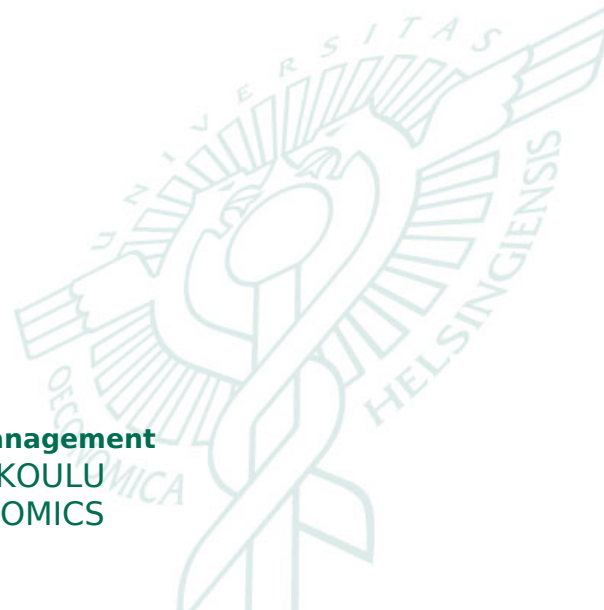


Ethical consumption as an identity project - A narrative approach to Finnish ethical consumers' identity construction

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ETHICAL CONSUMPTION AS AN IDENTITY PROJECT

- A narrative approach to Finnish ethical consumers' identity construction

Objective of the study

Aim of this study is to explore Finnish ethical consumers: Their values, preferences and habits. I will view ethical consumption as an identity project, that is to say, I will study how the consumer of the postmodern times constructs his or her identity by making ethical consumption choices.

Research method

This research is qualitative in its nature. I conducted six life story interviews with Finnish young adults, who declare themselves ethical consumers. This open-ended and in-depth research method enabled me to obtain true understanding of my informants' behavior as ethical consumers.

In organizing the transcribed interview data I used the methods of narrative analysis. I closely examined the interviewees' stories, and found common patterns of meaning in them. Based on these meanings, I elaborated five different themes and analyzed the data according to them.

Findings

The main findings of the research are fivefold as there were five emerging themes. First, the ethical consumers appeared to be ethically oriented from their teenage years, and ethical consumerism is a lifelong project to them. Second, the ethical consumers share the critique of the consumer society and 'throw-away' culture. They refuse to participate in the consumption hysteria and, instead, try to make sustainable consumption choices whenever it is possible. Third, ethical consumption acts as a way of social bonding. The ethical consumers fulfill their need of belongingness and are seeking acceptance from their peers through their ethical behavior. Fourth, the ethical consumers are striving for harmony with the surrounding reality: They try to respect the nature as well as appraise both human and animal rights in all their actions. Fifth, the ethical consumers have a strong will to influence things, and they believe in making a difference by their ethical action.

Together these five themes contribute to the ethical consumers' identity construction. The ultimate goal in the ethical consumers' identity projects is to become a better consumer, even a better person. One's identity as ethical consumer is one of the individual's many identities, and this identity is developing all the time.

Keywords

Ethical consumption, postmodern consumer, identity, narrative, life story interview

EETTINEN KULUTTAMINEN IDENTITEETTIPROJEKTINA

- Narratiivinen lähestymistapa suomalaisten eettisten kuluttajien identiteetin rakentumiseen

Tutkimuksen tavoitteet

Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena on tutkia suomalaisia eettisiä kuluttajia: Heidän arvojaan, mieltymyksiään ja tapojaan. Tarkastelen eettistä kuluttamista identiteettiprojektina, eli tutkin miten postmodernin ajan kuluttaja rakentaa identiteettiään tekemällä eettisiä kulutusvalintoja.

Metodologia

Tutkimus on luonteeltaan laadullinen. Haastattelin kuutta suomalaista nuorta aikuista, jotka kokevat olevansa eettisiä kuluttajia. Metodina käytin avointa ja syväluotaavaa elämäntarinahaastattelua, mikä auttoi minua todella ymmärtämään näiden eettisten kuluttajien käytöstä.

Organisoidessani haastatteluaineistoa käytin narratiivisen analyysin keinoja. Tarkastelin yksityiskohtaisesti haastateltavien kertomuksia, ja etsin niistä yhteisiä merkityksiä. Esille nousseiden merkitysten avulla kehitin viisi eri teemaa, joiden avulla analysoin tutkimusaineistoa.

Tutkimuksen päälöydökset

Tutkimuksen löydökset voidaan järjestää viiden teeman mukaisesti. Ensinnäkin, eettiset kuluttajat ovat jo teini-ikästään lähtien eettisesti suuntautuneita, ja eettinen kuluttaminen on heille koko iän jatkuva projekti. Toiseksi, eettisiä kuluttajia yhdistää kulutusyhteiskunnan ja kertakäyttökulttuurin kritiikki. He kieltäytyvät osallistumasta vallitsevaan kulutushysteriaan ja tekevät mieluummin kestäviä kulutusvalintoja aina kun se on mahdollista. Kolmanneksi, eettinen kuluttaminen yhdistää näitä kuluttajia. Eettisen toimintansa kautta he tyydyttävät yhteenkuuluvuuden kaipuutaan sekä hakevat hyväksyntää vertaisiltaan. Neljänneksi, eettiset kuluttajat pyrkivät harmoniaan ympäröivän todellisuuden kanssa: He kunnioittavat luontoa, sekä ihmisten että eläinten oikeuksia kaikessa toiminnassaan. Viidenneksi, eettiset kuluttajat haluavat vaikuttaa asioihin, ja he uskovat omalla toiminnallaan edistävänsä maapallon hyvinvointia.

Yhdessä nämä viisi teemaa vaikuttavat eettisen kuluttajan identiteetin rakentumiseen. Eettisten kuluttajien identiteettiprojekteissa tavoitteena on kasvamisen paremmaksi kuluttajaksi, jopa paremmaksi ihmiseksi. Eettinen kuluttajuus on yksi yksilön monista identiteeteistä, ja se kehittyy koko ajan.

Avainsanat

Eettinen kuluttaminen, postmoderni kuluttaja, identiteetti, narratiivi, elämäntarinahaastattelu

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1 Introduction

“I shop – therefore I am.” (New millennium Descartes)

– Hélène Cherrier & Jeff Murray

Consumption values in Western affluent societies have transformed from *consuming to live* into *living to consume* during the past decades. The implications of this transformation are critical because the consumption behavior in industrial societies has a profound effect on the present quality of life and that of the future generations (Kilbourne & al. 1997). The world is currently undergoing huge technological, economic and political change, and as a result, many of our established ways of living together are not working well. Consumption is the reason why anything gets produced, and consumption and production together are the source of man-made stress on the natural environment as well as the source of global injustice among people.

In the market economy the consumer has the main responsibility for environmental degradation and spreading of global injustice. However, consumers have little knowledge of the links between the consumption patterns and their consequences, and therefore have assumingly little power to affect the market place. In this Master’s Thesis I seek to find out how a newborn consumer group, the ethical consumers, is trying to change society with their own behavior. The underlying assumption is that society might be improved if consumers spend more time considering the impact of their purchase decisions. This ideology is well put in words by Dickinson et al. (2005): “Every time you step to the cash register you vote. When you switch from one brand to another, companies hear you clearly.”

The world has undergone an explosive expansion of consumerism during the past decades. Ollman (1998, sited in Harrison et al. 2005) has highlighted people’s profound involvement in consumption. The amount of time, thought and emotion spent in buying and selling, and in preparing for and recovering from these activities is increasing all the time. The market has become dominant influence in how people act and think throughout the rest of their lives. Contemporary consumers increasingly construct their identity and lifestyle through consumption. This relates to the increase in the symbolic value of the goods consumed. These consumption objects, with specific meaning, participate in one’s identity formation. This fact

itself justifies the research on people's consumption habits and highlights its importance. I want to contribute into this research by studying Finnish young adults' ethical consumption habits and explore how this affects to their identity construction. In this study I will view ethical consumption as an identity project for young Finnish adults.

When it comes to everyday purchase decisions, simple choices like choosing Fairtrade coffee for the sake of employee rights in developing countries, or supporting ethical clothing brands that are made without using sweatshop labor can make a difference. In this thesis my concentration is on everyday ethical choices, mostly concerning grocery and clothes shopping. I will highlight the role of *ethical fashion* as the textile industry has one of the longest production chains, and as it is characterized by severe social and environmental problems. Also, clothing plays an important part in one's identity construction process as it frames what we want to show to the others about ourselves. I aim to shed the light on the *positive buying* phenomenon, showing how people can contribute to improving society by selecting socially and environmentally friendly, that is to say, ethical products.

The origins of the ethical action by consumers lie in the 1970's when the first Fairtrade initiatives started and ethical banking gained momentum. The idea was simple: You cannot do everything through what you buy, but you can do something. The leadership for this ethical consumption movement has come from the margins as mainstream business has been slow to adapt to the demands of ethical consumers. Nevertheless, in the turn of the 21st century, the field of ethical consumption is rising to a new glory. As doing good business means understanding consumer behavior and purchase decisions, companies can no longer ignore the growing consumer segment that demands socially responsible business practices from them. The recent boom in corporate social responsibility has given companies pressure to pay more attention to ethical ways of doing business. (Harrison & al. 2005) Niinimäki (2007) sees sustainable development and environmental issues as a megatrend that drives the future development in Finland. It remains to be seen whether ethical consumption achieves this position some day.

I find that the issues surrounding ethical consumption are very current and of crucial importance as people's consumption habits in the end set the direction to the future of our planet. Ethical consumption solely may not save the globe, but the change starts with minor steps we all can make. Today people increasingly construct their identity through

consumption practices. It is extremely important to better understand young people's consumption habits, as they are the future generation. The viewpoint of consumers constructing their identity by selecting certain products / brands can also offer valuable information for marketers who wish to promote ethical brands. Ethical consumption is increasingly in the spotlights, and the offering of ethical alternatives is growing and ethical brands are born at an ever faster pace.

Today consumption cannot be regarded as a simple process based on rational choice, optimum information and time. Instead, it is often a highly non-rational process driven by emotions, moods, time pressure, taste, perception, opinions and beliefs (Langeland 1999). As a result of this there is a growing demand for products that answer to these drivers of consumption. For example, in the food market there is already an important niche market for organic and Fairtrade food that is steadily growing. It can be expected that the same thing will happen in the fashion industry during the following years. The signs are already in the air: Media is handling more and more the issues of textile industry and promoting ethical and sustainable clothing. Even in the streets of Helsinki ethical clothing stores are increasing in number, let alone in the world's metropolitan areas.

