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A Creator’s Life:
The Middle Way Approach to Living Sustainably

Amabel Hunting
“Art begins with resistance - at the point where resistance is overcome. No human masterpiece has ever been created without great labour”

Andre Gide
Abstract

This research explores what it means to live sustainably within a modern urban environment. The contributions of this research include the identification of a subculture, a new positive approach for marketing sustainability and an innovative research method. Using a qualitative multimodal design that combined photo elicitation, journaling, observations and interviews, informants were researched over one year using a three-phase strategy. This study revealed a ‘Creators’ subculture in which informants used their creative energy to create a connected and sustainable way of living.

Analysis revealed that escape from a consumerist culture was deemed impossible so Creators adopted the middle-way, a lifestyle that balanced living sustainably within an unsustainable system. Instead of perceiving this challenge in a negative light, they framed it as an opportunity for personal growth and empowerment. For Creators this lifestyle was a path to self-actualisation, enabling them to reach their full potential and having an on-going positive impact on society. My analysis revealed a ‘cloaked’ subculture who were early adopters of the environmental movement and whose boundaries were deliberately inclusive and permeable to encourage others to join and informants with an aggregated self-concept, extended to include nature and unfamiliar others as part of their in-group. This resulted in mindful consumption decisions in which informants considered the wider impacts of their behaviour. Instead of adopting lifestyles based on minimal consumption and austerity, Creators chose ‘valued consumption’ in which the profane became sacred. Issues of disposability, usefulness and societal impacts were carefully considered and once possessed these items were loved and revered.

My analysis found that informants were motivated by the positive, life-enhancing benefits of their lifestyle that included a sense of abundance, joy, creativity, connection and wellbeing. I propose that social marketing and political approaches need to move beyond the information-deficit and fear-based appeals used to date and create new inspiring campaigns based on positive emotional motives.
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# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... v
Acknowledgements ...................................................................................................................... vii
Table of Contents ........................................................................................................................ ix
List of Figures ................................................................................................................................... xiii
List of Tables .................................................................................................................................... xiii
List of Images ................................................................................................................................... xv

Chapter One: Introduction .............................................................................................................. 1
  Problem Identification .................................................................................................................... 1
  Research Questions ....................................................................................................................... 1
  Research Approach ....................................................................................................................... 2
  Boundaries of this Research ......................................................................................................... 3
  Document Map .............................................................................................................................. 4
  Summary ....................................................................................................................................... 5

Chapter Two: Literature Review ..................................................................................................... 7
  Sustainable Development ............................................................................................................. 7
  Sustainable Consumption ............................................................................................................. 8
    I. Role of Consumption in Society ............................................................................................... 8
  Sustainability and Marketing ......................................................................................................... 9
  Sustainable Living ......................................................................................................................... 10
    Identity ........................................................................................................................................ 11
      I. Personal Identity ..................................................................................................................... 12
      II. Social Identity ....................................................................................................................... 12
  Motivations for Sustainable Living ............................................................................................... 13
    I. Altruism ................................................................................................................................... 13
    II. The ‘Good Life’ ...................................................................................................................... 14
    III. ‘Social’ Impact ..................................................................................................................... 15
    IV. Related Motives .................................................................................................................... 15
  New Zealand Context .................................................................................................................... 17
    I. New Zealand’s Green Image .................................................................................................... 17
    II. Political Stance ..................................................................................................................... 17
    III. Sustainability-concerned Citizens ....................................................................................... 18
Chapter Summary

Chapter Three: Research Approach ................................................................. 21
  Ontology ........................................................................................................ 22
  Epistemology .................................................................................................. 22
  Theoretical perspective .................................................................................. 23
  Research Methodology .................................................................................. 26
  Research Method ........................................................................................... 30
  Quality Assurance Checks ............................................................................ 47
  Ethical Considerations ................................................................................... 49
  Researcher’s Journey ..................................................................................... 51
  Chapter Summary ........................................................................................ 53

Chapter Four: Research Findings ................................................................. 55

Section 1: Sustainable Lifestyles Conceptualised ........................................... 56
  The term ‘sustainability’ ................................................................................ 57
  Theme 1 - Lifestyle ......................................................................................... 59
  Theme 2 - Mindful .......................................................................................... 63
  Theme 3 - Connected .................................................................................... 67
  Theme 4 - Active ............................................................................................ 70
  Superordinate Theme - Subculture ............................................................... 75
  Section Summary ........................................................................................ 77

Section 2: Tangible Aspects of a Sustainable Lifestyle ................................... 79
  Theme 1 - Food .............................................................................................. 80
  Theme 2 - Housing ......................................................................................... 84
  Theme 3 - Energy .......................................................................................... 86
  Theme 4 - Transport ...................................................................................... 88
  Theme 5 - Waste ............................................................................................ 90
  Theme 6 - Consumables ................................................................................ 94
  Theme 7 - Tools ............................................................................................ 100
  Theme 8 - Community .................................................................................. 103
  Theme 9 - Other Life ..................................................................................... 106
  Theme 10 - Work .......................................................................................... 109
  A Sustainable Life ......................................................................................... 111
  Section Summary ........................................................................................ 114

Section 3: Identity Constructs ........................................................................ 115
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1: Out-group</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2: In-group</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergence of Subcultural Identity</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section Summary</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 4: Motivations</strong></td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1: Environmental Awareness</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2: Survival</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 3: Life Enhancement</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 4: Positive Contribution</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Creator's Life is driven by Self-fulfilment</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section Summary</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 5: Challenges</strong></td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1: Internal Challenges</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2: External Challenges</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges are Integral to a Creator's Life</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section Summary</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Five: Discussion</strong></td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Creator Subculture</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggregated Self</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valued Consumption</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowered Lifestyle</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Middle-way Approach</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Six: Conclusions</strong></td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributions</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Research</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>References</strong></td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appendix A – Participant Information</strong></td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appendix B – Consent Form</strong></td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

Figure 1: Outline of Research Approach ................................................................. 21
Figure 2: Data Collection Methods ........................................................................ 33
Figure 3: Summary of the Three Phase Data Collection Process .............................. 39
Figure 4: Combined Thematic Analysis and Grounded Theory Data Analysis Approach ................................................................. 44
Figure 5: Flow Chart Summarising Results Section ............................................... 55
Figure 6: Summary of Themes Representing a Sustainable Lifestyle ...................... 56
Figure 7: Summary of Tangible Aspects of a Sustainable Lifestyle ......................... 79
Figure 8: Summary of the Key Attributes of a Creators Life .................................. 112
Figure 9: Summary of the In and Out Group Identity Constructs .......................... 116
Figure 10: Summary of the Motives for Living Sustainably .................................... 143
Figure 11: Summary of the Challenge Themes ...................................................... 178
Figure 12: Summary of Strategies to Achieve the Middle Way .............................. 192
Figure 13: Summary of Main Research Findings .................................................. 195

List of Tables

Table 1: Informants Demographic Data ................................................................. 42
Table 2: Subthemes of Lifestyle ............................................................................. 60
Table 3: Subthemes of Mindfulness ...................................................................... 65
Table 4: Subthemes of Food .................................................................................. 81
Table 5: Subthemes of Travel ............................................................................... 88
Table 6: Subthemes of Waste Management ............................................................ 91
Table 7: Subthemes of Consumables ................................................................... 95
Table 8: Subthemes of Community ....................................................................... 104
Table 9: Summary of Out-group Identity Constructs ............................................ 118
Table 10: Summary of In-group Identity Constructs .............................................. 124
Table 11: Subtheme Mindful Consumer ................................................................. 125
Table 12: Subtheme Engaged Actives ................................................................... 128
Table 13: Subtheme Connected Authentics ............................................................ 133
Table 14: Subtheme Creative Makers .................................................................... 136
Table 15: Subthemes of Environmental Awareness ............................................... 144
Table 16: Subthemes of Survival Motives .............................................................. 150
Table 17: Subthemes of Life Enhancement ............................................................. 158
Table 18: Subthemes of Positive Contribution ...................................................... 165
Table 19: Summary of Self-actualised Metaneeds ............................................... 172
Table 20: Subthemes of Internal Challenges ......................................................... 180
Table 21: Subthemes of External Challenges ....................................................... 186
List of Images

Image 1: Mark’s Manual Coffee Grinder ................................................................. 57
Image 2: Rebecca’s Sustainability Model .............................................................. 58
Image 3: Rebecca’s Two Houses ......................................................................... 64
Image 4: Jan’s Connections ................................................................................ 68
Image 5: Kylie’s Marker’s Recycling Workshop .................................................... 71
Image 6: Aroha’s Treading Lightly....................................................................... 73
Image 7: Debra’s Abundance ............................................................................. 74
Image 8: Aroha’s Hope for the Future ................................................................. 75
Image 9: Diana’s Garden to Kitchen Connection ................................................ 80
Image 10: Mark’s Homemade Bread .................................................................. 82
Image 11: Debra’s Food Connection .................................................................. 83
Image 12: Rob’s Sustainable House .................................................................. 85
Image 13: Aroha’s Reclaimed House .................................................................. 86
Image 14: Aroha’s Self-sufficient Energy ............................................................ 87
Image 15: Small, Fuel-efficient Vehicle .............................................................. 89
Image 16: Christian’s Redesigned Bike ............................................................... 90
Image 17: Rebecca’s Recycled Gift Wrapping .................................................... 92
Image 18: Kylie’s Refurbished Furniture ............................................................ 93
Image 19: Fiona’s Organic Sheets ...................................................................... 96
Image 20: Fiona’s Authentic Clothing ................................................................. 97
Image 21: Wendy’s Overconsumption Concerns ................................................ 99
Image 22: Rob’s Tool for Mincing his own Meat ............................................... 101
Image 23: Maria’s Technology Tool .................................................................. 102
Image 24: Diana’s Community .......................................................................... 105
Image 25: Kylie’s Concept of Working Together ................................................ 106
Image 26: Richard’s Sacred Cow ...................................................................... 107
Image 27: Jan’s Contained Goat ........................................................................ 108
Image 28: Fiona’s Mindful Shopping Bags ......................................................... 126
Image 29: Christian’s inspiring front yard.......................................................... 129
Image 30: Kylie’s Political Action Group ............................................................ 131
Image 31: Kylie’s Connected Living .................................................................. 134
Image 32: Fiona’s Homemade Outdoor Tea Lights .............................................. 137
Image 33: Debra’s Pretty Outdoor Toilet ............................................................. 138
Image 34: Aroha’s Vision of a Dark Future ........................................................ 145
Image 35: Wendy’s Inspiring Reading Material .................................................. 147
Image 36: Maria’s Fireplace makes her Resilient .............................................. 150
Image 37: Aroha’s idea of Control ..................................................................... 152
Image 38: Fiona’s Solar Panel Financial Investment .......................................... 155
Image 39: Maria’s Healthy Food Choices ............................................................ 158
Image 40: Jan’s Plants as holders of Higher Energy .......................................... 159
Image 41: Aroha’s Ancestors watch over her ..................................................... 160
Image 42: Richard’s Invention – The Ubar ................................................................. 161
Image 43: Debra’s Functional and Aesthetic Elements ........................................ 162
Image 44: Kylie’s Social Connection ...................................................................... 163
Image 45: Debra’s Stone Stories ........................................................................... 167
Image 46: Aroha’s Feeling of Overwhelm and Guilt ............................................. 181
Image 47: Wendy accepting lifestyle tensions ...................................................... 184
Image 48: Christian’s Compromise ....................................................................... 189
Image 49: Christian’s Limited Public Transport Options ..................................... 191
Chapter One: Introduction

“A society is defined not only by what it creates but by what it refuses to destroy”

John Sawhill (1936-2000), former president of The Nature Conservancy

There is a growing concern about the impact human activities are having on the environment and, as expressed in John Sawhill’s sentiments, the role society can play in sustaining the planet’s natural resources. This research explores what it means for a consumer to be sustainable in a modern urban environment. The intent of this chapter is to outline the context of this research and introduce the research strategy. It will introduce the research problem, specific research questions, methodological approach, boundaries of this research and thesis structure.

Problem Identification

Within the international community ‘sustainability’ has been presented as the antidote to the environmental dilemma. Yet there is ambiguity and a lack of consensus around what it actually means to live in a sustainable way. The social, ideological and cultural meanings of consumption make sustainable choices a complex issue. This study explores consumers in New Zealand who live in an urban environment and are voluntarily choosing a sustainable lifestyle to gain an understanding of what it specifically means for them to live sustainably. The findings of this research contribute to sustainability and marketing theory, policy and practice.

Research Questions

Research strategies range on a scale from exploratory descriptive analysis through to investigating causal relationships. The limited research in this area and lack of consensus on what motivates sustainable behaviour resulted in the selection of an exploratory descriptive study. The intent is to understand a phenomenon and subsequently ‘what’ research questions were deemed to be the most appropriate. In keeping with the study’s methodology, the research questions were deliberately open to allow for changes in direction as new information emerged from the data.
Within the literature there is ambiguity and a lack of consensus of what it means to live sustainably (Evans & Abrahamse, 2009; Jackson, 2006; Seyfang, 2009). The first research question addressed this issue:

**Research Question 1: What does it mean to them to live sustainably?**

The use of identity theory has been proposed as a key tool for shifting people to more ecologically sustainable practices (Crompton & Kasser, 2009; Stets & Biga, 2003). There is a current gap in the literature in understanding the role sustainability plays in how people define themselves. This gap led to the second research question:

**Research Question 2: What role does sustainability play in their identity construction?**

There is limited understanding of the motivations for living sustainably (Borne, 2009) and a need for research into the diverse range of motivations that encourage pro-environmental behaviour (de Young, 2000; Kaplan, 2000). This gap led to the third research question:

**Research Question 3: What are their motivations for living sustainability?**

Challenges have been found in people making sustainable choices, particularly when balancing their personal priorities with societal concerns (Brennan & Binney, 2008). This research aimed to explore this further to gain an understanding of what prohibits informants making sustainable choices:

**Research Question 4: What are the challenges to them living sustainably?**

These research questions set the foundation for the data collection and analysis. In Chapter Four the findings have been structured to address each individual research question with a discussion of the overarching themes and theoretical contributions.

**Research Approach**

This research is interpretive and based on qualitative data. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, this research adopted a combined grounded theory and inductive thematic analysis methodology. A grounded theory methodology was chosen as being the most suitable for this study as it is ideal for research conducted in areas where there are few pre-existing theories or literature and where the intent is to generate inductive theories directly from the data (Goulding, 2005). At the data analysis stage an inductive thematic coding was combined with a grounded theory approach to support the multimodal research design.
This study used four main methods of data collection: photos, journaling, interviews and observational data. Informants were individuals selected by purposeful sampling who were voluntarily attempting a sustainable lifestyle within an urban environment. Data was collected over one year using a three-phase research strategy because this study was of a lifestyle and the longitudinal timeframe resulted in findings that went beyond a singular moment in time and enabled an in-depth exploration of a subculture.

**Boundaries of this Research**

This research focuses on individual consumer choices as opposed to political or business practices. Within the current political environment the emphasis is largely on producers and consumers to adjust their practices (Jacobs, 1997). It has been argued that relying on government interventions alone is unlikely to be enough and additionally could bring with it a level of commercial and social resistance (Podobnik, 2006). Individual consumption practices in particular can play a large part in the creation of social norms and cultural shifts (Dolan, 2002). Subsequently this research has focused on consumer practices instead of a business or political focus. To give context to their own behaviour informants were asked to reflect on institutional changes and business practices but it is not the intent of this thesis to focus further on these areas.

This study explores the lifestyles of urban consumers as opposed to extreme sustainable lifestyles. The majority of literature on living sustainably has been derived from sustainable communities - intentional communities created in isolated, rural surroundings (Barber, 1996; Sargisson & Sargent, 2004). While they are an interesting subset, questions have been raised about how achievable or realistic that model is for the vast majority of the population. Subsequently, I wanted to explore what it means for a person living and working in an urban environment to be sustainable. Moraes, Szmigin and Carrigan (2010) study on sustainable community behaviours propositioned the importance of a framework for categorising alternative consumer behaviour. If we were to position these informants on a scale with a hedonic consumer at one end to an extreme green lifestyle at the other, these informants would be more involved than the average person in sustainability, but still living in regular urban dwellings, working in a variety of common professions and trades, and embedded in local communities. Their involvement with sustainability while embedded in
relatively normal lives is precisely what makes them an interesting group to interview. Informants were chosen using purposeful sampling based on their geographical location, employment and life stage. A strength of this research was the diverse range of informants I selected who are attempting a sustainable lifestyle in an urban-based environment.

**Document Map**

This thesis has been structured to be authentic to a grounded theory research approach. Chapter Two outlines the literature that I familiarised myself with at the beginning of the study and used to develop the research questions. Chapter Three details the research strategy used for the collection and analysis of the data. Chapter Four discusses the findings for each research question, integrates relevant literature obtained after data analysis and discusses the overarching themes and theoretical contributions. Chapter Five is a discussion of the main findings and development of theory. Chapter Six outlines the conclusion for the study and opportunities for future research.

**Chapter Two: Literature Review**

This chapter outlines the literature that I sensitised myself to at the beginning of this study. It identifies the gaps in the literature and sets the context for the development of the research questions. Debate on the issue of sustainability has seen a shift in focus from consumption to the wider decisions people are making in all aspects of their lives. I outline the need for research to understand what it means to live sustainably, the role pro-environmental behaviour can play in identity construction, the motives of sustainable behaviours and how informants overcome the challenges their lifestyle presents.

**Chapter Three: Research Approach**

This chapter discusses the rationale for how this research was conducted and analysed. I outline the research strategy and my selection of a combined grounded theory methodology and inductive thematic analysis approach within a constructionism epistemological perspective. I discuss the multimodal qualitative research method and the importance of the visual component in my data collection. I elaborate upon how my data was collected and analysed. Lastly, I discuss the assurance checks used to ensure the
trustworthiness of the findings and end with a personal reflection of how my data analysis was influenced by emersion in this subculture.

**Chapter Four: Research Findings**

This chapter has five sections addressing the four main research questions. Section one answers the question of what it means to live sustainably from a conceptual perspective and section two addresses the tangible outcomes of this lifestyle and what they mean for informants. In section three I discuss the identity constructs informants were distancing themselves from and the positive ones they were attempting to adopt. In section four, I elaborate upon the main drivers of informant’s lifestyle. Lastly in section five, I discuss the challenges of living sustainably and the strategies informants used to overcome them.

**Chapter Five: Discussion**

This chapter addresses the main findings of this research. I discuss the Creators subculture and how they differ from previously research on voluntary simplifiers, anti-consumers and ethical consumers. I elaborate upon the aggregated extended self and how including nature and unfamiliar others within its boundaries contributes to existing theory. I argue the importance of a valued consumption approach and how informants were motivated by positive, life-enhancing motives. I propose a new direction in social marketing campaigns and policy initiatives that accounts for these emotional positive motives. Lastly, I present the middle-way approach, a cloaked activist lifestyle created by informants to fulfil their life potential and facilitate a wider shift in societal behaviour.

**Chapter Six: Conclusions**

In this chapter I summarise how the findings answered the main research questions. I outline the theoretical, methodological and managerial contributions. Lastly I discuss the limitations of this study and opportunities for future research.

**Summary**

This chapter outlined the research problem and questions that guided this research study. The exploratory nature of this research resulted in a combined grounded theory and inductive thematic analysis methodology with a multi-modal method. I presented a structure for this thesis that was in alignment with this methodology. This research has
theory, methodology and managerial contributions which will be elaborated upon in the subsequent chapters.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter outlines the gap in the literature that this research study aimed to address. It is not the intention of this chapter to provide a complete literature analysis; instead it outlines the research problem and the specific studies in this area that shaped the development of the research questions at the beginning of the study. In keeping with an inductive research method, where findings are formed directly from the data, I sensitised myself to the existing literature but did not establish preconceived ideas so as to remain flexible to emerging themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Charmaz, 2006; King & Horrocks, 2010). A focused literature review was conducted after data analysis and relevant research has been integrated into the discussion of the findings in Chapter 4.

As an overview, this chapter outlines the development of the sustainability concept within the marketing discipline. I frame the progression of the ‘sustainability’ issue, summarise the gaps in the literature and present the key arguments of why this area of research is an important one. A discussion of the current understanding of the motivations for sustainable lifestyles is presented as well as the role identity formation may play in future environmental campaigns. Lastly, the appropriateness of New Zealand as a research context is addressed.

Sustainable Development

Environmental decline has been directly attributed to the processes driving growth in modern economics (Booth, 1998; Kilbourne, McDonagh, & Prothero, 1997). In 1987 the World Commission on Environment and Development first proposed the term ‘sustainable development’ to address the international concerns around ecological degradation (Fisk, 1998). It is broadly defined as the use of resources that meet current requirements without jeopardising the prospects of future generations to do the same. This approach attempted to bring together the ideas of economic growth and environmental protection. The dilemma for many countries is how to support the lifestyles of their local population without having an adverse effect on the environment or future resources, an issue that has still to be adequately resolved (Brennan & Binney, 2008). From the ensuing debate consumer practices were spotlighted, with the burden seen to shift to the end-users responsible for
creating greenhouse gasses (Hajer, 1995). Sustainable consumption was identified as a fundamental element required to achieve sustainable development (Zadek & Amalric, 1998). As consumption is a central concept to marketing it has broad implications for its discipline and practices.

**Sustainable Consumption**

The terms ‘sustainability’ and ‘consumption’ are essentially opposing concepts (Frame & Newton, 2007). The term ‘sustainable consumption’ first appeared in the action plan (Agenda 21) that came out of the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 (UNCED). For the first time, at an international level it was reasoned that environmental degradation is in large part due to the unsustainable consumption patterns of developed countries, an issue needing to be rebalanced. To achieve sustainable consumption, critiques attest Western society must move away from the dominant marketing paradigm’s approach of encouraging a culture of endless consumption. The social, ideological and cultural meanings attached to consumption though make this a complex issue to address (Corrigan, 1997). The following is a brief discussion of the role consumption plays in Western society which give insights into the underlying tensions constraining a move towards more sustainable consumption.

1. **Role of Consumption in Society**

While historically people have always exchanged and consumed goods, it is within the last two centuries that being a consumer has become an identity (Trentmann, 2006). Consumption evolved from the functional use or ownership of goods to a key form of expression in how people define themselves; commodities being seen as extensions of people, valued for their symbolic meaning (Belk, 1988). Branding is a key part of this process, enabling people to differentiate themselves based on the products they buy (Holt, 2002). From a post-modern perspective consumers were no longer seen as passive recipients of information but active participants making informed choices based on their variable needs and desires. Shopping became a leisure activity and consumables fashion items, used briefly and then expended for the latest thing. Material consumption was positioned as the measure of people’s quality of life (Kilbourne, McDonagh, & Prothero, 1997) even though consumption levels have been found to have only a minimal relationship to people’s happiness and social wellbeing (Inglehart & Klingemann, 2000; Jordon, 2007). As
Campbell (2006) states, critiques of consumption are not based so much on the act itself, a requirement in any form of historical society, but levelled at the modern practice of attempting to satisfy an inexhaustible list of wants driven by a continuous desire for novel experiences.

Consumption though is more than just a personal pursuit; it’s a symbolic and social act of connecting with others within Western culture and carries with it a certain level of duty and obligation (McCracken, 1990; Trentmann, 2006). On a personal level, purchases can be seen as expressions of love and appreciation often required to keep relationships running smoothly (Miller, 1998). At a societal level they are a means of communication and connection, with people expected to consume to help maintain the economy and keep people employed (Potter, 2009). Consumption is also increasingly tied to social and global justice issues with people being encouraged to use their consumption choices to express their political views and ideological values (Connolly & Prothero, 2008; Fine, 2006). Wilk (2001) believes morality has become inseparable from consumption, as the interconnected nature of our world means the choices we make inevitably impact upon others. This view is particularly true in light of the effect overconsumption practices are having on the environmental dilemma.

The psychological desire for goods, supported by a culture of consumption has effectively trapped individuals into a process of unsustainable choices; any shift to more sustainable practices is seen as needing to address these overarching drivers (Dolan, 2002; Jackson, 2006). Marketing has been positioned as playing a crucial role in this shift through reshaping customers’ needs and wants and providing alternative options for consumers (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995).

**Sustainability and Marketing**

The main area of research on sustainability in marketing has been in the area of green marketing, in which businesses use their sustainable practices as a point of competitive differentiation to appeal to those consumers with ecological concerns. Studies have found increasing numbers of consumers becoming environmentally conscious in their purchases (Chase & Smith, 1992; Mackroy, Calantone, & DrÖge, 1995; Worcester & Dawkins, 2005), who are happy to reward businesses acting responsibly (Menon & Menon, 1997), as long as
they are authentic in their claims and not just ‘green washing’ (Carlson, Grove, & Kangun, 1993). Research in this area has focused mainly on the importance of environmental factors in traditional consumption choices.

The commitment to green consumerism has been found to be stronger than that experienced with normal consumption due to its ideological underpinnings (Moisander & Pesonen, 2002; Stern, 2000). Green marketing extends beyond just the environment and is often interlinked with the issue of ethical consumption. Ethical consumers are concerned about the overall nature of production so purchase decisions include a sense of moral responsibility where they take into account the impact of their choices on others in society (Harrison, Newholm, & Shaw, 2005). Described by Trentmann (2006) as ‘citizen consumers’, individuals are using their consumption choices to ‘vote’ on a range of ethical issues such as genetic engineering, fair trade, animal welfare, food miles and recycling. In this light, consumption has been positioned as a form of political activism. This approach is actively encouraged by NGO’s like Greenpeace and Fair Trade Association who encourage their supporters to use their consumption choices as a way of pressuring organisations and governments to improve their practices.

A key criticism of the focus of ‘green consumption’, however, is that it continues to foster self-focused, materialistic values and patterns of overconsumption. As McKay (2009) states, if large numbers of people makes small changes to their behaviour then the cumulative effect is only a small improvement in the environmental situation. While green marketing plays an important role, it was not designed to address the broader problem of how people within society are consuming, a fundamental shift that many advocates say is required (Jackson, 2009; Seyfang, 2009).

**Sustainable Living**

The terms ‘sustainable living’ and ‘sustainable lifestyles’ have become increasingly popular catch phrases in politics and the media as a solution to the environmental dilemma. A ‘lifestyle’ reflects an individual’s values, decisions and behaviour patterns, combining the functional, social and symbolic elements of consumption (Kahle, Beatty, & Homer, 1986; Spaargaren & van Vliet, 2000). A study on sustainable lifestyles looks beyond a narrow focus on consumption and takes into account the larger social and cultural issues impacting upon
people choices (Dolan, 2002). A clear definition of what is meant by sustainable living has yet to be adequately defined but is necessary if appropriate policy measures are to be developed (Evans & Jackson, 2007). The aim of this study is to contribute to this area through researching individuals attempting to be sustainable and exploring what living sustainably means to them. This aim led to the first research question:

**Research Question 1: What does it mean to them to live sustainably?**

This research explores what it means to live sustainably from both a conceptual perspective and in terms of tangible, behavioural outcomes.

**Identity**

Marketers commonly position consumption choices as a way for people to shape their identity. Crompton and Kasser (2009) propose the necessity of a shift within the environmental movement towards more identity-based campaigning. They advocate using marketers’ understanding of identity formation to minimise environmentally destructive behaviours and encourage more ecologically sustainable practices. To date the majority of research conducted on environmentally-responsible actions has focused on pro-environmental attitudes but only a modest link has been established between attitudes and behaviour (Scott & Willits, 1994; Van Liere & Dunlap, 1981). Stets and Biga (2003) found identity processes on the other hand have a greater level of influence on people’s choices. As they state:

“Identity factors improve our power to predict behaviour (compared to attitudes) because identity theory rests on the important sociological assumption that humans are embedded in a social structure in which behaviour is chosen, not on the basis of discrete, personal decision, but on the basis of competing demands stemming from the many positions one assumes in society” (p. 420).

A person’s identity is the overall perception they have of themselves and is multifaceted (Markus & Wulf, 1987) consisting of personal identities (characteristics specific to the individual) and social identities (characteristics of the groups to which they belong) (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).
I. **Personal Identity**

A personal identity is a sense of self that people create which is defined by their unique individual characteristics (Hewitt, 1997). It consists of their actual self and possible desired selves, which are projections of future selves people would like to be or fear becoming (Markus & Nurius, 1986). They serve to motivate people’s behaviour and as a point of comparison against their current self-image. Hitlin (2003) states that personal identities are largely based on people’s core values. Values are developed within a broader cultural context so that while a person’s identity is individualistic it is also heavily influenced by their social environment (Hewitt, 1997). According to identity theory a person’s identity is also heavily influenced by the different roles they undertake in society (i.e. – mother, lawyer, wife). Within the identity literature, sustainability concerns are often linked to people’s values and the responsibilities they have as members of society to make changes but there is currently limited understanding of the role sustainability plays in how people define themselves (Crompton & Kasser, 2009).

II. **Social Identity**

As previously touched upon, the influence of others can have a significant impact on people’s behaviour, particularly those groups to which people belong. Groups offer people a sense of value, belonging and self-worth (Stets, 2006). Group norms though have been found to be effective only for those individuals who identify with a social group (Terry & Hogg, 1996). According to social-identity theory we form social identities based on the groups to which we belong that we use to define people who are similar (in-groups) and those that are different (out-groups) (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). People have multiple social identities but only one is ever dominant in any given situation and is activated depending on the context (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg, 2006), the commitment to that identity is often dependant on the strength of social ties people have with others in the group (Stets & Biga, 2003). Self-categorisation theory states people are often stereotyped in terms of the ideal in-group member, which produces a sense of conformity, trust and affinity within the group (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). As people are motivated to maintain a positive self-identity, it can create a sense of ethno-centralism and belief in the superiority of one’s own group. This can result in an ‘us versus them’ phenomena, which has been
found to result in a bias towards in-group members and discrimination towards those in out-groups (Bardach & Park, 1996; Brewer, 1979; Turner, 1984). In this way, people are using groups to both categorise themselves and to bolster their self-esteem relative to others (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg & Abrahamse, 1988). Lifestyles are a form of identification people use to both differentiate themselves from others and as a means of connection and belonging on an emotional level with others in their community (Evans & Jackson, 2007; Haanpää, 2007). Given the presence and influence social identities can have this research aimed to more fully explore the influence that ‘others’ play in sustainability practices.

Research has found a move to a more environmentally-conscious lifestyle can involve a level of tension in how people re-define themselves (Connolly & Prothero, 2008; Evans & Abrahamse, 2009). Within psychology literature, theories behind identity change have received limited attention (Burke, 2006; Stets, 2006) and there is a need to more fully understand how people redefine their social identities (Brown, 2000). Therefore, further research into this area would offer a valuable contribution. The issues around identity formation have resulted in the second research question:

**Research Question 2: What role does sustainability play in their identity construction?**

This research explores the identities informants are distancing themselves from and those they are choosing to adopt or aspire to have.

**Motivations for Sustainable Living**

There is currently limited understanding of the motivations of sustainable lifestyles and a lack of consensus on the predominate motives for sustainable behaviour (Borne, 2009; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Within the consumer literature the main motivations to emerge were altruism, the ‘good life’, social influences and related motives.

1. **Altruism**

Research has found altruistic values or a concern for others to be higher among those individuals undertaking environmentally responsible behaviours (Dietz, Stern, & Guagnano, 1998; Karp, 1996; Schultz & Zelezny, 1999) and has historically been presented as the key motive for a sustainable lifestyle. Research shows individuals will put aside their own
immediate self-interests for the benefit of the larger group (Edney, 1980; Kramer, Brewer, & Hanna, 1996) and green consumers are often balancing their own needs and desires against environmental impacts (Haanpää, 2007). Kaplan (2000), however, contends that centring on altruistic motives in shifting people to environmentally responsible behaviours can foster a sense of helplessness in others as it focuses on sacrifice as opposed to positive, life-enhancing options. Similar to other authors (Csikszentmihalyi, 2006; Dolan, 2002; Inglehart & Klingemann, 2000) he argues that our future may not actually be about consuming less but more focused on choices that give people a better quality of life. When asking people to sacrifice something that conflicts with their own needs they are most likely to do so when they perceive some form of alternative benefit (Mansbridge, 1990). Campbell (2006) proposes that hedonic consumption and sustainable life choices are both motivated by the people’s desire to seek pleasure from their experiences and activities, just expressed in different ways. Kaplan (2000) states there is a need for further research to uncover the diverse range of motivations beyond the altruism of people who make ecologically sustainable choices.

II. The ‘Good Life’

Proponents of sustainable lifestyles promote the ‘good life’ as a motivator in itself (Elgin, 2006b; Price, 2010; Simms & Smith, 2008). They advocate a focus on ‘wellbeing’, proposing that living in balance with the environment offers a more enduring degree of personal satisfaction beyond that offered by a consumerist society. As Francesca Price states “my experience has been that by living a greener, more sustainable life, I have really added to my life and it has become more fulfilling and more abundant and more joyous as a result” (Bridgeman, 2010, p. 4). Simms and Smith (2008) suggest the environmental problem can be seen as a unique and positive opportunity for people to re-evaluate their lifestyles and create better ways to live that are focused less on resource use and more on personal wellbeing. This research explored whether the ‘good-life’ and ‘well-being’ are central motives for a sustainable lifestyle.
III. ‘Social’ Impact

People do not make consumption decisions in isolation, the behaviour of others shapes their beliefs and actions (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; de Gregorio & Sung, 2010). Research has found the communication of pro-environmental behaviour as a social norm can be a key motivator. Marketing appeals which use descriptive social norms about how others behave in the same situation have been found to be more effective than those purely emphasising environmental protection (Goldstein, Cialdini, & Griskevicius, 2008). Messages that positive behaviour is socially approved has been found to encourage people acting irresponsibly to alter their behaviour and helps prevent those acting responsibly from changing (Schultz, Nolan, Cialdini, Goldstein, & Griskevicius, 2007). In traditional consumption social pressure has a significant influence (Burgess, Bedford, Hobson, Davies, & Harrison, 2003) and given the rise in sustainable social movements, like Transition Towns and sustainable communities, the ‘social’ element will be explored as a motivator for people living sustainably.

IV. Related Motives

Environmentally positive behaviours have also been found to evolve from concerns that are not environmental, such as a desire to cut costs, connect with loved ones or to experience a sense of satisfaction (de Young, 2000). Evans and Abrahamse’s (2009) conducted one of the few studies on sustainable lifestyle and found that participants concern for sustainability did not originate from a pure concern for the environment but evolved from underlying values such as frugality, health and the importance of human and animal rights. Values are consistent guiding principles people use to make decisions and achieve their goals (Schwartz, 1994) and are formed based on beliefs that certain end states and behaviours are better than others (Rokeach, 1973). This study does not analyse specific values given that such an analysis would require a specific methodological framework. However values underpin people’s actions so those that emerged from the data are discussed. This also raises the issue of whether people are primarily motivated to live sustainably for self-interest or societal concerns. This study offers insights into this area and explores whether informants see themselves as forging choices for the greater good or for more self-motivated reasons.
There is limited understanding in the literature of the range of motivations for a sustainable lifestyle and commentators have advocated the need for further investigation. As de Young (2000) states:

“It is clear that no single motive is optimal for promoting environmentally responsible behaviour. No motive has universal appeal, works under all conditions or in all situations. No motive is likely to meet both short-and long-term goals. The widespread promotion of environmentally responsible behaviour will require an understanding of the great diversity of motives people find acceptable and empowering” (p. 523)

This led to the third research question:

Research Question 3: What are their motivations for living sustainably?

Within the current research there is a gap in understanding the decision making processes of individuals who make sustainable consumption choices, particularly when it involves competing values and multiple stakeholders (Brennan & Binney, 2008). Evans and Abrahamse (2009) found that for individuals it was not one lifestyle but multiple ones converging, some conducive and others in contrast which required an on-going process of adjustment. Borne (2009) attributes this dilemma to the challenges found in balancing personal priorities with global concerns as well as an uncertainty around what constitutes a sustainable lifestyle. From a practitioner perspective, there is a lack of understanding on the challenges of adopting this lifestyle. As such this research intended to gain an understanding of what the barriers are for people living sustainably.

Research Question 3: What are their challenges to living sustainably?

To date the majority of research on the motivations for environmentally conscious lifestyles has been conducted on the simplification movement. ‘Simplifiers’ are described as people who have consciously chosen to live more basic lifestyles (Elgin, 2006b), with studies undertaken on both individual voluntary simplifiers and those living within larger sustainable communities. Simplifiers differ from frugal consumers who are more motivated by income constraints (Pepper, Jackson, & Uzzell, 2009), and are often positioned within the broader category of the anti-consumption movement (Iyer & Muncy, 2009). While they are an important informant subset they are also a marginal group and, as previously addressed, sustainability may not necessary be about living in a basic way. As such, this study’s approach was to move away from these outlier groups and research a broader range of
people in urban society attempting to live sustainable lifestyles. The aim was to research people at different life stages to enable a more diverse range of motivations to be explored.

**New Zealand Context**

This is exploratory, descriptive research and consequently could have been undertaken in a number of different regional locations. I specifically chose New Zealand as the setting for the study because of its green image, political stance and the significant number of citizens concerned about sustainability issues. New Zealand has a developed economy and a small population on a relatively large land mass; these factors make it an interesting context for this exploratory work.

**I. New Zealand’s Green Image**

There is a perception domestically and internationally of a country that is clean, green and ecologically-minded. A study by New Zealand Trade and Enterprise found American consumer’s sustainability concerns were interlinked with a desire for quality and New Zealand was seen as well placed to deliver these goods due to its perceived environmentally conscious stance (NZTE, 2009). When you look deeper the ‘clean-green’ image is not necessarily true but is still a key part of New Zealand’s identity and marketability (Oram, 2007). New Zealand’s perception as a green nation makes it an ideal market to study sustainable lifestyles in practice.

**II. Political Stance**

In response to increasing public concern and a focus on sustainability on the international political agenda, the New Zealand government has recently prioritised the environment, with climate change identified as one of the government’s key environmental concerns (Ministry for the Environment, 2010). In 2007, the then Prime Minister Helen Clarke spoke of the government’s commitment to tackle sustainability issues:

“New Zealand can aim to be the first nation to be truly sustainable - across the four pillars of the economy, society, the environment, and nationhood. I believe we can aspire to be carbon neutral in our economy and way of life. I believe that in the years to come, the pride we take in our quest for sustainability and carbon neutrality will define our nation, just as our quest for a nuclear free world has over the past twenty three years” (H. Clarke, 2007).
The government implemented policy changes and a number of initiatives to run until 2012 aimed at householders, the public service and the business community. One of the main initiatives was the Household Sustainability Programme which received funding of $6million for 2007-2010 (OME, 2007). It focused on providing information to consumers, such as EECA energy wise website on how people can reduce their energy consumption, and government subsidies in the Warm Houses Project aimed at improved home insulation and cleaner heating. The government has chosen to predominately focus on ‘soft’ policy shifts aimed at consumer changes (Lewin, 2009), which supports the focus of this research on consumer practices as opposed to institutional changes.

III. Sustainability-concerned Citizens

New Zealanders are concerned about the environment, and a government survey found 83% of respondents felt it was everyone’s responsibility to protect and care for the ecosystem (Johnson, Fryer, & Raggett, 2008). The Household sustainability benchmark survey on New Zealanders attitudes to the environment found 53% ‘deeply concerned’ that we were not doing enough, with only 6% saying it was not a priority for them (Fryer, Kalafatelis, & Lee, 2007). Around 75% considered the environment in their choices and actions with 23% indicating it was the most important factor. As Kane and Neubert (2008, p. 9) state “everyday New Zealander’s are now joining the ranks of those who are making a conscious decision to live in a way that minimises their impact on the environment and ensures good health”. In addition, there is a strong section of society attempting to live sustainably, which is supported by the finding that New Zealand has more sustainable communities per capita than in any other country (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004). As a result of New Zealand’s image, political stance and population, it was seen as the most appropriate context in which to conduct this research.

Given the nature of this study being focused on people’s lived experiences within a New Zealand context, the results can only be applied to this specific geographical location. If this research had been undertaken in other regions this research would have likely produced different expressions of a sustainable lifestyle. This provides opportunities for future research to apply these findings to different regional locations.
Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the sensitising literature that shaped the development of the research questions at the beginning of the study. Within marketing, research on sustainability has predominantly been in the areas of green and social marketing. There is a gap in the literature in understanding sustainable lifestyle choices and a lack of clarity in how to successfully encourage people to undertake more environmentally friendly behaviours. Awareness of the issues alone is not enough and there is criticism of focusing on altruism as the key motivator for change. Research into the motives and the role identity formation plays in sustainable lifestyle choices addresses an important gap in the literature. New Zealand’s image, political stance and population make it an appropriate context for this research. A focused literature review was conducted after data analysis and relevant research has been integrated into the discussion of the findings in Chapter Four.
Chapter Three: Research Approach

This section outlines the chosen methodological approach of this research. The exploratory nature of this study led to the selection of a combined grounded theory methodology and inductive thematic analysis. A qualitative multimodal method was used combining photo analysis, journaling, interviews and observation data. Figure 1 summarises the research approach and outline of this chapter.

![Figure 1: Outline of Research Approach](image-url)
Ontology

Ontology is the study of being, i.e. how people exist in the world (Crotty, 1998). A researcher’s assumptions about the nature of social reality is essential to understand as these assumptions frame the approach to the study and affects how findings are collected and interpreted (Blaikie, 2007). This study takes a relativist perspective, where people’s view of ‘reality’ is seen as being individually constructed through the lens of their cultural and social experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). From this perspective there is no ‘one truth’ for researchers to discover as realists propose but instead multiple realities are created by different individuals based on their interactions with the world (Esterberg, 2002; Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). This research takes this perspective because it aimed to explore the concepts of ‘sustainability’ and a ‘sustainable lifestyle’ and acknowledges that it is through the interaction of informants with society that defines and gives meanings to these terms.

Epistemology

Epistemology is the philosophical understanding of knowledge and how it is generated (Alcoff, 1998; Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). In choosing an epistemological stance, a set of underlying principles are adopted by researchers on the conditions in which people acquire knowledge and how their beliefs are evaluated and justified (Audi, 2003; Crumley, 1999). This research has chosen a constructionism perspective where meaning is said to reside in the minds of individuals as opposed to objects (Cooper, Mohanty, & Sosa, 1999). From a constructionism perspective, objects exist with different potential meanings but it is the individuals who construct their meaning through their experiences, which are heavily influenced by the social world to which they have been conditioned (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). As Schwandt (2000, p. 197) states “we invent concepts, models and schemes to make sense of experience, and we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience”. From a social constructionism perspective an individual’s perspective is viewed through a historical and cultural lens, the meaning of which is socially mediated (Hackley, 1998). The constructionism perspective is most appropriate for this research as it is seeking to understand what it is to ‘live’ sustainably, an awareness that will have been constructed by comparison to other lifestyles in society. The term ‘sustainability’ and what it means to live a SL cannot be separated from the wider cultural context in which it is based.
I. **Constructionism vs. Constructivism**

Constructionism is often referred to as ‘social constructionism’ due to the heavy influence that culture plays in peoples' interpretations of the world (Crotty, 1998). People are born into a culture with a system of meanings that are adopted and used as lenses through which to view the world. The system of meaning is co-created by the members of a culture and adjustments are made to it over time but the fundamentals of it endure well past the life of any one individual (Crotty, 2003; Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). This perspective is defined as a ‘constructionism’ view and the heavy influence of culture in determining interpretations is the fundamental difference between it and a ‘constructivism’ perspective. Constructivism focuses specifically on the individual person’s mind as the sole means of constructing meaning (Schwandt, 2000). A constructionism perspective is most relevant to this research given that it is a study of a lifestyle sub-culture and is the experience of these people living within a wider societal context that is under inquiry.

Within constructionism there is delineation between weak and strong constructionism. Strong constructionism sees the researcher as playing an integral part in the creation of meaning through their interaction with the researched and their interpretation of the findings. In weak constructionism the researcher attempts to play a limited role in describing the phenomena, depicting findings purely from the researched perspective. This study has chosen a strong constructionism perspective, which involves a discussion of meaning and co-creation of knowledge between the researched and researcher, and recognises the active role the researcher plays in the interpretation of findings.

