

BUYING INTO DISTORTIONS:
INDIVIDUAL AGENCY AND IDENTITY-BASED CONSUMPTION

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Date 22 May 2019

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education in
Teachers College, Columbia University

2019

ABSTRACT

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The ways in which individuals act within the world around them and the ways in which individuals engage with commodities as consumers play a vital role in providing insight into innate human values and opportunities for growth. By exploring the seemingly mundane and small but meaningful ways individuals engage in the consumer process and space, fruitful data display an interconnected outline of cyclical pathways toward mending the gap between reality and desired individual values, identity, and behaviors. Building on literature from both sociological and adult learning fields, diverse avenues for decision making and strategic outcomes are highlighted to isolate an array of individual consumer experiences and subsequent triggers for ongoing learning and reflection.

While consumer research has an extensive theoretical history, by dissecting the nuanced nature of the individual experience, this literature adds a vital layer to the evolving consumer narrative by integrating the hidden fruit of perceived failure. To achieve this, an exploratory study was designed to dissect the lives of 20 individual consumers and their experiences with the intersectionality between their values, identity, and learned consumption behaviors. Several prevalent findings of the study included the identification of self-directed learning as a driving force for enacting agency and lifelong development, the essential nature of motivational drivers that sustain overt and covert degrees of commitment to individual values and the vital

presence of coping mechanisms as accessible entry points to engage with the identification and confrontation of shifting values and identity.

By tracing socialized behaviors through seemingly mundane acts of consumerism, individuals unlock opportunities to evolve through the increased exposure of varying experiences of others. As such, by adopting practices grounded in radical transparency with self, innate barriers to aligned behaviors can transform into stepping stones for growth, deep renewal, and empowerment. Thus, by capturing identities and values in action, this narrative displays a portraiture of the distorted consumer space and the individuals that consume and are consumed within it.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, thank you to the participants who entrusted me with their narratives. Learning from you reaffirmed my passion for exploring the human experience and the small but meaningful ways we all take in the world around us.

Thank you to my advisors, mentors, and dissertation committee for their words of wisdom and encouragement. You are all important pieces to the compass that guided me through this process.

Thank you to my loved ones for their never-ending support and patience. There are no words to describe the amount of gratitude and love I feel for each of you.

Lastly, I would like to thank God, for through Him all things are possible.

C. D. W. D.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

“The best thing you can do for others is to critically examine yourself.”

While out grocery shopping with my husband, we passed a shoe store that was going out of business, and as a result the store had marked down the prices of all their items. For a few weeks, I had planned on buying new shoes to replace my favorite but worn-down boots, but since I never got around to it, I figured why not pop in for a minute to see what they had. The store was very crowded, but after looking around for about ten minutes, I found a pair of shoes I wanted to purchase. After trying them on and walking around the store, my husband voiced his approval of the boots’ sleek but edgy look, and I began to receive several compliments from strangers who loved the shoes as well.

In the past, receiving a compliment on an item would have sealed the deal. However, instead, I sat down on nearby bench and began researching the store and the brand of shoe online. Unfortunately, I failed to find anything blatantly stating their ethical practices, so I asked the salesman, who responded awkwardly with a smile, “I do not know if they are ethical, but let me check with my manager.” He then proceeded to ask his manager, who then in an annoyed tone stated, “I do not know, but my best bet was that the shoes were made in unethical manner. Most items are these days” and walked away. I was completely uncomfortable at this point because based on their responses it felt like I had committed some form of taboo for using the “e” word. The negative peer

pressure to assimilate began to rear its ugly head as other shoppers began to glare, and I began to feel out of tune with the environment.

Nevertheless, I sat looking at the shoes for several more minutes while going back and forth with my husband about what he thought I should do. I had never seen these boots before, but something within me could see a piece of who I hoped to be in those shoes. Honestly, if I were a boot, I would have wanted to be those boots, but after taking several factors into consideration, I decided to continue my search for an item more aligned to my personal values and identity. In retrospect, there were three reasons why I walked away. First, I did not want to feed into the belief that purchasing an unethically sourced item is not an issue merely because other items are just as bad. Secondly, while the peer pressure from the other customers to purchase the shoes was convincing, I could not in good conscience welcome the boots into my life knowing so little about their origins. While those boots were a mirage of everything I thought I wanted to be in the moment, in the end if those boots were crafted by the marginalized and oppressed, they would only detract from the person I am and hope to be in the world. To own those boots would also mean taking on responsibility for the conditions by which the boots were crafted, and I refused to take on such a potentially heavy responsibility blindly.

Lastly, while very few people would have ever known about the origins of the shoes due to both the lack of visible branding and personal omission, my husband merely serving as a witness in that moment played a significant role in why I walked away. I believe that somatically, the body reacts to actions that are misaligned from our values, but it is easy to ignore that feeling when we only have ourselves to answer to. However, by having an accountability partner to aid in supporting our seemingly small but meaningful moments of clarity in bouts of socially induced disillusion, we are better able to overcome potential derailment from our individual values.

As my husband and I walked toward the metro, he put his arm around me and told me how proud he was that I had left the shoes behind. However, in that moment, I felt a

weight fall off my shoulders, and I immediately realized that, while I ended up leaving the store physically empty-handed, a piece of me had purchased emotional baggage from the experience that I can never return. A part of me will always struggle to avoid going against the norm and suppress my curious nature in a consumer space. However, I hope that a larger part of me will continue to persevere toward making purchases that align with my identity and values even against the odds because saying you believe or support something is one thing, but putting those same beliefs into active practice in a variety of contexts is an entirely different struggle—one that I now know I do not face alone. As such, the following narrative will explore the experiences of individuals as they embark on a critical examination of their overt and covert consumer behavior guided by evolving consumer paradigms.

Background and Context

With over 300,000 commodities in the average American home, desires and resistances for varying objects, which we experience as matters of indifference, love, and/or hate, interlock our internal world to the external social world. However, within the act of purchasing commodities rests a relationship of cruel optimism as consumers engage with objects that serve as obstacles to the enhancement of their lives (Berlant, 2011). These types of encounters are not inherently cruel but become cruel when the commodity begins to impede the alignment of an individual's identity to routine purchasing practices. By exploring how these conflicting inside-outside encounters play out on subtle levels, such as how we draw on strategies to ignore or reinforce them, we unlock profound learning through everyday strategies of coping with and comprehending what conflicts between American consumptive practices suggest (Britzman, 1998; Csutora, 2012).

Often, we as humans are asked to bear fruit seemingly too heavy for own branches, resulting in inevitable embarkation on a learning journey rife with both trials and failure. However, Drummer E. W. Wainwright once asserted that a mistake is the most beautiful thing in the world, as it is the only way an individual can grow into a space they have never been before (Klemp, McDermott, Raley, Thibeault, Powell, & Levitin, 2008, p. 4). As such, as a natural growth component of the human experience, mistakes—which some scholars view as an evolving taboo—aid in guiding principles for social norming and expectation standards.

However, while mistakes may serve as vital learning rites of passage in human development, they are often tied to narratives of pain and rejection, illustrating detrimental mental, physical, or emotional outcomes for the participants (Edmondson, 1996). These types of interactions not only considerably hinder the active engagement of making mistakes (Shellenbarger, 2011) but subsequently delays the development of “mis-takes”—defined as opportunities for innovation. Without mistakes, individuals are obstructing the cultivation and attainment of strong roots, which results in the reproduction of inadequate branches on the verge of splintering (Klemp et al., 2008). For this reason, learning from mistakes can be easier said than done (Edmondson, 1996), leaving realms of socially constructed notions on mistakes or consumer taboos rarely examined for their potential to provide opportunity, power, and agility to the evolving human experience.

For civic citizens in a democratic and capitalist-based society, consumer research provides indispensable opportunities to deepen pragmatic and ethical understanding on consumer behavior as it exemplifies social education or domestication within systemically oppressive communities of practice (Baumeister, Clark, Kim, & Lau, 2017). Specifically, by tapping into a consumer’s progressive articulation of ethical standards, society grows closer to capturing and conveying vital dimensions of the human moral-ethical experience, sustaining the translation of ideals into strategic action toward more

embodied liberating realities (Andriof, Waddock, Husted, & Rahman, 2017).

Furthermore, literature suggests that objects, ideas, and processes are significant to the discussion of social situations because the act of purchasing ethical or unethical commodities innately possesses an embodied narrative that can reveal humanity's core values, norms, limitations, needs, and impact on the world (Gainer Sirota, 2010; Latour, 2005).

To illustrate this, scholars have explored several facets of the shaded underbelly of capitalism, which include but are not limited to dissecting consumption phenomena such as hoarding, which affects over 2.4 million adult Americans (Feng, Leckman, & Zhang, 2004), increasing carbon footprints due to processed and mass-produced foods and products (Garnett, 2011; Neff, 2017), and the increasing number of deaths tied to socially reinforced compulsive shopping phenomena such as Black Friday. However, the practice of effective counter measures continues to rise due to growing accessibility to information and community spaces, which have bred an evolving space for identity development and civic participation rooted in ethical consumption. Specifically, a growing number of consumers have opted to purchase commodities or avoid purchasing certain commodities based on personal values and ideals (Bourdieu, 1984; Harrison, Newholm, & Shaw, 2005; Sandlin, 2008).

Thus, by “voting with their dollars,” a growing number of ethically minded consumers have positively shifted corporations' priorities to promote and integrate social/environmental justice solutions into business practices, such as fair-trade certifications, transparent labeling, and business profit donations toward service or environmental care (Barnett, Cloke, Clarke, & Malpass, 2010). However, although research suggests that some consumers seem to factor social and environmental considerations into many daily decisions, breaking through to consumers not only to “purchase what they preach” but critically reflect and invest in a representative system is proving to be harder than ever, as the harrowing consequences of not reaching consumers

are on the rise. For these reasons, it is critical to understand the nuanced drivers, barriers, and opportunities that resonate among discerning audiences on an individual level if sustainable change is desired (Csutora, 2012). Thus, by displaying the transformative process that occurs as the oppressed engage in the rediscovery of power through consumer-based contradictions in their world, the more critically aware individuals become as they transform their own realities by becoming more self-directed thinkers that negotiate their own values, meanings, and purpose rather than uncritically acting on those of others (Mezirow, 1997).

Research Problem Statement

Defining Consumerism

How we define consumption and what it means when individuals consume are vital questions to consider when exploring a seemingly core practice in American society. Due to its varying and vast origins, consumption is defined in a plethora of ways. From its Latin origins in the word *consumere* to its contemporary American use as a capitalistic-based term known as *consumerism*, its definition ranges from the act of using up an item or resource to the wasting disease of the human body. As such, the act of consumption, and thus consumerism, depicts a constant straddling of narratives between achievement and destruction for both the items consumed and their consumers (Trentmann, 2017a, 2017b; Williams, 1991).

For example, while several scholars such as Bertelsen (1996) have constructed definitions that depict consumerism as a process by which social, cultural, and economic practices function to legitimize capitalism, other scholars such as Smith (2010) and Storey (1996) ground their definitions in both overt and covert ideological seduction narratives of consumption as a piecemeal fulfillment guarantee to complete internal voids through hyperactive purchasing practices. Furthermore, traditional sociological,

philosophical, and anthropological perspectives provide a range of consumption-based studies where consumerism is frequently highlighted as both a space of adversity and complexity enacted in everyday practice (Trentmann, 2017a, 2017b). Nevertheless, building on Sandlin's work (2008), there are several diverse theoretical perspectives that aid in dissecting consumption practices as spaces to reclaim individual power and agency in seemingly small but meaningful ways.

Agency and consumerism. Neuroscientists argue that the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) plays a role in using reinforcement information to control behavior. While the ACC's critical role in reinforcement-guided behavior does not rest in detecting or correcting errors, it guides voluntary choices based on the life history of individuals' actions and outcomes. As such, it is central to optimal decision making that individuals learn to explore the value of options in uncertain environments, such as the evolving consumer space to intentionally detect and correct misaligned behaviors that reinforce agency in consumption (Kennerley, Walton, Behrens, Buckley, & Rushworth, 2006).

Leveraging contemporary conduits of consumer information, scholars such as Sandlin (2008) and Latour (2005) argue that society is provided artifacts of the rules and spheres by which they possess agency over their choices and exchanges. Furthermore, these rules serve as anchors to identity development and ultimately the perceived role and agency individuals perceive they possess as individual consumers. To illustrate this, there are several perspectives that aid in critically exploring the spectrum between human agency and conscious consumption definitions and practices.

The first perspective explores the construction of consumption through the lens of production. Scholars such as Smith (2010), Marcuse (1965), Adorno and Horkheimer (2007) focused on the cultural industry and systems that highlight the misalignment between individual priorities and mass-produced homogenized conduits that manipulate the public for the sole benefit of furthering consumer capitalism. By emphasizing that the core purpose of the system of production is to drive the system of consumption, Smith

(2010) identifies the causation and sustained presence of what Marcuse (1965) would emphasize as a space of repressive tolerance. Industries such as television, advertising, and entertainment reinforce a mirage of needs within consumers to direct individual agency toward the increased consumption of commodities. This act then creates what Marcuse (1965) calls one-dimensional individuals who are enticed by this oppressive mirage in their journey to fulfillment through manufactured needs rooted in the consumption of products. As such, Marcuse argues that individuals are mentally enslaved by the social systems of production and consumption and as such must tap into their revolutionary potential to fully explore the ways in which they are entangled in a system of false enactments of agency and covert suppression. Several scholars, such as Freire (1970) and Martens (2005), depict similar arguments exploring suppressive systems of production in varying contexts.

Building on Marcuse, consumer scholars such as Martens (2005) would argue that what and how Americans consume, act, and react to their local, national, and global marketplace are all performance-based norms taught and enforced by the market. Thus, from an individual's first to last breath, while the capitalistic market may play several vital roles in social, political, and economic life, Martens argues that its primary role is portrayed as an educator, both teaching and directing consumption-based behavior. However, Freire (1970) argues that education is never passive in that it either liberates or domesticates. Thus, in addition to the role as educator, scholars such as Marcuse (1965), Veblen (1899), and Smith (2010) illustrate a secondary and more ominous role of the capitalist market, which could be analogized as America serving as a puppet master aiming to sustain a phantasm for a global audience. Thus, by focusing on consumer-based cultural practices and how they sequentially reinforce the production, reproduction, and sustained presence of capitalism (Kenway & Bullen, 2001), a unique space for agency and consumerism exploration emerges as consumption scholars begin to focus on consumption practices and the scope to which they extend beyond mere markers of

social, political, and economic life (Marcuse, 1965) and derail individual identity-aligned opportunities for agency through consumption.

Consumerism as identity discourse. The second perspective explores consumption as identity discourse. Scholars such as Bourdieu (1984) argue that social agents produce not only classifiable acts but acts of classification that are classified. Thus, consumption could never be passive as it constitutes an ongoing discourse on the embodied social system and the actors that reside within the social structure. Aligned with Bourdieu, Veblen's (1899) early work details a construct of conspicuous luxury consumption as a means of gaining social status and recognition from others. Veblen argues that, due to its evolved capitalist nature, American society no longer places value in work, but instead on the level of grandeur of the commodities individuals possess and control. Scholars such as Kim and Marshall (2017) build on Veblen's work by exploring factors such as an individual's self-focus versus other-focus and an individual's self-transformative versus self-expressive motivation for consumption. Specifically, Kim and Marshall argue that not only do individuals who focus more on others than themselves gravitate toward conspicuous luxury products that reinforce socially favorable factors, but individuals who are motivated to transform themselves into their ideal selves prefer conspicuous luxury products more than individuals who are motivated to express their actual identity.

Adding to Bourdieu (1984), scholars such as Holt (1998) propose that US consumption theory should be reformulated to focus on consumption practices rather than on consumed objects and shifted to highlight social agents; thus, they pave the way for explorations on individual agency and consumption practices that focus on the messages communicated through consumption and why and how individuals consume. In addition, scholars continue to seek explanations on how consumption patterns aid in differentiating between social groups and mediate the social relationships between different groups. Therefore, from this perspective, scholars can explore beyond hierarchical needs of

consuming to satisfy basic human needs, to how the types of commodities consumed extend beyond basic needs into diverse narratives of individual identities. Thus, in this space, consumption is identified as integral to the shaping of US identity as a symbolic and active form of agency where one's commodity choices could be used as a communication tool to the world and introspectively to themselves (Bourdieu 1984).

Coping with Consumer Encounters

Like organizations, individuals enact defensive routines to cope with competing commitments and conflict (Argyris, 1985). However, within a capitalist market there are several spaces that actively serve as coping mechanisms toward attaining comfort in consumer encounters. Scholars such as Sandlin (2008) and de Certeau (1984) reinforce the notion that by exploring consumption through notions of everyday life practices, individuals are constantly struggling to enter spaces where the practices enacted in the space extend beyond the design of the space. As such, to cope with the array of disorienting encounters presented in the space through complex everyday actions and processes, scholars such as Paterson and O'Malley (2006) argue that a potential space for critical consideration of ethical and moral concerns arises as consumers relate their own individual practices of consumption to larger social paradigms, such as globalization. Furthermore, scholars such as Noddings (2002) add to this by placing a call for deeper exploration on the ethics of care, which prompts critical consideration practices grounded in what it means to be cared for and its relation to caring about self and others. Thus, scholars highlight a turning point in the development of the evolving ethical consumer, whose decisions to buy or not buy particular commodities emanate ethical, environmental, and political values and identity.

Other scholars who embrace this viewpoint also seek to understand how commodities are used once they are bought and highlight the ways in which consumers resist consumption and enable that cycle of suppressive consumerism. While scholars

such as McCracken (1986) cultivated a series of consumption rituals that consumers use to alter the meanings of commodities as they incorporate them into their lives, others like de Certeau (1984) and Fiske (2000) focus on the ways in which consumers resist dominant meanings of consumption by using commodities and spaces of consumption in ways that directly oppose what capitalist producers originally envisioned. Thus, individuals can cope with consumer encounters by extending beyond the box of particular desires and expectations actively promoted by producing their own styles and identities through that act of appropriating, changing, or individualizing what is offered in the marketplace to cultivate their own sense of identity as discerning critical consumers (de Certeau, 1984).

Mending the Gap

However, scholars such as Csutora (2012) argue that coping mechanisms can create “backfire” effects where tangible gains only reinforce the gap between behavior and desired impact. For example, an individual may opt to purchase only organic food, but may begin to increase their ecological or carbon footprint in the process if the organic food is not locally sourced. As such, even in the act of engaging with aligned consumer practices, consumers face a dilemma that may continuously strain their success as an aligned consumer, therefore prompting the presence of continuous mending opportunities surrounding individual impact or gaps to full cycle alignment. Thus, more attention must be placed on the detailed altering of destructive consumption patterns by highlighting the mis-direction of tolerance toward current individual consumption practices. As such, while aligning behavior is important, it is only the beginning of so many greater feats to achieve longevity and prosperity through aligned individual narrative, opportunity, and action.

Given the foregoing, although research suggests that some consumers seem to factor social and environmental considerations into many daily decisions, breaking

through to consumers to only “purchase what they preach” is proving to be harder than ever, and the consequences of not reaching consumers are growing increasingly high. As such, it is critical to understand the nuanced drivers, barriers, and opportunities that resonate among discerning audiences. However, little is known about the individual consumer experiences as they engage with products that are misaligned with their values, ideals, and self-proclaimed identities. For example, as described above, considerable research has been done on grouped consumer populations through the lens of marketing and behavior change. However, little research has been done on individual identity, consumer disjuncture, alignment practices, and their cross-pollination with learning. Therefore, further research is warranted to examine how consumers contemplate or react to products that are misaligned with their values. Having explored the following key words including but not limited to *consumerism*, *individual identity*, *tension*, and *learning*, this research aims to fill the gap by illustrating the diverse factors that influence individual consumption and subsequently our own realities by becoming more autonomous thinkers that negotiate our own values, meanings, and purpose rather than uncritically acting on those of others.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to explore the lives of 20 individuals and their experiences with purchases that misalign with their identity and values. To carry out the purpose, the following research questions were explored:

1. What patterns of self-directed learning can be identified throughout individual consumer practices?
2. What factors do participants perceive facilitate and/or impede their ability to make purchases that are consistent with their identity and values?

3. How do participants learn to reconcile the dichotomy emanating from purchasing products that are misaligned with their identity and values?

Design of the Study

Leveraging a qualitative design approach, the study aimed to aid in demystifying individual lived experiences across diverse social, economic, racial, age, and gender contexts. The study is composed of two data collection methods comprised of a survey and one-on-one in depth semi-structured exploratory interviews with individuals. The first data collection method, a survey, accounts for vital individual characteristics. Twenty individuals were selected from the survey participants to create a purposeful sample that was used for the one-on-one interviews that account for rich yet nuanced insights pertaining to individual learned consumption practices.

Assumptions

This study makes several assumptions, which serve as essential scaffolding to the embarkation of the research:

1. Consumers have agency and make conscious, rational decisions to engage in aligned buy-in.
2. Objects have “agency” as defined by Latour (2005) and cultivate an evolving partnership with the individual.
3. Individual consumers can influence societal norms as much as societal norms influence individual consumers.

Predictions

It was anticipated that while the commodities may change, there would be several shared overall thematic considerations among participants that would aid in reinforcing

consumption as a malleable and negotiable space where multiple, if not all individuals struggled to come to terms with reflections of their innate values in practice. It was also anticipated that while participants would find the study useful to increasing their enactment of conscious agency in everyday interactions, the primary attribute of sustained behavior would be external factors such as an accountability community of practice. Thus, it was anticipated that the study would not only supplement strategies for sustained practice of an individual's aligned identity, but illuminate the embodied narrative of commodities and the subsequent impact of an individual's responsive ownership, personal collective strategic actions, and sustained systems of individualized support toward a more liberating and in-sync future.

Research Rationale

The study rationale is grounded in the researcher's desire to aid in reclaiming informal spaces as primary educators and indicators of individual and social progression. In a capitalist society, consumption serves as the backbone to systemic displays of domestication and liberation. Thus, by exploring rich narratives on learned connectivity and individual agency, consumers are better enabled to be self-directed in transforming normative spaces and engage in embedded normative practices by rediscovering power through conduits of contradiction in their world. In the researcher's experience, the more critically aware individuals become, the more likely they are to transform their own realities by negotiating their own values, meanings, and purpose rather than uncritically acting on those of others who have come before them. Like the human body, the world evolves and is built on a system of intricate phenomena that aims to sustain life. As such, every so often it is essential to take a step back and focus on the self, as sometimes the answers to world's largest problems can be found within.

Study Significance

The next time you are out, pause and look at the ground around you. If you look closely, you may stumble across a bizarre phenomenon commonly referred to as an ant death spiral. An ant death spiral is when ants continue to circle around and around until they ultimately die of exhaustion. If you are wondering what causes ants to seemingly commit suicide, scholars such as Delsuc (2003) argue the answer is tied the core of what makes ants evolutionarily unique in that the same characteristics ants leverage to survive can at any moment create a devastating disadvantage and lead to their untimely demise. While this phenomenon may seem minuscule, history has shown us that, like ants, humans continue to pay a grave price for blindly following those in front of them. As such, this study's significance is rooted in exploring the unique characteristics that allow humans to avoid our own death spirals by magnifying normed behavior and critically examining individual factors that impede or facilitate opportunities to break harmful cycles of routine behavior.

The Researcher

As a passionate Adult Learning advocate, it has been my life's mission to create agile opportunities that improve and sustain the awareness, accessibility, empowerment, and quality of culture-based phenomena and learning. Life is filled with an abundance of learning opportunities that bring us closer to truly owning our own stories and creating new chapters within them every day. Thus, as an adult learning educator, researcher, and practitioner, my vocation and calling has been to create sustainable opportunities and spaces for individuals to find fruit in failure by leveraging informal, learning-based interventions within everyday actions and situations.

While some may look toward the future for answers to questions like how to be fulfilled, it is my belief that the foundational answers to these questions are often buried

in our past and present. Life has a funny way of cycling challenging experiences until we become fully present enough to acknowledge the strength we possess from within to move beyond them. For this reason, I focus on the process of learning transference within and between the self and the social, specifically exploring its subsequent impact on the reproduction of meaning and performance within varying social contexts.

An invaluable space for self-discovery and behavior change rests in the demystification of coping or defensive routines and harmful social expectations and norms. As such, this study seeks to explore material cultural and the relationship between both the consumer and commodities as actors with agency. Thus, dissecting the movement of value—in products and people—within everyday social contexts, and discernment in which the manner and magnitude of leveraging knowing and knowledge as habits of mind interventions play out between the individual and the social, this research will serve as a form of portraiture seeking to capture the essence of learned, lived, and desired human experiences.

Definitions

There are several terms whose definitions are vital to the intricate exploration conducted in this research study. These terms are displayed in Table 1 on the following page.

Table 1. Definitions of Terms and Concepts

Term/ Concepts	Description
Consumption	A constant straddling of narratives between achievement and destruction for both the items consumed and their consumers (Trentmann, 2017a, 2017b; Williams, 1991).
Commodities	A useful or valuable thing (Oxford Dictionary, 2018).
Immunities to Change	A paradoxical short-term self-defense mechanism that protects people from change (Kegan & Lahey, 2009).
Defensive Routines	Patterns as “defensive routines” or customary ways of acting that the individual evolves to avoid embarrassment or conflict (Argyris, 1985).
Agency	The capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power; a person or thing through which power is exerted or an end is achieved (Merriam Webster, 2018).
Identity	The characteristics determining who or what a person or thing is (Oxford Dictionary, 2018).
Values	Principles or standards of behavior; one’s judgment of what is important in life (Oxford Dictionary, 2018).
Self-Directed Learning (SDL)	SDL as a process grants people freedom and initiative to create their own learning experience. This includes planning, execution, and evaluation of the learning experience (Merriam et al., 2012).

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore the lives of 20 individuals and their experiences with purchases that misalign with their identity, values, and/or ideals.

Rationale for Topics

To achieve this purpose, a literature overview of social construction and adult learning theory was explored. To obtain the most relevant literature to this study, various library catalogues at and affiliated with Teachers College, Google Scholar, and the Google search engines were leveraged. Search terms including but not limited to consumption, consumerism, capitalism, agency, and learning were used. As such, several books, journal articles, and websites related to the study are included in the literature review. Thus, the following literature exploration is vital to the study as it contributes to the development of the conceptual framework.

To explore key concepts such as agency, the first topic will examine social construction, which will explore areas such as structural functionalism, tracing the social, modes of acquiring knowledge, technical criticism of the social and economic conditioning, and the ideology of routine as factors that impact individual agency. The second topic will examine adult learning theory and explore transformative learning, learning from experience, and self-direction as means of identifying the degrees to which

individuals leverage agency. This chapter will then conclude with a summary, followed by a description of the study's conceptual framework, which is informed by the previous literature overview and the study's research questions, which expand on: (1) What patterns of self-directed learning can be identified throughout individual consumer practices? (2) What factors do participants perceive facilitate and/or impede their ability to make purchases that are consistent with their values and ethical standards? And (3) How do participants learn to reconcile the dichotomy emanating from purchasing products that are misaligned with their identity and values?

Introduction for Social Construction

Standing on the shoulders of giants to understand the multi-layered dilemma of consumerism, several anthropologists and sociologists have aided in the expansion of diverse perspectives on the definitions and implications of social paradigms that impact capitalist consumption pressure and affect individual agency. Specifically, by displaying societies' influential prowess leveraging individual learning and collective individual actions in varying contexts, anthropologists and sociologists have cultivated rich narratives on cycles of social construction, individual efficacy, and agency. Building on scholars such as Emile Durkheim, Bruno Latour, Claude Levi-Strauss, Max Weber, and Jean Lave, there are several core issues, gaps, and patterns displayed within social structures that impact the individual's progression toward a liberating and aligned future.

Structural Functionalism

For example, credited alongside scholars such as Karl Marx and Max Weber as one of the principal architects of modern sociology, French sociologist and prominent late 19th century author Emile Durkheim argued that to identify gaps and patterns in society, one must explore issues leveraging structural functionalism. Seemingly originating in

Durkheim's exposure to Auguste Comte or Herbert Spenser's "organic analogy," highlighting evolutionary laws through a systemic biological functioning framework, Durkheim's structural functionalism argues that society should be viewed as a complex system of interrelated parts functioning to sustain stability. Thus, the functional paradigm proposes that social variations and issues are both structured and evolutionary. As such, society is comprised of products of history that not only influence individual human actions but surpass actions on generations to come (Carls, n.d.).

One of Durkheim's (1895) most prominent claims suggests that society is a *sui generis* reality, which is an objective reality comprised of both unique and irreducible phenomena (p. 54). As such, Durkheim argues that not only can *sui generis* only be comprehended using sociological terms, but that due to the unique qualities of social life and its grounding in the natural world, human societies should and could be studied scientifically. To properly study human societies, Durkheim went on to develop a scientific sociological method to explore what he coined as "social facts" (p. 54). Two years after publishing his doctoral thesis on the Division of Social Labor (1893), Durkheim published *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895), where he defined social facts as "a category of facts which present very special characteristics which consist of manners of acting, thinking, and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over the individual" (p. 52). Specifically, social facts are the unique attributes of human societies that can exist separate of the individual but possess coercive influence over the individual. However, a key gap in Durkheim's definition of social facts can be raised when he states that social facts are "external to the individual," but seemingly simultaneously explores the internal acts of individuals other than the designated individual subject (p. 52). Thus, although defined as external, social facts are both external and internal to the individual, as it is through the individual that social facts are sustained (Jones, 2011).