In this research I set out to examine Finnish ethical consumers in an attempt to explore how their ethical consumption practices affect their process of identity construction. When interviewing committed ethical consumers, I was surprised how thoroughly they considered their consumption choices, and how strong was their will to influence things. Even if the demands of everyday life create challenges for their ethical aspirations, they did not let themselves to be discouraged. The making of this Master's Thesis has been an eye-opening experience for me as a consumer, not just as a marketing student. One of my informants, Jaakko, sums up effectively what this Master's Thesis is all about:

“If I buy these mittens, I have to think if a Chinese 8-year old girl has been forced to stay up all night hungry by the production line because of them. Then I think that ‘hey, you don’t have to stay up there in China’, and so I ask my friend whether he has an extra pair of mittens. Unnecessary consumption is unethical.” -Jaakko

2 Aim of the study and research approach

The growing awareness among consumers about the environmental and social impact of their own consumption has led to an increased demand of more ethical product alternatives. This is most visible in the food market where organic and Fairtrade groceries are augmenting their market share. The same has started to happen in the clothing and fashion sector as consumers have started to demand more ethical alternatives. In this chapter I will reveal the objectives behind my research and present the research questions. Then I will explain the research approach and go through the relevant literature in the field. Finally I will conceptualize what *ethicality* means in this study.

2.1 Objective of the study and research questions

The objective of this Master's Thesis is to understand how young adults construct their identity through ethical consumption and by telling stories about it. The basic underlying assumption here is that consumption is an essential element in a person's identity construction process. I seek to explore the meanings that young people ascribe to consumption and in particular to choosing ethical products. Within the field of ethical consumption I chose to emphasize ethical fashion as it is a very current topic, and also because clothing plays an important role in an individual's identity construction. A more general aim of the research is to describe and analyze the overall phenomenon of ethical consumption among young adults in today's Finland. Ethical consumption can be roughly separated into two forms: Positive and negative, depending on whether the consumers actively seek out products they favor (choosing for) or actively avoid products they dislike (choosing against) (Langeland 1999). In this study I will concentrate on the phenomenon of positive buying or "buycotting", and I am trying to explore how consumers build their identity by choosing ethical products.

In the present study I will view identity construction by consuming ethically as a personal as well as a social identity project. That is to say, ethical consumption is a means of an individuals' identity construction. Today the role of consumption in the process of constructing one's identity is widely recognized. This relates to the transition from modern to postmodern society and the development of the consumer culture. It is suggested among others by Cherrier & Murray (2002) that consumer behavior research should expand the study of consumer's needs into the concepts of identity construction. Furthermore, in the existing research little attention has been paid to the ethical issues of the textile industry and to the

individual consumer behavior concerning clothes. Shaw & al. (2006) state accordingly that the Fairtrade concerns of the clothing market have been neglected in marketing research. Instead, there is greater number of studies about ethical grocery shopping, e.g. about choosing Fairtrade alternatives. However, previous studies in the area of ethical consumption have mainly used quantitative methods, and frequently experiments where only few variables have been introduced. This has led to the oversimplifying of people's purchase processes. My aim is to contribute into filling of this research gap by shedding a light on young Finns' consumption habits. I want to learn as much as possible from a few individual ethical consumers through in-depth inquiry and, thus, gain understanding about their behavior.

When it comes to ethical matters, people often behave unpredictably and inconsistently depending on the ethical issue at hand. Traditional theories and research methods used in mainstream marketing are often inadequate for studying complex social behavior phenomena that are inherently cultural or socially imbedded (Moisander 2001, 3). Ethical consumption is surely such a phenomenon, and therefore I attempt to answer the research questions with a narrative approach that allows the development of a deep understanding on people's behavior. Studying consumption through story-telling allows combining objective phenomenon (ethical consumption) with subjective experience, which enables to better understand and to analyze the act of situation. In the spirit of postmodernism the aim of the study is not to produce universal knowledge but to better understand a particular phenomenon of ethical consumption.

The narrative approach is both a method and a worldview that makes the process of human sense making itself the object of the study, namely through the process of storytelling. Polkinghorne (1998, sited in McAdams 1996) states: "Our lives are ceaselessly intertwined with narrative, with the stories we tell and hear told, with the stories that we dream or imagine or would like to tell. We live in an immerse narrative, recounting and reassessing the meanings of our past actions, anticipating the outcomes of our future projects, situating ourselves in an intersection of several stories not yet completed." (p.160) Narratives have the potential to contribute to the understanding of how consumers structure and make sense of their lives. By listening ethical consumers' life stories, I hope to gain understanding about the reasons behind their actions and, thus, hope to be of benefit to future ethical marketers.

The main research question is:

➤ **How do Finnish young adults construct their identity within the framework of ethical consumption?**

Here, I seek to illustrate ethical consumers' values, preferences and habits in their everyday life, as well as their drivers or reasons to consume ethically. Then I will explore how ethical consumption is related to the identity construction of a postmodern consumer.

Subsequent research questions are:

➤ **What is the role of fashion and clothing in an ethical consumers' identity construction?**

Here, I will highlight the impact of fashion and clothing in communicating a message to the others.

➤ **What kind of meanings do young adults ascribe to ethical consumption?**

Here, I want to understand the meanings that consumers, who declare themselves as ethical, give to their consumption.

➤ **How do ethical consumers express their moral commitment by consuming ethically?**

Here, I will examine the moral aspects that underlie the ethical consumers' behavior.

I will tackle the research questions by interviewing committed ethical consumers. This study is carried out from the consumer point of view which is natural regarding the nature of the research questions. However, this study is also interesting from the marketer's point of view, as I will explore what kind of criteria ethical consumers are placing on the companies. It is said that a company's credibility and image is very relevant to the ethical consumers and so marketers should act carefully, honestly and with forthright manner in their marketing practices.

In the theoretical part of this thesis I will define ethical consumption, present the characteristics of the postmodern consumer and go through some identity theories. Then in the empirical part of the study I will conduct my own research by interviewing ethical consumers, and analyze their stories according to different themes. Finally, I will discuss the results in the light of the theory.

2.2 Interpretative approach to research

In this study I will take an interpretative approach to consumer inquiry. Interpretive paradigm aims first and foremost in understanding the phenomenon under research i.e. to interpret reality. This approach has become common in the field of marketing and consumer research beside positivistic and structuralist approaches. According to Ozcaglar-Toulouse (2005, 177), positivistic paradigm that tries to explain people's behavior by causal relations between ethical consumption and different measurable variables often ends up producing confusing and not replicable results. Instead of uncovering causal links, interpretative approach is based on the assumption that all entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish the causes from the effects. (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 38). The process of knowledge creation thus involves understanding the meaning that actors give to reality, taking into account actors' intentions, motivation, expectations, motives and beliefs. Interpretive approach that centers on the meanings of action thus justifies itself in the research of ethical consumers. The focal point of interpretive approach is indeed the autonomy of actors and their capacity of modifying the events. Interpretativism also corresponds with the concept of postmodern consumer because in both approaches the reality is viewed as a subjective construction. (Ozcaglar-Toulouse 2005, 177-178)

Ethical consumption places a new link between the consumer and the external world through social and environmental demands. In this sense it is unavoidable to consider the social reality that a consumer faces when studying consumption. Thompson (1997) refers to the "linguistic turn" in the social sciences that has transformed different disciplines by focusing on the interpretive activities by which people make sense of their lives and the roles that language and narrative play in shaping these interpreted meanings. Narratives can be used as an interpretive tool that helps to understand how consumers structure their consumption experience, and so make sense of this particular aspect of their lives.

In a narrative interpretation, the line between ontology (the nature of reality, whether it is external / internal to an individual) and epistemology (the nature of knowledge; what can be known) is blurred. According to Shankar & al. (2001), the whole narrative perspective is based on a belief that "realities are multiple and constructed" and, thus, each individual has to make sense of the world in which they live in and give meaning to it. As both the researcher

and the object of the research construct their own realities, the interpretation of consumer behavior will always be subjective. (Shankar & al 2001).

The interpretative approach is compatible with my data collection method: Life story interview. Storytelling is a fundamental form of human communication that serves as an essential function in our lives; we often think and speak in the story form as well as bring meaning to our lives through a story. Storytelling means simply giving a narrative account of an event, an experience or any other happening. The events in our lives are made up of beginnings, conflicts and resolutions that form and repeat a pattern. (Atkinson 1998, 1-3) In this study I seek to explore these patterns from the narratives that Finnish ethical consumers tell me. According to Atkinson (1998, 7), stories make the implicit explicit, the hidden seen, the unformed formed, and the confusing clear.

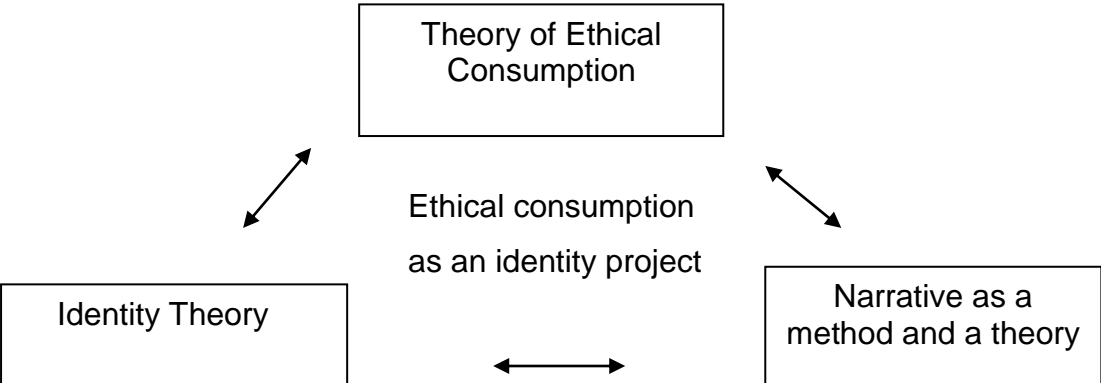


FIGURE 1 THE RESEARCH APPROACH

Figure 1 above illustrates my research approach that combines the theoretical background of ethical consumption and that of the individuals’ identity construction. By means of narrative inquiry and consumer storytelling I aim to gain understanding of ethical consumption as an identity project, and thus hope to be able to answer my research questions thoroughly.

2.3 Theorizing ethicality

There are two main philosophical approaches relevant to studying ethical consumption: Consequentialist approach and deontological approach. The former one defines ethical conduct according to the consequences or outcomes of actions. The right thing to do is to act in order to maximize the good. The latter approach is more rule- / duty-based and defines right action as independent of its contribution to human happiness or other favored goals. Besides these two more traditional approaches, there is also a third approach applicable to researching ethical consumption: The virtue ethics. Virtue philosophy centers around flourishing and living a good life by taking the ethical theory away from “what I ought to do?” into “What sort of person I strive to be?”. According to empirical research it seems that moral integrity is fundamental for the well-being of ethical consumers, instead of consequences or rules that are highlighted in the other two approaches. Therefore virtue ethics seems like the most suitable approach in this thesis where my aim is to study consumers’ aspirations as ethical decision-makers. (Barnett & al. 2005b)

In this study I want to explore how ethical consumers express their moral commitment by consuming ethically, and so act as ethical subjects. Foucault (1985, cited in Moisander & al. 2002) sees personal ethics as a mode of forming oneself as an ethical subject. Accordingly, if one engages in moral action it requires the formation of the self as a moral subject. Foucault sees moral agency as a form of resistance, on one hand refusing what we are, and on the other hand inventing what we are by promoting new forms of subjectivity. The latter is well in line with the concept of virtue ethics. Moisander & al. (2002) claim that green consumerism, which can be seen as a part of ethical consumerism, represents a certain way of thinking and acting that can be characterized as a style of life or as a desire to be a certain kind of person and stems from complex interplay of moral and aesthetic criteria.

