmine; L152).

In contrast, non-simplifiers had different attitudes to simple living practices, such as growing their own food and making bread. For example, Loretta viewed simple living practices as a form of “torture” which would not improve her life (L187). She stated:

“we tried to get a vegetable patch growing and that was fine until the potato nemotodes...whatever they’re called got into them...the bugs got into them (laughs)..I thought this is ridiculous spending all these hours fiddling around for a few tomatoes...I’m not going to do it...we tried (laughs)” (Loretta; L201).

Unfortunately, since Loretta had not found the experience to be particularly rewarding, she had not continued to grow her own food.

5.13 Technology

Simplifiers were not anti-technology or luddites. They embraced a range of modern technological devices including smart phones, laptops, and the Internet to help connect with other simplifiers and learn new skills. Simplifiers’ relationships to each of these technologies are discussed in further detail below.

5.13.1 Television

Simplifiers rarely watched television (if at all) or placed restrictions on how much television they consumed. If simplifiers did watch television, they tended to be very selective about the shows they viewed and avoided watching commercial television, although one simplifier said the public Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) still felt “a bit too commercial” (Jasmine; L632). Reasons for not watching television included preferring to engage in other activities and interests, not seeing value in it, the biased nature of television shows, and a lack of TV reception. While simplifiers tended not to watch much TV, they did enjoy watching movies and documentaries, and streaming shows online via ABC iView¹. A couple of simplifiers commented on how easy it was to waste time watching TV shows. For this reason, they preferred not to watch TV or had rules in place regarding their TV consumption (e.g., the TV could be turned on only between 6pm and 10pm). Not one simplifier said watching TV was a relaxing experience. Watching TV was described at best as being a cheap form of entertainment.

¹ ABC iView is a video on demand TV service run by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

In contrast, most non-simplifiers spoke of enjoying watching television every day and reported watching mainly commercial TV shows including a range of reality TV shows and soap operas. Watching TV was associated with feelings of relaxation and a sense of being entertained. Several non-simplifiers reported owning more than one TV. One non-simplifier, a stay-at-home mum, said she had the TV on all the time as it kept her company during the day.

While simplifiers avoided consuming television, they embraced the Internet and technologies in which they could easily access the Internet (e.g., smart phone, iPad, and laptop). The time saved from not watching TV seemed to be consumed by spending time on the Internet. The Internet provided simplifiers with a wealth of information on how to learn new skills and become more self-sufficient. As one simplifier said, *“everything is at your fingertips”* when you go online (Rachel; L256). Sites like ‘Pinterest’ provided simplifiers with endless ideas for creative projects. Yet simplifiers also cautioned that these sites could be addictive and they had to be disciplined when going online.

While simplifiers embraced technology, they were not the sort of people to line up in a queue for the latest iPhone. Victoria, a simplifier working in the area of information technology, discussed her approach to technology since simplifying, stating:

“In the past I would have been you know ‘Oh there’s something new out...I’ve got to get it’...now I’m like ‘I’ll just wait and see how that goes...I’ll wait for it to come down to like a third or a quarter of the price and I’ll let everyone else iron out all the bugs and then I’ll adopt it’...so it’s not that I wouldn’t still be an early adopter I just don’t...I guess it’s just quite consumerist to be an early adopter because you probably end up buying more than one of something before you find what you’re really happy with so I guess it’s a different approach to technology now” (Victoria; L672).

Waiting for the *“bugs”* to be ironed out in early versions of technology meant Victoria was able to still enjoy technology but not fall into the trap of acquiring multiple versions of essentially the same device.

5.13.2 Social Media

Many simplifiers appeared to be ambivalent about social media sites, particularly Facebook. The benefits simplifiers derived from using Facebook included being able to

stay in touch with friends and family, see how other (more mainstream) people live, and market their business. Additionally, Facebook was viewed as a good news source on topics of interest (e.g., urban homesteading, environmental issues, and permaculture) and a forum to share their simple living journey with others.

A number of simplifiers were critical of the way in which Facebook was used by others and expressed the need to be selective in how they used it. Simplifiers were generally not impressed by the quality of their friends' Facebook posts, with a couple of simplifiers stating that people post "*trite*" (Bart; L279, Caitlin; L811). Subsequently, simplifiers were reluctant to share their personal lives on Facebook and tended to either only follow the online activities of close friends and family or post in relation to certain aspects of their lives (e.g., the work they were doing in the community). Most simplifiers were aware of a number of negative impacts associated with using Facebook. Simplifier Rebecca described Facebook as being a "*toxic environment*" (L664) in which people showed off and posted things they would never say to another person's face in real life. Another simplifier said she found Facebook overwhelming and the conversations were "*superficial*" in nature (Jasmine; L645).

Most non-simplifiers also used Facebook and expressed similar concerns and feelings about the social media platform. Several non-simplifiers said Facebook was a great way to stay connected to friends and family (rather than having to write a letter or send an email). Subsequently, these non-simplifiers tended to have Facebook open while they worked and did not see this as a problem. However, a number of non-simplifiers also mentioned a dark side of Facebook, namely its addictive nature and the tendency to compare their life to others when using it. Non-simplifier Penelope found herself deactivating her Facebook account on a regular basis as it made her feel anxious and nauseous. She stated:

"I have this thing I call it 'Facebook Sick' and I joke about it with a girlfriend because she gets it as well...it's like I feel Facebook sick...I feel nauseous from looking and trawling and reading and...it just actually feels gross...you need to have a shower to get it all off" (Penelope; L159).

Like the non-simplifiers, simplifiers found sites like Facebook addictive and struggled to strike a balance between time spent online and time spent out in the real world doing

what they needed to do. A number of participants (both simplifiers and non-simplifiers) said they had tried to set limits on their Internet use in the past but despite good intentions to modify their behaviour, things had not worked out.

5.14 Intrinsically Rewarding Work

Most simplifiers, with the exception of a few, worked either part-time in jobs that they found intrinsically rewarding or they worked for themselves running their own small business. Simplifiers jobs were varied and included working as an administrative officer at a not-for-profit farm in the city, occupational therapist, artist, medical practitioner, PhD researcher, environmental educator, public servant, dog breeder, chicken breeder, sculptor, professional organiser, and sustainable accommodation provider. It was common for simplifiers to have multiple income streams from different jobs to make ends meet, particularly if they worked for themselves. For example, Rachel ran an online business selling equipment to farms via eBay and also bred dogs and sold them to the public.

Most simplifiers were willing to earn less at their jobs if the work was of interest to them, was perceived as being good for the planet and society (and in line with their values), and enabled them to learn things that they were curious about. Some simplifiers did not view their work as work. Instead their work had become their life and there was no longer a clear separation between the two. Caitlin said the following about her work as an environmental educator:

“It’s exciting...you know you’re camping...you’re making beautiful meals under the stars with fabulous people...we work with indigenous people...they talk to us about Mabon and how their sacred sites had been blown up after the Mabon decision...it’s lifelong learning...it’s just a fantastic way to spend your week...I don’t call it work” (Caitlin; L357).

Bart, a sculptor who made his income via multiple streams, described how there was no longer a clear demarcation between work and rest, stating:

“We don’t see it as work and rest...it is a lifestyle...a complete package of a lifestyle so that we don’t compartmentalise it into work, rest and weekend...each day is pretty much the same as the next and in some regards I guess I miss a little

bit of freedom to say ok I've finished work I've gone home I don't have to worry about anything else or it's my annual leave I can just take off" (Bart; L55).

In addition, artist Jasmine stated:

"As far as working goes like I'm working all the time...it's hard to define what's work now that I'm living in it...so yeah it's all my life now" (Jasmine; L541).

Some simplifiers admitted that they felt conflicted about the work they did in that it did not align well with their simple living philosophy. Working in an office environment that seemed disconnected from the natural world or being contracted to work for unsustainable industries, such as mining, led to simplifiers experiencing some degree of cognitive dissonance. Jasmine spoke of the challenges she experienced in creating art that she knew was connected to ecologically destructive industries and consumer culture. She stated:

"I've made less and less jewellery the more time that I've spent out here because I feel like it's too connected to commercial culture and basically making shiny things for rich people" (Jasmine; L128).

To Jasmine, her career as an artist was problematic to living simply and rejecting mainstream consumer culture. However, like several other simplifiers, she had acquired skills in a particular area and found it rewarding to use them. Other simplifiers found their work unsatisfying and the job was a means to an end: to earn enough money so they could satisfy their basic needs and/or eventually retire to live even simpler lives.

5.15 Less Career Ambition

Simplifiers were less ambitious in terms of career advancement than non-simplifiers. Paid work was a way for simplifiers to fund other activities and resources that helped to satisfy their needs for food, clothing, and shelter. However, work was no longer a central part of simplifiers' identities. Rita stated:

"I don't have that ambition whereas before in my previous life it would have been 'Right I'm going to achieve these 15 things and one of them is going to be..' whereas I don't have that now" (Rita; L753).

Simplifiers were ambitious, but their ambition focused on making a difference to their health and well-being, the local environment, and/or wider community. Nancy said:

“It’s about having more time to grow veggies and do volunteering and do things I’m passionate about and spend more time at home” (Nancy; L104).

In contrast, most non-simplifiers’ identities and sense of purpose in life seemed to be based largely on the work they did for pay. One non-simplifier, Charlie, acknowledged this, stating:

“I worry sometimes that I get too much of my identification from being a lawyer...like I’m from a working-class background in a small country town..I quite like the fact that people think ‘Oh he’s done OK...he’s a lawyer’” (Charlie; L418).

Non-simplifiers tended to be focused on job promotions, being successful at the work they did, and getting *“the best deal for me at the time”* (Rebecca; L29).

5.16 Less Paid Work for More Time and Freedom

Unlike non-simplifiers, money was not the primary motivator for simplifiers in the work they chose to do. Simplifiers did not equate earning money with freedom like many non-simplifiers did. For simplifiers, freedom was associated with having control of their time and flexibility of lifestyle. Bart summarised what he enjoyed about his new work lifestyle, stating:

“I enjoy moving at my own pace so being able to get up whenever I wake up...work when I want to work...have a morning tea break which can go for a minute to the rest of the day and there’s still work to be done but it’s that flexibility” (Bart; L5).

Simplifiers made a conscious decision to work less for pay; however, this did not mean that they did not engage in hard work. Working less for pay enabled simplifiers to have more time to engage in activities that were personally meaningful to them and often these activities involved hard physical labour (e.g., gardening, building, keeping bees, and looking after chickens).

Simplifiers spoke of how difficult it would be to live simply and sustainably if they worked full-time. Samantha said:

“I work part-time that makes a big difference which is why I always wonder how people can fit things in that are important when they’re working full-time...it must be really hard and particularly these days both couples are usually working...and then you’ve got children and if you want to buy that big house...you’re both working full-time...there’s no time for that” (Samantha; L21).

Selene also mentioned:

“It’s a difficult juggling act when you’re working full-time. So when you’re working full-time it’s like there’s eight hours that aren’t even yours and then you juggle trying to fit in whatever life you’d like to have around it. When you decide to open that up a little bit, 24 hours become open to you” (Selene; L44).

Despite having more time by working less for pay, most simplifiers still reported that they did not have enough time to engage in all the activities they wanted to do. This highlights how simplifiers are ambitious people, just not in the same way that the non-simplifiers tend to be.

5.17 Workplace Supports Lifestyle Choice

Part-time work was possible for simplifiers as their workplaces were open to flexible working arrangements. Simplifiers did not run the risk of losing their jobs or being taken less seriously in their work organisation by making the decision to work fewer hours.

When non-simplifiers were asked the question ‘Would you ever consider working less?’ some spoke of feeling uneasy about this idea as they feared not being taken seriously at work for promotions. Others were not sure what they would do with the extra time acquired if they worked less. They expressed concerns of becoming bored and going “crazy” (Stephanie; L27). Some non-simplifiers mentioned that they had made the decision to cut back on their work when they had children. This decision was not easy and involved weighing up the benefits of earning money versus the costs of missing out on spending time with their children.

5.18 Not a Slow Life but a Less Stressful Life

While it is a common misconception that simplifiers are lazy and live a life of leisure (section 5.22.1), simplifiers reported working constantly. Simplifiers were not working for pay a lot of the time and the work they were engaged in was intrinsically rewarding (section 5.14). Sustainable living practices and projects appeared to consume a lot of their time and energy. Not surprisingly, many simplifiers mentioned that simple living is not simple. Lucy stated:

“I think the one thing that is really misunderstood about simple living is that it takes a real lot of effort...people think that it’s simple and it’s easy but it isn’t you know...what’s easy is to go to the shops and buying take away...or buying everything or outsourcing everything...that is what is easy and simple really...so it’s a strange term because it isn’t...there’s nothing simple about it...it takes conscious effort and it takes a lot more time and people often think that you’re quite crazy” (Lucy; L138).

Despite working fewer hours at paid work, simplifiers still reported feeling like they did not have enough time to live as ethically and sustainably as they wished. Jasmine described how she found herself in situations where she would come up against barriers on her simple living journey. In this particular situation, Jasmine described how she no longer had any clothes she could wear to go out. She said:

“It just became a problem and I couldn’t put any clothes on and it’s become that way at different times about food too...I just couldn’t buy anything from the supermarket because that all had preservatives in...I get to these points when I just get stuck because I don’t want to do it but I don’t know how not to do it...so ideally I’ll be making my own clothes but while I’m making my own cups and making my own jam and preserved foods and everything else I just don’t feel like...so do I feel like there’s enough time...probably not in that way...like there’s not enough time for me to be as ethical as I want to be” (Jasmine; L391).

Even though they were still living busy lives, simplifiers reported not experiencing the same level of stress as they did before making the shift in lifestyle. Not having immediate deadlines and not being solely focused on work meant they were less stressed. Victoria described how life was for her before making the shift to part-time work as an engineer after giving birth to her first child:

"I worked so much and I was so stressed I didn't ever feel good enough to do certain things...like I'd be tired..I'd be stressed or I'd you know I couldn't sleep well...I mean I don't sleep well now but it doesn't really matter because it's normal but yeah and you know so you do things...but yeah now I'm like well if we want to do it we do it" (Victoria; L315).

Victoria went onto say:

"I'm pretty busy all the time...I'm pretty active on the days I've got off...but the stress isn't there...so if I don't make it I don't make it" (Victoria; L441).

Simplifiers tended to put less pressure on themselves than non-simplifiers and had lower expectations on what they felt they needed to accomplish in the day.

Simplifiers did not appear to be driven by the need to 'be busy' to the same extent as non-simplifiers. While simplifiers were busy with lives full of activity and different projects, what mattered most was the quality of their experience whilst engaged in the activity. Simplifier Bart mentioned that he enjoyed *"being absorbed"* in his work (L144), stating how he often entered a *"trance like state"* when building a sculpture, putting a fence up, or constructing a milking shed (L146). Simplifiers spoke of being on a journey and they seemed to enjoy the process along the way. In contrast, many non-simplifiers seemed to be dissatisfied with where they were at in life and talked about taking action to get to the 'next level' (e.g., obtaining a better job or house, and/or completing another degree).

5.19 Political Involvement

The vast majority of simplifiers refrained from getting involved in politics or activism, preferring to focus their energy on bringing about change at the individual and household level in the hope that this would inspire others to simplify their lives. Several simplifiers stated they did not like to preach about their lifestyle and stressed the importance of using their life to set a good example for others. Bart typified simplifiers when he said:

"I was getting fairly annoyed with the general apathy of the general population and after awhile you think well who am I to go and force my opinions on you even if you're screwing up the globe as a result...so I thought I'll get my own

backyard in order...try and live a more sustainable life and set a good example...mainly sort myself out first rather than preaching to other people while I'm tearing around in a gas guzzling vehicle which is quite common" (Bart; L626).

Similarly, simplifier Jasmine said she felt like her lifestyle was similar to an "art practice" (L371) and her job, as an artist, was to "find ways to do it [live simply] quite beautifully" (L483). Other simplifiers repurposed old items and made gifts for friends and family, which was an effective way for them to start conversations on sustainable living topics. They said they hoped to inspire others to live more sustainably.

Beyond making change in their own lives, a small number of simplifiers stated that they engaged in activities to bring about wider societal and political change. These activities included: writing letters to the editor; signing petitions; attending rallies; posting unnecessary packaging back to manufacturers; handing out 'How to vote' cards for the Greens political party at election time; collecting signatures for an issue of concern; being the leader of a community action group that opposed a local council plan; and being involved in a local Transition Town group. It is important to note that engagement in these political practices was not the norm for most simplifiers that were interviewed, with a strong focus being on implementing small changes in their own lives.

All the non-simplifiers, with the exception of two, were not politically active and questioned how effective political activism and individual action was in response to issues of concern. Charlie described topical issues as being like "fashions". He said:

"I don't know if it [taking action] achieves a hell of a lot...and I think to be honest the wind is blowing against us...there's topical issues that come up...everyone seems to jump on them...gay marriage for example is one...everyone seems to jump on them and think that if this happens everything is going to be OK...it ain't...like there will be another issue...there will be something else...it will be another thing or something else or something else...it will be OK...it's just...they're like fashions...they come in and then they go out" (Charlie; L679).

Other non-simplifiers said they could not see how they could bring about change beyond their friends and family and believed personal action did not achieve much. A lack of time and being disillusioned with the state of politics were other reasons given for not getting involved in politics.

5.20 Challenges to Simple Living

Since simple living runs counter to mainstream Western consumer culture, it is no surprise that adopting this lifestyle was described as being a lonely process by many simplifiers. The loneliness seemed to be due to losing many friends (and in a number of cases, an entire social network) and not feeling like they were able to relate to most people. Caitlin spoke of the difficulties she experienced when she left her husband to pursue a simpler, more sustainable life. She said:

“All my married friends disappeared...you don’t leave your husband in Western Australia...unless he beats you and he’s a real arsehole...so it was pretty lonely for quite a considerable amount of time” (Caitlin; L617).

Similarly, Jasmine spoke of losing her “complete network” of friends when she left her husband to pursue a simpler lifestyle. She said:

“I didn’t realise that me deciding to leave him would mean I was leaving my complete network of people and the friends that I had formed in the relationship with him so that’s the thing...I think they felt that I’d left them as well so suddenly you know they were all getting married because we got married but I was getting unmarried and I’d stopped hosting parties...it was terrible...it was awful” (Jasmine; L245).

As painful as it was to lose their friends, having this space away from old networks helped simplifiers to distance themselves from their old consumer identity and seek companionship with people who had similar values and interests (section 3.1.4). Many simplifiers spoke of the importance of belonging to a community of like-minded people, either online or in their local community.

In addition, simplifiers spoke of feeling frustrated and exhausted in trying to explain their lifestyle choices to others who did not share their worldview or values. Simplifiers expressed feeling like they were “singing a different tune” to a lot of people (Natasha; L661). Rebecca mentioned the negative reaction she received from friends when she inherited money and made the decision to put the money towards her mortgage. She said:

“Everyone started saying ‘Are you going to go on a family holiday? Are you going to buy a new car because your car is shit?’ and we just went ‘nah, we’re going to chuck it on the mortgage’ and we’re still living with an old car and didn’t feel the need to go on a holiday...so those things for others they’d see it as a loss and they’d say you’re mad because you’ve come to money so it’s time to upgrade things and keep up with the Joneses and get a new couch...get a new this and new that and we were like ‘nah’” (Rebecca; L435).

From Rebecca and other simplifiers’ comments, it was apparent that many simplifiers’ friends and relatives struggled to understand their lifestyle choices and motivations. Simplifiers said they had been labelled as ‘weirdos’, ‘zealots’, being ‘over the top’, ‘crazy’, ‘hippies’, ‘silly’, ‘off with the fairies’, and ‘a bit odd’. There was a fear of being labelled negatively or being seen as different, with Nancy stating:

“I’m very conscious that I don’t want to come across as hippy and I want to make clear that I’m the same like I’d love to have dreadlocks for example but I won’t because I don’t want people to label me” (Nancy; L402).

Simplifiers spoke of hitting limits to how much they could do to simplify. For instance, Jasmine expressed a desire to just wear a sheet as clothing but felt this was not possible if she wanted to still participate in mainstream society. She said:

“I feel like I’ve pushed it as far as I can to still participate in mainstream culture so I feel like I’m pretending to be one of them to a certain extent so I can still be effectual” (Jasmine; L811).

5.21 Benefits of Simple Living

Despite these challenges, simplifiers expressed a range of benefits experienced from making the shift in lifestyle. The most common benefits were feeling happier, healthier, and less stressed. Other benefits included: feeling more in control of their lives (particularly their finances and personal environment); a stronger sense of purpose and a more meaningful life; peace of mind; and connection to community. Time for relationships and to engage in the activities simplifiers wanted to do was also a major benefit reported. Rebecca said the biggest benefit for her was *“time to devote to real things in life like relationships”* (L197) as well as *“time to do what you want to do”* (L204). She said:

“You have so much control over your own happiness...I could pick up a magazine today and see an article and be blown away with sewing and tomorrow I could enrol in a sewing class just like that during the day and not think ‘Oh when am I going to get time off work?’” (Rebecca; L445).

Other positive benefits simplifiers mentioned included having greater awareness and feeling like they could have a positive influence on others. Nancy said:

“I’m just happy that I feel like I’m conscious. I’m living consciously. I used to look at the Conscious Living expo and stuff and go ‘urghh’ that word...I still don’t like that word but I know what I’m consuming more and more and just being aware and knowing that I am influencing other people and the world in general with my purchasing choices and things like that makes me feel happier” (Nancy; L389)

One simplifier mentioned she felt smug about her lifestyle. She said, *“We can feel happy and other people aren’t so happy”* (Samantha; L397). As mentioned previously, simplifiers appeared to have a good understanding of the factors that increased well-being and happiness, and the shortfalls of overconsumption (section 5.7).

5.22 Non-Simplifiers’ Perceptions of Simplifiers and the Voluntary

Simplicity Lifestyle

While simplifiers viewed their lifestyle in a positive way, the majority of non-simplifiers were ambivalent about simple living. Non-simplifiers expressed a range of positive and negative aspects associated with this lifestyle. Several non-simplifiers held strong negative attitudes towards the simplicity lifestyle as well as the idea of slowing down. Non-simplifiers’ concerns about simple living and their reluctance to pursue this way of life were largely based on a range of misconceptions to do with simple living or having been exposed to extreme examples of simple living. Each of these misconceptions to simple living is explored in further detail below.

5.22.1 Lack of Ambition and Missed Opportunities

The most common misconception about simplifiers was that they lacked ambition, did less in their daily lives, and wasted the opportunities life presented to them. As non-simplifier Rebecca, the State manager of a major fashion retailer, stated:

“It’s not utilising your capabilities to the full extent...it’s like you’ve been given a gift from god and whatever you’re successful at and you’re good at you should use that instead of just wasting it” (Rebecca; L229).

Similarly, car salesman Maxwell stated, *“You have just one life...there are opportunities to do that make it worth it” (Maxwell; L235).*

From the worldview of a person oriented towards materialistic values (e.g., money, power, and status), a simplifier may occur as someone who is lazy or lacks ambition because they are not pursuing ever-higher standards of living. The simplifiers interviewed were ambitious; however, their ambition was in other domains, such as caring for the environment and community, which are generally not highly valued or endorsed by Western consumer culture.

5.22.2 The Need for Speed

Non-simplifiers associated the idea of simplifying with a slower pace of life and being bored, which did not appeal to them. Notions of ‘simplifying’ and ‘slowing down’ also seemed to conflict with some non-simplifiers’ identities. For instance, Maxwell saw himself as a traveller and businessperson working his way towards success. Rebecca saw herself as a *“shopper”* (L188), *“total consumer”* (L188), and full of ambition living a busy lifestyle.

When exploring the pace of life, the majority of non-simplifiers said they liked being busy and associated being busy with success, feeling important, contributing to society, and being a productive member of society. As Stephanie said, *“It keeps me on my toes and I find I get more done when I’m like that [busy]”* (L481). Many non-simplifiers accepted the fast-pace of life as natural and felt if they did not operate at a fast-pace then they would get left behind. Emma stated:

“I feel like the pace of life at the moment is the way it’s suppose to be and it’s supposed to be fast and it’s supposed to be continuing to change and that’s how it should be almost” (Emma; L318).

Non-simplifier Loretta mentioned that she had been told by others (i.e., her son and doctor) to slow down but it was not in her *“nature to sit around too much”* (L37). She said:

“I couldn’t imagine not being busy...I retired from full-time work 18 months ago but we’ve had this business going for quite a few years so I was really too busy then” (Loretta; L39).

She went on to state, *“it’s good to be busy but there is a balance”* (Loretta; L98) illustrating that at some level she knew of the consequences associated with being overly busy; however, she was unsure how to not be busy as she had always lived this way.

Several non-simplifiers also spoke of having difficulty ‘switching off’ and felt the need to always be productive, and ‘doing something’. If they were not busy, they expressed feeling ‘lost’, ‘bored’, and/or ‘empty’. Charlie stated the sense of satisfaction he experienced when he was working whilst others were resting:

“I feel productive...I almost get like a guilty pleasure if I know that I’m studying or working when other people are sleeping...I almost feel like I’ve got one up on the rest of the world” (Charlie; L257).

Others spoke of thriving on the stress of being busy. Rebecca stated:

“I thrive on stress...if I was not stressed...if I didn’t have that stress I wouldn’t be able to do my job...I’m one of those who has to have stress to achieve results” (Rebecca; L40).

This busy pace of life and the stress that came with it seemed to be the norm for the majority of non-simplifiers. As Stephanie said, *“everyone is so busy and you can tell everyone is so busy. Always everyone is in a rush”* (L194). Not many non-simplifiers seemed to question this breakneck pace of life or know how to slow down, with the exception of Maria. Maria spoke of how she used to like being busy but things had changed when she got sick. She said:

“I started to get sick and I got diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis and that’s made it harder to do things so I got very tired afterward so I don’t like feeling tired in the afternoon” (Maria; L89).

Similar to the experience of several simplifiers who were interviewed, getting sick forced Maria to look at slowing down her lifestyle.

The busiest non-simplifiers were more likely to state that they did not take time to stop and reflect on their lives. Troy mentioned how it was easy to go about his day-to-day life and not make time to reflect, stating:

“You can sort of get caught up in whatever you’re doing...there were times even in my last job where I was just sort of doing stuff and I would never really sit and think ‘Is this really me?’” (Troy; L58).

Similarly, Rebecca who worked over 80 hours a week stated:

“I never reflect on my life...I should do that more...I probably could make that time but that’s a fault in me...I probably don’t” (Rebecca; L462).

Living a busy lifestyle prevented non-simplifiers from tuning into how certain things made them feel and reflecting on bigger questions in relation to their work and consumption behaviour. A couple of non-simplifiers acknowledged that it was something they had been exploring and that they were planning to engage in reflective practices such as meditation and yoga.

5.22.3 A Deprived Lifestyle

Some non-simplifiers also associated simple living with the idea of deprivation and living a less comfortable life. They expressed concerns that simplifying would mean that they would not be able to travel and pursue their dreams. They also feared that adopting the lifestyle would result in not being able to provide for their families basic needs. One non-simplifier associated voluntary simplicity with living an unhygienic lifestyle. All of these concerns seemed to connect to the issue of money and the fear of not having enough of it if they worked fewer hours.

Generally, non-simplifiers equated having money with opportunities and a sense of freedom, whereas simplifiers equated having time with freedom (section 5.6.2). Having less money and having to adjust to a lower income when they were already used to a certain standard of living was a major barrier to simple living for non-simplifiers. Computer programmer Stephen stated:

“You don’t want to be a person whose always thinking about money but at the same time without it you’re not going to get anywhere. You need money to pay the rent or pay the mortgage or to feed yourself. That’s the kind of society that we’re in...that you know money is the currency...the value of things that we use to exchange” (Stephen; L420).

For non-simplifiers, money represented access to different experiences and opportunities, not just for themselves but for their family. Lawyer Charlie stated:

“Less money doesn’t appeal...I believe that rightly or wrongly the world revolves around it...it can buy my kids one day if I’m blessed with them a better education...it can help my family...it can help my mum...it can send her to England so she can see the Mores of Yorkshire like she always wanted to...it could pay for medical treatment...it could pay for a niece’s world trip when she turns 18 that her parents wouldn’t otherwise be able to afford...that’s the sort of dreams that I have so money you know...doing those sorts of things with it” (Charlie; L384).

Non-simplifiers perceived money as their access to being able to maintain their current lifestyle and give their children the best opportunities available. Stephen stated:

“You have to work as much as you need to in order to keep your lifestyle as it is...I mean having children you have a sense of responsibility that you want to make sure that they have a roof over their head and food on the table and clothes for them to wear” (Stephen; L408).

5.23 Simple Living Requires Time, Energy, and Family Support

Most non-simplifiers did not hold any romantic notions of simple living and had an understanding that it took time and energy, which many of them felt they did not have, to pursue this way of life. Whether it be looking through buckets at the second-hand store for bargain items, growing vegetables or native plants, switching off lights, or making their own bread, non-simplifiers acknowledged that these activities are not

'simple' but in fact, complex. Several non-simplifiers expressed doubt as to whether the benefits of engaging in such activities were worth the effort. Loretta stated:

"I think it just drags you into making your own bread from scratch...to me it's sort of...why bother? That would not improve my life...it would be torture" (Loretta; L185).

Non-simplifiers were reluctant to invest their time, money, and energy in engaging with simple living practices and/or projects for fear that they may be disappointed if they did not go to plan.

Other non-simplifiers expressed a desire and willingness to engage in certain simple living practices but lacked both the perceived time and confidence in their ability to do so. For example, educational assistant Naomi was impressed by a friend who purchased clothing second-hand. She said:

"Apparently doing this second-hand thing...number one you have to find the taste that you like...you have to kind of know what you like and number two you've got to look for it. I mean I find it hard enough to find stuff in nice pretty laid out clothes stores...not going through buckets and tubs and that sort of stuff...so time is my big factor" (Naomi; L557).

Naomi also expressed doubt with being able to make the shift in lifestyle due to the difficulty in getting her family members on board. Having a husband and four children who all lived in the same household meant simple living practices had to be adopted by the whole family. If not, she felt her efforts would be undermined. She said:

"We've had recycling bins for as long as I can remember...it's a good 12 years we've had two different bins...so I'm thinking if in that time my husband still doesn't think that's easy...what chance have I got to simplify anything else? What chance have I got?" (Naomi; L604).

Similarly, materialist Penelope wanted to declutter her life; however, her efforts were thwarted by her husband's consumption behaviour. She said:

"I seem to be doing dishes all the time because my husband's solution to running out of plates during the day was to go and buy more rather than telling the kids to re-use their plates...like it's just...everything is so cheap and it's easy to do that way" (Penelope; L451).

For the majority of simplifiers who were interviewed, family support was a critical factor in making the shift in lifestyle. If the support and willingness was not there, in 20% of cases it led to simplifiers separating from their partners. In contrast, with the help of a supportive partner, simplifiers could continue to simplify their lives and find the process immensely rewarding.

5.24 Structural Barriers to Simplifying

A number of structural barriers prohibited non-simplifiers from seriously considering the idea of downshifting or simplifying by reducing their work hours. Mortgage and credit card debt appeared to lock non-simplifiers into having to work a certain number of hours each week. This debt made people more risk-averse and less likely to entertain notions of working less (unless they won the lottery).

In addition, the culture of people's workplaces also appeared to determine whether they could easily simplify their lives or not. In some cases, cutting back on work hours meant potentially jeopardising a person's career progression. Charlie felt there would be a real risk involved in reducing his work hours at his law firm. He said:

"You'd be looked at as you're less serious about moving up and stuff...yeah absolutely and especially if I didn't have a kid or reason to do it" (Charlie; L232).

Stephen pointed out:

"Part of the agreement of being employed there [at workplace] is you know we work 38-hours a week and get paid for it" (Stephen; L305).

These quotes highlight the structural barriers non-simplifiers face in simplifying their lifestyles. To act against workplace norms could be potentially risky and therefore, it was not something that many non-simplifiers were prepared to do.

5.25 Lack of Positive Simple Living Role Models

The majority of non-simplifiers did not know any people who had made a shift to a simpler lifestyle. It was more common for non-simplifiers to know people who had 'up-scaled' their lifestyles (rather than downsized) due to the mining boom. Several non-

simplifiers also mentioned that they tended to surround themselves with people who were similar to them. For this reason, it was understandable that they did not know anyone who had simplified. Five non-simplifiers (n = 5) stated that they knew people who had simplified, three of which were extreme case examples. This resulted in these non-simplifiers being repelled by the idea of simplifying. Loretta spoke of her father-in-law who attempted to live a self-sufficient lifestyle. She said:

“My father-in-law tried to live a completely independent life with bee hives and ducks on the pond and solar everything...it’s fine but as he got older it just became such a complicated thing to organise...it didn’t really work for him so that sort of put me off doing anything in such an extreme way” (Loretta; L143).

Similarly, Nadia spoke of her husband’s childhood friend, stating:

“My husband has a friend...well, he grew up with someone who was a policeman in Perth back in the early eighties. His wife had a baby and breastfed in a shopping centre. Front page of the West Australian ‘How dare she breastfeed in public, exposing herself’...it was a big hoo-ha so he just turned around, handed in his uniform, resigned, moved down south, became hippy, grew heaps of weed, the kids were running around. You know, that’s a drastic downsizing” (Nadia; L222).

As a consequence of being exposed to these extreme examples, non-simplifiers were reluctant to do anything that seemed too extreme or against the norm.

In contrast, the few non-simplifiers who had been exposed to positive simple living role models and friends appeared to be more open to the idea of simplifying their lives. Some mentioned already being engaged in simple living practices, such as keeping chickens and decluttering. Joseph spoke fondly of his colleague Claudia, stating:

“She is going to start her own bee hives at home. She told me you can have two milking goats on your property. She collects her rainwater. What else does she do? She makes fish emulsions for her vegetables, so she’s one notch up” (Joseph; L345).

Non-simplifier Joseph took an interest in growing his own food and having solar panels but he was motivated for economic rather than environmental reasons. Claudia was

someone he could relate to and respected and therefore, he was open to learning from her.

5.26 Positive Aspects Associated with Simple Living

Despite the misconceptions around simple living and the psychological and structural barriers non-simplifiers faced, some non-simplifiers could see the benefits that were associated in making a shift to a simpler lifestyle. These benefits included: lower stress levels; having more time for personal projects; taking more breaks; being less dependent on technology; and minimising their schedule.

5.27 Discussion

This preliminary research phase found that the vast majority of simplifiers came to make a shift in lifestyle as a result of reflecting on their lives and what really mattered to them. In most cases, this period of reflection was the result of a combination of factors: feeling a deep sense of dissatisfaction; experiencing a disruptive life event; and/or feeling concerned about the state of the environment. Subsequently, simplifiers felt compelled to end a relationship, make a career change, reduce their work hours, and/or move to a new area to create a simpler lifestyle. These results were consistent with the findings of others (Cherrier & Murray, 2007; Schreurs, 2010) who established the process of simplifying and downshifting involves critically examining one's life. Similar to the present study, these studies also found that this period of deep reflection is usually triggered by some conflict or an event that interrupts the usual course of people's daily lives.

While some simplicity advocates claim people are driven to pursue this lifestyle primarily out of concern for the environment (section 3.1), the present study found that concern for the environment was not a primary driver for making the shift in lifestyle. Participants were predominantly seeking more time for self and family, and a more meaningful existence. Western Australian's motivations for making the shift in lifestyle were similar to those found by Breakspear and Hamilton (2004) who identified four main reasons for Australians downshifting: 1) a desire for a more balanced life; 2) a clash between personal values and work values; 3) searching for a more fulfilling life; and 4) ill

health. In the present study, simplifiers were acutely aware of a range of environmental problems, especially how their consumption behaviour linked to such issues. This made the simplifiers different from most downshifter who usually do not share their concerns and the same level of understanding about the environment (section 3.1.31). Having an awareness of these issues, the belief that their actions made a difference, and having more discretionary time, enabled simplifiers to carry out a range of sustainability practices. The adoption of a simpler lifestyle was in most cases not 'simple' or easy. It was a gradual process. This shift in lifestyle involved high levels of deliberation, time and effort. Growing their own food and/or sourcing it locally, implementing practices to gain greater awareness of their financial position, being thrifty, and making items (e.g., ceramic cups, soap, laundry detergent, and clothes) were practices simplifiers engaged in and had developed over a number of years. This finding was consistent with the research findings of Lorenzen (2012) who found people can make a decision to green their lifestyle at any point; however, the process of making change and implementing new sustainable lifestyle practices takes time.

Due to being less time-pressured and not tied up with money concerns, simplifiers were able to think more deeply about bigger than self problems, such as the state of the planet. Non-simplifiers appeared to be locked into a cycle of 'work-and-spend' and had not reached a level of dissatisfaction and/or awareness of alternative ways to live that would drive them to want to break out of this cycle and pursue a different lifestyle. All that being said, it appeared that the foundations for living simply were laid early in life with the majority of simplifiers mentioning the influence their parents had had in the formation of their attitudes around money and frugality. Simplifiers spoke of watching their parents engage in a range of simple living practices, which was mostly out of necessity due to living through the Great Depression. In contrast, most non-simplifiers said they had not been exposed to any examples of people living simply.

