

Elegant Sufficiency;
How Young Australians are Living *Better* with Less

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

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Abstract

This research explores Australian consumer society and how the pursuit of materialist lifestyles had led to a problem of wasteful consumerism. This problem amounts to an annual expenditure of \$10.5 billion on goods that are not used (Hamilton et. al, 2005). Despite the urgent need for society to mitigate environmental catastrophe and shift towards a sustainable way of living, the problem of wasteful consumerism is only increasing. This research explores why this is the case through an analysis of meaning and motivation for modern consumerism. To address the tension between the problem of wasteful consumerism and sustainability, this research analyses the emerging discourse on sustainable consumption lifestyles and identifies how this theory can translate to individual action.

Furthermore, this research identifies how some young people are discontent with the consumerist status quo and as such, are seeking to adopt alternative, sustainable lifestyles. To gain insights into the sustainable lifestyles of young people, fourteen individuals committed to sustainable living (aged 18-35 years) are interviewed in-depth. Their stories are analysed and constructed into *lifestyle portraits*. The fourteen lifestyle portraits address the three objectives for this research and identify (1) the individual motivations for living sustainably, (2a) how young people are living sustainably, through an analysis of the principles and practices they adopt and (2b) the challenges between the individuals' consuming ideals and actions. Finally, (3) the biographical analysis explores the spheres of influence the individuals have within their families, peers and broader networks and assesses their potential to lead by example through living *better* with less.

Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Katherine E. Luckins

Date

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1.0 Introducing the Research

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1.1 Introduction

This research focuses on Australian consumer society and how the pursuit of materialist lifestyles has led to the creation of wasteful consumerism. Consumerism refers to more than the “consumption of goods and services per se, but to the endlessly desirous and wasteful consumption of affluent economies” (Humphrey, 2010, pxi). In 2005, The Australia Institute identified that Australians are spending \$10.5 billion annually on goods that are unused and wasted. This is a significant environmental, social and economic problem. Wasteful consumerism is on the rise at the very time we are required to reduce human impact in order to bring human impacts back within the limits of Earth’s capacity, to preserve the natural environment and to manage the onset of climate change. This research investigates this tension by challenging consumerist lifestyles and establishing a balanced approach to living that improves the wellbeing of individuals, society and the environment, as well as the economy.

This research proposes that young people may potentially be the catalysts for leading the transition to sustainable lifestyles. The majority of young people care about the conservation of the natural environment and believe that climate change is one of the most important issues their generation is facing. A global survey of 10,000 young people (18-24 years old) found that young people are aware of global concerns relating to the environment (UNEP, 2000). “Young people are also highly concerned about the environment and the wellbeing of others, and accept their individual responsibility for sustainable consumption” (Bentley, Fien & Neil, 2004, p2). Some young people are becoming discontented with the consumerist status quo, and are interested in pursuing alternative ways of living. As young adults are generally at a founding stage of their lives, they are flexible, open-minded and willing to make significant lifestyle changes if motivated to do so.

This thesis investigates why some young people are motivated to adopt a sustainable lifestyle, how they are doing it and what the influence on their peers

and broader networks may be. This research uses the lifestyle portraits of fourteen young people who are committed to sustainable living to describe and analyse how a life can be lived *better*¹ with less. It identifies a number of principles that could be used to guide broader adoption of more sustainable lifestyles by young Australians.

1.1.2 Introducing the Researcher

The researcher has previously completed a Master of Arts (Fashion) by thesis which included an action research case study of a series of clothing exchange events developed in response to the problem of wasteful fashion consumption. Prior to this study, the researcher completed a Bachelor of Industrial Design (Honours). It is significant to note that the researcher's knowledge was founded in design theory and has since evolved to a cross-disciplinary study of consumption and sustainable consumption theory.

It is also significant to note that the researcher shares characteristics with the research participants for this study who are 18-35 years old and committed to adopting a sustainable way of living. Thus, being an 'insider' enabled the researcher to identify and empathise with the research participants and draw upon valuable life experiences to inform the development of this research.

1.1.3 The Significance of the Research

This research addresses five significant issues. These include: (1) how sustainable consumption has become an important part of the sustainability discussion internationally, but not in Australia, (2) why sustainable consumption discussions usually focus on regulating production rather than addressing the individual perspective, (3) why sustainable consumption has become increasingly topical, with several significant related publications being released in 2010 alone, (4) what principles constitute how a sustainable lifestyle may be pursued and, finally, (5) this research addresses significant knowledge gaps in the literature and understanding of

¹ In this context, living 'better' refers to living in a way that improves the wellbeing of the individual, society and environment.

young people within the context of modern life. The following comments expand upon these issues.

1. Sustainable consumption was highlighted in *Agenda 21* (1992) and has been a major policy issue within the United Kingdom (among other countries) for over a decade (Jackson, 2006). However, it is yet to register significantly on the Australian Government's agenda. There is yet to be a comprehensive government study or policy that reflects the depth of the challenge of sustainable consumption in Australia despite initiatives such as regulations to encourage sustainable building and subsidies put in place to encourage individuals to invest in insulation and solar energy. Rather than waiting for Government leadership on sustainable consumption, this research focuses on addressing the potential for individual action, with a focus on young people. As Flavin confirms in the 2010 WorldWatch Institute Report, "While the destructive power of modern culture is a reality that many government and business decision makers continue to wilfully ignore, it is keenly felt by a new generation of environmentalists who are growing up in an era of global limits" (2010, pxviii).

2. Sustainable consumption literatures often focuses on supply-side issues related to sustainable production, with a focus on industry-led organisational change and government regulations. However, addressing sustainable consumption from the perspective of the individual is important given that wasteful consumerism is a collective issue, but an individual pursuit. It is also important to address and learn from individuals who are willing to act on their sustainability values. This is not to be confused with an approach to delegating responsibility to the individual and absolving government of responsibility to bring about change in a sustainable direction. Rather, the focus needs to be on translating sustainable consumption theory into an approach that resonates with and inspires the individual to act. This involves confronting the realities that the term 'sustainable consumption' can seem like a contradiction in terms, and the language of policy and academia can overcomplicate the task of seeking to live *better* with less for the individual. The effective engagement of individuals and communities can make complementary government action more likely and more effective.

3. Several new publications have demonstrated that overconsumption has become a key issue for sustainability. The 2010 WorldWatch Institute report “Transforming Culture from Consumerism to Sustainability” proposed that “there can be no doubt that consumer cultures are behind the ‘great collision’ between a finite planet and the seemingly infinite demands of human society” (Flavin, 2010, pxvii). The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has also initiated several projects and working groups on sustainable consumption research and action in recent years. In 2010, UNEP launched a global study of “Young People and Sustainable Lifestyles”. The year before, UNEP partnered the Stockholm Environment Institute to produce a significant report on “Sustainable Lifestyles”, while in 2006, UK policy advisor Tim Jackson edited the “Earthscan Reader in Sustainable Consumption” which has become a definitive guide to the subject.

4. The publication of these reports has led to the release of a range of books that explain the consumption issues to the general public. In this popular literature there are two dominant approaches. Some authors such as Tim Flannery and George Monbiot employ environmentalist “scare tactics” to engage the reader, while others adopt an optimistic approach that assumes readers will be inspired to act once provided with a great volume of information about sustainable living alternatives. The plethora of such self-help sustainability books (including Tanya Ha’s *Greenology* [2004] and Julian Lee’s *How Good are You?* [2008]) responds to the growing interest from individuals in the subject. However few address the challenge of lifestyle adaptation for the individual an integrated way. The qualitative approach adopted for this research encouraged honest accounts of the challenges of sustainable living from the individuals who are experiencing it. Through sharing these diverse stories and including information about what young people are doing but adding *how* they do it, and being honest about the challenges of lifestyle change, this thesis establishes a link between talk and action for sustainable living.

5. The research also identified that there is a gap in the understanding and descriptions of young people that relate to the current economic, social and cultural context. This research attempts to fill that gap by including literature written by young people about their generation within the review, in contrast with the dominant stereotypes provided by demographers and youth culture “experts”. The literature

review revealed a significant discrepancy between the negative stereotyping of young people as ‘a burden on society’ and the perceptions young people have of themselves.

1.2 The Research Proposition and Objectives

The Research Proposition

The research proposition is made up of three key points:

1. Contemporary Australian consumer society does not improve individual wellbeing as promised. Instead, the pursuit of materialist lifestyles has led to a problem of wasteful consumerism. This is a social, environmental and economic problem.
2. There is a need to address consumption-driven lifestyles with the view to simultaneously improving the wellbeing of individuals, society and the environment and overcoming this problem of wasteful consumerism
3. Some young people are questioning the dominant consumerist way of life and seeking to live “otherwise”². This research proposes that they will lead the way by adopting sustainable consumption lifestyles and leading by example. As Flavin confirms, “Young people are always a potent cultural force and often a leading indicator of where the culture is headed” (2010, xviii).

The Research Objectives

This research focused on how young Australians (aged 18-35 years) are living *better* with less. It was guided by three primary research objectives.

1. To investigate what motivates young people to reinvent their lifestyles in light of their sustainability values.

² “Living otherwise” is a term used to describe young people’s sustainable lifestyles. (Bentley, Fien & Neil, 2005).

2. To investigate and analyse how young people apply principles and practices to adopt sustainable consumption lifestyles. This included identifying the challenges that young people face when attempting to live sustainably.
3. To explore the potential for young people to influence others through leading by example and living *better* with less.

1.3 The Approach to the Research

The study represented in this thesis is based upon in-depth interviews with fourteen young Australians, aged 18-35 years, who are adopting sustainable consumption principles and practices. In line with the research objectives, the interviews were designed to elicit information about the life experiences and beliefs that motivate them to pursue sustainable living and the principles and practices they follow as part of what they define as sustainable lifestyles.

The qualitative data from the interviews were analysed in two phases. In the first phase, each of the fourteen interviews was analysed and constructed as individual narratives (or lifestyle portraits). The second phase involved analysing across the individual narratives with the view to identify significant patterns and themes as guided by the research objectives.

1.4 Overview of the Thesis

This thesis brings together a critique of consumerist lifestyles and the emerging need to develop a more sustainable way of living. It explores how young people are interested in being a part of this social shift through adopting sustainable consumption lifestyles. The thesis consists of two parts. Firstly, the literature review (Chapters 2-4) analyses consumption theory, sustainable consumption policy, concepts and action and seeks to understand the values and lives of young people. Secondly, the biographical narrative study (Chapter 5-8) includes the research design, the fourteen lifestyle portraits (or biographical narratives) of the young people interviewed, the cross-narrative analysis and the conclusion.

Chapter 2 analyses the meaning of consumption and consumerism within the context of modern Australian life. This chapter identifies and analyses the motivations for consumption from the individual perspective. This chapter argues that consumerism succeeds on the basis of offering the promise of a 'better life' to individuals. However, this 'better life' is always a purchase away, perpetrating a cycle of consumerism through the careful maintenance of dissatisfaction (Bauman, 2007). Chapter 2 demonstrates that consumption is simultaneously constraining as it is liberating (Heath & Potter, 2005).

This Chapter then analyses how modern consumerism is understood to be the "endlessly desirous and wasteful consumption of affluent economies" (Humphrey, 2010, pxi). Despite doubling our consumption (per person) over the last 50 years, we are not any happier for it (Fien, Neil & Bentley, 2005). As Jackson speculates, "the combined social and ecological critique suggests that existing patterns of consumption already threaten our quality of life, not just because of their impact on the environment, but also because of their failure to satisfy our needs" (Jackson et al. 2003, p20). Chapter 2 proposes that dissatisfaction with consumerism for under-delivering on the promise of a happier life, growing ecological concern, and discontent with the work-and-spend treadmill of modern life, together motivate a challenge to the consumerist status quo.

Challenging consumerism is not a straight forward task, as it is inextricably linked to modern life (Jackson, 2006). Chapter 3 addresses this challenge by focusing on sustainable consumption theories and concepts that seek to balance the needs of the individual, society, the environment and the economy. At the individual level, "sustainable consumption is based on a decision-making process that takes the consumer's social responsibility into account in addition to individual needs and wants" (Vermier & Verbeke, 2006, p170). This chapter includes an exploration of the emerging consumption concepts and movements that seek to reconcile the imbalance between wasteful consumerism and sustainability values. It proposes that rather than being an externalised practice, sustainable consumption needs to be integrated into lifestyle through the formation of new habits. This chapter investigates individual action for sustainable consumption and the challenges that can stand in the way.

Chapter 4 explores how young people may be best placed to adopt new consumption habits and adapt their lifestyles according to their sustainability values. To this end, this chapter explores the values and lifestyles of young people. This literature review reveals that there is significant contrast between the perceptions of young people defined by the generational stereotyping of demographers and commentators in popular media and the perceptions young people have of themselves. Historically, young people have long been seen as a 'burden on society' and in the current day, through the prevalence of negative stereotypes, they become the scapegoats for all that is wrong with modern life as far as previous generations are concerned. According to Bessant, "the way that young people get treated has less to do with their biological constraints and has more to do with beliefs and values brought to bear on them by adults" (Bessant, Secombe & Watts, 1998, pviii). Chapter 5 highlights the need to address this discrepancy and develop a relevant and balanced portrayal of young people. Many young people seem to have positive attitudes towards more sustainable living, and recognise the serious nature of the challenges their generation faces. The question this chapter raises is how might these young people be empowered to move beyond positive attitudes to positive action so they contribute to a transition towards sustainability.

Despite the fact that they have been born into a consumerist society and encouraged to aspire towards materialist lifestyles, some young people are becoming critical of consumerism. Given their lifestyle decisions are more transient and flexible (Anich, Luckins & Samson, 2009), Chapter 4 proposes that young people may be among the earliest to address their materialist lifestyles and reinvent the way they live, inspired by their sustainability values.

To test this proposition, there was a need to design a study to extract more information from young people themselves. Chapter 5 describes the research design which includes in-depth-interviews with fourteen young people who were committed to pursuing a sustainable consumption lifestyle. Chapter 6 presents the fourteen *lifestyle portraits* that were constructed from the interview data. These were organised around the three research objectives to explore the young people's motivations, actions, challenges and the influence they have on others.

The following chapter (7) expands the analysis through looking across the fourteen narratives and seeking to identify patterns and themes, commonalities and differences as guided by the research objectives. Through looking across the lifestyle portraits, the analysis reveals that a range of motivations inspire young people to question materialist lifestyles. In addition, the lifestyle portraits showed that the young people were living *better* with less through adopting a range of sustainable consumption principles and practices. These principles guided the participants towards consumption habits that reduced their demand on the environment, required less resources, created fewer emissions and supported society in a positive way. Despite the combination of good intentions and strong motivations held by the young people, their pro-sustainability beliefs did not always translate into action. Thus, the Chapter 7 analysis also explores some of the challenges that the young people faced both internally and those externally imposed by the infrastructures of consumption and the broader values of society. Chapter 7 concludes with an exploration about how young people influence their inner sphere of family and friends and their outer sphere of community, professional networks and the broader population.

The concluding chapter of the thesis identifies the key findings from the study of young people's sustainable lifestyles and relates back to the literature review (Chapters 2-4). The conclusion outlines the implications of these findings and identifies opportunities for further research.

2.0 Comprehending Consumerism

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2.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses how and why consumption has evolved to be inextricably linked to modern life. Australian society is widely considered to be a consumerist one because of the way consumption has become part of everyday life. The term, *consumption* describes the purchase and use of goods and services.³ In advanced, capitalist societies, the line between consumption and *consumerism*⁴ has blurred. Broadly speaking, where consumption refers to need satisfaction through purchasing and using goods, consumerism is the process of need creation and the satisfaction of these desires. As Humphrey argues, “Consumerism is conventionally understood as referring not to the consumption of goods and services per se, but to the endlessly desirous and wasteful consumption of affluent economies” (2010, pxi). Or, put simply, consumerism is excess consumption (Lodziak, 2002, p2).

As consumption is motivated by needs, and consumerism by wants, discussions of the differences between them feature prominently within the consumption literature. Douglas and Isherwood defined that there are two kinds of needs, those that are ‘physical’ and those that are ‘spiritual’ (1979, p17). Within consumption literature, there is a tendency to give priority to physical (or survival) needs. However, within modern life, the satisfaction of ‘wants’, plays an increasingly significant social and cultural role (Douglas & Isherwood, 1979, p17). As individual wealth increases, consumption extends from satisfying basic survivalist needs to the pursuit of wants. For example, while one may start with the consumption of a shelter by necessity (to provide a roof overhead), this can quickly lead to questions about how big a shelter, how comfortable and how social status can be attained from the way it is decorated. The extension from need-satisfaction to the pursuit of want-satisfaction has created the culture of consumerism that we participate in today.

³ Although Denniss and Hamilton question whether “use” has become an ‘optional extra’ where wasteful consumption is concerned (The Australia Institute, 2005)

⁴ The term *consumerism* refers to excess consumption (Lodziak, 2002, p2). Consumerism also refers to “the crass elevation of material acquisition to the status of a dominant social paradigm” (Conca, Princen & Maniates, 2002 p2).

However, consumerism was not always so embedded in everyday life. Rather, consumerism is a social practice that was created to provide markets for capitalist modes of production. In this way, a consumer revolution was stimulated in the pursuit of economic development (McCracken, 1990, p5). This involved inventing and promoting consumer desires to increase individual consumption. As Galbraith argued in *Affluent Society*, the ideology behind efforts to encourage excess consumerism were based on “The promotion of false needs such as prestige goods necessary to stimulate the economy...The more wants that are satisfied, the more new ones are born” (Galbraith, 1958).

Dusenberry (1949) illustrates how consumer desires were created through social competition, as articulated by his phrase “Keeping up with the Joneses”. Individuals were encouraged to look beyond their own basic needs and take inspiration from the consumption of others. Social competition was an effective means of increasing desires and consequently, consumption. Over the last three decades, individual values⁵ have overtaken community values. Even the subsequent rise of individualism provided a new incentive for consumption. The postwar consumer boom may have been socially motivated by “Keeping up with the Joneses”, but the 1980’s was about “Keeping different from the Joneses” through the pursuit of individuality (Slater, 1997. p10). Thus, in this way the pursuit of identity through the acquisition and display of goods has become a powerful driver of consumerism.

As a result, consumption has become increasingly important, indeed, central to the lives of most people. Bauman even suggests that consumption has become the very purpose of existence for many people and that it underpins the way we relate to one another (2007, p28). Modern life has evolved to champion materialist lifestyles, in which people are defined by ‘having rather than being’ (Slater, 1997, p24).

This chapter explores the factors underpinning the social revolution now known as consumerism. The next section (2.2) explains how a society of producers evolved

⁵ Ulrich Beck defines individualism as the “disintegration of the certainties of the industrial society as well as the compulsion to find and invent new certainties for oneself and others without them” (Lemert & Elliott, 2006, p68)

into a society of consumers, and analyses the key definitions and concepts of consumerism from a cross-disciplinary perspective.

The next section (2.3) explores the social and cultural meaning of modern consumerism by analysing how consumption can be both constraining and liberating for the individual. This section also analyses a prominent debate within the field as to whether consumerism serves people or whether people serve consumerism and, therefore, economic development. The neo-classical economic view is that consumption is liberating because all individuals are empowered by the independent consumption choices they make. However, other social scientists disagree, arguing that consumerism is a pathology that entraps consumers in an ongoing cycle of work and consumption (Conca et. al. 2002, p1).

The final section of this chapter draws from Packard's (1960) environmentalist critique of wasteful consumerism and focuses specifically on the problem of wasteful consumption in Australia. This is a social, economic and environmental problem that challenges the consumerist status quo.

2.2 Mapping Key Concepts within Consumption Theory

Many diverse theories contribute to the cross-disciplinary study of consumerism. Table 2.1 maps the key theorists and the concepts that have shaped the understanding of modern consumerism. This table is not inclusive of every influential theorist, but rather a refined list of those that featured most prominently within the consumption theory literature reviewed for this research. The table demonstrates how consumption theory has become increasingly complex over time, from the productivist roots of industrialism, to the social critique of consumerism.

Table 2.1: Significant Theories and Developments in the Evolution of Consumption Theory

THEORIST	THEORY	CONCEPTS	INFLUENCE
Karl Marx (1887) <i>Das Kapital</i>	Capitalism was turning a society of producers into a society of consumers, creating scope for the exploitation of workers. As consumers no longer produced, the production of commodities became mysterious and consequently, fetishised.	Commodity fetishism Alienation of labour Wage-labour Use-value	Marxism has influenced the Frankfurt School and the counterculture to consumerism (culture jammers, anti-capitalism movement).
Thorstein Veblen (1899) <i>Theory of the Leisure Class</i>	Focused on how status competition between individuals motivated conspicuous consumption and display. Being wealthy enough to waste goods and time were signs of high social status.	Conspicuous consumption Conspicuous waste Conspicuous leisure	Veblen identified that acquired wealth and consumption played a key role in redefining status. His theories inspired Bourdieu but were rejected by post modern theorists who focused on the role of individuality driving consumption.
Max Weber (1905) <i>The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism</i>	Where religion had focused on rewards in the 'next life' the protestant work ethic was motivated by the instant reward of luxurious living. Those that shared aspirations of luxury were defined as a 'status group'.	The Protestant work ethic Status group Ideal types	Individuals within a consumer society work hard in the hope that it will benefit them. Modern consumers are influenced by their peers or status group with regard to the criteria they use to define benefit.
Marcel Mauss (1925) <i>The Gift</i>	Explored the symbolic value of exchanging goods and focused on the social role of 'reciprocity' of exchange as 'social glue' binding individuals, communities and history.	Symbolic value of exchange Potlach (Native American term to describe the gift)	Mauss was an influential French Anthropologist who identified the strategic and competitive thinking and economic rationale behind gift giving still prevalent in modern rituals.
John Maynard Keynes (1936)	Keynes argued that consumer demand would drive economic growth. Consumer expenditure was proportionate to income.	Consumer demand	Influenced economic development to the current day where consumer expenditure supports economic growth. Influenced Dusenberry.

THEORIST	THEORY	CONCEPTS	INFLUENCE
<p>The Frankfurt School (eg. Adorno & Horkheimer) (1944) <i>The Culture Industry: Enlightenment and Mass Deception</i></p>	<p>A group of theorists including Adorno and Horkheimer who built on Marxist theories of worker alienation within capitalist structures. They argued that capitalism within the sphere of production creates a capitalist culture of passive individuals. They were critical of populist forms of entertainment and 'lowbrow' culture which they believed were employed to 'dupe' individuals into becoming mindless consumers.</p>	<p>Lowbrow culture 'Dupes' Manipulated consumers</p>	<p>The idea that the ideology of consumerism is a form of social control is still prevalent within social theory today. The Frankfurt School's theory that consumers are dupes came under criticism from those who saw this as a grave underestimation of the consumer mind (Schor, 2005). Also criticised because their theories did not account for consumer resistance. However others argued that the countercultural resistance is the purest form of capitalism (Heath & Potter, 2005).</p>
<p>Henry Ford (1945) <i>Automobile Production</i></p>	<p>Created the assembly line for standardised mass automobile production. Ford overcame opposition and united unions and business. Pioneered innovative retail strategies, self-service, advertising, branding and packaging.</p>	<p>Fordism Business unionism Mass production Mass market</p>	<p>The Ford automobile epitomised 'freedom', the consumer dream. The Ford Factory influenced production and the promotion of products for the future. Ford was considered to be the 'genius of consumer capitalism.'</p>
<p>James Dusenberry (1949) <i>Income Saving and the Theory of Consumer Behavior</i></p>	<p>Building on Keynesian theory, Dusenberry argued that relative income rather than absolute income determined consumption. Also, that consumption was motivated by social competition and the need to 'Keep up with the Joneses'.</p>	<p>"Keeping up with the Joneses"</p>	<p>This phrase has become part of popular culture since it was coined, and competition for status has been interpreted as a driving force for consumerism throughout social theory.</p>
<p>Vance Packard (1957 & 1960) <i>The Hidden Persuaders & The Waste Makers</i></p>	<p>Packard was critical of marketers that persuaded consumers to increase their consumption to the point of excess and wastefulness, as motivated by profiteering.</p>	<p>Society of waste makers Hidden persuaders</p>	<p>Packard was ahead of his time, his concerns about the ecological impact of wasteful consumption are pertinent today, as is his critique of advertising as manipulation.</p>

THEORIST	THEORY	CONCEPTS	INFLUENCE
John Galbraith (1958) <i>The Affluent Society</i>	Galbraith, like Packard, argued that producers were responsible for creating consumer desire. He argued that the link between consumption and wellbeing was weak and that the promotion of private consumption was driven by structural pressures.	Passive consumers Manipulated consumers	Galbraith's theories were highly influential following the second World War as he took a critical view of the consumer boom and raised concern for the wellbeing of individuals during this time.
Pierre Bourdieu (1979) <i>Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste</i>	Returned to Veblen's class-based theories and rejected the Frankfurt School's contention that consumers were dupes by developing his own theories that individual taste had a significant role in motivating consumption within the boundaries of class-determined taste. He added that cultural capital was a component of status driven consumption because 'bad art is always bad art' but only those with the cultural capital will recognise it as such and distinguish their superiority through this recognition.	Habitus Native Taste Cultural Capital Cultural Reproduction	Bourdieu argued against the Frankfurt School (and others eg. Galbraith, Packard) by restoring some independence to the role of being a consumer rather than presuming them to be 'dupes'. His focus on individual taste inspired postmodern theorists including Baudrillard.
Jean Baudrillard (1970) <i>The Consumer Society- Myths and Structures</i>	Redirected the emphasis on goods, to their representation and meaning. The object consumed matters less than the way its meaning is manipulated and interpreted.	Signs & Simulation	Studied under Barthes and Bourdieu, Baudrillard contributed to postmodernism through his study of semiotics which was shared with Derrida, Foucault and others.
Mary Douglas & Baron Isherwood (1978) <i>The World of Goods</i>	Focused on the role consumption plays in the construction and reproduction of culture. They explored the value of consumption as a means of social communication. They argued that social meaning is unstable, shifting at any time. Consumption satisfies either spiritual or physical needs.	Physical needs Spiritual needs Symbolic consumption	Douglas and Isherwood produced a pioneering combination of economic and anthropological ideas in relation to the 'world of goods' and the subject of consumption.

In the nineteenth century, Marx defined consumption as including the basic acts of eating, drinking and procreation. In *Das Kapital* (1887), he expressed concern that a society of producers was becoming a society of consumers through the 'enslavement' of workers through long hours of employment. This meant that peasants and workers who had previously been self-sufficient were becoming dependent consumers. The Marxist concerns were adopted by Galbraith (1958), Packard (1960) and Adorno and Horkheimer (1944). These theorists were concerned by the way in which a capitalist approach to production promoted a culture of capitalism that enslaved and disempowered consumers, rendering them 'dupes' to the system (see Schor, 2005, p22).

Rather than assuming consumers were mindless 'dupes', Weber (1905) observed that lifestyles based on employment and consumption were effecting a change in the conceptualisation of 'rewards' that permeated processes of social control. Thus, individuals began to look for gratification today rather than awaiting the rewards reserved for the afterlife. He also noted that people were looking to each other to learn how to enjoy the 'fruits of their labour' rather than looking to the church for guidance. These early observations demonstrate how consumption was shifting from a subsistence-based pursuit to a socially significant practice (Paterson, 2006, p15).

The Industrial Revolution was central in the development of modern consumer society. The invention of ways to convert fossil fuels to energy, together with technologies for mass production effected a shift from small-scale craftsmanship to factory lead production. Henry Ford's development of the production line with uniform, product specifications were the epitome of this. However, during wartime, the production capacity of the economy had increased due to technological advancements and a consumer revolution was needed to drive economic development. This is when Henry Ford (1945) became most influential, pioneering new advertising strategies to create consumer desire and a mass market for the high volume of cars he produced. Fordism may have pioneered a new dimension to consumer capitalism, but his production line products were not tailored to the emerging emphasis on individuality that consumerism started to promote.

The modern consumer no longer wanted what the 'Joneses had' (Slater, 1997). Instead, they were interested in consuming and displaying goods that reflected their individual taste. Consumption had become the main avenue by which the individual reflected their identity, their culture and their relationships with others. However, Schor proposed that the postmodern focus on individuality as the primary motivation for consumption is incomplete. She argues that the individual also consumes in pursuit of social conformity and aspires towards social norms (2005, p16). While acknowledging the role of individuality driving consumption, she questions whether Veblen and Bourdieu's theories shifted the emphasis of modern consumerism too far to individuality without acknowledging how consumption as a status game still prevails within modern culture (Schor, 2005, p17). In this way, consumerism can be seen to be driven by a set of social and cultural factors, especially the role of social status competition and the pursuit of individuality.

2.3 The Meaning and Motivations Driving Modern Consumerism

This section analyses the meanings and motivations for individual consumption within the context of modern life. We consume for a purpose, or rather, many purposes at one time. As such, consumption is a regular activity within our everyday lives, but not the ultimate end for which we strive (Jackson, 2006, p27). Individuals consume to satisfy both basic needs and socially constructed desires. According to Gronow and Warde (2001), consumption is inextricably linked to most aspects of modern living in the form of "convention, habit, practice and individual responses to social and institutional norms".

Seven primary meanings and motivations of consumption are identified and critiqued within this section, (1) satisfying physical needs, (2) satisfying socially-constructed wants, (3) progress, (4) the pursuit of identity and status, (5) the freedom of choice, (6) the consumer lock-in and finally, (7) consumption as a leisure pursuit.

2.3.1 Satisfying basic needs

Within the consumption literature, discussions often bypass the simple fact that individuals often consume to satisfy their basic needs within a modern consumer society. Douglas and Isherwood define two kinds of needs, physical (basic or survivalist) and spiritual (social) (1979, p17). However, there is a tendency to give priority to physical needs and assign them greater credibility than the pursuit of spiritual needs and socially constructed wants within consumption literature. However, the satisfaction of socially-constructed wants, plays an increasingly significant social and cultural role once physical or basic needs are met within modern life (Douglas & Isherwood, 1979, p17).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is widely used in the consumption literature. Maslow proposed a hierarchy of needs (Figure 2.1) where spiritual needs such as the actualisation of individual identity, self-esteem and intimacy are positioned at the top of the pyramid. At the bottom there are physiological needs including food, shelter and clothing. This hierarchy indicates that once the needs at the base of the pyramid have been realised, an individual can move towards the peak, step by step. The Maslovian approach was criticised for its limited cross-cultural relevance, for over-emphasising the 'individualistic nature of needs-satisfaction' and for undermining the role of society and ecology (Jackson et.al, 2004, p8).



Figure 2.1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1998)

Drawing from his study of economics and philosophy, Max-Neef (1989) addressed the limitations of Maslow's hierarchy and identified a set of needs that are consistent across cultural and religious boundaries (Figure 2.2). This set of needs includes: subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, creation, recreation, participation, affection and identity, and freedom. He analysed them against a set of 'existential'⁶ categories: interacting, doing, and having. Max-Neef used this framework to argue that needs do not vary across time, space and cultures, but the way in which needs are satisfied, does. Thus, within modern life, where commodities and materialist means have become the dominant satisfiers, we are more likely to seek definition through what we buy, own and show, rather than by who we really are (Fletcher, 2008, p121). Max-Neef also argued that the ways a culture attempts to satisfy needs may not always be successful with "pseudo-satisfiers" providing a false sense of satisfaction (Jackson et. al, 2004, p9).

⁶ The philosophy of *existentialism* argues that individuals are solely responsible for giving their life meaning.

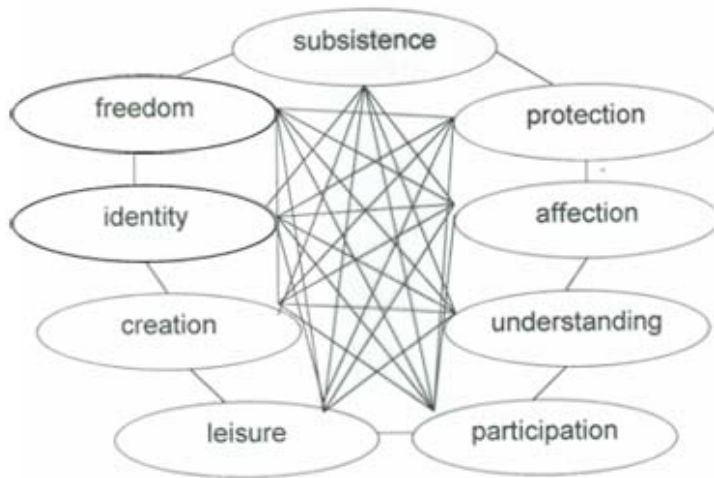


Figure 2.2. Max Neef's Axiological Needs (1989)

Thus, physical needs are only part of what constitutes the 'basic needs' for an individual within the context of modern life. Both Maslow and Max-Neef agree that self-actualising needs are of great importance to individual wellbeing. This analysis highlights that physical and spiritual needs are quite interrelated.

2.3.2 Satisfying Socially Constructed Wants

The consumer's pursuit of improved wellbeing, identity and status manifests in the creation of wants that are satisfied through consumption. However, as Max-Neef's analysis revealed, materialist answers to questions of meaning do not always satisfy as intended. Yet, the hope remains that the next purchase will fill that void and the cycle of want-creation continues. It is critical for the success of consumerism that people's wants remain insatiable (Bauman, 2007).

Competitive consumption⁷ is one of the most effective means of ensuring that the consumers wants remain insatiable because it taps into the individual's desire for higher social status through the goods he/she own and through the purchases inspired by others. Going one step further, consumption can be motivated by the complementary forces of competition and defence. Not all individuals are

⁷ Schor cited her term "competitive consumption" in an interview with Douglas Holt in 2005, for the Journal of Consumer Research.

competitive consumers who seek to up-scale their consumption relative to those around them. Some individuals are forced to partake in defensive consumption in order to maintain their social position relative to competitive consumers who are raising the stakes. According to Heath and Potter (2005), all consumers are either participating in direct competition or are consuming in defence. For example, if an individual chooses to upscale his/her own consumption to a higher level of expense and extravagance in the context of gift-giving, the other individuals within the same reference group will need to upscale defensively to match the level of generosity, so as not to appear “stingy” by comparison (Mauss, 1925).

Another way in which wants are socially constructed is through popular media that promotes the message that more is better and that you can always upgrade your lifestyle. Nowadays, the relationship between people and the media has strengthened and the amount of time spent having face to face interaction with real people has reduced as time engaging with the media has increased. Current popular media portrays upscale celebrity lifestyles as the cultural norm, raising the benchmark for people’s aspirations (Schor, 2005). The ‘aspirational gap’, or difference between what people want and what they have, increases (Schor, 1999, p46). People feel persistently dissatisfied because their consumption cannot fill this ever-increasing aspirational gap (Schor, 1999, p50). If the perception of wealth is relative, the discrepancy between what one wants and what one can afford leads to feelings of relative deprivation and the conclusion that we just need more. This reinforces the social myth that greater wealth and more “stuff” will make life better.

Advertising, the media and consumer reference groups⁸ collectively raise consumer expectations by promoting the acquisition of these goods as desirable, creating a culture of “luxury fever” (Frank, 1999). Over time, products once considered luxury items become the norm. As Schumacher explains, “What were luxuries to our fathers have become necessities for us” (Schumacher, 1973, p246). An example of second television ownership demonstrates this up-scaling of basic needs: in the United Kingdom 3% of people in the 1970s considered a second television to be a necessity, in the 2000s it increased to 75% (de Botton, 2004). As Schor (2002)

⁸ A *consumer reference group* is a term defined within consumption literature by Schor (2004) and refers a group of people who influence an individual’s purchasing decision through their social relationships.

confirms, "People today are more and more aspiring towards luxury and affluence, as opposed to an earlier era in which achieving a comfortable and decent middle-class existence was the more common goal".

Beyond these social drivers, goods themselves can also be want-producing (Heiskanen et. al, 1997, p425). By satisfying one desire, another related want is likely to manifest. For example, if one buys a new dress, it is likely that new shoes will be needed to match. Even where one may be pursuing a non-materialist commitment such as having a child, an array of commodities (eg. pram, clothing, furniture etc) are required to support this decision.

2.3.3 Progress

Consumerism is motivated by the pressure to be 'on the move' (Bauman, 2007, p98). Modern society fetishises technological⁹ and economic progress, and consumption is a means by which individuals can 'stay ahead' and be seen to be doing so. To 'lag behind' would be to risk exposure to social shaming. As Bauman asserts,

In consumer-commodity markets the need to replace 'outdated', less than completely satisfactory and/or no longer wanted consumer objects is inscribed in the design of products and publicity campaigns calculated for a steady growth of sales. A short life expectation for a product's use in practice and proclaimed utility is included in the marketing strategy and calculation of profit; it tends to be predesigned, pre scripted and instilled into consumers' practices through the apotheosis of new (today's) offers and the denigration of old (yesterday's) ones.

The consumerist pursuit is a search for continual novelty. However, new goods can only be new or novel for a short time. Once a product has made this transition from want to need, and become part of the everyday, it loses its novelty appeal to the next coveted purchase (Heiskanen et. al, 1997, p428). When new commodities are

⁹ Refer to Ulrich Beck's *Risk Society* (1992) for a critique of the modernity and the obsession with technology and progress.

adopted by the majority of consumers they become part of the social context. “On entering the life of consumers, new products are gradually institutionalized or ritualized, and they are no longer just implements, but part of our cultural and personal identity- and an inherent part of society” (Heiskanen et. al, 1997, p426). The mobile phone is one example where a novelty became a need that was normalised and ritualised within social life.

Another force of progress driving modern consumerism is fashion. Fashion is a transient force that encourages fast-paced cycles of consumption and obsolescence (Luckins, 2010). A fashion or trend will popularise a particular style of goods and after a period of time, demand its rejection and replacement by the next style. As Stone describes, the process of fashion includes three distinct phases, cumulation, decline and obsolescence (Stone, 2004, p3). In the cumulation stage, the fashion is born and adopted by fashion leaders. The fashion is in decline as the mass market adopts its style and once the fashion has passed, goods of that style become obsolete. Indeed, products are often designed so that they break down prematurely and need replacing.

McDonough and Braungart argue that “...industry designs products with built in obsolescence” so that they last until the time when consumers will be willing to replace them anyway (2002, p98). The modern market even ensures that it is cheaper to replace rather than repair a given product to accelerate the cycle of consumerism and consequently, waste¹⁰. As Bauman explains, “new needs new commodities; new commodities need new needs and desires; the advent of consumerism augurs the era of ‘inbuilt obsolescence’ of goods offered on the market and signals spectacular rise in the waste-disposal industry” (2007, p31).

These practices of modern industry reflect the view of Victor Lebow, a leading marketing consultant in the 1950s:

Our enormously productive economy... demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfactions, our ego satisfactions, in consumption...

¹⁰ In this context, the cycle of consumerism refers to the purchase, use and disposal of goods

We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced and discarded at an ever increasing rate. (Journal of Retailing, cited by Packard, 1960).

2.3.4 Identity and Status

The pursuit of individual identity plays a key role in individual consumption. Indeed, the ideologies of consumerism and individualism are closely related. Furthermore, Slater argues, “We are personally responsible for every aspect of ourselves - how we appear, our health, our manners and social conduct. And we can always do something to improve these aspects of ourselves” (1997, p91). Beyond self-improvement, consumerism also applies “the constant pressure to be someone else” (Bauman, 2007, p100). Through consumption, individuals can attain the appearance of their ‘better selves’.

The problem with consumption as the facilitator of the pursuit of individuality is that everyone is “playing the same game” and choosing from the same pool of goods. However, the dilemma is that everybody wants to be an individual, just like everybody else. Schor explains this dilemma by suggesting that while consumption is driven by the pursuit of individual identity it occurs within the parameters of social class structures and defined social norms (Schor interviewed by Holt, 2005, p17).

The irony of identity consumption is that the more time we spend consuming and ‘producing ourselves’, the less time we have to simply be ourselves. Social connections with community life are being replaced by consumerism (Elliott et al. 2006). In a consumerist society, defining and displaying individual identity is no longer derived from character but rather through the acquisition, ownership and display of goods. We are increasingly defined by ‘having’ rather than ‘being’ (Fromm, 1941). As Andrews and Pausacker confirm,

In the self-centred ‘having’ world the ascendant psychological drive is greed, for more money, more possessions, more exotic experiences, more fame, more power. Social status and personal satisfaction are gained solely through purchasing things and packaged experiences on the market. (1981, p5).