When exploring Durkheim's notion of social facts, it is vital to note that for him, society innovates and operates on collective ideas, beliefs, and sentiments attained through human interaction. Specifically, Durkheim (1895) argues that through social facts, individuals attain specific attributes surrounding social necessities such as religion, language, values, and technology. Furthermore, Durkheim argues that social facts could never develop in individual isolation, as they are the materialized expression of the collective conscious in a sustained *sui generis* reality (p. 54). Thus, the *sui generis* ideally contributes to Durkheim's creation of rules for studying social facts. To understand the context of Durkheim's rules for observing social facts, Durkheim says we must "consider social facts as things" (p. 60). As previously noted, social facts can exist independent of the individual, while simultaneously imposing coercion over the individual. Thus, Durkheim not only proposed that social facts can be identified through the resistance of individual will, but that due to their social nature, social facts require immense amounts of intentional effort to achieve change.

Tracing the Social

As outlined in his introduction to part two of *Reassembling the Social*, "Why is it so Difficult to Trace the Social?" Bruno Latour—French philosopher, anthropologist, and sociologist—(2005) argues "that what has rendered the social untraceable is the very existence of society or the social realm. The problem is not in the ambiguity of the word social, but from a confusion entertained early in the history of sociology, between assembling the body politic and assembling the collective" (p. 163). Like nature, society stands in the way of sociology and politics by hiding the differential intricacies of its true self. Thus, in rendering a traceable social, Latour argues that social scientists must first deploy the full range of controversies and be more abstract and relativist in how to compose the collective if social scientists are ever to reveal the disappearing individual-based compositions of the social domain and dilemmas.

During the early 1970s, Latour's interest in science and technology grew to include concepts concerning the anthropology of knowledge. Combining his prior philosophical studies of epistemology and fieldwork experiences exploring culture in Africa, Latour began leveraging ethnographic skills to study communities of scientists. This venture culminated in Latour's 1979 co-authored publication, *Laboratory Life: The Social Construction of Scientific Facts*, which marked Latour's entrance into the field of science and technology studies. Latour followed the success of *Laboratory Life* with the 1987 publication, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientist and Engineers through Society*, which further expanded on social construction in scientific practice. However, due to his increased interest in the historical and philosophical relationships of science, technology, and society, Latour went on to develop the Actor-Network Theory (ANT), which he explores in his 2005 publication, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*.

Reassembling the Social examined the ambiguity of the term "social" by exploring the notion of attachments and the social science tactics that account for and assemble the social within society. Latour's work on ANT continues to explore an approach to social theory that considers groups, objects, and facts as functioning social networks in need of translations, reassessment, and reconstruction. Thus, Latour leverages empirically-based analyses of connection to account for the contributions made by individual participants in the establishment of institutions, events, and histories within social contexts. Latour argues that the social requires an explanation that must answer how it is constituted, through what associations, and involving what actors. Thus, it is only due to the extent by which the individual notes the corresponding agents, translations, and relations involved, that an individual can purposefully exert agency, although grounded in a unified theory of the whole. To further exemplify Latour's argument, the following paragraphs explore Latour's *Reassembling the Social* introduction to parts one and two, and various

arguments surrounding the first—the nature of groups, the third—the nature of objects, and the fourth—the nature of facts, sources of uncertainty in *Reassembling the Social*.

Part one's introduction exploring "Learning to Feed off Controversies" argues that "although the insights of sociology are correct, the solutions suggested by a shrinking definition of the social has in many ways adulterated what was productive and scientific in them" (Latour, 2005, p. 21). Thus, by illustrating a purposeful investment in the power of relativity principles, Latour urges scholars to reexamine, dissect, and reassemble renewed definitions of what an association consists of within controversial contexts, such as those exemplified through experiences of disjuncture within consumerism. Thus, Latour actively seeks to break the habit of accelerated linking between power, society, structure, and context by examining the type of aggregates assembled and the ways in which they are connected to one another. However, Latour warns that the process is both slow and extensive. Like an ant trudging in to build its glorious colony, the ANT requires patience and collective building measures to attain its distinctive richness. Thus, in establishing the ability to differentiate a good ANT account from a bad one, Latour suggests a crucial quality test exploring the following:

1. Have all the difficulties of traveling been recognized?
2. Has the complete cost of the travel from one connection to the next been fully paid?
3. Has the traveler not cheated by surreptitiously getting a ride from an already existing social order? (p. 27)

When examining Latour's (2005) quality test in the first source of uncertainty, which explores the nature of group formation, Latour argues that "social aggregates are constantly evoked, erased, distributed, and reallocated" (p. 41). Thus, when sociologists explore groups, they should begin their endeavors by recognizing "the controversies about which grouping one pertains to, including of course the controversies among social scientists about what the social world is made of" (p. 28). In exemplifying this, Latour

defines “group,” “grouping,” and “actor” as purposefully “general” and “banal” terminology, speaking to the larger vocabulary choice and fundamental core of the ANT. By leveraging what Latour calls “infra-language,” which he defines as “strictly meaningless except for allowing displacement from one frame of reference to next” (p. 30), the individual actors maintain a voice among the course of social scientists exploring concepts of group traces, group reproduction, and the nuances of mediators and intermediaries surrounding social forces. Thus, the “enquiries do not in advance, and in place of the actors, define what sorts of building blocks the world is made of” (p. 42). While some scholars have argued that while social scientists have transformed the world in many ways; the point, however, is to interpret it; Latour adds that in order to truly interpret the world, social scientists must abandon the notion that “all languages are translatable in the already established idiom of the social” (p. 42).

Latour’s (2005) third source of uncertainty explores the concept of objects and agency, which innately speaks of the core of consumerism as a social domain dilemma. Latour argues that “power, like society, is a result of a process and not a reservoir, or stock, but produced, made up and composed” (p. 64). In exploring this notion, Latour defines social as “a movement, a displacement, a transformation, a translation and enrollment. For ANT, social is a type of momentary association which is characterized by the way it gathers together into new shapes” (p. 65). In reassembling the term *social*, Latour argues that social scientists are better equipped to distinguish society’s durability, ties, and substance if there are “multiple occasions to quickly detect the contradictions they may have fallen into” (p. 68), which reinforces capitalistic consumption as an ideal space to explore the social. Furthermore, by arguing that objects should be identified as participants while in action, Latour highlights the frequent disappearing focus on the tendencies of objects within traditional social science practice. However, to counter frequent disappearing tendencies, the ANT suggests explicit accountability on how actors weave through interactions. Latour goes on to argue that one of the most distinctive

measures of the ANT is that it examines object triggers—such as innovations, distance, breakdowns, archival collections, and scientifiction—within unexplored social ties of varying sizes and shapes. Thus, ANT scholars have proven that “if objects are not studied it is not due to a lack of data, but a lack of will”; furthermore, this includes interference concerning the intricacies of power relations that have failed to be “counterchecked” or “counterbalanced” between objects and actors (pp. 82-86).

Thus far, in layman’s terms, Latour (2005) has argued that “groups are made and objects play a role” in society (p. 89). However, the fourth source of uncertainty, which explores matters of facts versus matters of concern, highlights several notions surrounding how society defines “social” and “construction,” including the difficulties the ANT experiences in claiming social construction as a social fact. Latour argues that by leveraging the ANT, difficulties or failures within the social theory highlight the true extensions of contemporary science and technology. Thus, the failure of a social explanation on science serves as a great chance for social theory exploration concerning traditional conceptions of epistemology and sociology. This includes notions of social phenomena substitution and the translation and transportation of social explanations between the two accounts of the social as traditionally construed or deployed “strings of mediators” (pp. 98-106). While risky, “the great chance of ANT is that objectivity’s many folds become visible as soon as one moves a bit closer to where agencies are made to express themselves” (p. 112). Thus, in exploring the fourth uncertainty, Latour argues that the ANT is able to thrive on the “mapping of scientific controversies about matters of concerns by renewing the divide between natural and social empiricism from top to bottom,” thus enabling “natural objects an occasion to escape the narrow cell given to matters of facts” and explore “what the real world is really like” (pp. 114-117).

Modes of Acquiring Knowledge

While both Durkheim and Latour present arguments on the objective interconnected nature of social phenomena, French social anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1962), commonly identified as one of the key figures of structuralism along with Franz Boas and James George Frazer, highlights a social emotional attachment to society and culture. In *The Savage Mind*, which some argue served as the foundation of modern anthropology, Lévi-Strauss proposes that there are no fundamental differences between how modern people and primitive people think and interpret reality. Fundamentally, all human beings with normally functioning brains are capable of critical thinking and possess the ability to infer from their relationships. Therefore, arguments proposing a cognitive distinction between primitive and non-primitive people are not only false, but harmful to cultural studies (Bloch, 2009; “Claude Lévi-Strauss,” 2016).

Lévi-Strauss (1962) argues that regardless of societal differences, the human brain systematically processes organized or structured units of information, which continuously combine to develop common models across all societies that either explain the world, provide tools to operate within the world, or imagine alternatives. Lévi-Strauss argues there are “two distinct modes of scientific thought,” which “are not a function of different stages of development of the human mind but rather of two strategic levels at which nature is accessible to scientific inquiry: one roughly adapted to that of perception and the imagination: the other at a remove from it” (p. 15). Thus, by rejecting the concept of primitive and modern minds, Lévi-Strauss argues that, while all men possess the same intellectual potential, the only true difference lies within “two parallel modes of acquiring knowledge” (p. 13). This reinforces that one mode is not better than the other, but merely different or complementary (p. 110).

Lévi-Strauss (1962) goes on to argue that all societies have universal patterns of structures concerning thought and behavior. Therefore, primitive and modern ways of classification are “equally coherent” and accessible by all societies and civilizations after

“taking account of the wealth and diversity of the raw material,” which are not “predestined to be chosen by all societies and all civilizations” (p. 55). To illustrate this, Lévi-Strauss argues that each civilization or society since man’s first appearance

has claimed that it contains the essence of all meaning and dignity of which human society is capable and reduced through. Its claim has in its own eyes rested on a moral certainty comparable to that which can [be invoked throughout time]. But whether in their case or our own, a good deal of egocentricity and naivety is necessary to believe that man has taken refuge in only one of the historical or geographical modes of his existence, when the truth about man resides in the system of their differences and common properties. (p. 249)

Specifically, leveraging totemic logic, which is commonly used in commodity branding, Lévi-Strauss (1962) argues, “Native classifications are not only methodical and based on carefully built up theoretical knowledge. They are also at times comparable from a formal point of view, to those still in use” (p. 43). Lévi-Strauss notes that while totemic logic negates arguments for siloes in methodology, there are several concerns regarding notions, such as adequate identification and role ascriptions (pp. 64-66), that can create obstacles. Furthermore, Lévi-Strauss proposes that the

ideas and beliefs of the totemic type particularly merit attention because, for societies which have constructed or adopted them, they constitute codes making it possible to ensure, in the form of conceptual systems, the convertibility of messages appertaining to each level, even of those which are so remote from each other that they apparently relate solely to culture or solely to society. (p. 90)

However, similar to Durkheim’s relational view on informal structures, Lévi-Strauss (1962) seems to argue that a scholar’s responsibility is not to account for why culture is a particular way, but to understand and display the underlying ways in which the process of transformation occurs, as culture is passed along to solve practical or theoretical social dilemmas. Thus, the “mediation between nature and culture, which is one of the distinctive functions of the totemic operator, enables us to sift out what may be true from what is partial and distorted” (p. 91). Furthermore, Lévi-Strauss argues that

“men’s conception of the relations between nature and culture is a function of modifications of their own social relations” (p. 117). Compatible with Latour’s notion on assemblages, the latter argument highlights the notion that the attention individuals give certain phenomena aligns with how they assemble reality and differentiate between culture and nature (pp. 117-123).

Technical Criticism of the Social and Economic Conditioning

Alongside familiar names such as Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim, Karl Emil Maximilian “Max” Weber is revered as one of the principal architects of modern social science. Weber’s (1949) “‘Objectivity’ of Social Science and Social Policy” explores the notion of objectively valid truths in disciplines concerned with social and cultural phenomena. Weber’s question—posed primarily to discuss issues surrounding the continuously evolving conflict within the nature of the social science discipline—emphasizes reoccurring problems concerning methodology, concept formation, and notions of unconditional validity. By proposing that “an empirical science cannot tell anyone what he should do—but rather what he can do—and under certain circumstances—what he wishes to do” (p. 7), Weber argues that personal value-judgments, or matters of faith, tend to influence scientific arguments without being explicitly identified.

Weber (1949) explores social scientist’s “capacity and need for analytically ordering empirical reality in a manner which lays claims to validity as empirical truth,” and proposes the use of “technical criticism” as a means to address faulty data overlooked when exploring normative and empirical knowledge (pp. 6-8). Weber reinforces this notion by illustrating that “a systematically correct scientific proof must be acknowledged as correct,” or constantly attempt to be correct within a variety of cultural contexts (p. 11). Weber goes on to later identify this notion as the shared concept of universal laws. Thus, Weber argues that achieving objectivity begins with social

scientists blatantly distinguishing between personal value-judgments and empirical knowledge when dealing with social and cultural phenomena in social science.

Weber (1949) argues that the “analysis of social and cultural phenomena with special reference to their economic conditioning and ramifications was a scientific principle of creative fruitfulness and with careful application and freedom from dogmatic restrictions, will remain as such for a very long time” (p. 23). However, this notion not only inherently rejects the materialistic perception of history as a worldview or formula for the causal explanation of historical realities but calls for the display of critical and concrete conditions and interconnected relationships. Weber advocates that “there is no absolutely objective scientific analysis of culture or social phenomena independent of special and one-sided viewpoints selected, analyzed or organized for expository purposes” (p. 26). As such, Weber urges his readers to fully comprehend the unique characteristics of concrete reality and the norms that regulate social life.

Specifically, Weber (1949) outlines four tasks to objectively view social science and social policy. The first task explores the determination of hypothetical laws and factors that social scientists need to obtain the desired type of knowledge required for analysis. The second task explores the “historically given individual configuration of those factors and their significant concrete interaction, conditioned by their historical context and especially the rendering intelligible of the basis and type of significance” (p. 31). The third task explores the tracking process of each individual social feature throughout history as an evolved and significant configuration with its own explanations and significant individual configurations; and the fourth and final task explores the prediction of possible future constellations.

While some scholars would argue that cultural significance should be attributed only to valuable phenomena, Weber (1949) negates this by stating that cultural knowledge and values are conditioned and shared through particular points of view that present diverse perspectives on what individuals value (p. 37). Building on this, Weber

argues that through cultural value, there are two types of ways social scientists can analyze reality. The first focuses attention on reality under the guidance of values that lend reality significance, thus impacting the selection and ordering of cultural phenomena. The second analyzes reality in terms of laws, reiterating what the previous tasks highlight regarding objectively viewing social science and social policy. While both types of analysis can coexist without any logical relationship with the other, critics argue an issue arises if their occasional coincidence leads to the belief that each type of analysis lacks distinctive principles (p. 32).

Addressing the presence of distinctive principles, Weber (1949) argues that reality can only be known as a means of concepts. Thus, by exploring the relationship of how concepts are constructed, human sciences are evaluative ideas such as ideal types, which are logically based. Therefore,

the objective validity of all empirical knowledge rests exclusively upon the ordering of the given reality according to categories which are subjective in specific sense, namely, in that they present the presuppositions of our knowledge and are based on the presupposition of value of those truths which empirical knowledge alone is able to give. (p. 64)

Furthermore, when digesting Weber's theories, one could argue that Weber highlights two of the previously discussed topics noted in Durkheim's (1895) *The Rules of the Sociological Method* (1895) and Latour's (2005) *Reassembling the Social*. Like Durkheim, Weber (1949) highlights the relational components of social facts, such as religion, as a means by which value-judgments or conditioned orientations of interests and understanding are reinforced. Like Latour, Weber identifies prevalent but problematic ways social scientists assemble knowledge or, in Weber's terms, undergo the process of "thought ordering," to the detriment of social science progression (p. 14).

Ideology of Routine

However, of all of the prior arguments, American social anthropologist, ethnographer, and social learning theorist Jean Lave is most notable as one of few

scholars to overtly engage with the consumer dilemma by exploring culture, learning, isolated activities, and context. While Lave's perspectives are heavily influenced by John Dewey's arguments concerning experiential and social interaction-based learning, Lave was also influenced by other leading theorists, such as Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, and Albert Bandura. Thus, in exploring Lave's literature, the narrative depicts rich channels of knowledge and direction to examine passé models of rationality and cognition, as well as formal or informal context-centered education practices. Specifically, leveraging her 1982 article, "A Comparative Approach to Educational Forms and Learning Processes," Lave analyzes discrepancies amongst stereotypical definitions of non-pedagogical education in Liberian tailor apprenticeship practice. Specifically, by arguing that "in spite of the fact that [the tailor masters] do not deliberately organize most of the learning activities of apprentices, there is considerable structure to the educational process," including "highly structured [learning] but in nonpedagogical ways" (p. 182).

Furthermore,

the learning processes by which the apprentices acquire tailoring knowledge and skill are not haphazard, not osmotic, and not passively observational or imitative [but] the learning process apprentices engage in changes in predictable ways as the learner moves from the status of novice to that of master tailor. (p. 182)

As such, Lave (1982) argues against maintaining "school-centric, simplified dichotomies of formal and informal education," rejecting the cultural transmission model which views "learning as a passive reaction to teaching" (p. 185). Lave adds that traditional "assumptions about education make it difficult to examine the various sources of order and organization in learning" (p. 185). These then create obstacles to building "comparative models of education which are only possible when the basic process is taken to be learning rather than teaching" (p. 185). Therefore, by leveraging an anthropological approach to studying and understanding the "social organization of knowledge, learning and thinking," Lave argues that society is closer to understanding

“how thinking is shaped by, and shapes, routinely recurring situations, including educational situations, in people’s lives” (p. 186).

Closely tied to this is “The Dialectic of Arithmetic in Grocery Shopping,” co-authored by Lave in 1984, which highlights cognition in context by studying thought in routine activities involved in a “highly structured environment [such as a supermarket, where individuals] exercise clearly defined activities” (Lave, Murtaugh, & de la Rocha, 1984, p. 67). Lave’s research questions explored:

1. What is it about grocery shopping in supermarkets that might create the effective context for what is construed by shoppers as a “problem-solving activity”?
3. What are the general characteristics of problem solving when something happens in the course of shopping that appears problematic to shoppers?
3. How does the character of problem solving within grocery shopping specifically affect the nature of arithmetic activity? (p. 69)

The researchers were careful not to interpret the situation for the shopper but rather to clarify the shopper’s behavior for the record. Furthermore, as an “attempt to exercise high ethnographic standards,” the analysis reflects the interaction between actor and observer (p. 69). Thus, Lave et al. leveraged the “ideology of routine” in a supermarket to illustrate not only how arithmetic practices can aid individuals who are dealing with “complex structures of choice,” but how both the “context of activity and the activity in context” fill a void for analyzing arithmetic practices outside of linear or traditional school-based learning (p. 93).

In 2002, Lave went on to co-author “Estranged Labor Learning” with Ray McDermott, which compares Marx’s essay on “Estranged Labor” against “current social practices of learning—including the social practices of alienated learning and private educational property [emphasizing] the importance of distribution [within] institutionalized production and distribution” (pp. 19-24). By “[focusing] on education as

a distributional phenomenon” (p. 24), Lave and McDermott “critique—in parallel—theories of [ascription and diagnosis concerning] learning, intelligence, creativity, genius, stupidity, and disability [which] have developed in tandem with ideas about production, consumption, exchange, and direction (pp. 21-23). Thus, by challenging and changing common ways of reading Marx, Lave and McDermott argue that not only is alienated learning endemic, embedded, and distorted (pp. 38-39), but it serves as the core of perversely relentless estranged learning that overshadows learning as “a wider [interconnected] system of cultural, political and economic forces that organize and define education and its problems” (p. 43).

Understanding the multi-layered social dilemma of consumerism is not an easy task. However, several anthropologists and sociologists, such as Emile Durkheim, Bruno Latour, Claude Levi-Strauss, Max Weber, and Jean Lave have aided in the expansion of diverse perspectives on the definitions and implications of social paradigms that impact capitalist consumption as a social dilemma. By displaying societies’ influential prowess leveraging individual learning and actions in varying contexts, a variety of rich narratives depict the ecology of social construction, individual efficacy, and agency. Specifically, Durkheim’s and Weber’s emphasis on gaps within relational dynamics instilled through the use or misuse of social facts by the individual as a complex and evolving unit aids in reinforcing Latour’s accentuation on the social ecology of agency, which extends to the objects that surround the individual. In addition, by combining Lave’s emphasis on learning through informal routine practices, patterns of expressed and repressed efficacy are highlighted, which Lévi-Strauss’s argues must be explored. Thus, this depiction inevitably illustrates several core issues, gaps, and patterns displayed within society that impact humanity’s progression toward an equitable and just future. However, these depictions can serve as vital stepping stones toward application-based solutions if used in parallel with adult education-based theory.

Introduction to Adult Learning Theory

Adult learning is comprised of several principles that display both the art and science of the adult experience. By leveraging these principles and several relevant research studies that highlight both limitations and patterns, individual and social conceptualization on how to approach, study, and apply learning as a consumer can demystify the increasing perverse obsession with acquisition that plagues many Americans. Thus, by exploring the macro social dilemma of consumerism, which can be both harmful to the social and self, several adult learning theories, including transformative learning, learning from experience, and self-directed learning, will be drawn upon to understand how best to analyze and address the individual dilemma of exercising efficacy and agency as a consumer.

Transformative Learning

The first applicable principle of adult learning is transformative learning. Jack Mezirow (1990) argued that transformative learning is perspective transformation, a paradigm shift, whereby we critically examine our prior interpretations and assumptions to form new meaning or the “why.” This perspective transformation is achieved through (1) disorienting dilemmas, (2) critical reflection and perspective taking, (3) rational discourse, and (4) action. Influenced by several theorists, including but not limited to Habermas and Freire, Mezirow believed that learning is a constructivist process that is based on the assumption that we revise our personal meaning making through interaction and dialogue with others. Specifically, he argued that through interaction learners take on and test different perspectives and interpret and reinterpret their experiences, which are central to meaning making and hence learning.

Transformative learning is the process that occurs when we reshape our frames of reference to be more justified or true by becoming more critically reflective of our taken-for-granted assumptions. Our frames of reference or meaning structures are composed of

two dimensions. The first dimension is a habit of mind or meaning perspectives, defined as a set of assumptions that impact the way we understand our experiences and expectations. Habits of mind include socio-linguistic, which are taken for granted prevailing social belief systems rooted in mechanisms by which society and language limit perceptions; epistemic, which assumes that only valid propositions are empirically verified; aesthetic, which explores how we judge beauty; moral-ethical, which is rooted in definitions of good and evil; philosophical, which highlights religion and faith-based habits; and psychological, which is often associated with traumatic events in childhood. The second dimension is a point of view or meaning schemes, which is defined as the beliefs, attitudes, and feelings we have that shape the way we understand and interpret the world. These are habitual and give us rules for interpreting our experiences (Mezirow, 1990).

Mezirow (1990) believed that we reflect on the content of the problem, the process of problem solving, and the premise of the problem. He believed that reflection involves a critique of assumptions to determine if a frame of reference/meaning structure learned in childhood remains applicable in adulthood. Building on Habermas's communicative theory, Mezirow argued that there are three basic kinds of learning: instrumental learning, which explores task-oriented problems based on the determination of cause and effect relationships or learning to do; communicative learning, which is learning involved in understanding the meaning of what others communicate concerning values, ideals, feelings, moral decisions, and concepts as freedom, justice, love, labor, autonomy, commitment, and democracy; and finally emancipatory learning, which focuses on removing constraints and freeing oneself from limitations.

Mezirow (1990) believed that transformations often follow some variation of the following ten steps of meaning with four main stages: experiencing a disorienting dilemma; critical reflection or self-examination and critical assessment of one's assumptions; reflective discourse where individuals recognize the shared nature of

experience; and action, which is played out in ten stages, which include disorienting dilemma, self-evaluation, critical assessment of assumptions, rational discourse, exploring new ways of acting, planning new course of action, acquiring knowledge and skills, provisional trying on new roles, building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships, and reintegration into one's life and society.

Building on consumer-based disorienting dilemmas, this process can be played out in multiple ways. For example, if an adult learner realizes that the items they have surrounded themselves with misalign from their self-proclaimed values, they may experience a sense of disorientation resulting in a disorienting dilemma where the frame of reference or meaning structure they thought they held conflicts with the situation they have found themselves in. The learner could then critically reflect by examining their own beliefs, goals, and assumptions in relation to the experience and purchases. The learner could then participate in a dialogue that consists of gathering opinions from others via one-on-one or group conversations to further examine the new thoughts and ideas that have emerged from the critical reflection. The learner can then take action based on the new level of learning and perspective by exploring new ways of acting, planning a new course of action such as purchasing items that reinforce their values, acquiring knowledge and skills, provisional trying on of new roles, building competence and self-confidence as a conscious consumer, and reintegration into one's life and society.

While promising as a lens to analyze dilemmas, there are several critiques about transformative learning as defined by Mezirow's (1990) work. These critiques include arguments that the theory reflects U.S. values of individualism, rationality, and autonomy and separates the individual from the context (Clark & Wilson, 1991); insufficiently accounts for the pre-rational and affective (Yorks & Kasl, 2002); neglects cultural context (Brookfield, 2012) and power dynamics (Hart, 1990); fails to account for the developmental role (Kegan, 1995); and neglects to consider that the transformative process may be more recursive, evolving, and spiraling (Taylor, 1998). Furthermore, like

Habermas, Mezirow has received criticism for his over-emphasis on rationality (Dirkx, 1998).

While Mezirow (1990) has served as a major contributor to the development of transformative learning, it is important to note that other models of transformative education have contributed to this discussion as well. More specifically, this means discussing briefly the work of others like Paulo Freire (1970), who offers an emancipatory model of transformation. Specifically, Freire wanted people to develop an ontological vocation, which is a theory of existence that views people as subjects, not objects, who are constantly reflecting and acting on the transformation of their world so it can become a more equitable place for all to live. This transformation, or unveiling of reality, is an ongoing, never-ending, and dynamic process. However, unlike Mezirow's personal transformation, Freire is much more concerned about a social transformation achieved through the unveiling or demythologizing of reality by the oppressed through the awakening of their critical consciousness, where they learn to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions to take action against the oppressive elements of reality.

Furthermore, the intent of Freire's (1970) work was that of fostering an emancipatory transformative process of conscientization, whereby the oppressed learn to realize the sociopolitical and economic contradictions in their world and take action against its oppressive elements. Freire argued that education could never be neutral, as it either domesticates by imparting the values of the dominant group so that learners assume things are right the way they are, or liberates, allowing people to critically reflect upon their world and take action to change society toward a more equitable and just vision. Similar to Mezirow, Freire sees critical reflection as central to transformation in context to problem-posing and dialogue with other learners. However, in contrast, Freire sees its purpose based on a rediscovery of power such that the more critically aware learners become, the more they are able to transform society and subsequently their own

reality. Mezirow (1990) stops short of this view, as personal transformation is in Mezirow's view, in and by itself, sufficient. Thus, this is why he can link himself conceptually to Freire but draws back at the concept of praxis.

Learning from Experience

The second applicable principle of adult learning is learning from experience. Learning from experience is defined as prior learning brought to new situations that is based upon the life experiences of the learner, where the experience of the learner serves as the prime source and stimulus for learning. Learning from experience is comprised of two strands: pragmatist and phenomenological. Pragmatists define learning from experience as a noun and as an object reflected upon and learned from building on the scientific model adaptation which prioritizes rationality over emotions. Phenomenological theorists define learning from experience as a verb and as a subject that is holistic, emotion-centered, and explores many ways of knowing and learning in experience. Learning is seen as a felt encounter with all senses and modalities (Yorks & Kasl, 2002). However, it is vital to note that not all pragmatists discount holistic thinking or the importance of emotions; and not all phenomenologists disdain rational thinking.

However, pragmatist learning from experience theorist John Dewey (2007) argues that all genuine education is based in experience. However, not all experiences educate, and some can miseducate and inhibit growth. For learning to happen through experience, the experience must exhibit two major principles—continuity and interactivity—which are interconnected and work together to provide the basis for experiential learning. Specifically, continuity refers to the ideology that experiences that provide learning are never isolated events in time. As such, learners must connect what they have learned from the present to experiences of the past to explore future implications. In parallel, interactivity links the environment with the individual in a process of interaction and impact.

