

School of Psychology and Speech Pathology

A Qualitative Deconstruction of Consumerism: The Case of Lost Community

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of
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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Human Ethics (For projects involving human participants/tissue, etc) The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated March 2014. The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262), Approval Number PSYCH & SP 1013-62

Signature:

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Dedication

To my children, and my children's children.

In a world increasingly driven by profit and market forces, may you champion what matters most.

Love, Equality, and Justice for each person and the Earth.

And to current generations.

May we be bold enough to rise above our denials and insecurities, seize responsibility, and embrace the story we want to impart in future generations.

Abstract

The devastating impact of Western consumerist lifestyles on the environment has been extensively recognised in literature. Yet even with this knowledge, interventions developed to mitigate these impacts are insufficient as they have arisen from individualistic understandings of the issue. They support first order change; change encouraging an adjustment in consumption choice but inherently supporting the ideology of consumerism. Scholars argue that lasting mitigation requires deeper and broader shifts in the way society conceptualises the world. To achieve this, however, necessitates the exploration of underlying psychosocial processes embedded in consumerist behaviours and attitudes. Thus the aim of this research was to deconstruct the worldviews, ideologies, and shared narratives of consumerism in dominant Western consumer society in Australia. Twenty eight adult informants participated in semi-structured individual interviews. The discourse generated from these encounters was analysed using Causal Layered Analysis within a contextualist paradigm, revealing increasingly deeper perspectives on the issue of consumerism within this social context. The worldviews, myths, and metaphor emerging from this analysis reflected a complex and deep-seated tension between individualistic conceptualisations of *being*, and the profound desire for meaningful human connection and community. It was found that this tension may not only underlie overconsumption in dominant Western cultures, but has important implications for sustainability and environmental policy. The implications this tension poses for social transformation is considered in terms of collective metaphor and critical reflection in the governance of consumption and environmental issues.

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Prologue

Dawning on awareness

As I started to ponder the issues of consumerism, my thinking was influenced not only by what I was reading, but also by reflecting on my own consumption. However, there was one event that clearly made me think about my relation to and embeddedness in the topic. It occurred when I was conducting an interview with a member of a community garden. I disclosed I was wanting to procure a pair of 'Made in England' Dr. Martens; a pair of boots that represent punk, grunge, Indie, and urban twenty-something culture. I shared my trouble in justifying such a purchase and the inner conflict I was experiencing as to whether I should or should not buy them. My participant, who identified as belonging to a minority racial and ethnic group, looked at me carefully and said "You know that is privilege right? The very fact that you have a choice as to whether you do and do not buy them reflects your privilege". His comment very quickly made me realise my social position; as a middle class young Caucasian woman I have freedoms and choices available to me that a very great percentage of the world's population do not¹. It became apparent to me that having the option of engaging in internal and external dialogue concerning consumption choices, is a privilege, as much or more so than actively consuming. What's more, I was completely oblivious to my social position and the advantages it provided me. R. Wilkinson and Pickett (2014, p. 14) argue that "consumerism is not a reflection of a basic acquisitive human nature...it is a marker of the dysfunctional power of status". In this sense, due to my position of privilege, I am, and was in that instance, able to join in status competition. My privilege enables me to explore my identity materialistically, and pursue my desired aspirations.

This experience allowed me to begin to conduct this study using what Bennett et al. (1966) referred to as "participant conceptualiser"; a research and activist position in which the role

¹ I am a white, Caucasian, cisgender woman who was raised in a middle class family and has had access to primary, secondary, and tertiary education within my country of birth (Australia). My parents and grandparents were all born in Australia, and have British and German heritage. I have had access to Government support payments and scholarships for my schooling and free medical care. I have had many employment opportunities which have provided me a wage enough for savings and purchasing beyond my basic need. Furthermore, I have to my knowledge not been a target of racism or prejudice. These are just some examples of my privilege.

involves recognising that we need to be participants in the domain of study, critical analysts, and conceptualisers. This conceptualiser role involves reflective theory building and testing. More importantly, the researchers' role is both inside and outside the research; they are participants as well as observers (Bishop, 2007). Reflection becomes very important, as the researcher needs to be aware of what is occurring around them, and also within them.

This personal account also stands as a parable of sorts, reflecting some of the very tensions embedded in literature and common understandings of consumerism, consumer behaviour, and sustainable consumption. More explicitly, it is apparent in the above excerpt that the issue of consumerism is embedded within a profound and complex system of culture and social construction, which includes social processes related to power and privilege. However, the generally accepted explanations for, and perceptions of consumerism, fail to recognise such complexity. Research in the area of consumerism has typically only explored individual, immediate group, or surface level explanations for this phenomenon, such as the particular preferences, motivations, and choices of consumers, whether they be ethically driven (Sekerka, McCabe, & Bagozzi, 2014), triggered by certain environmental cues (Bauer, Wilkie, Kim, & Bodenhausen, 2012), personality traits (Hirsh & Dolderman, 2007), or personal values (Kasser & Ryan, 1996), or inspired by the desire for individual or group identity expression (Milner, 2016; Soron, 2010). In light of the framing of questions posed in previous research, it could be assumed researchers would be interested in why the Dr Martens would be or would not be purchased. They might explore the subculture I would be trying to identify with (Davies, 2016), the image I would be trying to reflect (Claiborne & Sirgy, 2015), or the influence of self-control and personal willpower on my decision (Dewitte, 2013; Haws, Bearden, & Nenkov, 2012). Furthermore, in exploring these ideas, researchers would likely ask me to complete a scale or survey, or a task in an environmentally controlled setting. I argue these positivistic forms of testing and analysis appear to only produce surface level explanations, and as such, they fail to acknowledge the social structures, ideological frameworks, and deeper meanings that lie beneath my very ability to even consider purchasing a pair of boots. Exploring these underlying social dynamics instead, requires deeper forms of analysis, ones that are more concerned with exploring complexity. The parable then, not only reflects differences conceptualising

consumerism, it also appears as a metaphor for analytic process, reflecting the distinction between surface and deeper forms of analysis.

In exploring depth in conceptualisation and analysis, Sarason (1984) described the deeper structures, frameworks, and meanings that underpin social issues as the 'obvious', as worldviews and myths that are so embedded within our socialisation and *being* in the world that they appear as transparent and obviously true. However, despite the obviousness of these axioms, their transparency means that more often than not, they remain unarticulated, unexamined, and unchallenged (Sarason, 1984). Indeed, such ignorance is evident not only in my own blindness towards my privilege, but in the prevailing understandings of consumerism reflected in research, which have subsequently lead to arguably inadequate efforts to mitigate the negative outcomes of overconsumption (Akenji, 2012; Bishop & Dzidic, 2014). My experience also reflects the power of taking an alternative perspective. My participant's comment forced me to see consumerism from a different view; his view. By doing so, I realised that discussing consumption from my experience, as a matter of what I do purchase and do not purchase was superficial and limited. I was focusing on the issues *in* consumerism, rather than the issue *of* consumerism. Acknowledging an alternative perspective created space for the 'obvious' in my *being* in the world to become visible, and allowed me to perceive the sociostructural and cultural dynamics embedded within consumption.

Addressing the undesirable implications of consumerism therefore requires the obvious unexamined and often disregarded truths to be taken seriously (Sarason, 1982); I argue this requires the worldviews, myths, and frameworks that support and drive overconsumption, to be amply deconstructed, recognised, and challenged. The intention of this research project then, was to take the obvious seriously, to question the premise on which my own thoughts and the thoughts of those in my broader culture are based². As Sarason (1984) writes:

² The broader culture I refer to here is Western Culture. According to Spielvogel (2010) Western civilisation originated primarily in Europe and is believed to have been shaped by Christianity, the political and intellectual achievements of ancient Rome and Greece, colonisation, and the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century. As such, it is uniquely characterised by political liberty and democracy, individual rights and freedoms, and rational, logical, scientific, and analytical thought.

...an essential prerequisite to beginning the process of articulating any aspect of our world view: the conclusion that something is wrong somewhere, something in our thinking and actions, something in our belief system that simply has not and will not work. And part of this conclusion is that whatever may be wrong in your thinking is also wrong in that of others. (p. 477)

My intention was to problematise the behaviour of the dominant Western consumerist culture to which I belong. It was also to investigate the issue from a perspective not bound up in social and economic structure, and to explore in depth, and make sense of, the stories of others; as individuals are reflective of broader social dynamics (Sarason, 1982). Taking the obvious seriously means to step back, and look at *why* it is the dominant Western culture I am embedded within consumes like it does. To engage with the ideological frameworks and narratives that we, as researchers, are often unconscious or cynical of. Together, the four main objectives of this study were:

1. To explore how dominant Western society within an Australian context conceptualise their consumption practices;
2. To explore obstacles to sustainable consumption;
3. To explore the macro structures that legitimise and support current consumption levels; and,
4. To provide recommendation that has capacity to inform policy for transformative and long-lasting sustainable futures by placing consumerism within a contextualist paradigm.

In meeting these objectives, this thesis has been organised into five chapters. In Chapter One: Conceptualising Consumerism, the rationale for this research is presented. This includes a detailed discussion on the troubling environmental implications of overconsumption, the limitations of present efforts to mitigate these implications, and the necessity for an expanded understanding of the factors driving consumption practices. Within this chapter, the fundamental complexity theorised by scholars to underpin Western consumerism is also explored. This complexity concerns the historical and socio-structural contexts that are posited to have shaped the various cultural ideas and ideologies underlying consumerist behaviour. These are discussed as they relate to psychological theory and research, and form the foundation on which a more contextualised conceptualisation of consumerism can be envisioned (Stråth, 2006).

Endeavouring to explore the 'obvious' yet paradoxically complex qualities of consumerism means this study needed to be supported within a research paradigm that is sympathetic to depth and complexity. As such, the Ontology, Epistemology, Research Question, Methodology, and Methods underpinning this study are considered in Chapter Two. Here, the traditional ideas of researcher and 'scientist' are examined and challenged as the roles of *iterative-reflective-generative practitioner* (Newbrough, 1992; Dokecki, 1992) and *participant-conceptualiser* (Bennett et al., 1966) are explored within a community psychology framework. Here also the ontological and epistemological foundations of this position are extensively contemplated, the limitations of previous research embedded within positivistic frameworks are discussed, and the significance and appropriateness of engaging social phenomena within a contextualist epistemology considered. Contextualism marries well with the intentions of this study; it is an epistemology that acknowledges the significance of ideological, political, and social worldviews in everyday human activities (Dokecki, 1992), framing research in a way that moves understanding beyond surface level explanations to deeper and complex levels of conceptualisation (Bishop, Dzidic, & Breen, 2013). Following on, the methodology of causal layered analysis (CLA) is outlined. This methodology aligns well with contextualist inquiry as it provides an interpretive framework in which discursive data can be deconstructed into increasingly deeper layers of understanding (Bishop & Dzidic, 2014). The specific procedures relating to this method of analysis are described, along with the research process and the relevant ethical considerations.

The findings of the causal layered analysis on interview data are presented in Chapter Three. These findings are structured according to the layers of CLA, with each layer being explored in depth. This structure allows for the complexities, tensions, and paradoxes within the stories of community members to become visible. The fundamental narrative arising from these complexities is presented in Chapter Four: Interpretation and integration. In this chapter is a consolidated interpretation of how the issue of dominant Western cultural consumerism in Australia manifested in the various layers of analysis, which is then discussed with relevant research and theory to reveal what this means for an overall understanding of consumer behaviour and sustainability.

Finally, in Chapter Five, the transformational learning experiences encountered in the process of this research project are described. What these experiences mean for lasting social transformation, and what the methods that facilitated such learning could offer political processes related to governance and policy development are discussed. Chapters Four and Five highlight the fundamental power of cultural narrative in both positive and negative social and environmental outcomes, and the profound importance of thinking about the 'obvious' critically.

Chapter 1 Conceptualising Consumerism: Consequences, History, and Community

“It is a stark and arresting fact that, since the middle of the 20th century, humankind has consumed more natural resources than in all previous human history.” - Margaret Beckett, launching the UK Sustainable Development Strategy, March 2005

1.1 Introduction to Patterns of Consumption

The Industrial Revolution and expanding internationalised commerce from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century thrust consumption into its modern form (Slater, 1997). Streamlined manufacturing methods enabled large volumes of standardised, low cost commodities to flood an increasingly wide market of consumers at regional, national, and global levels. It spawned an evolution in communication, transportation, and retail infrastructure, and marketing through branding, packaging, and advertising (Slater, 1997), which subsequently created unprecedented economic growth and arguably improved the living standards of the masses (Lucas, 2002). However ongoing growing global industrial output is threatening the reserves of the Earth’s finite raw materials and is causing immense environmental degradation, as well as economic instability, political inertia and corruption, social inequality and injustices, and existential crisis (Bina & Vaz, 2011; Gidley, 2005). It is becoming increasingly acknowledged in the literature and public domain that current levels of consumption, which is defined by Alcott (2008) as *using up* rather than just *using*, are both unsustainable and wasteful (Hamilton, Denniss, & Baker, 2005).

Indeed, as a result of social trends, and manufacturing and technological advances, functional items with ample residual life are continually being outmoded, replaced, and thrown away (Hamilton et al., 2005). Furthermore, it has been argued that the saturation of commodities in the market place has resulted in an unfavourable regard for durability among producers who could boost replacement sales through planned obsolescence or by budget, cheaply produced, low quality products which lack the potential for repair (Cooper, 2010). The management of tens of millions of tonnes of wastes created from consumption

through the principle use of landfill (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012) expels pollutants into the atmosphere, waterways, and surrounding land (Jones, Williamson, & Owen, 2006), which has devastating consequences for both environmental and human well-being (Foo & Hameed, 2009). Even more concerning are the latest Australian statistics which reveal a 145% increase in gross waste produced in the 15 years leading up to 2012, despite only a 22% increase in population (Pink, 2013). People it appears, are individually generating increasing quantities of waste as time progresses. It is thus crucial to understand what factors drive people to excessive and unsustainable consumption.

Endeavouring to explain why Western society consume as it does, scholars maintain that consumerism is supported through consumer identity and the desirable ideologies it promotes (Slater, 1997), and the embedded societal values associated with economic progress and productivity (Hamilton, 2003), which create the belief that well-being is coupled with increasing material consumption (Bina & Vaz, 2011). It is also believed that consumerism is driven by modernistic ideologies (van Egmond & de Vries, 2011) that are a reflection of societal worldviews and values, which are then perpetuated and strengthened by the market and policy (Sanne, 2002). It is with these understandings and the sheer magnitude of consumption consequences, that scholars argue attempts to change consumerist behaviours on an individual level with the goal to promote more sustainable actions, such as changing to more energy efficient light bulbs, will not be successful or adequate in addressing a future of environmental challenges (Thøgersen & Crompton, 2009). Indeed, such an individualistic conceptualisation of human nature and change, fails to acknowledge the socio-structural and cultural contexts in which individuals are embedded (Uzzell & Rätzzel, 2009). There is therefore the need to understand why individuals strive to meet the ideologies of the system, to recognise the deeply held internal values and worldviews that support unsustainable progress and consumption (Kasser, 2011), and to explore how this grand design plays out in their lives. Thus this research sought to provide insight into the social and ideological structures underlying the dominant Western culture of consumerism, particularly that within Australia.

The intention of this chapter is to build the rationale for this thesis, and lay the groundwork for conceptualising consumerism in dominant Western culture. First the concept of consumerism will be defined, and followed by a detailed description of the environmental

implications of current Western consumption practices. The limitations of proposed interventions to mitigate these environmental consequences will then be discussed, which will build the justification for a more contextualised understanding of consumerism in sustainability policy. In an attempt to provide some context, the historical processes contributing to consumer culture will be explored as they emerge in theory. This will be followed by a discussion concerning the social structural changes and ideological shifts that are theorised to underpin, perpetuate, and support dominant Western consumerism.

1.2 Defining Consumerism

Consumerism is a complex set of economic, social, and cultural practices characterised by the independent systems of production, monetary exchange, and commercialisation that dominate Western society (Sassatelli, 2007). In its simplest form consumerism is the action that seeks to fulfil one's culturally identified needs (Cleveland & Laroche, 2007) by acquiring and using goods; also known as commodities produced and sold on the market (Sassatelli, 2007). The majority of people however, purchase and consume for psychological and material reasons that are in excess of rational and basic need (Hamilton et al., 2005). Indeed Schwartz (1992) identified what he called *self-enhancement* values that are held by people who desire to accumulate money, status, and possessions as a way to stand out from the crowd. Two of the self-enhancement values he identified were *power*; the aspiration for wealth and resources, and *achievement*; to be successfully and admirably prominent within one's society. Furthermore, similar research with factor analysis has found a cluster of three extrinsic or *materialistic* goals: *financial success*; the acquisition of money and things, *image*; being appealing to others, and *status*; to be admired and popular (Grouzet et al., 2005; Kasser & Ryan, 1996). It appears that in Western culture under the influence of self-enhancement and materialistic desires consumption behaviours have become a fundamental aspect in personal identity formation (Hamilton, 2003) and appear to be used to address extrinsic or materialistic goals. Such research is consistent with Slater's (1997) definition of the culture surrounding consumerism as a "continuous self-creation through the accessibility of things which are themselves presented as new, modish, faddish and fashionable, always improved and improving" (p. 10). In this way modern consumerism becomes voracious in nature, whereby insatiable needs and competition born from

comparisons with others create the social pressure to *have* the fruits of the Earth, as opposed to *enjoying* them (Slater, 1997). It is thus overconsumption that is responsible for much of the devastation the natural world is currently experiencing (Chu & Karr, 2013). Certainly, it is the significant environmental implications of consumer lifestyles that makes the over consuming nature of modern consumerism ‘problematic’. Princen (1999) describes problematic ‘overconsumption’ as the “level or quality of consumption that undermines a species’ own life-support system and for which individuals and collectivities have choices in their consuming patters” (p. 357). Together, this definition of overconsumption, and the cultural understandings of consumerism presented here, form the conceptualisation of dominant Western consumer culture that has been explored and presented throughout this thesis.

1.2.1 The Unsustainability of Overconsumption

Sustainability is defined as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987), and as “transforming our ways of living to *maximize the chances* that environmental and social conditions will indefinitely support human security, well-being and health” (McMichael, Butler, & Folke, 2003, p. 1990). Robert, Parris, and Leiserowitz (2005) extend these definitions, arguing the concept of sustainability involves a core set of guiding principles and values, these being, the preservation of ecological services, such as fresh water, clean air, climate, and land productivity; the cultivation of humanitarian social characteristics, such as dignity, equity, and peace; and the promotion of values pertaining to tolerance, freedom, and environmental justice. Regrettably, such visions of sustainability are being threatened as unconstrained consumerist activities, an ever-expanding population, and dependence on technology, are all significantly driving environmental degradation (Chu & Karr, 2013; Princen, 1999). For instance, on a global scale human resource consumption is observed by Schor (2010) to be surpassing the Earth’s biocapacity by 40%. Consistent with this are reports that continued consumption has unbalanced the safe limits of three of the nine *planetary boundaries*; those being climate, the nitrogen cycle, and biodiversity (Rockström et al., 2009). Furthermore, the boundaries of freshwater and land use, the phosphorous cycle, and ocean acidification are also increasingly under threat. Rockström et al. (2009) emphasises that stressing the

environment to the point where these planetary boundaries are breached will have a catastrophic and possible deleterious impact on human well-being. One such implication is climate change (Garnaut, 2011; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007), triggered by the consumption of energy, such as in fossil fuels and other resources which generate and emit tens of millions of tonnes of Green House Gas (GHG) emissions and wastes back into the environment each year (State of the Environment 2011 Committee, 2011). Climate change poses a number of alarming implications for humanity. First is the threat to food security; inconsistent and changing weather patterns impact on the biophysical aspects of agriculture such as the growth of plant and animal stock, biodiversity and nutrient cycling, water cycles, and land use (Selvaraju, 2011). Furthermore, the increasing occurrence of extreme weather events are detrimental to the stability of food supply (Kang, Khan, & Ma, 2009) and elevated atmospheric CO₂ levels associated with climate change compromise natural crop resistance to pests (Zavala, 2008) and diseases (Chakraborty, 2003). Finally, the stability of food systems are also threatened by the impact climate change will have on human infrastructure, such as roads, storage, marketing, and housing, as well as the indirect effect of human health on economic and socio-political realities that govern the access to food (Selvaraju, 2011).

Increasingly uninhabitable regions and the rising scarcity of resources, such as food, water, and fossil fuels will additionally cause mass migration, sparking national security concerns and cross-border and national tensions (Campbell, Lennon, & Smith, 2007). Conflict over land and resources will have the propensity to reinforce inequalities in political and social systems, and strengthen racial and ethnic prejudices, exacerbating the cycle of poverty, disease, and civil violence (United Nations, 2004). A rise in natural disasters such as floods, drought, earthquakes, and hurricanes resulting from shifts in weather patterns will be fatal for millions of people globally (Campbell et al., 2007). Furthermore, environmental degradation and change will adversely affect the economy as governments will be faced with the financial burden of supporting the healthcare of increasingly ill and disaster stricken populations (Costello et al., 2009), as well as the adaption of households, and individual and agricultural firms to new and more complex climatic conditions through way of public goods and services (Tamirisa, 2008). Lastly, as the majority of global, national, and state wealth is invested in agricultural and natural resource services, environmental changes

that impact on production and efficiency of these investments will result in an ever increasing state of financial crisis (Leichenko, O'Brien, & Solecki, 2010).

Environmental degradation resulting from overconsumption is not limited to climate change. Indeed, the management of solid wastes created from consumption is principally through the use of landfill, which impacts on the quality of surrounding air, water, and land (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Gaseous odorous pollutants such as methane and carbon dioxide (Mosher et al., 1999), as well as toxic reduced sulphur compounds (Kim, 2006), elemental mercury (Kim & Kim, 2002), and volatile organic compounds (Davoli, Gangai, Morselli, & Tonelli, 2003) have been detected in the atmosphere around landfill sites. Furthermore, the decomposition of waste material in landfill produces leachate; an extremely toxic solution of oils, suspended particles and matter, inorganic heavy metals and ions, and various organisms such as viruses and bacteria, which when exposed to the environment have detrimental consequences (Jones et al., 2006), and can still be present hundreds of years after the landfill has been decommissioned (Kjeldsen et al., 2002). While contemporary technologies are attempting to effectively treat leachate, its infiltration of underground and surface waterways and land is inevitable (Poznyak, Bautista, Chaírez, Córdova, & Ríos, 2008), threatening aquatic life, natural ecosystems, and food chains (Foo & Hameed, 2009), and increasing human exposure to carcinogenic and genotoxic substances (Schrab, Brown, & Donnelly, 1993; Tewaria, Chauhana, Kumarb, & Gupta, 2005). Reducing the environmental impact of increasing wastes in landfill not only requires landfill operations to continue to improve, it also requires consumers to be more conscious of their wasteful actions (Hamilton et al., 2005).

Considering the impact emissions and solid wastes have on the environment, it is obvious the limits of the Earth's capacity to endure continual consumption needs to be recognised. Certainly, mitigating the environmental consequences of consumerism should be of the highest of priorities if humanity desires a secure future (Hamilton, 2003; Thøgersen & Crompton, 2009).

1.2.2 Addressing the Implications of Overconsumption

The energy intensive lifestyles consistent with high-income industrialised countries, such as Australia, are the leading producers of Green House Gas (GHG) emissions (Christensen, 1997; Fleming, Vanclay, Hiller, & Wilson, 2014). The processes of extracting natural resources, and processing, manufacturing and transporting products and commodities requires the burning of copious amounts fossils fuel to be possible (Allwood, Ashby, Gutowski, & Worrell, 2011). These activities alone accounted for approximately 21,933,000 tonnes of emissions in Australia alone during the year 2009; an ever increasing figure as each year's emissions supersedes the annual output of the previous year (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Further down the consumption chain, the average person chooses how much energy they indirectly consume based on their choice of food and material purchases such as personal care, health care, clothing, furnishings, vacations, recreation, entertainment, refrigeration, and cleanliness (Roy & Pal, 2009). In a more direct fashion, individuals consume energy in personal transportation, the use of electrical appliances, when heating water, and air-conditioning their homes (Zacarias-Farah & Geyer-Allély, 2003). All these lifestyle, material and energy consumption choices generate in one way or another GHG emissions. Thus an important component in reducing emissions is believed to be through changing the consumption patterns that demand energy dense practices (Roy & Pal, 2009).

Indeed, in an attempt to encourage pro-environmental behaviour, there has been a trend where governing bodies have developed policies that foster green consumerism (Thøgersen, 2002). Akenji (2012) describes green consumerism as the production and promotion of goods and services which are preferred by consumers on the grounds they are claimed to be pro-environment. Such policies have developed schemes for eco-labels on products, campaigns for public awareness, certification for eco-efficient production techniques, promotion of energy efficient appliances, and recycling strategies for corporate, shopping, and domestic used goods and wastes (Akenji, 2012). In Australia, initiatives encouraging pro-environmental behaviour include the phasing out of energy inefficient incandescent light bulbs and the phasing in of energy efficient LED (light-emitting diode) lights in Government owned buildings and individual households (Dowling, Mguirk, & Bulkeley, 2014). Schemes encouraging the recycling of obsolete televisions and computers have also

been developed, which incorporate the use of collection services, drop-off points, and existing recycling facilities (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). For example, services have been introduced providing drop points in local shopping centres for the recycling of battery and printer cartridges (Khaliq, Rhamdhani, Brooks, & Masood, 2014). Pro-environmental behaviour is further being promoted in the growing rate of Australian produced lifestyle television programs. These programs are either focused on, or air 'specials', that promote *green* alternatives in terms of lifestyles, and energy-efficient or environmentally-friendly products (Lewis, 2008).

However, the underlying assumption of these behaviour change initiatives is individual choice (Wilson & Dowlatabadi, 2007), of which there are a number of drawbacks. Firstly, policies that rely on an individualistic view of behaviour change emphasise the governing of environmental issues at an individual scale (Barr, Gilg, & Shaw, 2011). The weight of responsibility such policies generates on the shoulders of the individual creates a sense of unfairness and burden (Moisander, 2007) which may threaten the continued motivation of the individual to enact change (Barr et al., 2011). Secondly, such policies continue to legitimise consumerist values, as consumption continues to occur but becomes focused on alternative products and services (Duroy, 2011). For example, alternative lifestyle options promoted by lifestyle television programs, are typically in the form of the latest and newest environmentally friendly commodities (Lewis, 2008). The move to less harmful products, as is encouraged in these programs, may justify continued growth in consumption, off-setting any environmental gains that could be made (Herring, 1999). Fundamentally, individualistic approaches fail to encourage "deliberation between citizens as part of a collective movement of change" (Barr et al., 2011, p. 1225), and they do not consider the overwhelming socio-cultural shifts that would need to occur if the threat of continued environmental degradation is to be truly mitigated (Duroy, 2011).

In this way, previously developed individualistic interventions are directed towards and are indicative of first order change. First order change is described by Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) as incremental change that can be implemented using people's existing knowledge and skills and is consistent with already established paradigms of understanding the world, and existing values and norms. Thus it does not alter the purposes and

expectations of people undertaking the change (Marris, 1974) or challenge the core structures on which the system is based (Stickland, 1998).

Certainly, core structures that both drive overconsumption and hinder sustainability goals relate in part to the ideologies underpinning the economics of consumerism. For example, the idea of *progress* as it is conceptualised in dominant Western culture, propels consumerism by shaping economic and social 'growth' and development in terms of monetary performance (Söderbaum, 2007). As Cervantes (2013) asserts, progress as an ideology reflects the "assumption that the domination of nature through technological resources – developed, in turn, by the sciences – is the key to the well-being of humanity" (p. 26). Progress is conceptualised as "the way forward", with the functioning of the consumer market being the primary indicator of economic success (Söderbaum, 2007, p. 616). It is understood by those supporting the model of 'growth' that prosperity and the alleviation of poverty can be achieved through increased industry, and sustainability can be promoted through technological advance that either overcomes the need for nature, or increases the *green* choices available for consumers (Hopwood, Mellor, & O'Brian, 2005). In this manner, the underlying assumption for *progress* is resource use, and without challenging a core structure such as this, strategies towards sustainability will be inherently undermined by commodification and domination over the environment (Akenji, 2012; Bakari, 2013; Sanne, 2002).

This is also true for other core structures of consumerism, namely the interplay of Capitalism and globalisation. Capitalism as an economic system, involves the private ownership of production processes and stock, where commodities are manufactured by the labour of workers who are paid a wage, and the surplus extracted from the difference between the value of labour and sale of products is returned to the manufacturer as profit (Jenks, 1998). Globalisation, defined as an economic process that involves the rapid international movement and integration of commodities, ideas, and technologies (Robbins, 2009), advances capitalist interests by empowering transnational corporations to continuously expand capital flow throughout an open global market (Bakari, 2013). Globalised Capitalism opposes the goals of sustainability in several ways. Firstly, it is argued competition exists between capitalists for greater market share, which results in an abundance of consumer products and choices in the market (Sklair, 2002). Manufacturers

also attempt to increase their competitiveness by achieving lower prices for goods while still maintaining profit margins, yet the outcome of this strategy is the utilisation of unethical mass production manufacturing processes (Bakari, 2013; Walker, 2014). Furthermore the availability of cheaper goods for consumers means a greater spread of finances, and the ability to consume more products (Sklair, 2002). Finally, globalised Capitalism obscures other dimensions of economic importance, such as scarcity of resources and equity in basic needs (Redclift, 2000). Together, these processes of Capitalism are antagonistic to visions of sustainability because they encourage rampant consumption through marketing and commodity fetishism, initiate enormous investment in environmental degrading technologies, and are recognised for exploiting and devaluing the fundamental rights of workers (Cervantes, 2013; Speth, 2008). Therefore, advocating sustainability based on a system driven by ideologies of progress and Capitalism becomes problematic and “empty” (Cervantes, 2013, p. 31). That is to say, that while policy may encourage more environmentally conscious actions, such as recycling, and manufacturers may develop eco-friendly products, the overall goals of economic growth remain the same (P. A. Hall, 1993). In the words of Mezirow (1990), such problematic ideologies are persistent and powerful in their influence because they...

...can become a form of false consciousness in that [they] support, stabilize, or legitimate dependency-producing social institutions, unjust social practices, and relations of exploitation, exclusion, and domination. [They] reflect the hegemony of the collective, mainstream meaning perspective and existing power relationships that actively support the status quo. Ideology is a form of prereflexive consciousness, which does not question the validity of existing social norms and resists critique of presuppositions. Such social amnesia is manifested in every facet of our lives -in the economic, political, social, health, religious, educational, occupational, and familial. (p. 16)

Thus, changing patterns of overconsumption requires the influence of both consumption promoting ideologies and social structures to be openly and explicitly challenged in economics, policy, and in the everyday lives of people (Foster, 2015). As Assadourian (2010) and Spaargaren and Mol (2008) assert, lasting sustainability means a transformation of the paradigms embedded within the social system, not just the availability of alternative consumption choices.

Endeavouring to foster change at an ideological level, some scholars have advocated the Sustainable Consumption framework (Akenji, 2012; Princen, Maniates, & Conca, 2002; Spaargaren, 2003). Sustainable consumption reconceptualises the market producer as also the consumer of both raw material and the labour of others (Akenji, 2012), and aims to address the amount of material and energy moving within the system, the growth of economic activity, the scale, scope, and speed of material provisioning in relation to ecological capacity, and the patterns of resource use (Princen et al., 2002). Fundamentally, effective sustainable consumption requires individuals and corporations to consume less (Akenji, 2012), an ideal contrasting those of economic development and globalised Capitalism. Sustainable consumption theoretically, also places equal importance on the human agent and the contextual setting in which they belong, rather than positioning change as simply alternative consumer products and waste management (Spaargaren, 2003). Based on this understanding, sustainable consumption is believed to be possible through the following policy developments described by Akenji (2012):

...[policies] eliminating the most unsustainable options from the market, removing obstacles to sustainable lifestyles, and facilitating a translation of pro-sustainability attitude to deeper changes in behaviour beyond just purchasing of green products...it involves not only reforming of product choices and purchasing habits but also of values, reorganization of ways of meeting needs and redefining the notion of societal progress that is now held captive by snappy economic-growth statistics and charts...to evaluate development not as abstract numbers but in reflection of societal well-being and ecological health. (p.8)

Thus the conceptualisation of consumerism within the sustainable consumerism paradigm appears to be consistent with understandings of consumption as a profound and deeply collective and social practice (Willis & Schor, 2012), as it considers and aims to address the shared assumptions surrounding economic growth, development, and the values embedded within consumerism. The sustainable consumption paradigm is also reflective of second order change, which is understood to be emergent change that conflicts with existing values and norms (Waters et al., 2003). It questions the assumptions on which the social system is based, and changes the relationships between people, requiring deeper cooperation between leaders and members of the community (Stickland, 1998). Sustainable consumption may also support a third level of change identified by Marris (1974). Change at this level requires the paradigms, frameworks and schemas associated with how the world

is understood to completely shift and be transformed all the way up to the implementing agent (Hall, 1993; Marris, 1974), as would be exemplified in a transformation of the collective ideas concerning *progress* (Sanne, 2002). In encouraging profound shifts such as these, the goals of sustainable consumption are to “[live] within environmental limits and [ensure] a strong, healthy and just society, underpinned by good governance, sound science and sustainable economy” (Stevenson & Keehn, 2006, p. 4).

Based on the above discussion, it would appear that interventions offering long-lasting and transformative solutions to humanity’s impact on the environment will need to address the current socio-psychological, physical, and political structures that support and legitimate a society of consumerists (Akenji, 2012; Spaargaren, 2003). However, in order for this to be possible, a deeper understanding of the ideologies and complex issues underpinning consumerism needs to be had (Bishop & Dzidic, 2014; Bishop et al., 2013)

1.3 The Consumer Context

In order for the social structures and ideological frameworks underpinning consumerism to be fully and insightfully appreciated, and thus addressed for lasting change towards sustainability, it is important to appreciate the contextual and historical setting from which they have evolved (Adger et al., 2009). Indeed, Mills (1959) argues that a historical view of social phenomena is essential to understanding the structures from which they have emerged. He describes society as being historically formed as opposed to static: “The image of any society is a historically specific image” (p. 149), grounded in a particular period and shaped by a set of social patterns. Therefore the intention of the following section is to situate consumerism within a historical context, by firstly presenting an account of how it is believed consumerism emerged within dominant Western culture. This will be followed by a contextualised theory concerning the perpetuation and maintenance of consumerism, which is grounded in the historically bound social processes of industrialisation, urbanisation, globalisation, and modernity.

1.3.1 The History of Consumerism

Well before the modern era there is evidence of consumerist behaviours among aristocrats who would pleasure themselves with fancy luxuries and among wealthy merchants who

would seek to emulate aristocracies through the establishment of mansions (Stearns, 2006). Stearns (2006) maintains that while this may be so, as people, aristocrats were not characteristically consumerist. Their nobility and higher standard of living was traditionally appropriated through military and special political service. As for those in the lower classes, consumerism was constrained as a result of poverty, and for peasants who possessed some material means beyond what was needed for survival, any action of consumerism was frowned upon by the upper classes who did not approve of those below them demonstrating any desire to cross social boundaries or express individuality. Furthermore across all social classes, religious puritan teachings urging the observance to unworldly aspirations were deeply adhered to. Catholicism, the dominant religion at the time in Europe was wary of material goals as it distracted one from spiritual purposes and devotion. Thus the value systems prevalent in the pre-modern era were not a supportive foundation for consumerism (Stearns, 2006).

It is understood the development of consumer society is deeply and profoundly interconnected with the birth of modernity (Slater, 1997). Modernity is contiguous to commoditisation; the expansion of objects and services accepted as commodities and exchanged within the market, and is interrelated with commodity globalisation and the cultural structures that support and encourage exchange processes, such as advertising and the availability of credit to consumers (Sassatelli, 2007). Historians believe the beginnings of modernity occurred before the industrial revolution in Europe in the mid seventeenth century with a growth in material culture and consumption within all social classes (Fairchilds, 1993; Shamma, 1990). While it is unclear as to the distribution of growth within each class (Sassatelli, 2007) it is understood during this time period household furnishings, such as textiles, and personal ornaments, such as buttons were increasingly being purchased from the market among all classes (Borsay, 1989). It is highly possible the restructuring of consumption practices during this period is a consequence of the widening availability of goods, such as spices, and stimulants, such as tobacco, cocoa, tea, and coffee (Schivelbusch, 1993). Moreover, the sixteenth century saw government policies encouraging entrepreneurial initiatives for the domestic production of previously imported goods due to concerns the demand for foreign goods was draining the economy (Thirsk, 1978). Thirsk (1978) describes these entrepreneurships as *projects*, which involved large-volume cottage-

based production, primarily focused on consumer goods, such as pots, china, nails, linen, and tools. Thirsk argues that it was only when communities started to produce commodities that were not intended to meet basic needs that the working classes had enough money above margin to spend on other things. Essentially, projects provided both cash for the work-forces, and goods on which they could spend their cash (Thirsk, 1978), thus consumption was no longer restricted to the elite. This revolution in production and consumption saw the birth of commerce and trade; which is believed to be the catalyst of modern society from a previously traditional agrarian one (Slater, 1997).

The continued growth in commerce through the seventeenth and eighteenth century impacted Western society at the time in a number of ways. Firstly, the idea of consumption was redefined. Rather than it implying wastefulness and a destruction of moral, political, and economic values, it was realised for its significance and importance in the exchange of goods (Slater, 1997). With this new understanding, merchants and storeowners discovered new and various ways of enticing customers, whether it be through window displays, bargain items, or advertisements in the newspaper, on posters, and in newly circulating fashion magazines (Stearns, 2006). Advertising furthermore gave way to a rapid recognition of brand names, such as Wedgwood china (Laermans, 1993), and the market-based exchange of commerce meant that individuals, while limited to the degree of cash they possessed, were at liberty to buy whatever commodity they wished (Sassatelli, 2007). This development saw the rising instability and diffusion of hierarchical status as lifestyles could be decided by wealth as opposed to religious and traditional determinants of what particular social classes were allowed to possess (De Vries, 1999; Sekora, 1977). Furthermore, commerce opened a world of social intercourse which provided a stage for the free exchange of ideas, opinions, and conversation within the public arena (Burchill, 1991). Within this arena, men and women could break free from tradition and be comfortably opportunistic, energetic, and self-interested, as well as resistive to the subjective authority of aristocracy (Slater, 1997). Despite Government resistance (due to its believed moral and social dangers) to consumption among the working and middle classes during this time, there was acknowledgment that it was a well-spring for economic growth (De Vries, 1999). Sir Dudley North in 1691 wrote:

The main spur to trade, or rather to industry and ingenuity, is the exorbitant appetites of men (sic), which they will take pains to gratify, and so be disposed to work, when nothing else will incline them to it; for did men (sic) content themselves with bare necessities, we should have a poor world. (North, 1971, p. 27)

It would seem the individual desires of people for commodities, as self-seeking and lustful as they were considered, were recognised for their cumulative potential in creating a prosperous and productive society (De Vries, 1999). Thus political authorities, with the intention of strengthening the state, promoted the export of goods and population growth (Stearns, 2006).

Another crucial component to the rise of consumerism during seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries was the desire to emulate the aristocracy, particularly by the bourgeois (Sassatelli, 2007). The bourgeoisie were the social middle class throughout this period, categorised by their ownership of capital through commerce or finance. They were regarded as materialistic in worldview, cunning, and concerned with preserving and expanding their capital, so as to maintain their superiority within society (Hunt, 1996). As historian Werner Sombart (1967) describes it, as the bourgeois accumulated wealth, their desires to mix with the elite also increased. In an attempt to compete and achieve prominence among the nobility the bourgeois planned crafty strategies for marriage and became consumers of luxury, as refined goods were socially considered a status marker restricted only to the elite class. Consequently, the aristocracy joined in the bourgeoisie's emulation game, with each attempting to better the ostentatious display of the other for status and sophistication. The increasing need for luxuries accelerated production and commerce, stimulated capital growth, saw the advancement of stream-lined manufacturing methods, and contributed to the formation of the capitalist system. Moreover the mounting consumption of luxuries and non-essential items bought about a hedonistic-aesthetic attitude towards material goods which, in time, trickled down the social classes, as they too reaped the benefits of a growing commercial economy, the provision of financial credit, the new availability of adapted inferior refined goods, and the development of rationalist production (Sombart, 1967). Such a phenomenon, as maintained by De Vries (1999), established a new meaning for luxury from the status marker it once served. Luxury now provided comfort and enjoyment for the lower classes, and communicated culture and sociability among participating consumers.

The desire for luxury, along with a growing commercial economy, advertising manipulation, and social liberation is widely accepted by historians to have founded the demand necessary for the Industrial Revolution (McKendrick, Brewer, & Plumb, 1982; Sassatelli, 2007). Demand is further believed to have been driven by the rise of modern fashion in the eighteenth century, as commercial coercion and emulation could only be possible on a foundation of fashion (Sassatelli, 2007). Indeed, McKendrick (1974) describes the fast paced character of modern fashion, in which 'the new' was rapidly consumed and modified within only years. This new phenomenon contrasted previous traditional changes in fashion styles that would take generations to reveal themselves (McKendrick, 1974). Campbell (1987) maintains, however, that the theory of demand and its buttress of modern fashion fails to account for the presence of fashion in the first place or the rapid transformation it underwent. He argues such explanations for consumerism are inadequate in addressing the belief, value, and attitude changes which he understands to be fundamental to the consumer revolution. Indeed he observes such deep-seated changes in various cultural shifts that occurred during the eighteenth century. For example, it was predominantly the middle-class who were becoming increasingly engrossed in non-essential leisure activities such as theatre, dancing, and horse racing, and women were becoming immersed in fiction-reading which corresponded with the rise in romantic love, and its new position as a sufficient reason for marriage (Campbell, 1987). As it was the middle-class who held puritan beliefs centred in moral and religious thought which condemned indulgence, Campbell argues that the critical question concerns the origination of the facilitating values and attitudes propending the cultural shifts to modern fashion, luxury, leisure, romantic love, and ultimately consumerism. To this he asserts the fundamental and influential forces of Romanticism within an increasingly *Enlightened* period of time.