Where consumption reflects individual identity, it can also be employed to hide what is dissatisfying. As Baudrillard states, "Whatever is lacking in the subject is invested in the object" (Lane, 2000). This compensatory consumption is evidenced by the common practice of 'retail therapy' where shopping is a temporary replacement for a genuine solution to a problem. Disenchanted individuals will forget worries by consuming them away. Where an individual is not content with their lifestyle and status, they can emulate the signs of the lifestyle and status they aspire to through their consumption choices, just as Bourdieu (1979) observed the middle classes emulating the bourgeoisie through their consumption. However, 'retail therapy' and aspirational consumption only provide a fleeting comfort or a surface solution to a more significant problem. Consumerism adopts a trivial concept of identity, focusing only on style and image (Lodziak, 2002, p53). Self-identity is that part of the self that is most important and most authentic (Lodziak, 2002, p63). The pursuit of identity is so much more than consumption allows for and, therefore, the answers to questions of self-actualisation need to be sought elsewhere. The power of consumerism is that a single purchase can appear to be a more significant realisation about individual identity than it really is.

Bauman (2007) extends the connection between consumption and identity by arguing that people are promoting their individuality in a way that commoditises them. Bauman argues that consumers themselves are becoming commoditised as demonstrated through social networking sites such as Facebook (Bauman, 2007). Social networking sites ask the user to profile themselves and essentially market their personality with the view to attracting "friends" who sign up and forge an ongoing connection to their profile. This moves beyond the common understanding that there are goods to be chosen and people who choose them, to a situation where the person's profile becomes the product to be chosen.

2.3.5 Freedom to Choose

The traditional economic view is that individuals are expressing their freedom through the act of consumption. However, Marx argued that people could become “tiny cogs in a vast social and economic machine” (Giddens, 1999, p2). The critique of consumers as cogs or ‘dupes’ by Marx and later Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) underestimates the sophistication of the consumer mind. As Schor explains, this critique “failed to give the consumer sufficient credit for acting intentionally and with consequence” (2007, p17). However, the idea that consumers are entirely sovereign overstates our freedom. In a modern consumer society, the abundance of goods gives semblance of boundless choice and freedom but this is an illusion (Schwartz, 2004). In reality, consumers choose from limited options because what they choose from is chosen for them (Bauman, 2007). There is a range of choice rather than the freedom that is assumed (Lodziak, 2002, p80). Thus,

Unless the idea of choice carries with it the possibility of making a difference, of changing the course of events, of setting in motion a chain of events that may prove irreversible, it negates the freedom it claims to uphold. Freedom comes down to the freedom to choose between Brand X and Brand Y. (Lodziak, 2002, p80)

Choosing among limited options is not an expression of freedom. There is a much stronger relationship between consumption and work than consumption and freedom or, as Lodziak argues, “Consumption, rather than being an arena of freedom, constitutes a field of dependence by virtue of the alienation of labour” (2002, p75). Employment is required to generate the income that underpins consumption. This is a compromise for individual autonomy because the time and the energy required to maintain employment occupies a large portion of our waking lives.

2.3.6 The Consumer Lock-in

Consumers are locked into the cycle of employment and consumption in three ways in an advanced capitalist society. Firstly, consumption is integrated into our lives discretely in the form of institutionalised consumption. “There is a large part of

consumption, including transport, food, home-heating, and the like, that is no less culturally determined, but much more tightly bound structurally” (Sanne, 2002). Examples include mobile phone services, electricity and water. These ongoing costs are driven by the options made available to the dependent consumer.

Secondly, the comforts of modern life become addictive. Initially, choice can lead to pleasure, but after that, comfort takes over. Comfort motivates consumption and becomes addictive (Heiskanen et. al, 1997, p429). Then, “once an investment or consumption decision has been made, we become a hostage to the past”. For example, once we have the car - we make plans around it (Sanne, 2002). For individuals, the addiction to comfort can underpin the formation of consumption habits. As Bauman (2007) describes,

Consumption is a banal, indeed trivial affair. We all do it daily, on occasions in a festive manner, when throwing a party, celebrating an important even or rewarding ourselves for a particularly impressive achievement, but most of the time matter-of-factly, one would say routinely, without much advance planning or a second thought.

Consumption habits are ritualised in the context of daily life. People will shower daily without evaluating whether they require it to be clean. The ‘morning coffee’ before work can become ritualised and develop into caffeine dependency. Veblen may have identified that consumption can be strategically conspicuous, but it is also often discrete and occurs without contemplation in the form of habit.

Thirdly, the availability of consumer credit has allowed us to lock ourselves into a cycle of work and debt repayment. The theories of consumerism that relate to individuality and status lose their meaning in a context where consumption is locked in. There is no status seeking to be found by consuming the utility of provisioned services such as water and electricity, and the discrete consumption that we partake in out of habit has little to do with our identity. Locked-in or institutionalised consumption accounts for a large portion of private expenditure and is often ignored in critiques of consumerism.

2.3.7 Leisure Consumption and Entertainment

Consumption as a leisure pursuit or a form of entertainment has become popularised in modern society as it provides an opportunity for people to see others and be seen participating in the status-claiming acts of consumption. The Great Exhibition in the Crystal Palace (1851) is said to have signalled the beginning of modern retailing and the start of 'the spectacle' that excites the modern consumer (Cummings & Lewandowska, 2001). Modern shopping strips and malls are now designed to entrap and stimulate the senses consumers who are thus encouraged to spend hours upon hours consuming, and considering consuming as a leisure pursuit. "Today, people often visit town to look and be looked at, not just to buy, to enjoy looking at how commodities look, and enjoy the ambience of the shops" (Paterson, 2006, p174).

2.4 The Problem of Wasteful Consumerism in Australia

This section explores consumerism from an environmental perspective and argues that excessive or wasteful consumerism is a significant environmental problem. Packard first identified and critiqued a society of 'waste makers' in 1960 and expressed concern for both the integrity of individuals and the overconsumption of finite resources (p195). The wastefulness of the consumer society has recaptured interest within environmentalist critiques of consumerism in recent times. Wasteful consumerism has been identified as an economic, social and ecological problem (Hamilton et. al, 2005). Wasteful overconsumption is caused by increasing individual affluence, upscaled desires and the availability of affordable goods and services. Individuals are consuming goods they do not use and are becoming collectors of 'stuff'.¹¹ This 'stuff' becomes clutter that requires storage and management. With clutter management then becoming one of the motivators for consumption itself. For example, one in five Australians have built a shed or garage to store their clutter and one in eight have moved to a larger house to accommodate their 'superfluous stuff' (Frear, 2008, p1). Global awareness about

¹¹ Miller (2010) argues that "stuff" is difficult to define but in the context of this research "stuff" describes material goods en masse

the environmental problem posed by landfill may be well recognised, but as the problem of wasteful consumerism escalates, 'housefill' has become a significant environmental, social and economic concern (Luckins, 2010).

Australian consumers are now spending twice what they were fifty years ago buying goods and services (Bentley, Fien & Neil, 2005). Despite the fact that family sizes are shrinking, our houses have doubled since the 1970s to accommodate the accumulation of 'stuff' and provide occupants with the luxury of more space (Hamilton, 2002, p8). By way of explanation, psychologists have identified a pathological condition known as 'oniomania' or 'compulsive shopping'. It has been defined in the *American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* as an obsessive-compulsive disorder (cited by Hamilton et. al, 2005). Compulsive shoppers return home with "bags full of things that they could not resist which do not get opened" (Hamilton et. al, 2005 2005). After shopping sprees, compulsive shoppers experience feelings of regret, but they are unable to prevent repeat purchases (Hamilton et. al, 2005). By this diagnosis, 'oniomania' is applicable to many Australian consumers.

Schor (2005) and Hamilton (2002) proposed that wasteful consumption is increasing because the richer people become, the more they spend on goods they do not use. The Australia Institute (TAI) study into *Wasteful Consumption in Australia* (2005) identified that a shortage of time was also leading people to accumulate and waste without consideration. Australia's wasteful consumption expenditure of \$10.5 billion annually¹² highlights the magnitude of the problem of wasteful consumerism in economic terms. The social implications are less easily quantified, however, the TAI study revealed that wasteful people often feel guilty, predominantly because they have wasted money rather than resources. However, the social implications of wasteful consumerism are more far-reaching. Where people once used to suffer because of a scarcity of resources required to ensure survival (hunger due to a lack of food), overconsumption has increased to the point where individuals are more likely to be victims of lifestyle disorders, such as

¹² The TAI study revealed that Australian's are spending \$10.5 billion annually. A follow-up study in 2009 confirmed that Australians are now wasting \$5.2 billion every year on food that is not eaten and thrown away. This places a burden on the community through waste collection and disposal and the greenhouse gas emissions associated with rotting food (The Australia Institute, 2009).

obesity. For example, in Australia, 61% of adults are overweight or obese (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008).

Contrary to the myth that increased consumption and wealth improves individual wellbeing, the statistics show that consumerism and the incidence of mental disorders are both increasing and are positively correlated (Lodziak, 2002, p46). The National Opinion Research Centre of the University of Chicago found that American's are no happier now than in the 1950s despite having nearly doubled their consumption (Jackson, 2005). In fact, as identified previously, mental illness and lifestyle disorders are on the rise. In Australia, "despite several decades of sustained economic growth, our societies are no happier than they were" (Hamilton, 2002, p12).

Despite the discontent with consumerism, many still believe that there is a correlation between consumption and improved wellbeing. However, the promise of consumerism to increase our happiness is flawed because the cycle of consumerism is based on the maintenance of dissatisfaction for individuals (Lodziak, 2002, p47 & Bauman, 2007). Each consuming promise must be deceitful because "without the repetitive frustration of desires, consumer demand would quickly run dry and the consumer-targeted economy would run out of steam" (Lodziak, 2002, p47). In addition to encouraging excess and waste, consumerism is also a cycle of deception.

This myth that happiness can be attained through increased wealth and consumption was first challenged by the Global Happiness Survey in 1974. This survey revealed that despite their economic and social differences, Nigerians, Filipinos, Japanese, Israelis and West Germans all rated themselves to be in the middle of the happiness scale leading to the conclusion that "there is very little difference in the levels of reported happiness found in rich and very poor countries" (Jackson, 2005). As Hamilton confirmed "personal happiness depends on what people have compared with what they want, what they expect and what other people have" (Hamilton, 2002, p79). Thus, perceptions of happiness in a consumer society are relative and subjective.

Despite being considered an affluent society, 62% of Australians believe that they cannot afford to buy all the things that they *really* need (Hamilton, 2002).¹³ Popular media play a role through constantly reinforcing that people are poor relative to the luxurious celebrity lifestyles portrayed as the norm on television programs (Hamilton, 2002). Attempting to emulate the lifestyles of the very richest people makes those who are wealthy by historical and international standards feel poor by comparison (Hamilton, 2002). It is the relative position of the middle class as compared to the wealthiest that maintains these feelings of comparative deprivation.

Consumption-driven, materialist lifestyles require re-evaluation in light of the social, ecological and economic challenges they pose. Since the consumer revolution, the cycle of consumerism has been increasing pace and “the most radical critics of capitalism are agreed that the survival of the global population, now and in the future, will require a significant reduction in the volume of consumption in the advanced capitalist societies” (Lodziak, 2002, p150). Consumption is an individual pursuit that is creating a collective problem of wasteful consumerism. Individual consumption may appear sensible, but the collective outcome from over-consuming is catastrophe for the population and planet (Conca et. al, 2006, p57).

2.5 Conclusion

Consumption theory has evolved towards a social critique of consumerism. From when Marx (1887) believed that consumption constituted basic acts of eating, drinking and procreation, the understanding of consumerism has evolved, constituting a range of cultural, social and symbolic acts (Paterson, 2006, p15). This chapter analysed the meaning of consumption and consumerism within the context of modern life. Where consumption refers to need satisfaction, consumerism involves a process of need creation and the satisfaction of these desires. Drawing upon the key consumption theories and concepts identified in Section 2.2, it was determined that there are eight motivations driving individual consumption within modern life. Individuals consume to satisfy basic needs, but

¹³ According to TAI, 46% of these respondents were actually from the wealthiest Australian households

these basic needs include a range of activities from subsistence need-satisfaction to the realisation of self-actualising needs.

Within modern social life, cycles of want-creation are encouraged by reference groups and the media. Individuals are encouraged to believe that more goods and services may genuinely improve their wellbeing, although consumerism is often only a surface answer for deeper questions. Consumerism is also driven by society's 'progress fetishism', which in turn, reflects the consumer desire to keep 'on the move'. Individuals within a consumer society are encouraged to consider their identities to be an ongoing project managed through the consumption and display of goods. This chapter questioned whether consumers really are free, through identifying how they are constrained by institutionalised consumption, the limited choices they have and how individuals are enslaved through employment in consumer societies.

As this chapter demonstrates, consumption theory has a long, established history across economics, the social sciences (anthropology, sociology and psychology) and environmental studies. The traditional economic perception is that consumption is both an individual pursuit and a function of the economy. Social scientists position consumption to be both socially and culturally symbolic, while environmentalists critique consumerism as a threat to the natural environment. Each set of disciplines is motivated by different ideologies: traditional economists and marketers are motivated to find the best way to promote and sell goods, social scientists seek to understand modernity and the social implications of materialism, and environmentalists motivated primarily by ecological concerns (Jackson, 2006, p8).

There is theoretical strength in the diversity when these perspectives are taken together. This leads to an understanding that is sympathetic to the complexity of consumer culture and behaviour within modern life. As confirmed by Brewer and Trentmann (2006), there is "no single narrative of consumption, no single typology of the consumer and no monolithic version of consumer culture that will suffice".

Finally, this chapter analysed how consumerism can be understood as the “endlessly desirous and wasteful consumption of affluent economies” and its failure to provide a sense of fulfilment (Humphrey, 2010, pxi). As Jackson argues, the “combined social and ecological critique suggests that existing patterns of consumption already threaten our quality of life, not just because of their impact on the environment, but also because of their failure to satisfy our needs” (2003, p20). Dissatisfaction with consumerism for under-delivering on the promise of a happier life, growing ecological concern, and discontent with the work-and-spend enslavement of modern life, together motivate challenges to the consumerist status quo.

It is, however, exceptionally difficult to halt this cycle of want creation and consumption while still actively participating in modern life. It may be possible to resist advertising and boycott specific campaigns and brands, but it is much harder to escape the sum total of these public messages that become an enduring advertisement for consumerism itself. Consumerism is not just endorsed by large, profiteering corporations and marketeers, but also by our friends, family and community. To opt out would be to forego participation in entertainment, rituals and social practices that stem from a genuine need to participate in social life. A critique of consumerism needs to be sympathetic to this challenge.

3.0 Exploring Sustainable Consumption Theory and Lifestyles

3.0 Exploring Sustainable Consumption Theory and Lifestyles

3.1 Introduction

This chapter grounds the discussion of sustainable consumption in an examination of the current understanding of sustainability. It explores the origins of sustainable consumption theory in early environmentalism and how it evolved to a broader set of priorities for individuals, communities, business and government (section 3.2).

The publication of *Our Common Future*, the Brundtland Commission's report on Environment and Development (1987) and the subsequent publication of *Agenda 21* (Earth Summit, Rio de Janeiro, 1992) expanded environmentalism to a broader vision for sustainable development. It was within *Agenda 21* that the specific term 'sustainable consumption' was identified. Chapter Four of *Agenda 21* was entitled 'Changing Consumption Patterns' and argued that 'the major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment is the unsustainable patterns of production and consumption'. The responsibility for this deterioration was assigned to industrialised countries. Specifically, *Agenda 21* made a two-step call to action:

1. To promote patterns of consumption and production that reduce environmental stress and will meet the basic needs of humanity.
2. To develop a better understanding of the role of consumption and how to bring about more sustainable consumption patterns. (1992, 4.3-4.13).

This call to action generated significant enthusiasm for the subject of sustainable consumption, especially among European policy makers and NGOs. The Norwegian Government hosted a roundtable on sustainable consumption in 1994 to launch an action programme (Jackson, 2006, p3). In 2002, the *Johannesburg Summit* called for 10-year framework of programmes (called the Marrakech Process) to accelerate the shift towards sustainable production and consumption. The objectives of the Marrakech Process included assisting countries in their efforts to green their economies, to help corporations develop greener business models and to encourage consumers to adopt more sustainable lifestyles. These global programmes and publications put sustainable consumption on the policy agenda.

Since then, three dominant approaches actioning sustainable consumption have been identified by Shove (2003, p3).

1. Consumers as decision-makers: exercising environmental choice.
2. Consumers as citizens: influencing the environmental options on offer
3. Consumers as practitioners: reproducing more sustainable ways of life

1. Consumers as decision-makers: exercising environmental choice.

In this approach, “consumers are positioned as key ‘switches’ in the environmental system” (Shove, 2003, p3). In this way governments assume that consumers can and should make the right choices. As Shove confirms, “Lifestyles are believed to reflect personal preferences and commitments, whether to ‘the environment’ or to goals like those of well being, identity and status” (2003, p3). An example of a concept relating to this approach is eco-efficiency. The principle of eco-efficiency is to achieve the same outcomes and standard with fewer resources and less ecological damage. The limitation of eco-efficiency is that it is primarily a technological solution that separates means and ends in a way that will not lead to radical change across all areas of individual consumption. Without questioning consumer demand, the implications of eco-efficiency are limited (Shove, 2003, p5). As a result, this approach is likely to be part of the solution, rather than the complete solution.

2. Consumers as citizens: influencing the environmental options on offer

For this approach, choices are structured by producers but can be influenced by consumers through their collective ‘buying power’. Examples of this approach include the rise of ethical consumption and organised boycotts, bulk purchasing of solar equipment, and the use of eco-labels and other information to guide purchasing decisions. This strategy is similar to the first as it individualises responsibility and assumes individuals will understand their role to shape change through their consumption and make responsible choices accordingly. However, to be successful, this approach relies upon community engagement with governments, business and policy makers, and their willingness to make sustainable alternatives available for individuals to support.

3. Consumers as practitioners: reproducing more sustainable ways of life

This approach involves weaving sustainable consumption into everyday life (Shove, 2003, p5). This approach involves redefining “normality” and what individuals strive for with their consumption. It requires the integration of sustainable lifestyle alternatives with the appropriate infrastructure to enable the individual changes required to adopt a sustainable lifestyle.

Section 3.3 expands the third approach and defines sustainable consumption lifestyles. A scale is proposed, defining a process of sustainable consumption, from ‘consuming less’ to ‘consuming mindfully’. The following section (3.4) identifies the key concepts of sustainable consumption within the framework provided by this scale, including movements such as ‘voluntary simplicity’ and ‘ethical consumption’. It identifies and analyses key movements within anti-consumerism including ‘culture jamming’ and ‘skip-dipping’, that reinforce the notion that there is discontent with consumerism.

The following section (3.5) focuses on how individuals may adopt sustainable consumption lifestyles. It sets up the premise for exploring individual action as the Australian Government is yet to adopt a leading role. The final section (3.6) identifies some of the key challenges an individual faces in transition to a more sustainable way of life.

3.2 From Environmentalism to Sustainability

‘Environmentalism’ and ‘sustainability’ are movements that provide a theoretical framework for concerns about the relationship between people and planet. However, they also have a long history. Within the context of climate change, for example, the relationship between carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases and temperature increases has been known since the mid-nineteenth century (Manne, 2010, p8). A number of other environmental concerns, such as threats to biodiversity, pollution, resource depletion and population growth, has a longer history, and converged into the environmental movement as both a theoretical and political framework for ecological concern and action. In recent years,

environmental concerns along with economic, social, and cultural aspects are engaging a broader audience as the *sustainability movement*.

This section traces the evolution from early environmentalist theory through to sustainability theory. The purpose is not to provide an exhaustive examination of environmental issues or theories, but rather to identify the key ideas within environmentalist thinking and explain how these are carried through in an enhanced way in current sustainability thinking. These key ideas are identified within foundational environmental publications such as *Silent Spring* (Carson, 1964), *Limits to Growth* (Club of Rome, 1972), *The Population Bomb* (Ehrlich, 1972) and an Australian publication called *Seeds for Change* (White et al, 1978).

These texts were selected as representative of the early thinking in the environmental movement. Six aspects of environmentalism are identified in this literature:

1. Environmentalists were critical of how human activity is damaging Earth.
2. They identified that finite natural resources were being depleted, and believed there were limits to economic and industrial growth.
3. Population growth (in addition to economic and industrial growth) was identified as a threat to Earth's limited carrying capacity.
4. At times, environmentalists adopted extreme approaches to challenge the threats to the natural environment. This approach engaged a minority but alienated the majority.
5. A technological shift towards eco-efficiency was a solution put forward as an alternative.
6. A social shift towards collective action over individual action was promoted.

These six aspects of environmentalism are explored below:

Rachel Carson wrote in *Silent Spring* that “the most alarming of all man’s assaults upon the environment is the contamination of air, earth, rivers, and sea with dangerous and even lethal materials” (Carson, 1963, p5). Carson argued that humans were to blame for the resulting long-term environmental degradation. *Silent*

Spring is considered a seminal environmentalist text as it set a precedent for successive writings from the environmental movement. As observed by AtKisson, “The Rachel Carson formula” provided “a powerful lament upon the likely fate of nature and humanity, backed up by meticulous research – [and] set a template for almost every book, organisation, declaration, and public event that has represented the environmental movement ever since” (2000, p31). Carson (1) set a precedent for the critical environmentalist view that human activity is damaging Earth.

A decade later, the Club of Rome Report, *Limits to Growth* (1972) inspired further concern about the world’s resource depletion and environmental destruction. The contention of the book was that “if the present growth trends in the world population, industrialisation, pollution, food production and resource depletion continue unchanged, the limits to growth on this planet will be reached sometime in the next 100 years” (Meadows et. al, 1972). This text set the precedent for the anti-growth or anti-capitalist sentiments that featured in environmentalist discourse. (2) The Club of Rome identified that finite natural resources were being depleted, and that there were limits to economic and industrial growth.

Around the same time, Paul Ehrlich focused on the relationship between impending ecological disaster and the rapidly increasing population in his book, *The Population Bomb* (1972). Ehrlich feared that “people in the affluent nations are beginning to realize that the underdeveloped countries of the world face an inevitable population-food crisis because each year food production in these countries falls a bit further behind burgeoning population growth, and people go to bed a little bit hungrier” (1972, p3.). Ehrlich considered population growth to be catastrophic since the birth rate started to outpace the death rate and would create an unsustainable relationship between people and planet (Ehrlich, 1972, p9).

Ehrlich’s contribution to environmentalist discussion was that (3) population growth (in addition to economic and industrial growth) was a threat to Earth’s limited carrying capacity. In response to this catastrophe, Ehrlich posed a radical solution: to initiate a birth-rate measure for managing population growth sustainably before an inevitable death-rate solution arose in response to a food-scarcity crisis (1972, p18). (4) His birth-rate measure exemplified the extreme approaches adopted by

environmentalists to challenge the threats to the natural environment. This approach engaged a minority but alienated the majority.

Alongside this international literature, in Australia *Seeds for Change* (1978) was published Deborah White and featured chapters by Philip Sutton, Alan Pears and other experts. It provided a local perspective on the looming energy crisis and ecological challenges ahead. The authors identified that a lack of local oil resources combined with the increasing demand for energy for individual and institutional use would create 'an energy gap', the discrepancy between what we have and what we need. *Seeds for Change* detailed a two-pronged approach to overcome the energy crisis: (5) a technological shift towards energy efficiency and low impact energy sources, and (6) a social change towards reducing energy-consumption.

These concepts and principles of environmentalism are integral to sustainability. Growth is still widely considered unsustainable (although *Our Common Future* argues that the right kinds of growth are compatible with sustainability), finite natural resources are being depleted, biodiversity is threatened and the rapidly increasing population needs to reinvent the way we live to ensure a sustainable future. Despite the credibility of the early environmentalist agenda, during the 1980s, the environmental movement lacked mainstream support. There are seven reasons for this:

1. Environmental claims threatened growth and prosperity and personal freedom of action and, therefore, conflicted with the dominant economic paradigm.
2. Environmental claims of destruction and depletion were based on scientific predictions that seemed remote and contrary to what was being experienced first-hand in Australia.
3. Environmentalist extremism could be alienating.
4. Environmentalism was visible as a number of single-issue movements. engaging a minority rather than a driver for social change within mass culture
5. Environmentalist theory often favoured the environment (as the victim) over people (as the perpetrators of environmental destruction) and therefore struggled to gain the support of most people.

6. Some environmental ideals (such as self-sufficiency) were suited to a minority population and were not applicable for the majority.
7. Environmentalism had a 'hippie tree-hugging' stigma which conflicted with the dominant interest in technology and progress. (Hutton & Connors, 1999).

Environmentalism required a “makeover” to resonate with the broader audience required for wide-spread change. Where the single-issue environmental movement was struggling to gain mainstream momentum, the theoretically broader sustainability movement, has proved to be more successful. The term ‘sustainability’ was brought into popular use by Lester Brown in his book *Building a Sustainable Society*, published in 1980 (Orr, 1992, p23). *Our Common Future* (1987) defined the task of sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. This definition is still in popular use today as it reflects the three pillars of sustainability, the social, ecological and economic working in collaboration. These three pillars are interrelated, with the key characteristics of each explored below:

Social Sustainability

Within the social sphere of the sustainability movement, there is a crisis of global inequity where advanced capitalist nations consume 80% of the world’s resources despite making up only 20% of the population (UNEP). As Scott (2009) confirms, “Most industrialised countries are the source of past and current emissions and resource use. Their current consumption patterns are unsustainable because they require too many resources, cause too many emissions, and produce social impacts in developing countries that are unacceptable” (2009, p1). If developing nations such as India were to adopt the wasteful Western lifestyles, the carrying capacity of Earth would prove inadequate. With China, India and Brazil undergoing rapid economic growth and development, there is a need to reorient this development on a sustainable pathway. However, threats to their development exacerbate this crisis of global inequity, as it is unfair to stop these nations developing their economy in the same way nations such as the United States of America and Australia did before.

Environmental Sustainability

Historically, the environmental movement emerged from concerns about specific issues such as local pollution or damage to local or regional natural systems such as forests, rivers and habitat of endangered animals. Response to ozone depletion was seen by many as the first coordinated international response to a global environmental problem. This reflected both the broadening impacts of humanity, and the evolving recognition of the need for international cooperation on environment. At this time, there was early scientific concern about what was then called the greenhouse effect. Scientists were concerned that increases of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere was causing global temperatures to rise, and could have irreversible consequences (IPCC, 2008). Since this acknowledgement became the dominant scientific view, the terminology of the ecological problems has changed from the greenhouse effect, to the problem of global warming and, in the current day, the problem of climate change.

Climate change is leading to extreme weather events such as droughts and severe storms that are more frequent and less predictable than past weather patterns. It is feared that rising sea levels will cause severe flooding in many countries, indeed many Bangladeshis have already been forced from their homes by floods to become climate refugees within their own nation (COP15, 2009). The changes in climate and increasing pollution pose a threat to biodiversity, and the depletion of natural resources is leading to the destruction of the natural and constructed environment and pose a great risk to our current way of life.

Economic Sustainability

In short, economic sustainability is prosperity without environmental or ethical compromise. If economic and industrial growth is challenged by sustainability, there is widespread concern, from individuals to governments, about the economic consequences. However, inaction will be far more costly in both financial terms and through losing what is invaluable, our natural environment and the safety of many living species (Stern, 2007, Garnaut, 2009).

There have been several proposals that the relationship between the economy and society needs to change. One of the early examples was Schumacher (1973), who

conceptualised an economic system with humanist values. Lowe has contrasted the relationship between the economy, society and the environment in a model of development (Figure 3.1 below). This model demonstrates how a sustainable society requires a shift from economics as the dominant paradigm, to establish a balance between the three pillars of sustainability, society, environment and economics. Lowe's made the point that the economy cannot exist without an environment and a viable society. This point has been reinforced by studies of the drivers of collapse of past civilisations (Diamond, 2005).

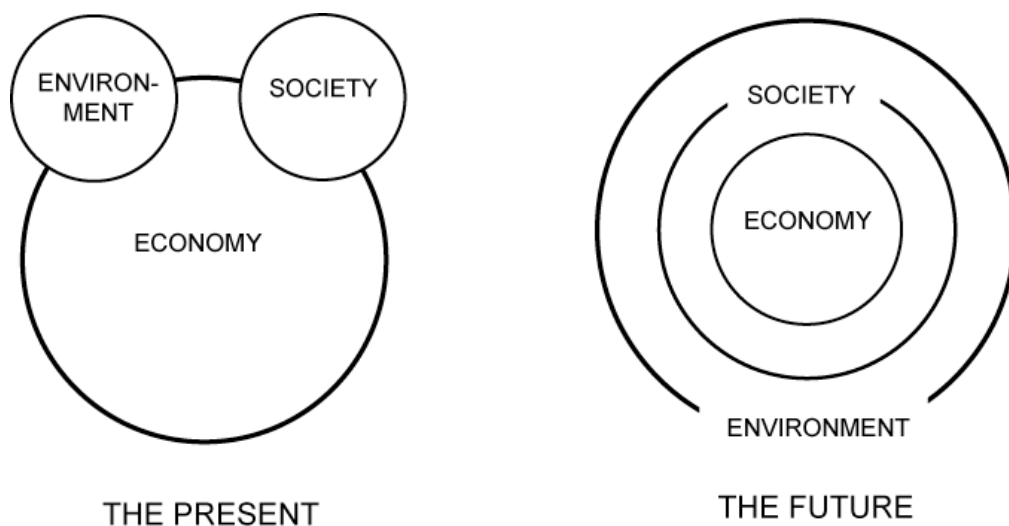


Figure 3.1 Representation of Ian Lowe's Model of Sustainable Development.

More recently, Schor has proposed the need to make economic arrangements alongside technological improvements and endeavours to reduce the negative impacts of consumerist lifestyles (2010, p2). Schor has devised a three-step process to reach what she refers to as a state of *plentitude*, a way of life that improves the wellbeing of people and planet through changing economic systems. These steps include moderating hours of work to free up time to spend on self-provisioning (producing for oneself), and taking the time to develop *true materialism*, an appreciation for what is consumed informed by an environmental awareness (Schor, 2010, p6). Schor is critical of the current approach that considers "the profound degradation now occurring in the earth's ecosystems as a

glitch in an otherwise well-functioning system” (2010, p70). Instead, Schor identified the need to,

Rethink the scale of production, how knowledge is accessed, skill diffusion, the ownership of natural assets, and mechanisms for generating employment. These questions move beyond the prescriptions of conventional economics, to a deeper reconceptualization of how to organize an economy where natural resources are valuable, jobs are scarce and equity matters. (2010, p70).

As this change takes shape, Schor acknowledges that the market economy is unlikely to provide the same high returns as the past. However, she suggests that there is a need to find a new way of measuring societies progress beyond financial gains (2010, p97).

3.3 Definitions of Sustainable Consumption

3.3.1 Introduction

Before the term ‘sustainable consumption’ was introduced into academia and policy circles, the underlying principles had been documented for many years (Bentley, Fein & Neil, 2004, p15 & Jackson, 2006, p2). Veblen (1899) expressed concern that the bourgeois leisure class thrived on conspicuous waste to signify their high status. Packard (1960) voiced his concern that industry was creating a society of waste-makers. In the sustainable consumption discourse, there are prominent concerns about environmental impacts and global inequality as a result of consumerism. This section explores the key definitions of sustainable consumption in response to these concerns.

Sustainable Consumption in a Global Context

As explained earlier, the precise term ‘sustainable consumption’ was developed within *Agenda 21* in 1992 (Jackson, 2006, p3). The fourth chapter of *Agenda 21* focused on changing consumption patterns in line with the principles of sustainability. Within this chapter, it was argued that ‘the major cause of the continued deterioration

of the global environment is the unsustainable pattern of consumption and production, particularly in industrialised countries'. *Agenda 21* proposed the need to promote consumption with a reduced environmental impact that helps people meet their needs and to develop an understanding of the role of consumption, so that more sustainable consumption patterns can be established (1992, section 4.3). A short time later, The United Nations (1995) defined sustainable consumption as bringing together:

A number of key issues, such as meeting needs, enhancing quality of life, improving resource efficiency, minimising waste, taking a lifecycle perspective and taking into account the equity dimension; integrating these component parts in the central questions of how to provide the same or better services to meet the basic requirements of life and the aspiration for improvement, for both current and future generations, while continually reducing environmental damage and risks to human health.

Thus, the consensus definition in the United Nations Environment Programme was that "sustainable consumption is not about consuming less, it is about consuming differently and consuming efficiently" (Jackson & Michaelis, 2003, p11-12).

Today, sustainable consumption is a broad term that includes the common features

- satisfying basic human needs
- prioritises quality of life over material standards of living
- minimises resource use, waste & pollution
- taking a life-cycle approach in consumer decision making
- acting with concern for future generations. (Bentley, Fien & Neil, 2005, p2)

The Limitations of the Language of Sustainable Consumption

Despite this clarity of the principles, the term 'sustainable consumption' can seem an oxymoron to some because consumption is an inherently unsustainable practice. There is also concern that the term escapes clear definition and does not resonate with an audience of individuals. "Sustainable consumption is still a technocratic term with little popular resonance and distinctly different meanings" (Hossain, 2006). As 'sustainability' is a term defined by context,

environmentalists use it to describe resource use while economists use it to describe the total spending on goods and services and these differing interpretations lead to dispute (Robins & Roberts, 2006, p40). As Flannery agrees, “Despite knowing that we need to live a sustainable life the term ”Sustainability” is a word that means almost anything to anyone” (Flannery, 2009, p2). Jackson reinforces these sentiments by claiming that “as yet no clear agreement has been reached on what sustainable consumption actually means” (Jackson, 2005, p20). By contrast, Blewitt suggests that a search for sustainability is necessarily broad and all encompassing but where it becomes too vague, direction can be lost. As Blewitt confirms, “What is needed and what the constructive ambiguity surrounding the term sustainability can offer is the possibility of integration, synthesis and synergy of a social learning process that bridges the gaps between the social and ecological, the scientific and the spiritual, the economic and the political” (2006, p2). Thus, the definition of sustainable consumption needs to be focused to resonate with an audience of individuals, but broad enough to enliven the imagination about the possibilities of consuming less and consuming differently.

Sustainable Consumption Lifestyles

Sustainable consumption has been re-defined as ‘sustainable lifestyles’ in order to relate to the everyday lives of individuals (UNEP, 2010). The difference is that, “Sustainable consumption is related to the process of purchasing products and services, consuming and disposing, while sustainable lifestyles include a broader set of activities, such as interaction, leisure activities, sports and education, including, but not limited to, material consumption” (Mont, 2007). As Scott clarifies, “Sustainable lifestyles provide a broad concept encapsulating more complex interactions about our consumer choices and behaviours” (2009, p1). At the individual level, sustainable consumption lifestyle choices may be motivated by both efficiency and *sufficiency* (Scott, 2009, p27). Therefore a sustainable lifestyle is one that is based on the principle of living *better* with less, having decided one has had “elegant sufficiency” or just enough. If individual consumption is voluntarily reduced through the pursuit of sustainable lifestyles, production may slow accordingly.

At the individual level, sustainable consumption is a decision-making process that includes the consumer’s social responsibility in addition to individual needs and

wants (Vermier & Verbeke, 2006, p170). In this way, rather than being an externalised practice, sustainable consumption can integrate lifestyle through the formation of new habits. As Spaargaren argues, “The lifestyle of each individual is constructed from a series of building blocks - corresponding to the set of social practices an individual invokes when pursuing his or her everyday life” (2003, p689). These building blocks could be new sustainable habits, alternative methods of consumption or new practices of consumption that reorient everyday life along a more sustainable pathway. “Everyday life is also the site from which we can fashion a critique of dominant, alienating and exploitative ideas and practices and start to create new or alternative ways of doing things, of thinking and acting, of producing and consuming, combining to develop the new art of living” (Blewitt, 2006, p14).

In this vein, Bedford Jones and Walker (2004) define a sustainable lifestyle as a pattern of action and consumption that meets basic needs, provides a better quality of life through using resources efficiently and minimising waste and pollution and does not jeopardise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (cited in Blewitt, 2006, p16). Sustainable consumption can be reframed to communicate the task of changing lifestyles in light of sustainability in order to capture widespread interest and support. Then action needs to be prescribed so that individuals can make these tangible changes. As Blewitt explains, “all learning really becomes meaningful when there is some resonance with the everyday life of the learner” (Blewitt, 2006, p10).

With everyday life as the site for individual change, there is a need to describe the process and guiding principles for this adaptation towards a more sustainable way of life. The scale (Figure 3.2) was developed to achieve this:



Figure 3.2. Scale of Sustainable Consumption to Guide Individual Consumption

1. Consuming Less

This can be done by evaluating and dismissing a want or by assessing the want and seeing whether different satisfiers can be used to reach the same desired outcome.

2. Consuming differently

if the goods or services are still required, the next step is to consider how they can be attained through more sustainable means (e.g. Second-hand or borrowed).

3. Consuming mindfully

if the goods or services are not available through alternative means, then the consumer can 'consume mindfully' and assess all available options and select the one that best realises the principles of sustainable consumption (e.g. Local, ethically produced, low life cycle environmental impact, etc).

Measuring Sustainable Consumption

One of the ways to measure and describe the impact of individual consumption on the planet is to quantify it in terms of an ecological footprint. Wackernagel and Rees (1996) developed this approach in their book *Our Ecological Footprint: Reducing Human Impact on the Earth*. The premise of the ecological footprint is that "Everyone takes up a certain amount of ecological 'space' in the sense of resource use and carrying capacity burden and this space is expressed as a footprint on the

earth” (Seyfang, 2005, p291). Australia's Ecological Footprint in the Living Planet Report 2008 was 7.8 global hectares (gha) per person. This is 2.8 times the average Global Footprint, and well beyond the level of what the planet can regenerate on an annual basis (EPA, 2010).

The country ‘eco-footprint’ makes for an excellent awareness-raising tool. However, the impacts of consumption include the whole supply chain (including manufacture, transport, raw material, retailing etc) (Scott, 2009, p7) and quantitative measures such as eco-footprinting (and lifecycle assessments) can not always factor in the whole picture. Also, studies often focus on the average household, and ignore the diversity of lifestyles. People lead very different lifestyles the differences within and between populations are important to understand (Scott, 2009, p7). Factors that effect the environmental impact of lifestyles include where people live, the infrastructure around them, their education, how much they earn, their age, their beliefs and principles (Scott, 2009, p7).

Another limitation of eco-footprints is that they measure what is consumed, but they do not account for the many times a consumer may choose not to make a purchase. In this way footprints measure eco-efficient consumption rather than radically reduced consumption. The focus is on what is “less bad” rather than what is “really good” in terms of reduced consumption. Thus, footprinting cannot measure qualitative improvements that accrue from individuals adapting to a sustainable lifestyle, such as how committed someone is, what their sphere of influence is and how profoundly they are changing their lives. Any quantitative, standardised measuring tool will not take into account the individuality of this lifestyle adaptation process towards sustainability. Lifestyles cannot be measured on one clear scale (Spaargaren, 2003, p689).

3.4 Sustainable Consumption: Key Concepts and Consumer Movements

According to the proposed scale of sustainable consumption (Figure 3.2), there are three primary approaches for sustainable consumption: consuming less, consuming differently and consuming mindfully. In this section (3.4), these concepts are analysed. When it comes to consuming less, concepts of post-materialism, sufficiency and efficiency refer to reduced consumption. These concepts are

referenced in social movements such as 'voluntary simplicity'. When it comes to consuming differently, a given need or want is realised through alternative consumption practices such as sharing, swapping, hiring and other product service systems. Within the concept of mindful consumption, responsible decision-making is fostered. This involves ethical consumption and anti-consumerism. These varied concepts have some shared meanings and some distinct differences, but together, they demonstrate the widespread discontent with consumerism and interest in pursuing a *better* quality of life.

3.4.1 Consuming Less

The process of consuming less refers to the reduction in consumption that followed a decision that one possesses all one needs and has reached "elegant sufficiency".

Post Materialism

Post-materialism describes a state where the dominant materialist values of consumerism have been surpassed by sustainable approach to living. In 1977, Ronald Inglehart defined post-materialism to uphold values of freedom, community and other social values. The term 'post-materialism' and post-materialist ideals are still evident in current day sustainable consumption literature. In 1989, Arne Deike Eidein Naess, the founder of the deep ecology movement, defined the need to "...tread lightly on Earth and to treat nature with care, enjoying a high quality of life while having time left over for a materially acceptable and comfortable way of living" (cited by de Geus, 2003 p178). Naess's guidelines are oriented towards creating a balanced lifestyle, with self respect and respect for nature as the clear priorities.

Eric Fromm (1979) proposed that the choice in affluent societies is simply whether "To have, or to be?". Consumers will either participate in the cycle of consumption, seeking social status through the acquisition and display of goods or they will seek to be defined by something else. In a society that awards status to 'having stuff', individuals suffer from the fleeting benefits consumption provides because the status is constantly reassigned to the next purchase. "Once the individual satisfaction derived from a consumer purchase evaporates, so does personal

happiness” (Bentley et. al, 2004, p19). Decades of dissatisfaction and an emerging environmental imperative may lead Australian’s towards post-materialism as a direct response to the deficiencies of consumer capitalism.