**Theoretical perspective**

A theoretical perspective is the viewpoint research takes on how people make sense of their world. Interpretivist research is focused on understanding the meaning of human behaviours within a social phenomenon and is the key theoretical perspective informing constructionism (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988; Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991; Schwandt, 2000). It derives from Max Weber’s concept of Verstehen (understanding) in human sciences which he proposed in the late 19th Century as a contrast to the traditional natural science focus on Erklären (explaining) (Crotty, 1998). In this perspective the importance is placed on how people construct their own view of reality depending on their historical experience; as such
the same phenomena can have multiple realities for the researcher to interpret (Schwandt, 2000). For a researcher to gain an understanding of another person’s reality they are required to put aside their own perspective and to immerse themselves in the other persons world (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). This type of research is context specific and conducted in natural environments that are constantly evolving; the theories developed predominately look at describing and explaining events that give insight into the structures of meaning within specific subgroups (Gioia & Pitre, 1990). This perspective relates closely to this research as it is exploring a specific sub-group of people who are attempting to live sustainably and through understanding their experiences gain insights into the ways they view the world.

The main streams of research to have developed from interpretivism are phenomenology, symbolic interactionism and hermeneutics. They all share a common goal of understanding the meaning of social phenomena. Phenomenology is concerned with individual meaning making and is therefore an approach better suited to constructivism. The hermeneutics approach is focused on understanding and interpreting text. Symbolic interactionism on the other hand aims at interpreting actions based on meaning. Both hermeneutics and symbolic interactionism could have been applicable for this research but I chose to use a symbolic interactionism perspective as it is specifically based on understanding phenomena from the informant’s point of view. From this perspective, meaning is constructed and derived from the social interactions between people (Crotty, 1998). Symbolic interactionism’s’ fundamentals align closely with constructionism and it is the influencing perspective for grounded theory, a key methodology in this research. The theory that underpins the psychology behind collective behaviour has also been based primarily on this perspective (Snow & Oliver, 1995). The suitability of symbolic interactionism will now be discussed.

1. Symbolic Interactionism

The founder of symbolic interactionism, George Herbert Mead (whose work was further developed by Herbert Blumer), asserts that culture defines people and meaning for individuals is developed through their interaction with others in society. Symbolic interactionism takes a pragmatist perspective in which culture is not criticised but is positively embraced and seen as the core of understanding the world (Charon, 1992). Pragmatist’s believe theories and concepts are best understood in terms of their usefulness
then their truthfulness (Rorty, 1979; Shalin, 1986). In this light, they are judged in terms of
their ability to fit particular contexts as opposed to their capacity to accurately capture
reality. Research enquiry is about understanding human behaviour from the perspective of
what is relevant.

There are different schools of thought on the underpinnings and focus of symbolic
interactionism. This research follows the Chicago School which focuses more on the
individual as the key to understanding (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988) and emphasises process,
with life perceived as a means of socially-created activity (Musolf, 2003). The three basic
assumptions that underpin symbolic interactionism from Blumer (1969) are:

1. Peoples actions towards objects or people are based on the meanings they
   assign to them
2. The meanings are developed through interactions with other people
3. The meanings are modified over time through people’s experience with objects
   and others

Meaning resides not in the object but in people’s behaviour towards it. Human activity
involves the creation and exchange of meaning, where symbolic representations (e.g.
words, gestures, money, fashion) are used and interpreted by others to make sense of their
world (Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003). Humans are socialised into what symbols mean
and are active informants in creating meaning – making them both a recipient and a creator
of cultural understanding (Prus, 1996). Symbols can have multiple meanings so
understanding them can be problematic and as such people are constantly involved in
interpreting and making sense of their environment (Snow, 2001). Variation and change are
also an inevitable part of human experience so meanings also evolve. Subsequently, as
researchers, we are interested in understanding on-going human activity with people being
perceived as active, creative beings. The study of individuals and society though cannot be
separated (Maines, 2001); society is a composition of interacting individuals and informants
perspectives are socially constructed as they are created within a cultural, historic, social,
economic and situational context (Bryant & Charmaz, 2011). The study of individuals offers
researchers insights into culturally embedded values.
To conduct this type of research the researcher tries to literally step into the place of the people being studied and see things from their perspective (Turner, 2006). This approach is achieved through an interaction with shared symbols, such as language, through which the researcher develops an understanding of how the researched see the world (Crotty, 1998), which is one of the reasons that interviews served as a main source of information for this research. Esterberg (2002) states that the research process is itself a form of social production as a researcher’s understanding is always an interpretation of the perspectives of others. Understanding comes from being immersed in the world-view of those being studied, with the researcher becoming both a viewer and a participator in the creation of knowledge. The details of my own personal journey as a researcher and my immersion in this subculture are elaborated upon further on page 51. Symbolic interactionism is an approach focused on understanding the micro-processes through which individuals construct meaning, order and identities in their daily life (Sandstrom, Martin, & Fine, 2003), which makes it ideally suited for this research.

**Research Methodology**

A research methodology is the strategy which outlines how the data is collected and analysed. A number of ethnographic methodologies have emerged within the interpretivist theoretical perspective such as game theory, negotiated order theory, labelling theory and grounded theory (Creswell, 2009; Crotty, 1998). At the start of this study I adopted a grounded theory methodology. Maxwell (2004) emphasises that qualitative research design is a reflective process and it is important that it adapts in response to new developments. When analysing and reporting the data I incorporated a thematic analysis approach with a grounded theory methodology. A thematic analysis approach is commonly used within grounded theory, which derives meaning based on a constructionist perspective (Boyatzis, 1998). A historical critique of thematic analysis is a lack of concise guidelines for analysing the data (Anataki, Billig, Edwards, & Potter, 2003) but recent methodological contributions, such as Braun and Clarke (2006), Guest et al (2011) and King and Horrocks (2010), have addressed these criticisms and provided methodological guidelines. I have chosen to use King and Horrocks (2010) thematic analysis framework because of its rigorous approach to data analysis and its symbiotic relationship to Charmaz’s grounded theory methodology. The
following section describes the rationale behind both methodologies, with the data analysis section outlining the specifics of this combined approach.

I. **Grounded Theory**

A grounded theory approach was selected for this research as it is ideal when conducted in areas where there is limited pre-existing theories or literature (Goulding, 2005). Grounded theory emerged in 1967 when Glaser and Strauss, assisted by Jeanne Quint, proposed a methodology to legitimise qualitative research in which theory was derived directly from data (inductive approach) as opposed to traditional research where theories were first formulated then tested (deductive approach) (Dey, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Using inductive analysis data is coded without fitting into a pre-existing framework or the researcher’s preconceptions (Patton, 2001). Grounded theory was introduced as a form of ethnographic inquiry that looks at slice-of-life scenarios where theories are not pre-supposed but ‘grounded’ in the lived experiences of informants (Creswell, 2007). The grounded theory methodology was created primarily to provide a theoretically rigorous approach for undertaking qualitative research (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008). Data is collected and analysed concurrently, described as a ‘constant comparison’ method, where codes and categories are formed directly from the data as opposed to fitting into predefined categories which are used to inform further data gathering. New theoretical insights emerge directly from the data. A defining feature of this approach is that findings are based in part on the researcher’s personal experiences and insights, a departure from the orthodox view of the researcher as an unbiased observer.

From the original theory, the last forty years have seen much debate, criticism and disagreement surrounding the development of grounded theory, with a number of different strands developing (e.g. - Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser, 2007). There is no singular accepted method with the approaches differing in their epistemological foundations. I have chosen to use Charmaz’s (2006) grounded theory approach because of its constructionism underpinnings. A key criticism of the other grounded theory approaches have been their objectivist leanings (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008; Creswell, 2009; Hallberg, 2006) and as such were less appropriate for this research. Charmaz’s methodology focuses on understanding the multiple perspectives of informant’s
experiences where meaning is seen to be socially constructed, which closely aligns with a symbolic interactionism theoretical perspective.

The grounded theory methodology looks at moving beyond description of the phenomena to the development of a higher-order theory. A key criticism of this methodology is that it has been used simply to provide rich descriptive data; Charmaz and Henwood (2008) stress the importance of this method surpassing description to the conceptualisation of meaning and its theoretical contribution. This outcome is achieved through looking past what the informants simply say and gaining an understanding of the underlying constructs influencing their statements. Theory is firmly grounded in the informant’s perspectives while acknowledging the influence the researcher has in interpreting findings and co-creating understanding. From a constructionist perspective, theories are not ‘discovered’ from the data as Glaser and Strauss propose but constructed by the researcher through interactions with informants, their viewpoints and the research context (Charmaz & Bryant, 2010).

Charmaz’s (2006) methodology focuses on theory development using qualitative data. As Bonoma (1985) stated, qualitative research is an important method of inquiry when the aim is to understand human behaviour. Shaw and Newholm (2002) propose that an understanding of the complexity of ethical concerns used when making consumption choices requires a method that extends beyond the ‘snapshot’ approach provided by survey data. Qualitative research has predominately focused on ‘what’ and ‘how’ research questions (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000), which is the focus of this research.

A grounded theory methodology is not simply a method of data analysis; it is a research style involving a systematic approach to the collection, analysis and interpretation of findings (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008; Liamputtong, 2009). A key element of this methodology is that the research must first be approached with an open mind and a limited understanding about the topic so that findings are derived from the data and not biased by previous research or the researcher’s preconceived notions. The research problem, and subsequently the research questions, are loosely defined at the beginning and become more refined over the course of the study as findings emerge (Dey, 1999). Hood (2007) states to be grounded theory research three main principles must be followed: theoretical sampling, constant comparison of data and theoretical saturation. In a theoretical sampling approach the sample size of the study is not predetermined but is dependent on the value.
of cases in formulating a theory. Information is collected from a number of sources, including interviews, observations and document analysis (Goulding, 1999). Data is analysed using the constant comparative method in which research is coded into categories that are continually compared so as to develop sensitising and analytical categories that conceptualise key elements and create a meaningful picture of the issues. Collection only finishes when theoretical saturation has been reached when no new key information emerges and an adequate theory has been developed. This study incorporated Hood’s three principles and the research methods section outlines the specific details on how these were applied.

II. Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a foundational method widely used in qualitative research. Thematic coding is predominately used within other methodologies like grounded theory (Ryan & Bernard, 2000), although Braun and Clarke (2006) argue it is a methodology in its own right. Thematic analysis is a meaning-based methodological approach for detecting, analysing and recording patterns within the data, and aims to offer deep insights into a phenomena (Boyatzis, 1998; Lane, Koka, & Pathak, 2006). Thematic analysis can be undertaken using a deductive or inductive approach; when used inductively it compliments a grounded theory approach which is why they are frequently combined (Berg & Lune, 2004). A strength of thematic analysis is its theoretical freedom which enables researchers to provide a rich and detailed account of the data (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2011), which is particularly useful when studying an under-researched group of people (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I chose to combine a thematic analysis approach with grounded theory so I could balance providing a rich description of the data with theoretical insights. Through the process of data analysis it emerged that I was in fact studying a subculture and if I had utilised a purely grounded theory approach than the insights the data provided into this group would have been absent. If I had chosen a singular thematic analysis methodology then I would have missed the rigorous analysis that grounded theory provides. It is argued that an integral part of qualitative research is flexibility in the analytical framework to appropriately fit the research questions and data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Maxwell, 2004; Patton, 1990). Utilising a combined approach was in response to my data and was utilised to strengthen the findings. In the results section I have chosen to provide rich description into what a sustainable
lifestyle entails combined with theoretical contributions on the motivations of this lifestyle and the associated identity constructs. The following section outlines the specific details on how the data was collected and analysed.

Research Method

A multimodal research design was chosen for this study in which several different modes of data collection were utilised. The value of a multi-modal approach is that data can be collected, presented and interpreted from a multitude of viewpoints; strengthening the research findings and enabling a depth and richness of findings to emerge (Carroll, Luchjenbroers, & Parker, 2004; Reavy & Johnson, 2008). Different methods can also enable the discovery of new information (Norris, 2012) and to check the reliability of the information presented by informants (Liu & O’Halloran, 2009). For example the physical ‘space’ in which research is conducted can play an integral role in the understanding and analysis of the data. The researcher interviewed people in their homes in order to be immersed in the context of their everyday lived experiences, and used observation to detect cues as to the reliability of the information being given (Lemke, 1998; Martinec, 2004). This inquiry takes an emic approach i.e. it explores how local people think; how they perceive and categorize the world, their rules for behavior, what has meaning for them, and how they imagine and explain things. It is about ‘understanding’ from the perspective of the informants and the multi-modal nature of the data collection allows the researched to drive the direction of inquiry using different means of expression, and for the researcher to become more immersed in their lived experiences. This makes it ideally suited for research being conducted in understanding informants’ lifestyle choices.

This study extended the traditional photo elicitation method by adding a journal in which informants could express their ideas, feelings, values etc. in an un-prescribed manner. Therefore there were four main methods of data collection: photos, journaling, interviews and observations. As visual images are a significant part of this research the following outlines the rationale for their inclusion, followed by the specifics of each method and a description of how the data was collected and analysed.
I. **Rationale for the ‘Visual’ Component**

Qualitative inquiry is about ‘understanding’ from the perspective of the informants. Visual techniques allow informants to drive the direction of inquiry and have a greater balance of power with the interviewer; the researcher is in their world and they are active informants in interpreting their own experiences. Harper (2002) succinctly articulates the benefits of imagery in research analysis, “When two or more people discuss the meaning of photographs they try to figure out something together. This is, I believe, an ideal model for research” (p.23). Visual experiences are inescapable part of people’s lives, their daily experiences and memories are constantly informed and filtered through what they see (Banks & Ruby, 2011). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) argued that our understanding of consumption experiences needs to extend beyond the information-based approach to incorporate the experiential aspects of consumer behaviour. In disciplines such as psychology, human geography, sociology, anthropology and media studies, the aesthetics of people’s life experiences are widely studied, with images serving as tools for creating new meaning (Banks, 2001; Malchiodi, 2003; Reavy & Johnson, 2008). Despite the prevalence of visual imagery in consumer’s lives, in qualitative research it has largely been marginalised with the majority of published research based on written text (Frith, Riley, Archer, & Gleeson, 2005). The lack of visual stimuli as a research tool has been attributed to the ambiguousness of images, which are more heavily reliant on the researcher’s interpretations, and are therefore perceived as less ‘objective’ than language (Clark, Prosser, & Wiles, 2010; Lynn & Lea, 2005). Schroeder (1998) suggests that images are not meant to capture the truth of phenomena; instead they are symbolic representations of what is important and meaningful.

Imagery can serve as a tool for understanding informants’ deep emotions and experiences that are not easy to articulate verbally (Banks & Morphy, 1997). Zaltman (1997) argues that consumer research methods should take into account the nature of thought production which includes both verbal and non-verbal elements. Standard qualitative research focuses on verbal dialogue but the majority of human communication is non-verbal, and people’s thoughts and emotions, which guide their behaviour, often occur without their awareness. Images have the ability to communicate deeper aspects of human consciousness and different types of information focused on people’s feelings and experiences (Harper, 2002;
MacDougall, 1997). For the informants in this study a sustainable lifestyle was central to how they lived and they were passionate about the subject area so it was an emotive topic for them. As feelings are formed prior to cognitive thought, people can struggle to express their emotions with words (Zaltman, 1997). For example, Aroha, one of the informants, found it challenging to articulate her thoughts and feelings with words yet provided a rich collection of images which she felt more adequately expressed her viewpoint. The images were used as a method of storytelling to express both her logical thinking and her emotional feelings. Visual methods are ideally suited for accessing and exploring more emotive content and exploring aspects of peoples identities (Harper, 2005; Holliday, 2007) so it was an appropriate method of data collection for this research.

The visual data is produced by informants and serves as key artefacts for discussion with the researcher (Heisley & Levy, 1991). The creation of images by informants is a form of self-ethnography, with the absence of the researcher resulting in more authentic expression that illustrates what is most important to them (Belk & Kozinets, 2005). Visual images elicit personal stories from informants with minimal prompting from the researcher and informants are able to self-reflect on their own actions, thoughts and attitudes. Harper (2005) found the use of images “proved to be able to stimulate memories that word-based interviewing did not. The result was that discussions went beyond what happened ‘when and how’ to themes such as ‘this is what this had meant to us’” (p.757). I found that to be the case in this research. My initial sensitisation interviews that did not include the use of images resulted in informants giving detailed descriptions of the different aspects of their lifestyle. When the images were added, the conversation extended beyond these stories to the deeper meaning these elements played in their lives. The interesting aspect of this technique is that the discussion of the photographs becomes a shared experience, the researcher almost as the tourist and the informant as the tour guide taking them into their world. Informants experience a sense of control and authority over the content, which offers a fairer distribution of power in the relationship compared to standard verbal interviews (Clark, 1999; Frith & Harcourt, 2007). Visual data is more than just an additional source of information, it can offer a different way of viewing and understanding an informants perspective (Pole, 2004). The key strength of this research was the inclusion of the visual element that offered informants multiple means of expression.
II. *Data Collection Methods*

There were a number of different methods that combine visual components with interview data. Varieties of this method include photo elicitation, videography, archival imagery, projective collages, autodriving and ZMET (Belk et al., 2003; Belk & Kozinets, 2005; Christensen & Olson, 2002; Harper, 2005). I choose a photo-elicitation method because of the descriptive and exploratory nature of this research and I wanted to use a method that would allow for open reflection and unstructured responses from informants. Given that the research context was people’s homes I also wanted to use a method that would give them the flexibility to capture and record the key aspects of their lived experience. A more prescribed method, such as ZMET, would have limited the open reflection that this research required and would be less congruent with the constructionist epistemology adopted in this research. This section elaborates on the four main methods of data collection: photos, journaling, interviews and observations as illustrated in Figure 2 to reflect the cyclical way each method strengthened the others.

![Data Collection Methods Diagram](image)

**Photos**

In this study informants were first asked to photograph elements of their life that represent ‘sustainable living’. During our first interview I discussed these images with them to help understand how they construct their version of a sustainable lifestyle. The images had
utilitarian and symbolic meanings. Informants produced visual images that reflected the physical aspects of their lifestyle (e.g. solar panels, recycled shopping bags) and symbolised important concepts (e.g. security, hope). Prompting from the researcher found that those items photographed for their utilitarian value often had layers of symbolic meaning. For example, Debra created an image that represented organic food. Further exploration found it represented ‘freedom’ and an ‘abundant lifestyle’. The informant gave the researcher an extensive tour around her property, selecting freshly grown food and creating a meal from their garden that demonstrated what an abundant lifestyle meant to her. The photos served as a cue to a much larger experience. In analysing visual images reflexivity is fundamental, the researcher needing to take into account the context in which it is situated and how images are stylised to create meaning (Banks, 2001; Lynn & Lea, 2005; Reavey & Johnson, 2008). McAdam (1988) proposes people tell their story with different layers of meaning (the content, narrator’s interpretation and historical setting) which all need to be taken into consideration.

**Journaling**

The journal was initially included in the study to compliment the photos and for informants to draw or paste images of any additional ideas not captured by film. A number of informants chose the journal as the main document for illustrating the concepts most important to them. This outcome was partly because certain ideas were easier to represent in a drawing. For example, Diana drew the concept of community and linked in the different groups she was a part of. For some it got around the issues of people’s anonymity – Fiona was uncomfortable taking pictures of her children so instead drew stick-figure images of them engaging in activities. For others, pictures gave them the ability to illustrate complex ideas not easily articulated through words. Jan drew a complicated image that reflected the different connections she saw between aspects of her life. These types of images present complex layers of meaning to be explored and analysed. As Zaltman (1997) articulates “pictures typically represent basic concepts that embody extensive information and defining attributes. The stories that accompany visual metaphors are highly revealing; they crystallize the essence of a picture as a representational medium for bundles of related thought” (p429). Reavey and Johnson (2008) assert that paintings in particular give insights into the nature of the phenomena, the person who created it and wider cultural meanings. The
richness of data that emerged from drawn images made this an invaluable tool. This use of a journal is an original methodological contribution of this study. I would argue future studies using photo elicitation would benefit greatly from the inclusion of a journal, not only to support photographs but as its own method of data collection.

**Interviews**

The interview is considered the basic method in qualitative research (Fontana & Frey, 2000) and a highly effective tool when researching a range of people that aims to generate theory in a specified area of interest (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). This method enables the researcher to discuss and examine the ‘lived experiences’ of the informants (Liamputtong, 2009). The interview is more than a one-sided conversation; it is a process of actively creating meaning between the researcher and the informant (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004; Roulston, 2010). Constructionist research is about the co-creation of meaning and as such the in-depth interview was an ideal method of data collection. I selected a semi-structured interview process as it allows the researcher to have some direction over the research but offers the flexibility to change direction as key themes emerge which enables informants to openly express their opinions (Cooper & Schindler, 2006; Esterberg, 2002). Using this method, the initial interviews were very open and as the research progressed the questions become more refined. Three sensitisation interviews were specifically conducted to check the interview questions and researcher style prior to data collection.

The interviews for this research were digitally recorded, thereby allowing me to concentrate on what the informants were saying and to ensure their comments were captured accurately. Some researchers suggest that taping conversations limits how open and honest informants can be (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) but the positive benefits of being able to capture exactly what informants say and the benefits of being able to revisit the data outweighed these concerns (King & Horrocks, 2010; Silverman, 2000). The interviews were transcribed verbatim by the interviewer and an external transcribe who signed a confidentiality agreement, all of which was acknowledged in the informant information sheet and consent form (refer to Appendix A & B).
Chapter Three

Research Approach

Observations

The experience of observing people in their home environment offered valuable insights into how people lived. Immersion in the ‘space’ in which the images were created also played an integral role in the understanding and analysis of images. It provided an opportunity to observe those aspects that people had chosen to push to the foreground and those that were deliberately marginalised to the background (Liu & O’Halloran, 2009). For example, Jess discussed the importance of native plants while suggesting I ignore her unsustainable dog in the backdrop. The choice of what not to photograph can be just as revealing as what was taken.

In keeping with a grounded theory methodology I made observational notes of people’s behaviour during the data collection process. Observing people’s facial expressions and body language can give cues as to the reliability of the information being given (Lemke, 1998; Martinec, 2004). Observational notes meant I continued to collect data beyond just the formal interview stage, which I found, was often when informants were most candid. For example, at the end of the study I asked informants to reflect on their participation in this research process and if it had changed their viewpoint in any way. The answer I predominately received was ‘no’, it had been good for them to reflect but they had always thought like this. This response was in contrast to the observational notes I had taken when making follow-up phone calls at the beginning of the study. Through the process of creating the photos and journals a number had reflected on how differently they had begun to see their lives and how they did so much more than they had even been aware of. By taking notes I was able to document the change in their how they viewed their lifestyle choices. Observational notes were also where I as the researcher was able to articulate my perspective.

Additionally, where appropriate I took my own photographs as type of field note. Peñaloza and Cayla (2006) state that from a consumer behaviour perspective it is the experience that is fundamental and imagery taken by the researcher when collecting data offers a medium in which to document these. I found it was useful to document experiences when I was conducting my research. For example, I took a series of photographs of Debra as she toured me around her property while selecting ingredients for our evening meal. It also meant I could capture images that informants may not have taken themselves, like Jan and Robert’s
eco-house which they discussed in the interview but had not photographed. To be respectful of informants and maintain their trust I made sure to ask permission, with all photos taken in their presence.

The multimodal nature of this research offers different viewpoints for analysing the data. Constructionism emphasises the role of language, with discourse helping people to construct their version of reality (Hall, 2001). Discourse though should not be limited to speech and includes the ways that images and stories can produce a perspective on events (King & Horrocks, 2010). This study combines informant self-reflection in photographs and journal entries, with researcher-led methods using interviews and observational data. The following section outlines the specifics of the multi-phase data collection process.

III. Data Collection Process

In keeping with a grounded theory methodology the study started with the researcher being acquainted with the current literature. This informed the research selection criteria and a sampling sensitisation stage. The process of collecting the data is described in detail as well as specific demographic data on the research informants.

Sensitising to the Literature

At the beginning of my thesis I conducted a literature search that assisted me in defining my research topic. In keeping with a combined grounded theory methodology and inductive thematic analysis approach, it was important prior to data collection to familiarise myself with the present thinking on sustainable consumption and develop my research questions. What emerged from the literature was a gap in understanding of what it means to live sustainably, with the necessity for research into the motivations of this lifestyle. Chapter Two outlines the main literature that initially informed this study. The literature that has since informed the results has been incorporated into the relevant sections in Chapter Four.

Selection of Informants

A theoretical sampling approach was used to select the informants, with each informant chosen according to the type of insights they offered the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As such, the sample size was not pre-determined but dependent on the data reaching a theoretical saturation point when no new themes arose. As Liamputtong (2009, p. 16) states
“the focus of sample size in qualitative research is on ‘flexibility and depth’. A fundamental concern of qualitative research is on quality not quantity”.

The boundaries I set at the beginning of the study were that the informants had to fulfil two set criteria:

1. Made a conscious choice to live more sustainably in their personal lives
2. Taken action and made physical changes to at least one or more areas of their lives (e.g. food, energy, physical home environment, transport, recreation, etc.)

Informants’ occupation was not a primary consideration when selecting them for the study. Some informants did work in sustainably-orientated organisations but the focus of this research was on people who were attempting to live sustainably in their personal lives. To recruit informants I attended sustainability groups, courses, festivals, regional and local events. A purposeful sampling strategy was used in which each informant was individually selected after I had a preliminary discussion with them about their lifestyle choices. Each informant was given a pseudonym to protect their identity.

**Sampling Sensitisation Stage**

The first four interviews were conducted November – December 2010 with a family in each of the four main centres of New Zealand (Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin) who were all in a different life stages (young single, middle age with young children, middle age with teenage children, older couple with grown children). The purpose was to assess if region or lifecycle substantially impacted on their responses. It was found that despite the regional differences the underlying concepts being expressed were consistent and as such I felt it was acceptable for me to conduct the remainder of the interviews in the upper North Island. The age and lifecycle of informants did impact on the types of choices they made and as such for the remainder of the study I consciously chose a broad range of people who were at different stages in their lifecycle. Demographic details are outlined in Table 1 on page 42.

**IV. Data Collection**

The core data collection was conducted in three phases from March 2011 – May 2012. The first phase was an informant self-reflection stage, the second phase consisted of an in-depth
interview conducted at informant’s homes and the last phase was a follow-up reflective interview (as illustrated in Figure 3)

Figure 3: Summary of the Three Phase Data Collection Process

**Phase 1: Informant Self-reflection**

In the first stage I sent informants a camera and journal and asked them to address the question of “What does living sustainably mean to you?” The informant pack contained a camera, A5 blank scrapbook, informant information sheet, consent form and a pre-paid return envelope. They could take pictures, draw images or write text – whatever they felt was most appropriate for them. Initially the cameras used were disposable ones but it was found that the picture quality was poor, informants were unable to check what they had taken and there was an inconsistency with the ‘sustainable lifestyle’ philosophy. Following the sensitisation stage three digital cameras were acquired. Once informants had completed their pack it was returned to me to analyse, after which I arranged a follow-up interview. One of the main challenges of doing visual research is the extended timeline required to collect data (Pink, 2007). Informants expressed that they found this stage challenging as it required them to reflect on all facets of their lives for them to be able to step back and take images that represented the aspects most important to them. As a result, informants took on average two to three months to complete this stage. Three informants pulled out of the
study during this phase – one was moving cities and a couple had just had a baby and found it difficult to have time to complete the exercise. Following the grounded theory methodology I stopped collecting data when I reached a theoretical saturation point where no new information of thematic relevance was being presented (Charmaz, 2006), what Dey (1999) describes as being theoretically sufficient.

**Phase 2: In-depth Interview**

In the second phase of the study an in-depth interview was conducted in informant’s homes. Four of the informants chose to meet at an external location as they were living in a shared housing arrangement with family and friends. They had already taken extensive photos of their home environment and I felt it was important to respect their privacy. For the other informants, visits to their homes enabled me to make observations and have a first-hand experience of their lifestyle choices. I was often given tours of their property and had a meal made from ingredients they had grown themselves.

All of the interviews were digitally recorded (see supplementary CD for the transcripts). In keeping with the methodological focus, the initial research questions were kept open to allow for changes in direction as new information emerged from the data. Over the course of the research the questions became more narrow and defined. These interviews were on average one to two and a half hours long.

**Phase 3: Reflective Interview**

A follow-up interview was conducted four to twelve months after the initial interview to check my initial constructs, ask additional questions, assess any changes that may have occurred over this period of time and reflect on the impact of the research process on the informants. In consumer behaviour research, the re-interviewing of informants deepens and strengthens research findings (Fournier, 1998; Wells, 1993). As this study is exploring people’s lifestyles over an extended period of time I found a number had gone through significant life changes. Some had made career shifts, e.g. Jess had left work and began studying to be a lawyer. Others had changed their physical location, work environment and relationship status. For example, when I first met Aroha she was married and working for a finance firm in Auckland. During the course of the research she left her husband, relocated further up the North Island for six months before eventually returning. When I conducted
our last interview she was in a new relationship and voluntarily choosing to be unemployed. In a case like this there were immense external changes between the research phases. For those informants where their physical environment had stayed the same, the energy they were putting into their lifestyle may have changed. Richard reflected that the first time I interviewed them they were being very productive but the second time they were in a lull. He revealed that their energy was very cyclical over an extended period of time:

“Lurching ahead and going fabulously and then it all sort of, you lose it for a period a month and then you get back into it again. I’ve found that frustrating in the past, things are still progressing even though you sort of lurch forward and back type thing”

Revisiting informants gave me the opportunity to be exposed to how their lifestyles altered over a period of time. Findings were not just based on a one-day snap-shot visit and how interviewees were feeling at that particular moment in time – the research reflected on deeper changes that occurred over an extended time frame, a strength of this research being its in-depth focus. At the completion of the study I had conducted twenty-eight interviews and collected three hundred images, and sixty-five pages of journal text.

V. Informants

Informants were purposively chosen for their theoretical contribution to reflect a spectrum of life-stages and ages. They were aged between twenty-one and sixty-five years with different family structures, including young single, de facto relationships, married with young children and teenagers, and older couples with grown families. Table 1 outlines their demographic data. A total of seventeen people participated, including three couples. The couples presented an interesting dynamic, shifting between similar comments and completely contrasting views. They often chose different modes of communication in the self-reflection stage. For example, Jan took photographs and drew images in the journal where as her husband Richard wrote a ten-page typed manifesto of his vision. I also researched a number of people in relationships who chose to participate on their own. Informally they reflected to me that they were the main driver of this lifestyle and their partner played a more supportive role. As my research focused on adults I decided not to formally interview their children but there were a few instances where they were involved. For example, Wendy’s son drew images in the scrapbook and was a key feature in her
## Table 1: Informants Demographic Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Relationship Status</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Regional Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4 children (13, 15, 17, 19)</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>Auckland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2 children (8, 12)</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Christchurch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Event organiser</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2 children (8, 12)</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>Christchurch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Debra</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Designer</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1 adult child (26)</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Dunedin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Dunedin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Jess</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Wellington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Student/ Housewife</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2 children (14, 16)</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>Auckland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Aroha</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Maori</td>
<td>Whangarei/Auckland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Auckland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>Midwife</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3 adult children (28, 34, 38)</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Hamilton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Jack-of-all-Trades</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3 adult children (28, 34, 38)</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Hamilton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Policy Advisor</td>
<td>Defacto</td>
<td>1 child (14)</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Hamilton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Kylie</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Charity coordinator</td>
<td>Defacto</td>
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<td>Auckland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
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<td>39</td>
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<td>None</td>
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<td>Auckland</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>29</td>
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<td>Married</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Auckland</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Anthony</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1 child (under 1)</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Auckland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>Defacto</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Auckland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
photographs. I believe a key strength of this research and its results is the diversity of people who were involved in the study.

VI. **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Commonly when a combined thematic analysis and grounded theory approach is used researchers do a ‘light’ version, neglecting the detailed data analysis that grounded theory offers at the beginning stages of research (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Groetzner, 2011). To offer rigour to my findings, I instead chose to undertake a full grounded theory analysis at the beginning of my study and incorporated King and Horrock’s (2010) thematic approach in the latter stages of the analysis. The following outlines the steps undertaken in the coding, analysis and reporting of the data’s text and images.

**Text Analysis**

An essential part of a grounded theory and an inductive thematic analysis approach is that data analysis is conducted throughout the data collection process. This process enables emerging concepts to be explored further and the strength of these emerging themes to be tested (Eisenhardt, 1989). For analysing the text I utilised Charmaz’s (2006) grounded theory coding approach that involved a systematic approach of initial coding, focused coding and memo writing. This research did not use the axil coding and theoretical coding approaches associated with Glaser and Strauss’s methods as they are more objectivist in nature and can force data into preconceived frameworks. Instead I incorporated King and Horrocks (2010) thematic analysis. They suggest three stages of analysis: descriptive coding, interpretative coding and overarching themes. Their descriptive coding approach is a similar, if somewhat, ‘lighter’ version of the grounded theory’s initial coding stage. As such I chose to incorporate only the last two stages of the thematic analysis approach. Figure 4 outlines the combined data analysis strategy I chose which includes initial coding, focused coding, interpretative coding, overarching themes and memo writing.

**Initial Coding**

The initial coding process involves analysing the data without predefined categories and being open to theoretical possibilities. Using a combination of line-by-line and incident coding, I identified key words and themes from the transcripts and my notes. I initially
planned to analyse these using a software package but their structure meant I could only do coding of themes across the informants. As I needed to separate out the themes for each informant for the reflective interview phase I instead had to conduct these manually. I created a physical data folder with a section for each informant and a summary sheet at the front outlining the key constructs and emerging memos. These served as the basis for the next interview. Throughout the data collection process I analysed the text using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which involves comparing the data for similarities and differences within an informants interviews and across informants. This form of coding forces the researcher to view informant’s interpretations with an analytical eye, checking the fit and relevance of emerging codes. At the end of the reflection interviews and initial coding process I combined the information on the summary sheets to form mind maps, outlining emerging themes across informants. These were provisional themes firmly grounded in the data.

**Focused Coding**

The second major phase in the data analysis was focused coding, which is a directed and selective form of coding where patterns are accessed within informants accounts and across the whole data set (Charmaz & Bryant, 2010). The initial codes served as the basis for the structure of my focused data coding when I returned and re-analysed the data to access
emerging themes. A theme is defined as a distinct and recurrent account of an informants viewpoints, which the researcher deems relevant to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The intent of this second coding process is to access the accuracy of codes and to allow the data to be seen afresh based on new insights. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommends that it is important for the themes to have ‘parsimony and scope’ before they are decided upon. From a constructionist perspective multiple meanings can emerge from the data and as such several theories may also develop (Creswell, 2009). I revisited my initial research questions and based on my data expanded or contracted these where appropriate.

**Memo Writing**

Memos are created throughout the research process, capturing the researchers emerging thoughts and ideas. They are analytical notes that give life to initial codes and assist in the development of focused codes. Charmaz (2006) emphasises the important of memo writing to capture ideas and advance the researcher’s thinking. I recorded memos for each informant and as the research developed thematic memos across informants. It was an opportunity for analysis and me to express my perspectives on the emerging ideas and shape the coding.

**Interpretative Coding**

It is at this stage that earlier codes with similar meanings are grouped together and the focus shifts from description to interpretation. Interpretative codes aim to encapsulate the abstracted meaning behind the earlier codes. It is important at this stage not to jump to theoretical conclusions and create a narrow framework, with the researcher continuing revisit the data to ensure themes are firmly rooted in the data (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2009). It is important to note that within the constant comparative method the writing and rewriting stages are considered an essential part of the analytical process (Bryant & Charmaz, 2011), as critical examination of the categories offers new insights and strengthens findings. I continued to develop my themes when writing the results, which involved revisiting and collapsing categories where appropriate.

**Overarching Themes**

Overarching themes are a higher level of abstraction where interpretative themes are coded into key concepts evident in the data. It is at this stage that themes are organised and a
hierarchy can develop with codes being collapsed and created as subcategories within the overarching themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Patton (1990) proposes themes need to have *internal homogeneity* and *external heterogeneity*, where they fit together in a meaningful way but are appropriately distinct from each other. Integrative themes, unique concepts within the data set, may also emerge and may be reported if of particular relevance (King, Carroll, Newton, & Dornan, 2002).

Themes are the building block of theory but they are not theory itself (Bryman & Burgess, 1994). From an interpretative perspective, theory is based on the *understanding* of social life as opposed to *explanation* (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004). As Charmaz (2006, p. 126) states “interpretative theories allow for interdeterminacy rather than seek causality and give priority to showing patterns and connections rather than to linear reasoning”. From a symbolic interactionism perspective, theorizing moves beyond individual inputs to understand the studied phenomena in imaginative and abstract terms (Maines, 2001). The resulting theory is an interpretation based on the researcher’s point of view – other researchers may produce similar concepts but how they theoretically depict them will be unique (Charmaz & Bryant, 2010). One of the challenges when reporting this type of research is to develop a thematic structure that offers clarity without being over-simplified and continues to capture the richness and depth of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King & Horrocks, 2010). Given the exploratory nature of this research and its focus on understanding a subculture I decided to write my results in a way that would offer the reader a balance of rich descriptive understanding with theoretical relevance.

Diagramming involves the visual representation of thematic ideas and is seen as an important end step in encapsulating key themes (Clarke, 2005). I found diagrams a useful tool in conceptualising key ideas throughout the research process and in the results section I present final diagrams that conceptualises the main themes relevant to each research question.

**Image Analysis**

The meaning of pictures can be ambiguous and multifaceted and Barthes (1977) argued their interpretation is not apparent until its accompanied by text. Words used by the researcher and researched frame the meaning of images and colour their interpretation.
Images though are not just about eliciting language as a means of analysis, they can powerfully illustrate a concept and in turn may change the way text is understood. Pink (2007) states the purpose of analysing images is not to change visual information into verbal knowledge but to use that information to explore other forms of knowledge; understandings that informants themselves may not have been aware of or able to articulate. To effectively analyse the meaning of images and text Felstead, Jewson and Walters (2004) propose a researcher must be reflectively aware and theoretically informed. Reflective understanding is a collaborative relationship that involves the researcher analysing their assumptions and being open to informant’s interpretation while using their theoretical understanding to inform their interpretation. For this research I chose a collaborative approach. I made notes on my assumptions of informant’s photos, images and journal entries. During the interview I used open reflection to explore the meaning of the images with informants. Afterwards I revisited the notes and reinterpreted their meanings based on informant’s insights. Using a constant comparison approach, throughout the research I continued to revisit my understanding of the images and reflected on how they informed my understanding of the text. In the results section I have chosen to exhibit the key images that reflect the relevant themes and sub-themes being discussed. While there were a number of images related to each theme I endeavoured to identify a core image that had illustrated and informed my understanding of the results.

**Quality Assurance Checks**

In conducting research it is important to have checks in place to minimise researcher bias and insure the quality of the findings (Fehring, 2002). Quantitative research relies on empirical tests (internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity) and a common criticism of qualitative methods is the lack of similar robust measures, with debate as to the appropriateness of applying adapted measures (Angen, 2000). Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose trustworthiness as a measure of research quality which consists of four elements: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability.

1. **Credibility**

Credibility considers whether the researcher’s constructs are effective representations of those given by informants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). From a constructionism perspective, this
is ensuring an understanding of the social phenomena as expressed though the multiple realities presented by informants. To ensure credibility of the data the transcripts were transcribed verbatim by the researcher and an external transcriber. Credibility can also be established through the use of triangulation, where multiple sources of information are used to verify concepts and ensure greater accuracy in findings (Stake, 2010). The multimodal nature of this research enabled the triangulation of people’s perspectives through the use of photos, drawings, written text and spoken language.

II. **Confirmability**

Confirmability is assessing that insights are based largely on informant’s perspectives and the conditions of the study as opposed to the researchers view (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This does not imply separating the researcher from the interpretation process but simply making sure the findings are based primarily on the informant’s view. I introduced the second interview in this research out of respect for my informants and to make sure I had captured their perspective accurately. It was an opportunity for me to feedback my interpretation and gave them an opening to contest or correct the information. Most of the informants spoke of how they appreciated me returning. From my own perspective, I experienced a deeper understanding of the concepts. To ensure my interpretations were not overly biased I enlisted a senior academic to audit the research process and ensure that my assumptions were appropriate (Hirschman, 1986; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The grounded theory methodology relies on the researcher’s interpretation and an essential part of this approach is that I outline my biases coming into the project and the changes of my thinking throughout the research process. As such the final section of this methodology elaborates on my journey as a researcher.

III. **Dependability**

Dependability measures whether the research process is consistent over the course of the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This judgement is hard to make in qualitative research as the measurement instrument is the researcher (Hirschman, 1986), but through the use of a semi-structured interview a similar line of questioning was employed with informants. This procedure allowed a level of flexibility as new information emerges, in keeping with this methodology. For dependability of findings multiple informants were interviewed until no
new information was being presented and emerging concepts were felt to be relatively robust (Stake, 2000).

IV. Transferability

Transferability is the ability of the findings to be applied in other contexts and to contribute to the development of theory (Hirschman, 1986; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Unlike previous research in this area which has focused predominately on more extreme outlier groups, one of the key strengths of this research is that it is looking at people across the spectrum of mainstream society attempting to live sustainably. The sensitisation stage enabled me to check whether I needed to research different regional centres and I determined the emerging themes were not context specific. This finding allowed me to concentrate the research in the Auckland region with the understanding that the findings could be applied more broadly.

This study also included outliers as a way of checking the transferability of findings within the lifestyle segment. For example, Aroha’s first two stages of data collection were conducted while living in an isolated region outside Whangarei. With no road access, I had to trek across the beach and rocky terrain for over an hour to reach her self-sustaining eco-house. I had to carry two days’ worth of supplies and take my rubbish with me when I left as there was no other means of transporting goods. This experience was in contrast to the experience I had accessing the other informants who lived in the main urban centres with easy access to amenities. I also chose to interview Jan and Richard as another outlier case as they lived on a lifestyle block in a rural area outside Hamilton. These alternative cases offered the opportunity to test the application of emerging concepts within a broader area, as well as proposing other interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I found that while the external representation of how these people chose to live was different, the underlying motivations were surprisingly similar. It is important to note that while the findings for this study are transferable within this lifestyle segment, further quantitative research is required for them to be generalised to the wider population.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations have been reflected on extensively throughout this research. In the interests of transparency all informants were volunteers who had been invited to
participate. Fontana and Frey (2000) state it is important to build trust with informants through clearly outlining the intent of the research and offering them the option to withdraw their information from the study. At the beginning of this study informants were provided with an informant information sheet and consent form (see Appendix A & B) to ensure they had full disclosure on the nature of the research (Christians, 2000). I also repeated the information again prior to each interview and gave the option to have any information they were not comfortable being included to be deleted. As it is important not to deceive informants (Whyte, 1984), the interviewing procedure was explained in detail, with permission sought to digitally record the interview and store this information in keeping with the Universities’ guidelines. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state it is important to strike a balance between the reporting of information and protecting the confidentiality of informants. Considerations were made in terms of guarding informant’s identities with the use of pseudonyms and removing identifying information from the transcripts, such as organisation names and those of family or friends they may have referred to.

The use of images in consumer research presents some unique ethical challenges. Sensitivities towards how people are presented in images needs to be taken into consideration. Harper (2005) perceives the role of the researcher as a visual sociologist, balancing the importance of full visual expression with the confidentiality of informant’s identity. Schroeder and Borgerson (2005) argue careful consideration must be given to how people are represented in print, ensuring they are not displayed in a negative or exploitative manner. A few informants decided not to take pictures of others as a way of protecting their privacy. Complete anonymity and confidentiality is almost impossible to achieve in visual research and raises issues of what is the most appropriate ethical practice (Clark, 2012; Wiles, Clark, & Prosser, 2011). Some authors advocate distorting the images as a way of protecting identities (Hindmarsh & Tutt, 2012; Oliffe, Bottorff, Kelly, & Halpin, 2008), while others feel this destroys the purpose of using visual images in the first place (Harper, 2002; Pink, 2007). Images of people in action were an integral part of this research so I have chosen to use the more common approach of pseudonyms combined with undistorted images as demonstrated by Grasseni (2012), Marquez-Zenkov (2007), Mizen (2005) and Prosser (2007). This enables the richness of the data to be represented while still protecting informants by disconnecting them from their visual identities (Clark, 2012). It is important to
gain informants consent not only in the collection of their images but for how they will be displayed to different audiences and contexts (Pink, 2012). In the cases where pictures of people were taken, I re-checked with informants at the second interview to ensure they were comfortable having their images documented in this thesis which they were.