1.3.1.1 The Enlightened and Romantic self in the rise of consumerism

Along with social changes that were occurring with commercialisation, there arose the celebration of technological and scientific progress within the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Stearns, 2006). This typified a period in time and a cultural movement known as the Enlightenment. Central to the Enlightenment was a reverence for reason by application of the scientific method, which was believed to give humanity the power to discover the

knowledge of the universe, to master nature, and to improve the human condition (Kors, 2003). Enlightened thinking was characteristically intolerant of dogma and superstition, and challenged traditional and faith-based thought, as these forms of thought were understood to restrain individuals. Thus the goal of enlightenment was to liberate humanity through rationality backed by science (Outram, 1995). The values intrinsic to Enlightenment mentality were equality, human rights, individual privacy and dignity, and democracy, all of which were believed to be achieved through science and research bodies, industrial Capitalism, market economy, mass communication, and military bureaucracies (Weiming, 2003). The Enlightenment mentality of reason sought to create an organised and structured world (Peckham, 1961) from within which a utopian human existence could be bought to life via the desire for and devotion to progress (Weiming, 2003). Furthermore, identities emerging from this movement were a construction of accumulated reasoned experience and empirical knowledge within the mind (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006) and, in this way, were perceived in the form of socially constructed roles within an organised world (Peckham, 1961).

Romanticism as a social movement arose in response to the Enlightenment (Campbell, 1987; Sassatelli, 2007). Peckham (1961) maintains that the rationalising of the Enlightenment saw many individuals experiencing a loss of meaningful connection to the universe and, as a consequence, saw individuals embracing a search for the mystical. As a result, however, these individuals endured feelings of alienation from a society which was widely immersed in the mentality of the Enlightenment. Romanticism intended to bring individuals spiritual awareness and experience (Peckham, 1961), self-expression aligned with nature, and self-fulfilment through inner subjective harmony (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Through romanticism individuals strove to reinvent themselves and form a sense of identity which was contrary to a structured social role offered by the Enlightenment (Peckham, 1961), and in doing so these individuals valued imagination, creativity sourced from divinity, individual uniqueness, and self-discovery (Campbell, 1987; Peckham, 1961). Meaning, organisation, and structure of the social and cosmic worlds was subsequently understood through the self rather than determined by outside positions, and thus identity became the symbolic projection of one's self-generated meanings (Peckham, 1961).

The emotive nature of self-discovery and imagination to the Romantics was considered a pleasure and a form of beauty, as it encompassed the spirit of life within the self, whether it be agony or pure joy (Praz, 1979). Such beauty and pleasure, containing both myth and symbol, held more truth and goodness to the Romantics than reasoned observation, as knowledge of the world and self could be attained from feeling alone (Campbell, 1987). Campbell (1987) maintains this philosophy of pleasure as good advanced intrinsic hedonism which, along with the desire for self-expression and taste for originality and novelty, provided the motives necessary for the pattern (rapid overturn) of modern fashion to operate. Furthermore imaginative fantasy held in high regard by the Romantics inspired restless longing, experiential dissatisfaction, and a yearning for the dream, all of which underlie the spirit of consumerism. Therefore Campbell maintains that in order for individuals to extract the pleasure from the life envisaged within their fantasy, they must substitute the object of their imagination with real stimuli. Thus products are imputed with meanings and images, and are revered for their novelty. The importance of novelty to this process explains the never-ending cycle of creating and abandoning *wants* existent in the nature of modern consumerism. Moreover the presence of idealism, characteristic of modernity, is explained by Campbell to arise from the gap between the hedonistic ideal projected into the world from fantasy and the real self which intrinsically desires to do and be seen doing the moral and good thing. The very act of being convinced of one's own goodness and virtuousness is in itself pleasurable and thus hedonistic concerns become interlocked with ethical matters that will offer occasions for hedonism. In this way "a desire for pleasure develops into a genuine concern for ideals,... ethical impulses 'degenerate' into mere narcissism" (Campbell, 1987, p. 216), and a belief that morality could be improved by consuming symbolic value laden products, all of which quietly satisfy the pursuit of pleasurable experience.

Together, it is understood by scholars that modern consumerism is motivated by romanticism and a longing for those pleasurable experiences enjoyed and produced in the imagination. The advancement of consumerism is also understood to be supported by the predominance of commerce, as well as the rise of Capitalism, rational economics, and individual freedoms under the Enlightenment which have matched consumption with production, and replaced play with work (Campbell, 1987; Slater, 1997). This interplay

between the passion of Romanticism and the rationality of the Enlightenment is what characterises modernity (Rougemont, 1956). Under the influence of modernity, identity is approached technically and extrinsically (Bauman, 1990), whereby the self is treated as a project, created, expressed, and maintained through the consumption of commodities, such as cosmetic products, self-help programmes, and possessions (Slater, 1997). Modernity is therefore postulated to have facilitated the increasing demand witnessed in history for non-essential products, which accordingly birthed the industrial revolution, and the culture and spirit of modern Western consumer society (Campbell, 1987).

While such historical understandings contextualise consumerism and provide insight into the birth of modern ideologies, macro-level and deconstructive analysis also involves looking at the economic and national structures that encourage, legitimise, and maintain ideologies and behaviours within contemporary consumer culture (Mooij, 2011). The next section will explore theory concerning consumerism as it relates to these structures.

1.3.2 A Contextualised Theory of Consumerism

Modern consumerism, which is believed to have arisen from the expansion of commerce and the interplay between Enlightened rationality and Romanticism (Campbell, 1987), is also theorised by scholars such as Elliot and Lemert (2006), Bauman (1998), and Arnould and Price (2000), to be influenced and supported by the urbanisation of communities and the globalisation of markets. It is argued that these social structural changes helped shape modern consumerism because they transformed the way in which people perceived, and consequently approached, the world around them (Elliot & Lemert, 2006). They postulate that a perceived loss of community connection and identity that has arisen from urbanisation, globalisation, and the Enlightenment, is responsible for an insecure sense of self, which is then comforted through materialism (Arnould & Price, 2000; Bauman, 1998). The ideologies and worldviews underpinning this theory, and how it is believed to play out in dominant Western consumerism, will be discussed in detail over the following sections.

At the core of this theory are the changes that have occurred to the nature of community since the industrial revolution. It is believed that urbanisation, globalisation, and neo-liberalism have transformed the lived experience of community into an experience of

society (Featherstone, 1995; Tönnies, 1974). To fully understand these changes, the concepts of *community* and *society* must first be defined. Bessant (2011), drawing together the philosophical writings of Husserl, Buber, and Tönnies, described an authentic community as “an emergent social form (and process) that reflects shared interests, intentions, and actions” (p. 28). True community as defined by Bessant exists when the self-interests of the individual are unified with the common goal and generalised will of all members of the community. Thus authenticity of community involves the collective action of ‘individuals’ in creating a ‘common’ life. Within this realm, psychological sense of community is fostered, which encompasses the feeling of belonging to a social structure which is a part of everyday life and is supportive, dependable, and readily available (Sarason, 1974). A strong sense of community is associated with improved physical and psychological well-being, as it provides both adaptive and protective factors. It offers a safe place in which identity, emotions, and shared history can be expressed, and is beneficial in building resilience to undesired social change (Pretty, Bishop, Fisher, & Sonn, 2006). This definition of community within the literature has been consistently juxtaposed with the concept of society (Bruhn, 2011). Indeed this dichotomy is evident in the descriptions offered by Berger (1998),

Community is tradition; society is change. Community is feeling; society is rationality. Community is female; society is male. Community is warm and wet and intimate; society is cold and dry and formal. Community is love; society is, well, business. (p. 324)

Similarly, in early sociology, Ferdinand Tönnies (1974) identified the differing natures of both social spaces as *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* and believed these existed along a continuum. The centrality of his work was to analyse and make assumptions about the history, culture, and psychology of everyday life, as well as the institutions, structures, and practices that support it (Harris, 2001). In doing so Tönnies theorised that community embodied the essence of *Gemeinschaft*, the nature of which was inclusive of all mankind, where members co-exist and are united with their own folk from birth, and whose relationships are genuine and enduring. Human wills within this setting are united and life is familiar and comfortable, and rich with a strong sense of community. Society on the other hand is theorised to embody *Gesellschaft*. Tönnies described *Gesellschaft* as life in the public sphere, as independent individuals living alongside each other, possessing separate wills,

and although members may live in peace within this space they are detached. Life is transient and superficial, with members being more concerned for themselves than their wider group, or common good. In this way society also becomes the source and expression of prejudices and trends, creates power tensions, corrodes human values, supports Capitalism, and fosters Individualism (Harris, 2001).

It was the industrial revolution and consequent rapid urbanisation of people Tönnies witnessed that led him to be concerned the essence of *Gemeinschaft* would vanish and be replaced with *Gesellschaft*, as the nature of social relationships changed with these social structural changes (Bruhn, 2011). Similarly, Emile Durkheim (1964) theorised that in characteristically urbanised and industrialised cities, members were not united as a result of custom and ritual as they were in small towns and family units, but by occupational specialisation and formal relationships. However, unlike Tönnies, this was a social change Durkheim was not concerned about, as he perceived there would be new ways in which members could find involvement, and it would create better opportunities for individual development (Bruhn, 2011). Furthermore, Berger (1998) describes a *cultural modernism* that occurred during this period of time which eased the constraint of community ties and made a way for those constraints to become diffused among diverse social groupings of which different and partial degrees of involvement were required. In this way freedom, liberation, and choice were esteemed. While Durkheim's assumptions and Berger's discussion have merit, there is an extensive and growing body of literature assenting a progressive decline in the existence of authentic community; of the *Gemeinschaft* experience, within urban society.

Indeed, the research and discussions of mid-nineteenth century American scholars, for example, Lynd and Lynd (1937), and Warren (1978) outset the theory of *mass society*, which posited that Modernism with its industrialisation and urbanisation was undermining small group and community ties which had historically ordered society and had provided meaningful participation for its members (Thomson, 2005). The works of Lynd and Lynd, Vidich and Bensman (1958), Stein (1960), and Warren certainly supported this thesis and argued that macro systemic pressures of centralised social institutions and industrial pursuits diminished local and community autonomy, solidarity, and cohesion. These changes in turn were theorised to contribute to the growing individualistic disposition of American

people. It was believed that increasing technological advances, consumerism and materialism were changing the way people perceived the world and those around them (Reisman, Glazer, & Denney, 1950). Thus the episteme of Modernism that accompanied social structural transformations was becoming deeply rooted within the culture. Modernism as a worldview encouraged a world free of tradition; produced through rational enlightened thinking and organisation, in which people were considered rational, free, and enterprising individuals (Slater, 1997). Modernism is also described by Carlisle, Henderson, and Hanlon (2009) as an objectivist, reductionist, and materialist worldview which is void of any intrinsic meaning, design or purpose, and considers each person as unique, separate, and alone. One of the central ideologies dominating modernity is Individualism, and as such creates a society of individuals whose core concern is for their own personal rights, goals, and autonomy (Hofstede, 1980; Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002), a system in which the pursuit of an authentic or meaningful self can be achieved through self-fulfilment and self-choosing (Taylor, 1991). The individualistic nature of modernity inherent within these definitions is certainly removed from the *Gemeinschaft* narrative of 'we'ness' described by Tönnies. Greenfield (2013) provides evidence for this cultural shift over the course of industrialisation and modernisation by exploring the language used in over one and a half million books throughout the two centuries between the years 1800 and 2000. By analysing the frequencies of various words that were characteristic of a rural *Gemeinschaft* ecology, such as obedience, belong, pray, give, and authority, and the frequencies of words that were characteristic of an urban *Gesellschaft* setting, such as individual, self, unique, get, and child, Greenfield (2013) found that *Gemeinschaft* culture as is reflected in the language used in books declined over the two hundred year period while *Gesellschaft* ecology increased in frequency. Thus choice, obtaining for self, self-concern, uniqueness, and the narrative of 'I'ness' has become more dominant with urbanisation and other social structural changes.

Individualism is believed to transform community as the bonds between people relax, connection to place becomes less significant, and the relationship between the individual and the broader community is less mediated by communal social structures (Bessant, 2011). Furthermore, individuals who identify with the modern world tend to view social relationships as a means by which personal goals can be realised and as such are less likely to form genuine connection and commitments to associations or communities (Beyerlein &

Vaisey, 2013; Taylor, 1991). For example, recent literature describes how despite an increasing number of American people claiming membership to organisations and groups, there is less time actively engaged in these institutions, and support groups, while flourishing, tend to foster self-involvement to the same degree they offer community participation and presents an apparent weakening of collective and altruistic endeavours (Putnam, 2000). These changes in the degree of community engagement since Modernism corresponds with a weakening sense of community. For instance, Ryle and Robinson (2006) found that people who demonstrated modern or individualist worldviews experienced fewer feelings of community belonging from interactions with neighbours, friends, fellow students, co-workers, other members of their ethnic group, and their place of worship, than those who pertain to a religious orthodox ideology. Qualitative research by Watts and Utting (2009) revealed people are aware of declining community and neighbourliness in society. Their participants describe a loss of “real meaningful, open, honest, and respectful communication between people” (p. 29), and continual concerns for safety and distrust. Hamilton (2003) and Long (1999) maintain that the breakdown of traditional family and community structures have resulted in materialism taking the place of social ties. Certainly, modern social relations are organised around the mutually advantageous roles of *provider* and *customer*, economic and instrumental in nature. Formerly these relationships would have been established through mutual trust and experience, and upheld by loyalty, devotion, and care (Long, 1999).

Another significant change to the structure of twenty first century Western society, brought about by Modernism and industrialisation, is globalisation. Expanding international commerce and communication technologies, as well as mass media and instant information transmission has undermined territorial boundaries. Globalisation according to Ritzer (1993), is responsible for a global *McDonaldisation*, whereby the formalised rules, regulations, and governance of transnational organisations are beginning to dictate the nature of everyday human relations. Interactions between peoples are impacted in such a way that they have become governed by efficiency, calculability and optimisation, predictability, control, and standardisation. This in turn, he postulates, creates a de-humanised population, whose creativity and imaginative decision making has been stifled by over-rationalisation. McDonalds in this sense is not only a metaphor of economic activity, it

also represents a way of life. The McDonalds burger is an icon that symbolises the American way of life. In this way, the global homogenisation of economic activity has meant that the artefacts and symbols of one culture (e.g., the McDonalds burger) become distributed throughout the world, and thus tradition becomes commodity in mass consumer culture (Featherstone, 1995). From this perspective globalisation has increased conformity, created a cultural levelling across nations, and an integration of societies (Shabir, Safdar, Jamil, & Bano, 2015). However, globalisation appears as a twofold phenomenon where, on the one hand, society on a global level has witnessed unification and standardisation through economic activities yet, on the other hand, society at a local level is experiencing division, differences, and dissemination (Pulcini, 2010). Indeed Featherstone (2007) argues there will always be resistance to letting go of popular cultural traditions, and there will always be a degree of misreading and ambiguities between cultures which protects them from cultural levelling or homogenisation as a result of multinational Capitalism and consumerism. Certainly, globalisation has seen the expansion of human movement throughout the world through immigration, resulting in many people existing between cultures. Furthermore, nation-states which once had an exclusive national identity they fervently constructed themselves upon, have had to give way to multiculturalism (Featherstone, 2007). In this way the unity, coherence, and traditions that embodied the culture of *Gemeinschaft* community has become fragmented, dislocated, and decentred as it is bought into direct contact with conflicting ways of defining the world.

Globalisation also saw the expansion of free market Capitalism and Neoliberalism. Neoliberalism as an economic system supports the privatisation of originally state owned enterprises, the liberalisation of trade and industry, and government deregulation of the economy (Steger & Roy, 2010). While a free market system boasts efficiency by closing the distance between producer and consumer, it eliminates the mediating social structures of trade unions, professional bodies, local government, and community groups that functioned via dialogue, consensus-building, and debate. In this sense democracy is a hindrance in a competitive capitalist economy, and community breakdown is thought to follow as production processes move off shore to increase corporate profits (Lawson, 2009). According to Thake (2009), no longer is community commitment and meaning experienced around the local manufacturing industries on which they thrived, and the changing nature

of the workforce means a change in family structure whereby both parents have to work, leaving little time for community activity. Neoliberalism also means a redistribution of power from government to the amassed wealth of corporations which take agency away from community (Lawson, 2009; Thake, 2009). Along with this loss of community agency is the devaluation of locality, as politics, capital, and information are freed from physical space and inhabited within the realm of the internet (Bauman, 1998). Thus for communities and localities their capacity to generate social meanings, norms and values that would typically be rooted in place become limited.

Such shifts in the social fabric created through not only Neoliberalism, but globalisation and industrialisation as described here, are thus theorised to have extensively changed the nature of community. What is most significant however are the implications these macro-systemic transformations possibly have on the individual's experience of selfhood. This is important as the way individuals interpret and approach the world around them is born from the perception they have of *self* (Gergen, 2009). There is therefore the need to explore how conceptualisations of *self* have possibly changed and how this manifests in the everyday lives of individuals in behaviours such as consumption.

1.3.2.1 Implications for *self* in consumer society

A globalised world has meant that people are exposed to a myriad of lifestyles, social positionings, and worldviews, which provides both choice, and supports individualisation, through self-creation (Elliot & Lemert, 2006). Smith-Lovin (2007) theorises the glut of possible identities and the decline of long-term and multiplex relationships as a result of Modernism and globalisation, has led to a complex yet less stable experience of self. Weak community ties throughout space and time mean that identity is no longer defined by relationship but is instead sought via introspection and autobiographical reflections. Thus self is more likely to be characterised by attributes, than by role identities and relationships (Smith-Lovin, 2007). Consistent with this thesis, Elliot and Lemert (2006) describe individuals coping with globalisation through reflexivity in self-constitution and self-reproduction. They describe the notion of self as a reflexive project, created from countless worldviews, social positionings, and lifestyles. For Bauman (1998) while the fluidity of identity appears to offer freedom, the presentation of endless possibilities creates a state of constant *unfinishedness*

and the continual desire to become *somebody*. For individuals these projects of self-creation and self-expression are theorised to be accompanied by crippling anxiety which arises from an internal battle between conflicting desires, risks, uncertainty, and dreads around identity and consumer choices (Bauman, 1998; Elliot & Lemert, 2006; Schwartz, 2009).

Furthermore, under the influence of Individualism, Bauman (2009) posits that consuming individuals experience a degree of cognitive dissonance. This tension is believed to arise as the ideology of Individualism teaches that the means of achieving social value resides in the motivation, skill, and efforts of the individual. For individuals limited by socioeconomic and structural factors, such beliefs encourage unrealistic aspirations and expectations (Bauman, 2009). In this way the worship of celebrity and affluence is juxtaposed with the individuals own lack of social desirability and value, and creates a sentiment of resentment and humiliation. Thus according to Bauman, dissonance is evident in both the desire and resentment held in objects of social value, where they become either a token of affluence or a reminder of shame. This he theorises, leads to continued anxiety and spiritual discomfort. Therefore, while Individualism teaches that all can be equal, the uneven distribution of wealth and power deprives many individuals of the material ability to realise that right. In addition, Bauman theorises that anxiety is generated from the fear of being socially excluded. Where being socially included and recognised is about being accepted by *others who matter*; that those *others* will judge their life to be worthy and decent through the possession of socially valued objects. Thus arises the existential uncertainty and terror that comes with the threat of becoming a *failed consumer*, of losing dignity, respect, and place in society. Indeed it would appear that by not continually and actively defending their social standing people may fear the loss of social recognition and value (Bauman, 2009). Consuming therefore becomes the means by which an individual's dignity and value is reinforced by way of self-creation, where once it would have been grounded in community membership.

Globalisation is also theorised to have diminished sentiments of national and community identity and with it a sense of common interest and collective responsibility (Bauman, 1998; Thake, 2009). A sense of authority and autonomy is further believed to be lost under Neoliberalism as the power of the market strengthens, which stifles both democracy and community voice (Lawson, 2009). In effect, it is posited the masses no longer trust or have

confidence in political institutions, leading to feelings of confusion, disorientation and uncertainty (Bauman, 1998; Head, 2007). Distress is also heightened as individual solutions alone are all that seem possible to solve collectively created problems (Lawson, 2009). Thus develops a society of passive, helpless, and detached individuals (Pulcini, 2010) who have little interest in the political process (Thake, 2009), and feel that if they cannot achieve anything collectively they might as well go out and spend (Lawson, 2009). In this way it is postulated by Thake (2009) that “consumerism [acts] like comfort food,... [a] displacement behaviour to mask the stress” associated with the mistrust people have towards governing authorities and institutions, the rapid economic changes in modern time, and environmental degradation (p. 169). However there is an apparent paradox here, where coping with the stress of the global neoliberal world has possibly meant individuals have retreated into themselves, yet such a withdrawal into the reflexive self has come with its own conglomerate of anxiety and insecurity.

At a deeper level of human experience, it is believed that globalisation has very much transformed the ways in which individuals perceive the world around them. Indeed the domination of Western culture has bought with it its own epistemology. Historically born in the Enlightenment, Western culture is grounded in positivistic and reductionist thinking. Such thinking ignores the more ambiguous ways of knowing as intuition, imagination, and inspiration (Gidley, 2005). As Gidley (2005) explains, the spread of Western epistemology under globalisation has disregarded the traditional ways of knowing in other cultures, which are grounded in mysticism, aesthetics, subjectivity, and spirituality. It is these ways of knowing for cultures and the communities within them that gave people a secure sense of who they were and their place in the world. They encapsulated worldviews that provided explanations to cosmological questions such as; How did I get here? What is my purpose? What is after death? Such questions ordered perceptions of life and filled it with meaning and permanence (Arndt, Solomon, Kasser, & Sheldon, 2004). These more holistic and traditional epistemologies also created a deep sense of understanding that was shared by all members. To quote Bauman (2001),

The community-style, matter-of-factly understanding does not need to be sought, let alone laboriously built or fought for: that understanding ‘is there’, ready-made and ready to use – so that we understand each other ‘without words’ and never

need to ask, apprehensively, 'what do you mean?' The kind of understanding on which a community rests precedes all agreements and disagreements. Such that understanding is not a finishing line, but the starting point of all togetherness. (p. 10)

For Bauman (2001) it is the loss of this *collective understanding* that transcends a positivistic and reductionist epistemology that he theorises has been lost in Western Culture. It is this, along with the loss of holistic ways of considering the world, that he postulates has meant individuals struggle to find ordered and meaningful ways to conceptualise themselves in the world. Thus with the fragmentation of community, an individual's experience of self is believed to be no longer secure and safe. That is, it can be argued that globalisation and Western culture have removed the reference points for selfhood found in community, nation, and people, which traditionally were meaningful sources of experiencing self before consumerism (Arnould & Price, 2000). This is certainly the sentiment of Seabrook's (2007) observations,

In this new social order, there is only one thing worse than domination by the market, and that is exclusion from it, since there is now no other source of knowing who we are.

Indeed, in the absence of more profound and meaningful ways of experiencing selfhood, and in the absence of permanence and authority afforded by tradition, Arnould and Price (2000) argue individuals attempt to surmount their sense of loss and insecurity by creating anchors such as myths, signs of reality, nativism, and nationalism, that are perceived to provide a feeling of authentic identity and continuity. These anchors become expressed, maintained, and integrated into the experience of self through the consumption of relevant commodities. In the same way, Bauman (2001) theorises it is the sentiment of community lost in society that stimulates the veneration of identity, where individuals search for meaningfulness, security, and belonging in consumerism which once would have been provided through collective understanding and engagement. In this fashion, identity is constructed in an effort to restore security through self-story. The narrative of identity encompasses self-generated answers to the past, what we are now, and where we are heading, and thus replace the old stories of communal belonging (Bauman, 2001). However, identity sought, experienced, reproduced, and created in the market is believed to not reflect a "stable core of self, unfolding from the beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change" (Hall, 2011, p. 1). Certainly, many scholars associate the

sentiment of meaningless in Western culture with Individualism and consumerism, and attach it to increasing rates of depression, suicide, anxiety, family breakdown, declining values, and other psychological and social calamities (Bauman, 2009; Elliot & Lemert, 2006; Gidley, 2005; Watts & Utting, 2009). Thus positioning selfhood in reflexivity and identity creation is theorised to be an insufficient buffer against the insecurity and isolation created by privatised life in Western culture. For this reason, it can be argued individuals find ways to bring more meaning into their life. One of these is the search for a sense of community, and in many cases this is sought through consumerism.

1.3.2.2 Seeking community in consumerism

Scholars maintain that members of society, whether consciously or unconsciously, feel a sense of meaningless and lack of communal belonging in their lives (Arnould & Price, 2000; Bauman, 2001; Lawson, 2009). For instance, Lawson (2009) observes the awareness in many individuals of the meaningless, emptiness, and frivolousness inherent in consumer life, while Bauman (2001) perceives in people the sentiment of dissatisfaction, precariousness, and fear. Similarly Watts and Utting's (2009) participants appeared to mourn the lack of community spirit in society as people are more concerned for their own wellbeing at the expense of collective wellbeing. These participants also described the social worship of celebrity as conducive of "vacuous ambitions", "unrealistic expectations" and "shallow aspirations" (p.31). It is theorised by Bauman, that whether individuals are aware of this inherent superficiality of consumer life or not, they will endeavour to recreate community in some form.

Arnould and Price (2000) assert individuals attempt to restore a sense of community belonging through authoritative performances. Authoritative performances are events, festival, traditions, and rituals that exhibit culture and shared values. They create a sense of unity between the individual and society by providing moments of integration and a sentiment of collective identity, which generates feelings of security and communal belonging (Arnould & Price, 2000). Heirlooms for example serve as a ritualisation process that connects the past, present, and future, and as commodities they reflect idealised values and narrative that provide meaning and culture. Heavily tied to consumerism, the Christian religious holiday of Christmas is another example of authoritative performances described

by Arnould and Price. They argue this holiday reflects the traditions of giving and receiving as it happens in the exchange of commodities. Events such as Christmas pageants for a moment create a liminal experience where past, present, and future merge to connect individuals to collective and ancient 'myth'. Such rituals bond people for a moment to a shared narrative (Arnould & Price, 2000). Authoritative performances may also transcend physical space and lived social relations through the imagined community (Hall, 2010). The imagined community is a concept that describes the symbolic and cognitive social structures that create a sense of collective identification (Anderson, 2006). In this way individuals may attempt to reproduce the intimacy of community belonging through the consumption of symbolic commodities that identify them with a particular group, such as nation, or youth culture which is bought together in fashion, media, fashion, and leisure activities (Thompson, 2000). It is therefore in the act of consuming symbolic laden and idealised commodities that the individual feels a collective sense of identity and belonging. In both forms of authoritative performances, community is sought by individuals who "invent collective consumption traditions that stabilize a sense of time and space through idealisation and participation" (Arnould & Price, 2000, p. 148).

Another way individuals seek to recreate community is argued to be through neo-tribal consumption. The phenomenon of tribalism in consumerism describes the small networks of individuals who are held together through lifestyles and shared emotions and beliefs. They develop their own set of meanings and symbols which signify membership and belonging and are typically expressed through commodity (Cova, 1997). These social tribes provide a local sense of identification and spirituality through syncretism, providing meaning and belonging. Neo-tribalism is seen for example in *fan cultures* such as Star Wars communities (Thompson, 2000) or sports clubs (Finn, 1994). In sports clubs, members form an emotional attachment and commitment to their team and reflect this through the purchase and adornment of relevant logos and colours. Within this setting members also experience a sentiment of unity as they both rejoice and despair together with the winning and losing of their team. In this way emotion and attachment are shared, providing moments of connection and communality. Tribes also inspire a powerful sense of community by the formation of symbolic boundaries that define *us* and *them* as is expressed

through the presentation of various commodities (Thompson, 2000), and these subsequently act to reinforce the status of belonging for members.

The problem however with community established through neo-tribal consumption is argued by Bauman (2001) to be that it does not provide the long term security or deep sense of collective understanding of *Gemeinschaft* that people dream of. According to Bauman, this is because such communities only form transient and superficial bonds between people, as they are experienced on the spot, then shaken off when they are no longer wanted. Such bonds, he asserts, are typically not expended in the routine of everyday life as would be the case of communities constructed through a long history, and when considered over the course of an entire life, communal engagement of this sort seem to be only momentary. In this way such attempts at community are an illusion and reinforce individual autonomy as they allow members to return to their individualistic freedoms. Bauman argues these actions successfully create moments of joy in belonging and community without the discomfort of ethical responsibilities and long-term commitments. Whether Bauman is correct in his assumptions or not, this possible phenomenon exposes an interesting paradox. It draws attention to the inherent tension of consumer life between basking in the liberties of Individualism and finding comfort in the securities of communal immersion. This is a paradox Bauman (2001) discusses at great length. He describes how in order to drink from the warmth, safety, intimacy, and security of authentic community, unconditional loyalty and stern obedience are required. Both of which are counter intuitive to freedom with its autonomy, right to self-assertion, and right to *be yourself*. Gaining the security of community, therefore, means losing freedom, and achieving freedom means letting go of security.

Based on the combined theory presented above it may be that a significant force in the maintenance of consumer lifestyles is the search for deeper belonging and security that has been lost with the change of community structure over the course of the last two centuries. To explain further, with the prevailing influence of worldviews and ideologies such as Individualism and materialism it is possible society is unfamiliar with any other lifestyle alternatives and for this reason misdirect their search for community towards consumerism. To quote Lawson (2009), "we can never stop buying because that would mean the end of society as we know it" (p. 161). What also appears to be a possibility here is that because

meaningful connection to community is not a present reality, individuals may feel that life lacks meaning beyond consumerism and the symbolic nature of commodities. That is, perhaps consumers are unfamiliar with community oriented worldviews, because of the prevalence of Individualism, modernity, and enlightened rationality in dominant Western culture. Therefore if consumerism related ideologies were to be removed from the forefront of cultural experience, individuals may be unsure about what other meaningful worldviews there are to fall back on. To make sense of the possible meanings found in consumption and relationships for individuals, Terror Management Theory has been applied in consumer research, and will be explored in the following section.

1.3.3 Terror Management Theory and Consumerism

Terror Management Theory (TMT) can provide insight into the psychological dynamics of consumerism. The aim of this theory is to determine the underlying motivations of human behaviour by positing that people act in response to their awareness of the inevitability of their own mortality (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986). Faced with the terror and insecurity such a realisation brings, people cope by adhering to worldviews that serve as buffers by providing a sense of significance in a meaningful and enduring world (Greenberg & Arndt, 2011). These may be identification with a transcendent entity or the contribution to some meaningful or valued legacy. Essentially TMT suggests individuals feel as though they are an eternal part of an everlasting reality and not a mere animal destined to become nothing upon death (Arndt et al., 2004). TMT posits psychological security of this sort is maintained through self-esteem, where self-esteem is conceptualised as believing one is a valuable part of a meaningful world, and is therefore dependent on one's efforts to subscribe to that specific cultural worldview (Greenberg & Arndt, 2011).

According to TMT, this phenomenon originates at the beginning of life with attachment with primary caregivers. Here children learn that security, comfort, love, and protection are explicitly provided when they meet their parents socially influenced standards of behaviour. Children also learn affection is not so obvious when they veer from these standards and, therefore, come to understand through socialisation that living up to socially dictated standards provides safety and security, while failing to do so exposes them to insecurity and anxieties. With growing age, the existential security provided by parents is eventually

transferred to the broader culture and in this way adhering to behaviours, values, and beliefs deemed to be culturally meaningful makes one feel good about themselves and their place in the world. This ultimately protects them from existential insecurities and anxiety. It is these two structures; the faith in a cultural worldview and self-esteem, that are central to TMT, as they are crucial to maintaining a sense of security and psychological calm (Greenberg & Arndt, 2011).

Since TMT was first proposed roughly 25 years ago there has been an accumulating body of work supporting its hypotheses. A meta-analysis of 277 empirical experiments investigating the mortality salience hypothesis of TMT conducted by Burke, Martens, and Faucher (2010) found that conscious or unconscious thoughts of death significantly bolstered one's faith in their cultural worldview. Accordingly, they found studies to consistently record moderate to large effects of attitudinal, behavioural, and cognitive responses when thoughts of death were activated in participants. For example, research has found that reminders of death increased prejudiced attitudes (McGregor et al., 1998), commitment to significant others (Hirschberger, Florian, & Mikulincer, 2002), in-group identification (Dechesne, Greenberg, Arndt, & Schimel, 2000), and the desire to boost self-esteem (Schmeichel et al., 2009). Conversely, research has also found that when cultural worldviews, intimate relationships, or self-esteem are threatened, anxiety and thoughts of mortality become more prominent (Hayes, Schimel, Arndt, & Faucher, 2010). This anxiety, however, has been found to diminish with the validation of one's worldview or with a boost of self-esteem (Harmon-Jones et al., 1997). The literature therefore supports the notion existential anxieties are a significant force behind human behaviour.

In terms of consumer behaviour, Western culture is dominated by worldviews valuing consumerism and materialism. To this effect, individuals tend to focus their lives around the purchase of symbolic laden commodities and the accumulation of wealth which, when internalised, serve to provide a sense of personal worth and social value (Dittmar, 2010). In this way living up to social expectations of prestige and affluence provides safety and security in the context of one's culture, and thus provides protection from existential insecurity (Hirschman, 1990). An illustration of this phenomenon is presented by Arndt et al. (2004):

Cash, and the fantastic appeal of what money can buy – for example, the spa-tanned and gym fit, cosmetically and surgically enhanced, dressed and jewelled “to kill,” perpetually young, sexually alluring, thinner-than-a-piece-of-linguini woman; the buff swashbuckling “player” with the sculpted hair and personally tailored Armani suit fondling the keys to his Mercedes with one hand and the aforementioned woman with the other – provide a way for humans to distance themselves from the disturbing realization that they are animals destined to die. (p. 203)

A body of empirical research has supported the idea materialism and consumerism serve as a buffer from death related anxieties (Arndt et al., 2004; Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2004). Mandel and Heine (1999), for example, found that reminders of death increased the desire for high-status objects such as Lexus cars and Rolex watches. While Kasser and Sheldon (2000) found that when evoked to think of their mortality, participants recounted elevated financial expectations in the future in terms of their monetary worth, their ownership of luxury goods and clothing, and their engagement in entertainment and leisure activities. More recently, Rindfleisch, Burroughs, and Wong (2009) explored the correlation between materialism, brand connections, and existential anxieties. They found that brand connections were a means by which materialistic individuals protected themselves from existential anxieties. Zaleskiewicz, Gasiorowska, Kesebir, Luszczynska, and Pyszczynski (2013) explored the power of money to buffer mortality anxiety. In a number of experiments they found that after being prompted to think of death, participants expressed an increased desire for money, they overestimated the size of coins and notes, and articulated higher expectations as to what is considered rich. They also found that when primed with thoughts of money instead of death, the reported level of existential fear was affected. More specifically, interacting with money considerably decreased death anxieties. Thus, money itself appears to possess meaningful protective capacities against existential anxiety. Supporting and expanding on the literature just outlined, Zaleskiewicz , Gasiorowska, and Kesebir (2013) found that the act of saving money appears to be more effective at buffering death anxieties than consumerism. Although this seems counterintuitive at first, Zaleskiewicz et al. (2013) argue that both saving and spending symbolise the accumulation of wealth, where wealth is highly valued in Western culture serving as an indication of social value and personal worth. Taken together, the literature reviewed illustrates the power of wealth and commodities in providing a sense of meaning and self-esteem, which then operates to buffer death concerns. Other scholars (Hui, Chan,

Lau, Cheung, & Mok, 2012; Kesebir, 2014), however, have sought to explore additional possible defences to mortality anxieties that provide a sentiment of transcendence. Such defences include spiritual observance and the maintenance of close relationships.

1.3.3.1 Spirituality and relationship defences in TMT

The relationship between meaning creation and material objects is argued by Arndt et al. (2004) to be common place in many cultures. Reviewing anthropological works of Bonsu and Belk (2003) and Goldschmidt (1990), Arndt et al. describes how people from different cultures and throughout different times have placed symbolic value on various commodities (whether it be dollars, cattle, or yams) to assert meaning and significance in their lives. The disparity in Western culture however is the dramatic propensity of consumption, which exceeds the tendencies of other cultures and historic times. Arndt et al. suggests this is due to the decline in religious belief and intrinsic motivational forces, and the increased desire for wealth as an end in itself. These cultural changes, the authors argue, have allowed the marketplace to create itself as the new immortality ideology. The literature certainly appears to support this notion. For example, Hui, Chan, Lau, Cheung, and Mok (2012) recently found that life events carrying an existential threat weakened the materialistic goals for Christians but did not affect the goals of becoming wealthy and achieving career success in non-believers. Similarly, Stillman, Fincham, Vohs, Lambert, and Phillips (2012) found that people who reported having spiritual experiences or were asked to reflect on a spiritual experience demonstrated less materialistic values and a decreased desire to engage in consumerism. Other research has found that the humility and self-transcendence of a *quiet ego*³ rendered death related concerns less threatening (Kesebir, 2014), as did an afterlife belief of literal immortality as opposed to the symbolic immortality found in worldview and self-esteem (Heflick & Goldenberg, 2012). In this way, it is possible that subscribing to a worldview that promises self or death transcendence, such as that found in

³The term *quiet ego* was first introduced by Wayment and Bauer (2008) who describe it as “a self-identity that is not excessively self-focused but also not excessively other focused – an identity that incorporates others without losing the self” (p. 8). According to Wayment and Bauer, a quiet ego reflects the composite of four qualities: detached (non-defensive) self-awareness and constructive self-criticism, a balanced concern for the self and others, compassion, and a reverence for personal growth. Kesebir (2014) similarly uses the phrase as an indication of humility, and the transcendence over egotistical concerns and self-serving, defensive behaviours.

religion or spirituality, buffers existential anxieties, relieving the need to find symbolic protection in materialism.

TMT literature has also drawn attention to the anxiety buffering potential of personal relationships. While this body of research has focused primarily on the relationship between the theory of attachment and mortality salience (Mikulincer & Florian, 2000), studies have also shown that, when reminded of death, people are more willing to initiate social interaction (Taubman-Ben-Ari, Findler, & Mikulincer, 2002), and will increase their commitment to their romantic partner out of love, but not duty (Hirschberger, Florian, & Mikulincer, 2002). Furthermore, being induced to think about being separated from a romantic partner increased existential concerns (Mikulincer, Florian, & Hirschberger, 2003). To this end, and after reviewing the literature, Mikulincer et al. (2003) postulated that the formation and maintenance of meaningful relationships functions as a buffer against the terror of death, which is related to but separate from the defences of self-esteem and worldview. The authors argue the protective value of close relationships are grounded in their ability to provide a sense of death transcendence in three different forms; First, close relationships form the structure on which procreation takes place, creating the sense one is living through their progeny. Second, close relationships provide a sense of being a part of a greater social entity that expands beyond the self, and creates a sense of connectedness with the world. Finally, passionate love arising from close relationships can generate an intense feeling of being alive. In these ways close relationships serve as a significant form of symbolic immortality (Mikulincer et al., 2003). The notion that close relationships mitigate death anxieties has been supported by a large body of literature. For example, research has found existential concerns increased the desire for romantic sex (Birnbbaum, Hirschberger, & Goldenberg, 2011), elicited greater forgiveness in more committed relationships (Van Tongeren, Green, Davis, Worthington, & Reid, 2013), induced increased parenthood related thoughts (Yaakobi, Mikulincer, & Shaver, 2014), increased the likelihood of naming offspring after oneself (Vicary, 2011), and led to an exaggerated perception of a romantic partner's regard (Cox & Arndt, 2012). These studies provide strong support for the anxiety buffering aptitude of meaningful relationships, and when used as a defence Mikulincer et al. (and others) propose such connections diminish the desire to find security in the domains of self-esteem and worldview. In this way, human connection has the greatest meaning making

and transcendence potential. Increasing levels of consumption in the Western world, however, would suggest the buffering and death transcendent capacity of relationship and spirituality is possibly underutilised, maybe as a result of ideological shifts toward Individualism and changes in the nature of community (Bauman, 2001).

1.3.4 Bringing the Consumer Context Together

Exploring both the dominant Western cultural consumption patterns over time, and the possible ideological, economic, and national structures contributing to problematic consumption currently, highlights the very contextualised and complex setting in which consumers are engaged. Based on the theory presented, it is possible macro-systemic changes over the course of the last three centuries have had profound implications for the nature of community and the experience of selfhood, in a way that has perpetuated and supported consumerism.

The theoretical and contextualised understanding of dominant Western consumerism that has been presented by scholars evokes the following account. The interaction of scientific reasoning and romantic philosophy during the period of the Enlightenment combined the ideals of self-expression, pleasure, and imaginative fantasy with increasing accessibility of symbolic laden commodities and streamlined production processes (Campbell, 1987). It was this interplay between Romanticism and rationality that is believed to underlie modernity (Rougmont, 1956), an episteme that considers identity and selfhood as extrinsically determined, and each person as unique and separate (Carlisle et al., 2009; Slater, 1997). In this way, it is believed modernity progressively strengthened the ideology of Individualism (Taylor, 1991). The nature of community is also theorised to have been drastically restructured during the period of the industrial revolution as a result of urbanisation (Thomson, 2005; Tönnies, 1974), and later, Neoliberalism is argued to threaten community power, community voice, and solidarity (Lawson, 2009; Thake, 2009). Finally globalisation, is believed to be breaking down the borders defining nations, and blurring the lines between cultures and national identities (Arnould & Price, 2000; Shabir et al., 2015).

It is theorised these socio-structural changes have had unfathomable implications for each person. Scholars argue that no longer are individuals regarding themselves as a piece of the

collective (Beyerlein & Vaisey, 2013; Greenfield, 2013; Long, 1999), or benefitting from the meaningfulness and security *collective understanding* affords them (Bauman, 2001). Instead it is theorised people seek significance and assurance in their lives, and value in their sense of self through symbolic laden products (Bauman, 2009; Elliot & Lemert, 2006) and materialistic worldviews (Dittmar, 2010). It is also suggested that the loss of community autonomy under Neoliberalism, is creating a sense of powerlessness for individuals (Pulcini, 2010), who then use consumption as a way of coping (Thake, 2009). Furthermore, while it can be argued that individuals pursue a sense of community belonging and connection through neo-tribal consumption (Arnould & Price, 2000), it is apparent they may struggle to reconcile the two opposing desires of freedom and security, which results in weak and transient bonds (Bauman, 2001). Thus individuals shaped by the context they inhabit, are believed to consume to belong (Arnould & Price, 2000), consume to forget (Lawson, 2009), and consume to realise selfhood (Bauman, 2001).