Sufficiency

In a fast-paced consumer society, where affluence and the abundant goods it affords are celebrated, concepts such as simplicity, frugality and choosing to have less, seem abhorrent. However, the urgent need to develop a more sustainable way of living provides an incentive for thinking otherwise. The principle of sufficiency refers to different, less demanding concepts of service (Shove, 2003, p5).

The concept of sufficiency as the answer to wasteful consumption is central to sustainable consumption lifestyles. Pausacker and Andrews (1981) authored *Living Better with Less* and described sufficiency as a ‘conservator society’. According to them, “A conservator society would be based on the ethic of stewardship, a feeling of responsibility for conserving the natural environment and all the natural resources it contains” (1981, p2). The authors adopted the slogan ‘living better with less’ to emphasise that there is a need for qualitative changes in consumption habits in the interests of improving the quality of life and reducing the consumption of non-renewable resources (1981, p7). The social benefits of ‘living better with less’ are that “model conservators” measure their lives according to the quality of their experience rather than the quantity of their consumption (Pausacker & Andrews, 1981, p7).

Removing oneself from the treadmill of consumerism, can bring many social advantages. For example, consuming less allows the individual to celebrate different ways of living (de Geus, 2003 p182). For example, by choosing to simultaneously work and consume less, an individual frees up time for reflection, planning and creativity in their lifestyle design. In this light, sufficiency refers to a *better* quality of life that is *better* for both people and the planet.

Voluntary Simplicity

The voluntary simplicity movement encourages people to assess their material needs in the light of ecological and individual wellbeing. There are two social movements within this broader movement evident within Australia, *downshifting* and *the slow movement*.

Downshifting refers to the decision to reduce work and income in order to pursue a richer quality of life. According to Hamilton, “many people in rich countries have already made a decision to reduce their work, incomes and consumption”. In Australia, 23% of thirty to sixty-year-olds have downshifted between 1998 and 2003 (Hamilton, 2003). Down-shifters are opting out of excessive consumerism, choosing to have more leisure time. This means a slower pace of life, more time with their kids and more meaningful work.

Broadly speaking, there has been a reactionary movement to start slowing things down in response to the fast pace of modern life,. Founded in the Italian town of Bra, the slow movement has captured global interest, especially in relation to ‘slow food’. As Honore explains:

Slow is not about doing everything at a snail’s pace, nor is it a Luddite attempt to drag the whole planet back into some pre-industrial utopia. On the contrary, the movement is made up of people... who want to live better in a face-paced modern world. (2004, p9)

Like the downshifting movement, the slow movement focuses on developing a higher quality of life by reducing or improving what is included within it. For example, the slow philosophy in relation to food focuses on concepts such as: diversity of produce, localising the production of food, improving the quality of produce, using the best methods of cooking to extract the flavour of the produce, sharing the meal amongst friends and family, and taking the time to savour the taste and experience of the meal. In this case, the slow philosophy is about extracting the maximum value from the experience rather than increasing its efficiency. Within the slow food philosophy, the element of localising food consumption has been amplified into becoming a movement in its own right called

'Locavorism'. Locavores try to consume food that has been transported less than 100 miles from the source to their plates.

3.4.2 Consuming Differently

There are four ways in which a need can be satisfied in line with the objectives of sustainability: goods can be shared, repaired, reused or recycled. In order to provide services that facilitate these alternative means of consumption, alternative product service systems are one answer. Types of product service systems include services added to products (e.g. repair), user-oriented services where hiring, leasing or renting intensify the use of products and result oriented services that answer demand in a new sustainable way (Scott, 2009, p30). There is a logical assumption that activating wasted consumer goods instead of buying new is a successful sustainable strategy. In Australia, a prime example is the clothes swapping movement where unwanted garments are exchanged for a 'new' wardrobe (Luckins, 2010). Other current examples include car-sharing initiatives and room exchanges. Botsman and Rogers (2010) have grouped these consumption practices under the banner term "collaborative consumption" to consolidate and promote this emerging movement of alternative consumption.

3.4.3 Consuming Mindfully

Mindful consumption is about managing consumption in a way that is socially and ecologically considered without threatening the enjoyment of life. Within the parameters of mindful consumption, the individual is encouraged to be aware of the implications of their purchasing decision and to limit consumption, but with some allowance for comfort and even luxury. Another derivative concept directed at the modern consumer society is that of 'restrained luxury'. The premise is that lifestyles need not be austere to be ecologically responsible. Thus, allowing the individual to enjoy pleasant experiences rather than be consumed by materialist hedonism (de Geus, 2003 p178). This approach encourages the individual to reduce and appreciate the goods they do buy, fostering what Schor (2010) refers to as "true materialism". In this way, individuals are integrating an environmental and social awareness into to their purchasing decisions.

Ethical consumption

Ethical consumption is the purchase of goods that are socially and environmentally responsible. Ethical consumption can be considered to be a form of consumer activism where individuals cast a vote for better choices with every dollar spent. "Shopping and consumption behaviour are increasingly seen as a public arena of activism and the expression of citizenship, and environmentalists are encouraged to put their money where their mouth is and do their bit by buying 'green' or ethical goods" (Seyfang, 2005, p290). Ethical consumption can also give rise to more organised forms of consumer activism such as boycotts, campaigns and establishment of purchasing cooperatives. It also provides the individual with a framework of issues to consider so they can make a more mindful purchase, including labour ethics, trade practices and sustainability.

Globally, ethical consumption involves the development of alternative trade agreements to overcome the inequitable relationship between the producers of developing nations and the consumers of developed nations. The global Fair Trade movement has rapidly increased its market share within Australia in recent years. Ethical consumption is a growing trend and the 2003 Ethical Purchasing Index reported that ethical product sales rose by 44% between 1999 and 2002 in the UK (Seyfang, 2005, p294)

Fair Trade certification assures the consumer that the producers of the product have been treated well and paid fairly along the supply chain to the consumer. Fair Trade is a very successful ethical consumption campaign within Australia as has been adopted by the mainstream. As Lewis reflects broadly, "While once associated with fringe values and alternative lifestyles, the notion of the ethical consumer today is on its way, to become thoroughly normalized, with marketing and corporate campaigns and popular media framing consumers as proactive agents whose shopping choices are reflective of a broader critical attitude or consciousness" (Lewis, 2008, p231).

3.4.4 Anti-Consumerism

Anti-consumerism includes a range of practices such as 'Freeganism' and 'Culture Jamming', that evidence dissent with consumerism. The 'Freegans' (or 'Skip-dippers' as they are referred to in Australia), choose to live off the waste of the

consumerist society, while the 'culture jammers' seek to interrupt consumerist propaganda with alternative messages of dissent.

Skip Dipping

Internationally, the 'Freegan' movement has developed in response to the wastefulness of society. The movement takes inspiration from the old European practice of gleaning where peasants would scavenge farmland after harvest in search of produce that had been left behind. Freegans are highly politicized and choose to live a life of anti-consumption. The most committed freegans squat in housing to avoid rental costs. They will scavenge rubbish heaps to find food and other goods, and speak out against the trappings of consumerism. After a scavenging mission, freegans will gather to cook and share the findings communally.

Rush describes the Australian skip-dipping movement of Freeganism as:

A small but growing group of well-educated urban dwellers, often in well-paying jobs, is challenging the socially-sanctioned revulsion around waste by engaging in 'skip dipping': sorting through the contents of publicly located skips for items which are still useful.

They talk about this practice as a personal and political response to the mountains of good quality items thrown out as waste each year in Australia. These conscientious objectors to consumerism represent a growing informal movement across the industrialized world (2006, p1).

The skip-dipping movement has not gained a mainstream following as it requires individuals to break with social convention with regard to hygiene. Not many people are willing to rummage through a large rubbish skip to find and then eat food in a questionable state. The contradiction of this movement is that the skip dipper could not live in this manner without wasteful consumption, which they simultaneously depend on and resent. However, one outcome of the skip-dipping movement is that the media coverage has made the public aware of the wastefulness of the consumer society in Australia. This has inspired groups such as Fare Share, who collect leftover food from restaurants and shops, and redistribute it to the poor and homeless.

Culture Jamming

Culture jamming is an established, international anti-consumerist movement that dates back to Guy Debord and the situationists of Paris. The intention of culture jamming is: "To liberate the mental environment from the powerful grip of the market-structured consciousness by reclaiming airwaves and public spaces to propagate ideas instead of plugging products" (Conca et. al, 2002). An example is *Adbusters*, a group of culture jammers who produce mock advertisements and publications that subvert major brands and their marketing slogans. *Adbusters* founder Kalle Lasn argues that corporate brainwashing and the erosion of social values perpetrated by the world of advertising is "mental pollution" (2000, p13). He believes that people will be motivated by disenchantment and ecological imperatives to rise up and reclaim this mental space that is currently dominated by advertising and fill it with humanist values.

In Australia, the television programs *The Chasers War on Everything* and *The Gruen Transfer* are prime examples of culture jamming. *The Chasers* subvert the roles of those with 'undue power' such as the government, corporations and business owners and produce entertaining skits. *The Gruen Transfer* is a panelist discussion that consults with advertising agents who reveal the intentions behind advertisements and upheave the "ugly side" of consumer culture.

The exploits of street artist "Banksy" is another example of culture jamming. Banksy claims that he is engaged in a 'war of walls' as his street stencilling often targets the corporations "who truly deface the neighbourhoods" (Banksy, 2005). Banksy's "Brandalism" reflects his belief that:

Any advertisement in a public space that gives you no choice about whether you see it or not is yours (the public's). It belongs to you. It's yours to take, rearrange and reuse. Asking for permission is like asking to keep a rock someone just threw at your head (2005).

This reclaiming of the streets and "liberation of the mental environment" engages an enthusiastic audience of participants and observers in the culture jamming movement. However, Heath and Potter (2005) argue that capitalism embraces this counterculture. For example, *Adbusters* sell a set of countercultural products including sneakers and magazines. In this way, the counterculture becomes market

competition, another consumer option, and another point of identity distinction that people can choose to buy. However, the significance of culture jamming is not in posing a genuine threat to consumer capitalism, but in the way it highlights anti-consumerist attitudes and dissent.

3.5 Changing Individual Consumption Lifestyles

The sustainable consumption movements explored in section 3.4 show how people are responding to their sustainability values and showing their discontent with consumerism. This section analyses how sustainable consumption lifestyles can be framed and pushed further, and why this should be the case.

Both governments and businesses have shown an aversion towards restrictions on consumption because they wish to preserve the “freedom” of the consumer (Sanne, 2002, p275). There are three key reasons why Australian government is slow to act in a comprehensive way. Firstly, because of political and systemic barriers; secondly, because our economic systems fetishise growth; and lastly, because consumption is widely considered to be central to our way of life (Hobson, 2003, p149). The Australian government is heavily influenced by the neo-classical economic policy approach that markets are more efficient than regulation, so they tend to equate restrictions to reduced economic efficiency. Business is unlikely to encourage reduced consumption for fear of economic disadvantage, so “people remain the only genuine force to bring about a turn in a sustainable direction” (Sanne, 2002, p287). However, based on the limited opportunities and support provided by government, this often equates to participation in eco-efficient consumption rather than more comprehensive responses.

In practice, sustainable consumption requires individuals to make sustainable choices within the context of their everyday lives. “Sustainable consumption consists of behavioural measures taken by the consumer such as turning down their heating and cycling instead of driving to work” (Scott, 2009, p4). However a question remains about whether consumers will voluntarily substitute one good with another. Within a consumerist mindset, they may want to have it all at once: the television on, the newspaper on the table and a computer open in their lap (Heiskanen & Pantzar,

1997, p423). The question remains about whether individuals will self-regulate their consumption without government leadership or structural changes to support them. Sustainable consumption is a journey towards a sustainable way of living, through the accumulation of knowledge, motivation and access to appropriate infrastructure. Thus, Scott argues, “The evidence clearly suggests that we are unlikely to reduce the impact of our lifestyles solely through increases in production efficiencies and voluntary shifts towards goods and services with lower climate change impacts” (Scott, 2009, p13). To go beyond eco-efficient consumption and enable the adoption of sustainable consumption lifestyles, there needs to be an increasingly supportive infrastructure of consumption that addresses the physical access to sustainable alternatives, informs of the benefits and socially drives change in a sustainable direction.

This lifestyle approach has been subject to debate. According to Wapner and Willoughby, “Lifestyle changes that emphasize greater efficiency, less consumption, and genuine personal sacrifice may feel good and make for good press, but they rarely help the earth” (2005, p277). They argue that this reaction is inappropriate and that there is a need to analyse the real impact of lifestyles and address their real influence (2005, p277). Thus, they “...question the injunction that the best route to less consumption is through individual action... individual action within the current world economy will not reduce overall throughput, but will simply change where the engines of consumption operate”. Wapner and Willoughby (2005) suggest that individuals will reconfigure their consumption rather than making genuine ecological improvement. These concerns need to be integrated into a broader strategy for enabling sustainable consumption alternatives.

However, without committed government action for sustainable consumption, and with the value of individual action undermined, there are limited opportunities to create real change. According to Wapner and Willoughby, there is a need to change the nature of the world economy rather than “tinker with individual practices” (2005, p277). Challenging the global economy may get results. However, it is unlikely to happen overnight. In the meantime, as Sanne (2002) suggests that, “People remain the only genuine force to bring about a turn in a sustainable direction”. Scott, Wapner and Willoughby are right to question the real scale and impact of change at the

individual level. However, there are three key reasons why it is important to promote and encourage the adoption of individual sustainable lifestyles

1. *Because in lieu of genuine government action, it is the only choice*
2. *Through individual action, a collective movement towards sustainable consumption can drive change from the bottom-up and encourage governments to undertake action on sustainable consumption.*
3. *Individual consumers will support innovative businesses offering sustainable alternatives by creating demand for more sustainable goods and services, and this will apply pressure to mainstream businesses to adapt or risk losing their market share.*

It is therefore the contention of this research that individuals should not be assigned full responsibility for adopting sustainable lifestyles through their consumption choices. However, this is the main opportunity we have to create change at the present time.

3.6 The Challenge to Individual Lifestyles

To focus on enabling the adoption of sustainable consumption lifestyles, this section identifies and analyses some of the challenges in doing this. Sustainable consumption at the individual level involves self-assessment and changing unsustainable consumption habits to align with the objectives of sustainability (Suzuki & Dressel, 2002). According to Fien, "Living sustainably also requires a conscious commitment to reflect upon the values and principles that guide our actions" (1999, p16). However, pro-sustainability beliefs do not always translate into action (Shove, 2003, p3). This is because institutional, financial and informational 'barriers' prevent people adopting more sustainable alternatives. Jackson lists the barriers as including: income, availability of time, availability of infrastructure, information, social barriers, household upbringing and decision-making (Jackson, 2006, p32). The challenges explored in this section include (1) overcoming established unsustainable habits, (2) the fact that a significant proportion of our consumption is 'locked-in' by institutions and infrastructure, (3) the lack of information or the conflicting information available about sustainable consumption alternatives, and lastly (4) how individuals can become disempowered.

1. Habit

Spending and buying are deeply rooted in Western culture. The rise of individualism ensures that people focus on individual material gratification over the shared goals of sustainability. Globalisation and free trade have only increased the reach and exposure of consumerism. Advertising and marketing pursuits seek to remind us that the opportunity to buy something and feel great is constantly present. The combination of these social forces has led to habitual consumption which goes unquestioned by the individual. Family upbringing and repetition also play a role in establishing and reinforcing individual consumption habits.

2. Institutionalised consumption

Another factor that ensures that individual consumption is constant and habitual is that a significant proportion of individual consumption is institutionalised and “service provisioned”. According to Shove (2003), consumers are trapped in cycles of unsustainable consumption. Consumers have very little control as they are locked-in to a process of unsustainable consumption and this constitutes a significant portion of the individual’s consumption footprint. Thus, Lodziak confirms, “Institutional consumption is the main site of consumption”. It accounts for a far greater proportion of the goods consumed than the sum total of what is consumed by individuals (Lodziak, 2002, p153).

3. Confusion and a lack of information

As sustainable consumption is a relatively new area of research, ideas and information are constantly coming to light. In some areas of consumption such as food, there is a significant body of information available, but claims can be contradictory and there is no clear certification that assists consumer decision-making (such as a consistent, reliable certification label for organic food in Australia). In other areas of consumption, such as clothing, there is very little information available to the consumer to assist their decision-making. As Seyfang explains the dilemma, “Ecological citizens seeking to make their preferences known in the marketplace face several information barriers, for example, a lack of information about environmental and social implications of consumer decisions, or issues of

credibility and consistency of marketing information relating to sustainable products” (2005, p295). Additionally, information overload can confound the individual consumer who can then become frustrated about their purchasing decision.

4. Disempowerment

Bentley, Fien & Neil (2005) found that young people can become ambivalent about the environmental cause amidst the challenges they face regarding sustainable consumption. One of those challenges is the feeling that others do not share their sustainability values, and that they are one individual working against mass consumer culture. As Seyfang elaborates, “Feelings of powerlessness generated by the thought that individual action will not make any difference, disenchantment with corporate green marketing and preference for products that are not available, such as efficient, clean and safe public transport system“ may all lead to feelings of disempowerment (Seyfang, 2005, p296). Without leadership from governments, support from producers and validation from their peers, individuals can lose momentum when they feel they are ‘going at it alone’ with regard to sustainable lifestyles.

It can also be the case that individuals choose to assess some aspects of their consuming life within the framework of sustainability and leave other aspects untouched. “Some people deliberately insulate specific practices or lifestyle segments from the environmental considerations they accept and apply as legitimate rules most of the time, and for other segments of their lifestyles” (Spaargaren 2003, p690). Where sustainability is a strong motivation in one area of consumption, it can be a low priority in another, signalling ambivalence. This can be a response to the challenging nature of sustainable consumption. Certain aspects of life are kept beyond its reach so that the individual need not experience guilt when justifying the prioritisation of other consuming values such as enjoyment, cost savings or fashion.

These individual challenges demonstrate that “it isn’t always simple being green or ethical, like many other things you either have to work at it, compromise or perhaps even face disappointment” (Blewitt, 2006, p46). By relating changes to everyday

life, there is a need to pursue genuine choices that will lead towards a sustainable future that are tangible and achievable for people now. Across communities, business and government, there is a need to focus on developing genuine alternatives so that sustainable consumption alternatives are within the reach of individuals. In addition, it is essential that the old environmentalist mantra of “deprivation” be overthrown by a new inspiring agenda to reinvent the way we live. As Robins and Roberts explain, “A perennial barrier to traditional efforts aimed at changing lifestyles has been a focus on giving up and losing out” (Robins & Roberts, 2006, p41). For example, in a modern consumer society, to choose not to own a car is to choose to forego a modern convenience (Lodziak, 2002, p150). If this deprivation remains the focal point, then sustainable consumption lifestyles will fail to inspire. This shift towards a more sustainable way of life needs to be communicated as an opportunity to reinvent the way we live to simultaneously improve human and environmental wellbeing. For example, car-sharing initiatives that offer a range of benefits including convenience, cost savings and reduced environmental impact, and effectively promote the appeal of this alternative to car ownership without a sense of sacrifice.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter commenced with an exploration of how early environmental concern became the sustainability movement to resonate with the majority. It defined a sustainable future as balancing the social, environmental and economic aspects rather than allowing economic concerns to dominate.

Sustainable consumption was defined by the common features such as satisfying basic human needs, prioritising quality of life over materialism, minimising resource use, waste and pollution, considering the whole lifecycle of goods and factoring this into consumer decision making and action with concern for future generations (Bentley, Fien & Neil, 2005, p2). To describe the process of sustainable consumption for individuals, a scale (Figure 3.2) was developed. At the top of the scale is ‘consuming less’, followed by ‘consuming differently’ and ‘consuming mindfully’.

The chapter then shifted from a focus on sustainable consumption theory to an analysis of the emerging sustainable consumer movements. The approaches explored in this chapter focus on raising awareness and reducing the wastefulness

of consumption while improving individual wellbeing. These approaches included: *sufficiency*, which challenges and reduces consumer desire, *mindful consumption*, which fosters responsible consumption choices and *anti-consumerism* which voices discontent with consumerism. While these approaches confirm there is widespread interest in 'living better with less', the problem is that for many people, sustainable consumption is reduced to eco-efficient or "green" consumerism (Seyfang, 2005, p294).

This chapter highlighted, that sustainable consumption is yet to be clarified in the mainstream as a journey of reinvention. It is often perceived as an inconvenience or an economic threat rather than an opportunity to preserve what we value about our current lifestyles and make further improvements to our quality of life. In short, many are yet to understand that sustainable consumption lifestyles simply constitutes 'living better with less' rather than an act of sacrifice.

This chapter proposed that "people remain the only genuine force to bring about a turn in a sustainable direction" (Sanne, 2002). On the other hand, Scott (2009), Wapner and Willoughby (2005) question the real scale and impact of change at the individual level. However, this chapter determined that there is a need to pursue individual action because the Australian Government is yet to take a leading role on sustainable consumption. Additionally, a collective movement towards sustainable consumption lifestyles may drive change from the bottom-up and encourage government to address sustainable consumption accordingly.

4.0 Understanding Young People in Australia

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4.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the depiction of *young people*¹⁴ provided by demographers, social scientists, marketers and youth culture experts and the ways in which these contrast to the way young people see themselves. The analysis of the literature available reveals that accounts of the aspirations, values and lifestyles of young people are not common in the academic literature despite the abundant literature on adolescence and youth culture as a life-stage. In addition, many articles were located in the popular media and marketing reports¹⁵ describing young people in terms of generational stereotypes. The common depiction found was that young people are a burden on society. None of these approaches appeared to do justice to, nor resonate with, the experiences of the young people involved in this study. Indeed, much evidence of the disconnection between such a portrayal and the self-perceptions was found in the literature authored by young people (Heath, 2005 & Crawford, 2006).

Before addressing this gap in understanding about young people, this chapter starts with an analysis of the three ways in which young people are commonly defined in the literature: by age, by life stage, and by generational stereotyping. The benefits and limitations of each approach are analysed. This leads to an examination of how young people define themselves in contrast to how they are perceived by others. This provides an understanding of the values, experiences and lifestyles of young people in a way that the conventional three approaches do not allow for. Further insight into the values and lifestyles of young people are provided in Section 4.3 which identifies and discusses key influences on the lives of young Australians today. The influences identified and explored include: the roles of risk, globalisation, individualism, consumerism, economic prosperity, and how changes in family structures have

¹⁴ 'Young people' in the context of this research refers to young adults, rather than 'youths' who are adolescents and those entering adulthood.

¹⁵ Over the last 3 years, the popular media has enthusiastically adopted the stereotypes of Generation Y as defined in the marketing reports (such as Salt & Sheahan)

shaped the way young people live today. The chapter also explores how young people may be willing to adopt sustainable consumption lifestyles, based on the understanding that they are environmentally aware, inheriting responsibility for initiating action for sustainability and may be motivated to act accordingly. Section 4.4 explores the potential for young people to adopt sustainable consumption lifestyles in light of these motivations.

4.2 Defining Young People

Historically, *young people* as a group have escaped clear definition. The French philosopher, Aries, defined youth as the period between childhood and old age (Bessant, 2005, p25). The descriptors of young people today remain vague and varied as they are referred to as ‘teenagers’, ‘youths’ and ‘young adults’. The life stages of adolescence and youth have been defined and discussed in a wide body of literature. However, adulthood has none of this concreteness and remains subject to interpretation. According to Crawford, “the archives for the study of adulthood still wait to be created” (2006, p25). As young people are the subject of this research, an understanding of the values and lifestyles young people adopt and lead needed to be reached. As a starting point, four approaches to describing young people by age, life stage, by generation and through young peoples’ own accounts of their values and lifestyles were analysed.

4.2.1 By Age

When defining a group by age, social research and policy-making institutions in Australia generally define young people to be between twelve and twenty-five years of age (Bentley, Fien & Neil, 2004 p 25). However, no consistent groupings are used within research or policy in Australia to gather data and report on young people (Fien & Skoien, 2000, p51). Locally and globally, governments and youth organisations have adopted wider ranging age demographic definitions to group and describe young people. A recent UNEP/ RMIT University study of young people’s sustainable consumption lifestyles in

Australia¹⁶ defined young people to be aged between 18-35 years (Anich, Luckins & Samson, 2009). The age range for young people has increased for studies about lifestyles change because those aged 18-35 years are establishing and changing their lifestyle at this stage.

These broader age groupings include young people from adolescence to early adulthood. Young people within this age group in Australia may be attending high school, undertaking their university education or in early professional life. They may be dependants living in their family home, or they may be living independently and starting families of their own. Thus, the age-group approach to defining a group of young people provides only a starting point. As Fien and Skoien confirm, “age-based data analyses vary widely within age-groupings and it is not possible to develop a coherent picture of the characteristics of young adults and their perceptions and experiences” (2000, p51).

Another limitation to defining young people by age-group is that youth or ‘being young’ is arguably a ‘state of mind’. Where one individual may have accelerated their progression towards adulthood and assumed adult responsibilities early in life, another may delay the traditional markers of adulthood. An age-grouping approach defines both to be ‘young people’, however, the first may not self-identify as a young person. Age is therefore a starting point towards a more comprehensive description of young people for this research.

4.2.2 By Life Stage

The life stage where people are considered “young” is most commonly described as their *youth* or *early adulthood*. The term *youth* developed from the concept of teenagers¹⁷, who were considered to be ‘adults in training’, experimenting, taking risks and defining their place in the world (Savage, 2007, p. 452). Over time *youths*, or *young people* have been associated with acts of

¹⁷ The teenage audience was first categorised by the launch of the publication of ‘Seventeen’ magazine in 1944 (Savage, 2007, p452).

self-centred irresponsibility. As Miles explains, “social scientists have portrayed young people as excluded, risk-taking trouble-makers motivated by nothing more than their own rebellious self-interest” (2000, p1). Indeed, young people have historically been positioned as the scapegoats for society’s ills. As Eckersley observes, “Older generations see the world in a state of moral decline and tend to blame the young for this decline” (2006, p10). In contrast to the critical view of young people as societal burdens is the assumption that young people have a right-of-passage to make mistakes, pursue romance, and discover themselves (Savage, 2007, p453).

The problem with defining *youth* as a life stage with the exclusive entitlement to experiment, deprives other life stages of this and other privileges. As Crawford explains, “Adulthood represents a fixed and unchanging state of being. No further growth or development is possible” (2006, p33). This limitation does not serve young people or older people and is not a realistic reflection of the way life is for either. Both young and older people go through periods of lifestyle experimentation and change.

The life stage approach to describing young people neglects the fact that there are societal and cultural changes that influence how young people behave, and that these vary from one era to the next. Being young in one era is different to being young in the next. Generational studies seek to overcome this limitation by presenting an argument that each generation has a range of experiences and common characteristics that can be drawn together to form a more accurate description or stereotype.

4.2.3 By Generation

Generational descriptions suggest that the experiences and characteristics of one generation of young people differs from the next. Generational stereotypes seek to define a group of people that share characteristics and experiences based on year in which they were born. Young people (aged 18-35 years) today fit within the age brackets of younger Generation X or older Generation Y. Specifically, Generation Y, are born between 1980 and 1995 and Generation

X are those born between 1965 and 1979 (McCrindle, 2006, p6). There is some overlap and the definitions of the generations by year varied across the literature (Salt, 2007 & Sheahan, 2008). This section identifies the characteristics of the generational stereotype that young people (1) have it easy, (2) are irresponsible, (3) selfish and (4) materialistic.

1. Young People 'Have it Easy'

A common assumption embraced by both popular media and some representatives from older generations is that young people 'have it easy' having been born into an advanced and affluent consumer society. This relative 'ease of living' is attributed to increased affluence experienced by young people, the technological advancements and the plethora of choice they have when it comes life opportunities.

2. Young People are Irresponsible

Despite their supposed good fortune, it is commonly claimed that young people are delaying undertaking traditional adult-markers of responsibility such as home-ownership or marriage, until later in life or forgoing them altogether (Crawford, 2006). For example, according to The Australian Bureau of Statistics, young people are living with their parents for longer, and this appears to support the assumption that they wish to delay adulthood and avoid taking responsibility (ABS, 2009). Because young people are making different life choices from their parents, they are open to being branded as irresponsible or commitment-shy, but there may be other economic and cultural forces at work.

3. Young People are Materialistic

Another common assumption about young people is that they want more and more "stuff" and they want it now. Immediate gratification is something they demand. A recent report by the Australian Centre for Retail Studies (ACRS) described Generation Y as "a notoriously fickle consumer segment", that demands the latest trends in record time (Daniels, 2007, p3). This statement exemplifies the common view that young people are spendthrifts consumers. In this regard, the ACRS Report

claimed that “Gen Y consumers are likely to spend their cash as quickly as they acquire it”.

There is also evidence to suggest that young people are becoming increasingly excessive and wasteful consumers (Hamilton et. al, 2005). The Australia Institute study into wasteful consumption revealed that young consumers spend at least \$100 per year on clothing they do not wear at all (Hamilton et al. 2005). One of the reasons young people may be wasteful consumers is because they have the means (opportunity and money) to do so. According to the ACRS Report, “Gen Y is cashed up and willing to spend given they have been earning income and live longer at home (Daniels, 2007, p3). According to Lifelounge’s Urban Market Report (2010), almost 80% of 16-30 year-olds are in full or part-time work and many choose to live at home so that what they earn is a disposable income. They spend their income on “indulgent pursuits such as clothing, travel, music and technology” (2010, p2). However, income savings are not necessarily adequate to fund young peoples expenditure. Despite the reduced costs of living at home, about 60% of young people aged 16-30 years have a credit card (2010, p4).

4. Young people are Selfish

A view commonly adopted by some members of older generations is that young people are self-centred rather than family or community orientated. The argument is that young people having grown up in an increasingly individualistic society, are prioritising their own interests over others. For example, The Sunday Times (UK) reported that Gen Y “exhibits the most extreme traits of self absorption” (Booth, 2007). This may be because individualistic pursuits such as consumption, internet-searching and social networking online rather than in-person means that young people appear to spend more time alone, focusing inwardly.

The Limitations of Generational Stereotyping

Where generational descriptions and stereotypes seek to describe the unique values, experiences and characteristics of a generation of young people, they are limited in value and do not necessarily lead to a deeper understanding of young people and the lives they lead. The limitations of generational stereotyping includes that (1) they present a one-sided view of young people,

(1) they are too narrow to accurately characterise the diversity of young people, (3) characteristics of the stereotype are exaggerated.

1. One-sided

One of the limitations of the generational descriptions and stereotypes is that they only consider one side of the argument. The negative stereotypes often reflect the views of a sceptical member of a previous generation. Young people are not clearly defined nor represented as a group. Thus, when they are subject to criticism en masse, they are vulnerable to the values imposed by the critic. As Bessant confirms, "The way that young people get treated has less to do with their biological constraints and has much more to do with the beliefs and values brought to bear on them by adults" (1998, pviii). Critiques of young people are not just about the young people themselves, they also carry the values and judgements of the critic and this can lead to a misrepresentation of young people.

2. Too Narrow

Young people represent a diverse range of backgrounds, traits and behaviours (Heath, 2005) and as such cannot be generalised by brief descriptions or stereotypes. As Bessant highlights, "Young people are not a homogenous group" (2005 p viii). Bogart thus argues, "When we place people in bins, we inevitably oversimplify when we classify them by age, we shortcut many of their most distinguishing features" (2005, p. 54). Young people today represent such a diverse array of tastes, attitudes, interests and pursuits that it is impossible to define them with any accuracy within narrow stereotypes. According to Heath "generational labels are good for shorthand and nothing else" (2005 p8).

3. Exaggerated Rather than Accurate

Another feature of generational stereotyping is that a particular characteristic can be amplified and applied to that generation alone. For example, according to Sheahan, "Generation Y are the most connected generation in history- connected to each other, the 'system', and the market" (2008, p1). However, young people are embracing the connectedness of modern technology and the Internet similar to the older and younger people that fall outside the Generation

Y age bracket. Increased connectedness is most likely attributed to technological progress rather than the indicative of the interests of Generation Y alone. Generation Y (and the successive generation Z) are likely to have encountered computers and related technologies and networks at a younger age, so they may find computer use comes more naturally, but they are not the only ones to embrace it by any means.

In this way, stereotypes exaggerate the differences between generations. Jennifer Deal, author of *Retiring the Generation Gap* (2007), concluded that the generation gulf is a myth based on her study into the working patterns, behaviour and attitudes of 3200 respondents born between 1925 and 1986. Deal (2007) found that people from across the generations had similar values and placed the most value on *family* and *respect*, and as such, are not so different after all. The generation gap is blamed for conflicts that have nothing to do with generational differences. In reality, “bad and good behaviour exist in people of all ages” (Gettler, 2007, p14).

Generation Y stereotypes often feature within marketing reports, However, rather than being rather than a genuine attempt to understand young people and the lives they lead, they are constructed to sell to advertisers and business. The descriptions of young people (or stereotypes) within marketing reports have been adopted by popular media which in turn, has played a role in shaping the public view of young people. The Gen X and Y stereotypes may be engaging to journalists and readers alike, but young people do not necessarily have access to the same public voice in order to defend their reputation. Thus, Crawford (2006) notes that recent studies have indicated that the distinctions are between generational groups are not as clear as many believe. Recruitment company Hudson, conducted a survey to detect the difference in attitudes between Generations X and Y. What they found were consistent similarities. The report concluded that while generational groupings may be engaging, entertaining and intuitively appealing, they offer little more than caricature, exaggerated and distorted to engage popular interest (Crawford, 2006, p11).

Generational stereotypes may provide a more descriptive portrayal of young people than the age or life stage approach. However, the exaggerated and overly judgemental approach often leads to generalisation and potentially, misinterpretation. Generational demography is a place to start, given the gap in the literature describing young people, however it must be subject to careful analysis. As McCrindle suggests, “We shouldn’t overplay the generational segmentation model...generation is still a useful step, but it is no longer the dominant one” (interviewed by Lee, 2007, p31).

4.2.4 How Young People See Themselves

In contrast to the narrow generational stereotypes of young people, this section analyses the ways in which young people define themselves. In recent years, several young people in Australia have written books that refute the claims of marketers, demographers and critics from the generations before them. For example, Crawford’s *Adult Themes: Rewriting the Rules of Adulthood* (2006) provides a detailed examination of young people’s lives, values and expectations through a critical analysis of common assumptions about young people. Heath’s *Please F*off, It’s Our Turn Now* (2005) rejects the dominant stereotypes and criticisms of Generation Y and argues that young people are diverse and very capable of ‘doing good’. This section draws from these texts and related studies to outline four of the key traits that these young authors believe their generation possesses. These are that: (1) they are hard-working, rather than ‘having it easy’, (2) they are constrained not commitment-shy, (3) they have a social conscience rather than being selfish, and finally, (4) they are responsible. In combination with the generational stereotypes of youth culture, an examination of these traits can provide a balanced, comprehensive and nuanced picture of young people, their values and lifestyles, and their potential.

1. Hard-working rather than ‘Having it Easy’

Much evidence counters the criticism that young people ‘have it easy’. This evidence suggests young people often work in more positions and across more roles than the generations before them. The working lives of young

people are less stable and involve longer and more irregular hours than adult workers, according to a report by the National Centre for Social Research and Economic Modelling (NATSEM, 2007). This report states that “Young people defined as Generation Y are working and studying harder than previous generations”.

Young people are more likely to be working a combination of jobs, or combining part time or casual work¹⁸ with study. This combined approach has become quite common among young people over the last decade. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 1987, 32% of young people (aged 15-24) were studying, and of these, 35% were participating in the labour force. By 2003, these figures had increased to 46% studying full time, and 50% were participating in the labour force. The 2008 Global Financial Crisis has also reduced the stability of employment for young professionals, causing a shift away from full-time work and an increase in part-time work as companies downscaled (ABS, 2009).

Modern working life has moved away from the traditional forty hour working to adapt to a culture that now operates twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week (Heath, 2005, Bessant et.al, 1998, p166). According to Bessant et al, “Young people are affected by the disappearance of full time work as the dominant model for employment” (p162). Also, the division between work time and leisure time has become less distinct for young people. The demands of young people, especially in the professions, often leads to the reduction or compromise of their leisure time.

2. Constrained not Commitment-shy

Influenced by the rise of individualism, many young people focus on maximising individual fulfilment rather than merely ‘getting by’. They also seem very willing to experiment with aspects of their lifestyle decisions, practices and their professional work. Thus, several studies reveal that young people are changing professions with much greater frequency than the generations before

¹⁸ Casual work refers to employment with flexible hours, higher pay and none of the employment benefits (such as sick leave) of part time or full time employment.

(Salt, 2007 & Sheahan, 2008). According to Heath (2005), young people change careers eight times on average before the age of thirty-two. Similarly, a RMIT study for UNEP of 200 young people (aged 18-35 years) in Australia resulted in more than 130 different job titles being identified (Anich, Luckins & Samson, 2009, p14). There was significantly less diversity when this sample was asked to categorise their parents' jobs. There are two possible explanations for this. The first is the changing nature of the job market, where roles are becoming both more casualised and specialised whereas the second reflects young people's unwillingness to be 'boxed in' and their preference for individuality to be acknowledged

Young people are also adopting a more transient approach to their living arrangements (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009). However, this may be more because of financial necessity as housing affordability has reached a crisis point in Australia, rather than a matter of young people being commitment-shy. In Australia, young people are often moving back to their family homes between rental lease periods and when they need to save money for a specific purpose (e.g. saving a deposit for a house or travel). The young people in the UNEP/RMIT study defined twenty-two living different arrangements, reflecting this cultural change towards transient lifestyles (Anich, Luckins & Samson, 2009, p2). From the perception of previous generations, "This tendency of today's younger generations to delay the onset of adulthood is reflected in several recent colloquialisms such as "kidult", "twentager" and "adulescent" (McCrindle, 2009, p1). Young people have also been branded as "Kippers" (Kids in Parents Pockets Eroding Retirement Savings) through their decision to live longer in the family home.

Attributing this shift to an unwillingness to grow-up and commit ignores the significant social and cultural trends that are necessitating changes in the way young people live (Crawford, 2006). The rising costs of living are a primary factor driven by the high costs of home ownership and the accumulation of educational debt. In Australia, the cost of housing has increased so rapidly over recent years that many young people have been priced out of the house-buying market (Crawford, 2006). In the 1970s, the average house price was

5.8 times the annual salary of the young owner; however by 2010, the average house was 9.3 times the annual salary of the young owner (ABS, 2009, p1). McCrindle attributes the delaying of housing investment to the rising costs of housing in addition to the rising expectation of young people. He explains that young people “are now demanding well-located housing that is also spacious and affordable (2009, p2). The raised expectation of young people has been influenced by their experience of living in their parents ‘luxuriously appointed’ homes (Mc Crindle, 2009, p2). The influence of increasingly luxurious lifestyles afforded by increased affluence and modern consumerism has raised the consuming expectations of young and older people alike.

McCrindle also argues that young people are struggling to save money to buy a house because their early adult lives are started in debt to higher education, credit cards and mobile phone bills (2009, p2). Where their parents’ education was free, “...today’s students faced debts of thousands of dollars under the Higher Education Training Contribution Scheme” (Trenwith, 2007, p30). Commencing their professional lives with debt means that young people must delay the significant adult achievement of buying a house out of financial constraints rather than for the sake of lifestyle convenience (Crawford, 2006).

3. Socially Conscious not Selfish

Young people have taken particular objection to the generational stereotype that portrays them as selfish. For example, in a *Sydney Morning Herald* article, Evans (2005) states:

I’m sick of my age group being labelled as the ‘Me Generation’...
Young people are frequently portrayed as soulless slaves to consumerism, self-centred zombies who care more about our iPods and our Tsubis than we do about our grandma, let alone bigger issues of politics, social justice or world poverty. (pxx).

Contrary to the ‘selfish’ stereotype, many young people are choosing to volunteer for organisations that they see merit in supporting. An Australian Democrats Youth Poll in 2004 revealed that 70% of 1200 interviewees did volunteer work. Heath confirmed that young people like himself would often

rather donate time than money to worthwhile causes as they want to be involved in an enriching experience (Heath, 2005, p29). The UNEP/RMIT study revealed that young people have a strong interest in their local community (Anich, Luckins & Samson, 2009, p4). This study found that over 90% of young people were involved in some sort of community-orientated organisation. Of the study respondents, 45% were involved with human rights organisations, 28% were affiliated with a youth, sport or cultural club and 9% were involved with an environmental organisation. Within these results, 60% of respondents were involved in more than one of the listed community orientated organisations, confirming young people's interest in, and commitment to, community engagement (p4).

4. Responsible (not Irresponsible)

As well as deferring traditional adult achievements, such as home purchases and settling in a career, young people are also defining adult responsibilities in new ways. Crawford (2006) rejects the projection that her peers are part of a new category of 'insufficient adults' who refuse to grow up. She argues that "While the claims that get attached to these generational labels may reflect certain aspects of our lives, it's always a strangely distorted reflection" (p2). Crawford believes that young people as a group are often judged alongside outdated expectations from the 1950s, rather than within a contemporary context.