Another common issue that can arise is ownership of visual information (Pink, 2007), a specific problem that was encountered in this research. One informant was reluctant to let go of their scrapbook because of the work they had invested in it and the insight it had given them into their life. A compromise was found with the work being returned to them after analysis. Collier and Collier (1986) propose that the tangible aspect of this research does bring to light issues around property ownership, something rarely encountered when dealing solely with text.

**Researcher’s Journey**

Research is a co-production between the informants and the researcher and as such reflexivity is an important part of the research process (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004; Roulston, 2010). Willig (2008) identifies two kinds of reflexivity: epistemological and personal. Epistemological reflexivity involves the researcher questioning assumptions made about the nature of the research, including how language is defined, interviews are structured and data is collected and analysed. Personal reflexivity requires the researcher to reflect on how their own beliefs, experiences and identities that may have affected the research outcomes. Within a constructionism perspective, it is particularly important to explore the multiple selves the researcher brings to the study (Reinharz, 1997). Throughout the research process I engaged in both epistemological and personal reflexivity. The latter was particularly essential given my extended immersion within groups that were part of the subculture. Willig (2008) argues for the necessity of a separate section reflecting on how the research has changed the researcher and their thinking on a topic. While reflexivity was undertaken throughout the research, the following is an attempt to encapsulate some of my key reflections at the end of this research and the impact it had on my perspective as a researcher.

My professional background is in marketing for non-profit organisations, specifically in the area of peace and conflict resolution. My previous role involved documenting and
promoting the antecedents and consequences of armed conflict. While working on the Sudan conflicts I first became interested in the environmental issue and its relationship to conflict; the Darfur crisis having been identified as the first violent conflict as a direct result of climate change (Ban, 2007). As countries experience more extreme weather conditions and its consequences, it is predicted that climate change is likely to become a key source of future armed conflict (Schwartz & Randell, 2003; Swart, 1996). It is on this basis that I became interested in sustainability issues - understanding what it means to live sustainably and how this knowledge could be used to encourage behaviour change.

While my professional background was in development work, I began this research with limited understanding of the environmental debate. I acknowledged that I held some negative attitudes towards the green movement. All the people I had previously known to be involved in this area were what I referred to as ‘hardened greenies’ - they appeared to anti-people and used the environmental problem more as a platform on which to judge others. It was important I recognised my past experiences and biases so I did not allow them to cloud my research.

During the course of the study I acknowledged a shift in my own values and began living in a more sustainable way. I had previously been conscious of my waste, had an ecologically-friendly car and used minimal chemical products. As my knowledge and exposure to the community increased I wanted to be more responsible in my choices so switched to organic food and began growing my own vegetables. While many of my informants made choices for ecological reasons I was conscious that my primarily motivation was my health. I explored with informants whether ‘organic’ or ‘local’ was a priority for them. Buying locally and minimising air miles was the predominant response, which was in contrast to me who was prepared to prioritise organic even if it had been shipped from overseas. I am also happy to get on a plane and fly anywhere without remorse, something most of my informants would feel uncomfortable about!

The visual method completely changed my research. At the beginning of the study my only intention for adding imagery was to serve as a warm-up to conversation. I was completely unprepared for how my informants would respond to them and how it would significantly change my data. For the informants, producing the images was both a challenging and rewarding experience. Many commented on how it was a rare experience for them to so
deeply reflect on their life choices and as a result they started to see their lives in a very different way. I have become a convert and advocate on using visual imagery – not only does it add rich illustrative examples of the text but results in deeper and more meaningful conversations.

On reflecting on this research, I can say that it has been a profound and life changing experience for me. I have had the opportunity to meet some inspiring people and become immersed in a vibrant community, many of whom have become my friends. I was invited to be on the board of a permaculture group and have been an active contributor for the last two years. Near the end of the study one of the informants stated I had emerged as one of the leaders of sustainability in the region. It was quite a surprise to me that I evolved from a naïve entrant to a key opinion leader in this field.

I would like to share one anecdote that I think accurately summarises my experience. On one Saturday outing with a group to the Waitakeres we stopped at a café and I had a stranger approach me to ask, “Who are you people?”. She had never seen such a diverse group of people from different ages, cultural and socio-economic groups and simply could not work out what the common tie would be. I have discovered that sustainability concerns and issues bring people together from all walks of life, the only strand of similarity often being a shared vision for a better way of living. While the literature often focuses on the negative environmental situation, I found this subculture firmly focused on the positive and were actively working to create a more abundant and prosperous future. They truly inspired me and changed the way I view the future. Pitcher (2012) states “If it is obvious that observation changes the observed then it should also be obvious that it changes the observer”. I can gratefully say I have been changed for the better.

**Chapter Summary**

This section outlined the rationale for this qualitative research study. The exploratory nature of this topic supported the use of a grounded theory methodology combined with a thematic analysis approach. This methodology was established within a relativist ontology, constructionism epistemology and symbolic interactionism theoretical perspective. The methodology offered a structured approach for data collection and analysis, undertaken using a multimodal qualitative research method, comprising of photo analysis, journaling,
interviews and observation data. Informants were selected using purposeful sampling and were individuals who are attempting to live sustainably in New Zealand. Quality assurance checks and ethical considerations have been accounted for in this study to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. This section ended with my reflection of the research process, outlining my own opinions and viewpoints coming into the study and how they have evolved over the course of this research through my participation and emersion in this subculture.
Chapter Four: Research Findings

This chapter outlines the results of the study, discusses their relevance to the established literature and develops new theory. One of the challenges of grounded theory is providing enough evidence to support findings while also moving beyond description to higher theoretical constructs (Charmaz, 2006). Given the overarching research question on what is a sustainable lifestyle, I have presented the results to capture the totality of the informant’s experiences and richness of data set as well as outlining the theoretical contributions. This chapter has been separated into six sections to answer the five research questions of the study. At the beginning of each section the relevant research question is outlined with a diagram summarising the key themes that will be discussed. In keeping with the methodology of this study, the purpose of these diagrams is not to depict causal relationships; they have been designed simply to clarify for the reader how the results will be presented. Figure 5 is a summary of the research questions and associated sections:

RQ1: What does it mean to live sustainably?
• Section 1: Sustainable Lifestyles Conceptualised
• Section 2: Tangible Aspects of a Sustainable Lifestyle

RQ2: What role does sustainability play in their identity construction?
• Section 3: Identity Constructs

RQ3: What are their motivations for living sustainably?
• Section 4: Motivations

RQ4: What are their challenges to living sustainably?
• Section 5: Challenges

Figure 5: Flow Chart Summarising Results Section
Section 1: Sustainable Lifestyles Conceptualised

A central focus of this study is to understand what it means to live sustainably in an urban environment. I address this in two research sections. This first section identifies the defining conceptual aspects and I argue for the existence of a subculture. The second section discusses the specific physical attributes that are an expression of this subculture, such as food, products and transport. I discuss the impact of a sustainability mind-set on consumption choices and its contribution to theory. Together these two sections answer the first research question of what living sustainably means for these informants, from both a conceptual perspective and how that is expressed in reality:

Research Question 1: What does it mean to them to live sustainably?

At the beginning of the study informants were asked to communicate their perspective of what it meant to live sustainably using a camera and a scrapbook. In this section I present my interpretation of the defining concepts as illustrated in Figure 6.
My analysis is that these informants are part of a subculture that has five main attributes: lifestyle, mindful, connected, active and empowering. I will begin by discussing these five themes and then present my rationale for the emergence of a subculture. As ‘sustainability’ is a central term in this research I first define what the concept meant for informants.

The term ‘sustainability’

The theme of ‘sustainability’ is central to this study so it’s important to understand what this term means. Informants struggled with the word ‘sustainability’ as they thought it was so heavily used it had lost any meaning. Anthony described his reservations:

“It’s got so many different meanings to it now, to the point where it’s almost become redundant... It’s kind of got this, the way that I’ve heard it used before it kind of places this inevitability around human civilization...It kind of, it makes it sound like there’s this end state that we’re working towards”

Anthony articulated informants concerns about sustainability being seen as an end-state. Informants stated it was impossible to be fully sustainable; as a human being living on this planet they were always going to have some impact. A few had preferred using the word ‘resilience’ as it instead reflected their ability to adapt to changing circumstances. They felt uncomfortable relying on societal systems to take care of them and were aiming to provide many of their own basic needs, such as food and heating. Mark wrote it was fundamental for him:

“Providing for ourselves and taking back the knowledge to do the basics whilst not entering into consumerism”

All of the informants positioned sustainability as a form of self-reliance, such as Mark’s manual coffee grinder in Image 1. He commented that it was essential he had tools that meant he could function independently if required. Being ‘resilient’ and ‘adaptable’ were key parts of what it meant to be ‘sustainable’ and my interpretation is that at a higher level
it reflected a need to feel in control of their surroundings and being able to respond to changes. Mark’s tool was a symbol of independence and control over his life. Informants were exhibiting all three aspects of Averill’s (1973) concept of control: behavioural, cognitive and decisional. Feeling a sense of control over their environment, events and decisions is a way of mitigating stress that can come from unexpected changes (Thompson, 1981). In the marketing literature, a sense of ‘control’ is also seen as an important contributor to customer satisfaction (Namasivayam, 2004). Through preparing for adverse situations, informants were effectively attempting to minimize the stress that the sustainability issues present and used consumption items as a means of personal empowerment.

Sustainability was about more than just the environment – it was a holistic concept that included economic, social, cultural and spiritual aspects. Image 2 is a drawing by Rebecca on what she considered being the four main components:

“I think traditionally, and even nowadays, a lot of people, sustainability is considered to be ‘green’ or it only represents the environment. Whereas I think in order to be sustainable you need to be considering the environment but you also need to consider the economic, social and cultural because then you’re sort of able to consider other aspects”.

As Rebecca explained, sustainability was an encompassing vision that affected all aspects of her life, which she thought was required if it was to be sustained over the long-term. Leiserowitz, Kates and Parris (2006) identify sustainability as an overarching value that contains aspects of sustainment (i.e. nature, life-supporting systems, community) and development (i.e. people, economy and society). Informants demonstrated both aspects, their lifestyle was not just about sustaining what is but encompassed aspects of a cultural system that continued to develop and grow. For these informants ‘sustainability’ was a predominate value. Values are the foundation for people’s attitudes which indicate behavioural intentions. People’s values compete for prominence and while research has
found evidence of pro-environmental values in the general population they have a lower priority relative to other values such as materialism (Karp, 1996; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Section four of the findings discusses the motives of a sustainable lifestyle and elaborates further upon why sustainability is a central value for these informants.

I interpreted informants’ perceptions of sustainability held an inherent contradiction. On one level being sustainable was about being ‘resilient’ - independent and able to survive on their own outside of societal systems. On a deeper level it was perceived as a holistic worldview that considered all aspects of the way informants were living within society. I interpreted that these diverging views came from an innate understanding that informants could not escape societal systems, nor did they necessarily want to. For example, Mark’s manual grinder meant he could make coffee without electricity for a short period of time but was ultimately reliant in the long-term on the raw product being shipped from overseas. Informants were concerned about the unsustainable practices imbedded within current society so looked for ways they could independently protect themselves while acknowledging their personal limits and reliance on societal systems. They were trying to find a balance between the sustainment and development dichotomies of sustainability.

Being sustainable went beyond environmental consumption choices, informants’ felt it impacted on all areas of their existence and how they chose to see the world. It was both a way of living and a point of view. This leads to the first theme of it being both a lifestyle and a fundamental part of who they are.

**Theme 1 - Lifestyle**

Sustainability was presented as a lifestyle and a way of living. Informants positioned it as a lens through which they viewed the world and impacted on every aspect of their lives, from the products they bought to where they lived. It effected major life decisions such as their career-choice, the size of their family and how they spent their free time. As Rebecca stated:

“I think living sustainably from me is an approach and way of life. It is embedded within the decisions I make. So can influence what I do, buy and eat quite considerably”.

For Rebecca, living sustainably had become such an innate part of her thinking that she automatically made sustainable decisions by default. Informants commented that they could never go back to how they lived before. A sustainable lifestyle was now an integral
part of how they saw the world and affected both their thoughts and practices. Within the theme of it being a lifestyle two main subthemes emerged: a life-long journey and a new way of living that combined old wisdom with modern thinking as illustrated in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Life Long Journey</strong></td>
<td>“A ‘truly sustainable’ lifestyle will be something I’ll always be working towards”. Aroha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Planning</td>
<td>“That’s what we love about sustainability actually, is that foresight of looking ahead, what can we do”. Debra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“There is an element of being almost thinking five steps ahead why and when you might need this object. But to do that you need already to have a system in place where you can utilise it”. Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Choices</td>
<td>“I’d buy, in terms of the purchases that I make, I buy stuff that I think represents quality and something that I want to use over a long period of time. Because of money but also because I think it’s the right thing to do”. Rebecca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Moderation</td>
<td>“There’s a lot of people that would live a much more sustainable lifestyle and then a lot of people that would live much less as well”. Kylie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. New Way of Living</strong></td>
<td>“A whole new way of seeing the world - a brand-new cultural vision”. Aroha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Mix of Old and New</td>
<td>“I think there’s some aspects of the nostalgia stuff, like the lost skills of sewing and bottling peaches and a slower life. I think there’s that, but then I think there’s also the technology changes that we’ve had that make things possible that weren’t possible twenty years ago”. Wendy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Embrace Technology</td>
<td>“I’ve enjoyed having modern things. I enjoy flying on an aeroplane. I enjoy having an internet connection. So there is this paradox of, I don’t necessarily want to go back to a world like my mother lived in, where she lived during the war years and were just surviving on vegetables and having to bicycle 10 kms to school”. Maria</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Subthemes of Lifestyle
Subtheme 1.1: Life-long Journey

For the informants, a sustainable lifestyle was not a passing fad, it was a lifelong commitment and something they were willing to take the time to create. Jan and Richard for example, spent considerable time thinking through future scenarios and how they would respond to them. At the beginning of the study they spent three days planning and gave me a ten-page dossier of their immediate and future ideas. I interpret that planning and thinking over the long-term made informants feel more in control of their future. The theory of planned behaviour identifies three main aspects of human behaviour: behavioural belief (attitudes towards behaviour), normative belief (subjective influence of others) and control belief (ability of external factors to hinder behaviour) (Ajzen, 2002). Ajzen states control belief combined with self-efficacy, a sense of confidence in a person’s ability (Bandura, 1977), has the greatest influence on people’s behaviours. Fishbein and Cappella (2006) have since equated control belief and self-efficacy as being essentially the same concept. The theory of planned behaviour has been applied extensively in the environmental literature to explain the gap in attitudes and behaviour. While a normative belief to shift to pro-environmental behaviour may be high, in individuals the control belief can be low and they are reluctant to act because they do not believe they can have an impact (Fransson & Garling, 1999; Kalafatis, Pollard, East, & Tsogas, 1999). The informants planned behaviour in this study suggests a high level of control and self-efficacy. They acknowledged low levels of perceived behavioural control over societal sustainability outcomes but were acting with the belief they could produce positive outcomes in their lifetime and were willing to work through the problematic challenges sustainable choices presented. The theory of planned behaviour goes part of the way to predicting behavioural intentions (Armitage & Conner, 2001), its weakness is that it does not account for the emotional aspects of behaviour (Dutta-Bergman, 2005; Perugini & Bagozzi, 2001). In this research I will argue that while self-efficacy and control do account for part of informant’s behaviour, the emotional aspects are a central driver.

One of the major challenges informants recognized was the impossibility of being fully sustainable. They felt limited in their ability to make perfect choices given the current structures of what they saw as an unsustainable society. A number talked about their lifestyle fitting along a scale from completely unsustainable to the utopian ideal of being
fully sustainable. They felt they were somewhere in-between and were always working to improve their position. Kylie, for example, reflected that she was not perfect but acknowledged her behaviour was better than others. I interpreted they were attempting a ‘moderate’ approach – acknowledging the imperfection of their choices yet focusing on what they could change and setting goals that maintained their motivation and continued growth. It was not an end-state they were going to achieve, instead it was a sense of ‘being’ and approach to life. This sense of ‘being’ is reflective of a moral orientation underpinning decisions and similar to Degenhardt (2002) I found the emotional aspect to be a underlying driver of a sustainable lifestyle. Informants were driven to make decisions that ‘felt’ right and were in alignment with their values to be a morally consistent version of themselves.

**Subtheme 1.2: New Way of Living**

My analysis suggests that informants perceived their lifestyle to be a new and better way of living. Nostalgia, the preference for objects with emotional links and idealized memories of the past, has been found to have a strong influence on certain types of consumer behaviour (Holbrook & Schindler, 2003). In this research though I found informants were not nostalgia for the past and wanting to go back to the way things were before. Jess, for example, felt that there was no such thing as a golden age. Informants respected the way past generations had lived more sustainably and were keen to reclaim some of the wisdom and practices of the past but combine it with current technology and know-how. A number of informants, like Maria, commented how much they actually enjoyed using modern technology and definitely would not want to lose it. Informants were clear they were creating a new lifestyle that had not been seen before. This new lifestyle was seen as being innovative and forward-thinking. The majority of informants positioned themselves as early adopters and believed when others saw the benefits they would follow as well. Early adopters are defined by their ability to adopt innovative approaches which results in a high degree of information search when making decisions and product usage (Ram & Jung, 1994). It is interesting to note that informants did not define themselves as ‘innovators’ – the very first to adopt new trends. My analysis suggests that the environmentalists were ‘innovators’ of the social movement. Informants were keen to distance themselves from this group due to perceived negative associations and instead chose to see themselves as just ahead of the curve before the early majority. Rogers (2003) described early adopters as
popular, well-educated, social leaders. This description appears to fit the informants as they were keen to be seen as respected opinion leaders and, as we shall see in later sections, they were actively engaged in presenting themselves as ‘normal’ citizens so they could be more effective at influencing others to change their behaviour.

The idea of sustainability as a lifestyle and a way of being is an important one. Informants saw a sustainability perspective as a type of lens through which they viewed all areas of their life and the decisions they made within it. No area of their life escaped scrutiny. They were committed over the long-haul and prepared to take the time researching consumption choices to ensure they brought the ‘right’ product. In Section 2, I elaborate on the key aspects of a sustainable lifestyle and what they take into consideration when making purchase decisions. Given the emphasis on it being a ‘lifestyle’ I have decided to use the term ‘sustainable lifestyle’ for the remainder of this thesis when referring to an informant’s attempts to live sustainably. I state their actions as ‘attempts’ because, as mentioned earlier, it was identified as impossible to achieve complete sustainability.

**Theme 2 - Mindful**

The third theme is the idea of being ‘mindful’. Sheth, Sethia and Srinivas (2011) define mindful consumers as those with a mind-set of caring for themselves, their community and nature which results in considered consumption behaviour that optimizes their wellbeing and values, and minimizes excess. Informants fit this description, positioning themselves as being ‘conscious’, ‘aware’ and ‘mindful’ of their decisions, thinking through the wider impact of their choices. Diana, for example, talked about the degree of thinking that went into her purchases:

“I think just being aware when you go out shopping of what you’re buying and, you know when you’re going to do takeaway foods, you know just I guess I’m quite aware of that sort of stuff, more and more”.

She considered all aspects of her consumption choices, including how she would dispose of packaging before she bought something. Informants perceived their actions as common sense and logical.

When informants made mindful decisions they felt they were living more in alignment and harmony with their environment. Fiona elaborates:
“When I do these things, when I take time and think about what I’m doing, there’s a, almost like a peace that exists inside me. Because I’m being more, I’m acting from a place of integrity, rather than a place of unconsciousness and just mindlessness if you like. It’s a mindful way of living”

For Fiona it appears the virtue of a mindful approach was a sense of peace as she was not acting in a way that contravened her moral beliefs or values. Moral philosophy effects a person’s evaluation of right and wrong which has a substantial impact on their consumer choices and practices (Vitell & Muncy, 1992). Kohlberg (1969) developed cognitive moral development theory to explain peoples ethical decisions. He proposed a three level, six-stage process for developing moral judgment over a person’s lifetime. The highest level is ‘post-conventional morality’ which represents a concern for the consistent application of universal principles for the benefit of all. At this level decisions are based on a sense of justice and what will be of equal benefit those in society. There is evidence in this research to suggest the informants were operating at this level. They considered the wider impacts of their behaviour and fought for the ‘fairness’ of decisions that impacted on others. They argued for the need to give equal consideration to a large subset of others that included people, animals and the environment in their decision making. This was not always possible so they had to bridge a divide between their moral ideals and the reality of their choices. Mindfulness was the process of them considering their options relative to their moral values.

Informants positioned themselves as living consciously and felt others lived in a more unconscious way. Rebecca told a story of two houses (Image 3) in her street that had different levels of mindfulness in their construction. The house on the left was a large mansion recently built. It was so big they had to buy their neighbour’s property to obtain resource consent. They had also shipped in materials from all over the world to build it. In contrast the house on the right was moved onto the site as opposed to building a new one. She felt the environmental footprint for building these houses and maintaining them were
significantly different. One was mindful of their environmental impact, the other was not. Being mindful was about being aware of the immediate and long-term outcome of their decisions. Turiel’s (1983) theory on moral development suggests social knowledge exists in three domains: moral, conventional and personal. For these informants their moral domain was having an implicit impact upon their perception of what conventional and personal ones were, with a certain level of judgment towards others who were not living up to their ideals. They had high moral standards that they were endeavouring to live up to. This led to two important subthemes that arose within the theme of mindfulness: the need for authenticity and the desire for a slower, more balanced life, as illustrated in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Authentic</strong></td>
<td>“If it says it’s sustainable I won’t necessarily accept that it is sustainable. But, you know, it might just be a tagline that someone’s using. I would like to kind of consider a bit more hypocritical view of it, yeah, because I do get a bit cynical if, you know, I think that people are just using it as a marketing ploy. And there are, perhaps there’s a real integrity behind the product in terms of sustainability”. Rebecca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Integrity in Values</td>
<td>“I’m coming from a place of integrity in what I do, and the effect that has for me and my family. It feels more in tune with who I am as a person, because I do care, I care what happens to the planet, and I care what happens to my kids and their kids. And we have a lot of freedom in our lives, and for me, I, you know my kids get fed up with me quoting with freedom comes responsibility. And I believe that we do have a responsibility to make sure we use the resources in a responsible way”. Fiona</td>
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<td>II. Moral responsibility</td>
<td>“I need to do what I know is the right thing to do and what we’re doing now is not the right thing to do, living an overly consumptive lifestyle, is not the right way to live. It’s not matching up with what I know to be true”. Jess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Slower &amp; Balanced Life</strong></td>
<td>“You get in that meditative state sometimes don’t you, and you can stand and listen to the birds, and watch them, and just enjoy life really, instead of rush, rush, rush, rush, rush, you know hurry, hurry, hurry, yeah”. Debra “I think ultimately to live sustainably that is the case, we do need to slow down. We do need to live within limits that does require us to change the way that we look at how we work, how we consume, what we consider fulltime”. Jess.</td>
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Table 3: Subthemes of Mindfulness
Authenticity and integrity emerged as important to informants when making mindful choices. Making choices with integrity was about informants living in alignment with their values. As Fiona elaborated to her integrity was about being responsible and making good choices. Informants expressed a strong sense of moral responsibility. Jess, for example, talked about there being a ‘right’ way to live. She reflected a number of informants’ beliefs in the importance of their external behaviour being consistent with their internal values. The desire for authenticity is ultimately about seeking what is real. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) define authenticity as experience that is unmediated, when something unaffected and original is presented. Many talked about having a ‘true’ sustainable lifestyle. They were critical of people who were sustainable just because it was fashionable and companies who made superficial green claims. As explained by Rebecca she tended to be sceptical of companies claims and desired consumables that were authentic. Within the marketing literature ‘authenticity’ is seen as an essential element of any type of consumption communities (Leigh, Peters, & Shelton, 2006; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). From a constructionism perspective, authenticity is negotiable and based on a person’s evaluation of their experience or an object as being genuine (Cohen, 1988). Unlike Grayson and Martinec (2004) who suggest authenticity comes from the objects people interact with, these informants were seeking goods as a means to obtain an authentic version of themselves. They were essentially trying to achieve existential authenticity where a person is seen as being true to themselves (Berger, 1973). Wang (1999) proposes the desire for authenticity is to bring forth a ‘real’ version of themselves which is formed by overcoming challenges and creating experiences that enable people to move beyond their normal, mundane experiences. Sustainability challenges present people with an opportunity to articulate Wang’s perspective as informants search for objects that are real and actively reject the superficial. From this perspective, the limited amount of authentic goods that fit informant’s criteria make their eventual acquisition a self-defining experience. The subsequent result sections will elaborate further on the desire for authentic goods and their role that it played in articulating informant’s self-concept.

In the second subtheme informants presented a mindful life as a slower and more balanced one in which they took time for things they enjoyed. They positioned a modern consumerist lifestyle as being busy and rushed. A slower life was about people simplifying their choices,
working less and putting their energy into the things that mattered most. A consumer’s choice to immerse themselves in their consumption experiences is said to result in a deepening of their life experiences (Firat & Dholakia, 1998). They are literally extending the pleasure they receive from the experiential aspect of their activities (Caru & Cova, 2007). It would appear that immersion into a sustainable lifestyle involves slowing down and appreciating one’s experiences more fully. A desire for ‘balance’ is identifying the need to experience all aspects of their life fully. As discussed earlier, the ideas of being in ‘balance’ and living in a moderate way were recurring concepts.

**Theme 3 - Connected**

A key theme to emerge was that a sustainable lifestyle was one of ‘connection’. Informants felt a sense of connection to people, animals, plant life and the planet. Jess, for example, explained how a sustainable lifestyle was all about feeling connected:

“To feel like you were giving something back to make a positive contribution, feeling in connection with your fellow human beings and the land and this environment”.

Informants expressed that everything was interconnected. Debra, Marie and Richard described how they believed people, animals and the environment were part of one connected organism. They were demonstrating values consistent with ‘Universalism’, a understanding and concern for the welfare of others, which is similar with previous studies on environmentally friendly behaviour (Stern, 2000; Thøgersen & Ölander, 2002). Research has found that a concern for nature similarly relates to a concern for people outside of a person’s immediate in-group (Schwartz, 1992). Osbaldiston and Sheldon (2002) identify ‘connection’ to past and future generations and to nature as a necessity for people to internalise ecological sustainable values and behaviours, a finding that was supported by this study. Informants took it further by perceiving everything as existing as part of a singular consciousness. Because everything was connected, they felt people had a responsibility to make good choices.

A sustainable lifestyle was positioned as one of connection and an unsustainable one of disconnection. In this excerpt Fiona discusses how judging others and seeing them as separate was a perception of disconnection, where as a sustainable mind-set was about appreciating the interconnection:
“That is not a sustainable way of being. Because then we create, or I create difference, and separation, and otherness between me and other people, and perhaps other races, other genders, etc. And until I explore that and I make an effort to bring my own prejudices to consciousness, there is a risk that I will not be living sustainably in terms of being fully interconnected and as interconnected as I can be with other human beings and with the planet as well”

Fiona, like other informants, was endeavouring to live a life that considered the interconnections of all things. Christian disclosed that he felt he previously lived an insular and disconnected life – he worked all day on the computer and his feet barely ever touching the earth. The choice to live more sustainably was transformative for him and represented a reconnection with the earth and people in his community. Image 4 is Jan’s attempt to encapsulate how everything in her life was connected. Her life was not compartmentalised, it was all inter-connected.

Informants believed this feeling of connection was an essential requirement for people to make good choices. Richard believed that a connection to the land was the reason people made ethical decisions:

“If you’re connected with the land, you won’t do things. Like, you know, these people that work in high rises in the corporate world and that sort of stuff. If they were connected with the land, their decisions, some of their decisions would be different. And that’s the same, it doesn’t only apply to people in the corporate world. It applies to anyone”.

Informant’s sense of connection to other people meant they cared deeply about how their actions would impact others. Wendy, for example, was uncomfortable buying products from overseas as they lacked a sense of connection with the people who made them:

“You want to know who they are, so the little Chinese woman who makes my underwear, it’s like what’s her name, what are her children like, does she have a husband and what are her
dreams. That’s only the one who stitches them together, what about the guy who then ships it off. It’s just that I do find that quite weird, especially with food because you’re then consuming all the people’s fingerprints or whatever that’s been on that food”

Wendy’s statement implied that a sense of connection resulted in a transference of a person’s energy on to the items themselves. Not knowing who had created it made her feel uneasy, as if she was consuming parts of people unknown. She is expressing concern of contamination, a negative reaction to other people touching goods they will consume even if they are left physically unharmed (Argo, Dahl, & Morales, 2006). Contamination is based on the law of contagion which proposes that when a person touches an object they pass on a piece of their essence that will continue to influence it well after contact (Rozin & Nemeroff, 1990). People can react negatively as a result of touch or positively if the person is perceived to have desirable moral or interpersonal similarities (Nemeroff & Rozin, 2000). In this case Wendy is reacting negatively to perceived contamination. Having to know where everything came from is about feeling a sense of control over their environment. Her desire for goods from people that she knew was an attempt to achieve the more positive side of contamination. There was an acknowledgement that contamination was always likely to occur so if she had a choice she wanted to connect with the energy of people she related to. Informants were clearly demonstrating an acute awareness of positive contamination and the desire to avoid the negative aspects (Fernandez & Lastovicka, 2011).

This theme of connection has a strong emotional component. Kael’s and Maes (2002) suggest any model on sustainability needs to include this aspect. Informants described their experiences as a heart-based connection; living in a way they felt was more human. Jess related a story of returning from an eco-retreat and feeling emotionally disconnected:

“You come to a place where we are totally removed from that and you recognise another way of living and I went back to London from that week and I felt like my heart was broken. To go from this world back into the harsh heavy world – of people who didn’t really care, where things were on such a huge scale, non-human scale and it was really emotionally hard for me and from then things just started changing in my life because I’d seen, I’d seen a connection to the environment”

Similar to Jess many informants felt the lack of an emotional connection with the earth and other people effected people’s physical and emotional health. A connected life was one in which people felt a connection to something greater than themselves and gave their life
meaning. The idea of connecting to a higher life force will be expanded upon in Section 3 when discussing ideology motives.

This desire for a ‘connected’ way of living is a central finding in this study. Informants’ intent and actions were focused on achieving a sense of connection, whether it was with the land, other life or people. Often it was about achieving a sense of deep emotional connection to their wider environment. Research has found emotional connectedness to be an important but secondary motive for engaging in sustainable behaviour (Schultz, 2002). In this research it emerged as a central motive. Subsequently it is a theme that will be revisited when discussing the results in this study. Its overall importance will be elaborated further in the discussion section.

**Theme 4 - Active**

A sustainable lifestyle was seen as an active one with a strong behavioural component. It was not enough to talk about it – they had to live it and take some form of physical action. It was often seen as hard work and required dedicated time and practice to achieve. Jess felt the communes of the past failed because they didn’t realise the work required:

“To live sustainably is very active, you can’t be passive, none of the communes of the 1970’s worked because of the fact that they didn’t do enough hard work and to live sustainably is hard work”

Jess felt it was the physical actions that made her lifestyle meaningful and rewarding. What being ‘active’ meant was different for everybody. For some it was growing their own food, for others it was encouraging and inspiring change, and for a number it was about protests and political engagement. There were a few who were active in all areas. As Christian stated it was a matter of finding a form of actions that worked for him:

“I fantasise about joining direct action groups and all of that. But it’s just fundamentally not who I am. So I’ve accepted that and it might sound like I’m a hypocrite but in my own way like I can’t say that I haven’t done anything. Coz you compare me now to me five years ago and there’s such a massive shift in just about every aspect of my thinking and approach and future plans”

Christian’s views reflected a number of informants who saw their lifestyle as an active form of protest. Aroha expressed how her lifestyle choices were a deliberate departure from the norm:
“I sort of felt like there were extreme options that I could take and sort of a lifestyle protest or something which sort of appealed to me more than just continuing on sort of treading water the way I was”.

Aroha had tried to retreat from society and live sustainably in an isolated community outside Whangarei but had eventually decided it was more important to be living within society and try to change from within so had returned to the Auckland urban centre. There she became heavily involved in the Occupy movement and felt it was important to make a stand against what she saw as the mainstream unsustainable way of living. As she later quoted:

“I couldn’t live the way I thought I was supposed to live within society and be at peace with myself”.

Her sentiments were reflected by a number of informants – they were making changes for their own personal benefit but were equally invested in setting an example of others. Kylie, for example, had become good at reusing common waste items in her garden but thought it was equally important to share that knowledge with others so created a series of instructional classes entitled the ‘Maker’s workshops’. Image 5 is a photograph from the first workshop that illustrates people in the community learning to reuse common waste items. It also represents this theme of being active and taking steps to bring about change. According to Bandura’s (2001) social cognitive theory, agency is a person’s deliberate intention to make things happen through their actions. A person’s propensity to act is directly related to their efficacy and belief in their ability to control the outcome. Bandura presents three types of agency: direct personal agency (one’s ability to achieve an outcome), proxy agency...
(relying on others to achieve outcome) and collective agency (using social coordinated actions and interdependent frameworks). Globalisation and modern living are said to have led people to rely increasingly on collective agency to solve their problems and shape their lives. These informants rejected this notion and were focused on direct personal agency to achieve their outcomes. They were also positioning their lifestyle as a form of protest against current forms of collective agency.

I found that being active comprised a component of working with others to bring about change. From the literature on collective behaviour, social ties are positioned as an essential aspect of people taking actions that benefit a social movement (McAdam, 1999; Rosenthal, Fingrutd, Ethier, Karant, & McDonald, 1985; Snow & Oliver, 1995). It appeared the informants were actively seeking groups and networks to give them a platform for promoting change. Given that the issue of sustainability involves larger societal shifts it also seems appropriate that informants would be looking beyond their own lives at ways of connecting and inspiring others to make changes. Research on social movements also suggests that personal self-efficacy – a belief that a person can make a difference – combined with a low level of trust in existing powers is a precursor to people taking action (Bandura, 1995). A sense of personal efficacy has been found to contribute to the development of a sense of collective efficacy, which is a belief in the ability to achieve social change through united action (Fernández-Ballesteros, Díez-Nicolás, Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Bandura, 2002). The informants were exhibiting high levels of personal self-efficacy. They were critical of existing societal practices and were not waiting for the government to step in, instead taking it upon themselves to create change. Section Two of the results will elaborate further on the physical attributes and actions that were essential to achieving this lifestyle. In Section 3 this concept of being actively involved will be explored further in the identity concept - ‘Engaged Actives’.

**Theme 5 - Empowering**

A sustainable lifestyle was positioned as a positive and empowering lifestyle choice. Informants thought others perceived this lifestyle as being about living with less. For them it was about making better choices that had a positive impact on themselves and others. As Rebecca discussed she perceived her life choices to be positive:
“Just living to sort of reduce or sort of make my mark in the world (laughter) in a positive way as much as a positive way with as possible rather than a negative. So tread lightly in the world”.

This idea of ‘living lightly’ was a common concept. Aroha, for example, produced Image 6 to illustrate her desire to tread lightly on the earth. She wanted to be but a shadow upon the planet so that when she died she would have had as minimal impact as possible. When I discussed this image with the other informants they thought it was about being more than just a shadow. They wanted to have an impact and leave their mark. Mark comments echo these sentiments:

“Having a sort of zero impact on society or on the environment and probably more than that is I suppose a bit of positive impact on both”.

Within the idea of it being an empowering choice, two main subthemes: abundance and hope, as illustrated in Table 3.

A sustainable lifestyle was positioned as one of infinite abundance. Christian talked about how nature was a natural producer and he thought everyone could benefit from the wealth it provided. As opposed to be a lifestyle of limited choices it was seen as one that offered natural abundance and growth. Debra felt a huge sense of abundance from being able to produce a meal from her own backyard. Image 7 was taken of the evening meal I had when I visited her and John. She took me on a tour of her garden to collect the ingredients and I took a series of photos of her exclaiming the sense of joy, wealth and abundance she felt this lifestyle offered. Campbell (2006) proposed that sustainable life choices were motivated by the people’s desire to seek pleasure from their experiences and activities. They have similar motives to hedonic consumption but were just expressed in different ways. I found support for this notion and agree with other authors who argue that the future may not be about consuming less but focused on choices that offer people a better quality of life (Csikszentmihalyi, 2006; Kaplan, 2000).
### Subthemes

<table>
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<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Example</th>
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| **1. Abundance** | “It’s like a 10 fold increase in material. For, virtually no effort, that’s nature. All of us could be so abundantly wealthy and rich in that kind of wealth, you know, so easily. Just by changing all of the systems that we know. There’s absolutely no reason, fundamental reason why they didn’t have gardens of Eden all over the city” Christian  
“We’re looking after the mind, body, spirit, we’ll pull this through to look after the universe and our environment as well, you know, it’s all about that. Huge” Catherine |
| **2. Hope** | “You can feel the wellbeing of the land and I find that’s quite neat, it gives me a lot of hope for the future”. Jan  
“I think the more I learn and the more I go through and try and put effort, the more positive it gets. I feel really proud now which is also to feel and really hopeful for the first time in a long time”. Aroha |

This lifestyle also gave informants hope and made them feel that a positive future was possible. Aroha, for example, discussed how it gave her purpose, something to live for and work towards, as she illustrated in Image 8. She reflected on how taking action decreased her fear and she experienced a sense of peace and hope. Many of the informants reflected on being aware of the seriousness of the environmental situation but were choosing to focus on the positive because it was more empowering for them. Harre’s (2011) work on sustainability strategies suggest a positive approach is necessary to maintain this lifestyle. I found these informants experienced genuine pleasure and enjoyment from their life and it was a defining factor in their sustained involvement and encouragement of others. I support Harre’s (2011) proposal that the ‘fun’ and ‘enjoyment’ aspect is not just a future benefit; it is equally important to promote it as an
immediate benefit to inspire others to join.

This idea of it being a positive lifestyle is an important point. In the literature sustainability was presented from a more negative perspective. Arguments focused on the need for people to be aware of their environmental impacts and live more simple and frugal lives otherwise the future would be bleak, full of misery and hardship (Lenton et al., 2008; Schmuck & Schultz, 2002). The research informants took a very different perspective and saw their lifestyle as positive and life affirming. It was not about living with less but making smarter more conscious choices, which made them feel abundant and created a long-term sense of satisfaction (Dolan, 2002; Inglehart & Klingemann, 2000). In Section 3 this concept will be elaborated upon further when I discuss ‘Enjoyment’ as one of the key motivators.

**Superordinate Theme - Subculture**

I propose that informants are acting as part of a subculture and the conceptual aspects represent the defining attributes. Subcultures are groups of individuals brought together by shared experiences, languages and behaviour (Gelder & Thornton, 1997). Subculture participation is pro-active and can have a transformative effect on people, playing a central role in their lives and offering deep social bonds (Arnould, Price, & Otnes, 1999). Historically perceived as a problematic deviation from the normal societal structure (Durkheim, 1964; Parsons, 1951), modern scholars have attempted to position subcultures in a positive way as a form of counter-culture that exists within the dominant structure (Gelder, 2005). The research informants did not want to be positioned as extreme outlier group, instead they
identified the necessity to be perceived as a group within society to make themselves attractive for others to join and avoid being alienated. Thornton (1995) developed the idea of ‘subcultural capital’ that describes the importance of membership status to its participants and the associated hierarchy and inherent values. In this research there was evidence of membership criteria and a social hierarchy with opinion leaders. Membership was determined by the exhibition of authentic values and behaviours, such as growing your own food, which Thornton (1995) suggests are an essential part of defining the subcultural boundaries. While I determined they were a subculture the informants are likely to reject the notion wanting to be positioned as having ‘normal’ values and being a part of mainstream culture. As Robb stated:

“I think you’re trying to wear the hat all the time of Joe Public, Mr Average, Mr and Mrs Average with 2 kids, you know. And what’s gonna turn you off, or turn you onto doing this … A lot of those people, like the Green Party in a way, some of the things they come up with you just think it’s just too extreme to work. And that’s a turnoff, you know a lot of people just say, they switch off to the whole concept unfortunately because of a headline, or, you know a comment. And we wanted to try and avoid that. We sort of wanted to plant ourselves in the middle somewhere as, you know just normal people who wanted to try and do something about it”.

Robb like many informants acknowledged his differences to others but felt it was fundamentally important to appear normal if he was to be effective at inspiring others to change.

Informants were deliberately downplaying their subcultural status, while exhibiting actions consistent with one. They were participating in what I have defined as a ‘cloaked’ subculture – a lifestyle with established components and boundaries yet did not want it to be explicitly identified as such by others. While research has looked at secret subcultures based on fetishes (Langer, 2007), criminality (Chin & Chin, 1990; Moore & Vigil, 1987) or exclusivity (Dowsett, 1993; Young, 1999), this groups motive was its ability to effectively persuade others. If they could not be labelled or identified as a specific group and were perceived as being part of society then the ability of their actions to appeal to others and encourage change would be greater. Despite this, the nature of their activities and similarities among informants led me to deduce they were clearly operating within a subculture, albeit one consciously cloaked.
In using the term ‘subculture’ I had considered alternative concepts presented in the literature. In marketing, research has focused primarily on subcultures of consumption, those formed around certain consumption activities (Christensen & Olson, 2002; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995) and those that specifically evolve around brands (Kozinets, 2001; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Burgh-Woodman and Brace-Govan (2007) state that while subcultures of consumption and brand communities revolve around consumption choices, subcultures are broadly formed based on activities, shared emotions and philosophical outlook. They argue that by focusing purely on the consumption element the depth of understanding of a subculture is lost. I found that while consumption was a part of this lifestyle it was not the defining factor so the definition of them as part of a broader subculture was more appropriate. I considered using the postmodern concept of ‘tribes’ as an alternative to subcultures. Tribalism places the desire for ‘community’ at the centre of peoples choices; unlike the traditional communities of the past, tribes are not limited by spatial distance and are instead defined by shared lifestyles, beliefs and consumption practices (Cova, 1999; Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009). The underlying desire is to connect with others and tribes are actively seeking locations and goods that enable them to do so. The quest for community and connection with others meant ‘tribalism’ could have been appropriately applied to the informants. Within the marketing literature, tribes see the symbolism of goods, the identity it presents and its ability to connect with the group as being more important than the good itself (Cova & Cova, 2002; Elliott, 1999). This approach was in stark contrast to the informants who prided themselves on using goods not for their image but for their personal functional value and meaning. They were seeking authentic experiences, of lesser concern was the ability of their consumption choices to resonate or connect with others. Subsequently I believed that subcultures were a more appropriate way of defining the informants. They were choosing to create community through working together as opposed to relying on products as a symbolic means of connection and belonging.