Building on Dewey (2007), pragmatist theorist Kolb (2014) developed a learning theory model that explores four interrelated modes of learning: concrete experience such as diverging, which explores what individuals feel and watch; reflective observation such as assimilating, which is what individuals think and watch; abstract conceptualization such as converging, which is what individuals think and do; and active experimentation such as accommodating, which is what individuals feel and do, where the ultimate objective is to obtain a fully integrated personality. For example, if an individual is interested in conscious consumerism, they may start by noticing opportunities in their reach and means, then begin researching ways to engage with activism. An individual may then schedule a time to join a conscientious consumer-based support group and finally begin making purchases that align with their conscientious values. While Kolb (Kolb & Kolb, 2005) views learning as a process and not an outcome, to Kolb, all learning is re-learning. However, while Kolb argues that learning takes place when there is tension between current experiences and past knowledge, pragmatic theorist Schön (1987) expands on Dewey by arguing that while the focus should be on the role of reflection in a learner's experience, an action is required.

However, scholars such as Eraut (2004) argues that Kolb's learning cycle is confusing as not only does it refer to concrete experience, which excludes the feelings associated with even the shortest of episodes, but it also refers to observations and reflections in a manner that appears to privilege the meaning of an observation as an idea over that of observation as a process of sensory reception. Eraut believes that part of the problem is that when individuals refer to an experience, we are probably thinking about a single episode or incident; but when individuals talk about what they have learned from experience in general, they are probably referring to their accumulated learning from a series of episodes.

As such, Eraut leverages Schutz (1967) to point out that every individual is embedded in a continuous experience throughout their lives. However, one vital caveat

that Eraut (2004) highlights is that discrete experiences can be distinguished from this and only become meaningful when they are afforded attention and reflected upon. A parallel account might even be comprised of a set of impressions being extracted from the experience and committed to long-term memory with or without further reflection. Thus, concurrent or later attention to this set of impressions may constitute an event or episode that is linked or construed as related, possibly extending even to thoughts about those episodes, each conferring upon it a different meaning and significance.

Like Dewey and Kolb, Schön (1987) believes that experience should be explored on an individual level. However, scholars critique Schön because, like Dewey and Kolb, Schön also neglects to place an emphasis on emotions. However, Schön adds that there is reflection on action, which is thinking through a situation after it happens, such as journaling or mapping; knowing in action, which explores tacit knowing that argues that while learners can experience internal knowhow, sometimes they fail to articulate it, such as riding a bike; and reflection in action, which involves thinking on one's feet, which some experience when they have to adjust their behavior in a situation to meet the needs of their audience. In addition, pragmatic theorist Jarvis (1992) adds that learning from experience is situated in a social context, where the focus is on whole person human learning and not just adult learning. Learning occurs in the learner's world, which is ever-changing, and builds on the learner's experience or biography as a whole person. As such, when one's biography and experience sense unease, it can trigger learning. However, if the person chooses to ignore the unease, learning does not occur (Illeris, 2008). In his classic, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, Schön (1987) argues that people cannot simply be told what they need to know in the complexity of practice. They must learn to see for themselves.

In contrast, phenomenological learning from experience theorist Heron (1992) argues that the learner's "developmental challenge" is to become adept at a process called critical subjectivity, which involves an awareness of the four ways of knowing, of how

they are currently interacting, and of ways of changing the relations between them so that they articulate a reality that is unclouded by a restrictive and ill-disciplined subjectivity. As such, Heron argues that within the psyche there is basic polarity between an individuating function and a participatory view. Thus, experience should be treated as a process encountered with the world. As such, Heron proposes four modes of psyche—the affective, imaginal, conceptual, and practical; and four ways of knowing—experiential, which explores knowing through direct encounters; presentational knowing, which plays a pivotal role in clarifying and codifying experience, creating pathways for emotion as intuited imaginal patterns expressed in various forms, such as media, storytelling, pictures, and dance; propositional knowing, which is expressed in intellectual statements, organized logically and evidently through formal theory and explanation; and practical knowing, which is evident in knowing how to perform a skill and practical action.

Additional phenomenological theorists Yorks and Kasl (2002) build on this by arguing that pragmatic models privilege rational discourse and under-theorize the role of affect. As such, building on Heron, Yorks and Kasl leverage multiple ways of knowing to integrate emotion and feeling by fostering Heron's four interdependent ways of knowing, which supports the learner's whole person development or whole-person knowing. They do this by arguing for learning-within-relationship, which involves engagement with others through balanced mixed whole person knowing and whole person knowing of neighbors while acknowledging the paradox of diversity, which is both invitational in that diverse perspectives generate rich potential for learning, challenge habits of mind and habits of being, but obstructive in that the more diverse learners you have, the less likely they are to create empathic connections, which enables the understanding of the other's point of view, thus blocking capacity to lead each other toward growth and transformation. As such, the challenge is to create an empathic connection to achieve the effective exercise of critical subjectivity, which results in congruence among the ways of knowing.

However, the pragmatist approach has been criticized for several reasons. For example, Fenwick (2000) argues that the pragmatist approach overly simplifies experience. Furthermore, arguments have been made that the clearly defined start and end point make experience too tangible, when real experience is more fluid. In addition, the approach fails to discuss the possibilities of experience being a social construct and the option of experience being rich in both cognitive and affective components. Furthermore, while Kolb (2005) in particular has been criticized for his inattention to context, scholars fear that facilitators may interfere with the basic tenet that experiential learning should liberate and free learners from oppression. Instead, workers' experiential learning is becoming tied to economic benefits for organizations, and workplace learning is shifting into tools to control lives by determining what counts as worthy experience, inevitably constraining spaces for tacit knowledge and incidental learning.

Self-Directed Learning

The final applicable principle of adult learning is self-directed learning (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2012). The origins of self-directed learning are rooted in humanism, pragmatism, and life-long learning. As such, there are three main distinctions of self-directed learning (Garrison, 1997). The first is self-directed learning as a goal. There are three main goals in self-directed learning. The first is to enhance the ability of learners to be self-directed, as promoted by Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2005) and Tough (1979). The second is to foster transformative learning as promoted by Brookfield (1995) and Mezirow (1990), and the third is to promote emancipatory learning and social action as promoted by Freire (1970), which explores social, political, and environmental contexts that affect learning. The second distinction is self-directed learning as a process. This includes linear models such as those developed by Tough (1979) and Knowles et al. (2005), which have evolved into more complex interactive models, such as those developed by Spear and Mocker (1984), which explores opportunities in learning

environments, and Garrison (1997), who analyzes the context of learning, and instructional models such as those developed by Grow (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005), which integrate self-directed learning methods into programs and activities. The third distinction is self-directed learning as a characteristic of learners, which, as Candy (1991) notes, is increasingly viewed not simply as an attribute that people either have or do not have, but as a quality that may be present in varying degrees.

Brookfield (1995) defines self-directed learning as learning in which the conceptualization, design, conduct, and evaluation of a learning project are directed by the learner. While self-directed learning can be viewed as highly individualized learning conducted in isolation, learners can work in self-directed ways while engaged in group-learning settings, if the individual believes it to be conducive to their learning efforts. As such, a recurring theme of research in this area is the way learners move in and out of learning networks and consult a range of peers (Maclean & Wilson, 2009). However, whether learners choose to be temporarily isolated from or immersed within peer networks makes trivial difference. Thus, in self-directed learning, all decisions concerning how and what to learn, and how or whether to consult external resources, rest with the learner. Furthermore, in the context of a self-directed learning effort, it is quite possible for there to be periods in which the learner decides it is most effective to place himself/herself temporarily under the control of an expert.

Self-directed learning was initially coined by American adult educator Malcolm Knowles (2005) as a universal disposition of adult learners who displayed an increasing tendency to illustrate self-directedness as they entered adulthood. Self-direction in learning was a central element in Knowles's concept of andragogy—the art and science of helping adults learn (as opposed to pedagogy, which is geared toward helping children learn). Knowles posited that a tendency for self-directedness separated adults from children and as such should be categorized as a uniquely adult phenomenon.

Specifically, Knowles (Knowles et al., 2005) focuses on instrumental learning and believes that adults become increasingly self-directed as they mature. Leveraging Knowles, self-directed learning is defined as a process in which individuals determine the appropriate climate, take initiative without the help of others in diagnosing their learning needs, form learning goals, identify human and material resources for learning, choose and implement appropriate learning strategies, and evaluate learning outcomes. Knowles identifies three reasons for self-directed learning. The first proposes that individuals who take the initiative in learning learn more about things and learn better than do others who sit at the feet of teachers possibly waiting to be taught. The second reason for self-directed learning explores the natural process of psychological development, and the third reason for self-directed learning proposes new developments in education that place a heavy responsibility on learners to take a good deal of initiative in their own learning.

Furthermore, Knowles (Knowles et al., 2005) identifies five key assumptions that underlie self-directed learning. The first is that self-directed learning assumes that the human being grows in capacity and needs to be self-directing as an essential component in maturing. The second assumption of self-directed learning assumes that the learners' experiences become an increasingly rich resource for learning that should be exploited along with the resources of experts. The third assumption is that individuals become ready to learn what is required to perform their evolving life tasks or to cope more adequately with their life problems. The fourth assumption of self-directed learning assumes that the natural orientation of individuals is task- or problem-centered, and the fifth assumption assumes that learners are motivated by internal incentives such as the need for self-esteem. However, it is interesting that Knowles does acknowledge that there are situations where the learners' experience is of little value, which includes when they have no previous experience in the subject matter, where an individual's readiness to learn is governed by one's level of maturity, and when the learner is motivated by

external pressures. As such, Knowles places an emphasis on learner responsibility and critical thought.

However, there are several critiques of Knowles's self-directed learning arguments. For example, scholars such as Smith (Garrison, 1992) propose that adults do not follow a defined set of steps and things are left more so to chance and circumstance. For these reasons, Knowles's argument seems very sequential and linear. Building on this, Merriam et al. (2012) agree that Knowles is too narrowly focused on individual instrumental learning, and Brookfield (1995) argues that learners are concerned with purpose and conscious action. Furthermore, an adult's willingness to be self-directed is heavily influenced by cultural views. Therefore, the self in self-directed learning is not autonomous, or free from cultural influences but is embedded within the surrounding culture. Specifically, self-directed learning is culturally dependent and rooted contexts where individuals are more likely to be self-directed if born into cultural groups that value and nurture self-direction. As such, Knowles seems to ignore the relations between the individual and the social by failing to include collective action, and human and social interdependence, including power and oppression dynamics (Hart, 1990).

Although Tough is credited for creating defined learning projects focused solely on those with high degrees of intentionality, both Knowles and Tough constructed linear self-directed learning models that assume that the self-directed learner will set goals and follow specific steps to achieve their goals. However, Brookfield (1995) argues that while someone can be skilled in self-directed learning, in specific learning domains such as goal setting or instructional design, they can simultaneously fail to critically question or challenge the learning experience. As such, for education and learners to combat against an oppressive learning environment, they must be able to recognize, acknowledge, and challenge the current cultural and political status. Furthermore, leveraging Grow's (1991) instructional self-directed learning model, Grow argues that through situational leadership learners can be more or less mature vis-à-vis a particular task and that teachers

or facilitators need to take both that into account as well as basic capacity for independent learning. As such, facilitators and teachers can then adjust their degree of control versus empowerment based on judgments about these factors. However, accounting for the above, for the purpose of this exploratory study, Garrison's (1997) model of self-directed learning seems to serve as an ideal map to explore the data displayed in Chapter 4.

By displaying the above several adult learning principles, which outline both the art and science of the adult experience, these principles and several relevant research studies highlight a variety of both applicable limitations and patterns in addressing the dark side of consumerism as a social dilemma. Individual and social conceptualizations on how to approach, study, and apply learning as a consumer can be used to demystify both macro and micro levels of consumerism that can be both harmful to the social and self. As such, leveraging the several adult learning theories above, scholars can explore a variety of implications for research and practice.

Implications for Research and/or Practice

Mezirow (1990) argued that the goal of adult education is to help the individual become a more autonomous thinker by learning to negotiate his or her own values, meanings, and purpose rather than uncritically acting on those of others (Taylor, 1998). Research and practice further this cause by negotiating between society and subjective self-determination as factors in individual actions. Exploring how individuals make decisions and take action in relation to their social environments leveraging the composition, functioning, and direction of society as a whole provides ideal opportunity to analyze and address core issues. Furthermore, social actions are overtly meaningful within the context of the purposes and intentions of individual subjects or agents. Such purposes and intentions should only be understood in context of the background of historical conditions and social structures and, most importantly, are largely informed by that background. Society is largely the consequence of individuals acting toward their

own independent ends; however, since society also plays a significant role in determining what kinds of things are considered important to those actors, individuals are considered both constitutive and partially constituted by their societies. Building on this, social action-based research and practice should aim to capture how actors and society interact, impact, and sustain change.

There are several practices that aid in capturing vital information on social interactions, impact, and equitable change. These practices can range from journaling, mind mapping, critical questioning, experiential activities, and simulations to mentorship or the exploration of human and object life histories. However, Mezirow (1990) argues that we should also consider the ideal conditions for these types of practices. For example, he proposes that to obtain rational discourse, several ideal conditions must be present, which include that individuals have accurate and complete information; be free from coercion and distorting self-deception; be able to weigh evidence and assess arguments as objectively as possible; be open to alternative perspectives; be able to critically reflect upon presuppositions and their consequences; have equal opportunity challenge, question, refute, and reflect and to hear others do the same; and be able to accept an informed, objective, and rational consensus as a legitimate test of validity. Nevertheless, it is also important to note that the conditions operate under the supposition that there will be an effort to establish standards that significantly reduce the influence of power, the use of a deficit model, and win-lose discourse on individuals (Brown, 2004).

Summary

The purpose of this research, therefore, is to explore the lives of 20 individuals and their experiences with purchases that misalign with their identity, values, and/or ideals.

To achieve the purpose, literature reviewing social construction and adult learning was explored. This exploration included a comprehensive outline of pertinent topics for

this study, which include topics such as structural functionalism, tracing the social, modes of acquiring knowledge, technical criticism of social and economic conditioning, and the ideology of routine. The exploration also examined adult learning theory, leveraging transformative learning, learning from experience, and self-direction to identify lenses by which to view adult behavior and strategic opportunities for individual agency and alignment. While there will be an ongoing literature review throughout the dissertation process, the above review aided in developing the Conceptual Framework displayed below, which identifies categories by which the data collected will be framed.

Conceptual Framework

Building on the above literature review, the conceptual framework displayed in Figure 1 is comprised of an integrative approach surrounding the individual, which builds on the theoretical foundations of consumerism, adult learning, and social construction to explore the microcosm of individual experience grounded in Weber-Fechner law (Smith & Nagle, 1995) and the human interaction model (Maltbia, 2016). Specifically, leveraging the Weber-Fechner law, which argues that even with the same stimuli an object can appear different to individuals as perception constantly shifts, this framework adds that an individual's ability to compare alternatives between their prior consumer experiences are relative rather than absolute, particularly when placed in strategically ambiguous choice contexts such as the routine consumer space. Thus, to make the most aligned actions toward the progression of individual identity and values, the human interaction model is integrated, which explores the anatomy of effective human interaction with consideration of varying worldviews potentially present in within an individual such as gender, culture, life experiences, education, social economic status, and thinking preferences—further promoting an exploration of whole person engagement with commodities in the evolving consumer experience.

The first component of the human interaction model is titled “engaging,” which explores objective data by effectively aligning expectations between all parties involved in the interaction with the context of the experience, thus clarifying general needs and wants while setting the stage for a productive conversation. These interactions can take place in the moment or be a product of preparation comprised of the content of the commodity or individual message. These interactions are generally grounded in the crafting of the how or overall architecture of agency and purpose, including character elements such as the values or identity of the individual or objects. When exploring foundational basics during this stage, individuals are gathering and synthesizing data, which requires attention, concentration, and a willingness to step away from their own opinion to actively attune to the holistic experience.

The second component of the model outlines a progressing or “advancing” stage that illustrates an individual’s purpose and the interpretive data, which moves individuals closer to realizing intentions, promoting understanding, making decisions, and building commitment to action while enhancing the ongoing relationship with themselves and their surroundings. This facilitates further understanding and access to deep meaning attained through attentive awareness to moments of disjuncture. The third and final component of the human interaction model is “disengaging,” which sets the stage for informed future aligned action and decisional clarification on accomplishments, key learning, agreements, unfinished business, and solidified next steps. During this stage, individuals can leverage agency and self-direction to free themselves from distortions and attain ongoing productive partnerships with the evolving consumer space.

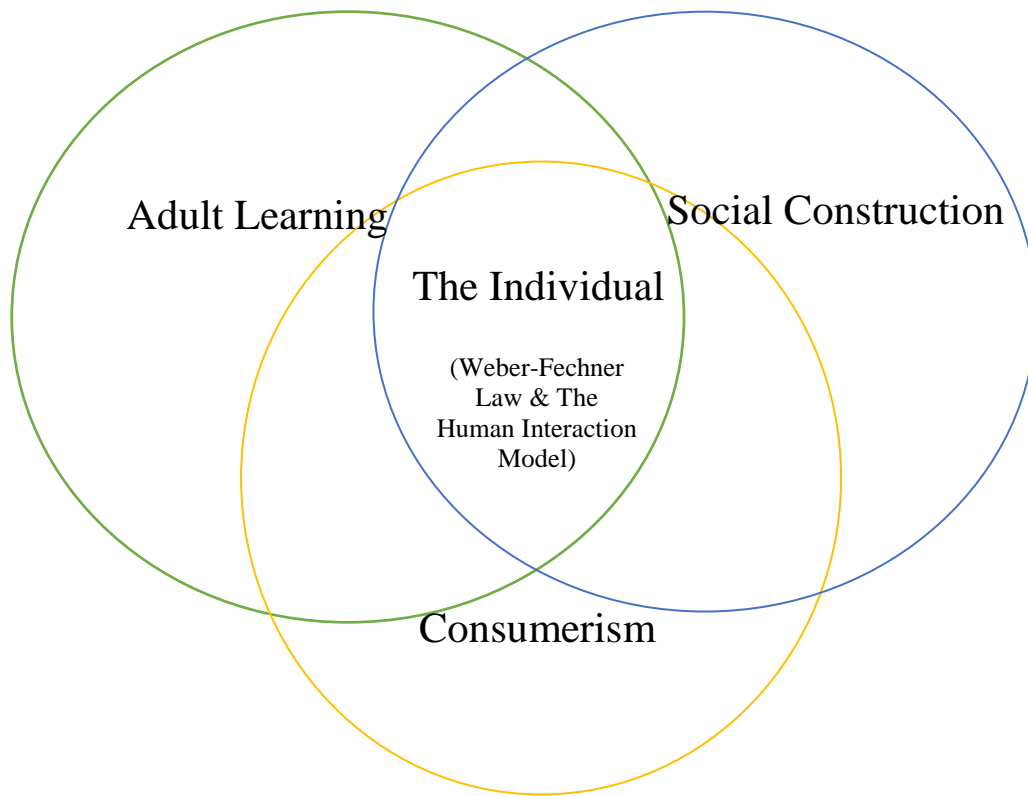


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this research is to explore the lives of 20 individuals and their experiences with purchases that misalign with their identity, values, and/or ideals.

While desires and resistances for varying objects, which we experience as matters of love and/or hate, interlock our internal world to the external social world, by exploring how these disorienting dilemmas play out on subtle levels, such as how we draw on strategies to ignore or reinforce them, we unlock profound learning and application opportunities through everyday coping strategies. As previously illustrated in Chapter II, through the exploration of social construction and adult learning theory, diverse facets of research provide indispensable opportunities to deeper pragmatic and ethical understanding of social behavior as it exemplifies social education or domestication of individuals within systemically oppressive communities of practice. As such, by leveraging several fields of research to analyze a consumer's progressive articulation of ethical standards, individuals can grow closer to capturing and conveying vital dimensions of the human moral-ethical experience, sustaining the translation of ideals into strategic action toward more equitable and representative realities.

Counter-measures, such as consumers aligning their purchases with their values, are uprising due to growing accessibility to information and community spaces, which have bred an evolving space for civic engagement rooted in ethical consumption. Society

is slowly but surely shifting its priorities to promote and integrate social and environmental justice solutions into sustained norming practices. However, breaking through to consumers to “purchase what they preach” can be a complicated process. For these reasons, it is critical to leverage the above literature to address the problem and to understand the nuanced drivers, barriers, and opportunities that resonate among discerning consumer contexts, audiences, and practices. To achieve this, the following research questions were examined:

1. What patterns of self-directed learning can be identified throughout individual consumer practices?
2. What factors do participants perceive facilitate and/or impede their ability to make purchases that are consistent with their identity and values?
3. How do participants learn to reconcile the dichotomy emanating from purchasing products that are misaligned with their identity and values?

To explore the above research questions, this chapter will elaborate on the following overview of a proposed exploratory methodology, which will include: the rationale for research design, descriptions of the research sample, an overview of information required, an overview of the research design, the use of data collection instruments as metrics, a description of the research sample, data analysis and synthesis methods, literature on methods, ethical considerations, issues of trustworthiness in study design, and study limitations, and will conclude with a brief chapter summary.

Rationale for Qualitative Method Research Design

Building on Guba’s (1990) constructivist views, if reality is merely the product of mental frameworks that cannot be separated from the person holding them, then “narratives about the most personal difficulties, the apparently most strictly subjective tensions and contradictions, frequently articulate the deepest structures of the social

world and its contradictions” (Bourdieu, 1999. p. 608). Thus, to truly comprehend the use of varying consumer practices that impact learning, only methodologies that consider how both social structure and agency combine to influence complex individual behavior are sufficient for exploration. As such, a qualitative method research design is used to display the intricate intertwining of innate values with external actions.

A qualitative design outlines social structural factors that contextualize consumer behavior and are grounded in qualitative methods to comprehend the subjective nuances of learning whereby structural factors cultivate the habitus through embodied social interaction. Thus, when exploring explanations of social behavior, which are comprised of both objective and subjective components of human behavior, qualitative research addresses the presence and growing demand of reflective social practice, aiding in the elaborate narrative about the nature and meaning of social behavior across macro and micro sociological contexts. For these reasons, qualitative research provides a rational basis oriented toward understanding the nuanced relationship between learning and individual agency in consumer behavior (Adler & Adler, 1994).

Description of the Sample

While over 50 individuals were contacted to complete the demographic survey, of the individuals sent the survey, 20 volunteer participants were selected to meet the standard minimum of participants for a predominantly qualitative study. Furthermore, the 20 participants were derived from the following criteria. (1) *Participants must be 18 or older*. Although several adult learning scholars argue that age is irrelevant to adulthood, 18 is the customary age at which the U.S. government identifies an individual as a legal adult. As such, the assigned minimum legal age of 18 was used as a criterion for participation. (2) *Participants must be fluent in English*. Due to financial limitations that restricted hiring a translator, participants had to be able to fluently communicate with the

principal investigator. (3) *Participants must be willing to self-identify.* Due to the focus of the study, participants also had to be willing to self-identify. Apart from initial questioning on identities, no additional confirmation requirements were requested.

(4) *Participants must live or work in New York, New York and/or Los Angeles, California.* Participants were expected to reside or work in New York City and/or Los Angeles based on the 2016 McKinsey's Global Institute report, which found that New York City and Los Angeles are the two largest cities in the U.S and rank globally as number two and four consumption meccas. As such, both cities were ideal to explore individualistic consumption practices.

After the 20 participants had been selected using the Demographic Inventory (Appendix D) and confirmed against the above four criteria, invitation letters (Appendix A), the Subject Consent Form (Appendix B), and Participant's Rights (Appendix C) were sent to candidates electronically for review and consent signatures. All 20 participants completed a self-directed learning survey titled the Learning Preference Assessment to avoid bias, and participated in an in-depth semi-structured interview. Chapter IV displays an overview and in-depth narrative of the data derived from the demographic inventory, self-directed Learning Preference Assessment, and semi-structured interview prompts obtained from the 20 study participants.

Overview of Information

This study explored the lives of 20 individuals and their experiences with purchases that misalign with their identity and values. As such, the data collected addressed the study's research questions.

The information aimed to provide further understanding on how consumers learn and reinforce consumption behavior. Specifically, the information used to examine this

phenomenon was initially identified within four categories, which follow contextual, perceptual, demographic, and theoretical models.

Contextual

According to McKinsey's Global Institute (2016), patterns of consumption are growing increasingly more diverse and complex. As such, the notion of an "average consumer" is a myth. However, several key factors behind consumption choices have been identified in exploring structural reasons for consumption behavior. Thus, by focusing on holistic structural reasons for consumer choices, changes in consumption over time can be highlighted by four sets of factors that influence consumer behavior. The first of the four consists of the core drivers of consumption, such as an individual's age and income. The second is grounded characteristics of consumers in a particular cohort that can impact purchasing behavior, such as education to ethnic and regional mix. The third key factor explores life stages, which include the timing of major life decisions such as marriage or having children, or life events such as obtaining a first job or retirement; and the fourth and final key factors are behavior and preferences, which are often the most difficult to assess or predict.

Perceptual

Since its inception, the use of narrative has served as a bridge to shared perception. Due to its mirage-like capabilities, narrative has played a vital role in enticing consumptive behaviors rooted in individual perceptual alignment and appeasement. However, there are very few accounts of the perceptual process of embodied narrative negotiations between individual consumers and the commodities they consume. As Fries (2009) argues, social behavior is complex and relational phenomena which integrates the dialogical interplay of objective social structural forces with subjective intentionality on the part of social agents. Thus, considerations concerning both social structure and agency are essential in researching consumer behavior to identify the interplay between

objective and subjective reasoning in the consumption process. This is also illustrated in Chapter II, which identifies the primary focus of the consumer experience leveraging Weber-Fechner law (Smith & Nagle, 1995) and the human interaction model (Maltbia, 2016) as foundational frameworks for reference. To achieve an initial pulse on each participant, the study utilized the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale (SDLRS), also known as the Learning Preference Assessment (LPA), as a baseline. An in-depth review of participant results will be covered in the study's findings.

Demographic

At the onset of the study, all participants were required to complete a demographic inventory, which included information prompts addressing their gender, age, ethnicity, income bracket, highest level of education, and profession and relationship status. The data obtained are used in the exploration and research analysis. The demographic results are outlined in Chapter IV, Figures 2-7.

Theoretical

To achieve the purpose, an ongoing exploration of literature reviewing social construction, adult learning, and the intersectionality between the two was examined. This comprehensive exploration outlined both social construction and adult learning under pertinent subcategories for social construction, including structural functionalism, tracing the social, modes of acquiring knowledge, technical criticism of the social and economic conditioning and the ideology of routine; and adult learning theory leveraging subcategories such as transformative learning, learning from experience, and self-direction theoretical literature.

Overview of Research Design

The following summary outlines the research design:

1. The research problem and research questions were identified, and the proposed methodology and conceptual framework were developed.
2. An interview protocol was developed, pilot tested, and revised throughout the proposal process.
3. A literature review examining social construction and adult learning to assess the current field of knowledge on the topics and their connections was conducted.
4. The researcher obtained formal training in the proposed data collection methods.
5. The researcher pilot tested proposed data collection methods.
6. The researcher drafted a list of potential participants based on the purposeful sampling criteria developed.
7. A proposal defense hearing was held in June, followed by IRB approval, which ensured that the current highest standards of ethics were followed.
8. All study participants were contacted leveraging several forms of technology including but not limited to social media, telephone, and email. After providing an overview of the research and time commitment, participants provided a written and or verbal confirmation of participation. The researcher then sent an online package to participants to review and complete, which included: consent forms, participant rights, a unique pseudonym to protect their identity, and a link to the demographic inventory.
9. Once the demographic inventory was completed, participants received their unique Learning Preference Assessment (LPA), also known as the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale (SDLRS), login and password. After

completing the assessment, participants were scheduled for a two-hour in-depth semi-structured interview. Participants received their SDLRS results automatically upon the completion of the assessment.

10. The interviews were recorded using Zoom, transcribed using TranscribeMe, and coded using Nvivo.
11. Data yielded from the semi-structured interviews were compared and contrasted by a peer researcher for inter-rater reliability to ensure codes were aligned.
12. All data yielded from the learning preference assessment and semi-structured interviews were collected and analyzed individually against the collected demographic inventory profiles.

Data Collection Methods

Several diverse methods were leveraged to strengthen the study. These methods included demographic inventory profile surveys, a learning preference assessment, and in-depth semi-structured interviews.

Data Collection Method #1: Demographic Inventory Profile Survey

The Demographic Profile Survey is a self-report grounded in obtaining basic information on study participants. Participants self-reported on characteristics including but not limited to gender, education, ethnicity, location, and age. Participants were instructed to complete the demographic profile survey following their submission of IRB approved consent forms. Furthermore, of the purposeful sample of 50 individuals, 20 volunteers were selected to engage in the demographic inventory profile survey.

Data Collection Method #2: Learning Preference Assessment

The Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale (SDLRS), also known as the Learning Preference Assessment for bias avoidance reasoning, is a self-report questionnaire with Likert-type items developed by Dr. Lucy M. Guglielmino in 1977. Due to its strong testing population of over 70,000 adults, the SDLRS was selected because it measures the complex attitudes, skills, and characteristics of an individual's current level of readiness to manage their own learning. Furthermore, over 500 major organizations around the world have used the SDLRS, and it has been translated into Spanish (Castilian, Colombian, and Cuban), French, German, Italian, Korean, Malay, Chinese, Japanese, Finnish, Greek, Portuguese, Afrikaans, Russian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Farsi, Dutch, Polish, and Turkish.