Within the context of modern life, young people are needing to redefine the 'markers of adulthood' (Crawford, 2006). In an age where the future of the planet is uncertain, choosing to forego having a child may come to be considered an act of responsibility and sacrifice, rather than a marker of immaturity. At a time when property prices in Australia are considered highly unaffordable by global standards, perhaps choosing to rent using income one has is more responsible than committing to significant home-ownership debt for decades to come. Given the changing socio-economic climate of modern Australian life, it appears that the re-definition of what constitutes responsible adult behaviour and achievements is long overdue.

4.2.5 Summary

This section analysed ways in which young people are described by others in contrast to the way they see themselves. The key points explored are summarised below.

1. The age-range approach is not very descriptive, and being young is arguably a state of mind.
2. The life stage approach does not factor in the social and cultural changes in modern life and how being twenty years old now is different to being twenty years old in the 1950's.
3. Generational stereotypes are too narrow for a generation characterised by diversity and individuality. The generational stereotypes commonly adopted by popular media shape the dominant view of young people. The stereotypes of generation X and Y position young people as scapegoats for society's ills. At worst, they can be self-fulfilling.
4. Young people's self-perceptions lack objectivity and can become defensive in response to the generational critiques. However, young people's reflections on their own values, experiences and lifestyle choices have provided a much deeper understanding of young people's values and lifestyles, beyond what generational stereotypes have achieved.

This analysis highlighted the need for young people to be understood within the context of modern life, as affected by the social, cultural and economic influences they face today. The next section adds to this enriched understanding of young Australians in the current day.

4.3 Background to the Lives of Young People Today

4.3.1 Introduction

The lives of young people today are significantly different from the lives of previous generations because of social, economic and environmental changes. As Crawford (2006) has identified, there is a need to reassess the perceptions and expectations of young adults in light of modern life and the constraints and opportunities it brings. This section explores the three key influences that define the lives of young people today. These include

1. The Risk Society¹⁹: Young people are living with the unprecedented risk of climate change and environmental catastrophes that will necessitate radical lifestyle change. The risk society is further characterised by shifts towards globalisation and individualism.
2. The Affluent Consumer Society: Young people today have been born into a consumer society and are influenced by the pervading materialist values. The Australian consumer society has flourished across decades of unprecedented growth.
3. Changes in Socialisation and Family Structures: Social practices are changing through emergent technologies such as the internet as young people participate in online social networks in the place of face-to-face interaction. Relationships between young people and their families have changed because of changes to family structure, including working parents, increasing distances between homes of family members, dual income families, increased incidence of divorce and the changing role of family in modern life.

1. Risk Society

Where previous generations faced depression, disease and war, this generation of young people now face the unprecedented risk of climate change and ecological

¹⁹ The Risk Society was a term coined by Ulrich Beck to describe the modern society that is facing unprecedented risks such as climate change.

destruction. According to Beck, “The consequences of scientific and industrial development are a set of risks and hazards; the likes of which we have never previously faced” (1992, p2). Centuries of human impact have caused harm to the natural environment, and young people today and tomorrow are inheriting the consequences. The Risk Society is predicated on and defined by the emergence of these environmental hazards (Goldblatt, 1996, p155). Scientists make their predictions about the extreme weather events ahead as a result of climate change, but there is no expert on risk (Beck, 1992, p29). Young people are learning to live with the uncertainty of environmental risk and, within Australia, have already experienced increasing rates of climatic abnormalities and extreme weather events, including water shortages, extreme floods, unexpected hail storms in cities that usually experience moderate climates, the spread of dengue fever as disease-carrying mosquitos migrate further south and plagues of locusts.

Another aspect of risk society is the rise of individualism.²⁰ Beck argues that modernization²¹ has led people ‘to become more individualised’ as social structures (such as community) have eroded (p2). Beck has observed that within a modern society, the process of individuation has become a reflexive self-produced project for the individual (p135). With the opportunity and responsibility for constructing ‘the self’ on “young people shoulders”, the risk of failure is heightened (Kelly, 2009, p5). A young person’s success or failure now depends on good or bad choices rather than just their capability alone (Sande, 2010, p1). This is a daunting prospect when the choices young people have to make are increasingly influenced by institutions (such as schools and healthcare) and they are, therefore, vulnerable to institutionally-generated risks (Kelly, 2009, p5).

Young people are seeking avenues of escape In order to cope with the increased stress derived from this increased responsibility within the context of institutional risk. A market for a ‘night life’ entertainment to facilitate such escape has been established, but this also promotes drug use and alcoholism among young people as coping mechanisms for modern stress (Sande, 2010, p2). Elliott & Lemert, (2006)

²⁰ The term ‘individualism’ was coined by Alexis de Tocqueville to describe an emerging sense of social isolation in American society in the nineteenth century (Elliot & Lemert, 2006, p90).

²¹ Beck defined that modernization is a reflexive process that involves structural and social change as discussed in “Risk Society” first published in English in 1992.

argue that one of the reasons for young people choosing escapism and seeking to protect themselves by adopting an inward focus is due to “The passage from childhood through adolescence to adulthood ... [becoming] substantially longer, more complex and insecure”. Individualism results in a denial of more significant social connections, and the assumption that people should leave it to others to deal with their own problems and get on with living life on their own terms (2006, p91). In this way individualism encourages young people to focus inwardly, and give attention to individualist pursuits such as consumerism over community engagement.

While local community engagement may be challenged by the rise of individualism, the process of globalisation is opening up a wide global community for young people. Globalisation is the “compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole” (Elliott & Lemert, 2006, p88). As Giddens defines it, globalisation is “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa (1990, p64). The rise of satellite and digital technologies has enabled instant communication across the globe and acts as a conduit for culture sharing, which young people eagerly participate in. While this globalised communication exposes young people to more educational opportunities and enhances their social and cultural awareness, the internet has also been the site of enhanced risk, through cyber crimes, the spread of organised computer viruses and cyber bullying through social networks. Through the world-wide-web, young people “process more new information in an hour than a 15th century peasant did in a lifetime” (Heath, 2005). Naish (2008) identified that the saturation of information had become so intense that some people were adopting a ‘data diet’ to restrict their information intake and cope.

2. Affluent Consumer Society

Australian consumer society has flourished alongside a period of unprecedented economic prosperity. In the past “not only did Australia survive the 1997 Asian crisis, the 2000 dot-com crash and the US and Japanese downturns of the early twenty-first century, it thrived” (Davis, 2008, pxiii). Young people have lived through an age of affluence unlike the generations before them. Australia is one of the world’s richest nations as people today have

incomes three times higher than in 1950 (Hamilton, 2002, p1). The implications of growing up in an affluent society are explained by Salt,

In nations such as Australia, Gen Y has only ever known a world of gently ascendant prosperity. They have no recollection of the excesses of the late 80's or of the stock market crash of October 1987. This, together with the fact they are supported either directly or indirectly by a parental safety net, makes them fearless of the future. (Salt, p11)

As young people have not feared for financial security in the same way their parents did, many are willing to undertake significant debts to finance the lifestyles they desire. Credit card debt has increased significantly in Australia over the last two decades (ABS Australian Social Trends, 2009). In Australia, the availability of personal credit and the expectation of rising incomes help feed a "cycle of work and spend" (Schor, 1998). Young people are often shaped by what they see around them and many will pursue lifestyles that seem glamorous and presently unobtainable (Schor, 1998). The valuing of materialist lifestyles is also passed down from parents to their children. As McCrindle explains, "This generation has observed their parents get the rewards of hard work: houses, cars and material wealth" (2007, p3). Young people have benefited from being the most materially endowed, and entertained generation of teenagers and this has set a premise for the development of their materialist lifestyles accordingly. However, not all young people are interested in mirroring their parents' wealth.

Materialist values are reinforced by advertising that targets young people as consumers from a very early age. Quart observes that "Over the last decade, there has been an exponential increase in the intensity that manufacturers employ to sell their stuff to the young" (2003, pxii), while Shor argues that the social lives of children "are being reconstructed around consumption and consumerism" (2004, p11).

Expansion in the field of marketing in recent times has led advertisers to focus on selling to young people in order to increase demand for product. Marketeers "prime" an audience of children today so that they are essentially 'born to

buy' (Schor, 2004). Advertising strategies are increasingly manipulative when targeting children, who may be encouraged to nag their parents for a given product. As Schor explains, "Children have become the conduits from the consumer marketplace into the household, the link between advertisers and the family purse (2004, p11).

As young people grow up, advertising is one of the most significant influences on consumption patterns, especially for young people (Klein, 2000 & Lasn, 2000 & Quart, 2003). The frequent repetition of symbols and value statements is designed to ensure they become integral parts of mainstream culture through their consumption. By the end of high school, most teenagers will have absorbed at least 350,000 TV ads, and as they move into adulthood they will face more than 3,000 marketing messages each day (Bentley, Fien & Neil, 2005, p27). Young people are encouraged to define their identities through purchasing brand named products and brand affiliation (Klein, 2000).

The early transformation of teenagers into consumers can lead young people to believe that "the only way to participate in the world is to turn oneself into a corporate product" Quart (2003). Many young people have also been willing to "commodify" themselves via social networking sites, such as MySpace and Facebook, which require the individual user to market their personal profile in return for "friends" as a barometer for their popularity (Bauman, 2007). In its extreme form, consumerism can lead young people to believe that anything can be purchased, changed or contorted. With young people not necessarily knowing a life outside consumerism, the boundaries between humanity and commodification can become blurred.

3. Changes in Social Life and Family Structures

Young people grow up in a range of family situations and living circumstances. Growing up in dual income families has become the norm rather than being reared by stay-at-home mothers like the majority of generations before. This means that care-giving may have been outsourced to after-school care programs and willing relatives while both parents worked full time jobs. Young people today grew up in the

age of 'LeSnacks', 'Roll-ups' and 'lunch orders',²² the commodified versions of more time-consuming homemade lunch preparations. The emphasis on home time, home-made goods and family dinners was replaced by the outsourcing of services and entertainment to fulfil a family's requirements.

The prevalence of divorce also means that increasing numbers of children are being raised in single parent households or regularly moving between two households. This complicates their relationships and, in some cases, leads to increased consumption when parents will use material gratification in return for the affection of the children. Consumption can be used as a substitute for time spent together by parents seeking to placate feelings of guilt. However, research by Pocock and Clarke has found that most young people were not interested in this placation (2006, pxi). With their parents absent and working, young people are spending more time with their friends and undertaking individual pursuits (Pocock & Clarke, 2006). They are spending more time watching television, playing video games and using the internet - often up to four hours screen time a day (McCrinkle, 2008, p3). There are critics that suggest young people's affinity with computers is replacing the development of genuine social relations (Bauman, 2007). However, the diversity of social interactions, in person and via the internet, is also opening up the educational opportunities for young people. As Heath (2005) argues, young people are the most socially and culturally aware generation today.

4.3.2 Summary

The influences of risk, consumerism and changes in family structures ensures that the modern world young people live in is vastly different from the world their parents grew up experiencing. Within a society of risk, it is difficult for young people to comprehend or anticipate the ecological, economic or technological risks they may face. They are more responsible for making the right life choices and face greater risks of disappointment than their parents. Developments in the area of digital technology have also enabled young people to connect across cultures, and become

²² LeSnacks and Roll-ups are prepackaged snack foods marketed to children and Lunch-orders are lunches provided by an external service that requires pre-ordering through the school system.

more globally and socially aware. However, they may also be subject to ‘information overload’ and at risk of cyber crimes and bullying.

Having grown up in a culture of individualism, young people are encouraged to focus inwardly and engage in individualist pursuits such as consumption. Young people have grown up in an age of unprecedented prosperity but they feel relatively no wealthier than before as the costs of living have risen proportionately - and the expectations of materialism have been raised so high and are so pervasive that aspiring to lifestyles of relative luxury has become the cultural norm. Therefore, young people today are more likely to be defined by what they have rather than by the values they hold, unless they are prompted to critique the consumer society and seek an alternative way of living.

4.4 Young People and Sustainable Consumption

4.4.1 Introduction

The chapter, thus far, has analysed the perceptions of young people from various interest groups and identified the key influences that affect the aspirations and lifestyles of young people today. These influences include the risk of environmental destruction and consumerism. Given that young people are inheriting the responsibility to solve environmental problems, and that some young people are critical of consumerism and looking to live otherwise, there is potential for young people to adopt lifestyles based on sustainable consumption. This section identifies young people’s attitudes towards the environment and explores their interest in sustainable consumption lifestyles.

4.4.2 Environmental Awareness

Young Australians have grown up amidst the environmental movement and have always had the presence of environmental conservation in mind. Environmentalism created rituals within Australian primary school education with activities such as ‘yard

duty'²³ which discouraged littering and encouraged responsibility to be taken by students for the conservation of the environment, starting within their schoolyard. For young Australians who were children in the 1980's, the hole in the Ozone layer and the consequent banning of the Chlorofluorocarbons (CFC's) responsible and the campaigns to use sunscreen and shading was an early introduction to the environmental problems that humanity has come to face. Growing up with the presence of climate change has meant that many young people are aware that they need to take some kind of responsibility for reducing their ecological footprint.

According to Denniss (2005), a number of studies that support the claims that young people are concerned about the state of the natural environment. A Roy Morgan Research survey of 56,344 respondents across Australia revealed that those aged 25 - 34 years are the most likely to support immediate action on environmental problems (cited by Denniss, 2005 p3). The results of a survey of the environmental knowledge, values and attitudes of 2,238 NSW school students, demonstrate that the environment is of major concern to young people. In this survey, approximately 90% of survey respondents ranked their environmental concern as high or very high. The UNEP/RMIT study demonstrated that respondents clearly prioritised environmental degradation over other global challenges as 42% stated that this was the most important global challenge (Anich, Luckins & Samson, 2009, p5). This study also found that a high proportion of young people are studying within the environmental field or pursuing a related career (Anich, Luckins & Samson, 2009, p5). The majority of young people are concerned for the conservation of the environment and many are willing to commit their professional work to this cause.

4.4.3 Young People and Sustainable Consumption

Despite the high level awareness that young people have about environmental problems, early research revealed that they are not necessarily making the connection between their consumption and a sustainable future. A UNESCO survey of 10,000 eighteen to twenty-five year olds demonstrated that while young people understand the impacts of the use and disposal of products on

²³ "Yard Duty" is a ritual where a group of students will be responsible for picking up any rubbish created by the students during the lunch break.

the environment, they do not necessarily understand the implications of their shopping behaviours (UNESCO, 2000, p2). A year after this study, another was conducted by advertising agency McCann-Eriksson in co-operation with UNEP. This second study uncovered “a big ignorance among youth and that alternatives to irresponsible consumption are not well-understood” (UNEP, 2001). Qualities such as the price, name of the brand, quality and peer pressure all scored higher than “sustainability” when ranked by the majority of young people surveyed (UNEP, 2001).

Contrary to these findings, a recent Australian study conducted by the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme (NYARS) revealed that young people “overwhelmingly agreed that in general their peers buy too much stuff” (Bentley, Fien & Neil, 2005, p6). It was a small minority of young people surveyed that believed that youth consumption patterns were not a major problem at the time (p113). However, while young people are critical of aspects of consumer culture, they are not always critical of consumption as a way of life (p6). Consumerism is an issue that many young people critique, mock and try to resist, but end up participating in nonetheless (p3). This may be because young people are caught between what they know to be environmentally responsible behaviour and the pull of consumerism. Many young people also feel their consumption is locked-in. As the NYARS study (2005) revealed, “44 percent of young people said that they have either only a little or no influence at all over their consumption decisions”.

Young people may also be ambivalent about addressing their consumption habits because other competing values, such as price, peer acceptance and availability govern their purchasing decisions. Young people may also be waiting for government leadership or the development of more tangible strategies for sustainable consumption rather than addressing their individual lifestyles. According to Hobson, “sustainable consumption has failed to become a political or public issue in Australia” and this may have caused widespread, individual ambivalence (Hobson, 2003, p149).

More recent studies suggest that young people's views on consumerism and sustainability are changing. They are "transforming the politics of consumption for their own ends, and in turn, are quite capable of establishing a critical stance on what consumer culture has to offer" (Miles, 2000, p117). There has been a rise of sustainability-inspired movements in Australia such as *skip-dipping* and *culture jamming* that have engaged an audience of young people. Cameron Neil, the Australian co-founder of International Young People's Foundation (IYPF) confirmed this emerging interest: "Young people increasingly understand the interconnectedness of our world and that what they buy, how they travel, and the energy and water they use, often has a negative impact on others and the planet" (reported in Ryan & Donahoo et. al, 2005, p126). Neil (2005) argues that young people who desire a more sustainable way of living have realised that adults are not going to create this path for them and, thus, they must do it themselves. According to Neil, recent studies have shown that "Many young Australians are clearly unhappy and unfulfilled by consumer society" and they are seeking out other, often sustainable alternatives - a kind of spirituality, authenticity and richness that they feel is currently missing.

The UNEP/RMIT study found that young people in Australia are a diverse group with many ideas about sustainable living, especially in relation to areas food consumption and mobility (Anich, Luckins & Samson, 2009, p8). This is because there is a high level of awareness about what can be done to make ethical and ecologically responsible decisions in these areas, and because there is an opportunity for young people to perform these desirable actions. The UNEP/RMIT study also determined that young people are willing to play a role in making change in a more sustainable direction, but many would like government to take a leading role (p8).

Both internationally and nationally, there have been a series of campaigns and initiatives seeking to engage young people in sustainable consumption action. To specifically engage young people, UNEP and UNESCO initiated a programme called *YouthXchange* that focuses on educating and encouraging young people to practice sustainable consumption. Inspired by the

YouthXchange programme, an Australian initiative called *otherWISE* was initiated in 2005 with a focus on educating and supporting young people to lead the adoption of sustainable consumption in their communities. Young people undertaking this program initiated awareness raising campaigns for sustainable consumption, through the production of a guide book, sustainable events, and clothes swapping initiatives.

In summary, there are three reasons why some young people are choosing to live *better* with less.

1. They are inheriting the environmental problems and the responsibility for solving them.
2. Some young people are critical of consumerism and are seeking to live otherwise (Bentley, Fien & Neil, 2005).
3. Young people have demonstrated that they can and will make significant lifestyle changes if motivated to do so, such as changing profession or living arrangements (Anich, Luckins & Samson, 2009).

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter revealed that there is significant contrast between the perceptions of young people as defined by generational stereotyping conducted by marketers and demographers and the perceptions young people have of themselves. This chapter demonstrated that young people are diverse and cannot be generalised, and that there is less distinction between the behaviour of generations in today's context than the stereotypes indicate. Generational stereotypes are reinforced for marketing purposes, rather than providing deep insights into the lives of young people.

Young people as a group, have long been seen as a 'burden on society' and in the current day, through the prevalence of negative stereotypes, they become the scapegoats for all that is wrong with modern life as far as previous generations are concerned. These stereotypes have become the dominant view of young people within popular media. The danger of this is that stereotypes can become self-fulfilling. According to Bessant, "the way that

young people get treated has less to do with their biological constraints and has more to do with beliefs and values brought to bear on them by adults” (Bessant, Secombe & Watts, 1998, p. VII). Young people are subject to a critical view by the generations before them in the form of generational stereotypes that do not take into account the changing economic, social and cultural changes to the society in which young people (and indeed, older age groups) now operate (Crawford, p5, 2006).

When seeking to understand and describe young people with accuracy, it is valuable to acknowledge that the stereotypes of Generations X and Y in popular media and marketing reports are inadequate and overly generalised. That is, they seek to consolidate a range of young people who have wide-ranging attitudes, behaviours and lifestyles within an insufficiently narrow view. It is misleading to assert that a whole generation of young people will assume the same or even similar behaviours and characteristics. Younger people are as diverse as older people. Stereotyping is not constructive. Diversity is part of the definition, but is just the beginning of a description of young people.

In order to fill the gap in the understanding of young people, further research into the key influences that affect young people’s values and lifestyles today identified that young people are affected by the societal factors of risk, including environmental threats, individualism and globalisation. They have been born into a consumerist society and are encouraged through advertising, parental precedents and peers to aspire towards materialist lifestyles of luxury. Given they have lived through a period of unprecedented economic prosperity and relative affluence, they are more likely to take financial risk in the form of mortgage debt and lifestyle expenditure.

However, some young people are becoming critical of consumerism, although they are not necessarily sure how to escape its reach. Over the last decade, a growing awareness has been fostered by global and local research initiatives and campaigns to encourage young people to adopt sustainable consumption lifestyles. Given they are inheriting the environmental problems and the challenge of creating a sustainable future from the generations before them,

young people may be the most motivated to reorient consumerist lifestyles in a more sustainable direction. Given their lifestyle decisions are more transient and flexible, young people may be the first ones willing to change their wasteful consuming behaviours and reinvent the ways they live and consume, inspired by the objectives of sustainability.

5.0 Research Design

5.0 The Research Design

5.1 Introduction

The study was designed to explore how young Australians are living *better* with less through their biographical narratives. As Chapter 4 identified, there is a gap where young people's values and lifestyles are concerned. There was therefore a need to interview young people about what they think and how they really live. As Chapter 3 identified, there is an urgent need to reorient lifestyles based on wasteful consumerism in a sustainable direction. Chapter 4 suggested that young people may be the most likely to lead this change as they are concerned for the environment, and have the flexibility to make lifestyle significant changes.

This chapter outlines the research design of this study, which includes the interpretive methodology, biographical method and in-depth interviewing techniques. Firstly, the methodology of interpretive research endeavours to understand the subjective world of human experience, so it is the overarching methodology chosen for this research. Secondly, biographical research "seeks to understand the changing experiences and outlooks of individuals in their daily lives, what they see as important, and how to provide interpretations of the accounts they give of their past, present and future" (Roberts, 2002). In order to collect the narratives, individual face-to-face interviews were undertaken between the researcher and participants. To guide the in-depth interviews, an interview schedule was developed to ensure that the conversation between the researcher and participant realised the research objectives for this study.

The research objectives were, firstly, to identify what motivates young people to adopt sustainable lifestyles, secondly, to explore how they are living sustainably and identify any challenges they face when trying to do so and, thirdly, to identify their spheres of influence for sustainable living within their family, peers and broader networks. The sample of people interviewed was not intended to be representative of all young people. Rather, it focused on young people who have demonstrated a commitment and some success in building more sustainable lifestyles.

5.2 The Research Methodology

The study employs interpretive research methodology to explore how young Australian's are living *better* with less. The purpose of interpretive research is to understand the subjective world of human experience. To achieve this, the interpretive approach searches for meaning, understanding, and social interaction as the basis for knowledge (Lincoln, 1990). Interpretivist researchers consider human behaviour to be too diverse and complex to be captured through quantitative measurement, generalisation and prediction (Robottom & Hart, 1993). Rather than seeking to test a hypothesis or make generalisations, the outcome of interpretive research is a set of ideas, themes or principles.

This study sought to determine a set of ideas about why some young people are motivated to pursue sustainable lifestyles initially and long term. The study also sought to identify how they are making changes to this end. The objective was to determine a set of guiding principles and practices for sustainable living as represented by the participants' narratives. There was also a need to identify some of the common challenges the young people faced when trying to adopt a given sustainable consumption practice. It was anticipated that there would be a set of internal challenges as well as external challenges on the basis of the literature review (Chapter 4). Additionally, this research sought to identify the ways in which young people influence their peers, family and broader networks and explore the possibility of magnifying this influence to increase the adoption of sustainable consumption lifestyles.

This, the interpretive approach that was used also sought to provide opportunities for participants to reflect on their lives and, where motivated, to make further lifestyle decisions. Accordingly, the young people interviewed were not considered *subjects*, but rather *participants*, who were central to the direction and changing nature of the research journey. The task of the interpretivist researcher is "to capture what people say and do as a product of how they interpret the complexity of the world, to understand events from the viewpoints of the participants" (Burns, 2000, p11). Within interpretive research, the data and the interpretation of the data are both considered subjective. The values of the researcher and participants also help shape

the research process and findings and as such, the findings are illuminating rather than deterministic. The purpose of interpretive research is to understand and interpret daily occurrences and social structures (how life is really lived), along with the meanings people give to them. In doing so, the meaning is in the interpretation, thus the researcher is considered to be one of the research instruments. Given that the researcher is embedded in the research methodology, strict measures taken to ensure the truth and validity of the study and that contamination was minimised (section 5.6).

5.3 The Research Method

5.3.1 Introduction

A biographical research method based upon in-depth interviews with fourteen participants was used in this study. Biographical research “seeks to understand the changing experiences and outlooks of individuals in their daily lives, what they see as important, and how to provide interpretations of the accounts they give of their past, present and future” (Roberts, 2002).

Biographical research methods have become of increasing interest within social research in the last 15 years. This is, in part, due to the perceived inadequacies of quantitative research and the increasing interest in lived experiences and how they are revealed and depicted (Roberts, 2002, p1). The biographical method involves researching ‘lived experience’ through the analysis of interview data, individual narratives and life stories. Thus, Roberts states:

The appeal of biographical research is that it is exploring in diverse methodological and interpretive ways, how individual accounts of life experience can be understood within the contemporary cultural and structural settings and is thereby helping to chart the major societal changes that are underway, but not merely at some broad social level. Biographical research has the important merit of aiding the task of understanding major social shifts, by including how new experiences are interpreted by individuals within families, small groups and institutions. (Roberts, 2002, p5).

Narrative analysis is appropriate for studies of social movements such as a shift towards sustainable living (Reissman, 2001, p4). Analysis of individual narratives can shed light on the “individual and collective action and meanings, as well as the social processes by which social life and human relationships are made and changed” (Laslett 1999,p392). The literature review identified what is proposed in the arena of sustainable consumption theory and policy, the narratives will uncover whether this theory has inspired action at the individual level, and how so.

5.3.2 How it Works

Through conducting an in-depth interview²⁴, a sociological autobiography can be drawn from an individual’s account of their life experiences as described in their own words (Minichiello, 2008, p125). The sociological autobiography is an avenue for the researcher to understand the ways in which a particular individual ‘creates, makes sense of and interprets’ his or her life (p125). As this research is concerned with young people and their views and approach to sustainable consumption lifestyles, the interviews are seeking to uncover a *topical life history* from the participants. A topical life history asks participants to describe their life experience through a lens of their sustainability values.

5.3.3 The Role of the Researcher and Participants

The biographical research method brings forth a question about how collaborative the relationship between researcher and participant is when constructing a biographical narrative. The general premise is that the participant tells the story and the researcher constructs the narrative from the interview data (Redwood, p674). “It is a collaborative practice, and assumes tellers and listeners interact in particular cultural milieux, in historical contexts essential to interpretation” according to Reissman (2002, p4). There is also scope for the researcher to bring their subjective view to the narrative as an influence. As Roberts states, “In the collection of stories (via interviews), interaction is not only helping individuals to reflect and give form and structure to their lives but also helping researchers begin to draw on their own

²⁴ An *In-depth interview* is a conversation with a specific purpose between researcher and participant that focuses on the participant’s perception of self, life and experience, as expressed in his or her own words (Miniciello, 1995, p60). This will be explored in greater depth in Section 5.4.

experiences” (Roberts, 2002, p13). By encouraging this subjective story-telling, the narrator accesses an array of anecdotal information that can shed light on the participants’ real life experiences. In this way, the researcher “gains entrance to the perspective of the speaker and the audience, tracing the transfer of information and experience in a way that deepens our own understandings of what language and social life are all about” (Labov, 1997).

5.4 The Research Instruments & Techniques

5.4.1 Introduction

This section identifies and analyses research instruments and techniques that were used to inform this research into how young Australians are living *better* with less. Specifically, this Section focuses on the in-depth-interviewing instruments and techniques used in this study to gain insights into the values and lives of young people. It defines in-depth interviewing, and explores the interviewing technique and its advantages within the context of this study. Then the interview techniques such as questioning, listening and building rapport are discussed in terms of how they informed the development of the Interview Schedule.

5.4.2 In-depth Interviewing

An interview is “a face-to-face verbal exchange in which one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information or expressions of opinion or belief from another person or persons” (Maccoby & Maccoby, 1954, cited by Miniciello, 1995). The narratives that developed in this study drew upon in-depth-interviews. As defined by Miniciello, an in-depth interview is “...a conversation with a specific purpose - a conversation between researcher and informant focusing on the informant’s perception of self, life and experience, and expressed in his or her own words” (1995, p60).

Green and Thorogood defined an in-depth-interview as “A conversation that is directed more or less towards the researcher’s needs for data and can be seen as a specific kind of interaction, in which the researcher and the interviewee produce language data about beliefs, behaviour, ways of classifying the world, or about how knowledge is categorised” (2004, p87). For this study, the in-depth-interview was designed to uncover the young people’s motivations for adopting sustainable

consumption lifestyles, the concepts and practices that they have adopted, the challenges they face when trying to live sustainably and lastly, their sphere of influence in relation to their lifestyle choices. The in-depth-interviewing technique is suited to the task of extracting the participants' definitions and interpretations of sustainable consumption as a set of principles, practices and overarching approaches to lifestyle. According to Minichiello:

Qualitative methods, such as in-depth-interviewing and participant observation are said to allow the researcher to gain access to the motives, meanings, actions and reactions of people in the context of their daily lives. It is the means by which the researcher can gain access to and subsequently understand, the private interpretation of social reality that individuals hold (1995, p60).

The in-depth-interviews are conducted as conversations with the researcher and participant face to face. As the participant's account is the one being sought, this is highly valued by the researcher. In the context of this study, the participant is a partner, not a subject. They contribute to this research and are valued as such. The participants relay their perspective in the language most natural to them and the researcher seeks to understand their perspective through their language with minimal distortion (Minichiello, 2008, p63). The task of the researcher is to listen intently to hear the meaning of what is being said, which may involve the interpretation of the symbols and metaphors that participants use to express themselves. The participants are also active in reframing the question from their own perspective (Mishler, 1991, p64). The researcher and participant are, therefore, participating in a 'joint construction of meaning' (Mishler, 1991, p64). The researcher and participant are also subject to each other's influence as the in-depth interview can alter lifestyle perspectives of both interviewer and participant.

The success of the in-depth-interview is largely dependent on the researcher's ability to build the rapport and trust of the participant. Trust and rapport can be successfully established through openness and politeness. Both the participant and researcher must share an understanding of the purpose of the interview and the credibility of the researcher. Establishing good rapport will mean the informant opens up and is willing to give accurate and in-depth information. If the researcher demonstrates their

understanding of the participant's worldview and communicates this understanding back to them, then rapport is established effectively (Minichiello, 2008, p83). When rapport is established, the researcher can empathise effectively and build their relationship with the participant, but this needs to be balanced with their objectivity.

To ensure that the in-depth-interview captures the data required to realise the three research objectives, the questioning and listening techniques must be suitable. A good in-depth-interview will include two types of questioning, the *theoretical* questions that relate to concepts and the *substantive* questions that focus on particular problems or issues that have been identified (Minichiello, 1995, p84). In the context of the in-depth-interview for this study, questions that encourage narrative answers will be asked in order to gain the short stories that will form the narrative analysis (Minichiello, 1995, p84). As Askham (1982) observed, asking the participant to tell a story encourages a monologue and puts the researcher in the role of active listener. The limitation of story-telling is that details can be omitted, embellished or invented for the sake of a good story (Minichiello, 2008, p96).

Substantive questions allow the researcher to *probe* and seek specific answers or greater detail relating to the conversation at hand. Probing can be done in ways other than direct questioning, by showing confusion, challenging or through showing understanding and allowing time for elaboration (Minichiello, 2008, p103). Another technique used to focus an interview on a particular research objective is *funnelling*, where the researcher starts from a broader inquiry and funnels down to a more specific detail (Minichiello, 1995, p84). The researcher may also need to use *transitions* in addition to probes to bring the participant back from a tangent through elaborating on a particular point (Minichiello, 1995, p81).

In the context of the in-depth-interview, listening techniques are of equal importance to the questioning. According to Marshall and Rossman (1999) the researcher should have "superb listening skills and be skilful at personal interaction, question framing, and gentle probing for elaboration". The researcher needs to keep an ear out for incomplete replies, or gaps. Listening is both an art and a strategy which requires the researcher to answer, comment and attend to the conversation sensitively. "The researcher needs to fully participate in the initiation, maintenance and closing of the

in-depth interview but at the same time to sustain a critical inner dialogue” (Minichiello, 2008, p84). In this way, listening is both support and recognition. The researcher needs to be patient, understanding and responsive rather than judgemental or disapproving.

5.4.3 Research Instruments

This section explores the role and development of the research instruments for the in-depth-interview and biographical narrative analysis. The research instruments for this study include the interview schedule that guides the face-to-face in-depth-interview and the follow up questionnaire completed by email one year later. According to Miniciello (2008), in-depth-interviews are either semi-structured or unstructured. This data collection was based on a semi-structured interview as guided by an interview schedule (included on the following page). A semi-structured interview uses the broad topic to guide the interview and in the case of this research, the topic is young people and sustainable consumption lifestyles. The content of the in-depth-interview is guided by the literature review and the research objectives, which are firstly (1) to identify what motivates young people to adopt sustainable lifestyles, secondly, (2) to explore how they are living sustainably (in terms of practices and principles) and identifying any challenges they face when trying to live sustainably and lastly, (3) to identify their sphere of influence for sustainable living within their family, peers and broader networks.

The interview schedule reminds the interviewer of areas for exploration. It is a list of questions or subjects for discussion that does not prescribe a particular order but rather ensures the conversation broaches the intended subjects (Minichiello, 2008, p89). The task of the researcher is to keep the conversation focused but flexible enough to allow for new relevant information to come to light through story telling. As the questions will be asked a little differently each time so that they flow with the conversation, the answers may differ also which heightens the challenge of analysis (Minichiello, 2008, p52). Because the style of the in-depth-interview is more flexible, the data from one interview to the next is not as directly comparable. The data will, however, provide a more valid expression of the various participants’ perceptions

and constructions of reality (Minichiello, 2008, p51) essential to an investigation into the sustainable lifestyles of individuals.

*The Interview Schedule is Appendix 1

5.5 The Research Design

5.5.1 Introduction

This section brings together the elements of the research method, instruments and techniques and outlines the research design of the study that investigates how young people are living *better* with less. Within the research design, there are several considerations including the ethics of the study, the recruitment and selection of the sample group, the collection of data via in-depth-interviews, the transcription and coding of these interviews, the biographical narrative analysis and lastly, testing the truth and validity of the study. This section outlines each stage or consideration in chronological order.

5.5.2 Ethics of the Study

Prior to commencing this study, ethical approval from RMIT University's Ethics Committee was sought and given. A detailed application outlining the study and the possible ethical issues within it was prepared for this process. The ethics application addressed issues of participant confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent. Participants were provided with a detailed outline (a Plain Language Statement) of the study prior to their participation. If they were keen to be involved, they provided informed consent permitting the study to go ahead. As this study was to include those aged eighteen years and above, participants needed only to provide their consent. They were also given the opportunity to undertake an alias to ensure that their details and stories remained anonymous.

The ethics application assessed the potential for this study to be of benefit or cause harm. In the context of a study that seeks the life stories from young people, it was

presumed that while it may be enjoyable for participants to share their story and views as this can be cathartic or reflective, interviews of this nature can also create an uncomfortable level of self-awareness (Minichiello, 2008, p216). The data collection methods (video filming and digital voice recording) needed to be approved as they may be considered invasive by participants. Participants were given the opportunity to refuse either of these methods of recording, and were allowed to cease the interview at any time if they became uncomfortable. They were also provided with a copy of their interview transcripts for review if they chose and had the opportunity to omit any statements they felt misrepresented their views.

5.5.3 The Sample Group

To undertake this research into how young people are living better with less, the sample group for the research needed to fulfil specific criteria. Specifically, young people for this study needed to:

1. Identify as Australian;
2. Be aged between 18 and 35 years at the time of interview;
3. Identify themselves as highly committed to living sustainably and evidence this with their lifestyle description within the recruitment survey (see Appendices); and
4. This study required fourteen participants for in-depth interviewing because that would be enough to provide varied perspectives on living sustainably.

In order to find participants that matched this sample description, a recruitment survey with a letter outlining the study was sent to a range of youth and sustainability networks and related university organisations. A total of 85 willing participants came forward, half of which filled out and returned the recruitment survey. The surveys were analysed according to the following criteria to identify a representative sample group for interview These criteria included gender balance;

1. Geographic balance through including representatives from at least 4 Australian states.

2. The median age of the sample group was between 26 and 28 years.
3. The sample group represented a diverse set of living situations (eg. dependants, young families, urban, rural, renters, home-owners).
4. The sample group reflected diverse approaches to sustainable living
5. Within the sample group there were varying periods of time spent committed to living sustainably (eg. recent converts and those long devoted to sustainable living).

A selection matrix based upon these criteria was used to select the range of participants needed to provide a purposeful and representative sample. As the interviews were scheduled and conducted, the researcher anticipated that there would be a time where a saturation, where no new ideas and information would come to light, would be reached. However, as the interviews were conducted, each life story was so different from the next that the researcher concluded that given the nature of this research inquiry, each young person would tell a different story about how they are reinventing their lifestyle and saturation was unlikely to be reached. While some correlations and repetition were evident among participants' responses, their approaches to living were vastly different. The life stories within the sample group of fourteen were rich and diverse, and it is likely that if the sample group increased, the stories would continue to differ, given that lifestyles and practices differ greatly from person to person.

5.5.4 Data Collection and Transcription

Data were collected from each participant in two phases. The first was a 60-90 minute in-depth-interview based upon the following questions related to the three objectives of the study:

1. Why did you decide that adopting a sustainable consumption lifestyle was important?
2. Can you tell me about some of ways you are adopting a lifestyle of sustainable consumption?

3. Is there anything that prevents you adopting a particular sustainable consumption practice?
4. Are there people in your life that you think may be influenced by your sustainable consumption lifestyle?
5. How do you keep informed about sustainable consumption?
6. So is there anything you'd like to further develop within your lifestyle as influenced by sustainability?
7. So, based on what we have discussed, how do you define a lifestyle of sustainable consumption?

To capture the data from the in-depth-interviews for analysis, the interviews were digitally audio recorded and filmed. The digital audio recording was the primary source of the data and was transcribed verbatim for analysis. Digital audio recording is an effective means of obtaining a complete and accurate record of the interview without interrupting the flow of the conversation (Minichiello, 2008, p117). The sound quality of some of the interviews was poor at times, so transcription was not always easy. The interviews took place in a location of each participant's choosing and when the chosen venue was a cafe or park, the sound quality was compromised. One interview was conducted over Skype due to the participant travelling in Europe . This meant that a digital voice recording was possible, but not the filming. Some sections where interruptions were prominent were *data logged*, where the point being made was summarised instead of transcribed completely. The filming served two purposes, firstly as a back-up recording in the event that the audio recorder failed and secondly, to create a filmed record that could be used as the basis for a documentary or film clip to share this research beyond the scope of this thesis.

*The full transcripts from the fourteen interviews are included in Appendix 3.

To validate the data collected from the interviews, and to capture any reflections the participants had post-interview, a brief follow up questionnaire was conducted via email. This questionnaire included the following questions:

1. Since the last interview, have you made any significant changes to your life?
(eg. Moved house, new job, joined a new network or community group)
2. Are there any new practices that you have adopted in line with your lifestyle of sustainable consumption since the last interview?
3. Have you overcome any barriers that you identified in the last interview that were preventing you from acting on a particular sustainable consumption practice? If so, please describe how...
4. Since the last interview, is there any person or organisation that may be influenced by your sustainability values?
5. Is there anything you'd like to further develop within your lifestyle as influenced by sustainability at this stage?

This questionnaire was completed by the majority of the participants, however there were four that had changed their contact details over the year that had lapsed, or were unable to respond due to life circumstances (eg. Sarah was on maternity leave).

*The follow up questionnaire is Appendix 2

5.5.5 Biographical Narrative Analysis

According to Taylor and Bogdan (1984), "The aim of data analysis is to find meaning in the information collected. Data analysis is the process of systematically arranging and presenting information in order to search for ideas". Biographical narrative analysis, in particular, "...seeks to understand human experience, by understanding how the individual story has been put together within the mind of the teller" (Minichiello, 2008, p276). It gives the researcher the opportunity to obtain knowledge about how people construct meaning and understanding of their everyday life experience. Narratives are framed within the social and cultural context of the story-teller. Analysis in narrative studies opens up forms of telling about

experience, not simply the content to which language refers. “We ask, why was the story told that way?” (Reissman, 1993). These narratives can reveal how identities or lifestyles shift over time through identifying “turning points” within the stories, moments when the narrator signifies a radical shift in the expected course of a life (Reissman, 2001, p21).

Once the in-depth-interviews were transcribed, data that related to each of the four research objectives were coded by colour. Then, these key quotes, stories and sections were copied into a narrative summary for each of the fifteen participants. These manageable-sized files were then used as the basis for the construction of the narrative. As the narrative analysis took shape, the original transcripts were referred to, to enrich and further inform the analysis. The analysis was not one simple stage, but rather many small stages towards the reduced and final biographical narrative. The qualitative data analysis is a cyclical process involving data reduction, organisation and interpretation (Sarantakos, 1993, p300).

