SOCIAL ASPECTS OF DEVELOPING AND SUSTAINING VOLUNTARILY REDUCED CONSUMPTION ACTIVITY IN NEW YORK CITY

by

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines the social aspects of voluntarily reduced consumption activity using the principles of cultural historical activity theory. Voluntarily buying less is viewed as ongoing interactive social process that is initiated and sustained as individuals engage with their surroundings. Data was collected from 320 online survey respondents living in the New York City Metro area, followed by a purposeful sampling of 24 participants for in-person, follow up interviews. Interviews revealed the social contextual influences on initiating voluntarily reduced consumption activity. For example, family experiences, personal life changes, and historical events played a role in individuals' choice to voluntarily buy less.

Individuals who choose to voluntarily reduce how much they buy experience both social supports and barriers to their activity. Many interview respondents treated voluntarily buying less as a sensitive topic of conversation, not to be openly discussed with others who did not hold the same opinions or values. Those participants adopted techniques to determine who the topic could be broached with while avoiding conflict with those who it may cause problems. Having social support and resources made a noteworthy difference in the viability of adopting many

practices, such as reducing the amount of gifts exchanged at the holidays or acquiring used goods instead of buying something new.

Social pressure to consume or support for buying less changed based upon specific situations, environments, and individuals with whom the respondent was interacting. Significant others were an important source of support for voluntarily buying less through actions such as sharing responsibility, reinforcing practices or providing skills. Having children presented particular challenges to buying less, as well as an opportunity to pass along one's values and practices. Family and friends were often a resource for skills and information for practices including repairing goods or doing things for oneself. However, friendships that were not supportive were a particular sore spot for some interview participants. Making compromises, not talking about their values and practices, or reducing the amount of time they spent with their friends was a source of strain, anger, and feelings of social isolation. While a few developed new friendships that supported their buying less values, others enacted conflict-reducing practices in order to negotiate social interactions with their friends. Interview participants' choice of employment influenced how much pressure they felt to maintain social norms and communicate status through purchasing of goods such as clothing and technology. The impact of living in New York City was very noticeable when interview participants talked about the support they received from their participation in local social groups, organizations, and communities.

Some interview respondents felt their voluntarily reduced consumption activity may influence others. However, not all participants were motivated by the thought that their voluntarily reduced consumption activity was making an impact on a larger scale. A few even feel that what they are doing may have a negative impact on others.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

Those who try to wean themselves off consumerism often need support, mainly in the form of approval of significant others and membership in voluntary simplicity groups and subcultures… (Etzioni, 1998, pg. 631).

The conspicuous consumption of goods plays a significant role in today's social interactions with others. The United States has a strong consumer culture which ties together cultural and social reproduction of daily life through the social practices of consuming resources (Holt, 2002). Within this system, there is a small portion of individuals living in the United States who are motivated to voluntarily reduce how much they buy. Given the importance of consumption and consumer culture in social relationships, how do social interactions with others either support, or hinder, voluntarily reduced consumption activity? Individuals may need to use their friends, family, social groups and community as a means of social support, information, skills, and resources (Etzioni, 1998). However, relationships with others may also be a main area of conflict and provide barriers to reducing individuals' consumption (Dobscha & Ozanne, 2001).

This dissertation examines the social aspects of developing and sustaining voluntarily reduced consumption activity in New York City. To begin, I review the relevant literature to see what is already known about this topic, including the role that consumption plays in social interaction, the motivations for voluntarily reducing consumption, practices engaged in by those who voluntarily choose to buy less, and the impact of buying less on social interactions. This is followed by my research question and details of my methodology. I approached my work using cultural historical activity theory, analyzing voluntarily reduced consumption activity as an ongoing, interactive social process, initiated and sustained as individuals engage with their

environment. My study uses a mixed methods approach, using an initial quantitative online survey of 320 respondents and a follow-up qualitative interview of 24 participants.

There are four chapters of results. The first (Chapter Three) looks at the social nature of initiating voluntarily reduced consumption activity, including one's family background, personal life changes, unhappiness with one's current lifestyle and situation, and being exposed to new information.

The second (Chapter Four) focuses on the social aspects of voluntarily reduced consumption practices. This includes two categories of practices: (1) practices that manage individuals' social interactions with others related to voluntarily buying less, for instance, gift-giving when trying to buy less; and (2) voluntarily reduced consumption practices, such as repairing goods or acquiring objects second-hand, which are impacted by social interactions with others.

The third chapter of results (Chapter Five) examines the social supports and barriers to voluntarily buying less activity within different social environments, for instance, the supports and barriers that arise when one is interacting with one's family or in one's work environment. Lastly, I present my findings (Chapter Six) on how participants in this study feel that others are influenced by their voluntarily reduced consumption activity. I conclude by discussing the results, as well as limitations, of my research and speculate on what it means for research on this topic going forward.

Social role of consumption in the United States

Consumption is experienced as the process of choosing and purchasing goods and services, which takes place within a system of interconnected economic, cultural, and social institutions (Zukin & Maguire, 2004). While the consumption of goods is often considered to fall

under the private domain of individual choice, taken as a whole, individuals' consumption of goods is a central part of the U. S. socioeconomic system (Slater, 1997). Consumption also currently plays a significant social role in the United States society in several ways. First, the choice and purchasing of consumer goods are used to express and communicate one's identity and status to others. Individuals' social position and identity are increasingly tied to one's appearance and lifestyle as produced through the consumption of goods and services (Crane, 2000; Holt, 1998; Martens, Southerton, & Scott, 2004; Slater, 1997). For example within hierarchies of social status, individuals may purchase consumer items, such as clothing, cars, or houses, that will help present an appearance of higher social status. In turn, this appearance may help individuals integrate themselves into higher status groups. "Consumerism sustains itself, in part, because it is visible. People who are 'successful' in traditional capitalist terms need to signal their achievement in ways that are readily visible to others in order to gain their appreciation, approval, and respect." (Etzioni, 1998, pg. 633). Consequently, there may be social advantages that come from continue reproducing consumer culture (Kasser, Ryan, Couchman, & Sheldon, 2003).

In this way, individuals' conspicuous consumption has become highly significant. It is a means for people to express who they are and play with different identities, communicating lifestyles, group belonging, and tastes. However, there is tension with between the idea of consumption being freeing and empowering while recognizing that much consumption is done in a socially and culturally standardized way. Choices are often made within a rigid structural context (Sassatelli, 2007). While people may theoretically be free to choose their own personal identity as expressed through consumer goods and services, most individuals have to make choices within the constraints of objective circumstances, including their economic, cultural, and

social capital[1] (Martens et al., 2004; Page & Ridgway, 2001; Raby, 2002; Sassatelli, 2007). For example, they must work to shape their selves and lives within their available income, acquired tastes, knowledge, resources, and mobility.

Second, consumption also plays a role in social interactions through ritualized gift giving on birthdays, holidays, or special events such as weddings and children's birthdays. Individuals may particularly feel even more pressure as gift-giving occasions continue to be more commercialized (Close & Zinkham, 2009; Lee, Katra, & Bauer, 2009; Mortelmans & Damen, 2001; Schor, 2004). Finally, retail and commercial spaces serve as locations for socializing, such as spending time with family and friends (Cohen, 2003; Slater, 1997).

So for what reasons would individuals choose to voluntarily reduce their consumption levels, given the consumption-focused culture present in the U.S.?

Motivations for voluntarily reducing one's consumption

Prior research has indicated a variety of reasons why individuals may choose to voluntarily reduce their consumption, including:

- concern about the environment (Barr, 2003; Barr, 2007; Bekin, Carrigan, & Szmigin, 2006; Connolly & Prothero, 2008; DeYoung et al., 1993; Dobscha & Ozanne, 2001; Iwata, 2001; Maiteny, 2002; McKenzie-Mohr, Nemiroff, Beers, & Desmarais, 1995; Olli, Grendstad, & Wollerback, 2001),
- wanting to spend less money (Dominguez, Robin, Tilford, & Zaifman, 2008; Lastovicka, Bettencourt, Hughner, & Kuntze, 1999),

[1] Cultural, social, and economic capital are defined as different types of resources that are available to individuals. Economic capital is control of economic resources such as cash and assets. Social capital is resources based on group membership, relationships, networks of influence and support. Cultural capital is forms of knowledge, skill, education, or any advantages a person has which give them a higher status in society (see Bourdieu, 1986).

- dislike of consumerism (Carducci, 2006; Cherrier, 2009; Close & Zinkhan, 2009; Dobscha, 1998; Iyer & Muncy, 2009; Klein, 2000; Kozinets, 2002; Rumbo, 2002; Sandlin & Callahan, 2009),
- to reduce household clutter (Ballantine & Creery, 2010),
- wanting to live a simpler lifestyle (Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002; Elgin, 1993; Hunake, 2005; McDonald, Oates, Young, & Hwang, 2006),
- in response to corporate business practices (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; Lee, Motion, & Conroy, 2009; Hoffmann, & Muller, 2009; Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006),
- to focus on the nonmaterial aspects of life (Kaza, 2006),
- in order to work less (Schor, 1992; Schor, 2005),
- concern about wealth and resource inequality (Schor; 2003)
- to achieving a sense of personal authenticity (Zavestoski, 2002),
- or for one's own intrinsic satisfaction (DeYoung, 1996; DeYoung, 2000).

For instance, Craig-Lees and Hill (2002) found in their study[2] that voluntary simplifiers focused more on their spiritual, religious, or environmental beliefs, wanting to give up or reduce their paid work hours so that they could spend more time on their hobbies, community, environmental issues and family than those who were not simplifying their lives (Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002). Dobscha and Ozanne's (2001) study[3] revealed that personal beliefs, values and

[2] They recruited 20 voluntary simplifiers and 33 non-voluntary simplifiers. The participants were located in Australia, earning at least $80,000, college-educated, and were between the ages of 40 to 55. No racial or ethnic demographic data was reported. The voluntary simplifiers had to meet all 3 criteria adopted from Duane Elgin's definition of voluntary simplicity: (1) practiced minimal consumption; (2) focused on people, including being interested in people, concerned with the well-being of others, and engaged in activities that improve the quality of life of others; and (3) community-oriented, focused on personal well-being, and environmentally-focused, such as wanting and achieving harmony between work, family, friends, and personal interests; actively engaging in environmentally-friendly behavior; or actively working toward and achieving psychological well-being. Respondents were originally identified by their membership in (food) cooperative (Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002).

[3] Dobsha and Ozanne's (2001) qualitative study was with 9 Caucasian women, ranging in age from mid-20's to early 70's who were involved with the environment through their jobs and/or through participation with voluntary organizations. Built upon a year-long participant-observation of a local environmental action group, the researchers conducted 3 separate in-depth interviews, observations, and autoelicitation with all nine women in their homes

priorities played a primary role in influencing the lifestyle choices their respondents made, bringing their concern for their relationship with, and impact on, the environment and nature to the forefront of their decision-making in their daily lives (Dobscha & Ozanne, 2001).

People may choose not to buy products when they are unhappy with certain corporations or service providers[4]. They can also engage acquiring goods through alternative providers of goods and services such as consumer unions, food buying clubs, cooperatives, credit unions, and Local Exchange Trading Schemes (or LETS) (Briceno & Stagl, 2006; Cohen, Comrov, & Hoffner; 2005; Herrmann, 1993). In a survey of 50 organizers and participants in Local Exchange Trading Schemes (or LETS) in the United Kingdom, Briceno and Stagl (2006) found that the main motivations for joining LETS were community building (72%), convenience (42%), environmental reasons (42%), socializing (38%), economic reasons (34%), desire to change lifestyle (28%), develop skills/ideas (24%), other (18%), political reasons (8%), and learning from others (6%). They also reported that participation in LETS fulfilled the following needs either effectively or very effectively: friendship (77%), participation (70%), creativity (52%), leisure (45%), knowledge (23%), personal freedom (20%), identity (18%), and subsistence (14%).

Individuals could also be feeling overwhelmed by consumption-focused culture which may reduces individuals' quality of life, subjective well-being, and self-esteem, including feelings of dissatisfaction, boredom, cynicism and anger (Helm, 2004; Kasser et al., 2003; Solberg, Diener, & Robinson, 2003). These decreases in well-being may be tied to decreasing amounts of quality time available for oneself, family, and community. That time is instead spent on earning money or shopping. Engaging in a consumer-focused lifestyle may be tied to

[4] Consumers may also choose to "buycott" certain goods – meaning to buy only goods or services made or supplied by certain corporations or providers (Low & Davenport, 2007; Shaw & Newholm, 2002)

decreased monetary savings and increased levels of debt (Kasser et al., 2003; Putnam, 2000; Schor, 1998; Schor, 2005; Solberg et al., 2003). Lastly, researchers have theorized that having an "unlimited" choice of goods, increased marketing and multiple symbolic meanings may overwhelm and stress people (Frost, 2003; Rumbo, 2002; Schwartz, 2004).

In addition, individuals often are often driven by more than a single motivation for buying less. For instance, by definition, participation in the Voluntary Simplicity movement involves valuing material simplicity; living and working in smaller scale; decentralized environments; self-determination; ecological awareness; and personal growth (Elgin, 1993). Participants in Huneke's (2005) online survey[5] of voluntary simplifiers emphasized the difficulty in pigeon holing individuals who practice voluntary simplicity because they enacted it in different ways depending on personal choices and trade-offs. Respondents were motivated to adopt voluntary simplicity because of concerns about the environment, dislike of stressful lifestyles, anti-consumerism attitudes, wanting to spend time on more satisfying things, and a desire for a more authentic life (Huneke, 2005).

Additionally, DeYoung thinks it is most likely that environmentally responsible behavior has multiple antecedents, with more than one factor prompting certain behaviors[6] (DeYoung, 1996). He argues that there are three broad sources of motivation for environmentally responsible behaviors: being concerned for the environment, being concerned for others, and

[5] In Huneke's (2005) online survey of voluntary simplifiers, of the 113 respondents, 73.5% of them were females. The respondents varied in age with 8% under 25, 21.2% between the ages of 25 and 34, 28.3% between the ages of 35 to 44, 28.3% ages 45 to 54 and 12.4% over the age of 55. No racial or ethnic demographic information was reported. Respondents were highly educated, with 65% having at least a 4 year degree and 22.1% having a graduate degree. The respondents also varied in length of time that they had been practicing voluntary simplicity, with 33.6% practicing for less than 5 years with 15.9% practicing for more than 3 but less than 5 years, and 50.5% practicing for more than 5 years (Huneke, 2005).

[6] DeYoung examines a satisfaction-based approach to promoting reduced consumption behavior by analyzing results from nine of his empirical studies done over the course of ten years focusing of intrinsic satisfaction and motivation (DeYoung, 1996).

being concerned for oneself. These three motivations are not theorized to be mutually exclusive (DeYoung, 2000).

Reduced consumption behaviors and practices

Reducing one's consumption often involves more than just not buying. Individuals have to enact different practices, mental routines and behaviors in order to buy less, such as avoiding impulse purchases (Huneke, 2005). Pressure to consume can be reduced through limited exposure to advertising and reducing their television use (Grigsby, 2004; Huneke, 2005). Individuals may engage in being active in their community and with friends in order to fill the time that could otherwise be spent shopping (Huneke, 2005).

The life of owned items can be extended through repair, reuse and re-purposing for other functions. Instead of buying something new, goods are also homemade, acquired second-hand, borrowed, or shared within one's social network (Dobscha & Ozanne, 2001; Grigsby, 2004; Leonard-Barton, 1981). Food can be grown at instead of being purchased at the store (Connolly and Prothero, 2008; Grigsby, 2004; Leonard-Barton, 1981). Individual's diet may be modified to eat less meat or processed foods. These practices are supported through knowledge of skills such as gardening, food preservation, cooking, sewing, knitting, and carpentry (Grigsby, 2004; Leonard-Barton, 1981).

Related to reducing one's purchases, those engaged in voluntary simplicity, green, or ethical consumption also choose to buy products that support local producers or sellers of goods, organic products, fair-trade goods, or products that are better for the environment. Those with environmental concerns often engage in recycling, composting, and other means of disposing of goods in an eco-friendly fashion (Connolly and Prothero, 2008; Grigsby, 2004; Leonard-Barton, 1981). Thrifty individuals engage in money saving practices, such as using coupons, acquiring

goods at low-cost or for free, or maintaining a budget (Dominguez et al., 2008; Lastovicka et al., 1999).

Sociocultural and historical context for voluntarily choosing to buy less

How individuals enact and create meaning from activity is shaped by their sociocultural and historical context. (Daiute, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). A handful of previous research studies provide examples of how socio-historical context plays a role in voluntarily reduced consumption activity.

A Pew Research Center study found that the financial hardships that are a result of an economic recession may influence individuals to reexamine their consumption habits. Respondents[7] reported a drastic shift in attitude towards what was considered to be a luxury compared to a necessity in the home as a result of the 2007 recession. The telephone survey found that 81% of respondents were taking cost-cutting measures in response to the recession, including 57% buying less expensive brands or shopping more at discount stores, 21% planning to plant a vegetable garden, 20% started doing yard work or home repairs themselves, 10% reducing their driving, 9% cutting back on spending in general, and 6% cutting back spending on food, clothing, and medicine (Morin & Taylor, 2009).

Zavestoki (2002) found in his analysis of books published on the topic of voluntary simplicity that their focus changed over time. Between 1973 and 1994, the majority of books published talked about the spiritual, religious, and virtuous aspects that this lifestyle provided. However, after 1994, the main focus shifted towards the reduction of stress, increasing personal fulfillment and providing strategies to reduce the complexity of one's life (Zavestoski, 2002).

[7] Results were based on telephone (cell and landline) interviews conducted with a nationally representative sample of 1,003 adults living in the continental United States. The data was collected between April 2 to 8, 2009.

With the recent recession, it is likely that voluntarily simplicity will embrace thrift as a major theme.

Media articles also provide clues to how voluntarily reduced consumption activity may change over time. Recent years have given rise to eco-challenges or groups focusing on reducing one's consumption out of concern for climate change and the damage being done to the environment. One example is a group focused on voluntarily reducing consumption which began under the label of "the Compact" in 2005. The Compact grew from a small group of individuals in San Francisco who challenged each other to not buy anything new for at least six months (Dunleavey, 2007). It now has almost 10,000 members (http://groups.yahoo.com/group/thecompact/ accessed Feb. 26, 2012).

Other individuals are putting their politics into practice by dumpster diving or salvaging food and goods that was bound for the trash (Essig, 2002). The Freegans are a group who are opposed to the current economic system. In response, they practice more extreme measures to "minimize resource consumption to lower our environmental impact and simultaneously ensure that all our needs are met," including: urban foraging and dumpster diving; recovering of food that would have otherwise been thrown out; "squatting" in abandoned buildings; wild foraging for food; participating in free market exchanges, free stores, and freecycling; ridesharing when traveling by car; guerilla and community gardening; and community bike sharing (http://freegan.info accessed Jan. 22, 2009).

As can be seen through the above examples, it is important to examine what is going on in the United States and the world that may play a role in individuals choosing to reduce their consumption. In addition, individuals' voluntary reduced consumption activity may be impacted by their locations, as local culture and resources may differ. For example, individuals within

New York City have access to Stop N' Swap events that are sponsored by the New York City Office of Recycling Outreach and Education[8]. At these free, community-based swaps, they can bring their unused goods to get rid off and pick up other items that they might need. In this study, participants have been asked about what events and community resources external to themselves they felt have played a role in their voluntarily reduced consumption activity. However, not only are historical events and community resources important, but so too are social interactions on a more personal level.

Social aspects of voluntarily reduced consumption activity

Little research in this area has focused specifically how social interactions support or hinder the activity of voluntarily buying less. As will be reviewed below, only a few research projects provide information on personal relationships with family, significant others, children, or close friends. In addition, there is only minor information on the impact of one's work environment on voluntarily choosing to buy less. Much of the work I found examines communities which support buying less practices and the formation of an identity beyond one of a consumer.

Support and barriers to buying less from significant others, family, and friends.

Connolly and Prothero (2008) found that "green consumers" they interviewed had to compromise and negotiate in order to maintain their social relationships. Participants felt social pressure surrounding their beliefs and practices, and in turn, their beliefs and practices also put pressure on their social relationships. For instance, participants experienced dilemmas in regards to making consumption decisions relating to their children. Participants had to figure out means to balance their own beliefs with their children's personal wants as well as the need to fit in with their peers.

[8] See http://www.grownyc.org/swap for more details

In comparing voluntary simplifying families with non-simplifiers, Craig-Lees and Hill's (2002) study found that while both wanted to provide what was best for their children, the approach to fulfilling that was very different. The non-simplifiers hoped that they would be able secure well-paying jobs for their children in the future by sending them to private schools now, while the voluntary simplifiers wanted to have control over the education of their children, through the choices of home schooling or alternative schooling systems such as Steiner or Montessori schools, with the goal of their children experiencing well-rounded lives.

Participants in Dobscha and Ozanne's (2001) study reported that some of the changes that they made to align their lifestyle with their environmental beliefs resulted in social disapproval from their mothers and teasing from their friends and coworkers. The participants in turn spent time trying to socializing others into new habits and creating new ecological spaces, starting with their home and families and continuing on to their work with their local communities (Dobscha & Ozanne, 2001).

In examining the power and gender dynamics within voluntary simplicity circles, Grigsby (2004) found that women she studied tended to be single, childless, financially independent, highly educated, and ambivalent about having partnerships with men. In her study, the single women doubted that men would support them emotionally or give them autonomy and described previous relationships as a drain on their emotional and financial resources. Women within the groups were able to have nurturing experiences outside of partnerships through their creative work, volunteering, and by living sustainably. Those who were in relationships often negotiated a relatively high degree of autonomy.

However, most of the men in the voluntary simplicity circles Grigsby (2004) studied wanted to be in partnerships or marriages. The men did not want to be defined by the roles of

wage earner or male breadwinner, and instead they turned to their knowledge of being financially independent, being a shrewd buyer, and skillful in making, repairing, and maintaining objects. Men worked to reject aggression, competition, and emotional attachment, though they were found to often dominate simplicity circle dialogues, which pushed some women to drop out or find other spaces for women-only dialogue, such as knitting circles (Grigsby, 2004).

Judkins and Presser (2008) found that within households, there was gender inequality between eco-friendly husband and wives in the division of household labor, with women taking on more of the work, including those tied to being more environmentally responsible. The couples felt the difference was due to the wife's greater concern or competence when it came to particular household chores. In addition, even though the wife took on more responsibility, the husband was willing to help when asked (Judkins & Presser, 2008). Based on these findings, it will be important to examine the gendered dynamics within relationships and supportive communities when it comes to voluntarily reducing consumption activity to see if they are a hindrance to reducing consumption.

Close and Zinkham (2009) examined resistance to purchasing gifts in celebration of Valentine's Day. The researchers found that individuals' sense of obligation to give gifts varied based on length of their relationship with their significant other and gender, with males in new relationships feeling more pressure to give gifts. Some individuals chose to not give gifts or to modify traditional gift-giving practices, such as by setting a price limit on gifts, making homemade gift, or making a special dinner at home (Close & Zinkham, 2009).

The literature review reveals that there has been work done on a variety of topics relating to the social aspects of reducing consumption and environmental behaviors. Initial studies provide hints at how holding different values impacts social relationships. Reduced consumption

and environmental beliefs may interact with one's values and expectations of social relationships. Compromise, social pressure, disapproval, and teasing may result when others do hold the same values. Lastly, gender dynamics could also play a role in social interactions related to voluntarily reduced consumption activity.

The work environment's role in voluntarily reduced consumption activity. With appearance and consumption of goods being an important tool in negotiating status and communicating social position, it is not surprising to find that research studies on personal attire and appearance has shown clothing to be important in many complex facets of individuals' self-regard, behavior and interactions at work (Rafaeli, Dutton, Hardquail, & Mackie-Lewis, 1997; Peluchette, Karl, & Rust, 2006), and that having the "right look" may also help individuals' get hired and possibly be more successful in their career (Tietje & Cresap, 2005; Warhurst, van den Broek, Hall, & Nickson; 2009).

However few studies directly examine how the work environment influences, or is influenced by, voluntary reduced consumption activity. In Craig-Lees and Hill's (2002) study voluntary simplifiers wanted to give up or reduce their paid work hours so that they could spend more time on their hobbies, community, environmental issues and family. The paid work that participants did want to engage in was described as meaningful, interesting, and providing significant benefits to other (Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002). Similarly Grigsby (2004) found that the voluntary simplifiers she interviewed wanted to reduce how much they worked and how much they consumed, but that since it was more difficult to change work practices, respondents focused more on consumption practices which allowed for a more immediate sense of accomplishment.

Schor's presents the notion of the work-spend cycle in her books, *The Overworked American* (1992) and *The Overspent American* (1998), arguing that the structure of work and leisure is explicitly linked to the rate of consumption. Schor (2005) argues that with the complex structures in place to reinforce the current status quo, it would take a lot of effort to convince (or force) companies to provide opportunities for employees to work less. Even with a rise in employee productivity and the benefits of evolving technology, it is more cost efficient for companies pay employees more income than cut back on the amount of hours that they work. Employment that does allow shorter hours often come at great cost to the employee, such as the loss of employee benefits (Schor, 2005). Because of the lack of research in this area, it is important to investigate the work environments of those who choose to voluntarily reduce their consumption.

Participation in communities that support buying less. Of the research available on social aspects of voluntarily reduced consumption, a larger portion focuses on participation in voluntary simplicity and other supportive communities and groups. Joining in a community that supports different values and a different cultural language to express oneself alleviates some of the social barriers to voluntarily reducing one's consumption. It provides individuals with an alternative identity to one of a "consumer" (Cherrier & Murray, 2002; Kozinets, 2002; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). It also provides a resource for getting goods and services without entering into the traditional consumer market system.

Cherrier and Murray (2002) argue that voluntary simplicity can be viewed is a fragmented, diffuse, and decentralized social movement based built on cultural or lifestyle-based changes, with the common theme of disliking of consumerism (Cherrier & Murray, 2002; Haenfler, 2004). Cherrier and Murray (2002) apply Plummer's framework of identity

construction to define voluntary simplicity as a social movement, presenting its four stages of identity construction: sensitization, signification, subculturalization, and stabilization. Individuals become sensitized to the problems of consumer society and take action to move from external sources of satisfaction to more internal sources of satisfaction and self esteem. The voluntary simplicity movement allows individuals access to resources and personal validation during this personal shift. In modifying their consumption lifestyle, individuals bring significance to and contrast themselves against defining themselves as a consumer. They view the consumer life as inauthentic and lacking autonomy (Cherrier & Murray, 2002; Zavestoski, 2002). By affiliating themselves with the voluntary simplicity movement, individuals can find a sense of belonging and solidarity. A subculture is created and maintained through involvement with others, collectively recognizing the right to their own identity. Finally, individuals who are in the stabilization stage are completely immersed in the voluntary simplicity movement as well as have fully aligned their life with the values of the voluntary simplicity movement (Cherrier & Murray, 2002).

Studies do demonstrate the use of communities as a means of social support for changes in individuals' discourses and practices. For example, in observing participants in anti-advertising, anti-Nike, and anti-genetically engineered food activist groups, Kozinets and Handelman (2004) wrote in their field notes:

> …practically everything at the meeting was encouraging reflexivity, thinking about the way we think about consumerism, consumer culture, capitalism, and simultaneously broadcasting that activists were different from most people because they did exactly that. Code words. In-group stuff…the entire meeting seemed to be much more about talking, spreading catchphrases, spurring reflective thinking about consumption, transferring ideology, and reinforcing how much different they were from the mass of consumers 'out there,' (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004, pg. 695).

Kozinets and Handelman (2004) observed participants' identity formation discourses and practices in which the groups talked about themselves as positive change agents who had been awakened and needed to work to reform consumer culture. In this image, they position themselves in contrast with weak-minded, duped, lazy and selfish consumers who are unable to control their urges. Informing, enlightening, and freeing these unreflective consumers was part of the work that needed to be done by activists. Participants also framed their work in opposition to large corporations who are viewed as powerful, evil bullies and puppeteers (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004).

Hollenbeck and Zinkhan (2006) conducted a two-year analysis of three large online communities that center on dislike and resistances against a specific brand/corporation (Wal-mart, McDonalds, and Starbucks), as well as conducting 36 in-depth interviews with members of the communities. These "anti-brand" communities have overlapping characteristics and values with anti-consumerism communities since they are both formed in responding to negative aspects of consumer culture, specifically how the actions of these large corporations contribute and promote consumerism and are viewed as destructive and oppressive to the environment and to local communities. Hollenbeck and Zinkhan (2006) found that the online anti-brand communities formed around common moral obligations and provided the social support to achieve their common goals, cope with difficulties, and to accumulate and share information resources and ideas for taking action. The communities had family-like environments that promoted reciprocal exchange and built up the confidence of individual members so they felt comfortable trying new things, making changes in their lives, and taking political or personal action to support their values, including adopting a voluntary simplicity lifestyle. Together, community members could construct a new collective identity for themselves. Additionally, the

virtual nature of the communities provides many advantages to the members, including speed of information sharing, convenience, diversity of the communities' members, and anonymity (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006).

Individuals who voluntarily reduce their consumption often have to find alternative means for fulfilling their needs for certain goods. One means of doing this would be to have an alternative network or community of people to turn to in order to acquire goods instead of buying them at a store. For instance, if an individual's television breaks, he/she may turn to others in order to replace the broken television with someone else's used television that they no longer need. Or he/she may choose to no longer own a television, but instead go over to other individuals' homes to watch television. Being part of a community allows access to resources that may not be available to individuals who are isolated from a supportive community. They may turn to resources that allow them to exchange goods or get used goods that another person is discarding, either through websites such as Freecycle (www.freecycle.com) or Craigslist (www.craigslist.com), or through local community exchanges, swaps or barter systems (Briceno & Stagl, 2006). Participants in Grigsby's study support these notions stating that it was important to have a good trading network and cooperative neighbors (Grigsby, 2004, pg. 74). Barr (2007) found that individuals who are members of community, political, and environmental groups reuse more materials. Additionally, as part of a community, individuals may be able to access the procedural knowledge that they need to feel competent enough to enact new behaviors (De Young, 1996; De Young, 2000).