When studying ethical consumption some caveats can be found. There is no one view of what is ethical. People are rarely rational but, instead, they are guided by their feelings and act inconsistently most of the time. Ethical matters are never easy; if it is fair to buy Fairtrade products it is unfair to not to buy them. If it is sustainable to buy environmentally friendly products it is unsustainable not to. This way conventional discourses of ethical consumption tend to polarize arguments: in the broadest sense ethical consumption creates unethical

consumption (Harrison & al. 2005). Consumerism is always wrapped up in morality, e.g. is it ethical to buy a bigger car to take the elderly to church?

Here, I will view ethical consumption as a means to express one's moral commitments. According to Barnett et al. (2005b) this moralizing can be seen as a part of people's self-image, their integrity. Three important points follow: First, without ordinary ethics of consumption there would be no basis upon which to build ethical consumption agenda; Secondly, framing everyday consumption as unequivocally unethical threatens to alienate ordinary people rather than recruit them; Thirdly, ethical consumption should refer to discussions that seek to refine consumption and non-consumption towards more broad ethical practices. Barnett et al. (2005b) also see ethical consumption as a medium for moral and political action - commodity consumption as a means of social reproduction is regarded as a potential resource for changing other practices and patterns.

3 The field of ethical consumption

Consumers play an active role in the consumption process. Everyday commodity consumption can be seen as a realm for the actualization of capacities of autonomous action, reflective monitoring of conduct and the self-fashioning of relationships between selves and the others (Barnett & al. 2005b). Barnett et al. (2005a) claim that consumer culture with its systems of commoditized social reproduction inevitably generates a set of questions about the relationships between how people want to live and how society should be organized. Thus consumption and consumerism include an inherently ethical or a moral dimension of social practice. In the following chapter I will introduce the concept of ethical consumption and reflect on who are the ethical consumers. I will also present the positive buying phenomenon and the concept of ethical fashion.

3.1 Defining ethical consumption

Ethical consumption is a relatively new concept in the field of consumer research and its definition has not yet been established. There is an ongoing debate about the subject, both in the academic world and outside of it. This is natural considering the more or less subjective nature of the concept of ethicality. One's perception of what is moral is influenced by his / her personal principles, values and the world view in general. However, ethical issues in the business world and among consumers are gaining importance worldwide. According to Cherrier (2006) there are two ways to view ethical consumption: Conservative and liberal. According to the conservative view consumers need to obey a prescriptive set of ethical norms in order to consume ethically. However, in this study I will take the liberal view that sees consumers as active agents who exercise informed and autonomous responsibilities in relation to their values and concerns. This view highlights ethical consumption as a personal choice arising from individual concerns and, thus, it is more applicable for my research question that concerns individual's identity construction. Anyhow, both liberal and conservative views are co-productive in the development of ethical consumerism. (Cherrier 2006)

The foundations of ethical consumerism were laid in the 1970's when the first ethical trading initiatives appeared. In 1975 Webster introduced the concept of *socially conscious consumer*, and defined him / her as someone who takes into account the public consequences of his / her

private consumption or who attempts to use his / her purchasing power to bring about social change. Today the definition is still justifiable and around the turn of the 21st century the concept of ethical consumption has arisen to a new glory as it is gaining momentum in the market economies around the globe. This relates to the on-going boom of promoting business ethics and corporate social responsibility, these concepts are getting more and more attention and media coverage. The rise of ethical consumerism also coincides with the information technology revolution. The processing and communication power available has it made possible to rate competing global products and companies against ethical issues. (Webster 1975, Harrison 2005)

Ethical consumerism spans to include several types of ethical purchases: Green, socially responsible and Fairtrade. In short, ethical consumption refers to both socially and environmentally responsible consumption which differentiates it from e.g. green consumption that only involves environmental issues. Some authors in the field (e.g. Fosse-Gomez, Ozcarlar-Toulouse) prefer to use the term responsible consumption instead of ethical consumption as they see that consumption is not an act of moral conformity. Also the term *vigilant consumer* is used by several scholars (e.g. Langeland), characterizing the watchfulness and alertness of this consumer group. However, in this study I will use the term *ethical consumption* in the aforementioned sense, and by an *ethical consumer* I also mean responsible and vigilant consumers, who are critical of both social and environmental issues.

The notion of ethical consumer has developed in society that can be referred to as the *consumer culture*. The growth of consumerism in the affluent Western countries is illustrated in increasing per capita consumption that is paralleled by a constant rise in inflation-adjusted consumer expenditure. One significant feature of this is the commodification of areas of our lives that were previously outside the market place. (Harrison & al. 2005) Strong (1996) has listed four main reasons for the rise of ethical consumerism: Increased media coverage; increased levels of information; greater availability of alternative products, and the shift in values towards sustainable development. Harrison et al. (2005) add to the list of reasons behind this ethicality boom the globalization of markets, the rise of transnational corporations and brands, and the shift in market power towards consumers.

There are a number of initiatives, cross-national and country-specific, created to propose code of conducts and labels for ethical trade such as Fairtrade Labelling Organizations

International, Fair Labor Association (US), Ethical Trading Initiative (UK) and the Clean Clothes Network. For example Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) is an alliance of organizations of 12 European countries. Its members constitute from trade unions and non-governmental organizations with varying interests that include consumer advocacy, women's rights and poverty reduction among other things. The CCC exists to support garment workers in their efforts to create substantive, sustainable improvements in working conditions. (Clean Clothes website 28.9.2009)

Studying ethical consumption means stepping out from the economist point of view where individuals are seen as rational beings whose goal is the maximization of utility. When it comes to the decision making process, ethical consumers are still not ignoring price and quality but applying some additional criteria when selecting products (Harrison et al. 2005, 2) Due to the young nature of the discipline there is no one established definition of an *ethical consumer*. Langeland (1999) defines the ethical consumer segment as follows: A significant group of people are considering the wider impact of their purchasing decisions and are trying to favor the products with improved environmental or social performance. This definition is very suitable for my purpose as I study the positive buying phenomenon. Strong (1996) adds the concern for the developing countries to the definition and states that ethical consumerism refers to buyer behavior that reflects a concern with the problems of the Third World. Strong (1996) also incorporates all the principles of environmental (green) consumerism to the concept of ethical consumption, just adding the "people" element in it. This is in line with the concept of *caring at distance* that Barnett et al. (2005a) discuss. This means that concern for the people who are close to you can be transformed into actively caring for more distant others, which is essential when making ethical choices.

In other words, *the ethical consumer* considers ethical and moral aspects present in production and in the delivery of goods, even if this happens at a long distance. These aspects include both social and environmental issues, for example the use of child labor, suppressing or preventing labor unions and testing on animals (Uusitalo O. & al 2004). Accordingly, Valor (2007) has defined ethical consumerism as an activity where consumers are demanding that human rights (including the right for a safe environment) are respected in the manufacturing process. Barnett et al. (2005a) claim that everyday consumption practices are always shaped by some sort of ethical dispositions; hence they can be regarded as *ordinarily ethical*. The same authors see shopping not being just an individualistic, self-indulgent and narcissistic act

but, instead, involves thoughtfulness about the desires and needs of others and it is in fact based on relationships and love. All in all, important aspect of ethical consumption is explicitly expressed commitment or obligation towards distant or absent others.

In **Table 1** (After Barnett & al. 2005b) below I have iterated objects, practices and organizational forms of ethical consumption. The objects include a variety of issues regarded as ethical, such as environmental sustainability, health and safety risks, labor conditions, human rights and animal welfare. All of these issues are strongly present in the food production as well as in the textile industry, which makes everyday commodity consumption an interesting arena for the project of ethical consumption. The practices of ethical consumption comprise e.g. shopping, investing, banking and boycotting. In this study I will concentrate on positive buying of groceries and clothes. Ethical consumption happens within different organizational forms: There are ethical trading organizations such as Oxfam and Body Shop, lobby groups like the Soil Association, Fairtrade campaign organizations (Oxfam, Christian Aid) and boycott and anti-globalization campaigns against such companies as Nestlé, Nike and McDonalds. To conclude, ethical consumption can be understood as a set of practices which mobilize diverse motivations, incentives and desires that can lead to developing large-scale forms of collective action and, thus, enable a meaningful change in the functioning of powerful economic and bureaucratic systems (Barnett & al. 2005b).

ETHICAL CONSUMPTION		
OBJECTS	PRACTICES	ORGANIZATIONAL FORMS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental sustainability • Health and safety risks • Labor conditions • Human rights • Animal welfare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shopping (positive buying) • Investment decisions • Personal banking and pensions • Boycotting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethical trading organizations • Lobby groups • Fairtrade campaigning • Boycott / anti-globalization campaigns

TABLE 1 CONCEPTUALIZING ETHICAL CONSUMPTION

The academic field of ethical consumption is still relatively narrow and important scientific research in the area is mostly done by small amount of scholars. In the discussion about ethical consumption differing schools of thought can be found. In this thesis I approach ethical consumption as an identity project that allows consumers to be regarded as complex beings who do not see consumption as a rational calculation. Instead, the consumers' approach to ethical consumption is part of their moral self-realization (Kozinets & al. 1998). Therefore ethical consumption plays a role in constructing a consumer's identity.

There is another school of thought that models ethical consumer decision-making through existing attitude-behavioral theories (Newholm & Shaw 2007). These studies often report the finding of an attitude-behavior gap, meaning that the positive attitudes and values toward ethical consumption do not translate into the ethical behavior (e.g. Uusitalo & Oksanen 2004, Shaw & al. 2006). Frequently, these studies also iterate obstacles to ethical consumption and highlight the role of information as a key to ethical consumption behavior. However, these attitude-behavioral models can be limiting. Moisander (2001, 15) writes about green consumerism: "Green consumerism is a social and cultural phenomenon that involves complex sociocultural and socioeconomic relationships in socially and culturally specific environments and therefore it cannot be studied only through limiting attitude-behavioral models." As green consumerism is a part of wider field of ethical consumerism, I see that her statement applies to ethical consumption as well.

According to Barnett & al. (2005a) good consumption practices are temporally limited, i.e. what is good at one time can be disadvantageous later and, therefore, the ethical consumer practices must be formulated and reformulated in a continuous and public debate. Also Cherrier (2005) denotes that the ethics of consumption are contextual: The rightness or wrongness of consumption is determined by the time and place in which one lives. In this context it is important to find ways not only for changing people's consumption practices but also for facilitating the public participation in debates and decisions about the meanings, objectives and responsibilities involved in contemporary consumption. (Barnett & al 2005a)

3.2 Who are the ethical consumers?

Webster (1975) lists characteristics of socially conscious consumer as following:

- 1) S/he must be *aware of the problem* as well as the opportunities to buy products or services that are responsive to the problem.
- 2) S/he must perceive that it is *within his / her power* as an individual citizen to have a favorable influence on the problem situation.
- 3) S/he will have *attitudes* toward social affairs and community involvement which are consistent with his / her behavior.