Structuring narratives

There are three kinds of biographical narrative within the biographical research method, the *life story*, *linked stories* and *poetic structures* (Reissman, 2001, p7). This research utilised the *linked story approach* that draws from a series of open-ended questions that relate to a core narrative. Within the narrative, each of the linked stories is structured to have a beginning, middle and end. The narration is distinguished by ordering and sequence, where one action is consequential for the next. The task for the researcher-as-narrator is to create a plot from disordered experience using the research objectives (Reissman, 2001, p7).

Once the narratives had been constructed, they became case summaries. Minichiello, (2008) says that: “The purpose of writing a case summary is to link the material presented in the transcript to the conceptual themes and topics relevant to the research question asked” (p270). These case summaries serve the purpose of ordering the information, allowing for comparisons and generalisations to be made across the fourteen narratives. By making comparisons between the cases, the researcher is required to identify and explain the similarities, differences and degrees of consistency between the participant’s accounts. This generates the underlying

uniformity which allows for concepts and themes to be drawn from the data (Minichiello, 2008, p271).

5.5.6 Truth and Validity

There were both advantages and disadvantages in the similarities between the researcher and participants in terms of age and interests: the researcher was a young person seeking to live sustainably too. On the one hand, this made the researcher an insider with special knowledge of the group, and thus, “endowed with special insight into matters that may be obscure to others” (Minichiello, 2008, p188). On the other hand, being close to the participants may obscure the data collection as “unprejudiced knowledge about groups is accessible only to non-members of those groups” (Zinn, 1979, p210). However, as Chapter 4 demonstrated, outsiders are not necessarily value-free, especially with regard to the perception of young people. In the context of this study, it was anticipated that the benefits would outweigh the risk of the research being too close to the subject, if measures such as cross-checking were rigorous.

The in-depth-interviewing process assumes the self-consistency of the individual, that if the individual says ‘yes’ today the answer will be ‘yes’ tomorrow. Getting data from multiple sources or from the one source at different times confirms truthfulness through identifying consistency. This study has been designed so that there are three points of data extraction, the recruitment survey, the in-depth-interview and the follow-up study. To ensure the rigour of the study, cross checking for validity was completed so that contradictions were overcome and accuracy was improved, while keeping in mind that encountering some contradictions is normal in the context of in-depth interviewing (Minichiello, 1995, p93).

5.6 Summary

This chapter outlined the research design of this study which is comprised of a methodology, method, research instruments and various techniques. Firstly, this research adopts the methodology of interpretive research which endeavours to

understand the subjective world of human experience. Secondly, the biographical research method “seeks to understand the changing experiences and outlooks of individuals in their daily lives, what they see as important, and how to provide interpretations of the accounts they give of their past, present and future” (Roberts, 2002). In order to collect the narratives, individual face-to-face interviews were undertaken between the researcher and participants.

In order to determine a sample group of young Australians who were committed to sustainable living, a recruitment process was developed to ensure a representative sample that when questioned, was likely to provide data that realised the objectives of the study. To guide the in-depth interviews, an interview schedule was developed to ensure that the conversation between the researcher and participant also realised the research objectives for this study. Additionally, a follow-up email questionnaire was developed to gather more data from participants as they reflected upon their interviews and to capture any updates on their sustainable lifestyles in the year that had passed. This questionnaire was cross-checked against the interview transcripts to ensure the validity and rigour of the study.

Finally, the interview data was transcribed and analysed in two phases. The first was the construction of the biographical narratives (or lifestyle portraits). The second phase was to analyse across the narratives to identify themes, patterns and reflect upon the research objectives.

6.0 Lifestyle Portraits

6.0 Lifestyle Portraits

6.1 Introduction

As introduced in the previous chapter, this study is based on fourteen interviews with young Australians who are highly committed to sustainable living. Each of the research participants was interviewed and then a biographical narrative or lifestyle portrait was constructed as the first stage of data analysis. These fourteen *lifestyle portraits* explore the individuals' motivations for living sustainably, reflect upon examples of concepts and practices that enable sustainable living and address some of the barriers between the individuals' ideals and actions. The biographical analysis also explores the sphere of influence the individuals have within their families, peers and broader networks.

The fourteen lifestyle portraits show a contrasting array of motivations and methods for developing sustainable lifestyles. There are some interview participants who share their more recent histories of sustainable living and those that have been brought up to live lightly on the earth. Some participants struggle with the guilt often associated with over-consumption, while others are empowered by their sustainability values. This chapter explores many different approaches to sustainable living including ethical consumption, local consumption, self-sufficiency and consumer activism.

The narrative construction was directed by the three research objectives:

1. To investigate and assess why young people are choosing to reinvent their lifestyles motivated by climate change and the principles of sustainability.
2. To investigate and analyse how young Australians (defined to be aged between 18 and 35 years) successfully adopt sustainable consumption lifestyles. This inquiry sought to determine any barriers standing between the participants and their desired adoption of sustainable consumption practices and products.
3. To explore the potential role of interview participants in terms of their positive influence on others.



6.2 James

23 years, living in Sydney City in a share-house with friends

A move to study environmental engineering in the city prompted a lifestyle change in a sustainable direction for James, as he grew up in the quiet Blue Mountains alongside his 'steak-eating friends and their four wheel drives'. Early in his university degree, he was moved by the inspiring lecturers and their enthusiasm for understanding the environmental problems humanity is facing.

James was elated to be around other students who were sharing his increasingly sustainability-focused views. In fact, with a new circle of "green" friends, he started to feel like the odd one out when he returned to the country to visit his family and friends. Initially, his family did not know what to make of his new lifestyle direction, nor how to accommodate it. This confusion was exemplified by their request that he own and maintain one of the family cars despite his preference for cycling. While his mother was initially bemused by a decision to forgo steak and embrace vegetarianism, she has since become inspired by his resolve to live more lightly and has focused on water conservation within her own life.

For James, an ongoing source of sustainability information, inspiration and support came from within his 'green' friendship circle. He kept further informed through reading the *New Internationalist* and favoured the writings of George Monbiot²⁵. However, learning through experience seemed to resonate with him the most. Whether it was within 'the co-op' or the local community garden, James found that where he made a change in a sustainable direction, a social benefit often followed. He enjoyed the practical aspects of community gardening and food production, and savoured the advice passed down by the experienced gardeners. He was keen to learn more about living sustainably and be open to new ideas, and enjoyed sharing

²⁵ Monbiot is a British author who writes about topical issues such as politics and climate change including 'Heat' in 2006.

these with his housemates, friends and broader community networks. As he explained,

I mean my personal view is that things will only change in a ... well there's top down and bottom up and I think that change from the bottom up is kind of neglected in some ways. Like there's certain groups of people who do a lot of stuff at the grassroots level but we're going to have to extend that across all sectors of society and all people if we really want things to change and so it has to be social as well as about the environmental. Personally I find that's what motivates me a lot of the time - having people around me who are similarly minded. And I'm not feeling hopeless in that I'm going it alone but I'm feeling like there's a supportive community around me of all these others that are doing similar things.

At the time of the interview, James was thrilled to have been able to translate his environmental engineering degree into a research position at the *Institute for Sustainable Futures* at the University of Technology, Sydney. Within this role, he was set the task of researching alternative urban water conservation strategies to the Desalination Plant. The position allowed him to work across local, state and the Commonwealth Government. Satisfied that he could pursue interesting and valuable work by day, James turned his focus to creating a sustainable lifestyle over the seven years since his lecturers first inspired him. While he embraced and enjoyed vegetarianism, he was working towards becoming vegan in a gentle way which he described as "being kind to himself". This goal of achieving 'personal sustainability' while adopting a sustainable lifestyle both grounds and directs James's lifestyle decisions.

James has taken the time to process each lifestyle change as a set of steps towards a sustainable way of living. Having been initially overwhelmed by the magnitude of the challenges posed by climate change and resource management, he has learnt to take the complicated problem and break it down to a series of tangible steps. He evaluates purchasing decisions on a case-by-case basis. He chooses to buy organic local produce when available, considers the ethics of production and avoids excessive packaging. He prefers to cycle over other forms of transport which is an opportunity he created through his choice to live near his work. For James, some of these decisions are simple, however, he is aware that sustainable consumption is

not always straight forward, especially when comparing an organic item that is excessively packaged and has been sent from overseas to a local item that is not certified to be organic. He makes the best choice he can by drawing upon his own framework for making responsible consumption decisions.

Despite his quiet enthusiasm for 'personal sustainability', James was critical of the fact that sustainable living is 'outsourced' to individuals rather than led or supported by government regulations. He was somewhat dismayed by the barriers between him and more sustainable living as a renter, rather than the owner of his share house, and so he cannot make changes for greater energy efficiency nor connect solar power. While owning a home and retrofitting it towards self sufficiency is a future goal, one which he considers achievable, he laments that this was not an opportunity economically available to all. He, therefore, believed that government had a role to place in supporting others to lead more sustainable lifestyles.

James did not seek to influence his old friends from the Blue Mountains, preferring to focus instead on those who are open to and interested in pursuing a sustainable way of living. He accepted that his 'old' friends will be the last ones to give up their steaks and four wheel drives.

A year after the first interview, James started to feel less certain about his place in the world and started to question his contribution to a sustainable future. He finished work at the university and moved to Brisbane with his partner. Prior to this, he went on a camping trip with her to solidify his values and answer pertinent questions about his role in the world while reconnecting with the natural environment. From this reflection, James has recaptured his original empowerment in the small things (such as community gardening) that genuinely contribute to creating the world he wants to live in. He assigns great value to these small actions that implicitly "challenge the status quo that keep us disconnected from the earth and each other". He "found a little bit more peace" having reclaimed the power and meaning he was seeking through these collective actions towards sustainability. As he described:

For too long I had unconsciously prioritised creating change through acquiring and piecing together more and more knowledge because of the complexity that I felt faced (and often overwhelmed) with. But I was beginning to realise more clearly just how radically powerful simple, everyday actions can be. I believe that supporting others and showing

compassion, taking time to understand others, better understanding myself and contributing to creating relationships and connections between people are some of the most important actions that we need to take to 'change the world'. I guess that shows that I came to realise that I really, really value community development approaches to creating social change, and I see that social and personal change is at the heart of environmental change for me.



6.3 Gabrielle

34 years, living in Sydney City in her own apartment

As a child growing up in the 1980s, Gabrielle recalls a strong awareness of African famines and the French Nuclear Testing in the Pacific Ocean. With parents as social activists, she grew up with the assumption that climate change was a significant problem that her generation would inherit. A decade ago, she undertook a PhD at the Institute for Sustainable Futures. As she remembered, “for me it was a natural thing to do, but I think my mother was always a bit worried at the time. I was doing this kind of hippy bearded scientist kind of degree and was there any future in that”.

Building on her interest in sustainable cities, she successfully applied to be the Sustainability Manager for residential and commercial projects for *Investa*, a large-scale development company. As she explained, “My job description is basically to put systems in place to move things towards sustainability and to innovate”. Her hard work has paid off, as *Investa* has been recognised and awarded for their sustainability achievements and she finds this encouraging.

The urgent need to reduce emissions significantly to mitigate the onset of climate change is something that weighs heavily on Gabrielle's mind. She believes that low-carbon lifestyles are the way forward. Choosing to become vegetarian was one of the first decisions she made. However, over time, she has reintroduced sustainable sources of protein such as kangaroo meat and some fish to balance her diet. When it comes to making sustainable choices, she says, "A lot of the stuff's quite automatic within, there are some things you automatically do, but then other things that you still learn about and shift". Where she has been vegetarian for a long time, she finds the concept of 'food miles' somewhat confusing. Rather than getting too caught up in the nuances of food debates, she finds it is important to get the big decisions that will significantly influence her ecological footprint right. She chose to buy an apartment which was located in Sydney city, close to a train station, so she would not need to own a car. The apartment is in a very old building from 1903 that she believes has excellent thermal properties for energy efficiency. She has recently invested her superannuation in ethical investments and she wishes others knew more about the sustainability value of this decision and did the same as her.

Her much-loved bicycle is key for reduced emissions and as a cycling enthusiast, she is a key advocate for Critical Mass²⁶ cycling activism in Australia. She ensures her bicycle is with her wherever she may need to travel, even if that's interstate. She often takes the overnight train to Melbourne from Sydney, (rather than the cheaper, time efficient plane trip) and takes her bicycle in the luggage section. Gabrielle admitted that catching the train was not always a viable alternative to flying interstate as "You can't use a public transport system that doesn't exist". This compromise does not necessarily translate to feelings of guilt because she understands the broader context within which she is forced to operate. As she confirmed, "The ideal thing is for people to make sustainable choices, but the choices have to be there to be made and that, lo and behold, largely comes back to the decisions of the government". Gabrielle pursues her political interest and her desire for far-reaching change in Australia through her involvement with the Labour Environment Activists Network, a group of volunteers who educate and campaign for improving environmental policy. She has been highly involved with the group reporting to government, and maintains that "it's always hard with political decisions, you never

²⁶ Critical Mass is a global cycling movement which encourages cyclists to meet and ride together along a specific route of a given city to raise awareness about the need for cities to be more cycling friendly.

know what are the exact things that cause things to tip or change. All you can do is contribute to the discussion”.

Gabrielle hopes for widespread social change, but is realistic about the lure of consumerism for most people. She doesn't think that living sustainably is a natural extension for many Australians since

“the Howard government really encouraged this whole idea of aspiration, which is in some ways co-word for greed, and aspiration as a kind of competition and consumption and you know, we've got into just absolutely astounding levels of debt, you know, so we're basically buying as you know all of the stuff we can't afford. I think that's done a phenomenal amount of damage to the culture”.

She is not very interested in seeking satisfaction through material goods herself, but knows for most people, “there's no status in purchasing less stuff”. She is aware that cultural change in a sustainable direction may not happen overnight, or fast enough to make the difference she hopes, but she is pleased to see momentum in the right direction. “I think there are good signs that hopefully a solar hot water system on your roof will be a status symbol rather than some seeing it as ugly”.



6.4 Ryan

28 years, on secondment in Belgium, originally from Sydney

Ryan remembers growing up in Coffs Harbour with the beach and a heritage rainforest nearby. His local scenery may have fostered his appreciation for the natural landscape, but he believes that appreciation for the natural environment is more about what kind of person you are. As he says, “if you are an outward person, you will pick up the environmental views; if you are only looking inward, it will pass you by”.

Ryan left Coffs Harbour to study in Sydney.

Inspired by university life, he became a vocal activist and joined a green group amongst many other campaigns. At twenty-five, Ryan wrote his first book in which he explored the key issues for young people and how they differed from the outdated views commonly espoused by the “Baby Boomer Generation”. With writing and activism driving his skills and interests, Ryan leapt at an opportunity to work for Environment Minister Peter Garrett. His introduction into the political arena occurred just as climate change was becoming a prominent political issue and it was an exciting time. However, rather than feeling like he had an opportunity to make a difference, he felt that he believed he was there to execute a preordained plan. He missed the empowerment of participating in his university activist groups, but felt that his new knowledge of political processes meant that he would no longer see the same value in grassroots activism alone.

At the time of the interview, Ryan was living in Belgium working on secondment as a speechwriter for a minister of the European Commission. Living in Belgium instead of Australia, allowed him to have good access to sustainable choices such as organic food and transport alternatives such as the fast train network that connects Europe. He makes sustainable choices when it is viable to, but when it came to vegetarianism, he was somewhat torn. Having acknowledged that he thought it is important that everyone becomes vegetarian, it is a commitment he was yet to make as it was an enjoyable pursuit that he was not ready to give up. As he conceded, “I won’t pretend to be the greenest person on earth, but I’d rather be light green and bring other people along with me rather than just feel good about myself and not really change anything, or make myself unhappy at the same time”.

Ryan is comfortable and confident with the lifestyle changes he has made. He is, however, concerned about the systems and constraints that lock in and restrict his consumption choices. He considers flying less but knows that the dynamics of the aviation industry will not be affected by this individual action, so instead he hopes for genuine alternatives and that flying is costed properly, through measures such as taxing aviation fuels. He had learnt that environmental activism is more complicated than an individual choosing the good option over the bad. If he were to give up flying, by example, he was mindful that he would also miss out on all the cross-cultural benefits that have enriched his life and more broadly, a

history of cultures shared.

Ryan's approach to living sustainably operates at two distinct levels, the simple 'common sense stuff' such as turning off light switches, and the broader top-down change that he hopes will bring about viable, sustainable opportunities and choices for individuals. As he explained,

I'll have sustainable housing where I can, I'll choose Al Gore's investment fund and avoid supporting British and American tobacco instead; I'll definitely make those choices but I am not going to give up my ability to participate in the world by things like stopping flying. I want to be really rational with my consumption choices and where possible I will make the environmental choices. But, I have big enough perspective to realise that it's not just about what I do.

Ryan believed that Australians need a stimulant to question the dominant way of life, and that the infrastructures of consumption need to be changed so that individuals can choose easy, sustainable options. He thought that consumer activism would become the next battleground but that this would take a shift in thinking. He was critical of the fact that in Australia, we grow up with the customer mentality where we are good at giving everyone what they want, rather than shaping what they should want:

Australians, they're used to getting things their own way and things getting bigger and better and faster for decades now and there's not a lot in Australia to make people stop in their tracks and make people question their choices. So if you're not being asked to question your choices and you're not being given new choices, then it is very easy to be in a narrow track mode and I think that's what a lot of Australian's are in.

Ryan strongly believes that Government should be taking the lead on environmental issues, but that young people can have a big impact on the future. He believes it is the task of individuals to set high environmental standards in their own lives. To support this, he hopes for a different political culture that creates genuine change in a sustainable direction.



6.5 Juliette

25 years, living in Melbourne City, sharing an apartment with her partner Tosh (also interviewed)

Juliette's enthusiasm for living ethically and sustainably was prompted by her partner's shift in values and priorities towards sustainable living. When Juliette followed him from Sydney, she chose to join him in his quest for a sustainable way of life. Always moved by the injustices of the world, she thought she may be "noisy and bossy enough to make a difference" where sustainability was concerned.

In her new job as a fashion buyer in Melbourne, she felt "like a fish in the wrong pond" and sought solace and new ideas by undertaking a Masters of Marketing with a focus on ethical consumption. Inspired by revolutionary business woman, Anita Roddick²⁷, and excited by her rapidly expanding pile of books on ethical consumption, Juliette was highly motivated to address her consumption habits. Upon reflection, she believes the move to Melbourne and the separation from her family and peers who knew her as "consumer girl", allowed her the fresh start she needed to re-evaluate and re-orient her lifestyle on a sustainable pathway. As she reflected, "I think part of the transition was I kind of turned away from being quite frivolous". Upon one of her regular return visits to Sydney, she found her family and friends were surprised by her transformation. As she recalled, "My parents think I'm mad, actually they refer to us living in the Dark Ages more often than not".

Despite the bemusement of her family, Juliette has taken pleasure in re-educating her mother, who now considers "David Suzuki²⁸ to be a God, now that she's no

²⁷ Anita Roddick is the founder of the Body Shop.

²⁸ Suzuki is a renowned environmental philosopher.

longer that impressed by Tim Flannery²⁹. She continued her mother's re-education with a trip to the farmers market and was amused by her response,

My mother has no idea. I took her down to the slow food market. It was actually hilarious. And we were buying things, not unusual things ... but she picked it up and she's like, "What's that?" "Mum it's spring onions." She's like, Oh. It grows in the ground. It comes out dirty. We tend to clean it off and it looks just like a spring onion. And because she's been shopping at Woolworths for I don't know, twenty five, thirty years that's the way it is.

Farmers markets, locavorism³⁰ and the slow food movement captured Juliette's interest and organic food shopping became a regular weekend ritual. Having recently made her New Year's resolution to give up beef, pork and lamb, she looked to kangaroo meat as a sustainable source of protein. When she finds a good idea, she likes to share it, "We always make a point of feeding all my friends Roo (Kangaroo) because we love to eat it and we hope that they'll love to eat it as much as we do". Going one step further, at the time of interview, Juliette was designing a range of handbags made from kangaroo leather which was previously going wasted. She also embraced environmentally responsible principles when it came to "recycling her cat Tobago" whom she adopted after finding her lost in a nearby park. She also finds that riding her bicycle everywhere she goes provided a source of joy, fitness and convenience.

Many of these sustainable rituals Juliette shares with her partner, Tosh, and she cites their conversations and the challenges they set themselves as an ongoing source of inspiration. Upon arriving in Melbourne, she was introduced to his circle of friends who have been a further source of knowledge as "they kind of sit around and they kind of forecast about exactly how much energy consumption might be used in a certain situation and one of them might yawn in the background, but I know what's going on and I don't think that many people would probably be exposed to something like that".

²⁹ Flannery is a well-known Australian environmentalist and author.

³⁰ Locavorism is a food consumption movement based on the principle of eating food within 100 miles of where it is produced.

Beyond inspiration, guilt has proved to be a powerful motivator for Juliette. “I feel guilty if I do something and I don’t let myself enjoy perhaps the simple pleasure of that certain moment because of the ecological concern”. The guilt can become overwhelming at times, as she recalled, “if we go out for cake or something, it’s like oh the cream, the eggs, where did the flour come from, it’s actually just too much”. She laments that eating ethically requires planning and is not as convenient as the supermarket. For example, if it is late and she needs oranges, she feels guilty about going to Woolworths because the farmers market isn’t open. If she is dining at a friend’s house, and the food put on the table does not comply with her ethical standards, she is once again in a quandary about what to do. The compromise that rouses the most guilt is the frequent need to fly, which she balanced in her own unique way. “I attempted to give up books as a way of offsetting a flight that I took to Canberra”. Living a flight away from home means that Juliette has to decide between quality time with her family and the environmental compromise. As she explained “I like to see my parents, so tomorrow on World Environment Day I’m catching a plane (because) it’s my mum’s birthday”. Juliette makes her decisions the most sustainable way she can without compromising social convention too much, but she has trouble reconciling her feelings of guilt.

In her new role as a marketing manager for an architecture practice, Juliette confessed that she was a bit of a “stirrer” who was lobbying for 100% recycled paper for printing and a switch to Fair Trade coffee. She felt frustrated by the resistance from her senior managers, but persisted nonetheless. She tries to remain respectful of others choices but concedes that getting on her high horse when chatting to people who live differently, she feels like a “Christian Evangelist at times - so are you driving a car? Are you mad? Like don’t you know how bad that is?”.



6.6 Tosh

26 years, living in Melbourne City in an apartment with partner, Juliette

Tosh has always been mindful of the environment. As he remembered, “My earliest memory of this is being forced to sweep up leaves by my father and thinking it was terrible because we’re wrecking the ecosystem”. Discontent with his early professional life in recruitment was the motivation that led Tosh down a different path.

When he proposed to his boss that they pursue ethical investments and he refused, he believed it was time to “go back to the career drawing board”. As he said:

Because at the time we were recruiting for rich American tobacco (and) mining companies and all this sort of stuff and he (his boss) basically said, “well if it’s legal, we’ll recruit for it” and I think that moment was kind of like, I definitely have to do something else. Sustainable energy was the choice because it seemed like climate change was the big environmental issue.

After redirecting his career, Tosh’s approach to living sustainably started with logic, “It makes sense to turn on a light when you need it, turn it off when you don’t” he said. The next step being to consider the ecological footprint of his consumption, “I guess my first consideration is, okay, what emissions were caused by this food getting to me”. He is both motivated and supported by his partner’s commitment to sustainable living and says they keep each other in check:

I think, like if you’re on your own and you’re cooking dinner and it was cold and wet and you probably wouldn’t bother, you know, you might just duck down to the supermarket to pick up something that was convenient and cheap and easy. But because Juliette’s there, you’ve got an eye over your shoulder, you feel like you have to make whatever the extra effort is

you know to make sure whatever you're doing is sustainable, ecologically friendly.

From his study of Environmental Engineering, Tosh developed a keen interest in energy conservation. He is fastidious about studying the household electricity and water bills and is always seeking to make further savings. As he proudly confirmed, "we use 1.5 KW hours a day, the average house uses about 16". He attributes their low energy consumption to the avoidance of excess appliances and gadgets such as a television and choosing efficient appliances when necessary, such as a fridge. Despite the fact that Tosh is well informed about energy efficiency and is willing to ensure he is a low consumer of it, he acknowledges that "it's very difficult to work out exactly what emissions you are responsible for, so drawing a line for what you're responsible for and what you're not, is a bit arbitrary". He firmly believes energy is the starting point for a sustainable lifestyle, and then he considers the implications of agriculture and transport. He focuses on these broad aspects and believes that everything else is makes a little extra difference.

Despite his unquestioning commitment, Tosh finds that making environmentally responsible purchasing decisions can be difficult and confusing at times. As he explained:

It's easy to get a little bit boggled by all of the certifications and I find the labelling for food is really quite confusing in some ways, if you're having a friendly chat with the person, it's a good way of cutting through all that crap and actually making a decision. This guy that does these amazing peaches and he rolls up in his truck and he sells his fruit outside, just outside the farmer's market. He's not organic, you know, he's not organic but he's local and you talk to him about how he grows that and he's like "well we're actually 95% organic but there are a couple of little things we don't do and I can't really be bothered to get to the 5%" and you know he tells you how it is and you think, yeah, why not. Because I do value some of the other things like the fact that I'm buying directly from the person who is growing it, that you know it's come from a local source.

Despite undergoing significant lifestyle change, Tosh has not felt that his last two and a half years without a car have been a compromise. He enjoys walking to work from his inner city apartment. "I've actually got no problem with it because it's quite nice to

go and walk for 30 minutes and you kind of freshen up, and so that's something you do quite happily". Making larger sacrifices takes further consideration, but his environmental resolve remains strong. "I would love to just go and fly to France and cycle around with the Tour and all that sort of stuff, but yeah, you don't do that because you realise that this is something that everyone – if everyone in the world was doing this every year we'd have a problem".

He is excited what he can achieve within his professional life and is excited by the prospect of the sustainable future as he envisages it. As he explained, "I want to close the loop and I just have a vision of you know the median strips of Carlton you know, being little farming sort of communities and little digesters along the way and people generate their electricity". Professionally, Tosh has seized many opportunities to bring this future closer. He conducted an energy audit for a fashion designer he met through Juliette and has provided advice that he has been surprised and delighted to see the designer has taken, and successfully repositioned her fashion label as an industry leader where sustainability is concerned.

Despite his own commitment, Tosh has found that most of his family are not very interested in pursuing a sustainable way of life. He has had a mixed response from his siblings:

My brother is actually, he's gotten really into it. Now he's got his own place, he's on green power, he switched his lights to more efficient ones and you know, he drives his car really conservatively and gets – you know he's always telling me what sort of mileage he got and all that sort of stuff. So he's right into it. And then my sister is kind of blissfully unaware. Or maybe she is aware but she gives the impression she's not.

With his family back in Sydney not necessarily understanding his lifestyle choices, it is hard for them to understand why he may choose not to fly to visit them more frequently. As he has to travel for work, he will try and link work trips and family visits and rationalise the best way he can. "I know I've had to fly a couple of times for work and somewhere in my head I go "you know, the work I'm doing will hopefully reduce emissions by a lot. You have that conversation I think with yourself that alleviates the guilts a bit"



6.7 Stephen

29 years, living in a share-house, inner Melbourne

Stephen is excited by the challenge of reinventing the way we live in light of the need to develop more sustainable lifestyles. In high school, his enthusiasm for inventing sustainable solutions first emerged. He was naturally curious

about how things worked and how they could be. His interest in sustainability is creativity driven, as he explained “it didn’t come from a kind of a religious zeal for protecting the earth, it’s not that type of thing, it’s more just that I guess I’m curious and in how things work and different ways they can be done”.

As he furthered his study in industrial design, Stephen was deeply inspired by the work of architect and visionary Hundertwasser. Like his idol, he has been captivated by the task of envisioning a new future and his work at CERES environmental park in inner northern Melbourne suburb Brunswick has become the ideal testing ground. Among the community-driven environmental activities, Stephen is developing an aquaponics³¹ system funded by a government research grant that would produce enough fresh produce to feed a family using a minimum of resources. Being fascinated by the challenge of closing the loop of production and developing zero waste projects, he has also created a composting toilet system at CERES. His boundless enthusiasm was evident as he explained “I’m fascinated by the concept of zero waste and the idea of re-examining what we currently see as waste and looking to how it can be valued as a resource; I suppose that’s my area of interest”.

Besides being busied with the task of invention, Stephen is also very keen to share his journey towards sustainability with others. He was part of a group of leading

³¹ Aquaponics is a food system based on growing fruit and vegetables with the assistance of fish farming.

environmentalists called “Sustainable Cities” and would actively participate in workshops and brainstorming sustainable strategies. Formerly a university tutor and CERES educator, he is always excited to engage others in collaboration, whether they be school children, university students or friends. Although, having spent a lot of time over the years contributing to education, he found there was a need to focus on doing a few things well rather than being stretched between professions and projects. As he recalled:

Teaching is one of those things that really excites me – but at the same time I found that I was doing all teaching and all talk and I really wanted to kind of, yeah, pull back from that for a while and actually do it. I’m pretty big on the solitary diligent action now. I think it’s – yeah, it’s really easy to get scattered over a lot of different projects and if you want to actually drive things through you’ve got to just sit down and focus”.

In his home life, Stephen embraces a communal approach to living with his house mates. Together they were growing half of the total vegetables they required and despite the potential constraint of their inner city location, they farmed chickens and bees. Once they had grown the food or sourced it through bulk buying, his housemates generally prepared and ate the meals together. Rather than making a conscious effort to be a low-impact household, Stephen and his housemates naturally gravitated towards living lightly. As he explained, “it’s not because we’ve kind of got together and said ‘yes, let’s eliminate packaging’ or ‘let’s grow 50 percent of our veggies’, it’s more just because it’s fun to do so”. Despite the fact he enjoys his lifestyle, Stephen wishes he had more time so that he could commit to more gardening and consider hunting his own food, given he considers his meat eating to be an unsustainable practice. He is disappointed by the time limitations imposed on what he can do, as he said:

It’s more of a time thing and I think that it’s probably one of the biggest challenges, for me and certainly a lot of my friends - is just the general busy-ness of life. I’d like to actually grow my own veggies, but it’s very much an ideal, you know? It still would actually require a significant re-engineering of your life to – you know, you’d be talking about at least a couple of hours a day of gardening work to supply yourself with veggies.

Stephen is ambitious about the contribution he wants to make the world a better place. As he enthused “I’m very interested in driving positive change but I’m a big believer in change through demonstration or through positive example”. However, he knows it is hard for others to do the same as there are many barriers that stand in their way. As he explained, “you have to be someone with great ‘moral fortitude’ to set up a stringent framework and adhere to it”. He is frustrated by the role eco-myths play in confusing people about what they can do to help the environment. He thinks that all the fuss about plastic bags is distracting from the radical action that needs to be taken, given they are not that bad for the environment. He would like to know more about the things he buys so that he can knowingly avoid child labour and exploitation. Above all else, he “wishes government would take a role in being responsible and letting people know the true nature of the crisis- that we won’t be able to drive cars one day. People don’t understand the consequences of their actions”.



6.8 Sarah

31 years, Living in inner Melbourne with her partner, expecting her first baby

Sarah took a very early interest in caring for the environment and traced her interests back to primary school. As she recalled, “both my parents have certainly lived very consciously of their environmental concerns, and I think that probably rolled off fairly when I was younger and then I think it just became quite a passion too”. Having completed her PhD in conservation biology, she became a university educator and academic that sought to bridge the gap between environmental research and government policy. She does this through sitting on a series of environmental boards and being an active participant in global conferences about sustainability. Introducing five hundred students each year to sustainability theory is a challenge she relished and valued. As

she enthused, “I think education for sustainability is a very underestimated tool for achieving change in society”.

Sarah thinks that it is sometimes easier to integrate sustainability change in her professional life than it is in her home life. She says her husband makes an incredible effort to embrace her values, but he doesn’t always live up to her exceptionally high environmental standards. She was not comfortable saying anything about these discrepancies and figures she is better off leading by example where her lifestyle is concerned. Despite the challenge, Sarah believes it is very important that she brings her sustainability philosophy from her professional life into her home life, as she explained:

I think it’s part of being an authentic person really, I mean how could you study and research and teach this stuff, and then not really be enacting it in your everyday life, I think I do see a bit of that around, and I just think it’s intensely hypocritical and it’s really missing the point.

To reduce the environmental impact of her lifestyle, Sarah has chosen to live close to the city where she works, so she can cycle. She will buy second-hand goods before buying them new, and if that’s not possible, she will choose Fair Trade alternatives. Sarah tried to create good consumption habits to ensure she continues to live lightly. “I think that’s it very important to kind of make sure that you do all the simple things that you can, you know choosing products and having the right systems in place to make it easy”. However, she acknowledged that it is not always easy to work out how to make the best choices because there is not always ample information:

I think the sustainability movement, because it’s so new, is full of a lot of misinformation, and you know I mean I think everything from buying a fridge to - or you can use a calculator that tells you how much energy your fridge uses, but then if you’re serious about it then you’re going to want to look at where it’s being transported from and to and what they do with the bits after it’s finished its life.

Another aspect that challenges Sarah is how sustainability is a journey that lacks definition and it may be one based on seeking to attain the unattainable zero-impact lifestyle. She is able to put this in perspective, because:

Even if you don't think that we're ever really going to achieve sustainability, I think it's a nice way of operating in your life, you know if you can have respect for other people, and you're not willing to accept that a child in Bangladesh is making your clothes or that sea levels are going to change and ruin the Great Barrier Reef because of the way that you decide to go on holidays, or you know I mean I think those sorts of things and understanding the linkages, and introducing that level of respect in your life is a fairly wholesome sort of thing.

Sarah was frustrated about the confines she had, living close to the city, especially where composting is concerned. As she recalled, "I have just spent so much bloody money on composting paraphernalia, and I feel like it's sort of just ending up being more wasteful than it's worth but you know". Without a backyard in which to make or use compost, she is unable to avoid creating food waste that she would rather see go to use. She has ideas about how the system of composting could be more inclusive, as she explained, "I honestly think that it's the sort of situation where a kind of centralised system, where people can just put their waste out, and have it collected every week and have it composted properly"

Her renovations had also proven to be a sustainability challenge. Despite her will to research and choose the best possible alternatives to ensure green building, she found that the alternatives were not always viable. As she recalled:

Everything that we could, we did, but the basics like bags of mortar and cement and plaster, and those sorts of things, if you want to do the right thing you've got to wait six weeks for it to be delivered from Tasmania, it's going to be about ten times the price, and you know you'd need to buy it that day and you can't afford to spend ten times the price because you just use so much of it.

Inevitably, their house renovation exemplified their best sustainable efforts, within aesthetic, functional and aesthetic reason. A lack of viable sustainable alternatives can be frustrating, but Sarah thinks that misinformation about what the best sustainable alternatives are can be even more so. As she explained:

I think that one of the biggest obstacles to people changing their own lifestyle, is realising that something that they were doing for a while is not actually the right thing to be doing, you know I mean like people

I've never seen such anger as people who have been separating rubbish for example, and then realising that it's all lumped into the one bin and then sorted at the waste station, or you know simple things like that can be psychologically so important and I think the wrong information can sort of do a lot of damage.

The next big consumption challenge for Sarah was to be motherhood. She was confident that she could find the most sustainable nappy solution, purchase goods secondhand and that any new investments could be shared with the next parents-to-be. Moving forward, she hoped that there would be more collaboration and more ways of sharing information and ideas about how to live lightly, instead of people keeping ideas "selfishly to themselves". She is cautious about the way she shares information, given that she is very committed to living sustainably and does not want to deter anyone who is interested in living better. As she explained "people do change and I think sometimes in your personal life, living by example is probably the most powerful way that you can operate, and you know ultimately I think your family appreciates what you do, and I let them feel guilty about doing, of making their own changes rather than having to really bring it up, that's my preferred approach".

6.9 Vahri

32 years, living in semi-rural Perth with her daughter

Vahri grew up with an innate understanding that she should live lightly on the earth. Growing up she thought that there was a need to live differently to those she saw around her in order to preserve the environment for the future. At this point, she feels like her beliefs align with where the world is at, but this was not always the case. As she explained, "it's only just now that I feel like the world's changing to recognise what's always been there for me, whereas, at school I was belittled and made fun of for my beliefs, which I didn't necessarily hold quietly".

When confronted with the prospect of eating turtle on an international school trip, Vahri decided it was time for her to become vegetarian. Her family were quite upset, not to mention inconvenienced, but she pursued it nonetheless. Living efficiently was something that was promoted within her family household. As she recalled "in my family upbringing there was that sense but it was motivated through economy rather than sustainability, you turned off the lights and you had short showers because we

didn't have the money to leave the lights on and have long showers and so that was sort of, I suppose it prepared me for the lifestyle of living lightly".

In her adult life, Vahri has completed her permaculture certificate and chosen to undertake her PhD in creative writing, so that she can enjoy a creative lifestyle, on her own terms. She was teaching theatre at the time of interview, and seeking to strike the balance between supporting herself and her daughter and having enough time to spend enriching their everyday life. She was highly involved in her daughter's school community and would share car pooling with other parents when possible. As a parent, she was concerned about the influence of materialism and consumerism and chose to strictly limit the amount of television watched together. Vahri has found that raising a child does not need to translate into the mass accumulation of stuff. She even avoided disposable nappies, having toilet trained her daughter from birth so she reduced the need for nappies. As she explained, when it comes to child rearing "there's so much knowledge around; you don't need stuff for a baby".

Having a daughter brought the reality of the future environmental catastrophe to mind, but did not necessarily make taking action any easier for Vahri. As she explained, "on the one hand you're forced to face the future right in front of you every day but also the pressures are so much greater that you're probably perhaps more likely to take short cuts that you wouldn't necessarily want to take, just because of the pressures of time that are involved in raising a child". Vahri wishes she had a bit more time to spend in her garden, which she developed guided by the permaculture principles she had learned. What she doesn't grow, she purchases from her local organic food store. Although organic food, to her dismay, most often comes over packaged:

I'm one of their annoying customers that unpacks all of the fruit and veg at the cash register and gives them back all of their Styrofoam packing because I won't buy organic produce if it's wrapped in Styrofoam packaging it just seems ludicrous to me and I've grilled them and grilled them about whether they reuse this.

Vahri finds greater empowerment in making changes around her home. Even though she is renting, her landlord is generous about allowing her to make changes such as the home-made grey water recycling system that transfers water from her and her

daughter's morning bath to water the garden. She has embraced her creative and resourceful side when it came to fashioning her wardrobe. She is the generous recipient of many of her friends' unwanted garments but she takes great pleasure in customising them with found objects such as feathers, to make them her own. As she explained:

I try and make a lot of my clothing which leads to having quite unique and individual taste and I suppose that's something that's been good for me because now most of my friends are aware that I don't really buy clothes and so when they're throwing stuff away, because most women do buy a lot of clothes, they'll always throw them my way first and so I actually have fabulous things to wear because a lot of people give me things along with the few things I can make. I don't feel like I miss out.

Sharing goods with others is a key to live by and she often uses Perth's sharing network called the "Quokka" to find 'new' things and give things onwards.

Living in a semi-rural area means that Vahri needs to own a car as it is the only viable way to get her daughter to school. She felt that being further out of the city meant she had less access to second-hand goods, and she relied heavily on the one local organic food store for groceries, and pays a premium for them. She feels a little disconnected at times because of her views, and takes great comfort in reading *Adbusters* and *Organic Gardener* which she finds enjoyable and validating. She is keen to build more of a community-minded approach to living sustainability which she can be a part of. She owns a bush block with her family which she hopes will one day become a social place for the community she is dreaming of.



6.10 Neesh

27 years, living with partner in their own house in the Melbourne suburbs

From her earlier memories Neesh can recall an inspiring teacher who first introduced her to the environmentally conscious principles of reuse, recycling and reducing consumption. However as a young adult, it was a recent trip to Japan that promoted further consideration about the ecological benefits of a “simpler life”. Building on her and her partner’s growing interest in living lightly, they contacted an

organisation called “Friends of the Earth”³² to

learn more. Neesh was excited by the prospect of investing time rather than money to assist the organisation and so she and her partner set up their own Carbon Rationing Action Group (CRAG). The concept of a CRAG was to invite a group of people to meet on a regular basis to discuss sustainable living and support each other with related action. Meeting an influx of new people and being exposed to a whole array of new ideas about sustainable living was a big motivation and support for them.

Neesh has continued to enjoy the benefits and inherent logic of group action for sustainability. She participated in a “backyard blitz” where a large group of people volunteered their time to focus on developing a vegetable garden in each of their homes. The first one she attended, she was amazed to see fifty devoted people digging and planting in the one garden. With the help of the group Neesh has transformed her own backyard into a “veggie forest”. These early experiences helped her shape her approach to sustainable living to include sharing ideas and the load for sustainable practices.