**Section Summary**

A sustainable lifestyle involved cognitive, emotional and behavioural components. On a cognitive level this lifestyle was seen as a mind-set based on sustainability values – they thought extensively about their life choices and were conscious of how their decisions
impacted on themselves, others and the environment. On an emotional level they were seeking a sense of connection, wanting to make choices that were authentic and in alignment with their values and living a life that was positive and empowering for them. On a behavioural level, this lifestyle required that people take authentic action. I propose that the emotional aspect is a particularly significant aspect. Even cognitive components like mindfulness had a strong moral and emotional component. Throughout this thesis I will argue for the prevalence of the emotional aspect as a key driver of this lifestyle. Importantly it appears that informants are part of a subculture but one that wants to remain cloaked so that others can see them as part of society not as a distinct and separate group. It is in this perception of being normal that they feel they can have the most impact, endeavouring to create and inspire change from within society as opposed to critiquing it from the outside. This section has addressed the first research question on what it means to live sustainably from a conceptual perspective. The next section completes this answer by addressing the behavioural aspects that are an expression of this lifestyle.
Section 2: Tangible Aspects of a Sustainable Lifestyle

This section answers the first research question on what it means to live sustainably from a behavioural perspective. The physical tangible outcomes are an expression of this subculture and offer insights into what is distinct about this lifestyle. In this section I explore and analyse why they are meaningful for informants. I argue that a sustainable lifestyle affected all aspects of informant’s lives from their consumption choices to their social networks and career options. It was not a separate fragmented part of their lives but a subcultural mind-set. At the end of this section I will outline my analysis of the key attributes of this subculture. Figure 7 illustrates what emerged as the main tangible aspects of a sustainable lifestyle:

Figure 7: Summary of Tangible Aspects of a Sustainable Lifestyle
Theme 1 - Food

Food emerged as a fundamental part of a sustainable lifestyle. Everyone grew some food – whether in a large lifestyle block, urban backyard or small apartment building. Growing their own food was positioned as an important first step in people becoming sustainable and it was an area where informants felt they could make the most impact. Christian had been motivated to transform his backyard into an abundant, productive garden. Like many others, he felt growing food was an essential part of his actions being in alignment with his values:

“It’s a small response but it’s still the vital response, it’s still like a step that needs to be taken. And without taking that kind of step you are part of the problem. You can’t deny that you’re part of the problem and I just didn’t want to be. Especially when I was like so worried and talking about it all the time but not doing anything, you know”

Christian positions food production as a moral issue and a physical expression of his values. Producing and making one’s own food was considered a fundamental part of this lifestyle. Food has been found to represent notions of health, pleasure and affection (Gustafsson & Sidenvall, 2002; Lupton, 1996). These were demonstrated in this research in which four main sub themes emerged: Natural produce, enjoyment, self-reliance and connection to the source as illustrated in Table 4.

Producing food meant access to fresh, natural and tasty produce. Informants, like John, were concerned about their health so having food that was natural, in-season and free of chemicals was important. There was also prominence placed upon producing food they had grown and cooked themselves. Diana took Image 9 to illustrate this garden to kitchen connection. Food that has been produced at home has found to

Image 9: Diana’s Garden to Kitchen Connection
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Natural</strong></td>
<td>“The freshness is there sort of thing, you can almost taste the freshness, sounds a bit airy fairy but I think for me that’s what it is sort of thing, that fresh foods and you get the salad and if everything’s from the garden within the last half hour it does have an energy about it sort of thing” <strong>Mark</strong>&lt;br&gt;“What idiot would want to eat chemicals? But people do it coz they don’t know they’re chemicals, half of them, half the people these days. But if you know what’s in there you wouldn’t eat it” <strong>John</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Enjoyment</strong></td>
<td>“There’s a real sense of satisfaction that you can grow your own stuff. Like you can completely rely on your ability to grow your own stuff and to eat your own food and it’s, and I know myself, I’ve got a small bit out back, but when I pick something it feels so good. It’s like, oh, I’ve grown that myself” <strong>Catherine</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Self-reliance</strong></td>
<td>“Just that you have a connection to it, you know where your fruit’s been. I know that when I step outside once those plums ripen up that I walk thirty paces, I’ll pick the fruit and I’ll eat the fruit. I’ve just observed the complete cycle of life of growing and eating it. Whereas when you turn up at the supermarket you don’t know who’s handled it. It’s the sense of all those people that have been a part of your fruit that you’re eating, it’s almost like you’re consuming them as well” <strong>Wendy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Connected to Source</strong></td>
<td>“There’s no connection is there, what I buy in a nice little shrink-wrapped pack in the supermarket and, you know, cuddly animals” <strong>Catherine</strong></td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 4: Subthemes of Food

provide a sense of coherence, stability and renewal of inter-generational family meaning (Moisio, Arnould, & Price, 2004; Oswald, 2003). There was an aspect of nostalgia for traditional family values in this research, with informants discussing food being produced in the old-fashioned ways. Food though was primarily positioned as a means of connecting with present energy as opposed to the past. They discussed a special energy and vibrancy that fresh food had, like Mark who described his experiences of eating food that had just been picked. He alludes to a sense of ‘magical’ energy that exists in nature. While magic has been discussed in consumer research in terms of consumption experiences (Arnould, Price, & Otnes, 1999) and fetish objects (Belk, 2010a; Fernandez & Lastovicka, 2011), these informants were seeing its existence within ordinary temporary objects, with the act of consumption enabling them to fully assimilate its properties. They are demonstrating contagion magic, the belief that energy can be moved from one object to another (Belk,
1988). This concept of magic energy will be expanded upon further within the ideology subtheme in Section 4. Specifically in regards to food, it appears that the ability to consume an aspect of the magical essence of nature was seen as an intrinsic reward for supporting and working closely with the environment.

All the informants discussed the enjoyment they experienced in the actual growing and production of food. The raw nature of their ingredients meant informants made most of their meals themselves. Macbeth (1988) suggests that interacting with nature in particular and its unpredictability can be a way for people to create a more deeply authentic version of themselves. This perspective can help explain why the act of growing and creating food was so central to informants. I received many photos of people making food and food production processes. For example, Jan took a series of images of her partner Richard milking his cow and then turning that milk into yoghurt. The informants elaborated upon the enjoyment they got from the process of making their own food. Image 10 was the end result of Mark’s bread making process. He reflected that making it himself was more satisfying and sustainable then travelling to the bakery to buy it. Bendix (1997) suggests the perception of authenticity is founded on a person’s moral considerations and requires the touch of human hands, as opposed to a machine, in its creation. This viewpoint is supported by this research which found the act of creating their food was an essential core element of living an authentically sustainable lifestyle.

A desire to make their food was partly based on wanting to ‘reconnect’ with the food production process. The theme of being ‘connected’ to the source was important and a few commented they felt that buying food from the supermarket was a ‘disconnected’ way of living. Catherine, for example, felt the way products were packaged in

![Image 10: Mark’s Homemade Bread](Image 10: Mark’s Homemade Bread)
the supermarket made it easier for people to disconnect from where the food had originated. Image 11 was taken of Debra to illustrate the importance of a food connection. For the informants this sense of connection was paramount and a key motivation for them growing their own food, which included fruit, vegetables, herbs, honey, eggs and meat. Borgmann (2000) argues that when food is home-produced the production and consumption become intertwined as it serves as a focal point of consumption in people’s lives, removing them from a sense of disconnection that mass-produced consumption presents. He argues people accept the alienation of paradigmatic consumption by choosing a few focal things, but I found in this research that the informants were endeavouring to make all of their consumption experiences connected ones. They rejected the notion of disengaged consumption and instead were actively connecting to the source of their food production to make it a meaningful consumption experience.

Producing their own food also meant they could be more self-reliant and assured on where the food had originated from. Self-reliance was partly about being in control. None of the informants were fully self-reliant but endeavoured to be as much as possible. If they could not produce it themselves they wanted to know where it had come from. Some informants discussed the idea of ‘contamination’ and their concerns of not knowing a product’s origins. Wendy felt strange about eating food when she did not know who had touched it. She positions supermarket food as having negative contamination while her own exhibits the more positive aspects (Argo et al., 2006; Nemeroff & Rozin, 2000). I concluded that the garden to kitchen connection was a way to safely avoid that level of contagion, while fostering the positive associations.
Producing their own or buying from local producers also meant they could be assured of its origin and trust the source. Some informants preferred local food as a means of exchange in itself, like Maria who swapped her eggs for her neighbour’s lemons. It was a fair currency, built relationships and she could be assured of its quality and origin. The concept of aggregated self-concept emerges (Belk, 2010) as Maria demonstrates through her sharing with others outside her family unit. Food served as a means for her to connect with like-minded others.

In summary, food represented control, pleasure and connection. Creating food gave informants access to fresh ingredients whose inputs they could control. They were concerned about negative contamination - where it was from, who was making it and how it got to them – so producing it themselves enabled them to avoid this and embody the positive aspects of contamination. It enabled them to feel connected to nature and other people. Most importantly though it was a process of creating their self-concept as their behaviours reflected their values and aspects of themselves were imbued in the production. It was also a very pleasurable experience which gave informants a sense of pride and satisfaction in having produced the food themselves. It is for these reasons that food was identified as the most essential aspect of this lifestyle. If a person did not grow at least some of their own food then they would not be considered a member of this subculture.

**Theme 2 - Housing**

Houses are a significant investment for any consumer. What makes these informants different is that they put considerable thought into the wider impacts of the materials that were used in its production. As one may expect of the general population, informants positioned their home as the centre point of their lives. As Jan stated everything starts at the home:

“It’s sort of just basically about the connections that everything sort of starts from home for me. And it’s actually like building the soil and building the home, and building all the relationships round”.

In deciding which home to live in informants considered whether it was a sustainable size, the quality of the soil and what products had gone into its construction. Richard, for example, had built his own home (see Image 12). He had used sustainable products and felt it had a nicer feeling about it than most modern houses. He was proud that his home was
built by hand, which he felt gave it a more human quality. In this case, contamination was occurring in a positive way (Nemeroff & Rozin, 2000). Houses have been positioned as a key extension of a person’s self-concept (Belk, 1988; Marcus, 2006). I argue that personally contributing to its construction is an intimate extension of one’s self. In building his house by hand through the process of contagion an aspect of Richard had been imbued into the property. It enabled him to feel a deeper connection to it, as he was part of its creation. Choosing recycled materials and smaller homes meant informants were creating a living space that was a more authentic reflection of them. Aroha’s family home and Debra’s farm cottage were both built using reclaimed school buildings that they had refurbished. They were delighted that no new resources were wasted and they could bring new life to an old building (see Image 13). These informants carefully planned their use of resources so that what they consumed would be utilised in the most environmentally efficient manner.

When it came to the physical location of where they lived, informants generally felt a sustainable lifestyle involved living in an urban environment. Kylie was keen to point out that she had no interest in moving to a lifestyle block:

“I don’t have any interest in going, like, buying a giant block of land and living completely off the land or anything like that. Like I like living in the city, I like being around other people and it being easy to meet up with other people … It’s about working with the cities and just changing up cities so that they are more sustainable and provide for different people and stuff”.

The idea of moving to the country and having land in a self-sustaining community was not part of informants plan. Anthony was critical of eco-villages as he felt they were insular, artificially-created communities, which was why they did not survive over multiple generations. The informants were focused on making changes in the urban communities
they were currently a part of. Maria and Aroha were the exceptions, both wanted to escape the city so moved to isolated communities at the beginning of the study. At the end of the research, Aroha had returned to the city, noting that it was unsustainable in the long-term and it was necessary to be where other people were if she was to be active and make a difference. Even Jan and Richard, who lived on a lifestyle block, had declined the opportunity to move to a sustainable community. They felt it was more important to have an impact in their current community then to be physically closer to others like them. Informants instead formed strong networks with like-minded people – a form of intentional community that was not based on physical location but shared interest. This network supported their lifestyle choices and made it easier to continue living in neighbourhoods with unsustainable practices.

The research suggests that people cannot escape the mainstream cultural model. They may temporary remove themselves and find support with like-minded others but there comes a point of needing to return and find a way to co-exist (Kozinets, 2002; O’Guinn & Belk, 1989). Informants saw urban living as a more resilient model and were not necessarily looking for ‘sustainable’ neighbourhoods to be a part of. Instead they saw their role as inspiring change in their existing physical locations while achieving a sense of community by connecting with networks of people with similar views. Later in this section I will discuss further the essential role community plays in informants maintaining their lifestyle.

**Theme 3 - Energy**

Sustainable energy was identified as a vital component of this lifestyle as it would enable them to be more resilient and self-sufficient. Unfortunately due to a lack of viable
alternatives it was positioned as something currently too hard to achieve. Rob was not planning to be fully self-reliant when it came to energy. As he stated:

“I don’t think we want to be fully self sufficient and go off the grid for electricity, things like that. That’s a major commitment, but we want to go some way towards, I suppose, you know, technically it’s about your whole footprint, you know, your energy footprint and how much you use up”.

As Rob discussed he considered his wider energy footprint but admitted that he would always be energy dependent as the systems were not there to support him being otherwise. As Sheth, Sethia and Srinivas (2011) state living in a mindful way is about finding a balance between the aspirational lifestyle and the one that is realistically achievable. The sustainable technologies were inadequate to meet their requirements. For example some of the informants had relatively self-sustaining energy systems. Fiona had been an early consumer of solar. Aroha lived fully self-sustainable as her location prohibited access to the electricity grid so she relied solely on solar and wind (see Image 14). I observed that managing power consumption was an important daily activity that significantly impacted on the way she lived. For example, she had to wash her clothes by hand as a washing machine would have used too much power. Aroha and Fiona both encountered issues around the technology not being sufficient for them to meet their basic needs.

Energy was identified as one of the key issues when it came to living sustainably but informants felt it was the area they had the least control over. They were willing to try alternative technologies to meet their needs and even pay more for products but current options did not allow them to be fully sustainable. For marketers this presents an opportunity with a segment that is willing to try new developments that would enable them
to be more sustainable. Energy was not just seen as a type of fuel, informants also considered that the embedded energy that went into all the products they consumed. As they could not achieve sustainable household energy informants focused on areas they felt they had more control over, namely transport and waste.

**Theme 4 - Transport**

Informants gave considerable thought to their transport and chose options that minimized the use of fossil fuels. The problem was that they were no easy alternatives or infrastructures in place to support substitutes. As Christian explained:

> “Oil obviously being the big one but you can’t do too much about energy at this point, with infrastructure and all the technology not quite up to scratch”.

Similar to energy, informants had to make compromises between their ideals and the reality of their choices. Informants prioritized the use of public transport and minimised the use of their car but were still reliant on some amount of petroleum. Within the theme of transport two main subthemes emerged: energy efficiency and personal mobility as illustrated in Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Energy Efficiency</td>
<td>“I felt like I deserved to be there because I’d travelled that distance and it’s a long way and we have the sense that the world is such a small place because we can get somewhere in a number of hours and it’s not. It’s a huge place and it takes a long time to travel but, so I guess transport choices for me, slow transport I suppose is a part of sustainability you know. It’s not the easy consumption” Jess</td>
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</table>
| 2. Personal Mobility     | “I don’t think cars are a way of life. Like a lot of the time I do use public transport or bike or walk when I can, because I really like cycling and I like walking, can’t say I love the bus but sometimes that’s the best option” Kylie  
“I really enjoy cycling, and I guess it’s something that, you know it feels quite nice being able to ride to work. And, you know seeing all the people in their cars not getting very far. And yeah I think it’s something that I really, I think it’s important that, you know more of us get on our bikes” Diana |

**Table 5: Subthemes of Travel**

**Subtheme 4.1: Energy Efficiency**

Modes of transport, particularly cars, can symbolize a person’s extended self (Belk, 1988; Steg, 2005). What was distinct about these informants is that they preferred energy efficient
transport options that others might consider unattractive or inconvenient. Jess for example chose to take a bus from Wellington to Auckland as opposed to a plane. She felt that travelling slower meant she appreciated it more. For this reason she refused to travel internationally. She had family and friends overseas but that was a sacrifice she was willing to make. Informants wanted to make authentic choices that represented their sustainability-values so preferred options with a low energy footprint, such as biking and public transport. Cars were still seen as a necessity for a number of informants but to reduce their impact they brought small, fuel efficient ones, as illustrated in Image 15. I found that informants consciously chose transport options that were a positive reflection of their identity. A number of informants spoke of choosing to vacation close to home to minimise their ecological footprint. Harré (2011) suggests fast transportation is an analogy of the current reckless consumerist lifestyle, with slow transportation reflecting a more sustainable, authentic way of being. The decision to engage in slow and public means of transport reflected the informant’s identity, authenticity and their commitment to a mindful way of living.

**Subtheme 4.2: Personal Mobility**

I found importance was placed on informants using their own energy to get places and promoting it as an option to others. Diana emphasised the pleasure she got from cycling. Promoting bike use was so important to her so she had been involved in a number of bike protests in Auckland and with the cycle group ‘Frocks on Bikes’, who encouraged females that they could still cycle and wear beautiful clothes. Christian felt personal mobility as a whole was essential. He had redesigned his bike so he could transport his shopping easily or collect plant material for his compost (see Image 16). He had called it a ‘chick magnet’ for a
certain type of female. He even had a spare bike for visitors so others could cycle with him. For these informants, biking was a form of political protest. They were exhibiting high political self-efficacy, a belief in their ability to understand and participate in political issues (Holbert, Lambe, Dudo, & Carlton, 2007; Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991). They hoped their actions in bike protests and making a stand personally would serve as an example for others. Subsequently they were demonstrating a form of political identity. A political self-identity goes beyond simply drawing attention to an issue, it has a strong social component and evolves as a social movement transforms (Kubal, 1998). I would argue that all of the informants demonstrated, to a certain degree, a political self-identity in creating a lifestyle designed to appeal to others. My analysis though suggests that informants’ priority was to separate themselves from the extremism associated with a traditional activist identity so their political self-identity was less prominent.

Sustainable transport was an important part of this lifestyle. Similar to traditional consumers, informants demonstrated objects of transport as an extension of self. Their transport options were a form of political activism that was expressed through informant’s modelling desirable behaviour for others.

**Theme 5 - Waste**

I found informants were highly engaged with the product deconstruction process. Informants felt a sense of responsibility to reuse materials and obligation to manage their own waste effectively. Christian presented waste management as a fundamental part of this lifestyle:

“I think if you can do it using materials, or at zero cost then you should. I mean it’s almost like an obligation. There’s just so much material out there that’s going to waste, especially in the
middle of the city. There’s a lot of sort of like industry around us, there’s so much material going to waste, and not to use it is almost criminal”

As Christian discussed, it was a moral issue for him and not actively doing something with his waste would be a contradiction of his values. I observed that waste and how he managed it had become a central part of his leisure time and his identity. This moral motive

<table>
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<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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| 1. Waste Management | “We try to use products until they fail/break/wear out. This goes the cars/bikes/TVs/clothing!! When they do fail, and we decide we no longer need something, we put it on Trade Me for one dollar reserves, just in case someone out to repair it or use of the spares (e.g. computer). This minimises what we put out for the inorganic collection every year” *Fiona*  
“I think the older stuff is actually better quality so I sometimes think I’m better off buying something that was made, like, 30 years ago and is still in good condition now than buying a new thing ... I also liked the idea that rather than, a totally new thing getting made, like you were just reusing something that’s already out there in the world, you just putting the resources to use again” *Kylie* |
| 2. Closed-loop Systems | “Compost for me is something that represented sustainability and sustainable living in terms of environmentally, like we are rather than using our food scraps to the landfill its being turned into something that we can reuse compost to put on the garden and make vegetables. So it’s a way of reducing the amount of waste we produce but also turning waste into something that is useful for living and reuse” *Jess*  
“Something overlooked or unutilised, destined to landfill, or some other useless position in the world. That can be used in a productive way. Not necessarily decorative, just productive. It’s a bonus if it’s decorative as well. But you rarely find that because those usually are snapped up by people. So yes, old recycling bins or bread crates, I mean who would have thought a bread crate had a use beyond holding bread” *Christian* |
| 3. Creative Expression | “When you’ve got something that has a purpose but you’re taking that, that item and sort of, not upping the ante but sort of like giving it an additional purpose that might have a greater value to you. So for example, like, you read a magazine or something like that and it’s got a whole lot of lovely photos in it, and instead of buying a new fridge that’s rusted around the edges and around the front but still functions perfectly well, it’s sticking photos, like cutting out photos from magazines and sticking them onto the fridge and then polyurethaining it. So you’re kind of upcycling that magazine”. *Rebecca*  
“The benefits of that are huge, you know and so multi-dimensional that you can’t, you know it’s not easy to put in a nutshell really. It’s therapeutic, it’s fun, it’s creative, you know it’s stimulating, creating process, lots of things. Saves money, saves the planet”. *Fiona*  
“I like it because sometimes when you re-use, recycle, reinvent you’re bringing the history of what, that comes with what you’re using, comes as well with it”. *Debra* |

*Table 6: Subthemes of Waste Management*
contrasted with Miller (1998) who suggested that re-use practices are primarily financially motivated. Within the theme of waste three main subthemes emerged: waste management, closed loop systems and creative expression as illustrated in Table 6.

From a consumption perspective, the dispossession of objects is as important as the possession with inherent structural, social and symbolic meanings; an object’s value and what constitutes waste an individual act of negotiation (Thompson, 1979). These informants thoroughly considered a products’ waste management process before they consumed – its contents, its packaging and how it would be recycled or disposed of after use. They deliberately chose quality items that would last and put effort into maintaining them to minimise excess waste. Lucas (2002) proposes the process of deconstructing an object can be as complex as the process of acquisition which is why hoarding has become a more common practice. I interpret that these informants were heavily engaged in the deconstruction process; they wanted objects to remain useful so recycled them to keep their value in the production system. Jan and Richard, for example, believed that it was greedy to hold on to items they were no longer utilising, recycling on the other hand gave them the opportunity to be valuable again. I observed that informants actively avoided hoarding and prioritized focal objects – everything they owned had to be useful or meaningful. Otherwise it was deemed excessive or wasteful and needed to be reconstituted. There is evidence of them elevating the profane to the sacred (Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989). Ordinary objects were removed, with possession focused on only that which was meaningful.

My analysis found that the reuse of materials was a highly creative outlet for informants. Rebecca, for example, took old newspapers and used them to wrap up gifts (see Image 17).

Image 17: Rebecca’s Recycled Gift Wrapping
She always chose articles that would be relevant to the person, so in addition to reusing materials she was creating a present that was unique. I argue that informants were actively engaged in co-creating value from their consumption experiences. The co-creator view positions consumers as connected, informed and active who add value to create a unique consumption experience (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Informants looked for ways to apply their creative energy to bring life back to post-consumed materials and make a new product that was unique and meaningful to them, which Rebecca entitled as ‘up-cycling’. In Image 18 Kylie showed that most of her furniture was second hand. She had taken items off Trade Me and took pride in refurbishing them. She is demonstrating positive contamination, imbuing her energy into the objects (Nemeroff & Rozin, 2000). The desire to up-cycle furniture appeared to have multiple benefits including the enjoyment of creating something new, reusing resources, minimising waste as well as acquiring a quality product. They took great pride in being able to use their skills to transform what others perceived as trash into valuable items. I interpret that for informants waste was a resource and they endeavoured to reuse it to create something beneficial.

My analysis is that a concern for waste and making responsible, authentic choices resulted in a focus on meaningful consumption. Informants were selective in their choices and once possessed they became focal items. Informants placed particular importance on objects they had co-created and had positive contamination. Informants focus was less on anti-consumption and more on elevating the objects they owned to be meaningful, sacred objects.
Theme 6 - Consumables

While informants endeavoured to be self-reliant, in reality they still brought a reasonable amount of consumables. As consumption choices are central to marketers I will briefly address the main considerations informants had when making purchases. They discussed the purchase of products such as food, household items, furniture, clothing and gifts. I was interested in what they considered when making purchases and what impacted on their final decision. Under the theme of consumables there were three main subthemes informants considered when making a purchase: product content, product value and consumption concerns, as illustrated in Table 7.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>Product Content</strong></td>
<td>&quot;I do try and buy New Zealand made clothes which is a good justification. I will have to have that shirt because it's New Zealand made. You know but supporting companies, like I just bought a Chalky Digits shirt the other day and they're sewn, make their stuff in New Zealand. They've got New Zealand seamstresses and whatever the male version of that is. And it's designed here and it's sold here. And so it's like in terms of an ethical, sustainable company they are, and sure it costs more but at least I know it's made here&quot; <strong>Wendy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Organic</td>
<td>&quot;You can buy organic NZ flour but rice you can’t buy NZ made rice so I’ll go for organic because at least I thought ‘whatever rice I buy it’s all coming from overseas’. As long as I’m buying organic it’s one thing I’m doing better” <strong>Jess.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Local</td>
<td>&quot;I'm supporting local artists, you are providing them with an income. You're sort of, like, connecting with the community&quot; <strong>Rebecca</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Fair-trade</td>
<td>&quot;I prefer to go there and buy from the Trade Aid shop so that I know it's fairly traded and the people who've made it have received a decent reward for doing it so ... I know they're a human being on this planet. And we are all interconnected, so I have a responsibility not to exploit in a way, internally I feel I have a responsibility not to exploit if I can avoid it” <strong>Fiona</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <strong>Product Value</strong></td>
<td>&quot;It’s probably, like, harder, a lot of the time than to just go and buy the first thing off the supermarket shelf necessarily. I want to know that I’m making a good choice and yeah, it’s a bit of a mission sometimes. It would be good if there was just, like, a really good guide out there to the best choice of everything you might need to buy” <strong>Kylie</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Durability</td>
<td>&quot;From a consumer culture point of thing as well is that ultimately durability is probably one of the most important aspects because we have got such a throw away culture” <strong>Anthony</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Authenticity</td>
<td>“This sort of feeling that the products, there’s transparency they’re not yeah it’s not green wash and if it’s transparent, if I can see that there’s a product that screams you know, has got a green integrity then, then that’s something that’s really important for me” <strong>Rebecca</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme</td>
<td>Examples</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</table>
| I. Affluenza  | “It is a fighting of the affluenza virus…. The idea that we have to have the latest, the best, the most trendy this, that or the other in order to be accepted/acceptable/loved/or to feel good about ourselves”. Fiona  
“One of the hardest things to practice is consuming less - this is a constant battle because I love clothes and shoes and stuff! How I battled this is by not going in to town so much”: Wendy |
| II. Imperfect Choices | “I know that every time you purchase something you’ve got to weigh off is this local? Where did the materials come from? What sort of locally grown did the people have that the people have that produced it? How far has it travelled? What’s the embodied energy and carbon that it's got? You know so those chairs, timber, plastic footing, glues, fabric, manufacturing, all of those sorts of things there. You know I consider them to a point but all that stuff is just too impossible to consider. I mean you would just turn into, you would just go into rigor mortis if you try to consider that for everything that you ever did. It’s just too hard” Anthony  
“Like my stereo is broken at the moment and I really love listening to music. And I keep putting off replacing my stereo because it’s like I know that where those stereos come from and I know that these people are paid a pittance to make it. And I know that they’re designed to break down in a few years’ time. And where’s that going to go and where’s my current one going to go. And where’s all, you know, so you can just paralyse yourself with the fact that there’s no choice about some of those products.” Wendy |
| III. Economic | “There’s an economic factor which inhibits a lot of kind of more sustainable stuff, purely. You know in terms of if you take the economics side of it, you can get chairs that have been made from locally grown timbers and produced down the road and stuff but chances are they will cost four times the price” Anthony  
“I deliberately would consume things that I thought were more ethical than other things. I’d rather spend more. I’d rather spend more on stuff that is nice and is handmade and is made in an ethical way” Maria |
| 3. Consumption Concerns | “That’s a liberation because the desire to have more things and better things is destructive and it’s over bearing, you know. So to get rid of that stuff is liberating I think. To chose ‘actually I don’t need this, I can live with what I’ve got, I can buy 2nd hand’. To have few things and to value them highly is what I think it’s about, simple living” Jess |

Table 7: Subthemes of Consumables
Subtheme 6.1: Product Content

When making purchases, informants considered all aspects of a product’s content and their primary considerations were if they were organic, local and fair trade. It was often difficult to find goods that fulfilled all of those requirements so they brought what they could and tended to prioritise one factor. For example, Jess stated being organic was important. Many other informants such as Rebecca, placed importance of buying locally. They could limit the distance goods had travelled and support people in their local community. Buying locally or fair-trade alleviated feelings of guilt as informants knew they were supporting good work practices. As a result of feeling interconnected with others they felt a responsibility to buy goods made fairly, as Fiona and Wendy explained. Wherever possible they went to great lengths to find products that met all their requirements so they did not need to compromise. Image 19 is a photo of the organic sheets that Fiona had found by searching all over Auckland. To be assured of what they were buying, many informants would extensively research their products. Even mundane purchases had a high level of consumer involvement as they scrutinized message appeals and took considerable time in weighing up the different criteria of their purchase, including its ability to match their perception of self (O’Cass, 2000; Zaichkowsky, 1985). Informants were highly engaged in their purchases seeking to find the ‘right’ product that met their criteria and minimized negative outcomes. As the purchase options were not perfect they constantly had to make trade-offs.
Subtheme 6.2: Product Value

When deciding whether to purchase a consumable item informants also considered the value of a product. Informants wanted quality products that were durable and would last. Anthony had inherited a sofa and chose to have it recovered as opposed to buying a new one. He preferred spending more and reusing the base material as it was still in good condition. A number of informants waited when purchasing items until they could afford to buy the right product, overcoming the need to make impulse purchases. They were exhibiting signs of self-control, using their willpower and a diminishment of their immediate desires to achieve a delayed sense of gratification (Hoch & Loewenstein, 1991). My interpretation is that informant’s behaviour was primarily motivated by the need to act in a way that was consistent with their beliefs. For example, Wendy loved clothing but felt it was frivolous to spend money on new things. To be in alignment with her values she brought clothes from op shops which enabled her to indulge in her passion for clothing while supporting the re-use of a good quality item.

Informants were conscious not to over consume so they tried to only buy products they actually needed. Jess, for example, liked to buy functional over fashionable products. She discussed making responsible choices that were not about her ego. This links back to the theme of authenticity – buying goods that have integrity and are in line with their values. Clothing companies such as Chalky Digits and Untouched World (see Image 20) were identified as companies who made authentic products. As Rebecca explained, many companies claimed to be sustainable but informants were sceptical of their assertions and wary of green washing. In seeking authentic objects Wang
(1999) suggests people are actually seeking existential authenticity, where a person is attempting to create a version of themselves that is more real and original. I would argue that in this case informant’s authentic products did serve as a tool for creating a more original version of themselves, the emphasis on being ‘real’ in all aspects of their lives.

Informants were still engaged in consumerist practices but focused on the right choices that would give them long-term satisfaction. When reflecting on his lounge furniture, Anthony acknowledged that the truly sustainable choice would have been to not buy the chairs in the first place but that was not very realistic for him. He decreased his sense of cognitive dissonance about buying products in general by making sure they were sustainable. As addressed earlier, Borgmann (2000) argues that consumption is an inevitable part of our current paradigm and suggestions of discontinuing it lack an understanding of our societal structure. He proposes shifting people to focus on key objects and practices that give meaning in their lives, which will ‘break the spell’ of excessive consumption and enable cultural capital to be invested in social and environmental justice. From my perspective, his argument supported my informants’ attempts to minimise excessive consumption by focusing on key items that fulfilled their ethical criteria. It was not about minimal consumption but focused and specific items that would give them long-term pleasure. As Borgmann (2000) argues the pleasures of paradigmatic consumption can be fleeting, focal items instead aim at achieving an enduring sense of satisfaction.

Informants did take into consideration economic factors but it was often a secondary concern. As Maria discussed, they were willing to pay more if it meant getting the right product. Informants acknowledged that the costs of sustainable product were often more and this sometimes inhibited what they were able to purchase. Brekke, Kverndokk and Nyborg (2003) found that people prefer to see themselves as socially responsible and do so by comparing themselves to that of an ‘ideal’ moral person. This self-image though is often being traded against economic factors. For these informants that was not the case. Cost was secondary to the moral implications. They were prepared to save and wait till they could afford something, or in the case of Wendy and her stereo, simply not buy something until a suitable option become available.
**Subtheme 6.3: Consumption Concerns**

When it came to consuming informants had a number of concerns that impacted on their overall consumption behaviour. The two main ones were affluenza and imperfect choices. Affluenza is defined as the excessive consumption of material symbols to create an inflated self-image (De Graaf, Wann, & Naylor, 2005). Informants were conscious of not over consuming so many avoided the shops. Fiona acknowledged she felt the desire to spend and had to actively work at resisting it. Informants acknowledged that their desire to consume and their propensity for impulsive behaviour was similar to other people (Baumeister, 2002; Rook, 1987). Wendy reflected on her struggles with imperfect choices and concerns about participating in a culture that valued excess consumption, taking Image 21 to illustrate the idea that over-consumption as a form of obesity. Bauer et al (2012) found desirable goods increase consumers materialism concerns while lowering concerns for wellbeing and social connection. This was equally applied to people who considered themselves materialistic and those who did not; effectively the shopping environment act as a trigger to encourage materialistic behaviour. A side effect of obsessive forms of consumption is that it can also make people financially vulnerable (Hamilton & Denniss, 2005). Informants were not different to other people, they acknowledged their vulnerability and chose to use willpower to establish cognitive strategies that avoided the temptation in the first place (Hoch & Loewenstein, 1991). It was often positioned as a ‘battle’ between their values and being a part of a consumerist society. Living sustainably was about living within natural parameters and making choices that did not exceed that. When informants were able to overcome the desire to consume unnecessary products they felt a huge sense of accomplishment. Jess, for example, felt a sense of liberation in making simpler choices. They were choosing lifestyles that moved away from values of materialism.
to one’s based on self-reliance, which Hamilton (2009) argues is necessary to avoid a propensity to over-consume.

One of the biggest challenges though was a lack of fully sustainable choices. They expressed their frustrations as consumers with only being presented with imperfect products. Wendy explained the dilemma she had experienced trying to replace her old stereo. Informants felt overwhelmed about the various attributes they needed to consider and at times paralysed in their choices, as Anthony described. This sense of inertia around their purchase choices was a common theme. The challenges of making sustainable consumable choices and the tension between ideal and reality will be elaborated upon further in Section 5.

In the marketing literature, alternative lifestyles to the dominant consumerist ideology are positioned as a form of consumer resistance (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Kozinets and Handelman (2004) argue that consumer activism is a form of evangelizing where participants actions are primarily focused on converting others to their cause. Cova and Dalli (2008) on the other hand position consumer resistance as a form of subversion in which consumers are literally hijacking the marketplace. I reject the application of these notions to the informants of this study. Instead I prefer Cova and Dalli’s (2008) ‘consumer empowerment’ categorisation in which consumers are seen as re-empowering themselves by taking responsibility for their decisions. The informants are primarily focused on changing themselves and though their actions hoping to inspire others. The impetus of their actions is not a subversion of the system but a positive change within the existing marketplace. They are deliberately distancing themselves from the extremist notions of traditional activists and making decisions based on re-empowerment, for them and for others.

**Theme 7 - Tools**

All of the informants discussed the importance of having the right tools. These were different to consumables; they were an asset brought to support and facilitate their lifestyle and often represented significant investments. Richard and Jan for example invested in a $2000 meat grinder which they identified as a necessary tool when growing and processing their own meat (see Image 22). They had recently invested in a number of pieces of equipment as they realised how essential it was to achieving their goals of becoming fully self-sufficient. When buying tools informants invested in the best quality available. Mark
told me a story of buying an axe and choosing the most expensive one because he wanted it to last. I found that a sustainable lifestyle was predominately about better quality consumption. Quality was more important than price and informants were willing to wait until they had the money to buy the right product. As waste was a concern, buying a quality item also meant it would not be thrown away contributing to landfill. It was important to them that they felt they were making responsible purchase decisions. It is suggested that informants were investing in luxury items. Wiedmann, Hennigs and Siebels (2009) argued for four main motives for luxury purchases – financial, functional, individual and social. The first three motives apply – they considered it a financial investment, were purchasing for function reasons, and the purchases were consistent with their values and self-concept. The social dimension was less relevant as they were not buying for hedonic or conspicuous consumption reasons. As such my informants fit within the criteria of Rational Functionalists who buy luxury items for individual reasons and predominately for product quality. I found this label appropriate as the informants were internally driven as opposed to externally focused in their purchase choices.

One of their most important tools was technology. The internet and computers in particular enabled them to connect with others. Rob stated the internet was one of his main tools:

“The internet’s brilliant, you know, you can get anything that you don’t know about, you just go on there and do a little, just Google it”.

Any problem he had encountered on his farm he was able to solve using his computer. He like others talked about the joy of having access to a larger community encountering similar issues. No longer are people reliant just on their immediate networks for information, the
web offered access to a global community. Fiona talked about how online communities prevented her feeling isolated as she could connect with others that had similar viewpoints:

“If there ever is a sense of isolation, you know one day on the street you’re thinking oh I’m a bit weird here, I’m a bit out of the ordinary then there’s always Facebook groups and there’s different societies that help people stay in connection and build networks throughout Auckland or throughout New Zealand or even throughout the world. So that there really is becoming - you know there is no need to be isolated wherever you live, there is no need to be isolated in whatever way you're doing things and that's bringing together the benefits of technology I guess. I know I curse it sometimes but it really is a blessing”

While computers were not technically sustainable technology they were identified as a necessary tool for enabling change and facilitating connection, as illustrated in Image 23. Belk (2013) argues that technology is changing the notion of the extended self. Technology can act as an augmented version of self as it holds memory and knowledge beyond a person’s physical existence, which was evident in my informants. Knowledge and the sharing of information were identified as a key part of this lifestyle and as such the computer was a fundamental object – one that could connect them to material beyond their immediate social environment. While in the past people were seen as surrendering themselves to technology (Kelly, 2010), it is now being positioned as an empowering tool (Streeter, 2011). This was reflected in informants such as Rob who expressed his joy at having access to a tool that could answer nearly any question he had about his lifestyle. There is also evidence of the networked self where others in the online environment are assisting in co-creating a person’s self-concept (Belk, 2013). As Fiona discussed, online communities enabled her to feel connected to like-minded others who supported her perspectives and self-representation. They also prevented her feeling isolated and adopting a negative perception of herself. Informants were embracing technology for its ability to connect them to...
knowledge, like-minded others and support for their construction of self.

Some informants identified their tools as objects that facilitated sharing with others. Aroha talked about how she liked the idea of shared equipment:

“I collected a bit of equipment. Doesn’t necessarily need to be owned though, I quite like the idea of if you’re living in a community, being able to share those tools and resources because you don’t need them all the time, you only need them for a couple of hours a week”

Aroha is referring to an aggregated version of her self-concept. Her willingness to share privately owned groups publically reflects an extended version of her perception of self (Belk, 2010b). This also fits with Giesler’s (2006) theory that gift giving is more than a means of exchange and sharing in this manner is a form social solidarity. He argued that it was a necessary part of creating and maintaining a vital and viable social group. This is supported by my research where the sharing of objects, whether it be permanent items such as tools or temporary ones such as food, was seen as a necessary part of the ethos of this lifestyle. In living sustainably informants felt it was not about ‘doing it on your own’, they wanted to connect and work with others to achieve shared goals. This leads to a discussion of what informants considered one of the most important themes of a sustainable lifestyle – the community.

**Theme 8 - Community**

People are an essential part of a sustainable lifestyle. In the ecological debate people were often positioned as part of the problem but informants positioned them as an essential part of the solution. Christian thought adopting a sustainable lifestyle was as much about the ‘social’ aspect. As he reflected:

“I can’t think of many other things that have such an appealing human element to them. Like it’s not like we get together and drink to excess or spectate at a sports event or something like that. It’s engaging. It’s practical. It’s interactive. It’s like sharing the load. It’s all these thing we talk about. So I just hope that continues in a larger scale and a larger stage”

Christian’s description highlights the importance of sharing. Given the complexity of the sustainability problems there was an acknowledgement of the necessity of working with others to achieve change. Community feeling has been identified as a key value needing to be strengthened in attempting to address ecological issues (Crompton & Kasser, 2009). A sense of community connection and collaboration with others emerged as a vital aspect of
this lifestyle. As such I will elaborate further on these two main sub themes of connection and collaboration as illustrated in Table 8.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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| 1. Connection | “A lot of that nostalgia isn’t only about the sewing and the returning to the land and growing the food, but also the associated community connections that go with that. With the changes that we’ve seen a lot of them have either caused or associated with decline in sense of community and social cohesion and all that kind of stuff. So if you bring back some of those things then maybe you bring back a sense of community and connection with people” [Wendy]  
“You’re in a community that really is, well you’ve just been with a group of people that are like-minded and it feels quite good to be part of the community … I think being part of a community it’s sort of a sense of belonging, like you belong there and you’re contributing”. [Diana]  
“I’m reasonably social and that sort of thing, so I wouldn’t want to be out in the wops and never talk to anyone”. [Mark] |
| 2. Collaboration | “So people working together, I think that’s the best thing about community gardens, is getting people in there that maybe don’t feel like part of the community but once they start, you know, participating in these gardens and really feel like they’re doing something, you know, it’ll make them happy I think” [Kylie]  
“We were kind of all learning together, and discussing together, and that was really helpful to be in an environment where we were all interested in doing our bit” [Fiona]  
“It’s all got to do with relationships and that. The thing is, if you’ve got a relationship with someone, you’re not going to sell them rubbish because it’s, you can’t sell rubbish to your friend’s sort of thing”. [Richard] |

Table 8: Subthemes of Community

Connection with others in their community was integral to living sustainably. Informants felt a sustainable lifestyle had been represented as a solitary one but for them it was the opposite – they felt intimately connected to others. Mark describes himself as a social person that needs to connect and bond with others. Wendy and Diana discussed how it was the connections to people in their community that primarily motivated their behaviour. The majority of informants felt a sense of community had diminished in a modern consumerist lifestyle and as such depicted it as a more ‘disconnected’ way of living. The need for connection at a community level is said to be a direct result of the fragmentation of society (Shaffer, 1993), with postmodernity being marked by the re-emergence of the community as people go through a process of reconnecting with others. According to Cova (1997) modernity represented a focus on utilitarian value, post-modernity is said to represent a
reversal as people re-connect with community and products are sought for their linking value and meaning to others. In the case of these informants their focus was not on the goods that connected them but the physical communities they could be a part of.

Informants were seeking a more ‘connected’ way of living. Informants who did not feel they had strong ties in their local area had actively sought out groups to foster a sense of community – a form of intentional community based on shared interests (Brown, 2002). The groups they joined included community gardens, education courses, local transition town initiatives and politically active groups. Participation was motivated by a desire to take action on issues and to find other people who had similar values. Diana, for example, had joined a number of groups and drew Image 24 to illustrate the importance of community groups to her. The idea of ‘connecting’ and ‘belonging’ was a central for the majority of informants. Leigh, Peters and Shelton (2006) argue that collective activities enable the sharing, communicating and enjoyment of activities that strengthen social bonds and enable people to express their true selves. My interpretation suggests that connecting with a subculture was as an important part of establishing what it means to live authentically.

Informants saw the necessity of collaborating with others for collective and personal reasons. From a societal perspective, they were never going to solve sustainability issues on their own so the ability to collectively work with others was seen as an important part of making a difference. Kylie produced Image 25 to reflect this idea of everyone working together to achieve a shared goal. As Barozzi and Dholakia (2006) report part of the attraction of communities is their ability to develop intentions which have a higher purpose.
beyond one individual. The communal aspect of communities giving power back to individuals to counteract traditional market rules (Cova & Dalli, 2008). On a more personal level, working with others offered them support and re-inspired them to continue with their lifestyle. For example, Maria explained how community groups were essential to keeping her sanity and commitment alive. Informants felt energised from group experiences and had fun that helped maintain their commitment over the long-term. Networks and relationships were also seen as essential to having access to good sustainable products. For example, Richard and Jan talked about how you had to know someone to get access to raw milk as it was not pasteurised so technically illegal. For them their relationships with other people was a guarantee of the quality of products. A strong network of allies was seen as a form of protection and a necessary part of being resilient. Belk’s (2010a) work on sharing indicates that the informants are engaging in a form of ‘sharing in’. It is a process of extending a person’s self-concept to people beyond their family unit who they openly share with. The act of sharing in this way is a form of social bonding and connection. The perception of common property is extended, the fear of invasion of ones boundaries is minimised and a level of intimacy with others is achieved. There is evidence in my research of informants being actively engaged in this form of sharing. As informants were seeking a more connected life, collaborating and sharing with others was identified as a necessary and fulfilling part of the broader picture.

**Theme 9 - Other Life**

Other life forms were an important consideration in this lifestyle. Informants felt connected to the wider environment so considered the impact of their decisions on birds, animals and...
insects. Informants’ all talked about ‘living in harmony’ with other life forms. For example, native birds were popular, with people buying special trees to support them. As Wendy explained:

“I’ve also been planting natives around the property - it’s my hope (and dream) that I’ll have Tui in my garden”.

Like Wendy, informants believed they had a responsibility to take care of other creatures. Maria, for example, was deeply concerned about animal welfare and talked about her role as a ‘steward’ overseeing their welfare:

“I’m a steward to the animals as well. I have dominion over the animals, that means I care for them. I just absolutely disagree with conventional farming. I don’t think we should be eating a lot of meat”.