Community participants in Bekin and colleagues' (2006) study of "new consumption communities[9]" in the United Kingdom regained control over the production process by

[9] A new consumption community was defined as "a fluid construct, ranging from those communities with limited direct involvement in the production process, i.e. Fairtrade Towns, to those highly committed to various interrelated

preferring to do things themselves, such as growing their own food, providing their own water, and producing their own goods, which allows them to maintain control, autonomy and to minimize waste through composting, reuse and recycling. Participation in these activities also encouraged the participants to be more conscious of the resources used up when things are consumed thereby encouraging overall reduced consumption and conservation of resources. Communities also supported repair and reuse of goods as well as salvaging broken objects for creative recycling into the building of "new" goods. Second-hand goods were also purchased, bartered, and exchanged through Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS), secondhand stores, and local markets. The researcher found that these practices would be more difficult to do on an individual level. The communities supported these activities by providing the structural support for the practices as well as through the specialized knowledge and skills of individual members (Bekin et al., 2006).

In Briceno and Stagl 2006 study, participants in LETS communities reported increased gatherings and community events, increased community awareness, friendlier atmosphere, and increased identification with the locality. A majority of respondents also reported being involved in other community groups and events, most of which they joined after getting involved with the LETS and 52% reported an increase in awareness of environmental issues. The most reported need that LETS fulfilled for participants was the need for friendship. Participants reported that benefits included "'meeting like-minded people who are environmentally aware', 'the benefits of this programme when one feels alienated in society', and 'the chance to interact and meet people I would not have met otherwise.'" (Briceno & Stagl, 2006).

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societal issues, i.e. intentional sustainable communities, in which it is possible to find many ethical simplifiers… the communities discussed below can be considered to be at the highly-committed end of the new consumption communities spectrum, and are mainly adopters of voluntary simplified lifestyles (although one community prioritises (sic) positive and technological options over simplified ones)," (Bekin et al, 2006, pg. 37).

Research findings indicate that participating in a community that supports buying less can be beneficial in a variety of ways, such as supplying an alternative discourse and identity to being a consumer; providing social support for making changes; and being a source of information, resources and skills (Bekin et al, 2006; Briceno & Stagl, 2006; Hollenbeck & Zinkham, 2006; Grigsby, 2004; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). A main reason for not always adhering to voluntary practices was a lack of time (Huneke, 2005). The amount of time spent at work (or engaged in other demands, such as childcare) may leave individuals with less time available for practices related to reducing one's consumption (Schor, 1992; Schor, 1998; Schor, 2005). Taking responsibility for the acquiring of goods or materials though alternative retailers, trading systems, or foraging, the production of goods through gardening, carpentry, knitting, and sewing, or the disposal of waste, such as through composting or recycling, requires a great deal of time.

Being part of a community or participating in a supportive social network may be helpful since it distributes responsibility for practices among multiple individuals. In addition, specialized knowledge and skill needed to engage in certain practices can also be shared among individuals instead of one person having to learn multiple skills. Lastly, the social nature of the communities may make engaging in practices more fun and engaging than doing them in isolation. However, it is unclear whether individuals must be a part of these communities in order to successfully make changes. Some individuals reducing how much they buy less may not feel comfortable adopting the shared identity presented in these communities or engaging in the practices they espouse, even if they could benefit from the social support that the communities provide.

Note on the social stigma and the voluntary nature of buying less

Most individuals who participate in the voluntary simplicity or the mainstream environmental movements have documented to be white, coming from a middle or upper-middle class background, and are highly educated (Gould, Lewis, & Roberts, 2004; Grigsby, 2004). While the research reviewed for this study often had participants who had both working class and middle class backgrounds, most were white and had achieved a high level of education (Connelly & Porthero, 2008; Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002; Dobsha & Ozanne, 2001; Grigsby, 2004; Huneke, 2005).

Some of the practices related to voluntarily buying less, as documented above, are not limited to those individuals engaged in voluntary simplicity, freeganism, or others who voluntarily choose to reduce their consumption. Being able to choose to reduce one's consumption, instead of being forced to, is an important aspect of the activity. Homeless individuals have been documented as performing the same practices as Freegans, including eating discarded restaurant meals from trash bins, squatting (illegally living in abandoned or empty spaces), scavenging for reusable or recyclable goods, wearing donated clothing from local charities, and creating networks or communities to barter or share goods and services (Hill, 2003; Hill & Stamey, 1990). Homeless individuals have adopted these practices in order to survive. Their appearance and practices expose them to stigma, placing them outside the social system in which they have a role-based source of self-esteem and human dignity. However, Hill and Stamey (1990) found that homeless use participation in alternative work, such as scavenging and recycling, and their lack of dependence on the welfare system, as a means to feel pride, resourcefulness and contribute to the good of society. Nevertheless, these practices are often interpreted differently by society and the media. Freegans have articles written about them

entitled “Young anarchists with guts of steel raid dumpsters for edible ‘trash.’ The idea? Divert waste to end wastefulness,” (Essig, June 10, 2002) while homeless individuals are often scorned, and are subject to collective avoidance, ostracism, and isolation (Hill & Stamey, 1990).

Similarly, Oliker (1995) and Hill (2001) document that social capital provided by family, friends and neighbors help low income women survive economically. Like individuals who are trying to voluntarily reduce their consumption, the low-income women used personal networks in order to exchange help with tasks, car repair, childcare, goods and money (Hill, 2001; Oliker, 1995). However, while more affluent individuals may participate in these same types of networks, individuals living in poverty are more dependent on these resources, having few alternatives, and therefore have little choice in their participation. Oliker (1995) found that for low-income women, these resources come with a strong debt of reciprocal obligation and emotional cost. The women, having little to give materially, often have to give of themselves in time caregiving, helping others, and were often burdened with feelings of constantly indebtedness (Oliker, 1995). These findings provide evidence that the social situation and context under which these practices are engaged in may contribute significantly to how they are experienced and interpreted by those performing them and those observing them.

Summary

Researchers have identified a large variety of reasons why people in the United States engage in voluntarily reduced consumption activity, ranging from concern about the environment to disapproval of corporate business practices. The appeal of these different motivations is likely to shift over time as historical circumstances change. In addition, individuals often have more than one reason for choosing to buy less. While previous research has indicated that individuals may hold social reasons for voluntarily buying less, such as wanting to spend more time with

family and friends or to focus more on participation in one's community, it has not often specifically examined on how interactions with other individuals play a role in motivating voluntary reduced consumption activity. For instance, how might one's parents' values contribute to an individual's initial decision to voluntarily buy less?

Individuals who choose to reduce their consumption do not just buy less, but also have been known to adopt a variety of practices as part of their reduced consumption activity, such as repairing goods to make them last longer or sewing one's own clothes. These practices are likely related to their initial reasons for reducing their consumption and their immediate and long-term goals. What is still unclear is how these practices are impacted by the resources, skills and information available across different social settings and in relation to one's significant other, children, family, friends, and coworkers. How do the interactions in these social settings differ from what we have learned in researching buying less within community groups?

In addition, consumption also changes across the lifespan as individuals take on new social roles and responsibilities, for example, if and when individuals get married, have children, or take care of ailing parents. As these circumstances changes, individuals' consumption practices also change. For instance, Zukin found that having children was a major turning point in how women shopped. Instead of just considering themselves, they had to choose between what they wanted and what they needed and were often short on time and money (Zukin, 2004). How might individuals who are reducing their consumption vary their activity when they are at different stages of their lives, with different social demands and circumstances?

More information is available which focuses on how community groups and organizations support reduced consumption practices. Community settings provide individuals with acceptance, friendship, a source for identifying oneself as something other than a consumer,

and a means to engage in non-consumption oriented activities. They serve as a location or provide a network in which people can exchange resources, knowledge, skills, and ideas. However it is unclear if participation in communities and organizations are necessary for individuals to begin or maintain reduced consumption activity, or only just very helpful. It may also be the case that these communities and organizations could serve as a barrier for some individuals who want to reduce their consumption but to do not identify with the members of these communities.

Research Question

This research study gathered data to determine the different ways that individuals' initiate and sustain voluntarily reduced consumption activity within New York City. In this presentation of results, I focus more specifically upon one segment of that work:

- How do social interactions support, or hinder, initiating and sustaining voluntarily reduced consumption activity?

Chapter 2: Methodology

Presenting a segment of a larger study

Presented in this dissertation are the results for one portion of a larger study. The overall study examines the different ways that voluntary reduced consumption activity is initiated and sustained in New York City. For this report, I specifically look at how social interactions support, or hinder, initiating and sustaining voluntarily reduced consumption activity. This focused presentation of the results allows for better clarity and focus within space constraints. The methodology for the overall study is described below along with the detailed analysis used for the specific results presented in this dissertation.

Using activity theory to analyze voluntarily reduced consumption activity

The research questions, design, and analysis for this project builds upon the principles of cultural historical activity theory. Voluntarily reduced consumption is analyzed as an activity meaning system. Activity meaning systems are an on-going interactive social process between individuals and society (Daiute, 2008; Daiute, 2010; Engestrom, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). Engeström (1999) provides a helpful description of activity systems.

> Activities are social practices oriented at objects. An entity becomes an object of an activity as it meets a human need. The subject constructs the object, 'singles out those properties that prove to be essential for developing social practice,' using mediating artifacts that function as 'forms of expression of cognitive norms, standards, and object-hypotheses existing outside the given individual' (Lektorsky, 1984, p. 137). In this constructed need-related capacity, the object gains motivating forces that gives shape and direction to the activity. The object determines the horizon of possible actions (Engeström , 1995). Objects are not to be confused with goals. Goals are attached to specific actions. Actions have clear points of beginning and termination and relatively short half-lives. Activity systems evolve through long historical cycles in which clear beginnings and ends are difficult to determine…An activity system constantly generates actions through which the object of the activity is enacted and reconstructed in specific forms and contents – but being a horizon, the object is never fully reached or conquered, (Engeström , 1999, pg. 380-381).

The motivations, or need, for voluntarily buying less gives shape and direction to the activity. Therefore, as part of the initially step in understanding voluntarily reduced consumption activity, I collected data on individuals' motivations for voluntarily buying less. However, the motivations do not come solely from the individual.

Individuals' perceptions, values, knowledge, practices and goals develop within social interactions and sociocultural contexts. (Daiute, 2008; Daiute, 2010; Engestrom, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). While cultural and social institutions and interactions may constrain an individual's actions, they can also motivate people to improvise and innovate, allowing for the reconstitution of the structures that initially shaped the individual (Engeström, 1999; Sewell, 1992**).** Individuals organize their perceptions, interpretations, and actions in relation to their circumstances (Daiute, 2010). Therefore, I asked participants about the contexts in which they voluntarily buy less, including other individuals and social communities that are involved in the activity meaning system.

Activities are seen as collaborative, participatory, and mediated with cultural tools. Cultural tools are used as a means to exert influence on one's surroundings and as an internal activity used to control oneself (Daiute, 2010; Engeström, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). Individuals are understood as having the agency to create new behaviors and practices over time as they interact with their circumstances and social environment. Consequently, I collected information about the mediating tools individuals used as part of their voluntarily reduced consumption activity, including external tools and signs such as technology, or internal tools or cognitive practices, such as information or mental models.

Additionally, I also gathered data about which factors individuals experience as helping or hindering their voluntarily reduced consumption activity, particularly when dealing with

routine practices that are deeply embedded in the consumer culture and social institutions in place in New York City. Most consumption is done in a socially and culturally standardized way – there are norms within and across institutions, social groups, and individuals for how they go about consuming and this consumption is often done within a rigid structural context (Sassatelli, 2007). Changes within activity systems often involve as "construction and resolution of successively evolving tensions or contradictions in a complex system that includes the objects or objects, the mediating artifacts, and the perspectives of the participants," (Engeström , 1999, pg. 384). Activity is not a linear process but a complex interplay of processes that allows for diversity and flexibility in how individuals engage with events, other people, and institutions. Interviews conducted with participants focus on their engagement with social structures, obstacles, and opportunities (Daiute, 2010).

Activity theory is multidimensional as it captures the individual, the collective, and the interaction between the two (Mørch, Nygård, & Ludvigsen, 2010). This project is narrow in scope as it only captures individuals' perspective of voluntarily reduced consumption activity. This approach provides a greater understanding of individuals' meaning-making process as they engage in voluntarily reduced consumption activity. I also view this as preliminary work that helps identify key factors in voluntarily reduced consumption activity. These results provide a basis for future research in which the activity could be directly observed, going beyond the individual's perspective, to capture the interaction between individuals and their environment.

Surveys and interviews were developed to collect data about individuals' understanding of significant aspects of their voluntarily reduced consumption activity, including the role of cultural, historical, and geographic context of initiating and sustaining voluntarily reduced consumption activity and the impact of interpersonal interactions in different social

environments on voluntarily reduced consumption activity. Interview questions specifically focused on the social supports and barriers to voluntarily reduced consumption enacted in New York City during recent historic events.

Survey and interviews protocol development and content

In order to prepare for the current research study, a review of the research literature was used to get an idea for how voluntary reduced consumption activity is initiated and sustained, practices used to reduce consumption, and to gain an initial understanding of the elements making up voluntarily reduced consumption activity.

New York City is a unique environment to study voluntarily reduced consumption activity. It is a large, urban metro area that supports a large variety of groups and communities whose activities relate to voluntarily reduced consumption, including environmental activism; exchanging of used goods; the production and consumption of local food and goods; do-it-yourself collaboratives; political and social justice activism; and alternative currency exchanges. Some spiritual and religious communities also include voluntarily buying less as part of their practice of focusing on non-material aspects of life. There are also a variety of resources and activities in both public and private space that are available to individuals for free or reduced cost.

In order to get a better understanding of what it means to voluntarily buy less in New York City, preliminary data was gathered from searches of local websites and online communities, as well as reading and watching of local media, to gain insight into how reduced consumption activity is impacted by being situated in New York City. This data collection was also used to gather potential locations and sources for participant recruitment and to guide survey and questionnaire development. Lastly, additional insight was gained from my own personal

reduced consumption activities, including regular participation in a local voluntary simplicity circle.

The online questionnaire and the in-person interview both serve to answer the overall research questions of the study, but focus on different aspects of the research questions. The online questionnaire contained mostly closed-ended questions that gathered the basic information about individuals' voluntary reduced consumption activity while the in-person interview predominantly focused on getting detailed information about initiating and sustaining voluntary reduced consumption activities across different social contexts. The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended revealing the more complex picture of individuals' social supports and barriers to voluntarily reduced consumption enacted in New York City.

Online Questionnaire

There were several motivating factors behind using an online questionnaire for the first phase of data collection. It allowed for less difficult recruitment than an in-person interview because it requires lower effort, commitment, and is more convenient for participants. Individuals were also able to go onto the website to get more information about the study and the types of questions that will be asked, which may have reduced apprehension individuals may have about the questionnaire and its content. Individuals were easily able to exit the survey at any time if they was uncomfortable or uninterested in completing it. The survey was anonymous or confidential depending upon respondents' choice of entering their contact information for a follow-up interview.

The online survey also increased the ease of spreading the word about the study among possible participants. With having the survey online, individuals could easily send the website URL to other people they knew who may be interested in taking the survey. This was very

important since the number of individuals who choose to voluntarily reduce their consumption is thought to be a small percent of the overall population of New York City. In addition, I hoped to recruit individuals across a variety of motivations as well as getting of mix of individuals who participated and did not participate in local groups that support voluntarily reduced consumption. Individuals who were contacted by email were encouraged to forward the email message to others who are voluntarily choosing to buy less.

Topics covered on the survey include the voluntary and involuntary nature of buying less; motivations for buying less; length of time respondents' have been buying less; frequency of their buying less related practices; confidence in problem solving skills; perceived social norms related to buying less; social support for buying less; social identity related to buying less; the membership to groups which support buying less; development of new relationships with others tied to buying less; time available in daily life; barriers to buying less; difficulty making changes to buy less; current living situation; control over household decision-making; security including income, personal health, access to healthcare, housing, food, and access transportation; employment status and demographic information.

In person interview

The in-person interviews were around two hours in length, with a few running as long as three hours. The goal was allow enough time to answer the interview questions and engage in an in-depth conversation on voluntarily reduced consumption activity over time, without over taxing or burdening the respondent.

Questions on the in-person interview included the following topics: how individuals first started buying less; how buying less has changed over time; decision-making related to buying less; practices related to buying less; skills or knowledge that have been helpful in buying less;

sources of support for buying less; events or circumstances that impact how much individuals' buy; impact of their living situation on buying less (including significant other and children); most difficult aspect of buying less; aspects of buying less that feel less voluntary or not voluntary; pressure to buy things or live a certain lifestyle; interaction with significant other related to buying less; reaction of family members, friends, social or community groups, and strangers to individual's buying less practices and values; how different environments have been helpful, or not, to buying less, including work, school, their local neighborhood, and New York City; areas of their lives that they avoid talking about buying less, changes in people's reactions over time; things they wished they had known about or started doing sooner related to buying less; whether there are more changes they want to make in the future; how they think their choice to buy less impacts others; whether buying less is something everyone should do; and what the big factors are that impact how much people buy overall.

Participants

Researching "people who choose to voluntarily reduce their consumption" is methodologically complex. When it comes to deciding who should be identified as individuals who can be placed into this category, it can be broken down into two key elements: reduced consumption practices and voluntary choice. It cannot include individuals who feel that they have been involuntarily forced to reduce their consumption. Voluntary reducing one's consumption is a choice, thereby making it significantly different than being forced to buy less. Individuals can usually only choose to reduce their consumption once their basic needs have been fulfilled (Ahuvia, 2008; Etzioni, 1998). However, there may be some individuals who have reduced their consumption under what may be called ambivalent circumstances. For example, in Grigsby's study of voluntary simplicity circle members, some of the participants had lost their

job or had their hours cut back, but found their circumstances as a motivation to make changes in their lives (Grigsby, 2004). Participants in this study were asked if they have voluntarily chosen to buy less, followed by a question asking if they have undergone a lifestyle change that resulted in buying less – but was not of their own choosing.

The measurement of reduced consumption is also tricky because what one person feels is a reduction in how much they buy may not be considered significant by someone else. However, since the focus of this study is to capture the reduced consumption experience from the individual's perspective and understanding, it seems most appropriate to gather this data through self-report data instead of using an absolute measure of how much each individual buys.

Surveys were completed between September 24, 2009 and December 27, 2009. One survey was completed January 15, 2010 because the individual was recruited through word of mouth after the original online survey was closed. Interviews were conducted between November 23, 2009 and February 22, 2010.

Of the surveys submitted, 320 completed surveys were kept. Seventy (70) surveys were removed for various reasons, including: the respondents had incomplete responses (n=44), did not live in the New York City Metro area (n=17), they did not report that they had voluntarily reduced their consumption (n=7) or they did not answer if they were over 18 years of age (n=2). All of the respondents were at least 18 years of age and lived in the New York City Metropolitan area[10]. Only 30 respondents (9.4%) lived outside of the five boroughs of New York City but still within the New York City Metropolitan area. Respondents who completed a significant portion of the survey were left in the data set with non-responses set to missing.

[10] The New York City Metropolitan area was defined by using the same parameters as the 2000 United States Census (U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, 2001).

When survey respondents were asked if they were interested in participating in a follow up interview, 147 (45.9%) said no and 143 (44.7%) said yes and provided name and contact information for the researcher to get in touch with them. Thirty (30) respondents (9.4%) did not answer the question or had not completed the survey.

Having the data from the online questionnaire as well as a large pool of volunteers for follow-up interviews allowed for a diverse set of individuals to be recruited for the in-person interview. Individuals interviewed were purposefully chosen from this pool to have a varied set of backgrounds and experiences. They were selected based on the length of time they have been committed to reducing their consumption levels, having non-voluntary reasons for buying less (in addition to voluntary reasons), and their choice of their top three reasons for buying less. Effort was made to get a diverse sample of demographics including age, gender, race/ethnicity, income, number of adults living in household, number of children in the household, and neighborhood location in the New York City metro area. I provide an overview of the demographics below and a detailed presentation can be found in Appendix I.

Length of time buying less. Survey and interview participants began voluntarily buying less from less than a month to over 20 years ago, with the largest percentages beginning[11] 1 to 3 years ago, 3 to 5 years ago, and 5 to 10 years ago.

Voluntary and non-voluntary reasons for buying less. All respondents had voluntarily chosen to reduce their consumption, with around half of the survey and interview participants also reporting that they had undergone a lifestyle change that resulting in buying less but was not of their own choosing.

[11] Surveys were completed between September 24, 2009 and January 15, 2010.

Age. Participants ranged in age from 18 years old to 74 years old. The largest groups of survey respondents fell into the ranges of 25 to 29 years-old and 30 to 34 years–old, while the largest percentage of interview respondents were 40 to 44 years-old and 25 to 29 years-old.

Gender. Around 25% of the survey respondents are male and 64.1% are female. Among interview participants, 66.7% are female and 33.3% are male.

Race/Ethnicity. Around 70% of survey and interview respondents are White/European-American. Among interview participants, 16.7% are Black/African-American/Afro-Caribbean and 12.5% were Asian/Asian-American/East Indian.

Income. Household incomes ranged from under $10,000 a year to over $500,000. Among survey participants, the responses varied greatly with the largest response categories being $50,000 to $74,999 and "prefer not to answer." The largest percentage of interview respondents earned between $75,000 to $99,999 a year, $10,000 to $19,999 a year, and $30,000 to $39,000 a year.

Education. The majority of respondents had a Bachelor's or Master's degree.

Because of the number of volunteers, while not initially planned as criteria for selecting interview participants, a number of additional survey responses were also used in order select individuals who had a wide range of experiences in buying less including: education level, religious affiliation, employment status, relationship status, length of time living in the New York City Metro area, average number of hours per week spent working or in school, confidence their ability to solve problems related to their efforts to buy less, average level of barriers to buying less, average level of social support, average level of talking with others about buying less, average level of engaging in buying less related practices, rating of the difficulty of buying less, and overall feeling about buying less. Open-ended statements regarding survey respondents'

main outcome or goal they wished to achieve by buying less, consistency in how of they practiced buying less since they began, the most difficult aspects of buying less, and what makes their efforts to buy less most meaning to them were examined to have a variety of experiences and opinions, though not formally qualitatively coded.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis. Quantitative analysis was done on the closed-ended survey responses[12]. Data was downloaded from the Survey Monkey website and transferred into SPSS for analysis. Responses were removed that should not be included based on the criteria previously detailed in participant recruitment. Empty responses were set to missing. Frequencies were run for all variables.

Analyses were run between variables based on the theoretical-methodological approach presented above. T-tests were used to analyze the relationship between the five most popular responses that survey respondents chose when rating the three most important reasons for buying less[13] and variables that were thought to have a relationship with one's motivation for buying less. Because survey respondents could choose multiple responses, the analyses compared those who chose the motivation as one of their most important reasons for buying less and those who did not choose it. Only the five most popular responses were chosen to be analyzed in order to have a larger number of respondents. This same analysis was also done comparing individuals who had only voluntary reasons for buying less compared to those who had both voluntary and involuntary reasons for buying less. In addition, individuals who belonged to groups who support buying less were also analyzed compared to those who did not.

[12] No quantitative analysis was done on any qualitative data. Any quantitative results presented in this document come from the analysis of survey data.

[13] The five most popular responses that survey respondents chose when rating the three most important reasons for buying less were Reduce my impact on the environment; Want to save more money; Reduce the amount of things I own so that I have less clutter in my home; Do not agree with ideas of consumerism, or living a life focused on consuming goods; and Concern about the future, including life on earth and the quality of life for future generations

The relationship between barriers and other variables was also examined, such as the correlation between ratings of barriers and frequency of practices. Correlations were also run between ratings of social support, frequency of talking about buying less, perceived social norms related to buying less; and social identity related to buying less. Only correlations above r=.300 in strength were reported.

Qualitative Analysis. The qualitative analysis of the in-person interviews was theory-driven to examine individuals' meanings of their voluntarily reduced consumption activity, as well as to capture their goals and activities in context. The coding of transcribed interviews was done with a focus on what participants' stated were their motivations to buy less, their process of initiating and sustaining voluntarily reduced consumption, and the tools or practices they engaged in when buying less. Within these broad categories, I looked at the social support and barriers individuals talked about experiencing in their voluntary reduced consumption activity while living in New York City.

The qualitative coding list were developed both inductively and deductively (Patton, 2002), presented below in Table 1. The broad categories listed in the previous paragraph supplied the a priori codes. Inductive codes came from analyzing reoccurring or important topics that arose during the interview within these higher level categories. For example, asking oneself questions in order to buy less was a practice or tool used as part of voluntarily reduced consumption activity. Supports to voluntarily buying less were defined as anything participants talked about positively or as enabling them to engage in voluntarily reduced consumption activity. Barriers were defined as anything talked about by the participant negatively or as inhibiting their voluntarily reduced consumption activity. In presenting the results of the qualitative analysis, summaries or quotes from interviews were chosen which exemplify the

findings. When analyses revealed a range of responses, multiple summaries or quotes are included in order to capture the variety.

In addition, it should be noted that voluntarily buying less activity is difficult to separate from other related activities such as ethical consumption, green consumption, buying used, or being thrifty. For this research study, I gathered information about more than the sole activity of voluntarily not buying, or buying less, goods and services. I allowed the participant talk about voluntarily reduced consumption activity in their own way, resulting in the collection of data about not only voluntarily reduced consumption but also related practices. While including this data about related practices makes the presentation of results less clear cut, it provides a better understanding of the context, meaning making and connections participants make between these activities.

Table 1: Qualitative coding of interviews

Coding Categories	Subcategory Examples	Summary examples
Examining the supports and barriers to initiate and maintain voluntarily reduced consumption activity in context		
Motivation to voluntarily reduced consumption	Triggers to buy less, Initial motivation, Current motivation	Being at home, she started to buy less because they had way too much stuff and it was driving her crazy.
Process of initiating voluntarily reduced consumption activity	Supports, Barriers	He has picked up habits over the last 5 to 10 years over time when he reads something or thinks of something himself.
Personal and family history related to voluntarily reduced consumption activity	Supports, Barriers	Parents are more accepting of used items as gifts because her grandfather also used to find things at the town dump.
Sustaining voluntarily reduced consumption activity	Supports, Barriers	Finds gratification out creating things (crafting) for her home and garden out of otherwise discarded goods – it is fun and saves money.
Tools/practices used in voluntarily reduced consumption activity		
Guidelines for buying less	Fitting buying less into one's priorities/daily life, what individuals choose to buy/not buy	Does not buy DVDs and instead rents movies from Netflix or the local library
Material practices used to buy less	Making products last, Acquiring used goods, Supports, Barriers	Doing minor repairs to owned items to make them last longer
Mental practices used to buy less	Worldview, Asking oneself questions	Having loose guidelines instead of rules for how she goes about buying less
Buying less practices related to social interactions	Not talking about buying less with individuals who are not supportive, Promoting buying less practices and values to others	Only talks casually with others about buying less and related topics and only if it comes up in conversation. Does not talk about buying less with people who are more materialistic.
Non-personal informational / inspirational tools	Movies, Newspapers, Books, Google	Reads New York Times online to keep up with latest environmental news.
Social context of voluntarily reduced consumption activity		
Social contexts for buying less	Family, Friends, Work, Social pressure to consume, Supports, Barriers	She turns to her sister, parents, and friends for ideas or help when she needs it. She has posted on Facebook when she is looking for something.
Buying less in New York City	Library, Green Market, Supports, Barriers	She tries to limit her visits to shopping-oriented neighborhoods (like SoHo) so she does not get caught up in the shopping energy and activity

Summaries were made of each interview examining individuals' goals and motivations for buying less (as noted on the survey and talked about in the interview); the individuals, groups, and communities that were involved in their buying less activity in New York City; the buying less practices that individuals were engaging in; and their experiences as they initiated and then sustained their buying less practices in New York City, specifically focused on the social supports and barriers to buying less. Analysis was then done across interviews summaries to find commonalities and differences.

Results are presented in the following four chapters that focusing specifically on how social interactions support, or hinder, initiating and sustaining voluntarily reduced consumption activity. The first (Chapter Three) looks at the social nature of initiating voluntarily reduced consumption activity. The second (Chapter Four) focuses on the social aspects of voluntarily reduced consumption practices. The third chapter of results (Chapter Five) examines the social supports and barriers to voluntarily buying less activity within different social environments. The last results chapter (Chapter Six) presents how participants in this study feel that others are influenced by their voluntarily reduced consumption activity.

Chapter 3: Social aspects of initiating voluntarily reduced consumption activity

This chapter addresses the social influences on the initial adoption of new practices using the internalization and externalization model of learning (Engeström, 1999; Sewell, 1992). As presented previously, this model assumes that a person's thoughts, motives, and intentions rise out of historically situated, cultural, and social institutions. It is within this context that individuals improvise and innovate, allowing for new practices. Therefore, individual interviews were analyzed for people's accounts of the social context within which they became motivated to buy less.

In order to understand why individuals first started to buy less, interview participants were asked about the situation surrounding the time they decided to begin to buy less. Common contextual factors emerged across interviews in analyzing interview participants' responses. Many respondents mentioned that they had some experiences growing up that they drew from, with a number of continuing traditions that began with their parents or grandparents. Others began buying less in response to changes in their lives, such as going to college or losing a job. Personal unhappiness with one's life also led respondents to make changes, including buying less. Finally, buying less was also motivated by exposure to new information or inspired by new people in respondents' lives. The main focus of this section is presenting some of the social historical context that triggered and supported interview participants while they began the process of learning to buy less, allowing the emergence of new voluntary reduced consumption practices out of the old, more consumption focused practices.