The possibility that commodities provide a sense of security and meaningfulness in the world may be supported by TMT (Arndt et al., 2004). TMT provides insight into the power of worldview and ideology in feelings of personal existential security and esteem for individuals (Greenberg & Arndt, 2011). In the case of dominant Western consumer culture, Arndt et al. (2004) and Dittmar (2010) argue these worldviews and ideologies relate to materialism. Embedded within this culture of materialism, individuals are therefore believed to seek security and esteem in material objects that are imbued with social significance (Solomon et al., 2004). In this way, it is speculated that TMT explains the human need to connect with something meaningful, or something that transcends the self, in order to feel secure in the world. In more recent discussion and research, the focus on TMT and consumerism has expanded from products, to spirituality (Hui et al., 2012; Kesebir, 2014), and meaningful human relationships (Birnbaum et al., 2011; Mikulincer et al., 2003). From this research it has been suggested that meaningful relationships have a stronger mortality buffering potential than worldview adherence (Mikulincer et al., 2003). It is therefore feasible that authentic community historically once had the potential to provide a sense of existential security, which would have removed the need to search for security in materialism. That is, modern socio-structural and ideological shifts that have changed the nature of community, may have also changed the defences used against existential

anxieties. Thus existential security, meaning, and esteem are perhaps now chiefly found in consumption related cultural worldviews (Arndt et al., 2004), which have been shaped by modernity.

This historically bound understanding of current consumer behaviour provides a highly contextualised narrative of problematic consumerism, and brings awareness to the possible worldviews and ideologies that underlie it. However this understanding is largely grounded in philosophical postulations and substantive theory, which in parts is limited in empirical exploration and evidence. The intention of this research then, is to determine the merit of these arguments by putting them aside, and empirically exploring the issue of problematic consumerism from the ground up (Heath, 2006; Morse & Mitcham, 2002). Furthermore, theory concerning consumerism presented here, has predominantly been applied to a North American context (Putnam, 1995; Reisman et al., 1950; Ritzer, 1993; Thomson, 2005) or dominant Western society generally (Bauman, 1998; Featherstone, 2007). Given that there appears to be disparities between Australian and North American settings, such as in how environmental issues are presented in the media (O'Neill, 2013), or in the way the dominant culture in each nation treats wealth and status (Mandisodza, Jost, & Unzueta, 2006), there is therefore a need to make sense of what consumption means to people in Australia specifically.

1.4 Research Rationale

Overall, the aim of this thesis is to build on existing knowledge of consumerism. Research in the field of problematic consumption and consumer behaviour is extensive, typically aimed at either measuring the level of income spent on non-essential items (Hamilton et al., 2005), looking at correlations between particular materialistic values (Grouzet et al., 2005; Kasser & Ryan, 1996), the impact it is having on the environment (Jones et al., 2006), public attitudes towards this ecological impact (Jain, 2012), or it has looked at ways consumerism could be made more sustainable (Jones, Hillier, Comfort, & Eastwood, 2005). The outcomes from much of this research have led to the development of campaigns promoting sustainable actions by individuals, businesses, and urban planners, and the production of eco-labelled products and services that promise to reduce humanities ecological footprint (Akenji, 2012; Fitzgerald, 2010; Mansvelt, 2010). Such interventions, however, are

insufficient in meeting all the environmental challenges being experienced now and expected in the future as people are highly inconsistent in their pro-environmental behaviours (Thøgersen & Crompton, 2009). Such interventions also tend to foster *green consumerism* instead of sustainable consumption which distracts from the structural changes needed for sustainable development at a macro scale, as it creates an illusion of environmentally conscious progress (Akenji, 2012). Furthermore the savings generated from sustainable and green actions may psychologically justify other consumerist activities, creating a rebound effect (Alcott, 2008; Herring, 1999). Indeed, despite research revealing increasing self-professed commitment to sustainable values, the environmental footprint of consumers continues to rise (Holt, 2012). Thus true and lasting change requires the values and worldviews deeply embedded within the political and social-psychological system to be addressed (Sanne, 2002). Furthermore in order to effectively communicate and generate positive societal action Magistro and Roncoli (2001) argue the necessity of understanding the cultural models and meanings, and collective myths on which information and ideas are filtered. Speculating on the social dynamics underlying, and contributing to, problematic consumption, scholars have postulated the restructuring and consequent loss of community through urbanisation, globalisation, Neoliberalism, and Individualism (Lawson, 2009; Tönnies, 1974), which has led to individuals seeking meaning and security in consumption (Arnould & Price, 2000; Bauman, 2009). While highly contextualised, this narrative of consumerism is yet to be fully explored empirically, and is largely based on an American context or a general idea of Western culture. Based on this premise, and given the impact consumption is having on the environment, this research sought to increase the knowledge base of consumerism by empirically exploring the myths, worldviews, ideologies, and social structures that lie beneath and support the dominant Western model of consumerism in Australia.

Chapter 2 Research Design

The issue of consumerism in Western culture is complex. As discussed in Chapter One, consumerism is deeply embedded within historical and temporal processes such as the Enlightenment, industrialisation, and globalisation (Elliot & Lemert, 2006; Stearns, 2006). It has been argued consumerism is influenced by the ideological systems of Modernism, Neoliberalism, and Individualism (Lawson, 2009; Thake, 2009), and is inseparable from the changed nature of community, from social norms and selfhood (Bauman, 1998, 2001). Given the complexity and impact of consumerist patterns in a contemporary Western dominant cultural context, deconstructing and exploring the underlying worldviews and mythology that underpins Western consumerism requires an epistemological framework that supports such an investigation. Indeed, research paradigms characteristic of previous inquiry have not supported such exploration. For these reasons, intervention initiatives developed as an attempt to foster pro-environment behaviour have been limited and encouraged green consumerism; a form of consumerism in its own right (Akenji, 2012). It is argued genuine change requires a transformation to the social structures and frameworks in which people live and consume. However, in order for second and third order change such as this to come to fruition, the ideologies and deep psychological processes that underpin consumerism must be first exposed and challenged. This research differs from previous studies in the area of consumerism by adopting a research paradigm that allows the complexity and deeper meanings inherent to social phenomena to be revealed. Furthermore, given methodology appropriate to such inquiry is limited in this domain, the framework used to investigate and provide insight into consumerism was informed by a number of theoretical areas.

In a broader context, this inquiry is positioned within the field of community psychology. From a theoretical standpoint, community psychology appreciates the ecological and multi-layered dynamics of human experience and thus provides an appropriate foundation on which to build the ontological, epistemological, and analytical framework underpinning this investigation (Bishop et al., 2013). Furthermore, in response to the limitations of traditional psychology to alleviate social problems (Rappaport, 1977), community psychology has transformed the way community and research is engaged and approached, and the ways phenomena are conceptualised. This chapter outlines the body of work used to inform this

research inquiry. Starting with the theoretical footing of community psychology, I then engage in a discussion of ontology and epistemology and stipulate the epistemological position underpinning this research. Follows is an examination of *truth* as it relates to the co-construction of knowledge, and a description of theory-generative research. Next, I outline the theoretical context providing an explanation for causal layered analysis as the analytical framework for this research project. Finally, I describe the specific methods and procedures used in this investigation, as well as the strategies employed to ensure quality, trustworthiness and rigour throughout the research process.

2.1 Community Psychology: A Broader Theoretical Context

Psychology has traditionally been concerned with the cognitions, motivations, emotions, behaviour, and development of individuals, and in doing so has emphasised intrapsychic and individualistic explanations in addressing social issues (Rappaport, 1977). These explanations based on the medical model, were recognised as being inadequate and too narrow for societal intervention, stimulating the emergence of community psychology (Bennett et al., 1966; Bishop et al., 2013). The principles underlying community psychology acknowledge the well-being of individuals to be inextricably tied to the functioning of community and social processes. These principles appreciate the complexity inherent to social issues, respecting the web of interdependent and dynamic relationships, as well as the multiple layers of localities, organisations, values, beliefs, and ideologies that make up a community system (Kloos et al., 2012). Thus community psychology focuses on promoting healthy functioning to the whole community as opposed to separate individuals, with its primary concern being the deep transformation of social conditions (Montenegro, 2002).

The theoretical basis of community psychology lies within the concept of empowerment. Endorsed by Rappaport (1981), empowerment conveys people achieving greater control over their lives, becoming more involved within their communities, and acquiring critical understandings of the social and political structures they are embedded within (Zimmerman, 1995). Empowerment also involves the possession of knowledge, skills, motivation, and interpersonal relations to contribute towards and make changes (Christens, 2012), and appears as a multilevel construct, relevant to both the individual and the

communities in which they belong. Subsequently empowerment implies recognition of people in context (Rappaport, 1987). Rappaport (1987) describes this as the *ecology of empowerment*, and includes the consideration of “role relationships between people, policy, programs and professionals, [of] change over time, and [of] the contextual meaning of the variables of interest” (p. 134). These elements, Rappaport explains, are mutually influential on each other, and as such, inquiry must take place across different levels of analysis, and not be limited to the study of individuals. This is because racial, economic, and educational justice, as well as legal rights, health care, competence, and sense of community, can only exist within a society in which empowerment is widespread. Empowerment also appears to be an issue within sustainability. For example, Rich, Edelstein, Hallman, and Wandersman (1995) discuss the potential disempowerment experienced by individuals and communities associated with local environmental threats. This collective sense of disempowerment is believed to be the product of political, institutional, and resource mobility arrangements that limit the voice and capacity of community members to make positive environmental changes (Quimby & Angelique, 2011). The framework of community psychology is well suited to this research because it recognises the capacity of change towards sustainability is shaped by the degree of empowerment allowed by the socio-political system communities are embedded (Rich et al., 1995). Addressing social and environmental issues then, goes beyond the individual to include transformation at an organisational, political, sociological, economic, and spiritual level (Dittmer & Riemer, 2012; Rappaport, 1987).

2.1.1.1 Praxis in Community Psychology

Embedding empowerment within praxis, a term defined as the unification of theory and action (Prilleltensky, 2001), community psychologists work as collaborators with community members, identifying community needs and then developing actions to meet them. Ideally a practitioner needs to be positioned as an agent of social change, active and engaged (Montero, 1996; Newbrough, 1992). Bennett et al. (1966) termed this role *participant-conceptualiser*. A title that reflects the active collaboration with community members and involvement in community processes. The individual who adopts the role of participant-conceptualiser should be able to self-reflect, a task that is particularly pertinent in an ever evolving social system where the impact of action cannot be known in advance (Smith,

1983). Encouraging self-reflection in those the practitioner is engaged with is also critical as events, objects, and activities are embedded with *meanings*, which *create* the lived reality of the community (Smith, 1983). The term participant-conceptualiser therefore, indicates a professional role in conceptualising macro-systemic processes within the context of psychosocial knowledge and theory (Bennett et al., 1966), and facilitating collective conscious awareness of symbols and meaning making processes (Smith, 1983). In this way the community psychologist works cooperatively with the community to re-examine patterns of interaction and psychosocial knowledge, and assist them in finding solutions that foster change, particularly in the direction of wellness, prevention, and competence (Elias, 1994; Smith, 1983).

Newbrough (1992) and Dokecki (1992) also argued for the community psychologist to engage in *reflective-generative practice*. This is a model for transformational psychological action which combines the work of Schön's (1983) *reflective practice*, Gergen's (1978) concept of the *generative theorist*, and Erikson's (1964) notion of generativity. Schön's reflective practitioner is an intervention agent operating via an intimate back-and-forth of knowledge generation in theory, and knowledge use in practice. In this way inquiry is perceived as arising from the very action of practice, which is used to inform further intervention (Dokecki, 1992). The generative theorist, as described by Gergen (1978), is a social scientist with the "capacity to challenge the guiding assumptions of the culture, to raise fundamental questions regarding contemporary social life, to foster reconsideration of that which is 'taken for granted' and thereby furnish new alternatives for social actions" (p. 1346). Inquiry, therefore, for the generative theorist avoids positioning value and *fact* in opposition, instead the everyday is seen in new ways (Fischer, 1980; Schön, 1979). Finally, Erikson's notion of generativity refers to the profound concern one has for the wellbeing of future generations, which extends beyond their children, and may also encompass the natural environment (Winter, 1989). Uniting these three concepts, the *reflective-generative practitioner* seeks to strengthen community by integrating inquiry and reflection with practical and value-based action (Dokecki, 1992; Bishop, Sonn, Drew, & Contos, 2002). In practice this becomes a circular process of reflection and action, where action inspires reflection and reflection informs action (Dokecki, 1992; Newbrough, 1992). The benefits of this approach for genuine community transformation are that it encourages

problematization and *consciousness-raising* (Montenegro, 2002). The concept of *problematization* here, refers to the process of questioning common knowledge and perceptions of the world, which allows alternative and new viewpoints to emerge (Crotty, 1998), and *consciousness-raising* signifies a process involving the gradual awareness of worldviews and ideologies concealing reality (Montero, 1994). The significance of both these conditions is that they are the cornerstone in promoting action within community as they invigorate a reconsideration of worldview and meaning, which inspires solutions and complements the process of empowerment (Montenegro, 2002).

It can be argued, therefore, that the position of the community psychologist differs remarkably from the idea of the detached human scientist as has historically been the primary role for individuals within mainstream psychological inquiry. This shift in the conceptualisation of researcher which is underpinned by an appreciation of community ecology; necessary to meet the goals of empowerment, means that research is directed less by technique and is more dependent on context (Bishop, 2007). Indeed, the field typically engages in methodology involving participant action research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnographies, and case studies. From a philosophical point of view, despite the legacy of positivistic dominance in psychology still contradictorily underpinning much of this research (Bishop et al., 2013; Burr, 2002; Dzidic, Breen, & Bishop, 2013), the contextual nature of communities and the principles guiding community praxis has spurred an ongoing and gradual shift in how the field fundamentally comprehends the world, and how social problems and phenomena are conceptualised (Bishop, 2007; Bishop & Dzidic, 2014; Docecki, 1992). Theory and epistemology indicative of this shift away from positivism underlie this research inquiry.

2.1.2 Conceptualising the ‘wickedness’ of Consumerism

Problematic overconsumption is considered a *wicked problem*. A wicked problem is a social phenomenon that is characteristically complex; being made up of multiple interdependent networks and variables, it is difficult to manage and define (Rittel & Webber, 1973). It is also unique, shaped and grounded in context, and for this reason efforts made to find solutions are not simply generalised from other problems (Wexler, 2009). Furthermore it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of any particular resolution, as when one interconnecting variable

from a multitude is addressed, the resulting shifts in the dynamics of others can cause new constraints and issues (Kurtz & Snowden, 2003). Indeed, the seeming resistance of wicked problems to solutions arises because the issues of today emerge as a consequence of attempting to understand and solve the issues of yesterday (Termeer, Dewulf, Breeman, & Stiller, 2015). For policy makers and researchers, the complexity and ambiguity characteristic of a wicked problem means such problems are considered too difficult, and are either ignored or insufficiently investigated, and provoke a sense of despair and hopelessness (Bishop & Dzidic, 2014). The problem of consumerism in the West fits this description. That is, its excessive nature is influenced by many layers of interrelated and interactive processes. Certainly, consumerism is deeply embedded within ideological and cultural beliefs, habits, and norms, which not only shape personal and collective behaviour but also determine how the issue is addressed and approached in popular discourse (Fleming et al., 2014). These processes are also grounded within space and time, and for this reason are inseparable from context (Fleming et al., 2014).

It is the inherent complexity and unpredictability of wicked problems such as consumerism that make them inappropriate for reductionist and mechanistic approaches to investigation (Jayasinghe, 2011). Unfortunately, it is these very approaches that underpin inquiry on such issues as it is highly valued as “evidence-based practice” (Van Beurden, Kia, Zask, Dietrich, & Rose, 2013) and “pure” scientific research (Bishop et al., 2013). Even community psychology, a discipline that claims to acknowledge the multilevel and ecological nature of social phenomena, struggles to release itself from individualistic and positivistic inclination (Bishop et al., 2013). Indeed epistemology, the fundamental beliefs about self, others and the world, is important in shaping what questions are asked about an issue, how those questions are formulated, the ways the information is sought, and the interpretive framework used to understand the responses (Creswell, 2007).

Pepper (1942) identified four main epistemological positions shaping the research process, these being formism, mechanism, organicism, and contextualism. Altman and Rogoff (1987) later applied Pepper’s framework to psychological research, and renamed the worldviews as being *trait*; study of the psychological processes of the individual, *interactionalism*; equal to positivism and the prediction and control of behavioural and psychological processes, *organismic*; the holistic study of psychological and environmental systems, and

transactionalism; the study of changing relations among environmental and psychological unities. Of these, it has been positivism, reflected in hard sciences and experimental studies that investigate cause and effect relationships, that has dominated research inquiry across many disciplines (Bishop et al., 2013; Dokecki, 1992; Van Beurden et al., 2013). The basic premise of this epistemology is that there is a single objective and external reality that can be observed, described, and measured to uncover *true* knowledge that is value and bias free. Inquiry is thus typified by deductive reasoning and hypothesis testing, and the goal of the researcher is to remain emotionally neutral and distant from those they are studying, to separate reason and feeling, science and personal experience (Carson, Gilmore, Perry, & Gronhaug, 2001). This epistemology, having arisen from the period of the Enlightenment, has been embraced by modern Western culture as the fundamental worldview from which the world is conceptualised, contemporary society therefore, socialised in positivism, perceives social issues merely in antecedent causation terms (Bishop et al., 2013). Consequently, research fails to comprehend the multileveled and complex character of wicked problems, and tends to ignore the lived experience, values, and perspectives of key stakeholders and those directly involved or affected by resulting interventions (Head, 2008). Therefore, strategies posed to alleviate the issue can be unsuitable (Bishop & Dzidic, 2014), superficial (Bishop et al., 2013), and stimulate hidden cause and effect feedback loops which can precipitate unexpected problems (Van Beurden et al., 2013).

Responding to the limitations of inquiry grounded in positivistic epistemology to adequately conceptualise complex social phenomena, Dokecki (1992), and later Bishop et al. (2013), advocate for psychosocial and community research to be grounded in contextualism. Dokecki in particular applied Pepper's original framework of the four epistemologies to different methodological paradigms within human sciences, and more specifically community psychology. These are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 Dokecki's (1992) Human Science Methodological Framework for Community Psychology

Scope of Inquiry	Type of Inquiry	
	Quantitative/Impersonal	Qualitative/Personal
Micro-Level	Experimental and Functional Studies (Mechanism/Positivism)	Interpretive Studies (Formism/Trait)
Macro-Level	Systems-Analytic Studies (Organicism/Organismic)	Worldview Studies (Contextualism/Transactionalism)

Dokecki argued that the complexity and scope of social problems the human sciences must attend to would require the discipline to embrace a variety of methods. Indeed, the framework presented in Table 1 would suggest that human science inquiry could be focused and narrow at a micro level, or be more broad and inclusive at a macro level. He rationalised that adopting different methods would provide different but complementary perspectives on social phenomena. It was, however, worldview studies grounded in contextualism, that Dokecki (1992) felt was necessary to achieve a complete understanding of the community. He argued that worldview studies positions inquiry within the human sciences to gain knowledge about whole political and social systems, as well as ideological, political, and ethical worldviews, which helps to facilitate decisions, particularly when there are competing value positions.

Indeed, contextualism, which underpins worldview studies, differs remarkably from the historically preferred positivistic paradigm of modern science. As described by Altman and Rogoff (1987) contextualism assumes that psychological phenomena are the confluence of environmental and temporal entities, psychological processes, and persons. Contextualism considers all these elements as inseparable and dependant on one another, aspects of a whole that coexist and jointly define one another. In this way contextualism seeks to examine the relational qualities of norms, roles, and rules that regulate and direct people in various contexts, in changing conditions, and in relations with others. Whereas mechanism (or rather positivism) focuses on the antecedent-consequent associations between variables

considered separate entities, contextualism considers the meaning and nature of an event as it arises from the coexistence and dyadic relationship of person and context. Furthermore contextualism recognises the importance of time, with temporal processes such as industrialisation, Individualism, and globalisation assumed to be an integral aspect of the whole (Altman & Rogoff, 1987). Thus phenomena are understood by examining the changing relationships within the person-environmental and historical system. Subsequently, contextualism frames the research in a paradigm that recognises the complexity of the problem (Bishop et al., 2013), and in doing so moves beyond the superficiality of first order change to challenge the deeper levels of social ideology, values, and norms (Bishop et al., 2013; Waters et al., 2003). In recognising the *wickedness* and inherent complexity of Western consumption practices, it was therefore necessary to ground this research inquiry within a contextualist epistemology.

In addition, the contextualist position underpinning this research is further buttressed by the ontological typology proposed by Kurtz and Snowden (2003). Their *cynefin* framework (see Figure 2-1) for sense-making draws on complexity science, an academic field that directs its study towards *complex adaptive systems*. That is, human systems characterised by dynamic webs of interaction which adapt and self-organise through emergent individual and collective behaviour changes (Van Beurden et al., 2013). The term *cynefin* is Welsh, and translated means habitat, the place of multiple affiliations and sense of collective roots (Kurtz & Snowden, 2003). The framework differentiates the known, knowable, complex, and chaotic domains of human systems, and in this way helps to make sense of social problems, particularly those that are characteristically wicked. The known domain encompasses undisputed, predictable, linear, and empirical cause and effect relationships, which typically inform standard operating procedures and single-point forecasting. The knowable domain on the other hand reflects similar stable cause and effect relationships, however these relationships might not be known entirely as they are separated over space and time. Here, analytical and reductionist methodologies are utilised, as well as scenario planning and systems thinking. Both the known and the knowable domains represent *ordered* space, where general rules and hypotheses can be derived, where “the whole is the sum of the parts” in problem solving (Kurtz & Snowden, 2003, p. 446). These are also the domains in which mainstream psychology tend to operate, characterised by positivistic and

reductionistic methodologies and episteme (Dzidic et al., 2013). Conversely, the complex and chaotic domains reflect *un-ordered* space, a dynamic and continuously altering environment, where “the whole is never the sum of the parts” (Kurtz & Snowden, p.446), and where it is possible to explore the pattern of phenomena but never assume order. This is the space argued to be of the human sciences (Dzidic et al., 2013). Indeed, the complex domain contains ambiguity; non-linear cause and effect relationships between multiple agents which challenge conventional categorisation and analysis. Here, emergent patterns of social phenomena are only understood retrospectively and in context. However these patterns cannot be relied on for prediction as their underlying causes are not seen. The chaotic domain deepens in complexity, representing concealed relationships within a turbulent system, where patterns are only perceivable to a few and traditional forms of analysis are useless (Kurtz & Snowden, 2003). Together these four domains epitomise the rich, multi-dimensional, and diverse nature of society, and provides a model on which a holistic understanding of social phenomena can be created that is rooted in historic, cultural, and situational context (Snowden, 2011).

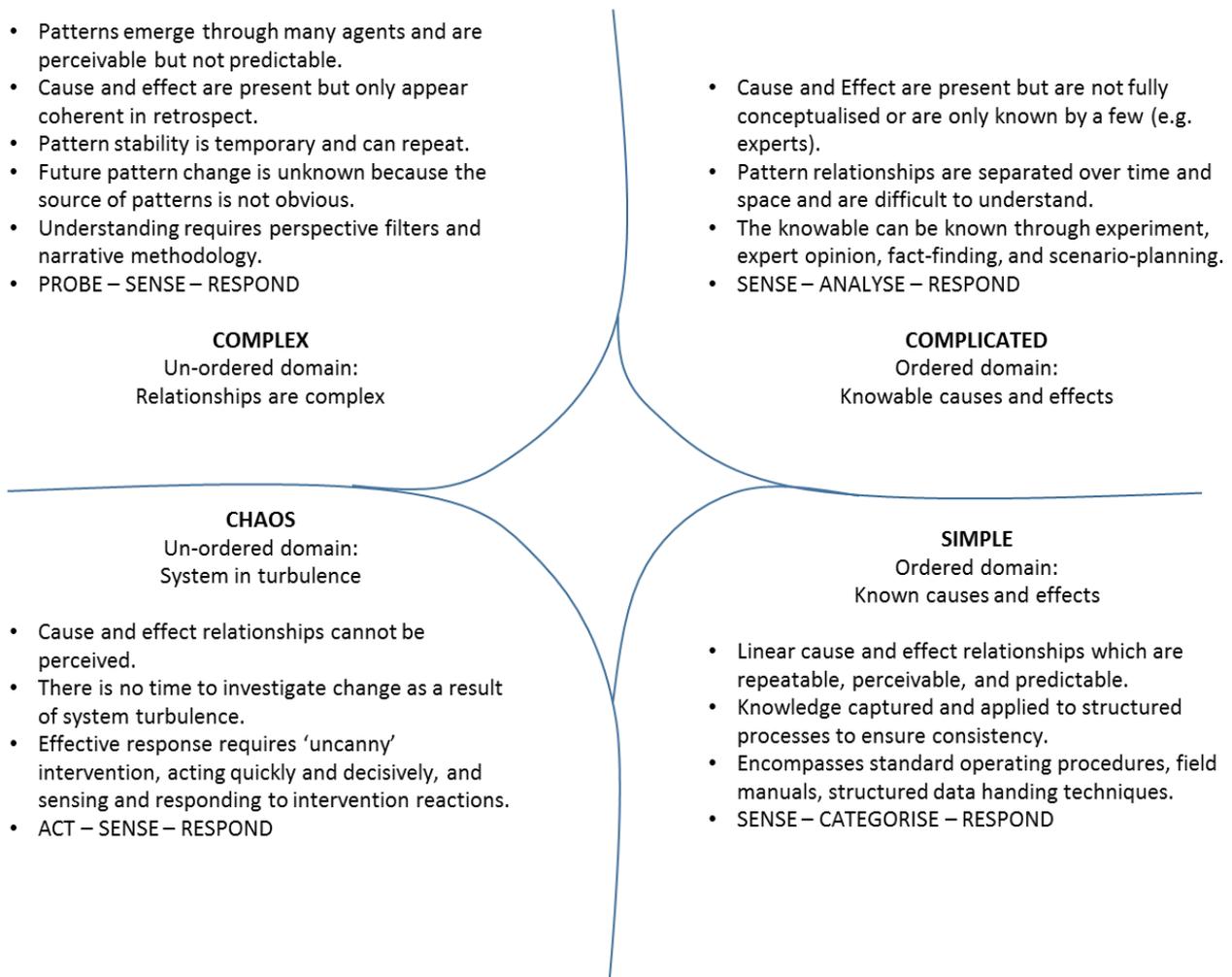


Figure 2-1 The cynefin framework, created by Kurtz and Snowden (2003).

The cynefin framework partners well with contextualism as it offers an appropriate and realistic lens through which consumerism in all its complexity can be interpreted. What is more, other methodological elements within this research project have also been shaped by this ontological and epistemological paradigm. These being: my position as researcher and co-creator of knowledge, the theoretical understandings of intervention and change, and the analytical framework chosen for this research. These last points will be the subject of discussion in the following sections.

2.1.3 Reconceptualising the Researcher-Participant Relationship and the notion of truth

Epistemology has a profound influence on how the researcher conceptualises the participant. For instance, the researcher whose epistemology is grounded within positivism will consider participants as passive subjects to be studied and observed. For the researcher,

this means the necessity of maintaining distance from the participant, being as invisible, contained, and unobtrusive as possible (Carter & Little, 2007). *Truth* in positivistic inquiry is therefore a value-free explanatory statement about the world (Ali & Chowdhury, 2015). Contextualist and phenomenological epistemologies, however, conceptualise the researcher-participant relationship very differently, particularly when faced with the ambiguity and uncertainty of complex social problems (Dzidic et al., 2013). It was Heidegger (1962) who first significantly challenged the assumptions of naturalistic science grounded in positivistic worldviews (Polkinghorne, 1983), arguing hermeneutics, or rather interpretation, could not be an objective process, as humans are fundamentally self-interpreting beings. Thus, distancing oneself from inquiry is a misdirected idea, as being human is to interpret; to derive meaning from experience, and to shape experience through interpretation. Being human, he says “is a laying-open of what is hidden: we are beings who approach ourselves with the hermeneutic question “what does it mean to be?”” (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 224). For Heidegger, *truth* cannot be constructed through methods promising objectivity and the freedom of bias, rather it is manifested through our interaction with the world. *Knowing* therefore arises from engagement, and is not about generating accurate description, but about understanding the meanings embodied within social discourse, and contingent to this is the time, space, and context in which this discourse transpires. One of Heidegger’s foundational assumptions was that the experiences, pre-suppositions, and values of the researcher create a *veil* that hides *knowing* truth, understanding, and lived experience. Thus in collaboration with the participant, the researcher is tasked with *unveiling* the common experiences of phenomena through iterative and progressive processes of interpretation and reflection (Bishop et al., 2002), a process termed the *hermeneutic circle*. The hermeneutic circle, as is depicted in Figure 2-2, is a metaphor representing the back and forth movement between parts and the whole (Dilthey, 1976).

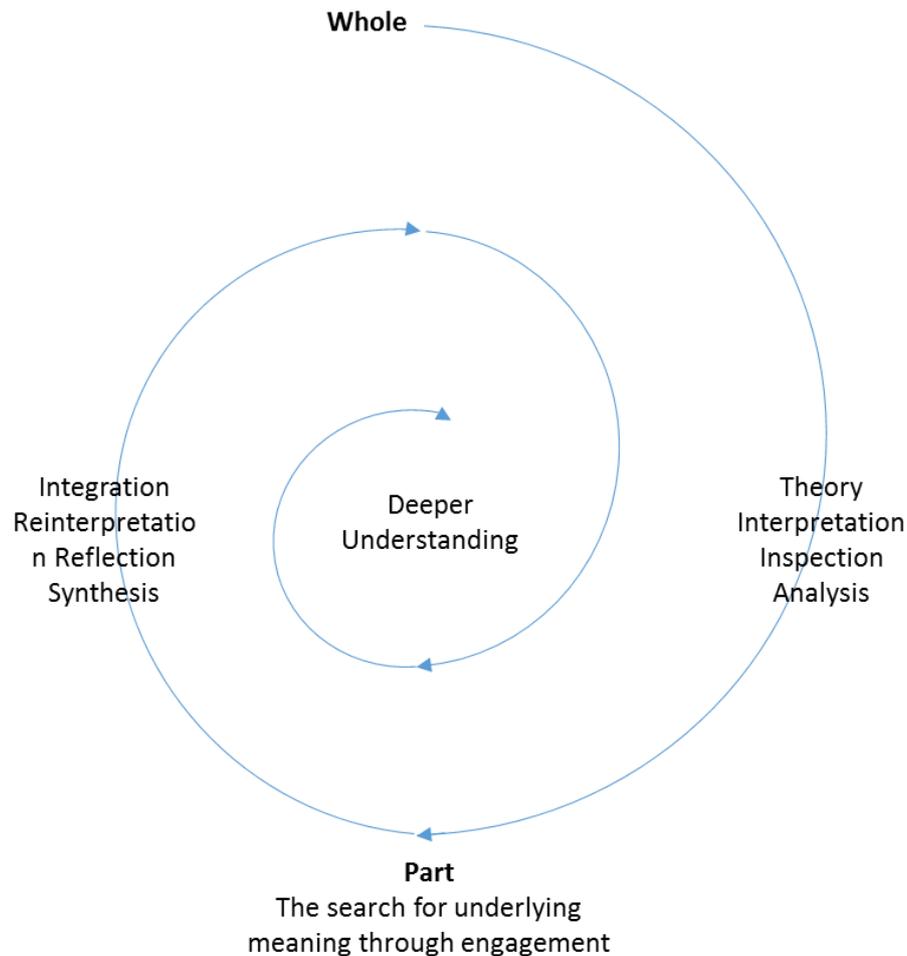


Figure 2-2 A visual representation of the hermeneutic circle.

The hermeneutic circle in interpretation reflects the spiraling relationship between analysis and deeper understanding, which uncovers something new from something familiar. This relationship results from perceiving phenomena from different angles as the researcher engages with the participant and the issue being interpreted (Polkinghorne, 1983). Gadamer (1975) applied the hermeneutic circle as a model of understanding, arguing that 'objective' methods can never reveal value-free undistorted knowledge, as the historical and cultural contexts that shape the understanding of the researcher cannot be escaped. Rather the lifeworld, which includes the beliefs, values and concepts of the interpreter, are legitimate components in understanding and interpretation, and thus become enmeshed with the lifeworld of the interpreted through dialectical interaction. This creates meaning in context, or what Gadamer describes as the *fusion of horizons*. Therefore, understanding progressively emerges as each person relinquishes a little of themselves to the other through dialogue, to co-create a new horizon or whole. In this way there is no one or correct

truth, but deeper understanding of the self, of others, and of the world through common themes, and shared and revised meanings (Polkinghorne, 1983; Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). The hermeneutic circle also means human experience and knowledge continuously unfold only through relation with others. As Macmurray (1961) puts it: “the Self is constituted by its relation to the Other; it has its being in its relationship; and...this relationship is necessarily personal” (p. 17). It is argued such exchanges produce a co-construction of understanding with a texture that is more complete (Wilkinson, 1998), since “we know existence by participating in existence” (Macmurray, 1961, p. 17). In summarising the philosophy of Heidegger (1962) and Gadamer, Yanchar (2014) writes:

...both researchers and participants are agents situated in the world and exhibit comportment as a basic mode of existence. As researchers conduct inquiry—that is, as they seek to disclose something relevant regarding a phenomenon of interest—they do so as participational agents rather than as detached spectators. They are not constructing realities, from this perspective, but rather—if their work is careful and insightful—disclosing a given phenomenon in a theoretically or practically useful way, made possible by their concerned involvement with participants, artefacts, and so on. In this sense, the world and its phenomena are always already underway and research practices make their contribution by revealing what was previously tacit, obscured, or misunderstood. (p.114)

The engaged and transactional researcher-participant relationship of Heidegger (1962) and Gadamer (1975) is far removed from the clinical relationship of positivistic inquiry. What is significant, however, is how the nature of knowledge creation here also influences the position of researcher. Unlike empirical research, the researcher in Heidegger’s hermeneutics is an active participant, whose concerned involvement and mattering in the world shapes how phenomena are engaged. The term *concernful involvement* here reflects a persons’ meaningful and purposeful participation in the world, characterised by their existential concerns, and how in their lives, they answer the hermeneutic question of “what does it mean to be?” (Taylor, 1985; Yanchar, 2014). Thus the way phenomena are revealed in inquiry will be shaped by how the agent attempts to cope, gain skills, solve problems, and dispositionally engage the world. According to Yanchar (2014), it is engagement and concerned involvement in the everyday familiarity of life that provides the setting from which worthwhile research questions surface. Indeed, it is argued that by reflecting on and seeking deeper understanding on their own concerned involvement, researchers can

produce fundamental and significant insight in their disclosures (Heidegger, 1962; Westerman, 2006; Yanchar, 2014). This, however, does not supersede the understandings generated from the experiences of participants; rather insight can be expanded by encouraging participants to contribute their meanings by sharing their own concerned involvement (Yanchar, 2014). Certainly, Polkinghorne (1983) asserts participants will offer more undisguised and genuine information when the researcher is also honest and self-revealing in the interview process, and in this way disclosure of phenomena becomes a collaborative process between researcher and participant (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The construction of knowledge therefore is first engaged with the researchers' search for truth, arising through disclosure regarding the significant feature of human existence. What is important? What is its relevance? How and why does it matter? (Yanchar, 2014). Hermeneutics then encompasses a circular and progressive process of shared disclosure with participants, as each person shares and abstracts meaning from their concerned involvement with the world, which when brought together form a meaningful perspective and narrative of phenomena that is temporally and contextually positioned. While the researcher-participant relationship exemplified in Heidegger's philosophy has many similarities with the participant-conceptualiser and reflective-generative practice of community psychology praxis in terms of reflection, problematisation, and consciousness-raising, the hermeneutic circle and shared concerned involvement deepens the researchers' position in the meaning-making process.

Furthermore, an important component in the process of joint meaning-making worth noting is the individual and personal transformation both the researcher and participant may experience through the research process. Anderson and Braud (2011) comment "that under certain conditions, planning, conducting, participating in, or learning about a research project can be accompanied by increased self-awareness, enhanced psycho-spiritual growth and development, and other personal changes of great consequence to the individuals involved" (p. xvi). Self-knowing as described by Butler (2005) is always contextualised within relationships, and in the mutual offering of self through research, qualitative shifts in life-view and worldview can be profound (Anderson & Braud, 2011). Therefore in reconceptualising the participant-researcher relationship, not only is the generation of

knowledge positioned as a joint and collaborative project of meaningful co-construction, this very process can also facilitate transformational learning and experience.

2.1.4 Emerging knowledge

In engaging the *wickedness* of dominant Western cultural consumption practices as a joint meaning-making process with participants, emerging theory throughout this research project was informed by the theoretical frameworks of *Substantive Theorising* and *iterative-reflective-generative practice*. The development of theory is considered some of the most critical work in fostering community transformation (Newbrough, 1995) and addressing social issues. For Newbrough (1995) theory and inquiry are central to system change as “we need to know communities, both urban and rural. We need to know what they want to become. We need to know how to intervene with them effectively” (p. 16). Furthermore, Sarason (2000) describes the transactional nature of theory and action, whereby “theories are the myths we create from our data, our experience, as a basis for new actions that tell us how much of our myths we have to discard” (p. 924). The generation of theory is not only important in guiding action but should always be open to the possibility of new, strange, and challenging ideas as a problem is confronted (Sarason, 2000). In this way, assumptions are continuously being evaluated and theory is always being refined (Elias, 1994). Traditionally however, theory development has been underpinned by positivistic paradigms, reflecting the dominance of such an epistemology in scientific worldview (Bishop, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1983; Wicker, 1989). Wicker (1989) argues such a preference “fails to reflect the subtleties and nuances of psychological and social events” (p.532), as well as the temporal and contextual domains from which these occur, thus limiting knowledge relevance and applicability (Bishop, 2007; Smith, 1983; Wicker, 1989). Instead, Wicker asserts the need for what he calls *Substantive Theorising* in psychology; the generation of theory that appreciates the complexity embodied within complex social phenomena.

Substantive theorising differs from research in positivistic approaches as the focus is first on the phenomenon being investigated rather than on concepts, hypotheses, and theories (Wicker, 1989). In substantive theorising, the researcher will identify an event or problem, then choose and apply an appropriate method that honours the temporal and contextual facets of the substantive domain from which the issue arises, and then explore the

interpretations that can be made, concepts that can be applied, or principles that can be synthesised (Wicker, 1989). This idea is akin to the concept of *abductive reasoning*, where knowledge evolves from drawing inferences and speculating on logical combinations of information (Peirce, 1955), or as Åsvoll (2014) describes it, “abduction... implies looking for and exploring potential explanatory patterns within the facts of a phenomenon” (p. 291). Thus, substantive theorising as Wicker envisions it,

...entails free and open discussion about developing ideas. Contradictions, exceptions, and problem cases are explored. Along with the goal of confirming or disconfirming formally stated hypotheses must stand the goals of expanding, elaborating, refining, and reorienting working concepts and propositions. (p. 540)

In this way substantive theorising is an open and ongoing process, and rather than being about the end product, it is about identifying, describing, and understanding substantive domains in more depth.

Along with substantive theorising, this research inquiry was also informed by *iterative-reflective-generative practice* (Bishop et al., 2002). Borrowing from the work of Schön (1983), Gergen (1978), Newbrough (1992), and Docecki (1992), iterative-reflective-generative practice is a circular process of knowledge development in which the conceptual domain is used to inform reflection on a psychosocial phenomenon, and the psychosocial phenomenon is used to reflect on the conceptual domain (Bishop et al., 2002). This reflects an incremental approach to learning where the researcher is considered inseparable from the research process, testing, actively reflecting, readjusting, and retesting research questions until a reasonable picture emerges (Bishop, 2007). For Bishop, the outcomes of this approach are asserted to be theory that is expansive and strengthened through the recognition and inclusion of complexity. Theory generated in this fashion also contributes to assertoric knowledge (Bishop & Browne, 2006). A concept that reflects the presence of multiple knowledge claims (Polkinghorne, 1983). To provide more detail, Polkinghorne (1983) describes that in assertoric knowledge,

...some knowledge claims are better than others, but none is beyond doubt. This is a more common-sense understanding of knowledge, for it means that one can have more confidence in some knowledge claims than in others and need not make a final choice between truth and falsity. (p. 279)

This model acknowledges the existence of multiple realities, and is not only consistent with Heidegger's (1962) conceptualisation of hermeneutics, but also recognises theory as an opportunity for open dialogue between researchers, as opposed to a grand end in itself (Bishop, 2007). Indeed, despite rejecting the idea of absolute objective knowledge, as is the ontology of positivism, it does not mean research cannot attain any usable knowledge (Dokecki, 1992). Truth and validity of such knowledge is argued by Dokecki and Polkinghorne to be grounded in reflective-generative practice and inductive argument within a community. Furthermore, paradox that emerges from such encounters allows researchers to create new meaning through embracing apparent contradiction (Snowden, 2011).