Simplifiers did not feel the need to base their identity on material status symbols. Instead they based their identity on the idea of not consuming and being someone who devoted their time to meaningful experiences. Simplifiers appeared to have a good understanding of concepts such as the 'consumer treadmill', manipulative advertising techniques that perpetuate consumption, the sources of happiness and well-being, as

well as the limitations of money and wealth once their basic needs were met. Subsequently, simplifiers' lives were strongly focused on engaging in intrinsically rewarding activities rather than around acquiring material goods. As a consequence of orienting their lives towards intrinsic values, the majority of simplifiers said they were happier, felt more peaceful, and content. This result was consistent with the findings of Alexander and Ussher (2012) who found 87% of voluntary simplifiers said they felt happier as a result of living more simply and 13% of voluntary simplifiers said they felt about as happy as they did before making the shift in lifestyle.

In comparison, non-simplifiers did not seem to be as satisfied with their lives and talked about seeking more and better opportunities. The majority of non-simplifiers were striving to make more money so they could obtain better opportunities (e.g., world travel and good education for their children) and to feel a sense of financial security. Several non-simplifiers were driven to achieve because they felt they had not accomplished much in the past and had wasted years of their lives. Others felt anxiety about their age and not being able to get back into the workforce. Non-simplifiers appeared to embody the values of capitalist culture, perceiving work and wealth as a form of salvation.

Key components of the simplifier journey included stepping off the 'consumer treadmill' (or at least taming the desire to consume) and having a clear sense of what was important in life (i.e., their values) and the things they needed to live well. This was made easier by the decision to not have a television or frequent shopping centres on a regular basis. Most simplifiers rejected materialism and the idea of climbing the corporate ladder and reinvented their own definition of success: one based on having a healthy mind and body, a happy family life, community connections and a healthy planet.

It could be argued that simplifiers are better placed to navigate the online world due to their increased levels of mindfulness (section 3.1.1); however, the present study found that across the board all participants (both non-simplifiers and simplifiers) struggled to manage their relationship with the Internet and other technological devices. While most simplifiers rejected television, they shared the same struggles with managing other addictive forms of technology as non-simplifiers. It was common to hear simplifiers say

they could waste hours of time online exploring simple living practices and not actually get around to implementing the practices (section 5.13). All that being said, simplifiers seemed to question the benefits of social media sites like Facebook more than non-simplifiers, but nevertheless continued to use Facebook seeing it as a useful platform to document and share their simple living journey with others. Despite interfering with their ability to live simply at times, the use of Facebook is particularly powerful as it can help simplifiers to spread the ideas of voluntary simplicity to more mainstream audiences (Wallman, 2015). Since these technologies are relatively new compared to the invention of television and not a great deal has been written in the simplicity literature on how to manage the online world, understandably this is an area that simplifiers are still trying to figure out. What is clear from the present research findings is that both simplifiers and non-simplifiers could benefit from learning about how to mindfully manage their relationship to technology.

Interviews with non-simplifiers illustrated that they lacked an understanding of environmental issues and a sense of urgency to take action to address these issues. Unlike simplifiers who were aware of a range of environmental problems (section 5.2.4), many non-simplifiers seemed to be in a middle-class bubble ('My life is good') and some were in denial about the state of the environment. They only appeared to be concerned about issues that affected them or their immediate family members directly. A few non-simplifiers expressed concerns with some aspects of Western consumer culture, such as competitiveness and narcissism. This information is valuable as it indicates possible entry points for facilitating discussions on consumer culture and overconsumption.

In addition, non-simplifiers failed to properly conceptualise what simple living was about, besides knowing that it was not simple. Through the eyes of non-simplifiers, simplifiers were lazy, lacked ambition, wasted their talents and had a lower standard of living. These misconceptions may be largely due to non-simplifiers being exposed to extreme examples of simple living or not being exposed to any simplifiers at all. Several non-simplifiers stated that they could not see the value in engaging in simple living practices and viewed practices such as making bread and gardening as a chore. One non-simplifier stated these practices were a form of "*torture*" (Loretta; L187). 'Why would you bother making your own bread when you could easily buy it from the shop?' was the question

that sprung to mind for many non-simplifiers. This way of thinking highlights a degree of ignorance held by non-simplifiers in relation to issues around food, health, and sustainability.

This preliminary research also illustrated how the terms 'simple living' and 'slow living' were problematic not only for non-simplifiers but also simplifiers. Simplifiers felt that the term 'simple living' was misleading and failed to properly convey their lifestyle, which was often far from being 'simple' in terms of the level of work, effort, and deliberation that was required. The voluntary simplicity lifestyle was also not described as 'slow', with simplifiers stating that they still lived busy lives, just not with the same degree of stress as they experienced before making the shift in lifestyle (section 5.18). This study found that the idea of slowing down did not appeal to most non-simplifiers (section 5.22.2). While non-simplifiers acknowledged some benefits associated with slowing down (e.g., better for people's health and well-being), the majority of non-simplifiers stated that they liked being busy. Being busy was associated with being productive and a sense of achievement. In contrast, 'slow living' was seen as not living up to one's full potential. Humphrey (2010) argues that while the words 'simplicity', 'frugality', 'slowness', and 'downshifting' have a certain appeal in that they are often associated with less stressful lifestyles, they can also be off-putting. He states that these terms *"leave little room for a love of the complex, the fast, the cosmopolitan and expansive way of life that also remain deeply valued as part of what modernity offers"* (Humphrey, 2010, p.164). In order to engage mainstream Western Australians, a new label may be required to describe the voluntary simplicity lifestyle. In addition, it is important to present less extreme examples of people who pursue this counter-cultural lifestyle.

The ultimate problem with the voluntary simplicity lifestyle as it currently stands is that it places the individual as an outsider, living in opposition to mainstream norms endorsed by consumer culture. In a world where most people have a social need to fit in and not stand out for the wrong reasons, simple living may not be an attractive lifestyle for many people (Humphrey, 2010; Wallman, 2015). Opting out of consumption practices means excluding oneself from attending certain social gatherings (e.g., dinners at expensive restaurants) and participating in expensive forms of entertainment (e.g.,

live concerts). In short, saying no to consumption may mean saying no to having a social life. In light of this, it is not surprising that many of the simplifiers who were interviewed lost contact with their old friends and made new friends who shared similar values and interests (section 5.20).

The question remains to be asked, is it possible to make the voluntary simplicity lifestyle more appealing to mainstream audiences? And if so, how? From interviewing simplifiers and comparing their key lifestyle practices and values to non-simplifiers, as well as gaining an understanding of non-simplifiers' perceptions towards this way of life, a number of principles emerged that could be utilised to help non-simplifiers make the shift to less consumptive lifestyles. The principles are as follows:

1. Educate people on the linkages between their personal consumption and ecological damage (i.e., how their daily consumption behaviour impacts on the natural environment).
2. Conversations about decreasing consumption need to be framed around issues such as the role modern technology has on people's lives (e.g., increased pace of life) and relationships, exploring needs and wants, managing finances, and what brings happiness.
3. Introduce non-simplifiers to simple living practices and their associated intrinsic benefits. Create opportunities for non-simplifiers to engage and experiment with these practices.
4. Expose non-simplifiers to positive examples of simple living. These examples should not be extreme and ideally come from a social reference group that non-simplifiers can identify with.
5. As a first step to simplifying, teach people about the benefits of decluttering their space and minds, and show them how to declutter. The issue of accumulating clutter can be linked to broader issues associated with the overconsumption of resources.
6. Create a space for people to reflect on their lives and questions such as 'Am I doing what I want to be doing?', 'What is most important to me?', and 'Are my values and behaviours in alignment?'. Help people to engage in activities that

develop awareness of their values and behaviour (e.g., mindfulness training, tracking spending, and the 'Technology Audit').

7. Assist non-simplifiers to get out of debt, develop thrifty habits, and become good savers (rather than spenders). This will decrease the perceived risks associated with making large lifestyle changes.
8. Empower people to take charge of their lives, think creatively, and broaden their outlook.
9. Emphasise the positive benefits associated with having a simpler and slower paced lifestyle (e.g., better health, less stress, and more freedom) and address misconceptions and/or mistaken beliefs around simple living and busyness.
10. Find a new term for 'simple living' and 'voluntary simplicity' that appeals to non-simplifiers. Frame the lifestyle in terms of something that appeals to non-simplifiers' identities (e.g., being busy and productive).
11. Show non-simplifiers alternatives to the cycle of 'work-and-spend'.
12. Educate participants on the sources of happiness and well-being.
13. Educate participants on the key factors that drive personal consumption.
14. Facilitate conversations focused on time as an important resource.
15. Help non-simplifiers to come up with their own definition of success (rather than simply adopting the definition of Western consumer culture).
16. Provide the opportunity for participants to reflect on what they need to thrive and live a satisfying life.
17. Question the role of television and the benefits derived from watching television in order to encourage non-simplifiers to cut back on their television consumption.
18. Help non-simplifiers to eliminate their exposure to commercial media messages and advertising.
19. Assist non-simplifiers to reflect on a range of bigger than self-issues and the importance of community.
20. Give non-simplifiers strategies, tools, and practices to mindfully manage technology.

Figure 8 illustrates the relationships that appear to exist based on the data presented in this chapter and the research literature (Chapters 2 and 3) between these 20 key principles. Note that some principles are listed multiple times due to overlap between the variables.

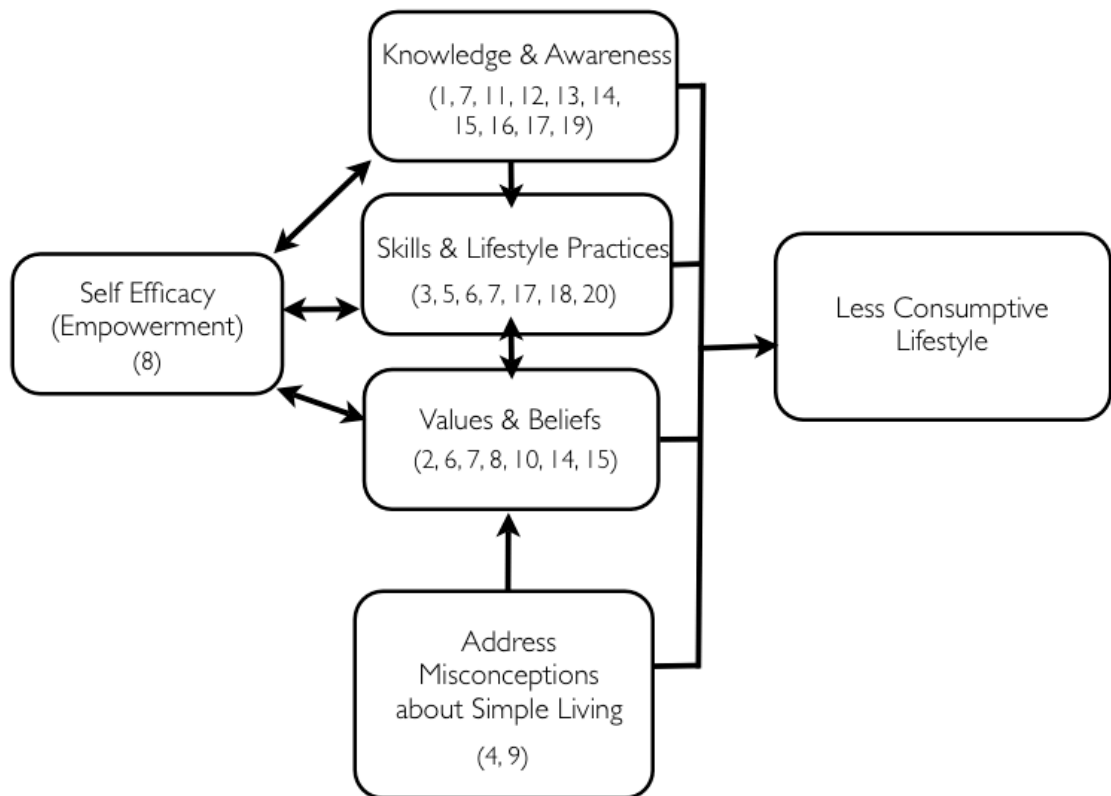


Figure 8. The Key Principles of an Adult Educational Intervention to Decrease Materialistic Values and Excessive Consumption Behaviour.

These principles, along with findings from the research literature, will be used to formulate an adult educational intervention that encourages people to adopt the practices of simplifiers as well as discourage engagement in extrinsic goal pursuits. The conceptual framework of the educational intervention will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Conceptual Framework of an Intervention to Decrease Materialistic Values and Consumption Behaviour: The *Smart Busy* Program

In Chapters 2, 3 and 5 of this thesis, a number of strategies were discussed that have the potential to decrease materialistic values and overconsumption in the Western developed world. The two key strategies this dissertation focused on are emulating aspects of the voluntary simplicity lifestyle and cultivating mindfulness. Although there is some overlap between the two strategies, it is important to consider them separately as not all voluntary simplifiers practise mindfulness. It is clear from the research literature that a voluntary simplicity lifestyle and mindfulness training have potential to bring about shifts toward more sustainable, less materialistic lifestyles. As yet there is a lack of published research exploring the effectiveness of educational interventions that aim to shift people's extrinsic values and excessive consumption behaviour through the use of these specific strategies. The aim of this thesis was to develop and test the effectiveness of an educational intervention that sets out to achieve such shifts in values and behaviour. This chapter outlines the goals, theory, and structure of the educational intervention that was developed: *The Smart Busy Program*.

6.1 Goals and Objectives

An overarching goal of the *Smart Busy* program was to shift people away from a materialistic lifestyle to a simpler, less consumption-based way of life. The program teaches skills, tools, and strategies to help participants become more mindful and lead lives that are more intrinsically oriented (i.e., centred around ideas and experiences rather than material goods). The *Smart Busy* program facilitates an ongoing conversation that gets participants to question materialistic pursuits and aspirations

and explores what is most important in life. In a world that is often characterised as being filled with mindless entertainment, busyness, and noise, the workshops provide people with the opportunity to deeply reflect on their lives over a 6-week period.

Each session covers a topic or several topics that relate to key aspects of voluntary simplicity, as either identified by the research literature or from the interviews conducted with simplifiers in Western Australia (Chapter 5). The topics that were identified as being critically important to the program included: food; identifying values and priorities; decluttering; limiting consumption; mindfulness and meditation practices; managing technology use; thriftiness and frugality; caring for community; and reclaiming time for meaningful activities. Table 11 details the goals of each session.

Table 11. Session Goals.

Session	Goals
1. Mindfulness 101	<p>Participants gain an understanding of the importance of self-control, how self-control can be depleted in everyday life, and the various ways to strengthen their self-control (e.g., mindfulness training).</p> <p>Participants learn about the benefits of mindfulness and how to cultivate mindfulness in their everyday lives through regular meditation practice and eliminating rapid task switching (i.e., multitasking) from their lives.</p>
2. Take back your time	<p>Participants gain a greater awareness of the negative consequences of excessive screen time and engagement with technology.</p> <p>Participants explore their media diet (i.e., how they interact with technology on a daily basis) and how technology impacts on their lives.</p> <p>Participants have an opportunity to reflect on and plan out how they would like to experience their leisure time.</p>
3. What really matters in life?	<p>Participants have an opportunity to reflect on their values and the reasons why certain values are important to them.</p> <p>Participants gain a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to enhanced well-being.</p> <p>Participants gain an understanding of the limitations of financial and material wealth in terms of enhancing well-being.</p> <p>Participants learn about concepts such as the ‘work-and-spend’ cycle, relative wealth versus absolute wealth, social comparison theory, and the hedonic treadmill.</p> <p>Participants acquire tools and strategies to help them gain greater awareness of their spending habits and examine the definition of their needs and wants.</p>

	Participants gain an understanding of the ancient virtue of thrift and learn a range of thrifty practices that they can implement into their daily lives.
4. Declutter your life	<p>Participants gain an understanding of how they accumulate clutter.</p> <p>Participants acquire practical strategies to discard clutter and decrease unnecessary items from entering their lives.</p> <p>Participants have an opportunity to see themselves as consumers of the Earth's finite resources and have an increased understanding of how their consumption behaviour impacts on the natural environment.</p> <p>Participants reflect on their consumption practices and what drives them to consume in unnecessary ways.</p> <p>Participants create an action plan to curb their exposure to advertising and materialistic messages in preparation for undertaking a 'commercial media fast'.</p>
5. Food matters	<p>Participants begin to cultivate a curiosity about the food they eat (e.g., where it comes from and what is in it).</p> <p>Participants have an opportunity to explore the barriers to cooking meals at home.</p> <p>Participants brainstorm a range of tasty, quick, and easy meals that they can make at home on a regular basis.</p> <p>Participants practice the skill of mindful eating.</p>
6. Planning for the future	<p>Participants have a greater awareness of how social ties and community connections impact on their well-being.</p> <p>Participants explore the barriers to getting more involved in their local community.</p> <p>Participants write a letter to their 'future selves' to strengthen their commitment to their goals and values, and reflect on their experiences in the program.</p>

6.2 Strategies and Theories Used

Although the *Smart Busy* program uses a number of strategies to help reduce materialistic values and excessive consumption, there are two primary strategies that are used to carry out the aims of the program: 1) promoting the values and practices of the voluntary simplicity lifestyle; and 2) cultivating mindfulness. On their own, each strategy may not be enough to reduce materialistic values and consumption behaviour; however, combined they have the potential to bring about large-shifts in lifestyle (Chapter 3).

Mindfulness is often taught in a purely secular fashion that is devoid of its religious and spiritual teachings (Gelles, 2015). As a consequence, it can end up being a superficial practice that merely brings about reductions in stress levels and increases in productivity without any deeper value or behavioural change (section 3.7.2). For instance, one could simply become mindful about pursuing extrinsic goal pursuits such as shopping for new clothes or getting a job promotion. To avoid this occurring in the *Smart Busy* program, mindfulness training will be scaffolded in the philosophy of voluntary simplicity in order to direct participants to think more deeply about what matters in life and develop greater awareness of their behaviour in certain areas (e.g., what they eat and how they eat).

The two key strategies are interconnected and designed to reinforce and strengthen each other. For instance, practising mindfulness can help people to clarify their values and shift towards being more intrinsically oriented (section 3.5.5). It can also help people to become more attuned to the shortfalls of consumption and increase their positive affect (section 3.5.2 and 3.5.4). Subsequently, this may place an individual in a better position where they are more likely to be open to adopting practices that are associated with voluntary simplicity (e.g., rejecting frivolous consumption). Similarly, engagement in voluntary simplicity practices, such as avoiding watching television and limiting exposure to advertising (which often confuse people's values and distort their thinking), may help people to become more mindful of what their own personal values and needs are.

6.2.1 Application of Mindfulness in Educational Intervention

Training people to become more mindful (i.e., improve their ability to pay attention), through regular meditation practice as well as encouraging environmental restructuring to minimise distractions, will strengthen participants' compassion, ability to self-regulate (and thereby decrease impulse buying), build their resistance to persuasive advertising messages, help to clarify their values, increase the potential for nature connectedness, and enhance their well-being (section 3.5). Mindfulness training will provide a solid foundation for participants to be able to not only quieten their minds but also broaden their outlook (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). If participants feel more in control of their lives and better about themselves,

they are likely to be more open to alternative ways of living rather than seeing the cycle of 'work-and-spend' as the only way to live.

In session 1, participants are taught what mindfulness is and how it can be cultivated through regular meditation practice. Participants are guided through a short meditation exercise and are asked to share their experience. They are encouraged to practise meditation daily in order to increase their self-control and experience a number of other physical and psychological benefits. Participants are given a meditation CD at the end of session 1 and are assigned homework to listen to particular guided meditation tracks each week. The duration of each meditation track gradually increases as the program progresses (from 2 minutes in session 1 to 11 minutes by the end of the program). Participants identify prompts and cues in their environment that act as triggers for practising meditation. In addition, participants are encouraged to persevere with their mindfulness training, even if it may feel painful and/or boring. They are reassured that it may take time to see benefits from meditating; however, with regular practice benefits will come. Sessions 2 - 6 commence with a short-guided mindfulness meditation.

Participants are also introduced to a range of different ways they can practise mindfulness other than just through seated meditation exercises. For instance, at session 5 participants have the opportunity to experiment with mindfully eating a piece of chocolate (Appendix V, 'The Chocolate Meditation'). This exercise introduces participants to the idea that mindfulness can be practised when engaged in a range of different activities, such as walking, patting a dog, and eating a meal.

In addition to cultivating mindfulness through regular meditation practice, participants are encouraged to restructure their environment to minimise distractions and maximise their ability to pay attention to their present moment experience. By educating participants on the costs of multitasking, the way in which technology speeds up the pace of life, and the impact technology can have on personal relationships, it is anticipated that participants will develop a greater awareness of the importance of focusing their attention on one thing at a time and placing limits on their technology use. Participants will be encouraged to engage in a 'Technology Audit' in which they track how they engage with technology on a typical workday and a

typical weekend day (Appendix V). They will also monitor what technologies they use, for how long, and how they feel before and after engaging with each device. This will help to overcome any mistaken beliefs participants hold about how much (or little) time they spend online. It will also help participants to recognise and become more aware about how they feel before and after engaging with certain technological devices. Participants will be taught practical strategies and tools, such as how to install Internet blocker applications, take 'Digital Sabbaths', and set limits on how much time they spend on technology, over the 6-week program.

Furthermore, each week participants will be asked to reflect on specific behaviours (as well as barriers to engaging in certain behaviours), attitudes, and beliefs. As a consequence, participants' mindfulness (i.e., awareness) levels in relation to particular areas of their lives may increase. Every week participants will be assigned homework exercises that require them to monitor their behaviour and report back to the group on any insights they may have had. Through increasing participants' awareness of how they behave in their daily lives and thereby becoming less 'mindless', participants are in a better position to create new, healthier habits rather than fall into automatic routines and patterns of behaviour (section 3.5.6). Becoming more mindful also increases the likelihood that participants will act in line with their values (Chatzisarantis & Hagger, 2007).

6.2.2 Voluntary Simplicity Practices and Philosophy

Every session of the *Smart Busy* intervention focuses on topics that are central to the lives of voluntary simplifiers. Each topic is framed predominantly around the idea of living a satisfying, healthier, and more fulfilling life rather than as a way to 'simplify' or live more sustainably. It is also important to note that words such as 'simplifying' and 'slowing down' are avoided wherever possible at the beginning of the program due to the negative misconceptions that are associated with these terms (section 5.22).

Each session aims to inspire and encourage participants to engage in a range of simple living practices that they may not normally engage in. According to Broaden and Build theory (Fredrickson, 2001) if participants are experiencing positive emotions as a result of engaging in mindfulness practices they will have an expanded thought-action

repertoire. If participants can have positive experiences engaging in simple living practices, such as cooking a meal at home or attending a community event, they will be more likely to engage in those practices again. Through developing new skills participants may also experience an increased sense of mastery, confidence, and autonomy (section 3.1.53). This may help to satisfy participants' core psychological needs, which in turn may lead to the adoption of other simple living practices and less desire to consume.

It could be argued that if an individual is time-poor and busy, how could they possibly find the time to engage in simple living practices such as cooking meals from raw ingredients? The intervention aims to help people make time for such activities by teaching them how to slow down through mindfulness training so they feel like they have more time and emphasising the need to prioritise health and happiness. Through participants examining the time they spend watching television and engaged with other technologies, as well as their motivations for doing so, they are likely to identify blocks of time in their schedule that could be better spent engaged in more meaningful activities. Participants will be encouraged to deliberately plan out their leisure time to avoid wasting time in front of a screen. With a broadened outlook and increased levels of mindfulness to help identify unhealthy habits and routines, participants could adopt a range of simple living practices that are encouraged throughout the intervention.

The voluntary simplicity philosophy focuses on pursuing non-materialistic sources of satisfaction instead of short-lived bursts of hedonic pleasure obtained through material acquisition. Participants will be educated about the consumer treadmill, hedonic adaptation, and social comparison theory to highlight the limitations of wealth and material accumulation on personal well-being (sections 2.4 and 2.5). The negative consequences of pursuing extrinsic aspirations (i.e., financial wealth, popularity, and an attractive appearance) are discussed (section 2.2). The benefits of thrift, refusing to purchase unnecessary items, and choosing experiences over material purchases are also explored. Common misconceptions that are associated with thrift, such as being stingy and miserly, will be addressed to decrease barriers to the idea of carefully using resources and saving instead of spending.

While most people in the Western world would agree with the statement that they have too much stuff (Wallman, 2015), far fewer people would be willing to admit that they are materialistic or consuming the Earth's finite resources through their everyday behaviours (Chapters 3 and 5). For this reason, the topic of consumption will be introduced by initially looking at practical ways people can declutter their homes. This was seen as being a less threatening approach to exploring the idea of reducing consumption. After participants are given practical strategies and a process to declutter their lives, they are introduced to the idea of keeping clutter at bay by refusing to consume items they do not need in the first place.

To illustrate the environmental impact of personal consumption, participants will be shown the animated video 'The Story of Stuff' (Story of Stuff Project, 2007). This video documents the process of consumption from initial extraction of resources to waste disposal. It also reinforces a range of concepts covered during the *Smart Busy* program such as the cycle of 'work-and-spend', the impact of marketing messages, and the consumer treadmill. After watching the video, participants are asked to discuss in small groups any insights they had while watching the video and to think about the costs associated with overconsumption.

The act of sharing material goods with others is also explored as an anti-consumption practice. This is important to discuss as Australian adults are generally not good at sharing, particularly when receiving items from others (Rooney, 2012). Nevertheless, the act of sharing is becoming increasingly popular in Australia as an avenue for addressing social and environmental problems (Rooney, 2014). In the *Smart Busy* program, participants will be asked to reflect on questions such as 'Do we need to own everything that we use?' and 'Could I borrow some items from others?'. The concept of collaborative consumption (i.e., the sharing/gift economy) is discussed to encourage participants to explore the possibility of borrowing and sharing to reduce their resource use and avoid overconsumption through hedonic adaptation.

In addition, participants are asked to reflect on questions such as 'Do we need to work so much?' and 'Could we work less, live more, and spend less?' The concept of the cycle of 'work-and-spend' is covered to illustrate how many people can get trapped in patterns of working long hours, consuming excessively to make up for what is lacking

in their lives, and neglecting their health and relationships (section 2.8). Participants will be invited to consider the possibility of working less and spending less. The relationship between time and happiness/well-being is explored to shift participants' perspectives away from the dominant paradigm of working as much as they can to accumulate more material goods to looking at how they can use their time in more effective ways to increase their happiness/well-being.

Participants will be encouraged to explore how much they need to live and participate fully in society. This will be achieved by tracking their spending over the course of a week (a practice many simplifiers reported engaging in) (section 5.6.2). Tracking where their money flows can also help participants to identify where they can make big savings by cutting back on certain expenses. If participants can cut back on purchasing certain items or be thriftier, then they may not need to work such long hours. They could also enjoy more time doing the things that they are interested in. It may not always be possible for people to reduce their work hours but even so, having conversations around time, work, and spending may encourage participants to think differently about time as a valuable resource. This may also help to create the foundations that are necessary for participants to lobby for broader political change to reduce the working week and/or for employers to provide greater flexibility to employees' work schedules.

Participants will be invited to consider what their true needs are to thrive and live a satisfying life. An activity called 'Needs and Wants', adapted from Dungan's (2010) 'Money Sanity Solutions' course, will be carried out. In this activity, participants reflect on items they thought about buying recently, what prompted the thought to buy the item, and whether the item is a need or a want. Participants are asked to reflect on their own personal definition of needs and wants and how they know the difference between the two. As a consequence of participants taking the time to reflect on their needs/wants and the environmental triggers for excessive consumption, they are likely to be less susceptible to misleading marketing messages that cater to mindless states.

Through promoting the above aspects of the voluntary simplicity lifestyle, participants' intrinsic values are likely to be activated. This will help to satisfy their core psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and social relatedness. Subsequently,

it is expected that they will feel more secure in themselves, and will be more resilient in the face of marketing messages and pressure from others to consume (section 2.2.12). Giving participants an opportunity to reflect on their most important values and the reasons these values are important during the intervention will also help to activate and strengthen intrinsic values (Maio, Pakizeh, Cheung, & Rees, 2009).

In an attempt to diminish extrinsic values, the intervention will also focus on debunking the common assumption that accumulating goods leads to increased levels of happiness/well-being. Educating participants on the fleeting happiness that comes from shopping and the concept of the consumer treadmill may prompt participants to start to explore more fulfilling ways to increase their happiness and well-being (section 2.5). Participants will be educated on the factors that lead to increased happiness/well-being as well as some of the strategies advertisers use to undermine their happiness/well-being by inducing feelings of dissatisfaction and insecurity.

Other strategies that will be implemented to shift the prioritisation of values from extrinsic to intrinsic include participants restructuring their environment to decrease their exposure to materialistic messages and increasing their exposure to nature (Chapter 3). After session 4, participants will be encouraged to alter their environment to decrease their exposure to messages reinforcing extrinsic values by avoiding commercial television and radio, shopping centres, and online advertising through Internet blocker applications. In relation to increasing participants' exposure to nature, participants are encouraged throughout the program to spend time outdoors in natural settings as a way to clear their mind and feel re-energised. Most importantly, these experiences in nature will help to strengthen their intrinsic values and environmental protective behaviours (section 3.1.53).

6.3 Emulating the Process of Change

The act of deeply reflecting on life is central to the process of adopting a simpler lifestyle (section 3.1.4). Stage 1 of Cherrier and Murray's (2007) Four-stage Identity Negotiation Process focuses on people closely examining their lives (e.g., 'Why am I living the way I am?') (Table 3). Indeed, the act of reflecting on life has been shown to be an important aspect in terms of promoting green lifestyle change (Lorenzen, 2012).

Since busy people rarely have time to reflect on such questions, the *Smart Busy* program was designed to help participants carve out the time in their lives to engage in deeper reflection in a structured way. Participants taking time out to reflect on their values and behaviour and how the two may not be in alignment may assist participants to make changes to their lifestyle.

The intervention attempts to create a new social norm that is counter mainstream society by encouraging people to make the pursuit of intrinsic values (e.g., spending time with friends and family) a priority. Modern day corporate and consumer culture teaches people that success is associated with the accumulation of material goods and wealth (Chapter 2). Instead, the *Smart Busy* intervention attempts to foster values of caring for others and the planet. Surrounding participants with people who prioritise (or aspire to prioritise) intrinsic values may help to strengthen participants' ability to live in line with their values.

6.4 Overcoming Barriers to Adopting a Simpler Lifestyle

It is critical that participants receive empowering messages about improving their lives throughout the intervention rather than messages of having to make sacrifices through reductions in consumption. Phase 1 findings showed non-simplifiers associated slowing down and simplifying with ideas such as going without certain things (e.g., hot showers) as well as being lazy and unproductive (section 5.22). While the majority of non-simplifiers associated being busy with making progress and being successful, several non-simplifiers spoke of the negative impacts associated with being overly busy. For example, participants spoke of missing out on spending time with their family due to working long hours and being too exhausted to cook or exercise at the end of the day. Therefore, the challenge was to present slowing down and simplifying in a socially desirable manner to non-simplifiers in the educational intervention. This was achieved through the creation of a new concept: being 'Smart Busy'. 'Smart Busy' was contrasted with the concept of being 'Crazy Busy', a term coined by psychiatrist Dr Edward Hallowell (2007). In session 1 of the program, participants are introduced to two ways of being in life: 'Smart Busy' and 'Crazy Busy'. 'Smart Busy' is described to participants as follows:

“Here’s how Smart Busy goes: You wake up in the morning feeling energised and refreshed. You’re focused on each thing you need to do. You’re also aware of what you’re doing and why you’re doing it. You learn to pause and know when you’ve done enough. You’re not in a race against time because you know you have all the time you need. By taking small steps, you know you’ll get there. When you’re Smart Busy, the process is just as important as the outcome. You feel calm and clear minded. In short, you’re passionate about life and what matters most to you. You’re still living a full life, but you’re savouring every minute of it”.

In contrast, ‘Crazy Busy’ was described as follows:

“You wake up in the morning. The first thing you do is you check your phone to see what’s happened on Facebook or if you’ve received any important emails. Before you know it 5 minutes online has turned into 30 minutes and you realise that you’re running late. You rush to get ready, race off to work, and then all day it’s push, push, push. You treat your body like it’s a machine, trying to get as much done as possible, rushing and switching from one task to another. But the problem is you’re not a machine. You’re a human. You have limits.

When you’re working on something you find yourself worrying about all the other things you need to do, so you’re not fully there. You feel like you’re always late and always behind. You just have one more thing to do and then one more thing and one more thing after that! Your ‘to-do’ list can feel like it never ends. That’s Crazy Busy living”.

The point of presenting participants with these two contrasting ways of being is to frame the idea of slowing down in a way that would be more palatable and appealing to a mainstream audience. For this reason, the program was called *Smart Busy: Live Better, Feel Free and Stress Less* and framed around giving people practical tools and strategies to help them cope more effectively with the stresses and demands of modern life.

While most people living in Western consumer culture would benefit from participating in a program to decrease materialistic values and consumption, it may not be immediately obvious as to why it would be beneficial for them to do so. As previously discussed, people do not typically view themselves as materialistic (Chapter 5). In addition, consumption is seen as being many people’s basic right (Schor, 1999) and as a fun leisure activity (section 2.7). People are also encouraged and rewarded for their consumption in Western consumer societies (Nevin, 2006). Therefore, in order to

recruit people to participate, the program had to be framed around topics that were of concern to people yet still related to consumption and materialism. The findings from phase 1 found that materialistic Western Australians (non-simplifiers) were fundamentally concerned about issues such as working long hours to consume frivolous items, competitive consumption, and the overwhelming amount of choice in shops (section 5.7).

In addition, non-simplifiers did not like extreme examples of people who had simplified their lives (section 5.25). Despite the fact various scholars have argued that radical shifts in lifestyle are required to ensure a sustainable planet for future generations (Alexander, 2015; Peattie & Peattie, 2009), it is important that participants are not put off or repelled by ideas in the educational intervention. Therefore, participants are gently introduced to ideas that challenge mainstream consumer culture and the current status quo. For the *Smart Busy* program to maintain its appeal to a mainstream audience, practices that run the risk of appearing too extreme or radical should not be presented in the first few sessions. If the values and practices are perceived as being in stark contrast to what participants are used to and may place them at risk of being socially marginalised, high attrition rates are likely to occur.

6.5 Intervention Curriculum

The *Smart Busy* program consists of six 2-hour sessions that run over six consecutive weeks. Each session builds on the next and follows a progressive order of exploration and awareness. Sessions are made up of four basic parts: 1) a brief meditation; 2) a review and discussion of the homework exercises; 3) specific information and activities that relate to the topic(s) for the session; and 4) an introduction to next session's topic. A friendly and relaxed atmosphere is created through the use of humour wherever possible and appropriate, and by getting participants to reflect on their lives and share their personal experiences (either with the whole group or in small groups containing two to three participants). Each session also includes a short break for light refreshments. This is an opportunity for participants to get to know each other better through informal discussions. Before each break commences, participants are given a question relating to the session topic to think about and discuss with others over the break. Between sessions, participants are given homework exercises to complete to

reinforce ideas and strategies taught at each session (Table 12). Participants in the wait-list control group will not receive any information about the *Smart Busy* curriculum while the treatment group receives the intervention. The main topics covered in each session are outlined in Table 12.

Table 12. Program Sessions and Content Covered in the *Smart Busy* Program.

Session	Topics covered	Homework
1. Mindful living 101	Busyness and modern life Self-control vs. instant gratification Mindfulness vs. mindlessness	Meditation (Track 1, 2 minutes) Bonus Opportunity: Practice the '3-sigh breathing technique' 10 times per day.
2. Take back your time	Time as a finite resource The impact of technology on our lives and time Screen time alternatives Leisure time	Meditation (Track 2, 6 minutes) Keep a technology diary for one typical workday and one typical weekend day. Bonus Opportunity: Take a 'Digital Sabbath'.
3. What really matters in life?	Values and goals Money and well-being Needs vs. wants The ancient virtue of thrift	Meditation (Track 2, 6 minutes) Examine spending habits. Bonus Opportunity: Pay for everything with cash.
4. Declutter your life	The costs of overconsumption Decluttering Advertising and commercial media	Meditation (Track 3, 8 minutes) Commercial media fast. Declutter one spot in a room.
5. Food matters	Culture of fast food vs. slow food Portion distortion Meal planning Mindful eating	Meditation (Track 4, 11 minutes) Cook one new meal from scratch. Bonus Opportunities: Visit a local farmer's market. Bring a dish to share to the final session.
6. Planning for the future	Longevity Social ties and community Concept of 'future self'	No homework assigned

6.6 Content of *Smart Busy* Program

The content of each of the six sessions of the *Smart Busy* program is summarised below. For a detailed outline of each session, see Appendix VI.

6.6.1 Session 1: Mindfulness 101

The first session of the intervention aims to introduce participants to the concept and practices of *Smart Busy* living as well as establish a friendly and supportive group environment. The session begins with an outline of the program and details what participants can expect from the program. This is followed by an ice-breaker activity where participants introduce themselves to someone they do not know and share a thought they had while travelling on their way to the program. This then leads into a discussion of people's ability to monitor their thinking and how their thoughts can influence their feelings and behaviours (Edelman, 2006). Participants are made aware that not all of their thoughts serve them and that over the duration of the program they will develop skills to better manage their thoughts, emotions, and behaviour.