While the assessment can be taken by both adults and children, the adult form of the questionnaire known as the SDLRS-A or Learning Preference Assessment (Appendix E) has 58 items. Respondents are prompted to read a statement and then indicate the degree to which that statement accurately describes their own attitudes, beliefs, actions, or skills. When designed and conducted correctly, assessments provide powerful opportunities to uncover opinions and unmask hidden issues that would likely be overlooked and unreported (Zohar, 2014). As such, the learning preference assessment was leveraged to supplement efforts to identify the impact of current social systems, policies, and community cultures on individuals and their consumption practices. To capture, conceptualize, and create meaning, it is beneficial to leverage the assessment to explore baseline perceptions, attitudes, and motivations impacting consumption behavior, particularly in consideration of perceived limitations. Therefore, acknowledging common critiques of the assessment, the information obtained from the SDLRS-A is used as an initial baseline for entry. Furthermore, in hopes of counterbalancing individual hesitations to be open and honest during interviews, as previously mentioned, assessments were distributed with assigned pseudonyms to ensure participant confidentiality.

To track incremental learning, although assessments are generally purely quantitative, a mixed method design was used to measure several indicators to further expand on individual consumer attitudes, knowledge, and skills at the beginning of the study. Specifically, the use of a Likert rating scale in combination with semi-structured interviews was incorporated with open-ended questions to create a safe space for overlooked and unreported issues and tap into rich mixed method process and data analysis, as prescribed by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004). The results of this can be found in Appendix L. Furthermore, due to the diverse socio-cultural dynamics at play, an intentional focus on balance was also integrated to create space for outliers and provide simple and accessible jargon counterbalancing miscommunication and disjuncture from the process.

Data Collection Method #3: Semi-Structured Interviews

In-depth semi-structured interviews are vital to understanding individual consumer perspectives and experiences. Semi-structured interviews are one of the most common qualitative methods used in research. Semi-structured interviews host the best of both worlds, as they collect desired information in the respondent's own language and framework (Leech, 2002), allowing respondents the chance to be experts and heavily inform the research (Longhurst, 2003).

In addition, semi-structured interviews are particularly impactful when measuring an individual's attitude, values, beliefs, and motives on a specific issue, subject, and/or matter, particularly when total immersion into the studied context or situation is not possible (McCracken, 1986). As such, all 20 study participants engaged in individual semi-structured interviews conducted on a one-on-one basis with the researcher. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix G and Appendix L.

Research Sample

Leveraging Creswell (2003), the goal of the exploratory study was to obtain a purposeful sampling of qualified participants who furthered the purpose of the study by addressing the problem and research questions devised. As such, the study adopted purposeful sampling, which is “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight. [Therefore, the investigator] must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). While some study participants were obtained through personal connections, others were obtained through social media based snowballing leveraging convenience sampling.

When a satisfactory list of potential participants was formed, 20 study participants were selected after a process of elimination was explored to create a diverse sampling population, following confirmation that study participants met the minimum layer of purposeful sample criteria: (1) Participants must be 18 or older; (2) participants must be willing to self-identify; (3) participants must live or work in New York, New York and/or Los Angeles, California; and (4) participants must be fluent in English. Thus, when a final list of study participants was confirmed, the researcher contacted participants to schedule a follow-up discussion on next steps and availability.

Data Analysis and Synthesis Methods

Scholars such as Marshall and Rossman (2014) argue that data analysis and synthesis is a nonlinear process that should occur simultaneously by leveraging several steps, which include the organization of data, combing for stories within the data, the generation of categories and themes, coding the data, a proposal of interpretations leveraging analytics, exploring alternative understandings, and finally formatting a report to present the study. As such, the conceptual framework was leveraged when collecting data to establish codes, which mirrored categories and descriptions representative of the

research framework. Specifically, coded schemes were explored and developed using descriptive codes pulled from the raw data collected from various methods input into NVivo software, as displayed in Appendix K.

The codes were further investigated to explore thematic patterns and leveraged to analyze and synthesize the data grounded in both cultivated participant narrative and relevant literature. Furthermore, to explore alternative understanding, a second researcher engaged in the coding process to ensure shared meaning and aid in prompting diverse data displays of multiple patterns identified throughout the study. Specifically, three rounds of data review were conducted. To avoid confirmation bias, the first round included an initial sweep of recurring themes separate from the research questions. The second round included a purposeful exploration of the research questions, which involved combing the data for aligned responses, and the third round included a final review of the data to solidify fit and challenge initial lenses. As scholars such as Jackson (2004) argue, by “looking at the same cultural material from diverse positions creates a more holistic and multidimensional understanding of the world than either vantage point would produce alone” (p. 36). As such, each methodology was analyzed separately, and then a cross-method analysis took place once all varying methods had been completed to create complementary conversations that speak to a larger constructive examination on consumption.

Literature on Methods

To achieve the purpose of the study, several methods, which include assessment and semi-structured interviews, were explored to achieve triangulation and validation of the data. However, each of the highlighted methods possesses both advantages and disadvantages, which will be further explored below.

Assessments

Assessments serve as a vital exploration method due to their portrayal of diverse factors that impact an individual's consumer behavior. Furthermore, assessments supplement understanding on agency by creating an outlet for individual consumers to engage and feel integral to understanding a shared social practice such as consumerism. Unfortunately, assessment respondents often report inaccurately on sensitive topics, and as such one disadvantage of assessments includes social desirability. Social desirability is where survey respondents answer questions based on what study participants think is viewed favorably by others. This can be portrayed as under-reporting on bad consumer behaviors or over-reporting on good consumer behaviors. Thus, while theoretical or practice conclusions surrounding attitudes, intentions, and behaviors are obtained, they possess potential to be sources of bias and error (Fisher, 1993).

Semi-Structured Interviews

Marshall and Rossman (2014) propose that semi-structured interviews can produce large amounts of data quickly by providing opportunities for follow-up and clarification of responses in the moment. Furthermore, since the quality of an interview is grounded on levels of comfort and openness between the interviewee and interviewer, listening and questioning skills of the interviewer are vital. However, scholars such as Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) argue that semi-structured interviews can seem asymmetrical due to power relationships where the researcher both initiates and defines the interview situation by identifying the topic, posing the questions, and cultivating both the probes and follow-up questions. Nevertheless, to mediate the disadvantage, due to power inequities playing a natural role in human conversations, the role of the researcher is not to eliminate power but to be aware and reflective of it.

Ethical Considerations

Addressing ethical and contextual concerns is essential to ensure the safety and protection of all voluntary study participants. As such, participants were given the following information prior to their participation in any of the above research methods (Bryman, 2006):

1. Identification of the problem and the purpose for collecting the data, including but not limited to transparent discussions on the data collection tools and issues of trustworthiness, as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985).
2. Participants' right to opt out of participating in the data collection process, and or to leave at any time without experiencing any negative effects.
3. Participants' right to confidentiality including but not limited to the use of pseudonyms.
4. Information on the security measures used to protect the data and the participants, including but not limited to the use of a locked file at an offsite location, shredding of personal information following 2 years after publication, and the use of pseudonyms.
5. Discussion around potential negative effects, if applicable, or incentives for participation.
6. Projected time commitments and scheduling concerns.
7. Candid identification of social cultural power dynamics and its impact on the study.
8. Discussion on access rights to the research study once it is completed and published.
9. The approval of the study by the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB), committee including the reference number for further inquiries.

Issues of Trustworthiness in Study Design

For the purpose of this study, trustworthiness is defined as the extent to which the findings are an authentic reflection of the personal or lived experiences of the phenomenon under investigation (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). Thus, to explore issues of trustworthiness in the exploratory study design, the study's credibility, dependability, and transferability were explored.

Credibility

Triangulation guards the researcher against threats and accusations that a study's findings are merely an artifact of a single method, a single source, or a single investigator's bias. To maximize the trustworthiness of the findings, the data collection processes included investigator triangulation—which involves more than one researcher in the field to gather and interpret data; theoretical triangulation—encapsulating the use of multiple theories (Banister, 2011); method triangulation—which is the use of different methodologies to gather information on the same subject (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010); and data triangulation—which is the process of collecting diverse accounts from different participants involved in any chosen setting, from different stages in the activity of the designated setting to different sites of the overarching setting (Banister, 2011). Specifically, throughout the study, the researcher drew upon at least two sources of evidence to obtain convergence and corroboration using varying data sources and research methods. Such sources include the learning preference assessment and semi-structured interviews. By extensively examining collected data leveraging diverse methods, findings can be substantiated across data sets, thus reducing the impact of potential biases that can arise in single method-based studies. Thus, by triangulating data, the researcher leveraged evidence to achieve both consistency and credibility.

Reliability and Dependability

A survey is reliable if it creates stable and consistent results that produce the same outcome. The Learning Preference Assessment is grounded within the testing of 3,151 individuals from the United States and Canada, leveraging a split-half Pearson correlation with a Spearman-Brown correction (Guglielmino, 1991). As such, the Learning Preference Assessment is reliable with a reliability coefficient of .94 and internal reliability estimates of test-retest reliability coefficients of .82 and .79 (Finestone, 1984; Wiley, 1981). Furthermore, the assessment reliability is standard, as many published studies on adult populations over 20 report similar reliability outcomes within a range of .72 to .96. Thus, while there are several criticisms and concerns of the assessment (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Field, 1989), most studies affirm the reliability and validity of the instrument (Delahaye & Smith, 1995; Finestone, 1984). Specifically, within the most recent and comprehensive review of the assessment, Delahaye and Choy (2001) argue that while one should remain cautious, the LPA or SDLRS can confidently provide an accurate measurement of readiness for self-directed learning.

Closely aligned to reliability, dependability explores the tracking of procedures and processing used to collect and interpret data. Potential threats to the reliability and dependability include subjectivity, which is inherent in qualitative based research as the data may be biased to match specific theory. As such, the researcher conducted an audit trail of evidence, which supplemented dependability by leveraging thorough and clear explanation on how the data were collected and analyzed, by ensuring that all data collected are available for other researchers to review, and by establishing inter-rater reliability by recruiting peers to code several assessment responses and semi-structured interview responses.

Transferability

Transferability is an important measure in any research methodology. As such, evidence aiding in transferability can be found throughout the study by leveraging rich

descriptions and detailed information on the study's context and background. In addition, while potential threats to transferability include a lack of a representative study population, which this study did not provide, evidence reinforcing the alignment between the study context and other contexts was examined. Nevertheless, it is primarily the responsibility of the reader to explore further implications of transferability when reflecting on the diverse elements of the research and their own experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Study Limitations

There are several internal and external limitations that have impacted the research study. Exploring internal limitations, Malaguzzi (1994) argues that the role of the researcher “never comes in an isolated way; you always come with pieces of the world attached to you” (p. 53). Reflexivity—the act of acknowledging that the researcher is part of the matrix of what is being researched (Banister, 2011)—is a fundamental part of qualitative research. As such, from a socio-cultural perspective, the process of reflexivity is an acknowledgement by the researcher that all findings are constructed and open to reconstruction (Banister, 2011). Thus, reflexivity in qualitative research adds trustworthiness because “we arrive at the closest we can get to an objective account of the phenomenon in question through an exploration of the ways in which the subjectivity of the researcher has structured the way it is defined in the first place” (Banister et al., 1994, p. 13).

Exploring external limitations, due to the lack of time and personal resources, all observations were self-reported, which inevitably neglects to aid in curbing biased observation-based measures. However, for this reason, the researcher leveraged triangulation to provide more than one source of data to examine the study's purpose. Lastly, due to the study's small sample size, bounded and situated nature, the study was

restricted from being generalizable. However, the purpose of the study was not to be generalized but to aid in adding understanding on the diverse consumer experience by providing a form of portraiture on the lives of 20 individuals and their experiences with purchases that misalign with their identity and values. Specifically, building on scholars such as Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), while each method outlined aids to capture the holistic aesthetic of the researcher as witness with their own deep source of connection and perspective to the topic and participants as multi-layered vibrant voices, their narratives are inherently placed inside a situational frame initially confined by the aligned or dissonant consumer experiences of the external audience. However, it could be argued that the narrative transcends many of its limitations through the purposeful blend of triangulation methods previously displayed and the use of thick individual context descriptions highlighted throughout Chapters IV and V.

Summary

This chapter presented an overview of the methodology used to highlight exploration of the lives of 20 individuals and their experiences with purchases that misalign with their identity and values. Leveraging an exploratory qualitative research design, three approaches were used to triangulate the data, which aided in reinforcing the design's trustworthiness. These approaches include the demographic profile survey, learning preference assessment, and semi-structured interviews. The research sample was comprised of 20 purposefully selected individuals who reside or work in New York, New York or Los Angeles, California. Collected data were referenced against the conceptual framework to obtain thematic patterns across the study. The aim of the study was to add an extra layer to consumption literature by exploring how individuals transform society and subsequently their own realities by becoming more autonomous thinkers that engage in negotiation with their own values, meanings, and purpose rather than uncritically

acting on those of others, which could not only benefit individuals but organizations seeking to know more about the evolving individual consumer and/or their own organizational purchasing behavior and its alignment with shared organizational values.

Chapter IV

DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

To highlight the importance of the individual experience, this chapter explores the individual characteristics of each participant to reinforce the nuanced nature of the interview narratives displayed in Chapter V. As such, in mending the gap within the consumer space, below each participant is highlighted by a diverse array of factors that influence their engagement practices within the consumer space.

Table 2. Demographic Profile Results and Study Sample Overview

Participant Number	Gender	Age	Work/Live	Ethnicity	Household Income	Highest Level of Education	Relationship Status
7	Female	25-34	NY	Caucasian	\$20,001-50,000	Masters (or equivalent)	Divorced
5	Female	25-34	NY	White	\$0-\$20,000	University/Bachelor's (or equivalent)	In a relationship
1	Male	25-34	NY	Japanese and Chinese	\$0-\$20,000	Masters (or equivalent)	Single
6	Male	35-44	NY	White/Caucasian	\$20,001-50,000	Masters (or equivalent)	In a relationship
4	Female	25-34	NY	Haitian American, Black	\$95,000 or more	Masters (or equivalent)	Single
15	Male	35-44	CA	Black African	\$95,000 or more	Masters (or equivalent)	Married
13	Male	25-34	NY	African American/Black	\$20,001-50,000	Masters (or equivalent)	Single
12	Female	35-44	NY	Latina	\$0-\$20,000	Masters (or equivalent)	Single
3	Male	25-34	NY	Chicanx/ Latinx	\$75,001 to \$95,000	Masters (or equivalent)	Single

Table 2 (continued)

Participant Number	Gender	Age	Work/Live	Ethnicity	Household Income	Highest Level of Education	Relationship Status
14	Female	25-34	CA	Mixed	\$0-\$20,000	University/Bachelor's (or equivalent)	Single
10	Female	25-34	LA	Asian	\$50,001 to \$75,000	University/Bachelor's (or equivalent)	Single
2	Female	18-25	NY	Asian (Chinese)	\$95,000 or more	Doctorate (or equivalent)	Single
8	Female	45-54	NY	European/American	\$95,000 or more	Post Graduate (or equivalent)	Married
9	Female	18-25	NY	White	\$0-\$20,000	University/Bachelor's (or equivalent)	In a relationship
18	Male	35-44	NY	Latino	\$50,001 to \$75,000	Post Graduate (or equivalent)	Single
11	Male	25-34	NY	Black/Mixed	\$50,001 to \$75,000	University/Bachelor's (or equivalent)	Single
16	Male	25-34	CA	Hispanic/Latino	\$50,001 to \$75,000	University/Bachelor's (or equivalent)	In a relationship
17	Male	35-44	CA	African-American	\$95,000 or more	Masters (or equivalent)	Married
19	Female	25-34	NY	Indian	\$50,001 to \$75,000	Masters (or equivalent)	Single
20	Male	18-25	NY	Indian	\$95,000 or more	University/Bachelor's (or equivalent)	Single

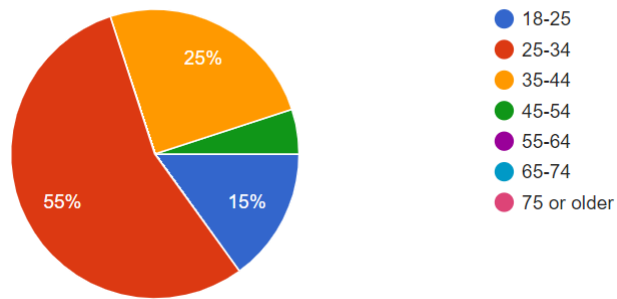


Figure 2. Participants' Ages

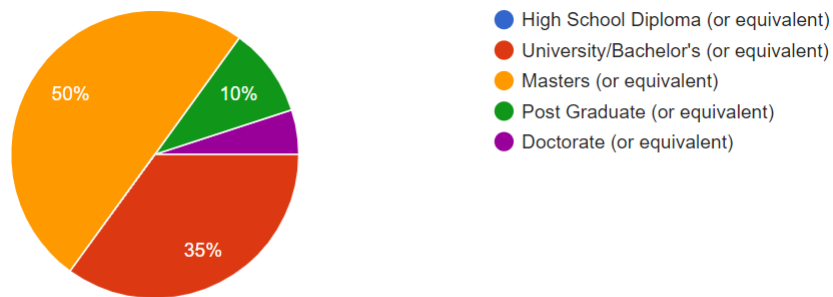


Figure 3. Participants' Education Levels

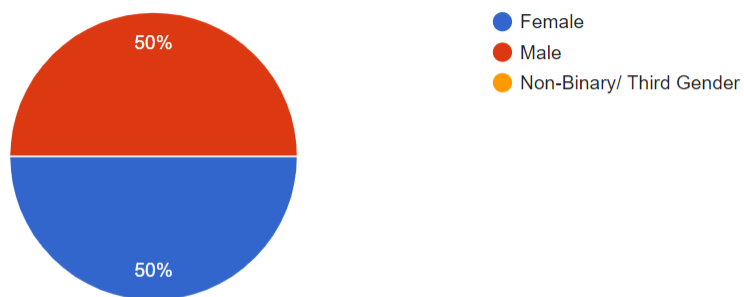


Figure 4. Participants' Gender

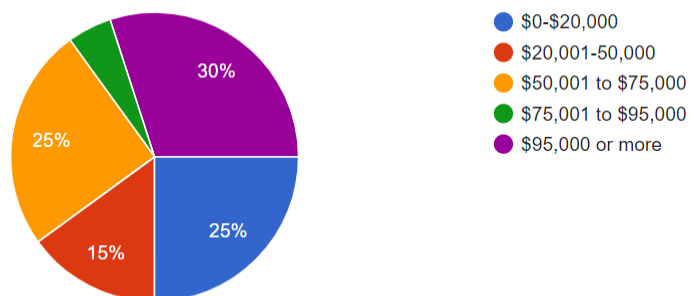


Figure 5. Participants' Yearly Income

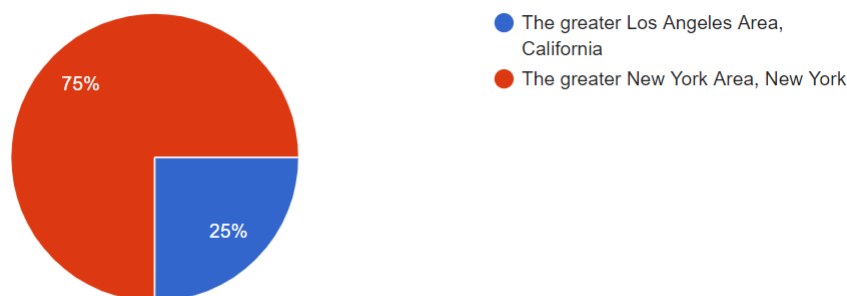


Figure 6. Participants' Locations

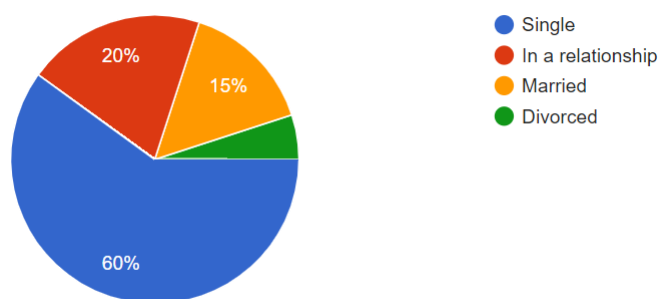


Figure 7. Participants' Relationship Status

Interpreting the SDLRS Scores

Building on Dr. Lucy Guglielmino, the interpretation of the SDLRS or LPA scores can be identified through defining the SDLRS scores as a measure of individuals' current

level of Self-Directed Learning Readiness. Guglielmino outlines SDLRS scores between 58 and 201 as below average, scores between 202 and 226 as average, and scores between 227 and 290 are considered above average. Table 3 displays the SDLRS/LPA score categories, and Figure 8 displays an illustration of the SDLRS spectrum between low and high scores, which can be found on Dr. Gulielmino's website at <http://www.lpasdlrs.com>.

Table 3. SDLRS Score Categories

SDLRS/LPA Scores	Readiness for Self-Directed Learning
58-201	Below Average
202-226	Average
227-290	Above Average

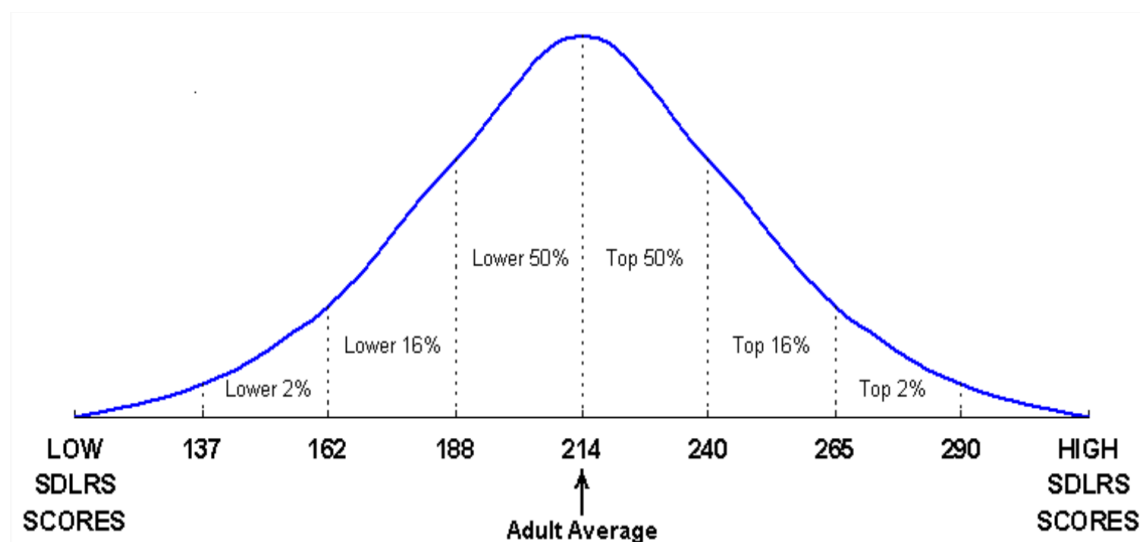


Figure 8. SDLRS-A Low, Average, and High Scores

As displayed in Figure 8, the mean or average SDLRS-A score for adults completing the questionnaire is 214, with an expected standard deviation of 25.59. As a measurement of an individual's current level of readiness for self-directed learning, Guglielmino (2015) argues that prior research suggests several patterns among

individuals that display tendencies toward the development of high self-directed learning skills. These include:

1. A high degree of problem-solving ability
2. A high degree of creativity
3. A high degree of change

Interpreting participants' SDLRS scores, there are pre-established clusters of preference grounded in the SDLRS scores. For example, Guglielmino (2015) argues that while participants with high SDLRS scores are generally drawn to learning opportunities that create space for individuals to determine their learning needs and outline a plan for execution, high SDLRS scorers may elect to opt into a structured learning environment such as formal workshops or courses, or even incorporate these structured elements into their learning goals and plan. In addition, participants with average SDLRS scores may shy away from managing their entire learning process, even though research has shown that they are more prone to succeed in individualized situations. Furthermore, Guglielmino's research also displays that below average SDLRS scorers often seek highly structured learning opportunities. However, researchers like Guglielmino argue that levels of self-directed learning readiness can be increased through purposeful interventions such as education and active practice.

SDLRS Scores and Descriptive Statistics for Study Participants

Building on the previous definitions of above average, average, and below average scores on the SDLRS, the findings obtained from the assessment were divided into their representative categories as highlighted in Table 4 below. In addition, the SDLRS group and individual statistic scores are outlined below in Table 5 and Table 6. The raw data set from the SDLRS-A assessment can also be found in Appendix J.

Table 4. SDLRS Categories and Study Participants' Scores

Self-Directed Learning Readiness	SDLRS-A Scores (Raw)	Number in Range	Percentage of Sample
Above Average	227-290	16	80%
Average	202-226	4	20%
Below Average	58-201	0	0%

Table 5. Study Participants' Group Statistics

SDLRS Group Statistics Scores	
Mean	241.8
Variance	288.48
Standard Deviation	16.98
Standard Error	3.8
Skewness	-0.93
Kurtosis	0.1
Minimum	202
Maximum	264
Range	62
Number of Complete Assessments	20

Table 6. Individual SDLRS Scores and Additional Demographic Data

ID	Gender	Age	Country	Education	Occupation	Percentile	Score
Participant 7	Female	25-35	United States of America	Master's degree	Educator-Teacher-Adult education	93%	255
Participant 4	Female	25-35	United States of America	Master's degree	Business-Mid level manager	95%	259
Participant 1	Male	25-35	United States of America	Master's degree	Educator-Administrator-4 year college	69%	229
Participant 6	Male	36-45	United States of America	Master's degree	Educator-Teacher-High school	88%	248
Participant 13	Male	25-35	United States of America	Master's degree	Educator-Teacher-College	92%	253
Participant 3	Male	25-35	United States of America	Master's degree	Government-Local-Top level manager	94%	258
Participant 15	Male	36-45	United States of America	Master's degree	Business-Mid level manager	74%	233

Table 6 (continued)

ID	Gender	Age	Country	Education	Occupation	Percentile	Score
Participant 5	Female	25-35	United States of America	Bachelor`s degree	Student-Graduate school-Education	81%	240
Participant 10	Female	25-35	United States of America	Bachelor`s degree	Business-Non-manager	88%	247
Participant 12	Female	36-45	United States of America	Master`s degree	Educator-Teacher-Graduate school	91%	251
Participant 14	Female	25-35	United States of America	Bachelor`s degree	Business-Non-manager	63%	225
Participant 2	Female	Under 25	United States of America	Master`s degree	Student-Graduate school-Education	88%	247
Participant 9	Female	Under 25	United States of America	Bachelor`s degree	Student-Graduate school-Other	50%	215
Participant 18	Male	25-35	United States of America	Master`s degree	Educator-Teacher-Adult education	87%	245
Participant 11	Male	25-35	United States of America	Bachelor`s degree	Business-Non-manager	97%	264
Participant 16	Male	25-35	United States of America	Bachelor`s degree	Government-Local-Non-manager	27%	202
Participant 8	Female	46-55	United States of America	Master`s degree	Educator-Teacher-Adult education	92%	253
Participant 17	Male	36-45	United States of America	Master`s degree	Business-Mid level manager	50%	215
Participant 19	Female	25-35	United States of America	Master`s degree	Business-Mid level manager	94%	258
Participant 20	Male	Under 25	United States of America	Bachelor`s degree	Student	81%	239

Chapter V

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore the lives of 20 individuals and their experiences with purchases that misalign with their identity and values. To carry out the purpose, this study explored three research questions:

1. What patterns of self-directed learning can be identified throughout individual consumer practices?
2. What factors do participants perceive facilitate and/or impede their ability to make purchases that are consistent with their identity and values?
3. How do participants learn to reconcile the dichotomy emanating from purchasing products that are misaligned with their identity and values?

This chapter highlights six emergent findings from the data accumulated over a six-month period and shaped by the above three research questions. As noted in Chapter III, all findings are reinforced by an in-depth literature review. Furthermore, all findings were identified based on NVivo numeric output leveraging thematic codes as outlined in Appendix K.

Each research question is addressed through the use of several research methods. The first question is answered by leveraging the demographic profile survey results, the initial base score of the self-directed learning readiness scale, and qualitative semi-structured interview findings categorized into several emergent themes. The second

research question is answered using a combination of the demographic profile survey results and several progressing themes from the qualitative data. The third and final research question is answered by highlighting several themes within the qualitative data. As such, findings obtained from addressing the research questions were used to explore and explain consumer disjuncture through the lens of reflecting on the lives of 20 individuals and their evolving experiences.