2.1.5 Conceptualising Social Change

Ultimately the goals of research inquiry are to in some way to benefit the human system on which it is based, and in this, knowing communities and how they change is important in considering and addressing social problems (Sarason, 2000). Community change can be conceptualised in a number of different ways, from demographic developments related to the movement of people, to shifts in economic, geographic, institutional, and legal processes. Change can also be conceptualised at a deeper sociocultural and ideological level, which manifests in society through emancipatory and oppressive processes (van Schooten, Vanclay, & Sloopweg, 2003). It is important to recognise how change is conceptualised in research as this will inevitably shape the methodological, action, and transformation processes (Sarason, 1996). Given that wicked problems are shaped by a complex web of social, historical, and ideological factors, a deeper and more expansive conceptualisation of change in research and in the generation of solutions appears the most relevant. Consistent with this is Sarason's (1996, 2000) notion of the barometers of change. While Sarason acknowledges the visibility of many changes over time in communities, such as new buildings, and road and shop changes, he is more concerned with those changes that are less obvious. These more obscure changes relate to the knowledge, perception, and experience of people, their values and worldviews. Barometers in this sense, seeks to understand the ways in which people think, and how they feel in response to the world around them, and the ways in which these thoughts and feelings are at the same time shaping that world (Sarason, 1996). Change here, is conceptualised as "the seeds of future

change” (Sarason, 2000, p. 919), and is a gradual process, making the indicators of ongoing changes difficult to perceive and identify, particularly when immersed within the changing community. Sarason (1996) comments:

What is pervasively fascinating about social change is that we are always playing catch-up ball, that is, using what we have learned from the past to understand the present, which the past has shaped in ways to which our barometers are insensitive. We are then surprised when we are jolted into the awareness that our accustomed ways of seeing our world did not prepare for changes we are now glimpsing. (p. 23)

Being sensitive to barometers of change in inquiry therefore, requires knowledge of the communities’ history, structure, and sociocultural qualities. Such information provides coherence to research and action, and generates theory on how communities have changed and are changing in ways that will significantly impact on the minds, behaviour, and lives of people. Thus being sensitive to barometers of change has the potential to dilute or prevent undesired implications of change through action (Sarason, 2000). The study of transformation also has the power to explore and account for an extensive proportion of the context surrounding phenomena and consequently can identify interventions from multiple positions, an idea that is in harmony with the epistemological and ontological assumptions underpinning this research. Thus recognising the barometers of change is about recognising the deep structural issues and changing ideologies inherent to consumerism in dominant Western society.

While identifying change is one thing, creating it is another. As mentioned previously, work concerning social transformation within community psychology can be achieved through empowerment. Newbrough (1992), however, has extended this theory of empowerment, advocating for what he calls the *Third Position*. The third position is Newbrough’s response to what Adler and Gorman (1955) describe as the “problem of the one and the many”. That is, the inherent conflict between the interests of the community with the interests of individuals. *The One* represents the premodern idea of the village, what Tönnies (1974) referred to as *Gemeinschaft*, where community members, with a focus on loyalty and dependability, form a larger whole that is centrally controlled. Alternatively, *The Many* reflects the modern *Gesellschaft* community, where independence and performance are valued, and individual rights are prioritised over the collective (Kirkpatrick, 1986;

Newbrough, 1992). While the solution provided by *The One* is the political principle of fraternity and the promotion of belongingness, the capacity of the individual is overshadowed by the needs of the group. Conversely, *The Many*, embedded within the principles of liberty and equality, provides the solution of freedom. However the consequence of such is alienation and fragmentation (Newbrough, 1992). To this apparent paradox, Newbrough asserts the postmodern solution of *The One and The Many*, where the three principles of fraternity, liberty, and equality are synthesised, pursued as values, and equivalently met in the development of policy. This he has termed the third position, and has theorised its application would enhance both the development of the individual and the community. It would help establish “social process that provides for diversity that is more just (Equality), cooperative (Fraternity), and free (Liberty) than if the procedure were oriented to achieving only one of the values” (Newbrough, 1992, p. 19). Indeed, he recognises this as a limitation to centralising praxis solely on empowerment. Empowerment, Newbrough (1992) suggests, is akin to the principle of equality, and by adding to it liberty and fraternity solutions and action questions are broadened to meet all three principles when addressing the issue. For example, questions underpinned by equality would ask: Does this policy enable persons to meaningfully participate in a viable community? Questions underpinned by fraternity would ask: Does this policy enhance the development of a viable community? And questions underpinned by liberty would ask: Does this policy enhance individual pursuit of goals? (Newbrough, 1992). The third position also aligns well with the philosophy of Heidegger (1962) as it removes dualism and inspires a balance in ways of approaching the world. Together, the third position intends to create integration at a community level that increases the capacity of communities to manage the stresses, tensions, and anxieties of diversity and change (Newbrough, 1995). In the end, both the theory of empowerment and the third position provides a framework of values on which psychological and political praxis can be evaluated.

2.2 Methodology

Given the complex and multi-dimensional nature of consumerism, evident in the interconnected ideological, historical, social structural, and psychological elements that underpin human consumption, analysis that can embrace multiple levels of reality and

experience is necessary. Causal layered analysis (CLA) is a methodology that aligns well with contextualism and the cynefin framework, and is advocated by Bishop and Dzidic (2014) to unpack the complexity inherent to wicked problems. It is congruent with the theoretical underpinnings of this research, as it acknowledges multiple truths and ways of perceiving phenomena. The following section provides a detailed description of CLA and its application to qualitative data.

2.2.1 Causal Layered Analysis as deconstruction tool

Causal layered analysis was developed by Sohail Inayatullah as a Futures research method that strives to integrate different ways of knowing including empiricism, interpretive, critical, and action learning paradigms (Inayatullah, 2004). While CLA was originally applied to planning and policy, Bishop and Dzidic (2014) have extended its application to the social sciences, particularly psychology. The assumption central to CLA is that underneath the common conceptions of a phenomenon are different layers of reality and alternative ways of knowing. It is claimed that through deconstructing the complexity underlying social issues, possible solutions supporting genuine change can be proposed (Bishop & Dzidic, 2014). Bishop and Dzidic emphasise such change is possible because the systems and structures underpinning and proliferating the phenomenon are exposed and challenged. Indeed, in understanding social phenomena Stråth (2006) states,

The language of globalization and the ideas of clashes of civilizations are sufficient evidence of the role of ideologies, in the form of master narratives, with totalizing ambitions or pretensions of being the explanation of the world. However, the analysis of ideologies has become much more complex. My argument is that instead of taking ideologies as pre-given they must be critically deconstructed and contextualized. Their emergence must be historicized and their appearance must be understood much more in terms of opposition, discontinuities and contradictions, internally as well as externally, than in terms of cohesion and continuity. (p.39)

Causal layered analysis makes visible the inherent complexity of social phenomena and the ideologies that underpin wicked problems by providing a model on which the issue of interest can be considered from multiple and deeper positions (Bishop & Dzidic, 2014). Analysis is organised into four layers, with each layer considering the issue, in this instance Western consumer practice, with more complexity than the layer before it. The first of these involves *Litany*, the most surface layer of knowing. It constitutes public, visible, and obvious

explanations for a phenomenon, and focuses on quantifiable trends and issues; the ‘soundbites’ and popular thinking surrounding the issue (De Simone, 2004). The second layer includes the contextual factors precipitating and influencing an issue and is known as *Social Causes*, and the third layer, which seeks to explore the deeper discursive, social, and cultural processes that both legitimate and support the structure of an issue is known as *Worldview Discourse*. The fourth and deepest layer of analysis focuses on *Myth/Metaphor*, and concerns deconstructing the unconscious dimensions of a phenomenon. These include aspects associated with collective archetypes and conventional metaphors. Effectively this layer of analysis adds emotion to the identified worldview (Inayatullah, 1998). Moving vertically between the layers provides insight into the complex influence and foundational role *Myth/Metaphor*, *Worldview Discourse*, and *Social Causes* play in manifestations of the issue (Western consumer practice) at the Litany layer (Inayatullah, 2004). In accordance with community psychology, the nature of CLA is essentially ecological, identifying micro, meso, exo, and macro aspects of an issue (Bishop & Dzidic, 2014; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Furthermore, similar to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Ecological systems theory, CLA assumes the layers of analysis, like the five ecological systems, are connected, interdependent, and influential on each other (Bishop & Dzidic, 2014). In this way the aim of CLA is not to make claims of causality, but to deconstruct the past and present, the complex and chaotic, and for community psychologists, it offers “the possibility of dealing with the present, the current environment (social, political, historical and physical) constraints on communities, as well as the historically based and relatively stable worldviews and culture” (Bishop & Dzidic, 2014, p. 17). It allows social scientists, including community psychologists, to explore and challenge the motivations and worldviews of key players in decision making and inform policy (Bishop, Vicary, Browne, & Guard, 2009; Hofmeester, Bishop, Stocker, & Syme, 2012), as well as determine the future possibilities and alternatives of social issues (Bishop et al., 2013).

2.2.2 Conducting a Causal Layered Analysis

The method for applying CLA to discursive data is outlined by Bishop and Dzidic (2014). They provide a framework consisting of five distinct steps of analysis which are influenced by De Simone’s (2004) ‘cookbook approach’, while at the same time maintaining Inayatullah’s (1998) intended meaning for each layer. The first step involves considering the research

question. This is followed by becoming familiar with the data, then coding between the layers, coding within the layers, and finally reconstructing the issue.

2.2.2.1 Step one: Considering your research question.

In the beginning of the research Bishop et al. (2013) maintain the importance of having a clear idea of what is being sought from research. In CLA the research question should be one that seeks to understand a complex phenomenon deeply, and the researcher's epistemology needs to be grounded in an appreciation for the multiple perspectives and truths that surround and lie beneath an issue (Bishop & Dzidic, 2014). The above section of this chapter is a demonstration of this first step.

2.2.2.2 Step two: Familiarisation.

The second step of analysis involves a simultaneous process of interviewing, transcribing using 'playscript' transcription (Gibson, 2010), re-reading transcripts, and taking note of any observations or nuances in the data, as well as any initial interpretations and reactions to the data. Reflexive journaling is engaged here, which continues throughout the research process, as the researcher takes note of their responses to the data (Ortlipp, 2008). Familiarisation also includes having an understanding of the culture in which the research is based. This is necessary for step three when decisions are made about what is content relevant to myth/metaphor, and what is relevant to litany (Bishop & Dzidic, 2014).

2.2.2.3 Step three: Coding between the layers.

Analysis involves systematically working through the layers, by first starting at the Litany layer and moving through to Myth/Metaphor. In this way text in the transcripts are coded according to the existing four layers of CLA. This is similar to axial coding in thematic analysis, however data is coded into the existing layers of Litany, Social Causes, Worldview Discourse, and Myth/Metaphor. Large excerpts are also coded in order to maintain its meaning or context, and memos are advised to support this. The coding process is iterative, with codes and data being revisited for deliberation as to the most suitable layer an excerpt reflects (Bishop & Dzidic, 2014).

2.2.2.4 Step four: Coding within the layers.

This stage of analysis involves coding within each of the four layers of analysis. Emergent themes within and specific to each layer are identified and organised in a way similar to thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). At this stage transcriptions are read again in light of more refined understandings, allowing themes to be further fleshed out and defined, and supportive extracts are selected for each of the themes identified. De Simone (2004) and Bishop, Dzidic, and Breen (2013) offer guidance as to the possible manifestations expected within each layer of analysis.

For example, at the Litany layer the initial statements about an issue indicate factors of causality, and reflect issues of apathy, disconnected ideas, unproven suppositions, and projection of responsibility. The presentation of the issue is at its most simplistic form. At the Social Causes layer, the focus is also on surface layer interpretation of causal issues. It constitutes questions of who, how, why, and what, in terms of system structures. It may also reflect an indication from what sources information is being obtained, and a strong opinion as to the solution or a technical explanation. Within the Worldview Discourse layer the underlying values underpinning the issue being analysed are explored. The focus of this layer is to explain why the issue is interpreted and addressed the way it is, possibly reflecting group think, emotional commitment to beliefs, and lacking acknowledgement for alternative perspectives. Finally, at the Myth/Metaphor layer the focus is not on how beliefs and values are rationalised, but how these are expressed emotionally. It explores the imagery exposed in analysis, and the existence of myths that restrict action and thought related to the issue.

Bishop and Dzidic (2014) explain that identifying themes within the layers may be a theoretical or inductive process, depending on the research question. As with step three, the manner by which themes are identified in step four is iterative. It is common for similar themes to emerge across layers, however it is the inherent meaning of the subtheme that will determine the layer it aligns with. The commonality of a theme across layers indicates its various manifestations at different layers of deconstruction. It is suggested by Bishop and Dzidic that layers, themes, and subthemes be illustrated in a thematic map.

2.2.2.5 Step five: Reconstructing the issue.

The final stage of analysis seeks to provide overall meaning to the now deconstructed issue by reconstructing and integrating the themes within each layer. It describes how and where themes are related to and influenced by each other. In this way, describing and reconstructing these relationships forms the consolidated narrative of the fundamentals underlying the issue revealed in the analysis. This provides insight and an interpretation of what it all means which can then be compared and incorporated into relevant existing literature and theory. Consequently, alternative futures, or rather strategies for resolution, grounded in a richer understanding of the problem, can then be proposed (Bishop & Dzidic, 2014).

2.3 Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of this research, positioned within community psychology and the epistemological, theoretical, and methodological frameworks aforementioned, was to deconstruct the phenomenon of modern consumerism within Western culture. In addition to this were the following specific objectives:

1. To explore how dominant Western society within an Australian context conceptualise their consumption practices;
2. To explore obstacles to sustainable consumption;
3. To explore the macro structures that legitimise and support current consumption levels; and,
4. To provide recommendation that has capacity to inform policy for transformative and long-lasting sustainable futures by placing consumerism within a contextualist paradigm.

2.4 Method

2.4.1 Research Design

The epistemological position I identify with as a researcher is fundamentally contextualist. This is a position that has accordingly shaped the open and exploratory nature of the research aim, and is congruent with my belief that phenomena in the human sciences is

system-dependent, and inspired by ideological, temporal, and holistic processes. In line with this episteme and in recognising multiple realities and perspectives, this research is also grounded in the philosophical understandings of hermeneutics described by Heidegger (1962) and Gadamer (1975). As such, inquiry while being loosely structured by interview schedules essentially follows a collaborative model of joint meaning-making between myself as the researcher and with participants. The generation of knowledge and theory abductively arising from this process is supported through *iterative-reflective-generative practice* (Bishop et al., 2002) and Causal layered analysis. Together these strategies create a progressive and incremental back and forth of shared learning and *unveiling*, analysing, consideration of existing theory, and active reflection. This research took a qualitative approach, with data collected via face-to-face interviews, and transcripts analysed using CLA.

2.4.2 The Research Process

Following approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee at Curtin University (Appendix A), this research project was performed in three phases. The first phase involved pilot interviews with the intention of exploring different conceptualisations of consumerism and to guide the development of an interview schedule appropriate to the aims of the research. In the second phase, a series of face-to-face interviews were conducted with members of the public who recruited via various online interest groups. In the final phase of the research, the data generated from the community interviews was systematically coded and analysed. The overall research process was iterative in nature, whereby phases two and three were conducted simultaneously. Interviews were typically being conducted while other interviews were being transcribed, analysed, and interpreted. This approach is consistent with iterative-reflective practice (Bishop et al., 2002) and hermeneutics (Heidegger, 1962), as the process of continually visiting the data and connecting with emerging insights, allows gaps in conceptualising the phenomenon to be identified during data collection (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). It also sharpens the understanding of participant's stories during the interview, enhancing the meaning making experience. Throughout the following section, the three phases of the research process are outlined in detail, along with explanation concerning the key decisions made.

2.4.2.1 Phase One: Pilot interviews

In the initial stages of the research process, three pilot interviews were conducted with experts of different disciplines related to consumerism. The aim here was to explore the different ways consumerism could be conceptualised and consider how individual interviews could be approached in terms of question structure and phrasing. That is, the intention of pilot interviews was to focus the lines of enquiry, by 'testing' an initial interview schedule (Sampson, 2004). Experts were chosen for pilot interviews because it was understood they may have a large knowledge base of consumerism, making data collection more efficient, and the data collected more concentrated (Bogner, Littig, & Menz, 2009). An expert in marketing was selected because of their knowledge concerning the development and promotion of consumer products and services (Kotler, Burton, Deans, Brown, & Armstrong, 2013), an expert within the field of social psychology was selected for their knowledge on the cognitive, affective, and behavioural factors believed to influence consumer culture (McDonald & Wearing, 2013), and finally an expert in economics was selected for their knowledge concerning the production, distribution, and consumption of capital, labour, money, and goods within the social system (Dobija & Kurek, 2013). Given that the fields of marketing, social psychology, and economics appear to significantly differ in how they address consumerism, I hoped that these experts would provide insight into the varying ways consumption could be conceptualised and thus approached with participants in subsequent phases of the research process.

The process of identifying experts and inviting their participation was an intensive process. I first searched online for individuals who had published consistently in either the public sphere and/or in academic space on issues related to consumption. I ensured I searched for individuals who discussed consumerism from multiple or varying perspectives, namely, philosophy, economics, marketing, politics, or psychology. I then gathered information on national and international research and advisory institutes and associations concerned with economic, business, and consumer matters, and identified the most appropriate members to approach. Finally, I searched the Curtin University staff database to identify academics whose interests were aligned with consumerism and marketing, business, and/or economics. Through these various sites of recruitment I identified twenty-five individuals, of whom I then emailed (Appendix B) with a request for a short interview, and from which only

three responded with interest. Two of the subsequent interviews were conducted face-to-face and one was conducted over the phone. Each interview was on average one hour in length, and all three experts identified as Australian.

The initial semi-structured interview schedule used within the pilot interviews (Appendix C) was developed in collaboration with my supervisory team. The questions asked about consumerism in this interview schedule were framed using the terms *supply*, *demand*, and *Western economic model*. During the interview process it became obvious that my interview schedule was too much directed towards economics, and for the experts in marketing and social psychology particularly, these questions were confusing. These experts stated they were unsure as to what it was that was being asked. Reflecting on this feedback, I decided that the interview guide would be less confusing to participants if it asked them to share their own consumption practices, and in particular, their opinions on Western lifestyles, rather than asking them to describe their knowledge of consumerism. In focusing predominantly on opinions, I anticipated participants would express less defensiveness than if they were asked directly about their consumption, especially if their values conflicted with the inherent values of consumerism. I expected that with this approach there would be a greater exposure of opinions, worldviews and tensions. Thus having identified the limitations and opportunities for revision in my initial interview schedule, a more appropriate semi-structured interview schedule to the aims of this research enquiry was developed for the second phase of data collection (Appendix D). Overall, this phase was intensive; interviews were in depth, and transcription and analysis of the pilot data required reflexivity. Notes taken during interviews were similarly analysed in a bid to formulate specific actions in interview design.

2.4.2.2 Phase Two: Face-to-face Participant Interviews

In total, 28 participants (19 females and 9 males, with an average age of 34 years, ranging from 18 years to 55 years) were engaged in 26 semi-structured and conversational interviews⁴ regarding their thoughts on consumerism and their own consumption habits.

⁴ Conversational interviewing is a style of interviewing that allows for greater flexibility in questioning and responding, as the focus is on the meaning of questions, rather than maintaining standardised wording. According to Currivan (2008), one of the central conversational interviewing techniques is to assist participants in correctly interpreting questions through clarification and feedback. Conversational interviewing is a more

Interviews ranged from 35 minutes to 90 minutes in duration, with all but one interview involving participants' individually. One interview involved three participants, and two participants were engaged in a follow up interview for further clarification. Participants were predominantly recruited via maximum-variation sampling, a form of recruitment involving the purposeful selection of participants from a wide range of interest or social groups (Patton, 2002). The strength of this approach is being able to explore the variation between the experiences of participants, but also to investigate the common core of experience. (Polkinghorn, 2005). That is, the shared worldviews, myths and metaphors expressed in participants stories. In the manner of maximum-variation sampling, 22 participants were invited to take part in this research through various Facebook interest groups.

As the topic of consumerism is a heavily engrained dominant Western cultural practice, it is arguably so engrained that describing the nuances of consumer practice in depth would likely have been difficult for those not actively thinking about it. Given this, purposely recruiting participants through community interest groups provided the opportunity to engage 'good informants' in the research (Tongco, 2007). Identifying appropriate community groups from which to invite participation required careful consideration and the development of a solid rationale for inclusion. The community interest groups specifically targeted were also purposely diverse (in line with maximum-variation sampling), and had to reflect one or more of the following qualities: reflected a social movement or ethos deemed 'counter consumerism', was purposively or symbolically focused on consumer practice or the consumption of a particular good/service, or consisted of community members with arguably developed/developing skills in critical reflection. The Facebook pages meeting the selection criteria included the *Pay it Forward* group (dedicated to the recycling of unwanted goods), the *Collective evolution* page (concerned with sharing anti-establishment⁵ related

informal structure also allows for follow-up questions by the interviewer so as to explore deeper aspects of the participants experience and gain further understanding. In this way, questioning can be manifested in and guided by the interviewer-participant interaction (Turner, 2010). The interviews I conducted for this study were more informal in style, guided loosely by an interview schedule. This meant that if a significant issue or reflection arose in the process of the interview, it could be explored in more depth.

⁵ The 'Establishment' in anti-establishment rhetoric refers to a ruling social, economic, and/or political elite class who are believed to maintain social inequalities and the status quo for their own financial and power gains (Schedler, 1996; Serazio, 2016). Anti-establishment sentiments tend to also incorporate anti-capitalist, anti-oligarchic, or anti-imperialist elements (Schedler, 1996).

information), the *iPhone* page (focussed on consumer practice/preference of a particular good/service – the iPhone), and the Curtin University postgraduate group (ability to critically reflect). The intention of recruiting from these different sites was to obtain diverse forms of experience and varying perceptions of consumerism (Sandelowski, 1995). Recruitment occurred in four rounds, each with a different Facebook group. Further justification for engaging each group will be considered in turn with the description of each round.

Interviews were conducted in two parts. The first half of each interview was more formal in style, following the format of the semi-structured interview schedule. In the second half of interviews I engaged participants in conversation regarding the evolving theory arising from the data and my reflection on existing theory. This was an intentional approach to collaborate with participants in joint meaning-making. I also disclosed purposively my own shopping habits. The aim here was to ensure a non-hierarchical relationship between myself and participants; a kind of 'levelling the field', which is posited by Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, and Liamputtong (2007) to show respect for participants, and help validate their stories. In turn, it is understood participants feel greater comfort in sharing and the rapport between both parties is strengthened (Reinharz, 1992). The benefit of taking this approach meant that data arising from mutual disclosure between myself and participants was rich with complexity. It became obvious participants experienced tension as they tried to negotiate their unfavourable beliefs of consumerism, with their disclosed consumer behaviours in everyday life. This dynamic is illustrated in chapter three where I present the findings.

Prior to the commencement of each interview, participants were provided with a participant information sheet (Appendix E), were informed that for the purpose of analysis the interviews would need to be digitally recorded, and asked to give their consent (Appendix F) for their information and recording of the interview. They were made known of their right to withdraw at any time during the interview, and their right to withdraw their information from the research up until a week after. The parameter to withdraw from the research up to a week after participating in the interview was due to recognising the timing of transcription and analysis of interviews. Anything later than a week after the interview ran the risk of preliminary analysis of the transcript having been completed and interpretations being embedded into the findings. Genuine withdrawal at this point

becomes questionable. Participants were informed that any information they shared would remain anonymous to my supervisory team and in the final thesis and subsequent publications. The age and location of participants were set as parameters for inclusion in the research. Participants were required to be over the age of 18 years and be available in the Perth region, Western Australia, so to enable face-to-face interviews. All interviews were conducted in a location of the participant's choosing, typically at their homes or in cafés.

2.4.2.2.1 Round one of recruitment and interviews

Five participants were recruited in the first round of sampling after they responded to a public message posted on the *Pay it Forward* page which advertised the present research. *Pay it Forward* is a community run online group on Facebook where members advertise their unwanted items on the page, items that are then given away to other members who request them. Members may also pass on or request food and advice from other members, and occasionally 'busy bees' and picnics are arranged. The interest in this group for this research was their desire to recycle goods and develop a community-minded support group. I was interested to see the dynamic between these apparent values and members thoughts on consumerism. For example, research on other similar online community groups has found that despite the motivation of members to engage being for environmental reasons (reduce landfill), 'downshifting' reasons (reduce clutter), and consumption reasons (obtaining free goods), there appears to be the additional benefit of community belonging and civic engagement (Nelson, Rademacher, & Paek, 2007). As Nelson et al. (2007) describe, it would appear these communities capture the highly nuanced relationship between consumption and civic life in contemporary society. Interviews in this first round were guided by the revised semi-structured interview schedule developed in phase one.

2.4.2.2.2 Round two of recruitment and interviews

In the second round of recruitment seventy private Facebook messages were sent via Facebook Messenger to Facebook members who had 'Liked' the page *Collective evolution* (Appendix G). I was initially able to identify a recruitment pool meeting the location parameters of the research amongst Facebook members who 'Liked' *Collective evolution* by using the 'current city' filters available on Facebook. The seventy private messages were sent ten at a time with four days separating each message round. The intention here was

spread the interviews with respondents evenly, to ensure I was not inundated with too many respondents at once, and to guarantee a reasonable number of responses. In total, there were ten respondents who indicated interest in being interviewed. *Collective evolution* is a grassroots organisation that posts articles on Facebook with the goal of inspiring people to be active in creating positive change in the areas of health, wellness, government, and the environment. This page is also used as a site for sharing anti-establishment related information and sentiments. Given the aim of the Facebook page, it was anticipated that participants who had liked this page would have greater awareness about the issues relating to consumerism, and have thought about the phenomenon in more depth. Of interest was how participants navigated consumerism while possibly having greater knowledge of the impact of consumption behaviours. As in round one, the interview schedule devised following phase one was used.

2.4.2.2.3 Round three of recruitment and interviews

After the first two rounds of interviewing it became obvious that while recruiting from *Pay-it-forward* and the *Collective evolution* page was successful in obtaining a sample, it also meant there was a bias in opinion within the data. The participants from both groups tended to have an explicit negative opinion of consumerism. In line with maximum variation sampling, it was therefore the focus in round three to conduct interviews with people who may have a different opinion and experience of consumerism to those engaged in rounds one and two of interviews. I was interested in engaging members of the dominant Western culture who may be less concerned with rates and practices of consumption. This also meant a change in interview approach, which is a strategy consistent with *iterative-reflective-generative practice* (Bishop, 2007). For example, whereas the attention of the first and second round was on participants thoughts around consumerism, in the third it was on participants' personal experiences of shopping. The aim here was to explore what different practices of consumption meant for participants. A semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix H) was developed to support this approach.

In round three, one hundred and fifty private messages (Appendix I) via Facebook Messenger were randomly sent to Facebook members who had 'Liked' the iPhone page. As in round two, I was able to identify an initial recruitment pool from which to recruit using

the 'current city' filters available in the search function on Facebook. The iPhone page was an ideal site for recruitment. The iPhone is currently a very popular consumer item, and much could be revealed by discussing the reasons underlying participant's support for and interest in this product. In the context of this research, the iPhone is in part considered a symbol of consumerism. Indeed, while the functional aspects of the iPhone are a significant motivator for its consumption, research has found individuals are principally drawn to the device by the need to create a social image or for self-enhancement (Hossain, 2015; Oh & Ki, 2012). By 'liking' iPhone on Facebook it was assumed firstly, that it was a product the participant's possessed, and secondly, that it was a product they possibly identified with. It was therefore an obvious medium from which to explore consumerism, as it may provide insight into the influence of consumerism on personal identity formation and group belonging. Seven people responded to the private message with interest and agreed to be interviewed as part of the research. In rounds one and two participants were eager to share their experiences and as a result recruitment was not difficult. However in round three, when there was not any interest after the first 30 messages were sent, it was decided a \$20 voucher would be promoted as a gesture of appreciation of time given to the research for each participant (E. Head, 2009). The email template inviting participation in the research was therefore revised (Appendix J), and responses subsequently increased.

2.4.2.2.4 Round four of recruitment and interviews

Finally, in the fourth round of recruitment, six participants responded to a message posted on a Curtin University postgraduate Facebook page, inviting them to be involved in the research. These six participants were all research students. It has been argued that students within higher education generally have developed the ability to think and reflect critically, whether it be on their own experiences or on their research matter (Smith, 2015). Without any prior assumptions as to what the opinions or values of consumerism this sample group might have, it was of interest to see how they conceptualised their own practices of consumption and the notion of sustainability. The intention behind engaging this group was to supplement the overall sample, ensuring the themes emerging with analysis were well saturated and that there was not any additional dynamics to understanding consumption practices that had not already been adequately represented (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003). These interviews were guided by the same interview schedule used in round three.

2.4.2.3 Phase Three: Data Analysis

Using the analytical framework of CLA as outlined by Bishop and Dzidic (2014), the data was analysed by means of an iterative-generative reflective approach (Bishop et al., 2002). Digital recordings of face-to face interviews were transcribed verbatim into word documents using play script transcription. Seventeen interview transcriptions were completed by myself as the primary researcher, nine were completed by a transcription service due to time restrictions. Actively transcribing interviews provided the opportunity for initial familiarisation of the data, and emerging ideas, patterns, and thoughts regarding the findings were reflected upon and noted. Familiarisation with the data was also intensified by re-reading transcriptions after they were completed. Following this, transcripts were imported into NVivo10 to assist in data management. The interview data was then coded according to the descriptive parameters of Litany, Social Causes, Worldview Discourse, and Myth/Metaphor. Sections of text that appeared to belong in more than one causal layer were coded to multiple layers, and memos were made as to ways the theme could manifest at different layers of understanding.

In the next stage of coding, each causal layer was analysed to identify its emergent themes in a process akin to Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. From here, initial themes were summarised and presented to my supervisory team with whom I consulted with weekly. These weekly meetings provided an opportunity for reflexive dialogue and additional understanding of themes as they manifested in various layers. This was an iterative process, with themes continuously being reflected upon, refined, and clarified. Writing up the findings formally extended this process further, as the meanings inherent to themes and their relationship to emerging ideas became more obvious. During the writing process, additional themes were identified and other themes were refined. At this stage of analysis the patterns and paradoxes developing from the data, within and between the layers of analysis, started to reveal themselves. In the final formal step of analysis emergent themes from each layer of understanding were reconstructed to bring to light the fundamental underpinnings of consumerism, which were then incorporated into existing theory and research. This formed the basis of Chapter Five, the Discussion.

2.4.3 Quality and Credibility of the Research

Determining quality in qualitative research is a much debated topic (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Ritchie, Lewis, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013; Sandelowski, 2015; Willig, 2013). As qualitative inquiry rests on the assumption that the researcher and that being researched are not independent of one another (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992), criteria such as reliability, representativeness, validity, generalisability, and objectivity, that are traditionally used to assess the scientific value of quantitative research cannot be applied meaningfully (Willig, 2013). For Corbin and Strauss (2008), the 'quality' or scientific value of qualitative inquiry should rest on the *credibility* and *applicability* of the research. Concepts such as validity, reliability, and 'truth' for evaluating qualitative research, which have been advocated by other qualitative researchers (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2008; Silverman, 2004), are argued by Corbin and Strauss to carry too many quantitative implications and reflect a certain degree of dogmatism. *Credibility* they argue, replaces the need for these concepts, and as a criterion of quality it "indicates that findings are trustworthy and believable in that they reflect participants', researchers', and readers' experiences with a phenomenon but at the same time the explanation is only one of many possible "plausible" interpretations possible from data" (p.302). Furthermore, *applicability* as a criterion is reflected in research findings that can be readily used, offer insight and understanding, they 'fit' the situation they were derived from, and are general enough to bring about change in diverse populations or situations (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

According to Corbin and Strauss (2008) one way the credibility and applicability of research can be assessed is by whether or not the findings fit or resonate with the participants who took part in the research. Very early on in the data collection stage of the research process, there was an idea of the main themes emerging from the narratives of participants. As the number of interviews progressed and the emerging themes gained substance, I shared these with participants in the second half of the interview process. In most cases however it was participants who asked me to share what I was finding. After sharing, participants sensed there was an element of truth in the theory developing from the themes and felt it resonated with their lives, and could possibly be reflective of the lives of other's. They also added their own ideas and thoughts which were considered alongside formal interview data. This was also strengthened by the variation in opinion, knowledge, and consumption

behaviours of participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Furthermore, in line with research values advocated by Montero (2000) I was conscious when reporting the findings that I did so in their entirety to reflect the wholeness of participant's experience. I also reflected on, and made note of my assumptions and predispositions concerning consumerism in the initial stages of the research process. It was hoped that through using this type of respondent validation and transparency, the final findings would *fit* or correspond with the experienced reality of participants (Lomborg & Kirkevold, 2003; Morrow, 2005; Shenton, 2004). Furthermore interpretations made on the emerging themes throughout the interview process were compared with existing theory. This inductive-deductive practice added support to their credibility (Cooney, 2011).

As is recommended by Corbin and Strauss (2008) a methodological audit trail was kept throughout the research process. This audit trail recorded what was done, how it was done, and how interpretations were generated from the data. Records were predominantly in the form of memos, notes, minutes from meetings, emails, and written questions concerning the possible links and areas of further exploration that were arising from the research process. This is one of the most important strategies for ensuring credibility (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), as it provides proof for the decisions made throughout the research project (Morse et al., 2008) and augments the trustworthiness of the findings (Bowen, 2009). Moreover, the consistency between the epistemology, theoretical frameworks, and analytical process underpinning this research further contributes to the trustworthiness and credibility of findings and data interpretation (Morse, Kuzel, & Swanson, 2001; Ormston, Spencer, Barnard, & Snape, 2013).

2.4.3.1 Reflexivity

The research paradigm and process engaged in this research meant that as the researcher, I embraced the position as co-constructor of meaning making with participants. Reflexivity is essential for ensuring the research is representative of the experiences of participants and not of my own biases and assumptions (Morrow, 2005). It involves reflecting critically on myself as the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 2005), openly acknowledging and addressing the sociocultural position and value systems that affect my choice of research question and design (Grbich, 1999), and those I choose to engage in the research process (Lincoln & Guba,

2005). One such strategy for reflexivity is the reflexive journal (Ortlipp, 2008), that I maintained throughout the whole research process. In this I made note of my personal assumptions and beliefs concerning consumerism and community, and recorded personal experiences that reflected the experiences of participants, as well as my reactions to these (Appendix K). After most interviews I would write down those issues, understandings, or interpretations that seemed stand out the most, and listed questions for further exploration. My reflections also informed decisions regarding the research process. For example, the process of reflexivity shaped the interview approach and sampling strategy I used with each Facebook group.

In another form of reflexivity, I engaged regularly with my supervisory team, who served as a “mirror” (Morrow, 2005), reflecting my responses, challenging my assumptions, and, nurturing deeper insights. Conversations with my supervisors took on an iterative-reflexive-generative process, whereby interpretation and emerging theory was discussed alongside existing models and concepts. I also engaged in critical discussion with co-workers, academic colleagues, and others in close proximity to myself. Within these encounters was an exchange of ideas and thoughts which helped to facilitate further reflection and understanding. This was certainly the case for participant interviews, where discussion concerning the emerging theory allowed for clarification and an exploration into the deeper meanings it held for both participants and myself.

Reflexivity is also commonly advocated for in the form of “bracketing” in qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2007). Through bracketing, the researcher recognises and suspends implicit assumptions and predispositions to allow for the ‘true’ essence of the phenomenon to be revealed (Crotty, 1998). However the context and co-constructionist nature of this research, as well as the epistemological and theoretical frameworks underpinning it made positioning myself as detached unnecessary and impossible. Indeed in the very process of acknowledging my *being-in-the-world*, I became part of the research (Heidegger, 1962; Koch, 1995). Reflexivity instead was engaged through continuous reflection, which helped in the proactive management of presuppositions during interactions with participants and the data. It also allowed me to actively consider how these encounters influenced my pre-existing attitudes and knowledge concerning consumerism so that I could understand it in new ways. In this manner, the use of reflexivity helped elucidate the research process,

augmenting transparency and contributing to the trustworthiness of the research findings (Shaw, 2010).

2.4.3.2 Adequacy of Data and Interpretation

The adequacy of data or evidence in qualitative enquiry can be surmised from the quality, length, and depth of interview data, which would consist of an adequate variety of evidence, adequate interpretation, and adequate disconfirming evidence (Morrow, 2005). For this research, adequacy was determined with a *saturation or representation* of concepts and issues, particularly in the Worldview and Myth/ Metaphor layers of analysis (Bishop, 2007). At this point no new information or themes were emerging from the data (Lincoln & Guba, 2005). The criteria for data adequacy were also met through a *triangulation* of data sources; those being the differing groups of people engaged as participants (as defined by their interest group membership). The diverse range of experiences, behaviours, and explicit opinions of participants in regards to consumerism added greater richness, breadth and depth to the data. Furthermore, engaging in conversation with participants in regards to the emerging theory as a form of respondent validation provided another kind of evidence from the more formal interview process. This strategy, along with a flexible and changing interview schedule that was responsive to the developing body of data, supports the trustworthiness of the research findings (Morrow, 2005). The analytical framework of CLA contributed to the adequacy of data interpretation. Encouraging an integrative process of data gathering, analysing, interpreting and writing, as well as a continuous reflection upon transcripts and refinement of themes, the processes of CLA enabled the research data to be explored and understood in depth. Throughout this process a collection of memos in the form of hunches, interpretations, and queries were kept, which are indispensable to enhancing the analytic process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Morrow, 2005).

2.4.4 Ethical Considerations

From the initial stages of design to the reporting and dissemination of findings, ethical principles should be at the heart of research (Webster, Lewis, & Brown, 2013). The processes of this research are in line with the requirements set by the Australian Psychological Society Code of Ethics (Australian Psychological Society, 2007) and the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Health and Medical

Research Council, 2015). Research integrity and respect for the rights of participants were maintained by applying ethical values, principles of ethical conduct, and specific protocol. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were made aware of the topic of the research and of their right to withdraw. In respecting the confidentiality and anonymity of participants, no identifying information was included on transcripts or in the final thesis. Digital copies of transcripts, information, and documentation regarding all stages of the research will be stored either in a password protected file on a secure Curtin University computer for seven years, at which point they will be destroyed. Transcript hard copies and digital vocal recordings however were destroyed at the conclusion of the research.

The co-constructive nature of knowledge acquisition in the research design also meant the potential for ethical issues related to power dynamics and professional boundaries (Webster et al., 2013). These concerns were addressed through engaging in what Guillemin and Gillam (2004) term *ethics-in-practice*. This involved reflecting on the possible effects disclosure and discussion may have on participants prior to interviews being conducted and considering how these issues may be addressed. I also endeavoured to be “neither judge, therapist nor slab of cold stone” (Patton, 2002, p. 405) during my encounters with participants, which helped build rapport and equality between myself and participants, and allowed me to be responsive to their demeanour and sensitive to the choice and wording of questions (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Knapik, 2008).

Chapter 3 Findings

3.1 Prologue to Findings

The narrative of consumerism arising from the discourse of participants revealed richness and complexity. It also bordered on perhaps more esoteric understandings of the world, and the meaning of oneself in the world. At a very deep level, the narrative spoke of perceived community change. Participants described a sense of disconnectedness in dominant Western society, where it is believed lives are driven by materialism, the accumulation of wealth, and about meeting ones individualistic, yet socially dictated needs. The findings suggest that in dominant Western culture, connection to others appears to occur on the basis of consumerism, where possessing certain items determines belonging and acceptance into a group. On the surface, the act of consuming to find human connection appears to be a widely accepted social practice. However, deeper levels of analysis suggest that such behaviour is perceived as meaningless and empty. It is possible people desire human connection, but struggle to find it in consumer lifestyles. Indeed, within participant discourse there appears to be a longing to experience *Gemeinschaft* (community), to be connected deeply with others, and to be a part of something greater than the self. To have a meaningful existence that borders on the abstruse, as participants reflect: “*there has got to be more*”. Paradoxically, it is perhaps this yearning for human connection that drives people to find it in consumption. The ideology at play here tells society that in order to survive and belong you have to consume, and in this way people try to find themselves through self-creation and try to connect with others through conformity. In effect, it is possible that consumers attempt to fill the emptiness such a lifestyle affords them. Despite what appears to be an awareness of one’s emptiness and superficiality, participant discourse reveals a shared resistance to change. It is possible that searching for fulfilment beyond consumerism challenges fundamental beliefs inherent in consumer society concerning meaning and happiness. Thus there exists a tension between the socialisation into *Gesellschaft* and the intrinsic and almost unconscious desire for *Gemeinschaft*.

The intention of this chapter is to describe the narrative above in its deconstructed form as it is revealed in the causal layers of participant discourse. The deconstruction is presented as

starting at the Litany layer, where the focus of analysis concerns individual understandings of consumerism. Here, participants spoke of their experiences of shopping, the convenient yet busy and expensive nature of consumer life, and the seeming pervasiveness of social disconnection. The next deepest layer, Social Causes, is then presented. This layer concerns social structural matters understood by participants to precipitate issues of consumption. These include the active engagement of consumers in the market, the unsustainable nature of governing bodies, and the very real social pressure to consume. Following this, the Worldview Discourse, and Myth/Metaphor layers of analysis are presented. These layers concern issues of culture. The Worldview Discourse layer of analysis explores the beliefs and ideologies that underlie consumerism. Here the complex negotiation of two contending worldviews is apparent. In the first, the world is seen as a stage for the creation and expression of self through consumption, and in the second, the value of meaningful human connection away from materialism is articulated. Finally, in the Myth/Metaphor layer, imagery that reflects the way consumerism is understood and experienced is explored as it is conveyed in participant discourse. Revealed in this layer is symbology representing the sentiment of meaninglessness and emptiness in consumer life, the dynamics of community change and the longing for authentic community, and myth guiding social expectation.

A visual representation of the themes per causal layers is presented in Figure 3-1. Here, the depicted arrangement of causal layers as nested circles represents their interdependent, mutually influential, and embedded relationship with each other. Together when reconstructed, these layers of analysis form a rich account of present consumer society in Australia as presented by the participants. This has provided insight into the cultural paradigms, meanings, and collective myths on which information and ideas are filtered; such ideas have the propensity to inform strategies for lasting social change.