Family background

Many interviewees were raised in families that had some values or activities that the respondents now draw upon in their current efforts to buy less, such as thrift, non-materialism, environmentalism, "do-it- yourself" activities (such as home improvement or sewing it yourself), or a dislike of wastefulness.

Continuation of family values. Some of the interview participants describing having values that are similar to their parents' values. For these individuals, the current motivations and activities related to buying less build upon what they have learned growing up.

Ellen and Carolyn are sisters who both participated in individual in-person interviews. They each described being brought up in a household where wastefulness was frowned upon. Their parents did a lot of things for themselves, such as make bread, sew their own clothes, did household repairs and construction, and make homemade gifts. These skills were passed along to their daughters. They were taught that making something or buying something used was just as good as new, to think for themselves, and to not care what other people think.

Raised in a family of performers, Laura talked about being surrounded by people who had to be thrifty in order to survive doing what they loved. She learned to be responsible at a young age, supporting herself financially. This background gave her the courage to do things differently than others. As an adult, she decided she only needed to earn a minimum amount of money to get by and did not feel she needed more. She bought a house and turned it into a community, renting out the rooms to others while living there with her husband and daughter. She has tried to steer the communal house towards thrifty and environmental values ever since the 1970s when she became interested in the environment through her work at a science-focused nonprofit.

Raised in a working-class, frugal family, Jack described his parents as making an effort to not spoil their children or be materially focused. His mother was a member of Greenpeace and he grew up reading the Greenpeace newsletters. Jack reports that he has never felt pressure to obtain the hallmarks of material success such as buying a house.

In her interview, Evelyn revealed that her grandparents were Holocaust survivors. Her parents moved to New York City and lived in public housing. Though they have now achieved middle-class status, her parents are still very frugal. Evelyn and her family do not have a phobia of used goods or an aesthetic expectation that everything should match since most of their furniture came from family and friends. In addition her father was one of the founding members of a local food cooperative.

Barbara talks about how as a child growing up in the Caribbean, her family made use of everything they had and were not aware of needing a bunch of other things because they were not around. She was always encouraged to appreciate what they had and not feel like they needed more or to desire things just because someone one else had it.

Along with being raised with values and activities tied to buying less, interview respondents also described having moments when they became more actively engaged in trying to buy less, going beyond what they were taught in their youth.

Picking values and activities to keep. Other participants describe currently having conflicting values with their parents but still had experiences from their childhood that they drew upon in their current activities related to buying less.

Dorothy states in her interview that her parents always made things for themselves and she inherited these skills from them. Her mother was crafty and therefore can somewhat understand why Dorothy likes to buy at thrift stores. However, Dorothy's father grew up poor

and cannot comprehend why she would choose to buy used clothing when she can afford something new. Her father feels that global warming does not exist and does not understand his daughter's concern for the environment or choosing to buy organic food.

Sue talks about her parents' life as immigrants to the United States. They didn't have much money when she was growing up. Her mom was very practical and would buy her daughter five pairs of the same jeans and shoes. But as her family became more financially stable, Sue's mother began buying sale items in bulk with the idea that someday her daughter would use them. But Sue did not want any of the 15 frying pans than her mother had bought for her, finding that all these material goods were a burden instead of a comfort. Even so, Sue finds inspiration in her parents' ability to find uses for things that other people would throw away.

Roxanne's parents are also immigrants. In describing her childhood, Roxanne reveals that her parents were focused on saving money and establishing themselves. Her mother worked as a seamstress and would make Roxanne clothes. They were finally able to achieve their dream of buying a nice house. However, now that they are financially sound, they consume more, buying in bulk and going to the mall to see what is on sale. Her family feels that if one can afford to buy something new, one should, and that buying used is something that one does only if you are poor and do not have any other options. Thanks to her mother's skills, Roxanne has learned to make her own clothes and gifts. She also likes to buy some of her clothing from thrift stores but feels she needs to lie to her mother about where her clothes come from in order to avoid any arguments.

Conflicting values. Finally, there were also interview respondents whose current activities go against the upbringing that they had. Rakesh says that he felt pressure coming from

a Hindu Brahmin[14] family to be ambitious and achieve great things. He strived to have a big house, a nice car, to be successful, and live in New York City. But he found that being ambitious and having money to spend was not satisfying to him.

Impact of family background: immigration, income, and culture. As can been seen in this section, interview participants came from a variety of backgrounds. A handful of interview respondents talked about their parents' struggle with poverty, with some making their way into a middle class lifestyle. Though not directly asked about on the survey or interview protocol, eight of the twenty-four interview participants talked about coming from families who immigrated to the United States or were immigrants themselves. This is not surprising given the large number of immigrants living in New York City. However, in discussing their families' experiences, interview participants suggest that not all the immigrants responded to the American culture of consumption in the same way. Some participants described their families as coming here to achieve the American Dream of a middle class lifestyle, including conspicuous consumption. Others chose not to acculturate to living in the United States in this way. The influence of individuals' background and cultural experiences are seen throughout the results, whether is it is in the family history that raised the interview participants to hold certain values, the passing along of skills that parents' used to make it through rough times, or clashes in ideas about buying used.

Life changes

Periods of life changes were often mentioned in relation to when interview participants began buying less, including going to college or graduate school; changes in household, family or relationship situations; changes of employment or income; and world, societal, or community events that impact individuals' lives. These life changes usually also resulted in changes in the

[14] The highest of the four main Hindu castes or social classes.

make-up of their social environment. As will be seen, this had an influential impact on their voluntarily reduced consumption activity.

College. College was a time when interview participants reported being exposed to new people, ideas, viewpoint, or politics that went on to influence their values and activities. Jack was environmentally aware in his youth, raised by parents who are non-materialist and a mother who is a member of Greenpeace. During his years in college, as he was coming out as a gay man, Jack was also becoming aware of feminist issues, racial justice, economic issues, and generally connecting and empathizing with others. In this time, he made a mental and ethical connection between people's rights and the rights of nature and animals.

Eight years ago when Barbara was in school, she became even more conscious of environmental issues when she was pursuing her degree in health and nutrition. She came across more resources pointing in that direction. "I became more exposed to that kind of information once I started school and you know, you become, you kind of go into this whole different, umm, society of people that are thinking alike and are working alike and promoting the same ideas. So it influences you and you see it's for a just cause and so it makes sense to adopt that."

College is also a time when individuals can be more financially constrained leading them to thrifty practices, including acquiring used or second-hand goods. For instance, Dorothy's financial constraints in graduate school led her to lifelong love of shopping at thrift stores. She also became interested in environmental issues and she feels good knowing that buying used clothing is environmentally sound.

Household, family and relationship changes. Individuals experience changes when they bring people into their lives such as moving in with someone, getting married, or having children. Conversely, people also leave households because of things like divorce, moving out,

or death. These changes impact people in many ways, including emotionally, financially, socially, or through sharing one's physical environment. These moments are times when respondents report they began buying less or when their current activities evolved to encompass the new changes going on in their lives.

Alicia was originally exposed to ideas about buying less through a book called Simple Abundance, but it wasn't until she was divorcing her husband and had to go through all the things they had accumulated over time that she realized how much money she had spent on junk and how little she had to show for it. After Alicia got divorced, she moved to New York City to live with her sister and was unemployed for a while. She has since gotten a temporary, full-time job, but is concerned about what she will do when it is over.

When Teresa and her husband moved in together, they found they had too much stuff for one household. They had to focus on how to de-clutter their apartment and get rid of the excess. She had also run across a few simple living blogs and thought the ideas there were interesting. She began focusing on spending time doing things that were important to them, as well as saving money. Later, she put her new knowledge to use when her and her husband both lost their jobs around the same time during the recession.

For Olivia, it was upsetting to see her son become a consumer at three years of age. In visiting other parents' homes, she began to notice the excess amount of things that people owned. Later, Olivia's husband passed away from cancer and in going through all the things he had acquired, she felt that all so much of it was pointless. Olivia summarizes her experiences

> I have a child and um, I think that's part of it, I, uh, you start to see the process where someone starts wanting to acquire things. They're born, for like three years they don't want anything and then you start to see them turn into consumers and that's sort of a strange thing to witness. Uh, um, you also start seeing more of how other people live, um, like when you're in your twenties or thirties you don't really go to people's apartments to visit them, you might go to a restaurant and

> that's where your social life takes place but I think you, you end up getting invited into people's homes more often when you're a mother. Uh, and you start to see how much stuff people have and how excessive it is, especially a New Yorker, so, suburban New York, kids have way too many things. That's one thing that started to bother me. Um, my husband also died and I had to get rid of all his stuff so that's sort of a weird thing to see, you know, he wasn't very materialistic at all but um, it still a massive amount of junk so, it's kind of, you sort of see the pointlessness of it all.

Kim began looking at the family finances when there was concern that her husband might lose his job, but she became truly invested in buying less when they had their third child. Instead of getting a second nanny, she decided to give up her full-time job and become a stay at home mom. Being at home all the time made her realize how much stuff they had and she started to make changes to save money and reduce how many things were cluttering up their home. When the recession hit, and she saw the drop in their children's college funds, she felt even more compelled to save money.

In addition to Tim's main motivation for buying less, he is now planning on getting married and therefore he is watching his spending to save up for the wedding and starting his life together with his fiancée.

Changes in employment. Allison lost her job after the September 11th attacks, when the industry she works in went through a large round of layoffs. She was already unhappy so being laid-off felt like a wake-up call, not only financially, but also in terms of what she had been doing with her career and what was going on in the world.

Bruce's partner was also laid off from his job after the September 11th attacks, leaving them to live on half their normal income. During this transition, they decided to start managing their household budget better and not make decisions based on the status quo or advertising influence. They also wanted to make more responsible decisions for their health. A couple of years later, they were introduced to the concept of peak oil. Concerned with how the world

would be affected with the decline of oil production, they are taking steps to gain skills which would allow them to be self-sufficient. Their hope is to be able to leave New York City and develop or join a community of people living in a more self-reliant manner but these efforts have been thwarted so far. As a result of the recession, they have been unable to find jobs outside of the city or sell their condo.

World, societal, or community events. Individuals also describe being motivated to buy less in response to external events which they found personally impact them, ranging from the September 11th attacks to a proposed landfill being opened in the area.

Linda was already feeling that holiday shopping had gotten crazy when, in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks, George Bush told Americans get their lives back to normal and go shopping. She states, "I didn't feel like starting shopping was gonna like change anything for the better and, and made me, you know, it made me examine the whole underpinnings of the economy and shopping and why you know maybe, maybe things could be better if we shopped less."

She also became involved in anti-war activism during the onset of the Iraq War.

> It was a gradual process but I would definitely say that when I got, I got more into anti-war activism, I started paying attention to more of my own habits and my place in society as a, as a consumer and that, so probably back two thou – I mean the war had been going for longer but I started becoming much more active because it was an election year. So that was probably, I, I think I was probably like, um, a moment that I started to become more self aware.

Being around a new group of people who were making connections between consumption and what was going on in the political world, made Linda examine her own choices:

> And so, even just being affiliated with these other people who obviously put a lot of thought into it made me think more about it myself and realized that was you know, that was like a path worth investigating. (Uh-huh.) And not in just in the

> terms of outright rejecting consumerism but like admitting your own role in it and really kind of looking into, you know, what it means to tell other people that we, you know, we're calling you out for this behavior while also acknowledging that you know, we're all a part of it.

External events were talked about as triggers to examine one's own life and practices, to take action, or to learn new information. In these cases, events led participants to examine their personal consumption practices and make changes.

Unhappiness

Participants described being unhappy with their current life situation, such as being overworked, and wanting to focus on other things like community and have a more balanced life.

After moving to New York City, Gwen was working 65 hours a week. To fill in what was missing in her life, she used the money she was making to shop online. She realized that even surrounded by all "this stuff" she still wasn't happy. Deciding to prioritize having a balanced life, she began practicing Buddhism. With these changes, she found that she no longer wanted to participate in capitalist society's practice of valuing money more than other people.

Evelyn's college semester studying abroad in Italy was life changing. The impact of her experience was evident in the unhappiness she felt upon her return to college life in the United States,

> …all of a sudden I'm very unhappy because I go from a life in Italy with a small group of friends who, we cook together, we eat together, we don't have television -- we were in a small town. There's only social interaction at, like, the little ice cream place. There's no waste because, you know, you have your coffee at the, at the little -- from a little glass cup in your espresso (mm-hmm), um, to coming back to college life in America -- which blew my mind as to, like, how unhealthy and unhappy I felt, um, and disconnected I felt, you know -- and I think that was really the realization was just loving Italy and loving my life there, of course -- and then coming back to, um, a house where everyone -- I lived with six girls -- sat in front of the television ordering takeout, um, playing beer pong with all these red cups -- you know, filling themselves -- it seemed to me everyone's filling themselves with garbage, creating garbage, putting garbage in their minds -- it was just garbage everywhere. Um, and then yeah, everybody only -- you know,

> they get in their car to go to the gym -- it just seemed like such a illogical, dysfunctional lifestyle coming from what to me was a simple, logical, um, and, and therefore more communal, connected, happier, wholesome, natural, healthier, everything lifestyle.

This new emotional understanding tied into Evelyn taking courses on globalization which gave her a deeper political understanding of the role of consumption in the world.

Sue was also overworked and unhappy with her job in the fashion industry. She started making changes in order to pursue a career path in alternative medicine and healing. Her practices have led her to be less materially focused. She has not yet been able to support herself with her alternative medicine work and continues to work in the fashion industry where she is disturbed with how much waste is produced and the lack of concern about the environment. Buying less reduces her own personal impact on the environment and helps her focus on the spiritual aspects of life.

After the September 11th attacks, Rakesh began spending money on "the good things in life" but he found that it did not make him happy. He was miserable at his job and working too many hours. He began working freelance instead, demanding more money for his time and doing more satisfying work. After taking a trip to India a year ago, he realized how much happier people where there even though they had so much less. This led to a new focus on developing community and spending time with others. Rakesh now prioritizes having a satisfying life through his relationships with other people instead of material things.

> Before then I was much more individualistic, I was just more on the Libertarian, Ayn Rand, a little bit more on that side of things. (Okay.) Um, but that didn't seem to work for me. So it just like I had like shifted my focus, 'cause I always believe in like, you know, the market. I think before then I was really a super believer in the market. (Okay.) And uh, believing that you know, well, you know, the market will find a way because of how, you know, the individuals will. . . and then I think now I don't see it that way, I see it like it's probably not so much the market as more the um, your real satisfaction comes from things you do as opposed to the things you get and that community is a, is a satisfying, is the

> satisfaction is really the motivating bottom line is satisfaction I think in a lot of things. (Okay.) 'Cause your sense of uh, community. So I guess I, uh I have become a collectivist.

New information

Interview respondents also mentioned having been motivated to take action when they ran across new information or media. This new information came from media sources, as well as from other individuals in their social environment.

In Evelyn's case, she was already rearranging her life after her return from her semester abroad in Italy when she watched the short video "The Story of Stuff" as part of a college course on globalization:

> the Story of Stuff kind of gave me this image of, like, mounting garbage (uh-huh), um, mounting, mounting garbage -- and then, you know, all of a sudden I'm walking down the street, seeing people put out their trash, thinking, where is that going? You know, I still now -- when I really think about it, I get really, uh, nervous and upset because, um, I still think -- I do think it's a huge problem and I think it's invisible. Um, so for me, it was, like, it was, like, something going from invisible to visible and, and yeah, you just starting wondering, you know, because they're -- none of the stuff disappears -- when you throw it in the garbage, it's not like it disappears, it's not like it's gone. You've just changed hands of who's responsible for it.

Tim became interested in bartering after he saw the movie Zeitgeist. His dislike for the federal government's actions, particular their handling of the banking crisis and the recession, has made him want to use money less and work to become more self-sufficient. After reading a book by Douglas Rushkoff about the corporate takeover of America and other books on alternative currencies, Rakesh is focusing on alternative currencies. Others mentioned reading Garbage Land, a book that focuses on what happens to trash after it is thrown out.

Through James' work in publishing, he became highly informed about climate change and has come to feel that there is nothing more damaging to the planet than having a hobby of

shopping. In order to do their part in reducing their family's carbon footprint, he and his wife have made changes to reduce how much their family consumes.

Respondents talked about being motivated or inspired by learning new information that changed how they understood or viewed the world. It was unclear from the interviews the degree to which the information was reinforcement of an already present motivation, if it was the origin of the inspiration to take action, or if it was a cumulative effect of ongoing exposure to similar ideas.

Summary

Analysis of interviews revealed social and historical circumstances that participants felt played an important role in initiating their voluntary reduced consumption activity. It was in these situations that individuals became motivated to start buying less and the learning process was initiated, allowing for the emergence of new practices.

Overall, many drew upon their family background, experiences, and social connections growing up to provide them with values, skills, knowledge, or social network to supports buying less. Some of the participants had not been intensely focused on consumption to begin with due to the family environment in which they were raised, but still had moments when they became more engaged in the practices related to their voluntarily reduced consumption activity. Individuals' culture, ethnicity, race, immigrant status and social class were integral in shaping participants personal and family histories and experiences, serving as inspiration but also causing conflict.

Periods of life changes were often accompanied by modifications in individuals' social environment, including going to college; modifying of household, family situations, and personal relationships; and the loss of employment or change in career. These personal changes were

sometimes related to community or world events, such as the September 11th Attacks and the 2007 recession. These historical events also led participants to question their own beliefs, values, behaviors, or life goals.

Unhappiness with one's life or with what one was seeing going on around them led to voluntarily buying less. The realization that one was unhappy was sometimes tied to one's social environment, such as being overworked in the intense New York City work atmosphere. Similarly, changes in one's social environment or historical events presented opportunities for participants to be exposed to new information that help spur or supported their decision to engage in voluntarily reduced consumption activity.

Chapter 4: Social aspects of voluntarily reduced consumption practices

The previous chapter examined the social nature of beginning to buy less. This chapter focuses on the social aspects of specific practices related to voluntarily reduced consumption activity. These practices are tools used by participants to reduce their consumption.

The results in this chapter include two categories of practices. The first category are practices which manage individuals' social interactions with others related to voluntarily buying less, including deciding how much information to share with others related to voluntarily buying less, practices to deal with conflicting opinions, parenting practices, and gift giving practices. The second category focuses on voluntarily reduced consumption practices which can be supported or hindered by social interactions with others, including non-consumption practices, frugal practices; repair of goods; "doing it yourself" or DIY practices; renting, borrowing, or sharing goods; acquiring and disposing of used goods; and information seeking practices.

However, the initial section of this chapter addresses interview respondents' personal "rules" for buying less, or the guidelines they follow when as they reduce their consumption. This is presented first because it provides a sense of interviewees' general approach to buying less, including how they choose to handle social interactions with others.

Fitting buying less into one's life

Interview respondents were asked a series of questions discussing possible rules or guidelines that they following in buying less and what they focused on not buying, including if their decisions about what to buy or not buy had been consistent, whether there were times when they disregarded their own "rules", if they have conflicts over what the right action to take is,

and if there is a point that there would be too much change, or where they have limited themselves too much.

The individuals interviewed vary in their efforts to minimize their purchases and engage in related practices, often depending on people's priorities and life circumstances. A small portion of the respondents make buying less one of the main concerns in their daily lives. Individuals described having a non-spending mindset, "staying lean all the time", or only buying necessities. On the other hand, many fit buying less into their lives as only one of numerous priorities or values. They feel the need to approach buying less in a way that does not make their lives "impossible". For example, Jack tries not to be too strict and does not say that he'll never do something, stating "I try not to live in absolutes -- and try not to think, oh, I'll never go to Starbucks, um, I'll never shop at the Gap, (uh-huh), because then I just feel like I start to box myself in to, to going a little crazy about these things and I don't want to become a rabid person who barks at other people and protests and throws blood on people. I think that's legitimate but it's just not me." For these respondents, it means not sacrificing what they feel is important, allowing themselves guilty pleasures, doing what is right for oneself (which is not necessarily what is right for everyone) or for one's current circumstances, making compromises, setting realistic goals, or taking a "measured approach" to buying less. Even those who made buying less one of their highest priorities said they try to not be hard on themselves when they do make purchases, acknowledging the need to sometimes "shut off their brain" and do what needs to be done, or realizing that it takes time to make changes in one's life.

In some cases, significant others help to find balance in respondents' buying less practices. For example, Kim's computer had broken down multiple times and she kept trying to fix it but it was not working. She was very frustrated but continued to try until her husband

finally went out and bought her a new one. She has not had any problems since then and realized that it really was the best solution because of how important her computer is to her daily life. In this way, her husband helps to keep her sane and balanced in her buying less practices.

For most interview participants, there are few "rules" that are set in stone about their decisions or behavior. Instead, individuals have guidelines or aspirations for what they want to do or achieve through their actions, and they try to live by those a majority of the time. However, most allowed for flexibility in how things are handled and accept that sometimes they cannot always do what they want under certain circumstances. Respondents are not always happy about these compromises. In addition, how much individuals need to compromise or have difficulty fitting buying less practices into their lives is tied to the available support, resources available in their lives, how much of a priority the practice is, and how much effort the individual puts into enacting the practice. Some feel guilt and conflict over these decisions while others are more accepting that they cannot enact one's will all the time. As will be presented later, individuals' social environments can influence how flexible they need to be in their voluntarily reduced consumption activity.

Deciding how much to share with others related to buying less values, opinions, and practices

The topic of voluntarily choosing to buy less is treated as a sensitive subject matter by many interview participants. Most interview respondents filtered how much they talked about their values and activities related to buying less. While a few said that they were open about their views with everyone, most said that it depended on who they were talking to, whether that person had similar values to their own, or if that other person expressed interest in hearing about the respondent's views or experiences. Some participants decided to avoid interacting with

individuals who they felt did not share their values, using different methods to determine which individuals would hold similar opinions to themselves. Often, those who did talk to others about their views took precautions to talk about their views in a way that would be nonjudgmental and not push their ideas on others.

For those who did share their opinions freely, they either felt that this is who they are and therefore felt no reason to filter their views or they thought that they should take the opportunity to share their ideas with others. For instance, Ray says that he and his wife go out of their way to "try to explain to people that choices that we made and the, the decisions that we've made (Mm-hmm), um, why, um, and if they're not interested, then we'll drop it but we'll certainly try to make the opportunity to, um, um, alert people to some of the things that we've discovered." David also chooses to have conversations about topics that may be divisive. He feels that this is possible because "I don't push stuff on people, (uh huh) Umm, so, so that, that means the conversation can happen and can happen more, it can develop over time umm, rather than it being a singular fight that happens, or something like that." He feels this approach has allowed him to have more discussions about environmental topics, even possibly influencing his family to change their habits and views in some small ways.

Ellen also tries to approach topics, such as Freeganism and dumpster diving, in a way that brings awareness rather than pushing her values and ideas on others. In order to make people more comfortable, she tries to frame it differently depending on who she is talking to and attempts to work things out when disagreements come up. She feels that she can be particularly honest with her friends, who include both shoppers and non-shoppers, because they have an open attitude to differences in opinions and values.

The majority of participants who did filter their views related to buying less when talking to others used different methods for figuring who they could to talk to about their values and activities related to buying less. For instance, Tim felt he could figure out which people were materialistic and who weren't based on how they carry themselves, what they own, what they wear and how they wear it. Others figured out people's values based on conversational cues. For example, James talks about how he starts with a "safer" topic that he feels may indicate that someone has similar values, saying, "I'm happy to bring up that I ride a bike to work. (Mm-hmm) And then that, that kind of might open the door a little bit (Mm-hmm). And they'll say "that sounds interesting, why do you do that?" and I'll say "oh, well, you know, it's healthy. It saves time. And it's good for the environment." And then, if they latch onto that well then you know we could have a conversation." Similarly, Dorothy also looks for people to mention or acknowledge common interests in order to discover that they are on the same page.

Some interview respondents did not talk about their values or activities with certain people in order to avoid conflict or arguments, particularly with family or close friends who they knew did not share their beliefs. For example, Allison states that she would rather keep the peace and talk about pleasant things since "you're not gonna convince them, they're not gonna convince you" about whose decisions are the right ones. Similarly, Sue has not talked to her parents or family about the changes in her life or values related to buying less because she does not want to "confront them with this all the time" and she feels it would be a full blown argument.

Another main motivation for not talking about their values and activities was because other people might feel judged for their decision to consume "normally" if the interview respondent brought up their own choice to buy less. These interview participants felt that it was

not their place to say anything about someone else's decisions around consumption. In many cases, consumption behaviors are seen as a personal choice. In addition, even if they did say something, they felt it would not be an effective way to get the other individual to change their ideas or behaviors.

Seen as a sensitive topic of conversation, interview participants either limited how much they talked about voluntarily buying less or approached the subject matter in a way that would not offend others, cause conflict or bring judgment upon themselves. Consumption related topics were also talked about by many of the interview participants as a personal choice and they did not want to appear to be judging others nor be judged by them. Some developed techniques to determine who would be more open to discussing buying less and related topics such as evaluating others' appearances, opinions, purchases, or using conversational cues. If a person's stance on the topic was already known to differ from their own, many interview participants chose not to talk about buying less with them in order to keep the peace and avoid conflict. Many felt that it was not their place to tell others how they should consume, even if they have strong personal opinions on the topic. A few interview participants are more open to discussions because of their comfort with talking about potentially controversial topics and / or having friends who are more open-minded to differences in opinion. Interview respondents' opinions on how their actions influence others are covered in detail in Chapter 6.

Practices to deal with conflicting opinions about voluntarily buying less

Since voluntarily buying less was seen as a sensitive subject matter, many interview participants developed a variety of practices specifically to avoid conflict, judgments, or

uncomfortable conversations that may arise from interacting with others who had different values from their own, including not talking about their values or activities with others, lying or distorting the truth about their choices, using humor, going out of their way to frame their choices in a nonjudgmental manner, or spending less time around people with whom they have conflicts.

For example, Roxanne goes out of her way to avoid conflict with her family by not talking about her choices, even going so far as to lie to her parents about what she is doing. She is in college and lives with her parents part of the year and cannot avoid interacting with her family. Her family feels that if you have the money, you should buy things new, and buying used is something that you only do if you are poor. Roxanne talked about her grandfather growing up in rural China where he was not able to buy notebooks. Instead, he used to hang newspapers that he found in the street until the ink ran out and then he would use it for his homework. Her family has worked very hard to gain a comfortable, middle class life in New York City. For her family, there is a definitive line between poor and rich. Roxanne's environmental values and choice to buy less conflicts with her family's traditions and values. Therefore, she chooses to not talk to her family about things related to buying less. Because her mother disapproves her thrift store shopping, Roxanne lies about where she gets her clothes.

Evelyn also feels she cannot talk about her ideas and activities around her friends who have different values in order to maintain her friendships:

> We went on to eat Chinese food with, like, 14 of my college friends who all ordered, like, 15 dishes and I knew they weren't going to eat the majority of that. I knew the majority of that was going to go right in the trash, um, and so I'm sitting there, kind of, like, eating my one little vegetarian dish because I won't eat the meat at, at -- I'm usually vegetarian because I think that it's unethical or that it's unsustainable, whatever, the whole system of meat production, um, so, so I am of course very aware of the food waste going on and trying hard to keep my mouth shut because nobody wants to sit with somebody who's judging them and,

> and, like, making them look like bad guys when they're just trying to have fun with their friends.

Another participant, James, describes how when talking to friends who he knew had different values, he would explain his choices with reasons that were more socially aligned with his friends in order to avoid conflict and fit in with his friends. In this case, he gave an example of saying that he is just waiting for his old television to die before getting a brand new flat screen model (like his friend had) instead of admitting that he purposely chose to buy an old used television for environmental reasons:

> I'll just say, look you know hopefully that one [television] will die soon and then we'll get a nice one, (Mm-hmm). Um, or something like that, I think, I try, I try to be a bit, try to meet them in the middle somewhat. (Right, so it's not sort of like you're sitting there saying "well, I'm not getting a new tv because you're destroying the environment when you do that") yeah, yeah, that's not me at all, I'm not, I'm not, I know I believe strongly in it (right) I'm not going to preach to people about it (okay, why is that?) just because I'm too social and, I think, my, my personality is more that I, I try to get along with everyone (Mm-hmm) and I'm, and I'm anti-conflict (Mm-hmm) I avoid conflict on purpose (okay) and um, so I don't want to say things that grate so, so much, that I feel grate so much socially. (Mm-hmm) I think that other people could probably say them and get away with them and feel fine about it (Mm-hmm) that, uh, I'm a bit too thin-skinned to, to start um, you know, having a go at people about it.

If participants did bring up buying less activities or made any suggestions to others, they felt that had to make an extra effort not to be viewed as judgmental. Evelyn tries very hard not to be abrasive when pointing things out to people. She wants to teach in a way that people will want to learn and not scare people away and tell them what they're doing is bad. "I want to make them think about what they do so maybe they will think that maybe they should take an idea or listen to an idea that I have – they don't have to take it." A few participants, such as Kim and David, use humor when dealing with differences in values with their friends. It is unclear whether this concern with not wanting to be judgmental or push one's views on others is particular to living in New York City. Many respondents felt particular comfortable in New York City because they

felt people are more open to others living different lifestyles than one's own. Having means to avoid conflict and eschew openly judging others may be particularly reinforced in an urban environment with a diverse population of inhabitants.

For some individuals, avoiding conflict even means making changes in their lives so that they spend less time around individuals, in social groups, or work spaces that clash with their personal values related to voluntarily buying less. For instance, it has been really difficult for Teresa and her husband because the main way to be social with their friends is to go out and spend money. Their friends were not understanding, interested or committed to buying or spending less. She feels there really isn't a compromise.

> So, when you're with people who aren't even, like, remotely committed to like, spending less or buying less (Mm-hmm), um, you just either have to go with it or not. And there's kind of, no middle ground there. So, I think that's been a -- one of the biggest hurdles was just our friends not understanding. So, then either, you never see them or yeah, that's kind of it, you never see them or you spend a lot.