In other words, the socially conscious consumer, also known as the ethical consumer, can be described as well-educated and reasonably affluent middle-class consumer who is well integrated into local community and can act as an opinion leader. Though s/he is adjusted to community norms, s/he is not a conformist and feels like s/he can do something to make the world better. Also his / her self-concept must allow him / her to take an active role in society. (Webster, 1975)

From this Webster's assumption stems a concern that the set of ethical consumption practices is reserved for relatively privileged and highly affluent consumers (Barnett & al. 2005a). This niche comprises of those who are able to spend time, energy and money to buy organic and Fairtrade products as well as invest ethically. The driving force behind the ethical concerns can be internal or external for the consumer. It can be stated that if the consumer's primary concern over ethical issues is internal i.e. it arises from concerns regarding to one's own health, one is not strictly an ethical consumer. An example of this is choosing environmentally friendly fashion for the fear of pesticide remnants in clothes. On the other hand, the concern can be external i.e. the consumer is truly concerned over the effect that pesticide use has on the wildlife and the environment. These people with external concerns over ethical issues can be regarded as true ethical consumers. (Harrison & al. 2005)

Fosse-Gomez et al. (2008) introduce *consumption objectors*, responsible consumers who are critical towards consumption. They do not negate consumption; instead, they believe consumption can be beneficial when it allows the development of communities as in the case of Fairtrade. Consumption objection is not an act of moral conformity but it can derive from

political essence or from a desire to liberate oneself from the consuming society. Cherrier et al. (2002) write about *voluntary simplifiers* who have decided to escape the consumption spiral and engage in plain living and in high thinking. These consumers perceive strongly that society is at risk and modify their lifestyles in order to seek more meaningful existences, acting according to their personal beliefs and, thus, resisting ideological manipulation. According to Lang et al. (2005), "It is the consumer as activist who confronts consumption explicitly seeking to alter its meaning and to redefine the cultural dynamic of goods by reintroducing the validity of the idea of needs and wants". It is these consumer activists; consumption objectors and voluntary simplifiers, and everyone in between them, that constitute the influential tribe of ethical consumers.

Shrum et al. (sited in Langeland 1999) associate an effort to buy ethical products with a higher perception of being an opinion leader, having an interest in new products, being active in exchanging product information and generally taking more care while shopping. Being a self-appointed opinion leader and information exchanger makes ethical consumers an important group in spreading word-of-mouth about responsible consumption habits which makes them a highly influential group in information dissemination.

Today ethical consumerism is a form of benevolence that reproduces oppositions between active consumers and passive recipients (Barnett & al. 2005a). Potential ethical consumers have accepted to take responsibility and act in order to address wrongs for which they are neither liable nor to blame. Practicing ethical consumption is demanding financially, socially and time-wise. Internalizing otherwise externalized social, environmental and human costs, almost inevitably raises the price of ethical goods and services. Social costs appear in the form of risk of isolation by peers, as a need to convince one's relations, and social embarrassment (Fosse-Gomez & al. 2008) when the individual has to justify his / her ethical actions. Time is consumed when the consumer searches for information and chooses ethical products that are not always easily available. This way, the purchasing of traditionally low-involvement product, such as a t-shirt, can require a lot of effort from the consumer's part. Yet there are a growing number of people following the principles of ethical consumption, some more tightly than the others. Maybe they have understood what Lang (2005) claims: "If humanity wants to have a decent society, it has to be paid for. If it doesn't, society and biosphere will pay anyway".

3.3 Positive buying - boycotting

In the turn of the 21st century everyone was chanting about boycotts, it was almost fashionable to be an anti-brand activist (see e.g. Klein 2001). Now the tide is changing and consumers are increasingly focusing their attention on the positive side of ethical consumption: New ethical brands. It has been shown by Shaw & Duff (in Shaw & al. 2006) that even if the active ethical consumers are involved in boycotts and others forms of negative ethical consumption, most of them would prefer to have an opportunity to make positive ethical choices. It is understandable that instead of wasting energy on avoiding unethical brands, consumers prefer to support ethical ones. This turn in favor of positive ethical action is also visible in the current boom of companies promoting corporate social responsibility. Seeking for positive attention, instead of only avoiding negative one, seems to be the tendency of the day.

Therefore, the focus of this study is on the *positive buying* phenomenon also known as “*buycotting*”. Positive buying means making ethical purchase decisions and supporting ethically behaving companies this way. This approach is closely related to the concept of *consumption as voting*, where ethical purchase behaviors such as positive buying are seen as means to influence the surrounding environment just as by voting in political elections. The consumers are naturally concerned with the quality of the goods and the satisfaction that they derive from them, but at the same time the conditions under which the products are made, both the environmental impact and the working conditions must be taken into account. Hansen et al. (1997) state: “The market is the only voting mechanism in which almost everybody can daily cast his / her vote with banknotes, and, thus, continuously participate in the development of the economy and society”.

Consumer buying and consumption are of utmost importance to society, as they present the key components of the whole economic system. Consumer buying also influences social and cultural aspects of society. Individuals reflect their values and beliefs by what they buy or do not buy and in this manner signal to the others their perception of good life and bad life (Dickinson & al. 1991). In the basic economic and business thinking, the consumer is assumed to be a self-interested or even a greed individual, who is making rational consumption choices. The concepts of ethical consumption and positive buying step out of

this way of thinking and claim instead that consumers can and are willing to influence the world by their economic votes.

There is something almost all people do: Buy goods and services. The question here is what kind of criteria do people use when selecting these goods and services? Obviously they have to fulfill the people's functional needs as well as varied wants (Dickinson & al. 2005). But, in addition to these criteria, purchases have a profound impact on society. Hansen et al. (1997) suggest that at least the consumers who are well-off have a responsibility to consider 'bona fide' the consequences of their votes on the system. It is clear that wealthy individuals have more votes than the poor as their purchasing power is greater. Dickinson et al. (1991) have listed the benefits of ethical purchase behavior that include: 1) *The message of considering and caring for others* (in form of positive buying) as a key component of consumer decision making which can change society in variety of ways; 2) Ethical considerations in economic voting can create the *sense of participation* in creating better society for its members; 3) Consumer behavior would not be seen in isolation from other *aspects of existence*. The key message here is that a single consumer can participate in improving society by showing caring for others through his / her consumption choices.

3.4 Role of information in ethical consumption

The awareness of environmental and social problem spots in the manufacturing and distribution of products is the starting point of ethical consumerism. Consuming ethically depends on one's ability to process knowledge and information, and on one's explicit practices of acknowledged commitment to ethical behavior. Information plays a role as the medium through which the ethical preferences of the consumers, as well as the ethical records of businesses, are signaled to the market place. Also, providing information to consumers regarding the conditions of production and distribution of commodities is central to changing consumer behavior: This is known as a model of informational understanding. Knowledge is as well the key to putting pressure on corporations and governments. The publicity achieved by consumer-oriented activism, such as Fairtrade campaigns and ethical trade audits, is a means to spread information about ethical issues and recruit new ethical consumers. (Barnett & al. 2005a)

According to Joergens (2006) consumers often feel that they are unable to make ethical choices when shopping because of the lack of information. The consumers confront uncertainty in terms of both information available and the consequences of their actions. This highlights the role of ethical companies, as well as voluntary organizations, in communicating about ethical matters, which allow consumers to make better judgments about the ethicality of the products. There is a real need for more information in the ethical consumer market. Now the degree of external effort put in searching for information about ethical credentials of products is too high. One solution to this demand could be labeling the products more precisely in the stores, certifying that they are ethically made. It is assuring, as consumers often need to see a clear benefit of their ethical purchase.

When it comes to spreading information, the reliability and truthfulness of the information source are of utmost importance. Consumers can be cynical towards companies' claims of ethical conduct that are getting more and more frequent in the current ethicality boom. There is a risk that companies do so called "green washing" i.e. they want to appear as environmentally and socially friendly in the eyes of consumers in order to increase their sales. (Nurmi 2009, interview) However, deep down these companies' practices can still be far from ethical conduct. Spreading correct information is crucial for the future of ethical consumption, nowadays consumers are sometimes forced to take a gamble whether the product is sweatshop-free or not.

3.5 Ethical fashion consumption

Ethical food consumption has been increasingly present in the scientific literature, especially when it comes to choosing Fairtrade alternatives. However, ethical fashion has been disregarded, and, thus, I want to take the opportunity to present it here as it seems to be the next emerging trend. According to Shaw et al. (2006) the Fairtrade concerns in the clothing market have been neglected in the consumer research. Ethical fashion consumption can be explained as environmentally and socially friendly shopping for clothing items. As the ethical consumer market is growing rapidly, the change is also taking place in the fashion industry as consumers are demanding more responsibility from the fashion retailers. New ethical fashion brands are born, and even the largest mainstream fashion retailers are increasingly taking environmental and social issues into account (or at least they are claiming to do that). Ethical fashion no longer means only hemp shirts made for hippies, but, instead, there are a number

of ethical clothing brands that attract young mainstream consumers. The main principles behind this “fashion with conscience” movement are ethical sourcing of garments while providing good working standards and conditions for workers. In addition, it is of equal importance to provide a sustainable business model in the clothes’ country of origin while considering the environmental impact of the materials used. (Joergens 2006).

It is found in previous research that consumers prioritize their ethical concern to a limited number of issues they can cope with when making consumption choices. One of the most pertinent issues behind the growing demand for fairer labor practices in the textile industry is the consumer concern surrounding sweatshop clothing production. (Shaw & al. 2006) During recent years there have been campaigns in the Western countries that have highlighted the poor labor practices and even made so called high-profile boycott calls against the organizations including Nike and Gap (Klein 2001).

Sustainability is now in fashion, also in the complex, creative and consumerism-oriented world of fashion and textiles. “The design” is no longer only a stylist or a shaper of things but also a promoter of social change. In today’s world fashion as usual cannot exist anymore, now it is all about building of a long-lasting environmental and social quality through the design, production and use of fashion and textiles that go beyond traditional ideas and expectations. There have been two waves of interest towards sustainable fashion and textiles: First in the 1990’s with natural and recycled fibres and then in the 2000’s with organic, Fairtrade and rapidly renewable fibres. (Fletcher 2008, XI-XIV)

Yet the market for ethical fashion is still in its offset if compared to the market for Fairtrade groceries for instance, as it remains underdeveloped and restricted by the choice. Shaw & al. (2006) list the main drawbacks of the market to be: 1) The lack of information regarding to ethical brands / retailers; 2) Difficulties in accessing ethical clothing e.g. lack of ethical retail outlets; and 3) The price of ethical clothing. Nevertheless there is hope for the change to come: Funky new ethical fashion stores have arrived to the streets of big cities. Even the luxury fashion industry is buzzing about sustainability these days. Menkes writes in International Herald Tribune (25.3.2009) about the death of the season’s “It” bag – there has been a dramatic change in the luxury business towards more sustainable practices.

In the literature it has been claimed that consumers cannot avoid acting unethically when purchasing clothing because they have aesthetic needs that cannot be fulfilled by ethical brands (e.g. Joergens 2006). I do not agree with this statement, as there is a growing number of fashionable ethical clothing brands available, that are not unreasonably priced, U.S based American Apparel and Swedish Indiska for instance. In addition, there are different forms of ethical fashion: Buying second hand can be seen as ethical when the cloths' environmental and social costs are already sunk. Also buying less and of better quality can be seen as a somewhat ethical act as a high-quality garment's life cycle is longer than that of the average off-the-rack garment's. Today many big fashion retailers like Swedish H & M and Spanish Zara have their own supposedly environmentally friendly "organic cotton" clothing lines. The problem with these is that there is neither a clear standard nor certification for this organic cotton and, thus, it is difficult to evaluate the ethicality of these clothing lines.