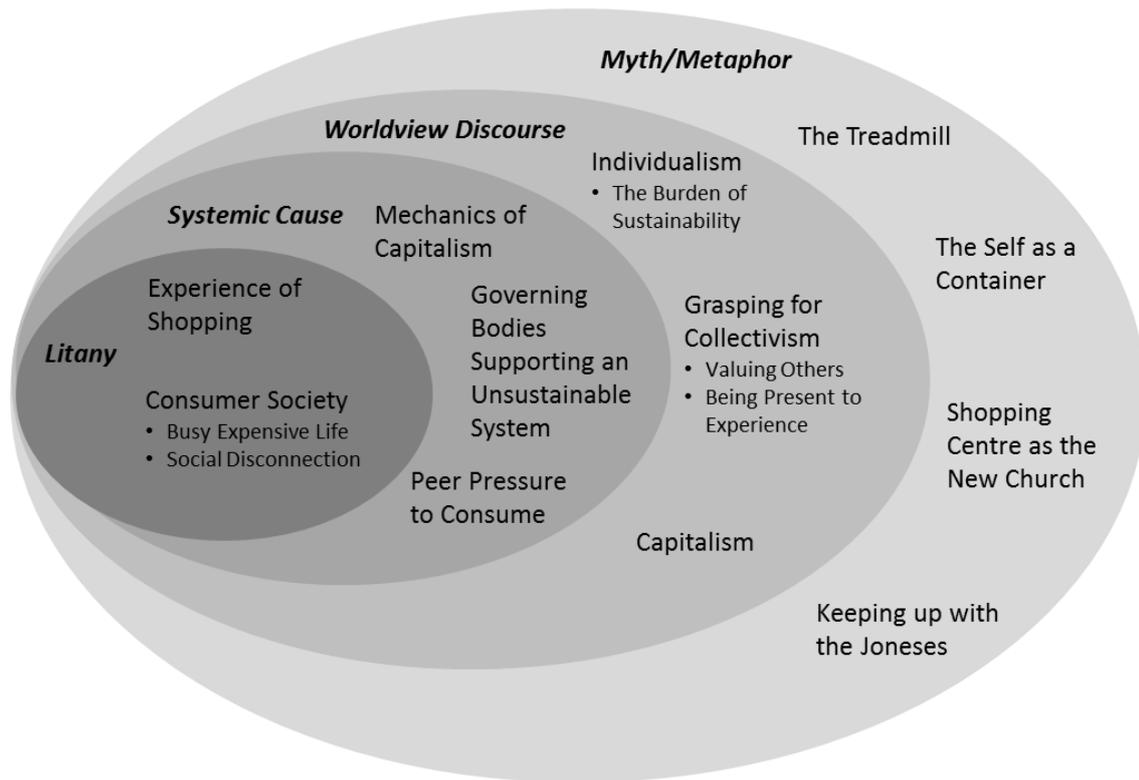


Figure 3-1 A thematic map of findings arising from Causal Layered Analysis.

In this chapter, the themes according to each causal layer will be explored in detail. The themes are not specific to each group sampled, rather capture content across the groups. This is arguably a finding in itself given the anticipated difference in the groups' opinions, reflections and overall utterances. Verbatim quotes are provided to illustrate and justify the claims made.

3.2 Litany

The Litany layer of analysis involved identifying surface level understandings of consumerism. This layer is limited to public and commonly known descriptions of an issue, and in regards to the present thesis, this encompassed the everyday experiences of consumerism as it relates to shopping. The themes at this layer of analysis were the *Experience of Shopping*, and descriptions of *Consumer Society*, which includes the subthemes *Busy Expensive Lives* and *Social Disconnection*.

3.2.1 Experience of Shopping

For the majority of participants, shopping was described as a loved and fun activity. Most participants became enthusiastic when asked about shopping. They described pleasure in window-shopping or in the actual purchase of something. They described a “buzz” and “kick” that is experienced in bringing a new gadget home or putting on a new outfit. In these moments participants expressed feeling momentarily fulfilled and satisfied with their new and desired purchase. Participants also shared pride in their ability to seek out the best prices for consumer items or their experience of attaining a bargain, whether it be online or in store. For most this required hours of research, such as seeking out reviews, visiting stores, and comparing prices. Decisions on the amount one is willing to pay for a product was justified on its usefulness and quality, where the higher the products quality and usefulness, the more participants would be willing to spend. Products bought this way were described as increasing the satisfaction and pride found in the purchase. Participants also disclosed having moments of “buyers remorse”, where they had spontaneously bought something and almost immediately wished they had not. For example,

...I might see something and really like it and buy it, but then I feel guilty. I don't feel so good about it because I know I probably shouldn't have bought it, or I should have thought about it, or did I really need it, or I wasted my money on it...

Participants also defined particular items that they found the most pleasurable to purchase, these included “clothes”, “shoes”, “handbags”, “gadgets”, “pretty things”, and “souvenirs”. Some participants admitted purchasing favoured items and never using them, having them in cupboards with tags still attached. Furthermore, participants acknowledged that it was

acceptable and “nice to spoil [one]self” and agreed that if something desirable is found while out shopping, you should not deny yourself; that you should not leave yourself wanting. Furthermore, enjoyment was commonly found in collecting and holding on to things considered sentimentally important, such as trinkets from places of travel. Such things acted as mementos, to show off to others moments in one’s own life, and to have something tangible to hold the memory of an experience;

I have a shot glass collection...The idea behind it was that every place I would go, like a city, that I would get one. It’s now become not just a city but maybe if I go to a museum or I go somewhere where that’s like a memento... I think it’d be really cool to have them all out and again, just have that as reference and it’s just a way for me to remember the trip or the place that it stems from.

Many participants also spoke of shopping as a form of self-therapy, where engaging in the action of shopping provided therapeutic benefit, helping them to deal with negative emotions such as frustration, depression, and anger. For example,

I wasn't angry, I was frustrated... I went to my sisters after I went shopping and she said “where did you get that?” and I said “I had just had enough, and I just wanted something to make me feel better”... every now and then you have got to, it’s nice to spoil yourself.

In this account the participant describes “spoiling” herself as a means to “feel better”. Other participants were less sure about their intentions when shopping without an objective. When shopping they describe feeling as though they need to purchase something, even if they could not see anything they desired. One participant described it as if buying something was akin to an achievement, that shopping trips were a waste of time if they came home empty handed;

Participant: I don’t know, I know the feeling after, usually I feel disappointed in myself because I know that I didn’t want it but I got it anyway and then I want to take it back but I’m too embarrassed to just last minute turn around and go “I don’t want this” and it’s such a hassle to take things back as well. Before, I think it’s more like “screw

it, let's do it anyway" I feel like, I don't know, you just get it and it's okay, it's not exactly what I want but -

Interviewer: You bought something?

Participant: Yeah and it's not a waste of a trip, I've done something still and I have something I can actually hold and take home.

Interviewer: That's really interesting isn't it, the concept of it not being a waste of a trip.

Participant: Yeah. I haven't really thought about it that much but it is and I do notice a lot of the time if I do leave the house I need to know that I'm doing something. So, I feel like if I am going to shops and I go to shops, look at stuff and then come home, it does feel like more of a, what's the point, unless I've set something up, often if I don't have the money I'll still have a little bit of money in my bank account and I'll put a whole heap of stuff on lay-by, just so I've got something.

There were other experiences of shopping that participants found frustrating, for example, limited time available for shopping meant participants typically had to be objective and purposeful. All participants described the unpleasant feeling of not being able to find the product they were seeking, whether it be the right gift for someone or the perfect fitting dress, for example,

I guess, in that it's nice to get a new outfit but it's also quite tedious when you're not finding anything that you like and that gets quite frustrating. Especially if you go, okay I need something, like, I need a dress for a wedding, I've been doing that for the past few weekends, I'm getting infuriated because nothing seems to fit me right.

For many participants this did not take away from their general enjoyment in shopping. For a few it made the overall experience of shopping unpleasant, and these few participants described avoiding going to the shops until it was necessary. They described preferring to spend their money on other consumables like travel, souvenirs, food, and experiences. The principle drawback of shopping as identified by participants was its drain on finances. Indeed participants reported it as the most limiting factor to one's consumption behaviours.

3.2.2 Consumer Society

This theme depicts participants' accounts of consumer society, and describes the tension participants face every day as they wrestle with the benefits and pitfalls of a consumer lifestyle. The pitfalls of consumer life emerged in two distinct subthemes, these were *Busy Expensive Life* and *Social Disconnection*, and will be discussed under these subheadings. In terms of the advantages of consumer life, this was not spoken about in great depth; this is interesting considering the majority of participants expressed an enjoyment in shopping. Participant accounts made reference to the ease that came with living in a dominant Australian society, whereby their social context enabled them to have one's essential needs of food, shelter, safety, and freedom met, which compared to the situations in other countries, made them fortunate; privilege gave them choice. Participants also expressed an appreciation for the convenience and comfort their dominant Western lifestyles offered them. This is evident in the following two excerpts;

...yeah you obviously want convenience right, I actually drive everywhere, it's only a short distance so it's ok. When I drive you know how they say 'ride your bike or whatever' I normally go oh is ok it's only a short way. Especially in Australia where it's so warm.

And...

...like just convenient buying a \$2 iPhone cable, buy a few of them and chuck them around the house and then having them there because it just makes my life easier and I know that I can walk into any room and plug in my iPhone and charge it and it makes me feel good that I have got those options and I have gone out, I have sourced the things that I want that make me happy and done it. I don't need to worry about iPhone cables for a long time.

In both these examples convenience is tied up in consumption. The benefit of driving even small distances to keep out of the weather and the ability to have multiple of one item to save time and effort are seen as advantages of consumer life. Convenience was the most commonly perceived benefit of consumerism identified by participants. It was however made complicated when participants reflected on the less positive implications of

consumerism. Indeed what was most pronounced in the discourse of participants was the negotiation between the advantages of convenience and comfort with the concern for overconsumption, financial debt, unethical production processes, and mental illness. For example,

I think you have to have a compromise within yourself. Like what are you willing to do to get what you want and I think that is what it is for us.

And,

You want to be able to have the best effect on the environment, keeping that in mind while you are trying to achieve your personal goals.

Throughout the interviews participants appeared to be more expressive of the negative elements of consumerism. The most prominent of these concerns was in fact financial limitations, and is embodied within the subtheme *Busy Expensive Life*.

3.2.2.1 Consumer Society: Busy Expensive Life

Participants described the expensive nature of their lives. Living expenses such as utility bills, food, petrol, and mortgage or rent, left many participants feeling financially challenged and stressed. As a result money became a central concern in their lives;

...yeah we do budgets big time, I'm a freak for a budget, everything has to be written down and figured out and I travel to three or four different shops cause I know I am going to get more for my money.

This excerpt describes the challenge of one participant to meet the basic needs of their family, and shows the necessity for bargain hunting. Although most participants described a similar situation, some also mentioned having to maintain a lifestyle that extends beyond these fundamental needs. While not in all cases explicit, most participants expressed a desire to create a particular lifestyle. For example, whether it be financially secure on a large country property, or having enough money to travel the world in comfort. They also openly discussed the pervasive need in society to have lifestyles encompassing the newest, the

biggest, the best, and the fashionable. One participant used these exact words when describing the popularity of the latest iPhone,

It's big, it's new and everyone wants the latest newest thing and it's fashionable to have it.

Other participants shared their own interest in the *new* and latest,

God, I like new things.

And,

I like looking at new things specifically. I find even if I don't have the money to go shopping, I'll still go shopping.

And another,

...I am also hungry for it, I am hungry to know what is the latest thing, I like to be completely up to date. I check the rumour websites, I check all the technology websites every day because I don't want to be left behind.

They described that the cost of such lifestyles is working longer hours, and has in turn adversely impacted work-life balance and family relationships. Participants describe overworking parents who do not have enough time for their children and busy couples who do not have time for each other. They also describe how common it is to be too tired after work to socialise and the desire to be home and not bothered by anyone. Interestingly, when describing these elements of consumerism all participants adopted a third person perspective, perhaps reflecting the desire to remove oneself from reality. For example,

I think people work too much, I think they are obsessed with work

And,

...people certainly in this day and age, people are messed up, they're very confused and very stressed

Together participant descriptions of consumer life illustrated it as busy, stressful, lonely, and expensive. Furthermore, some participants suggested that the busyness needed to keep up with expensive lifestyles has left people with the inability to stop and think about what will bring them true fulfilment. As a result, it is thought people become content in listening to marketing for this information as it is easily available. For example,

...parents are working longer just to keep everyone up with the latest fad and do they really need those things? We are just getting caught up in it and forgetting just the basics.

And another,

I think its people buying things that they will think will make them happy and just bouncing off them because they don't. People are so caught up with it that I don't think they stop and think what will really make them happy.

In this way, participants described being influenced and guided by social pressures, such as media and a pressure to conform. In these excerpts consumer life is perceived to be excessive and overcomplicated, removed from the basics and a more thoughtful way of living. Almost all participants admitted moments in their own lives where they realised overspending and overworking was taking them away from more fundamental needs in life, which they perceived to be the maintenance of relationships with family and friends. On top of the busy and expensive nature of consumer life, participants also described noticing an increase in disconnection between people, which is the focus of the second subtheme.

3.2.2.2 Consumer Society: Social Disconnection

The other prominent issue of consumerism identified by participants and located at the litany level of analysis, was social disconnection. Participants described this concern from both a first and a third person perspective. Participants revealed moments in their lives where being caught up in the technologies and products consumerism offered them led to feeling disconnected from those around them. In many ways the concerns disclosed in these stories were the consequence of engaging in social networking sites and platforms, and consuming technologies that enabled ease in engaging with social media. They described

how generally it was easier to email someone or follow someone's newsfeed on Facebook than it was to meet up with them. For example,

Interviewer: It's a really interesting thing because it just made me think about when I was trying to recruit for interviews, I printed out a whole lot of pamphlets, went to the city and my plan was to hand out pamphlets and talk to people in the city. I completely freaked out and just took the train straight back home... it's so much easier just to email people than it is to talk to them face-to-face.

Participant: A billion times easier. And it's easier for me too, I'm here judging everyone but I find it so much easier to write an email than to call someone up.

And,

I love that social contact with people and I guess Facebook when it first came along I was like "I can get into contact with people and I can connect with people, hey this is fantastic" and I fell into this trap, the instantaneity, instantaneous satisfaction of getting that contact like that, rather than going through the processes of ringing someone and "hey lets go out" or "lets meet somewhere", and have that human contact, or meet them at a party or a social situation.

All participant's reflected that technologies such as smart phones and iPads had limitations when it came to fostering human communications, often coming at the expense of face-to-face contact with people. Furthermore, when considering at the nature of consumer society, many participants lamented changing childhoods and social environments;

The biggest thing on the news the other day was that kids ran out onto the playground, but they didn't run out to talk and be social, they ran out into the playground, grabbed the mobile phone and started watching each other play a game. What has happened? Sit outside in the sun and play a video game.

And,

I used to come on the train and I used to sit and talk to people on the train, now I'm like I'm just going to watch a movie because everybody has got their heads in their iPods and things.

It was believed by participants that the changing nature of social environments as a result of communication technologies was diminishing the ability of younger generations to communicate respectfully and authentically. The accounts of participants were also littered with experiences in which the consumption of technology was considered a distraction when people were in each other's physical presence. For example,

I draw the line, like if I had a BBQ and people are on their phones I am like "nup that's bullshit" (sic), like we have got together here, there is no reason... I have caught my friend out. Like we will be out, not at a gig and she will be on Facebook and I am like what the fuck (sic) are you looking at, like what is on here that is more important. You are a little bit bored so you are going to satisfy your need to do something else and I am very aware that people get bored and they want to start doing this [scrolls on phone]. And I think that's bullshit (sic), when you are in a social situation with others.

And,

Interviewer: So you don't feel, apart from the fact that you'd feel it could be more convenient in your life, you don't feel this need to have it because everyone else has it?

Participant: I really don't. And actually to me I watch the people around me just keep staring at their phone and I don't want to do that and I know that a smartphone's going to make it easier to do that.

Interviewer: What are your thoughts about that?

Participant: About people's habits with the phones?

Interviewer: Yes.

Participant: It drives me kind of insane because I feel like... I mean, yeah it's a phone or whatever but if you're having a meal with people or interacting I'd rather have the

people's attention be on what we're doing. I just keep seeing everybody plugged to their phone.

The availability of the internet and the portability of smartphones has made social media readily accessible, which means that as is reflected in the excerpts above, attention can be diverted easily in the presence of others. All participants expressed an irritation about people using social media and smartphones while in their company. For them it demonstrated disinterest and disrespect. Facebook in particular was frequently referred to in discussion as it posed an ongoing tension for many participants. On the one hand it was considered a great way to be connected to others, particularly those who live a significant distance away, however overuse hindered communication in the immediate social situation. It was also considered, with its ease in instant communication, a detriment to the real social world as live chatting, posting, and commenting was taking the place coffee meet ups and nights out which require more effort. For example,

Participant: I don't know how many people sit at home on a Friday night on Facebook and opposed to actually going out to hang out with their friends. I know it happens because I do it. It is easier and cheaper to just sit at home and connect with people over Facebook and skype and whatever. Really, really-

Interviewer: It is really isolating-

Participant: Yeah it is, all these technologies that are meant to bring us together are actually tearing us apart.

Participants believed it was possible that the social disconnection they were witnessing was a result not only of enhanced communication technologies but also the busyness of their daily lives. Some expressed being so tired after a day or week of work that they did not have the energy to socialise, or they just wanted quiet from the noise of the day. In such situations Facebook was enough in the moment to satisfy social interaction. Thus, being overworked took energy away from the attentional demands of face to face communication.

Together the theme *Consumer Society* reveals the daily tension of participants as they negotiate the advantages and pitfalls of consumerism. For some, this tension is very real, but for others it is more implicit. The perhaps unconscious nature of this tension for most participants is evident in the differing viewpoints taken to reflect on thoughts and experiences of consumer life, where consumer life was described as unbalanced and exhausting, and driven by the need for bigger and better. The majority of discourse pertaining to the issue of overworked lives was reflected from an observer's point of view (participants third person accounts), whereas the discourse concerning the comfort, convenience, and choice of consumer life was expressed in personal (first person) accounts. In this way, participants appeared to have an awareness of problematic issues related to consumer life, and a belief they should be displeased with it, but they also enjoy its benefits and in this way possibly try to remove themselves from harsh realities through third person perspectives. In most cases, it appears the comfort participants derive from consumerism overrides the discontented consumer life it is believed to create.

3.2.3 Summary

Themes identified at the Litany layer of analysis include the *Experience of Shopping* and *Consumer Society*. The theme *Consumer Society* also encapsulates the subthemes *Busy Expensive Life* and *Social Disconnection*. The theme *Experience of Shopping* depicts the everyday experiences of participants as they engage in consumption activities. As expressed by participants, shopping incited feelings of pleasure when purchasing a desired or well-researched product, and a sense of comfort when negative emotions were being felt. However, the experience of shopping could also rouse a feeling of frustration if a particular consumer item could not be found. The theme *Consumer Society* portrays the tensions associated with engaging in a dominant Western consumer lifestyle. On the one hand participants described the convenience and comfort provided by consumer goods, but on the other they lamented the busy and expensive nature of their lives and the feeling that they, and those around them, were missing meaningful social interaction as a result of social media technologies and being overworked. These unfavourable aspects of a Western consumer lifestyle are captured in the subthemes *Busy Expensive Life* and *Social Disconnection*.

A key feature of the findings at the Litany layer of analysis is the apparent dichotomy in participants' everyday experiences with consumption. Both themes, *Experience of Shopping* and *Consumer Society*, capture the benefits and positive experiences of participating in consumer behaviour, however, they also portray the frustration, stress, and loneliness experienced by participants as they engage with dominant Western consumer lifestyles.

3.3 Social Causes

At the Social Causes layer of analysis participant's experiences and conceptualisations of consumerism are considered in terms of social and institutional factors. In the present analysis this encompasses the surface level social and systemic elements that participants identified as the most prominent causes for, and impacts of, consumerism and overconsumption. It describes the ways the ideologies and worldviews explored at deeper layers of analysis manifest in participants surface level understandings of, and engagement with, consumerism. Themes relating to this layer of analysis identified in participant discourse were *Mechanics of Capitalism*, *Governing Bodies Supporting an Unsustainable System*, and *Peer Pressures to Consume*.

3.3.1 Mechanics of Capitalism

It appears the way participants approached consumption is heavily driven by the social structures they are embedded within. The theme *Mechanics of Capitalism* captures the ways Capitalism shapes consumer behaviours. Participants described negotiating the market and all the products available to them by "shopping around". With products available in varying degrees of quality and for varying prices, being an "informed shopper", as some participants called themselves, was about getting the best quality of a product for the price willing to be spent. The following account is from one participant who describes a willingness to spend a little more money for quality goods. This requires product research and active engagement with the market,

...research, trying to find something that I want to enhance what I do in my life... and a want to enhance my life just to find that thing that will better do something that I want it to do or will make it easier or will bring me more entertainment or more joy or the desire to be the best at something. Like being involved in camera, or home theatre or music just having the best so doing the research and browsing and looking around and trying to find it...

As well as quality, the price of consumer goods heavily influenced participant decisions. Some participants describe an inability to justify spending larger sums of money on higher quality products if they were unsure the investment was worth it. For example, one

participant described not being willing to spend more than \$60 on a shirt because they were uncertain they will get more use out of it than a \$20 shirt. In this way, the monetary value of a product was also tied up in its utility.

The price of consumer goods was a major concern for some participants, particularly where the cost of living, explored in the theme *Busy Expensive Life* at the Litany layer, means that participants needed to stretch their wages as much as possible. The influence of the *Busy Expensive Life* is manifest at the Social Cause layer, and evident in the following account of one participant as they describe their weekly food shop:

...I know that if I go to [a low cost independent grocer] I get twice as much fruit and vegies then if I went to [higher cost independent grocers]... then I do [the low cost independent market] around the corner who do really good bulk meat packs, so I get meat from them...then I go to [major non-independent supermarkets] for the shelving stuff, the cupboard stuff and you just pretty much search for specials everywhere. Everything's about getting everything on special...

Therefore, the financial pressures of consumer life create the need for lower prices. However, some participants described the pitfalls of capitalist attempts to achieve lower prices for consumers. This concerned corporations still maintaining their own profit margins by utilising mass production and unethical manufacturing processes. For example one participant stated:

...one of the things I was interested in that [department store companies] were talking about is clothes, and how much people were getting paid to make them and what sort of percentage of actual cost is and sort of the wages they are being given... I wrote to [a corporate owned discount chain store] and asked them what their policies were on...the ethics behind [their products] being produced in sweatshops... [they] wrote back and said "we just do the cheapest clothes possible"...

And another,

I think mass production, particularly mass production of our food is one of the down falls in the world.

Despite the disapproval many participants described feeling towards mass and unethically produced goods, they expressed having little choice other than to be reliant on the capitalist system because of the costs of living:

So I think it is quite hard to say 'ok I'm just going to give up because everything's too hard to deal with and it is too hard to live completely 100% ethically, to be a 100% ethical consumer. Unless you have got the money to do so. So a part of me tries to be as ethical as possible and not beating myself up for doing things that I have to.

For another participant, this tension between their disapproval of the unethical structures of Capitalism and their own financial limitations, was a prominent challenge,

...big companies... have dominated the market in such a way that like for every product that people use regularly they have bought out their own brands and made it much cheaper. So it is like for somebody who doesn't have much money its almost silly not to buy their products. But at the same time I am supporting this major corporation. So it's a catch 22, I hate it, it makes me angry all the time.

Together, as one participant states: "the Western world has pretty much been created in this consumer driven way". The theme *Mechanics of Capitalism*, captures the ways participants engage with the system of Capitalism through negotiating the products available to them, whether it concern price, quality, and/or utility. It also captures the reliance participants describe having on the system, regardless of the animosity they reported feeling towards its often unethical nature.

3.3.2 Governing Bodies Supporting an Unsustainable System

Many participants expressed distrust for the Australian Government and frustration in its inability to provide what they perceived as sustainable infrastructure and policy. These possible, yet unemployed initiatives, identified by participants included: restrictions on the amount of plastic used in packaging, limiting waste, and employing greater solar panel usage for power. There was a belief amongst some participants that members of Government had vested interests with corporations (for example, non-independent major

supermarket chains) and a personal investment in Capitalism. In this way, participants perceived leadership to be self-interested in generating wealth through profit and control. In turn the vested interests of governing bodies were believed to shape the way success and wellbeing were understood within the system in such a way that it is measured by economic growth and the accumulation of wealth. For example,

...that annoys me that... the idea of a successful government or successful nation is one where there is growth and the people are spending money and that is considered to be a sign of success, to me that's probably a sign of not success really. Why don't you have low growth and be encouraging things like low economic growth, as long as people have got jobs and living ok, but focusing on happiness and health... I think particularly [name of a particular right wing conservative] Governments which we have most of the time, because their drive is business and money and if they say we have had five percent growth, their "great", I ask "why is that great?"

And another,

...people who run these [businesses] do not have the best interests of humanity as heart, they have making money as their main objective. Same with our Governments, same with our banks, same with our corporations, their main goal is not helping humanity it is making money and they don't care what happens to humanity in that process, as long as they keep consuming, as long as they keep buying, as long as they keep in the system they are happy.

In these accounts, the Government is perceived as not being concerned for the genuine wellbeing of people. Indeed the push for economic growth and making money is thought to be contrary to happiness and health. This was certainly the sentiment of many other participants as they described the busy and expensive nature of their lives. As a result many expressed an attitude of distrust and disrespect towards governing bodies. Furthermore, the nature of economic growth also endorses consumerism, as the generation of wealth in Capitalism is achieved through expanding the market place. This was considered by participants to be one of the unsustainable features of Australia's economic system as it encouraged the consumption of resources and raw materials. Participants also described

the unsustainability of existing infrastructure, particularly in terms of energy generation and public transport accessibility. They described how with other alternatives available, the infrastructure developed and maintained by Government fostered the unnecessary expenditure of resources. As a result participants felt limited and left with no other option than to consume as they did. For example, in reference to energy sources in Australia, one participant explained:

...it is the Governments' ignorance to other options and the amount of sun that we have and it's like are you serious and are you really pissing in everyone's pockets (sic) about where this energy is coming from and where we could get it from. I feel like it could definitely be better and I'm all the more for it. And I am happy to pay more for energy if it means it was renewable. That would not be a problem for me but there is nothing I can do about it. My energy just comes from where it comes from, that's just where it is.

Here the participant expresses frustration towards the Government. They allude to Government hypocrisy, where demands for people to be more vigilant in their consumption are being made, but the Government run system that people are reliant on is unsustainable in itself. In the case of the above account, this relates to the production of energy. Other participants also described the inadequacy of public transport which meant they had to use a car more than they would like. Furthermore, with resources such as electricity being a commodity, changing the way it is sourced modifies the power relations within the system, and the capital that can be generated from it. For this reason some participants did not trust the Government to create a sustainable economy because it would compete with capitalist interests. The potential power of governing bodies in the initiation of a more sustainable culture arises within the discourse of this theme. In recognising this, participants reported feeling frustrated and powerless because they believe providing genuinely sustainable infrastructure is not a priority of the Government. Thus the structure of the system participants are engaging in limits their ability to live more sustainable lifestyles.

3.3.3 Peer Pressures to Consume

Many participants described feeling a pressure to consume particular products. In some cases participants argued it was blatant peer pressure, where the negative judgements of other people towards them had influenced their purchasing decisions. For example,

All my friends have upgraded and I seem to be the only one of very few people who seem to have the older iPhone and they make fun of it, they're always talking about how small it is and how much better theirs is and it kind of makes you go, "maybe I should just do it now"...It can become a bit belittling at times, it feels like, just because they might have, well most of them have the money to be able to just get a new phone or they have the contracts or whatever they need and I don't, it feels like they're a bit more advantaged and I feel a little bit, kind of, left out sometimes when it comes to those little comments just because I can't get a new phone. Especially, I have one friend, she likes the... every time I pull out my phone or she has to use it, she'll get out her iPhone 6 Plus which is a giant, and just constantly compare the size and go on for about, I don't know, she went on forever last time about how she couldn't believe she used to use my phone and how small and useless and she's so happy she's got this new one, and it makes me like, now I want the new one because my phone has lost appeal.

In the above account it is evident the participant felt unacceptable and separate from the group for not upgrading their iPhone, whereby the iPhone 6 appears as a symbol of affluence and success within the group. This is perceived as an affordable and easy purchase for the participant's peers, which reflects their socially advantaged position, and increases the desirability of the "giant" sized new phone. In this way it also becomes a symbol for the qualities that define the group and the silent rules around belonging to it. Thus within this example, acceptability for group belonging appears tied to affluence and success as demonstrated by the ownership of a specific phone. This dynamic is evident in the way the participant feels "belittled" and "left out" when members of his social group suggest his older model phone is useless and undesirable, because symbolically, by extension, he is also obsolete. To regain acceptability and a sense of belonging to the group the participant therefore feels they need to upgrade their phone as it will reflect the symbols attached to

group membership. In this fashion the implicit threat of social exclusion under peer pressure helps to maintain social expectations. What is also interesting in this account is the desire for a new phone despite the current one still being in working order. The participant had described only having recently bought his current phone before the upgrade of the new one had been released. Thus consumption in this sense is being driven by peer pressure rather than a deficit-based need.

Another way the pressure from others to consume manifested in the discourse of participants was through their expressed desire to belong. This was certainly evident in the above account in the presence of explicit peer pressure, however it also appeared in the absence of overt peer pressure. Some participants described simply wanting to have what others have, or be wearing what others are wearing, because it bought a sense of social belonging. For example,

Sometimes I feel I've gone out and I think, okay, my outfits are great, but then I go out and I go, 'gee everyone's wearing this type of skirt or that type of dress, I really feel out of place, you know what, I really need to go find a dress or a skirt like that'.

What is interesting in the above excerpt is that although the participant liked their outfits, what is more important to them is that they feel *in place* with everyone else. In this way conforming to the style and purchasing behaviours of others provides a sense of social security and belonging. It is possible this phenomenon reflects a superficial means by which consumers attempt to maintain a sense of human connection and belonging through consuming the same fashions.

3.3.4 Summary

The three themes identified at the Social Causes layer of analysis included: *Mechanics of Capitalism*, *Governing Bodies Supporting an Unsustainable System*, and *Peer Pressures to Consume*. The theme *Mechanics of Capitalism* captures the ways in which the capitalistic economic system in Australia shapes participants choices in consumer products. It also captures the unease participants reported feeling about being reliant on a system they described as being unethical. In the theme *Governing Bodies Supporting an Unsustainable System* the limitations participants felt as a result of policy, infrastructure, and the believed

vested interests of Government on their ability to live more sustainable lifestyles was explored. Similar to the theme *Mechanics of Capitalism*, participants also described feeling a sense of powerlessness, particularly as it related to system wide changes towards sustainability. The third theme – *Peer Pressures to Consume* – portrayed the social pressures experienced by participants to consume particular products. The threat underlying this social pressure appeared to be concerned with not feeling *in place* with others, and participants therefore were motivated to purchase particular consumer products in order to achieve a sense of belonging. Together, the findings at the Social Cause layer of analysis depict the relational, political, and economic dynamics that constrain and shape the way in which participants consume.

3.4 Worldview Discourse

The Worldview Discourse layer of analysis is concerned with exploring the deeper cultural and social underpinnings of an issue. These structures include commonly held ideologies and discursive assumptions that underpin how the issue is thought about. They also inform the culture a community operates within, and in this way are not necessarily conscious or obvious to its actors. Revealed in the present analysis were two quite distinct yet entangled worldviews. The first being a Capitalist ideology accompanied by Individualism and the second being a collectivist ideology. What is interesting about the presence of these worldviews in participant discourse is that all participants, irrespective of their group membership, expressed both worldviews interchangeably. In participant accounts there was a genuine sense of trying to negotiate two different ways of seeing the world. On one hand, participants saw the world as a stage on which their uniqueness could be created and presented, and on the other, they saw deep human connection that goes beyond the self as the answer to a meaningful and happy life. The complexity inherent to this paradox of trying to balance individuality with the desire for collectivist relationship, deeply influences how consumerism is navigated at a personal and community level, and appears to impact on consumer's perception of change. At this layer of analysis the ideology and theme of *Capitalism* will be discussed as described and evidenced in participant discourse. Evidence for the theme *Individualism* as well as the influence this worldview has on mitigating the perceived negative impact of consumerism will be discussed. This dynamic is reflected in the subtheme *The Burden of Sustainability*. Finally, this layer of analysis will discuss *Grasping for Collectivism*, the second most prominent worldview and theme in participant discourse.

3.4.1 Capitalism

Many participants discussed Capitalism openly, describing it as an economic system that supported and encouraged consumerism. They described Capitalism as something outside of themselves, as a system they lived in but participated in minimally. It is possible the dissociation participants express towards Capitalism is due to the negative thoughts they hold towards this economic system and the ideologies it promotes. However it was clear in analysing participant discourse at a Worldview Discourse layer that the ideology of Capitalism is very real in the way participants approach the world. This is certainly evident in

the ways they engage in consumerism, which was explored at the Social Causes layer of analysis. The theme *Capitalism* will be presented as the descriptions within participant's discourse expressing the structure and values characteristic of twenty first century Capitalism. It will also present how these structures and values manifest in the lives of participants.

The qualities of Capitalism were described by participants in terms of big companies, corporations, and banks who own significant amounts of capital. Participants described that such organisations are associated with mass production and the push for lower prices and higher consumer demand, which consequently compromises the ethical components and quality of products. Capitalism was also associated with the uneven distribution of wealth and widespread poverty. Furthermore, participants described how the large amount of wealth held by capitalists provided them power which is then used to influence governments and manipulate consumers. The primary form of manipulation identified by participants was marketing and advertising. Manipulation through these mediums was described by participants as the practice of telling consumers how to obtain their deepest desires through the consumption of goods and services. Indeed, participants described the ability of advertising to align certain products with these desires in order to construct consumer beliefs that these desires will be fulfilled through consumption, for example,

...its challenging living in a world where advertising and marketing tell us... it's all about moving emotions, it's all about how you feel if you have this product, and trying to convince someone that there is a need that you have for this product they probably don't have, how amazing your life will be with this new product, so we are surrounded by all this, buy for self, buy for self...

As described in this excerpt, this participant perceived marketing as the instrument of capitalists; appearing as an outside force that dictates what people's aspirations should be and then gives them the tools in which to achieve them. Given the seeming awareness of marketing techniques used by business, participants approached advertising with disdain and expressed a level of disrespect for capitalist bodies that are seen to forgo human well-being for their own financial gain. This is evident in the following accounts;

...the actual messages that the television carries as well are focused on consumerism, on buy this and buy this, have this, you are not good enough, you need this in your life, you need that in your life, your life will not be complete until you have this block of land with this house on it, this car parked in the driveway, a wife that looks like this, its non-stop because the people who run these do not have the best interests of humanity at heart, they have making money as their main objective.

And,

Consumerism in general in my opinion is the drive for mass consumption for maximum gain regardless of the potential harm it may often cause to society as a whole.

These excerpts reveal awareness amongst participants that consumer goods do not necessarily bring fulfilment and satisfaction to consumers, rather they suggest consumption as a way to meet certain desires are detrimental to society. Additionally, participants questioned the values inherent in capitalist ideology, particularly as they related to unethical production processes. Some participants spoke of the disregard large corporations had for the well-being of workers manufacturing their products, where the principle concern was to obtain the cheapest labour possible, so as to maximise profits. It would appear that the central concern of Capitalism as identified by participants, is the generation of wealth and excessive self-interest that is indifferent to the well-being of others. This latter value appears to be a feature of Individualism, the ideological system accompanying Capitalism, and will be discussed in the next theme. First, the influence of capitalist ideology in the way people approach their everyday lives will be explored as it appeared in participant discourse.

The influence of Capitalism in the everyday life of people was evident in the stories participants shared of their experiences with others, and the typical patterns of behaviour they witnessed in society. For example, one participant describes their experience of living in a rental property,

...my landlords were actually my housemate's parents. They charged the maximum, so I was like, I was thinking to myself "don't you have concern for the kids that are

forking out the money to you?" they were concerned about the welfare of the house because it was their property but other than that... if you can't afford it then it's another problem. I mean I remember one time my housemate paid for me one week because I had just started uni[versity], I was working two jobs on the side and he was sort of... [the landlord] didn't like that at all. You know he showed me compassion by giving me rent, I paid him back immediately the next week but still they didn't accept it.

What is significant in this account is the main concern of the landlord for money and capital at the expense of the participant's well-being. The participant reflected on an absence of compassion and concern, as the struggles of one are disregarded for the materialistic gain of another. This social dynamic is very real in the first-hand account of one business owner. They describe having initially started a business wanting to help others, however this turned into a desire for wealth bringing about the employment of more people, the excessive need to market their product, and to bring in customers. For the participant, this ultimately destroyed the essence of what they were trying to achieve for themselves and those their business was servicing; the business became superficial and unrewarding,

...trying to get as many people as I could in like five years ago it was our aim, it didn't really matter what was wrong with you, just wanted to get you in here and get your money off you...

The significant aspect of this excerpt is the participant's admission of losing the genuine concern for others in his work, where customers become nothing but a source of profit. Indeed, whether it be property or business ownership, there is a real sense of estrangement and carelessness towards others in the way people managed their capital. However, capitalist ideologies also extended beyond those who owned large capital. Participants described in others the desire to accrue capital in the form of money and possessions as a characteristic of all consumer society. They described how people place high value on materialistic gains, believing fulfilment and satisfaction to be found in those things, and in this way buying into the stories of marketing. Follows is a description of consumer society expressed by one participant:

...everyone is in financial stress because we are losing track of where we are, instead of living within our means and keeping what we have got, everyone's aiming for something else. Money has become so 'we need money, we need money', so people are working two jobs now to pay a mortgage. It is the way society is geared, that we need more money...we will sacrifice our family's, our careers, to have more money to do those things, we will sacrifice, and this isn't to pass judgement on families that can't do it but, both parents working isn't, sometimes it has to be, but we'll sacrifice time at home with the children, with the family so that we can have the bigger house.

This excerpt makes explicit the value of 'bigger and better'. The participant here describes a society in which the accumulation of money and the creation of materialistic 'grandness' comes at the expense of family. What is also interesting here is that working becomes a means to an end, whereby working is about amassing monetary wealth. In this way, the worker is separated from their labour, where work is less about meaning and self-expression and more about obtaining an income to finance a materialistic life. A materialistically focused way of living can also be evidenced in the emotional energy placed in material possessions. The following account illustrates for one participant the intense emotion held in material objects,

...like if I buy something and it doesn't do what I want, like I built this computer that I use for editing, I bought it, planned it out, spent months planning, checked with all my friends, yes this is good, got it home and started fitting it and one of the pieces didn't fit and I was instantly like 'oh fuck (sic) my life, this just sucks, I need it now' called the place they were cool, they swapped it over and I was just like 'thank goodness that worked out, it just made me so anxious and I just... it wasn't even that I needed to get it sorted straight away but I was like I have to do this right now, I have to swap this and take it back and do it and get it sorted to make myself, to finish this so I am like 'oh it works, sweet'.

In this account it is clear the anxiety caused from having the wrong computer part was substantial enough to impact on the quality of the participants' experience of the day. The fact they needed it to be fixed straight away gives a sense that life could not go on until it was working like they wanted it to, even though in their own admittance it was not urgent.

Furthermore the phrase “fuck (sic) my life” suggests the meaning and experience of life itself was held in the computer, and the emotional weight it holds for the participant is evident in the relief they feel when it is fixed. Thus capitalist ideology shapes consumer life by placing high value on materialism through marketing and the availability of cheap products, and by shifting the focus of individuals to profit at the expense of concern for others.

3.4.2 Individualism

In parallel to the ideology of Capitalism is the ideology of Individualism. Participants shared the desire to be different from others, to make consumer choices or have lifestyles that identified them as unique from everyone else, for example,

People don't like to be considered different, people like to form that mainstream, people like to be the same. I find that boring, so I like to have a different outlook on life and why do you have to fall into the same line as everyone else? Why can't you be different?

In this account the participant perceived themselves as different from everyone else, and they saw everyone else as the same as each other. In this way members of consumer society are believed to be conforming and mainstream, while this participant believed their individuality set them aside from this. Participants believed they were unique in their opinions of the world, in the way they decorated their house, or the way they adorned themselves. The account above and the accounts of other participants also suggested disapproval associated with conformity. There was an inherent belief that one should not want to be like anyone else, that to conform is to be mediocre. In this way there was pride in being different and in standing out. It was important for participants that other people appreciated their uniqueness, for example,

[Facebook] satisfies a need to share, so like when I use Facebook, when I share my stuff it is to share, look at what I have done, achieved, look at where I have been. I just want to show all these people, I have got all this family that I don't talk to that often but they know what I am doing because I post pictures.

And,

Interviewer: so what's so important to you about that memory, about your Facebook timeline?

Participant: that it is my life, that's what I have done, that is me, like it's my identity you could say. Like sure I have got other ways of remembering it but it is a neat way that anyone can click on my timeline and see that's [me], that's who [I am], that's how [I have] changed. And more so just for me, like I did it for me, to look through and go 'wicked, we all went to that together, that was us, and I went here and I did that and that's cool'.

In these accounts, the participant's identity is constructed from achievements, things that have been done and seen, the people they are in relationship with, and how this has changed over time. What is most interesting in these excerpts, particularly the first, is the participant's reference to family they have very little contact with. The main concern here for the participant is that these family members know what he is doing, that they see *who* he presents himself as. The Facebook relationship expressed here is unidirectional, where Facebook is about him, rather than a medium to engage genuinely with others. What is also important for the participant in these excerpts is that others acknowledge the value of his constructed self as it is expressed in his Facebook profile. Perhaps this is because his sense of selfhood and worth is tied up in his created expression of uniqueness, and the acknowledgement by others of this uniqueness reinforces his value as a person.

Furthermore the nature of Individualism encourages a focus on the self when navigating around others in the world. This is apparent in the following excerpts,

...because your life and who you are is your own business, so mind it, look after it. Most people spend more time listening to other people's opinions, minding other people's business instead of their own. It's like having your own patch of grass but you spend all your time watering someone else's and wandering why yours looks like shit (sic). Water your own grass then you can share it and tell other people how they can water their own grass but you have got to look after your own business, your own life.