Overview of Findings

Honoring a purposeful comprehensive dissection of the foundations and individual intricacies of the above findings, each research question is highlighted below with core data leveraged to develop the study's six major findings. Furthermore, due to the study's focus on the individual experience, traditionally removed outlier narratives are highlighted to depict the array of coping mechanisms leveraged when engaging with misaligned experiences in a variety of consumer spaces. Thus, by providing an immersive opportunity of converging findings, as outlined in Table 7, a more holistic and authentic depiction of individual agency and identity-based consumption is achieved.

Table 7. Overview of Exploratory Study Findings

Research Questions	Research Question #1: What patterns of self-directed learning can be identified throughout individual consumer practices?	Research Question #2: What factors do participants perceive facilitate and/or impede their ability to make purchases that are consistent with their identity and values?	Research Question #3: How do participants learn to reconcile the dichotomy emanating from purchasing products that are misaligned with their identity and values?
Findings	1. Participants (80%) take initiative within their consumer experience by using tactics such as researching, comparing and planning viable options and next steps.	2. Participants (100%) leverage a variety of bridges which further the progression of aligned consumer behavior. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cyclical practice of critical questioning and reflection routines 	3. Participants (100%) identified a series of learned coping mechanisms which aid in addressing the dichotomy within the process of purchasing products that are misaligned with their identity and values.

Table 7 (continued)

Findings (cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-directed researching of consumer reviews and product details • Self-directed comparing and contrasting of product use and journey to fulfill designated needs • Self-directed planning and outlining of lists detailing options and best matched ideals <p>4. Participants (90%) view the obtainment of education as a form of self-accountability that unlocks accessibility and consumer mobility and is driven and sustained by varying forms of self-determination.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-directed initiative to obtain ongoing formal and or informal education as an outlet for development toward increased accessibility and capital mobility • Consumerism as self-directed internal and external expression of accountability for actions • Self-directed navigation of technology to achieve consumer goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product transparency • Materials as evolving resource <p>5. Participants (100%) feel inhibited by a variety of barriers that distance their capacity to achieve aligned consumer practices.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiences of desire dilemmas: perpetuated cycles of systemic failures demeaning permeated promises of American capitalism • Experiences of distance dilemmas: reoccurring experiences of denied accessibility to aligned consumer behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leveraging active communication with self and others • Outlining a plan that can be revised and tracked • Using others as models of behavior
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Table 7 (continued)

Findings (cont.)	<p>6. Participants (95%) place value on actively establishing and maintaining accountability networks when engaging in the consumer space to increase self-regulation capacities and achieve consumer-based goals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-regulation leveraged to develop resources and increase consumer capacity • Self-initiated use of internal and external accountability networks which prompt reflection and shifting actions 		
Examples	<p>R1.1: Researching- Participant 16: “lessons I’ve learned is really research the products that you’re buying. I think that’s the big one. For another two, maybe just looking-- well, I think it all ties into research. But I think that’s really the one big rule that I stick to. Just really, really researching everything.”</p>	<p>R2.2: Routines of Critical Questions and Reflection- Participant 10: “what you buy is what you stand for, and also, what you purchase is going towards funding that company. And if you’re totally against what that company stands for, then you’re not going to contribute money to them, are you?”</p>	<p>R3.3: Communication with Self/ Other- Participant 15: “there are some things I am very sure of and I know what I am going for. And some of them just does not need any level of communication with other people to find out more information or anything. And so for those that I need information on or I need validation or verification on, I communicate.”</p> <p>R3:3: Planning- Participant 12: “Well, certainly, I prepare. So going along with the research, asking questions, looking at reviews online, asking people in person, sometimes there’s YouTube videos about how products work.”</p>

Table 7 (continued)

<p>Examples (cont.)</p>	<p>R1.1: Comparing and Contrasting- Participant 18: "I have also been very mindful of, "What's the difference between this 4K TV and the new one that just came out?... I've had my iPhone for the last two years, and they just came out with the new one. And deep down, I know I really want a new iPhone because I just want to be super hip and all of that fun stuff, but it's really not worth it, because that's \$1,000 I could spend elsewhere"</p> <p>R1.1: Planning- Participant 11: "I don't peruse. I know what I want when I'm going in...I know exactly what I want when I go in. I make a plan and I want to get in, get out."</p> <p>R1.4: Formal/Informal Education- Participant 15: "for the purposes of my use of formal and informal, formal will mean ascribing myself to a particular rule of authority whether it is a school, whether it is a course. And yes, I've been to some of those, and part of the teachings I received there have come to reinforce what I had already received within my own family and communal structure outside of that formal school"</p>	<p>R2.2: Transparency- Participant 14: "If I thought it was made unethically would it still be quality? I think things made unethically could still be good quality, but I would never buy them as it's not something I would consider. If I knew it was made unethically it would not be something I would buy based on my definition of quality. I think quality includes the ways things are made and if it's made unethically, I can't buy that."</p> <p>R2.2: Materials as Resource- Participant 18: "I'd rather just pay the extra 20, 50 bucks and have a piece of mind that in case something happens, the company comes back, and they fix it."</p> <p>R2.5: Desire Dilemmas- Participant 15: "I walk into the shop, then I see the value I will be getting for that product options that are available compared to the value I thought I will be getting. Sometimes I change my mind."</p> <p>R2.5: Distance Dilemmas- Participant 2: "I have communicated with some friends from college who are from lower socioeconomic statuses than I am, and they say they've never had their own pocket money until they got financial aid for college."</p>	<p>R3:3: Modeled Behaviors- Participant 13: "I recognize that habits from those around me rub off on me very easily."</p>
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Table 7 (continued)

<p>Examples (cont.)</p>	<p>R1.4: Self-Accountability-Participant 12: “I’m the person ultimately that’s spending my money, so [laughter] I have a high degree of responsibility in placing that money in good hands where I know it’s going to affect the community positively and, I can get a value from that product or service.. ultimately people will be making decisions about my community based on how I affect it. So, I have to spend it wisely.”</p> <p>R1.4: Technology-Participant 3: “I’ll probably be the first to kind of call those things out, or at least just try to say, “Hey. Yeah, straws are a problem, but if you’re a person with a physical disability, that’s also an accessibility issue.” And so we should think about that before we just do a wholesale ban on something without talking to certain communities.”</p> <p>R1.6: Self-Regulation-Participant 14: “as I started going to the mall, or other places to shop I developed a value for my money and I started teaching myself practices based on my own values. Like what do I value and what do I like to do?”</p> <p>R1.6: Accountability Networks-Participant 1: “it’s a mutual thing. We talk about what we spend our money - my friends, co-workers, we often talk about what we spend our money on.”</p>		
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Research Question #1

1. *What patterns of self-directed learning can be identified throughout individual consumer practices?*

The sample consisted of 20 individuals who each completed the Demographic Profile Survey and Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale. To provide transparent insight into the first research question, the Demographic Profile Survey and Learning Preference Assessment (LPA), also known as the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale (SDLRS), were used to establish a baseline of the study sample. The Demographic Profile Survey was used to obtain vital characteristics representative of each study participant's individual context. These results are outlined in Chapter IV, Table 2. In addition, initial interview Likert style prompts were captured as displayed in Appendix L to illustrate a multi-layered approach to the individual consumer dynamics displayed throughout this chapter.

Semi-Structured Interview Findings Addressing Research Question 1

Building on the previous Demographic Profile and SDLRS results, a core layer of qualitative data obtained through the use of semi-structure interviews was added to address the initial research question:

1. *What patterns of self-directed learning can be identified throughout individual consumer practices?*

In doing so, three primary findings surrounding self-directed learning emerged throughout interviews with participants possessing average to above average baseline scores for self-directed learning readiness. These three findings included:

1. Participants (80%) take initiative within their consumer experience by using tactics such as researching, comparing, and planning viable options and next steps.
2. Participants (90%) view the obtainment of education as a form of self-accountability that unlocks accessibility and consumer mobility and is driven and sustained by varying forms of self-determination.
3. Participants (95%) place value on actively establishing and maintaining accountability networks when engaging in the consumer space to increase self-regulation capacities and achieve consumer-based goals.

Examination of Findings: Research Question 1—Finding #1

Finding #1—Participants (80%) take initiative within their consumer experience by researching, comparing and planning viable options and next steps.

Prior to most shopping engagements, participants routinely engaged in acts such as creating lists, communicating with their community, or reading and/or viewing online reviews of items they deemed worthy of their time, energy, and money. Participant 3 provides an example of their research process by highlighting vital steps of interaction including alignment with ideal product goals and values grounded in overt considerations of individual ethnicity when engaging within the consumer space. In addition, Participant 3 elaborated on the variety of cued actions prompted by specific types of purchases that dictate diverse decision-making processes:

I mean I guess it depends on the purchases, but I mean I think I primarily will just use the wonderful internet to explore what is the best type of use of my funds, what is the best company to use. I guess, for an example, I decided to do like an ancestry DNA thing. And so, part of my decision-making was I'm at Latinx person, and so I was like, well, which of these—most of these are designed basically for European people with European heritage, so they can kind of figure out their whiteness. And so, my inquiry was which is the best for Latinx folks to use, who have native heritage. Part of the decision-making was basically choosing one of the ancestry services that specifically had a larger database of Native American heritage and ...

there were consumer reviews and what not on which were the best. And so, I followed those reviews and did a little bit of research, using basically just Google and stuff.

In addition, building on the importance of preparation engagement when fulfilling needs and the integration of heightened consciousness of self, Participant 11 stated:

I don't peruse. I know what I want when I'm going in ... I know exactly what I want when I go in. I make a plan and I want to get in, get out.... I guess I have anxiety, so I am constantly nervous that I'm spending too much time on something ... I feel like it's taking too long, and so I like to use my time in a way that allows me to know what I need.

Participants generally displayed initiative by outlining realistic limitations such as finances and opportunities to achieve desired goals in their consumer experience. For example, Participant 20 stated, "I'm going to spend copious amounts of money that I don't need to because I'm kind of an impulse buyer. So, having a set plan aids me in purchasing better." Furthermore, participants displayed self-starting attributes, such as an intrinsic readiness and ability to initiate, which seemed driven from previously learned routines for self-accountability and time efficiency. Furthermore, earlier narratives considering the ebb and flow of triggered actions seem to be a reoccurring theme. For example, based on personal experience, Participant 12 advised consumers to:

develop the budget that you need for yourself. Find out what discretionary funds you have and then do some research, and try to make the best decisions that you can with your discretionary funds to the best of your ability to develop a balance of what you need, what your family needs, and how much money you have. How far is the store? Can I make multiple purchases in one store? Am I going to have to make several trips? Just try to gather as much information as you can with the time that you have. Sometimes you have to make a split-second decision and you don't really have time to think about the social impact or something ... and sometimes you need more time than that. It just really depends on what you're buying and how much time and money you have, so just try to make the best decision with the timeline you have, with the funds you have, and of course, considering yourself and your family's needs.

Examination of Findings: Research Question 1—Finding #2

Finding #2: Participants (90%) view the obtainment of an education and information as a form of self-accountability that unlocks accessibility and consumer mobility and is driven and sustained by varying forms of self-determination.

Participants believed that the obtainment of an education and information is of the utmost importance to their development of critical thinking and accessibility to increasing means of social, cultural, and financial capital needed to successfully engage in the consumer space and life. For example, Participant 13 divulged, “I recognize the great disparity in the world and how my educational resources and worldviews have the ability to make a positive impact. So, I want to execute that—I want to activate those abilities and do so.” Participant 12 added:

I think we need to talk about consumerism and how money works and how the economy works more, starting from even simple concepts in school like how interest works, how to file a tax form, how to open a bank account, how to save money. Those are some sample topics that could be discussed in school. And just offer a spiraling curriculum that begins with those types of simple concepts and moves through, just as you don’t learn English in a day. We have to take English from the time we’re in kinder all the way through high school and even into university, even though we speak English every day. Well, we spend money every day [laughter], and we’ll spend money the rest of our lives. So, I think it’s important to have an education on that that’s free and available and not so reserved only for certain people, or just a part of conversations for those people who have the information, but are not willing to share it publicly or widely with others.

However, some participants argued that education extends beyond traditionally formalized and structured lenses into informal and experiential learning patterns obtained and ingrained over time through the individuals evolving community of practice and the use of tactics prompted by the consumer environment. Participant 2 highlighted their own informal learning process grounded in context by stating:

I think usually if I go shopping alone, I go with something in mind. I kind of know I want to get something and, yeah, I don’t go with a list. I might make a mental note. Unless it’s a really long list of materials that I need to get for a project, then yes, I would go with a list. And then I would have searched up where to find those materials. But in general, say, if it’s for

food or groceries, I'll just go there and see what I like to get. Tell myself, I need to get two veggies, one meat, noodles or something like that, and then I'll get some range of that. Yeah. So, in terms of that preparation, yeah. But I don't know, I've been to some places that you can bargain so I would check up, I would do research on how much to bargain so that I'm not offending the person who's selling it also. Say, if you're a tourist going to a new city and you know that particular city has markets where you can bargain and if they know that you're a tourist, they'll try to sell it to you 10 times the actual cost. So, you know how to bargain to 10 times below what their first price is.

In addition, participants displayed heightened awareness of the conscious and unconscious socialization of consumer practices that influence their consumer behavior and routines on both micro and macro levels. These triggers highlight or conversely suppress patterns of consumer behavior that may be misaligned from self-imposed goals and pre-outlined pathways toward success. For example, leveraging routine external communication practices with their community, Participant 1 mentioned:

I talk a lot with my friends and co-workers. I also talk with my parents pretty frequently, at least twice a week. And we talk about my budget and how I've been spending my money. So that's nice just to say it out loud and hear what I'm spending my money on.... A lot of my friends, I think, are a lot more knowledgeable than I am, especially because I think this has been a recent trend. I mean, in my mind, because I lived abroad for a few years, so I didn't really think about this as much. Or maybe these are the friends I've now come into contact with. They're being more conscious about what items they're purchasing, and so that's making me more aware.

Participant 11 added to the narrative by highlighting acts of internal communication:

I don't like the concept of buying something just to buy something. And then also I don't like feeling like I bought something that I didn't actually want. Going in and knowing that I wanted this and then being like, "Oh, that feels—" And then you leave, and I feel like I accomplished something rather than it being a long process. I think, usually if you peruse there it takes more time, and you're not necessarily accomplishing a goal, I guess. I guess I have this internal thing about constantly needing to accomplish something. That's a realization just now. But there you go. That was my aha moment.

Furthermore, participants leverage the active use of technology-based tools to track and further their learning on best practices representative of both where they once were in the consumer space, where they are now as a consumer, and where they would like to be in the future. Participant 7 highlighted this paradigm by stating:

When I was younger, there was an app that I used to use all the time when I did more shopping that would kind of rate each store and their human rights record and their environmental record. I can't remember the name of it, but I kind of internalized what stores were "good" and which were "bad." But also there are websites too that you can go and check the ethical report card of a company. Just talking to others, paying attention to the news, just using critical thinking skills.

Participant 11 further elaborated on the influence of using technology in consumerism by stating:

I think consumer behavior has been, whether it's consuming certain media or whether it's consuming certain products, I feel like with Instagram and Twitter, I think people constantly talk about that kind of stuff. Again, I answer lots of questions sometimes, but I think that a lot of people interact with others in a way that expresses their consumer behavior quite often, if not daily. If not multiple times daily.

Participant 20 added to diverse ways to use technology by elaborating:

Mostly because using my bank feature on my app, I can tell where I've been spending, where I've been tracking, where all my, I guess, consumerism is going. And that way, I can budget myself more proper.... I always use the consumer feedback report and stuff like that. So, depending on that, I can better aid myself with purchasing other products or making sure the product that I bought is proper.

Participant 13 also added to the shared and diverse narrative on technology integration and limits by stating:

I'm really big on technology. I love having technology that will enhance my life. But most recently, I wanted a new MacBook Pro computer because I've had my most recent MacBook Pro for six and a half years. And in December, my MacBook Pro will be seven years old. So, I have a cart now on the Apple Store online that has the computer that I have designed for myself. And while I could make the purchase, I've decided not to. I've just left it in the cart because I've come to recognize that, as much as I want a shiny new MacBook Pro, the seven-year-old MacBook Pro continues to serve me very well because of my intentionality that I put into designing it seven years ago. Seven years ago, I had the foresight to know that my computer needed a 512-gigabyte solid state drive with the maximum amount of ram, 16 gigabytes--which is only now barely becoming the standard on computers-- and other features of the computer which makes my seven-year-old MacBook Pro still work on par with the basic versions of the new ones that are coming out today. So, I want a new computer because I feel like my computer's becoming, by the State of California, obsolete. Apple will no

longer support it after December, but it's still serving me very well. And I have really wonderful back up hard drives of my data, so if my computer actually suddenly dies, nothing will ever be lost. So, with that in mind, I've decided not to make the purchase. I've second-guessed it, and I'm going to keep my computer for as long as it continues to serve me, especially as a student. The cost of living in New York City is really high. And the cost of the computer that I want to purchase is probably about four month's rent. And when I get a computer, I get them to last, and I'm just like, well, who knows what family emergency will come up? Or what if I have to go to five funerals again on the other side of the country. The computer is not going to help me to get these things that I truly need. So, I'm just going to leave that computer in the basket and wait for new technology to come out as the years come on and wait for my current computer to die almost with a secret anticipation.

Examination of Findings: Research Question 1—Finding #3

Finding #3: Participants (95%) place value on establishing and maintaining accountability networks when engaging in the consumer space to increase self-regulation capacities and achieve consumer-based goals.

Participants (95%) explicitly expressed a series of degrees by which they are influenced by external factors when considering product consumption. Whether through themselves, family, friends, or members in a participant's community, each link serves as an impactful connection to new learning and self-driven sustainment of values in action. Through the exposure of experiences, participants engage in a form of micro and macro reflection, which cultivates a culminating norm of expectations of the consumer experience, the role and perceived capacity of self as consumer. Furthermore, over time participants seem to develop a sense of strategic intuition that serves as an internal compass for behavior in the evolving consumer space. This can be highlighted by Participant 5's complex journey to find success and overcome barriers as a consumer leveraging external learning opportunities within their community and environment:

I do try to stay motivated to push myself to be better.... I try to receive information from multiple sources and try to be the best, grounded, knowledge-wise that I can be. But I do think that community also plays a big factor based on the people that we surround ourselves with that are going to help us to achieve some of that information, as well as good influences

around us who may be able to present new perspectives or new sources of information that we wouldn't have otherwise had.... I think that with the community I am surrounded by, I am placed with a lot of positive influence to give back and try to make our environments better. And I try to do that when I am able and how I can. I do try to constantly remind myself to be better and learn about new issues and perspectives that I wasn't already familiar with. And I do try to participate and surround myself in activities that I feel will contribute to my community environment in a positive way. I think I definitely run into times where I may have used a company and then found out, "Oh, that company isn't being very environmentally responsible" or that, "that company has problems with workers or unions." And I just didn't know before. And that is pretty uncomfortable to be in that situation, but also to face that you were a part of contributing to that. And I think that when you sit in that discomfort and realize that, all you can try to do is be better, and not use that company or group from thereon and try to find a better alternative instead, and to also let others know what you have learned.

Participant 12 further elaborated on a common attribute of stress that stemmed from unmet needs for transparency and considerations of limited resources by adding:

It seems in my experience, most people have been honest about the information I get... However, I have to sometimes consider the source. So [laughter] sometimes if I know that—for example, if I'm speaking to a salesperson, sometimes they are there to make the sale and not to give me the best information. So, I can't always take them at their word because ultimately, they don't care about my purchasing [laughter], my needs, and they just want me to purchase. So, I weigh things as I get them, and try to ask as many people as I can. Again, it all depends on how much time I have and what I'm purchasing.... Just depending on how much money you have to spend-- I think most people in the United States don't have that much money to spend. There's the tale that's often said that you're only one ambulance ride away from your life changing, one illness away, one layoff from work away. So, in saying that and not having that job security and having to think about the things that you have to buy versus the things that you wish you could buy, and trying to understand your income, and if you should have any discretionary funds, it becomes fairly stressful thinking about just being a consumer.

Participant 12 added to this narrative by highlighting the intersection between commodities and identity and its ultimate influence on consumer behavior:

There are people who buy brand names because they're trying to keep up with the Joneses. And then there are others that stick to brand names because they do turn out quality, and they are long-time consumers of that brand, let's say, like electronics or automobile, and they put their trust in those things. I've purchased Toyota vehicles, although they're in Texas right

now ... and they're both still running without a problem. They're not breaking down every week or anything [laughter]. Those are quality cars. At the same time, it's not like a Lamborghini though [laughter], but I know that Toyota is a very respected maker of cars. But for me—more important is that they're very reliable. I needed a car that I could feel safe in.

Participant 13 added to this by highlighting the importance of habits and community in sustaining behaviors and meeting larger social goals by stating:

I recognize that habits from those around me rub off on me very easily. I have one roommate. We went to college together. We share similar friends and values, but when he purchases something for the refrigerator and I open the refrigerator door and look at it, I eventually want to try it or to have it and will take a piece of it, or even go out and purchase it myself. And that's just like—so I think that's just one personal anecdote about how the habits of those in my community and immediate environment really play a role in the decisions that I make as a person. So, it's important that I surround myself with people who have such values, have good values that I want to have as well.... There're different levels of community for me. So, there's my immediate community, my family, friends, church, colleagues at the university and in my research groups. And then there's the broader community such as society at large and different constituents of society. So, I've been encouraged by my family and by—or to—of the different scholarships and opportunities I have received as an underrepresented person who comes from a rather financially strained and disenfranchised community, that I should take my learnings and faculties and apply them towards social good and improving the lives of those who do not have similar opportunities. I therefore am encouraged to make positive contributions to my community.

Based on above samples of findings, it can be argued that individuals who score within the average to above average range on the self-directed readiness scale take initiative within their consumer experience by engaging in acts of research, active comparison, and strategic planning. They view education in a variety of ways and believe it is an integral variable in personal obtainment of goals, such as increased accessibility and fluid consumer mobility. Furthermore, they hold a deep value on the development and maintenance of knowledgeable accountability networks for self-regulation purposes, which aid in best practice sharing and the obtainment of decisional context and content. Taking a deeper dive into best practice, the second research question shifts the focus off of an individual's self-directed attitudes and attributes to the individual's experience with

the facilitation and/or impediment of a capacity for aligning consumer practices with one's values and identity.

Research Question #2

2. *What factors do participants perceive facilitate and/or impede their ability to make purchases that are consistent with their identity and values?*

Leveraging demographic profiles and participant interviews, several findings emerged that display an authentic dichotomous narrative of the ebb and flow found within the consumer experience. This dichotomy depicts the ongoing process of the consumer state in which participants seek out ways in which to achieve the most out of their consumption experience. As such, the following narrative highlights two dominant findings within the research:

1. Participants (100%) leverage a variety of bridges that further the progression of aligned consumer behavior.
2. Participants (100%) feel inhibited by a variety of barriers that distance their capacity to achieve aligned consumer practices.

Examination of Findings: Research Question 2—Finding #1

Finding #1: Participants (100%) leverage a variety of bridges which further the progression of aligned consumer behavior.

The findings suggest that individuals engage with achieving aligned consumer behavior through a variety of tactics including but not limited to the cyclical practice of critical questioning and reflection, demands for product transparency and the use of materials as resource to sustain beneficial routines. Participant 16 displayed a personal process of positive development as an aligned consumer when stating:

Initially, I would just buy whatever was the first thing that came up in a search, whether it was looking through the store or just looking stuff up

online. Whatever kind of matched what I needed, I would just buy it. Over time, especially with having to take a budget into account or looking for a very specific item, I started researching more and more, looking up different products. And, over time, that just led to a routine of looking up different items that might serve the same purpose. Seeing which one would suit my needs for that specific purchase and just following through. So, I think it was just trial and error for the most part.

Participant 18 added to this by stating a common narrative of perceived failure as a bridge to successful routines and learning turned to action:

Full transparency, here, I had to file for bankruptcy, and a lot of it had to do with things that I did when I was young and dumb. I was paying for the issues of getting that credit card when I was like 18, and eventually, struggling to pay it back. Or even student loans and stuff like that. So now, in my adulthood, the older I have gotten, I'm very much more diligent in making sure that if I make this purchase or if I spend this money, that I've done the research. I.e., for example, right now, I'm looking for an area rug in my apartment, and this has been a three-week process. I keep thinking, "Okay. It goes beyond just the initial purchase." I'm like, "Okay. If I get tired of this color, what am I going to do with it? Am I going to regret spending 60 bucks on something that I might not want six months from now?" So I'm very attuned to doing research, and listening to my inner voice, and trying to play adviser. I mean, I still go back and I'll talk to my mom or my dad about it, and be like, "I really want to maybe invest in this. What do you think?" And I get feedback from other people around me before I really jump in.

Specifically, participants seem to leverage critical questioning and reflection as a means to isolate and deconstruct influential variables within both their own experience and the life cycle experience of the product. Through a purposeful navigation of influential variables such as pricing, time and accessibility, participants engage in micro-shifts resembling the process of completing a puzzle where an individual inspects each piece until a series of matches can be obtained and replicated. Thus, using several materials as resource such as online reviews and creative forms of engagement such as bartering, participants embark on a process of prioritization of motivations and drivers which are grounded in innate needs such as trust and desires to meet diverse demands within their everyday lives. However, the findings also suggest there are several barriers simultaneously at play that influence the consumer experience.

Examination of Findings: Research Question 2—Finding #2

Finding #2: Participants (100%) feel inhibited by a variety of barriers that distance their capacity to achieve aligned consumer practices.

The findings portray several barriers to aligned consumer practices. These barriers can be attributed to two thematic occurrences. The first are desire dilemmas and the second are distance dilemmas. Participants identify desire dilemmas as perpetuated cycles of failure pertaining to systemized barriers and power dynamics which make it difficult for consumers to believe in the permeated promise of American capitalism. Specifically, cycles of failure address reoccurring experiences where consumers were denied accessibility to aligned products due to a series of barriers. These barriers include but are not limited to previously highlighted demographic barriers such as limited income or location, restricted product availability and incompatible cost analysis between the product market value and individual value standards. Participant 11 elaborated on perverse social value standards, ethics and external pressure by stating:

I'll start with society because I think that's easier for me. America has a very large focus on buying material things. Buy and consuming. We consume a lot as a society and we have a pressure to consume as a way to show how smart or how capable or how hard we work. I think that's one of the biggest parts is saying how hard you work. And connecting the Puritan ethic with how much money you have and therefore, how many things you have. And so, I think it's fairly stressful because of that. External pressure on the general community—On US citizens and people who live here because of that pressure and that history that's existed for quite some time. I think personally, I spend—It is a stressful thing, for me, sometimes to think about. Social pressure is real. Socialization is real.. and therefore, it's extremely hard to be a consumer. Especially a conscious consumer. Especially a conscious consumer in a way—When there isn't that encouragement. When instead there is discouragement of that behavior. That [being a conscious consumer is] somehow ridiculous or not important or ridiculous or not important. We as humans need that encouragement or else it's even more difficult to be socially conscious consumers.

When faced with repetitive failure, participants identified a growing distance between the socialized status quo and individualized markers of desired consumer behavior. These phenomena can be construed as distance dilemmas. As such, even

though participants display desires to purchase items that align with their identity and values, barriers within their reality perpetuate the norming of a hit or miss experience where individualized ideals are placed on moving targets within the consumer space. This can be displayed in Participant 9's statement:

I think generally when I'm shopping—I know some people can go shopping just for the sake of going shopping, but for me, it's less of a fun activity and more a 'I need to get X product,' so it's a little bit less of a fun pastime and more of a chore. And then, some of it is about just that—having very particular things to find—but a lot of it is just that there are a lot of options to consider, but they don't always line up with what you want. If there's a product, and I need it to have four qualities, then, I'm sure there are going to be 10 different options and they'll all have some different combination of qualities, but none will have the exact four that I want. I just think it's a very overwhelming process, and somehow, there never ends up being the right thing.

Participant 4 added to the shared narrative of mindfulness of resources by stating:

I try to be aware of where I'm putting my money and support businesses I believe strongly in and I think sometimes it really makes a difference pausing [inaudible] and then think about where I'm spending my money, but I will say that other times I'm just like, okay, well, I don't really know that it's going to make a difference—how do I say this? Sometimes I need it quickly and done efficiently and sometimes it doesn't align to where I'd rather be spending my money. Is it a small black-owned business or is it Amazon? I needed this yesterday, who's going to be able to provide this for me right away?

However, as participants engage in a series of trials and errors to mend the gap between their desires and varying limitations within their realities, participants display a porous relationship with acts of both repressive and agentic forms of tolerance.

Participant 17 highlighted this common mending narrative when stating:

I think that it's very important that you align your purchasing with your identity. I think what we purchase is a reflection of who we are, and in and of itself, is a reflection of our identity. I also think that what we purchase affects our being and the ability for others to be in society. So, I think it's important that we are educated and consume with all of that in mind. How what I purchase affects myself, both in body, mind, and spirit, and those I know. So, I think it should be a priority and should be considered deeply ... I think the increased availability of information online and the accessibility of

that information has helped me with my consumer knowledge. I now feel more empowered to understand more about the products I purchase, where they come from, whether they're being offered at a fair price, how the consuming of them could affect others, the variety of different products that I could choose from, etc. I think the accessibility of information due to the advent of the internet and accessibility to that has helped quite a bit.