Maria tried to create an environment where her animals were happy and cared for. All of the informants expressed their concerns that animals were treated with respect. As Richard expressed:

“It’s actually had a good life and that it’s been well cared for and that it’s, you know, every step of the process that the animals been well feed itself. And been loved and nurtured”.

Raising their own animals meant they could be assured of the quality of the meat and knew that they had been treated well during their lifetime.

I found animals were positioned as being either sacred or profane. To be sacred is to elevate something as being special and above ordinary use (Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989). A number of informants were vegetarian and for them animals were considered sacred. Other informants were not and they had clear lines around the animals that were functional and those with which they had a stronger emotional connection. Richard had a
close relationship with his cow as he milked her every day (see Image 26). He was clear that she was a pet and when she died she would be buried on the farm. Pets are identified as sacred animals and as such inconceivable for consumption purposes (Harris, 1985). One of the challenges of growing animals to eat was to ensure they did not become pets. Rob and Catherine had made a point of not naming the ones that were going to be consumed, as they would become difficult to kill. Informants are exhibiting a degree of anthropomorphism, where the animals are seen as exhibiting human-like qualities (Epley, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2007). When objects are imbued with human-like qualities it can result in enhanced feelings and social interaction (Aggarwal & McGill, 2012). By delineating them as sacred the animals were being given perceived human associations that elevated them above their ordinary roles and subsequently became untouchable as a source of food.

This sacred and profane classification continued on with informants positioning animals as fitting into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ categories. For example, some positioned birds as good and actively encouraged them, others felt they were in fact the enemy of a productive crop. Rob had set up a complex netting system to keep the birds away from his berries although they had still managed to get through. In Aroha’s family there is a Maori tradition of killing one of the birds and displaying it as a signal to the others to keep away. She found this only worked for a short period of time and had eventually come to the conclusion that she needed to find a way to share. There was a tension when attempting to living in harmony with animals and birdlife. Informants had overcome this by cordonning off certain areas for themselves and putting special areas aside to support other life forms. For example, Jan in Image 27 had blocked off an area specifically for her goat to prevent it eating the rest of her crops. Maria on the other hand had deliberately kept her cumquat fruit tree free so that it could feed the birds. I found informants were taking a dominant position towards

Image 27: Jan’s Contained Goat
animals, seeing it as their responsibility to set parameters that would support and protect them, while making sure informant’s needs were met as well. An original contribution of this research is that there is evidence of animals being identified in ways that are similar to in and out-group behaviour. There are animals that are desirable and accepted as part of informant’s in-group (e.g. pets) and those that are seen as undesirable (e.g. pests) and subsequently part of their out-group. Research by Brewer (1999) has identified that people exhibit just preferential treatment to their in-groups not out-right hostility to their out-groups as had earlier been reported. I found in this research that while informants tried to be understanding of all animals there was often visible hostile and aggressive towards those animals that threatened their way of life. Some informants were actively at war with what they considered to be pests. The challenge for informants was mediating their behaviour to be in alignment with their beliefs of respect for all living creatures. Again the theme of balance emerges as informants are trying to find a middle road between competing demands.

**Theme 10 - Work**

Work was a significant investment of an informant’s time. A stipulation of this study was that informants were actively attempting to live sustainably in their personal lives and no consideration was given as to what they did for a job. As shown in Table 1 in the methodology chapter the range of informants’ careers included teachers, accountants, administrators, designers and consultants. Most identified it was important to make a meaningful contribution in whatever industry they were a part of. Jan and Richard, for example, had no plans to retire, they saw doing meaningful work as an essential part of staying vital:

“Retirement is sort of something that able bodied mentally able people do and then become redundant in the brain. They sort of head out to golf courses and things like that. Which is, they just, it’s like they become part of the living dead, which I just would never. Retirement isn’t actually part of our ethos at all. That we actually plan to work until the day that we die, sort of thing. That’s pretty important to us”

Richards comment links to the idea of a sustainable lifestyle being an active pursuit and a life-long commitment. The tangible aspects of their lifestyle gave their life continued meaning.
As authenticity and integrity were important to informants, nearly a quarter of informants having chosen to change jobs and work in sustainability-aligned roles. For example, Kylie had felt dissatisfied with her job as a lawyer so had started an NGO encouraging urban growing. She didn’t have any formal experience but wanted to do work where she felt she was making a difference:

“I’d always been really into this kind of sustainable kind of thing. So I didn’t actually have any background in food growing or anything like that, beyond helping my parents in the garden when I was growing up. But I was really, like, interested in the idea of community gardening as a way to bring people together and learn new skills and sort of create community, but yeah, with a focus on sustainability and stuff”.

Kylie, like a number of others, discussed the importance of having a job that was consistent with her beliefs. Anthony and Rebecca both told of transformative experiences in their twenties that had motivated them to make career changes. A few of the informants with traditional jobs also expressed future plans to change careers to areas more in alignment with their values. A sustainability mind-set appeared to impact on all aspects of their lives with a career shift being the ultimate expression of their values.

Most informants identified their jobs as being quite normal and commented that most people would not know that they lived so sustainably. In whatever profession they had they did endeavour to bring a sustainability perspective to their roles. For example, Debra brought her consciousness of chemicals and waste to her position as a textile instructor. She taught her students to be mindful of the products they were using and take responsibility for the impact those decisions would have, like the effect of chemicals on the water they discarded down the drains. A number commented that they felt it was better to work within the current system to bring about change than to stand outside and critique it. Mark, for example, had used his influence as the HR Manger in the hotel where he worked to get them to purchase food that was organic and fair-trade. Jess recognised that her decision to return to study had been fuelled by a desire to change things from the inside:

“I have this sub conscious idea that I need to be as good as anyone else. And then once I achieve that, then I can critique the system in a more effective way. And whether that’s actually self-defeating and means that I end up, becoming a part of the mainstream, without realising it as a danger”.

110
She was concerned about maintaining her values and recognised that continuing relationships with people who felt the same as her was a necessary part of sustaining her convictions.

The importance of ‘values’ and the actions of informant’s being consistent with these were a consistent theme. As previously discussed, values are the guiding principles in people’s lives (Schwartz, 1992). Research has found that the propensity to participate in collective action, particularly environmental behaviours, occurs within Schwartz’s (1994) two-dimensional value axis of ‘self-enhancement’ (e.g. – materialism, ambition) and ‘self-transcendence’ (e.g. benevolence) (Karp, 1996; Stern, Kalof, Dietz, & Guagnano, 1995). Similar to previous research, my informants were exhibiting behaviours consistent with self-transcendence values, going beyond their own needs to consider the wider societal impacts (Stern, 2000; Thøgersen & Ölander, 2002). There was tension between what were perceived as predominant societal values for self-enhanced consumption and informant’s desire for more responsible choices. Informants mediated this by attempting to make changes from within business systems and living as consistent with their values as possible. There appeared to be an acknowledgement that change was best achieved within the mainstream, as Jess discussed, yet it was equally important to remain true to one’s values and not have the external values supersede their own. The decision by some informants to work in sustainability-orientated roles is a possible outcome of that.

**A Sustainable Life**

My analysis is that the tangible, behavioural aspects of a sustainable lifestyle suggested five superordinate themes: encompassing, meaningful, shared, controlled and compromising, as illustrated in Figure 8.

**I. Superordinate Theme: Encompassing**

This lifestyle was all encompassing. It affected on all parts of their life from what they consumed to how they lived. While other subculture research has focused on consumption choices that influence a defined area of people’s lives (Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007; Gelder, 2005; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), for this subculture their lifestyle impacted on every single aspect of their lives. As Rebecca had discussed it was a part of
Figure 8: Summary of the Key Attributes of a Creators Life

their ‘brain chemistry’. It is for this reason that I position this lifestyle as a way of ‘being’ as much as it is a sense of what they do and have.

II. **Superordinate Theme: Meaningful**

This lifestyle is about making meaningful choices. They are using contamination in a positive way to imbue goods with sacred meaning. Taylor (1992) argues that individualism has resulted in modern consumption that is essentially meaningless; the re-introduction of connection and community resulting in more authentic and meaningful offerings. This lifestyle is not about minimal consumption; instead it is about consuming quality items that have greater meaning for informants and result in a sense of long-term satisfaction. They are elevating, treasuring and stretching out the enjoyment they receive from the objects in their lives. Marketing’s aim is to obtain maximum utility for its customers. I propose these consumers are endeavouring to achieve this by embodying a sense of deep fulfilment from their goods and experiences.

III. **Superordinate Theme: Shared**

This lifestyle is a shared one. Whether it was the sharing of goods or working with like-minded others, informants were demonstrating an aggregated extended self in which sharing with others and the positive contamination of goods was valued. Sustainability
problems were positioned as a collective issue so the sharing of information, tools and abilities was seen as a required part of the solution. Caru and Cova (2007) propose an experience is never truly complete until it has been expressed so sharing and collective pleasure were an inseparable part of any consumption experience. While informants made changes in their own lives, they took pride in sharing with others the benefits and pleasures their lifestyle provided. An integration of the ‘social’ and ‘shared’ aspect was an essential part of meant to be sustainable.

IV. **Superordinate Theme: Controlled**

This lifestyle is also about being in control. Whether it was their food, consumables or animals they were trying to control and have dominion over those things around them. Part of being in control was about being responsible; as Maria stated she was a ‘steward’ of her environment, who cared for those around her and made decisions with integrity. The other part was about being safe – knowing they are protected whatever happens in the world around them. They were attempting to control all aspects of their lives for their own personal protection and the benefit of others. This theme will be discussed in more detail in Section 4 on Motivations.

V. **Superordinate Theme: Compromising**

This lifestyle is also about constant trade-offs. For example, Fiona’s search for organic sheets involved trade-offs of time, money, personal travel and country of origin. Compromising refers to the fact that their choices were always being negotiated. There were rarely perfect sustainable choices so compromises were constantly being made between different aspects of their lives as they sought to find an equilibrium they were comfortable with. They were endeavouring to find balance in their lives between competing demands at a personal, social and collective level. As it was a continuous task to find balance they developed strategies to overcome internal and external challenges associated with their lifestyle choices. This will be elaborated upon in Section 5 that discusses the challenges this lifestyle presents and the strategies they used to overcome them.
Section Summary

A sustainability mind-set impacted on all elements of informants lives. The tangible aspects represented the physical expression of this subculture. In this lifestyle, informants are endeavouring to make well-considered and meaningful decisions that positively impact themselves, their community, other living creatures and the environment. They are taking control of their life choices and aiming to achieve a sense of long-term satisfaction from consuming the ‘right’ types of products. If they could not find what they wanted immediately they were willing to search extensively or even make it themselves. They lived in a world of imperfect choices that required constant trade-offs, yet continued to strive for a better way of living in a way that was realistic and achievable.
Section 3: Identity Constructs

“Identity is a vital basis for any marked transition to sustainability” (O’Riordan, 2001, p. 19).

Sustainable lifestyles require a shift in individual consciousness and the development of new human identities. Cherni (2001) argues that the formation of a ‘sustainability’ identity is an integral part of the process of transiting towards being sustainable. My analysis identified a subcultural identity. I discuss the multiple identities that were part of the formation of an overarching identity I have labelled the ‘Creators’. This section address the second research question on the role sustainability plays in the construction of the informant’s identity:

Research Question 2: What role does sustainability play in their identity construction?

The development and formation of a person’s identity is an on-going process of social negotiation. Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock (1996) identified four non-linear stages for creating a subcultural identity:

1. Defining - bringing a construct into existence and naming it
2. Coding – creating rules and boundaries of identity
3. Affirming – creating opportunities to enact and validate identity
4. Policing – protection and enforcement of identity signifiers

Informants showed evidence of engaging in all four stages of identity formation. It is important to note that this research’s emerging identity constructs are not exclusive and are reflective of a subculture in the formation stage of defining who they are. A person’s definition of themselves can be multi-dimensional, complex and at times contradictory as they mature (Featherstone, 1995). This section elaborates on the multi-dimensional aspects that informants are drawing upon in defining who they are, and the formation of an overarching subcultural identity.

This section will predominately draw upon insights from two main bodies of research – social identity theory and collective action research. In social identity theory, boundaries are made between in-group and out-group members (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). When people define the identity of the groups to which they belong importance is placed on the creation of boundaries which discriminate between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Lamont, 2001). Gamson (1992)
found that defined boundaries assisted in mobilising people on social injustice issues and clearly shaped their position on political issues. This argument is supported by Kelly and Breinlinger (1996) who suggest that the fragmentation of identity and the absence of a unified social identity can result in a lack of political power, a key strength that unified large-scale social movements of the past have had. The delineation between ‘in’ and ‘out’ group members was clearly demonstrated by the informants of this research and as such I have used these classifications as the framework for presenting the results. Identity theory is also drawn upon from the lens of social identity given the social constructionism methodological framework of this study. In this section I outline what informants identified as the undesirable out-group member attributes and elaborate on the preferred in-group characteristics. Figure 9 summarises these key themes:

![Figure 9: Summary of the In and Out Group Identity Constructs](image)

I have chosen to first outline the out-group members as they played a key role in informants defining their in-group. The second half of this section will cover the more positive in-group member characteristics.

**Theme 1: Out-group**

My analysis revealed specific out-groups that I have placed under the umbrella term ‘Environmentalists’. Informants deliberately distanced themselves from terms that had
Chapter Four  Identity Constructs  Research Findings

traditionally been associated with environmentalism, in particular ‘Hippy’, ‘Tree hugger’ and ‘Greenie’. Most informants felt very uncomfortable being given these labels. Rebecca cringed at being described like that; she felt it showed a lack of awareness of what sustainability was all about:

“They’re terms that other people put on me. They’ll say, ‘Oh Rebecca, you’re a bit of a tree hugger’ or ‘you’re a greenie’. And I’ll sort of like cringe a little bit, because it kind of shows that they don’t really know me or they don’t have an understanding about what I’m, what sustainability’s about. That a lot of people just still think it’s about the environment”.

Rebecca, like most informants, had an aversion to these terms because other people used them as derogatory put-downs. Mark explained how it was a common occurrence for him when he shared information about his lifestyle:

“You start talking about it and they just sort of shut up and call you a hippie and that’s about it. So it’s like oh whatever”.

These terms were used to position informants as extremists and consequently negate any information they expressed. Aroha elaborated:

“I think it’s really sad when people kind of just count out any other way of thinking as extreme, extremist or activist because it’s just evolution. It’s just changing”

Research on past social movements has found that ‘activists’ are often portrayed in a negative light, positioned as taking an extreme position compared to the moderate mainstream and often described in terms of negative appearance and behaviour (Kelly & Breinlinger, 1996). For example, the feminist stereotype became one of an unattractive woman who was aggressive and anti-men; to be a feminist was in effect to lose one’s femininity (Percy & Kremer, 1995). In accepting the influence of a perceived out-group, the individual risks the negative associations with their identity, which can be perceived as a considerable threat (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1996). This was demonstrated by those informants who were wary of sharing information about their lifestyle because of the negative perception others may have of them. They had learnt to pick their battles and only argue about something if they felt really passionate about it. Some also distanced themselves from these terms because they did not feel they reflected the serious purpose and intent of their lifestyle. The following section elaborates on informant’s perception of the four main out-group identity constructs: ‘Treehugger’, ‘Hippy’, ‘Greenie’ and ‘Different’ as defined in Table 9.
### Environmentalists
Historical extremists focused on saving the planet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.1 Treehugger</strong></td>
<td>Soft person who is a dreamer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.2 Hippy</strong></td>
<td>Lazy and out of touch with reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.3 Greenie</strong></td>
<td>Concerned about the environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I. Hardened Greenies</strong></td>
<td>Live an ‘extreme’ isolated green lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>II. Fashionable Greenies</strong></td>
<td>Make green choices because they are fashionable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.4 Different</strong></td>
<td>Individuals operating outside mainstream society with limited ability to influence others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: Summary of Out-group Identity Constructs

**Subtheme 1.1: Treehugger**

The impression informants had of a ‘Treehugger’ was a soft person who was a bit of a dreamer. Rob and John both talked about how they were definitely not Treehuggers and in fact really enjoyed cutting down trees. Rob talked about how offended he felt when people labelled him as such:

“I’ll say ‘Oh yeah we’re doing this’ and one of the ladies say ‘Oh you bloody tree huggers’. And I go ‘I’m not a tree hugger!’ you know, no way!”

Informants stated that while they were partial to hug a tree once in a while they definitely did not want others to see them in that way. They on the other hand were making life-style choices that had a serious intent and purpose.

**Subtheme 1.2: Hippy**

‘Hippies’ was a term identified by a number of informants, who were described as people out of touch with reality. Jess felt it had a strong association with laziness:
“I don’t find any of those terms offensive but hippie has a connotation of laziness, eerie fairyness, it’s a term that [is] non-practical. Like people who aren’t productive, you know, life it about relaxing ... hippie has a kind of lazy, self-interested, hedonistic association”

She commented that a sustainable lifestyle was more about hard work and being practical. Jan supported this. She had lived through the 1960’s era and still did not feel it was an appropriate term to describe her:

“My kids summed it up that I was always, in the height of the hippie movement, I was in my raincoat and sensible shoes which is not part of the hippie movement sort of thing. So I, it’s just never, I’ve never felt the need to play to somebody else’s drums sort of thing and it just doesn’t, it’s not something I identify with. It’s not that I’m anti them, I’ve just never identified with it”

Informants felt ‘Hippy’ was an historical term that did not reflect the lifestyle they were trying to achieve.

**Subtheme 1.3: Greenie**

‘Greenie’ was seen as the least offensive term. Anthony was definitely not a ‘Treehugger’ or ‘Hippy’ but admitted if he had to take one of the terms he preferred ‘Greenie’:

“I don’t know I would brand myself as a greenie. But I guess I have to face facts is I probably am in terms of my political views and the lifestyle and stuff like that. I guess if I was going to be put in a box I would probably be greenie”

Nearly all of the informants tried to distance themselves from what I describe as ‘Trendy Greenies’. These were people who were making sustainable choices simply because it was fashionable. Jess expressed her concerns about people who in her opinion were superficially green:

“For the long term I think it’s actually a negative thing because it makes something that which needs to be permanent into a fad”

Informants were clear that they were committed over the long-term and making authentic choices, not fashionable ones.

When other people used the term ‘Greenie’ informants felt that they were really referring to a more extreme green lifestyle. Maria described these people as hardened Greenies who were focused on saving the planet, with humans positioned as the enemy:
“Greens sometimes become so obnoxiously myopic about their view of the world that they almost see humans as something to get rid of … like nature is just predominate over everything”

For informants, a sustainable lifestyle was about humans finding a way to live in balance with the environment. My analysis revealed that informants perceived humans to be at the centre of the environment, not in competition with it. They were deliberately trying to move away from the more radical or extreme perceptions focused only on saving the planet. Kylie’s youth group had been criticised for not being radical in their stance but she was fine with that as she wanted to appeal to ‘normal’ people like herself. As she explained:

“I care about this stuff, but like I don’t want to go out there and like tie myself to things or like (laughter) you know have to like just where hemp all the time or whatever. Like I just wanna, you know do it, I just want like the norm of society to change, rather than having to go out to an extreme in order to change, you know?”

While it was the least offensive term, most informants still preferred not to be seen as ‘Greenies’ because of its negative associations.

Informants were deliberately distancing themselves from the historic terms associated with environmentalism because of the negative associations. Pulido (1996) argues that a shared social identity is not automatic and is most often created through the interaction and struggle with others. She suggests that if a person’s identity is negatively criticised by others it can result in low self-esteem and a feeling of being oppressed which can limit the successful formation of a social movement for change. I suggest part of the reason my informants were motivated to create a new identify was to prevent these negative labels. If they were to inspire and encourage others to change they needed to create new identities that would be more appealing.

**Subtheme 1.4: Different**

One of the key constructs to emerge from the data was that informants did not want to be perceived as being fundamentally different from others. Unlike the other out-group labels that were historic terms, being ‘different’ was an underlying theme that they were consciously trying to avoid. They wanted to be seen as ‘normal’ so that other people would be more accepting of them and they could more effectively inspire others. Rob wanted to be appreciated as normal so that people would listen to what he had to say:
“If you talk about tree huggers, or greenies, you know people just seem to push them over there then as if well they’re dreamers really, join the real world and that type of thing. I don’t know, I’m not sure what, what you call us. We’re pretty normal really, but we want to try and make a change in our little bit, but also pass on the message a bit”.

He felt that if other people thought he was normal and he could share with them what he was doing there was a higher chance of them being inspired. Kylie also felt it was important to be seen as ‘normal’ to get other people involved in the issues. She reflected on this when describing her experience or recruiting volunteers for her group:

“A lot of people have kind of had the response that, ‘Cool, I care about these things and I’ve been looking for something to get involved with and it’s really great that, and I really connect with this because you guys are actually just normal young people, you’re not, like, crazy hippies that don’t wear shoes and think that capitalism must die’. ‘You’re normal, you’re studying, you’re young professionals, whatever’, so we can approach this in that way”.

Kylie had deliberately shied away from anything seen as too radical. She felt there were other groups people could join for that. Kelly and Breinlinger’s (1996) research suggests more moderate members of a social movement may be reluctant to be seen as activists and associated with the group, particularly if the perception of a stereotypical in-group member is of a marginalised position. Sustainability initiatives can often be associated with having to give things up and an underlying implication of hardship (Osboldiston & Sheldon, 2002; Svedin, Hjort afOrnas, Lohm, & Gooch, 2001). There was a distinct desire among the informants to distance themselves from these associations by focusing on the more positive aspects of the lifestyle. As addressed in Section 1, informants were even attempting to distance themselves from the word ‘sustainability’ due to its complex meanings and inherent complications. This desire to be seen as ‘normal’ suggests informants wanted to be perceived as part of the in-group of mainstream society. From a social constructionist perspective, a subculture’s identity constructs and associated artefacts do not reside just within that group, they are connected to cultural values and societal perceptions of power (Cerulo, 1997). Inglehart (1990) argues that emerging cultural values, such as environmentalism, are having a transformative effect on society’s culture. Informants positioned themselves as early adopters and their lifestyle choices were simply ahead of the curve and others would catch up. As Christian states:

“I’m just this little bit in front of everyone else who’s going to be discovering the same thing ... I feel like I might be leading by example a little bit”.

121
Christian expressed a need to be seen as a leader ahead of the mainstream society, as opposed to an out-group member. Informants, rather than criticising it as an outsider, had taken the position of advocating for change from within society. My research was focused on understanding the consumption choices of people in urban environments who, as a consequence of living in close proximity to others, felt a strong sense connection to those around them. Unlike extremists, they were embedded in normal communities so being perceived as an outlier would be inappropriate. They wanted to be positioned as part of society, not separate from it, as being an insider gave them the greatest opportunity to influence others.

It is important to note though that there was an important distinction made between how informants wanted to be perceived by others and how they felt inside. The majority of informants wanted others to see them as normal, yet acknowledged that internally they felt different. Fiona reflected on her struggle with fitting in with others:

“There are times when I can feel very much, you know I don’t care whether the choices I make are different from my neighbours...And there are days when that is definitely not the case where I feel much more disconnected ... So I think it's a work in progress and I think that's a lifelong”

Fiona’s description reflects the challenges she faced in maintaining an external perception of normality whist often feeling fundamentally different inside. Mark thought others saw him as normal yet he too felt different internally:

“I think because my lifestyle is, I suppose it’s pretty, on the outside if you looked into it, it’s pretty normal I suppose. But then that’s probably not what’s going on in my head sort of thing”

Informants discussed feeling isolated and that joining groups enabled them to connect with likeminded people. Jan emphasized how her community connections meant she was never alone:

“I've never seen myself as isolated because I've got this, have this whole community of equally positioned people”.

Most informants wanted to be perceived as normal yet acknowledged they were different; groups helped them navigate the tension between being sustainable and living in an urban-based consumerist society. Brewer’s (2003) theory of group identification suggests that people are seeking a sense of ‘optimal distinctiveness’, with a tension between needing to
be included and being seen as uniquely different. This theory may explain the informant’s desire to be seen as part of mainstream society yet still different from others. They joined groups with like-minded people a means of support for their beliefs yet were clear they were not so different as to be a part of an out-group with associated negative stereotypes.

Research in the area of collective action suggests the need for a defined out-group is necessary when creating an identity based on achieving social change. Gamson (1995) argues that when there are clearer frameworks around who the in-group is and who the adversarial out-group is, it is easier for a social group to communicate their position to outsiders and adopt formed identities. When the boundaries are unclear and the issue has a divergent focus it is harder to clearly identify that which constitutes an insider. In this research, when informants were defining who they were it was easier for them to first outline their potential out-group membership and the characteristics they were consciously distancing themselves from. The definition of an in-group identity was more challenging and, as we shall see in the next section, they articulated multiple aspects in the formation of their identity construct.

In summary, informants wanted to distance themselves from identities that would describe them as different or extreme. They wanted to be seen as ‘normal’ so they fitted in, which offered them the best chance of inspiring others. They were acutely aware of outsider constructs and were proud to be creating an identity that was different. The next theme focuses on the positive identity constructs that informants preferred using to define themselves.

**Theme 2: In-group**

A central question in collective action research is what motivates people to advocate for social justice issues or join a social movement. While research has found a link between the perceived effectiveness of a campaign and intention to participate (Flood, 1993; Wolf, Gregory, & Stephan, 1986), there is strong evidence of a willingness to join a social change movement even when the desired outcome is unlikely to be achieved (Hornsey et al., 2006; Kelly & Breinlinger, 1995; Stürmer, Simon, Loewy, & Jörger, 2003). Social identity theory research proposes that a major reason people participate in social change campaigns is their identification with the group (Simon et al., 1998). Subcultures offer people with similar
interests the opportunity to connect, belong and share a social identity. The complexity of
the sustainability issue and the convergence of multiple considerations means there is
unlikely to be a singular distinctive identity; instead a more dynamic and complex version is
likely to emerge comprising aspects of individual characteristics and collective ideologies
(Cherni, 2001). Informants in this research described emerging sustainability-related
identities that they used to define who they currently were and aspired to be. I have
developed four main identity constructs that encapsulate these themes, which I have
defined in Table 10 as: ‘Mindful Consumers’, ‘Engaged Actives’, ‘Connected Authentics’ and
‘Creative Makers’. I will discuss each of these and then elaborate on the overarching identity
construct I have labelled as the ‘Creators’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creators</td>
<td>People who use creative energy to develop a connected and sustainable way of living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Mindful Consumers</td>
<td>Mindful of the wider sustainability impacts of everything they brought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Engaged Actives</td>
<td>Advocating for change and inspiring others through their actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Connected Authentics</td>
<td>Emotionally connected to others, they cared and made decisions that had integrity and authenticity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Creative Makers</td>
<td>Took pride in using their own hands to create things and solve problems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: Summary of In-group Identity Constructs

**Subtheme 2.1: Mindful Consumers**

Mindful Consumers are people who consider the wider sustainability impacts of their purchase decisions. This first identity construct has a strong cognitive component because it is based on informants using their knowledge base to make informed decisions consistent with their values.
Nearly all of the informants identified themselves as people who were ‘conscious’ and thought through the wider impacts of their behaviour, as illustrated in Table 11. In describing himself as an animal, Anthony explicitly stated that he wanted to choose something that was warm blooded as it exhibited characteristics of being conscious. He felt a societal shift in values to more sustainable practices suggested that people were becoming more conscious. Jess explained that being ‘aware’ meant thinking about the wider impacts of her behaviour. Informants positioned themselves as being ‘aware’ while others were aware or indifferent. My analysis showed that informants had a strong sense of awareness of the injustice associated with current societal consumption practices. Kelly and Breinlinger (1996) in their work of social movements state that “identification with a social group and a sense of collective injustice go hand-in-hand” (p.174). Castell (2011) postulates that the failure of social movements to protect people from the harsh side effects of globalisation, such as environmental derogation, results in the formation of defensive identities as a way to counteract the feeling of uncontrollability. Oppositional identities are a way for a subculture to reclaim and affirm better version of their selves within the dominant cultural paradigm (Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock, 1996). These defensive identities overtime revive a sense of belonging and a common cultural identity that seeks a better quality of life. I would
suggest that informant’s positioning of themselves as aware and others as un-conscious are a type of defence identity. They see themselves as having more knowledge and others as lacking that level of understanding. MacKenzie and Dalby (2003) argue that the formation of a shared identity requires moving away from being in ‘opposition’ and instead focusing on the positive achievements possible in the local environment. I found most informants wanted to move beyond simply being aware and judging others for their indifference and instead focus on what they could do to make a difference. The choice to be a ‘Mindful Consumer’ is an expression of that. They are using their experience and knowledge to make informed decisions that have a positive impact.

I chose ‘Mindful Consumers’ to reflect them being educated about the issues and used this information to make well thought out purchase decisions. As Rebecca explained sustainable considerations were such a fundamental part of who she was that she always thought about it when making decisions. Image 28 is a picture of Fiona’s organic recyclable shopping bags, which she saw as an essential part of being a mindful shopper. For Wendy it was about being responsible in her choices and making sure she did not use more than what was fair. She was motivated by a sense of ethical social justice and not wanting to exploit people, particularly in third world countries. I suggest informants were endeavouring to use their consumption choices to embody their role as both a global and local citizen; some acknowledging their role as global people yet acted out their participation through their consumerism and citizenship at a local level. When an individual joins a social movement from a position of empathy, the identity that forms is likely to be more cohesive and encompass people across socio-economic groupings (O’Riordan, 2003).
2001). These informants were endeavouring to be inclusionary, considering ‘others’ in all of their purchases.

I argue that informants have adopted an identity that is an extension of the traditional ‘consumer’ construct. They devoted considerable time and energy to their purchases, seeking the ‘right’ product that was a reflection of their values. They were not anti-consumption, instead defining themselves as a more informed consumer who were highly-involved in their purchases and considered the wider impacts of their decisions.

**Subtheme 2.2: Engaged Actives**

An ‘Engaged Active’ advocates for change and inspires others through their actions. This construct has a strong behavioural aspect as all of the informants had described themselves as being ‘active’ in some way. Andrews (1991) longitudinal study on activists revealed a self-concept aimed at social change composes both a sense of *being* and *doing*. It was not enough to simply believe something; an integral part of the definition of who they are is that they took action. An activist identity, based on a strong sense of responsibility, is one of recurring and continual actions in their daily lives. An activist identity applied to my informants who described being ‘active’ as a fundamental part of who they are and a necessary aspect of participating in this lifestyle.

I chose ‘Engaged Actives’ to encapsulate this identity concept because it was not just about taking action in their own lives, they wanted large-scale societal behaviour changes and put considerable effort into inspiring others to adopt aspects of their lifestyle. Aroha for example felt it was important to be knowledgeable and share that information with others. She placed more importance on ‘doing’ something as opposed to the actual outcome of her behaviour. Research has found that people who are highly involved in a social justice movement describe themselves as action-orientated people who need to ‘do’ something as they believe if they did not than no one else will (Oliver, 1984). The dominant position in the literature is that people who participate in social justice issues do so because of a sense of moral responsibility, even if they know their actions will not result in change(Kelly & Breinlinger, 1996; Tyler & McGraw, 1983). These informants positioned a sustainable lifestyle as one of action and not participating in some way would effectively be contradicting an important aspect of who they are. What being active meant varied across
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Engaged Actives</td>
<td>“I know I’m not going to be able to accomplish necessarily massive things in my lifetime but I can help a little bit and that’s kind of what it’s about” Aroha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Passionate not preachy</td>
<td>“I very much believe that people do have to make their own choices, although I try to, you know if people ask me I will talk about it. I will tell them what I do, but I think it’s important that I don’t ram it down people’s throats as well” Fiona</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Liz specifically used the word: ‘I heard Anthony preaching about permaculture a lot over the last year’. And I cringed a lot for that. And I’ve also had one of my wife’s friends accuse me of being preachy before, which I am uncomfortable with. Because I’m quite conscious not to be preachy. But in saying that if someone asked me about it, I would be very happy to talk a lot about it.” Anthony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“That was an awakener to me because I realised I needed to live my life the best way I can to fit within my ideals and that’s the only way to have freedom and not end up like those hardened activists woman who just seem to have all the kindness taken out of them you know”. Jess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Educators</td>
<td>“I think by teaching people what you’re doing and stuff as well, I mean that’s an important part of that so that you are growing, teaching people how you raise chickens or whatever and all that sort of stuff, so you can have a bigger impact as well”. Mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I quite deliberately have a front garden that borders directly into the Street. And it’s not just for growing ... it’s also so that people can see that you can do something like this. And, from what I experienced just from looking out from my kitchen or being out front. And getting comments, there’s a huge amount of interest and delight. It’s not universal there are a lot of people who just walk right past unblinking but there are a lot of people that stop and comment and smile and look and examine. And they’re quite amused or delighted by it. And yeah so that’s, I think that’s a role I feel I’m playing at this point, it’s a bit of an activist role, it’s very passive in a way”. Christian</td>
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<td>“So it’s a bit like spreading the word really, it’s that whole thing about the expo really. Like if each one of those people goes away with one little concept that tickled their fancy a bit, and they tell someone else. And they tell someone else, that’s the principle we’re working on in a sense. It’s that it’s like everybody does a little bit and it mounts up to being a lot”. Robb</td>
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<td>III. Political Activists</td>
<td>“I kind of like the activist because I think that it does kind of sum up this idea that you’re trying to be a bit of a counter culture aspect to it, which is part of the thing I like about this, their uncivilisation. The fact that you’re gotta actually, it’s a conscious acknowledgement of the way that we’re living at the moment is not working and we need more, to use their language, a more honest response to that. So I guess there is that aspect of activism that I do quite like”. Anthony</td>
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<td>“I see my biggest ability to change things is through political process or my ability to influence people to change things through political process” Jess</td>
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Table 12: Subtheme Engaged Actives
informants and three main aspects within the subtheme of Engaged Actives: passionate not preachy, educators and political activists as illustrated in Table 12.

I. Passionate not preachy

My analysis has suggested that informants were wanting to be seen as effective opinion leaders which meant it was important they were perceived as passionate not preachy. They wanted to inspire others, not have people ignore their message. Anthony speaks of his discomfort in being seen as ‘preachy’. In his second interview, he equated being preachy with ignorance as it implies there is only one right way to do things. He preferred to be seen as informed and passionate. As described by Fiona, informants were very careful about how they communicated information to others not to scare them off. As discussed earlier, informants did not want to be seen as extremists. Jess for example was careful not to be seen as a bitter person, something she had identified in older activists. I believe this is part of the reason they chose to focus on the positive aspects of their lifestyle and deliberately steered away from the negative aspects.

II. Educators

Informants were actively engaged in educating people on the issues and inspiring others through modelling good practices. Image 29 is a picture of Christian’s front garden that he had specifically created to attract attention and get people in his neighbourhood talking. He acknowledged that he would love to be a more politically active person but it was not part of his character. His garden was a form of activism for him and the main way he felt he could inspire change. He reflected a common theme of a
sustainable lifestyle itself being its own form of activism.

A number of informants took more active roles, positioning themselves as opinion leaders in their communities. Fiona had started writing a green column in the local newspaper to spread the importance of living sustainably. A few of the informants had organised events to give others the opportunity to make positive sustainable changes in their lives. Catherine and Rob had organised an Eco-expo in Christchurch to inspire ordinary people to adopt more ecological practices. They deliberately wanted to get away from the ‘greeny’ label and aimed it at normal people because they felt it was more important to influence them. They got support from the council, had over 90 exhibitors and an attendance of around 14,000 Cantabrians. Due to time commitments they stepped back from managing the event the following year but were proud to have been the founders of such a successful initiative that promoted sustainable living practices and products to the mainstream.

I argue that the nature of their actions demonstrates that the informants are exhibiting high self-efficacy. A person with high self-efficacy believes they have the power to influence and enact change and are likely to persist for longer to achieve their goals (Zimmerman, 2000). Research has found that people with high self-efficacy feel more in control of their lives and believe they shape their destiny through their actions; those with lower self-efficacy will tend to perceive their life choices as largely outside their control (Ajzen, 2002; Judge & Bono, 2001; Phillips & Gully, 1997). These informants were taking action because they believe they can make a difference, modelling good behaviour and using social persuasion to encourage those with lower self-efficacy to change. They were not relying on external systems like the government to make changes; they felt firmly that it was within their power to control the outcomes of their lives. As demonstrated earlier in the results, they felt a keen sense of personal responsibility and as such were motivated to create food and social systems that would be resilient regardless of what happened in the external environment. A high self-efficacy could account for their willingness to engage in activities whose benefits were only visible in the long-term and their position that a sustainable lifestyle was a life-long commitment that a person was continually working towards mastering.
III. **Political Activists**

A number of the informants identified themselves as political activists. Anthony reflected that understanding that society is living in an unsustainable way meant activism was part of the equation if you wanted to make a difference. Kelly and Breinlinger (1996) work on social change emphasises that social mobility is possible at the individual level but it is primarily through participation in group action that real change is achieved. As illustrated in Table 11 Jess felt this was the area she could have the most impact. In our second interview she reflected on how being ‘active’ was an essential part of maintaining her beliefs. Having stepped back from her involvement with the Green Party due to study commitments she found that maintaining her lifestyle had become more difficult. Stets and Biga (2003) stated that the level of commitment to an identity is often dependant on the strength of social ties people have with others in the group. Jess’ struggle to maintain her lifestyle after leaving her support network reflects that. Support gained in smaller groups can enable individuals to determine similarities and differences with others and find a platform for shared grievances, which can help shape a sense of identity and can be a forerunner to political action (Hirsch, 1990). Diana, for example, started off in community groups then later joined a number of activist groups, commenting on the level of enjoyment she got from the community aspect of promoting issues she was passionate about. Through joining a group people have the opportunity to categorise their in-group membership and form a sense of connection and belonging with others in their community (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg & Abrahamse, 1988).

![Image 30: Kylie’s Political Action Group](image-url)
Informants who prioritised political action had all joined groups as they felt that working with others was the best way to bring about change. Kylie who described herself as an ‘engaged young person’ had organised ‘Generation Zero’ a group of young people developing authentic responses to climate change and fossil fuel dependency. Image 30 is a photo of one of their brainstorming sessions looking at ways to engage politicians. She was focused on political action as she felt that it was the most important place to put her energy. She felt no different to anyone else except that she was more aware. By actively engaging others in the issues she hoped they would catch up and join her. For the informants who were not engaged in political action, nearly all of them had joined participatory community groups. They identified that groups gave them continued support for their beliefs; an opportunity to participate in shared activities and have fun with others while making a difference.

Research has found weak identifiers with a social justice group are more likely to calculate the costs and benefits of their involvement; strong identifiers of the other hand perceive participation in positive action as a central part of their social identity and place less significance on outweighing the costs and benefits (Kelly & Kelly, 1994). I suggest that informants regularly engaged in community action groups, particularly those involved in political action, are strong identifiers. As discussed earlier, being ‘active’ is a fundamental part of an activist identity (Andrews, 1991) and group engagement enables people to bolster their self-esteem relative to others (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). The decision to be active and join a group also represents a key stage in the process for developing a social identity (Taylor & Whittier, 1999).

In summary, informants were engaged with the issues and active in disseminating that information to inspire others. As they were passionate about making a difference most did not want to come across as preachy or judging of others. Their lifestyle was a form of activism that would teach others through their modelling of ‘good’ behaviour. Some informants identified themselves as politically active. I argue that the informants have high self-efficacy and are seeking to connect with groups of likeminded people to help in defining their in-group characteristics as well as provide them with an environment of support, understanding and belonging.
**Subtheme 2.3: Connected Authentics**

Connected Authentics are emotionally connected to others and because they care they act with integrity and authenticity. This identity construct represents the emotional component of sustainability. Informants were emotionally connected - to the environment, people and other life forms, as illustrated in Table 13. Kylie produced Image 31 to represent this idea of connection. She reiterated that a sense of community and being connected to others was paramount. Others strongly identified themselves as people who were connected to the earth. For Jess being a connected person was about living within earth’s natural parameters. Christian had articulated that adopting a sustainable lifestyle was about a reconnection with all aspects the world around him. He felt like a different person and had become more involved with his community, joining local garden projects and eventually running his own workshops. He had become more connected with the land and people in his community,

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<th>Subtheme</th>
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<td>3. Connected Authentics</td>
<td>“Something that is necessary for sustainability is the connection with the earth because if you’re not feeling connected with the cycles of the earth, instead of humans feeling a part of the ecology, humans are separate from the ecology ... So that’s my utopia of people living amongst the earth and feeling like they are a part of the ecology” <strong>Kylie</strong></td>
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<td>“I remember how I used to be like I didn’t spend any time out here so I didn’t really interact with the neighbours... And, all of that, that changed a lot, so I left my house pretty much, and entered the world” <strong>Christian</strong></td>
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<td>“We paid for the sausages for the radio company to cook and give away as people came in. Because we thought you can’t just go part of the way and say you’ve got your old cheap sausages out the front that they’re giving away. So they were all organically produced meat in the sausages” <strong>Rob</strong></td>
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<td>“There’s something that happens in almost every cell in my body when what I’m doing, the decision I’m making is in tune with a more sustainable holistic way of being. It’s hard to be more specific than that because it’s not tangible, it’s not something that’s easy to describe” <strong>Fiona</strong></td>
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<td>“I can’t always be that authentic to myself sort of thing, coz you do have to do what you get paid for as well. Which I find quite hard at times but then well what else do you do”. <strong>Mark</strong></td>
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**Table 13: Subtheme Connected Authentics**
something he felt he could never have achieved if he had continued the insular lifestyle he had lived before.

An informant’s sense of connection resulted in an aggregate extended self-concept. A product of globalisation and technological innovations is said to be the emergence of a common human identity, not bound by traditional cultural identities, which see people as part of a connected singular consciousness (Robertson, 1992). In the case of these informants they explicitly stated it went beyond simply feeling a connection to a specific group of people, they felt a connection to everyone. While people can extend themselves through objects they can also do so through other people (Belk, 2010b). By including a larger subset of people in their in-group they are effectively extending their self-concept. The sense of being interconnected to others results in the informants feeling a responsibility to care of their welfare too. Belk (2010a) suggests that sharing and considering those outside of the family unit is a means of extending a person’s self-concept. An aggregate extended self diminishes fears of one’s boundaries being invaded, which leads people to enact rituals that involve communal sharing. Informants did demonstrate their connection to others through the sharing of food, goods and experiences. The sense of interconnectedness and communal sharing strongly indicates an aggregated self-concept as Belk (2010b) suggests.

As a result of feeling ‘connected’, informants felt it was important that their choices had integrity and were authentic. Rob and Catherine emphasised how everything they offered at the expo had to be authentic. Rob discussed how it was vital they were acting in accordance with their values, even if other people were not aware. Fiona elaborated on a physical response she had when her choices were in harmony with her values. Fiona’s body
served as a tool for measuring when she was acting with integrity. Human actions are often perceived in terms of what is ‘fair’ and people have been shown to mediate their behaviour according to what they consider to be their fair allocation of resources, even when it is possible to take more than their share (Lind, 2001). Tyler and Dawes (2008) argue that by choosing an identity linked to a social group people experience a feeling of being socially bonded and are willing to behave in ways that benefit the collective; without these ties they are inclined to act in ways that are based on their own self-interest. I would argue that feeling a connection to others encouraged informants to make decisions they feel are ‘fair’ and helped them identify those people as part of their in-group. Making decisions that are in alignment with their personal ethos means they minimise the occurrence of cognitive dissonance and maintain a positive sense of who they are.

One of the challenges of living in urban centres was that the informant’s ability to be authentic was often challenged. Mark, for example, spoke about the tension between his work values and personal ones. From a consumer behaviour perspective the drive for authentic goods and experiences is to express one’s individuality and originality (Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Lewis, 2001). I would argue the search for authentic offerings is a reflection of a desire for a unique expression of self. Buying, consuming and having authentic experiences allow informants to embody the essential aspects of a sustainable lifestyle. The out-group members were described as being disconnected from reality and essentially un-realistic. Informants on the other hand perceived their life choices as genuine. They were endeavouring to enact genuine and unique experiences that reflected their ‘real’ status and elevated their self-esteem.