And another,

[My husband] contributes as much as he feels is comfortable for him. Like he goes to work and he provides money and he brings home food and he cooks, but he doesn't step outside of the family unit to contribute to anyone else... When we first met all his friends would say to me 'oh he is such a tight arse, he doesn't do anything for anyone, it's all about him', I said 'I don't see that, he is really generous with me' and he is, he is very generous with me, but with anybody else nah ah.

Both these accounts describe the influence of Individualism on human relationships. The first excerpt illustrates the preoccupation participants reported people having with what others are doing and thinking, and what others may be thinking about them. This dynamic of social judgement and self-consciousness is believed by the participant to interfere with the process of individualisation; of creating oneself as separate and distinctive and proud. This appears to contribute to a worldview of not concerning oneself with the opinions of others. The second excerpt is an account of a participant describing her husband. Individualism in this example is apparent in the preference for concern given to oneself and the ones they are immediately responsible for. Here there is an embedded ideology of only looking out for your own. Based on either excerpts this could be ambiguous, such as looking out for your own individuality and uniqueness, or by only giving oneself to those you primarily care about. The worldviews integral to Individualism evidenced here suggests that on a societal level participants do not identify themselves or the people around them as part of a collective, rather they see themselves and have concern for themselves as a unique person in a population of individuals.

The ideology of Individualism was significant in the discourse of participants as they described the process of achieving a fulfilling life. There was a deep belief that “following your desires”, “loving yourself”, and “doing whatever makes you happy”, was the way to make life meaningful. When reflecting on their lives, knowing and following their purpose was a prominent theme expressed by participants. There was a pervasive belief that every individual had a role to play in the world, and that aligning with it bought happiness and fulfilment. Purpose, as it was described by participants, was bound to one's true desires; to what they personally believed would make them happy. In this way life's purpose was very

individual and unique. Participant's believed it was the lack of purpose and self-love in people's lives that contributed to the experience of emptiness and dissatisfaction. The following accounts are a clear example of this worldview and its individualistic nature;

...maybe consumerism is a result of the fact that we don't love ourselves...that's why people get coaches, fitness coaches, or business coaches to have an external motivation, cause they don't have the intrinsic motivation to do something for themselves. Because why would you do something for somebody that you don't really love. So I think that is what it boils down to. And here we are these amazing beings living these human experiences and we all feel like crap (sic).

And another,

We need to look inside ourselves to actually find out what is missing... this is some of the things that come across within the people I work with, what is it that you are after, what is your dream, how are you going to achieve that? What steps are you taking to get there? And a lot of people don't even know, they don't know what their dream is, you could be speaking to someone in their 40s, in their 60s, they don't know what their dream is, they are just living the life, doing the do, like everyone else does.

The first excerpt draws attention to feelings of unhappiness or 'crapiness' (sic) that arise from not being connected to and valuing yourself. The sentiment here is that the individual is responsible for their own care and sense of worth. The second account draws attention to the worldview of fulfilment being achievable through identifying one's purpose within oneself. The purpose or "dream" described by the participant appears to be separate and distinct to each individual. Furthermore, it removes one from conformity, of "doing the do, like everyone else", and in this way is a desirable aspiration. It would seem that conforming to what appears to be the conventional, common, and ordinary is not living up to one's true potential. What is also interesting in this excerpt is that realising one's "dream" is contingent on one's own actions, and in this there is a sense of personal responsibility and ownership over it. Thus finding fulfilment, worth, and meaning in life is a very individualistically driven process, with the self as the central concern.

The burden and individualistic nature of realising the “dream”, which is also attributed to happiness appears to have an interdependent relationship with Capitalism. Participants described ‘individuals’ attempts to discover and create themselves through the materials provided by Capitalism; an endless stream of possible affordable identities. Marketing, was identified by some participants as playing on the self-interested nature of individuals, and communicates a desirable *dream* that is achievable through the products it advertises. Arguably, the *dream* taught by Capitalism is bound in progress and wealth and as a result this worldview becomes entangled with the self-creation of individuals. An interesting aspect in this social dynamic is that by conforming to this capitalist desire, the individuality of individuals in consumer society becomes an illusion, whereby collectively, they are a society of individuals attempting to meet the same end but doing it separately and in isolation.

3.4.2.1 Individualism: The Burden of Sustainability

This subtheme is heavily influenced by the theme *Individualism. The Burden of Sustainability* describes the awareness participants expressed of sustainability and the way they conceptualise it and its possibility as an ultimate destination. For the most part, sustainability was conceptualised at an individualistic level and still paradoxically heavily entwined with consumption. Indeed participants described sustainability as limiting the use of certain consumer items or changing particular products for others. For example, participants described having shorter showers, recycling household waste, limiting their use of air-conditioners and lights, having indoor plants to improve the air quality within their home, changing the fuel they purchase “because it is better for the environment”, and making more ethical food and clothing decisions. For all participants the degree of empowerment expressed for creating change was for their own lives, and in this way responsibility could only be taken at an individual level. Thinking on a larger scale, some believed that by making changes in their own lives they could also encourage it in others, creating a wave of change. It is possible participants do not describe the ability to make change beyond a micro level because of an ideology of Individualism, whereby ones power is based on being a single entity and not as being part of a collective. Thus the weight of responsibility for change is placed on the individual, making one feel overwhelmed, frustrated and disempowered. The emerging construction of self is that the *big* issues

caused by consumerism are too much for a *small person* to alleviate. As a result, participants report feeling powerless to make any real change to their consumer practices, and when thinking about the issues associated with consumerism become overwhelmed. For example,

To be honest I found it really stressful, and its contributed to a lot of angst and frustration and at times depression and anxiety for me because I have educated myself to become very aware of the consequences of our actions as blatant consumers and so when I see people just consuming and consuming, consuming, consuming, consuming I know where that road leads and it is not a good place for anyone and it causes me a lot of anxiety... I get frustrated that people can't see, because it is so obvious that the way that we are living is not sustainable... not many people are not taking any real personal responsibility for what's going on in their environment and yeah that frustrates the hell out of me...

Here, the participant reflects on the personal burden of consumerism. The frustration and anxiety is rich as they are overwhelmed by the state of consumer society and the world it is leaving, and feel incapable of stopping it. The responsibility of change towards sustainability is recognised as being for all people, however the apparent disinterest of other people leaves the individual powerless. The perspective inherent in this discourse is that it is too hard to make changes for the benefit of the planet because nobody else appears to want to change. In this there is a sense of defeatism. The distress experienced here and in other accounts is believed by participants to result in people dissociating and ignoring the issues related to consumer life, in their words: "people deliberately don't think about it [consumerism] because it's too much". For participants this means placing the responsibility of change onto others or trusting in the government to do the right thing, for example,

I think we do live in a context and in a society that enables high levels of consumerism and any opinion to the contrary is challenged very overtly and by high people. So, I mean it gets challenged at political levels and it gets challenged at frigging international conference scary things. And I think the fact that when it gets challenged it seems so far from, or detached from normal life, so when your politicians are attacking some sort of climate change or whatever, it's easier to go,

well, they're dealing with it over there and because they're politicians they must know all about it and therefore there's nothing I can do about it, so I'll just continue going, I don't have to understand what they're doing, just continue going on my merry way and doing what it is that I want to be doing.

This account emphasises the distance between the consumer and the implications of their actions. Because responsibility is being positioned at a political level, there is a belief that one can continue to live the consumer life as desired and that the social system will change around them in accordance to Government decisions. However this belief appears to cover something deeper, a feeling of insufficiency in the ability to make any meaningful changes. In this way, placing the weight of responsibility on the Government appears to separate participants from the burden of responsibility. The discourse within this excerpt is also focused on the individual; “nothing I can do”, “I don't have to understand”, “doing what it is that I want to be doing”. The individualistic nature of the way sustainability is conceptualised is not only present in these statements but also in the actions participants took to be sustainable. Indeed participants do not perceive themselves as part of a collective; instead they feel *small* and ineffective. In this way the ideology of Individualism has limited the ability of participants to see the power of collective action and to behave in that way. They only see the action of themselves as individuals, intensifying the burden of responsibility. This in turn appears to result in separation and detachment from the implications of their consuming behaviours.

3.4.3 Grasping at Collectivism

The second most prominent worldview expressed in participant discourse entailed a constellation of beliefs and values that reflected a desire for collectivism. These beliefs and values could not be classified as a genuine expression of ideological collectivism because at the core of participant narratives, they still considered themselves as separate individuals, as opposed to conceptualising themselves as absorbed and interdependent with others (Gergen, 2009). The theme *Grasping at Collectivism* consists of two subthemes that embody the nature of this theme, these are *Valuing Others* and *Being Present to Experience*. Together these subthemes reflect a grasping for collectivism through the desire for deep relationship with others, through embracing the value of experience, and through

respecting a life that is intentionally mindful. Fundamentally, this worldview communicates participants' view that at the heart of a meaningful and fulfilling life is an appreciation of humanity. However an important point that concerns this theme is its interchangeable existence with capitalist and individualistic ideology. Participants expressed an ongoing negotiation between the conflicting worldviews, hence the 'grasping at' as opposed to an 'embodiment of' collectivism. They all described a collectivist ideology as ideal because of the fulfilment and genuine happiness it was perceived to deliver, however they struggled to implement the values it enfolded in their own lives due to the pressures and socialisation of Capitalism and Individualism. In this way, for most participants, the values described within the subthemes of *Grasping for Collectivism* represent ideals that are often not bought to life but are constantly negotiated with the qualities of experience of consumer life.

3.4.3.1 Grasping for Collectivism: Valuing Others

Beneath the litany talk of consumer life was a deep desire to connect meaningfully with others, where all participants described relationship as the most meaningful aspect of life. However, this relationship was not limited to just family and friends but to humanity as a whole, and was about recognising the validity of others and expressing compassion. It was about finding happiness in the happiness of others, supporting rather than hating your fellow humans, and trying to "make a difference in one person's life". *Valuing Others* as a theme arose as a result of participants reflecting on what they describe as the superficiality of consumerism. Indeed the importance of relationship over "stuff" is evident in the following excerpt,

My computer will be out of date in three months' time, like that's fine, I'll just want to catch up and as soon as there is the better thing I am like 'I am going to want that'. There is a hole that wants satisfying but... as much as my life is very much about stuff, the more I am getting older, the more I am going 'I will do anything to have just to have a Sunday hang out with my mates', that is way more important than anything else.

Within this account, the participant recognises that their "want" for the latest and best computer is about satisfying a "hole" within them. While they are not explicit as to what that hole is, they describe the difference in satisfaction found in relationship with people to

the satisfaction found in things. Furthermore there is a sense of *being* with people that makes “stuff” insignificant, indicating when the focus is on the stuff, the satisfaction found in connecting with people is neglected and a symbolic hole develops. The *beingness* of just hanging with mates on a Sunday is significant. Possibly it separates meaningful interaction from consumer life, where consumer life becomes a blur in the background, and the memories of dynamic human connection and experience becomes the true story. All participants expressed this in one way or another. For example, participants described that even with wealth and the capacity to buy anything you desired, life was meaningless without love and relationships. Consistent with this, many participants believed life purpose was about providing a service to others, where the skills and passions of individuals could be used to help others. It was believed that through actions that serve others, harmony and authentic fulfilment could be realised. Thus the important part of life is understood by participants to be about people.

3.4.3.2 Grasping for Collectivism: Being Present to Experience

When reflecting on their lives, all participants described the transient nature of material consumer products, and the desire to have meaningful experiences. They believed life satisfaction was found in doing things with people, being in desired places, travelling, and having fun. Participants described experiencing significantly more positive feelings when at the beach with family, jogging with friends, or out surfing, than they did shopping. Indeed the sentiment within valued experiences is illustrated in the following two accounts,

I don't know we just don't want to raise our kids like that, we want them to have a bit more of a life. Like for birthdays we don't buy them presents we give them an experience. So they can always have as much music and books as they want, we don't mind buying that, but we don't give presents anymore either, we will give them something to do or take them somewhere to see something... I think it is better, they don't live a cluttered life.

And,

I can't wait for my holidays because I'll be at the beach every day. And so I think those are the things that for me they would make me feel good and I think I get much

more enjoyment out of sitting on the beach and relaxing and not doing anything superficial, than I do from shopping.

The first excerpt suggests there is a sense of liberation associated with focusing life on experiences. For the participant it is the liberation from a “cluttered life”. A cluttered life would suggest a life made confused and messy by the accumulation of material items. Without clutter there is a sense that life becomes about other people and the natural world. Certainly this is the sentiment in the second excerpt. Here the participant implies anything related to shopping is superficial, as compared to relaxing on the beach. This comparison would suggest that *being present* in the natural environment provides a sense of depth and meaning that brings enjoyment and other positive feelings. The ability of experience to support human connection whether it be with other people or the natural world was evident in the accounts of many participants. For some this was particularly true in the experience of travelling. One participant described his love for travelling, for him it took him away from the stress and bustle of consumer life and allowed him to be *present* and in the moment. This freedom to become *present* facilitated connection with other people through *sitting* with them and learning from them;

I found when I did go up into the villages I did volunteer work too, I enjoyed that far more, just being able to sit down and talk to them and learn. I feel like some people travel because they like to see stuff or relax, I see it as a learning experience and I do like to learn, hands on and get out and talk about stuff, I'm not just sitting down and reading a book, it's not the same... I like the feeling that when you realise that you're not that different in the end and then everything kind of fits and then you get along and that communication barrier has broken down and you're just, yeah.

What is significant in this account is how being present to the experience of *being* with others and learning from them has enabled the participant to realise his humanity and the humanity of others. For the participant it is a profound experience that makes him realise that “[we are] not that different in the end”. In this way valuing experience fosters a sense of connection between peoples and encourages feelings of ‘we’ ness as opposed to the ‘I’ ness of an individualistic society. However an interesting feature of this subtheme is how it is heavily entwined with consumerism. For the most part, experiences like travel that were

described by participants, had to be bought, and the capacity to be *present* to others and place was reserved for those experiences. For example a holiday is only considered as such because a flight and accommodation have been bought. It is a commodity that is believed by social conditioning to provide the space and opportunity to allow the person to be open to the value of the experience. In this way being *present* to others and place is limited to a purchased setting. Thus, it is possible there is an absence in society to see that *experience* does not have to be financially bound or distance specific, which would hinder deeper human connection in everyday consumer life. Nonetheless all participants recognised the value in experiences to provide depth and meaning, and expressed a longing to bring it more into their lives.

Being Present to Experience was also reflected in the discourse of participants as they described the value of a “slow” and “simple” life. They believed that reducing the busy and *wanting* in consumer lifestyles allowed one to be *present to the moments* in everyday life, which brought about feelings of contentment. A slow and simple life as portrayed by participants opposes consumerism, it is about “being satisfied what you already have”, and in this way it is not having the desire for more or the best, or basing purchase decisions on the search for happiness and worth. For participants it was reported as a mindset free of conformity and superficiality, which encourages creativity, and appreciates the “basics” of food, safety, shelter, and people in life. For participants the contentment believed to arise from a slow and simple lifestyle is believed to help achieve more depth and meaning in life, and removes one from a focus on material possessions to a focus on selfhood, others and the natural world. It was believed that true and lasting happiness could be achieved with this shift. In the following account, a participant describes deliberately implemented mindfulness in their own life,

I suppose that, certainly my appreciation of the natural environment, of course I have always been camping and done things outside but certainly as I get older I just see so much more value in the natural world and meditation and really just taking things more slowly and trying to appreciate the moment rather than rushing around and doing lots of things. If there was any pivotal moment, it was when I did a few years ago met a guy who was a Buddhist and then he told me the ways Buddhists think about being in the moment, that really was a pivotal moment in terms of changing

how I took in the world and the sort of things I was doing which really weren't... I thought I was enjoying myself but I realised that I was rushing around too much and not really stopping to take it in.

The account here reveals richness in taking life slowly and simply. Without being caught up in the qualities of consumerist life there seems to be a greater appreciation for nature. The concept of slowness also appears to profoundly deepen and enhance the experience of life. This is evident when the participant describes their life before they made changes. Before the shift they allude to not being *present to* or *experiencing* life as they were having to rush around and “do lots of things” as is expected in consumer society. A slow and simple life appears to provide the space to *take it in*, which for participants is the space for family, friends, and the natural world, and in this place is the sentiment of meaningfulness, contentment, and enjoyment, as opposed to consuming material possessions.

3.4.4 Summary

The themes identified at the Worldview Discourse layer of analysis are *Capitalism*, *Individualism*, and *Grasping at Collectivism*. The theme *Capitalism* depicts an ideology in which people are removed from their humanity and reconceptualised as a source of profit. Participants describe how consumer society places a lot of value on materialism, which is believed to arise from the use of manipulation in advertising by capitalists. It is possible the value placed on materialism is also encouraged by the notion of the “dream” captured in the theme *Individualism*. In this theme, participants convey the desire to be distinctive and unique, to move beyond conformity and live up to ones “purpose”, and in doing so achieve a sense of happiness. This aspiration is also conceptualised as a matter of personal responsibility and dependent on the actions of one’s self. The subtheme, *The Burden of Sustainability*, within the theme *Individualism*, captures the tendency of participants to perceive their responsibility and power for change from an individual level. Combined with feeling overwhelmed by the scale of change required to change Western dominant cultural consumer practices, participants convey a sense of disempowerment, ineffectiveness, and *smallness*. It is thus possible Individualism limits their ability to see their potential in collective action. The third theme at the Worldview Discourse layer of analysis is *Grasping for Collectivism*. This theme portrays the reverence held by participants for meaningful

relational connection and experience, and is encapsulated within the subthemes *Valuing Others* and *Being Present to Experience*. In the subtheme *Valuing Others*, the significance of family, friends, and service to others as the basis for attaining a sense of meaningfulness in everyday life was explored. This theme arose in participant discourse as participants reflected on what they describe as the superficial aspects of consumerism. Similarly, in the subtheme *Being Present to Experience*, the meaningfulness participants reported feeling when valuing the “simple”, and being “present” to experiences in nature and with other people, was captured. The overall sentiment arising from the theme *Grasping for Collectivism* was the belief satisfaction, fulfilment, and happiness were truly realised in relational connection, rather than in accumulating wealth and material possessions.

In this way, a significant quality of the findings at this layer of analysis was the inherent tension between capitalistic/individualistic worldviews and the seemingly deep desire for a sense of meaning in loving relationships and connective experiences. On the one hand, participants shared a worldview that positioned the ideal of happiness as the achievement of an individualised and unique “dream” or “purpose”. However, on the other hand, there was a belief that nothing is meaningful without relationship – that human connection, simplicity, and presence are the paths to happiness.

3.5 Myth/ Metaphor

Myth/Metaphor is the deepest layer of analysis. It encompasses the deep collective and often unconscious stories, as well as the emotive and paradoxical dimensions of an issue as depicted in the narratives of participants. Metaphors structure the way issues and concepts are perceived, thought about, and acted upon. They are quintessentially about understanding and experiencing something in terms of the understanding and experience of something else (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), and in this way give meaningful structure to the world (Smith, 1991). Furthermore, while metaphor may surface as a conventional way of talking about a concept, the symbology and deeper meanings beneath it are typically unconscious. Metaphor, therefore, becomes more than the words used, it is all about how the idea is conceptualised which ultimately shapes how it is approached (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). At this layer of analysis, discourse concerning consumerism revealed four distinct metaphoric themes. The first of these, *The Treadmill*, portrays the sense of meaninglessness associated with consumer life as likened to the endless rotation of a treadmill. The second theme, *The Self as a Container* depicts participant's conceptualisation of self as a receptacle of consumer life and relationships. The third theme, *Shopping Centre as the New Church*, describes the fundamental dynamics of social change with symbology illustrating the shift of the church to the shopping centre, and describes how this change is conceptualised and negotiated within the collective narrative. Finally, the fourth theme, *Keeping up with the Joneses*, portrays the myth of social emulation as a possible source of substance and value. Together the metaphors inherent to these themes tell a story of lost human connection, the absence of lasting meaning, and of a desire to reclaim community.

3.5.1 The Treadmill

A metaphor used explicitly (verbatim) by one participant and the symbolic expressions used by other participants, describe the nature of consumer life like that of *The Treadmill*. Such imagery bestows profound insight into the experience of a life embedded in consumerism. The treadmill in a literal sense is a machine that provides a convenient form of exercise, recording the distance and time you walk. On it you are forced to take every step as the conveyer moves beneath you, one foot after another in an endless cycle. You can be running for any length of time, or for any recorded distance, and you are still in the same place.

There is no alternative direction, it is repetitive, and as a form of exercise it is socially acceptable. *The Treadmill* as a metaphoric concept is reflected in the language used by participants to describe consumerist lifestyles. In what ways this depicts their lived experience will be explored within this theme.

Just like the repetitive rotation of a treadmill, consumer life was described by participants to be a never ending cycle of buying, consuming, wanting, working, and rushing in the hope of achieving happiness, which as a goal always seems just out of reach. Although there is a lot of activity occurring in this cycle, life appears to always be staying in the same place, in the same cycle, driven by the same motivations. For participants the nature of this cycle made them feel as if life was meaningless, as is evident in the following expressions. Note here also, in bold, the ways the metaphorical concept of a treadmill is reflected in the language used,

*We do sometimes **run around chasing** our tail really.*

And,

*I get very much like what's the point? What's the point of doing a nine to five job? What's the point of vacuuming my apartment? I go **around in circles** with it.*

And another,

Interviewer: One of my thoughts was that that is why we consume because it is easy to buy things and manufacture this life then to actually stop and think about it.

*Participant: It's like a **vicious cycle**, like consumerism has been created and created to the point where it's like a competition, it's like people are out there to make the most money and it is like people get addicted to it only because it is already there, it's something that has been created and made the number one thing in our society and so you can't escape it...*

The discourse here draws attention to the perceived futility of consumerist lifestyles. The second excerpt in particular, describes struggling to maintain motivation to keep up with the cycle, where it is socially expected you work a nine to five job and keep a clean apartment.

In the third excerpt, the participant describes the primary social focus as being the process of making money. For these participants a consumerist lifestyle seems pointless, without depth, direction, and purpose. In this way, the treadmill of life appears as meaningless, where meaningfulness as a construct is attained through contribution to something larger than the self, which induces genuine fulfilment, gratification, and contentment. Thus, the endless cycle of consumerism with a focus on nothing larger than the individual, but on maintaining the expected and socially acceptable routine, is antagonistic to purpose and meaning.

The metaphorical concept of the treadmill is also reflected in the discourse of participants as they describe the effort required to keep the pace of consumer life, whereby the momentum of the conveyer belt becomes demanding and exhausting. Following from the participant's previous utterances, they were asked

Interviewer:...who would we be if we no longer had fashion, or trends or we couldn't buy expensive TV's or flashy cars?

*Participant: We would be able to **breathe**.*

Consumerism, like the physical exertion needed to keep in step with the treadmill, leaves one out of breath. There is a sentiment of suffocation here, where the pace of consumer life forces the participant into a stride not true to themselves. It is as if there is a force separate and outside of the self that one is expected to partake in. Considering breath is the indication of life, hopping off the treadmill to breathe suggests one was not really living when on it; breathing is to live, and to be alive. In this way, life beyond the treadmill is reflected as the experience of being free of the demanding and deathly drag of the belt, of consumer society. However, for one participant in particular, the predetermined path and expectation of the treadmill provided security and a sense of personhood,

*... everyone likes to be busy even if they don't have to be, it's like if you're not busy then you're not someone and sometimes it's harder to not do stuff then to choose to say go see your parents or have time out, like not just **get on the treadmill** or 'I've gone and seen five people today', I will do it, I am a bit crazy a bit of a socialite, I like*

going to see people I don't know why. But always go and visit people, that's what I do. I find it harder to stay at home really. I would get bored.

What is most significant in this account is the discomfort they experience when not running on the treadmill, they feel like their personhood is defined by how much they run, how busy they are; actions which themselves present as metaphors of consumption, where *running* represents the consumption of people, experiences, goods, and services. It is as if they fear their personhood will cease to exist when the treadmill is stopped, and in this way their deeper sense of selfhood is lost. It would seem that the nature of consumer society is that the identity and personhood of individuals is created by and determined by the system. In the theme *Collectivism* at the Worldview Discourse layer of analysis, participants expressed beliefs that authentic happiness and fulfilment can be found through being present to and connecting with self and the humanity of others. It is possible the pace of consumer life does not slow down enough to afford people the time to experience themselves without it. Thus, life *off the treadmill* becomes the unknown, and the unknown elicits fear and discomfort. Therefore it is possible that for individuals in consumer society, the desire to stop and catch their breath and experience a sense of selfhood beyond consumerism becomes inhibited because the treadmill is all that they have known and are accustomed to.

3.5.2 The Self as a Container

In all participant discourse, the conceptualisation of oneself was structured around the metaphor of a container. A container has the properties of being capable of holding something else, it has an inside and an outside, and as a vessel it protects the thing it encloses (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In the same way, participants conceptualised themselves as a type of receptacle. Words such as “fill”, “full”, “void”, “empty”, and “within” were regularly utilised in the expressions used when referring to themselves or other people. This is evident in the following discourse, with language reflecting the metaphorical concept of the container in bold,

*I think we are being primed to be consumers, its being **shoved down** our throats every possible opportunity, when you turn on the television its buy this, buy that...*

And,

*I thought I was enjoying myself but I realised that I was rushing around too much and not really stopping to **take it in**.*

In both these excerpts, the metaphor of a container is evident in the way participants portray themselves as they engage and are influenced by the world around them. For instance, the language used in the first excerpt reveals the position of consumer in a market driven society. Here the participant conceptualises her consumer self and other consumers as vessels being forced to *hold* the desire to buy, and the action of being “primed” suggests this is typically not in conscious awareness. This may imply that the self as a container is always being persuasively and forcibly prepared for reception by the market. In the second excerpt a different image of the self as vessel is depicted. Here the language used portrays the participant becoming aware of his own self-conceptualisation as a receptacle, as “rushing around” had distracted him from this. While what “it” is he is *taking in* is ambiguous, it is clear he is choosing to contain what “it” is, it is *adding* something to his life, and this is a positive experience. In this instance, even stopping and getting off the treadmill (as described in the previous theme) demands he consumes. Despite the differing experiences and use of the metaphor in these two examples, both draw attention to the significance of one's conceptualisation of self being able to *contain* something.

However, within participant discourse, the most prominent property of the container when used as a conceptual metaphor was its ability to be empty. Indeed most participants described experiences where they had felt a “void” or “hole” within themselves, or experienced the feeling of *emptiness* or as if “something was missing”. Typically, these feelings arose out of participant discourse reflecting on the deeper motivations for their shopping behaviours, where shopping was also described as a type of *filler*. In this way it is possible that in certain contexts shopping acts to pacify the distress caused from feeling empty. For example,

*But also, I do think about that **hole** and the necessity to **fill it**, but even in the last few months I have got a new girlfriend and we have **fallen in** love, and I am like “man that was something I was **missing** for a long time”. I was in a really destructive relationship and for the longest time I didn't know what was **missing** and it was love, we just didn't have love. We loved each other but we weren't **in love** with each other.*

*So that was a **big hole** for me, so for me I don't feel the **hole**... there a certain things in my life were buying things definitely makes me feel better and I feel like something is **missing** until I have got it, and then the **missingness** grows as time goes on when you don't buy anything for a long time.*

In the above excerpt the participant explicitly states their feeling of something missing, of experiencing a “hole” within them. What is interesting though, is the differing ways this “hole” is *filled*. He describes the romantic relationship he has with his girlfriend and the love he shares with her as the remedy to this emptiness, however he still feels as if something is “missing” and attempts to satisfy this with the purchase of things. What is also interesting here is how the *filling* of self through buying goods is only temporary, needing to be *refilled* over time, and that through this form of consumption he “feel[s] better”. In this way perhaps it is the purchase of things that soothes the discomfort of *incompleteness* when *something* is missing. This is certainly evident in the above account, and is also present in the following excerpt;

*Interviewer: One of the things that I have been thinking is the idea of Facebook or the idea of social media and smartphones and how it might relate to consumerism, and my thoughts were that, because when I reflected on myself I thought I couldn't close my Facebook account because then I'd feel like I wouldn't belong anymore, that's my plug into the social world and as soon as I lose that then it's just me at my desk typing, like where's the social space? But I wondered whether the use of Facebook and social media, because we're interacting so much through that cyberspace, whether we're actually becoming lonely and isolated in ourselves because we don't have that as much as that face-to-face interaction which I think is a little bit more meaningful, so I wondered whether because we were losing that maybe we were trying to **fill ourselves up** with gadgets and with fashion and we're trying to make ourselves feel like we're worth something or we're whole or whatever it is, because we're not getting that from relationship. What are your thoughts?*

Participant: I can agree. I did study consumerism back in high school, it was part of unit and we did learn that you do, we seem to be using items to -

Interviewer: Make ourselves feel good?

*Participant: Yeah. And I definitely could understand that if we're not getting as much one-on-one contact we will turn to other things that make us feel good and generally it is brand new things such as clothes, so, yeah, that would make a lot of sense. I'm thinking the young people stereotypes that you come across and what they seem to buy, it's all an escape. If you have like... that we're all I guess a bit lonely naturally but as you spend less time with people you do tend to **push yourself into something** else.*

*I used to be really big on the gaming and I'd never leave the house but I would always make sure I had the latest game or the latest Xbox or PlayStation and I wanted the best flat screen and the best computer, the fastest ram, all that stuff and **in that I escaped through all those games** and things like that but I spent no time with people. But I found the moment I spent more time with people, I spent less time playing my games and now I don't even care because although I do use social media a lot, my friends like to constantly be meeting up and especially when you go to university you don't necessarily lose that one-on-one as much because you are seeing people constantly and you're seeing your friends constantly.*

I do wonder when you leave university and you go on to the workplace and you're not necessarily socialising as much but just working, go to work, go home, what that would be like. I guess that's when you would turn, I know I would probably turn back to games because I know when I can't leave the house or see people, if it's been a week, instantly for some reason I'm playing these games again and I want to buy more.

Interviewer: Is that because you're forgetting, you're trying to forget that you're alone?

*Participant: You forget and you, it's strange, especially with gaming, you form attachments to the characters in the game and **it's almost you're a part of it** and that story line, you're the person going through it and it's not like you're watching it, it's not like a movie, it's like you are the player... And it's just all nothing more than **an***

escape from the real world... You don't have to think about things or reflect on things, everything is put into that game and I'm sure other people do it through other ways whether it be fashion or gadgets and stuff.

In this excerpt, the participant reflects on the sense of discomfort he experiences from a lack of engagement with others, and describes the action of consuming – or escaping *into* gaming – to forget that discomfort⁶. What appears to be significant for this participant is his vulnerability towards loneliness, he not only reflects “we’re all... a bit lonely naturally”, but admits he is susceptible to returning to gaming when a lifestyle change will mean spending less time with friends. Perhaps this vulnerability is similar to the “hole” in the previous account, and becoming “part of [the game]”, or contained *within it*, provides a forgetting, or soothing of that “hole”. The action of consumption to *fill* or soothe the discomfort of loneliness or “missingness” is further supported in the reflections of another participant;

*Participant: I think sometimes when I go to the big shops, not the op shops where I like to shop, but the main shops that's where I feel I need to fit in. I think 'I should buy something because that will make me feel better', because that's what everyone does, you see how many people at the shops. There is a sense of conformism there but I don't do it that often but when I do I don't always feel any better. Sometimes I feel alright but whilst I am looking around I feel **empty** anyway. Yeah so, I don't really want it, I get home and think 'I didn't need that'...*

Interviewer: so what happens in that moment when you purchase it and you haven't really thought about it? What do you think in that moment?

Participant: feelings you've just got to buy things yeah. Yeah I don't know why we buy things... I don't know, I guess when you go out to the shops you see lots of bright things, lots of colour, like I love looking at stuff and then I think I should probably buy something but sometimes I look at things and not buy anything I am quite happy with that really. But sometimes I think I want to buy something, it's almost like I think I need to buy something, that I need to buy something...

⁶ The participant's reflection also arose as a result of myself, as the researcher, sharing my reflections of my own social media consumption. The interaction that followed is an example of what Gadamer (1975) describes as the *fusion of horizons* – the co-creation of meaning, and a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, through dialogue and the sharing of lifeworlds.

The participant explicitly describes believing the act of shopping will make her “feel better”. However, she also describes that despite this belief, sometimes shopping does not bring relief and instead she “feel[s] empty”. What is also interesting is the “need” she expresses in those moments to shop, where she feels she “should” be buying something. This *need* appears to be influenced by feeling as though she does not “fit in”. Indeed, she describes wanting to “feel better” after perceiving herself out-of-place in the “big shops”, believing shopping is the answer as that is what everyone else appears to be doing. Therefore, by conforming to the same shopping behaviour as those around her there is a sense of fitting in. It is possible then that the *emptiness* she describes experiencing, arises from feeling as though she does not belong, and that the process of shopping satisfies the need for inclusion. Based on this premise, it is speculated that the *emptiness* and *void* in participant discourse is by nature a lost sense of human connection. In this case, it is not belonging with others, and in the previous accounts one participant describes a “hole” that was *filled* by the love between himself and his girlfriend, and the other reflects on the desire to escape from the loneliness he is vulnerable to experiencing. It appears that in all cases is the quality of human relationship. This theme is also present in the discourse of other participants as they share “**falling short** [in] parent’s expectations”, and describe their shoe addiction as “**filling a void** left by a lack of love somewhere”. Thus in their conceptualisation of self as a container, it is possible that relationships are *held within* the person and that the lack of such relationships leads to a sense of *emptiness* and a need to *fill*. In the case of dominant Western society *filling* appears to occur through shopping and the accumulation of commodity. Possibly this is the result of “priming” by a pervasive market as suggested in the first excerpt.

3.5.3 Shopping Centre as the New Church

Embedded within the narratives of all participants was symbology associated with the shopping centre and the church. The *Shopping Centre* was set as a metaphor that reflected the nature of consumer society. It represents materialism, where identity is bought and established through fashion, gadgets, and lifestyles; transforming the self into commodity. It reflects a place where the central focus is the individual, resulting in disconnection and social separation. In contrast, the *Church* emerged as a metaphor to reflect the nature of an idealistic community. It represents a place where one can experience selfhood through

quiet reflection and *presence*, and symbolises the search for deeper meaning and authentic identity. However most of all, it is a metaphor that reflects transcendence – the shift from a focus on the individual to a focus on community – which is believed to give rise to fulfilment, purpose, belonging and genuine human connection. It also encompasses the values within the theme *Collectivism*, explored at the Worldview Discourse layer of analysis.

Throughout participant discourse, the Church and the Shopping Centre were constructed as conveying opposing worldviews. However, they are also conceptualised together as one shifting worldview and in this way they depict the fundamental dynamics of social change. By way of explanation, one participant described the historical nature of traditional communities as being governed by the worldviews inherent in the *Church* and how in modern times these worldviews have shifted and become those that are now characteristic of consumer society and its *Shopping Centre*. An illustration of these metaphors as they relate to social change is apparent in the following excerpt,

...today we go 'what are the idols of our culture?' and you only have to look around and see that only a hundred years ago the centre of the community was very much the church, especially in Europe, there was the big church in the middle of the town and then there was the community built around the church and they would all come together and not just religious stuff would happen but there is community relationship. But now you look around and what's the counterpoint of most suburbs? It's the shopping centres built on just a grand a scale as any cathedral was, you look at Joondalup⁷ and there is those beautiful sails and vast open expanses and the twinkling of music and it's like there is such a parallel between them, we have changed from coming into church and being in awe of something transcendent and something apart from ourselves that we come to worship but instead we come now to worship our own gratification, our own feelings, our own desires through the spending of money and we will sacrifice our family's, our careers to have more money to do those things.

⁷ Joondalup is a North Western suburb in Perth, Western Australia. The City of Joondalup as a council region covers 97 square kilometres and contains a population of 164 000. *Lakeside Joondalup* is a shopping centre within this region and is the largest in Perth. It encompasses a cinema, all major supermarkets and retail stores, as well as over 300 specialty stores. This is the shopping centre the participant is referring to when they describe "Joondalup".

(City of Joondalup, 2015. <http://www.joondalup.wa.gov.au/Welcome/AboutJoondalup.aspx>)

What is interesting in this excerpt is that although the *Shopping Centre* and the *Church* reflect different idols and worldviews, their physical presence within social space is the same. Both are the centrepiece and both emanate grandness. The participant describes the church having become the shopping centre, or the shopping centre having become the *New Church* over the last century. It is therefore possible based on this observation that the nature of the community enclosing this centrepiece has also changed. At a metaphoric level this is certainly reflected in the shifting worldviews identified by participants and is consistent with Tönnies (1974) idea of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. This shift or transformation has also meant there is a sentiment of loss, where what once was, is no longer there. This loss is a sense of community, and is evident in the following account of another participant;

Other aspects of my life that would be if anything other than ideal... is the lack of community, I certainly don't feel like I belong to a community as far as my area or neighbours or that, and there are some things that do bring that back a little bit, and it sounds ridiculous, but like the markets where you go regularly and you are in close contact, there's a feeling of community there for me, but obviously supermarkets and everything else is very sort of soulless, you feel kind of invisible in places like that, you really don't have a relationship with yeah... and specifically for me I know the neighbours on that side and speak to them occasionally over the fence but I have never really been to their place on the other side, I barely know them...

The opposing nature of the *Shopping Centre* and the *Church*, and despondence felt as a result of lost community is apparent here. The location of consumption within consumer society is described as "soulless". Other participants described it as "clinical", "cold", and "intimidating". In this space the participant expresses feeling "invisible", which suggests there is a sense of being unnoticed in the world, of lacking value, or perhaps in the supermarket one simply becomes regarded as a consumer. The "[lack of] relationship" within this space described by the participant certainly supports a sense of detachment and a disconnection from others. Furthermore, the participant in this account appears to desire a sense of community, particularly within their neighbourhood. In this there is a longing for something deeper and more meaningful than what is currently being provided by society. This is consistent with the experience of other participants as they described feeling

detached from their neighbourhoods and not knowing their neighbours. All participants communicated experiencing a sense of community to varying degrees, however these were more relational in nature, consisting of interest groups, clubs, internet forums, and churches. Despite this there was a desire to be more connected to place and the people within the local community. One participant describes how they enjoy listening to Indigenous people because everything they talk about is in terms of community, and in this there is a sense of cohesiveness and profound connection⁸. One place however that seemed to provide a degree of community sentiment for participants was community markets. This is mentioned in the account above and it is also spoken of in the accounts of other participants, whereby participants approached community markets with fondness. Perhaps community emerges in this setting because the distance between producer and consumer is dramatically minimised, creating a space for discussion and a space where people from all walks of life feel comfortably gathered. In this way markets possibly support social interaction and community involvement. These qualities of community markets are reflected in the following accounts,

I certainly don't feel like I belong to a community as far as my area or neighbours or that, and there are some things that do bring that back a little bit, and it sounds ridiculous, but like the [local] markets where you go regularly and you are in close contact, there's a feeling of community there for me.

And,

Interviewer: With the moonlight markets you were talking about, what was so nice about them?

Participant: Most of the people there were really friendly, like they didn't care about the whole selling aspect, they were more just happy to make friends. There was a lovely lady who just started this little business and she's trying to raise money to send off to south Africa and she made these beautiful necklaces and rings and she gave us

⁸ This participant's statement is particularly poignant in the context of Australia's colonisation history and the associated implications of ideological 'progression' and rationality. It is possible that in reality, as is reflected in this participant's dialogue, those who have been marginalised for their way of life by the dominant Western culture, actually hold a more sophisticated worldview.

some advice, 'cause I used to make a little business as well and I told her a few tricks of the trade and she was so grateful and it was so nice you know....

And another,

I'd go to the markets, they have, I don't know it's not just, it's the smell as well, everything about it is a lot more friendly and you can talk to stall people for ages...

Although the markets appear as another location of consumption, it is perhaps the arrangement of this space that fosters a sentiment of community. However outside of this social sphere the ideologies of the *Shopping Centre* prevail and it is possible the disappearance of the *church*, and the transcendent community it encompasses, which is tasted⁹ in the markets leads to a sense of something missing. Perhaps it is the *void* and *hole* in participant discourse when participants describe the need to fill themselves up through consumption.

The metaphoric concept of the *church* reflects another significant aspect of social change. It is the idea of transcendence. Meaning in participant discourse is associated with relationship, the importance of which was discussed within the theme *Grasping for Collectivism* at the Worldview Discourse layer of analysis. Here participants described the meaningfulness found in *valuing* and *being present* to others and in this manner relationship becomes about something greater than the self, similar to the way *Gemeinschaft* as a concept is more than the people within it (Tönnies, 1974). Perhaps the community, built from these relationships, is a living entity itself that transcends the individuals within it and continues to exist despite the birth and death of its members. Possibly, contributing to the *Church* and the community that embodies it means belonging to legacy, which provides comfort and purpose. The loss of community therefore in the shift to consumer society and the shopping centre perhaps signifies the loss of shared community legacy. People then feel a sense of meaninglessness and question their purpose, and as a result look to consumerism to bring some sense of meaning. Thus achieving the car and the house and wealth will make life full and meaningful because consumer society says it will. Evidence for this postulation can be observed in the following excerpts;

⁹ Markets may also foster a tacit experience, where community connection is felt (tasted) but intangible, like a distant memory, 'knowing' or association in the collective unconscious.

There's got to be a reason we are all here but nobody knows.

And,

I am very conscious of the fact we are all going to die and the most important thing for me is having those memories with the people that I love and that is the thing that is becoming more important in my life...

Certainly an awareness of one's own impermanence is revealed here. In this awareness is the deep need for purpose; a reason to be alive. The second account draws attention to the paramount significance of relationship with people in providing that reason. It also emphasises the importance of memory in those relationships. The concept of memory is interesting, as it is about a collective shared experience among friends, and the opportunity to remember together creates a genuine sense of community. Indeed, as described by Leichter (2012), memory through shared heritage and experience entangles the stories of each person's life, binding people to one another in the form of communal identity. Furthermore, remembering together opens one up to experience the other as another self, expanding authentic human connection. In this way, memory and the community that encapsulates it transcends the individual, thus the potential for meaning is found in contributing to collective and shared memory. It is therefore possible that in the case of consumerism the genuine desire for meaning through human connection becomes confused with the values of the *Shopping Centre*. In other words, the *Shopping Centre* being positioned as the *New Church* may be a reflection of the misplaced desire for, and meaning derived from, transcendence and legacy.