The fashion industry is answering the demands of identity-seeking consumers by creating trends and producing clothes on an ever faster pace. Unfortunately this industry is characterized by many severe problems. The agriculture of textile materials, such as cotton, has a severe impact on the environment. Also ethical problems arise: People are working in poor conditions, even in sweatshops while producing clothes for the Western consumers. Producing fashion and textiles involves one of the longest and most complicated industrial chains in the manufacturing industry. The conversion of raw textile fibre to finished fabric and final product requires labor, energy, water and other resources. In general, the textile and garment manufacturing industry is recognized as both a major user of water and a major polluter (Simpson 2006). Furthermore, it is linked to a variety of social issues including poverty wages, excessive working hours, forced overtime, lack of job security and denial of trade union rights (Simpson 2006). The environmental and social impacts of producing textiles are numerous in the mosaic of interconnected resource flows that construct the fashion and textile industry. (Fletcher 2008, XI-XIV)

Clothing and fashion are interesting also from the identity construction point of view. Through clothing people communicate some things about their personalities, and at the collective level, cloths carry symbolic status claims and life-style attachments within them. Davis (1992) refers to fashion and clothing styles as a code and states that combinations and permutations of the code's key terms such as fabric, texture and color evoke meanings. He also lists distinguishing features of the clothing-fashion code that include: ambiguity, context-

dependency, variability in how its constituent symbols are understood and appreciated by different social strata and taste groupings. Clothing styles elicit different responses in different social groups and, thus, undercoding is very important in how meanings are communicated. This means that each person interprets one's clothing style differently. Exception of this would be a uniform that reveals the occupational identity of the wearer immediately. (Davis 1992, 4-10)

However, people's relationship with fashion and consumption conflicts with sustainability goals. People shop fashion addictively and are trapped by record levels of credit card debt. Changing fashion trends put pressure on reformulating one's identity according to these trends, which feeds insecurity. Fashion cycles and trends are supported by the apparent insatiability of consumer's wants. People meet their desire for pleasure, new experiences, and status and identity formation through buying goods - many of them clothes. In the retail fashion industry extreme importance is given to analyzing consumer votes. It is typical that what is selling dictates what is purchased and displayed. In the beginning of the season the whole industry is breathtakingly following how new clothing collections are welcomed when, at the same time, the hunt for the new trends that will determine the next season's collection already begins. (Fletcher 2008, Davis 1992)

4 Consumption and identity construction in the postmodern society

We live in the postmodern era where the boundaries between self-identity, consumption and lifestyles have become tangled. Affluent Western consumers are increasingly constructing their identity through consumption practices. Fragmentation of identities and lifestyles characterizes these postmodern times. Central to the contemporary notion of identity are dynamism and interaction: Identity formation is seen as an ongoing process where the importance of environment and culture is pivotal. No longer is the role of consumption limited to functional needs - instead the needs for belongingness, acceptance and self-esteem motivate individuals in their project of ethical consumption. Consumers must manage the contradiction between the need to build personal identity and at the same time express concern for ethical issues through their consumption choices. (Langeland 1999)

4.1 Postmodern consumer

The dominant narrative of consumption has changed according to the diverse conceptions of society. The late phase of modernity is usually described as the postmodern era. While in the modern times society was centered on the production of goods, in the postmodern era consumption is the centre of all activity. This turn is referred to as the beginning of the *culture of consumption* or *consumer society*. At the same time various domains of consumption activities have become highly symbolic and their meanings are derived from culture. (Uusitalo 1998) Artifacts of postmodernity include the dominance of television and popular culture, the wide accessibility of information and mass telecommunications. Today also the role of the Internet and IT is also crucial. Contemporary consumers increasingly use consumption as a way of satisfying emotional needs which means that consumption is influenced by non-rational forces such as habit, mood, emotion and impulse instead of rational calculations and planned behavior (Langeland 1999).

Consumers' becoming more self-reflective gives fruitful ground to the growth of ethical consumerism. Pantzar and Heiskanen (1997) have identified three stages in the evolution of consumption: 1) Consumption for its own sake; 2) Consumption for the instrumental value of the commodity and finally 3) The art of consumption; the critical self-reflective consumption. In this last stage the consumer is able to analyze his / her own commodity-dependency and

question the materialistic lifestyle. The consumer entering the third phase can be seen as a prerequisite for adopting ethical consumption habits.

Firat & al. (1995) have listed five conditions for postmodernism that consumers face: Hyperreality; fragmentation; reversal of production and consumption; decentered subject and juxtaposition of opposition. *Hyperreality* refers to reality being a part of symbolic world that is constructed rather than given and where the distinction between real and non-real is blurring. *Fragmentation* implicates that there is no single project, no single lifestyles and no sense of being to which individuals need to commit. Instead, the subject is divided into multiple selves in its multilayered existence. *The Reversal of production and consumption* means that there is no natural distinction between consumption and production, they are one and the same and occur simultaneously. The notion of *decentered subject* sees human subjects as historically and culturally constructed: Language is the basis for subjectivity. The concept of *juxtaposition of opposites* allows differences and paradoxes to exist freely; it is natural when fragmentation is the basis of consumption, not unification. (Firat & al. 1995)

The postmodern times are characterized by disruption of universal norms and ideologies. Consumers are conceptualized as autonomous self-constructors who are indifferent, continuously detaching themselves from any serious collective commitment. On the other hand they possess capabilities of self-reflection and meta-analysis of their own preference which is necessary in society where social norms and traditions are fading away. The era also exhibits a greater resistance to making sacrifices in the name of progress, including such features as environmentalism and the rise in demand of ethical products. (Uusitalo 1998) In the postmodern world there is a global crisis of meaning (Fosse-Gomez & al. 2008). The consumers' quest for finding meaning to their lives is evident in this era, where shared consumption interest and tastes are the only integrating forces left in societies. Consumption as a way of a life pattern will create new social bonds and feelings of a belonging to or of distinguishing oneself from a group. (Uusitalo 1998)

Individual ethical consumer behavior always takes place in a broader historical and political context. As profound economic changes are sweeping the globe, consumer pressure is used as one important channel of influencing. Postmodern consumers can actively influence existing structures and institutions by making right consumption choices and by using their voice. Thus, consumers are constantly modifying external conditions and structures of society they

live in. When external social norms and traditions are eroding, individuals are forced to handle all the information around them and to reflect on the ethical side of their choices. (Uusitalo 1998)

Postmodern consumers have been left alone to tackle some micro- and macro-level social risks. These include the ever increasing difficulty to get satisfaction in spite of growing numbers of available goods and services, environmental deterioration and limited natural resources, economic instabilities and the persistence of famines and wars. Society does not offer a suitable answer for these issues and individuals need to find them themselves. This results to the postmodern consumers' quest for identity. (Fosse-Gomez 2008) Recent writings on identity have been connected with the general discussion on cultural and political changes in society that relate to postmodernization.

4.2 Identity and lifestyle

The concept of identity is polymorphous: It has been defined differently during historical eras when the idea of sociological subject has been changing. Therefore most sociological theories of self-identity and identity formation easily appear obscure. In the postmodern times identities are regarded as fragmented: The subject is not having one solid and stable identity. It can be even said that free-floating and identity seeking have become a fashion. According to Hall (1999, 22-23) the subjects and social worlds are constantly on the move and identities are fluid, flexible and self-reflective. Giddens (1991, 52-54) regards "identity" as a feature that the individual has to create and maintain as a reflective process.

My study involves the use of narrative methods and, thus, it relies on people's self-reflective capacities. I am particularly interested in meanings that consumers create and express. Uusitalo (1998) asserts that each individual holds a plurality of social worlds or roles that are often connected to some leisure or cultural / taste groupings. The subject can have multiple identities that can be contradictory or unsuitable with each other. One's identity is also shaped by the habits that are presented in the surrounding culture. Hall (1999, 250) states that "identities are related to the fact how resources offered by history, language and culture are used when becoming somebody". Baudrillard (1988) sees an individual consumer as a product of the social and cultural milieu that s/he is embedded in. He shares the structuralist

views that social identities are expressed through symbols and signs. The meanings that these symbols and signs carry are created within the process of consumption.

The consumers of this digital postmodern era are often described as unpredictable, expressive and individualistic in their spending patterns. According to Wilska (2002) it is still doubtful that people make conscious decisions to use consumption as a means to play with their identities. She claims that economic restraints, social regulation, conventions, routines and socialization in peer groups are still likely to restrict the freedom of the consumer. Concerning ethical consumption, an essential element in it is becoming somebody, perhaps a better person or at least a better consumer, through responsible consumption activities. This makes the ethical consumer's identity construction especially interesting.

Postmodernists see identity construction as a life-long process that requires endless reconstruction and re-evaluation. Giddens (1991, 80-81) assimilates self-identity with the coherent narrative of the self and states that the maintenance of self-identity demands complex choices made under all manner of circumstances. Individuals can have multiple identities that change according to these complex situations. Multiple identities can also create conflicts, for example when the identity as ethical consumer clashes with that of the young professional at a workplace. Yet also a postmodern consumer must have some principles how to make choices and create identities. Arnould et al. (2005) state that the marketplace has become a source of mythic and symbolic resources through which people construct their narratives of identity. The authors also see consumers as identity seekers and makers, whose identity projects are considered goal-driven, even if the aim of the project might be tacit in its nature and somewhat vaguely understood.

Belonging to social categories is still important for the consumer. According to Wilska (2002) these categories are not based on traditional socio-economic dimensions but, instead, they can be described as lifestyle groups. Belonging to these groups depends entirely on the individual's appropriate consumption style. Lifestyle is an important concept in the definition of identity. It is an ambiguous term that is used in different senses, emphasizing different aspects of either social structures or the individual or everyday life (Wilska 2002). Lifestyle can be understood as a material expression of one's identity which has a role in maintaining the ontological security and the coherence of the self (Giddens 1991, 81-82). Lifestyles as well as identities can be fragmented, as in the postmodern world 'everyone can be anyone'.

Thus lifestyles are likely to be complicated mixtures of different kinds of consumption, and both conscious and unconscious attitudes and values. The meaning attached to a certain lifestyle is best expressed by visible consumption, and as a result the need to express a particular lifestyle then creates desires for particular consumer goods. (Wilska 2002)

4.3 Identity construction as a social and personal identity project

The concept of identity can be viewed from two different angles: First through what kind of processes the individual is a member of wider community of peers; and second how s/he stands out as a unique individual among this community. The former view builds on a long interactive process with the surrounding community, and the latter is based on the need of the individual to create his / her personal individual style. (Hirvonen 2003, 25). Thus the concept of identity can be separated into social identity and personal identity. This dual nature of identity seems to be dominant in literature. Ricoeur (1994) among others has defined two usages for the concept of identity: Identity as sameness i.e. belonging to the community (answer to the question “Where do I belong?”) and identity as itself i.e. standing out from the community (answer to the question “Who am I?”). Harré (1983) also separates identity projects between a social being and a personal being. In social identity project individuals strive for uniformity and sameness with the community whereas in personal identity project the identity is constructed by otherness when the individuals aim to convince others with their uniqueness. Therefore the identity construction can be viewed as two separate but simultaneous processes.