In this spirit, Neesh joined a food co-op of twenty-five people who take it in turns to visit the wholesale markets to buy bulk organic produce. They divide it twenty-five

³² Friends of the Earth is a Global Not For Profit Organisation that focuses on Sustainable Living.

ways and deliver a box of produce to each of the members of the co-op on a Friday morning. For a box of fresh produce that lasts a fortnight between deliveries, each member need only pay \$20, which is significantly less than the costs of buying organic produce from a retailer.

With group action being the primary method for actioning sustainable living strategies, Neesh was also very interested in reducing consumption individually through avoiding packaging, reducing emissions, water consumption and her household gas usage. To keep on track with how her quest was going, she enjoyed using ecological calculators to reveal the improvements she is making to reduce her carbon footprint.

Footprints have their limits, and she finds that there are still grey areas where the right answer is hard to find. As she explained, “it’s hard and sometimes you can get to, I find I get really hung up on small things and I just have to go, well, in other areas of my life, my impact is really small”. This rationalisation helps her keep perspective and avoid feeling unmotivated by smaller issues.

Through her CRAG group and food co-op, Neesh has drawn on a lot of support for sustainable living, but within her own family she can find opposition. As she explained, “My parents are just the opposite in the spectrum. They’re meat eaters and drive everywhere and they had three fridges and two freezers”. When likely to encounter resistance, she tries to be a gentle advocate for her sustainable views. She gifted an “eco-audit” to her parents last Christmas as a way to encourage them to question their abundant refrigeration.

Since choosing to reorient her lifestyle on a sustainable trajectory, Neesh has become a subject of curiosity to her friends:

Lots of people are really keen to know what’s going on and I’m sure that they think we’re a bit wacky, because we’ve just got rid of our big freezer and so people tend to go “How can you live without a freezer?” But I think a lot of people respect it but they don’t really have maybe the time or the energy to take it on.

Neesh believes that “the way to encourage people is to really get them to think about their values and then how their actions are matching their values”. She doesn’t need

to enforce her values on others, but is ready to offer a hand. She has found that there are many like her that wish to “live more sustainably or do better things for the environment, especially with all the media, but they just need people to help them”. Feeling lucky to have come so far towards a sustainable way of living in such a short time has motivated her to share this with others.

6.11 Amy

35 years, living with partner, relocating from Canberra to Albury NSW

The very first decision Amy made to reduce her ecological impact was to never own a car at age fifteen. Her class was talking about climate change at school and so she made this pledge that she maintained throughout adulthood until very recently. Her next big step was to become vegetarian along with her university friends and housemates. Amy found support through working at CERES Environmental Park where she belonged to the organic food co-op. Through share-housing with like minded friends, she found maintaining her vegetarian eating habits to be very easy, with others showing her the way to source and prepare delicious food.

Having grown up with her father’s “depression mentality” and resourcefulness, Amy would implicitly question the ownership of goods beyond her needs. Her father’s frugality is evident in her attitude to buying (or not buying) clothing. As she explained, “I try and buy now only things that I really like that I’m going to wear until they fall apart and you know, sometimes I buy second hand stuff when I can find it, but I hate shopping. So I minimise it and then just get on with life”. In direct contrast, her mother’s desire for luxuries she had never been able to afford before, such as fluffy towels, provided a different point of view. Despite her parents’ differences, Amy described them as ‘broadly supportive’ of her early quest for sustainable living.

Rather than presuming a materialist lifestyle was for her, Amy’s study of Philosophy lead her to question the relationship between sustainable living and capitalism. As she recalled, “I felt that with sustainability, often it runs up against economics and I wasn’t sure how I felt about the whole idea of green capitalism”. As she reflected:

I think it’s easy in the first world where everything’s quite nice, to think that “Oh well, we could just tweak a little bit and it will be fine” and it’s like

actually, you know, if we exist in a global world then there are huge, huge consequences and somehow, if we believe that we're all global citizens and we're all equally entitled to live on this planet, then we have to look at ourselves a bit harder than that.

While she knows her ecological footprint is well below the average Australian, it is well over what she considers to be a sustainable and globally equitable footprint. She acknowledges that this goal may be unachievable in Australia "because we're part of a society that has roads and cars and depends on them and houses and you know, we just live so differently".

Rather than being weighed down by these questions of capitalism and global equity, Amy distilled her views into a simple and tangible approach to sustainable living. She believes "less is best" but also, "let's make a society where 'less is more' possible". She enjoyed a recent example from a friend who "said she was planning to go vegan one day a week and I was like "That's such a good idea – that's achievable – one day a week". She is able to distill the bigger picture questions of global equity and a critique of green consumerism down to a relatable set of lifestyle changes. In the future, the concept of sharing is one such principle that she would like to integrate more thoroughly into her lifestyle. As she said, "I was very interested and still very interested in co-housing and sharing of resources. I'd still really like to live in that kind of environment".

Even though she is yet to establish her lifestyle in the ultimate context of shared living, she is very happy with the choices she has made to date and the enjoyment she gets from them. By example, she enthused, "I just love riding a bike and I think it's heaps of fun and I think people forget how much fun it can be and I actually really like public transport too". Far from being deprived, Amy feels that taking responsibility for her life choices is a great way to avoid feeling guilty or discontented. The only exception is when she agonises over whether to travel by flight. She is stuck between what she refers to as her generation's belief that flying is a rite of passage, and the knowledge that this is a poor environmental decision.

Amy is mindful of the constraints within modern life which she faces when trying to live sustainably. When it comes to food shopping with her partner, she encounters

some opposition about the high costs of the organic food she prefers. As she explained:

Probably 90% of the what we eat is organic and I mean everything that we eat fresh is organic and most of what of what we buy that's not, like dried roots or tinned goods is organic, but there are some things that it's just too hard to get or – I'm quite hardline about it but my partner, he's like "That's too expensive, we're just going to have the commercial ones"...

She is willing to experiment, and so she tried a sustainable and very cost effective method of acquiring food called skip-dipping. Although this short term experiment proved that it was not for her. "I feel like skip-dipping's a bit like op-shopping in that sometimes you bring home stuff that you've found that you don't really need". While skip-dipping as a method of consumption may not have enduring appeal to her, seeing the rubbish skips filled with food going to waste did make Amy more aware of the need to eliminate food waste.

Over the years Amy has experimented and developed her philosophical approach to sustainable living, and she has enjoyed taking others along for the ride. In leading by example, she says "you're showing young people that that's an okay way to live and it's an okay way to live when you're in your 30s and you have lots of fun and it means that it maybe opens up a way for them that wasn't so clear before. It's not that they wouldn't have got there on their own probably, but it might make it easier".



6.12 Simon

31 years, living in rural Victoria with his partner and two children in the Moora Moora community, Rural Victoria

Having grown up in the expansive, natural countryside of Queensland, a move to the city of Brisbane to pursue study was debilitating for Simon. He would take a three hour bus ride to get away from the concrete cityscape and take in some greenery at the nursery. As he recalled, “I had no money to spend or no garden to put anything in if I bought it, but I would just go there and hang out in this nursery and try not to look like a loiterer for the sake of being around all this green stuff”. This quick fix proved inadequate and Simon decided to leave the city and his studies to go wwoofing³³ so he could work on the farmlands and get back amongst the natural environment.

Simon spent three years wwoofing between various farms with the hope of finding ideas about alternative ways of living. He had a sense that the lifestyle he grew up with was unsustainable and was motivated by the concept of taking responsibility for his own existence. As he recalled, “I thought maybe if I visit enough people, no one of them is going to have the perfect lifestyle, but maybe if I visit enough of them I’ll be able to piece together something that’s good for me”. His adventures led to a greater sense of intention that he realised through returning to study social ecology.

Simon also had the pleasure of meeting his wife-to-be while working the farmlands. They had two children, which only enhanced desire for sustainable living. Addressing his children, he said:

I want to be able to say to them that I've done everything I could to play a part in being part of the solution rather than part of the problem and I

³³ Wwoofing stands for ‘Willing Workers on Organic Farms’, the practice of working on farms in return for accommodation and income.

want that to be a credible response, I want them to be able to go oh so that's why we put everything compostable in a compost heap and that's why you said no we can't drive there because it's too far away and that's why we did it so that they can go, oh, okay I see you've been doing everything you can. Now it's time for me to do everything I can.

Towards a self-sufficient, sustainable way of living, the family moved to the Moora Moora Community in Healesville, in rural Victoria. This cooperative community promotes sustainable living through the way residents live, and through a community learning centre that is open to the public. Food production is communally shared as Simon explained:

We've started up what's called a community supported agriculture project so about 200 metres that way there's a one hectare market garden that a couple up here are leading the way in running. And it's a subscription scheme, that's one way to describe it, where basically you become a member of the farm every spring so around about now actually we've got to get our membership in. We pay up for a whole year's worth of vegies and that gives Amy and Luke a guaranteed income, a guaranteed market, and they don't have to worry about what price it will fetch when their crops come up. They grow something like 40 different varieties of vegetables between now and next August and they supply us all with a share, so whatever gets picked is divided between however many members there are that year and depending on the season.

While cooperation is key for the day to day lives of Moora Moora inhabitants, Simon pointed out that there are some drawbacks. Being in a rural setting requires the use of a car for shared transport to schools and work. Rather than being a quiet country existence, life in the community is busy as there are regular meetings to attend and visitors to entertain and educate through the learning centre. In some ways, this conflicts with his reason for being there and his decision to work part time as a government environmental educator nearby. Reducing work to prioritise time with his family and time to manage their lifestyle self-sufficiently were two motivations for the move to Moora Moora. As he explained:

I refuse to be roped into working full time and there are a lot of reasons, it's a lifestyle thing, I don't find the idea of doing any one thing five days a week 40

hours or whatever it is a week attractive. (It was a) deliberate decision to be around more when my kids are young and to be more involved in doing things for myself like building the house or growing vegies or looking after chooks or whatever it is rather than earning enough money to be able to pay people to do that for me, I'd much rather just be doing it myself, having a go at least.

Simon's current life and work balance exemplifies his desire for a lifestyle that places environmental and family wellbeing above all else. As he said, "you either find a way to produce everything you want or only want what you can produce, and I think maybe they're two ends of the spectrum and somewhere in the middle there's a balance where you can learn to want less and you can learn to produce". Through questioning the balance between work and life, Simon has found a way to support his family on a single, part time income while he builds a straw bale home for them to live in. In his own words, "we tend to get by quite well on one part time income largely because we want a lot less than most people our age; we try and set that example to our kids of wanting less or wanting less elaborate and expensive things".



6.13 Cameron

32 years, living in Canberra suburbs with his wife in their own home

Cameron grew up alongside the wise presence of his grandfather who would "really question every time you just automatically lash out to kill an insect, (he'd) just ask the question as to why would you think you need to do that?". Their relationship fostered a deep sense of responsibility within Cameron. His father was also influential as the two would go to the rubbish

tip in search of all kinds of useful things that they would bring home in awe of what others would waste.

After studying psychology and working on a community development project in Ipswich, Cameron was starting to narrow his professional focus. As he enthused, “I love building things where that purpose is to create a better world, and typically that means building something that people are inspired by, participate in”. In his early adult life, Cameron has built and contributed to several organisations that have generated an enthusiastic following. He is the CEO of the International Young Professionals Foundation, a global community of young people who are trying to make the world a better place. Having founded this group, he has been delighted to see others within it go on to achieve amazing things, such as the Natural Edge Project. Simultaneously, he worked with a group of academics to found ACT Otherwise, a sustainable consumption action group that runs educational workshops and mentors young people through the process of creating sustainable initiatives such as events, educational documentaries and clothes swaps.

His latest contribution is working as the operations Manager for Fair Trade across Australia and New Zealand. In this role he has helped expand the Australian market for Fair Trade goods faster than any other nation, raising the profile of ethical consumption while he does it. As he explained:

It's interesting because I think the Fair Trade movement in Australia has both benefited from and helped build ethical consumption movement, so it's not just taking advantage of it; it's actually helped create it, through what it's been doing and its engagement with business and its education of the consumer.

Cameron's working life keeps him excited and engaged, but he is mindful that there are economic constraints. As he said, “I kind of stayed in the space of only working part time deliberately because I wanted to be able to have time to spend on doing these things that I thought were important and valuable for the world that certainly weren't going to pay me any money”. Out of economic, and ecological necessity, Cameron and his wife live a fairly frugal existence while they are managing the costs of home ownership. Besides keeping a tight rein on their energy and water consumption, they recently had to confront a situation where his wife's change of job required the transportation of a second car. To this quandary Cameron responded the only way he knew given, a second car was out of the question, and said to his

wife, “here’s the key, the car is now yours and I will maybe get a lift with you sometimes”.

While he maintains that this sacrifice was not a grand one, Cameron would find it very difficult to go without meat. As he said, “I’m not a vegetarian, I should be, from all the environmental things that I believe in, I know that I should be, but I’m not”. Beyond his love of the taste and culture of meat-eating, he attributes his family farming background as the root of his meat interests. He tries to buy and support local producers, and eats vegetarian meals at least half of the time, but giving it up is currently out of the question. This may be because he rationalises that the impacts of his actions are somewhat removed, and “when you don’t have those information loops, you can’t modify your behaviour according”.

While meat is still on the menu, he is willing to learn about and address the implications of his clothing consumption. It’s not an area he has known much about, but he is starting to think about the impacts of clothing and seeking alternative, sustainable means such as recycling and reusing. He describes his process of change towards sustainable living as “trying to build the best habits”. He prefers to act alongside rebuilding a supportive community in the place of the individualisation of society that drives consumerism. As he described:

I think part of the reason why we’ve become so unsustainable is because of the individualisation and it’s better for business and the economy that every individual buys stuff for themselves, because that’s more units as well as opposed to households buying them or whole communities buying them, so that works for an economic point of view, I don’t think it works from the sustainability point of view.

He knows that most of his generation are unlikely to be so critical as they “grow up in a system that just wants to consume; it wants their dollar, it wants us to get the job and to buy the stuff; that’s their primary role is to keep the economy moving and growing by buying stuff”. With a supportive community, he believes you can escape the cycle of consumerism. By example he mentioned that he hasn’t needed to buy a lawnmower because his friend nearby has one to loan.

Broadly speaking, Cameron sees sustainable living as simply “seeking to be conscious of what you are consuming, where it is coming from, where it is going, and

doing your best to consume in a way that has the least negative environmental, and greatest positive social impact, possible”. Going further, he sees his role as “seeking to influence and inspire those around you and working to change systems to make it easier to do good and harder to do bad”.



6.14 Shona

Age 24 years, living in Fremantle with her daughter

At high school, Shona had become known as “the hippy” after taking a keen interest in the peak oil crisis and delivered an impassioned speech about recycling to the whole school. In class she would ask the teachers the tricky questions. In economics she inquired why there were no environmental taxes and while most of her teachers dismissed her as facetious, there was one that rewarded her curiosity. This teacher not only encouraged her persistent questioning, but offered some career advice that lead Shona away from a career in acting and towards a degree in Sustainable Development.

Studying sustainability was a much greater challenge than Shona had expected and she ultimately decided to let it go. As she recalled, “I quit because I wasn’t mature enough to handle the reality of the situation, so when I started learning about how f***ed up everything is, it actually quite frequently brought me to tears, to the point where I just couldn’t read about it anymore”. Alongside her study, she had started working in her partner’s, parents’ organic food store where she was introduced to a whole array of sustainable produce and new concepts that she had never heard about at university.

As she was working in the organic food store, she was excited to see the demand for organic products increase, the availability of products diversify and seeing the movement take shape, with her being a part of it. As she explained:

I think some of the things I'm most excited about is watching all these organic products pop up everywhere, and all the different things that are available. When I started in this shop, there wasn't organic cream available, and there wasn't organic milk supplier, and now there's one in WA, which is really cool, so that kind of thing is really exciting, seeing the availability and seeing the awareness grow and seeing the sales figures go up for all these industries and watching the demand grow.

Learning from her working experience, Shona was inspired to start her own business called The Ethical Entrepreneur. Her role involves working for a variety of ethical and sustainable organisations to help them extend their reach and manage their business. One of her clients is Clean Life, an online database and newsletter promoting sustainable and ethical consumption. She also sells certified organic skin products and Fair Trade sustainable toys for two other businesses. It was important for Shona to have a working role that could be flexible, so she can enjoy time with her daughter. It was essential that this role also be aligned with her sustainability values.

Beyond her work, Shona is very focused on maintaining a sustainable and toxic free lifestyle for her and her daughter. She concedes that it is hard to overcome a "love of consuming", but it isn't the means by which she defines herself. As she said "I don't need other things to make me happy. I don't need to consume in order to feel good". With a child, it was difficult to forego some modern conveniences, of which owning a car was the most significant. Shona waited until her daughter was 9 months old before concluding that it was too difficult to manage a child and a grocery box without a car. Rather than seeking to justify this, she acknowledges that it is a step backwards, one she regrets in light of how sustainable she is in all other aspects of life.

The parameters for Shona's sustainable life are simple; consume less, don't waste and be resourceful. Despite this common sense approach, those around her have

had mixed responses. Her father was slightly confused and a little embarrassed by her decision to eat and live sustainably. But he was also proud, as Shona heard him telling others about the way she lived. Upon reflection, she reached her own conclusion that “people were not interested in me preaching to them at all, so I changed my tact from preaching to actually just living it and just being an example”. This approach has proved to be successful, as her friends now treat her as an authority on sustainable consumption and they are keen for her advice and her approval.



6.15 Jane

24 years, living in her family home in the outer suburbs of Perth

Something was getting Jane’s mother down. Months of gloom were finally explained by her growing concern about the problem of climate change. Jane’s mother’s worries combined with the enlightening release of Al Gores documentary “An Inconvenient Truth” sent Jane into a life-questioning tailspin. Studying to be a lawyer no longer had the same significance as before she was aware of the looming climate crisis. So she quit her study and set about the

task of spreading the word about climate change, and the need to live sustainably.

Her first project, in collaboration with her mother, was to draw a sustainability map, linking all the ideas they had about the subject. As she explained:

We created this mind map of all the different things we could do to make a difference. It came from our heart and then we thought oh we’ll put it on the internet, and it’s gone crazy, like thousands of people have seen it and said can we use this? You know, spiritual masters with a following of thousands of people have contacted me and said can we translate this into Mandarin,

so it's gone crazy! It's a powerful little mind map because when you look at it in one glance you can see what you need to do to make a difference.

From the success of their shared map, Jane got a taste for making a difference and wanted to do more. Inspired by Al Gore, she started a small business based on giving awareness-raising talks about climate change to students. However, it was not an easy path that she had chosen, and she became disheartened at the lacklustre response of some of the students. As she recalled:

On a couple of occasions I've left and cried after presentations, because the students and teachers just don't seem to care, they've grown up with this mentality of they deserve the best, big house, big car, just no real appreciation for the environment. I felt like I hadn't made a difference working with them at all. But I guess that was early on when I first started giving talks, and I was expecting to change these little kids, change their whole mentality, and you can't do that in an hour.

After further consideration, Jane realised she needed to change her approach. As she confirmed:

Unfortunately, if I talk about people suffering in Bangladesh that's not going to really do anything for a young person. I'm not saying all young people won't be alarmed by that, but you've got to really personalise your message and connect global warming to the students - this is how it's going to affect you, and I don't think I was doing it that well before. The way I was presenting, I think my worries and my fears were coming across and the kids just kind of sensed that...

Having overcome the adversity within her new professional role, Jane turned her attention to her lifestyle, which had generated some mixed responses from family and friends. As she recalled, at Christmas her family were discussing their overseas trips and she started asking them about offsetting and tree planting. To which they laughed and said "Jane's gone psycho, Jane's a bloody greenie". However, a month later and they were starting to ask questions of interest such as "it more energy efficient to use a fan or the air-conditioning?".

While living at home, Jane faces certain limitations when it comes to making sustainable choices. Her family have come together to agree on the installation of

solar power, but the car-filled yard is a sticking point. While she can choose to cycle, she acknowledges that their outer suburban location makes car-free living difficult. Rather than keep fighting battles where she is outnumbered, Jane focuses on the little things she can do to reduce her ecological footprint. Homemade vegetarian pizza nights replace the old take away rituals with friends. She takes her coffee in a reusable cup and will always question whether she really needs something before buying it.

One of the most challenging sacrifices Jane has made, along with her family, is her decision not to travel by flight. As she confirmed, “I can’t bring myself to fly, now I know about the impact of flying, I can’t be giving global warming talks and jet setting every year overseas; it just doesn’t feel right”. This topic is guaranteed to cause a rift with friends who cannot understand what motivates this enormous sacrifice. As Jane says, “my friends they argue a lot with me. If they’re all going say to Thailand, and I say I can’t do that, and said the only way I’ll get there is by cargo ship, they’ll laugh and think oh you’re being bloody ridiculous!”. Whether it’s the ridicule of family or the bemusement of friends, Jane just lets it wash over her, holding onto her core intention to live sustainably in light of the serious problem of climate change. A lot has changed for her in a short time, and as she says, “ I think slowly they’re understanding where I am coming from”.

7.0 Discussion

7.0 Discussion

7.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the lifestyle portraits by looking across the fourteen narratives. This phase of the analysis is guided by the research objectives with a view to identifying patterns, commonalities and differences. Thus, the first section analyses the initial and ongoing motivations that inspired the young people to adopt sustainable consumption lifestyles. The analysis found that some participants grew up in families that held to the view that they should live lightly on Earth, while others had a significant life experience that reoriented them away from a materialist lifestyle in pursuit of sustainability. Further analysis revealed that participants required support and the experience of success to maintain their motivation to live lightly.

The next section discusses the second objective by examining the different ways in which the young people sought to live sustainably. It outlines a set of practices that were consistently mentioned by the interview participants, and which may be summarised as an overarching set of principles for sustainable living. This is followed by an analysis of findings on the second research objective by discussing the challenges that the young people faced in seeking to follow their intentions to live sustainably. They experienced both individual (or internal) challenges that hinder sustainable behaviours as well as systemic (or external) challenges that extend beyond the scope of individual control. Both types of challenges are explored with a view to uncovering the ways in which the magnitude of these challenges could be reduced and overcome.

The analysis of the data in the portraits pertaining to the third research objective is then discussed through an analysis of the roles that participants played in influencing their peers, family and broader community through both their personal and professional lives. This discussion includes evaluating how participants utilised different strategies and opportunities to influence the consumption behaviours and attitudes of others. Through understanding their spheres of influence, this chapter argues that these young people may have a role to play in influencing social change in a sustainable direction.

7.2 What Motivates Young People to Pursue Lifestyles of Sustainable Consumption

7.2.1 Introduction

This section explores the reasons that *initially* motivated young people to consider living sustainably and the *ongoing* motivations that keep them on this path. A concept map that includes the key examples of these motivations is detailed below (Figure 7.1). Each motivation is discussed in-depth within section and conclusions about the key motivations for young people pursuing sustainable lifestyles are drawn.

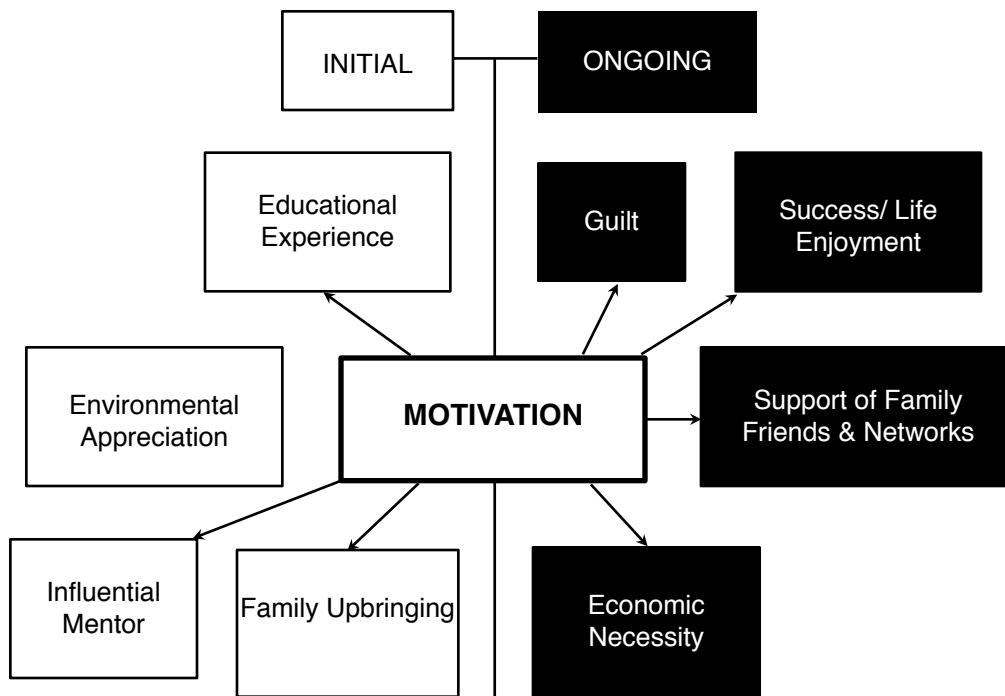


Figure 7.1 Participants Motivations for Sustainable Living

7.2.2 Initial motivations

Across the lifestyle portraits, there were four primary reasons that initially motivated these young people to adopt sustainable lifestyles. These include (1) family upbringing, (2) appreciation for the natural environment, (3) an educational experience and (4) an influential mentor. Some of these motivations (1 and 2) are long term, while others (3 and 4) are shorter term or sudden motivations that reoriented participants away from a materialist lifestyle in pursuit of a sustainable way of life.

1. Family Upbringing

Some participants had grown up with the understanding that there was a need to live lightly on Earth. Vahri's parents were economically motivated towards reducing their consumption, but she believed that this fostered her understanding that she need not consume more than was required. Amy's father, with his "depression mentality" and frugal ways fostered a similar conclusion in her life philosophy over the long term. The parents of both Gabrielle and Sarah were described as 'social activists' and their concern for the broader society in which they operate was passed down to both these participants. Other early life experience, such as discussing the hole in the ozone layer or the problem of littering at school built upon their founding philosophy about living lightly. For these young people, concepts of environmentalism and sustainability were the natural extension, rather than a new set of ideas. Having grown up with a pro-sustainability attitude, these participants could not imagine living another way.

2. Environmental Appreciation

Many of the participants expressed an appreciation for the natural environment, but there were a couple who noted that growing up amongst nature fostered their interests in living sustainably. Ryan recalled growing up in Coffs Harbour, with a national park for a backyard and sprawling beaches nearby. Simon has grown up in the Queensland countryside, and he was unable to bear living in the concrete landscape of Brisbane city when he moved to study. Being around nature was essential for Simon, and when removed from his green surrounds, his morale took a

turn for the worse. His dependence on the natural environment motivated his desire to work to preserve it. Like Ryan and Simon, many of the participants expressed that their appreciation for the natural environment and their desire to refrain from depleting Earth's natural resources through their lifestyle choices.

3. Educational Experience

An educational experience provided the initial motivation to question the ecological and social impacts of materialist lifestyles for the participants who were more recent devotees to sustainable living. James was first inspired in this way while studying environmental engineering at university. Beyond being introduced to the concept of climate change and its impacts, he also found a supportive network of new "green" friends and a food co-op to join, to support his journey towards sustainable living. Jane's climate change education and wake-up call came in the form of Al Gore's movie, 'An Inconvenient Truth'. After gaining an understanding of the problem of climate change and what humans stand to lose, she was determined to shift her focus to sustainable living. Tosh had returned and completed study within the field of environmental engineering, and this motivated him towards a low energy lifestyle. Given the age of the participants (aged 18-35 year), many were students or had recently completed their higher education degrees. Across the lifestyle portraits, it became clear that once they knew of the problem of climate change, and the impact of their lifestyles, they could not continue to pursue a conventional high consumption lifestyle.

A few participants, including James and Shona, mentioned that becoming educated about the dire state of the environment and the threat of climate change overwhelmed them initially. As Shona recalled, reading about climate change "it actually quite frequently brought me to tears, to the point where I just couldn't read about it anymore". However, their concerns led to further consideration and eventually, a more tangible framework for their sustainable consumption lifestyles.

4. Influential Mentor

Some participants were inspired to live sustainably by a particular person in their lives, whether this be a family member, lecturer or well known sustainability expert. James and Shona both referred to inspiring educators that helped inform and

motivate them about the need to live sustainably. Cameron's mentor was closer to home, as it was his grandfather that taught him to question his impact on the tiniest insect or world at large. Stephen was inspired by the prospect of inventing a sustainable way of life and cited futurist/illustrator Hilde Vasser as his conceptual mentor. Juliette drew inspiration from social entrepreneur Anita Roddick, founder of the Body Shop. Roddick brought together the business side of Juliette's previous interests and the new ecological and social awareness she was fostering. The role of mentors, whether they be close or connected only through the books they write, was to inspire and inform participants and set an example for what they could achieve.

7.2.3 Ongoing motivations

After the initial motivations inspired the young people to question their lifestyles in light of sustainability, a set of five ongoing motivations were identified that kept them focused on their sustainable living goals. These included (1) guilt, (2) economic necessity, (3) support from their family, friends and networks, (4) experiencing success and enjoyment through the experience of sustainable living.

1. Guilt

Finding out about the social and ecological impacts of their high consumption lifestyles was a great source of guilt for some participants. For many, guilt continued to play a role in keeping them on the track of sustainable living in the face of more convenient or desirable temptations. In Juliette's story, guilt kept her from indulging in unsustainable foods she craved and ensured she made it to the farmers market instead of stopping short at the local supermarket. When confronted by a meal at a friend's house that fell outside her ethical standards, guilt made Juliette uncomfortable, before she resigned herself to eating it. In her life, guilt was a motivator but at times, also a burden.

Most of the participants mentioned guilt in some capacity, even if it was their quest to keep guilt at bay so they could stay motivated. Guilt was portrayed as something that could provide a challenge to their motivation, as well as a motivation or mediator of their consuming behaviour. Ryan did not feel guilty about his lifestyle choices, even when he made a decision that he conceded, was not ultimately sustainable. He

managed potential feelings of guilt through understanding the broader picture of the society in which he operates. For example, Ryan did not feel guilty as others did about choosing to fly when there was no viable alternative. He understood that the dynamics of the aviation industry were bigger than his single decision, and so he knew his level of influence either way would be negligible, and this permitted him to board the plane, guilt free.

There were others who rationalised guilt with regard to one poor consuming decision against the nobility of the good decisions they make at other times. The guilt of flying for Tosh was offset by the good of the energy-reducing work he would be doing at his destination. As he confirmed “I know I’ve had to fly a couple of times for work and somewhere in my head I go “you know, the work I’m doing will hopefully reduce emissions by a lot. You have that conversation I think with yourself that alleviates the guilts a bit”.

Other participants wore their guilt like a badge of pride for the greater ecological good. Jane was too guilty about the carbon impact of flying to do it, but this was something that she was exceptionally proud of, if not challenged by. Whatever the role of guilt, it was clear that it played a role in most participants’ consuming lives as a motivating or mediating force.

2. Economic Necessity

Some participants mentioned that their low consumption lifestyles were motivated by their economic frugality in addition to their social and ecological concerns. Cameron told the story of his wife’s need for a second car, which he resolved by giving her his, reflecting his preference for saving money and carbon emissions. Amy and Vahri both recalled their parents’ approach to frugal living and it was evident that this influenced their consuming rationale. As Amy explained “I try and buy now only things that I really like that I’m going to wear until they fall apart” in relation to clothing consumption. In most instances, the economic benefits of the purchasing decisions were explained in relation to other sustainable benefits. Neesh enthused about the low-cost benefits of buying food in bulk and sharing it among her food co-op. Economic frugality was considered to be an ongoing motivation, but in some instances it could also pose a challenge to sustainable choices where they are more

expensive than a less sustainable alternative.

3. Support

One of the most significant motivations was the support participants received for their way of living. Support came from a variety of sources including family, friends and their broader networks. Parental acceptance of their way of living was a subject of great importance to many of the participants. James delighted that his mother overcame her initial confusion and resistance to him becoming vegetarian, to embrace water saving initiatives of her own. Shona noted that while her father was embarrassed by some of her lifestyle choices, he was also proud to some degree as he would make mention of it to his friends. Parental endorsement was not essential for participants to stay motivated, however it was preferred. Given these young people were highly committed to living sustainable and the purpose of doing so, experiencing severe opposition from parents was difficult at times. Neesh mentioned that her parents lived on the opposite scale of consumption, however she was gently educating them through measures such as gifting an energy audit to them for Christmas.

For some participants, family support was coming slowly, alongside their re-education about the impact of their consuming lives. Some participants were happy to have influenced a one member of their family while conceding that others would continue to resist. Juliette was very pleased to have converted her mother into a great admirer of environmentalist David Suzuki. Tosh was proud to have inspired his brother to live with a greater ecological conscience, even if his parents were disinterested in joining him “in the dark ages” as they described it.

Many of the young people cited the support they received from their friends as motivating. James enjoyed the support of his “new green friends” from university, some of whom he shared a house with. Both Amy and Stephen agreed that living with people who also wish to live lightly makes life easier, and only enhances their dedication to the cause. This kind of validation was an essential motivation, especially where consumption is communal, as is the case with these share housing arrangements. Through sharing values with the friends surrounding them, it was easy for young people to simply get on with their sustainable way of life, rather than wasting energy and time defending it. Where friends were opposed or threatened by

the participants new set of values, they could hinder their momentum towards sustainable living. Juliette confirmed that leaving behind the friends who knew her as “consumer girl” in Sydney and surrounding herself with people from whom she could learn about sustainable living in Melbourne, enabled and supported her lifestyle transition. In the same vein, James noted that his “old friends” who enjoyed steak eating and driving four wheel drives stood in direct opposition to his new “green friends” who chose vegetarianism and spending time community gardens instead.

For Neesh, the motivation provided by group action was a driving force. Her whole approach to sustainable living was enabled by group collaboration and support. From the CRAG group she founded to share tips of low carbon living, to the food co-op who would collectively purchase inexpensive, bulk organic produce to share, she found that group collaboration accelerated and enhanced her ability to live more sustainably.

Broader networks and organisations like Neesh’s food co-op were also a source of ongoing motivation. Food co-ops and community gardens were commonly mentioned in this way. By example, James enjoyed the advice and support he found in his local community garden from other, more experienced gardeners. Gabrielle relished the act of participating in Critical Mass, a large group of cyclists who ride to reclaim the city for bicycles from the cars that dominate. Feeling a part of bigger action seemed like the way for participants to avoid feeling the disempowerment sometimes associated with individual action. By coming together with others who share their views, they found inspiration and the validation they needed to continue to live in a sustainable way.

4. Experiencing Success

Across the lifestyle portraits, it was apparent that living sustainably could be a reward unto itself. Participants such as Amy stated that they quite simply enjoyed their low consumption life. Many cited that cycling for transport was something that was not only ecologically responsible, but something they enjoyed immensely. As Amy confirmed “I just love riding a bike and I think it’s heaps of fun and I think people forget how much fun it can be, and I actually really like public transport too”. Where participants were avoiding a negative impact successfully and gaining a high level of

enjoyment, participants found delight.

Three participants used ecological footprint calculators and more methodical means to test the success of their energy and water saving measures. Neesh, Sarah and Tosh were all pleased to claim a tangible victory when their conservation measures proved successful, and this provided motivation to continue or improve.

The success of a given practice was determined in a variety of ways, whether that be through enjoyment, calculated reductions of resources, the consistency of their commitment or validation from others. Regardless of the definition, success was an important ongoing motivation for sustainable living.

7.2.4 Synthesis

This section analysed the reasons why young people are motivated to pursue sustainable lifestyles (research objective 1). Through looking across the lifestyle portraits, it became clear that there were a range of four initial motivations that inspired young people to question materialist lifestyles in light of sustainability. This included an educational experience, an influential mentor, their family upbringing and their appreciation for the natural environment. The first two motivations were most likely to trigger a sudden realisation that there is a need to address materialist lifestyles, while the latter two motivations were part of the young people's upbringing, shaping a pro-sustainability attitude over the long term.

For some of the more recent devotees to sustainable living, the shock of learning about climate change was sufficient motivation to reorient their lifestyles along a sustainable pathway. This was consistent with the findings of the literature review (Chapter 3). As Blewitt explained, "identifying with a cause larger than oneself is perhaps the most powerful motivator to learn" (2006, p6). Both Jane and James were moved to address their lifestyle consumption on the basis of finding out about the threat of climate change and the concern for the environment and other issues that this brought to their attention. They were essentially shocked into action. It is significant to note that neither Jane nor James said that someone had been deliberately trying to scare them, it was their reading and interpretation that led them to take the consequences seriously. This suggests that scare tactics have to

be carefully managed, and not over-done, so they sink in instead of being brushed aside. As Fien expands, “using climate change scare tactics to engage individual action as motivated by fear or guilt may prove to be effective” (Fien et. al. 2007, p8). This is most evident in Juliette’s story where an awareness about the need to live lightly triggered feelings of guilt when she made a decision outside this intent. Guilt was shown to be a significant ongoing motivation across the lifestyle portraits, however, Shona and James were initially overwhelmed by the challenge posed by climate change before they were able to transform their concerns into inspired action.

Having grown up with the presence of climate change has meant that many young people have fostered an awareness that they need to take some kind of responsibility for reducing their ecological footprint, according to the literature review (Chapter 4). Each of the fourteen participants demonstrated they were willing and able to do this. Half of the participants recalled discussing an environmental concern such as the Ozone hole or littering at an early age. Gabrielle confirmed that she grew up believing that climate change was her generation’s issue to face.

Contrary to the suggestion from Bentley, Fien and Neil (2005) that young people don’t connect environmental concern with implications of lifestyle consumption, the fourteen participants translated this environmental concern into lifestyle projects where they addressed their consumption habits in a variety of ways. Some of the participants were “transforming the politics of consumption for their own ends, and in turn, quite capable of establishing a critical stance on what consumer culture has to offer” (Miles, 2000, p117). For example, Amy explained how she was questioning the relationship between sustainability and economics as exemplified by the proliferation of “green consumerism”. Cameron spoke about how he was playing an active role in defining and developing the ethical consumption market within Australia through his work with Fair Trade.

Several participants found inspiration and ideas about sustainable living through formal education, but this was not always the case. Simon and Shona preferred to learn through life experience and gather ideas about sustainable living from those around them. According to the literature review (Chapter 3), one of the most

powerful ways in which we gather knowledge and learn about how to change the world is through learning from each other. “Learning often takes place following or during critical reflection that feeds back into ourselves, re-articulating our experiences and our understanding of those experiences” (Blewitt, 2006, p6). Once this learning and understanding had taken place, the participants were very motivated to share it with others. As Jackson explained, “there appears to be a natural tendency to imitable behaviours we see in others” (2005, p110) so social learning may be an important way forward.

Collaboration and the support the participants received from family, friends and networks enabled and inspired them to pursue of a sustainable way of life. This is consistent with what Belford, Jones and Walker identified as the two key motivators affecting an individual’s willingness to change behaviour. Firstly, “knowing that everyone is equally engaged in taking responsibility for environmental activities; second, receiving feedback on the positive effects resulting from these actions” (Blewitt, 2006, p16). The literature review hypothesised that an individual may be highly passionate about the environmental causes and willing to ‘go it alone’ but their dedication can be sustained or even amplified if they have support from their family and peers. At the very least, family and peers need to make allowances for the changes in the young person’s way of living. From analysing across the lifestyle portraits, it is clear that participants needed some support figures close to them and required some room to change their consuming behaviours. For example, James needed his mother to accommodate his dietary shift to vegetarianism when he visited, but he relied upon his new “green friends” and housemates for ongoing motivation and support.

Contrary to the stereotypes of young people explored in Chapter 4, young people have a strong interest in their local community (Anich, Luckins & Samson, 2009, p4). The lifestyle portraits showed that young people were highly interested in ventures such as community gardens, where they had the opportunity to draw upon and contribute to a supportive network. As Cameron explained, his desire was to reduce his own consumption and at the same time, participate in what he referred to as “the rebuilding of a community” around him to support this. Cameron believed that a resilient community would

enable co-operative practices such as sharing, and that in this way, community-oriented values would overcome the dominant individualistic approach promoted by conventional economic values.

7.3 How are Young People Living Sustainably?

7.3.1 Introduction

This section analyses the participants' lifestyle consumption to explore the second research objective, to investigate how young people are living better with less. The lifestyle portraits provided details about the range of sustainable practices that young people were adopting in keeping with their sustainable lifestyles. The concept map below shows how these practices can be divided into three primary lifestyle categories, (1) food, (2) transport and (3) household consumption. These categories are consistent with the framework that UNEP developed for the global study of sustainable lifestyles (UNEP/RMIT, 2010).