As a result, Teresa had confrontations with her husband's friends initially because they took it personally and did not understand why they were not going out. After having the same confrontation over and over, she just avoided it and stopped having the conversation and did not go out with those friends – her husband would go out without her. His friends wanted to know why she was not spending money or allowing her husband to spend money. Teresa has prioritized which of her friends with whom she chooses to spend time. She still spends time with her friends who are doing similar things – where they just go get a cup of coffee or go to the park.

Gwen and Evelyn have both grown apart from their friends who are more consumer-focused. They have developed new friends who have similar values over time through their activities and work related to buying less. Evelyn feels this distance from her old friends is one

of the things that has helped her make changes in her life since it lessened social pressure to consume. Bruce says that he and his partner often choose to spend time around people who have the same beliefs as they do. There are people who they used to be friends with that they are not anymore because of changes in values. Kim has also limited the time she spends with people who do not align with her values. With others who are more supportive, she suggests making changes to their plans that works with her thrifty nature but still allows them to be social and spend time with their friends.

Similarly, Sue has gradually weeded out the friends who she feels are judgmental, who looked down on her and others when they do not wear the "right" thing, have the "right" thing, or go to the "right" places. Even so, she still does not talk to her current friends about buying less since she feels they do not have similar values and instead relies on her husband for support. She would like to participate in more of a community of people who have similar values and hopes that will happen in the future as she continues to make changes in her life. Laura, who has been buying less for over 20 years, summarizes the transition she went through with her friends,

> You know, sometimes -- I did -- I was very shy when I was young and I made finally a decision to be more out with myself and I made a decision to -- well, I'm just going to say certain things and see who likes what and who doesn't. And, you know, I'll end up being friends with the people who can tolerate who I am. And, for the most part, you know, I've -- it took a lot of courage, at times.

Though she has lost some friendships because of speaking her values, she feels supported by those whom remained her friend. Laura's approach of being open with her values, knowing that it may cause conflicts - enough even to lose friends, was unusual among interview participants. Not all interview participants have made new friends who have similar values to their own or have support from their current friends for buying less which has resulted in feelings of loneliness and anger.

Avoiding conflict with family was made easier for many respondents because they did not live near them and did not have to see them frequently. By having physical distance, family members are not confronted by differences in decision-making and can avoiding talking about certain subjects. For instance, Dorothy states that she would feel more pressure if her parents lived nearby. Her family has not been supportive of her choices but they live far enough away and she feels she does not need their support. Teresa thinks that her and her husband's choice to buy less does not affect her family since they live in the Midwest.

Values and practices related to voluntarily buying less are seen by a majority of interview participants as a sensitive topic. Many interview respondents found means to deal with conflicts with others related to their values and practices, often by not talking about certain topics with others. However, some went as far as misrepresenting the truth related to their opinions and practices, spending less time with individuals who held different values from their own, or finding new friends who held similar opinions through their buying less related activities. On average, survey respondents rated having conflicts with others about buying less the lowest of all the barriers, with a mean of 1.54 and a standard deviation of 0.866[15]. This result may be because, like the interview respondents, most individuals have developed means to avoid conflicts with others related to buying less.

Buying less parenting practices

Having children[16] presented its own challenges to interview respondents' decision making since they are responsible for making purchasing decisions for their children to different degrees depending on the age and responsibilities of the child. Interview respondents ranged in how much their own buying less practices were integrated into the decisions about purchases for

[15] Rated on a scale from 1=not at all a barrier to 3 = somewhat a barrier to 5=very much a barrier.
[16] Twenty-five percent of interview respondents had children under 18 in their household.

their children and whether they tried to influence their children to hold similar values related to buying less.

Parents with younger children talked about the process of deciding what their children really need and setting boundaries for what and how much they are given. Kim helps her three children mindful about the waste they are creating by monitoring and pointing out their wasteful behavior. For example, she tells them they cannot throw out plastic water bottles that they have not finished drinking. She and her husband do not bow to their children's demands and work to constantly reinforce boundaries. Kim has noticed her oldest son is now also supporting her by reinforcing boundaries with the two younger children. However, she does not want her children to be too restricted in their spending that they do not get things that they like and enjoy, so she tries to encourage having a balance.

Similar to Kim, Barbara is not very lenient with bargaining. Sometimes there are conflicts with her 11 year-old daughter over purchases but Barbara makes the final decisions. However, she tries to include her daughter in the decision making when she can by giving her a choice between acceptable options. She also explains to her daughter why they can't buy something if they can't afford it or discusses how they may be able to afford something but not the other. For instance, when her daughter wanted a new video game, she had her trade in some of her old ones so she could get it. Barbara's teenage daughter likes to keep up with fashion, but Barbara only buys her daughter things that she needs and anything else her daughter has to pay for herself. In addition to voluntarily choosing to buy less, Barbara also buys less because of financial constraints. In some cases, she wishes did not have such strict limitations on what she gets for her children, stating,

> But it's also hard for me as a mom to continuously say no, you know to things that, you know, I feel like maybe they don't need but I wouldn't mind them

> having, you know, because in some ways it could, you know, enhance their lives. You know? (Mm-hmm.) So for me it's been a little hard in that way and for my kids, I think my kids are the most affected by it.

James also does not bow to his children's demands. At this point in time, since their children are young, they do not going into details explaining their values to their children when shopping. Instead, if their children want something new at a store, they just say "we'll see if we can find one at a stoop sale" or point out how much cheaper it would be at a stoop sale, which means less money out of their allowance. James feels their children can be socialized to have a different standards or expectations. Similarly, Ray's children have learned from watching their parents to look at labels to see what things are made of and where they come from.

On the other hand, if Allison's daughter really wants something, like an iPod, she will get it for her since she is supportive of her teenage daughter having different values from her own. Olivia also buys things for her son if he really wants them, but for different reasons. Being a widow has left Olivia with a lot of responsibility and little time. She is conflicted because feels that children are influenced by their friends and by television to want certain things and are not happy unless they get them. However, one of her motivations for buying less was seeing her child become a consumer. In the end, she ends up caving to the pressure to buy toys for her son because she feels it is the only way to get what needs to be done in the time she has.

> At first I didn't, there was a period where I didn't take him into any stores, but that becomes, when you're a single mother that becomes impossible, so, uh, he has to, like he basically has grocery shop with me, which is different from other people so (right) but that becomes really hard, because they do, at least in New York City they don't do this as much, but in suburban stores, they put toys in the grocery stores and they're like fifty or sixty dollars each and um, they put them at the level, obviously the level of a child, and uh, it just becomes like a battle to get through the store and it's really engineered to make you buy. You do notice the um, this has happened to me once where my son put something in the cart and put it on the conveyor belt and the clerk said, the clerk just kind of took it and hid it

> ‘cause he knew I didn’t really want to buy. So that, like he’ll forget, like once you get to the, once you get out of the store but he won’t forget for the time you’re in the store. And so to get out of the store, to prevent like a tantrum, you kind of have to put it in your cart, you know, with other stuff. I ‘m not the only one who, who gets this but uh, so it’s a real struggle to get through the basic of life when all that stuff is directed at them. Um, when you have to bring your kid to the store every time (uh-huh) you know. So, I think other people can just not bring their kid to the store.

How interview participants handle purchasing decisions for their children may not be the same as how they handle it for themselves. Some interview participants placed a high priority on setting an example for their children and passing along their values while others felt their children should be free to make their own decision. In addition, personal circumstances and outside influences may also impact individuals’ ability to buy less when it comes to one’s children.

Buying less gift giving practices

In the U.S., commercialization of gift giving means that attempting to voluntarily reduce one’s consumption can impact ritualized gift-giving events such as weddings, birthdays, and holidays (Close & Zinkham, 2009; Lee et al., 2008; Mortelmans & Damen, 2001; Schor, 2004). Because of this, gift giving practices were specifically asked about in both the survey and the interview.

Gift giving may be one of the most noticeable social interactions that would be impacted by individuals who choose to buy less. Not wanting to break with traditions, such as gift giving, was the third highest barrier to buying less as rated by survey respondents, with a mean of 2.57 and standard deviation of 1.299[17]. There was a significant difference in ratings of this barrier based on gender, with males rating it a lower barrier (M=2.21) than females (M=2.73), p=.002. Ratings of not wanting to break with traditions, such as giving gifts, was significantly correlated

[17] Rated on a scale where 1=Not at all, 3=Somewhat, and 5=Very Much a barrier.

with overall rating of difficulty of making changes in their life in order to buy less, r=.311, $p<.000$.

Interview participants had different approaches to gift giving, some of which varied based on the occasion and the gift recipient. Some chose to maintain a traditional approach. For instance, Sue ends up shopping around the holidays. She gets caught up in all the buying activity and feels it is difficult to go against what everyone else is doing. In addition, Sue's mother shows love by buying things and giving gifts to her children and Sue has not been able to tell her not to send gifts. On the other hand, others chose to not give gifts or only give gifts under specific circumstances. For example, Gloria buys gifts when someone asks for something or she knows they really need it. Not giving gifts was often supported by distance from families or coming from families who did not place a high value on gift giving.

However, many interview participants found alternative means to deal with the pressure to buy gifts. They often chose to give charitable donations as gifts, give gifts that are experiences instead of things, or create their own gifts. For instance, Rakesh gives gifts, but he tries to buy ephemeral things, like flowers or chocolates, or things that will last for a long time. Ray and his family do not buy gifts for the sake of buying gifts but instead use traditional gift giving occasions to get each other things that know that they need, like a pair of shoes. Barbara deals with the pressure of gift giving at Christmas time by choosing to emphasize Christmas as a time to celebrate the birth of Christ and not about material things. Evelyn's approach is an example of replacing material objects as gifts with experiences.

> We would go to Bath and Body Works and stock up on, like, lotions and, and candles and I still have that stuff in my closet now because that's stuff that I think nobody actually uses, um, and so I had a bit -- you know, just especially this year, I really decided to stop buying gifts because they're things that nobody actually uses. Um, I do -- I want to kind of show love. I don't believe you shouldn't show love but I think, you know, the thought -- like, and same within my family -- we

> don't, um -- gift, gift buying has changed. It's not usually, like, a material thing. It's usually, like, a, a nice dinner out or a, a class somewhere or something like that or a trip. Um, so it's more like an experience as opposed to a material thing (mm-hmm) due to the amount of material things that we've just accumulated over the years.

This practice allows Evelyn to still express love for others through gift giving while still maintaining her values. While a few interview respondents felt comfortable giving gifts that are used or second hand if they know the other person is comfortable with it or would not know that it is second hand, most participants did not.

Interview respondents handling of gift giving often varies depending on the circumstances, such as who the recipient of the gift is or what kind of event it is. Some of the interview participants who would otherwise find alternatives to receiving or giving material gifts went along with traditional gift giving when it came to weddings or other occasions which called for gift registries. For example, Ellen had bought a gift for a friend's wedding that was not on the registry and her friend hated it, so now she sticks with the registry. In addition, Ellen's boyfriend feels that it would be shameful not to buy something new as a wedding present. He would never want to give the impression that he could not afford something new. For his wedding, David chose to have a wedding registry stating, "I mean there's a very strong cultural umm, things, I don't know what the word is, but, it's like people feel like they have to get gifts for people who are getting married and, and, I feel like people, a lot of people would be bummed out if they, if they weren't given concrete options." He figured people were going to get them things whether they asked for them or not, so they might as well get stuff they like. He is still using some of the things he receiving to this day, many years after his wedding.

Gift giving choices also depended upon the gift recipient. James feels comfortable breaking tradition with his family on holidays and birthdays but for other people's wedding and

births, they buy gifts. Teresa finds it difficult to not buy for other people because she knows it will not contribute to the clutter in her own home. Kim says she is more generous with her gift giving with people outside of her family, describing a strong association between buying gifts for others and the expression emotions and generosity.

Similarly, while Olivia thinks about with breaking birthday tradition with her own son, she does not feel comfortable doing that with other people's children.

> Um, for other kids, I don't limit myself at all, I feel a total, total need to, to give them what they're expecting. So [laughs]. (why is that?) I don't know. I just, uh, you know, I've heard about people like saying oh, give, we're not asking for presents, we're asking for donations. No one I know has ever done that. Um. I don't know. I feel like, it's sort of a, um, a social expectation, you feel like you're cheating them or you know being chintzy with them and that's not, I wanna seem generous. (uh-huh) Even though it's like a stupid present [laughs]. So. Uh, I don't think kids understand [pause] they don't understand at all, like, uh, someone not giving them a present like you know? (right) At least the age group that I'm working with hasn't, they would just be, they would burst into tears kind of thing if you didn't give them a toy [laughs] at the right time.

Again, gift giving is associated with generosity while breaking with tradition gives the appearance of being cheap. For Olivia, children assume they will receive gifts and would be upset and not understand if that social expectation was not met.

Along those lines, other interview participants also felt that children got too many gifts. Kim's children receive so many gifts at birthday parties that she hides some away before they are used to be re-gifted at other birthday parties they attend. She has her younger daughter pick out the gifts she really loves. With her older kids, she has a conversation saying that this is too much and they need to decide what to keep and what to do with the rest. She describes it as a negotiation process of asking them why do they need it, where are they going to keep it, wouldn't they rather return it and have the money. Teresa's family chose to draw names at Christmas specifically so that the children in the family would stop getting so overwhelmed with

so many presents. In these situations, practices have been established as alternatives to excessive gift giving.

Changing one's gift giving traditions with others was something that sometimes takes time and ongoing effort. For instance, Linda worked on lowering the expectations of her family over time. Teresa has also tried to tell her mother not to get her stuff as presents but it has been difficult. Finally, she tried making a list of things she needed and told her mother that she could only get her stuff from the list – if it was not on the list she told her mother that she would leave it at her mother's house. This approach mostly worked but a few things ended up coming home with her that were not on the list. Teresa chose to get rid of excess gifts by donating them to charities since she lived far enough away from her relatives that they would not know.

Gift-giving plays an important role in social relationships. It was an area that some interview participants did not alter from the status quo because they are concerned about how it would appear to not go along with tradition, they do not want to disappoint others, or because gift giving is a means to express emotion. Alternative practices were developed by some such as giving non material items, homemade gifts, or giving essential or needed items as presents. In addition, others reduced the number of gifts exchanged overall. Interviews reveal that participants modify their gift-giving practices based on who is the gift recipient and on the occasion. At formal gift giving occasions, such as weddings, participants are even less likely to break from social norms in order to avoid disappointing others, out of concern for appearances, or judgment from others. Respondents were more comfortable finding alternatives for regular, on-going occasions, such as holidays. Some report having an easier time modifying gift giving practices with their family than with their friends. However, this may depend upon the similarities in values they have with others as well as the physical distance they are from them.

Social support and barriers for non-consumption practices

Interview participants engaged in several practices with the goal of not buying or acquiring goods and services, including asking oneself questions in order to decide whether or not to make an acquisition, resisted making impulse purchases, and avoiding pressure to buy things.

Interview participants often actively engage in deciding whether or not to buy something, or figuring out their wants in comparison to their needs. These decisions are often tied to the individual's motivations for buying less as well as their current circumstances. Interview participants often decided what to not buy on a case-by-case basis depending on their existing needs. However, across in-person interviews, common purchases which were eliminated or reduced when trying to buy less were: clothing; media, such CDs, DVDs, books, and magazines; food, particularly "junk" or snack foods, processed foods, meat, or take-out food from restaurants; products that came with excessive packaging; and plastic. Interview respondents also mentioned reducing or eliminating their purchases of items such as shoes, home decorations, and children's toys. When it came to technological devices, such as cell phones, computers, or e-readers, some interview participants had recent technology while others felt they only needed to have the most basic functional version of commonly used devices, if any at all.

One of the most frequent practices used by interview respondents to not make purchases was asking themselves questions in order to decide whether or not to make an acquisition. While participants had different definitions of what was a want compared to a need, it was common for respondents to ask themselves the basic question "do I need this?" when figuring out whether to (not) make a purchase. This question was tied to efforts to avoid making impulse purchases, convenience purchases, or being externally pressured into buying something they didn't truly

need. Other questions interviews asked themselves included: “do I need this now?”, “is it going to last?”, “am I going to use it in the long run?”, “will it fit in my home?”, “can I afford it?”, “does it bring me happiness?”, “is there an alternative?”, and “how was it made?”.

Interview participants stated that this process was done alone, inside their own mind, as well as with others as a more interactive process. When it was done socially, the process was often talked about as occurring when out shopping, such as with significant others or friends. The decision of making a purchase would be debated, posing similar questions as listed above. One individual might say, “Oh, you don’t need that, you can borrow mine” or suggest getting an item repaired instead of buying a new replacement.

In addition to asking themselves questions, participants also bought less by resisting making impulse purchases, avoiding the pressure to buy things that can come from others, or from being around a lot of marketing, advertising, or shopping districts. These practices are covered in more detail in Chapter Five. Social barriers, particularly pressure to buy things, are examined throughout this chapter and Chapter Five.

Social support and barriers for frugal practices

Along with buying less, interview respondents who are motivated to save money have additional frugal practices. Many save money by not eating out and either bringing food with them or eating at home. They save on transportation costs by not taking taxis, using public transportation, riding bikes, or walking. They find cheap or free events and services. A few found ways to reduce their housing costs, such as by buying their residence when the market costs were down or by having roommates. They also saved money by comparing costs, using coupons, buying on sale, and maintaining a budget. Similarly, survey respondents reported that 56.9% often or always find ways to get items for free or at the lowest possible cost.

When it comes to receiving social support for buying less, interview participants greatly varied in how much other people helped or hindered their ability to be thrifty and buy less. On the positive side, family members support some interview participants by providing financial support, providing housing, or buying them things that they otherwise may not be able to afford. Kim has teamed up with some of her friends to save money. For example, she has gotten a yoga teacher to come to her home to have a class with her and her friends at a much reduced rate than what they would pay going to a studio. Dorothy's support comes in the form of understanding. She is comfortable enough with her friends that if she does not want to do something or if she cannot afford something, she just lets them know. She is confident that they will do something else in the near future.

On the other hand, interview respondents described how conflicts arose with significant others, family members and friends when it came to spending money. Teresa talked about how her husband's motivation and commitment has waned now that they have reached their financial goals and he is not as motivated to buy less which makes it more difficult for her. When asked about how they make decisions together and how they figure things out when they have conflicts, she says,

> Um, we're still working on that one [laughs]. (Okay.) Um, he doesn't really want to be involved at all with the budgeting or the money or dealing with any of it… he doesn't really want to be involved with the actual budgeting part of it which makes it then be really hard for him to be involved in the -- when we go over budgeting part of it. So, usually he tells me when he's planning on buying something that's going to cost a significant amount of money which is in probably like, a $130. Um, and it's really -- it's -- I guess we're still trying to figure out how to do that because I don't want to treat him like a child, like, "No you can't have money for lunch today." Um, and I don't want to take the money and your credit cards out of your wallet because I don't feel like I just have to do that. But he's really bad at resisting, like, "Oh, I want to get coffee" and so he'll go to the ATM machine and he'll get 40 bucks out.

Teresa feels that she cannot get her husband to sit down and talk about it with her. They are not really working on a solution as much as he is avoiding it and doing what he wants to do. She says, "So, I really want to do this but it's really hard to be the one who's always saying no (Mm-hmm). And so, I think that is something we haven't really talked about as much as we need to because it's easier to not deal with it because he doesn't want to. So, either I'm nagging or I let it go and mostly I just let it go. So, it's, um, it can be frustrating for me (Mm-hmm) to not be on the same page." This is an example of how difficult it can be for participants to voluntarily buy less when their significant others are not particularly supportive.

Kim has faced numerous social barriers to spending and buying less. Kim and her husband previously spent lavishly when they were both working as well-paid, successful professionals. However, they have become much more focused on spending less as the recession took a toll on job stability and their savings. Kim also decided to become a stay at home mother, decreasing the household income. Kim and her husband have stopped spending money on their families like they used to – paying for gifts, travel, shopping, and dining at fancy restaurants. Now that the status quo is changing, their families are a little disappointed. Some of Kim's friends have also caused conflict. For instance, one of Kim's friends who works at a department store beauty counter expected Kim to help support her sales by coming to events regularly and purchasing make-up. When Kim decided she no longer wanted to do that since she had all the make-up she needed, she was looked down upon by that group of friends and openly derided her as a "cheapskate." She has also had to deal with other parents and their children who do not have similar thrifty mindsets, from whom she feels pressure to spend money. She feels it is one of the biggest barriers with which she has to deal.

Kim handles the conflict by making a joke out of it to try to diffuse the tension or she will try to find an alternative that works for her and the other parents. And while Kim tries to deal with conflict with a sense of humor, she found the particular incidents described above to be hurtful.

Kim also feels that is painful that their families look at them for money and has chosen to just brush past it. With this kind of reaction, it is not surprising that Kim decides whether or not to talk about buying less depending on whether friends seem open to it, based on her friends' own lifestyle and how well she knows the person. Kim has not had a direct conversation about the conflicts with her family. Avoiding confrontation, she has only suggested doing different things or making changes to plans if it involves something expensive. If her parents drop hints for her to buy them something, she will ignore it. She thinks that others' disappointment will lessen over time. However, Kim thinks that she may finally talk to her family about it if her families' disappointment or pressure to buy things does not go away. Similar to Kim, when Olivia is in a situation where she is dealing with other parents in her social circle who want to do things she cannot afford, she also avoids it or brushes it off. As a last resort, Olivia will explain that she cannot afford something to others.

Dan does not have a lot of support from friends in New York City. The hardest part is the feeling that he is not getting invited to things because friends assume he does not want to go or spend money, so he misses out on spending time with his friends. Dan prepares himself for going out with friends who have different values than his own and he does not have much say in how things are going to go.

> I sometimes I have to like bolster myself when I know, when I know I'm going to be spending a lot for things I don't particularly value because it's part of a social experience. So um, you know there are times to, when I feel like I'm part of the decision making in terms of what we're going to do. And then there's times when

> I feel like um I'm coming along for the ride and I have to be a gracious guest and kind of a. . . and those times where I have to sit silently and. . . it takes energy though. To not, to not make a stink or not make a fuss or not have, or not be able to influence and I have to contain my own energy.

By doing this, it allows him to be able to spend time with these friends who may do things he is not comfortable with. He feels it is the cost he pays for being social. When he is with a smaller group of friends, he feels he has more say in what the group does. He can pick things to do that are more aligned with his values, for example, taking them to a local museum where he gets free admission. While Dan has friends outside of New York City that he can talk to, he wishes he had more friends living in New York City who are also into doing things that support would his values and improve his quality of life. He feels it would allow him to do certain buying less related practices more often, like cooking at home together.

These participants who were trying to save more money encountered some significant social barriers to buying less. Lack of support and understanding from friends was hurtful and could be a barrier to spending time together. Participants found some means to cope, such as by compromising or by keeping their values and opinions to themselves.

Some individuals go beyond choosing not to buy things and also focus on practices that get more use out of what they own or provide alternatives to buying something new. In order to buy less new items, interview and survey participants reported a number of practices that they have incorporated into their lives, including using what they already have, repairing and maintaining what they own, replacing disposable goods with reusable goods, and doing things themselves (DIY). Interview respondents described having a variety of people who helped them in these practices.

Social support and barriers for repair of goods

Some interview respondents choose to repair goods to make them last longer. Interview participants mentioned making repairs to things such as bicycles, clothing, household items, appliances, and computers. Some do it themselves, while others rely on friends, family, or repair professional. For instance, Linda and her husband work together to buy less, including fixing things. In responding to a question about whether her and her husband have any conflicts in buying less practices, she states, "No, no, no there's no conflict, I mean we're both in agreement and you know if I said, 'hey, the toaster's broken,' he wants to sit and try to fix it. You know? (mm-hmm). Even if he's busy. (Okay.) He'd rather see if he can, like, fix something, I mean, he's better with mechanical stuff. (Okay.) Mechanical and electronic stuff."

Roxanne and her boyfriend support each other by not only questioning purchasing something new but also suggesting alternatives such as getting something fixed instead. She describes a particular example,

> We do talk about it a lot. Um, (okay) we have a tendency to go into like to um, the main stores that we do like. Um, he always likes like the book bags from Brooklyn Industries. (Mm-hmm) I'm like 'oh I do like it. It does look nice but do you really need it?' He's like, and then recently he wanted to go buy a Brooklyn Industries bag because of the style, and stuff like that, and I told him 'like you don't really need it. Like your bag that you bought.' He bought a nice, pretty like, pretty like compact bag from um, from Salvation Army (Mm-hmm) about three years ago, four years ago, and the zipper started ripping and it, now it's kind of like a big mess because he likes to stuff all his notebooks and books in there, um, so I told him like 'well, might as well spend like a few dollars getting, going to a tailor and fixing the zipper then to spend more money on a new bag.' (Mm-hmm) Um, and so like, he's more, like right now were, we are conflicted like thinking about like 'oh, should you buy the bag or should you not buy the bag.' It's been like three weeks. (Mm-hmm) We've been considering buying, like having, he's considering buying this bag, and we talk about it, (Mm-hmm) and right now he's at the mindset that he's not going to buy the bag and he's just gonna spend a few dollars to get the tailor to fix it, (Mm-hmm) [laughs] So that a recent situation that happened.

This is a good demonstration of the activity of buying less and how it includes social interactions with others, including the initial pressure to buy coming from the enjoyment of going into a store and seeing something one likes, the process of asking oneself questions, support from a significant other in the decision making, waiting to see if something is truly needed, and presenting alternatives that extend the life of something that one already owns as well as saving money.

Individuals did not always have the skills or time to repair things themselves. Having support from others helped in this process. In addition, others can be a source of support for deciding to repair goods instead of buying new.

Social support and barriers for "doing it yourself"

While only 3.4% of survey respondents report always making or creating their own things instead of buying them, 74.4% surveyed sometimes or often make their own things. Almost sixty percent of survey respondents reported sometimes or often learning new skills which help them do things for themselves such as carpentry, sewing, food preservation, knitting, or mechanics.

Interview respondents also talked about doing things for themselves, often called DIY or "Do-It-Yourself", instead of buying things pre-made or packaged. This included making their own household cleaners out of basic ingredients such as vinegar or baking soda as well as making health or beauty items, including soap or lotion. They found ways to reuse objects, such as getting creative with things that would otherwise be thrown out and thereby giving them "another life". Other homemade items include cards, gifts, crafts, holiday decorations, and crocheting, knitting or sewing their own clothes. A few participants also do their own home renovations, gardening, or create their own music.

Interview respondents reported getting help and support from other people, including significant others, family, children, friends and acquaintances. Ellen and Carolyn got help from their family to repair and remodel an apartment. Similarly, Roxanne and Sue said that if they cannot create, fix or do something themselves, they turn to their family to help. Ray, his wife, and their children work together to buy less. For instance, Ray is handy around the house, fixing most things. His wife knits and sews. Their 9 and 11 year old daughters know how to sew and knit, including making some of their own clothes. They also make their own Christmas decoration.

Bruce, Ellen, and Carolyn have strong social networks which are a source of skills and information. Bruce has friends who know how to make their own beauty and health products, and taught him how to do it as well. Bruce, Ellen and Carolyn also help their friends, through sharing of their own skills. For example, Ellen knows how to sew and helps to repair her friends' clothes.

In addition to other people's support, some interview respondents took advantage of the resources offered in the New York City metro area in order to expand their skills. For instance, New York City green markets often provide education and resources, such as teaching how to compost and provide a place to drop-off recyclables and compostable waste. While Gloria was unemployed and trying to find things to do with her time, she took one of the free courses available to learn how to compost. Bruce and his partner go beyond the just visiting the local green markets. After their concern about environment led them to buy locally at the market, they began to visit the local farms to take courses to learn things such as how to milk a cow, butcher a chicken, plant an organic gardens, and bread-making. They felt it was a great opportunity to learn new skills and experience life outside of the city.

While respondents had a variety of supports for doing things themselves, they also ran into some barriers. On average, survey participants rated not having the skills to make, grow, fix or reuse things instead of buying new as the highest barrier of all those asked about, with a mean of 2.69. However, when asked about how much confidence they have in their ability to solve problems that they encounter related to their effort to buy less, such as by finding new resources or learning new skills, most (94.9%) survey respondents rated their confidence between three, some confidence and five, a lot of confidence, with a mean of 3.97. Confidence in respondents' ability to solve problems was significantly, moderately correlated with their reports of their frequency of learning new skills which help them do things for themselves such as carpentry, sewing, food preservation, knitting, or mechanics, r=.314, $p<.000$. As can be seen in the interviews, obtaining and using these skills may be tied to support from one's social network and community resources.

Some participants went beyond just not buying to adopt practices which support reduced consumption, such as using what they already have, replacing disposable goods with reusable goods, and doing things themselves (DIY). More so than other practices, doing things oneself and repairing goods usually required individuals to either have skills themselves or to get the support of others. Interview respondents who engaged in these practices often did have a support network in place to both help themselves and help others with these skills.

Social support and barriers to renting, borrowing, or sharing goods

A popular practice of individuals interviewed is using the local public library to borrow books, DVDs, and music instead of purchasing. In addition, others reported using Netflix, a DVD rental service, to rent DVDs and watch movies and television online instead of buying DVDs. A minority of interview respondents got support borrowing or sharing goods from

family, friends, and roommates. A few have supportive family living in New York City from whom they can borrow or share things. For example, Tim's family is helping to provide things for his wedding. Evelyn cooks and eats meals with her family. Dorothy's friends will loan things to her that she needs saying "don't buy that, here just borrow mine and then you can give it back." Roxanne borrows clothes from a friend who wears the same size as her.