The individual’s identity can be constructed around a collective social movement such as environmentalism, nationalism or religious fundamentalism. Often certain norms and attitudes towards consumption form the ideological bases for these movements. Ethical consumerism is surely one of these movements. The conscious choice of not buying something, e.g. unethical products, is typical for many ideologically motivated ‘project identities’ that aim to change cultural and social values within society. (Wilska 2002) However, positive ethical consumption that is centered on consuming ethically made products, works in the same way. Identity project refers to one’s aim to construct a certain identity, e.g. that of an ethical consumer, for him / herself. This is usually done with the help of suitable consumption

practices. A person's identity projects evolve over time, some fade out and new ones come along.

Indeed, ethical consumerism can be regarded as both a social and a personal identity project. In the social identity project the ethical consumer strives for sameness and belonging to a wider community of ethical consumers, whereas in the personal identity project the ethical consumer constructs his / her identity through otherness, when s/he aims to convince others with his / her unique capabilities. According to Kleine (2000) an adult self-cultivation project often involves only a piece of self, that he equals with social identity, instead of attempting to change one's entire identity. An individual can have multiple social identities that change according to situation and they comprise one's overall self-concept. The importance of each identity varies and together they form a hierarchy of identity importance. With the help of consumption people cultivate a specific social identity and, thus, acquire or maintain an aspect of their self-concept.

Kleine (2000) iterates the following basic steps that a social identity project consists of:

- 1) **Pre-socialization** may take place long before one becomes actively interested in or capable of pursuing an identity. In this enculturation phase the individual learns the role schema for the social role in question and also the stereotypical consumption patterns that support the role.
- 2) **Identity discovery** occurs when one evaluates a social role offered: "Is this the type of person I want to become?" The discovery ends with the implicit / explicit decision to pursue developing the identity.
- 3) **Identity construction** phase: One accumulates experiences with role-related products and behavioral patterns. This happens in context of one's social network.
- 4) **Identity maintenance** phase means the accumulation of more experience at the identity and becoming a veteran in it. Here one's networks are well-established.
- 5) **Identity latency**: Here the individual ceases identity-related activities or consumption behaviors although s/he intends to continue pursuing the identity. The latency can be cyclical or circumstantial.
- 6) **Identity disposal**. In this phase the individual gets rid of the identity and moves on with his / her life.

In the empirical part of this study I will get back to these steps of the identity project. In this study I will view ethical consumption as both a social and a personal identity project for my interviewees. Moreover, these two projects are not exclusive of each other, instead they are parallel to each other, yet distinct. It is important that both identity projects succeed so that the individual can obtain an acknowledged position as an ethical consumer.

4.4 Identity construction by ethical consumption

According to recent research, consumption plays an essential role in the creation and maintenance of identity. As consumption is transforming from being a means to an end (consuming to live) into an end itself (living to consume), it is increasingly becoming a source of identity construction as well as a statement of personal opinion. Contemporary consumers use consumption as a way of satisfying deeper emotional needs of acceptance, belonging and prominence. (Langeland 1999). Growing up as a consumer is one of the essential roles in today's society. It seems that especially young people, who are in the process of developing their consumer identities, are basing their identity and lifestyle on consumption more than other age groups. For them, consumption is the main area for the negotiation of their role and position in the ever-changing world. (Miles 2000). Giddens (1991, 82) highlights the role of identity construction in consumer research instead of traditional consumer behavior theories by stating: "All choices related to consumption and everyday life are not simply decisions about how to *act* but also about how to *be*".

According to Barnett et al. (2005a) ethical consumption practices enable people to cultivate forms of selfhood in their everyday lives. This involves *governing the consuming self* by various practices and making one's own life a project of self-cultivation through consumption as discussed before. The ethical consumption project often involves complex self - other relations. Barnett et al. (2005a) also see that the concept of governing extends beyond the self, when one attempts to achieve a degree of selflessness when practicing responsibilities towards distant others.

According to Davis (1992) the role of fashion and clothing is crucial in one's identity construction project, as it frames what we see when we see others. Also fashion and clothing are closely attached to one's material self. The way we dress serves as a visual metaphor for

our identity, and in the Western world it contains culturally anchored ambivalences. Our clothes “say things” about ourselves and they are able to communicate even subtle messages about their wearer. Mostly this communication is related to our social identities as it is framed by the cultural values bearing on gender, sexuality and social status. Individuals manifest their values and beliefs through what they buy which creates a fertile ground for ethical fashion. Clothing items are very visible in everyday life: By the way one dresses people can immediately draw some conclusions about one’s lifestyle. Thus clothing is an excellent and easy way to message people about your lifestyle and values. (Davis 1992, 25)

Thompson & Haytko (1997) state that consumers develop a sense of a personal identity through a contrast between their perceived fashion orientation, and that of the others in their social setting. The underlying motivation for fashion consciousness can be a desire to sustain a sense of personal uniqueness in the relatively depersonalized milieu of modern life and this way separate oneself from particular social typification. On the other hand, fashion can be used as a means to express identification with a relevant social group. In their studies Thompson & Haytko (1997) also found that for some, clothing has become a symbol of individuation and a vehicle of perpetual identity transformation. By using ethical fashion the consumer may want to be a part of a wider ethical consumer tribe and at the same time differentiate him / herself from the H&M frequenting folks. By doing this his / her identity might transform into that of an ethical fashion consumer.

Today consumption activities have become highly symbolic and the meanings for consumption objects are derived from culture. This is evident in clothing and fashion industry when clothes are bought not only for their utilitarian value but for their symbolic value as well. Goods have become means of conveying messages among individuals, and group of individuals. (Davis 1992) McCracken (1986) writes about the fashion system as an instrument of meaning transfer. Firstly, fashion system performs a transfer of meaning from the culturally constituted world to consumer goods (see **figure 2** below). This happens, for example, when new styles of clothing are associated with established cultural categories and principles. Secondly, fashion system invents new cultural meanings, for instance when opinion leaders shape and refine existing cultural meanings. These distant opinion leaders are sources of meaning for individuals of lesser standing. Thirdly, fashion system engages in the radical reform of cultural meanings. This is inevitable in Western societies that are subject to constant change.

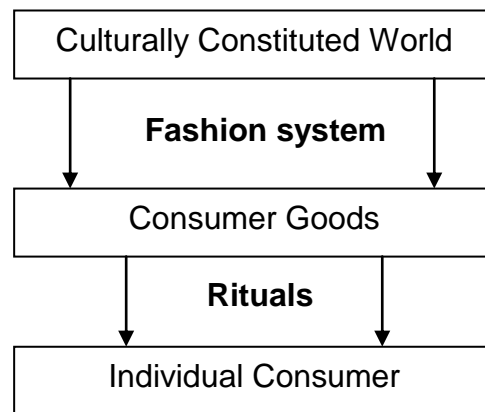


FIGURE 2 MOVEMENT OF MEANING

Figure 2 (After McCracken 1986) shows how meanings move from different locations (World → Goods → Consumer) through fashion systems and rituals which give meaning to individual consumers. For example the meaning of an ethically-made garment is born in a world that is culturally constituted as an opposition to the meaning of sweatshop made clothes. Fashion systems contribute to the creation of meanings e.g. when fashion designers, magazines and opinion leaders of the fashion industry promote ethical fashion. This trend has been very visible lately. Through the varied rituals the meaning moves from the consumer goods into the life of the consumer. Thus wearing an ethically-made garment can boost the consumer's perception of self and give meaning to his / her life.

By consuming ethical clothing people presumably want to make a statement of being responsible citizens and making a difference. Even if it cannot be seen from the outside whether the clothing item one is wearing is ethically made or not, it does make a difference for its wearer, and, thus, impacts his / her identity as a consumer. Careful shopping goes coupled with a perception of being an opinion leader (that is often the case with the pioneers of ethical consumption) which goes hand in hand with the parallel process of identity seeking. Ethical consumers evaluate the product features according to their potential to contribute to a carefully built self-image, and that are consistent with it. Thus ethical action can be defined in terms of choice made to accept a widened scope of responsibility towards others, and to act upon that acceptance through one's identity as a consumer (Langeland 1999, Barnett et al 2005) Consumption can fill the hunger for a space in which to construct a sense of self and

what is important in life (Kozinets 2001). Ethical alternatives can act as a step forward in filling this hunger.

According to Thompson & Haytko (1997) consumers interpret fashion through countervailing cultural discourses. It seems that the discourse of fashion as a realm of expressing one's ethical stance is getting more and more important in today's society. When media and fashion industry's opinion leaders create this relatively new cultural discourse, it increasingly gets into ordinary consumers' minds. It is already apparent that wearing second hand or vintage clothes and frequenting flea markets is fashionable. Now the hard-core fashionistas have found "first hand" ethical fashion. This can be concluded from the amount of new ethical fashion stores that appear both online and in the real world. (see e.g. online stores vihreakauppa.com, yalo.fi)

When it comes to ethical clothing consumers might have to make trade-off decisions between their ethical and fashion-based desires. In the research made by Shaw & al. (2006) consumers frequently reported difficulties in marrying their ethical identity and fashion identity. In the same study it came out that consumers were especially concerned about the ethical credentials of those clothing items / outfits that consumers perceived to be connected to the projection of their identity. For example it did not matter that much what they wore at work place, but when they bought an expensive dress or suit for a special occasion they wanted to assure it was not sweatshop-made.

4. 5 Narrative construction of identity

The narrative turn in investigating the self emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Hytti 2003, 31). Today the narrative-autobiographical approach has become more common and the concept of narrative identity is increasingly used. This means that the answers for the questions "where do I belong?" and "who am I?" are built through the narratives that people tell about their own lives (Hirvonen 2003, 26). We understand ourselves through narratives and build our identity with the help of stories, in a narrative manner. Furthermore knowledge about oneself and about the world is gathered through stories. Heikkinen (2000) describes the concepts of identity and knowing as Siamese twins that are nurtured by the narratives told. Polkinghorne (1988, 150) writes: "...We achieve our personal identities and self-concept

through the use of narrative configuration, and make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story...” Alasuutari (1989 77-80, cited in Hirvonen 2003) states that the use of the past times has gained importance in researching one’s identity construction process. The uniqueness of the individual can be shown through autobiography.

Identity always develops in a psychosocial context in the meaning-making processes with regard to other people and culture. That is to say meanings are constructed in a dialogue between ideas and the world. (Hytti 2003, 22) The idea of the narrative identity is that the identity is the product of, and realized in, narrative accounts of individuals’ past, present and the future. These narrative accounts are linked to action; what has happened, taken place, or what actions were taken to lead to a particular situation. (Polkinghorne cited in Hytti 2003, 31) According to McAdams (1996), modern identity as a psychosocially constructed narrative manifests a particular (a) structure and content, (b) function, (c) developmental course, and it may be further described in terms of (d) individual differences in types of self stories and (e) the extent to which a life story facilitates adaptation or reinforces pathology for the person whose identity the story is.

Once again both community and the individual play a part in the identity construction process. According to Hirvonen (2003, 26) the role of the surrounding community is important also from the point of view of a narrative construction of an identity. That is, the community creates the boundaries and the conditions that guide the construction of autobiographical stories.