The model below (Figure 7.2) shows the most common practices that young people are adopting as determined through analysis of the narratives as a whole. These common practices are discussed in section 7.3.2 with the view to identifying a general approach to sustainable living drawn from the lifestyle portraits of the participants. Section 7.3.3 translates these practices into a set of guiding principles for sustainable living. This leads to a concluding discussion (7.3.4) about how young people defined sustainable consumption as a set of principles and practices within the lifestyle portraits as compared to the definitions discussed in the literature review.

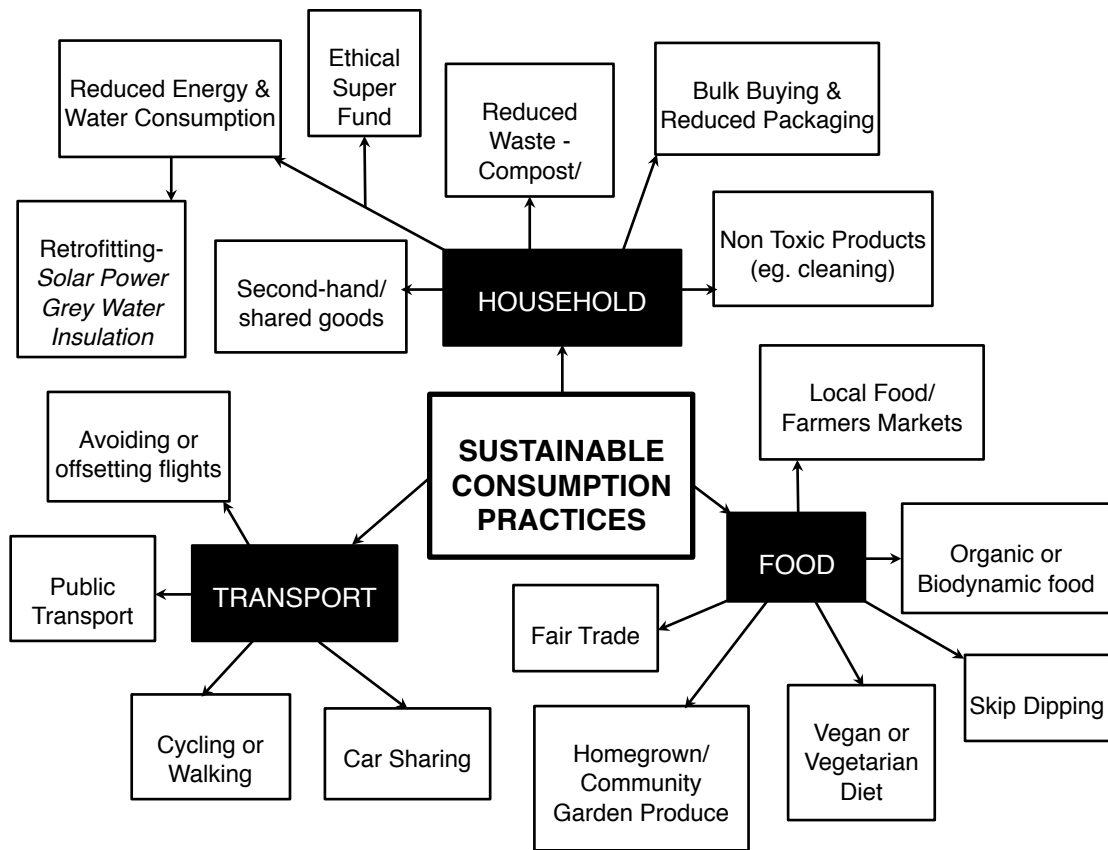


Figure 7.2 Participants Sustainable Consumption Practices

7.3.2 Patterns Across the Lifestyle Portraits

By identifying and describing the sustainable consumption practices identified by the fourteen participants, this section addresses the second research objective, which asks how young people are living *better* with less in social, ecological and economic terms. By analysing the narratives as a whole, this section identifies the common sustainable practices adopted by the participants within the consumption segments of (1) transport, (2) household and (3) food. It is not an exhaustive list of all the sustainable practices identified by participants, but rather a snapshot of the most prevalent and popular practices. The intention of this analysis is to determine a common approach to sustainable living as exemplified by the participants in this study and to highlight the actions that were seen by participants as most practical

within their lives, as well as being important from a sustainability perspective.

1. Transport

The fourteen participants chose to discuss their preferred modes of transport in light of their sustainability values. As a category, transport refers to how participants travelled from one destination to the next, most commonly by foot, bicycle, public transport or by car. The majority of the participants mentioned bicycle riding as one of their primary sources of transport. Some participants chose to live close to their place of work and inner city, thereby reducing their need to travel. They could rely on cycling and walking as their modes of transport, without the need to own or use a car to travel longer distances. Juliette, Tosh, Gabrielle and Ryan adopted a no-car ownership policy and Ryan went so far as to let his driver's license expire. Bicycle riding and walking were portrayed as having multiple benefits for the participants, including exercise and enjoyment in addition to the environmental advantages. Public transport was also mentioned by half of the participants as preference alongside cycling and walking. Sarah and Gabrielle both chose to live within close proximity of public transport so that this sustainable option was also a convenient one.

Avoiding car ownership was seen as desirable, and James, Vahri, Shona and Jane expressed disappointment in relation to their car dependency. For Vahri and Shona, having a child to transport over distances was the main rationale for car ownership. Jane chose to cycle when she could, however living far from the city meant she had to drive distances too long to commute by bike. James had an obligation to his family to maintain the 'family car' despite his inner city location and desire to cycle instead. These challenges will be elaborated upon in Section 7.4.

Where car ownership was deemed essential, the participants expressed a preference for reducing their driving through car sharing schemes such as car pooling. Cameron shared his car with his wife even though this involved compromising the convenience of his own access to the vehicle. Simon mentioned that car pooling was the way that his children were transported to school and he to work. Vahri referred to a previous car pooling group that her daughter used to travel to school, but she was disappointed that those in the group had moved out of the

local area, leaving her to drive her daughter daily. She was disappointed to have found a more sustainable solution only to have to revert to individual driving trips.

Travel by flight was the most contentious form of transportation that participants discussed. The majority of participants mentioned flying, but not without agonising over the emissions this creates and questioning their right to do so in environmental terms. At one end of the spectrum, Jane had pledged to forego flying forever as she believed it was at odds with her approach to sustainable living. As she explained, “I can’t bring myself to fly, now I know about the impact of flying, I can’t be giving global warming talks and jet setting every year overseas; it just doesn’t feel right”. At the other end of the spectrum, Ryan was comfortable flying if there was no viable alternative, such as a fast train. He is aware that the dynamics of the aviation industry are unlikely to be affected by his individual decision not to fly, so he is comfortable with a decision to restrict rather than eliminate travel by flight. If he were to give up flying he is mindful that he would also miss out on all the cross-cultural benefits that have enriched his life to date.

Like Ryan, the majority of participants chose to fly, but sought to minimise their air travel. Gabrielle travelled between Sydney and Melbourne by train with her bicycle on board, unless her work required an interstate trip at short notice and flying became the only option. Tosh felt guilty about his need to fly between Melbourne and Sydney for work and family visits, but he tried to combine these to reduce air travel. Juliette lamented that she had to take a flight to Sydney on ‘World Environment Day’ to visit her Mother on her birthday. However, she rationalised her guilt by offsetting the flight with a decision to stop buying new books to balance her consumption footprint.

A few participants mentioned offsetting their flights through the purchase of their airline tickets, however, given the small financial outlay, this was seen as a small concession rather than the appropriate environmental compensation for the emissions produced through flying. In summary, the participants were concerned about the implications of flying, however they still chose to do so for a variety of reasons including professional development, fulfilling family obligations and for cultural enrichment. They sought to reduce the environmental impacts of the flight

and the burden of the guilt they associated with flying.

It is significant to note that despite their concern, none of the participants the importance of urban design and planning to reduce the need for travel in the first place, nor observed how telecommunications and internet were used to reduce their need to travel. More obviously, none of the concerned participants mentioned other offset options provided by independent offset providers (eg. Greenfleet) that allows the traveller to offset the full warming effect of air travel, not just the direct effects that the airlines offset.

2. Household

The fourteen participants referred to a range of sustainable consumption practices that related to their homes and household consumption. Five participants had customised their homes to reduce their energy and/or water use. At the time of the interview, Simon was building his own straw bale home which was designed to be energy efficient, utilise reclaimed materials (such as windows) and have its own rainwater tank. Sarah was in the process of renovating her home, and seeking sustainable building materials where possible. This was not always easy, as she found at times the sustainable alternative was far more expensive and would take much longer to source. As she explained, “the basics like bags of mortar and cement and plaster, and those sorts of things, if you want to do the right thing you’ve got to wait six weeks for it to be delivered from Tasmania, it’s going to be about ten times the price”. Her eventuating renovations signified a compromise between sustainability, convenience, practicality and cost.

Gabrielle was pleased to have purchased an older apartment that she believed had very good thermal properties and therefore required less energy to heat and cool. Making a responsible purchasing decision in the first instance led her to reap the ongoing sustainability benefits. Vahri had customised a grey water recycling system to water her garden despite the fact that she did not own her home, she had developed a good relationship with her landlord who had permitted her to do so. While Jane was still living in her family home, her family jointly agreed to install solar panels to invest in renewable energy. Where they faced constraints as a renter and dependent respectively, Vahri and Jane sought to overcome them through

negotiation.

The majority of the participants did not own their own homes and, as such, did not have the same flexibility to adapt their houses to their sustainability requirements. James mentioned that home ownership and customisation was a future goal of his but, in the meantime, he hoped that there would be a policy developed to ensure landlords met basic environmental standards. This would enable him and other renters to have a more energy efficient home to live in.

Without the ability to customise their homes, these young people restricted their use of energy and water to save resources. Unable to implement the most sustainable utilities and services, they focused on developing better individual consumption habits. These habits included having short showers to save water, choosing to open windows instead of using energy-intensive air conditioners, and eliminating or limiting the use of heating. To ensure that their energy and water use remained low, Tosh and Neesh would keep a close eye on their electricity and water bills to ensure there were no increases and to motivate their restrictions. As testament to his reduced consumption Tosh confirmed that, “we use 1.5 KW hours a day, the average house uses about 16”. He attributed the low energy consumption of his household to the avoidance of excess appliances and gadgets such as a television and choosing efficient appliances when necessary, such as a fridge.

Another common decision among renters was to choose “green power” suppliers that were investing in renewable energy sources rather than drawing upon coal power plants alone. This was seen as a better option, but a preference for a more credible source of renewable energy, such as solar power was made clear. The participants showed a preference for the more tangible solutions that they can implement, control and monitor rather than systems-based options such as ‘green power’ and carbon offsets. This may evidence some mistrust of green claims by providers, or a desire to experience the benefits of their conservation measures.

Besides restricting their resource use, participants focused on reducing the wastefulness of their consumption. The subject of excessive packaging was raised as a concern by many participants. Stephen’s household would collectively bulk-buy

produce to reduce the packaging required and, thus, the waste. Vahri mentioned that her local organic food store sold produce wrapped in plastic and she felt this compromised the environmental integrity of her purchase. To protest against this excessive plastic packaging, she would remove it at the store counter before taking the unwrapped goods home. This protest may have been effective because in her follow-up interview, Vahri was happy to report that the store had stopped wrapping their produce in plastic.

In addition to reduced packaging, there were some composting enthusiasts among the participants, including Stephen and Sarah. Stephen's work involved working on composting toilets at the CERES environmental park, but his passion followed him home. His household maintained a worm farm to turn their food scraps into valuable fertiliser for their vegetable garden. Sarah was very excited by the prospect of composting, but found that living in urban setting without a garden meant she had no where to use the valuable compost she created from her household waste. As an alternative to individual household composting, Sarah hoped for a collective composting system that would enable those living in the inner city without gardens to contribute their waste. As she explained, "I honestly think that it's the sort of situation where a kind of centralised system, where people can just put their waste out, and have it collected every week and have it composted properly".

Several participants mentioned clothing consumption as an ecological concern. Cameron acknowledged that it was not an area of consumption he had considered in depth to date, but that he was starting to experiment with clothes swapping as a way to obtain second-hand clothing and reduce his consumption footprint. At the time of the interview, Juliette was volunteering with a Melbourne based organisation called The Clothing Exchange³⁴; a professional garment swapping service. She also professed an enthusiasm for attaining secondhand clothes through vintage shopping. Vahri was fortunate to inherit clothing that her friends no longer desired, which she customised with feathers and found objects to make her own signature style. Each of these participants found a way to expand their wardrobes in ways that met their social preferences without contributing to their ecological footprints,

³⁴ The Clothing Exchange was a clothes swapping initiative developed within the researchers MA (Fashion) Thesis: Fashion Re-Consumption (Luckins, 2010).

primarily through gaining access to secondhand clothes. Clothing was a primary example mentioned by participants, however other household items (such as furniture and a lawnmower) were also purchased secondhand, shared or borrowed.

Outside the more tangible practices of sustainable household consumption, Gabrielle highlighted the importance of investing in a sustainable and ethical super fund. She was surprised that her friends did not often think of this, given it is a decision that has a significant long term social and ecological impact. It can be the difference between investing your life savings to support the development of renewable energy or the creation of cluster bombs. Ryan was the only other participant who mentioned the importance of investing super in a sustainable and ethical fund.

3. Food

The fourteen participants' portraits illustrated varied environmental and ethical standards and approaches to eating. Overall, the subject of sustainable food was of great interest to all participants. This may be attributed to the wide range of opportunities they have to pursue the ethical and sustainable consumption of food and the way in which these opportunities are prominent and promoted in popular media. Half of the participants chose to maintain a vegetarian or vegan diet. Vahri, Gabrielle and Amy had been committed to living sustainably over a long period of time and had considered becoming vegetarian as an important early step. As a more recent convert to sustainable living, James was slowly adjusting to a vegetarian diet before pursuing veganism. He embraced and enjoyed vegetarianism, and saw this as a step towards becoming vegan in a gentle way which he described as "being kind to himself". Others such as Gabrielle, Juliette and Tosh chose to maintain an almost vegetarian diet with the inclusion of kangaroo meat, which they considered to be a sustainable source of nutrition. Cameron, Stephen and Ryan also mentioned that they believed vegetarianism was a key element of a sustainable lifestyle, however they enjoyed meat too much to eliminate it from their diet completely. Cameron was seeking to reduce his meat consumption by half, while Stephen planned to pursue hunting his own source of meat to take responsibility for his meat consumption and ensure the animals he eats are killed humanely.

Many of the participants were enthusiastic about growing their own produce in their

own backyard vegetable patch or at the local community garden. Home-grown produce was seen to have the advantage of being pesticide free, more nutritious, superior in taste and satisfying to grow. Having studied permaculture, Vahri had a well-developed fruit and vegetable garden. Stephen was also passionate about his garden, however he wished had had more time available to expand his garden so that he could rely upon his homegrown produce without the need to supplement with store bought goods. Simon had the benefit of a communal gardening initiative within his community at Moora Moora. In this case, there were two gardeners among the group who prepared the crops for the whole community to share in return for an annual membership fee. Simon believed this to be a fantastic solution economically and ecologically, although he conceded that in winter, the seasonal varieties were somewhat limited. For those living in inner city, high density housing such as Juliette and Tosh, a vegetable garden was a dream rather than a reality. James overcame this limitation by joining his local community garden where he learnt about gardening and produced some of his own food.

Without a garden of their own, Juliette and Tosh chose to buy their produce from weekend Farmers Markets nearby. This was an opportunity for them to attain the next best thing to home grown produce. They enjoyed talking to the farmers directly to determine the environmental and ethical credibility of the produce. They were most interested in purchasing organic, local produce. At times they found that produce was not certified organic, but adhered to the most of the principles of organic farming and was essentially as good in environmental terms. Being able to speak directly with the farmers was invaluable in these instances. As Tosh explained “It’s easy to get a little bit boggled by all of the certifications and I find the labelling for food is really quite confusing so in some ways, if you’re having a friendly chat with the person, it’s a good way of cutting through all that crap”. For Juliette, the Farmers Markets had the advantage of providing local produce, which fit within the parameters of her locavore diet. Her intention was to consume produce with ‘low food miles’- reduced emissions through reduced transportation distances.

Most of the participants believed that organic or biodynamic produce was preferable to industrially farmed or genetically modified produce. Although the higher cost of

organic foods was also highlighted as a concern. Neesh joined a food co-op with twenty-five others to bulk buy and save on the costs of buying organic food to overcome this challenge. Shona was also passionate about organic and biodynamic food and actively sought to avoid chemicals and pesticides after having worked in a produce store for many years. The common approach to sourcing food was to buy organic or biodynamic produce when available and priced within reach. When it was deemed inaccessible due to availability or prohibitively high prices, standard produce was supplemented to fulfill the dietary requirements of the participant. These limitations are discussed in detail in Chapter 7.4.

Another factor when sourcing food was the ethical nature of the source itself including how the people producing the food are treated and whether they are paid fairly for their produce. Cameron was most interested and informed about the ethical dimension to food production through his work with Fair Trade, but others, including Juliette were very interested in ethical food sources. The Fair Trade certification was mentioned by a few participants who appreciated the Fair Trade agreement it symbolised between producers and distributors.

Amy introduced an entirely different approach to food sourcing in the form of “skip dipping”, the scavenging of food going wasted in supermarket skips. This practice is part of the philosophy of the broader Freegan movement that encourages individuals to live off the wastefulness of society. Amy tried this practice in the context of a short term experiment, but found that her skirmishes with eating bread past its use by date stood in the way of her commitment to the practice.

Where skip-dipping may have proven to be too challenging, the fourteen participants were very engaged and excited by the subject of their food consumption. They expressed great delight when discussing their food consumption practices which included trips to farmers markets and growing their own vegetables. Some participants mentioned the joy of sharing their sustainable food sourcing, cooking and eating with friends and housemates. This is one area of sustainable consumption which enables young people to readily adopt a variety of sustainable alternatives and share them with others. They reap the health and social benefits along with finding reassurance in the environmental sustainability of their practices.

7.3.3 Contextualising the Practices within Principles of Sustainable Consumption

Where Section 7.3.2 identified a set of common practices that young people were adopting in order to live sustainably, this section aligns these practices with a set of guiding principles for sustainable living. These principles are identified in the concept map below. The concept map shows that the overarching principle to sustainable living is to reduce consumption. This was the first and most important step mentioned by the majority of the participants interviewed. A reduction of consumption was managed by participants in a variety of ways including reduced resource use (primarily energy and water), reduced waste and through adopting a reductive approach to consumption by only purchasing to fulfill needs rather than materialist wants. This section discusses each of the principles for sustainable consumption lifestyles identified in the concept map (Figure 7.3).

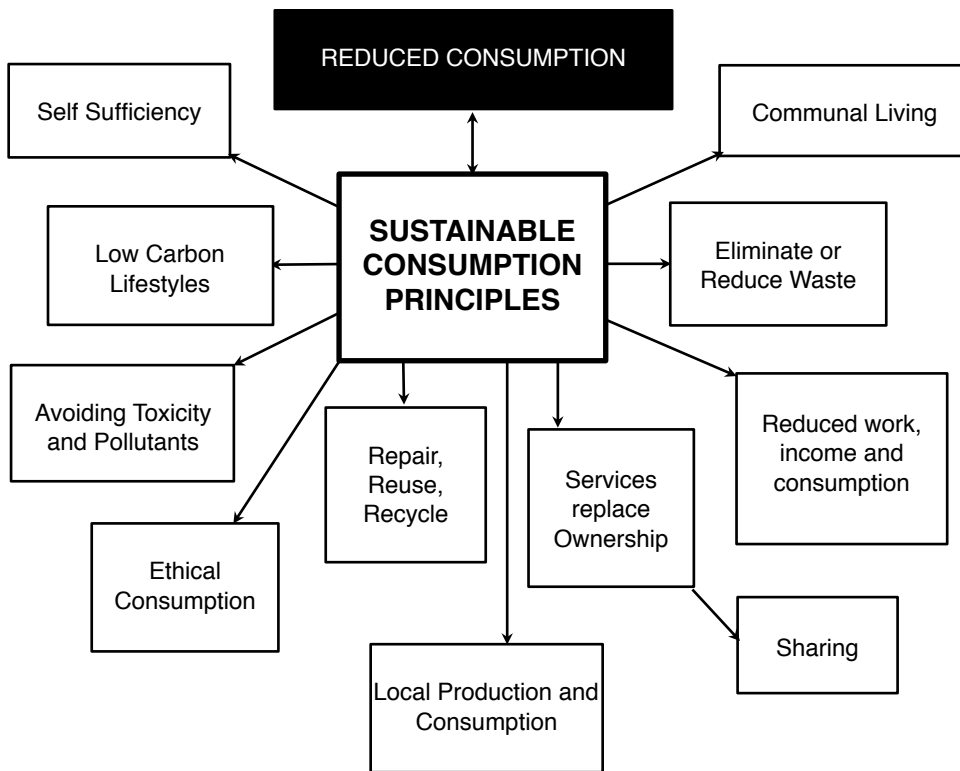


Figure 7.3 Participants Sustainable Consumption Principles

1. Self Sufficiency

Self sufficiency is an approach to living that is determined by the individual rather than by the infrastructures of consumption that can bind the individual to unsustainable habits. Opting out of a conventional modern lifestyle to pursue a self-determined approach to resourcing a lifestyle can appeal to those interested in sustainable living. Of the group of fourteen participants, Simon's lifestyle most exemplified an approach to self-sufficient, sustainable living. However, he relied on the cooperation of his community to realise this through initiatives such as communal farming and building. Through the cooperative construction of his own straw bale home, Simon was able to catch his own water and generate his own power. With the community members contributing financially to produce a communal productive garden, they were able to enjoy a self-sufficient food source throughout the year. Simon appeared to take a great deal of pride in his self-sufficient lifestyle while acknowledging that working part time enabled him the freedom to maintain it.

Several other participants enjoyed the concept of self-sufficient living, but could only participate in a small way towards it such as by developing their own little vegetable patch. Stephen was very passionate about the notion of living self sufficiently. This was reflected in his gardening, worm farm composting and his work developing independent 'aquaponic' food production systems. Others, such as Tosh, aspired to leave the city and adopt a self sufficient lifestyle in the countryside, but were yet to pursue that dream. It is significant to note that this renewed interest in self-sufficient living reflects back to the Marxist concern that life would be compromised as the society of self-sufficient producers became an 'enslaved' society of consumers. Discontent with their reliance on consumerism, some participants are seeking to disconnect from the system and live freely and sustainably.

2. Communal Living

Communal living refers to a lifestyle where resources and tasks are shared for social, ecological and economic benefits. Again, it was only Simon that lived in a fully cooperative community, but many participants included aspects of communality and collaboration in their daily lives. James enjoyed his local community garden where land, advice and produce are all shared among gardeners young and old. Cameron referred to his local community as a key source of support for his sustainable lifestyle. Within his community, Cameron knew he could share resources with others and negate the need to own goods which he would only require on occasion. Communal living was seen as an ideal, rather than as an attainable reality by some of the participants. Amy was very interested in pursuing a communal way of life in the future. As she said, "I was very interested and still very interested in co-housing and sharing of resources. It'd still really like to live in that kind of environment". Communal living strategies such as resource or knowledge sharing were seen by the participants to be socially beneficial as well as ecologically responsible.

3. Eliminate or Reduce Waste

Some participants were very focused on reducing the waste their lifestyles created. The most prevalent examples given were reducing unnecessary packaging and transforming food waste into valuable compost for gardening. Some participants such as Sarah and Stephen were highly motivated by commonsense to reduce and

recycle the waste from their lifestyles while others, such as Amy and Tosh, were motivated by frugality. They deemed waste to be an unnecessary evil in their consuming lives. Several participants associated feelings of guilt with the prospect of wasting resources. Whether it was Jane lamenting that her front yard was filled with an unnecessary number of vehicles for her small family, or Sarah raising concern over wasting money, time and resources fruitlessly pursuing composting, wasting is considered highly undesirable by those committed to sustainable living.

4. Work, Income and Consumption

Several participants questioned the relationship between work, time and consumption within the context of their lifestyles. Some chose to work part-time so that they could spare ample time to pursue the more time-consuming practices of sustainable consumption. Simon chose part time employment so that he was free to build his sustainable family home.

Another motivation to challenge the traditional full time working model was to enable a more diverse array of working opportunities that aligned with their ethics and sustainability values. As Cameron explained, “I kind of stayed in the space of only working part time deliberately because I wanted to be able to have time to spend on doing these things that I thought were important and valuable for the world that certainly weren’t going to pay me any money”. Their work aspirations were value and interest-driven rather than income-focused because the participants ‘wants’ were within the reach of the income they generated (even on a part time basis). Others chose full-time work that they believed positively contributed to a more sustainable world. For example, Gabrielle worked in the building industry, growing the sustainable component of the company she worked for. It was essential for most of the participants that their working life aligned with the values established within their sustainable lifestyles.

5. Services Replace Ownership

the question of whether we need to own goods or whether we can find a sustainable way to consume the utility of them upon demand is often raised in discussions about sustainable consumption . There was extensive evidence that fourteen young people in this study are seeking or developing services that replace the need to own certain

goods. Juliette and Cameron had both participated in clothing exchanges to attain 'new' clothes rather than buying them from the retailers of new clothing. Cameron referred to borrowing a lawnmower from a friend as preferable to purchasing one to own. Several participants preferred to participate in car sharing or car pooling strategies rather than owning a vehicle themselves and, if they did own a car, they wished to share it in this way. The fourteen participants did not define nor seek status in the ownership of objects with the same vigor that many people do within a consumerist society. Within the group, the enthusiasm for material 'things' ranged from appreciative to uncaring. They were more interested in the utility function that the given goods would provide, although aesthetics were important to some, especially with reference to clothing. At times, ownership of goods was considered a burden because it required time to manage and maintain.

6. Low Carbon Lifestyle

Adopting a low-carbon lifestyle is a way to provide a framework for limiting the consumption of goods and services. Neesh's CRAG group's sole purpose was to meet and share ideas about reducing the carbon emissions of their consumption with a view to helping each other realise these ideas. Participants such as Neesh and Sarah used carbon calculators to measure the impacts of their carbon reduction initiatives. The low-carbon lifestyle was a very tangible and methodical approach to sustainable living for them.

7. Repair, Reuse and Recycle

Since the 1980s, the three R's (Repair, Reuse and Recycle) have been promoted as environmentally responsible principles. Out of the three principles, the concept of repairing was the least prominent within the lifestyle narratives. This may be because in the age of mass consumerism, goods are designed to break down and become obsolete and it is most often easier and cheaper to replace the goods rather than repair them. Repairing broken goods may also require skills or resources beyond the individual's capability, or repair services that are difficult to find.

The principle of reusing goods for a successive purpose was mentioned by some participants, notably with reference to clothing exchanges where one individual's garments are swapped with another, giving them a new lease of life. Several

participants referred to recycling as a practice they readily adopt, but many also expressed frustration with the limitations of recycling programs operating locally. Ryan was a reluctant recycler who believed it was the right thing to do, but was skeptical about whether many of his recyclables would actually go on to be processed by a recycling plant, rather than dumped with the regular waste.

8. Avoiding Toxicity and Pollutants

The majority of participants were most concerned about the natural environment and personal and community health. They avoided pollutants and toxic chemicals as well as seeking to minimise the greenhouse gas pollutants they produced through as car and air travel. Some preferred to grow their own vegetables or purchase organic produce to avoid the pesticides and chemicals used within industrial farming. However, Shona was the only participant to articulate a strong non-toxic approach to living by choosing chemical free products for her household.

9. Local Production and Consumption

The benefit of consuming locally produced goods is to reduce the ecological footprint of the product through reduced transport emissions. Other benefits include increased accountability for labour ethics (although this is not always the case) and support for the local economy. This preference for local consumption alternatives was mentioned several times, most notably by Juliette and Tosh who shop at local Farmers Markets. Neesh and her food co-op were bulk buying local organic produce to share. Vahri had another perspective on local production, illustrated best through her hand made clothing that she was inspired to make. The notion being that something handmade is more personal and special to own than something store bought.

10. Ethical Consumption

Many participants singled out ethical consumption from their broader discussion about sustainable consumption. In this way, they referred to ethical consumption in terms of labour and trade ethics. Cameron was very informed and active in promoting ethical consumption through his role with Fair Trade. Juliette was interested in purchasing Fair Trade items because the clear certification and labeling made it easy for her to buy goods with a clear conscience. However, Juliette also realised the trade-offs involved as most Fair Trade goods came from abroad,

creating tension with her goal to buy locally. Fair Trade focuses on labour and equity issues, but this can be unsustainable from a broader environmental perspective.

7.3.4 Synthesis

The fourteen participants believed that a sustainable way of life starts with a reduction in consumption. Throughout the lifestyle narratives, the young people were questioning what they needed and then sought to realise needs through more sustainable practices such as sharing, swapping and purchasing second-hand goods. As the literature review discussed, at the individual level, “sustainable consumption is based on a decision-making process that takes the consumer’s social responsibility into account in addition to individual needs and wants” (Vermier & Verbeke, 2006, p170). This consuming conscience was evident in the lifestyle portraits of the fourteen participants.

Chapter 3 proposed a three-part scale of sustainable consumption practices: ‘consuming less’, followed by ‘consuming differently’ and ‘consuming mindfully’ (see Figure 3.2). The participants clearly prioritised consuming less and as such, their approach was consistent with the proposed scale of sustainable consumption. After this point, their approach to sustainable consumption was not so clearly structured. By analysing across the lifestyle portraits, the overarching approach to sustainable consumption was to consume less. Underneath this, a range of ten principles for sustainable living was identified: self sufficiency, low-carbon lifestyles, non-toxic living, ethical consumption, repair/reuse/recycle, local production and consumption, services replacing ownership, reduced income and consumption, reduced waste and communal living. A combination of these principles guided the participants towards consumption habits that reduced their demand on the environment, required less resources, created less emissions and supported society in a positive way.

The difference between the map of sustainable consumption principles developed from the participants narratives (Figure 7.2) and the scale proposed within the literature review (Figure 3.2) is that participants emphasised ‘consuming less’ explicitly, however, the practices and principles they mentioned also aligned (less obviously) with the categories of ‘consuming differently’ and ‘consuming mindfully’.

To reconcile the two models, a third was devised below, to demonstrate where the participants sustainable principles would fit within the scale. This is not an exhaustive identification of all the sustainable living principles. Once again, the model is based on the participants stories.

Table 7.1 Model of Participants Approach to Sustainable Lifestyles

CONSUMING LESS	CONSUMING DIFFERENTLY	CONSUMING MINDFULLY
Low Carbon Lifestyles	Self Sufficiency	Avoiding Toxicity & Pollutants
Communal Living & Sharing	Repair & Reuse*	Ethical Consumption
Reduced Work, Income and Consumption	Service Replaces** Ownership	Local Production & Consumption***
Reduced Waste	Recycling Waste	

* Repairing and reusing goods may replace the need for new items, or it may just extend the use of those items.

** Services may replace the need for ownership, but they may require equal or lesser resources than the goods replaced.

*** Localising production and consumption may reduce the transport footprint of the goods, however, other sustainable factors may be compromised and the holistic footprint may not be reduced. For example, buying locally and reducing 'food miles' (transportation distances and emissions) competes with the concept of 'fair miles' (that refer to the support for produce from developing nations) that provides an ethical counter-argument in favour of imported goods.

As the literature review identified, rather than being an externalised practice, sustainable consumption needs to be integrated into lifestyle through the formation of new habits. Across the lifestyle portraits the building blocks (or principles and practices) varied, with some participants focusing on ethical and local consumption and others taking a calculated approach to reducing their consumption of resources. The fourteen participants showed that there are many ways to approach sustainable living in order to live *better* with less. Where the participants experienced an environmental benefit from their practice, they often experienced a social and economic benefit too. Overall, the fourteen participants took a great deal of pride in their sustainable approach to living. They enjoyed many of the practices they adopted (such as vegetable growing and bike riding) and saw a significant

array of opportunities to develop and keep developing their sustainable consumption lifestyles.

7.4 The Challenges of Sustainable Lifestyles

7.4.1 Introduction

This section explores some of the challenges that young people faced when adopting a sustainable way of living. This addresses the second part of the second research objective that investigates how young people are living better with less. When seeking to adopt a given practice, the young people interviewed came up against a set of challenges. As the concept map below shows, some of these challenges are internal and relate directly to the individual. Others were external challenges imposed by the infrastructures of consumption and the broader values of society.

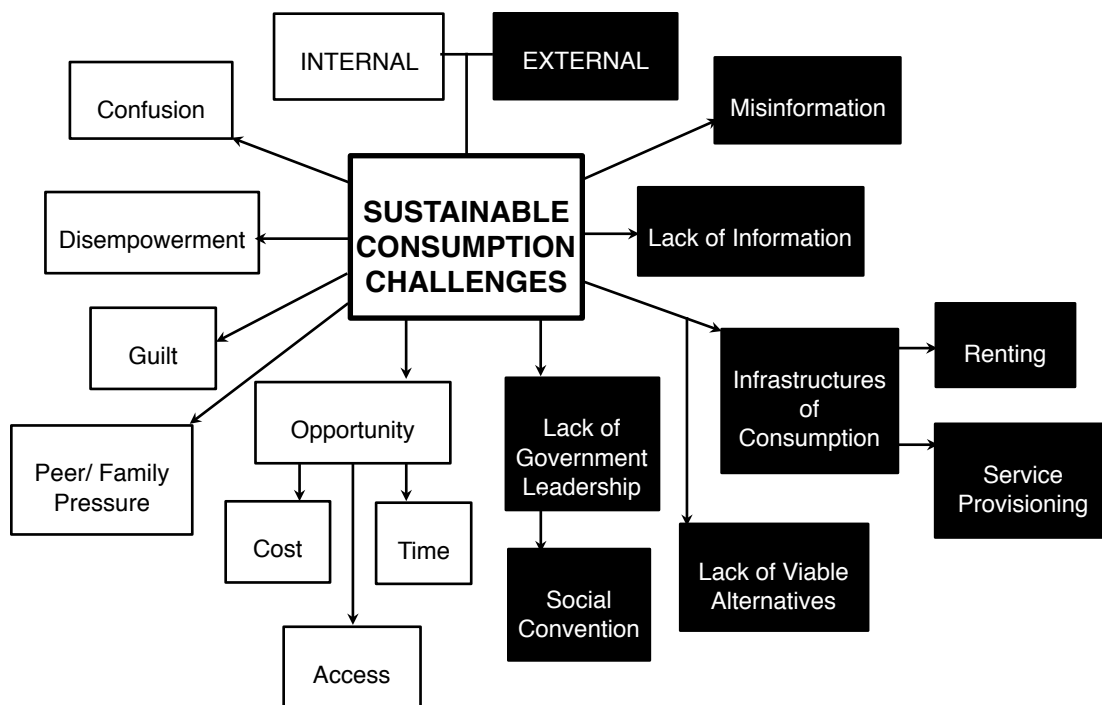


Figure 7.4 Participants Sustainable Consumption Challenges

7.4.2 Internal Challenges

1. Confusion

Several participants indicated that a lack of knowledge, or misinformation clouded their judgement at times. Tosh said he was confused by the certification of organic foods and James recalled being baffled by the complexity of food labeling. The popularisation of ecological myths by media and business interests was confusing and frustrating for Stephen. He cited the example of the promotion of 'green bags'³⁵ over plastic bags misleading in ecological terms.

Additionally, at times, the participants found themselves caught between competing sustainability values, knowing that one alternative was better environmentally, but another had greater ethical credentials, confusing the consumption decision. One example was where Juliette sought ethically-produced Fair Trade goods, but she compromised her pursuit of local consumables with reduced transport emissions.

2. Disempowerment

As a result of this confusion, they sometimes felt disempowered when making purchasing decisions. Without knowing which option was better for the environment, they became ambivalent or frustrated about their purchasing decision. Needing to make a decision regardless, they then felt uncomfortable and dissatisfied with the process. For example, despite the fact that Tosh is well informed about energy efficiency and is willing to ensure he is a low consumer of it, he acknowledges that "It's very difficult to work out exactly what emissions you are responsible for, so drawing a line for what you're responsible for and what you're not, is a bit arbitrary".

Some participants became disempowered by the individual nature of their pursuit for a sustainable way of life. Many were critical of the Australian Government as they believed for not setting an example on issues of sustainable consumption. While they overcame this disempowerment in most instances, it was something many of

³⁵ *Green bags* are reusable shopping bags which according to Stephen, take much more energy to produce than their use-life rarely justifies when compared to conventional plastic bags. [However, some base their rejection of plastic bags on other environmental factors such as their role in the deaths of many animals. So this reflects Stephen's priorities, or his belief that this problem could be dealt with in some other way]

them acknowledged. Ryan was very concerned about the dominant Australian attitude he diagnosed as being consumerist rather than sustainability-oriented. As he explained:

Australians, they're used to getting things their own way and things getting bigger and better and faster for decades now and there's not a lot in Australia to make people stop in their tracks and make people question their choices. So if you're not being asked to question your choices and you're not being given new choices – then it is very easy to being in a narrow track mode and I think that's what a lot of Australians are in.

Feeling part of a minority group can be disempowering, especially where the participants felt they were fighting against mainstream culture. Fortunately, all of the participants rose above any feelings of individual disempowerment they experienced through drawing on their motivations and support.

3. Guilt

Feelings of guilt were both a great motivation for sustainable practices and a challenge for all participants. Guilt is an uncomfortable and unpleasant feeling and so when participants felt it too strongly, it challenged their motivation to live sustainably and 'opting out' becomes a way of reducing or coping with the guilt. Guilt played a part in generating obligatory actions such as recycling household waste. However, this did not inspire enthusiastic involvement, and thus had limited value in driving sustainable lifestyles. Without being balanced by other motivations, guilt was a challenge for participants. Juliette told of how guilt was very overwhelming at times. As she recalled, "If we go out for cake or something, it's like oh the cream, the eggs, where did the flour come from, it's actually just too much".

4. Peer pressure

The majority of the participants identified that the support they received from their family and friends was a key motivation for pursuing their sustainable lifestyle. Conversely, when those close to them were disinterested or challenged their sustainability practices, they became frustrated and were often likely to make uncomfortable compromises. For example, James found it difficult to maintain his preferred way of living lightly when he returned to his home in the country and spent

time with his steak-eating, four wheel driving friends. Juliette identified her circle of friends in her home town as not receptive to her emerging sustainability values, and felt she had to conform while in their company. At times, the opposition to their lifestyle choices was not verbalised, but demonstrated through an action such as unwillingness to prepare a sustainable vegetarian meal to share. This placed the participant in the awkward position of having to choose between being discourteous to a host/ess and conformity. In these instances, Juliette let conformity win, but she was notably uncomfortable about it.

However, on some occasions, being challenged by those close to them encouraged the participants to stand their ground more firmly. Shona's father responded to her sustainable lifestyle choices with some embarrassment, which could have discouraged her. However, she noted that because he talked to her about what she was doing, at least in his own way, which she chose to interpret as his way of showing interest in her and support. In the other instances, a lack of support made sustainable living more difficult for participants.

5. Opportunity - Accessibility, Cost and Time

The participants often referred to the challenges that interfered with their opportunity to adopt a sustainable practice. These chiefly involved matters of accessibility, cost and time. Living in a semi-rural area, Vahri felt she had very limited access to sustainable products and services. Despite living in the centre of the city, Juliette and Tosh were frustrated by the limited nature of their access to local Farmers Markets which were open on the weekend, but not when they needed produce unexpectedly.

Shona was excited by the access she had to organic and sustainable produce, but she mentioned that at times, she found it too expensive to purchase. Some products, such as organic butter, she believed were simply excessively expensive and she refused to buy it. Similarly, when approaching her house renovations, Sarah identified that the sustainable alternative could also be the most expensive and time consuming to attain and that these were reasons she chose less sustainable options. Stephen was the most concerned interviewee when it came to the limitations on his lifestyle imposed by a lack of time. Beyond his current lifestyle, he had many ideas for sustainable practices he would like to pursue, such as developing a more

productive garden; however he lamented that he did not have the hours in the day available.

7.4.3 External Challenges

1. Lack of Information or Misinformation

The lack of information is not only an individual issue, but something that should be addressed by producers and retailers of sustainable products and services, as well as governments. Without clear certification and labeling, the young people interviewed could not be sure what they were purchasing was as sustainable and ethical as they hoped. Sarah explained her concern:

I think the sustainability movement, because it's so new, is full of a lot of misinformation, and you know I mean I think everything from buying a fridge to - or you can use a calculator that tells you how much energy your fridge uses, but then if you're serious about it then you're going to want to look at where it's being transported from and to and what they do with the bits after it's finished its life.

She went on to explain that eco-labeling strategies in Australia are eclectic and inconsistent and do not provide the consumer with the information required to make a responsible purchasing decision. In some instances, accurate information may exist but is just not presented in a consumer-friendly way. There is a need to address how information about the sustainability credentials of a product or service can be effectively relayed to the consumer, to empower them to make an informed purchasing decision. Seeking this information is not only an individual responsibility, but one that extends to the producers, retailers and governments.