Little was mentioned about borrowing or sharing with neighbors. However, while not specifically asked about, interview participants talked about sharing with roommates, which may be a more common practice in New York City than sharing outside of the household, such as with neighbors. For instance, Carolyn feels that living in communal housing allowed for more sharing of goods. Roxanne, thought the idea of sharing with non-relatives was unusual because it requires a certain level of trust, stating

> I think I remember reading a New York um, Magazine article about this um, this apartment building and they all shared everything and that was, that's pretty funny [laughs] that like people, that people actually sharing even though they're not related. (Mm-hmm.) It does break those like, um, family and friend boundaries and you become friends with people who you thought were just going to be your neighbors.

Survey respondents did not report high levels of sharing activity, with only 15.3% of those surveyed often or always sharing items or skills. However, 26.5% reported sometimes developing or participating in a network which allows them to share items or skills (for example, with their neighbors or friends).

Overall, there was a big discrepancy in how much respondents engaged in the practices of borrowing or renting through available services compared to sharing and borrowing with others. More work would need to be done to decipher specific barriers to sharing practices in New York City.

Social support and barriers to acquiring and disposing of used goods

Along with buying less, a portion of participants also chose to acquire used, second-hand or salvaged goods instead of buying new. Respondents have a variety of sources for acquiring used goods, though barriers to using second-hand goods included not having access to quality goods, lack of time, and inconvenience. Interviews revealed that there is some skill involved in replacing the practice of purchasing of new goods with used. In addition, there is mixed social support for the practice. Lastly, many participants also dispose of goods that are no longer needed in order to reduce clutter as well as support their buying less practices.

There was a mixed response among those surveyed in regards to participation in the local exchange of goods, such as through the online, local Freecycle website, where people post items they are either getting rid of or looking for free. Frequency of participation was reported as rarely by 26.3%, sometimes by 28.1%, often by 21.3%, and always by 7.5%. Only 14.1% reported never participating in the exchanging of goods. Many (64.1%) of the survey respondents report never or rarely having foraged, salvaged, or dumpster dived for discarded used goods. Dumpster diving, particularly for food, is not a common practice among those who were interviewed. However, more reported picking up used goods, such as furniture, that were left on the street for trash collection or "on the stoop" in front of homes or apartment buildings in their neighborhood. A few individuals expressed interest in doing more dumpster diving but talked about not having enough knowledge about how to go about it or having friends who would be willing to go with them.

Around half of those interviewed talked about using various means to acquire or dispose of goods. Sources for used goods included online websites, local resources, and social networks. The websites Craigslist (a free online classified ads website) and Freecycle both allow

individuals to look for local used goods that people are selling or giving away for free. Other national websites which supplied used items, such as EBay, which are then shipped to the recipient. Local resources for free goods include the free market events and swaps, where people can drop off and pick up free used goods. Some of the swaps focus on specific items such as clothes or books. In addition, interview participants frequented local thrift stores, used bookstores, CD stores, a local salvaged building material store, and yard or stoop sales.

Interview participants also turned to their social networks, receiving and giving away goods with their friends and family, particularly households items, clothing, and children's items such as clothes, toys, and books. They were also a source of advice and skills related to used or salvaged goods. For instance, Tim gets used furniture from his friends and has lots of friends he can ask for advice. Teresa and her friends exchange books. Dorothy and her friends are planning on starting a monthly informal mending and clothing swap among themselves. Linda also swaps clothes with her friends. If Ellen or Carolyn need something, they put the word out among their friends that they are looking and it usually comes to them in some way. Linda and Ellen both found that one of the benefits of having friends with different values is that those who buy new clothes have items to pass along to others. For example, Ellen says,

> I'm thinking of one friend in particular who's like – she's a shopper and she knows that I am not a shopper and wear a similar size. And when she's getting rid of stuff, she always calls me, and I come and I take it. (Laughing) Like, all of my nice clothes I have inherited from her. (Uh-huh.) So, and I've done that – I've had a friend like that, like, in every step of my life, I've had someone who gives me their castoffs, which has made it much easier for me not buying new clothes. Certainly, I guess that was something I should have said when I was working at [company name], the office clothes, is that she gave me a lot of clothes that I was able to augment my office wardrobe with.

Individuals' apartment buildings and neighborhoods are also a resource for some of the interviewees. When Carolyn first moved to New York City, she began salvaging used goods

when living in a building where there were informal areas on each floor to discard unneeded items. Kim picks up the unopened magazines that her neighbors often discard. James and his family acquire used goods through stoop sales or giveaways in their neighborhood.

When asked about how living in New York City was helpful to buying less, multiple respondents discussed the availability of used goods that are being thrown out, given away, or for sale in the area. Allison stated that New York City is "the wonderland where at any moment somebody's throwing something really good and useful away." Though she and several other respondents wished that there was a more efficient, practical means to both dispose and acquire all the available used goods in the city so that there was less being thrown away.

Respondents reported lack of time and convenience as well as not having access to high quality used goods as barriers for acquiring used goods instead of new. Among interview respondents, the various venues for getting used goods, such as thrift store, Craigslist.com, and Freecycle, are viewed as not as convenient as buying something new. The Freecycle website and email system was mentioned in particular by several interview participants as difficult to use. They found that it could be difficult to find a specific item that they needed. In addition, they might need to sort through a lot of different items to find what they wanted. Even for those who made it a high priority to not buy new feel that it takes more time to find the items that they need used instead of new.

When talking about used goods in the interview, the participants varied in their difficulty of accessing quality used goods. A handful of interview respondents do not have convenient access to resources, groups, or like-minded people because of what neighborhood they lived in. Not having access to high quality used goods which are as good as buying something new was the second highest rated barrier from the survey responses, with a mean of 2.64. Responses are

spread across the scale, with the most amount of respondents (14.2%) rating it a five, or very much a barrier to buying less, of all the barriers asked about.

Some individuals had more availability of used goods than others depending on their skills for and knowledge of acquiring goods (such as using the Freecycle network), their personal networks, access in their neighborhood, and their willingness to put effort into finding used goods. Some interview participants talked about having "skills" or techniques for successful acquisition of quality used goods. For instance, in order to deal with being overwhelmed with what was available, Dorothy developed a method to assess the value of second-hand clothes at the thrift store, allowing her to find quality items among the large amounts of goods available.

The interview participants who do regularly engage in successfully acquiring used goods described having patience when looking for items and do not expect the immediate gratification that comes with just going out and buying something new. The process is positively reinforced because they enjoy finding an alternative, often involving searching, researching, networking and/or creativity, and are willing the take the time needed reach a solution. For instance, Dorothy views the process as an adventure and likes the feeling when she "bagged a really good one today." In addition, for some buying used is a means to make a statement against consumerism, corporations, and/or being seduced by advertising imagery. For those interview respondents who did not acquire used goods often, this investment of time and patience needed to acquire quality used goods was a common complaint about the process.

Interviews revealed several sources for skills related to searching out used and salvaged goods, including family, friends, roommates, acquaintances from social groups, and local New York City organizations and communities. For example, Carolyn has moved around a lot and has had various living situations, including communal living. She feels her living situations have

allowed her to learn from others, with her initial forays into dumpster diving coming from friends she lived with and then reinforced by living in a communal house where dumpster diving for food was a central tenet of the community. Carolyn passed along the knowledge of dumpster diving for food to her sister Ellen. Both Olivia and Linda expressed during their interviews they would dumpster dive and salvage more if they had the support and guidance from a friend (which they currently do not).

Within New York City, different groups organize opportunities to engage in alternative, no cost means to acquire goods, services, and food. For instance, the local freegan group organizes "trash tours" which teach people how to dumpster dive for food and where the best spots are. There are also free markets where people swap goods they are not using or do not need for free. A local anarchist collective called In Our Hearts organizes community dinner called Grub twice a month which uses freegan (dumpstered) food.[18] While some interview participants are not comfortable being involved with these groups, they are a great asset for a few such as Carolyn who has developed a large network of friends and acquaintances with whom she exchanges goods. She feels that if she ever needs something, she can usually find it through her network. Because of that, she does not need to rely on other established sources of used goods, like thrift stores.

There was a mixed reaction when it came to the social acceptance and support that interview participants experienced for acquiring used or salvaged goods. Acceptance of used goods appears to vary depending on who the respondent was interacting with as well as the item in question. For instance, James feels his kids are young and are just as happy with something used as new. Most of his children's possessions are hand-me-downs from others or from stoop

[18] These are just a few of groups or organizations related to buying less that are based in New York City. There are others not listed available in New York City and online. The focus in this section is on the groups that interview participants discussed.

sales in the neighborhood. However, James feels certain things are more acceptable to talk about buying used with individuals outside of his direct family than others.

> (Do you feel like that second hand clothes and the buying things used has a particular stigma attached to it?) Yes, I think that some people are repulsed by it (Mm-hmm). I really think that some people um, think 'eww. Why would you do that?' (Mm-hmm) 'You know it might have been worn by a dead person'. (right) [laughs] (so that's one of those aspects that particularly) Right, I think that that um, one of the less socially acceptable parts (right) of it (okay) um, and, and, so some, some people have a thing about, I don't know, hygiene or something (Mm-hmm) and um, and, well, I think, the clothes is the main thing. But I mean, if, if I, you know, if I said we got this table on craigslist, I don't think people would have a problem, it's a table (right) you know it's not going to have bed bugs or something. (right) and so I'm quite happy to bring that up (Mm-hmm) (But the clothes, is) The clothes is the real sticking point (okay, okay) with people (right) psychologically

Similarly, Ellen says that in general, people she has interacted with have not reacted too strongly to her habits or ideas "other than the, sort of, uncrossable issue of 'is it gross to wear used clothing?'"

Many interview respondents avoid talking with others about practices that are controversial, such as the acquisition of certain used or salvaged goods. However, there were times when conflict could not be avoided. For instance, Ellen and her boyfriend have disagreements over some of her buying less practices, particularly when it comes to used or salvaged goods. Her boyfriend was raised with a very different upbringing than her own and has negative reactions to some of the items Ellen finds in the trash or on the street. She gave an example of one particular conflict they had,

> No, there's definitely is conflict. I mean, he's also got a touch of, like, OCD-ness, which I'm sure also comes from being raised by a doctor. But I did find – I really wanted a dish drainer, and the universe gave me a dish drainer on the street, and I was so excited. And I took it home, and when he found out that it came from the street, he was, like, "We can't have that. I can't have clean dishes going in to what to me is, like, dirty and untouchable." So that was a conflict in that, so I gave it back to the universe. I guess I did buy a new – I bought a new dish drainer which was cheap and made of plastic and came from, like you know, in Bushwick where

> I'm sure it came from Indonesia, or somewhere, and it was made under terrible conditions, and that was awful. But he won; I let him win.

Ellen says that they resolve their conflicts depending on who is most invested in the outcome – that person tends to win. In this situation, she had to bow to her boyfriend's demands, saying she "couldn't insist on something which was going to ultimately make my life hard. I don't know if he wouldn't use a dish that had been in that drainer – it was not tenable for my life". However, they also do manage conflicts by having discussions before they decide to buy anything. She also feels that not having a lot of money helps since it means they are not in a position to buy a lot.

When asked about strangers reactions to dumpster diving for goods or food, neither Ellen nor Carolyn had bad experiences to report. Ellen even overheard people talking about her and her fellow dumpster divers, saying that they said they had heard about it and it was the "new thing" people were doing. She feels most people have seen someone take a piece of furniture off of the street, so it is not a big deal. While Carolyn has had business owners come out and ask her what she is doing, they have never asked to stop. She has even had other people come up and ask her if they can have some of the food that she was salvaging.

Among interview respondents, the acceptance of the use of second-hand or salvaged goods among their social network depends on multiple factors, including what type of good it is (food, clothing, furniture, etc…) and the personal attitude of an individual towards the idea of using second-hand or salvaged goods.

Participants not only acquired used or second-hand goods, but also worked to get rid of items that they no longer need. A majority (65%) of survey respondents report often or always working to eliminate clutter in their home. Interview participants talked about focusing on the often on-going process of eliminating unwanted items. If items are still useable, they are not

usually thrown into the garbage, but instead either sold or donated to others who can use them. The means of disposing of still usable goods are often the same as for acquiring used goods, such as Craigslist, Freecycle, EBay, or thrift stores (including charities like Goodwill and the Salvation Army). Participants also regift items they have received but know that they will not use or will clutter up their home.

A handful of individuals reported going through a mental process of asking themselves questions to help them determine if they should get rid of stuff. For example, Dorothy asks herself what is the worst thing that could happen if she gets rid of something and if there is somebody out there who will enjoy or get more use out of an item than she does. Another participant imagines she is moving and asks herself if she would bring the item with her or not. For some of those interviewed, the process of getting rid of things reinforces buying less or is tied to individuals being more mindful of what they brought into their homes to begin with.

Generally, the practice of acquiring used, second-hand or salvaged goods often requires more work, skills, resources, and social support than just buying less. Participants used social networks to get hand-me-downs from their friends and family. They also found goods in their neighborhoods when individuals had stoop sales, put out unwanted but useable goods out on their stoop, or in a designated area in their apartment building. Participant, in turn, also gave away useable goods. Local and national resources, such as Freecycle, helped individuals acquire and get rid of used goods. Other individuals were also the sources of skills for uncommon practices such as salvaging food. However, participants also describe a stigma attached to used goods, particularly clothing and salvaged food.

Social aspects of information seeking practices

As can be seen in the sections above, certain practices require the acquisition of skills and resources. Not having enough information and knowledge had a mean of 2.14 on a five point scale as a barrier when rated by survey respondents[19]. Overall, survey respondents did not frequently engage in information seeking behaviors related to buying less, with a small percentage often or always participating in information seeking. About thirteen percent of survey respondents reported often or always engaging in watching documentary films, TV, and/or listening to radio related to buying less and around twelve percent often or always read books or magazines. About fourteen percent often or always use blogs, online videos, and/or specialized news websites to learn about buying less. While only 10.9 percent often or always use email lists and 4.4 percent often or always attend public educational events, workshops, trainings, or courses related to buying less.

Interview participants had a variety of means for acquiring information. Some turned to family, friends, and acquaintances as a source of advice, knowledge, and skills. A number gained knowledge through courses and activities in college or through their jobs. Others learn from reading books, blogs, or newspapers. Movies, particularly documentaries, are also influential. A few attended, and in one case organized, local conferences and events related to their motivations for buying less. These events allowed them to pick up new ideas through their interactions with other attendees and community groups. It also is a space where they can share their own ideas with others who are interested in similar things.

None of the interview participants talked about participating in online communities. The internet was mainly used as a tool for finding resources, not finding social support. Many stated that they just look things up as needed, usually "googling" it (using the online Google search) to

[19] Rated on a scale from 1 = not at all a barrier to 3 = somewhat a barrier to 5 = very much a barrier

find a solution to a problem. Few described a purposeful search for knowledge. Instead, it is often a haphazard process.

Overall, neither survey nor interview respondents report high levels of information seeking. Interview participants report a variety of sources for information, but most often they turn to the internet for solutions as a problem or concern arises. It may be important to separate out buying less from other related practices when asking about information seeking in the future since certain practices require more skills and resources than others.

Summary

Interview participants have found a means to balance buying less practices within their many priorities and life circumstances, engaging in a way that works for them even if it is not always ideal. Instead it is often what they find to be realistic under the constraints that exist in their life, living in New York City, and in a society that is not built to support buying less. The particular level of reduced consumption, balancing ideals and quality of life, varies from person to person depending on their circumstances. This strategy of having flexible guidelines may help increase individuals chance of successfully reducing their consumption since it relieves some of the pressure of having to live in a consumption focused society and one's objective of buying less. The focus is often on trying to enact one's ideals while also not compromising one's quality of life.

One important finding presented in this chapter is that many interview respondents treated voluntarily buying less as a sensitive topic of conversation. It was something that could not always be openly discussed with others who did not hold the same opinions or values. Therefore, those participants adopted techniques to determine who the topic could be broached with while avoiding conflict with those who it may cause problems. However, a segment of

respondents were more comfortable with discussing it because of their personal attitude towards discussing sensitive topics as well as those who had more supportive social environments which made it easier to talk about buying less.

For those individuals who have children, there is variation in how much they integrate their values related to buying less into their childrearing practices. It appears from the limited interviews conducted that it may depend upon individuals' notions of how much children should be similar to their parents in their values and practices, the age of the child, the amount of time and effort it takes to get their child(ren) to buy less, and the values of the social groups which the respondents and their children interact with regularly.

Gift giving was specifically chosen to be asked about because it is a ritual which plays an important role in social relationships. The findings from this study indicate that when it came to more formal special occasions, such as weddings, interview participants often engaged in traditional forms of consumption in order to not break with expectations. However, on-going gift exchanges with close family were more open to alternative arrangements, such as not exchanging gifts or giving of non-material items. Certain circumstances, for instance having family members who support buying less or having family that lived further away, influenced gift giving practices.

Supports and barriers varied across practices related to voluntarily buying less. While asking oneself questions to determine if a purchase should be made could easily be done alone, having social support and resources made a noteworthy difference in the viability of adopting many other practices. Some interview respondents looking to save money by enacting frugal practices had conflicts when their significant others, friends and social groups did not have those same concerns or were not willing to make compromises. On the other hand, others had a lot of

support from family in the form of housing, money, or purchasing of needed items. Family and friends were also a source of skills and information for those repairing goods or doing things themselves. Lastly, social support and networks were especially useful for those looking to acquire used goods instead of new.

Chapter 5: Social support and barriers to buying less in different social environments

The previous chapter examined the social aspects of specific practices individuals engage in related to voluntarily reduced consumption. This chapter focuses more broadly on the social support and barriers individuals reported experiencing in different social environments, such as with family members or at work.

Consumer theory argues that the buying and use of goods plays a central role in negotiating identity and status in industrialized nations (Slater, 1997). It is a means of presenting ourselves as part of different social groups as well as communicating our lifestyle, values, ideals, and aspirations to others (Jackson, 2005). Because the consumption of goods, services, and entertainment is currently part of our common culture, it is deeply embedded in our social interactions with each other, with commercial spaces used as a place to socialize and shopping as a means to spend time with one's friends and family (Cohen, 2003; Slater, 1997).

In one of the few research studies that examines the impact of reducing one's consumption on individuals' social interactions, Dobscha and Ozanne's (2001) found that some of the changes that the environmentally focused women in their study enacted caused conflicts with others in their lives. Connolly and Prothero (2008) reported that the green consumers in their research had to compromise and negotiate to maintain their social relationships.

Research has also looked at individuals who reduce their consumptions as part of a group or social movement, such as Voluntary Simplicity. Cherrier and Murray (2002) theorize that participation in the Voluntary Simplicity movement provides social support to those changing their consumer focus lifestyles, helping them move from external sources of satisfaction to more

internal sources. They feel the movement gives individuals a sense of belonging and solidarity with others.

In this chapter, I discuss individuals' voluntarily reduced consumption activity with a focus on who plays an important social role or has an impact on their activity across different social settings. The first segment of the chapter is then dedicated to examining how participants overall experiences with social pressure to consume, as well as social support to voluntarily buy less, while living in New York City. The rest of the chapter examines social support and barriers while interacting with specific groups of people such as our significant other; family members; children; friends; roommates; social groups, organizations, and communities; employers and co-workers; and in educational settings.

Social pressure to consume / social support to buy less

It is important to examine individuals who have chosen to voluntarily buy less within their social context because of the role that consumption plays in U. S. society. One's social position and identity is often negotiated through one's appearances, lifestyle, and social networks (Slater, 1997). In addition, consumer goods, as well as the marketing and advertizing used to sell them, often provide a common cultural language and means to communicate with others. As a result, there is social pressure and advantages that come from continuing to reproduce consumer culture (Etzioni, 1998). However, there is very little data on the close social relationships of individuals who have voluntarily chosen to reduce their consumption, such as family structure, close friends, and relationship status.

When people voluntarily reduced their consumption, they find themselves in a situation where they must figure out how to fit their values and practices related to buying less alongside the common cultural language of being a consumer. Significant others, friends, family,

coworkers, social groups and community may be a source of social support or conflict depending upon their openness to idea of voluntarily buying less. In addition, barriers may arise depending upon how much individuals need to use consumption as a communication tool within social environments and personal relationships.

Survey and interview participants were asked a series of questions to establish the levels of support they have for voluntarily buying less, as well as social pressure to consume, across different social environments, including interactions with their significant other; family members; children; friends; roommates; social groups, organizations, and communities in New York City; employers and co-workers; and in educational settings. Survey respondents were asked to rate the frequency that they talked with these different individuals, as well as rate the level of support they receive from them in regards to voluntarily buying less. Interview participants were asked how others have reacted to the respondent buying less, including who has been most supportive and least supportive. They also answered questions about how their work, school, and neighborhood have been either helpful or not helpful in regards to buying less.

When asked about barriers to buying less, survey respondents rated not having support from others to buy less as the second lowest barrier, receiving a mean rating of 1.77, with a standard deviation of 1.04[20]. However, ratings of not having support from others to buy less was significantly correlated with overall rating of difficulty of making changes in their life in order to buy less, r=.306, all *ps*<.000[21].

On the whole, interview participants varied in how much social pressure they felt to participate in "normal" consumer behavior in New York City. Some felt very little pressure to consume because they were not concerned with impressing anybody, because they felt

[20] Rated on a scale from 1 = not at all a barrier to 3 = somewhat a barrier to 5 = very much a barrier.
[21] Rated on a scale from 1 = not very difficult at all to 3 = somewhat difficult to 5 = extremely difficult.

comfortable with themselves, or because they were not easily influenced by others. For example, David does not feel much pressure to live a certain way, beyond buying a new shirt once in a while since he is single and dating. Alicia only feels pressure to own one item – her cell phone. Dorothy does not feel pressure but feel "a little freakish" because she does not own an iPod or iPhone and did not want to even get a cell phone.

Others did feel pressure to buy certain items, keep up with trends, to have a particular appearance, or hold certain opinions. Since Sue works in the fashion industry, she does feel pressure to look a certain way and communicate through her clothing. Dan feels pressure to keep up with fashion trends in New York City – particularly noticing that he is the only person not wearing a black jacket in winter or when he realizes that he does not have as nice clothing as others at work. Both of the openly gay men that were interviewed felt that there was pressure being part of the gay community to live a certain lifestyle and have a certain appearance, leaving them feeling social isolated. Gloria felt the most difficult part about buying less was the disconnect she felt with other people when they are talking about buying the latest thing or watching the most recent television show. She finds it tempting to go along with trends.

Living in New York City provided both supports and barriers to avoiding impulse purchases and feeling pressure to consume. Interview participants talked about the many activities available in New York City besides going shopping or spending time in stores. This ranged from visiting museums to going to a park to spending time with friends. For instance, Dorothy feels that spending time in the community garden provides her a space for alternative activities besides spending money. Participants also felt that New York City is a place where there is so much diversity that they felt they could be themselves and not feel judged or pressured to live a certain lifestyle. People are more open to others doing things differently. They

felt that it is okay if you do not do what others are doing and that there are places to go to for support. Gloria sums it up by saying that you can be who you are in New York City because it is so diverse, there are a lot of choices, there is freedom, where you want to live and where you want to shop, and that there is less of a pack mentality overall.

For example, Evelyn feels her environmental practices make her apartment appear to be a "kooky" place since it smells like compost, has laundry hanging out to dry, and a bunch of mismatched, found furniture. However, living in Brooklyn makes Evelyn feel like she can be more herself and not appear so strange, "Um, when I got back from [another country] this past summer I, like, kissed Brooklyn because I was so relieved to be back in a place where I could be myself (mm-hmm), um, and not feel like I was strange (mm-hmm) because the consciousness is here -- so if you go with your own mug, if you go with your own bag, people don't think you're, you're really strange."

On the other hand, New York City was also described as causing difficulty because of the prominent culture of shopping and going out to restaurants and bars as well as the amount of advertising, and marketing present in the city. Among survey respondents, not having the local resources need to buy less was on average rated the third highest barrier, with a mean of 2.35. Around thirty-five percent rated it not at all a barrier, 23.7% rating a two out of five, 21.3% saying it is somewhat a barrier, 12.7% rating it a 4 out of 5, and 7.6% stating it is very much a barrier to buying less. Survey respondents also rated the barrier to buying less of feeling pressure from others to buy things had a mean rating of 1.81, with a standard deviation of 1.07. While the average rating of this barrier is rather low, the ratings of feeling pressure from others to buy things was significantly correlated with overall rating of difficulty of making changes in their life in order to buy less, $r=.370$, $p<.000$.

Sue feels that living in New York City makes it more difficult because there is pressure to buy and it is difficult not to be seduced into shopping with all the stores and advertising around. However, some participants bought less by avoiding the pressure to buy things that can come from others, or from being around a lot of marketing, advertising, or shopping districts. A majority of those surveyed (85.9%) report that they often or always resist pressure to buy things. Some interview participants either instituted or already had in place practices that helped them avoid external pressure to shop that came from marketing, advertising, or branding. Many respondents mentioned that they either did not watch or own a television, reduced the amount of televisions they owned, did not have cable television, had only basic cable or limit the amount of television that they watch. Similarly, 60.9% of survey respondents report often or always limiting or eliminating their television use. In addition, 61.6% often or always limit or eliminate their exposure to marketing and advertising.

Multiple interview respondents also stated that they have gained distance or become desensitized to advertising or marketing. They feel that they understand how advertising works to manipulate people into buying and therefore can ignore it or mentally reduce its impact on their choices. Some individuals do not follow the latest trends in fashion and technology in order to reduce pressure to purchase the most recent item on the market. Others maintain a skeptical mindset about what is being sold and why.

In addition, participants avoid the pressure produced by their physical surroundings by not going into stores unless they have something specific they have to buy and also by steering clear of neighborhoods or streets with a lot of stores on them, such as the SoHo neighborhood in Manhattan. If respondents are in a store, they try to avoid impulse buying by asking themselves

the questions covered above or by focusing on getting the specific item that they needed when they entered the store.

Rakesh feels that there is social pressure in New York City with people being interested in "what you do" because it is evidence of how much money you make and what they can get from you. James explains that since living spaces are so small, people felt the need to show off their success through what they wear and put on their person. Bruce feels that living in New York City makes him aware of other people who have more money than he does. He feels that is not helpful, explaining

> You know, being in New York and thinking about the, the concept of buying less is so, it's like just the antithesis, really, because there's so, I think there's even more pressure, living here, to buy things. Because you see people on the street, and you feel as though you have to keep up with them. And, it's not just their clothes, but it's, you know, their hair, their, what they're doing to themselves, I mean, they're getting Botox and plastic surgery and all this stuff, and, um, so in that sense it's, it's a, it's a huge challenge not to buy things. You really have to make a very concerted effort and, and stick by it with all your strength.

Interview participants did vary in how much social pressure they felt overall. Some felt very comfortable with themselves and did not mind that they were making unconventional choices compared to others. On the other hand, a number of participants were affected by their social environments, not able to be immune to how they may not fit in with others or keep up with the trends. Similarly, New York City itself was a contraction in social pressure and freedom to make one's own choices**.** As will be explored below, participants had different levels of support across their specific social environments and interactions with others which may contribute to how much social pressure they feel overall to consume goods.

Social acceptability may also depend on the practice and the social environment. As talked about in Chapter 4, certain used goods, like clothing, or items salvaged from the trash may have more of a stigma attached to them than others, such as antique furniture. Many participants

figure out what practices might be socially acceptable to the individual(s) that they are talking to and gauge how much information to share based on those assumptions about their audience. This monitoring of how much share may be partly as a result of the variation in acceptability of certain buying less practices in different social environments.

Survey participants were asked about how often they talked with specific types of individuals about buying less and also rated the support they received for their efforts to buy less from those groups of people. Detailed results are presented below in Tables 10 and 11. In all cases, frequency of talking with types of people had a significant positive correlation with ratings of support. Interview participants were also asked about different types of individuals throughout the interview to gauge how different relationships and social environments supported or inhibited participants buying less practices.

Table 2: Frequency of talking with others about issues related to buying less

	Never 1		Rarely 2		Sometimes 3		Often 4		Always 5		Not Applicable		Missing	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Significant other	6	1.9	10	3.1	46	14.4	118	36.9	63	19.7	65	20.3	12	3.8
Family members	14	4.4	49	15.3	111	34.7	111	34.7	23	7.2	5	1.6	7	2.2
Roommates	16	5.0	10	3.1	29	9.1	43	13.4	11	3.4	173	54.1	38	11.9
Friends	7	2.2	33	10.3	147	45.9	106	33.1	23	7.2	1	.3	3	.9
Coworkers	32	10.0	59	18.4	102	31.9	60	18.8	12	3.8	40	12.5	15	4.7
Employers	81	25.3	69	21.6	55	17.2	28	8.8	6	1.9	60	18.8	21	6.6
Acquaintances in your social groups, organizations, or local community	45	14.1	62	19.4	125	39.1	59	18.4	11	3.4	14	4.4	4	1.3
Strangers	130	40.6	90	28.1	72	22.5	17	5.3	1	.3	7	2.2	3	.9
Local business owners or managers	158	49.4	83	25.9	45	14.1	16	5.0	1	.3	13	4.1	4	1.3
Local community leaders	183	57.2	73	22.8	29	9.1	13	4.1	1	.3	14	4.4	7	2.2
Local politicians	184	57.5	79	24.7	28	8.8	9	2.8	1	.3	13	4.1	6	1.9

Table 3: Ratings of support from others for survey respondents' efforts to buying less

	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		Not Applicable		Missing	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Significant other	4	1.3	2	.6	3	.9	19	5.9	32	10.0	38	11.9	134	41.9	71	22.2	17	5.3
Family members	5	1.6	8	2.5	10	3.1	74	23.1	48	15.0	67	20.9	78	24.4	16	5.0	14	4.4
Roommates	0	0	4	1.3	6	1.9	29	9.1	17	5.3	17	5.3	25	7.8	184	57.5	38	11.9
Friends	5	1.6	2	.6	12	3.8	85	26.6	60	18.8	72	22.5	62	19.4	13	4.1	9	2.8
Coworkers	5	1.6	3	.9	8	2.5	119	37.2	36	11.3	29	9.1	24	7.5	73	22.8	23	7.2
Employers	7	2.2	5	1.6	7	2.2	114	35.6	26	8.1	18	5.6	14	4.4	106	33.1	23	7.2
Acquaintances in your social groups, organizations, or local community	3	.9	4	1.3	2	.6	121	37.8	64	20.0	36	11.3	30	9.4	51	15.9	9	2.8
Strangers	3	.9	11	3.4	11	3.4	152	47.5	25	7.8	14	4.4	5	1.6	86	26.9	13	4.1
Local business owners or managers	7	2.2	16	5.0	10	3.1	124	38.8	15	4.7	7	2.2	7	2.2	111	34.7	23	7.2
Local community leaders	11	3.4	21	6.6	12	3.8	125	39.1	17	5.3	6	1.9	2	.6	106	33.1	20	6.3
Local politicians	15	4.7	21	6.6	11	3.4	122	38.1	10	3.1	10	3.1	2	.6	105	32.8	24	7.5

Ratings scale for this question was 1= very unsupportive to 4= neither supportive or unsupportive to 7=very unsupportive.