3.5.4 Keeping up with the Joneses

In the opinion of all participants, consumerism was driven by peoples need to "Keep up with the Joneses". As an expression *Keeping up with the Joneses* represents the unspoken, yet very real social pressure to have the same or to have bigger and better than everyone else, for example,

I think about it, having a new phone doesn't really add that much to your life, especially an iPhone, it is the same thing only faster, 90% of it would have to be status and keeping up appearances, keeping up with the Joneses as they would say.

In this excerpt, the participant reflects the primary reason for what appears to be unnecessarily buying a new phone, is to “[keep] up appearances”, or rather, to “[keep] up with the Joneses”. According to Matt (2003) ‘keeping up with the Joneses’ was a popular phrase in America during the 1910s and 1920s and in that time portrayed envy and emulation as harmless, normal, and expected. However *the Joneses* were not real people. The expression was based on a comic strip of the same name that ran in the American newspapers for 26 years (Cockayne, 2013). In short, the cartoonist Arthur R. ‘Pop’ Momand told the ongoing story of the McGinnis’; a couple, their daughter and housekeeper, who struggled to maintain appearances within a wealthy suburban environment. *The Joneses*, neighbours of the McGinnis’, were never actually seen in the comic strip, they were merely an occasional reference by the main characters as the ideal of American high society (Cockayne, 2013). While representing common emulation among people, the expression *Keeping up with the Joneses* also signifies a system of knowledge production and socialisation, and the humour arising from the comic strip results from McGinnis’ failure and lack of education in this sphere (Montez, 2007). In contemporary Western society, the expression is still often used colloquially as a reference to consumption competitions and attempts to improve social status through economic resources (DesJardins & McCall, 2000).

In regards to *keeping up with the Joneses*, participants described a genuine pressure in society to achieve an acceptable level of socialisation. For participants, socialisation was guided by very clear social expectations. They describe *rules* of life progression that people are expected to follow, which act as symbolic expressions of socially defined success;

You know, you have those friends that have to follow those rules, school, uni[versity], house, career, marriage, babies, [and] second house, because they need an investment home. You know that's how people think they should live...

And,

Participant: Now I drive a 10 year old Falcon Fairlane right, and the reason it's not a new one is they stopped making them 10 years ago, because every 18 months I used to buy a new one... [My son], in The Middle East, because there's no tax, because we earn more money in The Middle East, paid for a Maserati. Now if you and I are looking at the cars as a statement of our success, which one would represent success? A 10 year old Fairlane or a new Maserati?

Interviewer: The Maserati.

Participant: And that's consumerism.

In these excerpts “success” appears to be socially defined by the level of one’s education, their ownership of property, the make and model of their car, their chosen career, their marital status, whether they have children, and their investment portfolio. Participants also described the unspoken pressure to always be upgrading, specifically technological devices such as iPhones. Failing to do so results in feelings of inadequacy as evidenced in the theme *Peer Pressures to Consume*. Together the rules of life progression and expectations to upgrade described by participants appear to belong to the system of knowledge that guides socialisation. It is thus possible that failure in this arena leads to one becoming the joke, like the McGinnis’, and visible – much unlike the *Joneses* within the comic script, whose aristocracy has awarded them invisibility and veneration. It is also possible these elements of success are used to reflect a sense of social and personal worth, where on a collective social level worth is grounded in materialism, and therefore actively *Keeping up with the Joneses* is perhaps the means by which a person feels acceptable and of substance. This was evident in the theme *Individualism* at the Worldview Discourse layer of analysis as participants described “loving yourself” and the role of consumerism in substituting a lack of self-worth and validity recognition. In this way, perhaps believing in the myth of the *Joneses*, of social emulation, provides a sense of continuity, structure and security in the world.

3.5.5 Summary

The metaphors and myth identified at the deepest level of analysis include: *The Treadmill*, *The Self as a Container*, *Shopping Centre as the New Church*, and *Keeping up with the Joneses*. *The Treadmill* as a theme, and metaphor, symbolically reveals the meaninglessness

and exhausting elements of consumer life as depicted by participants. Participants indicate in their utterances that in living up to the expectations of consumer life, their lives could feel repetitive and suffocating. However, analysis reveals that remaining on the cycle of consumer life may also provide them a sense of security, as selfhood is entangled with social processes, such as busyness and consumption, which are constituents of the metaphoric treadmill. One, therefore, remains on *The Treadmill* because the thought of stepping off elicits a sense of insecurity. In the theme *The Self as a Container*, the way in which participants conceptualise themselves as an empty receptacle is explored. Participants convey a feeling of emptiness, or a void within them, that appears to be associated with missing human connection and relationship. Certainly, as is revealed in their stories, it is possible a deficiency in meaningful relational connection in their lives may leave them feeling as though their *self* is empty and in need of filling. In the third theme – *The Shopping Centre as the New Church* – the perceived loss of an idealistic community and transcendental human connection is explored as it relates to the changed nature of social space. Participants convey a desire to be more connected to those in their neighbourhoods and communities. Realising this desire, however, appears to be inhibited by the arrangement of the *Shopping Centre*, and what it symbolically represents as the focal point in society. Finally, the theme *Keeping up with the Joneses* captures the myth that social emulation and competition are indicators of successful socialisation and status. Participants describe rules of life progression, and they communicated the social pressure to consume in particular ways. As is discussed within this theme, it is possible this myth holds influence in consumer life because it provides a structured platform on which a sense of perceived worth can be explored. Indeed, the myth of *the Joneses*, and the deep-rooted metaphors underlying Western consumerism identified in this layer of analysis, appear to influence together, the expression of ideologies and worldviews, the manifestation of social and systemic processes, and the experiences of everyday consumer life exposed in the proceeding layers of deconstruction. The narrative that arises from this interplay is both complex and profound, and will form the basis of discussion in the following chapter.

Chapter 4 Reconstruction: Interpretation and Integration

Brian: Please, please, please listen! I've got one or two things to say.

The Crowd: Tell us! Tell us both of them!

Brian: Look, you've got it all wrong! You don't NEED to follow ME, You don't NEED to follow ANYBODY! You've got to think for your selves! You're ALL individuals!

The Crowd: Yes! We're all individuals!

Brian: You're all different!

The Crowd: Yes, we ARE all different!

Man in crowd: I'm not...

Monty Python's *Life of Brian*, directed by Terry Jones, 1979

The final stage of a CLA is to describe the issues underpinning the problem being explored in reconstructed form (Bishop & Dzidic, 2014). The reconstruction forms the basis of this chapter and reflects an attempt to present a consolidated interpretation of how the issues manifested at different layers of analysis and what this means for an overall understanding of dominant Western consumerism in Australia. The aim of analysis was to move away from individual and socio economic level observations, which have typically dominated the field of environmental action and consumer inquiry (Akenji, 2012; Jiménez-Dominguez, 2002; Prothero et al., 2011), and explore the 'obvious' (Sarason, 1984); the worldviews, myths, and metaphors that underlie, maintain, and perpetuate a culture of consumption. Reconstruction then, consolidates these layers of understanding into a full and rich account that gets to the root of Western consumerism within an Australian social context (Bishop & Dzidic, 2014). The narrative that arises in this process appears obvious in hindsight, as it reflects *ways of being and perceiving* that to privileged dominant Western Australian culture are so common and fundamental. Generally, these ways of *being* and *seeing* are out of conscious awareness, constructing ones assumptions of, and consequently actions in the world (Inayatullah, 1998). In acknowledging the seemingly ubiquitous nature of such cultural understandings, the reconstructed narrative presented in this chapter is not concerned with making value judgements, rather the intention is to portray the story of consumerism as it emerged in participant discourse.

Within the following discussion, the principle messages arising from the findings will be described and considered in the context of existing literature and theory. Included in these messages are fundamental tensions relating to individuality and the desire for deep relationship, and conflicting societal demands of sustainable effort and materialism. Such tensions appeared to result in a sense of powerlessness and confusion for participants, leading to ambiguous social action and thoughts. In this chapter, these dynamics and what they mean for lasting social change towards sustainability will be explored in detail.

4.1 Reconstructing and reflecting on the research findings

There were several key dynamics reflected in the narrative of consumerism exposed through analytical deconstruction and reconstruction. At a fundamental level was participants' narrative of social change. They perceived a loss of community sentiment in their lives and neighbourhoods, and in place they described the presence of detachment and concern for the accumulation of material goods within consumer life. Throughout participant discourse, the lived experience of this social change is exemplified by the metaphorical concept of the *treadmill*. Deconstructed, the treadmill of consumer life reflected the endless cycle of buying, consuming, wanting, working, and rushing with the intention of achieving happiness. It also appears to be supported and reinforced by the pervasive and widely held myth of *keeping up with the Joneses*, which creates the social pressure to consume particular goods or pursue an expected lifestyle. The consequence however of riding the cycle of consumer life, as expressed by participants, is ensuing sentiment of meaninglessness and suffocation. It appears at an existential level, the idea of stepping away from the treadmill and social prescriptions of life creates anxiety, as selfhood, being entwined with such social knowledge, is threatened, and one fears "*not [being] someone*". This dynamic is also reflected in the narrative of social change. Central to this narrative is the weight of lost community. Here, the sentiment of transcendence, of existential understanding that comes with tradition and contributing to something beyond the individual appears to have been challenged by a pressure to consume and conform to what appears to be a dominant capitalist value system. This seems to have resulted in a sense of purposelessness, disconnection, and insecurity. Metaphorically the loss of genuine

community and meaningful relationships appears to have shaped the conceptualisation of an “*empty*” self, where the self as a container, is inwardly experienced as a “*void*”, a “*hole*”, and always in need of *filling*. What follows is the *self’s* search for *fulfilment*, *wholeness*, and *their personhood* in consumption, as they possibly know no other social structure other than that of the *treadmill*.

The narrative of social change, the nature of consumer life, and the *empty self*, appear to be influenced by and underlie several key assumptions and tensions concerning how one should be in the world. For instance, participants espoused values that were characteristically collectivist in response to the isolation, detachment, and meaninglessness they experienced in the current arrangement and nature of social space. They describe the value of humanity and the significance of compassion. They also described the importance of relationships, which were believed to be enhanced through authentic and memorable engagement. At the heart of these values is the search for more meaningful experiences. However the realisation of these seems to be in conflict with the qualities of Individualism, the ideology that has emerged with the *New Church*, or the shopping centre at the core of consumer society. According to individualist ideology, the person conceptualises their self as a completely separate being and different from other people. This has substantial implications for sustainability. More specifically, with attention being drawn to a separate self, it appears participants’ focus their sustainable efforts on individual behaviours, such as having shorter showers and changing their use and type of consumer products. At the same time the devastating ramifications of overconsumption were conceptualised as *big* global issues. With self being experienced individualistically, participants perceive themselves to be small and consequently powerless and incapable of creating any significant change in large global environmental and social justice issues. This is further compounded by the belief others are not interested in creating change, and as a result, participants dissociate from the implications of consumer life, believing there is nothing they can do. Ultimately, the separate self has meant participants do not conceptualise themselves as part of a larger collective, and therefore they fail to recognise the influence of collective action. Instead, they appear to experience the heavy burden of responsibility for global change on their shoulders as individuals.

One way this sense of powerlessness described by participants appears to manifest is seen at a social structural layer of analysis. There appears to be a pervasive mistrust for governing bodies in relation to sustainability matters, due to perceived vested interests and apparent hypocrisy of those in positions of authority and control. Participants' narratives conveyed instances where they feel stuck in a system they think they have little power or influence over. This is possibly further compounded by the internalised conceptualisation of self as separate, whereby participants see themselves as an insignificant force against a Government they perceive to be disinterested and capital focused.

Additionally, Individualism appears to underpin and sustain the *empty self*. Participants' reflected that they sought *fulfilment* through uniqueness, attempting to *fill up* with personal successes and achievements, and trying to find *wholeness* through self-love and realising their "dream" or "purpose". In these ways the empty self, along with the myth of *keeping up (with the Joneses)*, also justifies and supports Capitalism, since the system of Capitalism provides the means by which socially dictated dreams of material wealth can be attained. At the Social Causes layer of analysis, this is evidenced in the abundance of consumer products available to consumers at low prices which offers a vast array of options for identity production and *self-expression*. In this manner, the *empty self's need* to shop makes it a willing receptacle for marketing and advertising, as it is eager for socially manufactured knowledge concerning the satiating power of consumer products. Indeed, the vulnerability of participants is evidenced in their desire to "*fit in*" through *keeping up* with popular consumer products and social expectations, because failure to do so elicits feelings of inadequacy and isolation. There also appears to be an inherent tension in this dynamic. While *keeping up with the Joneses* reflects downward social comparisons and conformity, the *treadmill* represents the constant desire to be at the head of the pack, to always be "upgrading". The contradiction that arises here echoes the message in Monty Python's *Life of Brian* (1979), "We're all individuals", striving to be different and to stand out, and then at the same time, "[We're] not". This fundamental contradiction seems to create a stasis of dynamic stuckness and confusion, where the *empty self*, seeking to realise *wholeness* in individualistic notions of "purpose", does so by imitating the consumption practices of others.

The desire to *fit in* may also be an indication of an underlying desire to experience a sense of belonging, given that conforming to the purchasing behaviours of others appeared to provide participants with a seemingly superficial means of attaining positive regard and human connection. However, it is possible the satisfaction is only temporary, that “the missingness [re]grows”, because of individualistic ideals embedded within consumerism. Thus participants, attempting to achieve a sense of belonging and communion that will *fill* their *emptiness*, engage in consumption practices that are fundamentally socially designed to display their uniqueness and individuality. This again reflects an inherent tension between wanting to belong and experience the security of people, and desiring to be different and at liberty to pursue ones individualistically determined “dream”. It is plausible this underlying confusion manifests at the Litany layer as the fleeting moments of joy, fulfilment, and pride experienced in the process of shopping, as well as the opposing and seemingly unfavourable impression participants hold of consumer life. A visual representation of this overall narrative of consumerism exposed through analytical deconstruction and reconstruction is depicted in Figure 4-1.

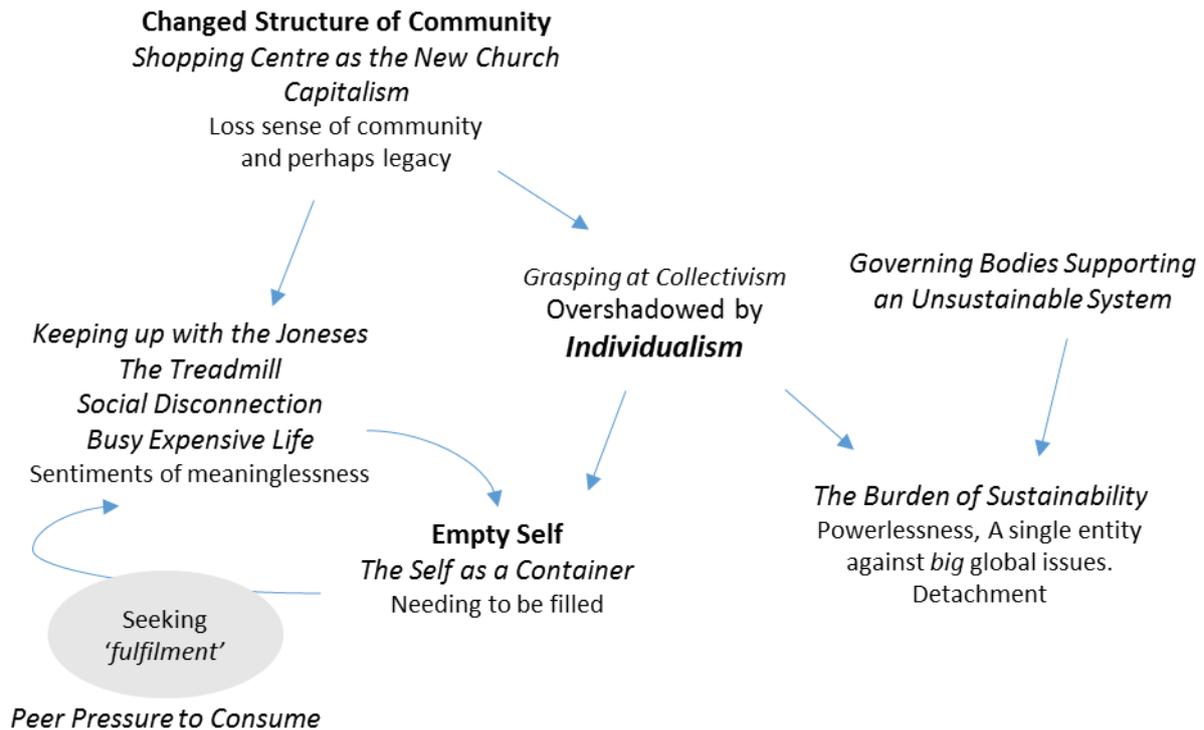


Figure 4-1 A visual representation of the key messages emerging from the reconstructed narrative of dominant Western consumerism in Australia arising through CLA.

4.2 Exploring the notion of *self*

A fundamental concept in the above reconstructed narrative is the notion of *self*. How *self* is conceptualised culturally, and how it is experienced personally, is fundamental to how the social, environmental, and economic world is approached by individuals and societies (Gergen, 2009). The cultural, and consequently personal conception of an *empty* and *separate self*, embedded within participant discourse, seemed to be crucial in supporting a culture of consumption, in shaping personal sentiments of empowerment (or more so, the lack of it), and appeared incompatible with collective efforts towards sustainability. In the following section theory exploring the notion of *self* will be presented as it relates to the reconstructed narrative of consumerism arising from the analysis. This will include an argument for an alternative conceptualisation that is truer to the nature of humanity, which will then be built on in a discussion concerning sustainability.

4.2.1 *Self* in relation to the narrative of consumerism

Conceptualisations of *self* are shaped by ideology (Cushman, 1990). In the narrative emerging from this research, Individualism was one such ideology that influenced an understanding of *self*. According to Gergen (2009), the experience of *self* in Individualism arises from the shared understanding of the “individual as singular and separate... whose abilities to think and feel are central to life and whose capacity for voluntary action is prized” (Gergen, 2009, p. xiv). Gergen describes this *self* as *bounded*. That is, *being human* is understood by each person as being “an individual thinker, dwelling in an interior world of consciousness that is all [their] own”, a private place that not only separates them, but is a mystery to others (Gergen, 2009, p. xiii).

This individualised conceptualisation of *self*, while being highly esteemed in dominant Western culture, is not without adverse implications (Gergen, 2009). Gergen (2009) argues the *separate bounded self* invites a sense of fundamental isolation, as the most important and *essential* part of what makes a person who they are, lies within their own private world, hidden behind their eyes, and is never completely available to another. Furthermore, if each person is fundamentally alone, then all their actions are their own doing. Failures therefore, even those outside ones control, threaten the *essential self*, and one fears being seen as internally lacking and inferior, which creates a persistent need for self-evaluation (Gergen, 2009). In effect, each person becomes responsible for their own salvation, and *self* becomes the continuous evolving product of self-authority, self-improvement, and self-sufficiency (E. E. Sampson, 1985). Self-esteem is also sought through self-love, self-worship, and self-acceptance, which leaves the *self* vulnerable to commodification through self-help products and services, and to darker characteristics such as narcissism and selfishness (Gergen, 2009; Slife & Richardson, 2008). Elements of these dynamics appeared in participant discourse when participants expressed their belief fulfilment and happiness could be found in “loving yourself”, “following your dream”, and “spoiling yourself”. Slife and Richardson (2008) argue that a consequence of such an internal focus on *self* is that relationships may become artificial, as other people become seen as a *means to an end*, an instrument and object used to fulfil the *self's* own desires, and resentment may result from moral demands that threaten ones sense of autonomy (Gergen, 2009; Macmurray, 1961). Such implications are

not conducive to the maintenance of meaningful human connection, relationship, and community (Bauman, 2001; Cushman, 1990; Gergen, 2009).

Indeed, it is the absence of relational significance in the conceptualisation of *self* surrounding Individualism that Cushman (1990) asserts is at the heart of the *empty self*. He writes,

...our terrain has shaped a self that experiences a significant absence of community, tradition, and shared meaning. It experiences these social absences and their consequences 'interiorly' as a lack of personal conviction and worth, and it embodies the absences as a chronic, undifferentiated emotional hunger. (p. 600)

The conceptualisation of the *empty self* is argued by Cushman to underpin the consumption heavy lifestyles in modern Western society. The *self* he claims,

...yearns to acquire and consume as an unconscious way of compensating for what has been lost... it is a self that seeks the experience of being continually filled up by consuming goods, calories, experiences, politicians, romantic partners, and empathetic therapists in an attempt to combat the growing alienation and fragmentation of its era. (p. 600)

This same pattern of Individualism, loss of relational significance, personal sentiments of emptiness, and consumption, is reflected in the narrative of consumerism observed in this research. Participants described the desire to acquire consumer products in an attempt to *fill up* a personal sense of *emptiness*. An emptiness, they indicated, as arising from a *missingness* of community and human connection in their lives. It appears the individualised conceptualisation of *self* has created a perception of separateness that fosters a sense of emptiness. This is because, as Hay (2010) postulates, the individualised *self*, being a relatively recent product of the Enlightenment, does not reflect the true core of what it means to be human. Individualism, he argues, has prompted a "socially constructed amnesia" (p. 40); a forgetting of humanities most natural inclination towards the relational. He writes,

We in the Western world are living through a period during which metanarratives appear to be undergoing a process of eclipse. That is, for an increasing number of people, the 'big stories', including religious stories about our place in the universe have lost plausibility. Yet the metanarrative lives on under the surface... (p. 45)

The metanarrative Hay (2010) is referring to here is what he terms *relational consciousness* – the reality of human meaning and existence being born from relationship. Here also is the centrality of religion, not as it is conceived in modern thought, but as Macmurray (1961) describes it; a celebration of communion, of mutually coming together as community. Indeed, Cushman (1990) and Gergen (2009) argue that above all else, the concept of *self* is relationally defined. That is, Cushman (1990) identifies *self* as the shared cultural understandings of *individual* and “what it means to be human” (Heelas & Lock, 1981, p. 3). He did not believe individuals could be considered separate from culture, nor did he believe individuals and their culture were distinct entities, rather he postulated culture becomes merged with the person to influence their shape and behaviour (Cushman, 1991). Self is therefore a unification of the person and their indigenous cultural psychology, and an embodiment of the culture’s existential beliefs (Cushman, 1990). In this way “there is no universal, transhistorical self, only local selves; no universal theory about the self, only local theories” (Cushman, 1990, p. 599). *Self* it appears, is communal, and the communal “is bound up with the experience that makes us persons” (Macmurray, 1957, p. xi). Certainly, Macmurray (1957) described *self* as being constituted by relations with others, perceiving personal existence to be the embodiment of ‘You-and-I’ rather than the solitary ‘I’. Relationship he postulates, is inseparable to human life, providing the ‘texture’ of experience (Macmurray, 1961). Gergen similarly asserts that *self* cannot truly exist without relationship. *Self*, he argues, emerges from coordination and co-constitution of the world through the ongoing process of relationship. This is because all intelligible action is born, sustained, and finished in relationship, so that; “even in our most private moments we are never alone” (Gergen, 2009, p. xv). This philosophy of *self*, is also reflected in the popular and widely spoken phrase “no man is an island”, which originates from the 17th meditation in John Donne’s (1624) classic work *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*. The entire poem reads;

No man is an island, entire of itself,
 Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.
 If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less.
 As well as if a promontory were.
 As well as if a manor of thy friend's
 Or of thine own were:
 Any man's death diminishes me,

Because I am involved in mankind,
 And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;
 It tolls for thee.

Here, as reflected by Donne and emerging in metaphor, is a sense of profound interconnectivity between persons. The words of Donne imply that each *self* is only completed in the company of other *self's*, and each *self* is a significant element in the whole of humanity, just as each part of a continent is inseparable from any other part of the main.

Together, the works of Hay, Macmurray, Cushman, Gergen, and Donne signify that *Self*, and the experience of *being*, are born from, sustained, and given meaning in cultural heritage, communion, and relationship (Slife, 2005), so that fundamentally “there can be no man [sic] until there are two men [sic] in communication” (Macmurray, 1961, p. 12).

This is the relational *self* obscured by Individualism, and its loss from conscious awareness is postulated in this thesis to be what participants experienced as emptiness. Indeed, the seemingly unconscious desire for communion is evident in participants attempts to grasp at collectivism, and in contemplatively expressing the value of others and relationship. This tension between manifest behaviours and beliefs of the individualised self, and the inherent grasping for collectivism is understood by Kirkwood (2012) to be “an attempt to resolve a deep seated conflict between the desire for personal autonomy and the need for relatedness, social security, and justice” (p. 13). Emptiness, insecurity, and, in reference to a key metaphor emerging from this research, the fear of stepping away from the treadmill, therefore arise because the dominant ideology of Individualism, neglects the most important component of being human. “The ‘I’ is a fiction”, asserts Sacks (2002), because “we develop a sense of personal identity only through close and continuous conversation with ‘significant others’” (p. 15). Consequently, the constructed, numerous, and often fleeting identities that characterise consumer life serve as a superficial form of security and confidence in a privatised and lonely world (Bauman, 2001).

This idea is certainly consistent with features of Terror Management Theory, in which it is proposed people cope with existential anxieties by adhering to worldviews that provide a perceived sense of significance to their lives (Greenberg & Arndt, 2011). In terms of TMT, the *separate bounded self* of Individualism holds onto worldviews of materialism, because

materialism appears to offer a shallow sense of belonging and meaning, especially when other '*self's*' are following the same path (Arndt et al., 2004). It is possible this arises because the culture of Individualism fails to impart a profound sense of being connected to something greater than the *self*, a legacy that will continue to exist beyond the death of *self*. So while material aspirations offer a buffer to existential concerns, as has been found in empirical studies (Arndt et al., 2004; Rindfleisch et al., 2009; Zaleskiewicz et al., 2013), the comfort is empty and fleeting, and as such, always needing to be sought. To this, Sarason (1978) writes;

It has not gone unnoticed that the wonders of science and technology have had little or no effect on society's capacity to help its members feel less alone in the world, to enjoy a sense of community, and to help them cope with anxiety about death. (p. 378)

In contrast, religious belief and personal relationships have been shown to mitigate death anxieties and relieve the need to find protection in materialism (Mikulincer et al., 2003; Stillman et al., 2012). Perhaps this occurs because reconnecting to the relational *self*, whether it be with the divine, personal relationships, or community, inspires sentiments of transcendence, where the *self* is experienced as a part of something bigger than itself; a part of an everlasting reality. It is possible this sense of transcendence alleviates existential concerns because it impresses a sentiment of immortality and significance through contributing to legacy. Such a phenomenon was evident in participant discourse, as they reflected on the importance of shared heritage and memory in bestowing life with meaning. Thus, the relational not only appears to embody an authentic experience of *self*, but connects *self* to the transcendent, which imparts profound significance and meaning, unattached from material wealth, accumulation, and aspiration.

Genuine and lasting social change, therefore, requires a shared relational metanarrative to emerge, and revolutionise how *selves* in dominant Western consumer culture perceive *themselves* and their place in the world. This last point will be explained in more detail in the following discussion on sustainability.

4.2.2 Implications for sustainability and sustainability policy

In the narrative of consumerism emergent from this research, the individualised conceptualisation of *self* had significant implications for sustainability. On an individual level, this narrative shaped participants perceived capacity to alleviate the ramifications of overconsumption, and fuelled materialistically bound social markers of success and happiness. Individualism, as is strongly embedded within consumer culture, also appears to underlie and emerge in proposed political strategies concerning sustainable development, and as such poses significant barriers to generating lasting sustainability.

In the following section, the dynamics between Individualism and sustainability will be discussed in more detail, as well as alternative visions of *self* that offer a foundation for transformative social change. In terms of Individualism, participants described feeling overwhelmed by the scale of change that would need to occur if environmental degradation was to be truly mitigated. They struggled to perceive themselves as anything other than a unique separate entity, and subsequently, the power of collective action, and their place within it. On a personal level, this individualised sense of *self* diminished their motivation and created a sense of disempowerment. Indeed, Sass (1988) describes, Individualism as emphasising an inward focus on self, which tends to devalue the social. This is exemplified by the shopping centre becoming the *new church* in participant discourse. With self being the centre, the social world loses its material influence, and social issues are dissociated from political action (Sass, 1988). In effect, efforts towards change become limited to a bumper sticker that reads “Visualise World Peace” (Cushman, 1990). This is the individual level action taken by participants as they describe taking shorter showers, using “energy saving lightbulbs”, and buying indoor plants. Such actions appear tokenistic – superficial gestures for the appearance or the intrinsic sense one is concerned with saving the world (Barendregt & Jaffe, 2014).

Sustainability is further hampered by socially constructed ideals of life progression and expectation, as was reflected in the myth of *Keeping up with the Joneses*. These define how ‘the good life’ is envisaged in privileged Western culture, which then shapes and motivates the way people act on the world (Kasser, 2004). In consumer culture, Kasser (2004) portrays

'the good life' as 'the *goods* life', where happiness and well-being are conceptualised as the product of accumulated wealth and material possessions. In the same way, participants described expectations related to investments, property, cars, and education. Ideals that are not only antagonistic to a sustainable future but also to happiness (Akenji, 2012; Cushman, 1990). Certainly, at a Litany layer, participants described how busy, stressful and lonely consumer life was, working long hours to meet both material needs and desires. At an institutional level, it is believed Neoliberalism and Capitalism provide the messages that mould 'the *goods* life' conceptualisation (Stevenson, 2010), as its very existence is dependent upon a society of consumers (Foster, 2015; Prilleltensky, 2001). Governing bodies and policy, embedded within a capitalist tradition, are thus positioned to support unsustainable practices, since it is these practices that drive the economic growth paradigm (Akenji, 2012). For participants, the unsustainable nature of institutionalised Capitalism limited their capacity to make more sustainable choices, eroded their trust in governing bodies, and created a sentiment of disempowerment.

It can be argued therefore that significant changes towards sustainability will require the dominant ideology of Individualism and its conceptualisation of *self* to be questioned (Cushman, 1990), the cultural construction of 'the good life' to be redefined (Akenji, 2012; Cushman, 1990; Stevenson, 2010), and an adjustment to the paradigm on which policy and governance decisions are made (Akenji, 2012; Foster, 2015; Sanne, 2002). Together these factors speak of deep social and cultural transformation. Furthermore, conceptualising overconsumption as possibly arising from notion of the *empty bounded self*, as has been discussed previously, suggests the current worldviews of sustainability need to be reconsidered. Indeed, current proposals that address the issues of consumerism, while promoting pragmatic solutions, fail to contextualise consumer behaviour and thought.

For example, the widely accepted sustainable consumption framework for social change, is advocated to provide institutional and policy alternatives that appear to support lasting sustainability, however these are undermined by their embeddedness in Individualism (Middlemiss, 2014). One strategy proposed by this framework is to reconceptualise the commonly held economic ideals of 'growth' and 'progress' to be considered in terms of individual and social well-being (Akenji, 2012; Sanne, 2002). It is suggested this could be achieved through institutional amendments that support shorter and more flexible working

hours, which increase time for non-consumptive leisure activities, such as gardening, walking, and meaningful social interaction, and in turn increase well-being (Akenji, 2012). Such a proposal supports sustainability since it is understood that people who work long hours also tend to make more resource-intensive lifestyle choices (Schor, 2010). Hence, additional leisure time means increased space for self-provisioning (Akenji, 2012), less need for convenience products, and more time for recycling, reusing, and slower, more energy efficient forms of transport (Graaf, 2010). However the problem with this strategy is that it assumes individuals have the ability to work less hours, neglecting the systemic arrangements that restrain their actual capacity (Middlemiss, 2010). Sanne (2002) provides the example of quality education and safe neighbourhoods, these are likely to be expensive, and consequently force families to choose work and money over leisure. Moreover, some people have little choice in the hours they work, as long hours are necessary for them to make ends meet (Burke, 2008). Thus implementing a strategy that encourages less working hours will need to be supported by a Government that champions fair income distribution, low cost health care, high quality free education, and adequate social security (Foster, 2015; Sanne, 2002). Furthermore, cultural pressures to work long hours complicate this strategy, as money, or the desire to *Keep up with the Joneses*, appears to hold significant influence in the perception of one's success (Burke, 2008), and the intrinsic drive to maintain the *treadmill* appears to be important in providing a personal sense of *being someone*, as is reflected in the narrative of consumerism arising from the findings of this research.

Contextual factors also restrict the effectiveness of other Sustainable Consumption strategies. Grassroots Innovation is one such strategy. This strategy involves the collaborative and equal participation and importance of community members in designing solutions to meet their specific needs (Akenji, 2012). The aim is to encourage problem solving through the accumulation of social and community wisdom (Grabs, Langen, Maschkowski, & Schöpke, 2015). While promise for this strategy has been observed in terms of strengthening moral and value systems, encouraging community ties, bolstering social capital, and empowering individuals (Grabs et al., 2015), it is dependent on individuals volunteering their time and resources. This requirement becomes an issue when the social and economic structures in which those individuals are embedded pose significant barriers to their involvement. For example, shaped by Individualism, people may be less inclined to

participate in collective efforts (Middlemiss, 2014), perceiving that such efforts siphon away time from achieving personal goals (Gergen, 2015). Excessive busyness arising from work and social pressures can also make putting time aside for civic involvement challenging (Lange, 2004; McBride, Sherraden, & Pritzker, 2006). Furthermore, because environmental devastation is understood by individuals to be created at the industrial level, there is a sense of futility and cynicism in meaningful civic action at an individual and community level, as it can be hampered by bureaucratic regulation, corporate bottom line profit margins, and the preservation of organisation public image (Lange, 2004).

Indeed, policy that emphasises social change through civic participation places the responsibility of sustainability on the individual and community, assuming the modification of consumption and lifestyles will mitigate environmental degradation (Middlemiss, 2014). The outcome of such individualised policy is evidenced in green consumerism, characterised by individual level tokenistic efforts, such as buying a bike or recycling (Maniates, 2001), and the overwhelming personal sense one lacks the capacity to 'save the world' (Markle, 2014). Thus, while on the surface collective action as a strategy to design solutions for environmental problems has genuine potential, it will not be effective without fundamental change to the cultural and political individualised conceptualisation of responsibility and *self*.

The underlying psychosocial dynamics that shape individual's interactions with and perception of the world also constrain sustainable consumption strategies concerned with the organisational and corporate levels of society. For instance, political strategies directing Government away from corporate interest by eliminating existing tax schemes and subsidies, policy limiting the extraction and expenditure of non-renewable resources and pollutants, and policy removing the most unsustainable options from the market (Akenji, 2012) are hindered by their embeddedness in capitalist ideology and the socially perceived importance of accumulated wealth. In respect to this, McCabe (2013) maintains cultural and social transformation is not possible without dealing with current economic power relations, as Capitalism creates contested space between democratic ideals for sustainability and capital growth. He makes the argument that with common resources positioned in private hands, the fundamental intention for those resources is always going to be for the generation of wealth and market expansion. Similarly, Marx (1859) reflected, "The mode of

production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life” (p. 20). Therefore, when it comes to governance and resources, capital interests not only have power but influence all relations within the social system (Cervantes, 2013; Gidley, 2005; McCabe, 2013). What’s more, locating the concept of sustainability in Capitalism leaves it vulnerable to commodification. ‘Green’ products, through the clever marketing and rhetoric of corporate bodies, become the culturally accepted way one can reconnect to and nurture the planet (Cervantes, 2013). Thus, alternative products are made available for individuals, and individuals continue to consume them, because their *selves* continue to be *empty*. Subsequently reaffirming, reproducing, and expressing consumerism.

The limitations of these strategies indicate lasting change towards sustainability requires disruption at a fundamental level of *being*, and necessitates alternative visions of living to be integrated. It suggests the conceptualisation of sustainable action needs to be reconsidered, as the problems arising from consumerism, and the ensuing devices required for change, involve much more complexity than that which is currently being debated. In regards to this, Palmer (1992) asserts:

What we face in the West today is not an ecological crisis, nor a crisis of economics, nor a crisis of structure. It is a crisis of the mind. A crisis of the stories we tell ourselves, of the position we wish to give ourselves in the creation, and of the purpose that we give to our existence. (p. 178)

Therefore, lasting change needs the *bounded separate self*, the story shared within Western culture – which not only isolates people from one another, but fosters a sense of emptiness and also disengages them from the natural world – to be shed (Martin, 2000). Discourse concerning sustainability then, has to acknowledge the cultural suppression of the *relational self* by Individualism, and the implications this has for consumerism and collective action.

4.2.2.1 Reconceptualising *self* for sustainability

As previously discussed, lasting change towards sustainability is profoundly intertwined with the lived experience of *self*. Considering understandings of *self* are shaped by the myths and metaphors embedded within the community (Gergen, 2009; Korten, 1998), transformation will necessitate the questioning of these deep structures. It is possible then, based on the discoveries of this research, that change requires the emergence of a shared relational

sense of *self*. This is a vision shared with Lange (2004). Her research exploring transformative learning found that radical relatedness to time, space, body, Earth, and relationships, existed beneath the cultural scripts of her participants. Transformation, she argues, involves these foundational ethics to be *restored* to conscious awareness via transformative and restorative learning, and reflection. This sense of *restoration* is evident in Sampson's (1985) decentralised conceptualisation of personhood, where *self* is an experience of interconnectedness that arises through continuous development, maturing within mutual relationship, and co-evolving with other interdependent *beings*. Restoring and embracing relational ethics such as love, compassion, and care is argued by Gergen (2009), to be at the heart of this transformation, as such an invitation replaces individual responsibility with relational responsibility. Here, relational responsibility encompasses the care for relationship, solidarity, and collaborative action, which support new metaphors for *being*. Metaphors that support a culture of sustainability by connecting individuals to the *fullness* of relational communion.

Indeed, metaphor has been argued as the foundational key to lasting change. Bin Larif (2015) describes metaphors as not only the ways in which the world is conceptualised, but as having the ability to naturalise specific worldviews and justify certain behaviours, particularly when they become unconscious and 'fossilised' into everyday discourse and *beingness*. Thus, metaphor not only reflects reality, it also creates it (Bin Larif, 2015), in the same way "*the individual self* is not a state of nature but of language" (Gergen, 2009, p. 31). Collectively adopting and internalising alternative metaphors then, will craft new stories, guiding philosophies, and shared visions, which is then translated into action and robust meaningful change (Spencer & Salvatico, 2015).

Examples of alternative metaphors to the *separate, bounded, and empty self* are already present in the discourse of humanity. On the surface these may appear unreasonable or idealist, which is perhaps the consequence of limitations dominant Western thought and worldview places on how the world is understood within Western culture. Arguably, Western thought tends to ignore the presence and merits of alternative cultural paradigms (Malewski & Jaramillo, 2011), which may in many ways reflect the profound nature of fundamental truth. As Maslow (1964) describes, the most meaningful experiences of life are "not communicable by words that are analytic, abstract, linear, rational, exact, etc. Poetic

and metaphorical language...are more efficacious in communicating certain aspects of the ineffable" (p. 85). Perhaps then, emotive truths, the ones that resonate with the heart, are best communicated emotionally, and this occurs through metaphor (Sherry & Schouten, 2002).

The first of these alternative metaphors is an understanding of *self* as shared by African peoples known as *Ubuntu*. It proposes that "a person's humanity is dependent on the appreciation, preservation and affirmation of another person's humanity... [and denying] another's humanity is to depreciate my own humanity" (Eze, 2008, p. 387). In other words, "I am who I am because of who we all are" (Gergen, 2009, p. 388). Within *Ubuntu* then, the community and individual are intricately interwoven, so that community exists because of the common heritage and fate of the individuals it consists of, and at the same time the personal experience of each individual is only bought to actualisation within that community (Eze, 2008). Therefore the wellbeing of individuals is determined by the wellbeing of the community. Furthermore, *Ubuntu* does not mean the liberty of individuals is forsaken, rather the intrinsic value of each person is pronounced, because of what they uniquely contribute (Eze, 2008). The *Ubuntu Self* also fosters consensus, as the community of *Ubuntu selves* collectively share in the pursuit of the common good (Eze, 2008). Such an effort provides profound meaning and purpose; a sense of transcendence, of contributing to something larger than the *bounded self*. Qualities participants alluded were missing from their lives as was reflected in the theme *The Shopping Centre as the New Church*.

Another possible metaphor is *biological interdependence*. This metaphor reflects the dynamic, holistic, and thoroughly interconnected nature of all *beings* (Gergen, 2009). Augmented by the *Gaia hypothesis*, it positions the whole earth and its cohabitants as one life-form, existing in a delicate balance, so that everything affects and is being affected by everything else (Lovelock, 1979). Human wellbeing therefore is dependent on the wellbeing of the Earth as a whole, and the wellbeing of the Earth is dependent on the ecological awareness of humans (Luke, 2002). The natural and the person, or rather the person in the natural, are thus equal in their intrinsic value (Gergen, 2009; Luke, 2002). However, *biological interdependence* does not just reflect a human-environment interconnectivity, it also represents the interconnectivity of all persons to each other (Luke, 2002). Thus the profound relational appreciation this metaphor rouses, positions all persons as part of one

great story, and connects them to the sacred and intrinsic value of all life (Clark, 2014). Embracing such a conceptualisation of *being*, encourages self-gain values to be abandoned, and instead fosters a fundamental commitment to sustaining the natural earth as a whole (Gergen, 2009). *Self* therefore, is encouraged to transcend *itself*, becoming an experience of interconnectivity, equality, and stewardship (Clark, 2014; Luke, 2002).