Participants are asked to reflect on the characteristics of modern life. The concepts of 'Crazy Busy' and 'Smart Busy' living are then introduced and a group discussion follows. The shift from delayed gratification to instant gratification and the erosion of self-control are explored in further detail. The benefits of delayed gratification (self-control) are discussed and participants learn ways to strengthen their self-control with a particular focus on mindfulness training. Participants are taught meditation as a way to cultivate mindfulness and experience a short-guided meditation.

6.6.2 Session 2: Take Back Your Time

In session 2, the idea of time being a finite resource and how participants have a choice in how they spend their time (being 'Crazy Busy' or 'Smart Busy') is explored. Participants are asked to reflect on their television consumption as well as how they engage with other technological devices. This leads to a discussion on how participants may engage with technology in 'mindless' ways (e.g., multitasking) and the impact this can have on personal relationships as well as personal productivity. Two groups of people who have a tendency to engage mindfully with technology are then examined: 1) the Amish; and 2) Buddhist monks. Participants are asked to brainstorm all the technologies in their lives and how they interact with these technologies on a daily basis. The practice of taking 'Digital Sabbaths' is introduced to participants (section 3.6.2).

The second half of the session focuses on the importance of leisure time and engaging in activities that are personally meaningful and fulfilling. Participants are instructed to brainstorm a range of screen time alternatives that they would enjoy engaging in and pinpoint gaps in their schedules when they can engage in these activities. In the final part of the session, participants are reminded of the fact that it takes discipline to engage in these leisure activities, as it is easy to waste time online and/or watching television. Subsequently, participants are shown strategies to limit the amount of time they spend online and help clear the mind when their brains feel overloaded and overwhelmed by technology. As part of this, participants are encouraged to spend time out in the natural environment. To illustrate the benefits of spending time in nature, participants are asked to look at a picture of nature for 20 seconds and notice how they feel. They are then asked to look at a picture of a grey concrete wall for 20 seconds and notice what feelings come up. Finally, participants reflect on the various ways they can take better care of themselves to avoid getting sick and burning out.

6.6.3 Session 3: What Really Matters in Life?

In session 3, participants have an opportunity to explore their personal values through a series of value clarification exercises. The basics of goal setting and the psychology of motivation are also covered so participants can create goals and take practical steps that are in line with their values. Participants are warned about the potential negative impacts of setting extrinsic goals and the various positive benefits associated with intrinsic goal pursuits (section 1.1).

The second half of the session sets out to deconstruct common misconceptions around money, material acquisition, and happiness. Concepts such as having unrealistic expectations, social comparison theory, relative versus absolute wealth, the cycle of 'work-and-spend', and the consumer treadmill are examined. Participants have an opportunity to examine their current needs and wants through a simple reflection activity adapted from the 'Share, Save, Spend' curriculum (Dungan, 2010, p.31). The factors that lead to increased well-being and happiness are discussed to highlight the limitations of excessive consumption. Participants are shown how they can use their money to work less and have more free time through tracking their spending habits and adopting practices from the ancient virtue of thrift.

6.6.4 Session 4: Declutter Your Life

The focus of session 4 is on how participants can declutter their homes but more importantly, stop accumulating items they do not need. While at first this session may appear to simply focus on decluttering, deeper issues of material consumption are also covered by examining what drives people to consume and how they can step off the consumer treadmill to lead more fulfilling lives. The session commences by looking at the impact physical clutter has on participants' lives and why people have accumulated so much 'stuff'. Factors such as the influence of advertising and marketing, identity signalling, and planned obsolescence are examined (Chapter 2). An efficient process to declutter is demonstrated to participants.

In the second half of the session, participants delve deeper into the environmental implications of overconsumption. The American short animated documentary 'The Story of Stuff' (Story of Stuff Project, 2007) is shown and participants are directed to think about and discuss the costs of excessive consumption. The issue of waste disposal is examined in further detail. The point of this is to enable participants to see the linkage between their personal everyday behaviour in an Australian context and environmental degradation.

Participants will also explore ways they can avoid consuming and bringing more items they do not need into their homes. Asking the question 'Is it a need or is it a want?', engaging in collaborative consumption (i.e., the sharing economy), and avoiding exposure to glossy sales catalogues and advertising are discussed as ways participants can reduce their consumption and control their desire to consume. Finally, participants are introduced to the concept of a 'commercial media fast' (Ferguson & Kasser, 2013). As a group, participants brainstorm where they encounter commercial media messages in their environment. Participants are asked to consider how they can eliminate or reduce their exposure to these messages. Participants are then invited to take part in a 'commercial media fast' for their weekly homework exercise.

6.6.5 Session 5: Food Matters

Session 5 begins by looking at the rise of takeaway/processed foods and the negative consequences of fast-food culture. Participants are told the session will focus on two aspects associated with food: 1) what we eat; and 2) how we eat. In relation to what we eat, participants will spend some time in small groups reflecting on why people are not cooking as much as they used to. The following concepts are then covered: increased portion sizes; additives and preservatives in foods; the lack of connection to our food; food waste; and the rise and role of farmers' markets. The process of planning weekly meals (i.e., meal planning) to reduce food waste, streamline the cooking process, and save time is explained. Participants brainstorm and share quick and easy meals they enjoy preparing.

The session then shifts focus to look at how participants eat. Participants are asked to reflect on how they ate their food during the supper break: did they take their time to savour the food and tune into the texture and different flavours? Or did they gobble it down mindlessly like the cookie monster? A simple mindful eating exercise is carried out where participants experience what it is like to eat a piece of chocolate mindfully (Appendix V, The Chocolate Meditation).

6.6.6 Session 6: Planning for the Future

The final session aims to bring the previous content together and introduce participants to the importance of fostering strong social ties and connections. The session begins by playing a 20-minute video called 'How to live to be 100+' (Buettner, 2009). This video explores a number of factors that lead to longevity and focuses on Blue Zones (i.e., Health and Longevity Hotspots). The benefits associated with eating well, having a sense of purpose, engaging in regular physical activity, and belonging to a community are discussed. Participants have a chance to reflect on what stood out for them from watching the video and share these ideas with the rest of the group. The importance of belonging to a community and the decline of community over the past 30 years are examined. The group explores barriers to connecting with others (e.g., fear of being rejected, the built environment, narcissism, and affluence). Participants also reflect on a time when they have experienced a sense of community in their lives

and what it was like to be part of that community. They also get to see that community does not just happen; it is something that needs to be worked at. For this reason, practical examples of how people can create community and increase social ties and connections are provided.

To conclude the session, the past 6-weeks are briefly summarised before participants have an opportunity to write a letter to their 'future self'. The point of writing the letter is two-fold: participants are guided to think about what changes they would like to maintain as well as new changes they would like to make to their lifestyle. Writing the letter may also strengthen participants' commitment to carry out their goals and act in line with their values (McGonigal, 2011). Participants are told that this letter will be mailed back to them in 12-weeks time (with a 12-week follow-up survey). Finally, post-course evaluation surveys are filled out and a number of resources are distributed, including a reference list of further educational materials.

6.7 Discussion and Conclusion

The *Smart Busy* program was created to decrease excessive material consumption and materialistic values. It was specifically designed to cater to the needs of a Western Australian mainstream audience. While the program shares similar content with other voluntary simplicity programs, it differs in that it was framed as a general lifestyle program to help busy people cope more effectively with the stresses and demands of modern life. This framing was based on the findings from phase 1 which indicated materialistic Western Australians were repelled by the concept of 'simple' and 'slow' living and attracted to the idea of being 'busy' (section 5.22.2).

Despite the existence of several voluntary simplicity programs (section 3.4), none of these programs have been formally evaluated to test their effectiveness in bringing about change (i.e., reducing consumption and shifting materialistic values). Studies have shown that voluntary simplifiers tend to be more mindful, intrinsically oriented, and engage in environmentally friendly behaviours more than others (section 3.1); however, there is a lack of research on whether or not an educational intervention can bring about these changes. This research project aims to address this gap in the literature through designing, implementing, and evaluating the *Smart Busy* program.

This chapter has outlined the rationale, structure, and content of the educational intervention that has been developed for a group of Western Australian non-simplifiers. In the next chapter, the effectiveness of the intervention will be examined.

Chapter 7

An Evaluation of an Educational Intervention to Decrease Materialistic Values and Excessive Consumption Behaviour: Findings from a Wait-List Study

The aim of this chapter is to present the evaluation results from the educational intervention (*Smart Busy: Live Better, Feel Free and Stress Less*) designed to decrease materialistic values and excessive consumption as described in Chapter 6. It is hypothesised that, compared to wait-list control participants, treatment group participants who received the intervention would decrease their materialistic values and consumption behaviour. It is also hypothesised that at 12-week follow-up these changes would be maintained.

7.1 Method

7.1.1 Sample Recruitment

Participants were recruited for the *Smart Busy* program via a number of media outlets promoting the program and study. These included local radio (ABC 720 WA), the front page of a local newspaper (The Melville Times), online news sources (Oneperth.com and WAtoday.com), community noticeboards, and social media (Appendix VII). The intervention was described to the general public as a lifestyle program aimed at helping Western Australians cope more effectively with the stresses and demands of modern life. Individuals were encouraged to register their interest online at the *Smart Busy* website (www.smartbusy.com) by submitting their details (i.e., name, contact number, and postal address) in an entry/application form.

Upon receipt of potential participants' details, information packs were posted out. The packs contained an information letter that described the nature of the research, along with potential risks and benefits from participating in the program (Appendix VIII).

Participants also received a consent form (Appendix VIII) and a reply-paid envelope. To be able to participate in the program, participants were required to give informed consent by filling in the consent form and mailing it back. Participants were assured that their participation in the program was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time if they wished. The research was approved by the Human Ethics Research Committee at Murdoch University (Ref: 2013/219).

7.2 Procedures

7.2.1 Experimental Design

As consent forms were received, participants were allocated to the immediate 6-week *Smart Busy* intervention group (treatment condition: program 1) and then the wait-list control group (control condition: program 2). The 6-week pre-training interval for the wait-list control group served as a control condition. A control condition was utilised in this study to ascertain whether the effects occurred as a result of the treatment and not due to other influences affecting the general population (Alasuutari et al., 2008). At the end of the pre-training period and after all participants had been assessed, the wait-list control group received the intervention (Table 13).

Table 13. Research Design.

	Baseline	6 weeks	12 weeks	12-week follow-up	12-week follow-up
Group 1 Treatment	Begin program (Pre-test: time 1)	Complete program (Post-test: time 2)		Optional 'Booster' session (Follow-up: time 3)	
Group 2 Wait-list Control	Wait-list (Pre-test: time 1)	Begin program (Pre-test: time 1)	Complete program (Post-test: time 2)		Optional 'Booster' session (Follow-up: time 3)

Power analyses using G*Power (Buchner, Erdfelder, Faul, & Lang, n.d.) found that 34 participants were required to yield a medium to large effect size. Since attrition is an issue with data collection that spans over several phases (Creswell, 2005), 40 participants were recruited for the first program to increase the likelihood that at least 34 participants completed the program. Forty-five (n = 45) participants were recruited

for the second program as a higher dropout rate was anticipated due to the longer period of time between registration and commencement of the program.

Over 160 people registered their interest to participate in the *Smart Busy* program. Of this, 84 sent back their consent forms and surveys. All of these participants were assigned places in either the treatment group or wait-list control group. Two weeks before the start of the first program, all participants were sent an identical pre-course survey to complete. A reminder email was sent out to ensure the pre-course surveys were sent back by all participants prior to session 1 commencing. Receipt of the survey was confirmation of the participant's place in the program. To ensure pre-test, post-test, and 12-week follow-up surveys could be matched, each participant was assigned an identification number and the back page of each survey was coded with this number. Once the data were entered into SPSS (Version 22) and NVivo (Version 10), the back sheet was removed to ensure participant anonymity. Identical surveys were distributed to participants by mail or in person at the training site and returned in reply-paid envelopes or in person at each time point.

7.2.2 Facilitator

The same facilitator conducted both *Smart Busy* programs (with the treatment and wait-list control groups) to minimise the possibility of different facilitator styles influencing the results. The program facilitator was the author of this thesis, was tertiary qualified in psychology, and had extensive experience facilitating workshops with adults. The facilitator followed a pilot-tested manual to ensure both groups received the same intervention.

7.2.1 Intervention

The intervention comprised of six consecutive weeks of 2-hour workshop sessions (section 6.6). The sessions have been described in the previous chapter and are summarised in the table below (Table 14). A seventh session called the *Smart Busy* 'Booster' session was created after several participants stated in their post-course surveys a desire to meet again as a group for a follow-up. This session ran for 2-hours and coincided with the return of participants' 12-week follow-up surveys. The 'Booster'

session revised concepts from the program and also contained content that some participants felt should have been covered in greater depth in the 6-week program (e.g., the importance of physical movement). Additionally, this session presented itself as another opportunity to gather in-depth qualitative data on changes made to participants' lifestyles and the barriers they faced in making change. Participants signed consent forms upon arrival at the session (Appendix IX). The form stipulated that anything the participant said in the session would remain anonymous.

Table 14. Sessions of the *Smart Busy* Program.

Session	Title of Session
1	Mindfulness 101
2	Take back your time
3	What really matters in life?
4	Declutter your life
5	Food matters
6	Planning for the future
7 (Optional)	The <i>Smart Busy</i> 'Booster' Session

Participants could miss up to two sessions of the 6-week intervention. If they missed a session they were sent pre-recorded session content so they could catch up with the rest of the group before the next session. The pre-recorded session content followed the same format as the group session. To obtain an objective measure of program engagement, program attendance was recorded for both the treatment and wait-list control groups. Mean attendance for the treatment group was 5.84 sessions and for the wait-list group 5.69 sessions, from a maximum of six sessions. Out of 67 course completers, 54 participants attended all six sessions, 10 participants missed one session of the program, and 3 participants missed two sessions of the program. Three participants missed more than two sessions and therefore their data was excluded from the study.

7.3 Dependent Measures

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used. A number of variables were selected for examination based on the literature and results presented in earlier chapters. Survey instruments were used to observe if there were any treatment effects in relation to these variables as a result of the *Smart busy* intervention: a pre-test survey; post-test survey; and 12-week follow-up survey (Appendix X). All of these surveys contained various valid and reliable scales to measure a range of psychological, environmental, and demographic variables. Four measures (i.e., time affluence, mindfulness, psychological well-being, and ecological footprint) are described in Chapter 4 (section 4.3.3). A shortened 18-item version of the psychological well-being measure was utilised for phase 2 of the research. Since the results from phase 1 indicated that the ecological footprint measure may not be sensitive enough to detect any change in lifestyle over a six-week period (Chapter 4), additional measures for frugality and simple living practices were included in the survey instruments. These measures are described below.

1 Frugality

Frugality is conceptualised as a lifestyle trait in which people carefully use resources to make them last for as long as possible and exercise restraint in acquiring goods/services (Lastovicka, Bettencourt, Hughner, & Kuntze, 1999). Since the *Smart Busy* program aims to decrease excessive consumption, it is believed this scale is appropriate and adequate to measure shifts in consumption behaviour. Research has found that this scale has reasonable internal consistency, reliability, and validity (i.e., discriminant, known-groups, and nomological) (Lastovicka et al., 1999).

2 Simple Living Practices

To measure whether participants experienced shifts to simpler, less materialistic, and consumption-based lifestyles, items from the Simple Living Scale (i.e., practices associated with voluntary simplicity) (Huneke, 2005) and the Environmentally Responsible Behaviour Measure (Brown & Kasser, 2005) were utilised. These scales were modified to suit an Australian context based on preliminary research findings

(Chapters 4 and 5) and the research literature. The scale comprised of 28 items and had good internal consistency and reliability with a Cronbach’s alpha of .85.

3 Demographics, Lifestyle Factors, and Program Characteristics

Measures of age, gender, current work situation, occupation, and level of education were administered at pre-test. Open-ended measures of the number of hours worked for pay, hours of television consumed each week, and minutes participants meditated or practiced mindfulness for each day (if any) were also asked. To obtain information on why participants were motivated to register for the program, participants were asked to state their reasons for wanting to participate in the *Smart Busy* program.

7.3.2 Post-Course Surveys

The scales provide the quantitative empirical measures to identify change in particular domains of participants’ lives as a result of participating in the program. Nonetheless, these scales cannot possibly capture data relating to aspects such as how profoundly a participant has changed their life. They also are not able to measure participants’ level of commitment to making changes to simplify their lives or the benefits experienced as a result of shifting to a less materialistic lifestyle. For this reason, several open-ended questions were asked in the post-course and 12-week follow-up surveys to obtain a richer, more detailed picture of the program’s impact on participants’ lives (Table 15).

Table 15. Additional Questions in Post-Course Survey Instruments.

Survey Instrument	Question
Post-course	Are you doing anything differently as a result of participating in the program? (Yes or No response) If yes, what new things are you doing or doing differently? (Open-ended question)
12-Week Follow-up	How has the <i>Smart Busy</i> program helped you in your everyday life? (Open-ended question) Have you made changes to your lifestyle since participating in the program? (Yes or No response) If yes, what changes have you made? (Open-ended question)

7.4 Results

7.4.1 Preliminary Analyses

1 Comparing Program Participants to Phase 1 Sample

Participants were also compared to the sample of 443 people who filled in surveys for the preliminary phase of this research (Chapter 4) to ascertain whether they differed in any major ways (). Compared with our study sample (n = 443) from the preliminary research phase, the intervention participants tended to be slightly older, more educated, and contained a higher percentage of females. Intervention participants also tended to score lower on the time affluence measure compared to the WA study sample, indicating that they were more likely to feel a greater sense of time poverty. This illustrates that the way in which the program was marketed to recruit time-poor individuals was effective. Interestingly, only small differences were found in relation to psychological well-being, mindfulness, television consumption, and ecological footprint. No difference was found in materialism.

Table 16. A Comparison Between the Preliminary Research Study Sample (Phase 1) and Intervention Participants (Phase 2)

	WA Study Sample (Preliminary research)	Intervention Participants
Female (%)	65%	84.70%
Mean age (years)	38	45.60
Employed full-time (%)	40.60%	40.80%
Education (%)		
Completed university	61.50%	70.80%
No university degree	28.50%	29.20%
Materialism	-1.98	-2.00
Time affluence	2.80	2.19
Psychological well-being	4.46	4.48
Ecological footprint (hectares)	7.32	7.55
Mindfulness	3.97	3.60
TV consumption (hours per week)	9.34	10.53

2 Participant Attrition

Five participants withdrew before the program commenced due to family and work commitments. Seven participants commenced the program; however, these participants dropped out before the post-course assessment phase (three from the treatment group and four from the wait-list control group). Attrition analyses were conducted to determine whether the participants who dropped out during the program differed from those who completed the program (course completers). Comparisons of dropouts and course completers revealed no significant differences between the two groups on demographic variables; however, there were a number of significant differences on a range of simple living practices (see Table 17 for means and standard deviations). Dropouts were significantly less inclined to engage in a range of simple living practices than course completers. These simple living practices included:

- Recycling ($t(73) = 3.52, p = .001$);
- Buying environmentally friendly products ($t(73) = 2.76, p = .007$);
- Limiting car use ($t(73) = 1.98, p = .05$);
- Buying from socially responsible producers ($t(73) = 2.51, p = .02$);
- Composting ($t(73) = 2.18, p = .03$);
- Limiting wage earning work ($t(14.90) = 4.10, p = .001$);
- Being active in the community ($t(73) = 2.27, p = .03$);
- Being politically active ($t(20.50) = 5.15, p = .001$); and
- Sharing tools/equipment ($t(73) = 2.69, p = .009$).

Dropouts also scored significantly lower on the autonomy subscale ($M = 3.52, SD = .72$) of the psychological well-being measure than course completers ($M = 4.32, SD = .98, t(73) = 2.08, p = .04$). In addition, dropouts rated as significantly less important than course completers:

- Trying to hide the signs of ageing ($t(17.17) = 2.79, p = .01$); and

- Teaching others the things they know ($t(73) = 2.21, p = .03$).

They agreed significantly less with the statement “*I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important*” ($M = 3.43, SD = 1.13$) than course completers ($M = 4.59, SD = 1.37, t(73) = 2.16, p = .03$).

Table 17. Course Dropouts Compared to Course Completers on Significant Measures.

Measure	Dropouts (n = 7)		Course Completers (n = 67)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Recycling	3.00	0.58	4.04	0.76
Buying environmentally friendly products	2.71	0.95	3.69	0.89
Buying from socially responsible producers	2.14	0.69	3.16	1.05
Composting	1.43	1.13	2.60	1.37
Limiting car use	2.00	0.82	2.78	1.01
Limiting wage earning work	1.17	0.41	2.07	1.20
Being active in the community	2.29	1.11	3.19	1.00
Being politically active	1.14	0.38	2.16	1.13
Sharing tools and equipment	1.71	0.76	2.84	1.07
Trying to hide the signs of ageing	1.86	0.38	2.38	1.01
Willingness to teach others the things they know	3.00	0.82	3.74	0.84
Autonomy	3.52	0.72	4.32	0.98
I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important	3.43	1.13	4.59	1.37

M: mean; SD: standard deviation

3 Group equivalence of Treatment and Wait-list Control Completers

Participants who completed post-course surveys attended an average of 5.76 ($SD = .52$) workshop sessions. Independent samples t-tests and chi-square tests were conducted to ensure the treatment and wait-list control groups were equivalent at baseline (Time 1). These tests indicated that there were no significant differences in mean baseline scores between the groups on all measures (Table 18).

Table 18. Baseline Demographic and Characteristics Per Group.

	Treatment group, M(SD) n = 35	Wait-list control, M(SD) n = 40	<i>p</i>
Age (years)	42.74(11.21)	47(13.88)	0.15
Gender (% female)	82.9%	85%	1.00
Education (%)			
No university	25%	32.5%	0.66
Completed university	75%	67.5%	0.66
Work for pay (hours per week)	28.34(17.72)	24.46(17.04)	0.34
Television consumption (hours per week)	8.77(6.78)	11.63(11.82)	0.20
Meditation practice	9.35(15.78)	5.35(9.56)	0.18
Psychological well-being	4.41(0.63)	4.50(0.63)	0.56
Positive relations	4.28(1.06)	4.40(0.86)	0.58
Purpose in life	4.53(1.06)	4.78(0.86)	0.26
Autonomy	4.20(0.98)	4.28(1.00)	0.72
Self acceptance	4.36(1.06)	4.40(1.17)	0.89
Personal growth	5.21(0.64)	5.28(0.88)	0.67
Environmental mastery	3.95(0.90)	3.83(0.91)	0.57
Mindfulness	3.41(0.84)	3.71(0.75)	0.11
Frugality	3.90(0.49)	4.10(0.44)	0.07
Time affluence	2.14(0.69)	2.22(0.77)	0.61
Simple living practices	3.06(0.50)	2.93(0.46)	0.24
Ecological footprint (hectares)	7.09(2.77)	7.91(2.59)	0.21
Intrinsic values			
Self acceptance	1.06(0.30)	1.03(0.44)	0.68
Physical fitness	0.94(0.33)	1.01(0.47)	0.52
Affiliation	0.85(0.45)	0.95(0.37)	0.27
Community feeling	0.53(0.66)	0.43(0.57)	0.46
Extrinsic values			
Social recognition	-1.48(0.57)	-1.57(0.59)	0.54
Attractive appearance	-1.24(0.59)	-1.00(0.75)	0.14
Financial success	-0.60(0.58)	-0.84(0.50)	0.07
Relative importance of Extrinsic Values	-1.97(0.67)	-1.99(0.67)	0.92

M: mean; SD: standard deviation

4 Reasons for Participating in the Program

Participants expressed a range of reasons for wanting to participate in the *Smart Busy* program. These reasons were coded into key themes using NVivo (Version 10) and are summarised below (Table 19). The most common reasons for participating in the program were wanting to manage one’s time better, learn ways to decrease stress levels and be less busy, regain a sense of control over life (e.g., become more organised) and experience more fun and enjoyment in life.

Table 19. Reasons for Wanting to Participate in the *Smart Busy* Program.

Reason	Indicative Response	Comments/Observations
Time management	<i>“I want to better manage my life so I can free up more time to do more of the things I enjoy, to relax more and to be able to be more productive in general”, “I want to make the best use of my time”, “Be more constructive with my time, less wasteful”</i>	Participants spoke of wanting to manage their time better so they could be less stressed, feel more in control of their lives, be more productive, and have more time for themselves and to engage in enjoyable activities.
Stress	<i>“Learning to cope with the stresses in life”, “I feel stressed and run down a lot. Mostly I feel that time is flying but I’m too busy to sit back and enjoy things. I have trouble slowing my mind. My frustration and stress levels affect others in my life. My stress levels affect my work”, “I would like to lead a stress free (or close to as possible) life and learn to make room/space for behaviours that promote this”</i>	A number of participants wanted to reduce stress and busyness in their lives. Some participants noted that they were so busy and stressed that they no longer felt in control of their life and had difficulty enjoying everyday experiences.
Reflecting on life	<i>“Wanting to find better ways to evaluate my life and decide directions to go in and find more satisfaction in my general life”, “I am at a bit of a crossroads deciding where to direct my future career and study and I thought the program would provide an opportunity for useful self reflection”, “More time to assess my life. Identify practices I can change and improve”, “I feel like I need to focus my energy on what is important in my life and not consume or waste energy on matters and things which are not”</i>	Participants perceived the program as an opportunity to evaluate their lives, look at what is most important, and examine their goals and priorities. Several participants expressed a desire to be more focused on the important things in life and get clear on their purpose in life.
Enjoy life	<i>“Not happy – need to start living life and having fun. Need to slow down and start enjoying life more”, “To maybe learn how to enjoy now and strategies to help me feel happier and less</i>	A number of participants stated they were not happy and/or were “workaholics” who wanted to lead more

	<i>stressed”, “I am a workaholic and I am still running at that steam. I want to slow down, I am anxious to ‘enjoy life and have fun’! I don’t know how”</i>	exciting lives.
Sense of control over life and surroundings	<i>“I’m interested in decluttering my life – mind and surroundings”, “Implement steps to take better control over my life rather than feel like its running away from me”, “Too much clutter in my life and not enough organisation”</i>	Participants expressed a desire to learn skills to regain control over their life and environment. Decluttering and getting more organised were talked about not just in relation to material objects but also one’s mind, thoughts, and life schedule.
Reduce busyness	<i>“Life feels too busy. I am spending too much time doing things that aren’t part of my goals”, “Always running late. Always in a rush. Can’t stick to deadlines”, “Tired of living in damage control – going from one crisis to another. Never enough time – not able to achieve my goals”</i>	There was a general sense that some participants felt life was “too busy” and they were not being effective in carrying out tasks. Subsequently, they wanted to slow down the pace of life.
Work-life balance	<i>“To get better work-life balance”, “I would like to explore and implement ways to bring balance with my life – work, family, home and personal wants/needs”, “Find balance in my life”</i>	Finding better work-life balance was seen as a way to achieve one’s goals and enjoy life more.
Mindfulness	<i>“Learn more about mindful living”, “I would like to learn to be more mindful and make the most out of my days”, “To learn more about mindfulness and become better at meditating”</i>	Some participants said they wanted to be more present and have greater self-awareness. Several participants said they wanted to improve their meditation practice.
Health and self care	<i>“To make time for better health and exercise”, “I am starting to think my health is being adversely affected by how busy I am, so I am looking for ways to better manage my time, responsibilities and health”, “I want to be able to nurture myself”</i>	Participants wanted to have more time for themselves (e.g., to pursue goals and look after their health).
Desire to help with research	<i>“Participate in a research program that will generate results to help more people in the future”, “Interested to help out with research but hopefully I will learn some useful skills also”, “Participating in a research study appeals to me”</i>	A small number of participants were primarily motivated to participate in the program to assist with the research project.

7.4.2 Assessment of Program Intervention

Thirty-two ($n = 32$) participants from the treatment group and 35 participants from the wait-list control group completed the post-course assessment. Analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to statistically compare post-test scores with the pre-test scores as the covariate. Preliminary checks were conducted to ensure that there were no violations of the following assumptions: normality; linearity; homogeneity of variances; homogeneity of regression slopes; and reliable measurement of the covariate. The assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes was violated for the measures of community feeling (intrinsic value) and mindfulness. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (1989) this suggests that there is an interaction between the covariate and treatment and subsequently the results from conducting an ANCOVA would be misleading. For this reason, change scores (Time 2 scores – Time 1 scores) were calculated and used as the dependent variable. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare if there were any significant differences between the treatment and wait-list control group in relation to these measures. A significant difference was found between the wait-list control ($M = 3.77$, $SD = .85$) and treatment groups ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.72$) for the mindfulness measure ($t(68) = 2.23$, $p = .03$) (Figure 9). Additionally, a significant difference was found between the wait-list control ($M = .38$, $SD = .63$) and treatment groups ($M = .80$, $SD = .52$) on the community feeling measure of the Aspirations Index ($t(66) = 2.84$, $p = .006$) (Figure 10).

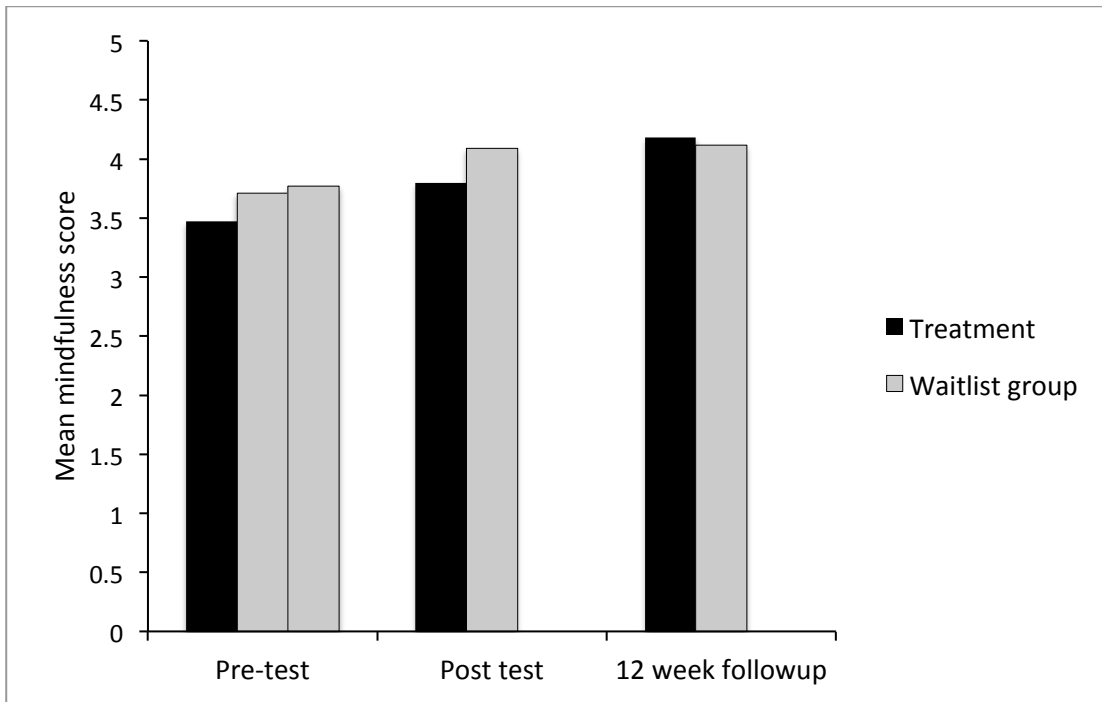


Figure 9. Mean Scores of Mindfulness for Treatment and Wait-List Control Groups

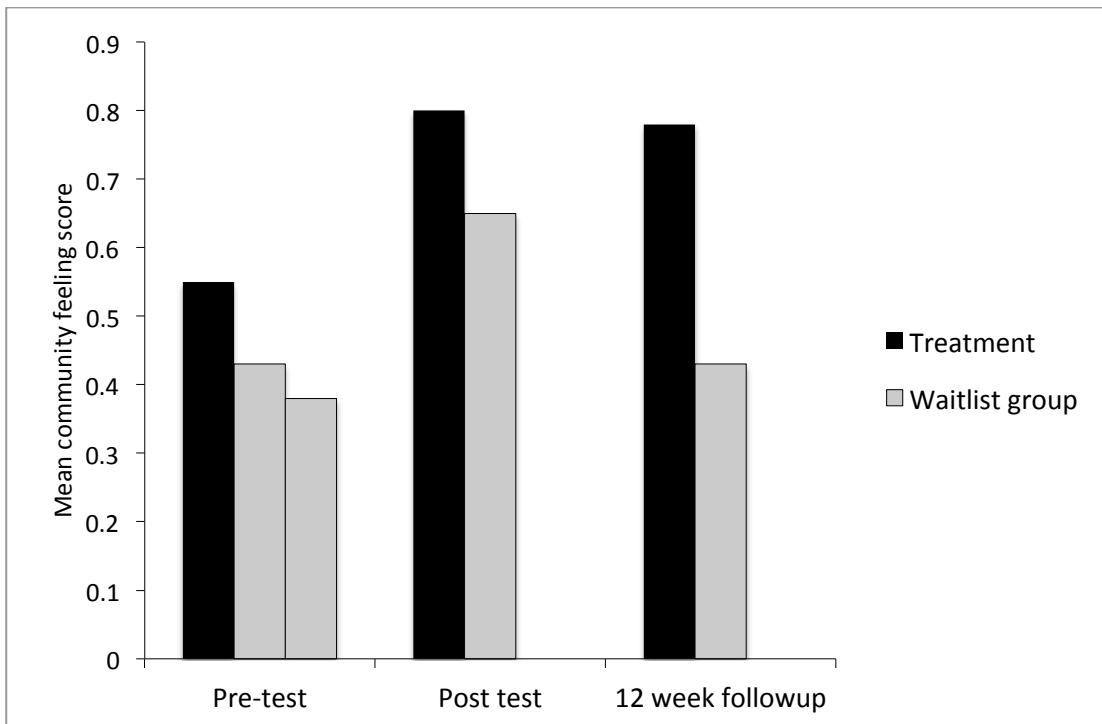


Figure 10. Mean Scores of Community Feeling for Treatment and Wait-List Control Groups

In cases where no violations of assumptions of ANCOVA were found, a series of ANCOVAs were conducted. The independent variable was the intervention and the dependent variable consisted of scores on the following measures: materialistic values and each component of the Aspirations index; ecological footprint; frugality; simple living practices; time affluence; television consumption; meditation practice; and each psychological well-being subscale and the composite value. Participants' scores on the pre-intervention administration of the measure were used as the covariate of analysis. After adjusting for pre-intervention scores, a significant difference was found between the treatment and wait-list control group on post-intervention scores for materialistic values ($F(1,71) = 9.27, p = .003, \text{partial eta squared} = .12$) (Figure 11). According to Cohen's (1998) guidelines, .12 is a large effect size. Significant differences were also found between the groups on post-intervention scores on simple living practices ($F(1,71) = 35.09, p < .000, \text{partial eta squared} = .33$) (Figure 12), time affluence ($F(1, 72) = 5.17, p = .03, \text{partial eta squared} = .07$) (Figure 15), relative importance of financial success ($F(1,71) = 18.14, p < .000, \text{partial eta squared} = .20$) (Figure 13), and relative importance of affiliation ($F(1, 71) = 12.68, p = .001, \text{partial eta squared} = 0.15$) (Figure 14). Although not significant, it is worth noting that the differences between the treatment and wait-list control groups' scores were approaching significance for the measures of environmental mastery ($F(1,74) = 3.59, p = .06, \text{partial eta squared} = .05$) and frugality at Time 2 ($F(1,74) = 3.18, p = .08, \text{partial eta squared} = .04$) (Figure 16).