Significant Others. When survey respondents were asked about how often they talk with their significant other (boyfriend, girlfriend, husband, wife, or partner[22]) about issues related to buying less, most[23] chose sometimes (18.9%), often (48.6%), or always (25.9%), with a mean of 3.91 with a standard deviation of .912. Talking with their significant other about buying less had the highest average frequency of all the types of individuals asked about. Survey participants also rated the overall support they received from their significant other for their efforts to buy less (scaled from 1= very unsupportive to 4= neither supportive or unsupportive to 7=very unsupportive). Significant others received the highest ratings of support among all the types of people asked about with a mean of 6.12 rating of support with a standard deviation of 1.312. A larger portion of respondents (57.8%) rated their significant other as very supportive. There are no significant differences in talking with or support from significant others based on respondents' top motivations for buying less as well as because of having non-voluntarily reasons for buying less.

Many interview participants who had significant others described them as supportive, or "on the same page" as them when it came to buying less and related practices. Within this group, some described that their significant other as being their main, sometimes only, source of support. Significant others also served as the individual with whom they are frequently able to discuss buying less as well as related values and practices. Roxanne feels her boyfriend is her main support for voluntarily buying less. They are able to talk about, and engage in, voluntarily reduced consumption practices together as a couple. Ray and his wife (and their children) also

[22] When asked about their relationship status, 35% of survey respondents reported being single, 19.4% cohabitating with a partner, 24.1% married, 3.8% divorced, 0.6% separated, 1.3% widowed, 5.0% in other situations, 1.9% preferred not to answer, and 9.1% had missing responses. In describing their current living situation, 41.9% of survey respondents reported that they are living with their husband, wife, partner, or significant other, while 20.3% said they were living alone.

[23] For whom it was applicable, 20.3% (n=65) reported that this question was not applicable to them.

work together to buy less and do not have conflicts regarding what to (not) buy. They each contribute to buying less. As talked about in Chapter 4, significant others provided support for buying less practices, including such things as helping with the skills or work needed, reinforcing each others' decision-making, providing emotional or inspirational support, and helping to find balance in their buying less practices.

A few interview participants describe being in relationships in which they are the driving force behind changes to voluntarily buy less. Their significant others do not necessarily hold the same values or degree of drive to make changes as the interview participant, leading to some conflicts around buying less and related practices. However, they are often described as supportive to various degrees since they are usually willing to make some changes. None described having a significant other who did not support buying less at all.

For instance, Evelyn started dating her boyfriend around the same time that she became focused on her consumption habits. She describes him as having come along for the ride, with him making changes based on her pointing stuff out to him. Having him alter his behavior makes things easier for them and she does not feel like he is sacrificing anything because he usually also thinks that whatever she pointed out to him makes sense to do. However, she has had fights with her boyfriend when she sees him enacting a consumptive lifestyle. Evelyn is very aware of how every consumptive action may affect the environment and produce waste. She gets angry when others are not aware of these consequences, though most of this anger is not expressed openly in order to avoid conflict. This causes conflict with her boyfriend who feels that one cannot live that strict of a lifestyle.

This conflict is similar to Theresa and her husband, covered in Chapter 4's section on thrift, who do not agree upon how much effort should be put into saving money. Not having

similar goals or values related to voluntarily buying less as one's significant other likely brings about more tensions because it cannot be avoided as easily as with more distant, less personal relationships. However, even with the conflict, Evelyn thinks that buying less and related practices improve the quality of her relationship with her boyfriend overall because they do interesting things together instead of just buying each other stuff.

Some of the interview respondents who do not have a significant other describe being glad to have the freedom to make their own choices when it comes to voluntarily buying less and related practices. They do not have to worry about making compromises on their choices or values. They stated that when or if they have a significant other in the future, it will be important for them to have similar values and practices when it came to buying less. However, Jack described the difficulty he has had of finding such a person among his social circles and the social isolation he experiences due to his values, which he feels is the hardest part of buying less,

> Um I think the relationship -- I actually really do feel like it's impacted my relationships, my dating relationships (okay), because I have rarely met any other gay men who have the same values (Mm-hmm), I mean, I'm very -- I'm actually very, like, cynical about it. But, um, I mean, I'm also, like I'm not a hopeless romantic, but I'm hoping for that person who has the same values, but, I really rarely meet -- and I feel like, the guys that I've dated, when they get to know me, they just, it's like a realization -- and it's mutual -- that we don't have that in common (Mm-hmm). We don't have like, being mindful about consumption habits in common (Mm-hmm), and so, you know, it's uh, that's hard. That's part of the social isolation factor.

Significant others play a large supporting role in individuals' buying less practices. For those who have supportive significant others, it makes their ability to buy less much easier through sharing of responsibility, reinforcement of behaviors, and even providing a sense of balance between consuming and not consuming. For those who had less supportive significant others, it resulted in having more conflict and putting energy into monitoring the significant others' behavior or making compromises between differing opinions. Some of those who were

single liked not having to compromise when it came to (non)consumption choices while others wished that had the support of being with someone who held similar values.

Family Members. When survey respondents were asked about how often they talk with their family members[24] about issues related to buying less, responses[25] varied with 4.5% choosing never, 15.9% rarely, 36.0% sometimes, 36.0% often, and 7.5% always, with a mean of 3.26 with a standard deviation of 0.967. How often they talk to their family about issues related to buying less is moderately correlated with their rating of support from family members, r=.376, p<.000. Survey participants also rated the overall support they received from their family for their efforts to buy less. Family received a mean of 5.29 rating of support with a standard deviation of 1.465[26] which was the second highest rating overall. Respondents varied in their evaluation of support, but most (92.1%) rated their family between neither supportive or unsupportive to very supportive. However, 7.9% rated their family on the less supportive end of the scale (between 1 and 3). There are no significant differences in talking with family based on respondents' top three motivations for buying less as well as because of having non-voluntarily reasons for buying less. However there is a significant difference in ratings of support from family members for individuals who chose wanting to save more money as one of their top three motivations for buying less (M=5.51) than those who did not (M=5.14), p=.033. This indicates that individuals who chose saving more money as one of their main reasons for buying less rated their family as being more supportive.

As described in Chapter 3, many interview respondents were raised in families that have some values or activities that the interviewees draw upon in buying less in their own lives. For

[24] Only 10.0% of survey respondents said they are living with their family, including parents, grandparents, or other extended family members when asked about their current living situation.
[25] N=308 with 12 missing or not applicable responses
[26] Rated on a scale from 1 = very unsupportive to 4 = neither supportive or unsupportive to 7 =very unsupportive.

some, families play an important role in influencing values as well as providing skills, information and support for buying less.

Parents continue to influence and inspire into interview respondent's adult lives. Evelyn and Ellen are both inspired by their parents' lack of fear to act differently than the norm. Tim is inspired by his parent energy conscious and frugal ways. Gwen feels that having spiritual parents her brought her up with values and skills to be resourceful has been the most helpful to her in buying less. She sees that her parents were able to save a lot of money from consuming less and were able to retire early.

Siblings also provide influence, inspiration, and support for interview participants. Linda feels that her sister is a role model in that she demonstrates a balanced life, without the need for a lot of things but will buy something when she needs it. Ellen feels that living with her sister Carolyn pulled her in the direction of buying even less. Olivia's sister is also very non-materialistic and she has actually learned a bit from how she lives with so few items. Dan's brother is inspiring to him because his brother cooks for himself, does not go out to eat or drink a lot, and managed to vacation with just his motorcycle and a tent. James' brother is into permaculture[27] and is very supportive.

However, interview participants also talked about feeling pressure from the social expectations of their parents and family. Even though her parents have some similar values to her own, Allison feels the tension between how she lives her life and her parents' expectations. They have ideas of how one's house should be and how to do things the correct way. Allison deals with this by learning to just say "whatever" and accept things how they are. As talked about previously, Barbara deals with pressure to spend money on her family by avoiding confrontation,

[27] Permaculture is a design system for agricultural and human settlements that focuses on energy-efficiency and sustainability modeled on natural ecosystems (Sullivan, 2008).

ignoring hints from her family to spend money, by suggesting doing different things that are less expensive, or by making changes to plans that involve spending a lot of money.

In addition to the ways that family shapes individuals while they are being raised, family has an on-going influence for many interview participants. Survey respondents also indicate that family members are a main source of support for voluntarily buying less. For those interview respondents who do not have as much support, they often have means to cope with differences, either through being physically distance from their family or by setting boundaries in how much they talk with them about buying less, often only confronting differences when it cannot be otherwise avoided.

Children. As talked about in the chapter on motivations for buying less, some individuals found that having children[28] tied into their motivations for buying less, including concern about the financial cost of providing for children and about their children's well-being and future.

In regards to buying less, parents held a range of positions on how they handled their values and practices in relation to their children as also presented in Chapter 4. Many wanted to pass along their values and beliefs to their children while others were more accepting that their children may feel differently than themselves. Allison states that she is not controlling, feeling that her teenage daughter might have different values than her, just as she did with her own parents, and therefore does not force her opinions on her daughter. On the other hand, Ray and his wife focus on passing along their values to their younger children. Ray describes their children as not very materialistic and their support and enthusiasm for the family's lifestyle is inspiring to him. In dealing with other children, Ray says that their children are "rugged

[28] Only 8.1% (n=26) of survey respondents reported that they are living with their children. When asked about how many children under the age of 18 years old are living in the household, 6.3% (n=20) survey respondents reported 1 child, 3.8% (n=12) reported 2 children, and 1.3% (n=4) reported 3 children (so some respondents are living with children that are not their own). Seven of the 24 interview participants have children, ranging from preschool age to adult.

individualists" and don't really let others tell them what they should or should not be doing. Their children have also found other ways to overcome social differences related to their choices. For example, since they do not have a TV in the house and many of the kids at school talk about what they have seen on television, Ray's sons pretend they know what the other kids are talking about.

Interview participants found various ways to deal with other parents and children who had values different than their own. Often they avoided confrontation by not talking about certain things, finding reasons to not do something they do not agree with, coming up with alternatives to a particular activity, or using humor to diffuse tension.

Some interview participants with children are making an effort to shape their children's values and habits to coincide with their own values related to buying less. In doing so, they sometimes have to guard against the influence of other parents and children who do not have the same values. However, not all parents who were interviewed try to influence their children to buy less, either because it took too much effort, out of concern for their children's happiness, or because they did not want to push their own values onto their children.

Friends. When survey respondents were asked about how often they talk with their friends about issues related to buying less, responses[29] varied with 2.2% choosing never, 10.4% rarely, 46.5% sometimes, 33.5% often, and 7.2% always, with a mean of 3.33 (scaled from 1=never to 5=always) with a standard deviation of .843. This was the second highest mean of the different types of individuals asked about on the survey. How often they talk to their friends about issues related to buying less is moderately correlated with their rating of support from friends, $r=.441$, $p<.000$.

[29] N=316 with 4 missing or not applicable responses

Survey participants also rated the overall support they received from their friends for their efforts to buy less (scaled from 1= very unsupportive to 4= neither supportive or unsupportive to 7=very unsupportive). Friends received a mean of 5.20 rating of support with a standard deviation of 1.347. Respondents varied in their evaluation of support, but 93.6% rated their friends between neither supportive or unsupportive to very supportive, with largest segment (28.5%) rating them neither supportive or unsupportive. There are no significant differences in talking with friends based on respondents' top three motivations for buying less as well as because of having non-voluntarily reasons for buying less. The only gender differences in frequency of talking and ratings of support were in the rating of support of friends. Females had a significantly higher rating of how much their friends provided support for their efforts to buy less (M=5.32) compared to males (M=4.87), p=.013.

As covered in Chapter 4, some interview respondents discussed turning to their friends for support, providing inspiration and resources for buying less, including a network for finding used items. Rakesh explains how focusing on spending time and connecting with his friends improves his quality of life and reinforces buying less,

> I think one of the things is that we have is jam once a week with some friends and just get together and make music. (Mm-hmm) And it's more satisfying I think because I make music than to go out and watch music, you know, go watch, you know, a famous artist play whatever and um, some big band and you know, it's like it's kind of like, like a vicarious thing. And to actually do it yourself is much more fulfilling and I think that's why people like local bands and local, is that, there's, you, your friends are in the band, so you. (Right.) You know? So you're actually part, you feel like it's a part of your, your interactions. So when you make, do your own music, it's kind of fun so that's actually another thing that's just like, making your own entertainment, whether it's music or whatever, instead of going to the, you know, the mainstream things. And um, not watching as much TV. I've never been much of a TV person but um, just not watching as much television um, and uh, so you know, just because you know, it's more fun to hang out with other people. (Mm-hmm) Using the internet more is a way of getting together in real life rather than using that as a place where you get together. (Right.) Um, you know, just thinking in all these other ways that, um, allow me

> to you know, enjoy life more as a matter of fact. It's just, that's actually, it reinforces itself through its own satisfaction, it's almost natural. (Okay.) It feels natural, so it's not, it's not an effort to spend less. As a matter of fact, it's easier to spend less. (Okay.) I would say.

Rakesh often organized social gatherings in order to steer events toward having them at his or his friends' homes instead of going out to bars and restaurants. However, some of his friends were not as supportive of these changes and insist on meeting up at a bar. Rakesh tries to still to stay in touch with his friends with different values by conceding to meet at a bar if necessary -- a demonstration of how some interview respondents made compromises instead of maintaining strict "rules" in their practices.

On the other hand, a portion of the interview participants had to deal with the social isolation, tension, and conflict that came with their values, opinions and practices. Gloria feels the most difficult thing about buying less is the disconnect you have with other people – when she doesn't know what they are talking about when they have bought the latest thing or watched the latest tv show. James also misses being able to communicate easily with others who have different values,

> I kind of feel like I miss some social connections sort of thing that, a friend of mine from work for example, we had people around um, a few weeks ago (uh-huh). We've been around to his apartment and he loves his, you know, home theatre style of things, so he's got the big new screen and the sound system and everything (uh-huh) and um, and, he was kind of looking at our tv which is like the old 25" tube which was off craigslist, twenty bucks, you know (right) bargain. And um, and we're on two different planets you know, so, so I can appreciate what he gets out of those things but also appreciate that um, I'm not going to be part of that world (right) so I kind of miss that, that that means that I miss communi… I'm, I'm on a different plane to some people.

Evelyn feels the hardest aspect of living her values is being around her friends who do not share the same values as her because she has a hard time being true to herself while spending time with them. She has gotten a lot of comments, negative remarks, and teasing from her old

friends. They have been unsupportive. They try to make their comments lighthearted but she is offended by it.

> I want to maintain my social life and I was -- you know, it would be hard for someone to live with me, um, it's hard for me to live with someone when I have these kind of strict, um, values -- and it's not like I would force somebody to go that but, you know, it's just very frustrating for me to see somebody, let's say, throwing out a whole meal of, of vegetables, um, when I know, you know, I would say, you can compost this -- but it's a, it's a delicate thing because -- and I have so many solutions for having not waste and most of, most people don't think about it, don't care and feel like that's judgmental to really, um, to ask them to change their habits (mm-hmm). Um, so yeah, so -- but -- so, right -- so I don't want these, these, uh, rules of mine or these ethics of mine to prevent me from having a social life and keeping my friends, who I value. Um, so I try to pocket them when it comes to going out, going out to eat, going out to a bar (mm-hmm), um, things like that.

Jack also feels the social isolation he experiences as a result of his choices is the most difficult part about buying less. He says that most of the people in his life are "mindless consumers", explaining:

> And I um, and so, and part of that is like, I'm known in almost all of my circles, as the tree-hugger, as the save the whales guy, as the buy less guy. Um, and there's an acceptance of that. But, there's also, it's sort of like, judgmental, um, dismissive, and, it's like,' Oh, Jack[30], he's doing his thing again.' Um, and I do think that, that some people do look down on me that I know. They think I'm less of a -- they just, um, it's like, poor him, you know, he doesn't want to buy things, he's not sophisticated, he's not, uh, one of us (Mm-hmm), so, and that's hard. It's hard to, to be, to feel like you're swimming upstream, so to speak, (Mm-hmm), a lot of the time.

He feels he could have more friends if he didn't have these values. He likes talking about issues related to the environment but feels that others think it is a downer.

Carolyn also experienced some conflict going out with her friends because she did not like the waste produced from eating out and did not want to pay for food when she knew she could get salvaged food for free. Her friends would offer to pay for dinner or drinks for her because they don't really understand that she can pay for it, she just doesn't want anything to be

[30] Name has been changed in the quote to protect respondent's identity

bought. Carolyn ends up feeling torn between spending time with her friends who want to go out to eat and her own values.

Other interview participants landed more in the middle ground of limiting how much they talked or interacted with their friends who had different values than their own, as is also covered above. For example, Linda explains that while her friends are somewhat aware of her buying less, they probably do not know the extent of her beliefs, "I had a weird conversation with a friend and we were talking about our lifestyles 'cause she's commented on something that was, like insulting to me and so then we talked about it and um, that's rare. That's pretty rare that I actually have a meaningful conversation about my lifestyle with one of my friends in that way." However, even though her friends do not have her same beliefs, she does not feel pressure to conform to theirs. So while these interview respondents do not share their ideas with, or get a lot of social support from, their friends, they also did not express feeling as much social isolation, anger, or hurt about the differences they had with their friends.

Interview participants whose friends did not have similar values found different means of coping. For instance, Jack ends up dealing with the social isolation by trying not to get angry but instead empathizing with others who are different from him. He doesn't make apologies for himself and just keeps living life according to his values. Rakesh is learning to not be judgmental about other people's beliefs and tries to see commonalities across people's different values among those individuals who buy less and those that do not. He still questions their beliefs but he tries to see the good in people and ignore the things he does not agree with or thinks are unreasonable. He makes a point to talk to people who have all different perspectives.

On the other end of the spectrum, Carolyn feels pressure to live up to her values because she is known for them, stating "Umm, but still, I think, you know, people just begin to know me

for these things. And -- and will, you know, I feel a bit of a pressure to like, uphold these things that I talk about a lot." When she did tell one of her friends who has more consumer-oriented values that she made a purchase at a "mainstream" store, they teased her about it.

Friendships are a complicated topic for interview respondents. Friends are an important source of support for some individuals, while it is a place to set boundaries in order to avoid conflicts for others. For several not having friends with similar values is a source of social isolation and pain, putting the greatest strain on their buying less values and practices. Differences in values related to buying less also has led to drifting away from certain friends or even severing of friendships, when there were no accessible strategies for dealing with the conflicts that arose. Findings from the interviews indicate just how much consumption choices can impact social relationships. However, for those not involved in social organizations, groups or communities related to buying less, there was no clear path for finding new friends with common values. As will be covered further on, a few individuals who tried to become more involved in these social organizations, groups, or communities could not find the right place where they felt comfortable or could not find the time to be involved.

Roommates. Around 18% of survey respondents report living with roommates. When survey respondents were asked about how often they talk with their roommates about issues related to buying less, responses[31] varied with 14.7% choosing never, 9.2% rarely, 26.6% sometimes, 39.4% often, and 10.1% always, with a mean of 3.21 (scaled from 1=never to 5=always) with a standard deviation of 1.202. How often they talk to their roommates about issues related to buying less is moderately or strongly correlated with their rating of support from roommates, $r=.428$, $p<.000$.

[31] N=109 with 211 not applicable or missing responses

Within the survey results, there are no significant differences in the average frequency of talking with roommates about voluntarily buying less based on survey respondents' top three motivations, or because of having non-voluntarily reasons for buying less. However there is a significant difference in ratings of support for voluntarily buying less from roommates for survey respondents who chose reducing their impact on the environment as one of their top three motivations for buying less (M=5.49) than those who did not (M=4.82), p=.022.

Survey participants also rated the overall support they received from their roommate(s) for their efforts to buy less[32] (scaled from 1= very unsupportive to 4= neither supportive or unsupportive to 7=very unsupportive). Roommates received a mean of 5.14 rating of support with a standard deviation of 1.450. As can be seen in Table 3, respondents varied in their evaluation of support, but most (89.7%) rated their roommates between neither supportive or unsupportive to very supportive, with the largest segment (29.6%) rating them neither supportive or unsupportive.

For the interview respondents who had roommates, most found that having housing companions with similar, or at least non-conflicting, values is helpful in supporting their buying less practices. Evelyn had a roommate last year who felt certain things, such as subscribing to a full cable television package, was essential and Evelyn felt the need to compromise. Now that she is sharing her space with a family member instead, she is able to greater control over how the apartment is run. She feels that in the future she will be more cautious about choosing a roommate who has similar values to her own. Jack, on the other hand, has roommates who have similar values and they have little conflict over how the apartment is run.

Laura bought a house and turned into communal housing over 20 years ago. In order to facilitate cooperation, potential roommates are given a document outline expectations before

[32] N=98 with 222 not applicable or missing responses

they agree to live there. Laura feels that she helps individuals living in the house to be more environmental as well as communal through her own example and the established house rules, such as cooking and eating dinner together and belonging to the local food co-op. However, there have been occasional conflicts when individuals have been asked to leave because of ongoing problems of not living up to the expected responsibilities.

Bruce and his partner participated in planning an intentional community. However the plans fell apart after conflicts over the rules of the community and membership. Carolyn found there could be a lot of drama and power struggles within the communal housing she lived in among people who had different opinions, even though having power struggles went against the shared values of the community.

Having roommates is an opportunity for some respondents to learn from others as well as to share their knowledge and values with others. For those who have roommates, household function is easier when individuals living together have similar values and practices, with conflicts potentially arising when that is not the case. Larger housing situations, such as communal living spaces, add to the complexity of social interactions.

Social Groups, Organizations, and Communities in New York City. Past research has looked at individuals who reduce their consumptions as part of a group or social movement, such as Voluntary Simplicity. Cherrier and Murray (2002) theorize that participation in the Voluntary Simplicity movement provides social support and resources to those changing their consumer focus lifestyles, helping them move from external sources of satisfaction to more internal sources. They feel the movement gives individuals a sense of belonging and solidarity with others. Being part of a community that supports one's values and provides a different cultural language to communicate with others like oneself may alleviate some of the barriers to buying

less and provide an alternative identity than being a consumer. Social groups, organizations and communities also provide resources for getting goods and services without entering into the traditional consumer market system (Cherrier & Murray, 2002; Kozinets, 2002; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004).

Survey respondents were asked a series of questions about their interactions with acquaintances in their social groups, organizations, or local community in general. They were also asked about more formal memberships in local groups or organization, including specific questions about belonging to a group or organization that supports buying less. When reporting how often they talk to acquaintances in their social groups, organizations, or local community about issues related to buying less, survey respondents had a mean of 2.76 (scaled from 1=never to 5=always) with a standard deviation of 1.044. Detailed frequencies are displayed in Table 2, with the largest segment (39.1%) saying that they sometimes talk with their acquaintances about issues related to buying less. How often they talk to acquaintances in their social groups about issues related to voluntarily buying less is moderately or strongly correlated their rating of support from acquaintances in their social groups, r=.446, how often they report supporting or participating in groups or organizations related to voluntarily buying less (either online or in person), r=.401, support or participate in the restoration or conservation of plant or animal habitats, r=.336, support or participate in the restoration or conservation of watersheds and other water resources, r=.310, and supporting or participating in the greening of neighborhoods, r=.350, all *p*s<.000. These results indicate that there is a positive correlation between talking about issues related to buying less with acquaintances and participation in groups related to buying less and related to environmental issues.

Survey participants also rated the overall support they received from their acquaintances in their social groups, organizations, or local community about issues related to buying less (scaled from 1= very unsupportive to 4= neither supportive or unsupportive to 7=very unsupportive). They received a mean of 4.80 rating of support with a standard deviation of 1.176. As can be seen in Table 3, respondents varied in their evaluation of support, but most 96.5% rated their acquaintances in their social groups between neither supportive or unsupportive to very supportive, with 46.5% rating them neither supportive nor unsupportive.

There are significant differences in frequency of talking with and ratings of support from acquaintances in their social groups, organizations, or local community about issues related to buying less based on respondents' top three motivations for buying less. Survey respondents who chose wanting to reduce their impact on the environment as a top motivation had a higher average of how often they talked with their acquaintances, as well as ratings of support. Individuals who chose concern about the future as a top motivation also had higher ratings of support from acquaintances in their social groups. On the other hand, survey respondents who chose wanting to save more as a top motivation had a lower average frequency of talking with their acquaintances. They also had lower average ratings of support from acquaintances in their social groups.

Survey respondents were asked about their participation in a local organization or community group (such as a non-profit organization, spiritual or religious organizations, Meetup community, or political groups) followed by a question asking if they are a member of an organizations or groups that support or advocate buying less. Many of the survey respondents report (76%) participating in a local organization or community group, but only 28.8% belong to an organization or group that supports or advocates voluntarily buying less.

Membership in a group that supports buying less did vary based on survey respondents' gender. While there was no gender difference in overall participation in local organizations or community groups, there is a significant association between belonging to an organization that supports buying less or not and gender, $X^2(1) = 5.484$, p=.019. Around a third of females (33.8%) reported belonging to an organization that supports buying less, while only 19.8% of males do.

Membership in a group that supports buying less also varied based on motivation for voluntarily buying less[33]. There is a significant association between belonging to an organization that supports buying less or not and choosing wanting to reduce their impact on the environment as a top motivation for voluntarily buying less, $X^2(1) = 9.864$, p=.002. Of the 165 survey respondents who chose environmental concerns as a top motivation, 36.3 percent were members of an organization who supported voluntarily buying less compared to 20.3 percent who did not choose environmental concerns as a top motivation. There is also a significant association between belonging to an organization that supports buying less or not and choosing wanting to save more money as a top motivation for voluntarily buying less, $X^2(1) = 4.216$, p=.04. Of the 129 survey respondents who chose wanting to save more money as a top motivation, 22.5 percent were members of an organization who supported voluntarily buying less compared to 33.2 percent who did not choose wanting to save more money as a top motivation.

When survey respondents were asked about whether they were developing any new relationships with people related to their efforts to buy less[34], 54.1% said none, 32.2% said a few, 8.1% said several, and only 3.1% said many. There is a significant association between

[33] Analysis was conducted on the five most popular responses that survey respondents chose when rating the three most important reasons for buying less. In this analysis, there was no relationship between choosing wanting to reduce clutter, dislike of consumerism, and concerns about the future and belonging to an organization which supports voluntarily buying less.

[34] Eight survey respondents had missing data for this question.

belonging to an organization that supports buying less or not and developing new relationships related to buying less[35], $X^2(3)=60.662$, $p<.000$. Only 35.1% of interview respondents who were not members of a group that supports buying less reported having developed new relationships with people related to their efforts to buy less while, 68.5% of those who were members of a group that supports buying less had developed new relationships.

Interview participants were asked about the reactions they had received from any groups or communities they belonged to as well as whether they had joined any new groups or communities since deciding to buy less. Discussions about social groups, communities and organizations also occurred when interview participants were asked about the most helpful aspects of New York City.

Interview participants felt a variety of New York City social groups, organizations, and communities were related to their buying less activities. These settings served multiple purposes for the respondents, including a place for getting support, finding information, providing alternative sources of goods, being around others who have similar values, making personal connections with others, and sharing their own knowledge, skills and resources with others. For example, Evelyn learned how to make a worm bin from others and is now a compost teacher herself. She enjoys giving away parts of her compost bin to others so they can start their own. Bruce runs workshops to teach others the skills he has learned. This way he is passing along the skills that have been passed onto him. Rakesh focuses on developing things in his life that make him really satisfied and to him that means focusing on relationships with other people. His involvement in community groups is part of that.

[35] Original responses have been regrouped into two categories of yes, new relationships (n= 139, 44.6%) and no, no new relationships (n= 173, 54.1%).

New York City Food Cooperatives, Farmer's Markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), and Community Gardens. Almost seventy percent (68.8%) of survey respondents report that they often or always practice green or ethical shopping, including buying fair trade, non-sweatshop, organic, buying locally sold or produced goods. Some interview participants found that their local food co-op, farmer's markets, CSAs, or community gardens, are a place for community, information, and to be around other like-minded people. Dorothy feels living in New York City is one of the most helpful things in making changes related to buying less. Because of the resources available, such as the CSAs and the farmer's markets, there is an infrastructure of people in place that make her behaviors and values feel somewhat normal.

There are at least five food cooperatives in New York City with more being established[36].When asked about having other people around who have similar values to his own, James described his food co-op as subculture of people:

> A lot of people that you see and meet at the coop will um, point out, you know, things. It's funny, you know. I actually recommended to someone 'oh you should try the snap peas' and she said 'oh yeah but they're from Peru, you know, food miles[37]' (uh-huh) and I said 'well, yeah, you know, good point' (right) [laughs]. 'Choose the ones from Mexico or, you know.' (right) So yeah, you do, you do have a bit of a, um, I really think there is, there is a, um, sort of subculture (uh-huh).