In summary, informants prided themselves on being seen as people who were connected – to the environment, people and other life. This sense of connection meant that they had extended their perceived in-group to consist of human beings and other living creatures. There were essentially creating an expanded sense of self through others. They particularly wanted to be defined as people who had integrity and were authentic, which meant making consistent decisions that were in alignment with their values. Through seeking authentic experiences they were demonstrating their unique perspective and originality. The next construct expands further on this idea of creative expression.
**Subtheme 2.4: Creative Makers**

Creative Makers take pride in using their own hands to create original items that solve sustainability problems. It has a combination of cognitive, emotional and behavioural components, as illustrated in Table 14. Anthony, for example, defined himself as a thinker and designer. When using an animal to describe himself he chose the spider and the paradise bird as they were both creative and ‘made stuff’. He described the paradise bird as a plain bird that was productive, which was in contrast to other colourful birds that might look good but were unproductive. He felt the bird analogy could easily apply to humans. He wanted to be useful, productive and creative not a flashy, fashion-orientated person who might look good but was ultimately useless. The physical act of making something made informants feel useful. Jan reflected that doing things herself meant she could be self-reliant and no longer needed to rely on external experts. The physical act of making and doing things themselves was personally rewarding and gave them a sense of freedom and confidence knowing they could comfortably take care of their basic needs.

A sustainable lifestyle was also a means of creative expression and informants enjoyed the process of being ‘creators’. Kylie stated that whether it was physically refurbishing furniture or brainstorming ideas, it challenged her creatively. She reflected that a traditional consumer lifestyle did not offer the same level of creativity. Buying things from magazines

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<td>4. Creative Makers</td>
<td>“They just look like sparrows but they make the most complex nests out of any bird. And it’s almost a perfect continuum between the plainness of the bird and the complexity of their nest through to the plainness of their nest and the complexity of their plumage”. <strong>Anthony</strong></td>
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<td>“I really like learning new skills and learning new things and trying out new things. And I’ve sort of come to realise that, just more recently, that part of the excitement for me around some of this stuff is just the creativity that’s involved. Like anything from, you know, deciding to make your own compost bin for your garden through to, like, creative, like how can I match these second hand bits of furniture in my room to make it look cool and stuff like that?”. <strong>Kylie</strong></td>
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<td>“This is what I’ve created, it does have that, so I suppose that sense of satisfaction that this is what I’ve created!” <strong>Mark</strong></td>
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Table 14: Subtheme Creative Makers
or off the shelf was simply following someone else’s design. Creating it themselves or developing new solutions to issues was a product of their creativity. Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock (1996) note that the creation of a subculture’s identity in opposition to the dominant cultural paradigm requires artistic and creative talent as people are actively creating a new identity that offers a sense of worth and positive affirmations protecting them against any negative social perceptions. I identified that the act of being able to create things themselves was one of the most enjoyable parts of their lifestyle.

Informants felt the things they created were superior to brought items as a part of themselves had been invested in their creation. This links back to the concept of contamination – a part of themselves was imbued in their making so was intimately connected to them. Making it themselves meant they had control over the materials they used and would end up with a product that was unique, such as Fiona’s tea lights made from recycled materials in Image 32. Goods act as an extension of one’s self and communicate qualities of a person’s identity (Belk, 1988). The goods they made served as authentic lifestyle symbols and the act of creating something was the ultimate way to imbue part of themselves in the objects they owned. Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock (1996) argue the process of creating an identity is a semiotic bricolage in which people literally create themselves through objects and symbolic acts. If people cannot find the right goods then they will create them so they can more clearly communicate their desired selves (Perinbanayagam, 1991).

I argue that a key draw of a sustainable lifestyle is that it offered informants the opportunity to express a level of creativity that wasn’t available to them in traditional consumption.
choices. They sought to bring a creative aesthetic element to everyday objects. Debra, for example, thought it was essential that objects in her property were beautiful and functional. Image 33 shows the outdoor toilet she built and the extra touches she added to make it look attractive. Christian considered the aesthetics of everything he built – the more beautiful it was the more appealing it would be to others. He won a permaculture design award for a compost system he created that was both functional and aesthetically pleasing. The objects they made were elevated to be sacred objects. They were perceived as better than anything store brought as a part of themselves had gone into its creation. Objects had a story and they were a part of its creation. They also served as clear symbols of their desired self and as a progression towards self-actualisation. For the informants the choice of what they bought and made was a powerful component of their lifestyle and identity.

In summary, informants saw themselves as creative people. A sustainable lifestyle often required inventive solutions that resulted in them making things themselves. This challenged them creatively and they took pride in using their own hands to create original and unique items. The process positively contaminated the things they owned and served as a tool to achieving a self-actualised version of themselves. These objects served as symbols and markers of the process of creating their identity.

Emergence of a Subcultural Identity

This section outlined an emerging subcultural identity with cognitive, emotional and behavioural characteristics. A cultural identity is defined as a network of people with shared
symbols and norms of behaviour (Hall, 1992). Informants in this research are in the process of creating a cultural identity and defining the boundaries and different characteristics of this in-group. Understanding the identity transformation process in regards to a social justice issue can be drawn from past research focused on collective action. Coming out of the ‘new social movement’ literature, is the development of the concept of a collective identity – constructed through an interaction of common interests, experiences, shared resources and a sense of unity (Epstein, 1990). A collective identity is the end result of an identity process in which participants form a sense of collective action through their relationship with the environment and its perceived constraints (Benford & Snow, 2000). Taylor and Whittier (1999) research on sexual identity in social movements identified a three stage process for the creation of a collective identity. Firstly, boundaries are constructed to protect and differentiate between the group and the mainstream. Secondly there is the emergence of a consciousness based on shared beliefs and goals. Thirdly, there is a politicisation of group members to achieve shared goals. While this framework is partially reflected in my research, I question its full application given the inconsistent levels of political engagement by the informants. Similar to Melucci’s (1996) analysis on identity in regards to social conflicts, I propose that the outcome of this social issue is not primarily political action but challenging existing social practices in daily life.

A clear distinction is made between collective and subcultural identities. The former is predominately shaped by the leaders of a social movement, a subcultural identity on the other hand is a more collaborative process of members working together to co-create the concept of who they are (Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock, 1996). My analysis revealed the subcultural identity view of my informants as active creators. They first formed their own personal identities and then joined groups to shape their social identity. Connecting with others enabled them to articulate and refine what it meant to live sustainably. While some were engaged in political action, others were content performing practical actions, such as creating a community garden. A defining feature of a subcultural identity is that it is distinct yet still resides within the larger culture. The four main identity constructs represent the process of them categorising and defining what it means to be part of this subculture.

I propose there is an emerging subculture identity for people attempting to live in a sustainable way. My research uncovered multiple identity constructs that represented
cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects. While acknowledging the multi-dimensional nature of these identity constructs, I have chosen to define an overarching construct, which I have labelled as the ‘Creators’. Their underlying motivation is to create a new way of living – one completely different to anything seen before. It embodies wisdom from the past with modern thinking, and all aspects of this lifestyle are about them creating things – whether it’s an abundant garden or a new piece of furniture, creativity is the lifeblood of their endeavours. Catherine sums up this desire to create:

“People want to create something themselves that they’ve accomplished...To have something that you’ve created that is not work-orientated, this is your creation, is a really big deal”.

The power to create was a hugely motivating factor. It is a lifestyle embedded in authentic values acted out in all aspects of their physical environment. As no lifestyle expression was the same, I define ‘Creators’ as people who uniquely use their creative energy to develop a connected and sustainable way of living. This construct represents the life-long pursuit for sustainability and acknowledges the distinct creative energy each informant was contributing to achieve a connected way of life.

**Section Summary**

This study offered insights into an emerging subcultural identity that is seeking a better quality of life both for themselves and for others. An activist identity includes a sense of being and doing, and the multi-dimensional constructs presented in this section represent a combination of cognitive, emotional and behavioural components. The development of a common identity is an important development in the evolution of a social movement that is advocating for change. In keeping with social identity theory, informants clearly identified out-group members they were deliberately distancing themselves from. These out-groups represented historical identities traditionally associated with the ‘green’ or ‘environmental’ movement. These informants were instead advocating for a lifestyle based around humans living in balance with the environment, not in competition with it. As ‘Creators’ a sustainable lifestyle offered creative outlets in which they could actively create a self-actualised version of themselves. This vision was of a person living in an authentically connected human way who had found a balance between themselves and their physical and social environments. Through claiming a positive ‘sustainable’ subcultural identity
informants were given a path for enhancing their personal self-image and social group recognition. It also gave them an outlet to be engaged in, creating solutions that they hoped would inspire shifts in the dominant cultural paradigm.
Section 4: Motivations

The purpose behind this section is to understand the motives for informants adopting and maintaining a sustainable lifestyle. While there has been a plethora of research into this area there has yet to be agreement on definitive motives of sustainable consumption (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). A contribution of this study is the broad range of motives that were simultaneously impacting upon informants’ lifestyle choices. This section analyses these motives and what can be learnt from them to inspire change in others:

Research Question 3: What are their motives for living sustainably?

In the environmental literature, people who make sustainable choices have more framed as possessing more pro-social, altruistic and self-transcendent values in which they willingly put others needs before their own (Batson, Van Lange, Ahmad, & Lishner, 2007; Eisenberg & Miller, 1987; Rushton, Chrisjohn, & Fekken, 1981). Within the collective action literature, a similar argument has been presented with personal sacrifices seen as necessary for people to achieve social change (Hogg & Abrahamse, 1988). The shift in the last half century towards individual actions is said to be reflective of activists choosing the most effective strategy for change, with sacrificing for the collective still positioned as the prevailing motive (Bynner & Ashford, 1994; Kelly & Breinlinger, 1996). My analysis of informant’s motives suggests that while empathy and altruism played a role, their behaviour was more complex and driven by a diverse and evolving range of motives. This supports Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) argument that there is no singular defining factor but a multitude of motives impacting on sustainable behaviour.

I have positioned informants’ primary motives as fitting into four main categories: environmental, survival, life-enhancing and a wider contribution, as illustrated in Table 10. Informants initially used negative information on environmental problems and their experience of connecting to nature to inspire their behaviour. Their subsequent lifestyle choices were driven by a combination of survival-orientated motivations (resilience, control and economic), life-enhancing motives (wellbeing, ideology, enjoyment and social connection) and the desire to make a positive contribution to society (legacy and impact).
The motives I found in this research had similarities to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and I have drawn upon aspects of his theory in this section. Maslow (1954) presented human motivation as moving through levels, from a person’s basic needs through to their desire for excellence. While there are criticisms of Maslow’s hierarchy (Daniels, 1988; Hofstede, 1984; Taylor et al., 2000; Wahba & Bridwell, 1976), it remains a significant motivational theory in business literature and the findings of this research supported this framework. According to Maslow (1972), people are first required to meet their ‘deficiency motivations’, a combination of physiological and psychological needs (i.e. food, shelter, self-esteem, belongingness) before the attainment of ‘being motivations’, described as self-actualisation in which people are focused on the fulfilling their life potential. In this study, Maslow’s lower levels of physiological and safety needs are reflected in my categories of environmental awareness and survival, with his belonging and esteem levels related to my life enhancement category. Of particular relevance to this research is the highest level of self-actualisation, which is demonstrated in my contribution category. A criticism of Maslow work was the lack of a rigorous evidence-based theory on self-actualisation (Daniels, 1982); subsequently this research aimed to make a contribution in this area. I propose these informants were creating a lifestyle that was abundant and self-fulfilling as a means of being...
in a self-actualised state. This section will address the range of motivations that satisfied informant’s needs from the basic to the more evolved.

**Theme 1: Environmental Awareness**

Awareness or environmental issues served as both a negative and positive driver. In the literature there has been debate around how effective ‘environmental awareness’ is in encouraging sustainable behaviour (Blake, 1999; Borne, 2009; Burgess et al., 2003; Seyfang, 2009). I found that while negative information may have initially motivated some informants, it was the personal experience of engaging with the physical environment that sustained their commitment over the long-term. I have positioned environmental

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<th>Subthemes</th>
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<td><strong>1. Information</strong></td>
<td>“I think initially there’s that fear of sorting yourself out and making sure that you’re okay” Mark</td>
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<td>“You can feel very overwhelmed by all the issues and, you know, it’s really nice to meet people who care as much as you, I guess and are doing positive things” Diana</td>
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<td>“My awareness about all the troubles capital T, was growing. And I’d seen the stock standard docs and stuff which blew me away ... And this is the moral question right, how do you respond to that kind of information? What was it diversion, denial or indifference, yeah I didn’t pick any of those I picked something else I guess. I’m the forth – if I could sum it up in a word, ‘action’, just doing something!” Christian</td>
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<td>“There’s definitely a line that you can cross and just become kind of scary to people that wouldn’t understand it. I’ve probably maybe passed that line once or twice without really knowing it ... as soon as you surround yourself with negative thoughts and negative thinking, then you’ve kind of defeated the whole thing really, coz it’s just not gonna catch on” Aroha</td>
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<td><strong>2. Personal Experience</strong></td>
<td>“It’s about that stuff of connection. You know, it’s like that thing of reading books and glossy magazines about stuff. But when you actually sort of smell it and feel it and live in it ... it’s like that experiential stuff and people get quite shifted in there, how they think about things. They can provide quite germinal moments for them” Jan</td>
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<td>“The articles that I’ve been reading all week is that, yeah they’re quite angst filled and short on solutions. Whereas for me that actually getting out and doing the stuff that we’re doing around here is that it’s solution based. It’s actually looking at everything that we do that results in living sustainably” Richard</td>
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<td>“It actually changed my life and my heart in a way that I hadn’t experienced before and I felt this really intense connection with the land and with cycles of living that were natural” Jess</td>
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*Table 15: Subthemes of Environmental Awareness*
awareness as a physiological need because informants positioned their fears around environmental depletion as a survival issue and connecting with nature as a basic necessity. The following will elaborate on these two main subthemes: information and personal experience as illustrated in Table 15.

**Subtheme 1.1: Information**

Information on ecological deprivation scared informants and motivated them to take action. Fear about the future was identified as a key motivate, particularly when informants first started living sustainably. Fear is defined as a negative emotion with a high level of personal threat arousal (Ortony & Turner, 1990). Resource depletion, pollution, population increases and species extinction fears were intermingled with economic and societal concerns of collapse. Nearly all of the informants became aware of the seriousness of the environmental issues through information they learnt from books, talks, films and documentaries. It was painted as a climactic time in human history. As Mark described, his desire to be more self-resilient was in response to his fears. Early behavioural research positioned fear as a negative driver of behaviour that in certain cases was necessary for people to take action (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953; Leventhal, Singer, & Jones, 1965; Maddux & Rogers, 1983). I found that while negative information motivated informant’s initial behaviour changes it was detrimental over the long-term. To sustain their lifestyle they needed to transform their fears into positive motives. For example, when I first interviewed Aroha and Maria they were by far the angriest, depicting a dark and volatile future based on the information they had learnt. Aroha used vivid imagery and text to express her vision of the future. Through educating herself on information about environmental degradation she believed the human race had developed to the

![Image 34: Aroha’s Vision of a Dark Future](image-url)
point of standing on the edge of an abyss, as reflected in Image 34. Maria was disgusted by an all-encompassing consumerist society she felt had created the mess. Compared to the other informants, Aroha and Maria took a more extreme position. They were both angry and fighting to make sense of their world in a system they felt was working against them. Research has found that remaining in a sustained state of fear can have damaging mental outcomes (Davis, Walker, Miles, & Grillon, 2009). By our second interview, these two informants had recognised it was unhealthy to remain angry or fearful so had actively sought to focus on the positive aspect of their lifestyle. While fear was a short-term motive its ability to support long-term behaviour change appeared to be limited.

I found most informants positioned action as the antidote to overcoming their fears. The choice of ‘action’ as a psychological coping strategy to fear demonstrates informants have high-efficacy, a belief that their actions will have an effective response (Witte, 1998). In comparison, research has found those with low-efficacy, a lack of belief in their power to make change, have greater propensity to choose denial, diversion or indifference as a way of coping with the fear of environmental degradation (Borne, 2009; Johnson & Johnson, 1995; Witte & Allen, 2000). Informants desire to be ‘authentic’ and a belief in their ability to make change facilitated their actions. Anthony and Rebecca, for example, commented on a time when they had felt despondent about the state of the world and had chosen to channel that energy into new careers looking at solutions to these issues. Negative information may have been an initial catalyst but it had encouraged informants to seek out positive solutions. One interpretation from these findings was that fear was an effective motivator; I argue though that fear had only a limited short-term impact and that informants response was due to their high-efficacy. For those with low-efficacy it was unlikely to be effective. Informants identified that their response strategies appeared to be different from others so informants deliberately focused on the positive appeals when attempting to inspire other people. As Aroha stated, it was easy to focus on what was wrong and scare people but if she was unable to offer viable options of how they could move forward they would simply dismiss her concerns. These finding support other authors who argue the limitations of environmental fear as a long-term behavioural change strategy (Crompton & Kasser, 2009; Evans & Jackson, 2007; Seyfang, 2009).
While information may have initially made them fearful, they actively sought positive information to support their lifestyle choices. Informants were choosing to be hopeful and optimistic about the future, despite being well-informed and aware of the seriousness of the environmental problems. Informants instead chose to see information and people as a source of inspiration. Wendy took Image 35 to reflect the materials she relied on to continually inspire her. Information helped informants sustain their commitment to their lifestyle and ensured they made informed decisions. Informants felt that being informed on the issues but choosing to have a positive approach was essential when encouraging others to change their behaviour.

**Subtheme 1.2: Personal Experience**

The experience of connecting with the environment inspired informants in a positive way and was a prominent motive for sustaining their lifestyle in the long term. The literature on environmental behaviour positions a connection with the environment as central to sustained behaviour change and an antidote to overconsumption (Dunlap, Van Liere, Mertig, & Jones, 2000; Nisbet, Zelenski, & Murphy, 2009; Ponting, 2007). Subsequently a plethora of practitioner initiatives have been undertaken focused on creating a bond between people and nature. I support the current literature and found a nature connection to be important to these informants. Jan, for example, felt it was the physical act of connecting with nature that actually changed people. Schultz (2002) developed a psychological model for the inclusion of nature that combined a cognitive component of connectedness, an affective component of caring, and a behavioural component of commitment. In this research, informants demonstrated all three aspects of the model. Richard, for example, felt that regularly connecting with his physical environment helped
maintain his commitment over the long-term. He found reading the news depressing whereas taking action re-invigorated him and made him feel that he was making a positive difference. Caring and forming a bond with nature appeared to be an important part of this lifestyle.

A contribution of this research is that informants were doing more than simply connecting with the environment; nature had become part of their in-group. Jess related a story of life-changing trip planting trees in Scotland. It was a transformative experience in which she had formed a deep connection with nature and afterwards felt committed to defending it. Within an aggregated self-concept people’s boundaries are extended to include people outside their immediate familial group (Belk, 2010b). I interpret that in the process of forming a bond and connection with the environment the informants were extending their in-group to include nature. This differs slightly from Schultz’s (2002) position that an inclusion with nature involves self-transcendence values - principles not tied to one’s self concept. I argue that informants felt part of nature and were invested in its welfare because they saw it as an extension of themselves. This supports Armsworth et al’s (2007) call for a shift in the promotion of conservation efforts to integrate people as part of nature, not separate from it. An original contribution of this research is the expansion of the aggregated self-concept to include not only people but nature and animals as well.

In summary, while fear may have served as an initial motive, it was informant’s positive actions and experiences of connecting with nature that incentivised their behaviour and sustained their lifestyle over the long-term.

**Theme 2: Survival**

The choice to live sustainably on a basic level was about informant’s survival and I found that they were predominately focused on their future needs as opposed to their present ones. Maslow (1970) argues that people are firstly driven by their physiological needs (e.g. – food, water, sleep, etc.) and their safety needs (e.g. – security of body, resources, family, etc.). I found that these lower level needs related to my survival category in which informants were concerned about their safety and their ability to meet their physiological needs in the future. They saw a strong relationship between a sustainable lifestyle and their future survival. As Richard articulated if the earth did not survive then people would not:
“Basic things about sustainability - if the land can’t sustain, can’t continue on then we can’t”

Like Richard, all of the informants identified they were making sustainable choices because they had concerns about how they would survive in a climate-change affected world. Aroha explained why it was a significant motivation for her:

“Key motivator, necessity. I just don’t see any other option. Like, yeah I mean what else is there? Like if I’m not working towards something better than what we’ve got I really don’t see any point in living.”

In this statement Aroha positioned a sustainable lifestyle as an essential part of her continuing to actually live. Within the theme of survival three key subthemes emerged: self-sufficiency, control and economic motives as illustrated in Table 16.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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| 1. Self-sufficiency | “If you can be self-sustainable then you can say well I can actually support myself and it does have that type of confidence I suppose that it doesn’t matter what happens, if I get made redundant or whatever, that I’ll be okay for a while. Obviously you still need a job, but at least you won’t starve sort of thing” Mark  
“It’s got to do with that thing of sustainability in the sense that, you know in adverse situations, is that we think about how we can respond to those situations so that we can continue on what we’re doing. Whereas it, we feel there’s a huge number of people in New Zealand that, when adverse things happen they flounder. They don’t know what to do, they’ve never thought of it before” Richard  
“I just have to wait till I can buy my own land so till then I can live in a situation where I have some autonomy, or influence over the land and living in a way that I see as a good way to live. With consumption choices that fit to some degree with my ideals” Jess |
| 2. Control | “I think that is definitely important that I want to feel that I’m in charge. I’m happy to obey the rules and laws of the land but there’s lots of things where you want autonomy over your life” Wendy  
“One fundamental of existence is food, one of the most fundamental if not the most. So taking control of that in any way shape or form to control that. Like having a say in that or producing something. And the more you produce and the more, the more you take back that power from those who have it over you right now, the more secure you feel. The more comfortable” Christian  
“I feel like I do have control over food and that’s not necessarily even just a physical control also as part of a mental control. Like, being more aware of what, where food is coming from, what it contains, how your body responds to it” Jess |
| 3. Economic | “Why would I bake a banana loaf, buy a banana loaf, covered in plastic and wrapping material if I can make it for half the price and without any plastic, you know. That’s a no-brainer really” Christian |
### Chapter Four

#### Motivations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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| I. Not Frugal                 | “We would buy a sofa or a piece of clothing or whatever that’s kind of got more sustainability credentials but up front it’s more expensive because we can. I guess where a frugal lifestyle would be you would go to the op shops and spend the time required to find something that’s cheaper.” **Anthony**  
“They’ll be sustainable if it suits them, and if the price is right” **Rebecca**  
“We’re looking at what furniture do we want and where’s it made and that sort of stuff, and if we told family how much you might pay for something they’d probably freak out” **Mark** |
| II. Secondary consideration  | “I would probably go towards, even if it was more expensive, towards something that’s, you know, less plastic or, you know, less packaging. Yeah, it’s just, yeah, something, I just don’t like seeing waste basically” **Diana**  
“It was more about feeling that we, it was important to do it, the money actually was less important (laughter) which is strange. And I suppose that’s my whole philosophy, is where do I chose to spend my money? If I spend more on organic food, for me the health benefits and the benefits to the environment and the planet, outweigh the fact that I may not be able to afford a new pair of jeans” **Fiona**  
“It doesn’t make economic sense to have a vegetable garden. I don’t think so. They’re so cheap to go to the supermarket and buy things, but it’s almost therapeutic, you know? You get out in the garden and you start doing something out there and it takes your mind off everything else” **Rob** |

**Table 16: Subthemes of Survival Motives**

**Subtheme 2.1: Self-sufficiency**

Informants were motivated by a desire for self-reliance as it enabled them to feel protected from external influences, including the effects of climate change. The wider environment impacts were outside of their control but the area they could influence was their personal built environment. Informants defined self-sufficiency as an ability to meet their basic needs and respond to changing circumstances. In the literature, the need for autonomy and self-
sufficiency was seen as a higher level motive (Boeree, 2006; Maslow, 1972), yet I interpreted resilience in this context to reflect a survivalist need. Informants wanted to be sure that if anything happened they could take care of themselves and meet their basic requirements, as Mark described. Maria defined herself as a survivalist and her fireplace as shown in Image 36 meant she could be self-sufficient. If there was no money or electricity she would still be able to use wood pruned from her trees for heating and cooking. She wanted to be less dependent on others as she felt those systems could be unreliable in the future. In this context self-sufficiency was positioned as a psychological need as opposed to a self-actualised one.

Informants positioned good social networks as a necessary part of being self-sufficient. Self-sufficiency is not positioned as being fully self-reliant, instead informants were looking to like-minded others to offer additional support in times of change. In this case, the ‘social’ component was a form of protection. This supports arguments in the literature that the social aspect can be a motivating force at all levels of Maslow’s hierarchy (Daniels, 1982; Hofstede, 2001). Richard and Jan, for example, stated that one of their main motives for joining sustainability groups was to have access to an informal food network. They thought it was necessary to plan for adverse situations and felt normal people were simply not prepared. Planning for possible future scenarios made informants feel protected and offered them a sense of freedom over their life choices. These dual aspects of ‘protection’ and ‘freedom’ were also dominant in the control subtheme and given the similarities between the two concepts I decided to elaborate upon their relevance in this next subtheme.

**Subtheme 2.2: Control**

Informants wanted to feel more in control of their lives which was motivated on one level by a desire for security and protection, reflected in Maslow’s (1970) safety needs; and at another level for a sense of freedom, which relates to Maslow’s highest level, self-actualisation. This supports Neher’s (1991) argument of motivations occurring concurrently at simultaneous levels. The concept of control is defined as a person’s ability to respond and affect the outcome of an event (Thompson, 1981). It is similar to the definition of self-sufficiency, the difference being that the latter relates to adaptability while control refers to an ability to elicit power over a situation. For example, an important part of living
sustainably for Wendy was feeling like she was in charge. Food was identified as one of the easiest and most important areas for her to take ownership of. Informants discussed stockpiling consumables, saving seeds and finding ways to be self-sustaining with their food supplies. In this regard, control is framed as a form of self-protection. Feeling in control on a cognitive and behavioural level is a mechanism for reducing stress and adopting competence coping strategies when challenges emerge (Averill, 1973; Thompson, 1981). For example, Aroha took Image 37 to represent the theme of control. By generating her own electricity she felt secure against outside influences. Within the literature on contamination, control is mechanism of preventing impurities being passed from one person to another (Argo et al., 2006; Nemeroff & Rozin, 1994). As Christian stated it was about no longer being vulnerable to the influence of others. It appeared that informant’s acute awareness of the interconnections between people and objects motivated them to prevent cross-contamination and to control the objects in their environment to keep themselves safe and protected.

I found though that control was about more than protection, with informants also reclaiming a sense of power over their life choices. Diana, for example, discussed the freedom and sense of control her bike gave her as she relied solely on her own energy to transport her places. To achieve this sense of independence though required willpower and planning. Consumer self-control is positioned as a struggle between the forces of desire and willpower (Hoch & Loewenstein, 1991); in which to complete their long-term goals people

![Image 37: Aroha’s idea of Control](image-url)
are required to inhibit their impulse responses (Baumeister, 2002; Trope & Fishbach, 2000). Delayed gratification in this manner is indicative of high-powered individuals who set significant goals based on personal growth and long-term satisfaction (Fujita, Trope, Liberman, & Levin-Sagi, 2006; Magee & Smith, 2013). I found informants demonstrating these attributes and were proud of their ability to resist impulses and make empowered life choices. Rob discussed saving up and investing in the right tools to facilitate his lifestyle, like a specialist fridge that enabled him to make his own cheese. Previous attempts at making cheese had been disastrous but this product meant he could successfully turn his own milk into cheese, which made him feel self-reliant and proud he could produce food his family loved. In this case, feeling in control also resulted in informants experiencing a sense of freedom and self-empowerment.

I interpreted that being resilient and in control was in part about informants finding ways to escape the consumerist system; the problem was that their escape could only be temporary. Their lifestyle gave them a degree of independence over their consumption choices but they were still reliant on others in society to meet many of their needs. Jess’ dream of owning land did not mean that she would be free of outside influences. Aroha had first-hand experience of the challenges of being fully self-reliant. Her family had tried to be self-sufficient but eventually had to relocate back to the city to earn income to cover the land’s taxes. She told a story of her Uncle losing a significant piece of his land to the Inland Revenue as he was unable to earn income to cover the land’s taxes. I found that by the end of the study she had accepted that she could not escape the system and had returned to live within mainstream society. Research has found consumers seeking temporary escapes from the dominate cultural paradigm to re-invigorate them, but these could never be permanent and they must eventually return and find a way to live within the system (Arnould et al., 1999; Kozinets, 2002; O’Guinn & Belk, 1989). My interpretation of this lifestyle was that it offered informants a means of balancing their desire for independence within the current consumerist paradigm. Instead of being in competition with it, they were finding ways to be authentic and feel in control of their lives. Self-sufficiency and control were basic needs yet a motivating force.
**Subtheme 2.3: Economic**

Economic considerations effect people’s ability to meet their physiological and safety needs. In this research I found only a few informants made sustainable choices for economic reasons, the majority positioned financial considerations as a secondary concern instead prioritizing quality, sustainable outcomes. In the consumer literature, financial considerations are positioned as a key determinant of behaviour, with frugality and values of thrift framed as necessary attributes consuming sustainably (Arrow et al., 2004; Kjellberg, 2008; Princen, 1999). John was one of the informants who stated he lived sustainably because he is frugal and did not like to spend money unless he had to. His frugality meant he was able to retire early and subsequently had more time to spend in the garden. His wife, Debra, thought it was expensive to grow their own food but John felt it was still cheaper them buying it from a store. Even though John was adamant frugality was his main motivator, further probing revealed that protecting nature was just as important. For example, he regularly placed advertisements in the paper encouraging people not to buy native trees in the ‘firewood for sale’ section. He thought it was important to maintain native trees to support the biodiversity and birdlife and was upset the newspaper had banned his ads that had tried to educate people to stop cutting them down. He also trimmed his trees and grass using manual tools as he did not want to contribute to environmental and noise pollution. While he stated his actions were driven by his cheapness, his motivations were much more diverse.

Informants determined a difference between people motivated by frugality and those driven by sustainability. Todd and Lawson (2003) defined frugality as a lifestyle choice. Anthony admired people who were frugal but stated he was not. While frugality was positioned as a desirable characteristic, it was not an appropriate label for these informants. Her parents, who were financially motivated, had originally influenced Rebecca’s lifestyle. She identified her motives were more authentically driven. I found a number of informants had hidden the costs of items from family members as they would have been judged harshly for spending a large amount of money on sustainable products. While some informants had initially been inspired by their family, for informants went beyond them being frugal and instead prioritized authentic choices. This provides further support for my argument that informants are using their lifestyle as a tool for developing a self-concept different from
their immediate familial networks. In the ecological debate, being thrifty and frugal was positioned as an integral part of sustainable lifestyle (Arrow et al., 2004; Kjellberg, 2008; Princen, 1999). This research instead lends support to Alcott’s (2008) argument that frugality is a less desirable strategy when promoting environmental reductive behaviour.

Informants did consider the financial outcomes of their decisions but prioritised their sustainability concerns. I found they were willing to pay more if it meant they got a sustainable product. Diana, for example, paid more for items if they used less packaging. Informants chose to prioritise their spending on good quality products that would last. Mark and his wife had just moved into a new house and were looking to buy furniture. They had decided to wait until they had enough money to buy what they wanted. Part of the willingness to wait is that sustainable choices were generally seen as being more expensive. Early adopters often pay premium prices for goods (Dewan, Jing, & Seidmann, 2000; Slater & Olson, 2001) and there appeared to be an acceptance among informants that making these purchases was part of their role in supporting wider sustainable changes. For example, Fiona and her husband installed a solar water heater as illustrated in Image 38. It was a large financial investment and would take nearly ten years before it was economically viable. She stated their motivations were more than financial; they felt it was important to support sustainable technologies and be true to their values. Informants were demonstrating Jackson’s (2005) ‘double-dividend’ strategy in which they focused their consumption on quality items that enabled them to live better while reducing their environmental impacts. He argued the need to move beyond the ‘limited-consumption’
argument that had been relatively ineffective to date and instead focus on better consumption choices.

In summary, informants were concerned about their survival and felt a sustainable lifestyle made them feel more self-sufficient and in control. They considered the economic impacts of their decisions but these were often secondary to sustainability concerns. Informant’s survival motives were essentially future driven and there was evidence for informant’s willingness to delay short-term gratification for longer-term outcomes. There was evidence of needs traditionally positioned as physiological or safety orientated fitting in multiple categories in Maslow’s hierarchy. This offers support for my argument that a sustainable lifestyle is satisfying different levels of needs simultaneously. The next theme explores informant’s needs beyond their survival and accesses their drives for psychological fulfilment.

**Theme 3: Life Enhancement**

A key motive for a sustainable lifestyle was a better quality of life. The ‘feeling’ component - the positive, life-affirming benefits that appeal to people on an emotional - has largely been neglected in the sustainability debate; as such I have predominately relied on literature in the consumer behaviour field to support my findings. This category closely relates to Maslow’s (1970) belonging needs in which people are motivated by the feeling of love, belonging and connection that social relationships provide; and self-esteem needs where people are motivated to achieve enhanced personal confidence, achievement and respect. These emotional aspects represent the remaining deficiency needs and I argue they are as fundamental as the survival motives. As Jan stated, she was looking beyond her current survival needs to how her choices would enhance her life in the future:

“**Doing what needs to be done today in terms of not only survival but going ahead**”.

In this section, I propose informants were motivated primarily by the current personal benefits this lifestyle offered as opposed to future delayed benefits. Within the life enhancement theme four main subthemes emerged: wellbeing, ideology, personal enjoyment and social connection as illustrated in Table 17.
# Ideological Wellbeing

**Subtheme**

1. **Wellbeing**

   "Without the environment we are nothing pretty much ... I guess I can just connect health of us with the health of the environment" **Diana**

   "A big one for me is health reasons. I want to become more self-sufficient health wise. I’m sick and tired of being kind of slightly sickly because I’m depending on bad food, bad environment and also bad drugs and bad medical advice. I’m starting to research and look into how my whole life can become more healthy" **Maria**

   "Don’t buy from out of season ... for your health and well-being. And more than likely I think there’s a nice balance for your health and well-being from creating the vegetables, from growing the vegetables as well" **Debra**

   "There’s a lot of magic in the garden, the things that you grow yourself. There’s that indefinable thing ... you don’t get that from a pill. And you don’t get it from processed food in a supermarket. So that’s part of that health giving stuff" **Jan**

2. **Ideological**

   "There’s a physical presence about things, like if you, sometimes depends on what the tree is, if you go close to the tree there is a spiritual presence around the tree ... I would never define it as a God because I don’t follow patriarchal things but it’s, it could be an earth mother in that sense but it’s, it’s actually about an energy. It’s not just a physical thing ... it’s that thing of not being alone" **Jan**

   "I connect with the shamanic tradition of understanding and working with the spirits of nature and the elements and so on and I feel very connected to those things myself. That does influence the way I am as well" **Fiona**

   "It seems magical doesn’t it ... even though you play just a managerial role, you do feel like a bit of a magician creating something from nothing" **Christian**

   "I agree with the magic of a garden and I think different gardens do have different energies about them. It’s definitely some invisible force that I feel is always judging me. It’s not God, it’s I don’t know, the collective spirits of all the hippies around or something like that that would look down upon me and go, ‘oh, she’s not very whatever’" **Wendy**

3. **Enjoyment**

   "I wouldn’t do it unless I liked it. That is key. Many things they can be considered as being sustainable I actually enjoy doing. Otherwise my sustainability approach would not actually be sustainable!!" **Rebecca**

   "Like synesthetic pleasure of touch and feel and smell and all of that stuff that you encounter in a space like this as well. So, yeah, it’s immensely enjoyable on all sorts of levels really ... it was a like awakening, or a re-awakening, you know, like back to childhood when you’re out there in the backyard, the field and the forest... that wasn’t the initial, you know, like motivation to do it. But that has been the outcome regardless of why I first started. And now that’s probably as important as any kind of moral reason, you know" **Christian**

   "So it’s about being creative with it, and having fun. It doesn’t have to just be dull and boring, you know" **Fiona**

   "Nice clothes are beautiful, we don’t have to not wear nice clothes o it’s not about not having anything it’s about having less things and valuing them more. And having things that last" **Jess**
### Subtheme 4: Social Connection

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td>“Living in an individualised way is very tough because you don’t feel connected... but in a community of people then the work is shared and living in a way that is environmentally responsible is easier because you can share out the work that is involved” <em>Jess</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I always find a really good motivator is going along to, like a workshop or a meeting or some kind of event where there’s, like, likeminded people there and you can just sort of share the things you’re working on and just see it catching other people’s energy. It’s really contagious, I do really find that is one of the best things, just go and get reinspired at a gathering like that” <em>Kylie</em></td>
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**Table 17: Subthemes of Life Enhancement**

### Subtheme 3.1: Wellbeing

A sense of wellbeing in the present moment was an important driver of this lifestyle, as opposed to it being a long-term sustained outcome. Wellbeing refers to a person’s condition and the quality of their life, of which a person’s health is a fundamental part (McGillivray, 2007). I identified wellbeing as a life-enhancing motive as opposed to a safety need because informants framed it as improving the quality of their life Sustainability is often paired in the literature as being an integral part of people’s on-going wellbeing, yet current measurements like the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW) and the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) only consider its impact on the future, neglecting its effect on current wellbeing (Neumayer, 2007). While the informant’s desire to be self-reliant was based on their concern for their quality of life in the future, I found a significant proportion of their energy and motivation was focused on achieving a greater sense of wellbeing in the present. Image 39 was taken by Maria to reflect her more ‘natural’ diet that she described as a

![Image 39](image-url)
medicine for her current health issues. Informants felt there was a clear link between a sustainable lifestyle and being healthy. As Diana discussed, informants identified a symbiotic relationship between their own current wellbeing and the health of the land. Subsequently taking care of the land and their local environment was in part about taking care of themselves. To her the benefits were immediately felt. I interpret that it was the short-term benefits, not the long-term ones that were motivating informant’s behaviour. The literature presents sustainability actions as having an accumulative benefit so it requires people to be forward thinking and willing to delay immediate gratification for a purported future benefit (Dannenberg, Frumkin, & Jackson, 2011; Neumayer, 2007; Thompson & Troester, 2002). I propose a shift in focus to the current wellbeing benefits would be more appropriate. Informants reflected on how the immediate rewards were a key factor in maintaining their behaviour and continuing to make changes in the long-term. It was not, as the literature advocates, about projected future needs but a present desire for health and well-being that was being met.

**Subtheme 3.2: Ideological Motives**

A connection with nature emerged as a morally overriding force that guided, informed and motivated informants. Spirituality has been positioned as playing an important role in driving consumption decisions (Baumeister, 2002; Dyson, Cobb, & Forman, 1997). Despite this, Skousgaard (2006) identified there has been limited consumer research on spirituality, particularly outside of a religious context. In this research only one informant identified himself or herself as part of a recognised religion; the others expressed a belief in a more earth-based spiritual connection. Central to a spiritual focus is a search for meaning in life (Zinnbauer et al., 1997).
In this research informants belief in the power of the natural environment was a driver of behaviour and a reward for ‘service’. Jan described plants, as illustrated in Image 40, as holders of higher energy and through working on the land she was able to connect with them. The physical act of touching the earth appeared to have a powerful effect on informant’s beliefs. Christian, for example, described himself as an atheist and believed that when he died he simply turned to dust. Despite this, he talked about a sense of magic and wonder that existed in the natural process of the garden – something special and intangible happened and being a gardener he got to experience the benefits of that. In Christian’s case he did not believe in life after death so his actions were not future-orientated but instead guided by his present experiences of ‘magical energy’. Magical thinking is defined as a belief in a sense of power and meaningful connections attributed to actions, event or objects (Fernandez & Lastovicka, 2011). The law of contagion, which Belk (1988) refers to as contagious magic, is based on an understanding that the ‘essence’ of an object can be transferred to people when they touch it (Argo et al., 2006; Nemeroff & Rozin, 1994). Informants felt the plants held energy and transference was a benefit of being in nature. Communing with magical energy can be an empowering experience - helping people overcome their fears, enhancing their sense of faith and hope, and enriching their sense of self (Arnould et al., 1999; Fernandez & Lastovicka, 2011). This magical energy appeared to be a powerful motive. I recognized that the energy informants were discussing was not a ‘higher’ power but an energy inherent in the natural kingdom. They used their connection to the earth toinform a strong moral sense of what was right and wrong that guided their actions. Some informants also felt their ancestors existed in the unseen world around them and judged their choices. Image 41 by
Aroha illustrates her ancestors who she felt were looking down at her. For some informants this idea of being judged was a recurring theme.

I advocate that the natural environment was seen as a higher power that informants actively communed with, guided their behaviour and were accountable to. The benefit of growing plants and working the land was a magical energy that re-invigorated them. Kozinets and Handelman (2004) link activist behaviour with an evangelical identity. I suggest informant’s continual and active encouragement of others to connect with the environment is a form of religious evangelizing based on saving their place of worship. They deliberately disassociated themselves from extremism and operated as a cloaked subculture precisely to make their message more appealing. I would argue that these informants represent an ideological group based on an earth-based spiritual belief system. Informant’s lifestyle was guided, supported and enforced by a life force inherent in the earth.

**Subtheme 3.3: Enjoyment**

While a sustainable lifestyle has been positioned as one of austerity and simplicity (De Young, 1996); informants viewed it as a fun, pleasurable and abundant lifestyle. While the ‘pleasure’ aspect of consumption has been considered a motivation in traditional consumption, this emotional component has been relatively neglected in the sustainability literature. This is despite the pursuit of fun and happiness being an essential part of the experiential aspects of consumption, and related to higher customer satisfaction (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Lewis, Haviland-Jones, & Barrett, 2010; Westbrook & Oliver, 1991). I interpreted that enjoyment of their lifestyle was one of the main reasons...
informants continued their lifestyle. For example, Christian equated his experience of growing his own food with the joys of discovery he felt as a child. He stated that initially he was not motivated by the ‘pleasure’ aspect, it was an unexpected outcome but became a key driver that continued to sustain him.

A pleasurable aspect of this lifestyle was that it offered informants’ a creative outlet and the opportunity to co-create value. Research in the services literature has found consumers who are given the ability to co-create their outcomes result in a greater sense of ownership and higher levels of satisfaction (Namasivayam, 2004; Van Raaij & Pruyn, 1998). Sustainable solutions could not always be brought straight off the shelf which required informants to be inventive. I found informants enjoyed being self-sufficient and making things themselves – it was relaxing, rewarding a creative outlet. Richard, for example, had some issues with effectively planting his crops so have invented a double pitchfork that he had called the ‘Ubar’ as illustrated in Image 42. I argue that due to positive contamination there was transference to the final product that resulted in a sense of pride at having designed the solutions.

Informants emphasized the importance of ‘beauty’ which involved combining the functional objects with the aesthetically pleasing elements. Image 43 by Debra illustrated the idea of combining the two and highlighted the enjoyment that gave her. As Jess explained there was joy that came with having things that were aesthetically appealing. This reflects a movement of the meaning of objects from the sacred to the profane (Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989) and supports Borgmann (2000) argument that focal objects that are beautiful
and deeply meaningful can result in a sense of long-term satisfaction. As Jess stated, it was about being selective in what she purchased and then really valuing the items she owned. This supports Lastovicka and Sitianni (2011) proposition of the need for more possession love as sustainability driver to prevent excess consumption and disposal. These informants genuinely enjoyed the objects that they owned which extended their meaning. Informants positioned a traditional consumerist lifestyle as one focused on short-term pleasure; instead they were making choices aimed at creating a lifestyle that offered long-term and sustained satisfaction. I argue that while the sustainability debates to date have neglected the ‘pleasure’ factor, an original contribution of this research was enjoyment as a significant driver of this lifestyle and the extension of possession love as a desirable attribute in supporting sustainable consumption initiatives.