In my study I will view one’s identity as a construction, not as a stable state. An individual’s narrative identity is always shaped by new stories. When our conception of the self changes and develops along new experiences, it means that the narrative identity must change as well. Thus the individual’s uniqueness depends on what s/he tells about him / herself. Therefore a narrative identity can be characterized as a story that a person tells in order to renew the conception of who s/he is. (Hirvonen 2003, 27) Sarup (1996, 25) has described narrative identity as a multidimensional state where different stories blend; when we tell about our lives in the form of memories and tales, we simultaneously construct our identity. As the fragmented identities have been prevailing in postmodern times, the narrative construction of an identity can be seen as an integrative conception.

As my research questions concern the process of identity construction, the life story interview is a very suitable method for gaining information about it. The life story narrative may be the most effective means for obtaining understanding of how *the self* evolves over time or at least seeing the subjective perspective on that. In fact the self can be defined in narrative terms as an ongoing story. Because a life story is a representation of a life experience, telling it is a way to organize one's experience and verify one's identity. In fact telling a story can be a means to become who one really is. It can be an opportunity to acknowledge ones' values and attitudes that have been acquired over time. (Atkinson 1998, 11-12)

To summarize, in this study I will be looking at socially constructed identities of the ethical consumers that are constituted by linguistic acts and practices, as well as the narrative conversational identity developed in the interaction between the interviewee and myself as researcher.

4.6 Notions of Finnish consumer identities

It is brought out that consumer behavior is determined by culture and its specific ethical beliefs (e.g. Kotler 2003) Finland is often regarded as a forerunner e.g. when it comes to environmental issues, and Finnish companies are in general regarded as having a strong ethical stance. This creates a fertile ground for ethical consumerism among Finnish citizens. We are educated in a manner that encourages us to take environmental and social issues into consideration. Also as members of a wealthy society, we have here the possibility to ponder ethical issues, and have means to influence by buying ethical products.

The current youth is the first generation of Finns that is accustomed to live in an affluent society from the childhood (Autio 2004). In spite of this Finland is still behind the United States and the Western Europe in terms of development of the consumerism, as it was not until the 1980's that Finland acquired a status of an affluent society. Autio (2004) has researched young Finns' consumer identity. She found out that traditional consumer ideologies such as saving money and consuming frugally are still influential in the Finnish consumer culture. Also Wilska (2002) has found that Finnish consumers show still modest and rational spending patterns along more materialistic and hedonistic ones. Nevertheless the

current youth can be regarded as a branded generation that has learned to spend money and enjoy consumption in order to express themselves.

Wilska's (2002) findings also show that Finnish consumers are not particularly individualistic. They remain influenced by different social and demographic groups as well as by public opinion. Thus they are less omnipotent and exciting than postmodern theories suggest. This is understandable as in the everyday life, especially now during the economic downturn, we still have economic and other restraints that take us down to earth from flying in the postmodern spheres.

5. Data collection and narrative analysis

In this chapter I will present my own research, the data collection method, the interviewees, and the limitations of this research. First, I will unveil how narrative inquiry works both as a method and as a phenomenon under the research. I will also explain the choice of my interview method: The life story interview. Then I will describe the course of the conducted interviews and briefly present my informants. Finally, I will describe the limitations of the research.

5.1. Narrative inquiry – Life story interview as a research method

When deciding about the data collection method, I was wondering, what is the best way to gather information about ethical consumers? As my aim is to truly understand these consumers, it was clear that this study needed to be qualitative by its nature. According to Denzin & Lincoln (1994) qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting in attempt to understand, or interpret, the phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them. Moreover I reckoned that the best way to learn about ethical consumption is to ask the ethical consumers to tell me about it. So I selected as my data collection method an in-depth life story interview that will describe routine, as well as problematic moments and meanings in the interviewee's life. In the interviews I will hear ethical consumers' narratives about their life and particularly about their consumption habits, and this way I wish to obtain pertinent knowledge about their behavior and finally make conclusions about their identity construction.

I will use the methods of narrative inquiry in making sense of the data collected. Simply put, a narrative is equivalent for a story or a tale and narrative researchers study narratives / stories, i.e. descriptions of a series of events. The basic underlying assumption here is that the story is a fundamental form of human communication and therefore it accounts for human experience (Clandinin 2007, Atkinson 1998). People often think and speak in story form as well as bring meanings to their lives through a story (Atkinson 1998). Narrative knowing is connected to the idea that the world is socially constructed by means of language. We use language to build the narratives out of the stream of ideas and things we do and things that happen to us. The

narrative mode of knowing relies on sequentiality and the temporal ordering of events suggests some causality. (Hytti 2003, 51-52)

The framework of narrative research is relatively loose and researchers use a wide number of research approaches, strategies and methods. There is no need for unanimity among narrative practitioners. What is common for all narrative researchers is the use of narrative in some way. However, according to Riesmann (1993, cited in Hytti 2003, 52), scholars agree that a sequence is necessary for a narrative. Yet there are views that theme over-rides time, as an episodic narrative is woven together through a theme rather than by the time. In this study I work on the basis of narratives that are both sequential and thematical. I am interested in themes that the ethical consumers include in their narratives, as well as in the ways that they construct meaning in time (what led to what).

Narrative inquiry regards narrative as both the method and the phenomena of study. The starting point for the narrative inquiry is experience expressed in lived and told stories. Therefore the method and the inquiry have experimental beginnings that are informed by and intertwined with theoretical literature. Narrative inquiry involves the reconstruction of a person's experience in relationship to the others and to a social milieu. (Clandinin 2007) An essential feature of a narrative is that it gives the flow of experience a meaningful and understandable form by relating the part to the whole. This refers to the ability to make connection between what people do (or say they do) and what they mean by it. (Toyoki 2007, 57) The essential features of a narrative are a plot and a possibility to transform it into a text (Hirvonen 2003, 27). Shankar et al. (2001) have also iterated the key features of a narrative. These are: 1) the establishment of a valued end point, 2) selection of events relevant to the goal state, 3) the ordering of events (linear, temporal sequence), 4) establishing causal sequences, and 5) demarcation signs (beginnings, middles, ends).

I decided to use the life story interview as my data collection method. The life story interview is a method for gathering information about one person's entire life. It is a form of narrative inquiry that has evolved from oral history, life history, and other ethnographic and field approaches. This method sees life as a whole and it is a good way of carrying out an in-depth study of individual lives. The aim is to understand single lives in detail and to see how the individual plays various roles in society. (Atkinson 1998, 3) McAdams (1996) writes that a life story is an internalized and evolving narrative of the self that incorporates the

reconstructed past, perceived present and anticipated future. He also states that a person has a life story in the same sense as s/he has traits, goals, plans and values. Life story is a psychosocial construction, which means that it is constructed by the person whose story it is but the story has also constitutive meanings in the culture. (McAdams 1996)

My aim is to understand the ethical consumers' behavior and I believe that a life story interview is a suitable method for researching these consumers as it enables me to recognize meanings and gain context of this complex behavior. McAdams (1996) puts it: "Life stories echo gender and class constructions in society and reflect, in one way or another, prevailing patterns of hegemony in the economic, political, and cultural contexts wherein human lives are imbedded." In the theoretical part of this thesis I have gained understanding about the context of ethical consumption, and I hope that by interviewing the ethical consumers I can combine their personal experiences into the wider societal influences surrounding the ethical consumption.

In a life story interview the interviewee is a storyteller (a narrator) and the interviewer is a guide or director of the process. The two together are collaborators, composing and constructing a story that the teller can be pleased with. The researcher guide is never in control of the story told, the process must be open-ended. (Atkinson 1998, 9) Each life story consists of a familiar pattern of stories: beginning, middle and resolution. The plot, the pattern of life is actually what gives it its identity, as well as its meaning and purpose. Life stories are based on empirical fact, but they also go beyond fact as imaginative interpretations of the past, present and future, in order to make one's life-in-time into a meaningful and followable narrative (McAdams 1996).

Concerning the reliability of the results, it must be noted that narrative does not reflect the totality of what happened in reality, since the setting of the narrative affects as well. (Fosse-Gomez et al. 2008) Also the success of the life story interview depends on the willingness and openness of the storyteller of being guided into telling a truthful story. As narrative is also socially constructed in the interview situation it must be pointed out that the story is told to a particular person and it might take a different form if it was told to someone else.

Life stories can be judged by aesthetic standards such as coherence and richness, or by pragmatic standards such as credibility. As life stories are psychosocial constructions that aim

to spell out personal truths, they lie somewhere between pure fantasy and a slavish chronicle. (McAdams 1996) McAdams (1996) identifies six standards that a good life-story form contains: (a) coherence, (b) openness, (c) credibility, (d) reconciliation, and (e) generative integration. I will discuss later on the realization of these standards in my interviews.

5.2 Conducted interviews

I conducted six life story interviews with people who claimed to be ethical consumers and who also paid attention to the ethical dimension when shopping for clothes. For my research purposes it was beneficial to interview people who are truly committed to ethical consumption. It appeared to be quite a challenge to find ethical consumers who also pay attention to the fashion, and who are willing to sacrifice one and a half hours of their precious time talking to a stranger about their life. I used purposive sampling as I wanted to make sure that I have the right people in my interviews. I applied different methods in catching the interviewees: I visited ethical fashion stores, sent interview invitations to e-mail listings of Finnish ethically oriented organizations, such as Dodo (www.dodo.org) and Porkkanamafia (Carrot mob; www.carrotmob.org). This way I arranged interviews with four women. It seemed to be very difficult to find men who were interested in these issues, which is in line with Moisander's (2001) findings that girls and women appear to be more ethically focused than boys and men. One of the offered explanations for this is that the so called soft values seem to fit better into female perspectives. Nevertheless I managed to catch two male interviewees, one I contacted through Facebook, as I saw that he was active in a group that promoted ethical clothing, and another one is a teacher I know who is explicitly ethical in his consumption practices.

Finally I had six interviews set up, with four women and two men, aged between 26 and 33 years. I chose to study young adults, as they are still in the process of developing their identities but yet they are past their insecure teenage years, when the need for belongingness to a group for instance is higher. As follows, my interviewees are in a narrative era (McAdams 1996) in their lives, which runs from young adulthood till adulthood. In the young adulthood the individual begins to create a self-defining life story through most of adulthood, during which time one's identity continues to be refashioned (McAdams 1996). It is known

that consumer identity develops and changes with age, as young people grow up as consumers.

Three of the interviewees contacted me saying that they were volunteers for the interview, and the other three I asked myself as I saw that they were suitable for my research purposes. However, I found out that the volunteer ones were the most passionate about the subject. The interviewees were not offered any remuneration, only a cup of coffee and cookies. The interviews lasted from one hour to one and a half hours, and their average length was approximately one hour fifteen minutes. The interviews took place either at the interviewees' work place (three) or in my home (two). One interview was not conducted face-to-face, but instead by calling over the Internet with Skype, as the informant lived far away. I found out, that it was more challenging to conduct a life story interview on the phone, as it is easier to form a picture of a person when you see him / her face-to-face.

All the interviews were recorded with the interviewees' permission, and each informant was assured of anonymity and confidentiality. The informants knew that I was studying ethical consumption, but I did not give them any definition about what is ethical consumption, nor did I give them any further information about my research in order to minimize the bias in their stories. However, it was clear that the interviewees had given a thought to their consumption practices before the interview, some more than the others. Even if I used the life story interview method, the emphasis in the interviews was more on the recent happenings in the interviewees' lives, and the most of the discussion circled around consumption.