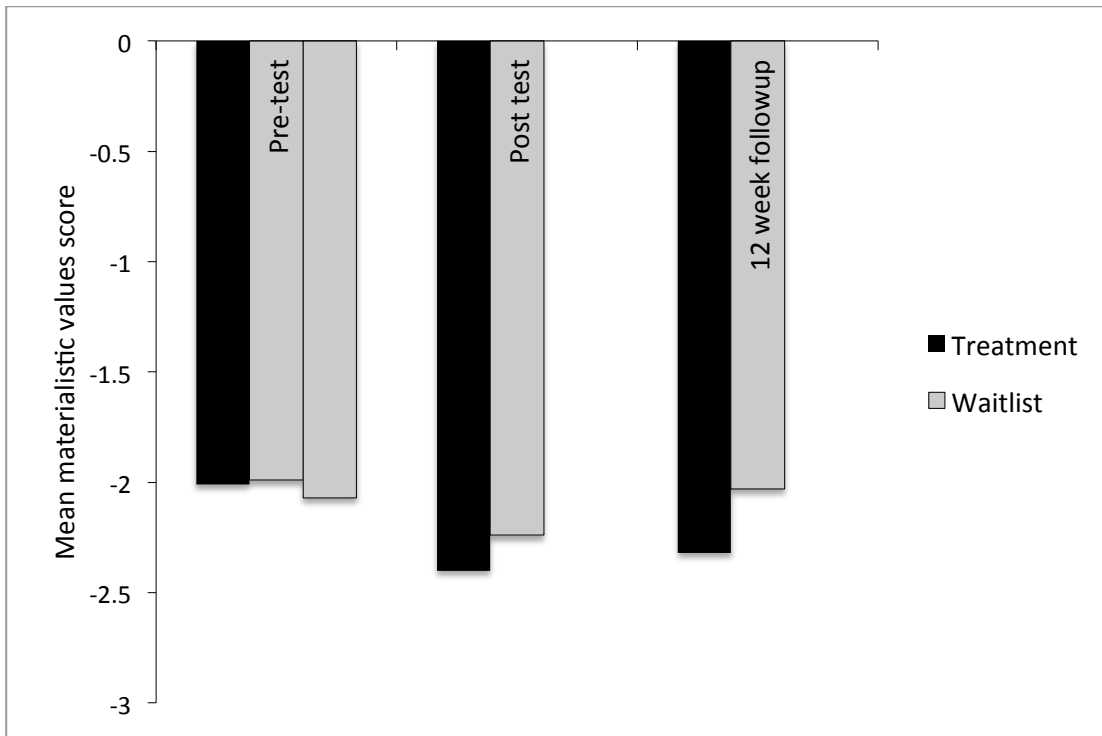


Figure 11. Mean Scores of Materialistic Values for Treatment and Wait-List Control Groups

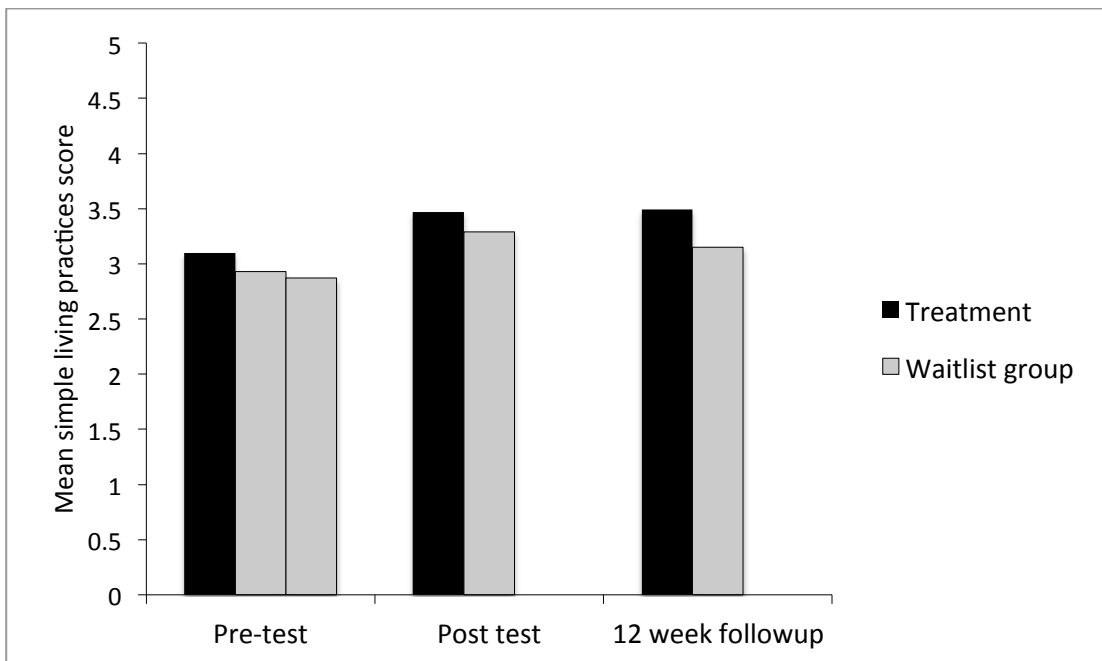


Figure 12. Mean Scores of Simple Living Practices for Treatment and Wait-List Control Groups

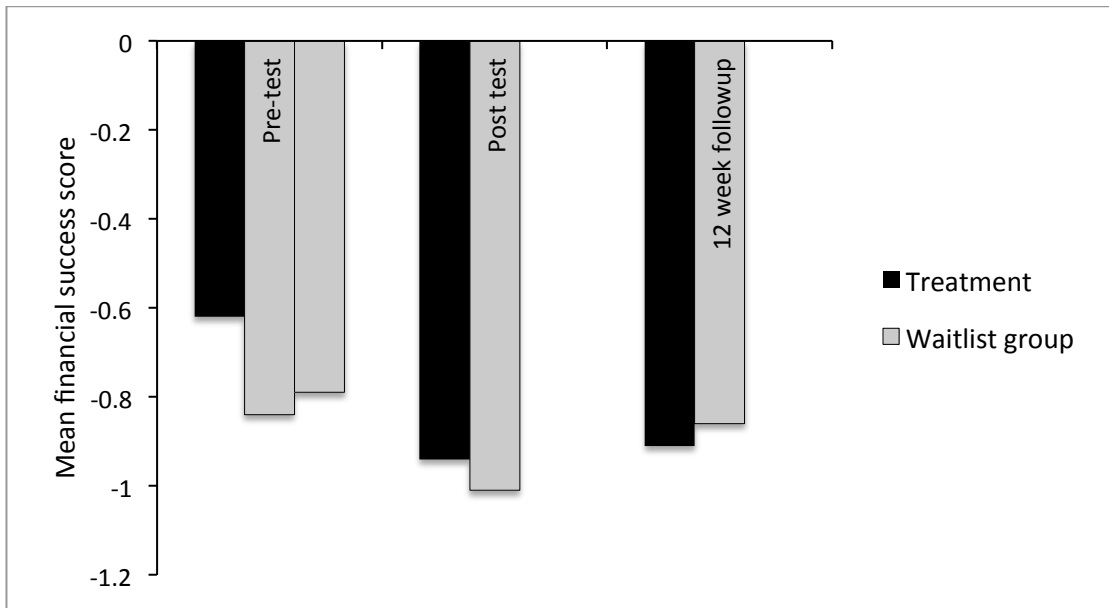


Figure 13. Mean Scores of Financial Success Value for Treatment and Wait-List Control Groups

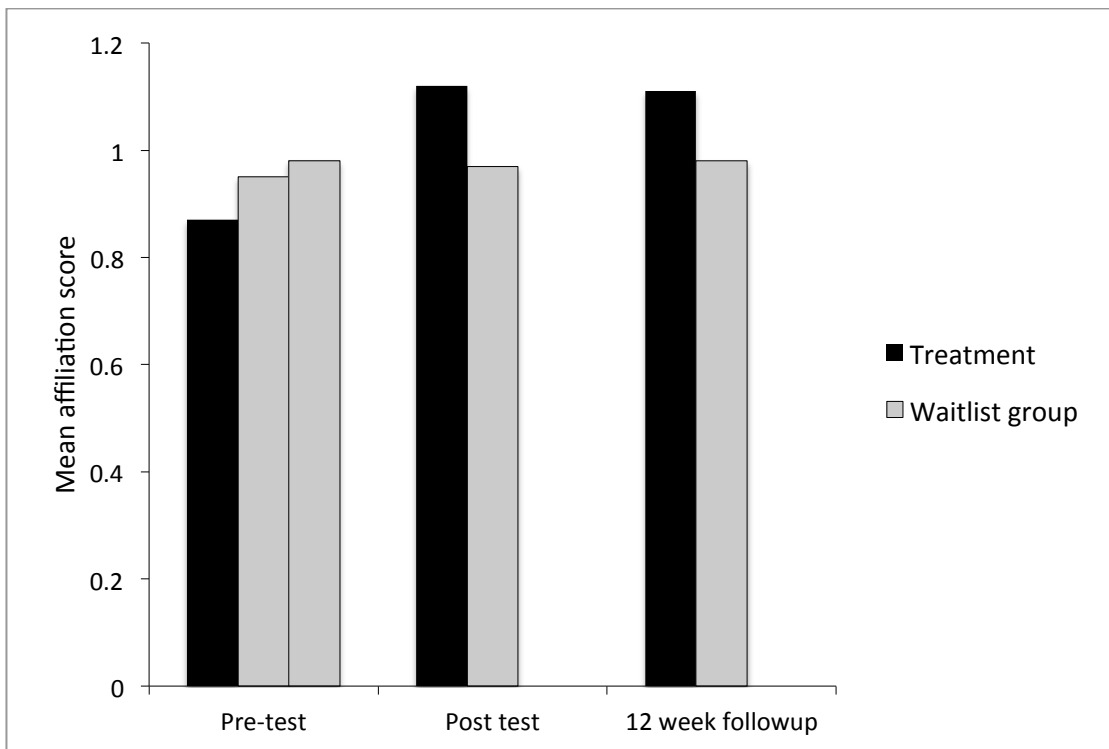


Figure 14. Mean Scores of Affiliation Value for Treatment and Wait-List Control Groups

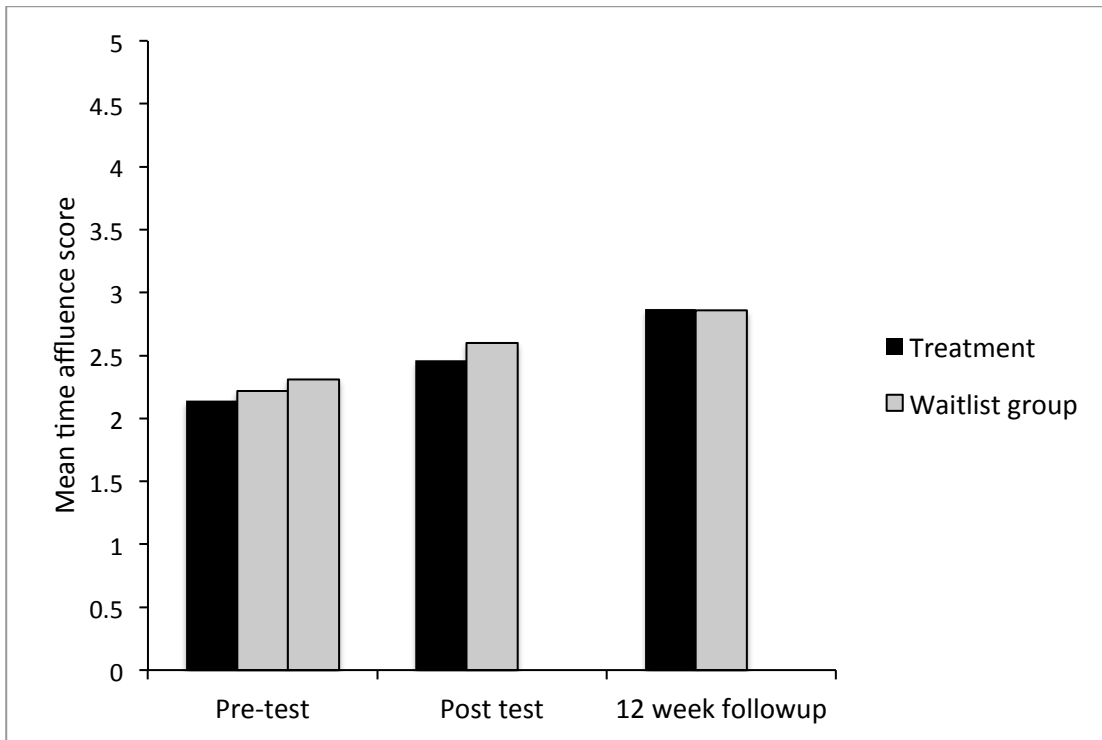


Figure 15. Mean Scores of Time Affluence for Treatment and Wait-List Control Groups

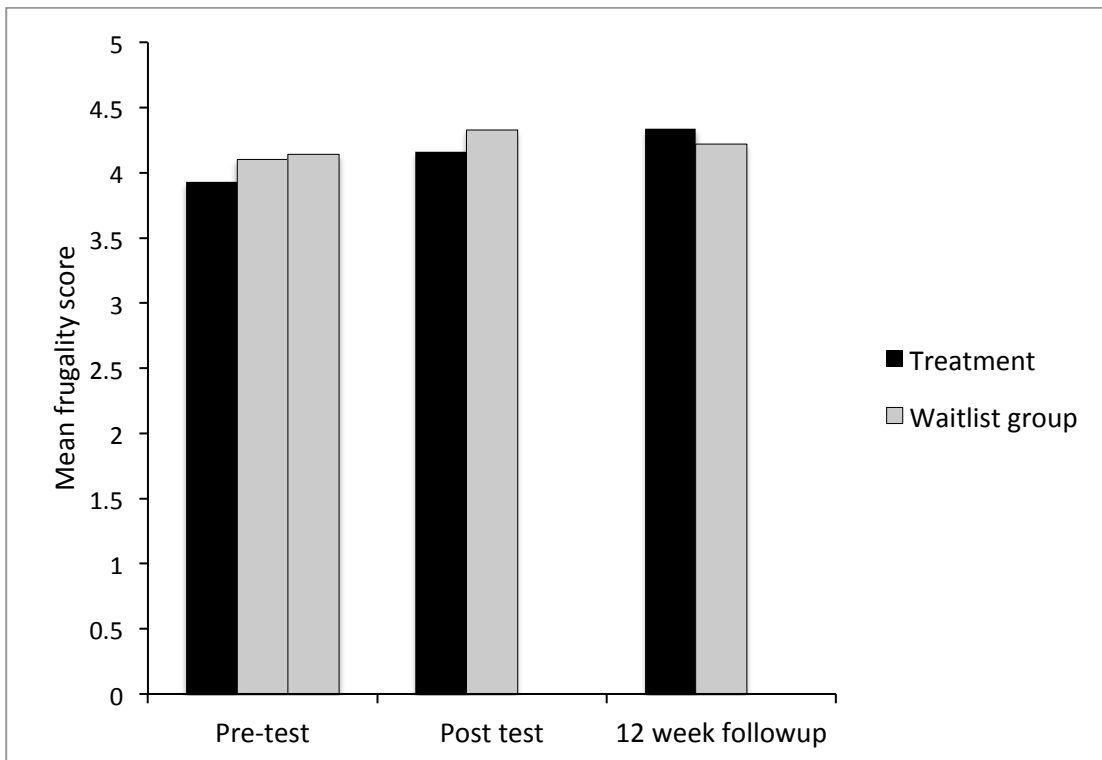


Figure 16. Mean Scores of Frugality for Treatment and Wait-List Control Groups

No significant differences were found between the two groups on measures of ecological footprint ($F(1,66) = .99, p = .32, \text{partial eta squared} = .02$), psychological well-being ($F(1,73) = 1.81, p = .18, \text{partial eta squared} = .03$), physical activity ($F(1,71) = .64, p = .43, \text{partial eta squared} = .009$), social recognition ($F(1,71) = .22, p = .64, \text{partial eta squared} = .003$), attractive appearance ($F(1,71) = 2.82, p = .10, \text{partial eta squared} = .04$), personal growth ($F(1,73) = 1.42, p = .24, \text{partial eta squared} = .02$), self acceptance ($F(1,74) = 1.89, p = .17, \text{partial eta squared} = .03$), autonomy ($F(1,74) = .05, p = .83, \text{partial eta squared} = .001$), purpose in life ($F(1,74) = 2.59, p = .11, \text{partial eta squared} = .03$), positive relations ($F(1,74) = .09, p = .76, \text{partial eta squared} = .001$), television consumption ($F(1,68) = 2.23, p = .14, \text{partial eta squared} = .03$), and meditation practice ($F(1,67) = .39, p = .53, \text{partial eta squared} = .01$) (Table 20).

Table 20. Mean Differences and Standard Deviations of the Wait-List Control and Treatment Groups at Pre-Test (Time 1) and Post-Test (Time 2) for All Dependent Variables.

	Treatment group, M(SD)		Wait-list group, M(SD)	
	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
Psychological well-being	4.47(0.62)	4.69(0.52)	4.50(0.63)	4.59(0.72)
Positive relations	4.35(1.08)	4.47(0.97)	4.40(0.86)	4.54(1.12)
Purpose in life	4.52(1.04)	4.75(0.91)	4.78(0.89)	4.67(1.20)
Autonomy	4.26(0.96)	4.43(1.00)	4.28(1.00)	4.50(0.71)
Self acceptance	4.40(1.07)	4.76(0.81)	4.40(1.17)	4.61(1.21)
Personal growth	5.24(0.63)	5.38(0.52)	5.28(0.88)	5.22(0.83)
Environmental mastery	4.02(0.91)	4.38(0.70)	3.83(0.91)	4.00(1.00)
Mindfulness	3.47(0.85)	3.80(0.72)	3.71(0.75)	3.77(0.85)
Frugality	3.93(0.50)	4.16(0.51)	4.10(0.44)	4.14(0.41)
Time affluence	2.14(0.72)	2.46(0.60)	2.22(0.77)	2.31(0.76)
Simple living practices	3.10(0.48)	3.47(0.44)	2.93(0.46)	2.87(0.45)
Ecological footprint	7.09(2.77)	6.98(3.07)	7.91(2.59)	8.15(2.88)
Intrinsic values				
Self acceptance	1.06(0.31)	1.11(0.37)	1.03(0.44)	1.12(0.38)
Physical fitness	0.96(0.33)	1.09(0.38)	1.01(0.47)	1.07(0.42)
Affiliation	0.87(0.46)	1.12(0.43)	0.95(0.37)	0.98(0.39)
Community feeling	0.55(0.67)	0.80(0.52)	0.43(0.57)	0.38(0.63)
Extrinsic values				
Social recognition	-1.55(0.48)	-1.76(0.46)	-1.57(0.59)	-1.70(0.49)
Attractive appearance	-1.27(0.60)	-1.41(0.51)	-1.00(0.75)	-1.06(0.66)
Financial success	-0.62(0.59)	-0.94(0.56)	-0.84(0.50)	-0.79(0.58)
Relative importance of extrinsic values	-2.01(0.69)	-2.40(0.69)	-1.99(0.67)	-2.07(0.59)
Hours worked for pay (per week)	28.62(17.67)	31.13(18.43)	24.46(17.04)	23.68(16.71)
TV consumption (hours per week)	9.16(6.87)	7.94(7.78)	11.62(11.82)	12.33(11.62)
Minutes of meditation (per day)	9.61(16.45)	8.22(7.52)	5.35(9.56)	8.21(13.80)

M: mean; SD: standard deviation

7.4.3 Correlational Analyses

Pearson product–moment correlations were conducted to examine the relationships between the following change scores: change in materialistic values (extrinsic values); change in mindfulness; change in simple living practices; change in ecological footprint; change in frugality; change in time affluence; change in psychological well-being; change in television consumption; and change in meditation practice (Table 21). Change scores were calculated by subtracting Time 1 scores from Time 2 scores for all participants. Only scores of the treatment group participants who completed the program ($n = 32$) were included because Time 2 scores were not available for dropouts. Changes in materialism were negatively (but significantly) correlated to both changes in mindfulness ($r = -.29$, $n = 67$, $p = .02$) and changes in simple living practices ($r = -.48$, $n = 67$, $p < .001$). Changes in mindfulness were significantly positively correlated with changes in psychological well-being ($r = .29$, $n = 69$, $p = .02$) and changes in time affluence ($r = .30$, $n = 68$, $p = .01$). A change in ecological footprint was negatively associated with changes in psychological well-being ($r = -.23$, $n = 68$, $p = .06$), although significance ($p = .05$) was not reached. Changes in psychological well-being were significantly correlated with changes in time affluence ($r = .24$, $n = 68$, $p = .05$) as well as changes in television consumption ($r = -.29$, $n = 70$, $p = .01$).

According to Cohen's (1998) guidelines a small relationship for correlations exists between .10 and .29, medium relationship between .30 and .49, and a large relationship between .50 and 1.0. With these guidelines in mind, the strength of the majority of these relationships are small; however, still noteworthy, particularly the negative relationship between changes in mindfulness and changes in materialism as well as the medium to large relationship between changes in simple living practices and changes in materialism. The high correlations between changes in community feeling and changes in materialism ($r = -.62$, $n = 68$, $p < .001$), changes in community feeling and changes in simple living practices ($r = .57$, $n = 67$, $p < .001$), and changes in frugality and changes in simple living practise ($r = .37$, $n = 68$, $p = .002$) are most likely due to similar scale items being found in both measures.

Table 21. Correlations Between Change Scores of Different Variables (Time 2 – Time 1).

	MAT	EF	SLP	FR	TA	TV	MF	MED	PWB
EF	0.03								
SLP	-0.48*	0.03							
FR	-0.16	0.03	0.37*						
TA	-0.07	-0.16	0.04	0.12					
TV	0.19	0.002	-0.21	0.02	-0.11				
MF	-0.29*	0.06	0.18	0.18	0.30*	-0.18			
MED	0.03	-0.02	0.02	-0.11	-0.18	0.06	-0.05		
PWB	-0.06	-0.23*	0.07	0.06	0.24*	-0.29*	0.29*	-0.14	

MAT: materialism; EF: ecological footprint; SLP: simple living practices; FR: frugality; TA: time affluence; TV: television consumption; MF: mindfulness; MED: meditation practice; PWB: psychological well-being.

7.4.4 Qualitative Data

All participants indicated that they had made changes to various areas of their lives as a result of participating in the program (Table 22). The most common change made was practising mindfulness meditation either daily or several times per week. Participants stated they felt more in the ‘here and now’, more aware of their surroundings, and were more present with their children and other people in their lives. As participant #41 said:

“I’m attempting to meditate or at least stop and breathe everyday. This is a new thing for me and it has allowed me to be a little kinder to myself”
(Postcoursefeedback.xls; #41, Row 40, Column 5).

Participants’ relationship to food was also impacted as a result of participating in the program. Twenty nine participants indicated they had started shopping for fresh and

local produce at farmers markets, were cooking more meals 'from scratch', had become more aware of the ingredients in the food they eat, were eating less processed food, being more adventurous with their cooking, and/or meal planning. As one participant stated, *"I am thinking more wisely about the connection between food, health and life"* (Postcoursefeedback.xls; #23, Row 16, Column 5). Several participants said they had started a vegetable garden.

A large number of participants engaged in dispossession practices (i.e., decluttering). Participants reported decluttering their wardrobes, office desks, and also their minds. Several participants also stated they had restricted new items from entering into their homes, with one stating, *"I've been thinking about 'stuff' and how to prevent clutter in my house"* (Postcoursefeedback.xls; #100, Row 76, Column 5).

After decluttering, the most reported change made was building social relationships and a sense of community. Participants said they were taking more time to connect with friends and family and get to know people in their neighbourhood as they realised or were reminded of the importance of strong social ties. As one participant said, *"I'm taking time to build community. I'm not wasting time when I have a cup of tea with my neighbours"* (Postcoursefeedback.xls; #21, Row 14, Column 5). Several participants said they had made an effort to reconnect with old friends and make new friends.

A number of changes were made in relation to how participants engaged with technology. The most common change in this area was spending less time in front of screens (e.g., computer and television). Participants said they felt more aware of the time they spent online and were more mindful of how they used technology. Several participants also reported taking regular 'Digital Sabbaths', where they disengaged from technology for a 24-hour period. Interestingly, one participant implemented 'Digital Sabbaths' for the whole family stating, *"[We have] screen free days every second Sunday for the whole family and every Sunday for me"* (Postcoursefeedback.xls; #2, Row 2, Column 5). Another participant said he had removed his television from his bedroom. A couple of participants reported logging off Facebook and not using it since session 2 of the program, which focused on participants' relationship with technology.

In relation to decreasing material consumption, participants stated that they were thinking more carefully about whether something was a 'need' or a 'want' and engaging in thrifty practices (e.g., paying for more things with cash). Participants also reported that they were more aware of the influence advertising and marketing had on their lives. One participant demonstrated she had adopted a philosophy central to the lives of voluntary simplifiers when she stated, *"I am trying to be really aware when I want to buy new things (do I really need it?). I want to try to live with less things/possessions"* (Postcoursefeedback.xls; #93; Row 69, Column 5).

The program appeared to give participants permission to spend time engaged in activities that they enjoyed doing and take time out for themselves. During the program, many participants reported experiencing a sense of guilt when they took time out for themselves. The feedback on the post-course surveys indicated that a number of participants experienced a shift in their perspective in how they viewed leisure time. One participant made the following comment, *"[I am] trying to stop and enjoy rather than ticking the next task off my list"* (Postcoursefeedback.xls; #58; Row 45, Column 5). Other participants mentioned that they had booked holidays, with one participant stating, *"I am going to start enjoying life – going overseas for 5 weeks travelling"* (Postcoursefeedback.xls; #72; Row 33, Column 5).

Other notable changes include increased self awareness and physical activity, working less, slowing down the pace of life, appreciating what one has (rather than what one does not have), and recycling. In relation to changes made at work, one participant stated, *"I have implemented a policy at work that forces staff to leave their PC every two hours and to go outside to a grassed area for ten minutes"* (Postcoursefeedback.xls; #40, Row 29, Column 5). For this participant, change went beyond the self and impacted the health and well-being of his employees.

Table 22. Changes Made to Participants' Lives as a Result of Participating in the *Smart Busy* Program.

Change made	Indicative response	Number of responses (n = 67)
Mindfulness meditation practice	<i>"I don't do my mindfulness meditation everyday but a few days a week. I use the 3 sigh technique a lot, especially when I'm getting annoyed with my kids", "I'm attempting to meditate – or at least stop and breath – every day. This is a new thing for me and has allowed me to be a little kinder to myself"</i>	38
Food practices	<i>"Making more home cooked meals and cutting out processed stuff", "Trying to implement the weekly meal planner and shop for fresher produce and sometimes organic (depending on price)", "Rearranging my shopping to include markets and wholefood stores"</i>	29
Decluttering	<i>"Giving things I don't need away", "I have been decluttering at every opportunity I get", "Thinking about 'stuff' and how to prevent clutter in my house"</i>	24
Building social relationships	<i>"Allowing self to fall in love and connect more deeply with others (big deal after 2 years of being very isolated", "Make sure family and friends are given the time they deserve", "Organising to catch up with friends more. Realising the importance to stop and have a conversation"</i>	20
Limiting technology use	<i>"Less time on computer and in front of TV", "Trying to have a 'Technology Sabbath'. Watching less TV", "Reading at night instead of mindless TV"</i>	17
Consumption practices	<i>"I am trying to be really aware when I want to buy new things (do I really need it?) I want to try to live with less things/possessions", "Avoiding buying many wants and more focused on saving up for needs", "Rethinking spending patterns (e.g., buying lunch at work)"</i>	13
Time/Self management	<i>"Break down larger tasks into smaller tasks", "Disciplined used of time (trying to be more aware of how spending time on activities stops me achieving my goals", "Trying to be more efficient and effective and less busy"</i>	10
Leisure time	<i>"Doing more stuff that I enjoy and involving the family in it", "Taking leisure time more seriously (booked holiday)", "Being mindful of things I want to do and schedule them into my life"</i>	8
Self care	<i>"Allow myself time to nurture myself", "Being more relaxed and caring on myself", "I'm not so down on myself – I'm trying to make small changes and have realistic goals and expectations"</i>	8
Self awareness	<i>"Thinking more consciously about my future, how I want to live rather than being on automatic pilot or living as society would encourage me to (i.e., buying "things", achieving at all costs, etc.)", "I notice when I am feeling stressed", "Thinking about what's most important to me and how I build that more into my life"</i>	6
Work	<i>"Have requested only 4 work days for next year (not 5)", "Working less", "Stop working too hard"</i>	5

The majority of participants indicated that they intended to make other changes to their lives once the program ended and expressed a desire to maintain the practices they had started whilst participating in the program (Table 23). The main practice participants intended to continue was mindfulness meditation. Some participants stated that they wanted to keep learning more about mindfulness and enrol in a formal meditation course. The highest proportion of participants reported that they planned to work on their personal relationships. Thirty participants (n = 30) indicated that they wanted to increase their social connections with family, friends, and the broader community. Several participants said they also wanted to start volunteering for a cause they felt strongly about.

The second highest proportion of participants stated that they intended to change their food practices. These practices included cooking more meals from scratch, improving their diet (e.g., more plant based, less meat), going to the farmer's market to source local produce, meal planning, and experimenting with cooking. One participant planned to engage in mindful eating stating, *"Eat more mindfully, savour and enjoy food"* (Postcoursefeedback.xls; #56; Row 44, Column 6).

While physical activity was not covered in much depth during the program, a number of participants (n = 15) expressed a strong desire to incorporate more movement into their everyday lives. This is likely due to viewing a video in the final session called 'How to live to be 100+' (Buettner, 2009). This video discussed the importance of physical movement and the role it plays in living a long and healthy life. The timing of watching the video and completing the survey shortly after meant participants were likely to have held this information at the top of their minds.

Other practices participants wanted to maintain post-intervention included: decluttering; using strategies to help manage their time and stop procrastinating (e.g., breaking things down into small steps and planning out the week and day); limiting spending and consumption by avoiding the shops; being thrifty; and/or thinking about whether the item was a 'need' or a 'want'. One participant shared how she intended to limit her credit card spending, stating:

"I used our savings today to completely pay off my credit card (nearly \$8000!) Gosh it feels good. I don't want to build up that kind of credit again"
(Postcoursefeedback.xls; #48, Row 31, Column 6).

Seven participants stated that they had intentions to engage in environmentally friendly practices such as recycling, planting trees, and using less plastic. One participant planned to join an environment/conservation group. Several participants planned to engage in more leisure activities and make more time for themselves. Interestingly, two participants stated they planned to downshift (i.e., reduce their hours at work) and one stated, *"I want to change my job to something less stressful"* (Postcoursefeedback.xls; #61; Row 47, Column 6). Other notable intended changes included participants wanting to live more in line with their values (three participants), practice gratitude (two participants), and create more time to relax (two participants).

Table 23. Changes Participants Intended to Make to their Lives as a Result of Participating in the *Smart Busy* Program.

Intend to change	Typical response	Number of Responses (n = 67)
Increase social connections	<i>"Try and make more simple connections with family and friends", "Make more effort to connect to a community", "Look into community activities – contribute to a cause I feel strongly about"</i>	30
Food practices	<i>"Making more effort to make regular meals for friends and family", "Make a regular event of going to the farmer's market", "Eat less meat, more plant based products"</i>	24
Physical activity	<i>"Start walking more each day", "Get more exercise", "Incorporate more incidental exercise"</i>	15
Mindfulness meditation	<i>"Continue on with meditation", "Spend more time meditating" "More meditation daily"</i>	14
Declutter	<i>"Declutter and have a different relationship with material goods", "Not bringing clutter into house", "Keep decluttering my house! Bit by bit and using the box system and timer. I'd like to teach the decluttering techniques to my parents. It will take years to declutter their house!"</i>	10
Time management strategies	<i>"Stop procrastinating and make a start", "More attention to how I use my time", "Keep prioritising my load and spend more time on what's important to me"</i>	8
Consumption practices	<i>"Avoiding shops", "I used our savings today to completely pay off my credit card (nearly \$8000!) Gosh it feels good. I don't want to build up that kind of credit again", "Think about need versus want when I go shopping"</i>	7
Environmental practices	<i>"Use less plastic", "Join environmental group", "Recycle"</i>	7
Leisure activities	<i>"Have more leisure time", "Spent time doing things I love and dream to do", "Schedule more fun stuff"</i>	5
Self care	<i>"Make time for self", "Be kinder to myself", "Focus a little more on me and know it's OK"</i>	5

7.4.5 Twelve-Week Follow-up

Twelve-week follow-up data from the treatment and wait-list control groups were obtained to determine whether the treatment gains (i.e., changes in materialistic

values, simple living practices, mindfulness, time affluence, community feeling, affiliation, and financial success) were maintained once the intervention finished. This data was also gathered to see if participants had been successful in carrying out their planned behaviour. Forty-three ($n = 43$) of a possible 67 participants returned their 12-week follow-up surveys (65% response rate). The data was pooled and a series of one way repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted to compare participants' post-test scores (Time 2: treatment group; Time 2: wait-list control group) with their scores at 12-week follow-up (Time 3: treatment group; Time 3: wait-list control group). The means and standard deviations for these comparisons are presented in Table 24. No significant changes between the end of the program and at 12-week follow-up were found for:

- Simple living practices ($F(1,42) = 1.33, p = .26$, multivariate partial eta squared = .03);
- Affiliation ($F(1,42) = 2.93, p = .09$, multivariate partial eta squared = .07); and
- Mindfulness ($F(1,43) = 2.09, p = .26$, multivariate partial eta squared = .05).

This indicated that the treatment gains for these measures were maintained.

Treatment gains were not maintained for the following measures:

- Materialistic values ($F(1,42) = 9.47, p = .004$, multivariate partial eta squared = .18)
- Community feeling ($F(1,42) = 4.26, p = .05$, multivariate partial eta squared = .09)
- Financial success ($F(1,42) = 5.70, p = .02$, multivariate partial eta squared = .12)

However, time affluence continued to increase post-intervention ($F(1,41) = 5.11, p = .03$, multivariate partial eta squared = .11).

Table 24. Descriptive Statistics for Treatment Gains (Time 2) and 12-Week Follow-Up (Time 3).

	Post-intervention		12-week follow-up	
	M	SD	M	SD
Materialism	-2.38	0.68	-2.16	0.74
Simple living practices	3.40	0.44	3.31	0.45
Financial success	-1.06	0.55	-0.89	0.57
Time affluence	2.62	0.67	2.85	0.83
Mindfulness	4.08	0.69	4.16	0.64
Community feeling	0.71	0.55	0.61	0.60
Affiliation	1.13	0.40	1.03	0.43

M: mean; SD: standard deviation

The qualitative data at 12-week follow-up showed participants increased awareness of their behaviour, choices, and stressors in their environment. Participants indicated that they had increased awareness of the areas of their lives that they felt needed improvement. In addition, many participants gained increased awareness of what was most important to them (their values) and what they needed in order to thrive and feel satisfied in life. Participant #59 typified these participants when she stated:

“[The program has] given me the opportunity to spend time re-assessing who I am, what do I want and need to make my life less stressful and more satisfying” (12-week follow-up survey; #59; Row 42, Column 3).

Participants reported making a range of changes commonly adopted by voluntary simplifiers and downshiffters in relation to working less and consuming less. Several participants had reduced their work hours (or were in the process of reducing their hours at work), changed jobs to carry out more fulfilling work and started looking for new work. One participant had sought advice from a financial advisor on how she could work less to reclaim her time. Participants reported increased well-being due to making these changes to their work situations. For instance, participant #100 who worked as a team leader at an engineering firm stated:

“One of the things I did at work because I just felt I don’t have enough space is I spoke to my two bosses about going to four and a half days and one of those

half days being a work from home day. I assumed that they'd say no because I'm in a team leader role and I felt like I had to be there for my team all the time and they're like 'yeah that's fine' and I'm like 'Oh my god!' I was so ecstatically happy at this extra four hours a week and my happiness levels have increased so much" (12-week follow-up wait-list control; #100; L79).

Another participant (#62) spoke of how she had experienced a shift in mindset in how she related to work and life as a result of participating in the program, stating:

"Through what I've learnt I've decided to work to live and not live to work and I've changed my whole outlook. I'm beginning to enjoy life a bit more...embracing the good things in my life, recognising what is good in my life...my husband and my children and they are all happy and well...my life is complete" (12-week follow-up wait-list control; #62; L5).

A number of participants also indicated that they were watching less television and spending less time in front of screens since completing the program. Participant #78 shared, *"I got rid of my foxtel...so I'm watching a lot less TV"* (L18). Instead of watching television in the evening she had started participating in a boxing class, which she found to be enjoyable and helped to relieve stress.

Many participants seemed to have developed a deeper curiosity about the food they ate and where it came from as a result of participating in the program. The most reported change in this area was cooking more meals 'from scratch' and cutting back on processed food. Several participants also stated they had started meal planning and buying their produce from the local farmer's market.

Decluttering was an area many participants chose to focus their time and energy on since completing the program. One participant stated:

"I have been down the decluttering path and you have to be kind to yourself when you're doing this because it's taking a lot longer than I thought it would...I thought 'Oh I'll get that done today' but you only get about that much done so I started with the recipe books and I'm slowly going through it...I'm on holiday at the moment so I sold some furniture this week and things like that so I'm cleaning some space in my living area and in my life as well" (12-week follow-up wait-list control; #43, L49).

While some participants mentioned that they were trying to declutter on a regular basis, it is worth noting that participants were also trying to stop accumulating clutter in the first place. This is illustrated by the fact participants stated they were thinking more carefully about how they spent their money. One participant commented, *“I try to think before I buy stuff and try not to buy more stuff”* (12-week follow-up survey; #60; Row 31, Column 3) and another mentioned she was *“Buying less”* (12-week follow-up survey; #2; Row 2, Column 5). In addition, one participant spoke of actively avoiding the shops and another tried to avoid advertising wherever possible.

While this consumer resistance was present for some participants, other participants highlighted the daily struggles they faced in maintaining the simple living practices that they had learnt during the program. Some participants discussed on one hand feeling a greater sense of contentment and no longer feeling the need to travel and/or consume unnecessarily; however, they then would make a comment which illustrated the pull they felt to engage in consumption practices. Participant #53 illustrated this point when discussing how enjoyable it was to housesit for a friend and the attitude she brought to the experience:

“I’ve just been housesitting so I had the pleasure of picking lovely tomatoes and corn and eating the corn straight from the cob without cooking it...it’s unbelievable...it’s just the best. The first week of my holidays I thought I’m just going to enjoy this place like it’s a retreat...it’s got a swimming pool...it’s close to the river so I thought you know I don’t need to go to Bali to do this..I’ve had friends over...I’ve cooked meals...I’ve picked up a book and read...it’s just been bliss...it’s been really good...but I am going to Bali in April” (12-week follow-up wait-list control group; #53; L146).