2. Infrastructures of Consumption

The young people interviewed were also challenged when one of the practices they hoped to adopt was beyond their individual control. This was the case with utilities such as electricity and water. Being mostly renters, the participants had little control over where these resources came from and how they were provided to them and thus were often frustrated by the binding nature of the infrastructures over which they had little control over. James was especially dismayed by this as he could not make

home changes for greater energy efficiency nor connect solar power.

3. Social Conventions and Expectation

The participants also mentioned that at some point, they faced a decision between choosing to maintain their sustainable approach or complying to social expectations. Juliette felt torn between appearing as a well mannered guest and standing up for her sustainable preferences when dining with friends who did not share her preferences. Tosh was also put in the position of having to choose between family loyalty and his environmental concerns with regard to taking regular flights back home. James found himself caught between his sustainable way of life and his parents' desire to have him maintain the old family car, which he reluctantly did. From the lifestyle portraits, it became clear that these young people are not always acting independently, but rather come up against the challenge of social convention which as it stands, is not focused on, nor necessarily inclusive of the values of sustainability.

4. Lack of Government Leadership

Each of the fourteen participants were willing to pursue individual lifestyles of sustainable consumption but argued that government leadership was lacking. Given that consumption is a collective problem, some participants believed very strongly that it should be a policy issue as well as an individual pursuit. Ryan was the most concerned about the systems and constraints that lock in and restrict his consumption choices. He considered flying less but believed that the dynamics of the aviation industry will not be affected by this individual action. Instead, he hoped for genuine alternatives and that flying is costed properly, through measures such as taxing aviation fuels, which he believes is a regulatory issue. While Gabrielle was also sceptical of the significance of the individual gesture to forego flying, she still believed that if she took the train, she was making her contribution in the hope that others will do the same and have a collective impact.

5. Lack of Viable Alternatives

A final external challenge that the young people faced was a lack of sustainable choices. At times, making a consuming decision was a matter of choosing between 'bad' and 'worse'. Across the portraits, the most prevalent example was where air

travel was concerned. Ryan believed if there was a viable alternative such as a fast train, he would preference this over flying. Jane was willing to forego flying and commit to a three day train ride to Melbourne, however for the majority of the participants, this time commitment was not viable. Once again, the consumption alternatives are determined by producers. Consumer demand may have a role to play in shaping what producers make available, however without viable sustainable alternatives to support, the individual can remain challenged.

7.4.4 Synthesis

Despite the combination of good intention and strong motivations, pro-sustainability beliefs do not always translate into action (Shove, 2003, p3). This is because of the institutional, financial and informational challenges that prevent people adopting more sustainable alternatives. Within the literature review in Chapter 3, there were four key challenges identified and explored, (1) Habit, (2) Institutionalised consumption, (3) Confusion and (4) Disempowerment.

Habit

In Australia, spending and buying are deeply rooted in our culture. Advertising, family upbringing and repetition play roles in establishing and reinforcing unsustainable consumption habits. It is interesting to note that participants did not refer to their pre-existing consumption habits as a challenge to adopting sustainable consumption practices. This may be because habits are discrete practices that go unacknowledged, or because participants were very willing to overhaul unsustainable consumption habits and adopt new ones when the knowledge about how to do so became available. When some of the participants, such as James and Juliette returned to their family homes, they found they slipped back into old habits due to their families' influence.

Institutionalised consumption

Consumers are locked-into consuming habits through institutionalised consumption and service provisioning such as mobile phone plans, electricity supply contracts and transport infrastructures (or a lack there of). Individuals cannot control the discrete consumption of the institutions within which they operate, whether this be

their university, workplace or recreation centre, As Lodziak confirms, “institutional consumption is the main site of consumption”. It accounts for a far greater proportion of the good consumed than the sum total of what is consumed by individuals (Lodziak, 2002, p153). There were some participants that acknowledged that aspects of their consumption was determined by external service providers or institutions beyond their control, however, the emphasis was on the consumption choices that they could control. This may signify that the majority of the participants are unaware of the high proportion of their consuming footprint that is beyond their control, or they may have chosen to discuss what they could change rather than complain about what they could not.

Confusion and a lack of information

As sustainable consumption is a relatively new area, ideas and information are constantly coming to light. In some areas of consumption such as food, there is a significant body of information available, but claims can be contradictory and there is no clear certification that assists consumer decision-making. As Seyfang explained, “ecological citizens seeking to make their preferences known in the marketplace face several information barriers, for example, a lack of information about social and environmental and social implications of consumer decisions, or issues of credibility and consistency of marketing information relating to sustainable products” (Seyfang, 2005, p295). Additionally, information overload can confound the individual consumer who can become frustrated about their purchasing decision. Tosh found this to be the case where food consumption was concerned and overcame it by speaking directly to the source of the produce in question.

Disempowerment

In Chapter 3 the challenge of ambivalence that young people face when approaching sustainable consumption was identified. As Seyfang explains, “Feelings of powerlessness generated by the thought that individual action will not make any difference, disenchantment with corporate green marketing and preference for products that are not available, such as efficient, clean and safe public transport system“ may all lead to feelings of disempowerment (Seyfang, 2005, p296). The participants expressed varying degrees of disempowerment in this way. Sarah lamented that her composting was an exercise in wasteful

consumerism itself, because of all the equipment she had bought to try to make it work in her constrained circumstances, and longing for a centralised composting service to address her household waste properly.

Ambivalence was reflected in the participants' choices to insulate some practices (such as air travel) from their sustainability values. As identified in Chapter 3, "Some people deliberately insulate specific practices or lifestyle segments from the environmental considerations they accept and apply as legitimate rules most of the time, and for other segments of their lifestyles" (Spaargaren 2003, p 690). This can be a response to the challenging nature of sustainable consumption. Certain aspects of life are kept beyond its reach so that the individual need not experience guilt when justifying the prioritisation of other consuming values such as enjoyment or fashion. The most common example among the participants was the decision to travel by flight, to preserve the cultural enrichment of the practice. Another common choice was to own a car, despite knowing there are more sustainable modes of transport, to preserve the convenience it provided.

In the face of some of the challenges young people faced, they maintained their motivation through focusing on the overall successes of their sustainable lifestyles and drawing on the support around them. As Blewitt empathises, "it isn't always simple being green or ethical, like many other things you either have to work at it, compromise or perhaps even face disappointment" (2006, p46). Another challenge young people faced was that sustainable living starts with a reduction of consumption and at times, they may feel deprived or at the very least, inconvenienced. As Robins and Roberts explain, "a perennial barrier to traditional efforts aimed at changing lifestyles has been a focus on giving up and losing out" (Robins & Roberts, 2006, p41). In a modern consumer society, to choose not to own a car is to choose to forego a modern convenience which is a tall ask of the individual (Lodziak, 2002, p150). It requires a strong level of commitment. To ensure the broader adoption of sustainable lifestyles, from the individual perspective, to organisations and government, there is a need to focus on developing genuine alternatives so that sustainable living is within the reach of the individual.

7.5 The Influence of Young People

7.5.1 Introduction

In the lifestyle portraits, the participants described how they were inspired and influenced by others, but also how they influenced them in return through leading by example and living better with less. This section explores the level of influence young people have in their inner circle of family and friends. Then section 8.5.3 discusses the role of participant's influence in their outer circle which includes their community, professional networks and broader population. This section concludes with a discussion about the potential for young people to influence others towards adopting sustainable lifestyles.

7.5.2 Influencing the Inner Circle

The fourteen participants told stories of being inspired and motivated by others to want to live sustainably. The portraits reveal that they were also influential themselves. This section explores how young people were influential within their inner circle, comprised of their family, friends and partners.

Family

The role of the family in supporting the participants' sustainability choices varied greatly. Where some parents inspired their children to live lightly, others were confused or even affronted by their children's decision to adopt a lifestyle that varied vastly from that of their upbringing. As Tosh recalled, his parents consider that he is living in the "Dark Ages" and this is something they are not interested in whereas James delighted in the fact that while his mother was initially confused by his decision to become vegetarian, she was now supportive and even pursuing water saving initiatives of her own.

Some of the participants made active efforts to re-educate their families about the implications of wasteful consumption. Neesh purchased an ecological audit as a Christmas present for her parents who she felt needed to reduce their excessive energy consumption. Juliette took her Mum to the Farmers Market to educate her

about the distinction between organic, local produce and the industrially farmed produce she knew. Jane and her mother were the sustainable living pioneers of their family and were capable of negotiating some sustainable changes within their family household. They were successful in getting a collective family decision to install solar power and give up flying, but were yet to reduce the excessive number of cars the family owned.

Generally, where young people detected opposition to their sustainable way of life from parents and siblings, they chose to stand up for their views initially, but if this was not successful they would choose to lead by example and hope to be influential in this way. Where the participants genuinely inspired a family member, which was often the case, they found that this was something they could bond over and share, and this motivated both parties. Tosh may have been disappointed in his parents' lack of support and understanding, but he was delighted that his brother had started to share his interest in energy conservation.

Friends

The majority of the participants was aware of their potential to influence others and discussed how to broach issues of sustainable consumption with less informed peers. James believed that his steak-eating, four-wheel driving friends would be the last to convert to a sustainable way of life, and so he preferred to spend his time sharing ideas with those who were receptive. Shona had begun sharing her concerns in a very confrontational manner but, upon reflection, had concluded that "People were not interested in me preaching to them at all, so I changed my tack from preaching to actually just living it and just being an example". This approach has proved to be successful, as her friends now treat her as an authority on sustainable consumption and they are keen for her advice and her approval. Some participants, including James and Juliette, actively sought a new set of friends who supported their sustainable way of living as they felt their older friends' view of them would stifle their ability to change. There were others (Stephen and Simon), whose friendships were all based on shared sustainability values and so the influence within their social circles was reciprocal.

Jane had been very successful in shifting the values and lifestyle decisions of her

family; however, she struggled to win over her friends. She mentioned how affronted they were by her decision not to fly, when they were keen to pursue travel and adventure. Jane's values seemed alienating and she was yet to reconcile how to inspire her friends, beyond inviting them around for home made vegetarian pizza nights in the place of less sustainable social activities. The approach by many of the participants was to lead by example and seek to engage their friends and family in sustainable consumption practices so they could experience the benefits for themselves.

Partners

Amy and Sarah both discussed how their partners were less committed to sustainable living and admitted to being the influential force within their households. Sarah believed her husband made an incredible effort to embrace her values, but did not always live up to her exceptionally high environmental standards. She chose not to say anything about these discrepancies for fear of discouraging him, preferring to lead by example and hope he 'catches up'. Having undergone a radical values shift towards sustainable living, Tosh said that he would have been concerned if Juliette had not adopted a similar value set and overcome her consumerist ways. Juliette was inspired by Tosh and, in turn, inspired and motivated him by adopting sustainable practices that he was less knowledgeable about. The team-based approach to sustainable living that these two shared through mutual influence enhanced their commitment and the success of their sustainable practices.

There were six significant points identified about the influence the participants played within their inner circle of family, friends and partners from an analysis of the portraits.

1. The participants stood up for their beliefs by choosing to lead by example When those close to them were uninspired or opposed to their sustainable lifestyle.
2. When the participants influenced those close to them to adopt pro-sustainability values or behaviours, it was something they bonded over and enjoyed.
3. The majority of participants had "jumped off their soapbox" and chose not to preach about living sustainably, but offer themselves as an example or resource for information.

4. In some cases, the participants became an authority on sustainable living within their family or friendship circle and were called upon by others for advice and approval.
5. The majority of the participants were mindful that those close to them had differing values or a lesser level of commitment to sustainable living and were not inclined to point this out for fear of becoming discouraging.
6. Some participants sought to actively re-educate their family and friends about sustainable living through sharing experiences and information.

7.5.3 Influencing the Outer Circle

The fourteen lifestyle portraits showed how young people can become influential through their professional roles and lifestyle choices. This section explores how young people are influential within their outer circle of their community, professional networks and the broader population.

Community

The lifestyle portraits revealed that the young people interviewed see the cooperation and support of their local community as a key feature of a sustainable future. Cameron believed that the success of his individual commitment was greatly influenced by the role his local community would play. With this belief motivating him, he was an active participant in generating community awareness about sustainable consumption. Jane was very focused on sharing the values of sustainability within her community and did so through giving regular sustainability lectures to schools in her area. Stephen chose to spend his time pursuing sustainable solutions at the CERES environmental park, where he could demonstrate composting and food systems to the park patrons. The belief that a sustainable lifestyle for the individual is achieved with the support of others motivated many of the participants define a role for themselves where they could influence and contribute to community decision making.

Professional Networks & The Broader Population

The majority of the participants had adopted working roles that aligned with their

sustainability values. Those who worked in non-sustainability focused roles sought to make small scale contributions to their workplace. For example, as Juliette worked for a large architecture practice who were not very interested in sustainable alternatives, she focused on instigating small scale changes such as a switch to using recycled paper and choosing Fair Trade coffee.

At the other end of the spectrum, five participants sought positions that would enable them to be participants in driving change in a sustainable direction from the top down. These participants were interested in influencing change on a grander scale. Ryan chose a role within politics as a speechwriter for the Minister for the Environment. Both Tosh and James were involved in research on resource conservation for the government. Gabrielle was involved in an environmental research and lobby group and often met with government advisors to share her views in this role.

Reflecting on their roles in government, Ryan and Tosh were skeptical about the level of influence they had because of the rigidity of the political process and because of the long timelines for policy development and change. However, Ryan mentioned that seeing the inner workings of the political processes undermined his perception of the value of his previous individual activism. Gabrielle was more philosophical about her role with the Labour Environment Activists Network, suggesting that “it’s always hard with political decisions, you never know what are the exact things that cause things to tip or change. All you can do is contribute to the discussion”.

Several participants had chosen a role in educating for a sustainable future. Jane was enthusiastic about giving sustainability classes to high school students. Sometimes she felt she made a difference and received an enthusiastic response from her audience although, at times, she believed “they had not absorbed a word”. Stephen had been a university lecturer in sustainable design. However, he thought he was spending too much time talking and needed to focus on action and so now teaches practical examples of sustainable living at the CERES environmental park. Sarah was responsible for teaching a core introduction to sustainability course to 500 university students. Cameron worked to raise the profile of ethical consumption

through his Fair Trade work. He was also very interested in equipping young people with the knowledge and know-how to develop sustainable consumption initiatives of their own through his involvement with *Otherwise*. In each of these instances, the participants were so inspired by their sustainability values that they sought to share them with others.

Regardless of their professional roles, each of the participants focused on effecting change in a sustainable direction, within the scope of the opportunity they had. Whether it was small scale process changes in the work place such as using recycled paper, through to contributing research and viewpoints to the leaders of their country, their sustainability values motivated them to seek to make a difference.

The cross-portrait analyses revealed three points about the participants' influence within the outer sphere of community, professional networks and broader population:

1. A role in government advocating for top-down change was not a guarantee of success in instigating or influencing changes for sustainability.
2. Seeking to make smaller-scale changes within the workplace was often more successful.
3. Influence is non-linear. It does not necessarily travel from the top down, nor necessarily from the bottom up. A variety of strategies can work, depending on circumstances and personal approach.

7.5.4 Synthesis

When exploring how young people influence their inner sphere of family and friends, it became clear that leading by example was much more effective than preaching to those who do not share their sustainability values. Any self-righteousness, or disparagement could discourage or alienate the individuals that the young people sought to influence. They were mindful to maintain their approachability, so that they could maintain a position of influence among their peers and family. Regardless of how successful they felt when influencing others, they each sought ways to do so as a reflection of their resilient commitment to sustainable living.

Contrary to the assumption that top-down change in the form of governmental policy making is the most influential way to contribute to a sustainable future, some of the attempts to educate and inspire individuals taking a grassroots approach were very effective. When exploring the capacity of these young people to be influential, it must be noted that with little action from the Australian government, individual action for sustainable consumption alternatives is proving to be a more influential force. However, this influence is unlike the implied pattern of being 'top-down' or 'bottom up'. The influence of these young people within their inner and outer spheres is non-linear. These young people are catalysts for sustainable lifestyle thinking, the suppliers of information and reference points within their networks by example. The influential potential of these young people is suggested by the model of individual influence developed (Figure 7.5) below.

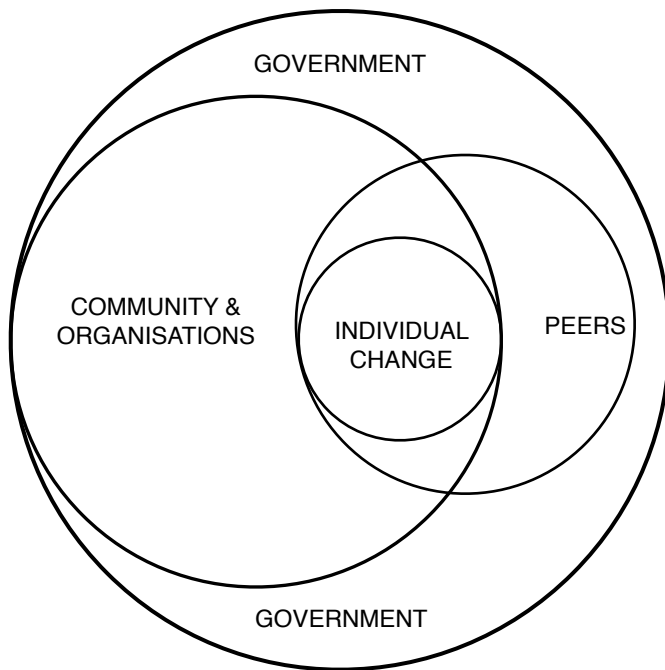


Figure 7.5 Model of Individual Influence Based on the Participants Lifestyle Portraits

This model of individual influence suggests that with the individual committed to adopting a sustainable lifestyle at the centre, they can become a catalyst for informing and inspiring change in those around them. This may be through influencing a parent or friend, or seeking to contribute to broader, organisational or governmental change. As the information and inspiration travels from individual to individual, or between organisations, the shift towards living better with less gains momentum. In this way, as AtKisson's model of the "Amoeba of Culture" (Figure 7.6) suggests, a fringe concept can enter the mainstream consciousness and result in social change. AtKisson's model shows the new ideas as a black spot, outside the mainstream cultural bubble. Slowly, the mass population moves towards embracing that idea (the black dot). At this stage, the new idea is the belief that there is a need to reorient materialist lifestyles on a sustainable pathway. The young people interviewed are some of the progressive individuals on the edge of mainstream culture. They have committed to acting on the need for a sustainable way of life and as such, are imbuing sustainable lifestyles with credibility through their dedication and example. Slowly they are inspiring others. The black dots signifying the new ideas about sustainable living are multiplying. As the conviction and inspiration for sustainable living spreads through the culture, this 'new idea' will become embedded in our culture. A wasteful, materialist lifestyle will be replaced by a sustainable approach that exemplifies a life lived *better* with less.

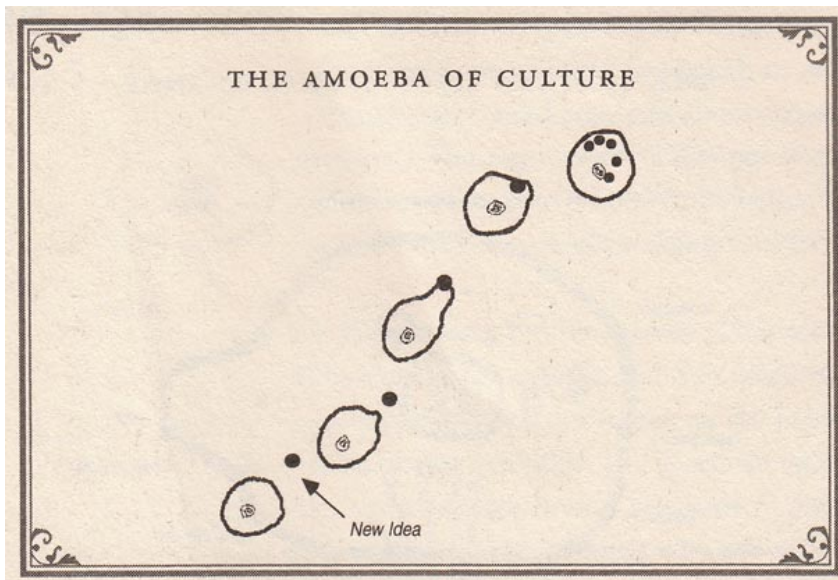


Figure 7.6 The Amoeba of Culture (AtKisson, 2000)

7.6 Summary

This chapter analysed the lifestyle portraits according to the three research objectives. The first objective was to explore the initial and ongoing motivations that inspired the young people to adopt sustainable consumption lifestyles. The second objective explored how young people sought to live sustainably through the principles and practices they adopted. The second objective included an analysis of the challenges that the young people faced in seeking to follow their intentions to live sustainably. The third research objective explored the roles that participants played in influencing their peers, family and broader community through both their personal and professional lives. Below, each of the research objectives is discussed.

1. Motivation

Through looking across the lifestyle portraits, it became clear that there were four initial motivations that inspired young people to question materialist lifestyles in light of sustainability. These included an educational experience, an influential mentor, their family upbringing and their appreciation for the natural environment. The first two motivations were most likely to trigger a sudden realisation that there is a need to address materialist lifestyles, while the latter two motivations were a part of the young people's upbringing, shaping a pro-sustainability attitude over the long term. The key to motivating young people to adopt sustainable consumption lifestyles enduringly was through providing information, support and examples.

2. How young people are living better with less

The young people interviewed were living better with less through adopting a range of sustainable consumption principles and practices. Firstly, the fourteen participants believed that a sustainable way of life starts with a reduction in consumption. Throughout the lifestyle narratives, the young people questioned what they needed and sought to realise prevailing needs through more sustainable practices such as sharing, swapping and purchasing second-hand goods. As the literature review showed, at the individual level "sustainable consumption is based on a decision-making process that takes the consumer's social responsibility into account in addition to individual needs and wants" (Vermier & Verbeke, 2006, p170). This consuming conscience was evident in the lifestyle portraits of the fourteen

participants. From the cross-narrative analysis, ten principles for sustainable living were identified including self-sufficiency, low carbon lifestyles, ethical consumption, local consumption, replacing the need to own goods with services, communal living, avoiding toxicity and pollutants, reducing income and consumption, repairing, reusing and recycling. These principles guided the participants towards consumption habits that reduced their demand on the environment, required less resources, created fewer emissions and supported society in a positive way.

As the literature review identified, sustainable consumption needs to be integrated into individual lifestyles through the formation of new habits. “The lifestyle of each individual is constructed from a series of building blocks - corresponding to the set of social practices an individual invokes when pursuing his or her everyday life” (Spaargaren, 2003, p689). Across the lifestyle portraits the building blocks varied, with some participants focusing on ethical and local consumption and others taking a calculated approach to reducing their consumption. The fourteen participants showed that there are many ways to approach sustainable living that are socially, environmentally and economically rewarding.

2b. Challenges to living better with less

Despite the combination of good intention and strong motivations, the pro-sustainability beliefs of the participants did not always translate into action. This is because of the institutional, financial and informational challenges that stood in the way (Shove, 2003, p3). Some of the challenges the young people faced were internal and concerned the individual such as guilt, confusion, peer pressure and opportunity. Other challenges were externally imposed by the infrastructures of consumption and the broader values of society. If the motivations in the young people’s lives were stronger than the challenges, then they remained empowered to pursue their sustainable way of life. At times, they lapsed or conceded defeat on a small scale but retained their bigger picture perspective of the significant lifestyle changes they were making. Based on the challenges discussed by the participants, there are opportunities for organisations, businesses and government to play roles in removing barriers and enabling more alternatives for sustainable living. This will be elaborated upon in the conclusion.

3. Influence

When exploring how young people influence their inner sphere of family and friends, it became clear that leading by example was much more effective than preaching to those who do not share their sustainability values. When they were able to influence those around them, there was an opportunity to bond over the shared values and experience. Exploring the influential potential on the outer sphere of the young people interviewed, their community, professional networks and broader population, the patterns were less clear. Contrary to the assumption that top-down change in the form of governmental policy making is the most influential way to contribute to a sustainable future, some of the attempts to educate and inspire individuals taking a grassroots approach were very effective and satisfying. The influence of these young people within their inner and outer spheres was non-linear. These young people are catalysts for sustainable lifestyle thinking, the suppliers of information and reference points within their networks based on the example they set. Their influence travels in unpredictable ways from peer to peer and between organisations.

The young people interviewed represent progressive individuals on the edge of the Australian culture. They have committed to a sustainable way of life and as such, are imbuing sustainable lifestyles with credibility through their dedication and example. Slowly they are inspiring others. As their conviction and inspiration for sustainable living spreads through the culture, it will become embedded in our culture. "Young people are always a potent cultural force and often a leading indicator of where the culture is headed" (Flavin, 2010, p.xviii). With young people leading, wasteful, materialist lifestyles will be replaced by a sustainable approach that exemplifies a life lived *better* with less. This better life is one where the individual is defined by their values and by who they are rather than by what they have. It is a life that represents a balance between the individual and society, the environment and the economy.

8.0 Conclusion

8.0 Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

The literature review explored the Australian consumer society and how the pursuit of materialist lifestyles had led to a problem of wasteful consumerism. Chapter 5 identified that some young people are discontented with the consumerist status quo and are seeking to adopt alternative, sustainable lifestyles. To explore the sustainable lifestyles of young people, fourteen individuals were interviewed and their stories were analysed. The fourteen *lifestyle portraits* addressed the three research objectives and identified (1) the individual motivations for living sustainably, (2a) how young people were living sustainably, through analysis of the principles and practices they adopted and (2b) addressed the challenges between the individuals' consuming ideals and actions. Finally, (3) the biographical analysis explored the spheres of influence the individuals have within their families, peers and broader networks and assessed their potential to lead by example through living *better* with less.

This concluding chapter summarises the key findings within the literature review that focused on consumption and sustainable consumption theory. It also highlights the key findings from the analysis of the fourteen lifestyle portraits. It then synthesises the most significant conclusions from this research and identifies the implications of these conclusions. The final section explores the potential for further research drawing upon the key findings within this research.

8.2 Summary of Findings

This section summarises the key findings from the literature review and the analysis of the fourteen lifestyle portraits.

Chapter 2 analysed the meaning of consumption and consumerism within the context of modern Australian life. It was determined that *consumption* describes the process of realising needs (that can be physical or social), and *consumerism* is the

realisation of wants in excess. Chapter 2 identified seven motivations driving individual consumption within modern life: (1) satisfying basic needs, (2), satisfying socially-constructed wants, (3) keeping up with the pace of production (progress), (4) reflecting identity and status, (5) as an expression of freedom, (6) being locked-into consumption and lastly, (7) as a form of entertainment. Through the analysis of the motivations for consumption a critique of consumerism was formed that challenged the assumptions that drive individual spending. Consumerism succeeds on the basis of offering the promise of a 'better life' to individuals. However, this 'better life' is always a purchase away, perpetuating a cycle of consumerism through the careful maintenance of dissatisfaction (Bauman, 2007). For consumerism to flourish, it is essential that the individual continues to define new needs and wants to be satisfied through consumption. New needs and wants are derived from a variety of sources, including the influence of advertising, consumer reference groups (influential friends and networks) and social convention.

When tied to social rituals and relationships, consumption goes beyond purchasing the utility value of goods and becomes socially symbolic. Consumption can also be discrete and hidden within the infrastructures of consumption and the individual habits. As a conscious pursuit, consumption is an expression of freedom for the individual. It is an enticing modern concept that people can have what they want, when they want it. However, the critique in Chapter 2 demonstrated that consumption is simultaneously constraining as it is liberating (Heath & Potter, 2005). The individual is constrained by the very nature that they are a reliant consumer. They have a limited selection of goods from which to choose from and they are constrained by their individual economic limits.

This chapter then analysed how consumerism within modern life is understood to be the "endlessly desirous and wasteful consumption of affluent economies" (Humphrey, 2010, pxi). The Australia Institute study into wasteful consumption revealed that Australians are spending \$10.5 billion on goods they do not use every year (Hamilton et. al, 2005). This is a significant social, ecological and economic problem. Additionally, despite doubling our consumption over the last fifty years, we are not any happier for it (Fien, Neil & Bentley, 2005). As Jackson argued, "The combined social and ecological critique suggests that existing patterns of

consumption already threaten our quality of life, not just because of their impact on the environment, but also because of their failure to satisfy our needs” (Jackson et al. 2003, p20). Chapter 2 concluded that a range of factors, including dissatisfaction with consumerism for under-delivering on the promise of a happier life, growing ecological concern and discontent with the work-and-spend treadmill of modern life, had instigated a challenge to the consumerist status quo.

Posing a challenge to consumerism is not a straight forward task given that consumption is inextricably linked to modern life (Jackson, 2006). Chapter 3 addressed this challenge by focusing on sustainable consumption theories and concepts that seek to balance the needs of the individual, society, the environment and the economy. Sustainable consumption was shown to be a broad term that includes: satisfying basic human needs, prioritising quality of life over materialism, minimising resource use, reducing waste and pollution, considering the whole lifecycle of goods and factoring this into consumer decision making and action (Bentley, Fien & Neil, 2005, p2).

At the individual level, “sustainable consumption is based on a decision-making process that takes the consumer’s social responsibility into account in addition to individual needs and wants” (Vermier & Verbeke, 2006, p170). To describe the process of sustainable consumption from the individual perspective, a scale was developed in Chapter 3. At the top of the scale, the ideal is ‘consuming less’, followed by ‘consuming differently’ and then ‘consuming mindfully’.

This chapter determined that rather than being an externalised practice, sustainable consumption needed to be integrated into lifestyle through the formation of new habits to construct sustainable lifestyles. “The lifestyle of each individual is constructed from a series of building blocks - corresponding to the set of social practices an individual invokes when pursuing his or her everyday life” (Spaargaren, 2003, p689). This chapter acknowledged that changing individual consumption habits is not always easy as there are not the cultural allowances, systems in place or viable alternatives to make it so (Blewitt, 2006. p46).

Despite the challenges, Chapter 4 identified that young people are well placed to overcome them and adapt their lifestyles according to their sustainability values. On this basis, Chapter 4 explored the values and lifestyles of young people. This literature review revealed that there is significant contrast between the perceptions of young people defined by the generational stereotyping of demographers in popular media and the perceptions young people have of themselves. Historically, young people have long been seen as a 'burden on society' and in the current day, through the prevalence of negative stereotypes, they can become the scapegoats for all that is wrong with modern life as far as previous generations are concerned. According to Bessant, "the way that young people get treated has less to do with their biological constraints and has more to do with beliefs and values brought to bear on them by adults" (Bessant, Secombe & Watts, 1998, p. VII). This can become problematic when the stereotypes become self-fulfilling and undermine the positive contributions young people have the potential to make to society.

From their perspective, young people are subject to a critical view by the generations before them in the form of generational stereotypes that do not take into account the changing economic, social and cultural changes to the society in which young people now operate (Crawford, p5, 2006). Let alone factoring in their potential to drive positive change for the future. With a view to learning more about the lives of young people, the Chapter 4 identified that young people are affected by the society of unprecedented environmental risk, globalisation and individualism. They have been born into a consumerist society and are encouraged through advertising, parental precedents and peers to aspire towards materialist lifestyles. However, Chapter 4 also highlighted that rather than representing the generational stereotype, some young people are potentially amenable to change if it is handled the right way. Many young people share concerns about climate change and consumerism, but do not feel strongly enough to act on them. This is a positive basis for change when sustainable lifestyles can be framed in a way that empowers them. Given their lifestyle decisions are more flexible (Anich, Luckins & Samson, 2009) and, as the lifestyle narratives showed, some young people are highly committed to sustainability, there are some young Australians who are willing to make significant changes to their lifestyles accordingly.

This research sought to understand the decisions, practices, motivations and influences of such young people. The research design (Chapter 5) included in-depth interviews with fourteen young people who were committed to pursuing a sustainable consumption lifestyle. It also included a follow up questionnaire one year later to capture their post-interview reflections and updates about the participants' lives, as many were continually adapting them. These interviews were then analysed in two parts, firstly in the form of constructed biographical narratives (the lifestyle portraits) presented in Chapter 6. Secondly, a cross-case analysis of the portraits was conducted, guided by the three research objectives (in Chapter 7).

1. Motivation

From the cross-case analysis, four initial motivations inspired young people to question materialistic lifestyles were identified: (1) an educational experience, (2) an influential mentor, (3) their family upbringing and (4) their appreciation for the natural environment. The first two motivations were most likely to trigger a sudden realisation that there is a need to address materialistic lifestyles, while the latter two motivations were a part of the young people's upbringing and contributed to shaping a pro-sustainability attitude over the long term. Chapter 7 determined that the key to motivating young people to adopt sustainable consumption lifestyles enduringly was through providing information to guide action, and support and encouragement from those close to them.

2a) Sustainable Lifestyle Principles and Practices

The analysis confirmed that young people could live better with less through adopting a range of sustainable consumption principles and practices. They believed that a sustainable way of life starts with a reduction in consumption and a questioning of what they they 'needed' as opposed to what they 'wanted'. As a result, they sought to realise prevailing needs through more sustainable practices such as sharing, swapping and purchasing second-hand goods. The participants principles for sustainable living were identified and integrated into a Scale of Sustainable Consumption (Table 7.1 referencing Figure 3.2).

2b) Challenges

The cross-case analysis confirmed that the pro-sustainability beliefs of the young people did not always translate into action despite the combination of good intentions and strong motivations. This is because of the institutional, financial and informational challenges that stood in the way (Shove, 2003, p3). Some of the challenges that the young people faced were internal and included guilt, confusion, peer pressure and opportunity (cost, time, access). Other challenges, such as social obligation and reliance on infrastructure services, were externally imposed by the infrastructures of consumption and the broader values of society. The analysis within Chapter 7 determined that if the motivations for sustainable living were more powerful than the challenges, then the young people remained empowered to pursue their sustainable way of life.

3. Influence

When analysing the influence the participants had within their inner sphere of family and friends, leading by example was identified to be much more effective than preaching to those who do not share their sustainability values and risking rejection. When they were able to influence those close to them, there was an opportunity to bond over the shared values and experience. Exploring the influential potential of the young people interviewed within their community, professional networks and broader population, the patterns were less clear. Contrary to the assumption that top-down change in the form of governmental policy making is the most influential way to contribute to a sustainable future, some of the attempts to educate and inspire individuals taking a grassroots approach were very effective and satisfying. The influence of these young people within their inner and outer spheres was non-linear. Their influence travels in unpredictable ways from peer to peer and between organisations. These young people became catalysts for sustainable lifestyle thinking, the suppliers of information and reference points within their networks.

The young people interviewed in this research represent progressive individuals on the edge of Australian consumer culture. They have committed to adopting a sustainable way of life and as such, are imbuing sustainable lifestyles with credibility

through their dedication and example. Slowly they are inspiring others. As their conviction and inspiration for sustainable living spreads through the culture, it will become embedded. Under such leadership, wasteful, materialist lifestyles may be replaced by a sustainable approach that exemplifies a life lived *better* with less. This better life is one where the individual is defined by their values and by who they are rather than by what they have. They aspire to a lifestyle that balances an appreciation of the material culture and convenience consumerism provides, respect for the environment alongside self-preservation and the wellbeing of others. It is a life that represents a balance between the individual and society, the environment and the economy.

8.3 Implications of the Findings

Five implications have been derived from the key findings from this research:

Firstly, Chapter 3 identified that there is a need for a clearer definition of sustainable consumption from the individual perspective alongside the definitions that exist within academia and the policy arena. With a clear understanding about what constitutes a lifestyle of sustainable consumption, it becomes a more tangible pursuit for the individual.

Secondly, there is a need to overcome the negative stereotyping of young people promoted in popular media through developing a comprehensive understanding and definition of young people. There is a need to respect their role in society and further explore the potential for young people to be leading the adoption of sustainable consumption lifestyles, because “young people are always a potent cultural force and often a leading indicator of where the culture is headed” (Flavin, 2010, p.xviii).

Thirdly, the fourteen lifestyle narratives contradict the old environmentalist mantra that a responsible way of living is attained through deprivation. This myth was challenged by the enticing lifestyle opportunities within the lifestyle portraits, that simultaneously enhance individual wellbeing while maintaining respect for the environment. The young people spoke about their lifestyles in a way that signified their enjoyment, rather than a sense of compromise. They are living in a way that

balances their individual wellbeing, the wellbeing of their community, and the environment. They are actively redefining their interpretations of needs and innovating to create solutions they can integrate into their lives. They have balanced their appreciation of material 'things' with their environmental consideration.

The fourth implication of this research is that the long-standing myth of consumerism, that growth is good and more is better has been challenged. The young people interviewed demonstrated how it is possible to live within one's economic means through managing the relationship between individual wants and the environmental and economic constraints. Across the lifestyle portraits, the participants questioned their needs and wants, and sought to realise them within their economic and environmental limits. They did not want more than they had. They had reached "elegant sufficiency"³⁶ a state of having consumed 'just enough'

Lastly, the young people demonstrated how it is possible to be defined by who you are and the values you hold within a consumerist society that promotes the materialist value of 'having' over 'being'. Within their interviews, the young people defined their quality of life through their relationships with friends and family, the satisfaction of their working life, through having the luxury of leisure time and the pride taken in making a difference to society. Consumption played a role within their lives, however it was not the dominant method for self-definition or social status.

8.4 Recommendations

The key findings from this research highlighted several opportunities for further research and action. The analysis (Chapter 7) identified a set of challenges that young people face when adopting sustainable consumption practices. Some of the internal challenges are difficult to address, however there is scope to further investigate some of the external challenges. These include:

³⁶ Having reached "elegant sufficiency" is an Edwardian term to describe a state of consuming satisfaction

1. Addressing how Government can play a leading role to accelerate the adoption of sustainable lifestyle principles and practices
2. Investigating some of the proposed alternatives that would lead individuals to more sustainable consumption decisions. Eg. looking into sustainable transport solutions to replace air and car travel
3. Working towards a certification and labeling strategy for products (such as food items and clothing) so that consumers can make informed purchasing decisions
4. Investigating the potential for community services to enable the individual to reduce their consumption footprint or better manage their waste. Eg. a centralised urban composting service.
5. Some of the participants were unsure of the real ecological benefits of their consuming actions, so there is scope to conduct further research into the sustainability benefits of the common sustainable consumption practices. (Eg. the real benefits of locally produced food over imported goods).
6. The role of government needs to change from being controlling on one hand, and over-reliant on markets on the other hand, to becoming focused on 'change management' through "seeking ways of living that enable individuals, the collective and nature to flourish must be a learning process for the whole of society" (Jackson & Michaelis, 2003, p7). Government needs to collaborate with business and consumers to action sustainable consumption and production strategies (Scott, 2009, p19). This study has shown that young people are willing to accept responsibility for reducing their individual consumption footprints, however they would prefer to be part of a collective movement, led by government, towards a sustainable future.

In lieu of Government leadership, there is the potential to explore avenues for promoting the capacity of young people to adapt to sustainable lifestyles and inspire others. Alongside this PhD research, a sustainable consumption capacity-building program called *Otherwise* has been piloted to achieve this purpose. Operating over four years, *Otherwise* has successfully mentored a group of young Australians through the development of a range of sustainable consumption initiatives. These included the production of a sustainable living book, the hosting of clothes swapping events, a green careers expo and an environmental education documentary. On a global scale, the United Nations Environment Programme has initiated a youth-

oriented project called the YouthXchange which seeks to educate young people about sustainable consumption lifestyles and encourage global collaborations for action. These initiatives signal the beginning of a broader investigation into how to maximise the influence of young people who are seeking to live better with less and hope to inspire others to do the same.

Appendices

Appendix 1.

Interview Schedule

Personal details (confidential)

Name _____ Birth date __/__/__

Preferred alias _____

Address _____

Email _____ Phone _____

Questions

1. Why did you decide that adopting a sustainable consumption lifestyle was important?
 2. Can you tell me about some of ways you are adopting a lifestyle of sustainable consumption?
 3. Is there anything that prevents you adopting a particular sustainable consumption practice (insert example based on what they have mentioned)?
 4. Are there people in your life that you think may be influenced by your sustainable consumption lifestyle?
 5. How do you keep informed about sustainable consumption?
 6. So is there anything you'd like to further develop within your lifestyle as influenced by sustainability?
 7. So, based on what we have discussed, how do you define a lifestyle of sustainable consumption?
-

Appendix 2

Follow-up Questionnaire (conducted by Email)

1. Since the last interview, have you made any significant changes to your life?
(eg. Moved house, new job, joined a new network or community group)
 2. Are there any new practices that you have adopted in line with your lifestyle of sustainable consumption since the last interview?
 3. Have you overcome any barriers that you identified in the last interview that were preventing you from acting on a particular sustainable consumption practice? If so, please describe how...
 4. Since the last interview, is there any person or organisation that may be influenced by your sustainability values?
 5. Is there anything you'd like to further develop within your lifestyle as influenced by sustainability at this stage?
-

Appendix 3

Full interview transcripts on the cd at the back of this thesis.

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