Between July 2009 and June 2010, there were 51 green or farmer's markets in New York City (GrowNYC, 2010). Ray feels that his local farmer's market is a central facilitator to how his family lives. He says that his daughters look forward to going to the market every week and they know all the vendors. He feels that it is like a village atmosphere. Similarly Evelyn states,

[36] https://idealistnyc.wordpress.com/2010/01/06/all-of-nycs-food-co-ops-not-just-the-famous-one/ Accessed March 4, 2012.
[37] "Food miles" refers to the distance that the food has traveled from the producer to the consumer of food. Individuals who are concerned about food miles are usually worried about the environmental impact of transporting food long distances.

> I love going to the green market (mm-hmm) -- that's been a great experience. I went today, I, I loved the farmer who sold me potatoes. Um, and it always just brightens my mood. It really makes me happy because I know A) I love the food I get -- it's exciting, it's a challenge, I, I wind up accumulating food that I, that I don't know how to cook so I end up kind of learning and being creative to cook this food (mm-hmm) and I feel good because I know that I'm, I'm supporting, um, a good, a good system (mm-hmm) so I'm supporting this farmer who was so nice to me. I know that I'm giving money directly to him and, and that makes me feel good.

A few of the interview respondents also participate in local community supported agriculture (CSA). In this system, they buy a share of a local farm's crop of fruit and vegetables which gets dropped off in a particular New York City neighborhood for pick-up. Similar to local food co-ops and green markets, it is also an alternative source of goods and information. When Dorothy was asked about having any landmark moments where she has changed how she has done things, she talked about how becoming part of the CSA was one step that led to greater awareness of her food consumption by providing her with locally grown, seasonal food. This practice also provides information and awareness about food related issues, such as how and where food is grown and the impact food production has on the environment and the economy. Dorothy changed her eating habits, increased her skills in planning ahead and made her more aware of her purchases because she had food showing up on a regular basis from the CSA which she had to find something to do with. This process then led to paying greater attention to other related consumption issues.

> It's always been just much more gradual and much more 'oh that makes sense to me.' Like when I first heard about CSAs, for instance, I was like oh my god this is such a great idea, why - and then through paying attention to that, just sort of, that sort of ripples out into paying attention to other stuff that's connected to it. *(Uh-huh.) And, and that's sort of how it's come to be, just my decision making process such as it is.*

New York City has hundreds of community gardens.[38] A few of the interview respondents participate in their local garden. Dorothy feels that her community garden provides a support system of other individuals with similar values with whom she can talk and exchange information. In addition, since she has been involved, she has learned group decision making and negotiating with different personalities towards a common goal. Evelyn also feels her community garden is a place of great support and community. It has allowed her to interact with a diverse group of people through lots of activities, such as working in the garden, a book club, and potluck dinners.

Freegans, free markets, anarchist collectives and other alternative spaces. Within New York City, there are different groups that support engaging in alternative, no cost ways to acquire goods, services, and food, including the Freegans, anarchist collectives, and alternative currency organizations.

Most of the interview participants did not participate regularly in these communities, though they may take advantage of the resources to get or dispose of used goods. Linda talked about attending one of the freegan community dinners a few times but did not feel like it was the right place for her.

> So that's a resource that I could take advantage of more and I just haven't because I don't live that close and, um, there is like a little bit of a social awkwardness, like I, I would like to go with someone I know and people that I know aren't that into that scene, so. . .(So you don't really have any close, you're not really close with some of those communities that are doing that kind of stuff?) Yeah, I think that's it. That's an accurate statement. (Okay. Why do you think that is?) I think there's an age difference. (Okay.) So that's probably one of the reasons. (Okay.) And also I think I don't outwardly wear the badges of, um, this lifestyle. So, it maybe, it maybe makes me feel different or if people actually feel differently about me, so maybe it's like a perception on my part or maybe there's a reality there, I don't know which but, so there's enough to kind of make me feel, I wouldn't say it's super uncomfortable, but just, hesitant.

[38] http://www.greenthumbnyc.org Last accessed March 3, 2012

Similarly Allison said that she does not participate in those groups because the people in the groups are either younger or older than her. She does not feel she is in the right stage of life to engage with those particular communities. Dan thought about participating in alternative currency network but he felt that the events and organization "seemed a bit too hippy dippy."

However, a few interview participants are involved in local community groups that support buying less and the alternate acquisition of goods. Carolyn was specifically looking to get involved in the anarchist community when she moved to New York City after college. Through her involvement, she has developed a large network of friends and acquaintances with similar values who share their resources. Rakesh has also enjoyed his participation in local communities which have allowed him to socialize and meet other people who can teach him skills. His role in organizing and managing groups of people in the community has taught him to really listen, communicate and be open with others who may have different ideas. While a majority of the interview respondents were not members in these community groups, they served a very important role for those who did partake in them.

Religious community. A couple of the interview respondents gained support from their participation in their religious community, one a Quaker and the other a Buddhist. They felt that their religious community held similar values and beliefs which support practices tied to buying less.

Apartment buildings and neighborhoods. Neighborhoods serve as a support for buying less practices for some interview respondents, but not others, depending on the neighborhood. Ray and his wife are active in their neighborhood community and use this as an opportunity to exchange information and ideas. James, Laura, Carolyn, Ray, and Sue all said they feel that it is helpful to have some people living in their neighborhoods that have similar values to their own to

share information, resources, or just a knowing that they are not alone in their values. Sue has found that living in Brooklyn instead of SoHo has put less pressure on her to live a certain lifestyle because she is not surrounded by so many shops. On the other hand, Ellen feels that her neighborhood is a bit "scattered" and does not interact with others living near her. Bruce feels that were he and his partner live is not very helpful because the other people in the building do not have the same values that they do. He feels socially isolated living there and has little influence to make larger changes to make the building or his neighborhood more supportive of their lifestyle.

While engagement in their community groups, resources, and neighborhoods is very important for some participants, other respondents do not choose to participate. Reasons for not getting involved included not finding the right community for them where they feel comfortable, not being much of a "joiner," not having interest in participating, or not having the time.

A few participants who have been highly active in community groups have also had conflicts arise within the groups that are difficult to deal with. Carolyn expressed that a lack of communication can get in the way of achieving goals and being productive with some of the groups she participates in. While Bruce found that the amount of responsibilities, as well as conflicts, that he and his partner experienced in participating left them feeling burned out, depressed, and less engaged in their community groups.

Only around a quarter of the survey respondents report being a member in a group or organization that supports voluntarily buying less. There was an association between being a member and developing new relationships with others related to buying less. Some interview participants found local communities and organizations to be a source of skills and resources. In addition, they provided a place for social interactions with like-minded people. Having these

exchanges were talked about very positively by interview respondents and clearly played an on-going role in supporting voluntarily buying less. Surprisingly, it was not often communities or organizations that specifically stated that they supporting buying less, such as a Voluntary Simplicity Circle, but instead more loosely related communities, such as food coops and green markets, that were most frequently mentioned and espoused by interviewees. A handful of interview participants found that the groups that were more focused on buying less, such as the Freegans or alternative currency organizations, were not places that they felt comfortable or fit in. However a few of the interviewees were very happy, active participants in those groups. Lastly, interview participants also found social support and comfort in living in neighborhoods in which provided a community in which others held similar values to themselves.

Employers and co-workers. Only minimal research has been done previously that looks at the relationship between individuals' voluntary reduced consumption activity and work environments, where appearance and ownership of certain goods is often an important tool in presenting status and social position.

When asked about their employment status[39], only 43.9% of survey respondents report working full time, 22.6% working part time, 18.0% are self-employed, 6.4% are not employed by choice, and 8.1% are not employed, not by choice. In addition, 15.1% are full time students and 6.1% are part time students.

When survey respondents were asked about how often they talk with their employers about issues related to buying less, responses[40] varied with 33.9% choosing never, 28.9% rarely, 23.0% sometimes, 11.7% often, and 2.5% always, with a mean of 2.20 (scaled from 1=never to 5=always) with a standard deviation of 1.108. How often they talk to their employers about

[39] Survey respondents could check all that applied with regards to their employment and/or student status.
[40] N=239 with 81 missing or not applicable responses

issues related to buying less is strongly correlated with their rating of support from employers, r=.537, p<.000. When survey respondents were also asked about how often they talk with their co-workers about issues related to buying less, responses[41] varied with 12.1% choosing never, 22.3% rarely, 38.5% sometimes, 22.6% often, and 4.5% always, with a mean of 2.85 (scaled from 1=never to 5=always) with a standard deviation of 1.047. How often they talk to their co-workers about issues related to buying less is strongly correlated with their rating of support from co-workers, r=.495, p<.000.

There are significant differences in frequency of talking with employers about issues related to buying less based on respondents' top three motivations for buying less. Survey respondents who chose wanting to reduce their impact on the environment as a top motivation had a higher average (M=2.39) of how often they talked with their employers than those who did not choose it as a top motivation (M=2.00), p=.006. Survey respondents who chose wanting to save more as a top motivation had a lower average (M=2.04) of how often they talked with their employers than those who did not choose it as a top motivation (M=2.33), p=.047. There is also a significant difference in frequency of talking with employers for individuals who chose concern about the future as one of their top three motivations for buying less (M=2.57) than those who did not (M=2.09), p=.005.

Survey participants rated the overall support they received from their employers for their efforts to buy less (scaled from 1= very unsupportive to 4= neither supportive or unsupportive to 7=very unsupportive). Employers received a mean of 4.35 rating of support with a standard deviation of 1.238. Respondents varied in their evaluation of support, but most (90.1%) rated their employers between neither supportive or unsupportive to very supportive, with 59.7% rating them neither supportive nor unsupportive. Survey participants also rated the overall

[41] N=265 with 55 missing or not applicable responses

support they received from their co-workers for their efforts to buy less (also scaled from 1= very unsupportive to 4= neither supportive or unsupportive to 7=very unsupportive). Co-workers received a mean of 4.61 rating of support with a standard deviation of 1.251. Respondents varied in their evaluation of support, but most (92.9%) rated their co-workers between neither supportive or unsupportive to very supportive, with 53.1% rated neither supportive nor unsupportive. Ratings of support from one's employers is strongly correlated with ratings of support from co-workers, r=.790, p<.000, possibly indicating that these two indicators may demonstrate the overall supportive nature of the individual's work environment.

Interview participants talked about the different ways that their work situations have supported or hindered their buying less related practices. In some work environments, such as more traditional jobs working for corporations or business, participants described having more pressure to have formal dress clothes appropriate for the work environment as well as feeling less comfortable to share their personal values in the work place. As mentioned previously, Sue feels pressure to look a certain way and communicate through her clothing since she works in the fashion industry. James and Roxanne both had to buy more formal clothing when they started new jobs but have since then tried to buy the minimum amount necessary to maintain their work wardrobe. James feels that the work environment is somewhere he has to maintain social norms. Dan often wears the same casual clothes that he would normal put on if he was not going to work, therefore not needing to have a separate collection of work clothes. However, he is conscious of his clothing not being as formal as others at his job.

At Roxanne's new job, she sees her co-workers are constantly buying new things and shopping online at work and it makes her want to shop online as well. Comparatively, at her one of previous jobs working at a non-profit organization, her co-workers were more

environmentally conscious. It was there that she started using a refillable water bottle because she noticed her co-workers using them.

When Kim was working full-time, she felt pressure to go out for drinks after work or to lunch at expensive restaurants. She was also so busy that she did not have time to step back and think about what was the best use of her time, money and effort. Now that she is a stay at home mother, she is able to avoid the pressure to consume and has more time to think about her choices. She is also able to spend more time connecting with others, such as through her volunteer work at her children's school.

A segment of the participants were self-employed, worked freelance, or owned their own business. This gave some of these respondents more flexibility in what clothing they wore, often no longer needing to purchase the clothes they would have needed in a more corporate business environment. For some, it also means that they have more time to allocate as they wished which helped to support living their values and practices. Dorothy explains:

> (do you feel like your, your chosen work and how you're employed and how time is allocated that you have the space to do those things? Do you think that helps?) yes, and I think it's the biggest reason why I've chosen the kind of work that I do, and the method and the way of working that I have because I've always, you know, for fifteen years I've been a freelancer and I've had, you know, I don't, because it was more important to me always to have control over time then it was to have the security of a job and there are times when I've regretted that choice, there are times when I've, not regretted it, there are times I wished for the specific things that I've given, but, I know why I've given them up (uh-huh) and that makes it okay.

However, sometimes it also meant that they had to keep up to date in purchasing technology and other items that they needed to do their work.

In some cases, interview participants worked in jobs that had a better fit with their personal values, such as working at non-profits organizations, which they felt allowed them to dress more casually and where they felt more comfortable sharing their values and ideas with

others. Jack tried to get a "green living" column instituted at the non-profit where he works. For some respondents, these jobs were even a resource for learning new skills and making new connections with others.

Several of the interview participants said that they mindfully chose their work environment to be compatible with their values and preferences. For instance, David states,

> there is a feeling of, umm, that choosing this path and choosing this education is in a way a financial sacrifice (uh huh) and I'm okay with that. Like, I'd prefer doing something that I love and like having a lifestyle that might be hard work but it's enjoyable and, and I don't have any guilt feelings. If I was working for some corporation that was producing a bunch of stuff was that was pointless anyway then I wouldn't feel good about myself in that sense.

Carolyn often chooses jobs that provide her with resources. For example, by doing work in catering, she is able to take home or give away food that would otherwise be discarded.

Interview respondents' work environments have an impact on voluntarily reduced consumption practices through their social norms and available resources. For those whose work environments were less supportive, participants often worked within those norms the best they could, such as by buying new work clothing but trying to make them last as long as possible. Others seek out more supportive work environments which are a good match to their personal values and practices. In some of these situations, participants benefited from the information, skills or resources they gained at work, as well as felt good about being able to provide those same things for others.

School. As covered in the Chapter 3, college environments were places that some interview participants reported being exposed to new people and ideas that influenced their values and activities, including their motivations and practices related to buying less. Participants talked about being influenced by the information they were exposed to in their courses and

fellow students. Roxanne also participated in one of her school's environmental organization which brought her new awareness about environmental issues. Gloria had a different experience when she went back to school to get her M.B.A. She felt that the other people in the program were living very consumption-focused lifestyles and it made her step back and examine her own consumerism. However, she still felt that being in school was helpful in exposing her to new ideas and different perspectives. It also allowed her more time to learn and think about ideas without the distraction that comes with working full time.

Not many individuals interviewed were currently participating in an educational setting, however others reflected back upon previous times when they were in that situation. While attending college often requires resources and can be a source of stress, it also can serve as an opportunity to meet new people, be exposed to new information, and examine current habits and practices.

As has been demonstrated above, examining the relationship between voluntarily reduced consumption activity and different social environments has been fruitful since social supports and barriers vary across social context and social audience. Significant others are a primary support for many of the interview participants. Family, friends, social groups, and local communities also play an important role in buying less activity. However, how much support individuals receive vary, with some individuals having an easier time buying less as a result of the family, friends, and community that surrounds them while others have go it alone in their practices as well as set barriers to avoid conflicts with those around them.

Summary

This chapter has focused on social interactions around voluntarily buying less. Highlighted in the results is how much buying less activity is influenced by social context and interaction with others.

Interview participants varied in how much social pressure they felt to consume, as well as amount of support for buying less. Some felt little pressure in general because they were not concerned with impressing anybody, because they felt comfortable with themselves, or because they were not easily influenced by others. Others had social environments that were mostly supportive of buying less, such as having supportive family and friends as well as holding a job that coincides with their values. Others had more pressure because their family and friends did not hold similar values and they worked in field where one's appearance, ownership of certain technology, and knowledge of consumer culture mattered Social pressure also changed based upon specific situations, such as depending upon who one is interacting with.

Looking at the survey results examining support levels for individuals efforts to buy less, significant others were the only group where the majority of respondents (in this case 41.9 %) were rated as very supportive. Surprisingly, a larger percent of responses for most categories (besides significant others) fell under neither supportive nor unsupportive rating. However, family members, roommates, friends, and acquaintances ratings of support were divided between neither supportive nor unsupportive and more positive ratings on the scaled compared to coworkers, employers, strangers, local business owners, community leaders, and politicians[42], who predominantly rated neither supportive or unsupportive. Not unexpectedly, frequency of

[42] Interactions with strangers, local business owners, community leaders, and politicians will be covered more in the following chapter.

talking with others about buying less was often significantly positively correlated with ratings of support.

Frequency of talking with others about buying less and ratings of support varied based on individuals' motivation for buying less. Those who chose concern about the environment as a main reason for buying less had a higher average frequency of talking with employers and acquaintances in their social groups while those who were motivated mainly by wanting to save more money had a lower average frequency. Frequency of talking with significant others, family members, roommates, friends, and co-workers did not vary by motivation.

Ratings of support from family members was higher for those who chose wanting to save more money as a top motivation. Support from roommates was rated higher on average by those who were motivated by concerns about the environment. On average, rating of support from acquaintances was rated higher by those whose main motivation was concern about the environment and those who disagreed with the ideas of consumerism while it was lower by those whose top motivations included saving more money. Ratings of support did not vary significantly by motivation when it came to significant others, friends, coworkers, and employers.

Interviews revealed the importance of examining the circumstances of social interactions since social support and pressure to consume did change depending on whom the interactions involved. Similar to survey results, significant others were also reported a predominant source of social support (for those who had them). Significant others provided support by doing things such as sharing responsibility for buying less, reinforcing practices or providing skills. Unlike some of the previous research done, no one specifically talked about experiencing an unequal division of labor between partners (Grisgby, 2004; Judkins & Presser, 2008). Some interview

participants did mention that each partner in the relationship had different skills and knowledge when engaging in practices related to voluntarily buying less. When conflicts arose, it was often related to not holding the same values, not the balance of shared labor within the relationship.

Similar to Grigsby's (2004) research, a few of the interview participants who did not have significant others were glad to be able to make their own non-consumptive choices and not compromise. However, other interview participants in this study who were single wished that they had the support of a significant other with the same values.

Family was another important source of support for those who family members held similar values or practices, providing ideas and inspiration as well as resources. Those who did not have the support of their family negotiated differences in values by avoiding interactions with them, not talking about topics related to buying less and making compromises on practices such as gift giving.

Having children presented particular challenges to buying less. For some it is an inspiration and support to their buying less practices, while it was a large barrier for others. As seen in the research done by the likes of Schor (2004), interview participants often reported that their children's social environments were particularly focused on consumption and consumer culture. Parents and their children developed different means of dealing with the pressures to consume. A portion report caving in to social pressure either to fit in with others or because they lack time and energy to make different choices. Others let their children make their own choices related to consumption. On the other hand, some parents and children resisted consumption oriented lifestyles and behaviors through the establishing of alternative practices or by finding means to negotiate social interactions steeped in consumer culture with minimal participation in consuming, such as by lying about seeing a particular television show.

Like family, supportive friends were a vital means of sustaining buying less practices for interview participants. For instance, quality time with friends replaced spending time engaging in consumption. Friendships that were not supportive were a particular sore spot from some interview participants. While a few developed new friendships which supported their buying less values, others enacted conflict-reducing practices in order to negotiate social interactions with their friends. Making compromises, not talking about their values and practices, or reducing the amount of time they spent with their friends was a source of strain, anger, and feelings of social isolation.

Not surprisingly, for the segment of interview respondents who had roommates, it was helpful to have roommates who were on board with household practices related to buying less. Communal housing settings could be supportive of buying less practices through the sharing of resources but the few interview respondents who lived in communal environments also had to deal with conflict over establishing and maintaining household practices among a larger group of individuals.

Examining buying less as it occurs in New York City, interview participants felt that it could both be a very supportive and unsupportive environment. There is pressure to buy more because of the large proportion of space delegated to consuming goods and services. In addition, interview participants report a general culture of consumerism that they feel living in New York City which puts pressure to fit in upon the individual. However, it is also a place of diversity, with many different people doing different things where one does not have to fit one particular mold. The impact of living in New York City was very noticeable when interview participants talked about the support they received from their participants in local social groups, organizations and communities. They reported having resources available to buy "differently"

and buy less, turning to spaces such as green markets, food coops, free meets, swaps, as well as alternative groups such as anarchist collectives and alternative currency exchanges. These communities were also a source of social support by providing an alternative common language to communicate ideas and values. However, not all interview participants were comfortable or felt like they fit into the social groups or communities which support voluntarily buying less.

Little research has been done when it comes to work settings and buying less. Interview participants' choice of employment influenced how much pressure they felt to maintain social norms and communicating status through purchasing of goods such as clothing and technology. Overall, those who work in more traditional, corporate work environments, as well as those based in consumer culture, such as the fashion industry, felt more pressure. Those working in less corporate environments, such as non-profits or who were self-employed, felt more supported to bring some of their personal values and practices into the work environment.

Chapter 6: Impacting others by voluntarily buying less

The previous three chapters focused on social aspects related to initiating and engaging in voluntarily reduced consumption activity. This last chapter of results reports on how interview participants think they are influencing others. Examining how individuals may create change in their social environment, interview participants were asked about how they felt their voluntarily reduced consumption activity may have impacted the lives of those around them. They were also asked how they feel their activity may or may not influence the world more globally, thereby addressing how their choices may be altruistically motivated to make a difference in the world.

Influencing other individuals

Many participants felt that they are able to influence others to buy less through leading by example and by sharing information either formally, such as through teaching, or informally, through conversations with others. However, quite a few also stated that they did not want to push their views on others. Carolyn explains her strategy to determine who she talks with about her values, which clearly depends upon who it is, their values and their relationship to her, as well as holding to her philosophy to not impose upon others,

> Right. I think uh -- okay, as far as family, I -- the -- the family that I am close with and ec -- and really have a personal relationship with, I'm glad to talk about it with. The family that I don't, I'm not like -- like I said, I've always made a concerted effort to not be an imposing type. To make my own decisions and expect people to respect them, but also respect other people for their -- you know, return the favor. Umm, and so, I don't think -- some of my family, I don't think that I will like, convert, nor would I really want to. And so, I just -- it doesn't come up, because we don't have a real personal relationship. So, uh, I don't care about talking to them about it. As far as friends, umm, there are certain friends that, whether or not they like, respect me matters a lot. And so, for those people, if they don't choose the same lifestyle I do, I still want to make them understand my choices and respect them. (Mm-hmm) Uh, and uh, some people like, employers or coworkers that may have some power over my well-being, if I don't think that they -- if I think that it will be any kind of like, conflict or argument, I won't -- I don't want to bring it up, because there's no point. Could only end badly for me.

> (Okay) Umm, so I guess the biggest thing is that, since I'm not really necessarily trying to uh, impose, I don't talk about it so much with people who I don't think already agree at least a little bit or like, are interested in learning more about it. (Mm-hmm) You know, if people ask me, I'm glad to talk about it, though.

Carolyn has seen some of her friends who did not like her ideas originally come around because they have been broke as a result of the recession and need help getting food. She has shown some of them how to dumpster dive. One in particular was initially adverse to it but was able to do it because she trusted Carolyn so much. Carolyn has also tried to pass on acceptance of dumpstered food and goods to her new roommates.

> Umm, so yeah, surrounding myself by people doing the same thing has made a huge difference. (Mm-hmm) Umm, and also, uh, the desire to help provide for my community and roommates umm, uh, without buying things to -- to sort of be an example. To show, like, oh, look, this is possible. You can do it, too. Umm, I'm -- I'm often bringing home food, uh, that e -- everywhere I live, I always have some way to mark like, this is communal food. Please eat it. And uh, because a lot of people are freaked out by the idea of dumpster di -- dumpster diving and salvaging. And umm, I sort of want to prove to people, you know, look, you don't have to do this thing, but you also don't have to be disgusted by it. Look at this great food that I'm bringing home uh, and you're enjoying. And guess where it came from.

Laura also reports influenced her roommates through her environmental practices in her communal home.

At work, Gloria and Barbara have actively shaped their environments. Barbara has been able to influence her workplace towards using local food in their services. The non-profit Gloria started serves to provide information and resources to people in the local community, much of which focuses on environmental and social justice related issues. David feels that he can influence others through the material he presents in the courses he teaches, and in that way can hopefully make a difference in how people understand and view environmental issues. Evelyn also feels that she can influence others through her work with middle and high school students.

Like Evelyn**,** a few other participants also worked with children through their jobs or volunteer work. These individuals often felt that children are more open to learning different values and practices because they are younger. While Dorothy does not try to push her ideas on others, she does try to be a counter example through her own actions, in particular when it comes to her nephew. Similarly, Evelyn works with middle school and high school kids because she feels that she can be a role model for them and teach them to act sustainably. However, while she works with college aged students, she feels that are not as receptive to new ideas.

Creating change in the system

A majority of the interview participants expressed the view that even though they felt others should buy less, one's consumption is a personal choice and that buying less is not something that should be forced on others. Only a handful reported actively engaging in political activism related to buying less. Bruce has been very active environmental community organizations and events, even helping to organize conferences, workshops and events. Laura is engaged politically in a variety of causes which are generally related to her values which motivate her to buy less, such as caring for the environment and social justice issues. Jack says that he does advocate for certain politicians and policies that support his values. Though Carolyn participates in multiple social and political groups who have activities related to buying less, she says she tries not to push her values on other people because it goes against her anarchist ideas of imposing on people's free will. When survey participants were asked how often they engage in political activism (including: boycotting, letter writing, phone calling, participating in politically active groups, or protesting) 18.8% said never, 21.6% said rarely, 28.8% said sometimes, 21.9% said often, and only 8.8% said always.

As can be seen in Tables 2 and 3, the majority of survey respondents did not talk to strangers, local business owners or managers, community leaders, or politicians about voluntarily buying less. In addition, when it came to ratings of support from these groups of individuals, many survey respondents rated them as either neither supportive or unsupportive or felt their support was "not applicable."

Interview participants were asked a series a questions to uncover how they think buying less influences the way things works more globally, such as impacting the economy, corporations, the environment, or other people's lives. Respondents held a range of beliefs about how much of an influence they had in the larger scheme of things going on in the world. Some do not think that their actions make any difference on a global scale but are choosing to live their values. On the other end of the spectrum, participants expressed the belief that their choice to buy less impacts others and the environment. In between, individuals varied in their potential level of influence, believing that they may make a difference on a local level or may be a drop in the bucket along with others who make similar choices.

No or little impact. Some participants felt that their changes did not make a larger impact beyond their own lives. Interestingly, they had a range of ideas about whom they felt the changes did not have an impact on, from corporations to the economy to the environment. While Laura feels that she is one of the people out there working to change the values of our society, corporations do not even know who she is. Theresa feels that people need to buy things to keep the economy going but she does not feel that the small changes that she and her husband have made make an impact on the bigger picture. James does not feel that his family's changes are making a difference but he does not want to be part of the damage to the environment. He thinks about what he will say to his kids when they are grown up and ask him "what did you do?"

Instead, these participants buy less in order to live their own values or benefit themselves personally. Kim states, “I think I would feel so unhappy if I spent all our money on just taxicabs and going to Bergdorf’s to buy make up from [friend’s name] and going to sporting events. I will feel very unhappy myself because it wouldn’t reflect our values as a family.” Dorothy does not do it “out of any hope of change, I do it because I have to do it. Because it’s, it’s, um, I don’t have to do it, it’s, I choose to do it. I choose to do it for reasons that are important to me. (okay. So it’s living your values) right, much more than it is any delusion that I’m gonna change anything globally or even locally.” However, Dorothy also expresses hope that maybe she is part of a larger movement of people making changes.

Other participants felt that their actions could have an impact when added to what others were doing. Roxanne feels that her choices keep things from getting worse and that the future might be better with her and other people buying less. Gloria and Linda hope that buying less adds to everyone else’s efforts. However, Linda feels even if it did not make a difference, she would still keep doing what she is doing because of her own conscience and values. She feels she is voting with her wallet. Similarly Dan states “it's kind of like I do it for me. If I'm one of many, we're all doing the same practices for different reasons and maybe that'll have some impact.”

Local impact only. A few interview participants felt their impact could be made within their local community. For example, while Carolyn does not think she can make a difference in terms of the economy, corporations, and the overall environmental situation, she may be able to fix things locally by being an example for others, influencing people she comes into contact with, and having an effect on the groups she participates in. She also buys less for her own personal happiness.

Changing the world. Some interview participants did feel that what they were doing was changing how things occurred on a global scale. Like their motivations, they varied in what they feel is impacted and how those objects are influenced by their choices. Tim feels that his actions impact the world and that one can spread great influence by setting an example through one's own personal behaviors. David feels that everyone is interconnected so that what one person does impacts everyone else. Alicia feels she is making a difference by not supporting trends and by buying fair trade. Sue feels that she is making a statement every time she buys something secondhand instead of new. She is doing her part to help the environment and other people and if enough people do it, companies will not produce as much. Gwen's priority in decision-making is the environment. She feels her choices not only affect the world, but are political actions and make a statement that she is not buying into what corporations are telling her. Jack gets personal satisfactions from his actions because he feels they make a difference. While he may not be able to afford to buy more ecologically sound products, he can choose not to buy and therefore not support exploitative companies and also save money.

Bad for the economy. A handful of interview participants showed concern that their personal choices have negative consequences for the economy and other people, such as Olivia who responded to a question asking about how she feels that her choice to buy less make an impact on a more global level:

> I mean, I -- you know, obviously, there is, you know, you choosing -- you kind of feel like you need to participate in the economy to keep everything going. I do feel that if there's a benefit to other people when you spend money, you know. It's not the whole point -- you know, it's necessary actually, you could see the effects of people not shopping. That actually kind of drags everything down, I guess. I don't know -- so there's a weird tension there, like, uh [laughs], spending money actually helps people and something, so you have to think about that too.

Barbara does feel that consumers' choices impact other people globally as well as corporations and the choices corporations make. However, she also feels tension over her choices. She thinks it is a complicated situation when she decides to not buy clothes from China in order to not support an exploitive situation but at the same time this action might mean that people there could lose their job. While Evelyn feels that being wasteful and consumer-oriented is wrong, she worries about what it would mean to transition to a new economy. She worries about how that change would impact people who earn less, whose jobs she feels are based on individuals' consumption.