**Subtheme 3.4: Social Connection**

One of the key motives of this lifestyle was a sense of connection, affinity and belongingness. This relates closely to Maslow’s (1970) belongingness needs. I have positioned it as a life-enhancement motive as a connection with others was positioned as a beneficial outcome of this lifestyle. This concept of ‘connection’ has been addressed throughout these results. In this subtheme I will particularly address the social aspect of connection. Informants positioned social bonds as a core driver of this lifestyle. Jess, for example, felt a sustainable lifestyle was about connecting with others and not needing to do everything herself. In the sustainability literature, ecological problems are said to require collective solutions with the ‘social’ aspect an essential part of the equation (Dillard, Dujon, & King, 2008; Sharma & Ruud, 2003). While a number of informants joined groups to facilitate change, I found they did it primarily

![Image 44: Kylie’s Social Connection](image44.jpg)
for support, friendship and inspiration for their lifestyle. Kylie, for example, found that working with others was inspiring and gave her energy. She took Image 44 to represent the theme of social connection and people having fun together. Similar to other subcultural research, forming social bond with like-minded others was an important part of sustained involvement (Gelder, 2005; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). As informant’s lifestyle was different from their existing social networks, connecting with a subcultural identity made informants feel they belonged. Wendy commented that living in a modern urban environment could be lonely so she had actively gone in search of likeminded people to feel a greater sense of human connection. She felt it was essential in maintaining this lifestyle to work with others, have fun and focus on the lighter side of life. As previously discussed, there is evidence of informants aggregated self-concept extending beyond themselves to include other people outside their familial networks (Belk, 2010), and I contend that the importance of social connection resulted in the permeable subcultural boundaries. Informants saw their way of living as a socially connected lifestyle and valued the human relationships that assisted them in creating and maintaining their way of life.

In conclusion, informants were making sustainable choices because they felt it would positively enhance their lives. They were driven by emotional benefits which included a sense of wellbeing, enjoyment, ideological fulfilment and social connection. I found these were short-term benefits; informants were making decisions based on immediate positive outcomes as opposed to a delayed sense of future gratification. While the survival motives were future-focused, life-enhancement motives were present-orientated. The immediate ‘feel good’ factor has been largely missing from environmental campaigns to date. In this research I found informants were being driven by the ‘feeling’ factor as much as the cognitive rationale.

**Theme 4: Positive Contribution**

Informants were motivated by a desire to make a positive contribution on society. I interpreted that a sustainable lifestyle was offering informants a path to contribute to societal change, reach their own full potential and create a positive legacy for their family. When discussing the positive impact informants wanted to make I found evidence that
reflected Maslow’s (1970) highest level of self-actualisation. Jess emphasised the importance of making a wide contribution:

“To feel like you were giving something back, to make a positive contribution, feeling in connection with your fellow human beings and the land and this environment”

As Jess discussed, a sense of connection to others and the environment motivated her behaviour. I have argued in this thesis that informants concern for others and the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Legacy</td>
<td>“I think that’s part of being a gardener as well is that you, it’s not a selfish undertaking, it’s almost a selfish undertaking in a sense. So yeah, up to the extent of your abilities, and time and energy. I think you want to bring that to other people as much as you can”. Christian</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Next Generation</td>
<td>“I want to reach old age and meet my grandchildren. I want my grandchildren to survive and live pain-free stress-free lives. I don’t want to be the kind of ancestor they look back on with contempt due to the devastated planet they inherited from us” Aroha</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“It’s about the impact on the kids. That we want them to learn about the fact that you can grow your own vegetables, you don’t have to go to the supermarket for everything, and you can create your own entertainment, you don’t have to go to the mall for everything” Rob</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Shared History</td>
<td>“I just loved that idea that they came with their histories. And that’s where telling histories came from really because everything that I love going to op shops and second hand shops because you get an eclectic mix of life” Debra</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“It’s got a story to it as well so it’s not just a product that I’ve gone to a shop and bought, it’s got a story to it, it’s got value, it’s got a lot of value for me associated with it, I think because of that story” Rebecca</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“There’s a bit more of an emotional attachment to stuff that’s got a bit of character” Kylie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Impact</td>
<td>“I’d hope that the good that I’m trying to achieve would outweigh the negative, because I am trying to yeah tread lightly in the world” Rebecca</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“So I think all you have to do is put yourself in the shoes of others, you know, it’s empathy. It’s either other species or other people or future people. I think it’s just basically empathy” Christian</td>
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<td>“You can’t pick them before the wee kids come. They’ve got to pick them with you so they learn this experience where they come from. So it’s that sharing and caring and that nurturing with your whanau and I love that. I think it’s so neat that they learn that carrots come from the garden, they don’t come from thin air, they don’t come from the supermarket” Debra</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“I think there’s a huge number of people in our generation that actually really care a lot about what’s going on in the world” Kylie</td>
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Table 18: Subthemes of Positive Contribution
environment is a direct result of this ‘connection’ that has resulted in an aggregated self-concept. Self-actualisation though goes beyond a concern for self and others and reflects a desire for excellence and fulfilment of one’s life purpose. I propose informants’ actions and their commitment to their lifestyle are built around them defining who they truly are and enabling them to reach their full potential through contributing to society. This will be elaborated upon further within the subtheme of ‘Impact’. I also found that informants were motivated to make a positive contribution out of concern for their family’s future and maintaining a sense of shared history, which is reflected in the ‘Legacy’ subtheme. In this case, making a contribution was driven by safety and belonging needs. I again found evidence of subthemes traditionally associated with one level being reflected at multiple levels of Maslow’s hierarchy. These two subthemes are illustrated in Table 18.

**Sub theme 4.1: Legacy**

Informants thought beyond their immediate future to the legacy they were leaving for future generations, which implied they were forgoing their own needs for others, a form of altruistic behaviour (Batson et al., 2007). I found that concern for future generations was a common statement but in terms of their actions it was a relatively nebulous concept. When informants addressed leaving a legacy it predominately materialised in terms of their immediate familial network. For example, Christian spoke of a moral obligation to future generations so he developed his mum’s property into a productive garden so that his niece would grow up learning important skills. Jan and Richards’ property also played an important role in sharing skills and knowledge with their family, especially their grandkids. An aggregated self-concept applies beyond the family unit, and while there was evidence of that occurring earlier in terms of shared goods and community projects, I found that when they discussed a legacy they were predominately concerned about their family unit. This links back to the earlier topic of survival; in planning for the future they want to make sure that their family was also protected (Noble & Costa, 1999). While the informants were concerned about future generations, the younger kids were not always as receptive to their overtures. For example, Rob and his wife had moved to a lifestyle block outside Christchurch primarily to teach their kids a different lifestyle. When I re-interviewed Rob a year later he was despondent the kids were not as interested in working on the farm as he thought they would be. I found informants concern for later generations was to a certain extent about
alleviating guilt and being able to tell future grandkids they had tried to make a difference. Guilt can be a powerful motivation for consumption behaviour (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1995; Tangney & Dearing, 2004). It was also identified as a challenge that informants needed to overcome so I have chosen to discuss guilt further as a separate subtheme in Section 5. Informant’s intent for a continued family legacy was a self-driven motive that contained aspects of safety and belonging needs. I think this shows that they are human. Creating initiatives that achieve a legacy for future generations is a challenging prospect, what was often more achievable was initiatives within the family home. I wanted to make the point that making a positive contribution was not just about self-actualisation and contained aspects of self-driven behaviour as well.

Protecting one’s legacy did not just apply to people; it emerged in objects as well. I found in this research that the majority of informant’s objects had a story behind them and informants felt a responsibility to maintain that historical legacy. Stories being imbued in objects moves their meaning from profane to sacred (Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989) and I found that if informants were going to consume they wanted to surround themselves with meaningful objects. In some cases the history of the item was known and a reflection of their own story. For example, Image 45 were the stones that make up Debra’s front door entrance. She explained that every single one had a story attached to it – where it had come from and how she had obtained it. By using them she was capturing those stories and keeping them alive. Research shows that the value of objects to their owners increase over time, particularly if they are seen as hedonic objects, as aspects of themselves and others have been transferred to the items (Dahl & Wertenbroch, 2000; Strahilevitz & Loewenstein,
1998). Objects that are heavily associated with family kinship, connectedness and memories are also seen as having unique value (Belk, 1990; Fiese & Schwartz, 2008; McGraw, Tetlock, & Kristel, 2003). Mark talked about preserving the table his wife’s grandfather had made. The acquisition of a family heirloom that had been made-by-hand was particularly valuable, reflecting positive contamination. This process of preserving family history within objects matches previous consumer research that position family heirlooms as irreplaceable sacred objects (Belk et al., 1989; Curasi, Price, & Arnould, 2004; Grayson & Shulman, 2000). I interpret informant’s desire for focal objects that represented their personal and family history as fulfilling their needs for belongingness and self-esteem. Being able to pass these goods on to others would also enable that legacy to continue.

What was unique about this research was that informants brought second-hand objects whose history was unknown, yet the desire to preserve their meaning was just as strong. Kylie, Rebecca and Debra enjoyed being able to rescue second-hand items and saving materials from landfill. They described the importance of preserving an item’s story and history, even when they had no contact with the previous owners. Objects hold both public and private meanings (Belk, 1988). When owners dispose of items they go through rituals of detachment from the personal meanings (Young & Wallendorf, 1989). In the case of these informants they wanted to preserve these personal meanings. This supports Lastovika and Fernandez’s (2005) assumption that people seeking authenticity are more likely to value private meanings. Informants discussed an emotional attachment to older items that new items simply did not have as they sensed a connection to the people who previously owned them. This again relates back to the idea of informants valuing positive contamination and demonstrating an aggregated self-concept. Consumer research on the second-hand market has found the disposition of meaningful objects to strangers suggests a common-identity based shared self (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991; Lastovicka & Fernandez, 2005). This aggregated self-concept was evident in informant’s acquisition of second-hand objects and recycled materials, with the desire to protect the stories and meanings behind the objects, both known and unknown. While the disposition of objects by an owner represents a detachment from self (Young & Wallendorf, 1989), their acquisition by informants and the associated up-cycling process reflected a possession ritual that transferred personal meanings to informants self-concept. I interpret that maintaining the legacy of objects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Four</th>
<th>Motivations</th>
<th>Research Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

168
Chapter Four  

Motivations  

Research Findings

whose history was unknown accessed informants self-esteem needs as they felt a sense of pride and satisfaction in rescuing sacred objects and continuing to value their meanings. It also addressed belongingness needs as they felt connected to their wider community and acted out their aggregated self-concept.

In summary, the desire to leave a legacy for future generations implied informants were driven by altruism in which they put others needs before their own; instead I found evidence that their legacy was more personal and was fulfilling their psychological needs for safety, belonging and self-esteem.

**Subtheme 4.2: Impact**

A recurring motive was the desire to have a positive impact on the environment and society, which I have interpreted as demonstrating a self-actualised state of being. Becoming one’s true self is positioned at the highest level of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and efforts are said to be focused on obtaining it once people’s basic needs have been met (Goldstein, 1939; Maslow, 1970; Rogers, 1961). In reality, it is argued that few actually achieve this state but it is the drive for personal growth that is of most interest to this research. It is important to note that for these informants the desire for self-actualisation went beyond simply creating an ideal self-concept. Some scholars have equated self-actualization with self-expression - the attainment of one’s ideal self (Bar-On, 2001; Johnson, 1972; Perls, 1969). Maslow however had positioned it as the high achievement of a morally ‘good’ version of oneself that actively contributed to improving society (Maslow, 1972). I found this interpretation was the version best demonstrated by these informants. Rebecca hoped that the collective sum of her choices meant she would leave a positive mark on the world. I found informants invested considerable effort in initiatives aimed at benefitting others. Debra, for example, liked gifting vegetables to people and educating the children of her friends on the joys of growing your own food and eating it fresh. She felt it was important to pass on an awareness of nature and a caring philosophy. My interpretation is that informants were actively sharing the benefits of this lifestyle as they wanted to both inspire others and in the process become a self-actualised version of themselves. At the end of his life Maslow suggested a higher motive of self-transcendence which represented mystical experiences and a desire for something greater than themselves (Koltko-Rivera, 2006). Given the contention around the later formation of his theory, I am choosing to utilize the
‘self-actualisation’ term with the understanding that it combines self-transcendence elements (Daniels, 1982). Maslow (1972) defined the desire for a self-actualised state of being as going beyond the deficiency needs to fulfilling being needs also known as ‘meta-needs’. Meta-needs are those at the top level of his hierarchy and constitute a desire for a person to fulfil their higher purpose in life. These include the desire for meaningfulness, wholeness, truth, justice, simplicity, self-sufficiency, beauty, and uniqueness.

**Meta Needs**

I found throughout this research the presence of meta-needs. Maslow (1972) identified that people with these needs focused their energy on societal as opposed to personal problems and included a preference for realism and authenticity over the superficial. For example, when Mark was young he was heavily involved in planting native trees. When it became a popular thing to do he moved onto other issues where he could make more of a difference. He wanted to contribute in an authentic way, as opposed to doing something simply because it was popular. Marks decision to support causes that were unpopular demonstrates him looking beyond his own personal benefits and focusing on those that had the greater collective impact. People who are self-actualised also have a propensity to express themselves creatively in everyday life, being loving and caring, valuing life and deep interpersonal relationship, openly accepting themselves and others, and exhibited healthy boundaries in respect to privacy and autonomy (Chan & Joseph, 2000; Jones & Crandall, 1986; Maslow, 1968, 1970). These traits revealed themselves in informant’s statements and actions. These self-actualised meta needs (Boereee, 2006; Maslow, 1972) are demonstrated in Table 19.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meta-needs</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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| **1. Wholeness** | “I saw a connection of what they were doing to pull this forward and going, we’re looking after the mind, body, spirit, we’ll pull this through to look after the universe and our environment as well, you know, it’s all about that. Huge” **Catherine**  
“Being aware of the interconnection between things and how, you know things will have an impact on my health and impact on the planets health and how those things are deeply interrelated. Impact on the health and wellbeing of other people” **Fiona** |
| **2. Completion** | “Everything’s got a place and purpose and all that” **John**  
“I am now in the world but I am no longer of the world. That’s how I justify the contradiction” **Maria** |
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<th>Meta-needs</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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| 3. Perfection | “We are both souls on this planet you know having a journey and feel deeply connected with everybody at that level ... I think it's a work in progress and I think that's a lifelong on that of how to become comfortable making the choices I make and not allowing that to get in the way with my connection with other people and anyone else” **Fiona**  
“It is that spiritual contact with the earth and with your human or your spirituality too ... that physicality, the actual physical digging, the planting, the nurturing, yes, they're all those elements that we need in our lives, to make ourselves feel not adequate but responsible too” **Debra** |
| 4. Effortlessness | “Work is shared and living in a way that is environmentally responsible is easier because you can share out the work” **Jess**  
“Instead of just talking about it, a lot of people were talking about it, like planning, and worried and having all these conversations but wasn’t doing anything. So I think it was just taking a step from talking to doing, less hui, more doey” **Christian** |
| 5. Simplicity | “It’s how to fit in with nature so that you can benefit and nature can benefit, you work together ... it’s just how we can fit into nature and how we can work in, if you like, a symbiotic relationship” **Richard**  
“When I take time and think about what I'm doing, there's a, almost like a peace that exists inside me. Because I'm being more, I'm acting from a place of integrity... My whole pace of life is slower, and my kids generally seem happier, my family is happier” **Fiona** |
| 6. Truth | “When I say ‘aware’ and ‘conscious’ I am sort of referring to knowledge and informing one self and knowing and having that knowledge and information and so that knowledge and information means that you are aware about what is going on, and you’re conscious about what’s going on. And so it can inform your decisions” **Rebecca**  
“Knowledge makes a big difference. The more I learn about stuff the more I change my behaviour. As you read all the time knowledge is power” **Anthony** |
| 7. Justice | “A sense of living within my own ethics is a very important part of being honest with myself” **Jess**  
“I think we’re becoming dangerously dependent on a world that’s quite false and not necessarily sustainable” **Maria** |
| 8. Goodness | “In my heart I know that I’m a good person and I’m trying the best and that should be enough” **Wendy**  
“Just getting people to actually realise what the implications of this are for them and the outrage but then following that with a message of hope, like we can actually do something about this if we get together” **Kylie** |
| 9. Aliveness | “An emotional connection with the environment and that is for me a spiritual feeling. And that feeds us, you know, it feeds humans” **Jess**  
“This land was essentially dead when we got here, you know, there was bits of life in some of the trees around the banks, but we, we’ve been instrumental in bringing it back to life and that’s hugely satisfying ... you can feel the wellbeing of the land and I find that’s quite neat, it gives me a lot of hope for the future” **Jan** |
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<th>Meta-needs</th>
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| 10. Uniqueness| “I have heaps of fun with clothes from op shops and, but they’re second-hand clothes. And, you know it’s much more fun that way as well, my daughters do that too. I like the creativity that comes with it, so, and the surprise, you never quite know what you’re gonna find. I suppose I have a fairly eclectic taste”. Fiona  
Part of the excitement for me around some of this stuff is just the creativity that’s involved. Like anything from, you know, deciding to make your own compost bin for your garden through to, like, creative, like how can I match these second hand bits of furniture in my room to make it look cool and stuff like that” Kylie |
| 11. Autonomy  | “Make what I can myself, fix what I can, these are old shoes, but my other shoes were coming apart, all along here and I drilled little holes along the rubber. And I sewed it up with kite nylon kite string. And now it’s got this recycle chic look to it” Christian  
“I can actually support myself and it does have that type of confidence I suppose that it doesn’t matter what happens” Mark |
| 12. Playfulness| “It’s fun to do otherwise it’s not worth doing!” Jan  
“Life’s too short not to ride your bike or not to crack the funny joke. We had a work do and it was a fiesta theme so I was well justified, but I wore my Carmen Miranda outfit that I made for a fancy dress earlier on this year, you know, with the fruit hat. It’s like, life’s too short not to wear a fruit hat (laugh). Everyone was like wow, that’s really cool, and I’d like I know. I’d made it and everyone was like wow, you made that. Yeah, probably trying to be more free with that as opposed to thinking about being more serious” Wendy |
| 13. Richness  | “The farm in itself is a living organism. And that none of its separated. You know, the cows are connected to the plants and the plants are connected to the soil and the soil’s connected to the trees and the trees are connected to the soil and the animals are connected to the farmer and the farmers are connected to the family. And it’s all a total organism. And that’s what we... live integrated, getting it all together type lives” Richard  
“I find something really kind of nostalgic about drying herbs and using my mortar and pestle to grind them. I find something really magical about that ... there’s clearly something abundant about being in the garden, connecting with the earth, grounding” Aroha |
| 14. Beauty    | “Our souls are feed by beautiful things as well. But we can have things that are aesthetic that are not unsustainabe. Gardens are beautiful, handmade artisan crafts are beautiful, hand-made pottery is beautiful. I don’t see that as unsustainabe. Nice clothes are beautiful, we don’t have to not wear nice clothes” Jess  
“You can transform them into something useful, and if you’ve got an artistic feel and into something beautiful as well” Christian |
| 15. Meaningfulness | “It’s just that deep contentment thing, that you’re, it’s really, you know, it’s not like a fizz joy, it’s just that this is absolutely where I want to be in my life” Jan  
“Heaps of pleasure, there’s a lot of hard work but there’s also pleasure in hard work. So it’s not just the pleasure of doing something well or doing something, and producing the result” Christian |

Table 19: Summary of Self-actualised Metaneeds
My analysis suggested that informants had needs based around universality (i.e. wholeness, completion, perfection, simplicity, effortless). As Catherine reflected, informants perceived a bigger picture and their place in the wider universe. They valued simplicity and saw the perfection in everything around them based on their spiritual beliefs of oneness and the interconnection of life. As Fiona discussed, her actions were founded on a sense of integrity and responsibility to the universal energy around her. Informant’s needs demonstrated a desire to contribute to something greater than themselves.

I revealed that informant’s needs were based on a strong sense of what was morally right (i.e. truth, justice and goodness). They valued what was real over the superficial. They educated themselves on environmental issues because they wanted know the truth. It was also reflected in their search for ‘real’ authentic products. Informants needed to know that they people who made it had been treated fairly. For example, Rebecca identified it was important to be fully conscious of the wider implications of her decision making. There was also a deep acceptance and respect for others which resulted in a strong sense of ethics. As Jess stated it was important that she acted in a way that was morally consistent. How Kylie discussed they are aware of the reality of the situation but choosing to focus on what is good and transform that into a sense of hope. A desire to do what was right guided their continued behaviour.

Informants also demonstrated needs based around independence (i.e. aliveness, uniqueness and autonomy). Senses of connection to the world around them made informants feel alive. As Jess commented her connection with the environment feed her energy and resulted in a sense of vibrancy and life. They were non-conformist and comfortable being unique. For example, Fiona discussed how her tastes were eclectic. She like other informants valued the opportunities this lifestyle offered to be creative and produce objects that were a unique expression of who they are. They prided themselves on their independence and being relatively self-sufficient. As Mark discussed, regardless of what happened their independence meant they could comfortably take care of themselves. They felt deeply connected to others and equally independent. This dichotomy made them comfortable standing and modelling behaviour for others while existing as part of their community not separate.
Informants also demonstrated needs based on a passion and joy for life (i.e. playfulness, richness, beauty and meaningfulness). As Wendy illustrated, they endeavoured to also see the lighter side of life and not take themselves too seriously. It was not a life of seriousness and strife but one of joy in which they prized that which had beauty and meaning. It was a Creators life precisely because they valued the authentic combined with the aesthetically pleasing. As Jess expressed part of this lifestyle was enjoying the beautiful things she owned. Informant’s cherished objects that were both functional and pleasing. However their focus on the pleasurable aspect was not about a superficial need but grounded in a desire for a deep sense of meaningfulness in all of their life experiences.

The meta-needs were demonstrated on some level by all of the informants. I will use Kylie as an illustrative example of a person attempting the evolution to self-actualisation. She was a caring person who wanted to make a meaningful difference. As a result she left her corporate job and created her own charity to promote growing food in urban environments. She specifically took the photo on page 134 to reflect the interconnectedness of life and the deep interpersonal relationships she had felt towards others. Kylie had created a political action group specifically to appeal to mainstream youth – she wanted participants to feel acceptance not the isolation that extremism brings. I noted connection, belonging and people working together were the fundamental traits of her lifestyle. She also looked beyond her immediate networks to create opportunities for people in her physical community to be inspired. For example, she ran free community workshops to teach locals how they could create objects using recycled materials that were both functional and aesthetically pleasing. A desire for beauty was reflected in her home life where she took great pride in up-cycling ordinary objects and spoke of the abundant opportunities for creativity that this lifestyle provided. Her home was an eclectic mix of pre-loved objects that she had given a new life and reflected her idea of beauty. She was also to my mind very humble, being a catalyst of change yet never needing to be acknowledged as such. She is endeavouring to be the best version of herself while making a positive societal contribution. Kylie is but one example and I argue that the informants lifestyle was driven by these meta needs and offered them a path for demonstrating an ‘actualised’ version of themselves. There are criticisms of Maslow’s theory with people shown to be self-actualised yet having deprived needs (Daniels, 1988; Koltko-Rivera, 2006) but I chose to follow Boeree’s (2006)
argument that there is a difference between a fully-actualised person and one who is
imperfect yet using self-actualisation as a defining life force. Informants in this research
positioned their lifestyle as a life-long journey of continual improvements and it was the
journey itself, not the end destination that was of interest.

In summary, informants wanted to contribute to society and were motivated by a desire to
have a positive impact and to leave a legacy for future generations. They wanted to pass on
useful skills and preserve history, which was inherent in the knowledge they shared and the
objects they owned. These contributions enabled informants to meet their psychological
needs for safety, belonging and esteem as well as a self-actualized state of being. I suggest
this lifestyle enabled them to meet their deficiency and being needs simultaneously.

**A Creators Life is driven by Self-fulfilment**

A sustainable lifestyle was presented as a path to self-fulfilment in which informants could
achieve their full potential. Their overarching motive was a self-actualised state of being,
but this lifestyle did not neglect their deficiency needs and instead offered a means of
achieving both. On a basic level, informants were motivated by a need to survive. They
wanted to feel protected from outside influences and in control of their lives. Informants
recognised that overcoming sustainability problems required working with others in their
community and the feeling of connection and belonging that this offered motivated them.
Informants wanted their choices to enhance their life and they continued to be motivated
by the sense of wellness, pleasure and satisfaction that their lifestyle offered. Most
importantly their long-term motivation was self-actualisation – the desire to be the ‘best’
version of themselves and have an on-going positive impact on society. These results
supported the existence of the needs in Maslow’s theory but not his hierarchy as
informant’s motives tapped into multiple levels of his framework. This supports critiques in
the literature levelled at Maslow’s structured hierarchical framework (Daniels, 1988;
Hofstede, 1984; Taylor et al., 2000; Wahba & Bridwell, 1976). Maslow’s work made a
significant contribution to the academic field in understanding the positive motivating life
forces, and as Neher (1991) states is a theory that subsequently deserves further scrutiny
and modification based on new research. I found informant’s had a diverse and evolving
range of motives and a contribution of this research is a lifestyle that addressed deficiency
and being needs simultaneously. They were not favouring one need over the other but attempting to meet both of their requirements. This reflects what I describe as the ‘middle-way’ in which informants moved away from extreme behaviours and are instead focused on finding a balanced approach between in all areas of their life.

A finding briefly discussed but not elaborated upon is that informant’s motivation and commitment to achieving their full potential was in part based on a desire to avoid the negative side effects of not living their life purpose. Maslow (1972) argues that when needs are not met by self-actualisers, they turn into meta-pathologies that include depression, despair, cynicism and alienation. The gap between fulfilling one’s basic needs but not achieving their full potential can leave people with a sense that life is meaningless (Lea, Tarpy, & Webley, 1987). Schott (1992) suggests a similarity between Maslow’s self-actualisation and Jung’s individuation process in which healthy individuals chose life paths of continual personal growth. Interestingly, Jung (1969) also cautioned a form of psychosis that could develop for these people if not acted out correctly. Aroha in Table 15 discussed the ease with which she could fall into a negative mind-set and how difficult it could then become to move forward. Taking action was a way for informants to move beyond their fears. I think this research demonstrates an approach-avoidance emotional strategy in which positive rewards and negative outcomes combine to motivate behaviour (Elliot, Eder, & Harman-Jones, 2013). I found informants’ actively avoided a negative outlook on the ecological situation; they instead chose to focus on the positive aspects of their experiences and framed their lifestyle challenges as opportunities for growth. This is a further example of a self-actualised mind-set. The next section will discuss how the challenges of this lifestyle were a path of personal growth and elaborate upon the specific strategies informants used to overcome negative psychological outcomes.

I propose that marketing campaigns need to change their focus towards more emotional appeals. I found a strong motive for informant’s consumption choices was their aggregated self-concept. Initiatives within the environmental movement have positioned nature as an externalised object that people must save. I instead argue that informants were invested in saving the environment precisely because they perceived they were part of nature. This supports Armsworth et al’s (2007) argument that conservation efforts need to evolve to include people in the picture, not exclude them. The permeable boundaries of informants
aggregated self resulted in them feeling intimately connected to others so they felt a responsibility to be mindful. This is not a new concept. Where it has been neglected is in the marketing of environmental campaigns to date. I propose marketing campaigns promoting sustainable behaviours consider people as an integral part of the message. There is a need to look at ways of promoting sustainability that looks beyond the information-deficit and fear-based approach utilised to date (Blake, 1999). In this research I found the present emotional life-enhancing motives were just as important as the future-focused survival orientated ones. An argument for the value-action gap in consumer behaviour has been an inability for people to see the future benefits (Blake, 1999; Seyfang, 2009). I suggest a focus on immediate outcomes would be more effective. A key finding of this research is that marketers need to create campaigns that are both positive and empowering and to see the change to a more sustainable lifestyle as one that is beneficial, not a disadvantage. I argue for a new direction in marketing that promotes sustainable lifestyles as a life-affirming option with current positive benefits.

Section Summary

Informant’s lifestyle choices were driven by four main motives: environmental, survival, life-enhancing and positive contribution. These motives reflected needs across Maslow’s hierarchy in which informants were endeavouring to fulfil both their deficiency and being needs, which extend on the existing theory. I propose informants overarching motive is self-actualisation in which they are seeking to realise their higher life-purpose and make a positive impact on society. I argue that informants were making changes in their lives not for pure altruistic reasons but because their behaviour was personally beneficial and meaningful. Future marketing campaigns need to integrate these more diverse motives and promote a sustainable lifestyle as a positive, life-affirming option.
Section 5: Challenges

There are inherent challenges in undertaking a sustainable lifestyle within a society with unsustainable consumption practices. Leiserowitz, et al (2006) contend that a crucial area of research is understanding how people overcome individual and structural barriers to achieve sustainable behaviours. This section makes a contribution to this area by understanding what the barriers were for informants and the strategies they used to overcome them. It addresses the final research question:

Research Question 4: What are their challenges to living sustainably?

At the beginning of this research my intent had been to report on the barriers that prevented informants enacting their lifestyle. However my analysis revealed that instead of viewing challenges as blocks, informants perceived them as opportunities for personal growth. Maslow (1972) contented that a path of self-actualisation is in part motivated by people wanting to avoid the negative pathological side-effects that can develop from not living one’s life purpose. I will present an argument that it was precisely the process of overcoming these challenges that made this lifestyle so meaningful.

Internal

• Guilt
• Perfectionism
• Idealism versus Realism

External

• Time and Money
• People
• Life Changes
• Infrastructure

Figure 11: Summary of the Challenge Themes
Chapter Four

Challenges

Research Findings

My analysis determined a number of internal and external challenges to informants achieving their lifestyle. These themes are illustrated in Figure 11. The internal challenges represent the personal feelings and personality traits that effected informant’s ability to achieve their goals. The external challenges address the physical attributes and lifestyle transitions that impeded on the changes they wanted to make. I will outline the key strategies informants used to overcome these perceived barriers.

Theme 1: Internal Challenges

Internal challenges represent the psychological blocks that effected informant’s behaviour. Etzioni (1998) identified that the tension between people’s urges and moral considerations can create heightened internal conflicts not easily resolved. Informants contended with a number of internal struggles, specifically guilt, perfectionism and a tension between their ideals and the reality of their choices, as illustrated in Table 20. My analysis suggested that these were feelings informants had contended with prior to adopting a sustainable lifestyle. However this lifestyle appeared to offer opportunities for these informants to work through and overcoming these pre-existing challenges.

Subtheme 1.1: Guilt

My analysis revealed that guilt appeared to have a detrimental effect on a number of informants psychological health. Guilt is defined as a feeling of disappointment in one’s self as a result of a person’s actions, circumstances or intentions (Baumeister et al., 1995; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). These informants felt a huge burden of responsibility to make the right choices. For example, Wendy discussed how she felt the ‘weight of expectation’ and did not want to be accused of ‘selling out’ by making unsustainable choices. She described an internal battle between her ideals and what was achievable; with the resulting guilt was an ever-present feeling in her life. Wendy felt like she was being watched from above and judged for the choices she was making. She was not traditionally religious but believed that nature and the energy of generations of people who had come before were surrounding her, judging her and expecting her to live up to their expectations.
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| **1. Guilt**                                 | “Alleviation of guilty, absolutely! If only every product could come with that. Now with twenty seven percent less guilt, buy this!” *Wendy*  
“I’m tired of sharing the guilty responsibility of our culture devastating the entire ecosystems and our efforts to make this planet uninhabitable. This kind of guilt is overwhelmingly exhausting” *Aroha*  
“I became quite sick through living, trying to live in a society that’s not really suited for us as a human being. I wasn’t created to be living like I was. Hyper stressed, dysfunctional kinds of relationships, eating bad food. I think it all builds up and you create this kind of unsustainable life for yourself which is part of just another big unsustainable, dysfunctional life that other people are leading”. *Maria* |
| **2. Perfectionism**                         | “I emailed you about that perfectionist thing. I was sort of wanting to do everything and wanting to achieve everything, and wanting to be everything. It’s kind of unrealistic. So to look it back to sustainability, it’s like sustaining your energy over the course of your life, having constant anxiousness about whether you’re making the grade or not is not good” *Wendy*  
“Gee, living in the city, living in Auckland I find it’s impossible to make 100% sustainable choices. Like no matter what you do, what you eat, you kind of have to make the better choice of two bad choices because there’s never the perfect choice” *Aroha* |
| **3. Tension between ideal and reality**     | “When you’re working 60 hours a week and you sort of think, it feels like it’s an excuse sort of thing, but you sort of end up doing what the mainstream does because it’s easier I suppose as well … it’s about that preparedness, but when it’s been too busy or whatever and you think, oh God it’s just too hard sort of thing, and you do go back” *Mark* |
| I. Trade-offs                                | “I would need to make it like a decision in a case by case basis and kind of weigh things up. I wouldn’t be, I wouldn’t take a wholesale approach with organic is everything and that’s where I’m going to go” *Rebecca*  
“It’s a sort of offset thing, you know. I ride my bike during the week so then I feel justified and okay about driving that because some people commute for an hour every day to work. So there’s sort of that trade off … But feeling quite justified with it too, and probably those other people feel like that too”. *Wendy* |
| II. Balance                                  | “I mean it’s very easy for me to get caught up in feeling guilty if I don’t buy something sustainable. But I think it is about balance, it’s about understanding that, you know I can’t do everything, I can’t be perfect. And, you know being, just being compassionate with myself about that and aiming, you know aiming for an overall, overall to do it as much as possible” *Fiona*  
Yes it is important. But not being militant is also important because being militant also alienates people and I know it’s frustrating for my family … I stopped having all dairy products and meat for about eight months and it was really hard for my family because they wanted to cook things for me, or they would be sharing food and I couldn’t have it and you see that that actually creates friction between people because sharing food is part of community, part of family and relationships”. *Jess* |
In consumer research, guilt has been categorised into transgressions against societal standards, other people and oneself (Dahl, Honea, & Manchanda, 2003). Wendy described her guilt as societal but I argue she was actually demonstrating self-related guilt in not meeting standards she had set for herself. While a sustainable lifestyle has a societal component it is currently self-motivated, and I contend that when informants discussed not living up to what ‘society’ required they were effectively imposing their values on society not the other way around. For these informants a constant feeling of self-imposed guilt was overwhelming.

Guilt was positioned as both a negative obstacle and a motivating force. Guilt had spurred a number of informants to initially adopt a sustainable lifestyle and impacted on the choices they made. Anthony, for example, discussed his guilt about owning a couple of chairs – they suited his décor but they were not essential and if he were truly sustainable he would not have brought them in the first place. Informants saw continual intense feelings of guilt as being detrimental. Aroha discussed how exhausting it was for her. She drew Image 46 to reflect this feeling of being overwhelmed about the future. She felt the development of humanity had resulted in society’s current circumstances. Her feelings of shame and guilt about the past and fear of the future were depicted in her image of a deep dark abyss. For these informants guilt was both a motivator and a curse. This is supported in the literature where guilt has been positioned as both a punishment (Monteith, Ashburn-Nardo, Voils, & Czopp, 2002) and a motivator of pro-social behaviour (Baumeister et al., 1995; Maitner, Mackie, & Smith, 2006).
guilt as a targeted mechanism for remedying social offenses (Cryder, Springer, & Morewedge, 2012). Amodio, Devine and Harmon-Jones (2007) propose an integrated model in which guilt first serves to inhibit negative behaviour and then encourages positive behaviour to fix a transgression. This was reflected in this research; guilt motivated them to change their behaviour and encouraged them to make the right choices. In this case, the outcome of guilt was positive action.

For some informants though a sense of guilt never went away, resulting in a feeling of dissatisfaction even when they made good choices. Irresolvable guilt is generally associated with passivity which was not the case for these informants, so instead suggests they were experiencing ‘shame’ which is a deeper negative emotion (Lewis, 1995). Shame can have detrimental effects on a person’s emotional and mental health and result in strategies of blame and anger (Tangney & Dearing, 2004). For example, in our first interview Maria flipped between feelings of shame and anger as she discussed the negative affects her outlook was having on her health. The remedial strategy involved informants compelling themselves to take some form of action. As discussed in Section 3, action was a way for people to enact an activist identity. In this section action is presented as a means of overcoming negative psychological patterns. Instead of dwelling on the unfairness of the situation they had made the decision to take action in their lives to prevent themselves being negatively affected. It is for this reason I have positioned guilt as a challenge as opposed to a motivator. It curtailed their negative behaviour and encouraged them to behave in a way that had positive psychological benefits.

**Subtheme 1.2: Perfectionism**

In the literature perfectionism has been perceived by some as a positive personality trait but the prevailing argument is that it is a negative construct, playing a major role in number of psychopathologies (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Perfectionism has yet to be clearly defined but is generally seen as occurring when a person sets themselves exceedingly high standards of performance (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990; Hamachek, 1978). Around a quarter of the informants struggled with perfectionism. At the beginning of the study I experienced difficulties getting these informants to return their scrapbooks due to concerns they were not ‘perfect’ yet they often delivered the least completed scrapbooks. One informant even dropped out of the study as he found the idea of doing the scrapbook
overwhelming. A finding from this research is that living a sustainable lifestyle appeared to help informants overcome the negative restrictions of perfectionism and adopt a more positive position. In the literature a distinction is made between positive perfectionism, which results in psychological wellbeing, and negative perfectionism, a neurotic state of psychological distress (Geranmayepour & Besharat, 2010; Terry-Short, Owens, Slade, & Dewey, 1995). When experiencing negative perfectionism people are overly critical of their behaviour and feel they never do enough (Frost et al., 1990; Haase & Prapavessis, 2004), and there is evidence of that occurring in this research. To counteract this informant’s discussed a process of choosing to accept the realities of an ‘imperfect’ sustainable lifestyle.

Aroha, Wendy, Jess and Fiona reflected that perfect sustainable choices were near impossible and acknowledging they were part of an imperfect system helped them realise they could never be perfect themselves. They went through a process of internal acceptance. In a similar strategy to that used for overcoming guilt, taking action - even if small - made them feel good and helped them overcome their fears. While perfectionism was a consideration, their commitment to their lifestyle was stronger. They chose to use the imperfect nature of this lifestyle as an opportunity for personal growth and enable them to move beyond their perfectionist behaviour.

**Subtheme 1.3: Tension between Idealism vs. Realism**

One of the main challenges informants faced was a lack of truly sustainable choices and all of the informants discussed a tension between their ideal outcomes and the reality of the options presented to them. Mark discussed the continual tensions that existed in living sustainably within a consumerist society. He emphasised it was necessary to be organised and to plan in advance if he was to make authentic choices. Otherwise he was likely to make impulsive, easy choices that were not necessarily sustainable. I interpret this tension as an issue of ‘adaptability’. Walker, Holling, Carpenter and Kinzig (2004) define adaptability as the ability to be resilient - the propensity to recognise challenges and find solutions to overcoming them. They argue it involves both self-organisation and utilising ecological resource appropriately. In the case of the informants there is evidence of resilience in the form of extensive planning, reuse of materials and creative solutions to meet their needs. I interpret that adaptability was an important skill, with informants adapting both themselves and their environment to redress their needs.
It was established that there were rarely ‘perfect’ sustainable choices so I was interested in how informants made their decisions. In this research there was evidence of a willingness to make compromises to achieve an underlying value of sustainability (Leiserowitz et al., 2006). Important problems often involve multiple objectives and the multi-attribute utility theory suggests that when satisfaction is uncertain utility plays a role and decisions are made by comparing basic factors against a structure of values (Keeney, 1993). Rebecca discussed how she made decisions on a case-by-case basis. Informants appeared to have an individual hierarchy of factors they considered important which they weighed their decisions against. When they could not fulfil their requirements they offset their decisions; as Wendy explained, she made the best decisions she could and hoped her good behaviour in one area would make up for her less than sustainable choices. She took Image 47 to reflect her coming to terms with the tensions her lifestyle presented and having to make trade-offs. My analysis revealed the offsetting was a common coping mechanism for informants. This is supported by the theory that suggests to reach an optimal solution a trade-off of selective criteria is required (Mateo, 2012). Informants thought through the outcomes of their behaviours, weighed up the alternatives and hoped that positive behaviour in one area would off-set the negative impacts in another. Offseting was a required strategy in the current societal structure and a direct result of the lack of authentically sustainable choices to support their lifestyle.

My analysis revealed that informants preferred coping strategy was to find a sense of balance in their life, accepting the things they could change and those they could not. Fiona
had learnt to be compassionate with herself and describes what I have labelled the ‘middle way’. A sustainable lifestyle was about balance so they also needed to embody that in their approach to life. The balance theory of wisdom suggests that people with wisdom weigh up considerations towards self, others and the environment to try and achieve a balanced solution for the common good (Sternberg, 1998). Koltko-Rivera (2006) suggests that this approach illustrates self-transcendent values that represent the highest form of human development. This supports my earlier argument that informants are attempting a path of self-actualised people. A sustainable lifestyle was about being mindful and respectful of others and informants strived to apply that equally to themselves. Jess reflected that being too strict also had the tendency to alienate others. She had softened her views on her own practices so that she could continue to be part of her family gatherings. It has been suggested that environmental radicalism has had limited wide-scale impact due to a lack a solid social base (Mareš, 2008). Informants discussed the isolation that an extreme sustainable lifestyle presented, so chose to take a balanced approach when spending time with others so that they could continue to be a part of their communities.

In summary, internal challenges were psychological blocks that informants actively worked at overcoming and were used as a mechanism to empower them to make sustainable choices. Informants took the negative aspects of guilt and perfectionism and used their lifestyle as a means of alleviating these emotions, transforming them into a positive expression. To overcome the tension they experienced between their ideals and reality, informants’ offset their decisions or tried to be compassionate with themselves. They were endeavouring to find a ‘middle’ way that would leave them feeling in balance with their values. As long as they were presented with only imperfect choices a truly sustainable lifestyle would always be a challenge. They chose to accept the realities and challenges of this lifestyle and still continued to make changes, which is indicative of the level of commitment to their lifestyle.

**Theme 2: External Challenges**

Aside from informant’s internal challenges, I identified a number of structural barriers and lifestyle transitions that impeded on what informants could achieve. These external challenges represented the physical attributes that informant’s had to work at overcoming. I
### Subthemes

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| **1. Time & Money** | “A lot of these choice situations, a lot of it is about time, you know, the environmentally friendly option will just about always take longer to do” Rob  
“‘There is time, this is a slow process and that it is getting there that’s what matters’. Jess  
“We had this mismatch, that if we had the money we actually didn’t have the time to actually do it, and if we had the time to do it we actually didn’t have the money to actually buy ‘that’ which was an essential part of it” Jan |
| **2. Life Transitions** | “It’s harder when you’re renting as well because, like, you can’t make big changes to the way the house works and stuff like that, just thinking purely about living situations” Kylie  
“My commitment has changed in terms of my energy levels and what I’m doing in life but the motivations are still there. I have a vision in my head of what a meaningful connected life would be and a desire to get to that point.” Jess |
| **3. People** | “We used a builder who was prepared to work with us on creating a more sustainable extension, but he didn’t have much knowledge. And that is another barrier, I think, when people are building, is that a number of builders out there who have the information and knowledge about it, is very small. But he worked with us, and he thought we were nuts at times (laughter) spending, you know one and a half times the amount of money we needed to on insulation. He thought we were crazy, but it was important to us, so he did work with us on it.” Fiona  
“They’re making me feel really frustrated that they don’t have the same values as I do. That they’re not seeing the world in the same way that I am”. Jess  
“It’s almost easier for me just to look after it than I don’t want to go off ranting to her about, preaching to her about not using herbicides and stuff. I would rather just make it easier for her not to use them” Anthony |
| **4. Infrastructure** | “It’s particularly frustrating that my ideals and my aspirations can’t be met because of the infrastructure that’s provided in the services, that are provided in the topography. It’s terribly frustrating to the point where I, I’m making decisions about where I will live in relation to my job so that I can have that sort of lifestyle where I can cycle to work or bus to work”. Rebecca  
“I’m kind of too practical, like to some degree a realistic person. Like I’m not gonna do something that’s gonna like be a massive, massive inconvenience, or like just be way more inefficient than doing it another way. Like transport’s a big one because in Auckland, like if I wanna go across town at an obscure time, like I’m just not gonna ride a bike that far at night and I’m just not gonna like take three buses to get somewhere” Kylie  
“Until some of that bigger structural stuff changes, me as a consumer can only get so far ... That’s the frustrating bit because then you feel like your choice is taken away as someone who is trying to do the right thing or some right things, you are limited in that”. Wendy  
“I think it has to be large scale government driven change of our laws and regulations to force us to behave, or push us to behave in a way that is sustainable. And companies as well because they are not going to change of their own violation” Jess |

**Table 21: Subthemes of External Challenges**
was interested in these challenges because they impacted on the tangible outcomes of their lifestyle. My analysis determined that the main barriers were time and money, lifecycle transitions, other people and infrastructure constraints illustrated in Table 21.