This participant describes the enjoyment she experienced from viewing the housesitting experience as a retreat and mentions how she questioned the need to travel to Bali. However, she then states she has a trip to Bali booked in the near future (although it is unclear whether she had booked the trip before commencing the *Smart Busy* program).

Similarly, another participant (#62) who had mentioned feeling a sense of gratitude for what she had in her life (*“My life is complete”*) expressed how difficult it was to not consume when she went on holiday to Melbourne:

"Is it a want or a need? He [my husband] disagreed. I just came back from Melbourne the fashion state...you know...I just want it...that's what I've got to work on" (12-week follow-up wait-list control group; #62; L172).

Despite participants' daily struggles to resist engaging in consumption activities, such as air travel and shopping for clothes, some participants had become less reliant on their cars and were taking public transport or walking to and from work. This was interesting as alternatives to car travel and the notion of reducing car travel were not addressed in the program. For instance, participant #28 shared how she gave up her car bay at work and started taking public transport to work for the first time in 25 years. She stated:

"I would just get out from home, get in the car, drive, get in the basement and go up the lift so I just gave it [work car bay] back. I take public transport now...I learnt how to read a timetable and when you miss it you think 'Bloody hell!' It's also you're not buying take away food on the way home so there's all those benefits too" (12-week follow-up treatment group; #28, L59)

Participant #28 attributed this change in behaviour partly as a result of becoming more mindful and *"living more in the present"*. She also stated that she identified how reliant she was on her car, which led her to reflect on her environmental impact as well as other aspects of her life that related to her car dependency (e.g., working long hours and eating take away food on the way home from work). Interestingly, some participants reported adopting a range of other environmental practices, such as recycling, composting, and upcycling, which were not a direct target of the educational intervention.

The majority of participants who returned their follow-up surveys reported engaging in some form of mindfulness or meditation practice, including: avoiding multitasking; the 3-sigh breathing technique; and simply being present to whatever was happening around them. A number of participants said they no longer felt the need to practice meditation as they were now just being more mindful in their daily lives. As one participant said:

"I'm not doing the meditation but I am in a way...because when I sit in bed in the morning I've got a beautiful view...Brian put a bird bath there and all these lovely birds flutter around in it and I'm sitting there having my cup of tea and

I'm not thinking about anything...I'm just watching the birds" (12-week follow-up wait-list control group; #62; L187).

Participants also reported spending more time being present and connecting with friends and family. Participants seemed to understand that whilst you could be in the presence of another human being, you could also be 'not there' and fail to experience quality time with that person, particularly due to technological distractions. As participant #31 stated:

"I've always had good relationships with people but trying to find situations in my family or amongst nieces or nephews and my siblings, especially the younger ones and the kids just to connect with them more because I think we're in times where the adults around us are all so busy and sometimes I'll just take a step back and I'll look at how other people's kids are going 'Mum! Mum! Mum!' and the mum is like 'Yeah what?' [Mimicking tapping on phone] and they're actually saying, 'Mum, you're not looking at me. Mum, I'm talking to you' and they're just like tapping away on their phone. There's no quality time...there's no focused attention" (12-week follow-up treatment group; #31; L105).

This participant noticed the role technology played in keeping her family separate, distracted, and disconnected from one another. Subsequently, she made an effort to give people her full attention. Other participants stated they were actively working to improve and repair relationships with friends and family. One participant noted, *"It [the program] made me realise how much I need to keep important relationships alive"* (12-week follow-up survey; #79; Row 54, Column 3).

Following completion of the program, many participants gave themselves permission to enjoy life more by making time for leisure, fun, and holidays rather than being solely focused on productivity and achieving results. Whereas previously many participants had experienced a sense of guilt with taking time out for themselves, they now appeared to feel more comfortable with the idea. As one participant stated, *"I make time for leisure without feeling guilty"* (12-week follow-up (survey); #21; Row 13, Column 5). The sense of having to be constantly productive and achieve was not as strong for her as it once was. Additionally, participant #62 illustrates this point when she describes how she spent her day:

“Today I just woke up, I had no plan...I was out in the garden sweeping leaves and pottering out there...I started an oil painting...took three bags of clothing to the op shop...decluttered...I then treated myself to a coffee and a donut at Garden City [shopping centre] and just people watched and then I came back, laid on the couch and watched a couple of crime shows and ate some chocolate and I didn’t feel one bit guilty...that’s how I’m looking at my life” (12-week follow-up wait-list control; #62; L10).

Several other participants mentioned they had taken holidays (overseas and within the state) since completing the program. One participant stated, *“I went on my first holiday in four years! Didn’t take any work with me”* (12-week follow-up survey; #7; Row 6, Column 7). Another mentioned that she had travelled overseas with her family for five weeks. This participant mentioned how she had made a special effort whilst overseas to connect with other people, stating:

“I was really trying to make a connection with others and just getting to know the culture...the people...and just talking to people...strangers...something I probably wouldn’t do as much but in doing that we met so many lovely different people...it made the holiday” (12-week follow-up treatment group; #72; L180).

Physical activity was only briefly touched on in the final session of the program (session 6) and then covered in more depth in the ‘Booster’ session at 12-week follow-up. Interestingly, many participants had increased their level of physical activity as a result of participating in the program. Participant #7 stated that since doing the program she had incorporated more incidental exercise into her day. She said:

“I walk to work most days...well I walk to the train and then I walk to work. I’ve been encouraging my friends...I don’t catch up with friends for coffee. Instead I go for walks with them and just generally walk around the place whenever I can. I don’t pick up the phone. I just go and have a walk” (12-week follow-up treatment group; #7; L9).

Other participants had incorporated more structured exercise into their day and had set clear goals for themselves. Examples of this included participants attending personal training sessions, training to become a surf lifesaver, and preparing for a pilgrimage walk. Having a clear goal appeared to motivate these participants. For instance, participant #36 stated:

"I find it very difficult to get up once I've come home from work and sat down. So I actually found having a goal...like my child does surf life saving so I'm working towards my bronze medallion now so actually having to get fit has meant I get out with the dog most days...keeping up yoga more...I've got something to work towards" (12-week follow-up treatment group; #36; L28).

As a result of engaging in more exercise, participants reported having more energy, losing weight, and feeling healthier.

7.4.6 Failure to Make Desired Changes to Lifestyle

While participants had good intentions to make changes to their lifestyle, many failed to implement certain practices predominantly due to a lack of time, family support, and motivation. Time was the most reported barrier to change with participants sharing that they still felt they had too much going on in their lives (e.g., busy workload and family commitments) and not enough time to carry out practices such as decluttering. As one participant stated:

"I need to commit to balancing work and life. I am getting better but my workload over the last few months has made it difficult to have the weekends off and 'Digital Sabbaths' I wanted" (12-week follow-up survey; #7; Row 6, Column 7).

A number of participants acknowledged that they had not been successful in making the changes they had intended to make due to being 'lazy' and lacking motivation and self-discipline. One participant described himself as a *"lazy creature"*.

Other participants had good intentions to adopt new practices; however, they were stopped by family members who were not supportive. Participant #25 illustrated this point nicely when she made the following statement:

"I would like to declutter a lot because I find stuff stresses me but I share a house with four other people that don't like to declutter so if you declutter one area and then you turn around the next day and someone goes 'Oh there's a space! I'll put that there' you think I went to all that effort to clear that space and it's filled up already so you know that's a big thing" (12-week follow-up treatment group; #25; L233).

This participant's frustration in being thwarted in her efforts to make change was shared by other participants. Participant #92 mentioned how she was stopped in taking 'Digital Sabbaths' due to her husband's love of watching children's cartoons. She said:

"I was a bit road blocked by my husband so I blame him...I wanted to do a bit of the 'Digital Sabbath'...he's a big kid and loves his cartoons so first thing in the morning he's with my two boys and they sit there and watch it...it does my head in. I say 'Do we really need the TV on at six o'clock in the morning?' but he's kind of like 'yeah yeah yeah' and then it doesn't get done" (12-week follow-up wait-list control group; #92; L158).

Several wait-list control participants attributed their failure to engage with certain practices to the disruptive nature of the Christmas period. These participants completed the program approximately 2-months before Christmas and mentioned difficulties in carrying out thrifty practices during this period (e.g., saving money). As one participant stated:

"I thought I was doing pretty well and I had some money before Christmas and then over Christmas it just vanished and my credit card started getting used and I thought 'Nooo, what happened?'" (12-week follow-up wait-list control group; #82; L94).

It was interesting to note the internal struggle one participant experienced with tracking her spending and implementing a budget. Participant #31 shared how she felt conflicted about being thrifty as she wanted to remain generous in how she was with her money. She explained:

"I think I need to understand and distinguish within myself what my budgets are...what my limits are...when I grew up we didn't have a lot of money...it was really constrained and it was hard here when dad was just only working...so I think now that we have our own life and my husband and I have our own money but I don't want to constrain myself and my kids...if we want to spend...I want to be generous...how do you balance out being generous and then saving money but then not being stingy at the same time so I have to figure that out" (12-week follow-up treatment group; #31; L265).

Several participants indicated they struggled to make meditation a part of their daily routine. The most common barriers to practice appeared to be finding the time to do it, remembering to do it, and having difficulty meditating.

One participant who ran a catering business specialising in making cakes was stopped in decreasing her waste consumption, specifically the use of single-use disposable plastics (e.g., cling wrap). This was largely due to a lack of sustainable alternatives being available. She said:

“I wanted to use less plastic but I found with my job using glad wrap was much more practical. I was also hoping to buy less with plastic, although everything seems to be wrapped in it” (12-week follow-up survey; #79; Row 54, Column 7).

Despite this participant’s good intention to use less plastic, she was not able to do so.

7.5 Discussion

To date, there has been very little empirical research on interventions designed to reduce materialistic values and excessive consumption. This study set out to answer the research question: can an educational intervention decrease materialistic values and excessive consumption behaviour? In order to achieve this aim, the *Smart Busy* program was developed, implemented, and evaluated for its effectiveness. The results support the hypothesis that the intervention significantly decreased materialistic values at post-intervention; however, this shift in values was not maintained at 12-week follow-up. The hypothesis that the intervention would significantly decrease consumption was only partially supported by the finding that treatment group participants significantly increased their simple living practices compared to the wait-list control group. Although the treatment group’s frugality score approached significance ($p = .08$), no significant difference was found on this measure and the ecological footprint measure at post-intervention.

The qualitative evidence showed the intervention assisted participants to simplify their lives to some extent and shift away from pursuing material sources of satisfaction. A number of participants stated that the intervention allowed them to reflect on their lifestyle, behaviour, and values, and make desired changes where necessary.

Participants adopted a range of behaviours that are commonly practiced by voluntary simplifiers, such as sourcing foods locally, cooking meals from scratch, decluttering, reducing (paid) work hours, volunteering in the community, practicing mindfulness meditation, spending more time with friends/family, and rethinking spending habits. The findings of the present study support the idea that pursuing a lifestyle of voluntary simplicity can allow people to engage in more sustainable patterns of consumption as a result of living more thoughtful and reflective lives (Kronenberg & Lida, 2011).

Despite simple living practices significantly increasing post-intervention, no significant changes were obtained on the ecological footprint and frugality measures that were utilised to detect shifts in consumption. At the time the ecological footprint measure was selected for this research it was the most commonly utilised tool to measure an individual's behavioural change in consumption. However, the ecological footprint measure may not have been appropriate to use for this study due to the fact this measure only takes into account what is consumed but not the many times participants may have decided to refuse a purchase (Luckins, 2011). Throughout the program participants were encouraged to reflect on their consumption behaviour, question whether they needed to buy certain material goods ('Is it a need? Or is it a want?'), and resist making impulse purchases. Since the ecological footprint tool is better suited to measuring eco-efficient consumption rather than reduced consumption, it is hardly surprising that no significant difference was found between the two groups at post-intervention.

It is notable that the difference between the treatment and wait-list control groups on the frugality measure at post-intervention was approaching significance with a p value of .08. Frugality is defined as a lifestyle trait in which a person carefully uses resources to make them last longer and exercises restraint in acquiring material goods and services (Lastovicka et al., 1999). Therefore, the frugality scale was selected as a tool to measure shifts in consumption that could not be captured by the ecological footprint measure. This study found that a change in frugality was positively associated with a change in simple living practices. This demonstrates that as participants embraced an ethos of frugality that they were more likely to adopt simple living practices that typically use less resources and rely upon people developing new skills. This finding

was to be expected as throughout the *Smart Busy* program participants were encouraged to embrace a philosophy of frugality, which included saving rather than spending, learning new skills, and focusing on satisfying their basic needs.

It is possible that the lack of significant findings on the frugality measure at post-intervention is the result of ceiling effects occurring. A ceiling effect occurs when a large number of participants' scores concentrate around the upper limit of the scale (e.g., for a 5-point scale most scores are close to 4 or 5) (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao, 2004). At baseline, both the treatment and wait-list control groups had mean scores of 3.90 ($SD = .44$) and 4.10 ($SD = .49$) (out of a maximum score of 5) respectively on the frugality measure. Subsequently, it was difficult to increase these scores.

In addition, there may have been issues with the accuracy of self-reporting on this measure. The Dunning-Kruger effect refers to the tendency of relatively unskilled people to hold overinflated ideas of their skills (Dunning, Johnson, Ehrlinger, & Kruger, 2003). Due to not being able to evaluate their own ability accurately, they fail to see the flaws in their performance/thinking and remain ignorant of their limitations. In the present study, participants may have overestimated how frugal they were before the program commenced. As a result of participating in the program, participants most likely had a deeper understanding of frugality and how they practiced it in their own lives. This may explain why they scored themselves lower on the frugality measure at post-intervention. Studies evaluating the efficacy of mindfulness interventions have also found this phenomena, where participants score themselves highly on mindfulness measures at pre-intervention but lower at post-intervention (e.g., see Davis & Hayes, 2011). This is due to participants gaining increased awareness of how 'mindless' they can be in their daily lives. For future research, better measures need to be developed and utilised that deal with cognitive biases, such as the Dunning-Kruger effect, to obtain meaningful data in relation to shifts in consumption behaviour.

The *Smart Busy* program used two key strategies to decrease materialistic values and excessive consumption behaviour: 1) emulating the lifestyle practices and values of voluntary simplifiers; and 2) cultivating mindfulness (Chapters 3, 5 and 6). The results showed that the program was successful in bringing about significant changes in increasing mindfulness and simple living practices. These changes were maintained at

12-week follow-up. In relation to mindfulness, many participants reported engaging in the regular practice of meditation, with participants practising meditation for an average of 9 minutes per day ($M = 8.98$, $SD = 8.01$) at post-intervention and 8 minutes per day ($M = 8.42$, $SD = 10.06$) at 12-week follow-up. Research has found that practising meditation is an effective way to cultivate mindfulness (Shapiro et al., 2008). In addition, participants reported taking steps to stop themselves from multitasking to improve their ability to pay attention. The qualitative evidence suggests that mindfulness may have helped participants become more aware of their everyday behaviours and implement new habits. For instance, one participant attributed becoming more mindful with reducing her car travel.

The negative relationship that was found between changes in mindfulness and changes in materialistic values (section 7.4.3) may suggest that as participants become more mindful, the desire to accumulate wealth and material goods decreases. This finding is consistent with the literature that shows cultivating mindfulness may help people to become better attuned to their needs, clarify values, increase well-being, and decrease automaticity (Chapter 3), all of which may result in lower levels of consumption and a shift towards intrinsic values. Participants who have a greater awareness of their core psychological needs and can see how material goods often fail to satisfy these needs are not only more likely to orient towards intrinsic values but are better able to self-regulate to align their behaviour with their intrinsic values (section 3.5).

Similarly, changes in mindfulness were also positively associated with changes in frugality and simple living practices. These positive relationships may be explained by the fact that as a person becomes more mindful they can better self-regulate (section 3.5.1). If people are able to pause and reflect on whether they actually need an item, as well as the impact the item will have on the environment and their health, then they may resist making impulse purchases. Many voluntary simplifiers appear to practice such thoughtful deliberation with respect to acquiring material goods. For example, the preliminary phase of this research found that before making a purchase, simplifiers often ask questions such as, 'Where will I put this?', 'Do I need it?', 'Can I get it second-hand?' and 'Is it going to serve a purpose?' (section 5.6.2). Similarly, a

study by Ross (2015) found the voluntary simplicity lifestyle was negatively correlated with consumer impulsiveness. It follows that the ability to self-regulate through increasing mindfulness may enable participants to exercise restraint in their consumption behaviour, which is a central aspect to practising both voluntary simplicity and frugality.

Despite the fact changes in mindfulness were positively associated with changes in materialism, the findings of the present study suggest that mindfulness may not be enough on its own to reduce materialism. Mindfulness levels were maintained at 12-week follow-up; however, decreases in materialistic values were not maintained. This indicates that other ongoing stimuli may be required to diminish materialistic values and strengthen intrinsic values over the long-term. Empirical research has firmly established that mindfulness is a useful strategy to assist people with reflecting on their behaviour and can enable them to prioritise intrinsic values (section 3.5). However, mindfulness can also lead people to enter states of passivity and acceptance of their current situation (Krupka, 2015). In the absence of conversations that encourage participants to engage in intrinsically oriented activities and question the pursuit of financial and material wealth, participants' values shifted back to being more aligned with the values of the dominant culture (i.e., Western consumer culture). Without providing adequate scaffolding for participants' mindfulness practice, mindfulness may become a strategy that simply helps people to decrease stress levels and accept what life throws their way.

Despite participants shifting back towards materialistic values following the program, it is worth noting that changes in simple living practices were maintained at 12-week follow-up. This may be due to some of the practices (e.g., buying local food, decluttering, and recycling) being easy to implement, non-intrusive, and/or non-disruptive to participants' lives. It is possible that participants engaged in a range of easy to do simple living practices to feel as if they were doing their bit for the planet while not altering their lifestyle in a fundamental way.

This study found that changes in materialistic values were associated with changes in engagement with simple living practices. The program focused on encouraging the adoption of a range of voluntary simplicity practices (Chapter 6). At the same time,

intrinsic values, such as caring for the community and affiliation, that many voluntary simplifiers report having were promoted throughout the program and materialistic values were discouraged in an attempt to diminish them. The results show the program was successful in significantly decreasing the value of financial success and increasing the values of affiliation and community feeling. According to the value circumplex (Grouzet et al., 2005), the intrinsic values of affiliation and community stand in opposition to the value of financial success (Figure 3). In the current study, it appears that a suppression effect (i.e., the seesaw effect) may have occurred with an increase in participants' intrinsic values, which decreased the financial success value. Similarly, the negative correlational relationship that was found between changes in community feeling and materialistic values also points to suppression effects occurring.

In addition, a bleed-over effect may have occurred as evidenced by the uptake of a range of environmental behaviours that were not a direct target of the program. Some participants reported program outcomes such as composting and limiting their car use despite these behaviours not being mentioned during the 6-week program. Research on values structures by Schwartz (1992) and Grouzet et al. (2005) may explain why these pro-environmental behaviours increased. Both of the value models presented by these researchers show that some values in the circumplexes are compatible with each other and associated with other values, whereas other values are in direct opposition to each other (section 2.2). Values such as affiliation and care for the community are located close to values that focus on care for the environment. By strengthening these neighbouring values in the circumplex it is likely that the care for environment value was also strengthened, thereby resulting in the adoption of pro-environmental behaviours.

This finding may also be explained by the fact that as people become less materialistic they are more likely to acknowledge the existence of environmental problems and take action to address such issues. A meta-analysis by Hurst, Dittmar, Bond and Kasser (2013) explored the relationships between materialism, environmental behaviour, and environmental attitudes. These researchers found that as people become more materialistic they are more likely to engage in behaviours that are damaging to the environment. In addition, they are less likely to believe that anything needs to be done

to protect the environment and that there is no need to alter their behaviour. Kilbourne and Pickett (2008) argue that this is due to cognitive dissonance arising in the lives of materialistic people when confronted by environmental problems. Rather than reduce their consumption behaviour, materialistic people are more likely to downplay the seriousness of environmental issues to resolve the psychological tension experienced. However, if people become less materialistic, they are more likely to be in a less defensive frame of mind and therefore more willing to accept the reality of our current ecological predicament. In order to resolve the cognitive dissonance, a less materialistic person is more likely to adopt behaviours that are less damaging to the environment.

Additionally, the *Smart Busy* program covered content on the costs of consumption to people's well-being and the natural environment, which may have led to the adoption of pro-environmental behaviours. The links between people's everyday consumption behaviour and environmental degradation were clearly illustrated to participants. This was considered important since it was questionable whether Australians see overconsumption as an environmental issue and make the connection "*between the environment 'out there' and everyday practices in homes, jobs and leisure*" (Hobson, 2003, p. 151). In doing so, participants were in a better position to acknowledge the existence of environmental problems, the ways in which their behaviour contributed to them and subsequently, implement appropriate practices to address these issues.

Furthermore, Brown and Kasser (2005) argue that people who are highly oriented towards intrinsic values engage in activities that tend to be less environmentally damaging (e.g., growing food and volunteering in the community). On the other hand, people who are higher in materialism tend to engage in activities that are connected to consumption (e.g., purchasing a large home or luxury vehicle to display status). As people move away from a lifestyle focused on materialistic pursuits and towards a philosophy of voluntary simplicity, they are more likely to engage in activities that are intrinsically rewarding and develop their own skills, a sense of competence, and autonomy. They also focus on saving, thrift, and reuse rather than spending money and acquiring new things (Kasser, 2011). Engagement in environmental practices, such as growing food and cooking meals from raw ingredients, depends on people being

resourceful and using their own skills to accomplish the task at hand. These skills can help to build self-esteem and confidence. This can assist to inoculate people from feeling the need to increase their self-worth through consumption (Burroughs et al., 2013).

The present study found that changes in television consumption were negatively associated with simple living practices, indicating that participants were less likely to engage in simple living practices if they increased their television consumption over the 6-week intervention period. This finding may be explained by previous research that showed people who watched significantly more television than others were less likely to see environmental limits to growth, the fragility of nature's balance, and the possibility of environmental crisis (Good, 2007). It follows that participants who increased their television consumption during the *Smart Busy* program may have adopted these distorted ideas about the state of the environment. Subsequently, they may have felt little need to exercise restraint and engage in simple living practices to decrease their environmental impact.

In addition, this study found changes in television consumption were positively associated with changes in materialistic values. This finding adds to the body of research that has established people who watch significantly more television tend to be more highly oriented towards materialistic values than others due to increased exposure to materialistic messages (section 2.2.11). Participants in this study may have fallen into a 'work-and-watch TV-and-spend' cycle since participants who experienced feeling increasingly time-poor appeared to increase their television consumption. Long work hours may have left some participants with such depleted energy levels that all they felt able to do at the end of the day was watch television (a passive activity that requires little concentration or energy). Further research is required to explore whether this is indeed the case and if the relationship between time affluence and television consumption is mediated by hours at work.

Qualitative data indicated that the *Smart Busy* program helped a number of participants take either preliminary or substantial steps towards simplifying their lives. At completion of the *Smart Busy* program, the majority of participants could have been classified as beginner voluntary simplifiers according to McDonald et al. (2006)

categorisation of simplifiers (section 3.1.3). Of these participants, most fell into either the apprentice simplifier or partial simplifier subcategories. Many reported being engaged in a number of simple living practices (e.g., meditating and cooking meals from scratch) but not other practices (e.g., limiting long distance air travel). Some participants shared common characteristics with downshifter in that they had reduced their work hours and income to reclaim time and reduce their stress levels. However, it was unclear whether these participants had shifted their relationship to money and possessions in a fundamental way.

Nevertheless, it could be perceived as a positive (rather than a negative) that most participants were classified as beginner voluntary simplifiers at completion of the program. Much of the popular literature on voluntary simplicity encourages people to begin their simplicity journey by making one or two small changes (e.g., riding a bike to work one day a week) (Alexander & Ussher, 2013; Hetzel, 2014). The preliminary research findings of this study supported this idea in so far that voluntary simplifiers shared that simple living is a slow journey and people are likely to fail if they attempt to make too many changes all at once (Chapter 5). By making changes to their lives that were manageable in a short period of time, participants may have been more likely to maintain and/or expand their repertoire of simple living practices post-intervention.

Qualitative data also illustrated the importance of not labelling people as simplifiers or non-simplifiers based on the daily activities they engaged in. For instance, one participant shared how the program had helped her to be more content with life rather than focus on what she did not have. She shared what a typical day in her life now looked like, which included frequenting a local shopping centre where she 'people watched' as well as viewing crime programs on television. This participant expressed feeling more content, despite still frequenting shopping centres and watching television, which are typically not associated with practising voluntary simplicity. However, this participant stated that she felt like she had simplified her life. Indeed, it may be the case that in some urban environments the shopping centre is the only way people can experience some sense of community (even if it is manufactured to turnover a profit) (Ritzer, 2010). It is important to put these participants' experience of

change into perspective. As reported by the majority of simplifiers who were interviewed (Chapter 5), shifts in lifestyle take time. For this participant, with the right encouragement she may eventually discover other forms of community and find that her needs can be better met by engaging with local community groups rather than shopping centres. In fact, this participant also mentioned at the 12-week follow-up session that she was placing her large home on the market and was going to travel around Australia with her husband. Perhaps on this journey she will discover what it is like to belong to other communities. Further qualitative research is required to explore the nature of the shifts that occurred as a result of participating in the program.

Many participants reported cooking more as a result of participating in the program. They stated that they had shifted towards eating less processed foods and were spending more time in their kitchens cooking meals 'from scratch'. It is, however, unclear how participants defined cooking 'from scratch' in this study. As Huntley (2014, p.21) states, *"Most of us rely on pre-prepared ingredients to some extent even when we are making something 'from scratch'"*. Future educational interventions could include practical hands on cooking sessions in which the facilitator demonstrates what it looks like to cook a variety of simple and healthy meals from scratch without relying on pre-prepared processed ingredients or products. This could help to build participants confidence in their ability to do things for themselves (i.e., self sufficiency), which is an aspect central to living simply.

Changes in participants' psychological well-being were associated with a number of factors, including changes in mindfulness, time affluence, TV consumption, and consumption behaviour (i.e., ecological footprint). Increasing participants' mindfulness levels led to experiencing increases in psychological well-being (section 7.4.3). These results are consistent with previous research findings that have found mindfulness increases various positive psychological effects (e.g., subjective well-being) (Keng, Smoski, & Robins, 2011). Similarly, when participants experienced increases in time affluence (i.e., how much time they felt they had to engage in meaningful activities) they also experienced increases in psychological well-being. It is likely that having more time to engage in personally meaningful activities and leisure pursuits helped to satisfy participants' core psychological needs (Kasser, 2009a). Negative relationships

were found between changes in psychological well-being and changes in ecological footprint and TV consumption, indicating that psychological well-being decreased as participants' consumption of resources and television increased.

One possible explanation for these negative correlational relationships is that as participants focused their energy on consuming, they were left with little time and energy for pursuits that would better satisfy their psychological needs. Similarly, the more television participants watched the less time they had to socialise with family and friends (Bertman, 1998). In short, these activities distract people from engaging in more personally fulfilling activities. All that being said, it may be that certain high impact consumption activities are responsible for decreasing psychological well-being. For instance, eating more processed foods (Dipnell et al., 2015) and long commutes to work (Office for National Statistics, 2014; Stutzer & Frey, 2008) have been found to negatively impact on people's mental health. Further research is required to unpack the consumption activities that may be particularly damaging to people's well-being. Future research could target these high consumption activities to safeguard participants' well-being and reduce ecological impact.

One of the aims of the *Smart Busy* program was to encourage participants to focus on pursuing non-material sources of satisfaction through choosing experiences over material accumulation. This message may have been presented to participants in an overly simplistic manner by failing to address the fact that not all experiences are beneficial for the environment and/or people's well-being in the long-term. The heavy emphasis that was placed on choosing experiences over material goods throughout the program without providing a discussion on the environmental impacts of certain experiences (e.g., non-essential/frivolous flying) resulted in some participants booking holidays abroad. One participant said she had booked a holiday to Singapore to celebrate her 60th birthday and another went on a 5-week overseas holiday to "*start enjoying life*". It is unclear whether these holidays were planned prior to these participants commencing the program or whether the program triggered them to book these trips overseas.

Due to air travel being a high consumption activity that dwarfs all other consumption behaviours (Rosenthal, 2010), this program outcome was not intended. Since air travel

is viewed as being part of a normal Western lifestyle and is a highly valued activity (De Botton, 2003) participants' may not have perceived it as being a high consumption behaviour. The failure of the *Smart Busy* program to address participants' flying behaviour means the program is potentially open to criticism for not being serious about decreasing impacts of consumption behaviour. In trying to appeal to a mainstream audience, the program may have fallen into the trap of focusing on targeting small-scale changes in behaviour rather than confronting the most damaging aspects of our consumer way of life (Thøgersen & Crompton, 2009). It is unknown how participants would have reacted to the suggestion of not flying or reducing their air travel. But it is likely that it could have backfired since air travel is socially desirable and viewed as normative behaviour in the Western world. As Steg and Vlek (2009, p.313) argue when designing interventions it is important to ensure that they are "*within people's limits of tolerance*".

The relative ease and low cost of air travel as well as it being a socially desirable activity means decreasing this consumption behaviour is a particularly challenging area. Not surprisingly, research has found that very few people are willing to reduce their air travel to deal with ecological issues (Barr & Prillwitz, 2011; Becken, 2007). Future programs could guide participants to reflect on: 1) their motivations for travelling abroad; 2) why they so readily assume happiness is to be found in travelling to faraway locations; and 3) how they can get their needs met closer to home. In addition, participants could explore the benefits associated with taking local holidays (within state) and 'staycations', where one holidays in their own hometown as a way of practising frugality and thrift. This idea of travelling closer to home has been something that many voluntary simplifiers have embraced and have helped to develop (Hall, 2011). Therefore, it would be interesting to explore the process simplifiers go through in arriving at the decision to reduce or abstain from flying.

The results from the 12-week follow-up surveys indicated that several of the treatment effects of the program were maintained. Changes in simple living practices were maintained, suggesting that many of the practices may have become everyday habits for participants. In addition, treatment gains in mindfulness and time affluence were maintained and increased respectively. This is most likely due to participants applying

the strategies in the program (e.g., meditation and 'Digital Sabbaths') on a regular basis as many stated that they continued to engage in these practices once the program ended.

A possible explanation for why time affluence scores continued to increase once the program ended is that participants had organised their lives to free up more time for activities that were meaningful to them. For instance, several participants stated they had negotiated more flexible work conditions and reduced their work hours. One female participant had resigned from a committee that was taking up a lot of her time and energy. Another participant was in the process of sorting out her finances and exploring the possibility of reducing her work hours by renting out a room in her house as short-term accommodation. It takes time, thoughtful deliberation, and a certain level of risk taking to make these changes (Lorenzen, 2012). As a consequence of making these changes, participants reported that they had gained extra time and a sense of control over their lives, which had ultimately improved their overall well-being. However, these results need to be treated with caution as there was no control group available for the 12-week follow-up period.

Despite the idea of trading money for time being raised throughout the program, the vast majority of participants had not reduced their work hours or changed their jobs upon completion of the program and at the 12-week follow-up. One explanation for this is that structural barriers may exist that ruled out the possibility of participants reducing their work hours. Participants may not have been able to work less than a standard 40-hour work week due to being on a low-wage or out of fear of being perceived as not being serious about their job (section 5.24). For this reason, it is important to acknowledge these barriers during the course so participants do not feel as if they have failed or that they are incompetent in not being able to reduce their work hours to obtain more free time. It may be appropriate to facilitate a discussion on the importance of lobbying for wide-scale change such as a shorter work week and a basic living wage for all (Andrews, 1997; 'Beyond the work family balance', 2015).

Despite attempts to manipulate participants' environment by encouraging them to avoid advertising messages and limit their television consumption, decreases in materialistic values were not maintained at 12-week follow-up. Following the program,

participants were likely to have come under pressure to consume. The lack of maintenance of decreased materialistic values suggests that participants may need ongoing support and stimulus to maintain the shift towards intrinsic values. Living in a Western consumer culture, it is near impossible to avoid advertising and materialistic messages (Jansson-Boyd, 2010). There is evidence to suggest that the dominant social environment of materialism and consumerism that participants went back to following the program made it difficult for them to resist engaging in consumption activities such as travel and clothes shopping. For example, one participant acknowledged she had transformed the experience of house sitting for a friend into a 'staycation' holiday. However, despite the realisation she could have a traveller's mindset in her own backyard, this participant still engaged in frivolous travel to Bali (Indonesia). Another participant stated that she was content with what she had; however, while on a holiday in Melbourne she could not resist going shopping for clothing. Participants appeared to wrestle between their old consumer identity and the new *Smart Busy*, frugal identity.

Although participants had decreased their TV consumption by approximately 2.5 hours (from 10.53 hours at pre-intervention to 8.22 hours post-intervention) at completion of the program, they were still watching an average of 8 hours per week (just over 1 hour per day). While it is not known whether participants were watching mainly commercial or non-commercial television, it is likely they were exposed to materialistic messages from television and friends, family, and work colleagues. This highlights the need for broader structural changes to be made, such as regulating the advertising industry. Some of these large-scale changes will be explored further in the final chapter of this thesis.

As a consequence of participating in the educational intervention, participants reported feeling calmer and more in control of their lives. The quantitative measure of time affluence supported this finding as scores on this measure significantly increased at 12-week follow-up. While the program could be criticised for appearing too 'self-focused' in nature rather than dealing directly with addressing large-scale environmental and societal issues, it could also be argued that this is an effective way to engage a more mainstream materialistic audience. If an educational intervention

can help participants to feel less stressed, more mindful, and more time affluent then they will be in a better position to think about the health of the planet and engage in a range of simple living practices. In fact, changes in time affluence were negatively correlated with changes in ecological footprint and positively correlated with changes in frugality respectively. When participants reclaim their time they may begin to feel like they can engage in activities, such as gardening, cooking, and sewing, which are often put off until some time in the distant future. In short, participants may feel like they have time to engage in other pursuits besides work and household chores. Therefore, they may be more likely to engage in simple living and frugal practices. In the present study, the qualitative evidence showed that at completion of the program many participants were engaging in lower impact activities that were more time consuming (e.g., preparing a meal from raw ingredients) rather than opting for convenience (e.g., buying takeaway food).

This finding is consistent with other research that found people who have greater levels of time affluence are more willing to take slower forms of transport, such as walking and cycling (LaJeunesse & Rodríguez, 2012). However, another study found that while downshifter were more likely to engage in sustainable behaviours around the house, these sustainable behaviours did not extend beyond the home to impact on their transport decisions (Kennedy et al., 2013). The Kennedy et al. (2013) study shows that simply having more time may not translate into individuals engaging in more sustainable behaviours. Nevertheless, the findings of the present study suggest programs that are designed to encourage the adoption of sustainable behaviours may not need to be framed as environmental or sustainability programs. Instead they could be framed around the idea of reclaiming time for self, decreasing stress levels, improving health, and increasing leisure time. Framing programs in this way could make it easier to engage people who may not typically enrol in an environmental education program due to the polarising effect words such as 'environment', 'green', and/or 'sustainability' can have (Koger & Winter, 2010).

In the 12-week follow-up survey, several participants reported being restricted in their efforts to make change due to family members not being supportive of their new practices. If properly implemented by the participant, many of the *Smart Busy*

practices had the potential to impact on the lives of other people living in their household. An example of this is decluttering. Some participants appeared to be fighting an uphill battle to rid their household of clutter. This barrier to simple living was also raised in phase 1 of this research (section 5.23). Several non-simplifiers mentioned the reason they did not engage in pro-environmental behaviours was because other family members were not on board. Subsequently, they perceived it as being too challenging to engage in certain green behaviours (e.g., recycling). Similarly, a multi-national survey on the voluntary simplicity movement found a common barrier faced in trying to live simply was having family members who did not share a similar worldview (Alexander & Ussher, 2012). To decrease this barrier, educational interventions to decrease excessive consumption could be designed for entire families (i.e., children and partners). Working with the whole family helps to establish a degree of family buy-in that is necessary in shifting towards a less consumptive lifestyle (McDonald et al., 2012).

Participants were at varying levels of readiness when it came to making changes to their lives. A small number of participants indicated in their 12-week follow-up surveys that while the *Smart Busy* program had made them more aware and had motivated them to engage in certain practices, in the long-term they had been unsuccessful in maintaining the change. One participant said that he had not made any changes because he was 'lazy' and 'uncommitted'. According to the Transtheoretical model (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992) the degree to which one alters their behaviour and makes changes to their lifestyle is dependent on their pre-treatment stage of change. This model sets out that there are five stages people progress through when changing their behaviour: 1) pre-contemplation; 2) contemplation; 3) preparation; 4) action; and 5) maintenance. If an individual is at the pre-contemplation or contemplation stage then an action-oriented intervention, such as the *Smart Busy* program, is unlikely to be effective. It is worth considering how educational interventions can be tailored to cater to the needs of participants at the pre-contemplation or contemplation level to help bring about change in their lives. Pre-course instruments of future interventions designed to tackle excessive consumption could include measures to ascertain the stage of change participants are at. Subsequently, interventions could be tailored accordingly.