Participant 19 added to the narrative of reoccurring barriers by further elaborating:

I think shopping is very stressful. It upsets me. I come back home depressed. I mean, it's probably also because I have become very, very budget conscious, and also because I care about what I buy now, so I try to avoid, like for example, a whole lot of plastic. And every time I want to buy something, I'll tell myself, "Hey, you know what? Wait. Go home. Do your research. Figure out whether there's an alternative that's more sustainable." So I guess that kind of slows down my whole process. And in turn, I have to tell myself that if I continue doing that, I may never buy anything again. So sometimes I have to even let go of that idea and say, "Okay. Figure out what you need right now and go for it." But then there are other times when, let's say, I'll just tell somebody I need something, and they'll tell me, "Go pick this up," and I'll probably not even think and just go pick it up...

Participant 19 then shifts by highlighting information barriers and reinforced distortions prevalent in the consumer experience:

We live in a world where it's not even about buying something and use it till it lasts. It's about buying something, use it, throw it, buy another thing, use it, throw it, and keep going with that cycle ... there are these brands where prices have been driven down to as cheap as \$2 and \$3 and \$5 for just—one time would have been very expensive for us to buy. But who's cost does it come at? There are people around the world who are being paid nothing. There are atrocities that's happening that we don't see. So how many questions are we even asking? So, I guess for me, it is about the face value when I look at something I wanted. But a lot of times, I don't know what went toward making that. I'm trying to find out now.

These acts are followed by a series of coping mechanisms triggered to ease heightened tensions and silence negative self-dialogue, which, similar to the varying forms of tolerance, seem to shift not only between individuals, but between experiences and commodities. For example, Participant 12 highlighted a unique use of commonly neglected alternative ways to consume such as bartering, which are sparked by innate tensions and desires to cope and realign with agentic behaviors:

I really wish I knew more about [bartering] from a standpoint of someone who's—well, maybe I have bartered a little [laughter] now that I think about it.... I think it should be done more. I think to the extent that it empowers the community, I think it should be done. I think, just as anything, it's all in balance. I would hate to think, and perhaps it happens, that people take advantage, and not in a good way of people who barter because they know that their purchasing power is limited. There are even bad deals in barter, so they continue to barter with people but keep handing them bad deals. So, I mean as long as the bartering is honest and uplifts the community, I think it's fine. I think it should be done. But when it's an abused practice, then no.

Participant 6 added to this narrative by providing exploration of an additional layer to overcome barriers leveraging a common desire for transparency and trust by stating:

I always think about the contemporary society of alternative facts, or what do they call it? Fake news, and things like that. And I feel like the truth is more diluted when you do research. There are more people, there's more voices saying things to consumers that might be untrue.... I think I'd disagree with the idea that I'm getting the right information about my purchases, yeah. I think that's something new in the last couple years of consumer culture too, or at least it's become relevant because you can go look at a YouTube video of a product or something like that, but then you can see the comments in it, and then you can see how many people looked at it, and that all takes into factor. It's there. It is becoming very complex. There is a very complex structure of what to buy ethically and what research is good ... if people are going to be involved with consumer culture and they're going to be selling products and people are going to be buying products, I wish there was more of an outreach to the consumer to say, "We want to be trusted because we want to be part of not only your wallet, but part of your life, yeah, in a special way."

Research Question #3

3. *How do participants learn to reconcile the dichotomy emanating from purchasing products that are misaligned with their identity and values?*

Examination of Findings: Research Question 3—Finding #1

Finding #1: Participants (100%) identified a series of learned coping mechanisms which aid in addressing the dichotomy within the process of purchasing products that are misaligned with their identity and values.

The findings suggest that participants (100%) engage in the act of using a series of coping mechanisms which address the dichotomy within the process of purchasing products that are misaligned with identity and values. For example, Participant 4 stated,

The way I realign myself is by educating myself and by - how do I say this - making smart choices every single time I can, or investing in the independent radio station that I think is cool, donating where I can, volunteering where I can, and so, well, sometimes my purchases don't align with my values and beliefs, which is not that often, I'm doing other works that I feel good about as well.

However, these coping mechanisms fall into a trifecta of learning outlets that include the use of communication, planning, and modeling.

Participants leveraged active intrapersonal and interpersonal communication (95%) as a key component to the reconciliation of harmful practices. Specifically, by engaging in active communication practices within themselves and with others, participants seem to embark on a negotiation with internal and external competing commitments aimed at the optimization of choice and self-care. Thus, by using internal and external dialogue, participants ease building tensions by addressing gaps and best practices with peers, family or larger social communities, which can be integrated and recycled through varying consumer experiences. However, it is vital to note that aligned within communication is the lack thereof. Participant 9 highlights intrapersonal communication by outlining their personal struggle with common purchases such as makeup and its alignment with their values and identity in action, stating:

If you live by something in life, why wouldn't you live by it in your purchases? But it is kind of hard. Shopping is one of the times when you might realize-- like the example that you gave with testing on animals. You might be like, "Oh, I love animals. I would never do that." But if your mascara is really good and they tested it on animals, you might be like,

“Maybe I don’t love animals that much.” I don’t know. It’s a poor example, but it’s one of those you can sort of use it to think how important really are these values to me. But then in terms of your identity, I’m not really sure how-- yeah, I think it’s less about identity and more just you should purchase what you enjoy and what makes you happy.

Participant 8 added to this in outlining the nuances they consider when exploring commodities and addressing the gaps in their values and actions which address the use of modeling and communication with others by stating:

I’ll definitely research a range of sites. I also will try to buy things like vitamins at a place where people are fairly educated or, at least, I think they’re supposed to be educated about the vitamins. And I’ll ask a lot of questions. Then maybe I’ll look something up if I don’t really feel satisfied with the answers I’m getting. I will talk to family members and friends about products or things that I’m buying or thinking about buying. I will also look up sourced ingredients to find out what they are. And I oftentimes read—I’ll read all the ingredients on things. I’m pretty into that to find out what percentage of sugar it has or what other ingredients it has. And then, sometimes, I’ll investigate that, or I’ll ask someone about it. I’ll research companies sometimes, like I want to find out where they make most of their clothes. I usually look at labels. And then, sometimes, I’ll ask people if I feel like I need more information.

Acknowledging the gap, they continue:

But again, I’m pretty busy, and things move quickly. So, I’m not doing any of the things that I mentioned as fully as I would like to do, but they’re in my mind. They’re on my mind.... That’s kind of been like the whole premise, I think, like the undercurrent of everything I’ve been saying is that I don’t feel I’m there yet. And I don’t feel that I’m doing the research I need to do, or B, taking the time, which is what I think it would take for me—maybe I’m wrong - but what I think it would take for me to kind of figure it out and perhaps consume less in certain ways, and then buy from and support other businesses, which I think would cost me more money. Now, I could be wrong about that. But for someone who doesn’t feel comfortable spending what I consider to be expensive or not a bargain or whatever, then it becomes a little bit of an issue. But yes, I would definitely like to learn more and like to think more about that. In fact, I’m trying really, really hard to support women-owned and women-run businesses, and that’s been for about just a month.

In addition, they address the nuances of the consumer experience by stating:

And it’s been really interesting for me because I’m finding that I can do it in certain situations, and then in other situations, I don’t really have the

energy or know how to find alternatives to what I already do or already know that are convenient. So, I think it would have to do with changing my life and putting more energy and time into being a positive consumer ... my life philosophy is driven by trying to not just do no harm, but to have a positive impact in the world. So that's a philosophy that runs through my interactions with people, my life with my family and friends, my work life, my interactions on the subway. I believe strongly in not just a purpose-driven life, but a positive impact in life. And so, I'm not saying that I do that perfectly, and I certainly think that there are gaps there, but that's definitely a driving force in my life. And so that also drives my thoughts and desires for myself as a consumer.

Participant 12 highlighted interpersonal communication, specifically noting external factors that shape the seemingly taboo nature of consumer discussion, by stating:

I do like to be supportive and help my friends and those people who are looking for advice of either things to buy or how to spend their money or how to save their money, although it's not a conversation that I open up. Usually, it's because someone has come to me to ask for advice or help. It seems that there's a general, I guess, practice or understanding that matters about money are not considered polite conversation. And so, I think a lot of people steer clear of that topic for that reason. At the same time, I have found it interesting that there are some people that don't subscribe to that way of thinking that we should steer clear of talking about how to spend money, and they openly talk about it. And it seems they very openly share, and they'll open the conversation.... They'll ask you about your budget and what you're buying and why, and offer advice and tips and either send you in a direction where-- if they can't help you, then they know someone who will. And I've benefited from those conversations and those friendships, because those people have reached out.

Participant 12 adds to this by highlighting a specific experience with a valued community member and reflections on potential social factors which widen the gap between current and desired engagement with consumer-based dialogue:

I had a conversation with a friend of mine who had subscribed to this thinking, and I said, "Why do you think it's okay to talk about this? I don't mind it, but we're always told that it's not polite conversation." I can't remember his exact wording, but basically it had to do with, "Sometimes people don't want you to have this information, because they're trying to manipulate you. And so, in order to become empowered, it's important to have these conversations to uplift each other." And so, for that reason, I've become more open to helping others, although I still tread carefully about

opening that conversation, knowing that other people don't think it's very polite to do that.... I would say that is a myth that is perpetuated by those in power, because those in power know all about the money and how it works. And I would guess that they regularly talk to each other about it, and where to invest in—how to get the most profit shares, and they talk about those ways in which they can earn more money. And when the money is going in one direction, that means it's not going in another direction. It means that's not going to those that are poor and powerless. So, it seems to me that to keep people ignorant, it's something that they perpetuate and say, "That's just not polite to talk about. Let's not talk about it." And I would say that runs parallel to politics as well. Those people in power know all about the laws and politics, and how it works and how government works, and how capitalism works. But when it comes to politics, we're not supposed to talk about it. We're supposed to just stay ignorant about it. [Society says,] "We don't need to share those ideas. You just keep your opinions and your ideas to yourself."

Participant 15 built on a common use of interpersonal identity and value considerations when engaging in the consumer process as a holistic alignment lifestyle decision, adding:

I think out of our identity and values flows everything in terms of who we are, what we do, why we do what we do, and so on, and so forth. So, an individual or a consumer's refusal to align their purchasing behavior to who they are and their values, constitutes what I would describe as them not knowing what they exist for. Because sometimes we think we are buying products but we're actually buying into an agenda. We think we are buying a service, but we're actually buying into a lifestyle. And so, it is important that an individual consumer makes a clear decision of determining who they are and aligning their purchasing behavior to it because there is more that comes with buying a product of service than just obtaining that service and product.

By attempting to ignore or refrain from addressing tension, participants learn to norm discomfort through the reluctant acceptance of failure within the consumer experience. As such, to reconcile the dichotomy emanating from purchases the misalign with their values and identity, participants learn to use diverse communication practices to not only achieve alignment but deal with misalignment in the consumer space.

As previously identified, planning plays a vital role in the dichotomous consumer experience. Several participants (90%) identified planning as a key learning outlet which prompts a cycle of reflection and learning when faced with crossroad decisions.

Participant 10 highlighted short-term and long-term planning as a form self-care and self-investment by stating:

I've learned to invest in myself because until recently I—well, not super recently. But I'm taking design classes again, and it's coming out of my own pocket. And these classes are not cheap. But then it's also something that I really want to learn how to do, and I know that no one else is going to invest in me. I mean, maybe my parents if I ask them really nicely, like, "Hey, I want to go back to school. Could you please support me," but I don't want to rely on them for that. So now, I am paying for school again because I want to. Because I know that this has to do with my career and my future. And no one else is going to help me. If I ask my friends, like, "Hey, can you pay my tuition?" they're all going to be like, obviously, no [laughter]. But we're all broke like 20-something-year-olds. We're all broke. So yeah. I've learned to kind of, I guess, prioritize my purchases, too, because of that. Because I have to pay for school now and it costs so much, because of that, I learned how to prioritize my purchases. If I'm like, "Oh, I could really use this new pair of high heels. They're so cute, but they cost 200 bucks. Do I really need them or can I use that money to save toward my school fund?" And then I'll be like, "Okay. I should probably invest in my future instead of investing in right now."

Specifically, by leveraging the planning process as a tool to outline projected opportunities and barriers, participants are enabled to shift probabilities of alignment in their favor by slowly adapting misaligned behaviors through the accurate outline of resources. As such, through the use of progressive shifts, participants engage in incremental trials which serve as an ongoing coping mechanism that feed into inevitable future consumption engagement.

The final and most prevalent learning method used in the consumer space is modeling. While examples of modeling can be found throughout the prior learning methods highlighted, participants (100%) identified the use of modeling as a primary factor on their learning. For example, Participant 14 used memories of familial normed values to modeling current personal values and behaviors, stating:

My living situation and my values and personality really dictate my personal spending and consumerism. I am a semi- recent grad that makes about a mid-range of money—I don't make a ton of money—that values my time and good quality of things I developed my spending habits or the ways I

consume things based on my growing up in a middle class family that has a decent amount of money but really values things that last a long time and because of that I found smarter ways to maximize my happiness with the things I buy based on trying to look for something that is of quality and value to me.

Participant 13 mirrored similar uses of familial memories when exploring personal considerations of values and consumer behaviors but added an additional layer of factors which drive and sustain behaviors such as community support:

My community is indirectly supportive of my experience because when I have a positive experience and I use my time efficiently, and I make purchases efficiently, then I have more time to spend with members of my community or to correspond with them with my wonderful stationary. I also think about the inefficient ways that consumption happened within my family growing up, just namely because they didn't have these resources and they also had different needs. So, with bearing that in mind, I'm all the more excited about my abilities to consume using digital means and know that my greater community probably supports the time that I'm able to spend with them because of my efficiency.

Specifically, participants leverage modeling to achieve their goals through the use of witnessed successes and failures enacted by their family, peers and community. While several participants identified parental modeling as a key influence on their learning and consumer behavior, others mentioned the lack of formal training as a pressing area of concern. Furthermore, not only do participants note that they model after others, but also provide a portrayal of how they serve as models to others. Thus, by dissecting their consumer behavior for alignment and misalignment, participants argue their actions both reinforce authentic learning within themselves and in others.

Summary

This chapter explored both quantitative and qualitative data produced from the exploratory research design. Research question 1 explicitly leveraged both the quantitative data pulled from the SDLRS scores, demographic profile survey and participant interview responses, while research questions 2 and 3 primarily pulled from

the qualitative data obtained from the interview responses with consideration of the quantitative data for a holistic picture. Building on the data obtained through the purposeful exploration of the research questions, it can be argued that self-direction plays an important and powerful role in the consumer experience in America.

However, when considering the demographic factors of each narrative, it can also be argued that while increased financial capital and accessibility create increased opportunity to engage in aligned consumer practices, no one is immune to consumer-based dilemmas. It may take on many shapes and be a variety of sizes, but it does not discriminate against race, age, education, gender, income bracket, or location. However, it is vital to note that there are a variety of social factors which place certain populations at greater risk for dilemmas perpetuated by consumerism than others. For example, while several participants note the importance of their consumer awareness and its immediate and direct negative implications on lower income or disadvantaged communities, others note the importance of their consumer awareness as it directly impacts their own livelihoods and/or acknowledge personal responsibility of maintaining and prioritizing both levels of self and social consciousness. Nevertheless, building on the quantitative data, after looking for key patterns, the narrative seems to lack prevalence in any particular demographic grouping, suggesting no discernable patterns but potential intersectionality between the participants and consumerism. Specifically, when exploring each demographic category, diverse attributes were present among participants aligning with earlier inclinations that while individual experiences vary, consumer nuances are shared.

Highlighting shared nuances, there were five major converging summaries captured throughout the data analysis process prior to the purposeful exploration of the three research questions. Leveraging the most dominant thematic nodes as displayed in Appendix K, the five major converging summaries include:

1. While participants (100%) identified an opportunity to enact agency in their consumer behavior as a positive occurrence, the degree to which an individual engages with agency as a form of accountability for self and others varies drastically.
2. Participants (100%) identified motivation and commitment as key predictors in their consumer engagement; however, participants identified a variety of motivations as drivers and inhibitors for their consumer engagement that were grounded in porous levels of negotiations with themselves, the product, and their communities.
3. Participants (100%) viewed informal learning as an integral coping tactic that further enables the individual and society to address evolving consumer dilemmas by enabling the explicit and implicit tracing of individual and community progression. However, while stated, purposeful formal consumer education opportunities were deemed valuable but rarely accessible.
4. Participants (100%) referenced degrees of identity grounded in self and product as a primary factor on beliefs of personal agency to make a meaningful positive and or negative impact on themselves and the world through consumption. However, this commitment greatly shifted when participants were faced with perceived limited time or financial commitments.
5. While participants (100%) rely on active integration to sustain desired change over time, the means by which they achieve integration vastly vary from outlets of self-integration to community-based integration.

Chapter VI

DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore the lives of 20 individuals and their experiences with purchases that misalign with their identity and values. To carry out the purpose, the study explored three research questions aimed to isolate emblematic occurrences in the consumer space:

1. What patterns of self-directed learning can be identified throughout individual consumer practices?
2. What factors do participants perceive facilitate and/or impede their ability to make purchases that are consistent with their identity and values?
3. How do participants learn to reconcile the dichotomy emanating from purchasing products that are misaligned with their identity and values?

This chapter outlines an overview of the research findings and provides answers to the three above research questions through the exploration of implications and recommendations for future theory, research, and practice. Thus, by revisiting initial assumptions identified in Chapter I and synthesizing the literature in Chapter III and the findings of Chapter IV, this chapter discusses emergent themes that highlight what we know now, what is consistent and what is added to prior knowledge on the consumer experience.

Summary of Study and Findings

Discussion

Chapter III provided an array of rich narratives to deconstruct cycles of social construction, individual efficacy, and agency. As such, analyzing the work of social constructivist and adult learning scholars, there are several aligned, misaligned, and emergent patterns displayed throughout the literature when compared with the findings of Chapter IV. To best address the gaps and bridges within the literature and findings, the following narrative will dissect the aforementioned literature for its active presence in the research findings.

Synthesizing Literature with Research Findings

Consumer choice and social impact. In collaboration with the literature, the findings suggest that Durkheim's structural functionalism is a prevalent occurrence in the consumer experience. Specifically, building on Durkheim's argument that society is a complex system of interrelated parts functioning to sustain stability and is comprised of products of history that not only influence individual human actions but surpass actions on for generations to come (Carls, n.d.), several participants identified the interconnected impact of products on their lives. Furthermore, several participants displayed consciousness around the act of strategically accounting for the impact of their consumer choices on the lives of others and future generations to come, including an unexpected exploration surrounding how their own obtainment of wealth impacts their inherited internal struggles with under-serving mobility mentalities when evolving along the social mobility spectrum. Specifically, it would seem that building on the findings, some consumers engage with tensions when discovering the difference between connections with products that provide power to the individual versus attachments to products that provide more opportunities for counterintuitive behaviors than agentic.

Rediscovering attachments. In addition, Durkheim's argument surrounding social facts, which are both external and internal to the individual, as it is through the individual that social facts are sustained (Jones, 2011), are also reflected in the findings. Several participants identify as collective oriented actors, integrating ideas, beliefs, and sentiments attained through human interaction into everyday practice. As such, leaning into Durkheim's proposal, the tension identified by participants in the consumer space when making purchases that misalign with their individual identity and values could be attributed to the social nature of social facts, which require immense amounts of intentional effort to achieve change.

Further exploring notions of attachments, there were several instances identified within the consumer experience that align with Latour's argument to resemble the social as a means to examine and remove the ambiguity surrounding social terms and attachment notions. Specifically, several participants identified objects and facts as forms of functioning social networks in need of transparency, translations, reassessment, and reconstruction. By identifying a paradigm by which participants explore their connections to established institutions, events, and histories within social contexts, like Latour, participants reinforce that consumers seek explanations that must answer how a product is constituted, through what associations and involving what actors.

Reassembling facts. As predicted by Latour, in moments of uncertainty and controversy, some consumers engage in learning by the act of reexamination, dissection, and the reassembling of renewed definitions to build crucial quality measures that align their needs with the relative tasks expected in the consumer space. However, counter to prevalent ANT arguments, surprisingly the findings suggest that if objects are not studied, it is not only due to either a lack of data or a lack of will, but seemingly the lack of perceived resources such as time or hidden commitments that derail "mediators" or other acts toward personal desires to countercheck or counterbalance power dynamics that reinforce misaligned behavior in the consumer space. However, aligned with ANT,

the findings portray a narrative of difficulties or failures within the consumer space as representations of failed contemporary science and technology. Thus, it can be argued that the failure of social explanation on the intricacies pertaining to the science of consumerism serves as an opportunity for self-directed consumers to pull back the many folds of the capitalist consumer experience to shift the hidden to the visible as consumers move closer to their ideal consumer experiences.

Negotiating values through interaction. Aligned with Lévi-Strauss, participants displayed that regardless of societal differences or their scores on the SDLRS, they each systematically process organized or structured units of information, which continuously combine to develop common models across all societies that either explain the world, provide tools to operate within the world, or imagine alternatives. Furthermore, it is vital to note that the findings show that consumers display an array of modes to acquire knowledge, and aligned with Lévi-Strauss, the notion that one mode is not better than the other, but merely different or complementary to individualized needs is reinforced. However, while universal patterns of structures concerning thought and behavior are present within the findings, product values are placed on a negotiated spectrum cultivated by unique experiential factors, such as individual demographics and education.

Affirming Weber's work, the findings suggest calls for the display of critical and concrete conditions and interconnected relationships on products and their life-cycle. When accomplished, several participants were far more likely to display personal value-judgments, or views grounded in matters of faith, as influential triggers for aligned consumer behavior. Through the use of normative criticism, several participants live their truth leveraging consumerism as a vessel of self-reflection, actively acknowledging spaces of economic conditioning that reinforced notions of right or wrong ways to engage in the consumer space. Thus, as driving tensions to align value-based consumption fester, coping mechanism are triggered through what Weber coins thought ordering. As such,

based on the findings, some consumers engage in a series of internal formulas, which are verified through interaction, to achieve desired goals in the consumer space.

In addition, synthesizing Lave's argument against maintaining school-centric, simplified dichotomies of passive formal and informal education, the findings affirm that some participants engage in a lifetime of learning grounded in early modeled routines of behavior in the consumer space. Specifically, most participants identified their mothers as the leading factor into how they learned to shop. Aligned with Lave's argument, the findings affirm that thinking shapes and is shaped by routinely recurring situations, including educational situations in people's lives, such as the evolving consumer space. Leveraging arithmetic practices to aid individuals who are dealing with complex structures of choice, taking into account both the context of activity and the activity in context, based on the findings, an equation for the consumer experience would look like:

$$\frac{\text{Degrees of Commitment (Values + Social Expectations + Resources)}}{\text{Learning}} = \text{Outcome}$$

Understanding the ever-changing dilemma of consumerism in America is not a trivial task. For this reason, as highlighted throughout the findings, an individual's commitment serves as a primary motivator for aligned or misaligned outcomes.

Transforming to learn, learning to transform. Shifting into earlier depictions of applicable adult learning principles, the first exploration of synthesizing literature and findings will highlight transformative learning. As previously mentioned, transformative learning is defined as a perspective transformation, a paradigm shift, whereby individuals critically examine prior interpretations and assumptions to form new meaning or the "why" to life's most pressing questions. As affirmed by the findings, learning is a constructivist process that is based on the assumption that individual personal meaning making can be revised through interaction and dialogue with others where learners test, interpret, and reinterpret different perspectives that are central to meaning making and hence learning in the consumer space. Specifically, through the use of communities of

practice, several participants either highlighted interactions that created space for testing or expressed desires for increased opportunities within the consumer space for active testing of products.

As aligned with the findings, participants engaged with three basic kinds of learning within the consumer space. The first included instrumental learning, which explored task-oriented problems based on the determination of cause and effect relationships or learning to accomplish a task, such as the task of purchasing basic human needs like food or clothing. The second displayed form of basic learning was communicative learning, which is learning involved in understanding the meaning of what others communicate concerning values, ideals, feelings, moral decisions, and concepts as freedom, justice, love, labor, autonomy, commitment, and democracy. This primarily played out through intrapersonal and interpersonal dialogue and reflection on the core of how participants define themselves and the things around them, to which several participants responded they are what they purchase. The third and final included emancipatory learning, which focuses on removing constraints and freeing oneself from limitations, which participants deemed as a vital space for continual improvement when addressing tensions as a consumer in a market entrenched in economic contradictions that forces its participants to purchase for survival.

Learning and unlearning tolerance. Building on consumer-based disorienting dilemmas grounded in Mezirow's earlier work, the findings suggest that often when learners realize that the items they desire misalign from their values or identity, they experience a sense of disorientation resulting in a disorienting dilemma where their frame of reference or the meaning structure that they thought they held conflicts with the situation they have found themselves in. However, counter to Mezirow's narrative, participants stated that they either chose to engage in passive tolerance in the moment by simply opting in or engage in acts of agentic tolerance where they may purchase the product but critically reflect by examining their own beliefs, goals, and assumptions in

relation to the experience and purchase the item or decline to purchase the item for a more aligned commodity. Furthermore, as some participants continued to engage in a process of reflection over time, many developed alternative plans to avoid compromising situations, which aided in building the confidence to trial new actions and inevitably increased their repertoire of knowledge and skills to add to their evolving lifelong consumer toolbox.

Reflective of the literature, the findings suggest that learning is seen as a felt encounter with all senses and modalities, obtained over time. Participants affirmed that by using experiences as a form of learning, their learning became holistic, interactive, emotion-centered, and porous. Furthermore, participants also identified that while continual education can serve their ability to align their purchasing behavior with their values and identity, some experiences have miseducated and inhibited their growth, only adding to the growing tensions present within the consumer space.

Social calling for transparency. Counter to Schön's argument that action is required, the findings suggest that how action is defined is integral to the difference between what would socially be considered a successful consumer learning experience and what would not. Specifically, participants highlight that even if action cannot be seen or taken in the moment, space is created for the unseen shifts that build into action over time through the active use of tactics involving reflection in action, reflection on action and tacit knowing. Further aligned with Schön, the findings display that most consumer-based learning took place in action amidst the complexity of the purchasing practice. As such, participants seemed to pull primarily from a discretely embedded series of episodic experiences, which dictated their current action or purposeful inaction within the consumer behavior. In addition, several participants displayed the active goal of attempting to achieve Yorks and Kasl's argument for learning-within-relationship specifically within the consumer space by seeking transparency and due diligence from products and their creators. Specifically, in a market rich with options, consumer

decisions are ongoing as participants displayed narratives of constantly searching for the best option for their needs in the moment and over time.

As previously displayed throughout Chapter IV, self-directed learning plays a vital role in the consumer process and experience. In alignment with the three main goals of self-directed learning, several participants displayed the drive to enhance their abilities as self-directed learners as promoted by Tough and Knowles, transform their learning as promoted by Brookfield and Mezirow, and expand their emancipatory learning and social action opportunities as promoted by Freire, including the social, political, and environmental contexts that affect their learning. Building on Candy, the research sample and SDLRS findings, self-direction was expressed as a quality that was present in varying degrees within each participant.

Aligned with recurring themes of research in this area, participants engaged in the act of moving in and out of learning networks, consulting a range of peers and while also engaging in isolated decision-making practices. Like Knowles, participants placed an emphasis on responsibility and critical thought when engaging in the consumer space. However, counter to Knowles's arguments, while participants engaged in active planning to achieve their goals, they were conscious that within the consumer space, things are left more so to chance and circumstance. Thus, for this reason, participants seem to engage in active planning to gain control within the nonlinear space, but accept and generally create space for the unaccounted.

Learning to plan. Furthermore, it is vital to note, that while participants may actively engage in goal setting and planning, as aligned with Brookfield, they can simultaneously fail to critically question or challenge their learning experience. As such, the findings display that through active engagement with their communities, participants learn to resist oppressive consumer environments by recognizing, acknowledging, and challenging cultural and political phenomena around them. Specifically, this played out in instances of participants speaking on experiences of racial oppression practices, to

owning their roles in gentrification, to acts of actively supporting local mom-pop shop-style businesses; all of which represent reoccurring themes of individual values for authentic relationships grounded in transparency, respect, and most importantly trust.

Contributions to the Literature

The above literature and findings are grounded in the purpose of this research, which aimed to explore the lives of 20 individuals and their experiences with purchases that misalign with their identity and values. Building on Chapter I, in mending the gap within the literature, the findings of this study are primarily confirmatory in that each narrative contributes a unique perspective which further deepens how consumerism is defined and the spaces in which individuals consume and ultimately are consumed. While experiences vary, this narrative portrays invaluable snippets of what can happen when individuals connect and communicate on seemingly mundane and isolated struggles within their everyday lives. The consumer space is not set in stone and extends far beyond the mere categories instituted to drive economic capital. It is malleable and corruptible, and until individuals deconstruct and critically examine the diverse spaces in which they consume, they will not only continue to be consumed, but cultivate generational debts that will be paid in full by the acceptance and reproduction of buying into distortions ripe with normed uneven and unaligned exchanges. As such, the literature and findings highlight the small but meaningful ways that individuals engage with overcoming distortions over time, one experience at a time, to achieve the promise of capitalism in America.