**Subtheme 2.1: Time and Money**

One of the biggest external limitations for informants was having the time and money to reach their goals. Rob, for example, felt there was always a trade-off between time and what he wanted to achieve, with the environmental options requiring more effort. Time and money are scarce resources; Leclerc, Schmitt and Dubé (1995) determined that the value of time is context dependant and peoples propensity to sacrifice it dependant on the level of risk involved in their decisions. I found in the case of these informants’ the propensity to sacrifice time was not based on risk but the personal value that came from its investment. This outcome aligns with expectancy-value theory that argues people’s choices are based on their belief in an outcome and the degree to which they value the activity (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). In the case of these informants they placed a high value on a sustainable lifestyle and were willing to make sacrifices for authentic options that supported their lifestyle. Jess, for example, was willing to take the slower transport options. I found informants choosing time-consuming methods because they were perceived to be more authentic. They deliberately avoided timesaving consumerist items and took the time-consuming route of doing it themselves. I interpret this as elevating ‘time’ to be a valuable artefact of this lifestyle. There appeared to be a huge sense of pride in using methods that were slow and adopting a lifestyle in which people used ‘real’ time to achieve their goals. Money on the other hand was simply a resource. They were distancing themselves from the materialistic aspect of consumerism yet acknowledged that high costs were a reality of authentic sustainable products. In a consumerist society, time has been positioned as a means of exchange against money (Cross, 1993). These informants were trying to break this association, time was seen as the most valuable resource, money was simply a transactional tool and unlike other consumers they were not interested in offsetting it against time saving devices.

A key attribute of this subculture is that informants had to be organised and take a long-term view for them to overcome the limitations of time and money. Jan looked back over her life and identified that time and money had always been a challenge in terms of achieving their goals. It was only as she and Richard were approaching retirement age that
they were in a position to have both. While time and money did pose limitations on their choices, a key part of this lifestyle involved being resilient and capitalising on the resources they had. Money was not a necessary requirement of this subculture but the willingness to invest the time was.

**Subtheme 2.2: Life Transitions**

One of the benefits of doing longitudinal research is that during this study a few of the informants went through significant life changes (e.g. marriage break-ups, having children, moving house, returning to study). I focused specifically on those transitions that were external to their sustainable lifestyle choices because I wanted to understand how these occurrences challenged their every-day decisions. Some informants chose to see their life changes as an opportunity to do things differently. For example, Maria moved locations due to a relationship ending and commented how liberating it was to finally do exactly what she wanted. In this case her life changes were empowering and made her feel more in control of her choices. Others experienced their life choices being questioned. Jess noted how relaxed her lifestyle had become since she returned to study and was no longer actively involved with environmental groups. She found that disconnecting from her support network had made it harder. What I found interesting is that the expression of her values might be different but she still remained dedicated to her lifestyle. This is supported by the earlier argument that a sustainable lifestyle is a life-long one that took perseverance and work.

When I first visited Richard and Jan they were energised and productive. In my subsequent visit they commented they were in a low energy phase. They reflected that while their energy may fluctuate, what really mattered were incremental improvements over the long-term. I uncovered that the challenges associated with life-transitions ultimately reinforced informant’s commitment to their lifestyle. Research has found that negative life changes can result in people adopting detrimental coping strategies or they position the event as a route of self-improvement and personal growth (McFarland & Alvaro, 2000; Schaefer & Moos, 1992). In the case of these informants they proposed to see the challenges an opportunity for them to grow and recommit to their lifestyle. Commitment to a difficult goal is said to be the greatest when it is internally driven and the person has a propensity for high achievement (Hollenbeck, Williams, & Klein, 1989), which was demonstrated by these

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<tr>
<th>Chapter Four</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
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188
informants. They were willing to continue to pursue their goals over the long term despite their lives changing and the obstacles that accompanied these transitions.

**Subtheme 2.3: Other People**

Informants reported that other people posed a challenge due to their criticisms and lack of support. There were times informants had to justify their behaviour and defend their choices to others. Fiona, for example, recently put an extension on her house and went to considerable effort to ensure sustainable products were used in all aspects of the build. She encountered problems with her builder who could not understand why she was willing to pay almost double to ensure it was sustainable. Informants found it particularly difficult when family members and people that were close to questioned their choices. Jess, for example, found it challenging living in a household with people who had different values and there was sadness for her in what she felt was a divide too hard to cross. I found that the sense of isolation in familial networks had prompted informants to seek out support networks of people who were like-minded. Similar to other subcultures (Gelder, 2005; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), a sense of community and connection with their in-group prevented them feeling isolated and helped informants maintain their life goals.

To continue having congenial relationships with others informants adopted the strategies of non-disclosure and compromise. By choosing a strategy of non-disclosure they could continue to live their lives and avoid the judgement of others or the stigmatisation of extremism. Anthony, for example, found it easier to look after the hedge he shared with his neighbour rather than to get into an ideological debate with her. Conforming to the social norms and expectations of others can be an effective strategy to avoid ridicule (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). I argue that part of the
reason informants were adopting the ‘middle way’ was to avoid having confrontations with others. Christian, for example, had issues with his neighbours and his landlord over how he had grown his backyard. He had decided to accommodate their needs and turn some of it back to grass, which he had started to do as shown in the bottom of Image 48. He felt he had the moral imperative and was annoyed at having to accommodate people who he felt did not care. My analysis suggests informants aggregated self-concept meant they were willing to make compromises if they believed it was for the greatest good. While informants expressed challenges living within their local community, most were committed to remaining where they were and had instead tried to have a positive impact on their neighbours. Jan and Richard had considered leaving their neighbourhood because the people were so different to them and moving to one with similar values. They had decided to stay because of their family and to be an example to others in their area. As I mentioned in Section One, this was a type of ‘cloaked’ subculture deliberately designed to influence others in a covert way. Unlike activists who were perceived to vigorously advocate for a cause, these informants wanted to fit in and be seen as normal which they hoped would make them more effective at influencing others. As shown by Christian they were also willing to compromise if it meant a solution that would work for everyone. Others opinions were identified as obstacles informants had to overcome, but ultimately it did not prevent them acting out their lifestyle.

Subtheme 2.4: Infrastructure

A number of informants commented that the physical infrastructures were an impediment to achieving their goals. Transport links, cost-effective energy alternatives and land values were some of the major external factors that impacted on their choices. Rebecca talked about her frustrations in regards to her daily transportation options. She expressed her annoyance at infrastructure designed with mainly personal motorists in mind. Image 49 is a photo Christian took of the limited bus services that run outside of Auckland. Crompton (2010) argues that the lack of quality public infrastructure is reflective of local cultural values. Informants were being constrained in a society that does not share the same values as they do. Informants such as Jess acknowledged the limitation of what they could do and large-scale structural changes were positioned as a necessity to support a greater shift in consumer behaviour. Infrastructure change have been identified as an essential component
of sustainability outcomes and the lack of adaptability positioned as a significant deterrent to behaviour change (Johnson, Hays, Center, & Daley, 2004; Smith, Stirling, & Berkhout, 2005). Most of the informants had found ways around infrastructure limits or internally accepted there was only so much they could do. Kylie, for example, tried to be realistic and practical in her choices. She made good choices but tried not to be too hard on herself when she failed. Instead of using the absence of infrastructure as an excuse, I found the informants to have a realistic outlook. They acknowledged the limitations of their lifestyle but continued to make changes in their own lives regardless. They were endeavouring to be the change they wanted to see, expecting that societal values and practices would eventually catch up.

**Challenges are Integral to a Creators Life**

I found that the challenges were an integral part of this lifestyle; they tested informants but ultimately served as opportunities for personal growth and resulted in a strong commitment to their lifestyle. The fact is a sustainable lifestyle is at times difficult and inconvenient, and informants were realistic about the hard work and dedication their lifestyle entailed. Instead of seeing these as blocks they chose to use the challenges to motivate and empower them. I propose the enjoyment they experience from this lifestyle was in part a result of the effort required to surmount these challenges. Within the personal development literature, overcoming obstacles are perceived as an integral part of a person’s growth and necessary to achieving self-actualisation (Fidler & Fidler, 1978; Schaefer & Moos, 1992; Wilber, 2001). I interpret that the difficulties and obstacles built their commitment for their lifestyle and resulted in a sense of deep satisfaction and pride in their choices. They could not just buy the solutions; they needed to develop their own which required creative thinking and
original responses. The eventual outcome was a lifestyle which they were actively co-creating, with aspects of themselves entrenched in the solutions.

My analysis revealed that informants were adopting the ‘middle’ way, attempting to implement a lifestyle that was meaningful, realistic and balanced. They were endeavouring to live a sustainable lifestyle within a mainstream consumerist society. Instead of positioning these perspectives as polar opposites, informants were creating a lifestyle that was a balance between the two. To achieve this, I discerned informants adopted pro-active strategies of adaptability, offsetting, taking action, non-disclosure and acceptance of their limitations. These strategies are illustrated in Figure 12. In the image the strategies overlap to reflect an interwoven approach in which informant’s utilised a range of responses to overcome the challenges their lifestyle presented. They endeavoured to find a balance between the different aspects of their lives and sought to find solutions that would benefit both themselves and others.

![Figure 12: Summary of Strategies to Achieve the Middle Way](image)

This lifestyle was challenging and required commitment but the process of overcoming these obstacles made it deeply meaningful for them. I propose this is why a sustainable lifestyle eventually became such an integral part of who they are. While informants did have ulterior motives for promoting this lifestyle to others, I interrupt they also wanted others to experience the personal growth and self-actualisation this lifestyle provides.
Section Summary

In conclusion, internal and external challenges imposed limitations on what informants could achieve. Instead of perceiving them in a negative light, informants chose to see these challenges as opportunities for personal growth and empowerment. They adopted a balanced, middle way approach to their lifestyle that combined strategies of adaptability, action, offsetting, acceptance and non-disclosure to surmount these obstacles. Overcoming challenges created a sense of pride and satisfaction in informants which re-engaged their commitment to their lifestyle.
Chapter Five: Discussion

In this chapter I discuss the main findings of this research with contributions to theory and practice. My study of people attempting to live sustainably in an urban environment revealed the Creators subculture, which differs from consumer activists that have previously been identified. The informants demonstrated an aggregated self and I have contributed to the existing theory to include nature and other people within the boundaries of informants extended self-concept. Mindfulness and issues of contamination impacted upon their consumption choices and Creators prioritised what I have labelled as ‘valued consumption’ over an anti-consumption perspective. I found this lifestyle to be an empowered one and argue for the inclusion of positive, life-enhancing motives in social marketing campaigns. Lastly, I argue that informants were adopting the middle-way, an activist lifestyle that as early-adopters of the environmental movement was designed to avoid the extremism of the past and inspire change from within existing urban communities. Creators have designed a life aimed at fulfilling their potential and making a positive contribution to wider society. These main findings are summarised in Figure 13.

Figure 13: Summary of Main Research Findings

Valued Consumption

Aggregated Self

Empowered Lifestyle

Subculture

Creators

The Middle Way
The Creator Subculture

A key contribution of this research is the identification of a subculture that I have labelled ‘Creators’. This subculture is defined as people who use their creative energy to create a connected and sustainable way of life. Informants positioned an unsustainable lifestyle as a disconnected one; they were instead endeavouring to create a connected way of living, both for themselves and others. Sirsi, Ward and Reingen (1996) argue for the importance of intra-cultural variation in the study of subcultures. I found evidence of that occurring in informant’s consumption choices with individuals differing in the importance of criteria. These differences as whole though were only minor. What were most important about my research were the similarities between informants. I had deliberately chosen a diverse range of informants in terms of age, occupation, socio-economic group and location, expecting there to be diverging viewpoints. Instead I discovered consistent answers and similar perspectives. The unique contribution of my research was not the range of opinions but the presence of a developed subculture based on similar ethos, values and worldview.

I will now elaborate of two important aspects of this subculture: its definition as a cloaked subculture and its difference to existing consumer resistance lifestyles.

I. Cloaked Subculture

From my analysis I identified a ‘cloaked’ subculture that was deliberately disguising itself. Extremism within the environmental movement had been perceived by informants as making a green lifestyle unattractive and had limited mainstream participation. Informants wanted to distance themselves from these out-group associations and instead be seen as ‘normal’ to have the greatest chance of influencing others as an in-group member in their local communities. A subculture by its very nature is a group that is distinctly separate from mainstream society (Gelder, 2005). The informants acknowledged their separateness but as opposed to seeing themselves as being marginal to society they saw their position as firmly rooted within the mainstream structure. As they could not escape the capitalist system they were finding a way to exist within it while actively encouraging change. A key point is that informants were assuming an activist identity. This identity differs from traditional activists and in the ‘Middle way’ section I will discuss what I see as an original contribution that this cloaked subculture makes to the social movements’ literature.
II. *Creators and Consumer Resistance Lifestyles*

It is important to acknowledge that there are distinct differences between Creators and existing consumer resistance lifestyles, specifically Anti-consumers and Voluntary Simplifiers. Iyer and Muncy (2009) identified four categories of anti-consumers: global impact consumers, simplifiers, market activists and anti-loyal consumers. The latter two categories relate to specific product classes, so were not relevant to this research. The former two have some bearing. Creators exhibited similar concerns as global impact consumers but differed in strategy as this group chose less consumption as a means to redress environmental issues (Borgmann, 2000). The greatest similarities with these informants were Voluntary Simplifiers who reduced consumption to focus on the non-material aspects of life (Elgin, 2006a; McDonald, Oates, Young, & Hwang, 2006; Pepper et al., 2009). Like Simplifiers these informants were seeking authentic choices (Zavestoski, 2002), self-determination (Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002), relationship to others and nature (Johnston & Burton, 2003) and personal growth (Elgin, 2006b). However I identified two key differences between Creators and Simplifiers. Firstly, informant’s actions were a form of activism. Simplifiers focus on personal quality of life differed from informant’s outward focus of facilitating change, while Creators are motivated by quality of life concerns they were equally driven by making a societal difference and designed a lifestyle that appealed to others. In comparison, Simplifiers focus on personal life-improvements and their motives were broad with sustainability concerns not the primary focus. Secondly, this lifestyle was focused on making mindful choices not less consumption. I disagreed with the anti-consumption viewpoint as I found consumption played an integral role in this lifestyle. Simplifiers swap material satisfaction to focus on the non-materials aspects of life. The informants embraced their consumption choices and once possessed their objects became sacred. This is a marked difference but a significant one. The anti-consumption perspective takes a critical stance towards consumption. The Creator’s primary focus was on how their consumption choices and actions could have a positive and meaningful impact on themselves and their community.

Given the focus on meaningful consumption, it is important to distinguish the relationship between Creators and Ethical Consumers. Ethical Consumers have concerns about the overall nature of production so their purchase decisions are based on moral and
environmental choices (Trentmann, 2006). Shaw and Newholm (2002) identified that ethical consumers fit into divergent groups based on a multitude of considerations; subsequently they positioned ethical consumers as existing as a subset within larger movements. I found evidence in this research of ethical consumption decisions and they demonstrated a similar fragmented nature. Subsequently I have chosen to follow Shaw and Newholm’s (2002) framework and position ethical consumption as an outcome of a Creator’s lifestyle. Informant’s ethical considerations were just one aspect of their sustainable lifestyle choices.

In conclusion, I identified the Creator subculture as a group that differs from previous consumer resistance lifestyles. The remainder of this chapter will outline the specific attributes of this group.

**Aggregated Self**

Informants demonstrated an aggregated self-concept, derived from Belk’s (2010a) work on sharing. He argues that there are two different types of sharing. In ‘sharing-out’ items are exchanged and there is a clear distinction made between self and others. ‘Sharing-in’ involves intimate sharing in which the boundaries defining self expand to accommodate others as if they were immediate family members. Family is seen as part of a person’s extended self so to share with them is to effectively share with one’s self (Belk, 1988; Lamb, 2000). In the aggregated self-concept, boundary invasion with others disappears and objects are seen as common property, such as the sharing of food and tools demonstrated by informants in this research. In Western society sharing outside the family has become increasingly uncommon (Belk & Llamas, 2011). This has been attributed to increasing consumerist lifestyles and the resulting ‘possessive behaviour’ in which people become emotionally attached to items and subsequently less propensity to share them (Kasser & Kanner, 2004; Kleine & Baker, 2004). In this research informant’s exhibited signs of being emotionally attached to items but willing to share based on their aggregated self. I observed informants experiencing joy when given the opportunity to share with others and there was no expectation of reciprocity, as the sharing-out version suggests. As Belk (2010a) states sharing in has a caring component and can have exponential benefits in creating community without people feeling they are losing anything. This perspective has similarities with research on sacred items which found that people were willing to share special goods if it
was with like-minded others (Lastovicka & Fernandez, 2005; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Where this research differs is that informants were willing to share with people dis-similar to themselves; i.e. - they were not just sharing with like-minded others. I argue that this finding demonstrates an extended aggregated self-concept that includes people unfamiliar to them in their self-boundaries.

An original contribution of this research is an extension of the aggregated self-concept to include both nature and unfamiliar others in informants self-concept. They perceived of interconnection between themselves and all living entities. Nature, for example, was seen as being part of informants not separate from them. This interconnection resulted in informants being mindful of the effect of their behavioural choices on unfamiliar people and to act in a way that they themselves would expect to be treated. Informants aggregated self resulted in an acute awareness and sensitivity to contamination which drove their behaviour. For example, part of the reason informants grew their own food was to avoid negative contamination that came with store brought products. They valued positive contamination - an object made by hand had a story and history behind it that informants got to experience once possessed. However they feared negative contamination when informants lacked the full story of an objects origin. For example, Wendy spoke of her frustrations around the unknown origins of a piece of clothing in China and the person who made it. Feeling disconnected from that person’s experience and how they were treated made Wendy feel wary of buying it. She preferred to buy a locally-made product knowing she could connect with the maker directly and be ensured of its ethical credentials. This differed with recycled objects as the owners might be unknown but the story of a life lived was inherent in the object itself. This sensitivity to other people’s energy and touch was a significant drive of the tangible outcomes of this lifestyle. An aggregated self-concept and its diminished boundaries resulted in a propensity to share, a sense of responsibility towards others, a preference for positive contamination and dissatisfaction with negative contamination when the source of origin was unknown.

Creators aggregated self-concept also related to the subcultural boundaries which were broad and permeable. In forming an in-group identity informants were reluctant to exclude others and wanted to demonstrate values of being inclusive. Simon and Klandermans (2001) argue that a social group identity based on a politicised issue goes beyond the in-group/out-
group dynamic as it involves a third party - the general public - that they are trying to convince of the legitimacy of the issue and win their support. This could explain why the subcultural boundaries were so transparent. Modern cultural movements are increasingly positioned as being in a process of transition (Canclini, 1995; Gilroy, 1993). Informants situated their subculture as being in an active process of transition and wanted to emulate other subcultures that had become part of mainstream society. The informants defined the boundaries of their subculture as being loosely formed and inclusive with the eventual aim of being non-existent. While many subcultures have tried to reinvent themselves to prevent being subsumed and stay ahead of mass-culture (Roberts, 2005; Thornton, 1995), this group were actively seeking to make themselves as attractive as possible to allow full submersion and integration.

In conclusion, I extend the aggregated self to include nature and unfamiliar people. This enlarged personal boundary resulted in mindful decisions and contamination concerns. Creators embraced positive contamination of their goods and avoided the negative aspect associated with a disconnection from the source of origin. In the next topic I address the specific role of consumption in Creator’s lives.

**Valued Consumption**

Informants made what I have defined as ‘valued consumption’ decisions. In the marketing literature there is a distinction made between items that are special and meaningful and those that are ordinary, which Belk, Wallendorf & Sherry (1989) describe as sacred objects and Borgmann (2000) defines as focal items. Lastovicka and Sirianni (2011) in their research on possession love suggest there is a need to encourage the love of meaningful items to redress sustainability issues. In this research I found evidence to support this. Informants were not separating between objects that were sacred and those that were profane; instead they were endeavouring to elevate all of their objects to be meaningful. Informants identified they were equally vulnerable to the pleasures of excess-consumption as others (Bauer et al., 2012) and to battle affluenza had focused on the consumption on meaningful items. Most purchases were high involvement as they considered the content, quality, origin and disposability issues before making a purchase. These mindful consumption decisions considered both the temporal and lasting implications of their choices. Once
purchased informants were demonstrating possession love resulting in them elevating its value and experiencing sustained satisfaction (Lastovicka & Sirianni, 2011). In the literature on sustainability the prevailing argument is the need to move people beyond consumption as a meaningful cultural expression and shift their focus to valuing life experiences (Borgmann, 2000; Sheth et al., 2011). I suggest this approach is likely to be challenging given the prevailing consumer culture. I instead propose a focus on valued consumption that actively encourages possession love. By carefully selecting and then loving these items informants extended the value of their consumables to counter the need for excess purchases. There was a particularly high value placed on quality aspirational items that informants had waited to acquire, either due to financial limitations or finding available items that met their requirements. In the consumer behaviour literature the focus was on ‘less consumption’, I propose a shift to ‘valued consumption’ that can offer people a sense of joy and sustained satisfaction.

Linking to the earlier topic of aggregated self, valued consumption places a premium on goods and experiences that were co-created. Informants were seeking pleasure beyond the objects themselves, taking pride in consciously contributing to its creation; whether it was up-cycling a piece of furniture themselves, buying something made with human hands or using recycled material because of the stories inherent in them. The creative aspect is an important one. As there were no easy ‘off the shelf’ solutions to sustainability informants had to use their own creative mind to create solutions. This is one of the main reasons I labelled them ‘Creators’, they actively wanted to co-create value. They were experiencing a deep sense of satisfaction from these objects because it was their creation and they acted in a way that was of benefit to others. This leads into the next topic that discusses the positive benefits of this lifestyle that I found to be powerful motives for informant’s behaviour.

**Empowered Lifestyle**

For Creators, this lifestyle was a positive, empowering choice. Informants were hopeful and optimistic about the future, despite being well-informed and aware of seriousness of the environmental problems. I observed that most informants had come to an internal acceptance of a level of environmental degradation. There was a dichotomy and tension between their awareness of the issues and the reality of existing in what they saw as an
unsustainable society. Focusing on the issue of climate change made informants feel fearful so they chose to put their energy into the positive aspects as it was empowering and gave them a sense of hope for the future. Informants were seeking an authentic way of living that was in alignment with their values. Wang (1999) suggests people’s desire for authenticity can be nostalgic or a romanticising of the past. I argue that instead of looking back, the emphasis was on creating new and original experiences going forward. These informants did not want to regress to the past, they were seeking to take the wisdom of old and combine it with present understanding to create a positive and more authentic way of living going forward.

I have argued that a sustainable lifestyle is a path for Creators to achieve a self-actualised state of being. It gave the informants unique opportunities to express themselves creatively, make authentic choices, inspire change in others, achieve their full potential and make a positive contribution on society. While the overarching motive was a self-actualised state of being, this lifestyle did not neglect their deficiency needs and instead offered a means of achieving both. In addition to long-term survival considerations, Creators were motivated by short-term emotional benefits. These life-enhancing benefits included wellbeing, enjoyment, ideological fulfilment and social connection. These motives were just as powerful as their survival fears yet have been missing in the environmental debate. An original contribution of this research was a lifestyle that enabled Creators to meet both their deficiency and being needs simultaneously.

I found that instead of being motivated by guilt informants made decisions precisely because it made them feel good, not dissimilar to traditional consumption choices. It is these positive emotional aspects that have been missing from the sustainability debate and I propose needs to be integrated. The information-deficit and fear-based approaches that have predominately been used to date have had only limited success (Blake, 1999; Evans & Jackson, 2007; Johnson & Johnson, 1995). I suggest that marketing consider a new direction that utilises life-enhancing emotional appeals and promotes sustainable lifestyles as a positive and life-affirming option.
Chapter Five

Discussion

The Middle-way Approach

The Middle-way is a moderated lifestyle in which informants distance themselves from extremist behaviours and instead focused on finding a balanced approach to life. I propose the idea of finding ‘balance’ reflects an informant’s desire for a psychologically healthy way of living. Informant’s identified that remaining fearful or in state of anxiety was unhealthy and could be psychologically damaging. I found evidence of them using response strategies to overcome negative psychological states such as guilt and perfectionism. I argue that Creator’s commitment to personal growth and overcoming challenges was partly based on a desire to avoid the negative pathological side effects that can come from not fulfilling one’s purpose (Jung & Hull, 1969; Maslow, 1972). A Creators lifestyle appeared to offer informants a means of achieving an ideal psychological state of health and avoiding the negative outcomes. Laars (2006) makes a delineation between healthy and unhealthy social movements and people’s personal psychological health. She argues that healthy populist movements consisted of people with values of inclusivity, flexibility, trust in human nature, people over ideology, support for diversity, self-discovery and empowerment. These reflect traits of ‘self-actualizing’ people and I suggest the Creator subculture is a demonstration of a healthy social movement.

The Middle-way also represents an activist identity but one that is cloaked. There was clear evidence in this research of informants creating a lifestyle based on empowering change in others yet they predominately distanced themselves from an activist identity. Activists critique current cultural practices but this can also result in them being positioned as an out-group member of society (Kelly & Breinlinger, 1996). The experience of earlier environmentalists who had deliberately or indirectly been seen as outsiders served as a warning to informants of appearing too extreme. They had experienced discrimination and negative comments when people suspected they were ‘different’, labelling them in a derogatory way as greenies and tree-huggers. Informants instead wanted to be perceived as normal and an in-group member of society to have a greater chance of being accepted and encouraging change in others. I perceived the desire to be ‘normal’ as a form of disguise. Informants acknowledged their fundamental differences to the average consumer but actively sought to mitigate those associations. A significant contribution of this research is a focus on what it means to live sustainably within urban environments. The cloaked identity
is an attempt by informants to live their values and propose change from within their local communities. While they would socially connect with like-minded others who supported their views, their physical environments were where they felt they could have an impact, with a subversive identity required to fit in. An original contribution of this research is the emergence of this cloaked activist identity.

The Middle-way approach that I have discussed in this research is different from the consumer activism presented in consumer research to date. I found that discussion of social movements in opposition to global consumerism focused on actions that disrupted business practices, consumption that criticised global practices or chose alternative ways of living to escape the consumerist culture (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; Sargisson & Sargent, 2004; Sklair, 1995; Touraine, 1985). These strategies appeared to be based on Touraine’s (1977) perspective of the need to ‘struggle’ and ‘fight’ against a dominant ideology. These informants had chosen a different direction. As opposed to critiquing from the outside or seeking temporal escapes (Arnould, Price, & Otnes, 1999; Kozinets, 2002; O’Guinn & Belk, 1989), they accepted the consumerist paradigm and put their energy into making changes from within. I suggest there are parallels between Roger’s (2003) diffusion of innovation model and this social movement. As he states diffusion occurs within a social system and his model outlines a structure for the transmission of innovative ideas and the adoption of behaviour throughout a culture. The informants in this research positioned themselves as early adopters on the crest of a wave, with the majority of the population to follow. As ‘early adopters’ informants identified the important role they played in promoting change to others. I suggest environmentalists were the ‘innovators’ which required a strategy based on standing out to make the issues known and had resulted in informants becoming aware of the issues. Informants however positioned their role as making the ideas acceptable so they instead chose a normalised strategy to facilitate change. Their lifestyle was different enough to make it appealing but not so alternative to be excluded. I argue along with della Porta (2009) that social movement research and theories have focused primarily on these ‘innovators’ but what has been missing is an understanding of how the strategies shift as there is a diffusion of ideas within the culture. Social movements can be an important source of cultural innovation (Rao, Morrill, & Zald, 2000). An original contribution of this research is that it provides an understanding of a subculture as early adopters of a social
movement. Instead of a strategy based on political affirmative action they instead chose a cloaked strategy to facilitate change.

**Chapter Summary**

Creators are ‘early adopters’ of the environmental movement who consciously distance themselves from references to previous activist identities and are instead creating a new persona aimed at normalising green behaviour. They acknowledge they are different to the average consumer but have developed a ‘cloaked’ activist identity in which they believed that appearing as normal people living within urban society would be the most effective strategy to promote cultural change. For the informants this lifestyle offered them a means to obtain a self-actualised state of being and created for them a way of life that is balanced, connected, prosperous and self-empowering. An aggregated self-concept and valued consumption choices are a central part of Creators achieving these outcomes. Creators are choosing a lifestyle based on fulfilling their personal potential and inspiring a diffusion of sustainability values to the wider general population.
Chapter Six: Conclusions

The chapter is an overview of the main research findings. I outline the outcomes of the research questions and discuss the study’s theoretical, methodological and managerial contributions. Lastly I address the limitations of this study and opportunities for future research.

Research Questions

This research was an exploratory descriptive study into what it means to live sustainably in an urban environment and addressed four main research questions:

Research Question 1: What does it mean to them to live sustainably?

My analysis suggests sustainable living is an all-encompassing lifestyle that had cognitive, emotional and behavioural components. It is more than a lifestyle and it is a mind-set, a cognitive lens through which informants viewed the world. This resulted in them making mindful decisions and meaningful consumption choices that made them feel resilient and in control of their environment. On an emotional level, they were seeking a sense of connection, wanting to make choices that were authentic and in alignment with their values and living a life that was positive and empowering. On a behavioural level, it was a lifestyle that was active and required tangible outcomes that included growing their own food, managing their waste and creating solutions to sustainability problems. This lifestyle though was not one of isolation; instead informants took pride in being part of their communities and sharing the benefits of this lifestyle with others. I found the emergence of a subculture, one I have defined as cloaked whose intent was to distance themselves from extremist associations and instead inspire change as a member of society.

Research Question 2: What role does sustainability play in their identity construction?

Sustainability considerations were an integral part of informants’ lives and impacted upon how they defined themselves. I found informants in the process of developing an in-group subculture identity to enhance their personal self-image and social group recognition. I labelled them ‘Creators’ - people who are using their creative energy to create a connected and sustainable way of living. They were deliberately distancing themselves from the
historic out-group identities traditionally associated with the ‘green’ or ‘environmental’ movement. Instead they desired a positive identity to reflect their lived experience. The Creators identity construct consisted of cognitive, emotional and behavioural components that I labelled as Mindful Consumers, Connected Authentics, Engaged Actives and Creative Makers. These informants were aspiring to be a people who lived an authentically connected way and found a balance between themselves and their physical and social environments. It was a creative way of living and a positive identity that aimed to inspire shifts in the dominant cultural paradigm.

**Research Question 3: What are their motivations for living sustainably?**

Informants’ lifestyle choices were driven by four main motives: environmental, survival, life-enhancing and positive contribution. These related to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and I extended the theory by demonstrating a lifestyle that fulfilled both his deficiency and being needs simultaneously. I propose that the informants overarching motive was self-actualisation in which they were seeking to realise their higher life-purpose and make a positive impact on society. I argue that informants were making changes in their lives not for altruistic reasons but because their behaviour was personally beneficial and meaningful. This finding suggests that future marketing campaigns need to consider these more diverse motives and promote a sustainable lifestyle as a positive, life-enhancing option.

**Research Question 4: What are their challenges to living sustainably?**

Living a sustainable lifestyle within a consumerist society posed challenges both internally and externally. It was a lifestyle of constant compromises but instead of seeing these as blocks informants turned them into opportunities for personal growth. They adopted a Middle-way approach to their lifestyle using combined strategies of adaptability, action, offsetting, acceptance and non-disclosure to surmount these obstacles. This created a sense of pride and satisfaction in informants which re-engaged their commitment to their lifestyle.

**Contributions**

There are key contributions in this research that extended beyond the initial research questions in terms of theory, methodology and managerial implications.
I. Theoretical Contribution

This research extended existing theory and contributed to the creation of new theory in several ways. An original theoretical contribution is the development of the Creators identity construct. I identified a subculture that has positioned themselves as early adopters of the environmental movement. They are choosing to distance themselves from the approaches of earlier environmentalists whose tactics were to be vocal and actively raise awareness of the issues. Instead they adopted a ‘cloaked’ strategy aimed at achieving a sense of normalisation of their behaviour. Creators still assumed an activist identity but one where the approach was to assimilate within urban environments and create attractive examples of sustainable lifestyles that would inspire others. As opposed to being perceived as an out-group member of society they presented an in-group identity as the most effective method to encourage behaviour change. Importantly, I found evidence of a developed and unique subculture that differs from contemporary consumer resistance lifestyles presented in the literature to date.

In this research I also developed the concept of valued consumption. When discussing the environmental dilemma, the current proposition in the literature is the need for minimal consumption. This is a significant departure from the current consumerist culture. Valuing and owning possessions is positioned as being in opposition to the environmental movement and a significant barrier to people living sustainably. Consumption though is an inevitable part of the human experience. I argue that instead of positioning it as a barrier there is a need for a radically different approach in which possession love is an integral part of a sustainable lifestyle. Valued consumption is a focus on the joy and sustained satisfaction material products can provide. Through the co-creation of value and positive contamination, objects become sacred items. Elevating objects to be meaningful would counter the need for excessive consumption, as demonstrated by these informants. The sustainability movement would benefit from a shift in perspective from an anti-consumption stance to one that proactively encourages valued consumption choices.

This research also reinforced and extended existing theory. Firstly, I found support for Maslow’s path to self-actualisation. My findings differed from his hierarchical path of finding deficiency and being needs occurring concurrently, but agreed with the principles of it as a motivational path to fulfilling a person’s potential. I provided evidence of a subculture
actively working on attaining a self-actualised state of being. Secondly, I found evidence that supported the extension of the aggregated self-concept to include nature and unfamiliar others. This has implications for the environmental debate and supports a proposal by Armsworth et al’s (2007) for the conservation field to reframe people as part of nature, not excluded from it. Lastly, I applied the diffusion innovation model to the environmental movement. The model developed by Rogers (1993) has predominately been applied to technological innovation but its purpose was also to depict the dissemination of ideas. In this research I was able to apply the model to the development of a social movement. It reflected informants’ perceptions of the shifting social movement and the role they played in facilitating that. It provides opportunities for future research to explore if this model applies not just to this subculture, but the general population as well.

II. Methodological Contribution

A strength of this research was the multi-modal method which enriched my research findings. The journal was an original contribution to a photo-elicitation style method that combined informant-created photos with interviews and observational data. I found the journal offered informants the chance to reflect, discuss their photos, draw and record any additional ideas that were not be easily captured on film. Drawings also enabled informants to overcome concerns about showing children or strangers in pictures. Photos are just one medium, the journal enabled multiple means of expression that greatly enriched my data. I discovered that one informant in particular found it challenging to articulate her opinions in the interview yet wrote in detail journal entries and drawings. Without this medium, key concepts would have been lost. I recommend the inclusion of a journal in future photo-elicitation studies.

Another contribution of my methodology was the three-phase longitudinal timeframe. This research was not a ‘snapshot’ but an in-depth inquiry into informant’s lives. In phase one of the research, the two to three month time frame gave informants the opportunity to deeply reflect on their life choices and resulted in interviews that were focused and comprehensive. In phase two, conducting interviews at informant’s homes gave me the opportunity to document and observe their lifestyle in action, comparing their rhetoric with actual physical outcomes. In phase three, a reflective interview not only enabled me to check emerging constructs but follow the informants over an extended period of time. This
three-phase timeframe resulted in richer findings based on observations over a significant period of time. For example, a number of the informant’s went through major life transitions and I was able to gain an understanding of how these choices affected their lifestyle. I found the quality of the interviews was also related to how informants were feeling on the day and second interviews enabled me to compensate for the variation. This approach also enabled me as the researcher to build a relationship and a sense of trust with the informants. For example, Wendy’s first interview was very short but her second was one of the most in-depth and comprehensive. I found trust needed to be established before she was more comfortable opening up. I question if this would have been possible with only one point of contact. The timeframe was an opportunity for me to get to know and understand the informants which I believe resulted in richer data. I propose future lifestyle research would greatly benefit from a longitudinal timeframe.

III. Managerial Contribution

A marketing contribution of this research is a greater understanding of sustainable purchase decisions. Informants prioritised authentic sustainable goods and services and were willing to pay more and delay purchase until they found products with the right credentials. Creators were highly involved and selective in their purchases and due to ethical and contamination concerns needed to understand where products came from, who made it and its carbon implications. They were engaged in all aspects of the purchase process and considered in detail the end-of-life implications for packaging and products prior to use. As early adopters they were willing to invest significant funds to support new innovations. Once purchased they were engaging in product love and were brand loyal to authentic offerings. If solutions were not available informants were opting out of the traditional marketplace and creating them. They appreciated co-creating value because they enjoyed producing it themselves, could control the inputs and be assured of its credentials. For marketers this research offers insights into a highly engaged market segment who considered all aspects of sustainable product purchases. I suggest a shift in focus from the functional benefits of sustainable choices to ones that actively create possession love.

The relevance of this research to policy and social marketing campaigns is the finding of informant’s positive life-enhancing motives. I propose future campaign and political actions need to move beyond the information-deficit and fear based campaigns that can result in
psychological strategies of denial, diversion or indifference (Borne, 2009; Crompton & Kasser, 2009). I propose a strategy that focuses on these positive appeals to inspire behaviour change. A sustainable lifestyle does not have to be about ‘less’, it can be a platform for encouraging people to do things ‘better’.

**Limitations**

The findings of this research are limited to the subset of the population being explored, namely those who are actively trying to live sustainably at this time in New Zealand. Further quantitative research would be required to generalise these findings to a wider population. Given the exploratory nature of this research and qualitative methodology I was limited when discussing the results to reflect on informant’s values. I acknowledged that a thorough analysis of values would have needed a specific method and subsequently was not in the scope of this study. A further limitation of the research subset is the education and ethnic diversity of my informants. Cherni (2001) states that new social movements rarely come from the socio-economically disadvantaged and that minority groups are often marginalised. I endeavoured in this research to include people from a diverse range of backgrounds but I acknowledge that the majority had a higher income and education level. My deliberate decision to exclude those having to make sustainable choices due to economic circumstances also limited my available subset. The currently high cost of many sustainable choices is also likely to have been a natural barrier.

**Future Research**

There are a number of research opportunities to extend the application of this study’s findings and grow this topic as a substantive area of research. There are opportunities for further investigation into this subculture, specifically a study on their values, an area that was outside the scope of this research, and their prevalence throughout different regions in New Zealand. Informants positioned this lifestyle as a life-long commitment so this lends itself to a longitudinal approach and I plan to revisit them in the future to analyse how and if their lifestyle and viewpoints have changed. The subculture in this study exists within a limited geographical region and further research is also needed to understand if it is evident in other regions. I suggest research needs to be conducted in other countries to understand the applications of these findings in these markets. Studies in more condensed and
populated urban environments (e.g. New York, Singapore, London) would be an interesting comparison of these results.

This research focused on informants who were different from the average so it would be valuable to explore the relevance of these findings to average consumers in New Zealand. Informants were motivated by long-term survival concerns, short-term emotional benefits and a desire for self-actualisation; research is needed to explore if these motives are specific to this subculture or prevalent in the wider population. Informants in this study preferred valued consumption choices, but the question is, is this appealing to a wider range of consumers? They also proposed their strategies of normalising behaviour would inspire change in others but there is a need to investigate how members of the general public have responded to these actions. This study presents opportunities to test the transferability of these findings to a broader subset of the New Zealand population.

At the beginning of this research I chose New Zealand as the location for this study as I proposed its natural environment and green image would put it at the forefront of sustainable behaviour. Instead there is evidence of a population that has a high rate of waste per capita and an ecological system that is heavily polluted (OECD, 2013). The presence of a small population on a large land mass has concealed these realities but I question if a sense of inertia to change maybe prevalent among the population due to these factors. Further investigation into the perceptions of the broader New Zealand population and the impetuous to change their behaviour is needed. These motives may differ substantially from people in other countries with denser populations and more limited natural resources. I question the role necessity is playing in people’s behaviours and see scope for research analysing the size of a populations resource base, and its related sustainable practices.

The aim of this research was to understand why people adopt sustainable behaviours. My original research plan had been to study social marketing appeals on sustainable behaviours but the limited understanding of the motives of sustainable lifestyles necessitated me to ask the broader questions of what it meant to live sustainably. Appropriate research would be the application of these findings to create positive social marketing message appeals in campaigns run by local and regional governments. I have found a critical demand from these institutions for developed thinking in this area and appeals that will more effectively
encourage behaviour change. While the findings of this research recommend the use of positive message appeals, further analysis is required on how responsive the average consumer would be to this approach. I believe this is an important area to both extend this research and offer practical applications of these findings.

In this study I applied Rogers (2003) framework and found the emergence of ‘early adopters’ in the environmental movement whose strategies to promote change were markedly different from the first environmental activists. One of the challenges identified in the social movement literature is how a social movement evolves beyond these initial ‘innovators’ who uses vocal strategies to raise awareness to the diffusion of ideas to the cultural majority (Porta & Diani, 2009). This research suggests the strategic approach of activists in the environmental movement is shifting and there is scope to investigate the occurrence of other subsets in the wider population. The application and use of activist strategies was outside of the scope of this study and I propose future research is also needed to investigate the occurrence and application of ‘early adopter’ subcultures in other social movements.

**Conclusion**

At the beginning of this thesis I wrote a quote by Andre Gide that art begins when resistance is overcome. I found an acceptance among these informants that resistance was futile, escape was impossible but that did not mean defeat. Once they stopped fighting an unwinnable war both internally and externally a new path opened up in to which they could invest their energy with positive results. It was a life of hard work yet the creative end results were abundant. A Creator’s way of life represents freedom, connection and ultimately self-fulfilment. They aim to inspire others of the merits and joys of a sustainable lifestyle and as early adopters of the environmental movement they attempt to use a middle-way approach to facilitate and encourage cultural change.
References


Appendix A – Participant Information

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

The Meaning of Living Sustainably in New Zealand

Researcher: Amabel Hunting

The purpose of this study is to explore how individuals in New Zealand are attempting to live ecologically sustainable lifestyles. The research is being conducted by Amabel Hunting who is completing a PhD in Marketing at the University of Auckland. This research aims to explore what it is to live sustainably in New Zealand and gain an understanding of the motivations and barriers for doing so.

I would like to invite you to participate in an interview to discuss your views. You have been selected because you have been seen as attempting to live sustainably. I am interested in hearing about your experience and you will be asked for your opinions, thoughts or suggestions around this topic. There are no right or wrong answers, I am genuinely interested in hearing your views.

The interview will take about an hour during which time I will be audio-taping the interview for transcription purposes. This enables me to concentrate more fully on the interview than if I were to take notes. Please be assured that the tapes will not be used for any purpose other than this research project. Tapes will be kept in a locked cupboard by the Principal Researcher and will be destroyed following transcription.

Participation is confidential and you will not be identified. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time without explanation. You may ask for your interview data to be withdrawn from this study up to 30th March 2011.

Your interview will be analysed together with that of other participants. In the future your interview may be used in an academic article. Please be assured that no one will have access to your identity. When a full analysis is complete I will provide a report of my findings to interviewees if they request one.
I would like to thank you in advance for your time and help with this research. If you have any questions at any stage, please feel free to contact me at:

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If you have any enquiries regarding ethical concerns, please contact:

For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Office of the Vice Chancellor, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 373-7599 extn. 83711.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE on 14th April 2010 for a period of three years, Ref no. 2010/125
Appendix B – Consent Form

CONSENT FOR INTERVIEW
THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF SIX YEARS

The Meaning of Living Sustainably in New Zealand

Researcher: Amabel Hunting

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, have understood the nature of the research and why I have been selected. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

- I agree to take part in this research
- I understand my identity will be kept confidential
- I understand I am free to withdraw at any time and I may ask for my data to be withdrawn from this study up to 30th March 2011
- I understand I may be contacted after participation if the researcher needs further clarification of the issues raised
- I understand that information from my interview may be used as data in future publications
- I understand that my data will be kept for 6 years, after which original data files will be destroyed
- I understand that this interview will be audio taped
- I understand that a third party who has signed a confidentiality agreement will transcribe the audio tapes

Signed Participant:

Name (please print): 

Date:

Email: Phone:

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE on 14/04/10 for a period of three years, Ref no. 2010/125