Similarly, dropouts of the program appeared to be at the pre-contemplation or contemplation level of making change. These participants indicated that they desired to make change and recognised the negative aspects of living an overly busy lifestyle; however, they were not able to maintain commitment to the process of completing the 6-week program. It is notable that at pre-intervention dropouts were less likely to engage in a range of simple living practices than course completers. While it is encouraging that it was possible to recruit these individuals who most likely would not have signed up to a typical environmental education or sustainable living program, further research is needed to explore ways to retain these individuals in such programs and maintain their interest.

The festive season appeared to have a disruptive effect on the development of new routines, skills, values, and practices acquired in the program, which may not have been firmly established. While both the treatment and wait-list control groups completed the program before Christmas, the treatment group filled in the 12-week follow-up survey early in December and the wait-list control group completed the same survey early in the New Year. Some scholars have argued that the focus of Christmas has become less about celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ and more about giving and receiving material goods (Belk & Bryce, 1993; Kasser & Sheldon, 2002). In addition, pro-environmental behaviours often go out the window during the Christmas holiday period with people engaging in a range of high consumption activities such as consuming large quantities of food (particularly meat), travelling by plane to see family overseas and interstate, and using large amounts of energy for Christmas light displays (Kasser & Sheldon, 2002).

Even though two months may seem like a substantial period of time to establish and form new habits, the Christmas season and pressure to consume often begins several months before Christmas day and occupies most of December with multiple celebrations taking place at work and within social networks. Once the course was complete, participants were on their own to deal with materialistic messages suggesting that buying and receiving goods is the path to happiness and that giving gifts is the best way to express your love for others. Opting out of gift giving rituals at Christmas can be socially awkward when there is an expectation and social norm of

giving and receiving gifts (Cherrier & Gurrieri, 2013). Subsequently, this pressure to consume and conform to norms around Christmas is likely to have adversely impacted on the anti-consumption messages conveyed throughout the program. It would be worthwhile scheduling future programs during quieter (less disruptive) periods of the year to maximise program effectiveness. In addition, introducing a discussion on how to remain resilient and resist the pressure to consume not just at Christmas, but also at other special celebrations (e.g., birthdays, Easter, and Valentines Day) may be beneficial to participants.

7.5.1 Limitations

There are a number of limitations to this study that need to be considered when interpreting the results. These include issues relating to:

- Self-report bias;
- The inability to identify causation;
- The self selecting nature of participants; and
- The survey instrument acting as a tool for change.

In order to illustrate the care that must be taken when interpreting these results each of these issues is discussed below.

The findings of this study are based on self-report measures and therefore are subject to a number of cognitive biases. At post-intervention, participants may have been reluctant to report low scores on measures (e.g., mindfulness) and may have exaggerated some scores due to not wanting to upset the facilitator. It is therefore possible that social desirability effects were at play in this study. As discussed, it is likely that the Dunning-Kruger effect (Dunning et al., 2003) impacted on participants' scores at pre-intervention on various scales (e.g., frugality and mindfulness) with participants overestimating their level of ability in certain areas.

Another important limitation of this study is that it is not known which aspects of the program were most effective in reducing materialistic values and increasing simple

living practices. The data only permits us to speculate on why the program was effective. The *Smart Busy* program employed two key strategies to decrease materialistic values and excessive consumption behaviour: 1) emulating voluntary simplicity practices and values; and 2) cultivating mindfulness. However, multiple tools and educational practices were employed for both of these key strategies. For instance, in promoting mindfulness, participants were encouraged to practice meditation as well as take 'Digital Sabbaths', avoid multitasking, and use Internet blocker applications. Similarly, to promote a voluntary simplicity lifestyle a range of structured conversations and various exercises were carried out to diminish extrinsic values and activate intrinsic values (e.g., participants reflected on their needs and wants, on the costs of overconsumption, and the science of happiness and well-being). Since different strategies were utilised it is unclear how effective each strategy was in bringing about the shift in values and behaviour, and whether one strategy or a combination of strategies was more effective than others.

Due to the way the educational intervention was designed, it was not possible to determine whether the program was more effective than a standard support group. As a result, it may be that some group-dynamic variable may be responsible for the changes in values and simple living practices. Future research may be enhanced by studying the effectiveness of each strategy (e.g., mindfulness training on its own) and identifying factors that impact upon important variables (e.g., frequency of contact with participants). In addition, it may be useful to study the variables in a basic support group that is matched with the treatment group.

The self-selecting nature of participants for the program may have compromised the generalisability of the data. In their pre-course surveys, the majority of participants expressed a willingness and desire to improve and make changes to their lives. Subsequently, they were highly motivated to learn and adhere to the homework recommendations. For this reason, the findings must be treated with caution. Due to differences in motivational factors it cannot be assumed that all Western Australians will benefit in the same way from the program. However, the results of this study indicate that the *Smart Busy* program can be beneficial to individuals who express a desire to participate in order to make positive changes to their lives.

Finally, it is possible that the process of completing the pre-course survey may have triggered behavioural change. Known as survey and question-behaviour effects, research studies have found that the act of being surveyed can alter people's behaviour by reminding them of an activity or intention they had not previously carried out (Gregory, Cialdini, & Carpenter, 1982; Zwane et al., 2011). In the present study, the survey instrument was a thought-provoking tool, which directed participants to consider a number of areas in their lives, including how important it was for them to engage in a number of simple living practices. This could explain the uptake of environmental practices (e.g., recycling) that were not a direct target of the educational intervention but were mentioned in the pre-course surveys. Nevertheless, a significant difference was found between the treatment and wait-list control group at Time 2 in terms of simple living practices. This indicates that the educational intervention had a larger impact in bringing about change and it was not simply due to the survey instrument. The program touched on the issue of consumption and its consequences (e.g., excessive waste), which most likely prompted participants to think about their household waste and ways they could reduce it. As discussed, this finding may also be explained by the program activating intrinsic values (i.e., community feeling and affiliation), which in turn strengthened neighbouring values in the circumplex, such as caring for the environment.

7.6 Conclusion

Notwithstanding these limitations, it was found that the *Smart Busy* program decreased materialistic values in the short-term and reduced consumption behaviour to some extent as indicated by the increase in simple living practices. The program also increased a range of other variables such as time affluence, mindfulness, community feeling, and affiliation, and decreased the value of financial success. Some of these changes (i.e., simple living practices, mindfulness, and time affluence) were maintained at 12-week follow-up; however, treatment effects of changes in materialistic values were not. It is important to note that these changes were small and therefore, should not be taken out of context.

The findings suggest how challenging it can be to remain intrinsically oriented in a social and cultural environment that reinforces materialistic values. Importantly

interventions designed to tackle excessive consumption and materialism at the individual level cannot be expected to have a community or population wide impact unless implemented on a large-scale and supported by larger structural changes.

In the concluding chapter of this thesis, the findings of this research are placed in the broader context of educating for sustainability, the voluntary simplicity lifestyle, and mindfulness training. The implications of this research and the possible application of the findings in these areas will be explored. In addition, future avenues for research will be discussed.

Chapter 8

Can an Educational Intervention Decrease Materialistic Values and Excessive Consumption Behaviour?

Discussion and Conclusions

“We must step off that consumerist treadmill for ecological reasons, and we should step off it for social justice reasons, but we should want to step off it because if we transcend consumer culture we will discover that there are simply more fulfilling ways to live. Consumerism is a tragic failure of human imagination. Certainly we can do much better”

-Samuel Alexander (2015, p. xii).

Consumption has always been part of people’s lives, playing a key role in our survival for many centuries (Smart, 2010). However, the scale of consumption that exists in the Western world today goes above and beyond satisfying people’s basic needs. Despite material wealth and comfort levels being higher than ever before, psychological illnesses (e.g., depression and anxiety) are at an all time high (Levine, 2013). Our resource and energy-intensive lifestyles have also led to the Earth being in a state of ‘ecological overshoot’ (Wackernagel, 2002). If the rate of consumption continues to grow in a ‘business as usual’ fashion, humanity will face ecological collapse by the end of the century (Turner, 2011). In light of this grim diagnosis of the present day situation, people will need to reduce their consumption of resources and do so with a sense of urgency to ensure a sustainable future (Alexander, 2015). A clear need for a grassroots approach to the problem was identified in the literature (Chapter 1). Therefore, this research study focused on what individuals could do to scale back their personal consumption through an educational intervention.

The aim of this thesis was to answer the question: can an educational intervention decrease materialistic values and consumption behaviour? In order to achieve this aim an educational intervention (the *Smart Busy: Live Better, Feel Free and Stress Less* program) was designed, implemented, and evaluated for its effectiveness. This project consisted of two main research phases: a preliminary research phase (Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5); and program design and evaluation phase (Chapters 6 and 7). The primary objective of the preliminary research phase was to understand the factors that perpetuate materialistic values and consumption behaviour to inform the program design. It also examined the relationships that existed between materialistic values, consumption behaviour, and a range of other variables that were considered important to this study (e.g., mindfulness, work hours, and time affluence).

A review of the literature on consumption identified a number of factors that perpetuate consumption at both the individual and structural level (Chapter 2). These factors included: long work hours and time poverty; materialistic values; easy access to credit; emulation of luxury lifestyles; identity signalling; habits and routines; planned and perceived obsolescence; advertising and marketing; the influence of the mainstream media; and infrastructure. The theory of materialistic values (Kasser, 2002) purports that these values are developed and strengthened via two central pathways: 1) exposure to experiences that trigger feelings of insecurity; and 2) exposure to people modelling materialistic values. It was established that many of these factors were inextricably connected and worked together to drive people to consume excessively, often to the detriment of people's personal well-being, relationships, and the natural environment. People can easily become locked on a consumer treadmill that is difficult to step off as illustrated by Schor's (1991) concept of the 'work-and-spend' cycle (section 1.1 and 2.8). Examining each of these factors and the way they influence each other to drive overconsumption was considered of utmost importance to avoid simplistic and inadequate solutions being devised.

While many people find themselves on the consumer treadmill due to a range of factors (Chapter 2), the research showed there are people pursuing ways of living with lower levels of consumption (Chapters 3 and 5). Commonly referred to as voluntary simplifiers (and downshifter), these people have voluntarily chosen to reduce their

hours at work and spending behaviour. This lifestyle shows that despite the compelling forces that perpetuate consumption, pursuing alternative ways of living, based on non-materialistic sources of satisfaction, is possible and even desirable. Many advocates of the voluntary simplicity lifestyle purport that this way of life is more sustainable due its anti-consumption stance and rejection of commonly accepted notions such as 'more is better' (Alexander, 2015; Andrews, 1997; Burch, 1995). However, little empirical research has been conducted to identify whether the voluntary simplicity lifestyle is more sustainable and has less environmental impact than their mainstream (non-simplifier) counterparts.

Therefore, it was important to ascertain whether shifting people to this lifestyle would result in a significant reduction in their ecological footprint (i.e., consumption behaviour). Through exploring the process of change that voluntary simplifiers experience, the barriers and challenges faced, and practices and values adopted, it was proposed that it could be possible to emulate key aspects of this lifestyle through a structured educational intervention. The lifestyle practices and values of voluntary simplifiers (n = 15) were compared to those of a sample of highly materialistic non-simplifiers (n = 14). In addition, the perceptions that non-simplifiers held towards the voluntary simplicity lifestyle were also explored to see how a more mainstream audience could effectively be engaged in an educational intervention to decrease excessive consumption and materialistic values.

8.1 Preliminary Research

8.1.1 Phase 1: Large-Scale Survey Findings

The preliminary research phase involved the administration of a large-scale survey to a diverse sample of 443 Western Australians (Chapter 4). Due to a lack of data pertaining to values in Western Australia, it was considered important to establish the value structure and relationships between materialistic values and consumption behaviour to other variables of interest. The main hypothesis that was proposed was:

H1: There will be a clear distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic values in Western Australia, with two clusters of values forming: extrinsic values (social recognition,

attractive appearance and financial success) and intrinsic values (self-acceptance, affiliation, community feeling and physical fitness).

This hypothesis was supported as the sample of Western Australians' values fell into two distinct categories: intrinsic and extrinsic (section 4.5.2). This was similar to Grouzet et al. (2005) cross-cultural research findings on values. The findings confirmed that the body of research literature that related to the activation of intrinsic values could be applied to the design of the educational intervention in WA.

The preliminary research also found that materialistic values and consumption behaviour were associated with a number of variables that could be manipulated by an educational intervention (Chapter 4). Firstly, a positive association was found between materialistic values and consumption behaviour (H2). This supported theoretical arguments that people with a materialistic values orientation are more likely to orient their lives around pursuits such as shopping (Kasser, 2002). It also reinforced previous research findings that materialistically oriented people tend to use more resources than others (Brown & Kasser, 2005). Therefore, it was plausible that an educational intervention aimed at shifting people away from materialistic values towards more intrinsic values, via emulating aspects of the voluntary simplicity lifestyle and cultivating mindfulness, could result in a reduction in consumption behaviour.

The results of the present study highlighted the relationship between work hours, income, and watching television in driving excessive consumption. It was found that television consumption was positively associated with materialistic values (H3). In addition, work hours were identified as being positively associated with consumption behaviour (H5). Western Australians who worked longer hours also tended to feel less time affluent. In addition, those who were on higher incomes tended to consume more resources than others (H5). These findings lend support to Schor's (1991) concept of the cycle of 'work-and-spend', showing that Western Australians who work long hours are likely to be left with little time and energy to consider the impact of their consumption behaviour and carry out sustainable alternatives. Subsequently, it was determined that special emphasis needed to be placed on reducing television

consumption and work hours to decrease people's income as well as their ability and desire to consume in unnecessary ways.

The results suggested that decreasing work hours could also lead to increases in time affluence. Time affluence was found to be associated with higher levels of mindfulness (H13) and psychological well-being (H14). The research literature indicated that a range of positive benefits could be obtained by cultivating greater levels of mindfulness and well-being, which may help to reduce excessive consumption and materialistic values (section 3.5). Some of the benefits that were identified included people becoming more open minded and developing a greater awareness of the best ways to satisfy their core psychological needs (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Rosenberg, 2004). Since time affluence appeared to impact significantly on psychological well-being and therefore had an indirect relationship to consumption behaviour (if people are less happy then they are more likely to turn to consumption to get their needs met), it was considered a critical factor for changing patterns of overconsumption and materialism. This is why the educational intervention was framed around helping people to reclaim their time and regain a greater sense of control over their lives.

8.1.2 In-Depth Interviews

Based on the survey results (Chapter 4), semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted to better understand the lived experience of Western Australians, specifically people who had voluntarily simplified their lives. A range of topics were explored as discussed in Chapter 5. Simplifiers' responses were contrasted against a group of highly materialistic, non-simplifiers. The results showed that the majority of voluntary simplifiers made the shift in lifestyle after a period of deep reflection, specifically around their values and priorities (Chapter 5). As a consequence, simplifiers took steps to live in line with their most important values. This reflective period was most commonly triggered by either: 1) a deep sense of dissatisfaction with their lives and consumer culture; and/or 2) a disruptive life experience (e.g., becoming ill or having a baby). This is consistent with existing research on traumatic life experiences that found these experiences disrupt a person's value system and create shifts towards more intrinsic values (Lykins, Segerstrom, Averill, Evans, & Kemeny, 2007; Tedeschi &

Calhoun, 2004). The disruptive life experiences reported by simplifiers in this study appear to have had a similar effect in mobilising them to look at what they wanted out of life and make shifts away from materialistic pursuits.

The present study has made an important contribution to the body of literature on the motivating factors for adopting a voluntary simplicity lifestyle. Contrary to the views of other simplicity advocates (e.g., Shaw & Newholm, 2002), concern for the environment was not the primary motive driving people to make the shift to a simpler lifestyle (Chapter 5). Western Australian simplifiers were motivated to pursue a simpler lifestyle predominantly to have a more meaningful, healthier, and satisfying life. As a result of experiencing work stress and/or a general sense of dissatisfaction with their lives, simplifiers made the changes they felt were necessary to reclaim more time and a sense of balance.

Despite the fact that concern for the environment was not the primary driver for making the shift in lifestyle, it was still identified as being an important factor. Most simplifiers had a comprehensive understanding of sustainability, the severity of the ecological crisis, and the central role of overconsumption in driving environmental destruction (section 5.2.4). They also tended to place greater priority on values focused around caring for the environment compared to non-simplifiers. For instance, some simplifiers stated that they cared more about the natural environment than other people and the potential loss of jobs that could come from protecting the environment. Subsequently, it was common for these simplifiers to engage in a range of pro-environmental behaviours to decrease their ecological impact. Common pro-environmental behaviours included: resisting purchasing materials goods they did not need; cooking meals from scratch; growing their own food; decluttering; buying items second-hand; and being involved with the larger community. Given simplifiers' depth of understanding of environmental issues and desire to live in accordance with their values, it was hardly surprising that they engaged in these behaviours. As Kronenberg and Lida (2011, p.70) state, *"If consumers understand the environmental impact of their consumption choices, they are more likely to take environmental considerations into account while making their decisions"*. In the present study, most simplifiers had come to the realisation that excessive consumption undermined personal and

planetary well-being. Therefore, they felt compelled to actively reduce their consumption.

There was a strong belief amongst simplifiers that through carrying out these practices they were able to make a difference to environmental issues of concern. Simplifiers chose to use their lifestyle as a vehicle for change. Instead of being critical of others and the lack of action by government decision makers, simplifiers chose to “*get their own backyards in order*” and focused on making change at the individual level where they had most control and power (section 5.19). This finding reinforces previous research by Lorenzen (2012) who found individuals who were in the process of greening their lifestyles believed that their actions made a difference and they were able to address a range of environmental issues through engaging in green lifestyle practices.

Despite simplifiers making an effort in their lives to carry out pro-environmental practices, the survey results from phase 1 found that there was no significant difference between voluntary simplifiers and non-simplifiers in relation to consumption levels as measured by the ecological footprint tool. This finding undermines the idea that the voluntary simplicity lifestyle may be a potential pathway to greening people’s lifestyle and reducing their ecological impact (Kronenberg & Lida, 2011). It is possible that the lack of significant difference was due to indirect rebound effects. For instance, some simplifiers may justify engaging in high consumption activities (e.g., air travel and eating red meat) as a result of being green in other areas of their lives. In fact, Black and Cherrier (2010) found it was common among a group of women who had adopted sustainable lifestyles to overlook unsustainable practices and justify engaging in high consumption activities, such as air travel, if it was a core part of their identity. Further qualitative research is needed to identify if rebound effects are occurring in the lives of simplifiers and if so, how such rebound effects could be minimised. Alternatively, this result may have been due to the inadequate tools to identify voluntary simplifiers and measure consumption (i.e., the ecological footprint) (section 7.5.1). Due to the diversity of lifestyles and the difficulty in defining simplicity, McDonald (2014) argues that qualitative approaches are required to study this way of life. Therefore, this approach was adopted as a follow-up measure with in-

depth interviews being conducted with simplifiers and non-simplifiers in phase 1 of the research.

These in-depth interviews revealed that the majority of non-simplifiers were repelled by ideas such as simplifying and slowing down their lives. Simplifying and slowing down were associated with people not being productive and failing to utilise their “*god given talents*” as well as being lazy (section 5.22.1). In contrast, the idea of being a ‘busy’ person was appealing and associated with being productive and successful. In fact, one non-simplifier saw stress as giving her an advantage over others and being an essential factor in helping her to do her job effectively. However, some non-simplifiers also shared concerns about being overly busy: high stress levels; failure to reflect on life; and serious health problems (section 5.22.2). In addition, they expressed dissatisfaction with how competitive our society has become, the excessiveness of affluent people’s consumption, and the negative impact of social media and the Internet on personal relationships (sections 5.7 and 5.13.2). These issues were seen as being useful entry points for engaging in deeper conversations with mainstream audiences about the ‘good life’ and what is most important with mainstream non-simplifiers.

8.2 The Creation of the *Smart Busy* Program

The preliminary research established the importance of time affluence, mindfulness, and deep reflection in decreasing overconsumption and materialistic values (Chapters 4 and 5). However, it also found that it would be hard to engage a mainstream audience around the ideas of simplifying and slowing down. Interestingly, the majority of non-simplifiers appeared to enjoy being busy and associated simplifying and slowing down with living a boring and deprived life. In order to engage a mainstream, materialistically oriented group of people, the program was framed around stress-reduction, ‘getting more out of life’, and the new concept of being *Smart Busy*. The program was unique in that despite the aim being to decrease materialistic values and consumption behaviour, it was not presented as an environmental or sustainability education program. Based on the finding that non-simplifiers have a tendency to not view themselves as materialistic and had a poor understanding of the negative impacts associated with overconsumption (section 5.7), framing the program around healthy

living was important to ensure a sufficient number of participants could be recruited for the program.

The program aimed to create a safe and supportive environment where participants could engage in deep reflection (specifically around their personal values) and examine how their most important values could be expressed in their daily lives. Participants explored the negative aspects of being overly busy and were encouraged to reflect on the impact of living life in the fast lane. Participants were able to explore ways of regaining a sense of control over their lives through the adoption of a range of voluntary simplicity practices (Chapters 3 and 6).

Another key strategy that was utilised to help participants decrease materialistic values and overconsumption behaviour was mindfulness training. Participants cultivated mindfulness via two main pathways: 1) through formal meditation practice/mindfulness training; and 2) through environmental restructuring to minimise distractions and enhance attention. In addition, participants developed greater awareness of their overall way of living by closely examining their behaviour in different areas of their lives. For instance, participants became more aware of how they engaged with various technologies by completing a 'Technology Audit' by recording how long they used different devices over the course of a typical workday and typical weekend day (section 3.6.2). This led to a number of participants decreasing the amount of time they spent engaged with technology (section 7.4.4). This demonstrates that when combined with other strategies, cultivating mindfulness (i.e., increased awareness and attention) of everyday behaviours can be a powerful tool in bringing about behavioural change.

8.3 The Effectiveness of the Educational and Psychological Strategies

The program was effective in significantly increasing participants' mindfulness levels (Figure 9) and this was maintained at 12-week follow-up (section 7.4.5). Changes in mindfulness were positively associated with changes in materialistic values. However, due to the broad nature of the *Smart Busy* program it is not possible to conclude whether mindfulness training is an effective strategy that can be used on its own to decrease materialistic values (section 7.5.1). Previous research by Brown et al. (2009)

found mindfulness training helped participants to decrease their financial desire discrepancy, suggesting that mindfulness can help people to feel more satisfied with what they already have. It is not known how Brown et al. (2009) taught mindfulness in their intervention (e.g., a secular way or with Buddhist teachings). While the *Smart Busy* intervention taught mindfulness in a secular way, the skill was supported by the philosophy of the voluntary simplicity movement. Future research is needed to explore the effectiveness of mindfulness meditation alone for decreasing materialistic values and overconsumption. Furthermore, an experimental design study could also test the effectiveness of teaching mindfulness in a secular way compared to a more traditional manner (based on Buddhist philosophy and teachings).

There was some evidence to suggest that the program was effective in helping participants to emulate aspects of the voluntary simplicity lifestyle (sections 7.4.2 and 7.4.4). *Smart Busy* participants stated that they had adopted a number of practices including avoiding advertising and shopping centres, cooking more meals ‘from scratch’, engaging in regular mindfulness meditation practice, and decluttering. According to the McDonald et al. (2006) classifications of different types of simplifiers, most *Smart Busy* participants qualified as beginner voluntary simplifiers upon completion of the program in so far that they had intentionally adopted certain practices, but not others. Some participants also reported feeling a greater sense of gratitude and satisfaction with what they already had. At 12-week follow-up, several participants shared that they had been successful in reducing their work hours. Other participants reported that they had started to explore the possibility of reducing their work hours and/or changing jobs.

Despite the life changes outlined above, only a small number of *Smart Busy* participants reduced their work hours and/or changed jobs (Chapter 7). This illustrates the difficulty most people face in making significant changes to their lives. The voluntary simplifiers interviewed in phase 1 appeared to be in a better position than most non-simplifiers to make a dramatic shift in lifestyle (Chapter 5). Firstly, the majority of simplifiers in phase 1 were debt free and utilised a number of strategies to manage their financial resources (e.g., budgeting and tracking their spending) (section 5.6.2). By not having financial concerns about mortgage repayments and/or credit card

debt, they appeared to have more options available to them, such as choosing to work less and/or go back to study. Although some degree of risk was still involved in making these decisions, it was significantly less than that faced by a non-simplifier who had a mortgage and credit card debt.

It is possible that many of the *Smart Busy* program participants could not easily decrease their work hours due to being on a low-wage, having accumulated significant debt (e.g., mortgage), or inflexible work structures. It has been identified that simplifiers tend to be highly educated and skilled, which means they are in a far better position than others to negotiate and trade their income for time (Grigsby, 2004; McDonald, 2014). Future research could examine how best to assist participants in overcoming these barriers.

8.4 Durability of Treatment Effects

Decreases in materialistic values were not maintained at 12-week follow-up, highlighting how difficult it is to maintain intrinsic values in an environment where the dominant values are highly materialistic. Despite many participants having decreased their exposure to advertising, the treatment effects were bound to diminish with participants going back to live in essentially the same environment. The insidious and pervasive nature of advertising makes it near impossible for people to avoid being exposed to materialistic messages (Jansson-Boyd, 2010). People (including voluntary simplifiers) do not live in a vacuum. In addition, a range of factors outside the individual's sphere of control perpetuate unsustainable patterns of consumption (Figure 2). Large-scale survey research across a number of countries found that a significant barrier to living simply reported by voluntary simplifiers is the temptation to consume (Alexander & Ussher, 2012). Studies on the process of simplifying also demonstrate that people frequently go back to adopting aspects of their old consumer identity after a period of time (Cherrier & Murray, 2007).

8.5 Sustaining the Treatment Effects: Possible Avenues

There are a number of pathways that could be explored to ensure decreases in materialistic values are maintained. Firstly, the implementation of educational

interventions, like *Smart Busy*, on a wide enough scale throughout the Western world could push society in the right transformative direction towards less materialistic values and lower consumption levels. Potentially, delivering such programs to thousands of people could help to establish a new set of social norms and values around self-restraint, frugality, and mindful living. This could help reduce competitive consumption and people's desire to emulate luxury lifestyles. Schor (1998) argues that setting collective limits on spending could make it socially embarrassing for people to engage in excessive acts of consumption (e.g., over-the-top weddings or purchasing luxury vehicles). Additionally, establishing new norms around work and care could make it socially acceptable and easier for people to reduce their work hours, which would ultimately lead to reductions in patterns of consumption. For instance, Nedelsky ('Beyond the work family balance', 2015) proposes establishing a new norm that everyone engage in 12 - 30 hours of paid work per week as well as 12 - 30 hours of care work. The care work component goes beyond people caring for their family and extends to caring for friends, neighbours, and the broader community. Establishing such norms around work and care would reduce the corrosive effects that time poverty has on the capacity to enjoy care work and engage in simple living practices.

To ensure the durability of any reduction in materialistic values and consumption behaviour, ongoing support groups could be established to inspire participants to keep living in a *Smart Busy* way and maintain their intrinsic values. Similar to the instrumentality of a Church, the creation of not-for-profit institutes that bring people together on a regular basis may be a useful path forward. Studies have found that people's behaviour is strongly influenced by the people they are surrounded by. For instance, one study found obesity often spreads like a virus through social networks suggesting unhealthy lifestyles may become a social norm (Christakis & Fowler, 2007). Being surrounded by people who are committed to engaging in anti-consumption practices and engaging in non-materialistic pursuits is likely to influence a person's behaviour in a positive way. In fact, a study by Kennedy et al. (2013) found that the adoption of pro-environmental behaviours and the strength of a person's commitment to decrease consumption was determined by whether or not they were exposed to a social network of people who acted in similar ways.

Since the voluntary simplicity movement remains largely individualistic and scattered, the establishment of formal institutional settings to encourage low consumption lifestyles could also assist to unite simplifiers. Although the institutes would not directly be associated with the voluntary simplicity movement or the idea of slow living, the ethos and values are likely to resonate with simplifiers. For this reason, it is likely that simplifiers would be attracted to attend events and courses hosted by such institutes. Providing opportunities to meet face-to-face could help motivate simplifiers to 'keep the faith' of not consuming and engage in intrinsic, non-materialistic pursuits. Regular public talks and courses could be delivered to get people to question commonly held beliefs around success, continuous economic growth, and progress. Instead of people's success being based on wealth and material acquisition, they could be encouraged to explore new ways to define success and progress.

Additionally, a support structure could play a role in assisting people to live 'simpler' and more sustainable lifestyles by providing them with an extended community and the support required (e.g., child care facilities) to be able to think about their values, how to live in accordance with their values, and the health of the planet. It would also help to break the sense of isolation that so many people feel in contemporary society, particularly simplifiers who express being commonly misunderstood by their mainstream counterparts (Chapter 5).

The media and popular culture have important roles to play in the promotion of alternatives lifestyles. In recent years, an increasing number of stories have appeared in the mainstream media focused on people who have downshifted and/or choose to buy nothing new for a year (e.g., see Hill, 2015). These stories often present extreme examples that may repel the average person towards taking the steps to live a simpler, more sustainable lifestyle. In phase 1 of this study it was found that non-simplifiers had very little exposure to simplifiers (Chapter 5). If a non-simplifier knew a person who had simplified more often than not it was an extreme example that they disapproved of and could not relate to. As a consequence of such limited exposure to positive examples of simplifiers, non-simplifiers held a number of misconceptions about low consumption lifestyles (i.e., voluntary simplicity). These misconceptions included associating low consumptive lives with being deprived, poorer hygiene

standards, lacking ambition, and being lazy (section 5.22). Non-simplifiers may need to be exposed to a wide range of examples of mainstream people who they can identify with and are within their social reference group who have made the decision to simplify and/or embrace values that are countercultural in order for these stories to be influential. For instance, an example of a news article that may appeal to non-simplifiers is the story about local Major John Carey (Town of Vincent) giving up his motor vehicle for an electric bike to embrace the council's 'frugal' values (Your Herald, 2015). Positive media stories such as this could make a difference in shifting people towards embracing anti-consumption practices and frugality values. However, since the mainstream media is driven by powerful commercial vested interests this is unlikely to occur (Bogart, 1995). Therefore, these positive stories about people who attempt to lower their consumption may need to emerge via the Internet (e.g., personal blogs, Facebook, and YouTube) and in grassroots run community newspapers.

The voluntary simplicity movement can also play a larger role in helping to combat a culture saturated in materialistic messages. This study found that while most simplifiers focused on making change at the individual level and saw this as their way of addressing large-scale environmental and social issues, only a small number of simplifiers made an effort to engage with their local community and in the political arena to bring about change (section 5.19). By becoming more politically active, voluntary simplifiers can lobby political leaders to make the necessary structural changes required for easier uptake of this lower impact lifestyle. As Jensen (2012) argues individual actions do not influence policy. He states:

“Would any sane person think dumpster diving would have stopped Hitler, or that composting would have ended slavery or brought about the eight-hour workday, or that chopping wood and carrying water would have gotten people out of Tsarist prisons, or that dancing naked around a fire would have helped put in place the Voting Rights Act of 1957 or the Civil Rights Act of 1964? Then why now, with all the world at stake, do so many people retreat into these entirely personal ‘solutions’?” (p.26).

Although many would disagree with Jensen's perspective on the futility of individual actions to bring about change (e.g., see Chan & Clarke Murray, 2010), he makes an important point: change that directly influences governments, corporations, and large institutions can bring about large and lasting impacts to improve our current situation

in a much more rapid fashion than voluntary behaviour change. The voluntary simplifiers that were interviewed and participants in the *Smart Busy* program spoke of hitting limits and not being able to carry out certain practices despite good intentions (Chapters 5 and 7). This was primarily due to structural barriers. Furthermore, the fact that decreases in materialistic values were not maintained after completing the program shows the need for larger-scale structural change to support intrinsic values.

Simplifiers could be encouraged to: become more politically active by engaging in behaviours such as visiting their local member of parliament; run for local and state government; join unions to advocate for better and more flexible work conditions; attend rallies on social and environmental issues; and educate/facilitate others about voluntary simplicity. Encouraging simplifiers to become more politically active and step up into leadership positions may be challenging, as part of the appeal in living simply lies in the fact simplifiers can see the fruits of their labour relatively quickly, whether it be a warm loaf of freshly baked bread or fresh home-grown tomatoes. This is what makes simple living deeply rewarding for many people (section 5.12). In contrast, it can be much harder to see direct and immediate results when lobbying for political change (Koger & Winter, 2010). Additionally, political lobbying may be stressful for simplifiers, which is likely to explain why they choose to focus on pursuing change at the individual level in the first place (Chapters 3 and 5). Nevertheless, it is important that simplifiers extend their efforts to the wider community and political arena. Expanding and actively recruiting others to adopt lower consumptive lifestyles, whether it be through simplifiers having persuasive one-on-one conversations with others and/or writing blog posts and articles on the benefits of the lifestyle, is also important to ensure voluntary simplicity does not remain a fringe movement. As Alexander (2015) states:

“Until there is a culture that embraces the ethos of voluntary simplicity at the personal and household level, there will never be sufficient social forces to induce the necessary structural changes that can support sustainable living” (p.115).

Future research could look at studying key differences between voluntary simplifiers who are politically active and those who are not. Strategies and interventions could

then be devised to mobilise simplifiers who tend to be focused solely on making change at the individual level to become more politically active.

It may also be time to explore the possibility of the voluntary simplicity movement receiving a 'makeover' and adopting a new name to better convey what this movement represents. Phase 1 of this study found that most voluntary simplifiers who were interviewed were dissatisfied with the term 'voluntary simplicity' as it failed to accurately reflect the lifestyle (section 5.18). Many simplifiers said the lifestyle was far from being simple and in actual fact it was quite complicated and time consuming. In addition, most non-simplifiers were repelled by the idea of simplifying. A similar movement called 'minimalism' has become increasingly popular in recent years, where people rid their lives of unnecessary possessions. While this movement overlaps with simplicity in so far that it is critical of the 'work-and-spend' culture of Western consumer societies, it has been criticised for not necessarily embodying values of sustainability, self-reliance, and frugality. For example, Wallman (2015) argues that some minimalists fall into the trap of striving to acquire status through owning less objects and achieving a certain minimalist 'look'. Subsequently, a new *Smart Busy* movement that embodies an ethos of frugality, valuing time over money, mindfulness, and self-reliance may assist in showing people that they can be frugal and live a happy, fulfilling life. This movement can also focus on encouraging people to embrace both fast and slow modes of living within an ecological framework. This would tap into people's desire to be busy; however, not overly busy.

The findings in relation to time poverty and long work hours suggest that in order to effectively tackle overconsumption the underlying factors that perpetuate the fast-paced and overworked culture of the Western world will need to be addressed. When people live in a 'nowist culture' that is obsessed with novelty, instant gratification, and speed, very rarely do they take the time to stop and reflect on what they are doing and where they are headed (Bertman, 1998). In the present study, the need for speed was reflected in a number of non-simplifiers stating that they were unaware of their values and they did not make time to reflect on their lives (section 5.5). In contrast, simplifiers engaged in deep reflection and examined their behaviours and how they could live more sustainable lives. This finding supports the work of Lorenzen (2012) who found

one of the key characteristics of people who green their lifestyles is deliberation: thinking about how to make changes and the practices that are best to adopt. But in order to do this, people need to feel like they have sufficient time to engage in green lifestyle practices and research the best practices to adopt. Additionally, it is important that people have the time and space to consider the predicament humans currently face in order to realise that urgent and dramatic change is needed. Since being overly busy can lead to the adoption of 'mindless' habits and unsustainable patterns of consumption (Amel et al., 2009), it may be necessary to encourage participants to engage in deep reflection about the way they currently live, issues facing humanity, and the pace of modern life.

Reclaiming time for thoughtful reflection will require assisting participants to examine their relationship with technology and develop skills to mindfully manage this area of their lives. This study found that both voluntary simplifiers and non-simplifiers struggled to manage their relationship with technology (section 5.13). Many *Smart Busy* participants also expressed not feeling in control of their use of technology and admitted that they felt addicted to social media and checking their email (section 5.13.2). Several simplifiers mentioned they felt conflicted about technology. On one hand, the Internet provided them with the knowledge and a range of ideas to help them become more self-reliant. But on the other, browsing the Internet for different ideas could easily consume all their free time. The implications of this is that time consumed by technological devices is time taken away from engaging in simple living practices and other intrinsic pursuits. Additionally, technology can disrupt people's ability to engage in deep thought and reflection by distracting them from the present moment experience (Chapter 3). Yet, the key role technology plays in social and political activism must also not be overlooked (Rosen & Loubani, 2008). Therefore, educational programs that focus on developing a healthier relationship to technology and assist participants to take time out from technology for deep reflection may help them to reclaim a sense of control over their lives.

It is important to note that reclaiming time is not just about personal time management and the effective management of technological devices. It is also about the wider social structures that are in place (e.g., decent work conditions and transport

options) and whether one belongs to a supportive community (sections 2.8 and 2.14). Workplace structures and arrangements can lock people into certain lifestyles and determine to a large extent the amount of discretionary time they have as a result of making it either easy or considerably difficult to work part-time (Humphery, 2010). As a number of non-simplifiers expressed during interviews, reducing their work hours could be potentially damaging for their careers as they could be viewed as not being serious about career advancement (section 5.24). While highly educated and skilled simplifiers may find it easier to negotiate reduced work hours and a fair working wage, other people who are less educated may not have the confidence or skills to do so. For this reason, it has been argued that simplifiers need to mobilise and create a time movement, in which they lobby for a shorter work week for all (De Graaf, 2003; Maniates, 2002). With the Swedish Government recently trialling reducing the work day from eight-hours to six-hours to improve people's well-being and productivity, this may be entirely possible to achieve in other parts of the developed world (Crouch, 2015). It can therefore be concluded that personal strategies supported by structural changes that remove barriers to reducing work hours are needed in WA to help people become more time affluent. In doing so, people are more likely to feel they have the time and energy to engage in simple living practices rather than opt for convenience.