Chapter VII

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

This chapter highlights eight major conclusions derived from the data and will explore recommendations for future engagements.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the above exploration. These conclusions include, but are not limited to:

1. *Formal education opportunities for consumer behavior development are underwhelming, and as such, self-directedness is an important attribute to possess to in order to peel back the true value of the evolving consumer space.*

Formal education opportunities on consumer behavior are few and far between. While an integral component of a capitalistic market, very few formal engagements are provided to critically examine consumer behavior. Thus, through the use of learning-based tactics such as self-direction, individuals take initiative creating opportunities to fill varying gaps between their values and their actions in the evolving consumer context.

2. *Reflection and communication are vital components to learning and growth as an aligned consumer.*

The active use of reflection in and on action within the consumer experience serves as a powerful entry point for the critical deconstruction of communication between self and consumable artifacts. Information obtained directs learning and growth as foundational data, which serves as a scale for alignment and misalignment. As such, by

relying on active reflection and communication, consumers not only feed into the cycles of normed behavior, but aid in the reinforcement of behaviors in others.

3. *Being forced and being pressured can seem more alike when faced with an undesirable decision.*

Pressure serves as a driving motivator for behavior and is often tied to narratives of defeating force when encountering decisions that distance alignment with individual values and identity. Specifically, while often subtle, pressure can shift from perceived prompts of light persuasion to mechanisms of heavily reinforced directives, triggering emotions of helplessness to engage in authentic opportunities of choice. As such, to cope with the disjuncture, some individuals seek to release internal tension by placing control beyond self and onto the social structures that innately probe and prompt for self-serving responses, while others select to engage or disengage in opportunities for critical reflection to impact future behavior.

4. *Moments of disjuncture are ideal opportunities to identify values and commitments.*

Leveraging moments of disjuncture as entry points is vital to the authentic exploration of self-proclaimed values and commitments. By examining moments of tension and misalignment, individuals place themselves directly in front of opportunities to face misaligned behaviors and question self-proclaimed values. Thus, experiences of disjuncture provide fruitful learning lessons for consumers to deconstruct self at any moment in the consumer evolving space.

5. *Holistic engagement processes are ideal to the identification of challenges and next steps to achieve desired goals.*

The pursuit of whole-person engagement tactics is ideal when considering barriers to achieving consumer goals. By establishing holistic approaches to overcome normed misaligned behaviors, individuals are closer to reaching aligned outcomes. However, both introspective and extrospective identification are necessary to isolate avenues of

success within the consumer process. Therefore, through the holistic dissection of behaviors and a strong sense of self, adequate next steps to overcome challenges can be established to ensure vital success opportunities are obtained in the individual journey to aligned consumer action.

6. *Misaligned purchases charge interest that will always be paid in full by someone.*

Misaligned purchases carry a heavier weight than generally advertised. The cost of a purchase extends beyond financial capital and the common trading of goods. Purchases carry a history and a relentless debt that requires payment in full. As such, when participants engage in misaligned consumer behavior without the acknowledgement and acceptance of accountability for their actions or inactions, they further a cycle of growing tensions within themselves and others that feasts on feigned indifference—thus triggering the widening the gap between an individual’s goals and realistic obtainment.

7. *Relationships are a vital component of the human experience and must be dissected as they serve as powerful motivators for sustained behavior.*

The ability to cultivate relationships drives vital learning opportunities, which promotes survival and opportunities to thrive. The same principles can be found in the consumer space as individuals rely on relationships to define and norm values and behavior as consumers. However, through the development of self, information received through relationships is sorted to meet personal needs and weighed against current self-proclaimed identity and personal values. As such, the information and connections obtained through relationships serve as key motivating factors that drive sustained behavior cultivated to survive and thrive.

8. *Coping mechanisms are important to self-care, but must be critically examined for the hidden commitments it overshadows.*

Coping mechanisms play an important role in the protection of self. As such, the exploration of coping mechanisms, not in service of removing them, but to merely

explore what hidden commitments are driven by them could be deeply informative. Therefore, using a critical examination of coping mechanisms, individuals unlock learning opportunities for authentic self-care and ownership.

Recommendations for Future Research

Theory and Research

Based on the findings, ideal consumer experiences are not impossible to achieve. The five most recurring requests from participants were for affordability, accessibility, transparency, durability, and trust. They didn't ask for mind readers or sales representatives that fan and feed them as they shop; they simply wanted the experience to mirror what anyone could argue we all desire out of life. In a nation where capital drives survival and consumerism is more of a job or more like an unpaid internship where you hope whatever you receive will actually bring about the results it promised, due diligence remains with the individual, but should not stop there. The institutionalized rules put forth from government to corporate policies possess a high level of power and influence over the individual consumer. As such, with great power comes even greater responsibility.

However, responsibility should be everything but a burden. In fact, based on the findings, some participants are generally more likely to put in more time and money for more expensive products to save time and money later. As such, when exploring the previous conceptual framework, there are several factors that can be further explored within the consumer experience context. Specifically, while the researcher recommends the continuation of this research study, there are several noteworthy shifts that should be made. The shifts include but are not limited to:

1. *Increasing the sample size and the diversity within levels of education*

While consumer narratives can seem similar, each individual brings a different lens and perspective to the experience. For this reason, it is vital to curb urges to group narratives, as each experience possesses an important learning opportunity that could be buried for the sake of compartmentalization and comfort. Thus, by increasing the sample size, more experiences could be explored and ultimately a mirrored depiction highlighting both the individual and clustered narrative could be leveraged to further demystify phenomena in the ever-evolving consumer space.

2. *Engaging in the actual shopping process with a group of participants*

Being present during an actual shopping experience could add a powerful additional layer to the critical examination of the consumer experience. By depicting the actual shopping journey with a participant, potential interventions could be developed to address specific barriers or drivers for individual behaviors and desires. Thus, by capturing authentic shifts in action and on action for the participants, research could be bridged with practice to cultivate a cyclical examination of self and social triggers.

3. *Replicating the study to check for validity and reliability of the findings*

The replication of the research would be ideal, as there are several opportunities to further explore the nuances of the findings. By replicating the study, the research will undergo an external review of validity and reliability that could only be achieved through multiple rounds of testing with diverse populations of participants. Furthermore, all participants seemed interested in further participation in the study, so it would be intriguing to see the same population undergo multiple rounds of the same research with a new principal researcher.

4. *Performing a longitudinal study to account for change over time within participants' identification of values and commitments*

As consumer behavior seems to shift over time, the performance of a longitudinal study accounting for varying phases of a consumer's life would be immensely helpful to understanding the evolving nature of the individual consumer experience. The human

condition is under constant change. As such, it is important to trace the power of experiences and how they account for misaligned behavior outcomes in the past, present, and future.

Recommendations for Future Practice

Consumers are urged to place more attention on altering destructive consumption patterns by highlighting the misplacement of tolerance toward current individual consumption practices. Specifically, consumers should refrain from minimizing feelings of tension or disjuncture when within the consumer space, as they reinforce misaligned forms of behavior as an acceptable norm over time. While no one is immune to the temptations that perpetuate misaligned behavior and failure within the consumer process, when individuals notice tensions but do not explore them, they are opening a way for their own demise by desensitizing repressive actions and draining power and energy away from endeavors that could bring the individual closer to their desired goals.

As such, the first person to stand up for the individual has to be the individual. If consumers cannot put their own self-care first, how can they expect others or organizations—which function through a collective of individuals who may model the same self-deprecating practices—to truly put them first? As such, to ensure the sustainability of high standards as a consumer, individuals should consider if they would metaphorically “date” their purchases. Do your purchases meet the requirements that it takes to come home with you? Are your purchases truly worth an emotional, physical, and psychological investment?

Everyday plans are put into motion to trigger behaviors deemed beneficial to the capitalist dream. However, the question remains, as individual consumers, will we continue to literally and metaphorically buy into the distorted plans outlined by others or realign our behaviors to serve our own plans for an aligned and fulfilled life? While it

could be helpful if individuals used these types of questions in action, as previously displayed, there are a variety of barriers that plague the consumer experience. From innate insecurities to institutionalized drivers for generational social, cultural, and financial capital deficits, the road to consumer alignment can seem long. However, even some of the smallest internal shifts can trigger a rippling effect that can impact not only our own self-development, but the development of those around us.

Revisiting Assumptions

Initially, this study made several assumptions, which served as essential scaffolding to the embarkment of the research. These assumptions included:

1. Consumers have agency and make conscious, rational decisions to engage in aligned buy-in.
2. Objects have agency and cultivate an evolving partnership with the individual.
3. Individual consumers can influence societal norms as much as societal norms influence individual consumers.

Building on previous chapters, the above assumptions remain constant. However, there are several prevalent caveats to the aforementioned. These include the realization that decisions can undergo a rationalized process but are often simultaneously tied to emotional triggers that dictate the spectrum of motivations and hidden commitments enacted throughout individualized consumer engagement. In addition, while participants did note the evolving relationship between self and object, very few addressed perceptions that objects maintain agency as active actors for socialized values and expectations of behavior. Furthermore, while individual consumers do influence and are influenced by social norms, the varying levels of accessibility and transparency play an important role in individual perceived degrees of consumer impact.

Looking back on the introduction narrative outlining my personal experience while shopping, so many questions have been answered. However, so many new questions have arisen. While my initial inquiry sprouted out of a blend of pain, curiosity, and a personal quest to justify my actions, as an individual, I have come to realize that sometimes saying no to items means saying yes to a more holistically aligned self. Our actions and inactions are foundationally a product of our own decisions, both big and small. Failure is inevitable, but every purchase will be a new opportunity to reflect on who we really are and what we truly value in life.

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Appendix A

Letter of Invitation

Dear (insert participant's name),

The purpose of this letter serves as both an introduction and request for your participation in an upcoming learning research study I will be conducting.

My name is Chloe Dawson and I am a Doctoral student in the Adult Learning and Leadership Program in the Department of Organization and Leadership at Teachers College, Columbia University located in New York City.

I am contacting you because you have been identified as a potential participant in this study due to your potential interests, age and location. Specifically, I will be conducting research with individuals over the age of 18 who live and/or work in New York, New York or Los Angeles, California. The research will be exploring the lives of individuals and their experiences with purchases that misalign with their identity and values.

Participation in this study will involve:

- ✓ Completion of a consent form, demographic inventory and agreeing to the terms and conditions of the study, which will include the audio recording of the interview.
- ✓ Completion of a learning preference assessment.
- ✓ Participation in a one-on-one interview with me on a day and time to be determined that will last approximately one hour.

For your participation, you will be provided with a copy of the research findings.

If you are interested and willing to participate in this study, please contact Chloe Dawson as soon as possible to schedule a follow up discussion.

Chloe Dawson
(661) 400-8348
Cw2916@tc.columbia.edu

Appendix B

Informed Consent and Participant Rights

Teachers College, Columbia University
525 West 120th Street
New York NY 10027
212 678 3000

INFORMED CONSENT

Protocol Title: Buying Into Distortions: Individual Agency & Identity-Based Consumption

Principal Investigator: Chloe Dawson, Ed.M., Teachers College
661-400-8348, cw2916@tc.columbia.edu

INTRODUCTION

You are being invited to participate in this research study called “Individual Agency & Identity-Based Consumption” You may qualify to take part in this research study because you are over 18 years old, work or reside in New York, New York or Los Angeles, California, you are fluent in English, and you are willing to self-identify. If you are presently participating in another study you can be part of this study. Approximately twenty people will participate in this study and it will take 2 hours of your time to complete.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

This study is being done to explore the lives of 20 individuals and their experiences with purchases that misalign with their identity and values.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you decide to participate, you will be given a demographic survey which will ask for standard identification information. The demographic survey will take approximately five minutes. You will then be given a pseudonym and receive a link to complete the learning preference assessment which will take approximately 30 minutes. You will then be contacted to set up a time to be interviewed by the principal investigator. During the interview you will be asked to discuss your consumer experience, your identity and values. This interview will be audio-recorded. After the audio-recording is written down (transcribed) the audio-recording will be deleted. If you do not wish to be audio-recorded, you will not be able to participate. The interview will take approximately ninety minutes. You will be given a pseudonym or false name/de-identified code in order to keep your identity confidential. All data will be kept for three years following the completion of the study.

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While the demographic survey and learning preference assessment will be done remotely, the interview can be done in person or virtually pending availability and a time that is convenient for you.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily life while taking routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. However, there are some risks to consider. You might feel embarrassed to discuss problems or struggles that you experienced as a consumer. **However, you do not have to answer any questions or divulge anything you don't want to talk about. You can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty. If you feel distressed at any time, several medical professional contacts can be distributed to you upon request.**

The principal investigator is taking precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering or guessing your identity, such as using a pseudonym instead of your name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?

You will not be paid to participate; however, your learning preference assessment costs will be covered.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?

The study is over when you have completed the interview. However, you can leave the study at any time even if you haven't finished.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY

The investigator will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a

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computer that is password protected. What is on the audio-recording will be written down and the audio-recording will then be destroyed. There will be no record matching your real name with your pseudonym.

For quality assurance, the study team, the study sponsor Lyle Yorks, and/or members of the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the data collected from you as part of this study. Otherwise, all information obtained from your participation in this study will be held strictly confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by U.S. or State law.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?

The results of this study will be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. Your identity will be removed from any data you provide before publication or use for educational purposes. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the principal investigator. Please note, regulations require that the study data be kept for at least 3 years after the completion of the study.

CONSENT FOR AUDIO AND OR VIDEO RECORDING

Audio recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don't wish to be recorded, you will not be able to participate in this research study.

_____ I give my consent to be recorded _____
Signature

_____ I **do not** consent to be recorded _____
Signature

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WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

__I consent to allow written or audio recorded materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College_____

Signature

__I **do not** consent to allow written or audio recorded materials viewed outside of Teachers College Columbia University_____

Signature

TRANSCRIPTIONS

Please note, to ensure quality, professional transcriptionists will be hired to transcribe audio-recorded interviews. However, transcriptionists will complete a non-disclosure agreement form.

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PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

- I have read and discussed the informed consent with the researcher. I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at his or her professional discretion if I am deemed no longer a good fit for participation.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- Identifiers may be removed from the data. De-identifiable data may be used for future research studies, or distributed to another investigator for future research without additional informed consent from the subject or the representative.
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study

Print name: _____ **Date:** _____

Signature: _____

Appendix C

Demographic Inventory

Participant Data Inventory: Demographic Profile

The information collected from this inventory is completely confidential and will only be used for the purposes of this research study.

Please list your participant number:

1. My gender is:

_____ Female

_____ Male

_____ Non-binary/ third gender

_____ Prefer to self-describe: _____

2. My age is:

_____ 18-25 years

_____ 25-34 years

_____ 35-44 years

_____ 45-54 years

_____ 55-64 years

_____ 65-74 years

_____ 75 or more years

3. I work and/or live in:

_____ The greater Los Angeles Area, California

_____ The greater New York Area, New York

4. My ethnicity is (select all that apply):
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African Origin
- Hispanic, Latino or Spanish Origin
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Caucasian
- Some other race or origin: _____

5. My household income bracket is:
- \$0 to \$20,000
- \$20,001 to \$50,000
- \$50,001 to \$75,000
- \$75,001 to \$95,000
- \$95,001 or more

6. The highest level of education which I have achieved is:
- High school diploma (or equivalent)
- University/Bachelor's (or equivalent)
- Masters degree (or equivalent)
- Candidate/Post graduate (or equivalent)
- Doctorate (or equivalent)

7. My relationship status is:
- Single
- In a relationship

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Appendix D

Survey

Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale (SDLRS)/
Learning Preference Assessment (LPA)
Taken from <http://www.lpasdlrs.com/>

Learning Preference Assessment
Items 1-19 Only
© Lucy M. Guglielmino, 1977

Instructions: This is a questionnaire designed to gather data on learning preferences and attitudes towards learning. After reading each item, please indicate the degree to which you feel that statement is true of you. There are no right or wrong answers. Please read each choice carefully and choose the response which best expresses your feeling.

There is no time limit for the questionnaire. Try not to spend too much time on any one item; however, your first reaction to the question will usually be the most accurate.

Responses

- 1 = Almost never true of me; I hardly ever feel this way.**
2 = Not often true of me; I feel this way less than half the time.
3 = Sometimes true of me; I feel this way about half the time.
4 = Usually true of me; I feel this way more than half the time.
5 = Almost always true of me; there are very few times when I don't feel this way.
-

Items

1. I'm looking forward to learning as long as I'm living.
2. I know what I want to learn.
3. When I see something that I don't understand, I stay away from it.
4. If there is something I want to learn, I can figure out a way to learn it.
5. I love to learn.
6. It takes me a while to get started on new projects.
7. In a classroom situation, I expect the instructor to tell all class members exactly what to do at all times.
8. I believe that thinking about who you are, where you are, and where you are going should be a major part of every person's education.
9. I don't work very well on my own.
10. If I discover a need for information that I don't have, I know where to go to get it.

11. I can learn things on my own better than most people.
12. Even if I have a great idea, I can't seem to develop a plan for making it work.
13. In a learning experience, I prefer to take part in deciding what will be learned and how.
14. Difficult study doesn't bother me if I'm interested in something.
15. No one but me is truly responsible for what I learn.
16. I can tell whether I'm learning something well or not.
17. There are so many things I want to learn that I wish there were more hours in a day.
18. If there is something I have decided to learn, I can find time for it, no matter how busy I am.
19. Understanding what I read is a problem for me.

Appendix E

Interview Protocol

Interview Opener

These series of questions were developed to better understand your thoughts and opinions about your consumer behavior. As a participant, you should answer the questions as most appropriate as you deem, as there are no right or wrong answers. Thank you for your time and participation in this survey.

Below you will find general statements about how often you do the following activities as a consumer. Please choose only one response for each statement.

1. I feel confident in my consumer behavior.

Often Sometimes Rarely Never I don't know

Comments: _____

2. I stay up to date on pressing issues that impact where and how I spend my money.

Often Sometimes Rarely Never I don't know

Comments: _____

3. I communicate with others about my consumer behavior.

Often Sometimes Rarely Never I don't know

Comments: _____

4. Others communicate with me about their consumer behavior.

Often Sometimes Rarely Never I don't know

Comments: _____

5. I believe that my interest and participation as a consumer makes a positive difference.

Often Sometimes Rarely Never I don't know

Comments: _____

Below you will find statements about concerns you may have about your consumer behavior. Please circle only one response for each statement.

6. I am knowledgeable of the problems and issues others face as consumers.

Often Sometimes Rarely Never I don't know

Comments: _____

7. I know where to go and who to contact with questions about my purchases.

Often Sometimes Rarely Never I don't know

Comments: _____

8. I know where to go and who to contact with questions about my purchasing behavior.

Often Sometimes Rarely Never I don't know

Comments: _____

9. I always receive proper information about my purchases.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Comments: _____

Below you will find statements about your community. Please circle only one response for each statement.

10. I am encouraged to contribute positively to my community.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Comments: _____

11. I am encouraged to learn to contribute positively to my community.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Comments: _____

12. My community's environment facilitates the relationship between conscious consumerism and community members.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Comments: _____

13. I trust my community.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Comments: _____

14. In general, community members share knowledge.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Comments: _____

Below you will find a statement about organizations who you purchase from. Please circle only one response for each statement.

15. Organizations respond promptly when I have questions.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Comments: _____

Below you will find statements about your opinions as a consumer. Please circle only one response for each statement.

16. It is my responsibility to have positive impact on the world around me.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Comments: _____

17. I am confident in actively supporting others emotionally and openly communicating with them about consumption behaviors.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Comments: _____

18. How would you characterize your motivation as a socially conscious consumer?

Highly motivated Somewhat motivated Somewhat unmotivated Highly unmotivated

Comments: _____

19. How stressful or not stressful do you find being a consumer in America?

Not at all stressful A little stressful Fairly stressful Highly stressful

Comments: _____

Please tell us how important or not important the following statements are to your motivation as a consumer. Circle only one answer for each statement.

20. Supporting socially conscious policy.

Not important at all Somewhat not important Somewhat important Very important
I don't know

Comments: _____

21. Recognition from your family as a socially conscious consumer.

Not important at all Somewhat not important Somewhat important Very important
I don't know

Comments: _____

22. Recognition from your community as a socially conscious consumer.

Not important at all Somewhat not important Somewhat important Very important
I don't know

Comments: _____

23. Support in sustaining socially conscious consumer behavior.

Not important at all Somewhat not important Somewhat important Very important
I don't know

Comments: _____

24. Living in a supportive community environment that reinforces your commitments.

Not important at all Somewhat not important Somewhat important Very important
I don't know

Comments: _____

Below you will find questions about your typical shopping experience.

25. In few sentences, explain what an ideal shopping experience looks like for you.

26. Have you ever come close to your ideal shopping experience?

Yes No In Progress I Don't Know

Comments: _____

27. Was the community supportive during the shopping experience?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Comments: _____

28. Were the organizations helpful in the development of your experience?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Comments: _____

29. In a few sentences, list a few deciding factors that you consider while shopping.

30. Do you feel like you are a true decision-maker and stakeholder while shopping?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Comments: _____

*Adapted from Zohar (2014); Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004)

Warm Up Question: How did you learn to shop?

I. What factors do participants perceive facilitate and/or impede their ability to make purchases that are consistent with their identity and values?

1. Do you prepare before you engage in the actual shopping process? Why or why not?
2. While shopping, have you ever thought twice about a making a purchase? Why or why not?
3. In your experience, what are some challenges or obstacles that have you encountered when trying to achieve your ideal shopping experience?
4. What would you say has helped to sustain your ability to purchase products that align with your values?
5. What advice would you give to someone hoping to align their purchases more to their values?

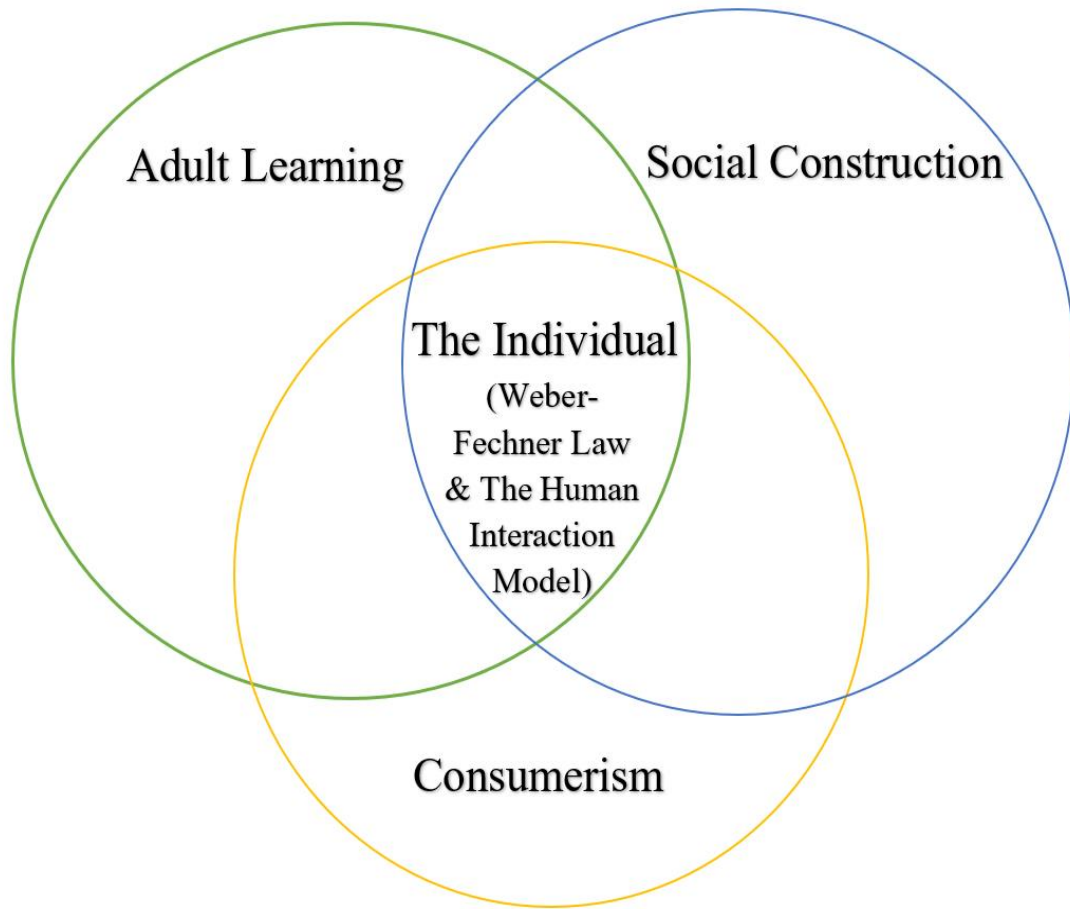
II. How do participants learn to reconcile the dichotomy emanating from purchasing products that are misaligned with their identity and values?

6. Over the years, how would you say you have learned to reconcile the negative attributes attached to some of your purchases?
7. If you had to identify the top three ways you have learned to use to align your purchases with your identity what would they be?
8. Based on your experience, what big assumptions do you think are at play while shopping?

Closing: Would you argue that people should align their purchasing behavior to their identities or values? Why or why not?

Appendix F

Conceptual Framework



3. RQ: How do participants learn to reconcile the dichotomy emanating from products that are misaligned with their values?

		III: Influencing Factors				
Participants	I have the money to invest in a product that I believe in					
Total						
%	%	%	%	%	%	%

MAJOR FINDING:

Appendix H

Indicators for Coding Scheme

I: Descriptions of Commodities

- I consider how the commodity works in my life and how affordable the commodity is.
- I think about the memories tied to the commodity.
- I think about where the commodity comes from.
- I want commodities that are locally sourced, organic and supports small business.
- I avoid commodities that are outsourced and harmful to others or myself.
- I want commodities that will last.
- I consider how the commodity connects me to the world.

II: How they Reconcile Differences

- I think back to how I learned to shop from my mother.
- I avoid clothes with brands.
- I don't buy products that my community rejects.
- I feel it's better not to engage.
- If it makes me cringe I hesitate.
- What I don't know can't hurt me.
- I believe that commodities have a second life so it won't always be harmful.

III: Influencing Factors

Facilitates:

- I have the money to invest in a product that I believe in.
- "There is no quality in the product, if there is no quality in the person who produces it"
- It's a function of built in obsolescence, I want things that will last.
- People I respect are buying it.
- I have the time to do my research on the product.

Impedes:

- I don't have access to products that I would like to purchase.
- I don't trust the product based on the feedback from those around me.
- The people around me are not interested in this so I am alone with my concerns.