Embracing metaphors such as *Ubuntu* and *biological interdependence* are essential to revolutionising the culture of consumption. They deepen ones sense of belonging and relational connection through rewriting and restoring the story of *self*, of how *self* is conceptualised and experienced, and where meaning and fulfilment is located and can be found. It is proposed that actions arising from these relational conceptualisations of *self*, such as meaningful community engagement and bonding, will speak to the desires and needs of the *empty self*, as they hold the potential to arrange meaning addressing the *missingness* – the profound human connection needed to fill the *void*. They also inspire transcendence, connecting *self's* to something greater than *themselves*, which possibly inspires the intrinsic desire to contribute to and find significance in legacy. *Being someone* then is no longer defined by the constraints of the *treadmill*, but by ones' unique input in the shared story of all *beings*. The *self*, shaped by such metaphors, also approaches the world with a sense of reciprocity and mutuality, expressing empathy, respect, and acceptance for both the environment and other people (Chatalos, 2013).

4.3 Conclusion

The narrative of dominant Western consumerism in Australia arising from a Causal Layered Analysis on participant discourse, reveals the complexity underlying consumption. It would appear that consumption is not just a matter of desiring certain products, or being compelled to follow fads; instead, consuming goods is metaphorically filling a void in people's lives. This void appears in part to be a consequence of Individualism and a loss of community, both qualities that are fostered in and supported by Capitalism. In discovering this, addressing the issues of consumption will require a transformation in the structure of community and the conceptualisation of *self*. Indeed, Individualism is argued to have cultivated a *separate* and *bounded* conceptualisation of *self* (Gergen, 2009), which is experienced as *empty* (Cushman, 1990). This individualised conceptualisation of *self* also

appears to create a sentiment of disempowerment in regards to sustainability concerns, subsequently impacting on the sustainable efforts made by individuals. Furthermore, while strategies towards sustainable consumption presented in the literature offer seemingly pragmatic solutions, they do not address the fundamental stories of *being* that give rise to individual thoughts and behaviours, and they fail to address the embedded ideologies of Individualism and Capitalism that influence governance decisions. Addressing the issues of consumption then, demands the individualistic story of *self* to change. This is because metaphors, such as *bounded self*, and *empty self* shape our very *being* in the world, which profoundly influences how each person approaches another, how each person approaches the natural world, and the values each person's actions reflect (Inayatulla, 2015b). To this end, the metaphors of *Ubuntu* and *biological interdependence* have been suggested as possibilities, as they inspire a reconceptualisation of *self*, one that integrates the relational and fosters shared responsibility for the well-being of all *beings*. Not only does engaging such metaphors hold potential in mapping a new and sustainable future, but has the propensity to foster people feeling more connected and in community.

Chapter 5 Reflections on where to from here

In the prologue I shared an experience I had with a participant. At the time of the interview I was conflicted as to whether or not I purchase a pair of 'Made in England' Dr. Martens boots. In an effort to encourage a personal discussion on consumption practices, I shared this tension with my participant. After thinking a while, my participant responded by informing me of the privilege embedded within my ability to even consider such a purchase. I realised in this moment the privilege bestowed upon me as a white, middle-class, young female. I realised that being able to engage in internal dialogue concerning consumption choices, is a privilege, more so than actively consuming; that my privilege is reflected in the very process of my indecisiveness. This moment of insight revealed an instance of transformational learning in my own life, where critical reflection initiated an awareness of my own taken-for-granted presuppositions and expectations of the world. It was because of this moment, revealing to me the concessions of my social position, I decided to forgo the boots. They were for me a materialistic endeavour, not a genuine *need*.

In a similar way, I also observed my participants experiencing moments of profound awareness during the interview process. They appeared to become increasingly sentimental and less attached to materialistic ideals as they reflected on their values and belief systems, and towards the end of the interview, shared that they had enjoyed our discussion, that it had made them "think about things". I sensed they felt more centred and connected to their core convictions, and in this way, not only did the process of this research profoundly challenge me, but it also provided the space for participants to experience their own learning. As Anderson and Braud (2011) describe, the very process of qualitative enquiry encourages increased self-awareness, enhanced psycho-spiritual growth, and inspires significant shifts in the worldviews of those involved. The intention for this chapter is to explore this process of transformational learning through critical self-reflection, and how it is essential to lasting social change towards sustainability, particularly within governance settings. Before I move into this discussion, however, it is important that I first critically reflect on some of the most prominent parameters of this research inquiry. It is essential that the findings arising from analysis are positioned within the boundaries of their

interpretation and extrapolation. That they are shaped by the shared learnings of myself and participants and do not claim to exhibit a single absolute truth.

5.1 Critically Reflecting on the Parameters of this Research Enquiry

One of the parameters of this research inquiry concerns the processes of recruitment. In the planning stages of this inquiry I aspired to engage 'members of the general community' as participants and partners in the research process, however, as I started exploring sites of social space from which to recruit, it occurred to me that the notion of the 'general community' was a myth. I realised the structure and groupings of people in social space are too complex to be considered 'general', as individuals are engaged in various communities, each with its own set of values, beliefs, and expectations. Therefore, experiences with and perceptions of, a significant aspect of Western society; namely consumerism, has the potential to differ significantly between these social groups. To explore the possibility of a common core experience to the consumer phenomenon, it was thus necessary to engage different social groups. The findings then, reflect fundamental shared understandings of consumerism in Australian Western culture between the participants engaged, rather than reflecting the 'general community'. The prominent and integral nature of the cultural dynamics exposed in analysis, however, provide a sense of how people appear to be thinking about consumerism, and a framework in which broader social patterns of consumption can be critically considered.

The parameters of this research inquiry have also been influenced by my 'horizon' as the researcher. Gadamer (1975) writes that the historical and cultural context, as well as the lifeworld of the interpreter are legitimate components in the process of interpretation, and important in the co-creation of deeper understanding and meaning with participants. As such, the findings arising from analysis are an understanding of consumerism shaped by my own privileged position as a Caucasian, middle class woman in Western Society. Those participants I engaged with in the four rounds of interviews during the research process were also generally middle class individuals, born in Australia and identified as Caucasian. Therefore, the meanings generated from our encounters reflect only one of the possible perspectives of consumerism. Indeed, McGrath (1989) comments that a comprehensive

account of any substantive domain is not entirely possible, as complexity is endless and there is always another position from which to learn the system. As I have reflected in the prologue, talking with the member of a community garden opened my eyes to the possibility of another perspective. I learnt the privilege I held acted as a veil, blinding me from an alternative conceptualisation of consumerism.

Another parameter of this research inquiry concerns its truth value. Critics of qualitative research often perceive positivistic methods as 'proper' science and the appropriate path on which to attain knowledge or '*the truth*' (McGrath, 1989). Alternatively, qualitative inquiry is often perceived as unscientific, overly subjective and biased, and of soft scholarship (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). However, the very notion of 'truth' itself is subjective, shaped by historical forces and reproduced in the social arena (Bleicher, 2014). Indeed, positivism has been fashioned from the worldviews of rationality arising from the Enlightenment, where truth value is positioned in empiricism. This is only one possible path to truth, as Hawkins (1964) states;

Men (sic) are model-builders, mythopoeists. They work between the poles of explicit prosaic statement and imaginative construction. Philosophers try to be prosaic and say what is literally and semantically true, as do scientists. But even in these fields the tension is felt; mythopoeia has its place and on occasion finds shorter roads to prosaic truth than would otherwise be found. (p. 39)

Here, narrative and subjectivity are also recognised for their truth value. Certainly, meaning and understanding emerges through our interaction with others and the world (Polkinghorne, 1983), through shared myth, metaphor and symbology, reflection, and subjective experience. Subjectivity is at the heart of method and was a strength in the methodology underlying this research. It was appropriate to exploring the complexity, and determining the core cultural elements underlying consumerism. It was also necessary in the processes of joint meaning-making, which added depth in understanding the resemblances in my own and my participant's lifeworld. A deeper, more complex conceptualisation of consumption behaviour, such as that concerning metaphors of emptiness and experiences of *self* would not have been possible within the boundaries of a positivistic paradigm. However, subjectivity should also be acknowledged as only one possible truth. McGrath (1989) warns that we should not settle for knowledge gained from

study on one path, “knowledge gained by means of multiple paths, is a sine qua non for approaching that state of knowledge we call ‘truth’” (p. 552). Thus, this research offers another possible insight or ‘truth’ that enhances and extends those ‘truths’ previously found in consumer research. Many of the insights gained from this research process have emerged through the transformational learning experiences of myself and my participants. The significance of these transformative and reflective processes in problem conceptualisation and social change forms the basis of discussion for the rest of this chapter.

5.2 Transformational Learning and Critical Reflection

Transformational learning is the process by which the fundamental assumptions on which the world is understood are brought into awareness and reconsidered, facilitating the assimilation of inclusive, permeable, and integrative meaning structures (Mezirow, 1990). Lange (2004) argues these meaning structures, particularly values and personal ethics concerning the relational, are already embedded within the person as a result of early learning and experience. Such ethics, are argued to have become submerged over the life course under dominant cultural scripts, and therefore, require only to be *restored* as opposed to recreated. Indeed, the findings of this research project found that beneath the Individualism of participant discourse, were conflicting core principles and values concerning love, relationship, connection, and communion. It is possible then, that the increased sentimentality I observed in each participant over the course of the interview, came about as they reconnected to and recaptured hidden ethics. An example of this reconnection occurred when I had asked one participant why they felt upset after seeing a tree felled, they were quiet for a while, and then slowly expressed the reasons nature meant so much to them;

...it must be the kind of, I don't know whether it is peace or tranquillity, but it is something about the colour green and all those sorts of things that are...I don't think I can fully explain it. I certainly appreciate the beauty and diversity in nature, it is amazing, I think that's the one thing about this garden, you go out and there is a flower of something to me that is something. It is dynamic, it is alive, unlike most things you build, it is what they are, unlike a house or a road or a car, it is of interest

straight away but is also a great feeling of peace. If I am to walk through a garden it... I guess because it is a natural garden I feel natural in it, it has a sense of peace...

It appeared that in this moment, expressing the profound wonder they felt for nature, the participant received insight into their *naturalness of being*, of constituting and being one with the natural world. The sense of connectedness realised in this moment was possibly the catalyst for this participant sharing their desire to sit in their garden at the conclusion of our time together. Lange (2004) witnessed a similar phenomenon of reconnecting to core relational ethics in her participants, she writes;

Herein lies the dialectical nature of transformative and restorative learning: As the participants recovered suppressed values/ethics and forgotten relations (restoration), they engaged in a critique of dominant cultural values and embraced new values related to the concept of sustainability (transformation). As the participants restored forgotten relationships and submerged ethics, they transformed their worldview, habits of mind, and social relations. (p. 135)

Transformation then, involves three different processes, the restoration of core values through reflection, the reassessment of culturally defined presumptions, and the integration of new understandings into one's life-world (Lange, 2004; Mezirow, 1990). It also appears to not be about imposing new metanarratives onto people, rather it is about allowing each person to emerge as *self's* in harmony with their foundational *truths*. As Sarason (1984) writes;

There is a part of us that knows, and in the most poignant ways, that over the course of a lifetime there is one condition that will sustain us, a condition that allows us to mute anxiety and despair and that makes all other conditions and accomplishments pale in personal significance: the sense that one is part of a dependable, mutually supporting, meaning-giving, network of relationships compatibly embedded in a larger society. (p. 484)

It is possible, metaphors of *being* that reflect the profound relational nature of these foundational *truths*, such as *Ubuntu* and *biological interdependence*, are given strength over time and with recognition, and become woven into the fabric of our shared story. Indeed, continued transformational learning, as described by Lange (2004), is "not just an epistemological process involving a change in worldview and habits of thinking; it is also an ontological process where [one experiences] a change in their being in the world including

their forms of relatedness” (p. 137). Comparably, Hard’s (2012) evidenced such ontological shifts in the life stories of environmentalist figures. Through narrative research she found each to have at least one moment of transformational learning in their lives which acted as catalysts for ongoing and sustained lifestyle change, and worldview transition towards a sense of interconnectedness with all life. Taylor (2009) also noted this sentiment of interconnectedness in the narratives of surfers, writing;

These experiences, and the enclaves in which people reflect upon them, foster understandings of nature as powerful, transformative, healing, and sacred. Such perceptions, in turn, often lead to ethical action in which Mother Nature, and especially its manifestation as Mother Ocean, is considered sacred and worthy of reverent care. (p. 104)

The evidence suggests that transformative moments of reflection and awareness are imbued with the potential to stimulate a “fundamental rethinking, re-feeling, and re-visioning of the place of humans in nature”, which is profoundly vital for lasting sustainability (Van den Noortgaete & De Tavernier, 2014, p. 583). While this degree of transformational learning was not seen over the course of one interview, being given the opportunity to think deeply about fundamental issues did however, enable participants to explore and bring into awareness some of their core values and ethics.

Reflecting critically on fundamental issues is a key component of transformational learning. Critical reflection, according to Mezirow (1998), involves thinking about and questioning the very premise on which the world is understood, it is about recognising sociocultural and epistemic distortions which are shaped by shared belief systems and ideology, and challenging long-standing presuppositions and personal values. Critical reflection “is not concerned with the how or the how-to of action but with the why, the reasons for and consequences of what we do” (Mezirow, 1990, p. 13). For many participants, reflection in the process of interviewing allowed them to become consciously aware of *why* in certain circumstances they chose to shop, or what it *means* for them to acquire particular material objects. In exploring these ideas, they connected to sentiments related to emptiness, isolation, emotional distress, the need to feel belonging, and a sense of *trying to be someone*. Such insights then facilitated further reflection on what they felt was *meaningful*,

and in doing so they reassessed the presumptions underpinning their everyday belief systems (Mezirow, 1990).

5.2.1 Critical Reflection in the Governance of environmental issues

Head (2014) and Preston, Mustelin, and Maloney (2015) argue that it is the lack of critical reflection in policy development and governance that has led to ineffective, superficial, and short term solutions in environmental degradation mitigation. Head asserts this is because decision-making in governance is typically undermined by superficial assumptions and political judgements, particularly when the problems being addressed are complex and multifaceted. One such assumption concerning sustainability is that adaption and change is an issue at the local level, which positions political strategies and environmental responsibility on often not well-resourced individuals (Preston et al., 2015). Similarly, Heflinger and Docecki (1989) discuss in detail the value laden nature of policy development. They describe how decision-making, influenced by complex economic and social dimensions, is a process engaged with the intention of shaping the system in a way that is congruent with particular values. Certainly, Browne and Bishop (2011) explain how the governance of environmental issues in bureaucratic and Government settings is inherently embedded in ideologies of Neoliberalism, globalisation, and Capitalism, which creates a culture of competition and favours the interests of energy production industries. As Cairney (2016) explains, “policymaking is often about the dominance of one interpretation of the world”, which influences how issues are framed and interpreted (p. 7). The predominance of particular interpretive frames creates bias when considering and weighing up scientific research in ‘evidence-based’ policymaking (Cairney, 2016), usually in favour of empirical studies, grounded in positivistic epistemology (Dunlop, 2014) which lacks depth in exploration (Bishop & Dzidic, 2014). Furthermore, the ‘evidence’ typically chosen, is done so because it legitimates a preferred strategy or value-laden goal (Levidow & Papaioannou, 2015). It would appear then, that the narrow and value infused conceptualisations of complex problems in governance means that solutions and policy, generated and shaped from such worldviews, tend to be restricted, inappropriate, and superficial (Browne & Bishop, 2011; Head, 2014). Thus, effectively addressing environmental issues through policy

requires these deep structures of ideology and value to be critically examined, challenged, and reconsidered in bureaucratic and Government circles. To this end, Smith (1983) asserts:

A major task confronting us however is to grapple with the theoretical, epistemological and technological work of building into our organizations the capacity to reflect upon themselves, their environments and how they relate with other organizations within those environments. Until such a self-reflective capacity becomes built into collective systems, their development, I argue, will continue to be driven by forces they don't comprehend let alone have any mastery over. (p. 156)

Like Smith, Head and Preston et al. maintain that barriers created by limited frames in traditional approaches to policy development, can be overcome through reflexive, deliberative, collaborative, and integrative processes. Critical reflection in governance, it is argued, opens space for innovation through new thinking, diverse viewpoints, contributes to the clarification of values, assists the move away from fixed strategic positions, and establishes shared pathways in ongoing problem solving (Dunlop, 2014; Head, 2014). It means that *how* the problem is conceptualised and subsequently approached can be examined, reassessed, and developed (Browne & Bishop, 2011). As Smith and Brassett (2008) assert, critical reflection in bureaucratic decision-making has the potential to influence alternative and “emergent political realities” (p. 89).

Furthermore, critical reflection should be integrated with action, as problems engaged in a circular process of reflection, action, and open deliberation are in a better position to be dealt with in dynamic, innovative, and creative ways (Hoppe, 1999). This is of particular importance for social issues that are inherently *wicked*; complex, ambiguous, and multilayered (Head, 2014), as it overcomes the *stuckness* typical of these problems (Browne & Bishop, 2011). This process is akin to *reflective-generative practice*, the back-and-forth movement between reflection and action, which is grounded in the intention of bettering the world for present and future generations (Dokecki, Newbrough, & O'Gorman, 2001). In sustainability policy, this would play out in the collaboration of scholarly and stakeholder critique and reflection, and thoughtful action and practice (Head, 2014; Hoppe, 1999; Preston et al., 2015; Smith & Brassett, 2008). In this way, rather than searching for definitive answers and responding with knee-jerk reactions (Head, 2014), which are ineffectual, tackling and moving forward in environmental issues becomes an unfolding, evolving, iterative, and reflexive process (Browne & Bishop, 2011).

5.3 Engaging Policy Development in Transformational processes

It has been argued that governance, extensively shaped by ideology and values, needs to bring to awareness, explore, and reassess the very premise on which decisions are made and policies are developed; a process that calls for iterative, reflexive, and collaborative practices. The aim of the following section is to present an interpretive framework on which reflexivity in complex governance decisions can be supported. The proposed paradigm is both grounded in the Futures methodology of causal layered analysis and in the field of community psychology.

In this research, CLA was used to deconstruct the complex problem of consumerism. Revealed in this process were the underlying myths, metaphors, and worldviews that give rise to and perpetuate overconsumption. In bringing awareness to these underlying elements, it became obvious that framing solutions in individualistic, capitalistic, and even community oriented ways, would be and have been ineffectual because they are not congruent with the fundamental narrative of people's everyday lives. Indeed, it would appear consumption occurs to satisfy an *empty self*, and sustainability is hindered by the disempowered *separate self*. In the same way, the deconstructive process of CLA would be of great benefit in governance as it allows for greater depth in understanding social phenomena, which will consequently lead to more appropriate and effective solutions and strategies (Bishop et al., 2013). However, CLA as a framework is not limited to making sense of complex social issues, it also provides the tools necessary for deeper reflexive consideration. As Bin Larif (2015) describes,

One...useful application of narrative analysis is to increase the transparency of engagement efforts by identifying and/or disclosing your own organisational narratives, discourses and how these influence your engagement with others and approach to problems. Explicitly acknowledging your own world view and limitations/boundaries (e.g. legislative, scientific, policy) and encouraging others to do so can help build better relationships by encouraging people to move out of entrenched positions on issues and to shift conceptual frameworks. (p. 100)

Causal layered analysis, when used as a reflexive tool, can bring into awareness the values, worldviews and myths rooted within the social and governance system¹⁰ (Inayatulla, 2015a). This enables practitioners to perceive what is often not seen and said, and consider whether these are a hindrance or assistance to the future that is wanting to be created (Inayatulla, 2015b). Furthermore, by being encouraged to perceive multiple perspectives; namely litany, systemic, worldview discourse, and myth/metaphor perspectives, practitioners are assisted in the move away from worldview blindness. That is, by deconstructing their own and their organisations dominant paradigms, alternative worldviews and value systems are recognised, created, and contemplated (Inayatulla, 2015b). Fundamentally, CLA helps facilitate thinking that is more integrated, transrational (Gidley, 2005), and transparent (Bin Larif, 2015), moving interpretation and deliberation away from positivistic, value-laden, and linear reasoning (Bishop et al., 2013).

Transformational policy development could also be augmented by Newbrough's (1992) notion of *The Third Position*. The third position is a triadic model offered as a way to integrate the dualities of Individualism and collectivism by placing equal importance on the values of Liberty (individual freedom), Fraternity (community welfare), and Equality (human and community development). Typically, it has been the dualities of Individualism and collectivism, embedded in positivistic thought that have guided policy implementation, and in this way, governance has tended to be over reliant on and in favour of instrumental rationality, which discounts mythic, subjective, aesthetic, traditional, and spiritual ways of knowing (Gidley, 2005). Such thinking also ignores the inherent complexity underlying social life (Bishop, Johnson, & Browne, 2006). The triadic model moves policy development away from a positivistic paradigm and engages it with complexity, allowing the impact of possible decisions to be evaluated against the moral, ethical, and value dimensions of *being* (Newbrough, 1995). One of the most prominent dynamics in participant narratives concerning consumerism was this apparent duality between secularisation, and personal ethics attached to communion and community. This tension appears to be a very real experience, submerged under the dominant discourse of Individualism and its promise of freedom. Newbrough (1995) stresses the overemphasis of libertarian values in privileged

¹⁰ See Inayatulla (2015a, 2015b) for an extensive discussion and overview on the use of CLA as an analytical and self-reflective tool in Government and organisational policy development.

Western culture, which persists at the expense of community and egalitarianism values, and creates a space of imbalance and segregation. Furthermore, liberty in Individualism is not emphasised in the same way it is encouraged and understood within *Ubuntu*. Liberty here, is the freedom to pursue individual preferences, needs, and desires, unrestricted by any social accountability or responsibility, which gives way to indifference and selfishness (Weber, 2007). Thus engaging the third position in governance decisions helps shape the birth of a progressive paradigm, allowing social practices to be designed in a way that respects and involves all three ethics; Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality. Indeed, such a balance is important for supporting both personal and cultural harmony as each person is together “autonomy *and* interconnectedness, individuality *and* solidarity, sovereignty *and* commitment” (Schmid, 2005, p. 83). The integration potentially arising through this paradigm allows for social transformation, as it moves governance away from the secular, and supports the re-emergence and assimilation of alternative ways of *being*, ones that revere the relational and fundamental nature of the human spirit (Newbrough, 1995). As Gergen (2015) explains, the way forward is not about replacing all the discourse and conventions associated with Individualism, rather it is about “adding significant dimension to our forms of life” (p. 154).

Finally, engaging community psychologists in the widely advocated collaborative structure of policy development would also be of benefit. According to Smith (1983), community psychology is one of very few domains in social science that embraces an ecological and contextualist perspective, and is therefore already equipped with the tools needed to explore the multileveled, paradoxical, and complex nature of social issues (Browne & Bishop, 2011). One such tool employed by Community Psychologists is a discursive approach to inquiry. This approach, respecting democracy, allows the voices of numerous stakeholders to be heard, including those typically excluded from discussion, such as underprivileged and marginalised groups (Nelson, 2013; Phillips, 2000). In doing so, Community Psychologists apply and encourage values such as empowerment, justice, equality, and solidarity (Rappaport, 1987); principles, that according to Nelson (2013) and Newbrough (1995), are undermined by the predominance of libertarian values in Western culture. Engaging and including the work of Community Psychologists in the development of policy will therefore facilitate a move towards *The Third Position* in governance (Bishop et

al., 2009; Teo, 2015). Moreover, community psychologists operating in this setting, have the potential to work as *policy-liaison-specialists*, employed to understand the conflicting values and relationships between key stakeholders, and work towards finding resolution, balance, and common ground (Heflinger & Dokecki, 1989).

Community Psychologists are also increasingly engaging with multileveled and ecological frameworks of analysis, such as CLA, which are essential in transformative policy change (Nelson, 2013). These frameworks are explicitly designed in a way that enables social issues to be more thoroughly and contextually conceptualised (Phillips, 2000). This means complex problems can be adequately deconstructed, thus illuminating root causes, and being reframed to focus on the social context, as opposed to the individual (Bishop & Dzidic, 2014; Bishop et al., 2013). According to Phillips (2000), the potential outcome of assessing and framing social problems within an ecological framework, is that it “increases the chances of identifying unintended consequences of intervening at one point rather than another, and may advance policies that intervene simultaneously at several points” (p. 409). Thus narrowly conceived policies can be redirected so that more effective solutions are subsequently formulated, resources more adequately allocated, and strategies more appropriately implemented (Nelson, 2013). Community Psychologists can also be effective in policy circles due to their familiarity with conceptual and narrative work, which makes them accustomed to recognising and examining underlying values systems (Phillips, 2000). As a consequence, they have an awareness of the value-laden nature of social, organisational, and political systems (Heflinger & Dokecki, 1989), and can therefore promote reflexivity, critical thought, transparency and objectivity (Phillips, 2000; Weiss, 1983). Together the community and ecological experience of Community Psychologists positions them well for roles in policy related to translation, advocacy, advisory, and mediation (Browne & Bishop, 2011; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010).

5.4 Conclusion

While keeping in mind the parameters of this research inquiry, the findings arising from analysis appear to indicate that consumption may act to *fill* a void in ones experience of personhood, which has possibly developed with the loss of community. Based on this, it has been argued that moving forward into a sustainable future requires the re-emergence of

relational metanarratives into dominant conceptualisations of *self* and *being*, as this holds potential in reshaping how all aspects of living are approached. In this chapter, such a change was discussed as the hallmark of transformational learning which is augmented by the process of critical reflection. It was argued that governance, extensively shaped by ideology and values, needs to engage with these transformative and reflective processes, as political decisions are heavily influenced by ideology and values. Critical reflection in governance creates a platform for innovation through new thinking and the contribution of diverse viewpoints, it allows values to be revealed and clarified, assists the move away from fixed strategic positions, and encourages collaboration through shared pathways in ongoing problem solving, benefits which are essential if environmental degradation is to be genuinely mitigated (Dunlop, 2014; Head, 2014). It was proposed that critical reflection in political deliberation and thought can be encouraged by employing multileveled tools such as CLA to assist in deconstructing the paradigms guiding decisions (Bin Larif, 2015). Also advocated was *The Third Position*, a triadic model in policy development that assists in balancing the dominance of individuality and freedom with equality and community (Bishop et al., 2009; Newbrough, 1995). Finally, the work of Community Psychologists employed in political settings was considered. Practitioners in this field are often familiar with reflexive and conceptual analysis, so can provide relevant support, bring voice to all key stakeholders, and aid in more fully understanding the complexity and wickedness of social problems (Browne & Bishop, 2011; Nelson, 2013).

Concluding Remarks

The intention of this thesis has been, in the words of Sarason (1982), to “[take] the obvious seriously” (p. 234); to identify and recognise the worldviews, ideological frameworks, myths, and metaphors that underpin everyday consumption behaviours in Western consumer culture in Australia. Through a causal layered analysis of participant stories, thoughts and experiences, the ‘obvious’ was found to be intricately shaped by a lost sense of community and the ideology of Individualism, which has influenced an *empty* experience of *self*. Subsequently, it was found this *emptiness*, or *void*, is metaphorically being *filled* with consumption.

It also appears an individualised conceptualisation of *self* may undermine many strategies and policies proposed for advancing sustainability. Participants reported instances of feeling overwhelmed with the scale of change needed to mitigate the implications of overconsumption, tending to perceive themselves as small and powerless against large global environmental issues. It is possible that because of the proliferation of individualistic ideology, people may generally be less inclined to engage in or perceive the power in collective endeavours. Consequently, they will prefer to instead demonstrate sustainability through ineffectual and tokenistic efforts. It has also been argued that Individualism underlies sustainability policy, and as a result policy neglects the institutional arrangements that limit the capacity of consumers to behave and act sustainably (Adger et al., 2009; Sanne, 2002). Furthermore, strategies proposed by the Sustainable Consumption paradigm are also limited as a result of not only the embeddedness of Individualism in social space, but socially defined ideas of success, which are influenced by the *Treadmill* of consumer life and the desire to *Keep up with the Joneses*, and may be important in the personal perception of *being someone*.

Given the profound influence of an individualistic empty conceptualisation of *self* on consumption behaviour and sustainability, alleviating the ramifications of consumerism on the environment will require this personal and collective experience of *self* to be reconceptualised. As Dittmer and Riemer (2012) state,

In reflecting on existing efforts to address these environmental issues, we are reminded of Einstein's often quoted insight that problems that exist in the world today cannot be solved by the level of thinking that created them. (p. 2)

Indeed, it would appear based on the discoveries of this research project, that addressing overconsumption necessitates the re-emergence of the *relational self*. This conceptualisation of *self* has the potential to both deepen one's sense of belonging, and sense of meaning in contributing to shared legacy through human connection and community. Consumption then, idealistically no longer serves the purpose of *filling*, because the *void* is no longer significant in one's own experience of *self*.

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Every reasonable effort has been made to acknowledge the owners of copyright material. I would be pleased to hear from any copyright owner who has been omitted or incorrectly acknowledged.

Appendix A Ethics Approval Documentation



Memorandum

To	Associate Professor Brian Bishop
From	Dr Moira O'Connor
Subject	Approval for form C ethics
Date	1 October 2013
Copy	Kaitlyn Holyman, Dr Peta Dzidic

Office of Research and Development
 Human Research Ethics Committee
 Telephone 9266 2784
 Facsimile 9266 3793
 Email hrec@curtin.edu.au

Thank you for your "Form C Application for Approval of Research with Low Risk (Ethical Requirements)" for the project titled "A qualitative deconstruction of consumerism in a time of global climate change". On behalf of the Human Research Ethics Committee, I am authorised to inform you that the project is approved.

Approval of this project is for a period of 4 years 1st October 2013 to 1st October 2017.

Your approval has the following conditions:

- (i) Annual progress reports on the project must be submitted to the Ethics Office.
- (ii) It is your responsibility, as the researcher, to meet the conditions outlined above and to retain the necessary records demonstrating that these have been completed.

The approval number for your project is PSYCH & SP 1013-62. Please quote this number in any future correspondence. If at any time during the approval term changes/amendments occur, or if a serious or unexpected adverse event occurs, please advise me immediately.

Dr Moira O'Connor
 Senior Research Fellow
 School of Psychology and Speech Pathology | Faculty of Health Sciences

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Please Note: The following standard statement must be included in the information sheet to participants:
This study has been approved under Curtin University's process for lower-risk Studies (Approval Number xxx). This process complies with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (Chapter 5.1.7 and Chapters 5.1.18-5.1.21). For further information on this study contact the researchers named above or the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee. c/- Office of Research and Development, Curtin University, GPO Box U1987, Perth 6845 or by telephoning 9266 9223 or by emailing hrec@curtin.edu.au.

Appendix B Expert Interview Request

To

RE: Interview request

I am conducting research in the area of consumerism, capitalism, and climate change. I am seeking the specialised knowledge of world leading experts in a variety of disciplines and was hoping you might be available for a short interview of approximately half an hour. The information you will provide will support my larger study in consumerism, and the findings may be of significance to your own area of research.

If you are interested I would love to make arrangements to meet/chat with you. I have attached a participant information sheet with some further information.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Kindest Regards,

Kaitlyn Holyman.

PhD Candidate, Curtin University, Western Australia.

Appendix C Interview Schedule Experts

- Introductions
- Provide participant information sheet
- Ask Participant to sign consent form
- Ask if there is any questions before we begin

To start do you mind telling me about yourself, your work, and your areas of interest?

1. What does consumerism mean to you?
2. What drives demand?
 - Have there been changes over time?
 - What are the implications of these changes?
 - What will occur if consumers cannot get what they demand?
3. What factors Impact on supply?
 - Have these changed over time?
 - What are the implications of these?
4. What is the current western model of supply and demand?
 - What are the strengths of this model?
 - What are the weaknesses of this model?
 - How does this impact on consumer behaviour?
5. What are the basic motivations behind the current western economic model?
6. What are alternative models of production and consumption?
 - How do the concepts of supply and demand change according to these models?
 - What factors impact on their possible success?
 - How do you feel about the alternative models you have identified?

Before we finish do have any questions you want to ask me?

Appendix D Interview Schedule

Consumerism

Interview schedule

What are your thoughts regarding the way we live in Western countries?

What does consumerism mean to you?

Is shopping something you enjoy?

Why?

Are there situations in which this experience changes?

Do you have concerns about the way we are living in Western countries?

What are these?

Why do/why don't these concern you?

Do you want change?

What do you want to see changed?

Have you thought about ways you could implement change?

In your everyday life in what ways do you express yourself?

What are your interests/passions?

Are these hindered in anyway?

Is there anything that gets in the way of enjoying these?

How do you deal with stress/ distress?

Do you have any default purchases?

What does community mean to you?

Is this something you experience?

What does your experience of community look like?

Do you feel satisfied by the relationships around you?

Why?

Appendix E Participant Information Sheet



Participant Information Sheet

RE: People's experience of community.

Hello!

My name is Kaitlyn, I am a PhD student in Psychology, currently studying at Curtin University of Technology. For my thesis I have chosen to explore peoples experiences of community and everyday consumption practices. I am hoping you could share with me your thoughts and experiences.

Participation will involve an interview which will typically take about an hour, in which you will be asked a series of open ended questions. You are free to express any of your thoughts and experiences. The information you provide will be analysed and the findings will be reported in my thesis. Findings from all participant interviews may possibly be used in future academic publications and presentations.

All information you share will remain confidential. With your permission I would like record the interview, so that it can be transcribed by myself to allow for a more thorough analysis and deeper understanding. Transcriptions will respect your privacy, your name or any other identifying information will not be printed anywhere on the document. My supervisors and I will be the only people to read the transcripts. University policy requires information gathered from research to be stored in a password protected file on a secure Curtin University computer for a minimum of five years, but at the completion of my thesis in June 2016 all digital recordings and hard copies of transcripts will be destroyed. You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time, and to withdraw the information you share up to a week after the interview.

This study has been approved under Curtin University's process for lower-risk Studies (Approval Number PSYCH & SP 1013-62). This process complies with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (Chapter 5.1.7 and Chapters 5.1.18-5.1.21). For further information on this study contact the researchers named above or the Curtin

University Human Research Ethics Committee. c/- Office of Research and Development, Curtin University, GPO Box U1987, Perth 6845 or by telephoning 9266 9223 or by emailing hrec@curtin.edu.au. If you require any more information, do not hesitate to contact me at kaitlyn.holyman@postgrad.curtin.edu.au, or my supervisors Brian Bishop at B.Bishop@curtin.edu.au and Peta Dzidic at Peta.Dzidic@curtin.edu.au.

Thank you for your participation, it is greatly appreciated.

Appendix F Consent Form



Interview Participant Consent Form

I _____ (name) give my consent to participate in the study conducted by Kaitlyn Holyman, as outlined in the participation sheet I have been provided with. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions for further clarification.

I understand the study involves a discussion of my thoughts regarding consumerism and experiences of community. Any information which might potentially identify me will not be used in published material.

I accept that my participation in the study may not be of any, or little benefit to me.

I acknowledge that I have been provided with a participation information sheet, which outlines my right to withdraw from interview participation at any time without prejudice, and the right to withdraw the information I provide up to one week after the interview.

I acknowledge that the nature and purpose of this study has been explained to me to meet my satisfaction.

Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of Witness _____ Date _____

Appendix G Email Invitation for Collective Evolution

Hello

I apologise for the randomness of this message but please bear with me. My name is Kaitlyn and I am currently completing my PhD at Curtin University in the area of consumerism and the Western lifestyle. I noticed you liked the Collective Evolution page on Facebook and thought you might have some insights or thoughts about your experience of both my topic areas, and was hoping I could interview you. It would be a great contribution to my research.

The interview would be between 30 and 60 minutes, and I am happy to come to you, wherever you feel comfortable. You will remain totally anonymous in my thesis and your confidentiality will be respected. I also have ethics clearance from Curtin University.

Please feel free to PM me on Facebook or through my email:

kaitlyn.holyman@curtin.edu.au if you are interested or have any questions.

Kindest regards

Kaitlyn Holyman

Appendix H Interview Schedule iPhone

Interview Schedule

Do you enjoy shopping?

- Why/why not?

What sort of things influence your purchasing choices?

- What is in fashion?
- The brand?
- Price?

Do you ever get concerned you shop too much?

- Why are you concerned?
- What makes you think this?

Do you ever go out for 'retail therapy'?

- What is the experience like for you?
- What are the feelings before you go?
- What do you feel after?

What do you do when you are feeling angry, stressed, or upset? How do you cope?

- Do you find these effective strategies?

Do you have any big goals that you want to achieve financially?

- What influences these?
- How important are these to you?

Is sustainability something you think about?

- If so, do you try and incorporate it into your life in any way?
- What things hinder/support this?

Do you feel like you are part of a community?

- In what ways?
- Common experiences/likes?

- Do you feel satisfied in this social space?
- Are there things you wish were different?
- Are there things that could be improved on?
- What do you like about it?

Do you own an iPhone or smartphone?

- What influenced your purchase of this?
- What does it mean to you?

How often do you check your Facebook account a day?

- Is there a reason you might check it that often?
- Do you want to be able to check it more often?

How would you feel if your Facebook account was closed?

Would it affect any areas of your life

Appendix I Email Invitation for iPhone

Hello

I apologise for the randomness of this message but please bear with me. My name is Kaitlyn and I am currently completing my PhD at Curtin University in the area of consumerism and the Western lifestyle. I am looking to interview people on their experiences of shopping and social media, and was hoping you would be interested in contributing to my research. The interview would be between 30 and 60 minutes, and I am happy to come to you, wherever you feel comfortable. You will remain totally anonymous in my thesis and your confidentiality will be respected. I also have ethics clearance from Curtin University.

Please feel free to PM me on Facebook or through my email:
kaitlyn.holyman@curtin.edu.au if you are interested or have any questions.

Kindest regards

Kaitlyn Holyman

Appendix J Revised Email Invitation for iPhone

Hello

I apologise for the randomness of this message but please bear with me. My name is Kaitlyn and I am currently completing my PhD at Curtin University in the area of consumerism and the Western lifestyle. I noticed you liked the iPhone page and was hoping I could interview you on your experiences of shopping and social media, it would be a great contribution to my research. A \$20 Coles Myer voucher will be given in recognition of your time, openness, honesty, and expenditure in participation in the research.

The interview would be between 30 and 60 minutes, and I am happy to come to you, wherever you feel comfortable. You will remain totally anonymous in my thesis and your confidentiality will be respected. I also have ethics clearance from Curtin University.

Please feel free to PM me on Facebook or through my email: kaitlyn.holyman@curtin.edu.au if you are interested or have any questions.

Kindest regards

Kaitlyn Holyman

Appendix K Excerpts from My Reflexive Journal

15/06/2014

My values and opinions concerning consumerism have been on a journey throughout the process of researching the literature, interviewing people from the same walk in life but with different experiences, and becoming aware and more perceptive of it in my immediate surroundings and my own life. I set out to understand why our society is so addicted to progress in material form? Why are we driven by the need to be bigger and better? Why does the value of things over ride the value of nature, of the planet? It made me sad that this is what our society had become and I felt lonely and meaningless in it. Why do we choose it? Why do I choose it?

I have reflected a great deal on the Aboriginal cultures of this land. Their deep respect for the earth, their mission to preserve it. I heard someone say that the fundamental difference between first Australians and the colonists is that the first Australians believed they belonged to the land, while the colonists believed the land belonged to them. Thus preservation or exploitation are expressed respectively. The more I became aware of the destruction the Western world was inflicting onto the planet and the treatment of Aboriginal people in order to realise their material goals, the angrier I became. I became hateful of everything my society stood for. I hated seeing development, overpopulation, rubbish collection, and shopping centres. Advertising made my blood boil. I started to resent the white skin I was born with. I felt tremendous guilt. I want to fix this mess. In many ways I want Australia to return to what it was before colonisation. I know that is not possible, but I want significant change. I want depth, meaning, and connection in my experience of the world, and I want that for my children and their children.

...

7/10/2014

After speaking with participants today, I was left thinking about my own Facebook use. They talked about how sad it was that everyone is always looking at their phones, that children are always on iPads, and that it felt as if nobody was really experiencing each other or the world outside of technology.

So why do I check Facebook so often?

I get bored and I am looking for some sort of entertainment. It is a distraction when things get too hard and I get frustrated. Like an escape. I feel like I am maintaining connection with people by knowing what they are doing. But all of it is superficial. It makes me feel like I have got people in my life.

What would I do without it?

I would have more time for other things. I don't know what. I think I would miss it. If I think about it know I would be scared that there would be nobody in my life. My 'social' life would shrink and I would be lonely in the world.

...

3/2/2015

I feel like I am missing out with not having a smart phone because so much can be shared. Pictures can be sent and captured and then shared.

It appears to me that communication technology needs to be consumed in order to maintain connection to others in this fast pace world. Is it the only way we now know how to connect?

It is like a new level of relationship has taken form. In the cyber world. And the stuff, left behind in the deeper meaning stuff that is forgotten. I think it is the Cyber world that is also suffocating us.

...

12/05/2015

After talking with one participant today, she made mention of hating going to the shops, but finding enjoyment in her work on eBay purchasing goods for other people. She described the joy in being able to shop without the financial repercussions that typically come with the practice. It made me think about why I enjoy online shopping so much, and why I spent so much time procrastinating other things to do it. Online shopping is perhaps reflective of the tension within myself of not wanting to be at the shops but wanting to connect to the outside world. Possibly also, the process of taking photos of our food and people we are with and uploading them to Facebook is about maintaining relationship and belonging to the Cyber world.

...

10/9/2015

What is the emptiness/ void participants tend to speak of? How do I make sense of it in my own life?

Bulimia. I binged, consumed large amounts of food when I felt alone in the world. It was an attempt to fill the emptiness within me.

...

6/3/2016

On a relational conceptualisation of self. It is difficult for me to perceive the experience of a relational sense of self because I am so socialised by Individualism. I naturally separate my being from others. Life has taught me others cannot be trusted and they will leave you hurt.

For me the idea of true community, of Gemeinschaft is a fantasy. I feel uncomfortable with connecting at such a level. Engaging others in such a way creates a lot of anxiety for me. Perhaps my interest in this topic is because it holds a great amount of tension for myself. I embody a deep desire for belonging and comfort in bonding, but I also embody an intense

fear of others rejection. Separation becomes a form of safety. Has Individualism created this neurosis? Being separate makes it so easy for us to reject and hurt each other, because it is all about what the self wants. It also appears to make it very easy to separate ourselves from hurt. But it leaves us without a genuine sense of community. Possibly, maybe.