However, there is some doubt as to whether acquiring more discretionary time guarantees people will devote that time to living more sustainably and engaging in deep reflection. Could the extra time acquired simply go towards experiences such as overseas travel? The present study found that although some participants did report going on holidays abroad following the *Smart Busy* program, changes in time affluence were negatively associated with changes in consumption behaviour (as measured by the ecological footprint tool) and positively associated with changes in frugality respectively (section 7.4.3). These findings give support to the idea that increasing people's perception of having enough time to engage in meaningful pursuits increases the likelihood that they may engage in sustainable behaviours. A study by Kennedy et al. (2013) found that downshifting led to the uptake of more environmentally friendly practices around the home; however, it did not extend to transport behaviours. It was suggested that the lack of uptake of sustainable transport behaviour was most likely due to insufficient infrastructure. It can therefore be concluded that when increases in

time affluence are combined with support structures, such as a supportive community and adequate infrastructure (e.g., cycle paths), then it is more likely that extra time and energy gained may be directed towards engagement with more sustainable patterns of consumption.

8.6 Framing Sustainability Programs as General Lifestyle Programs

The present study found that the majority of simplifiers make the shift in lifestyle primarily due to a desire to have more time, better quality of life, and lower stress levels (Chapters 3 and 5). Therefore, educational interventions that aim to promote the adoption of sustainable behaviours may be considerably more effective with engaging a broader cross-section of the population if they are framed around these desires. The data from phase 2 of the research found that framing the intervention around the concept of *Smart Busy* and ‘getting more out of life’ was effective in that the people who were recruited felt greater levels of time poverty than the original survey sample from phase 1 (Chapter 7). This illustrates that the *Smart Busy* intervention was effective in engaging a different demographic to that which would typically be recruited to a sustainability and/or environmental education program.

This study shows that instead of teaching people how to adopt small-scale behaviours (e.g., recycling and refusing a plastic straw), engaging people in deeper reflection on their values and whether or not their values align with their behaviours may be a more effective approach. Since people tend to report prioritising intrinsic values more than extrinsic (Schmuck et al., 2000), it is likely that they would be open to the idea of attending a program that explores these values in-depth. By reinforcing intrinsic values through reflection and assisting people to live in line with their values through the development of better self-control and environmental restructuring could increase the likelihood that they will engage in a range of pro-environmental and pro-social behaviours rather than just one single behaviour in the short-term. The human values approach (Crompton, 2010) may also help to engage people who would not typically sign up to participate in a sustainability or environmental education program.

The next challenge for educational interventions that aim to decrease excessive consumption is to find ways to sustain participants’ interest once they are enrolled and

gently introduce the issue of overconsumption. This could best be achieved by facilitating conversations around participants' issues of concern. The preliminary research phase identified that simplifiers had a good understanding of the issues associated with overconsumption compared to non-simplifiers and that this knowledge seemed to contribute to their engagement in anti-consumption and pro-environmental practices (section 5.7). Therefore, discussing the various issues associated with overconsumption is critical in an educational intervention that aims to shift people to less consumptive lifestyles.

The *Smart Busy* program attempted to activate neighbouring intrinsic values that were associated with care for the environment and diminish extrinsic values around the pursuit of financial wealth and material acquisition. While environmental issues were rarely directly discussed (besides playing the animated video 'The Story of Stuff' in session 4) a number of participants reported adopting pro-environmental behaviours, such as joining a local environment group, composting, and giving up a car bay at work to take public transport (Chapter 7). Engagement in pro-environmental behaviours also significantly increased as a result of participating in the program and these changes were maintained at 12-week follow-up. The adoption of these pro-environmental behaviours suggests that a values approach may be effective in bringing about behavioural change. However, since a number of different strategies were utilised to tackle overconsumption, this study cannot draw the conclusion that the activation of intrinsic values resulted in these changes (section 7.5.1). Further research is required to better understand whether there is a direct causal relationship between activating intrinsic values and the adoption of pro-environmental behaviours.

8.7 Educating Adults about Materialism and Overconsumption

Phase 1 of this research project provided valuable insights on highly materialistic individuals in relation to their perception of themselves and their level of awareness with respect to consumption and other environmental issues. The first finding worth noting is that materialistic individuals (non-simplifiers) do not generally think of themselves as materialistic (Chapter 5). It was other people living in places such as the more affluent Western suburbs that were materialistic. While most highly materialistic non-simplifiers disapproved of the excessive accumulation of material goods and

competitive consumption that occurred within affluent areas, they failed to see how their own personal behaviour connected to larger environmental and social issues. Compared to voluntary simplifiers, most non-simplifiers lacked awareness of the consequences of overconsumption and the mechanisms that drive it (section 5.7). Many non-simplifiers also reported enjoying going shopping whereas most voluntary simplifiers tried to avoid the shops as much as possible. Additionally, the vast majority of non-simplifiers failed to express concern about the existence of environmental problems (section 5.2.4). Some non-simplifiers even denied the existence of environmental problems, such as climate change, stating that they were “*sceptics*”.

These findings have significant implications for engaging the mainstream to reduce consumption. If people are largely unaware of the ecological crisis and problems associated with overconsumption, then they are unlikely to recognise the need to change the way they live to address these issues. Therefore, some education on the environment and overconsumption is necessary; however, the content must be carefully delivered. Kilbourne and Pickett (2008) argue that cognitive dissonance stops highly materialistic people from accepting environmental problems. To avoid seeing themselves as materialistic and contributing to the ecological destruction of the planet, Kilbourne and Pickett (2008) propose that materialistic people downplay the severity of environmental problems, thereby making it possible to continue their consumption without experiencing any psychological tension. Schor (1999) also argues that shopping is seen by many as a fundamental human right in the sense that “*one should be able to buy what one likes, where one likes, and nary a glance from the government, neighbors, ministers, or political parties*”. Therefore, telling people that they have to cut back on their consumption may elicit a defensive reaction.

In short, it is likely to be insufficient to tell people that they are materialistic and must stop shopping for the good of the planet. People need to be engaged in a process to help them examine how their everyday behaviour connects to environmental degradation without being made to feel that they are materialistic, greedy, and/or ignorant. Shaming people and making them feel bad about themselves is unlikely to be productive and may lead to even higher levels of consumption and materialism (section 2.2.12). This research has shown that educating people on the key

mechanisms that drive excessive consumption (e.g., hedonic adaptation and the Diderot effect) and the factors that enhance well-being can empower people to make better choices in the face of pressure to consume (Chapter 7). People need to feel that by taking a stand against excessive consumption that they are improving their quality of life rather than diminishing it and being forced to make sacrifices (Chapter 5).

Yet there is no guarantee that understanding the impacts of consumption will lead to people altering their lifestyles and adopting anti-consumption practices. Research has firmly established that information on its own is usually not enough to change human behaviour (McKenzie-Mohr & Smith, 1999; McKenzie-Mohr, 2008). This is why it is important to not only educate people on consumption in a sensitive manner but also connect them deeply to their personal values and provide them with a positive, clear vision that they can consume less, live frugally, and still have an inwardly rich and satisfying life.

8.8 New Directions for Future Research

Some interesting avenues for further research stem from the results of this study. While it can be said that the educational intervention decreased materialistic values and consumption behaviour to a certain extent in the short-term, it is not known which strategies were most instrumental in bringing about these changes (section 7.5.1). Future research should test the program to isolate which strategies are most effective.

The literature and the findings of this research project show that shifts to voluntary simplicity lifestyles are gradual and often take place over a number of years (Chapters 3 and 5). Unfortunately, humanity does not have the luxury of many years to make the transition to a sustainable society (Sprat & Sutton, 2008). Therefore, future research could explore whether it is possible to speed up the process of radically simplifying a person's life and the various strategies and support structures that could be used to fast-track and maintain such shifts in lifestyle.

This research project found that many non-simplifiers perceived engagement with voluntary simplicity practices as torturous and similar to doing household chores.

Research could explore why simplicity practices are painful for some people but enjoyable for others. Could these differences be explained by different mindsets, such as a fixed or growth mindset (Dweck, 2006)? Do simplifiers have a greater tolerance for failure and are they more willing to learn from their mistakes? Furthermore, is there anything that can be done to ensure people have positive and rewarding experiences when they engage in simplicity practices? Studying the factors that facilitate greater uptake of key simplicity practices, such as gardening and cooking meals from raw ingredients, may help expand the movement.

Another direction for future research would be to investigate the effectiveness of running an intervention like *Smart Busy* in different formats (e.g., smaller group sizes and in different forums). To obtain statistical power, 40 participants were recruited for each *Smart Busy* program in the present study. However, smaller class sizes are known for being more effective in terms of student engagement (Finn, Pannozzo, & Achilles, 2003). Future interventions could trial the effectiveness of running the same program with different group sizes as well as through different mediums (e.g., online versus face-to-face).

Furthermore, the effectiveness of educational interventions that tackle overconsumption and materialism on men and women as well as people of different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds could be explored. In the present study, the vast majority of participants were middle-aged, highly educated, white women. This may have been due to the fact that they feel time-poor due to multiple commitments such as work and having to care for both children and ageing parents ('The Sandwich Generation') (Roots, 2014). By understanding how different groups of people respond to educational interventions like the *Smart Busy* program could help further refine them to suit the needs of different groups.

8.9 Overall Implications and Conclusions

This research project has shown that an educational intervention can reduce materialistic values in the short-term (Chapter 7) but these changes are unlikely to be sustained over the long-term without ongoing support and structural changes occurring (section 8.4). There is some evidence that the program was effective in

reducing overconsumption with participants significantly increasing their engagement with simple living practices (sections 7.4.2 and 7.4.4). These changes were maintained at 12-week follow-up (section 7.4.5); however, no significant shifts occurred in frugality or the ecological footprint measures. The lack of significant results may have been due to ineffective measures being utilised to measure consumption and/or participants inability to accurately self-report (section 7.5.1). Better tools are needed to measure the adoption of anti-consumption practices, such as refusing to buy frivolous items and saving rather than spending.

The findings of this research project have implications for the way in which sustainability educators frame their programs and how they market to and engage mainstream audiences. In a world where people feel highly insecure due to job uncertainty (McGee, 2005), educational programs that are framed as self-help and/or healthy lifestyle programs may be more effective in recruiting mainstream audiences. By taking a values approach to shifting behaviour (Crompton, 2010), educators are able to tailor their programs to activate particular intrinsic values. As previously mentioned, since most people state that they prioritise intrinsic values more than extrinsic (Schmuck et al., 2000), it is highly likely that many people would be open and receptive to the messages and ideas presented. As the program progresses, conversations around the need to care for the community and natural environment can be introduced to increase people's understanding and concern of environmental issues, as well as the need to take action in their everyday lives.

This research shows that there are other ways to appeal to mainstream audiences (besides explaining the environmental benefits) to help create shifts to simpler, less consumptive lifestyles. Non-simplifiers appear to show some level of concern about excessive spending, competitive consumption, and the addictive nature of technology, although they may lack self-awareness with respect to their own consumption behaviour (Chapter 5). The Harwood group (1995) recommends that conversations aimed at tackling excessive consumption be framed around people's concerns about the core values driving society.

There is no silver bullet to solving the materialistic malaise and desire to consume in the Western world. In terms of the role educational interventions can play in tackling

the issue of overconsumption and materialistic values, they must be ongoing to counter a social environment that gears people towards consumerism. Furthermore, for large-scale change they need to be supported by systemic change that results in a transformation in the norms around consumption, work, and care. To build the groundswell of political pressure that is required to implement such changes, people will need to receive ongoing support via formal institutions. In addition, it may be time for the voluntary simplicity movement to flex its political muscle, as governments will only respond to the ecological crisis when the public demands that they do so. As Alexander (2015) states:

“When downshifting [voluntary simplicity] has become so widespread that it is no longer seen to be an act of defiance, then modern consumer society will have demonstrably undergone a radical change” (p.ix).

Despite the enormity of the ecological crisis humanity currently faces, shifting people towards simpler, less consumption-based lives provides a powerful solution. This research shows that prompting people to reflect on their lives, encouraging the adoption of voluntary simplicity practices and values, and cultivating mindfulness can reduce materialistic values and consumption behaviour. Interventions such as *Smart Busy* therefore provide a critical educational tool to overcome the stranglehold of consumption on Western culture. This is an essential step towards achieving global sustainability, *“saving the world by saving one man at a time”* (Bukowski, 1983, p. 100).

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Appendix I

Promotional Materials for Preliminary Research

Page Messages Notifications Publishing Tools



What's life like in your shoes? West Australian Participants Wanted Community

Create Call to Action Liked Message

Timeline About Photos Likes More

23 people like this
Kim Brackman and 9 other friends

View Pages Feed
See posts from other Pages

Invite friends to like this Page

Boost Your Page for \$7
Reach even more people in Australia
[Promote Page](#)

ABOUT

- Research at Murdoch University
- Add your website [Promote Website](#)

PHOTOS



What's life like in your shoes? West Australian Participants Wanted
June 1, 2012 · 🌟

Do you have any male friends who would be willing to fill in a 20 minute survey? I have received lots of responses from females but we really need more men to have a say!



Lifestyle and Society Survey (WA)
This study has been approved by the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval 2012/021). If you have any reservation or complaint about the ethical conduct of this research, and wish to talk with an independent person, you may SURVEYMONKEY.COM

Boost Unavailable

Like Comment Share

What's life like in your shoes? West Australian Participants Wanted shared a page.
May 2, 2012 · 🌟

What is life like in your shoes?



Do you feel like your life is too rushed? Never have enough time to do the things you want? Or perhaps you feel like you have plenty of time to do the things that are important to you?

Whatever the case, we would like to hear from you.

We are trying to find out about the goals, day-to-day experiences and general well-being of West Australians.

As part of our research, we would like to survey as many people as possible from all walks of life about their daily lives. Filling in the survey will take approximately 20-30 minutes of your time. To take the survey, please visit:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/lifestylewa>

Returned surveys will go into the draw to win 4 movie tickets to a cinema of your choice (approximate value \$60).

If you have any questions please contact **Jane Genovese** on **0422 460 598** or email **j.genovese@murdoch.edu.au**

This study has been approved by the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval 2012/021)

DISCOVERERS WELCOME



Murdoch
UNIVERSITY

Are you always busy?



Do you feel like life is rushing by and you're missing out on something? Don't feel like you have the time to do the things you really want to be doing?

If so, we want to speak with you.

We are trying to understand the lives, aspirations and challenges faced by West Australians from all walks of life and seek feedback on potential solutions to these modern day challenges.

You are invited to share your experiences by participating in this research. Your participation will take approximately 20 - 30 minutes of your time and will involve filling in a short survey.

To take the survey, please visit: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/lifestylewa>

You may also be invited to participate in an optional interview which will take approximately 45 minutes - 1 hour.

Returned surveys will go into the draw to win 4 movie tickets to a cinema of your choice.

If you have any questions please contact **Jane Genovese** on **0422 460 598** or email j.genovese@murdoch.edu.au

This study has been approved by the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval 2012/021)

DISCOVERERS WELCOME

Have you made a lifestyle change?



Have you made an active choice to slow down and put the brakes on the frenetic pace of life? Perhaps you decided to work less (and earn less) so you could have more free time?

If so, we want to speak with you.

We would like to hear your story of how you came to this decision and what impact this has had on you and the people in your life.

Your participation in this research will take approximately 20 – 30 minutes of your time and will involve filling in a short survey. To take the survey, please visit:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/lifestylewa>

You may also be invited to participate in an optional interview which will take approximately 45 minutes - 1 hour.

Returned surveys will go into the draw to win 4 movie tickets to a cinema of your choice (approximate value \$60).

If you are interested in participating please contact **Jane Genovese** on **0422 460 598** or email **j.genovese@murdoch.edu.au**

This study has been approved by the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval xxx/xxx)

DISCOVERERS WELCOME

Appendix II

Survey Package for Preliminary Research Phase

Exploring the Lived Experience of West Australians

Dear

We invite you to participate in a research project that explores the everyday lived experience of West Australians. This study is part of my PhD research, supervised by Dr Catherine Baudains and Associate Professor John Bailey.

Nature and Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to find out the goals/aspirations, day-to-day experiences and general well-being of West Australians. As part of my research, I wish to survey as many people as possible from all walks of life about their daily lives.

What does your participation involve?

If you wish to participate, this will involve the completion of a brief survey that will get you to reflect on various areas of your life. Some of these questions may be seen as personal and private. You can choose not to answer any of the questions on topics sensitive to you.

Completion of the entire survey will take approximately 20 - 30 minutes of your time. Returned surveys will go into the draw to receive 4 movie tickets to a cinema of your choice (approximate value \$60).

In the survey, you will be invited to participate in an optional interview that will be arranged at a later date. This interview will take approximately 45 minutes - 1 hour and will occur at a time and place that is convenient for you.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal from Study

It is important that you understand that your involvement in this study is voluntary. While we would be very pleased to have you participate, we respect your right to decline. You can decide at any time to withdraw your consent to participate in this research. As the information gathered from the surveys is anonymous, it cannot be removed if you decide to withdraw. However, if you agree to be interviewed and later decide to withdraw, information collected from the interview can be removed.

Your Privacy

All information collected in this study will be treated in a confidential manner, and your name or address will not be used in any form of publication arising out of the research.

If you are willing to participate in this study, I would kindly ask that you complete the survey enclosed and return it to us in the supplied reply-paid envelope (ideally within the next fortnight)

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this study please feel free to contact me (Jane Genovese) on 0422 460 598 or Dr Catherine Baudains on 0409 374 231. Either of us would be happy to discuss any aspect of this research with you.

We would like to thank you in advance for your assistance with this research project. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Kind regards,

(Signature)

This study has been approved by the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval [2012/021](#)). If you have any reservation or complaint about the ethical conduct of this research, and wish to talk with an independent person, you may contact Murdoch University's Research Ethics Office (Tel. 08 9360 6677 (for overseas studies, +61 8 9360 6677) or e-mail ethics@murdoch.edu.au). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Lifestyle Survey Questions

(response options in italics)

Section One

Psychological Well-being

(Strongly Disagree, Disagree Somewhat, Disagree Slightly, Agree Slightly, Agree Somewhat, Strongly Agree)

W1. Most people see me as loving and affectionate

W2. In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live.

W3. I am not interested in activities that will expand my horizons.

W4. When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out.

W5. Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me.

W6. I am not afraid to voice my opinions, even when they are in opposition to the opinions of most people.

W7. The demands of everyday life often get me down.

W8. I live life one day at a time and don't really think about the future.

W9. In general, I feel confident and positive about myself.

W10. I often feel lonely because I have few close friends with whom to share my concerns.

W11. My decisions are not usually influenced by what everyone else is doing.

W12. I do not fit very well with the people and the community around me.

W13. I tend to focus on the present, because the future nearly always brings me problems.

W14. I feel like many of the people I know have gotten more out of life than I have.

W15. I enjoy personal and mutual conversations with family members or friends.

W16. I tend to worry about what other people think of me.

W17. I am quite good at managing the many responsibilities of my daily life.

W18. I don't want to try new ways of doing things - my life is fine the way it is.

W19. Being happy with myself is more important to me than having others approve of me.

W20. I often feel overwhelmed by my responsibilities.

W21. I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world.

W22. My daily activities often seem trivial and unimportant to me.

W23. I like most aspects of my personality.

W24. I don't have many people who want to listen when I need to talk.

- W25. I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions.
- W26. When I think about it, I haven't really improved much as a person over the years.
- W27. I don't have a good sense of what it is I'm trying to accomplish in life.
- W28. I made some mistakes in the past, but I feel that all in all everything has worked out for the best.
- W29. I generally do a good job of taking care of my personal finances and affairs.
- W30. It seems to me that most other people have more friends than I do.
- W31. I enjoy making plans for the future and working to make them a reality.
- W32. People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others.
- W33. I have confidence in my opinions, even if they are contrary to the general consensus.
- W34. I am good at juggling my time so that I can fit everything in that needs to be done.
- W35. I have a sense that I have developed a lot as a person over time.
- W36. I am an active person in carrying out the plans I set for myself.
- W37. I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others.
- W38. It's difficult for me to voice my own opinions on controversial matters.
- W39. I do not enjoy being in new situations that require me to change my old familiar ways of doing things.
- W40. Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them.
- W41. My attitude about myself is probably not as positive as most people feel about themselves.
- W42. I often change my mind about decisions if my friends or family disagree.
- W43. For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth.
- W44. I sometimes feel as if I've done all there is to do in life.
- W45. I know that I can trust my friends, and they know they can trust me.
- W46. The past had its ups and downs, but in general, I wouldn't want to change it.
- W47. I have difficulty arranging my life in a way that is satisfying to me.
- W48. I gave up trying to make big improvements or changes in my life a long time ago.
- W49. When I compare myself to friends and acquaintances, it makes me feel good about who I am.
- W50. I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important.
- W51. I have been able to build a home and a lifestyle for myself that is much to my liking.
- W52. There is truth to the saying that you can't teach an old dog new tricks.
- W53. In many ways, I feel disappointed about my achievements in life.
- W54. I used to set goals for myself, but that now seems like a waste of time.

Section Two

Goals and Aspirations

(Not at all, A little, Moderately (so/so), Very, Extremely)

- G1. You will be physically healthy.
- G2. Your name will be known by many people.
- G3. You will have people comment often about how attractive you look.
- G4. You will have a lot of expensive possessions.
- G5. You will be famous.
- G6. You will feel good about your level of physical fitness.
- G7. You will be the one in charge of your life.
- G8. You will have good friends that you can count on.
- G9. You will keep up with fashions in hair and clothing.
- G10. You will have a job that pays well.
- G11. You will share your life with someone you love.
- G12. You will be admired by many people.
- G13. At the end of your life, you will look back on your life as meaningful and complete.
- G14. You will have people who care about you and are supportive.
- G15. You will work for the betterment of society.
- G16. You will achieve the "look" you've been after.
- G17. You will deal effectively with problems that come up in your life.
- G18. You will feel energetic and full of life.
- G19. You will successfully hide the signs of aging.
- G20. Your name will appear frequently in the media.
- G21. You will know people that you can have fun with.
- G22. You will be relatively free from sickness.
- G23. You will help others improve their lives.
- G24. You will know and accept who you really are.
- G25. You will be financially successful.
- G26. You will do something that brings you much recognition.
- G27. You will help people in need.
- G28. You will have a couple of good friends that you can talk to about personal things.
- G29. Your image will be one others find appealing.

G30. You will donate time or money to charity.

G31. You will have a job with high social status.

G32. You will work to make the world a better place.

Section Three

Mindfulness (Day-to-Day Experiences)

(Almost always, Very frequently, Somewhat frequently, Somewhat infrequently, Very infrequently, Almost never)

M1. I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until some time later.

M2. I break or spill things because of carelessness, not paying attention, or thinking of something else.

M3. I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present.

M4. I tend to walk quickly to get where I'm going without paying attention to what I experience along the way.

M5. I tend not to notice feelings of physical tension or discomfort until they really grab my attention.

M6. I forget a person's name almost as soon as I've been told it for the first time.

M7. It seems I am "running on automatic" without much awareness of what I'm doing.

M8. I rush through activities without being really attentive to them.

M9. I get so focused on the goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I'm doing right now to get there.

M10. I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I'm doing.

M11. I drive places on 'automatic pilot' and then wonder why I went there.

M12. I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past.

M13. I find myself doing things without paying attention.

M14. I snack without being aware that I'm eating.

M15. I find myself listening to someone with one ear, doing something else at the same time.

Section Four

Time Affluence (Pace of Life)

(Strongly disagree, Disagree somewhat, Disagree slightly, Agree slightly, Agree somewhat)

T1. My life has been too rushed.

T2. There have not been enough minutes in the day.

T3. I have felt like things have been really hectic.

T4. I have had enough time to do the things that are important to me.

T5. I have plenty of spare time.

T6. I have had enough time to do what I need to do.

T7. I have been able to take life at a leisurely pace.

T8. I have been racing from here to there.

Section Five

Ecological Footprint

E1. How often and how much do you eat animal based products? (e.g., beef, pork, chicken, fish, eggs and dairy products)

(Never (strict vegan), Infrequently (a few servings a month), Occasionally (a few servings a week), Often (several servings a week), Very often (several servings a day), Almost always (a large part of every meal))

E2. How much of the food you eat is either processed, packaged, or imported (or a combination of these)?

(Most, Three quarters, Half, One quarter, Very little)

E3. How much waste do you generate per week? (Note: This does not include composted or recycled waste)

(Less than one bin-bag (equivalent of 30 litres) a week, About one bin-bag a week, More than one bin-bag a week)

E4. How many people live in your home?

E5. What is the size of your home?

(250 square metres or larger (large home), 200 - 250 square metres (average home; approx. 4 bedrooms), 150 - 200 square metres (average home; approx. 3 bedrooms), 100 - 150 square metres (small home; approx. 2-3 bedrooms), 50 - 100 square metres (average apartment), 50 square metres or smaller (small studio flat or equivalent))

E6. Which housing type best describes your home?

(Free standing house without running water, Free standing house with running water, Multi-storey apartment building, Row house or building with 2 - 4 housing units, Green-design residence)

E7. Do you have electricity in your home?

(No, Yes, Yes with renewable energy (either your own or supplied by your energy retailer))

E8. On average, how far do you travel on public transport each week? (bus, train, tram or ferry)

(100 kilometres or more, 25 - 100 kilometres, 10 - 25 kilometres, 1 - 10 kilometres, Fewer than 1 kilometre)

E9. Do you have a motorbike?

(Yes, No)

E10a. Do you travel by car?

(Yes, No)

E10b. On average, how far do you travel by car each week? (either as a driver or passenger)

(500 kilometres or more, 300 - 500 kilometres, 150 - 300 kilometres, 50 - 150 kilometres, 15 - 50 kilometres, Fewer than 15 kilometres)

E10c. How many litres of fuel per 100 kilometres does the car you travel with consume?

(Fewer than 4.5 litres (very fuel efficient car such as Ford Fiesta Econetic), 4.5 -6.5 litres (fuel efficient car such as Hybrid), 6.5-9 litres (small car), 9-15 litres (family sized car), More than 15 litres (large 4WD))

E11. How often do you travel by car with someone else rather than alone?

(Never or almost never, Occasionally (about 25%), Often (about 50%), Very often (about 75%), Almost always)

E12. On average, approximately how many hours do you spend flying each year?

(100 hours or more, 25-100 hours, 10-25 hours, 3-10 hours, Fewer than 3 hours)

Section Six

Demographic and self-reported lifestyle questions

D1. Gender *(Male, Female)*

D2. Age

D3. Education level *(Less than high school (year 12), Graduated from high school, Some university, Bachelor's degree or higher, Postgraduate degree)*

D4. Annual income before tax *(Less than \$15,000, \$15,000-\$24,999, \$25,000- \$39,999, \$40,000-\$69,999, \$70,000-\$99,999, \$100,000-\$150,000, \$150,000-\$200,000, Over \$200,000)*

D5. Family income before tax *(Less than \$15,000, \$15,000-\$24,999, \$25,000- \$39,999, \$40,000-\$69,999, \$70,000-\$99,999, \$100,000-\$150,000, \$150,000-\$200,000, Over \$200,000)*

D6. Current work situation *(Employed full-time, Employed part-time, Self employed full-time, Self employed part-time, Full-time homemaker, Full-time student, Not currently employed, Retired)*

D7. What is your occupation?

D8. Have you voluntarily made a long-term change in your life that has resulted in you making less money other than retirement? (For example, switching to a lower paid job, reducing your work hours, making a career change or quitting work to stay at home)

(No, Yes, Not applicable)

D9. Have you voluntarily made a long-term change in your life that has resulted in you spending less money, whether or not your income has changed?

(No, Yes, Not applicable)

D10. How many hours do you spend per week on the work that you do for pay, for childcare and other household necessities, on average?

D11. How many hours do you watch television per week, on average?

D12. How many hours do you spend surfing the Internet per week, on average?

Appendix III

Consent Form for Interviews (Phase 1)

Interview

Exploring the Lived Experience of West Australians

Participant

I (the participant) have read the participant information sheet. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to take part in this activity, however, I know that I may change my mind and stop at any time.

I am happy to be interviewed and for the interview to be audio recorded as part of this research. I understand that I do not have to answer particular questions if I do not want to.

I agree that research data gathered for this study may be published provided my name or any identifying data is not used.

I understand that all information provided by me is treated as confidential and will not be released by the researcher to a third party unless required to do so by law.

Signature of Participant

Date

Investigator

I have fully explained to _____ the nature and purpose of the research, the procedures to be employed, and the possible risks involved. I have provided the participant with a copy of the Information Sheet.

Signature of Investigator

Date

Print Name

Position

Appendix IV

Interview Schedules

Interview Schedule

Non-Simplifiers

Enjoyment

Can you tell me a bit about the things you enjoy doing in your everyday life?

Why do you enjoy doing [activity]?

Time affluence

Do you feel like you have enough time to engage in these activities?

Do you feel like you have enough down time (i.e. time to stop, think and reflect on your life)?

Work/Life Balance

You indicated on your survey that you work as a [state occupation]. Can you tell me about the work you do for pay?

What do you enjoy about your job?

What don't you enjoy so much?

You also indicated on your survey that you work [state number] hours a week. With these working hours do you feel a sense of work/life balance?

Would you like to work less?

If yes, why would you like to work less?

What stops you from doing so?

Pace of Life

On your survey, you indicated that you felt [e.g. BUSY]. Is this still the case?

Do you like being [e.g. BUSY]?

If yes, what do you like about it?

If no, what don't you like about it?

OR

Some people say modern life is busy and rushed. How would you describe the pace of your own life?

Do you like being [e.g. BUSY]?

If yes, what do you like about it?

If no, what don't you like about it?

Stress

There is a perception that modern life can be stressful, do you think this is true?

Why do you think this is the case?

How do you manage/cope with stress in your life?

Perceptions of alternative lifestyles

There is a growing number of people who have decided to simplify their lives by working less and consuming less. What do you think about people who have made the decision to simplify their lives?

Do you know anyone personally who has made a shift to a simpler lifestyle?

Would you ever consider making a shift to a simpler lifestyle? Why?

If yes, what stops you from making that shift now?

If no, why not?

If there anything that doesn't appeal to you about the idea of simplifying your life?

Do you think that an education programme could potentially help you (OR PEOPLE) to make a shift to a simpler lifestyle?

If yes, what specific topics would be of interest to you?

What would stop you from participating in such a programme?

If no| why not?

There is this perception that people who have shifted to simpler lifestyles live slower paced lives. Do you think this is true?

Why do you think that?

What do you think about the idea of slowing down the pace of your life?

Is this something that appeals to you?

Why does it appeal to you?

Why doesn't slowing down appeal to you?

Perceptions of the Good life

What do you think are the elements of living the good life (i.e. the good life is the life you would like to live, a satisfying/joyful life)?

Relationship to modern technology/engagement in social media

What forms of modern technology do you use in your everyday life?

What benefits do you get from using these things?

Are there any downsides to using any of these technologies?

Do you use any forms of social media (i.e. online tools that allow people to communicate. Examples, blogs and social networking sites)?

If yes, what do you get out of going on [X]?

How much time would you spend on [X] in a typical day?

If no, why don't you use social media?

Do you feel in control of your use of social media or do you find it a bit distracting?

Have you imposed any restrictions or rules on your use of technology and social media?

Values

Part of my research looks at human values. Have you consciously thought much about your own personal values (i.e. the things that are important to you, guiding principles in one's life)?

What do you value?

Do you feel like you are living your life in accordance with those values?

Connection to community and involvement

Do you see yourself as someone who is quite active and involved in the community or other voluntary organisations?

If yes, what do you get out of being involved in your community?

What made you get involved in the first place?

If no, what stops you from getting more involved?

Issues

Are there any issues that you feel strongly about? (local, state, national and global level)

Do you find yourself taking action on these issues?

If so, in what ways?

If not, what stops you?

Openness to education interventions (weave throughout interview)

Do you think that an education programme/workshop could potentially help you to improve this area of your life?

What topics would interest you?

If a programme was available, would you be open to participating in it?

If not, why?

Interview Schedules

Voluntary Simplifiers

Enjoyment

Can you tell me a bit about the things you enjoy doing in your everyday life?

Why do you enjoy doing [state activity]?

Time affluence

Do you feel like you have enough time to engage in these activities?

Do you feel like you have enough down time (i.e. time to stop, think and reflect on your life)?

Work/Life Balance

You indicated on your survey that you work as a [state occupation]. Can you tell me about the work you do?

What do you enjoy about your job?

What don't you enjoy so much?

You also indicated on your survey that you work [state number of hours] hours a week. With these working hours do you feel a sense of work/life balance?

Would you like to work less?

If yes, why would you like to work less?

What stops you from doing so?

Pace of Life

On your survey, you indicated that you felt quite busy and rushed. Is this still the case?

Do you like being [e.g. BUSY]?

What do you like about it?

OR

Some people say modern life is busy and rushed. How would you describe the pace of your own life?

Do you like being [e.g. BUSY]?

What do you like about it?

Stress

There is a perception that modern life can be stressful, do you think this is true?

Why do you think this is the case?

How do you manage/cope with stress in your life?

Perceptions of the Good life

What do you think are the elements of living the good life (i.e. the good life is the life you would like to live, a satisfying/joyful life)?

Relationship to modern technology/engagement in social media

What forms of modern technology do you use in your everyday life?

What benefits do you get from using these things?

Are there any downsides to using any of these technologies?

Do you use any forms of social media?

If yes, what do you get out of going on [X]?

How much time would you spend on [X] in a typical day?

If no, why don't you use it?

Do you feel in control of your use of social media or do you find it a bit distracting?

Have you imposed any restrictions or rules on your use of technology?

Values

Part of my research looks at human values. Have you consciously thought much about your own personal values (i.e. the things that are important to you)?

What do you value?

Do you feel like you are living your life in accordance with those values?

Connection to community and involvement

Do you see yourself as someone who is quite active and involved in the community or other voluntary organisations?

If yes, what do you get out of being involved in your community?

What made you get involved in the first place?

If no, what stops you from getting more involved?

Issues

Are there any issues that you feel strongly about? (local, state, national and global level)

Do you find yourself taking action on these issues?

If so, in what ways?

If not, what stops you?

Shift in lifestyle

Triggers of lifestyle change

You indicated on your survey that you'd made voluntary decisions to work less and spend less.

Why did you decide to make a long-term lifestyle change to work and spend less?

Was it a single event or a number of events that led to the change?

Major changes and challenges

What are the major changes you made to your lifestyle? What do you do differently now?

What helped you make the change?

Have you ever slipped back?

If so, what was the trigger to help you get back on the bandwagon?

What are the greatest obstacles you have faced in making this shift in lifestyle?

Changes to consumption behaviour

How do you consume differently?

Risks and losses

What risks did you face in making the change?

Have you experienced any losses as a result of making the change?

Benefits of lifestyle change

Have there been any benefits?

Impact on family and friends

How did your family and friends react to your change of lifestyle?

Did any of them have to make changes?

Has it affected any of your relationships?

Advice to others

What would your advice be to others who are thinking about shifting to a simpler lifestyle?

Areas for improvement

Are there any aspects of your life that you would still like to change?

Perceptions of simpler lives: slower lives?

There is this perception that people who have shifted to simpler lifestyles live slower paced lives. Do you think this is true?

Why do you think that?

Identify as a simplifier

Do you see yourself as someone who has simplified their life?

If no, why not?

Snowball sampling: Recruiting more interviewees

Do you know anyone else who has made shifts to simpler lifestyles that I could potentially interview?

Appendix V

Sample Exercise Material from the *Smart Busy* Program

The Chocolate Meditation



In a moment you're going to give 100% of your attention to eating a piece of chocolate. You'll have a choice – you can choose a piece of milk chocolate or dark chocolate. And once you have your piece of chocolate, you're not going to think of anything else or do anything else. You're not going to jot down notes or chat to the person next to you. All you need to do is just focus on this piece of chocolate.

Now you may wonder what this is about but there is a point to doing this. Being focused and slowing down will allow you to really savour and enjoy this piece of chocolate, more than any other piece of chocolate you've ever had before.

So please take a piece of chocolate and just hold it until everyone has a piece. Take a moment to look at it. Imagine that you have never seen anything like it before.

Now take the chocolate...and holding it in the palm of your hand...or between your finger and thumb...totally focus on the chocolate.

Breathe in and out a few times to help yourself focus and become more in touch with how you feel about this chocolate. Most of the time, we barely take the time to really look at the food we eat. We grab, chew and quickly swallow. This time, take note: What colour is it? How does it feel? What does it smell like? Inhale the aroma. And just notice what's going on in your body.

If a thought arises about work, something you need to do, a worry, just let it go and return your attention to the chocolate.

Now place the chocolate in your mouth on your tongue. Resist the urge to chew it or suck on it. See if you can just let it sit there on your tongue and let it melt for a little bit. They say chocolate has over 300 different flavours. Can you sense some of them?

And if while you are doing this, any thoughts come to mind like "This is weird" or "What is the point of this?" then just notice those thoughts and bring your awareness back to the chocolate.