Appendix I

Timeline for Dissertation

Submit Final Proposal to Advisor	Early April 2018
Prepare and Submit Revisions	Late April 2018
Proposal Hearing with completed IRB application	Early June 2018
Prepare and Submit Revisions	April – July 2018
Receive IRB approval	Early August 2018
Collect Data	August (after IRB approval) – Nov 2018
Analyze data and write findings	Nov – Dec 2018
Write Analysis	Nov – Dec 2018
Write conclusions; assemble entire document	Dec – Jan 2019
Submit draft dissertation to advisor	Feb 2019
Prepare and Submit Revisions	Feb 2019
Schedule oral defense	March 2018
Have oral defense	April 2019
Prepare and Submit Revisions	April 2019
Prepare dissertation for submission to ODS	April 2019
Graduation	May 2019

Appendix J

Individual SDLRS Raw Data

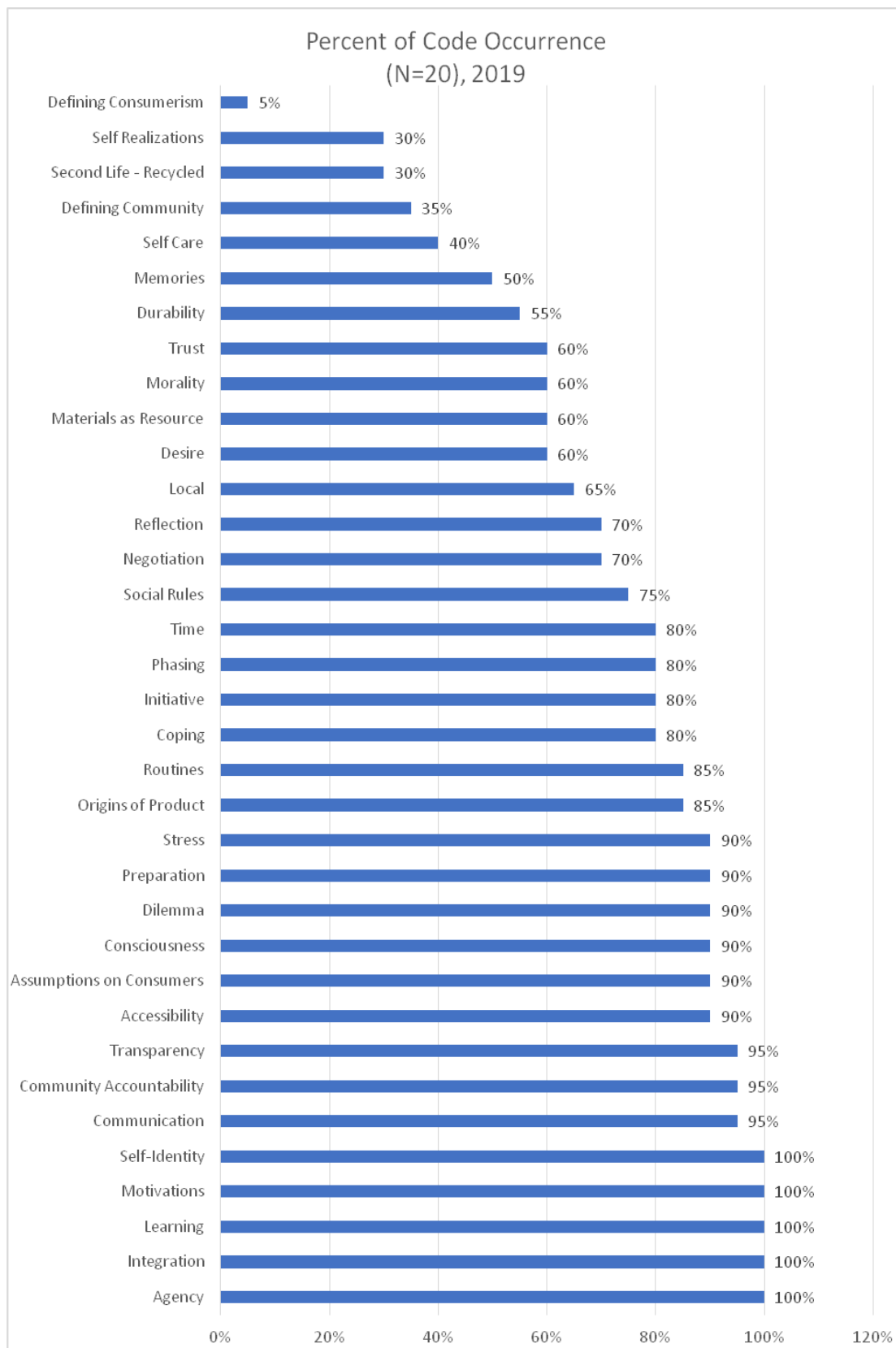
ID	Gender	Age	Country	Education	Occupation	Percentile	Score
Participant 7	Female	25-35	United States of America	Master`s degree	Educator-Teacher-Adult education	93%	255
Participant 4	Female	25-35	United States of America	Master`s degree	Business-Mid level manager	95%	259
Participant 1	Male	25-35	United States of America	Master`s degree	Educator-Administrator-4 year college	69%	229
Participant 6	Male	36-45	United States of America	Master`s degree	Educator-Teacher-High school	88%	248
Participant 13	Male	25-35	United States of America	Master`s degree	Educator-Teacher-College	92%	253
Participant 3	Male	25-35	United States of America	Master`s degree	Government-Local-Top level manager	94%	258
Participant 15	Male	36-45	United States of America	Master`s degree	Business-Mid level manager	74%	233
Participant 5	Female	25-35	United States of America	Bachelor`s degree	Student-Graduate school-Education	81%	240
Participant 10	Female	25-35	United States of America	Bachelor`s degree	Business-Non-manager	88%	247
Participant 12	Female	36-45	United States of America	Master`s degree	Educator-Teacher-Graduate school	91%	251
Participant 14	Female	25-35	United States of America	Bachelor`s degree	Business-Non-manager	63%	225
Participant 2	Female	Under 25	United States of America	Master`s degree	Student-Graduate school-Education	88%	247
Participant 9	Female	Under 25	United States of America	Bachelor`s degree	Student-Graduate school-Other	50%	215
Participant 18	Male	25-35	United States of America	Master`s degree	Educator-Teacher-Adult education	87%	245
Participant 11	Male	25-35	United States of America	Bachelor`s degree	Business-Non-manager	97%	264

Participant 16	Male	25-35	United States of America	Bachelor`s degree	Government-Local-Non-manager	27%	202
Participant 8	Female	46-55	United States of America	Master`s degree	Educator-Teacher-Adult education	92%	253
Participant 17	Male	36-45	United States of America	Master`s degree	Business-Mid level manager	50%	215
Participant 19	Female	25-35	United States of America	Master`s degree	Business-Mid level manager	94%	258
Participant 20	Male	Under 25	United States of America	Bachelor`s degree	Student	81%	239

Appendix K

NVivo Thematic Data

Name	Files	Percent of Files	References	Percent of References
Agency	20	100%	127	7%
Integration	20	100%	64	3%
Learning	20	100%	103	5%
Motivations	20	100%	154	8%
Self-Identity	20	100%	100	5%
Communication	19	95%	118	6%
Community Accountability	19	95%	154	8%
Transparency	19	95%	69	4%
Accessibility	18	90%	104	5%
Assumptions on Consumers	18	90%	22	1%
Consciousness	18	90%	112	6%
Dilemma	18	90%	100	5%
Preparation	18	90%	30	2%
Stress	18	90%	31	2%
Origins of Product	17	85%	35	2%
Routines	17	85%	45	2%
Coping	16	80%	53	3%
Initiative	16	80%	29	2%
Phasing	16	80%	44	2%
Time	16	80%	55	3%
Social Rules	15	75%	36	2%
Negotiation	14	70%	24	1%
Reflection	14	70%	25	1%
Local	13	65%	40	2%
Desire	12	60%	23	1%
Materials as Resource	12	60%	30	2%
Morality	12	60%	36	2%
Trust	12	60%	36	2%
Durability	11	55%	23	1%
Memories	10	50%	21	1%
Self-Care	8	40%	18	1%
Defining Community	7	35%	11	1%
Second Life - Recycled	6	30%	15	1%
Self-Realizations	6	30%	9	0%
Defining Consumerism	1	5%	1	0%
			1897	100%

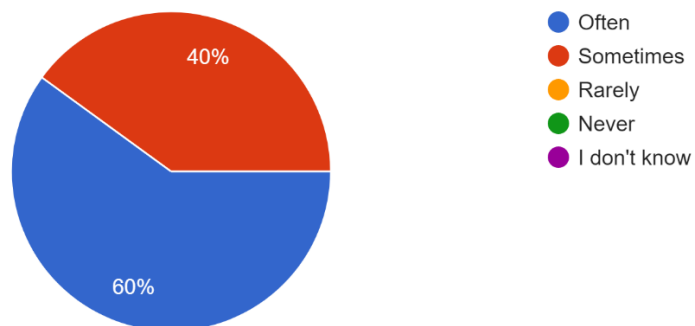


Appendix L

Likert Scale Interview Prompt Graphs

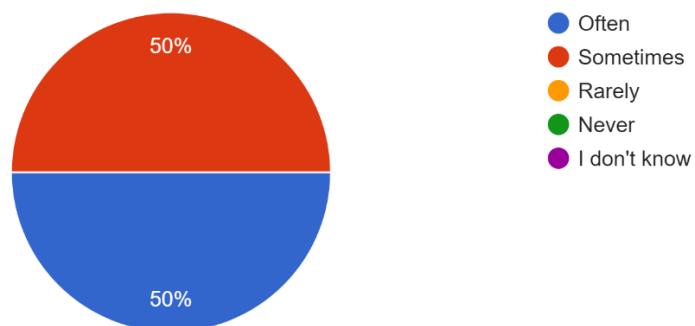
1. I feel confident in my consumer behavior.

20 responses



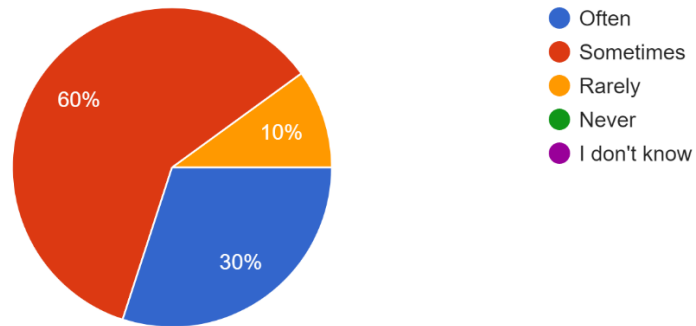
2. I stay up to date on pressing issues that impact where and how I spend my money.

20 responses



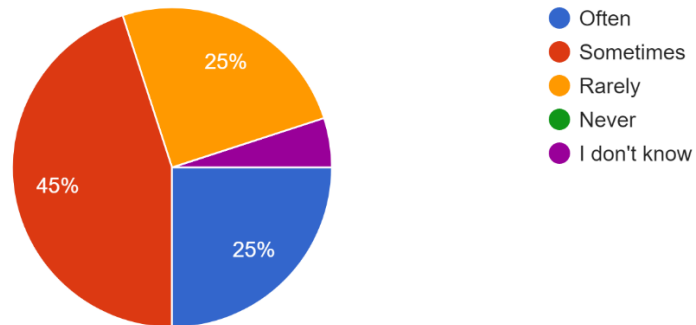
3. I communicate with others about my consumer behavior.

20 responses



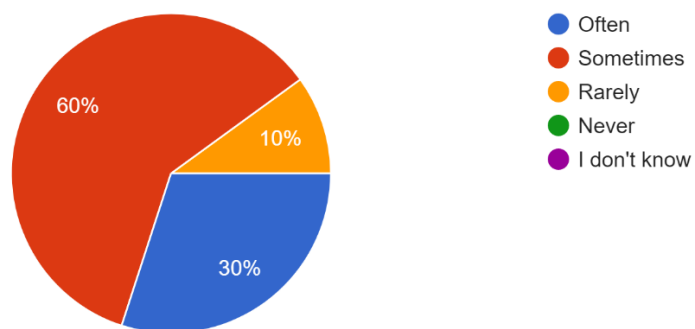
4. Others communicate with me about their consumer behavior.

20 responses



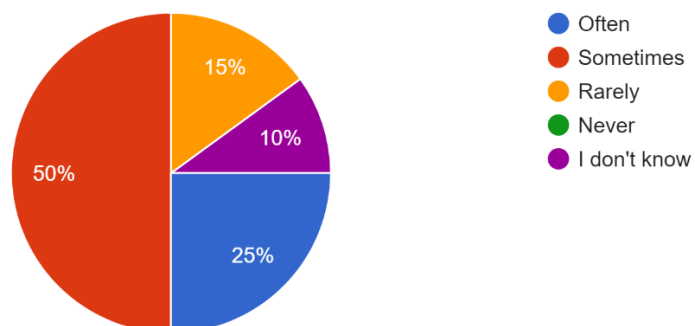
5. I believe that my interest and participation as a consumer makes a positive difference.

20 responses



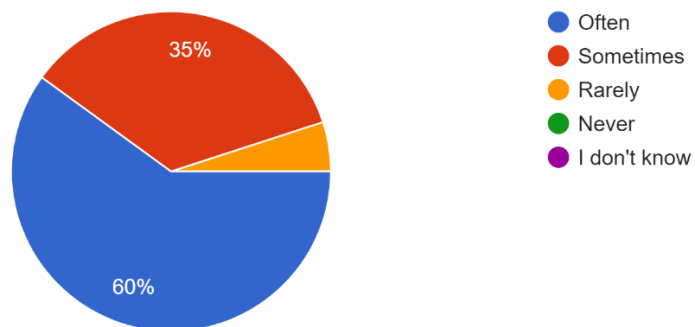
6. I am knowledgeable of the problems and issues others face as consumers.

20 responses



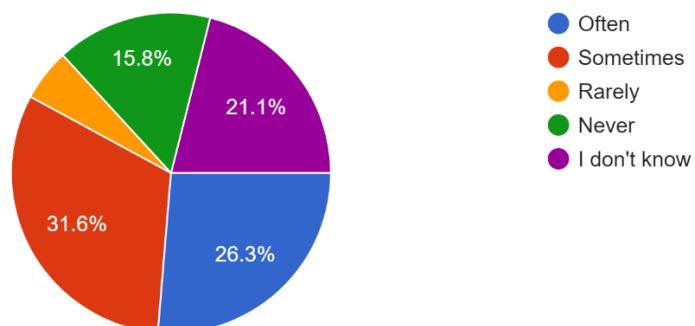
7. I know where to go and who to contact with questions about my purchases.

20 responses



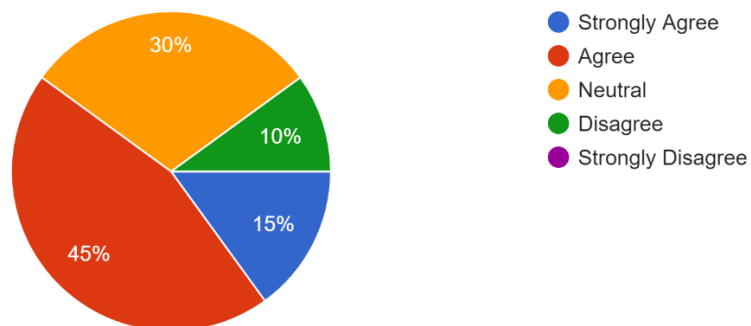
8. I know where to go and who to contact with questions about my purchasing behavior.

19 responses



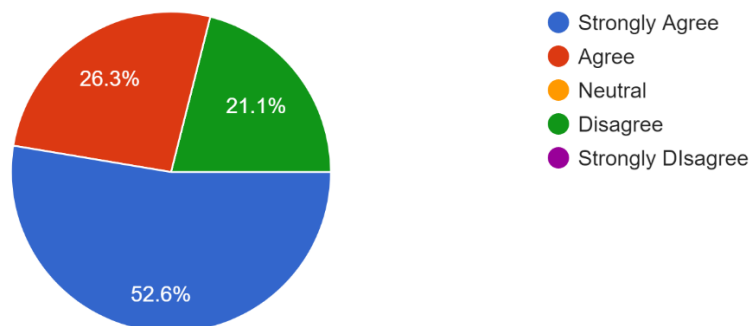
9. I always receive proper information about my purchases.

20 responses



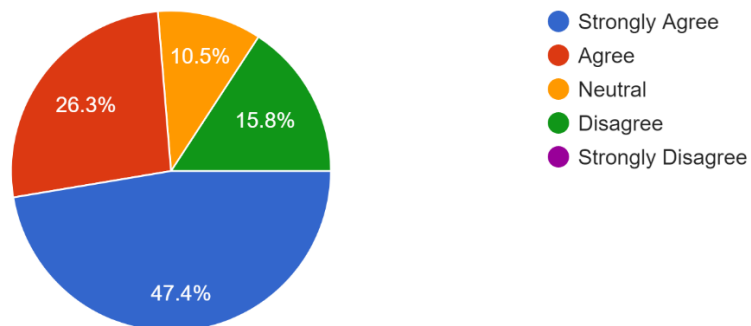
10. I am encouraged to contribute positively to my community.

19 responses



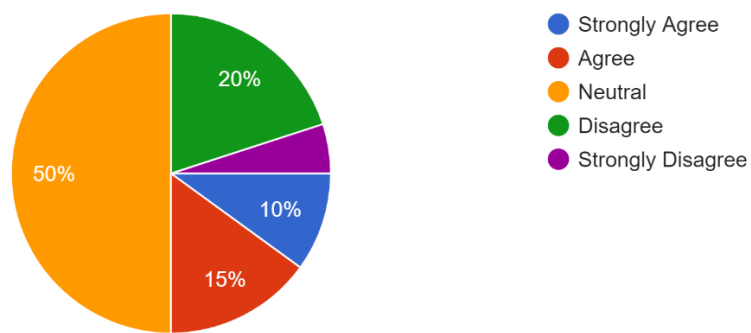
11. I am encouraged to learn to contribute positively to my community.

19 responses



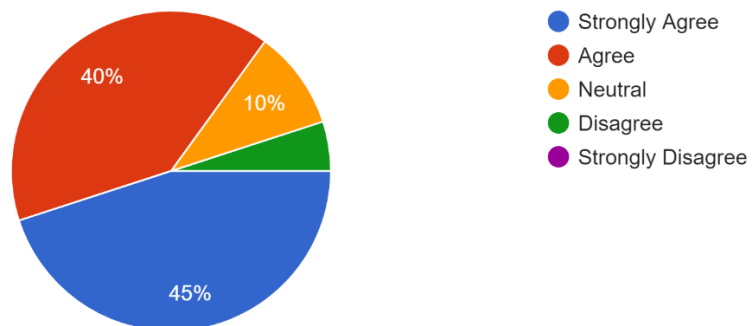
12. My community's environment facilitates the relationship between conscious consumerism and community members.

20 responses



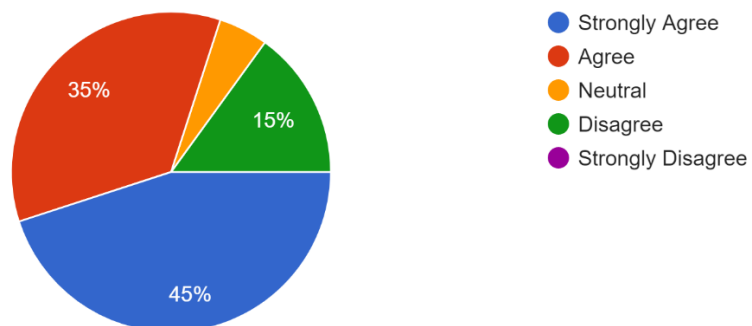
13. I trust my community.

20 responses



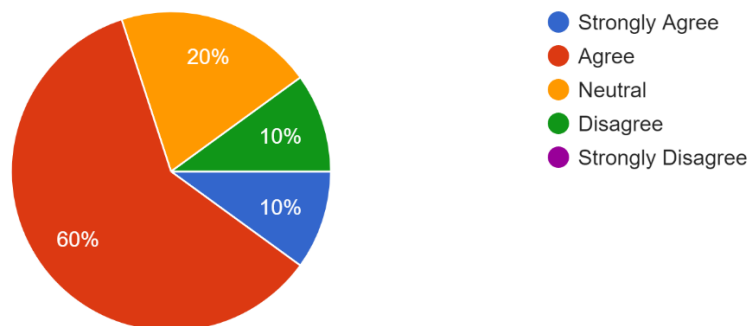
14. In general, my community members share knowledge.

20 responses



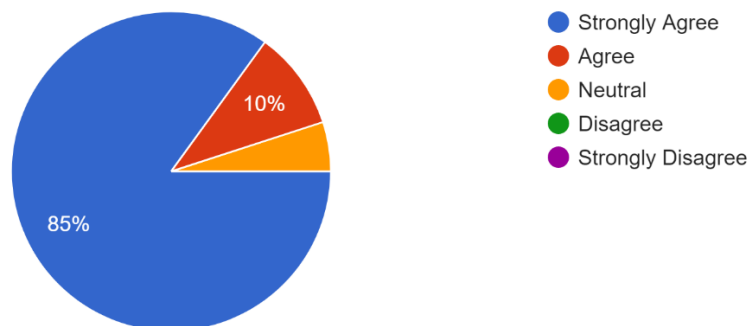
15. Organizations respond promptly when I have questions.

20 responses



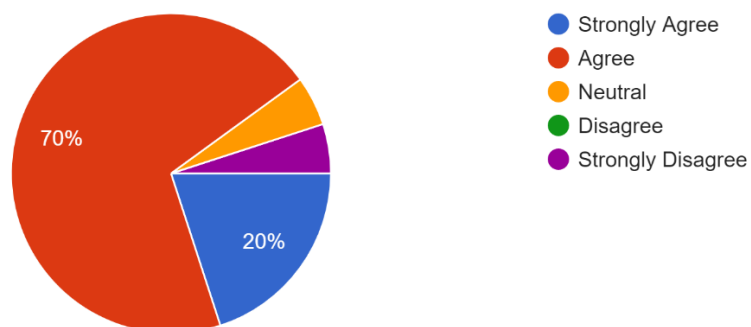
16. It is my responsibility to have positive impact on the world around me.

20 responses



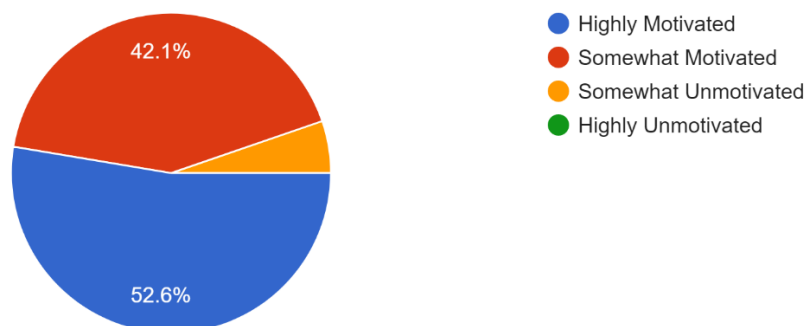
17. I am confident in actively supporting others emotionally and openly communicating with them about consumption behaviors.

20 responses



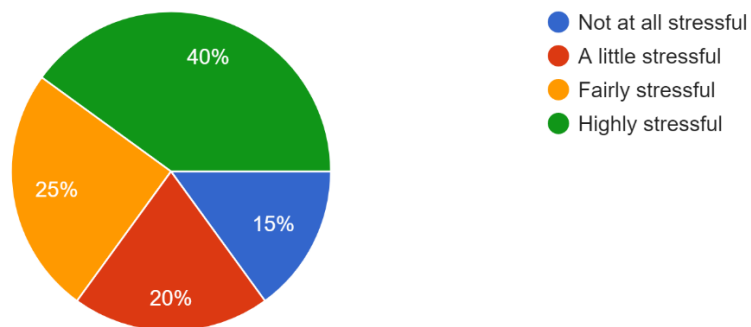
18. How would you characterize your motivation as a socially conscious consumer?

19 responses



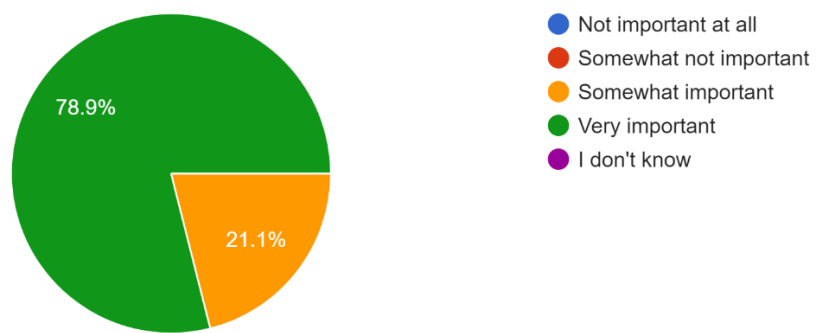
19. How stressful or not stressful do you find being a consumer in America?

20 responses



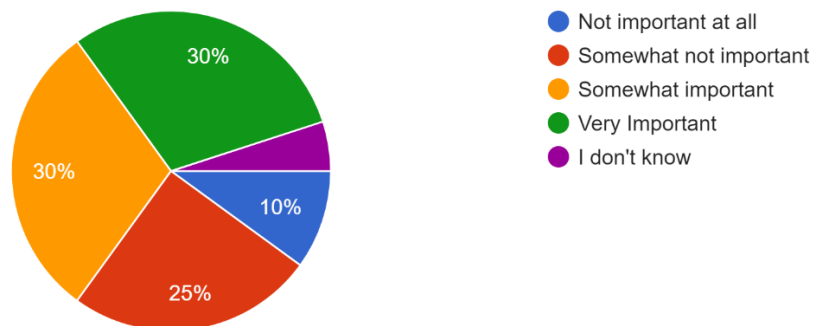
20. Supporting socially conscious policy is:

19 responses



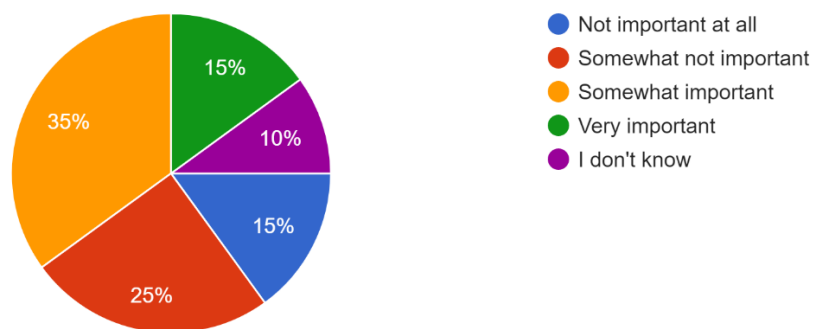
21. Recognition from your family as a socially conscious consumer is:

20 responses



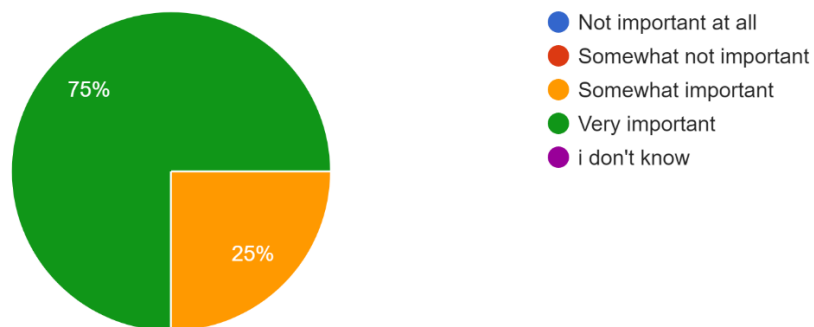
22. Recognition from your community as a socially conscious consumer is:

20 responses



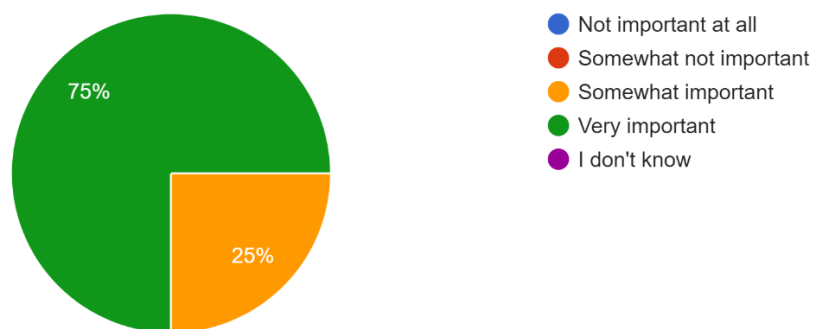
23. Support in sustaining socially conscious consumer behavior is:

20 responses



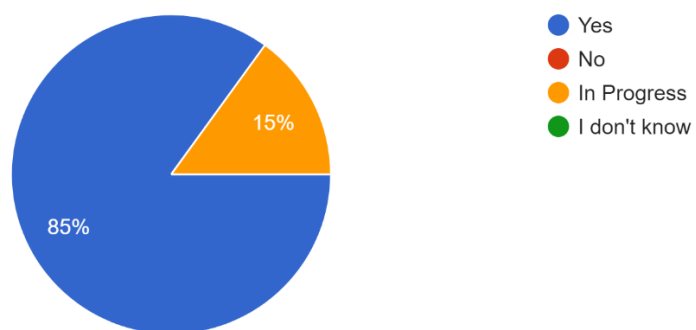
24. Living in a supportive community environment that reinforces your commitments is:

20 responses



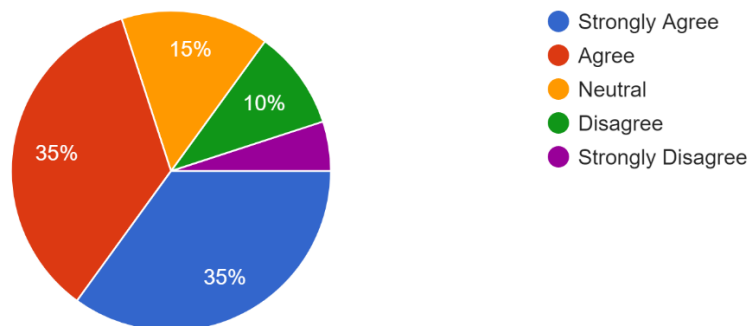
25. Have you ever come close to your ideal shopping experience?

20 responses



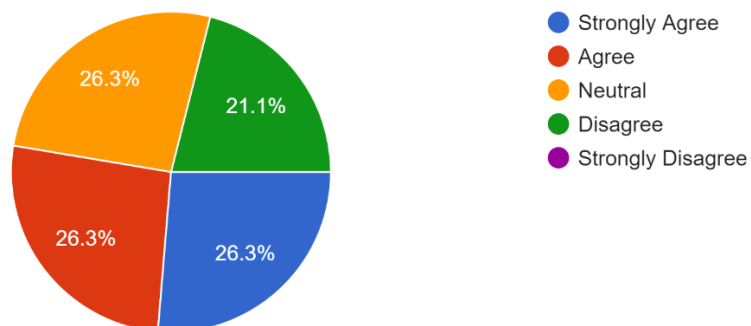
26. Was the community supportive during the shopping experience?

20 responses



27. Were the organizations helpful in the development of your experience?

19 responses



28. Do you feel like you are a true decision-maker and stakeholder while shopping?

19 responses