When it came to influencing others, personally and more globally, through their actions, many hoped that they were setting an example for others to follow. Some took more active routes of influence by sharing information with others but few were politically engaged in trying to make changes in how much is produced and consumed nationally or globally. However, there were mixed results when it came to how much interview participants felt that they were making a differences in areas such as others lives as well as the economy, corporate practices, or the environment. Many felt that individuals' consumption practices were a private matter and it was up to each person to decide what and how much to purchase.

Summary

Individuals are not only shaped by their environment but also play a part in creating the world in which they live. Some felt their voluntarily reduced consumption activity may influence others by setting an example, as well as by sharing information with others through formal and informal means. A few participants reported having taken steps to bring their values and practices into their work environments. However, as noted in previous chapters, some of this sharing of information may be tempered by the practice of limiting talking about voluntarily

buying less to other individuals who participants think share similar attitudes, as well as refraining in order to keep others from feeling judged or as though ideas are being pushed upon them.

Not all participants were motivated by the thought that their voluntarily reduced consumption activity was making an impact on a larger scale. A few even feel that what they are doing may have a negative impact on others. Many interview respondents state that they are living their values, doing what is right for them, or gaining personal satisfaction from their choices. Some wished that what they did was making a difference, but felt little hope that things could change. Only a few interview participants were active on a political level. Among survey respondents, those who had environmental concerns as a main motivator for buying less had higher levels of participating in political activism overall.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Discussion

This dissertation examines the social aspects of initiating and sustaining voluntarily reduced consumption activity by participants living in New York City. Significant findings include the social supports and barriers participants experienced in voluntarily buying less; the practices participants used to overcome those barriers and maintain their activity as they worked toward their objective of buying less; and the value of examining voluntarily reduced consumption activity within its social historical context.

Consumption of goods and services serves an important role in social interactions in U. S. society today. Individuals use goods, such as clothing and technology, to express their personal identities as well as display status and group membership (Crane, 2000; Holt, 1998; Martens et al., 2004; Slater, 1997). Many gift-giving occasions have been commercialized to require the purchase of goods or services for others, such as holidays, birthdays, or weddings (Close & Zinkham, 2009; Lee, Katra, & Bauer, 2009; Mortelmans & Damen, 2001; Schor, 2004). These gift-giving rituals can be a way to express love and affection for others and often has great meaning. Lastly, consumption spaces serve as locations of social interactions and activity with others (Cohen, 2003; Slater, 1997).

With the consuming of goods and services playing such a significant role in social interactions, it is understandable that voluntarily choosing to reduce one's consumption can impact social relationships with others. Those relationships can be a potential barrier to buying less when others do not hold or support the values and practices related to voluntarily buying less. This lack of support can leave individuals who are trying to buy less exhausted, overwhelmed, angry, hurt, or socially isolated. It can even be damaging to interpersonal

relationships as individuals lose common ground for spending time together, expressing their affection for one another, or shared values, interests, and activities. However, social relationships and networks also prove to be a great resource in initiating and sustaining reduced consumption by providing skills, knowledge, and an alternative source of goods. In addition, relationships provide emotional support as well as a sense of identity and belonging.

Participants in this study engaged in a variety of practices in order to maintain social relationships while voluntarily buying less. They compromised with others, finding alternatives or middle ground between what they would prefer and what others wanted. They also avoided engaging in social situations or practices that they did not agree with. Some maintained normal gift-giving traditions in order to not upset others or to not appear cheap. Participants decided how much information to share with others about their values and behaviors, often not sharing when they felt it would avoid unnecessary conflicts. They often went out of their way to make sure others did not feel judged for their own conspicuous consumption of goods. Participants often avoided preaching their values or forcing their opinions on those who would be unreceptive to the idea.

These practices may keep individuals from being socially hindered by buying less. By limiting interactions that may cause conflicts, as well as evaluating how their values and practices compare to the individual they are talking to, their voluntarily reduced consumption does not offend or cause disruptions in their social relationships. It appears that this strategy is particularly effective to keep one's voluntarily reduced consumption activity from impacting one's social status and group membership with acquaintances or within work environments. It also reduces conflict with family members, whom one does not get to choose (compared to one's friends) and with whom one does not always share the same values. However, for some,

particularly the individuals who do not have significant others or close friends with shared values, the side effects of these practices are negative feelings such as anger and social isolation which results from being different from others and not having the social support they would like to have.

Research on conflict, topic avoidance, and privacy management reveal similar findings. Thirty percent of adult children and 38% of their parents surveyed by Clarke and colleagues (1999) report having conflicts about habits and lifestyle choices (Clarke, Preston, Raksin, & Bengston, 1999). In Durham's (2008) study of voluntarily child-free couples, he found that couples strategically concealed or revealed their decision to not have children based on the anticipated reaction of others and the perceived degree of similarity between themselves and the other person(s). In addition, they also took into account the risk of adverse or negative reactions of others (Durham, 2008).

In discussing the results of their study, Clarke and colleagues (1999) had concerns that conflict between adult children and their parents may have a negative impact on relationship quality. Dailey and Palomares (2004) found that avoiding certain topics could impact a relationship positively or negatively depending on the topic, the specific relationship, and the strategy used to avoid talking about a topic. For instance, avoiding the topics of religion and politics with one's significant other was negatively related to relationship satisfaction and high avoidance of discussing money issues with fathers was related to less closeness and satisfaction in the relationship (Dailey and Palomares, 2004).

These research studies indicate that the strategies of avoiding conflict and talking about voluntarily reduced consumption may be similar to other strategies used for dealing with sensitive topics in general. Conflict within families about lifestyle choices is not uncommon. The

use of conflict avoidance practices may impact relationships either positively or negatively depending on the type of relationship and the strategies used to avoid talking about voluntarily buying less.

The participants in this study who are engaging in these practices often assumed the responsibility of reducing the conflict and fitting in – not putting pressure on others to change their traditional consumer values and practices – even though they wanted to set a good example for others to follow. The need to avoid conflict and maintain positive social relationships may put a damper on the dissemination of values and practices related to voluntarily buying less. Multiple respondents pointed out that preaching or judging others did not feel like an effective (or pleasant) way to change other people's minds.

On the other hand, social interactions with others also plays a key role in supporting buying less. Social interaction with others can inspire individuals to start buying less when they are exposed to new values, behaviors, or information. Social relationships can also be a source of skills, resources, and division of labor. For instance, relationships may provide enough security to allow people to try something that they have never done before, such as reclaiming edible food that has been thrown out. In addition, other individuals support buying less by reinforcing behaviors and helping decision-making. Being around others who have similar values is also helpful in normalizing behaviors and cultivating a common language for ideals and practices outside of traditional consumption. Significant others played a large supporting role for a portion of those interviewed and were the highest rated in support on the survey. Family members and friends were also important. Those who did not have supportive friends and family often had to go it alone, having to spend more time and energy to acquire the skills and resources needed to voluntarily buy less than those with a support network.

Drawing from research done on causal relationship between attitude and actual behaviors, DeYoung (1996) notes that it is important to take into account other variables that impact behavior such as past experiences with the behavior, familiarity with the situation, competence in carrying out the behavior, and subjective norms. Researchers should not assume because individuals have a positive attitude towards reducing their consumption that they will necessarily know how to go about reducing their consumption. In addition, when examining individuals who have chosen to reduce their consumption, it is important to see if risk and uncertainty were a concern when individuals adopted new behaviors, and if so, how they overcame these barriers. Barr (2003) found that local, concrete knowledge had more of an impact on recycling and waste minimization behaviors than abstract knowledge of environmental issues. My research results indicate that having a social network provides a resource to pass along concrete skills and knowledge while potentially minimizing risks and the effort needed to try new behaviors.

It may be that social support among those who have similar values does help to create change on a small scale, moving a person a bit further along in their quest to buy less. For instance, a person who is nervous about dumpster diving may have the confidence to do so with a close friend whom they trust and has the previous experience of scavenging for food. Individuals who start by buying local food may move onto composting that they learned from others at the farmer's market and then continue by examining more ways to reduce their production of waste and trash.

In addition to the demographic diversity of respondents, being based in New York City influenced the interview participants' experiences of voluntarily buying less. They talked about the supportive resources available, including the public library systems, public transportation, food coops, green markets, neighborhood-based Community Supported Agriculture programs

(CSAs), community gardens, local parks, museums, and the availability of many free or cheap local activities and events. In addition, there are many sources of used and free goods, such as local postings on Freecycle and Craigslist websites, thrift stores, swaps, free markets, and used bookstores, among others. However, the resources available within individual neighborhoods vary, with lower income neighborhoods often having less available. For some this limitation means extra effort to go outside one's own neighborhood into others to get what one needs.

Living in New York City may also impact social relationships. For instance, a few participants report sharing goods with one's neighbors. However, without having done similar research or a comparative study, it is difficult to draw conclusions about how living in New York City, or an urban area compared to a more rural area, impacts the social aspect of voluntarily reduced consumption activity. It may be that there are less resources available in smaller communities, but greater levels of community sharing, networking, and trust among residents.

Surprisingly, only 28.8% of survey respondents in this study belong to groups or organizations that support buying less. Those who belonged to a supportive group or organization had some significant differences from those who did not. For example, almost seventy percent of those who did belong to a group or organization had developed new relationships with people related to their efforts to buy less compared to only 35.1% of those who were not. This is an important finding for future research on individuals who buy less – it is important to distinguish if one's participants are just being labeled as part of a community based on their values and practices or if they truly are part of an organization or group.

Interestingly, interviews revealed more details about membership in communities related to buying less. For many, the community groups available in New York City which directly supported voluntarily reducing one's consumption was not a comfortable or right fit for them.

Instead, they found support in alternative consumption spaces such as food coops and green markets. Similar to Kozinets and Handelman's (2004) findings observing participants in anti-advertising, anti-Nike, and anti-genetically engineered food activist groups, these spaces help sustain buying less by providing alternative discourses and practices in support of an identity other than a traditional consumer. In addition, like DeYoung's work discusses (1996, 2000) some communities provide access to procedural knowledge and training to enact new behaviors, such as learning to compost.

These findings indicate that spaces that focus mainly on "green," sustainable, ethical or local consumption, such as a farmer's market or food cooperatives, also promote values and behaviors related to buying less. This blurs the distinction between these alternative consumption spaces and nonconsumption activity. These activities appear to interact and support each other. Additionally, the excitement that comes from traditional shopping activity can be channeled into "green" or ethical consumption, shopping for food, or searching for high quality used goods.

Buying organic, eco-friendly, local or fair-trade goods can be more expensive than traditional shopping. Some participants were able only to afford to make these types of purchases because of the monetary savings gained from buying less. However, interviews indicate that participants in green consumption enjoy more than just their purchases. Many interview participants talked about food cooperatives, green markets, community gardens, or CSAs as spaces where they enjoyed a sense of community with others, shared identity, and exchanged information or resources.

Analysis of my survey results indicate that individuals who were motivated to buy less for environmental reasons had higher average levels of social support from acquaintances in their social groups, organizations, or local community, while those whose top motivation was saving

more money had lower average levels. It may be that those who are not participating in ethical or "green" consumption, who focus mainly on thrift and were unwilling to spend the extra money for fair-trade, local or eco-friendly products, may be missing out on community support provided by these unique consumption spaces. Most of the interviewees who prioritized saving money did not talk about having social, community spaces to support their activity. While survey results indicate that those who were motivated by wanting to save more money had higher average ratings of support from family members, interviews did not provide a clear explanation of why this was the case, or if this made up for the lower levels of support from social groups and communities.

Looking across the literature on different alternative communities (Kozinets, 2002; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006), it appears that individuals may be finding the communities that fit them best based on their comfort level and values. Manzo and Weinstein (1987) compared active and non-active members of the Sierra Club environmental organization and found that active members were much more likely to have friends who belonged to the club before they joined and made additional friends once they did join. Families of the active members were also more likely to be involved (Manzo & Weinstein, 1987). Similarly Olli, Grendstad, and Wollebaek also found that active members of environmental organizations had higher levels of resource conservation when compared to non-active members or non-members (Olli et al., 2001). One could conclude that it is important to provide different access points for people who may be at different stages or have different needs for support. However, it is surprising that in a place like New York City, where many interviewees remarked about how you can find a supportive community for almost every interest, that more people did not participate more regularly and that some still felt very socially isolated in their values and

behaviors. More work needs to be done to look at the difference between being a member in a formal community compared to more informal social groups and alternative consumptions spaces in terms of support levels and helping to sustain buying less practices. If more formal groups do provide better support then more research needs to be done on how to overcome barriers to joining.

What is clear from my research results is that participants' location in New York City had a significant impact on the findings, from the demographics of the participants to the resources available to them. While immigration status was not asked about on the survey or in the interview protocol, interview participants revealed that around a third had come from families who immigrated to the U.S. or were immigrants themselves. Among the interviewees, 70.8% identified as White or European American, 16.7% as Black, African-American, or Afro-Caribbean, and 12.5% as Asian, Asian-American, or East Indian. It is likely that recruiting in New York City contributed to this diversity of respondents.

Previous studies of individuals in Voluntary Simplicity circles or those who held voluntary simplicity values in the United States indicate that most, if not all, of their participants are White or Caucasian, though racial or ethnic demographic data is not always reported (Dobsha & Ozanne, 2001; Grigsby, 2004; Huneke, 2005). However, it may also be that there was more diversity in respondents because the study was not focused on participation in the Voluntary Simplicity movement. Even with a diverse group of respondents, interviews did not clearly reveal results indicating how race or ethnicity may play a role in voluntarily reduced consumption activity. It may be that future research could address this question in more detail now that this study has revealed that a more diverse sample of participants is possible in studies of voluntarily reduced consumption.

Additional studies should also examine the importance of immigration experiences in voluntarily reducing one's consumptions. As seen in Chapter 3, interviews did indicate that this played an important role in the values, experiences, and skills of participants. In some cases, children of immigrants had different ideas about the importance or meaning of the "American Dream" of achieving prosperity and success. However, this generalization could not be applied to all children of immigrants since others had families who held strong values of thrift and responsible consumption. Clarity may be achieved if recruitment focused specifically on immigration status and experiences, such as which countries individuals immigrated from, when they immigrated, and the reasons for immigrating to the United States.

Participants in the survey and interview had a wide range of incomes, from earning under $10,000 a year to over $500,000. Sixty percent of survey respondents had a household income above $30,000 a year and 17.2% earned under $29,999 a year[43]. Half of the individuals in the current study also reported having non-voluntary reasons for reducing their consumption in addition to voluntary ones. Among survey respondents, 7.5% report being unemployed not by choice. When it came to education, 68.8% of survey respondents and 79.2% of interview participants had either a Bachelor's or Master's degree. Results indicating higher levels of education among those who voluntarily reduce their consumption are similar to previous findings (Connelly & Porthero, 2008; Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002; Dobsha & Ozanne, 2001; Gould et al., 2004; Grigsby, 2004; Huneke, 2005).

It is difficult to extrapolate the implications of this demographic data for the social aspects of voluntarily reduced consumption activity since many participants did not address these topics directly. As covered in the literature review, some of the practices engaged in by those voluntarily reducing their consumption are also used by individuals who have limited means to

[43] 13.1% preferred to not provide income information.

consume, such as homeless individuals and others surviving on low-incomes, but with a greater stigma attached to the activity (Hill, 2003: Hill & Stamey, 1990; Oliker, 1995). Having a higher level of education may increase the likelihood that one is able to voluntarily engage in reducing how much one buys, instead of being forced to. Individuals with a higher education are likely to have more skills and access to resources which enables them to not only be able to voluntarily buy less but also better able to socially negotiate any stigma that may come from engaging in particular practices, such as salvaging used goods.

Looking outside of friends, family, and social groups, work is an area where some have chosen routes that better support their values while others have continued to fit into a more traditional work setting. For those who do not have a work environment that is helpful to buying less values or practices, some individuals do the minimal needed to fit in with others and try to find ways to cope with the pressure to consume. Others have made it a priority to have work environments and career paths that are more in line with their values, including allowing for a more flexible work schedule, casual dress code, similar ideology, and/or providing helpful resources.

Not all individuals interviewed were motivated by the goal of creating change beyond their own lives by buying less. Instead they gained satisfaction from living their values and reaping the benefits of their behaviors which many found to improve their quality of life. This finding supports DeYoung's (1996) assertion that that environmental behaviors can be driven by intrinsic satisfaction instead of external reward and that it would be helpful to highlight direct personal benefits of pursuing new pro-environment activities.

Others did hope that their choice to buy less was making an impact on a larger scale. However, this hope clashes with individuals' need to minimize social disruptions by not talking

about their values and practices as well as not engaging in more buying less related practices because of the inconvenience it causes. On the other hand, these practices also help to sustain buying less activity. In order to make more of an impact, larger structural issues which make buying less inconvenient would need to be addressed. In addition, social barriers would need to be overcome in order to increase the dialogue about buying less, making it a more socially acceptable practice overall. This may allow for greater skill sharing and access to resources through social networks.

It is unclear if voluntarily reduced consumption activity may be a stepping stone to more politically active behavior. Sandlin (2005) argues that participants in voluntary simplicity are not thinking on a social or economic level when it comes to problematizing the hegemony of consumerism and the naturalization of consumer culture, stating "Although the consumers described here are aware of some of the negative environmental, spiritual, social, and cultural impacts of consumption, the responsibility for these negative impacts is seen in an individualized way, and the necessary changes proposed to remedy this situation are seen to be located in the individual."

My findings indicate that the social aspects of buying less may serve as a barrier to not only voluntarily reducing one's consumption but also to engaging in politically focused activity. Many interview participants already adopted practices to avoid social conflict that arose in relation to voluntarily buying less. It is likely that the activity resulting in creating change on a more global scale would require dealing with even more conflicts and would require sharing one's values and opinions with those who may not agree with them. Dislike for this kind of upheaval as well as feeling one should not force one's opinions onto others may be one reason

people choose to take this more individualistic route of voluntarily buying less as opposed to engaging in creating change on a more community or societal level.

It should be noted that not many of the interview participants felt that their voluntarily reduced consumption was going to cause big changes to the consumption-focused nature of United States society or the capitalist market system. Creating that change was not often the most important goal or motivation for reducing their consumption. For some participants, it was not always obvious how their activity specifically connected back to some larger, external motivating issues, such as concern for the environment[44]. Interview participants were usually "living their values" or doing what they felt was right. They were not trying to force the same lifestyle on others.

However, a small portion of participants were more engaged in creating change, through their work or activism. For these individuals, voluntarily reduced consumption activity was only one of the ways they were working to create change in their lives, the lives of others, or to address larger, global problems. Some of these interview participants seemed more comfortable with interacting with others who held different values or they had found ways to deal with the conflict that could arise related to their values and activities. Others who did not have these interpersonal skills still continued with their activity and had to deal with social isolation and anger that could result from living their values.

Limitations & Future research

In interpreting the results of this research study, there are some limitations that should be noted. Resource constraints impacted the study in several ways. First, the impact of context on

[44] However, personal, internal motivating factors did have more obvious results, such as saving more money and reducing clutter. With individuals holding more than one motivation for buying less, the internal and external motivations were often combined. Further research could determine how having a combination of internal and external motivations for voluntarily buying less impacts the activity.

the findings may have been better demonstrated if there had been the resources available to collect data in other locations as comparisons. Second, the survey data was a convenience sample because of restricted resources and the small population size of individuals who have chosen to voluntarily reduce their consumption. Third, I did not include a comparison group of individuals who may have similar backgrounds and experiences but did not choose to voluntarily buy less. These limitations make it difficult to generalize the results of the study.

In addition, the survey items were not able to be cognitively tested to reduce potential errors caused by problems with comprehension of the questions, retrieval from memory of the relevant information, survey respondents' decision processes, and usability of the available response options (Willis, 1999). This is a particular concern for the issue that came to light during the interview in regards to the differences between buying less practices and the related practices involving acquiring used instead of new goods. There may have been some impact on the interpretability of the survey results since many of the questions on the survey did not distinguish between buying less and buying less related practices, such as acquiring used goods. When looking at the list of barriers, not having the skills to make, grow, fix, or reuse things instead of buying new and not having access to high quality used goods which are as good as buying something new are the two highest rated barriers on average.

Individuals who chose to participate in the follow-up interview were not compensated in any way. Therefore, they may have been motivated to participate because they do not have other individuals in their daily life to talk to about voluntarily buying less, thereby over-representing the social isolation that may result from voluntarily choosing to buy less. However, a large portion of interview participants did say that they felt their voluntarily reduced consumption activity was supported by at least one other person in their lives.

Since there was not a lot of previous work done on the social aspects of voluntarily reduced consumption activity, the research design was broadly focused on a lot of different topics instead of concentrating on a small number of topics to delve into deeply. This exploratory design was useful to capture the social aspects of voluntarily reduced consumption activity across many different social environments and interactions. Future research which focuses more narrowly on specific relationships or social environments may add depth to the understanding on this topic. For example, more research needs to be done on the key role that significant others play in supporting buying less, as well as the impact of having children on one's buying less activity. In addition, future work being done may want to take a more focused and structured approach examining the impact of having different resources available across different communities, neighborhoods, or even countries, while also taking into account the variety of social support available.

Future work may also want to address the contradictions that arose in discussion of individuals' values and actions related to consumption and changing the level of consumption on a societal scale. Consumption was often expressed a being a personal choice, not to be regulated by others. It can be difficult to address these contradictions in one-on-one interviews, which may place the interviewer at odds with the participant. Therefore, it may be better served to address this topic with a focus group setting.

Much of the research that has been done on individuals who have voluntarily reduced their consumption has been done through interviews and survey questionnaires. A few, such as Grigsby (2004) and Kozinets and Handelman (2004), have done observation of group meetings while Hollenbeck and Zinkham (2006) conducted a two-year analysis of three large online communities. The lack of direct observation of reduced consumption activity is a limitation for

the current state of the research. One of the likely reasons this methodological approach has not been used is the difficult nature of capturing voluntary reduced consumption as it happens. One could observe routine shopping, such as at a grocery store or shopping center. However, much of the process is done mentally, such as the decision-making process of asking oneself questions regarding whether a purchase is truly needed or if there is an alternative option to buying something new. To account for this problem, researchers could observe when shopping is done with someone else, for instance observing a couple shopping together, thereby capturing the social aspects of the decision-making process. Researchers could also have an individual take part in a think-out loud exercise to verbalize decision-making during routine shopping activity, but this may interfere with the normal process and make the participant more aware of their decision-making.

Beyond observing shopping activity, longer periods of observation would be required in order to capture what happens in the home that enables individuals to not partake in shopping. Some practices are likely to be more routine, day-to-day happenings, such as using less of a product to make it last longer. Others may only arise when the occasion calls for it, for instance making a repair on an object when it breaks or sharing of goods between individuals. Possible options besides direct observation may be to have participants create a journal or daily diaries of their actions.

Some social interactions related to buying less may be more easily observed than others. As described above, routine shopping trips would be a predictable time to view interactions and decision-making between individuals. My research findings indicate that there are also other opportunities to see social interactions related to buying less, such as teaching a friend to

dumpster dive or salvage food; discussing household protocol among roommates or people living in a cooperative house; or locating used or second-hand goods from one's social network.

As described in my research findings, individuals feel social pressure to consume or fit in with consumer culture when interacting with others. The timing of observing this phenomenon would be unpredictable and it may be difficult to discern when individuals are feeling social pressure. A possible solution would be recording interactions, particularly when someone is spending time with friends or family who hold different values, followed by a review of the recording by the research participants in order to gain their insight into the interaction.

Greater understanding needs to be gained about why individuals may not participate in social groups or communities related to buying less, particularly since they can play such an important supporting role to voluntarily reduced consumption activity. Previous research that has examined membership behavior for participants in groups (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004) and Grigsby (2004) has indicated that some women may leave a voluntary simplicity group if it is being dominated by males. However, little has been done on individuals who may be interested in social groups related to voluntarily buying less but either do not attempt to join or attempt to join to find it does not suit them. My research indicates that individuals may not be able to find a social group that they feel comfortable with or where they feel that they identify with other members of the group. Overall, there was not enough data to make a strong statement on what was happening. Future research may want to focus more on the differences between individuals who voluntarily reduce their consumption and belong to groups who support the activity compared to those who do not.

There has been difficulty comparing the results of different research studies done on individuals who have voluntarily chosen to buy less because of the variety of methods used and

the means by which the population has been defined. In addition, the research on this topic covers a broad range of academic fields, such as psychology, sociology, economics, and marketing. Effort to do work across disciplines in a more coordinated way may prove to be beneficial.

Lastly, circumstances surrounding voluntarily buying less are constantly changing. Current examples include the Occupy Wall Street movement, the ongoing economic troubles, and businesses (such as Patagonia's common threads campaign[45]) choosing to promote buying less. These historical changes are just a few instances which demonstrate why it is essential that research continues to take into account the socio-historical context of individuals who are voluntarily choosing to buy less.

[45] http://www.patagonia.com/us/common-threads/# Last accessed March 4, 2012.

Appendix I: Survey and Interview Participants Descriptives

Table 4: Survey and Interview Participants Descriptives

	Survey N	Survey %	Interview N	Interview %
When did you start buying less?				
Less than a month ago	1	.3	0	0
1 to 3 months ago	10	3.1	1	4.2
3 to 6 months ago	18	5.6	0	0
6 to 12 months ago	29	9.1	1	4.2
1 to 3 years ago	117	36.6	8	33.3
3 to 5 years ago	44	13.8	4	16.7
5 to 10 years ago	52	16.3	4	16.7
10 to 20 years ago	25	7.8	3	12.5
over 20 years ago	24	7.5	3	12.5
Missing	0	0	0	0
Have you undergone a lifestyle change that resulted in buying less – but was not of your own choosing?				
No	169	52.8	11	45.8
Yes	148	46.3	13	54.2
Missing	3	.9	0	0
Age				
18 to 24	37	11.6	2	8.3
25 to 29	60	18.8	5	20.8
30 to 34	57	17.8	2	8.3
35 to 39	38	11.9	3	12.5
40 to 44	28	8.8	7	29.2
45 to 49	22	6.9	1	4.2
50 to 54	22	6.9	1	4.2
55 to 59	12	3.8	1	4.2
60 to 64	5	1.6	0	0
65 to 69	3	.9	1	4.2
70 to 74	3	.9	0	0
Missing	33	10.3	1	4.2
Gender				
Prefer not to answer	5	1.6	0	0
Female	205	64.1	16	66.7
Male	81	25.3	8	33.3
Other	4	1.3	0	0
Missing	25	7.8	0	0

Table 4: Survey and Interview Participants Descriptives Con't

	Survey N	Survey %	Interview N	Interview %
Race / Ethnicity				
Prefer not to answer	14	4.4	0	0
Asian / Asian American / East Indian	23	7.2	3	12.5
Black / African American / Afro-Caribbean	14	4.4	4	16.7
Hawaiian / Pacific islander	1	.3	0	0
Latina/o / Mestizo/a / Hispanic	21	6.6	0	0
Middle Eastern / Arab / Persian	3	.9	0	0
Mixed Race / Multiracial / Biracial	11	3.4	0	0
Native American / Indigenous / Indian / First Nation / Alaska Native	5	1.6	0	0
White / European American	228	71.3	17	70.8
Other	10	3.4	1	4.2
Missing	24	7.5	0	0
What is your yearly household income?				
Prefer not to answer	42	13.1	3	12.5
Under 10,000	13	4.1	1	4.2
10,000 to 19,999	19	5.9	4	16.7
20,000 to 29,999	23	7.2	1	4.2
30,000 to 39,999	24	7.5	4	16.7
40,000 to 49,999	29	9.1	0	0
50,000 to 74,999	55	17.2	3	12.5
75,000 to 99,999	27	8.4	5	20.8
100,000 to 149,999	24	7.5	0	0
150,000 to 199,999	20	6.3	0	0
200,000 to 249,999	9	2.8	0	0
250,000 to 499,999	3	.9	1	4.2
above 500,000	1	.3	1	4.2
Missing	31	9.7	1	4.2
Number of adults in household				
1	75	23.4	7	29.2
2	156	48.8	9	37.5
3	39	12.2	4	16.7
4	11	3.4	2	8.3
5	2	.6	0	0
6	4	1.3	1	4.2
7	2	.6	1	4.2
16	1	.3	0	0
Missing	30	9.4	0	0

Table 4: Survey and Interview Participants Descriptives Con't

	Survey N	Survey %	Interview N	Interview %
Number of children in household				
0	254	79.4	18	75.0
1	20	6.3	3	12.5
2	12	3.8	1	4.2
3	4	1.3	2	8.3
Missing	30	9.4	0	0
Education				
Prefer not to answer	3	.9	0	0
High school or GED	5	1.6	1	4.2
Vocational/Tech school	2	.6	1	4.2
Some college	25	7.8	0	0
Two-year / Associates degree	6	1.9	0	0
Bachelor's degree	128	40.0	10	41.7
Master's degree	92	28.8	9	37.5
Professional degree (JD, MD, MSW)	18	5.6	2	8.3
Doctoral degree (Ph.D.)	14	4.4	0	0
Missing	27	8.4	1	4.2
Employment				
Employed, full time	130	40.6	8	33.3
Employed, part time	67	20.9	7	29.2
Student, full time	48	15.0	2	8.3
Student, part time	19	5.9	1	4.2
Self employed	54	16.9	9	37.5
Not employed, by choice	19	5.9	1	4.2
Not employed, not by choice	24	7.5	2	8.3
Missing	24	7.5	0	0
Relationship status				
Prefer not to answer	6	1.9	0	0
Single	112	35.0	7	29.2
Cohabitating with partner	62	19.4	5	20.8
Married	77	24.1	7	29.2
Separated	2	.6	1	4.2
Divorced	12	3.8	2	8.3
Widowed	4	1.3	1	4.2
Other	16	5.0		
Missing	29	9.1	1	4.2

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