What does it feel like in your mouth? Just explore the sensations of having it in your mouth.

When you're ready take a bite into it and notice the flavor that's released.

When you are ready to swallow, swallow it very slowly and deliberately. Feel it go down your throat.

So you just did the chocolate mindfulness meditation.

How did you go with that? What was it like taking your time to eat the piece of chocolate?

In pairs, share back and forth.

Appendix VI

The *Smart Busy* Intervention Schedule

Procedure and Protocol for Session 1: Smart Busy Program “Mindful Living 101”		
Start Time	Finish Time	Topics Covered
6.30pm	6.35pm	Welcome, introduction, overview of program
6.35pm	6.45pm	Discussion on busyness, purpose of program and breakdown of tonight’s session
6.45pm	6.50pm	Participants introduce themselves (pair share) and reflect on a thought they had on the way here
6.50pm	6.55pm	Discussion on monitoring our thoughts and the impact of certain thoughts
6.55pm	7.00pm	Cover ground rules
7.00pm	7.05pm	Discussion on modern life and problems associated with modern life
7.05pm	7.20pm	Introduce concept of instant gratification and the importance of self control
7.20pm	7.35pm	Break
7.35pm	7.40pm	Activity: “I want it now!”
7.40pm	7.45pm	Explore how to boost self control
7.45pm	7.50pm	Introduce participants to concept of mindfulness and mindlessness
7.50pm	8.00pm	The myth of multitasking and the impact of multitasking on our lives Activity: The Stroop Effect
8.00pm	8.05pm	Discuss why it is difficult to be mindful if you are busy
8.05pm	8.20pm	Teach how to cultivate mindfulness
8.20pm	8.23pm	Exercise: Mindfulness breath meditation
8.23pm	8.25pm	Making meditation part of our daily routine – action planning and setting a cue/trigger
8.25pm	8.30pm	Cover homework for the week, summarise session and introduce topic for next session

Procedure and Protocol for Session 2: Smart Busy Program "Take Back Your Time"		
Start Time	Finish Time	Topics Covered
6.30pm	6.35pm	Exercise: Mindfulness meditation
6.35pm	6.45pm	Discuss homework from previous week
6.45pm	6.50pm	Discuss purpose and breakdown of tonight's session
6.55pm	7.00pm	Remind participants of crazy busy versus smart busy living
7.00pm	7.10pm	Examine how time is consumed
7.10pm	7.20pm	Discuss our relationship to technology
7.20pm	7.30pm	Group reflection exercise: Technology and our lives
7.30pm	7.35pm	Highlight the hidden costs of technology
7.35pm	7.50pm	Break
7.50pm	7.55pm	Discuss concept of leisure time
7.55pm	8.05pm	Exercise: Brainstorm screen time alternatives and schedule those in diaries
8.05pm	8.10pm	Discussion on managing our time engaged with technology and screens and how to deal with an overloaded brain
8.10pm	8.15pm	Exercise: Staring at a brick wall versus a natural setting
8.15pm	8.20pm	Discussion on being mindful in nature
8.20pm	8.26pm	Discussion on taking care of yourself Reflection exercise: Am I taking care of myself right now?
8.26pm	8.30pm	Cover homework for the week, summarise session and introduce topic for next session

Procedure and Protocol for Session 3: Smart Busy Program “What really matters in life?”		
Start Time	Finish Time	Topics Covered
6.30pm	6.35pm	Exercise: Mindfulness meditation exercise
6.35pm	6.45pm	Discuss homework from previous week
6.45pm	6.50pm	Purpose and breakdown of session
6.50pm	7.00pm	The importance of values and the difference between values and goals
7.00pm	7.05pm	Problems with being goal focused rather than value focused (putting your happiness on hold)
7.05pm	7.25pm	Values clarification exercises: 80 year old you: What would you do differently? What is most important? And why is it important to me?
7.25pm	7.35pm	Discuss the importance of taking action: Setting goals based on values and strategies to overcome self regulation failure
7.35pm	7.45pm	Break
7.45pm	7.55pm	Discuss concepts of relative wealth, social comparison and cycle of work and spend
7.55pm	8.05pm	Look at the role commercial media plays Discuss concept of needs versus wants and how one knows the difference between the two
8.05pm	8.10pm	Exercise: Is it a need or is it a want?
8.10pm	8.15pm	How do we enhance our wellbeing?
8.15pm	8.25pm	Introduce idea of tracking spending and the ancient art of thrift
8.25pm	8.30pm	Cover homework for the week, summarise session and introduce topic for next session

Procedure and Protocol for Session 4: Smart Busy Program “Declutter your life”		
Start Time	Finish Time	Topics Covered
6.30pm	6.35pm	Exercise: Mindfulness meditation
6.35pm	6.45pm	Discuss homework from previous week
6.45pm	6.50pm	Purpose and breakdown of tonight’s session
6.50pm	6.55pm	What is clutter? The different types of clutter
6.55pm	7.05pm	Discuss how we accumulate clutter and why it is hard to let go of some objects
7.05pm	7.25pm	Share practical strategies to declutter and demonstrate decluttering process
7.25pm	7.35pm	Break
7.35pm	7.40pm	Discuss idea of stopping clutter before it start (refusing)
7.40pm	8.00pm	Play video: Story of stuff
8.00pm	8.05pm	Reflection exercise: What are the impacts of consumption?
8.05pm	8.10pm	Discuss impact of plastic waste and oceans Play video: Midway journey
8.10pm	8.20pm	How to say no to more stuff coming into our lives
8.20pm	8.25pm	Discuss the impact of commercial media on consumption behaviour Brainstorm: How are you exposed to commercial media messages?
8.25pm	8.30pm	Cover homework for the week, summarise session and introduce topic for next session

Procedure and Protocol for Session 5: Smart Busy Program “Food Matters”		
Start Time	Finish Time	Topics Covered
6.30pm	6.35pm	Exercise: Mindfulness meditation exercise
6.35pm	6.45pm	Discuss homework from previous week
6.45pm	6.50pm	Purpose and breakdown of tonight’s session
6.50pm	7.00pm	Discuss our culture of convenience (the decline of cooking meals at home) and the problems associated with convenience food
7.00pm	7.05pm	Introduce visual representation of what our meals should look like and the benefits of buying fresh and local food
7.05pm	7.15pm	Discuss issue of food waste in Australia
7.15pm	7.35pm	Break
7.35pm	7.55pm	Introduce concept of meal planning and its benefits
7.55pm	8.05pm	Discuss mindful eating
8.05pm	8.20pm	Mindfulness exercise: Mindfully eating a piece of chocolate
8.20pm	8.30pm	Cover homework for the week, summarise session and introduce topic for next session

Procedure and Protocol for Session 6: Smart Busy Program		
“Planning for the future”		
Start Time	Finish Time	Topics Covered
6.30pm	6.35pm	Exercise: Mindfulness meditation
6.35pm	6.45pm	Recap on homework from previous week
6.45pm	6.50pm	Purpose and breakdown of session
6.50pm	6.55pm	Reflection exercise: Who is doing well for their age?
6.55pm	7.15pm	Introduce concept of blue zones (vitality hotspots) Play video: TEDx talk by Dan Buettner on longevity
7.15pm	7.25pm	Discuss the importance of social ties and connections and barriers to connection
7.25pm	7.30pm	Case example of strongly connected community
7.30pm	7.35pm	Break
7.35pm	7.40pm	Discuss the concept of community and importance of community
7.40pm	7.50pm	Reflection exercise: When have you experienced community?
7.50pm	7.55pm	How to increase social ties and connection
7.55pm	8.00pm	Where to from here? Summarise program and introduce concept of future self
8.00pm	8.10pm	Activity: Participants write letter to their future selves
8.10pm	8.25pm	Participants complete post course evaluation form
8.25pm	8.30pm	Final thoughts (What to do if you get stuck?)

Procedure and Protocol: Smart Busy Program		
Booster Session: Intelligent Exercise		
Start Time	Finish Time	Topics Covered
6.30pm	6.35pm	Exercise: Mindfulness meditation
6.35pm	6.45pm	Speed sharing exercise
6.45pm	6.50pm	Purpose and breakdown of session
6.50pm	6.55pm	Revisit concept of Smart Busy living
6.55pm	7.20pm	Discussion on changes made as a result of participating in program and barriers faced
7.20pm	7.30pm	Break
7.30pm	7.40pm	Introduce participants to concept of 'intelligent exercise'
7.40pm	7.45pm	Reflection activity: Fondest memory of physical activity
7.45pm	8.00pm	Activity: Exploring the barriers to exercise
8.00pm	8.10pm	Discuss barriers to exercise and brainstorm ways to overcome them
8.10pm	8.20pm	Brainstorm: Incorporating more movement into daily life
8.20pm	8.25pm	Discussion on the benefits of walking and the connection between walking and thinking
8.00pm	8.10pm	Activity: Participants write letter to their future selves
8.10pm	8.25pm	Participants complete post course evaluation form
8.25pm	8.30pm	Final wrap-up

Appendix VII

Promotion of the *Smart Busy* Program via Media Outlets and Poster



Smiles ahead of the rest

DON'T WORRY, BE HAPPY WITH UNI COURSE

Emma Clayton

A RESEARCHER at Murdoch University has concluded that more than half of West Australians worry what other people think of them and the demands of everyday life are getting them down.

The results of a survey of nearly 500 people surprised PhD candidate Jane Genovese so much that the university has created a free course to help people cope with life.

Ms Genovese has used the findings of how the survey participants viewed their lives to develop the six-week course in an effort to help them reclaim a sense of control and balance in their lives.

"I found that more than half of the 440 people who responded to the on-line survey felt like their lives were really hectic, while almost 40 per cent of the sample indicated they were running on automatic without much awareness of what they were doing," she said.

"I also interviewed 30 people from various walks of life and the general sense was that people are flat out, rushing around and time-poor.

"Interestingly, to some extent people like being busy. They feel they are accomplishing things and going places. But it can get to a point when they are so busy that it's no longer enjoyable and it starts to take a toll on their health."

The course - available to 60 people and which still has some vacancies - is the final phase in Ms Genovese's PhD, which she hopes will be taken on by large organisations.

The Smart Busy course starts on Thursday, August 7, at 6.30pm and will run weekly for six sessions at Murdoch University's South Street campus.

To register or for more information, visit www.smartbusy.com or email Ms Genovese at j.genovese@murdoch.edu.au

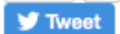
HAPPY STATS

- 50.3 per cent of people say the demands of everyday life get them down.
- 43.8 per cent say maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for them.
- 36.3 per cent often feel lonely and have few close friends with whom to share their concerns.
- 59.8 per cent feel worried about what others think of them.
- 33.9 per cent feel people they know have got more out of life than they have.
- 36.5 per cent do not have a good sense of what they are trying to accomplish in life.

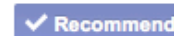
Categorized | **South**

Free 'how to manage your life' course

Posted on 27 June 2014.



STAFF REPORTER



A Murdoch University researcher wants you to enrol in a free course to help you better manage your life.

PhD candidate Jane Genovese (pictured) has developed the six week **Smart Busy: Live Better, Feel Free + Stress Less** course after surveying Perth people about their lives.

"I found that more than half of the 440 people who responded to the online survey felt like their lives were really hectic while almost 40 per cent of the sample indicated they were 'running on automatic' without much awareness of what they were doing," Ms Genovese said.

"I also interviewed 30 people from various walks of life and the general sense was that people are flat out, rushing around and time poor.

"Interestingly, to some extent people like being busy.

"They feel they are accomplishing things and going places.

"But it can get to a point when they are so busy that it's no longer enjoyable and it starts to take its toll on their health."

Ms Genovese said the course had been developed to help Western Australians reclaim a sense of control and balance in their lives.

Participants will be exposed to the latest information on topics such as happiness, decluttering and how to focus.

"It will be an opportunity for people to take time out from their busy lives and explore what really matters to them," Ms Genovese said.

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Feeling stressed? Unusual ways to find peace in Perth

July 23, 2014

☆ Read later



Candice Barnes

Entertainment reporter

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The sound chamber at Echoes in Canning Vale.

We make time for work, for play and for family, but experts say too many of us don't set aside enough time to really unwind from our busy schedules.

Apparently, tinkering with model trains or sitting on the couch watching YouTube videos just

MURDOCH UNIVERSITY
INVITES YOU TO PARTICIPATE
IN THE FREE PROGRAMME

SMART BUSY: LIVE BETTER, FEEL FREE + STRESS LESS

THE 6 SESSIONS ARE:

- WEEK 1**
Mindful living 101
- WEEK 2**
Take back your time
- WEEK 3**
What really matters in life?
- WEEK 4**
Declutter your life
- WEEK 5**
Food matters
- WEEK 6**
Planning for the future

WHEN:
Thursday 6.30pm – 8.30pm
Starts 7th August 2014

WHERE:
Murdoch University
South Street Campus

COST:
Free

REGISTER:
To register your interest
contact Jane on:
T: 0422 460 598
E: j.genovese@murdoch.edu.au
Light refreshments provided
www.smartbusy.com



Appendix VIII

Information Letter about the *Smart Busy* Program and Consent Form

Evaluating the Effectiveness of the "Smart Busy" Program

Dear Alexis,

We invite you to participate in a research study evaluating the effectiveness of a 6-week community education program - "Smart Busy: Live Better, Feel Free and Stress Less". This program has been developed as part of my PhD research, supervised by Dr Catherine Baudains and Associate Professor John Bailey.

Nature and Purpose of the "Smart Busy" Program

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the "Smart Busy" program, which aims to provide participants with an opportunity to reflect on what is important in life, acquire strategies to reclaim a sense of control and become more mindful in a safe and supportive environment. The program will provide participants with a range of practical skills to deal more effectively with the stresses and demands of modern life, for free.

The weekly program sessions are as follows:

- Week 1 - Mindful living 101
- Week 2 - Take back your time
- Week 3 - What really matters in life?
- Week 4 - Declutter your life
- Week 5 - Food matters
- Week 6 - Planning for the future

What does your participation involve?

If you wish to participate in this research, you must be over 18 years of age. Your participation will involve the completion of several (3-4) surveys that will get you to reflect on various areas of your life. Some of these questions may be seen as personal and private. You can choose not to answer any of the questions on topics sensitive to you.

Completion of each survey will take approximately 20 - 30 minutes of your time.

Participation in the program will involve attending 6 sessions (each session being 2 hours in duration) over 6-consecutive weeks at Murdoch University (South Street campus, Murdoch) on a Thursday evening. The program is scheduled to commence on the 7th of August 2014 at 6.30pm.

Whilst the program is designed to be an enjoyable and enriching experience for participants, it is possible that you may experience some low level of anxiety or stress during the program as it will involve reflecting on various areas of your life.

Please be aware that you are free to withdraw at anytime during the session. If these feelings persist after the completion of the program, arrangements will be made for you to access support from a professional counsellor at no expense to you.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal from Study

It is important that you understand that your involvement in this study is voluntary. While we would be very pleased to have you participate, we respect your right to decline. You can decide at any time to withdraw your consent to participate in this research and the information gathered from the survey will be destroyed.

Your Privacy

All information collected in this study will be treated in a confidential manner, and your name or address will not be used in any form of publication arising out of the research. Following the study, data will be kept in a de-identified format, in a locked cabinet in the office of the Chief Investigator.

If you are willing to participate in this study, I would kindly ask that you complete the consent form enclosed and return it to us in the supplied reply-paid envelope as soon as possible.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this program please feel free to contact me (Jane Genovese) on 0422 460 598 or Dr Catherine Baudains on 9360 6398. Either of us would be happy to chat with you.

We would like to thank you in advance for your assistance with this research project. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Kind regards,

Jane Genovese
PhD Candidate

This study has been approved by the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval 2013/219). If you have any reservation or complaint about the ethical conduct of this research, and wish to talk with an independent person, you may contact Murdoch University's Research Ethics Office (Tel. 08 9360 6677 or e-mail ethics@murdoch.edu.au). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Consent Form

Evaluating the Effectiveness of the "Smart Busy" Program

Participant

I (the participant) have read the participant information sheet. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to take part in this program, however, I know that I may change my mind and stop at any time.

I am aware that all surveys filled in for this research are anonymous and no details which may personally identify me are being collected or used by the research.

I agree that research data gathered for this study may be published provided my name or any identifying data is not used.

I give permission for any photographs of myself taken at the program to be used by the researcher for research presentations and in education resources where appropriate.

I understand that all information provided by me is treated as confidential and will not be released by the researcher to a third party unless required to do so by law.

Signature of Participant

Date

Investigator

I have fully explained to _____ the nature and purpose of the research, the procedures to be employed, and the possible risks involved. I have provided the participant with a copy of the Information Sheet.

Signature of Investigator

Date

Print Name

Position

Appendix IX

Consent Form for 'Booster' Session

Consent Form

Follow-up session "Smart Busy" program

Participant

I (the participant) agree to take part in this follow up session, however, I know that I may change my mind and stop at any time.

I am aware that anything I say in the session is for research purposes and is treated as confidential. No details which may personally identify me are being collected or used by the research.

I agree that research data gathered for this study may be published provided my name or any identifying data is not used.

I understand that all information provided by me will not be released by the researcher to a third party unless required to do so by law.

Signature of Participant

Date

Investigator

I have fully explained to _____ the nature and purpose of the feedback session.

Signature of Investigator

Date

Print Name

Position

Appendix X

Survey Instruments for *Smart Busy* Program

Pre-Course Survey

(response options in italics)

Section One

Psychological Well-being

(Strongly Disagree, Disagree Somewhat, Disagree Slightly, Agree Slightly, Agree Somewhat, Strongly Agree)

W1. In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live.

W2. When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out.

W3. Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me.

W4. The demands of everyday life often get me down.

W5. I live life one day at a time and don't really think about the future.

W6. I am quite good at managing the many responsibilities of my daily life.

W7. I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world.

W8. I like most aspects of my personality.

W9. I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions.

W10. People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others.

W11. I have confidence in my opinions, even if they are contrary to the general consensus.

W12. I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others.

W13. Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them.

W14. For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth.

W15. I sometimes feel as if I've done all there is to do in life.

W16. I gave up trying to make big improvements or changes in my life a long time ago.

W17. I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important.

W18. In many ways, I feel disappointed about my achievements in life.

Section Two

Goals and Aspirations

(Not at all, A little, Moderately (so/so), Very, Extremely)

- G1. You will be physically healthy.
- G2. Your name will be known by many people.
- G3. You will have people comment often about how attractive you look.
- G4. You will have a lot of expensive possessions.
- G5. You will be famous.
- G6. You will feel good about your level of physical fitness.
- G7. You will be the one in charge of your life.
- G8. You will have good friends that you can count on.
- G9. You will keep up with fashions in hair and clothing.
- G10. You will have a job that pays well.
- G11. You will share your life with someone you love.
- G12. You will be admired by many people.
- G13. At the end of your life, you will look back on your life as meaningful and complete.
- G14. You will have people who care about you and are supportive.
- G15. You will work for the betterment of society.
- G16. You will achieve the "look" you've been after.
- G17. You will deal effectively with problems that come up in your life.
- G18. You will feel energetic and full of life.
- G19. You will successfully hide the signs of aging.
- G20. Your name will appear frequently in the media.
- G21. You will know people that you can have fun with.
- G22. You will be relatively free from sickness.
- G23. You will help others improve their lives.
- G24. You will know and accept who you really are.
- G25. You will be financially successful.
- G26. You will do something that brings you much recognition.
- G27. You will help people in need.
- G28. You will have a couple of good friends that you can talk to about personal things.
- G29. Your image will be one others find appealing.

G30. You will donate time or money to charity.

G31. You will have a job with high social status.

G32. You will work to make the world a better place.

Section Three

Mindfulness (Day-to-Day Experiences)

(Almost always, Very frequently, Somewhat frequently, Somewhat infrequently, Very infrequently, Almost never)

M1. I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until some time later.

M2. I break or spill things because of carelessness, not paying attention, or thinking of something else.

M3. I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present.

M4. I tend to walk quickly to get where I'm going without paying attention to what I experience along the way.

M5. I tend not to notice feelings of physical tension or discomfort until they really grab my attention.

M6. I forget a person's name almost as soon as I've been told it for the first time.

M7. It seems I am "running on automatic" without much awareness of what I'm doing.

M8. I rush through activities without being really attentive to them.

M9. I get so focused on the goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I'm doing right now to get there.

M10. I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I'm doing.

M11. I drive places on 'automatic pilot' and then wonder why I went there.

M12. I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past.

M13. I find myself doing things without paying attention.

M14. I snack without being aware that I'm eating.

M15. I find myself listening to someone with one ear, doing something else at the same time.

Section Four

Time Affluence (Pace of Life)

(Strongly disagree, Disagree somewhat, Disagree slightly, Agree slightly, Agree somewhat)

T1. My life has been too rushed.

T2. There have not been enough minutes in the day.

T3. I have felt like things have been really hectic.

T4. I have had enough time to do the things that are important to me.

T5. I have plenty of spare time.

T6. I have had enough time to do what I need to do.

T7. I have been able to take life at a leisurely pace.

T8. I have been racing from here to there.

Section Five

Ecological Footprint

E1. How often and how much do you eat animal based products? (e.g., beef, pork, chicken, fish, eggs and dairy products)

(Never (strict vegan), Infrequently (a few servings a month), Occasionally (a few servings a week), Often (several servings a week), Very often (several servings a day), Almost always (a large part of every meal))

E2. How much of the food you eat is either processed, packaged, or imported (or a combination of these)?

(Most, Three quarters, Half, One quarter, Very little)

E3. How much waste do you generate per week? (Note: This does not include composted or recycled waste)

(Less than one bin-bag (equivalent of 30 litres) a week, About one bin-bag a week, More than one bin-bag a week)

E4. How many people live in your home?

E5. What is the size of your home?

(250 square metres or larger (large home), 200 - 250 square metres (average home; approx. 4 bedrooms), 150 - 200 square metres (average home; approx. 3 bedrooms), 100 - 150 square metres (small home; approx. 2-3 bedrooms), 50 - 100 square metres (average apartment), 50 square metres or smaller (small studio flat or equivalent))

E6. Which housing type best describes your home?

(Free standing house without running water, Free standing house with running water, Multi-storey apartment building, Row house or building with 2 - 4 housing units, Green-design residence)

E7. Do you have electricity in your home?

(No, Yes, Yes with renewable energy (either your own or supplied by your energy retailer))

E8. On average, how far do you travel on public transport each week? (bus, train, tram or ferry)

(100 kilometres or more, 25 - 100 kilometres, 10 - 25 kilometres, 1 - 10 kilometres, Fewer than 1 kilometre)

E9a. Do you have a motorbike?

(Yes, No)

E9b. If you have a motorcycle, on average how far do you ride it each week? (either as driver or passenger)

(250 kilometres or more, 100-250 kilometres, 10-100 kilometres, 1-10 kilometres, Fewer than 1 kilometre)

E10a. Do you travel by car?

(Yes, No)

E10b. On average, how far do you travel by car each week? (either as a driver or passenger)

(500 kilometres or more, 300 - 500 kilometres, 150 - 300 kilometres, 50 - 150 kilometres, 15 - 50 kilometres, Fewer than 15 kilometres)

E10c. How many litres of fuel per 100 kilometres does the car you travel with consume?

(Fewer than 4.5 litres (very fuel efficient car such as Ford Fiesta Econetic), 4.5 -6.5 litres (fuel efficient car such as Hybrid), 6.5-9 litres (small car), 9-15 litres (family sized car), More than 15 litres (large 4WD))

E11. How often do you travel by car with someone else rather than alone?

(Never or almost never, Occasionally (about 25%), Often (about 50%), Very often (about 75%), Almost always)

E12. On average, approximately how many hours do you spend flying each year?

(100 hours or more, 25-100 hours, 10-25 hours, 3-10 hours, Fewer than 3 hours)

Section Six

Simple Living/Environmental Activities

(Not at all, A little, Moderately (so/so), Very, Extremely)

S1. Avoiding impulse purchases (i.e., buy only what's on my shopping list)

S2. Recycling

S3. Working at a satisfying job

S4. Buying locally grown produce

S5. Limiting exposure to ads

S6. Buying environmentally friendly products

S7. Limiting car use

S8. Buying from socially responsible producers

S9. Buying from local stores

S10. Limiting/eliminating TV

S11. Limiting wage-earning work

S12. Being active in the community

S13. Being politically active

- S14. Composting
- S15. Making rather than buying gifts
- S16. Maintaining a spiritual life
- S17. Buying organic foods
- S18. Being friends with neighbours
- S19. Eating a vegetarian diet
- S20. Cooking meals from scratch
- S21. Sharing tools/equipment/other items with others instead of buying
- S22. Buying clothing and other items second-hand instead of new
- S23. Avoiding buying products that wear out quickly
- S24. Choosing non-mechanical recreational activities (e.g., bushwalking, swimming) rather than mechanical ones (e.g., jetskiing, 4WD)
- S25. Renting things I need rather than buying them (e.g., car, power tools, and other machinery, etc)
- S26. Using and maintaining older appliances so as to avoid buying new ones
- S27. Eliminating clutter
- S28. Doing tasks that maintain or enhance my self-reliance (e.g., home maintenance, car repair) rather than paying for someone to do them

Section Seven

Frugality (Money Practices)

(Strongly agree, Disagree, Unsure, Agree, Strongly Agree)

- F1. If you take good care of your possessions, you will definitely save money in the long run
- F2. There are many things that are normally thrown away that are still quite useful
- F3. Making better use of my resources makes me feel good
- F4. If you can re-use an item you already have, there's no sense in buying something new
- F5. I believe in being careful in how I spend my money
- F6. I discipline myself to get the most from my money
- F7. I am willing to wait on a purchase I want so that I can save money
- F8. There are things I resist buying today so I can save for tomorrow

Section Eight

Demographic and self-reported lifestyle questions

D1. Gender (*Male, Female*)

D2. Age

D3. Education level (*Less than high school (year 12), Graduated from high school, Some university, Bachelor's degree or higher, Postgraduate degree*)

D4. Current work situation (*Employed full-time, Employed part-time, Self employed full-time, Self employed part-time, Full-time homemaker, Full-time student, Not currently employed, Retired*)

D5. How many hours a week do you work for pay?

D6. What is your occupation?

D7. How many hours do you spend per week on the work that you do for pay, for childcare and other household necessities, on average?

D8. How many hours do you watch television per week, on average?

D9. How many minutes per day (if any) do you meditate or practice mindfulness on average?

D12. What are your reasons for deciding to participate in this program?

Post-Course Survey

(response options in italics)

Section One

Psychological Well-being

(Strongly Disagree, Disagree Somewhat, Disagree Slightly, Agree Slightly, Agree Somewhat, Strongly Agree)

W1. In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live.

W2. When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out.

W3. Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me.

W4. The demands of everyday life often get me down.

W5. I live life one day at a time and don't really think about the future.

W6. I am quite good at managing the many responsibilities of my daily life.

W7. I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world.

W8. I like most aspects of my personality.

W9. I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions.

W10. People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others.

W11. I have confidence in my opinions, even if they are contrary to the general consensus.

W12. I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others.

W13. Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them.

W14. For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth.

W15. I sometimes feel as if I've done all there is to do in life.

W16. I gave up trying to make big improvements or changes in my life a long time ago.

W17. I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important.

W18. In many ways, I feel disappointed about my achievements in life.

Section Two

Goals and Aspirations

(Not at all, A little, Moderately (so/so), Very, Extremely)

G1. You will be physically healthy.

- G2. Your name will be known by many people.
- G3. You will have people comment often about how attractive you look.
- G4. You will have a lot of expensive possessions.
- G5. You will be famous.
- G6. You will feel good about your level of physical fitness.
- G7. You will be the one in charge of your life.
- G8. You will have good friends that you can count on.
- G9. You will keep up with fashions in hair and clothing.
- G10. You will have a job that pays well.
- G11. You will share your life with someone you love.
- G12. You will be admired by many people.
- G13. At the end of your life, you will look back on your life as meaningful and complete.
- G14. You will have people who care about you and are supportive.
- G15. You will work for the betterment of society.
- G16. You will achieve the "look" you've been after.
- G17. You will deal effectively with problems that come up in your life.
- G18. You will feel energetic and full of life.
- G19. You will successfully hide the signs of aging.
- G20. Your name will appear frequently in the media.
- G21. You will know people that you can have fun with.
- G22. You will be relatively free from sickness.
- G23. You will help others improve their lives.
- G24. You will know and accept who you really are.
- G25. You will be financially successful.
- G26. You will do something that brings you much recognition.
- G27. You will help people in need.
- G28. You will have a couple of good friends that you can talk to about personal things.
- G29. Your image will be one others find appealing.
- G30. You will donate time or money to charity.
- G31. You will have a job with high social status.
- G32. You will work to make the world a better place.

Section Three

Mindfulness (Day-to-Day Experiences)

(Almost always, Very frequently, Somewhat frequently, Somewhat infrequently, Very infrequently, Almost never)

- M1. I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until some time later.
- M2. I break or spill things because of carelessness, not paying attention, or thinking of something else.
- M3. I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present.
- M4. I tend to walk quickly to get where I'm going without paying attention to what I experience along the way.
- M5. I tend not to notice feelings of physical tension or discomfort until they really grab my attention.
- M6. I forget a person's name almost as soon as I've been told it for the first time.
- M7. It seems I am "running on automatic" without much awareness of what I'm doing.
- M8. I rush through activities without being really attentive to them.
- M9. I get so focused on the goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I'm doing right now to get there.
- M10. I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I'm doing.
- M11. I drive places on 'automatic pilot' and then wonder why I went there.
- M12. I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past.
- M13. I find myself doing things without paying attention.
- M14. I snack without being aware that I'm eating.
- M15. I find myself listening to someone with one ear, doing something else at the same time.

Section Four

Time Affluence (Pace of Life)

(Strongly disagree, Disagree somewhat, Disagree slightly, Agree slightly, Agree somewhat)

- T1. My life has been too rushed.
- T2. There have not been enough minutes in the day.
- T3. I have felt like things have been really hectic.
- T4. I have had enough time to do the things that are important to me.
- T5. I have plenty of spare time.
- T6. I have had enough time to do what I need to do.
- T7. I have been able to take life at a leisurely pace.

T8. I have been racing from here to there.

Section Five

Ecological Footprint

E1. How often and how much do you eat animal based products? (e.g., beef, pork, chicken, fish, eggs and dairy products)

(Never (strict vegan), Infrequently (a few servings a month), Occasionally (a few servings a week), Often (several servings a week), Very often (several servings a day), Almost always (a large part of every meal))

E2. How much of the food you eat is either processed, packaged, or imported (or a combination of these)?

(Most, Three quarters, Half, One quarter, Very little)

E3. How much waste do you generate per week? (Note: This does not include composted or recycled waste)

(Less than one bin-bag (equivalent of 30 litres) a week, About one bin-bag a week, More than one bin-bag a week)

E4. How many people live in your home?

E5. What is the size of your home?

(250 square metres or larger (large home), 200 - 250 square metres (average home; approx. 4 bedrooms), 150 - 200 square metres (average home; approx. 3 bedrooms), 100 - 150 square metres (small home; approx. 2-3 bedrooms), 50 - 100 square metres (average apartment), 50 square metres or smaller (small studio flat or equivalent))

E6. Which housing type best describes your home?

(Free standing house without running water, Free standing house with running water, Multi-storey apartment building, Row house or building with 2 - 4 housing units, Green-design residence)

E7. Do you have electricity in your home?

(No, Yes, Yes with renewable energy (either your own or supplied by your energy retailer))

E8. On average, how far do you travel on public transport each week? (bus, train, tram or ferry)

(100 kilometres or more, 25 - 100 kilometres, 10 - 25 kilometres, 1 - 10 kilometres, Fewer than 1 kilometre)

E9a. Do you have a motorbike?

(Yes, No)

E9b. If you have a motorcycle, on average how far do you ride it each week? (either as driver or passenger)

(250 kilometres or more, 100-250 kilometres, 10-100 kilometres, 1-10 kilometres, Fewer than 1 kilometre)

E10a. Do you travel by car?

(Yes, No)

E10b. On average, how far do you travel by car each week? (either as a driver or passenger)

(500 kilometres or more, 300 - 500 kilometres, 150 - 300 kilometres, 50 - 150 kilometres, 15 - 50 kilometres, Fewer than 15 kilometres)

E10c. How many litres of fuel per 100 kilometres does the car you travel with consume?

(Fewer than 4.5 litres (very fuel efficient car such as Ford Fiesta Econetic), 4.5 -6.5 litres (fuel efficient car such as Hybrid), 6.5-9 litres (small car), 9-15 litres (family sized car), More than 15 litres (large 4WD))

E11. How often do you travel by car with someone else rather than alone?

(Never or almost never, Occasionally (about 25%), Often (about 50%), Very often (about 75%), Almost always)

E12. On average, approximately how many hours do you spend flying each year?

(100 hours or more, 25-100 hours, 10-25 hours, 3-10 hours, Fewer than 3 hours)

Section Six

Simple Living/Environmental Activities

(Not at all, A little, Moderately (so/so), Very, Extremely)

S1. Avoiding impulse purchases (i.e., buy only what's on my shopping list)

S2. Recycling

S3. Working at a satisfying job

S4. Buying locally grown produce

S5. Limiting exposure to ads

S6. Buying environmentally friendly products

S7. Limiting car use

S8. Buying from socially responsible producers

S9. Buying from local stores

S10. Limiting/eliminating TV

S11. Limiting wage-earning work

S12. Being active in the community

S13. Being politically active

S14. Composting

S15. Making rather than buying gifts

S16. Maintaining a spiritual life

S17. Buying organic foods

- S18. Being friends with neighbours
- S19. Eating a vegetarian diet
- S20. Cooking meals from scratch
- S21. Sharing tools/equipment/other items with others instead of buying
- S22. Buying clothing and other items second-hand instead of new
- S23. Avoiding buying products that wear out quickly
- S24. Choosing non-mechanical recreational activities (e.g., bushwalking, swimming) rather than mechanical ones (e.g., jetskiing, 4WD)
- S25. Renting things I need rather than buying them (e.g., car, power tools, and other machinery, etc)
- S26. Using and maintaining older appliances so as to avoid buying new ones
- S27. Eliminating clutter
- S28. Doing tasks that maintain or enhance my self-reliance (e.g., home maintenance, car repair) rather than paying for someone to do them

Section Seven

Frugality (Money Practices)

(Strongly agree, Disagree, Unsure, Agree, Strongly Agree)

- F1. If you take good care of your possessions, you will definitely save money in the long run
- F2. There are many things that are normally thrown away that are still quite useful
- F3. Making better use of my resources makes me feel good
- F4. If you can re-use an item you already have, there's no sense in buying something new
- F5. I believe in being careful in how I spend my money
- F6. I discipline myself to get the most from my money
- F7. I am willing to wait on a purchase I want so that I can save money
- F8. There are things I resist buying today so I can save for tomorrow

Section Eight

Demographic questions

- D1. How many hours a week do you work for pay?
- D2. How many hours do you watch television per week, on average?
- D3. How many minutes per day (if any) do you meditate or practice mindfulness on average?

Section Nine

Program Feedback and Self-reported Change

P1. Which sessions did you attend of the program? (Please tick sessions attended)

(Session 1: Mindful living 101, Session 2: Take back your time, Session 3: What really matters in life?, Session 4: Declutter your life, Session 5: Food matters, Session 6: Planning for the future)

P2. How satisfied were you with the program?

(Not satisfied at all, A little, Moderately, Very, Extremely)

P3. What aspects of the Smart Busy program did you enjoy the most?

P4. What do you think could be improved?

P5. Are you doing anything differently as a result of participating in the Smart Busy program?

(Yes, No)

P6. If yes, what new things are you doing or doing differently?

P7. Are there any other things you intend to do or do differently in the future?

(Yes, No)

P8. If yes, what other things do you intend to do or do differently in the future?

P9. If there is anything else you would like to tell us about the topics covered in this questionnaire or your experience of the Smart Busy program, please do so in the space provided below

12-Week Follow-Up Survey

(response options in italics)

Section One

Psychological Well-being

(Strongly Disagree, Disagree Somewhat, Disagree Slightly, Agree Slightly, Agree Somewhat, Strongly Agree)

W1. In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live.

W2. When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out.

W3. Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me.

W4. The demands of everyday life often get me down.

W5. I live life one day at a time and don't really think about the future.

W6. I am quite good at managing the many responsibilities of my daily life.

W7. I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world.

W8. I like most aspects of my personality.

W9. I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions.

W10. People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others.

W11. I have confidence in my opinions, even if they are contrary to the general consensus.

W12. I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others.

W13. Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them.

W14. For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth.

W15. I sometimes feel as if I've done all there is to do in life.

W16. I gave up trying to make big improvements or changes in my life a long time ago.

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(Strongly agree, Disagree, Unsure, Agree, Strongly Agree)

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Demographic questions

- D1. How many hours a week do you work for pay?
- D2. How many hours do you watch television per week, on average?
- D3. How many minutes per day (if any) do you meditate or practice mindfulness on average?

Section Nine

Program Reflection

P1. How has the Smart Busy program helped you in your everyday life?

P2. Have you made any changes to your life since participating in the program?

(Yes, No)

P3. If yes, what changes have you made?

P4. Were there other things you wanted to change but you weren't able to?

(Yes, No)

P5. If yes, what stopped you?