In my study I asked the interviewees to adopt a particular identity position, as I am interested in their identities as ethical consumers. This means that the interviewees are talking to me as ethical consumers, but yet I am also exploring how their identities as ethical consumers relate to the whole, i.e. other aspects of their identities and lives, such as being young professionals. The interviews took place naturally in Finnish and they were as loosely structured as possible, since a life story interview is an open-ended research method. Nevertheless I had a set of questions prepared to support the discussion, and I used them in all the interviews when there was a natural pause in their story. (see **Appendix 1, the interview frame**). Beforehand I was slightly concerned about how open would Finnish people, who are known for their shyness, be in the in the interviews. Nevertheless this concern appeared to be futile. I was even

surprised how openly the informants told me about some painful things they have gone through, for example about the feelings of being insecure or anxious.

With the interviewees we went through their personal history, but mostly we talked about their project of ethical consumption. As I wanted to understand their ethical aspiration in their everyday life and everyday consumption, naturally we talked mostly about grocery and clothes shopping. Grocery shopping seemed to be an easy subject to talk to all of the informants, perhaps due to the increasing attention that Fairtrade and organic products have risen. Anyhow, all of the informants were considering their grocery shopping profoundly, but instead fashion and clothing seemed to be a more difficult subject to the informants. They were aware of some unethical practices of the textile industry, but they had much less knowledge about this than about the food consumption for instance. In addition the informants had hard time reacting on it, mostly due to the poor offering of ethical clothing in Finland, and because of the poor labeling of the products. Nevertheless I gained valuable information about the role of clothing and fashion in their identity projects.

Interviewee	Miia	Kati	Antti	Jaakko	Anna	Salla
Age	31	32	33	26	29	30
Marital status	Steady boyfriend	Steady boyfriend	Single	Single	Steady girlfriend	Single
Level of Education	Polytechnic degree in design	University degree in psychology	University degree in German philology	University studies (business)	University degree in Agriculture and Forestry (Focus on economy)	University studies (Japanese) / Textile artisan degree
Profession	Entrepreneur (textiles), partner in a store in Helsinki	Researcher in University of Arts and Design in Helsinki	Teacher of German language in Espoo	Entrepreneur (environmental certification) in Vaasa and business student	Worker in Finnish Forest Industry Association in Helsinki	Secretary in an advertising agency in Helsinki

TABLE 2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE INFORMANTS

Table 2 presents the background information about the informants. The group constitutes of six young adults, five of them live in Helsinki and one in Vaasa. The group is quite homogenous when looking at the ages and the study backgrounds. I did not precisely look for informants with a high level of education, but five out of six informants happened to have a degree from the university, or at least they had studied at that level. Also the sixth informant, Miia, has a degree from the University of Applied Sciences (polytechnic). This coincides with the previous research that people with higher level of education are more interested in the ethical consumption. Regarding to the role that information and awareness of the environmental and ethical issues play in ethical consumption, it seems natural that people with higher education are more likely to adopt ethical consumption practices.

All of the informants associated consumption with negative feelings and they shared a critical attitude towards the 'throw-away' society, where cheaply made goods are easily disposable. Moreover the informants manifested strong values that guided their consumption behavior. These values appeared to be at least partly inherited from the interviewees' childhood homes. The group shared common values such as caring, which was demonstrated in their interest towards the environment, considering other people also on the other side of the world, appraising animal rights, and worrying about the current state of society and the high level of consumption. They also jointly described themselves as being alternative or at least leading an alternative lifestyle in comparison to an average citizen.

Another common factor within the informants was their knowledge about the environmental and social impact of consumption, acquired through formal education e.g. in the university or by voluntary efforts in their free time. The whole group was actively following the news and current happenings of the world. Two of the informants, Miia and Salla, are working or had worked within the textile industry and thus they were aware of the problems in the clothes production, especially its environmental impact. Anna and Jaakko are both promoting environmental-friendly solution in their jobs; the former is advocating wood as an ecological alternative in the construction, and the latter is creating a new environmental certificate for the service businesses. Kati is in touch with research on consumption through her job as a new media researcher, and she had quit a job as a busy consultant because it did not fit her values and was too hectic. Antti has been strongly influenced by Steiner education methods (Steiner or Waldorf education is a pedagogy based upon the educational philosophy of the Austrian

philosopher Rudolf Steiner), which emphasize the child's development into a moral, integrated and unique individual and it is often described as an alternative approach.

It must be noted that none of the informants are extreme consumption objectors, eco activists or hard core hippies. I intentionally looked for interviewees that were actually consuming and buying things, only paying more attention to what they buy than average people. It became clear in the interviews that the informants separated themselves from these more extreme eco people, by stating for instance that they do not want to wear hippieish clothes in earthy colors, and thus be stigmatized as tree hugging and carrot eating earth lovers. This illustrates how there are still strong stereotypes towards eco-friendly people, although the concept is changing when ethical consumption is becoming trendier.

None of the informants had children, which presumably makes making ethical choices easier when one has to consider only his / herself and a possible life partner, and one has more time and money. A significant feature that this group shares, is an active approach to life, which is also possible when they have no family duties. All of the informants were efficacious in their free time i.e. they had an active social life, sporty background or interest towards travelling and other cultures. However, they were not really active in organizations, except Salla who was involved in the environmental organization Dodo. The project of ethical consumption seemed to be very personal to them, and they did not make big noise about it.

Interestingly Jaakko appeared to be sort of a contrarian among the informants. When all the other five informants stated something, he often did not agree with them. He clearly is an original and individualistic personality who is not following the herd. Also on a few matters it came out that the two men had similar standings in opposition to four women. Of course this can be a coincidence. Based on the sample of two men and four women it is not possible to make conclusions about the differences between the sexes, although it is clear that there are existing differences.

The whole process of interviewing people was very rewarding and interesting both for the interviewees and for me, the researcher. Some interviewees explicitly stated in the end that it was beneficial for them to think about their reasons for consuming ethically, as they do not normally do that. Some interviewees stated having learned new things about themselves, and even thought that having this conversation could lead into a deeper commitment to the ethical

consumption. On the other hand, I was fascinated about these people's voluntary commitment to use a lot of time and money in thinking of and making the right consumption choices. I was astonished about their strong moral stance and integrity. As a result, I have made some changes in my own consumption practices as well. This way the life story interview appears to me as a truly two-way process where both the informant and the researcher can learn new things about themselves.

5.3 Limitations

The nature of qualitative research and narrative inquiry allows only making interpretations about the informants instead of making wider generalizations about the Finnish ethical consumers. This means that the results are applicable only to my interviewees, even if it is likely that similar stories would be found if researching more ethical consumers. Also, my study is heavily dependent on the selections that I have made regarding to the informants' stories. I interpret these stories according to my own best knowledge, which is biased after I have read a lot of material about ethical consumption lately. The same applies to the emerging themes that reflect my personal view of what was important in my informant's stories. Someone else could have come up with whole other themes. However, these are the usual drawbacks in this type of research.

Social desirability bias must be taken into account as a limitation for this research. It occurs when participants tend to give a socially desirable answer or the one that they believe the interviewer is looking for, although it may not be entirely true. Intention research and social desirability bias may endanger the validity of the research. (Valor 2007) I told my informants before that I was researching ethical consumers, so they were able to prepare for the interviews, even if I asked them not to prepare in any way. However, I do not believe that the validity of my research is endangered even if the informants have googled what ethical consumption means before the interview. All the informants were volunteers, and I do not see any reason for them to lie in the interviews albeit they might exaggerate. The social desirability bias is illustrated in Kati's comment: *"But maybe this is not what you are looking for in your thesis..."* Kati is a researcher herself, in the University of Arts and Design, so she easily put herself in my position and perhaps adjusted her answers slightly to the direction

that she thought I wanted to hear. Yet this was also a minor notion in her interview, and a quite natural one regarding her profession.

6. Narrative themes on ethical consumption

In this chapter I will first analyze the narratives told by the informants on more general level according to McAdams' (1996) framework, in order to give a better picture about the informants and about the overall tone of the interviews. Then I will analyze the interviews according to the five different themes that emerged while close reading the textual data. The interviews covered extensively the topics of ethical consumption, ranging from environmental sustainability, health and safety risks, labor conditions and human rights to animal welfare. The role of everyday consumption, that is to say grocery- and clothes shopping, was accentuated in the interviews. This is natural regarding that the informants told me about their everyday lives.

6.1 General data analysis

After conducting the interviews I transcribed them and read them several times highlighting the most relevant and interesting parts. I draw mind maps about the prevailing themes and constructed timelines about the interviewees' lives, particularly about important happenings and turning points in them. In the analysis of the textual data, I will utilize a hermeneutically grounded interpretative framework, described by Thompson (1997). I will apply this framework in three levels of interpretation: 1) Identifying the key patterns of meanings expressed by the informant in his / her consumption stories; 2) Identifying the key patterns of meanings that appear in different informants' consumption stories, and finally 3) Draw broader conceptual implications from the analysis of consumer narratives based on understanding of the cultural, societal and historical processes behind the ethical consumption.

McAdams (1996) has presented the features of life story that include: Narrative tone, imagery, ideological setting, nuclear episodes, imagoes, endings and themes. When close reading the interviews I paid attention to these components, and I will now shortly go through all of them. **The Narrative tone** in the interviews was quite optimistic overall. However, the interviews reflected the eventful lives of the informants, containing both painful and happy incidents. More pessimistic stories included feelings of insecurity, anger and insufficiency. I see these feelings as a result of the informants' high sense of self-discipline, which led to the

fact that they were easily disappointed with themselves if they made wrong consumption choices for instance. Nevertheless none of the interviewees talked about really traumatic incidents. Perhaps they did not have experienced them or they did not want to share them with me. Guilt, on the other hand, was present in the interviews, particularly in Salla's story. Only Jaakko's story showed some amount of comedy as he talked about himself in an ironic manner with a twinkle in his eye. Probably the use of humor is a defense mechanism for him, but I do not analyze this in deeper level as I am not a psychologist.

Imagery in the interviews means the informants' use of word pictures, sounds, metaphors and similes. The extent to which the interviewees used metaphors varied. Jaakko was the one who uses the richest language, which is in line with his strong character. However, I asked all of the informants to tell me what the key words in this thesis, consumption and ethicality, mean to them. They described the word *consumption* by using the expressions like extremity, passivity, obsessiveness, vanity, exploitation and need satisfaction. When it comes to *ethicality*, the informants' views varied: For Miia it meant quitting intensive production, respecting nature, appraising human rights; For Kati it meant having strong values and acting according to them; For Antti it meant awareness - identifying oneself with others' situation; For Jaakko it signified a general being, a good spirit; For Anna it meant choosing the less evil, whereas for Salla it meant transparency in production, producing goods in a manner that no-one or nothing suffers.

These metaphors appeared to be really interesting, all of the interviewees recognized negative connotation from the word *consumption*. Only Jaakko and Anna found something positive from it; the employment effect and basic need satisfaction. It is not surprising that these two were the ones whose study background included economic studies. However, the group is quite uniform in their view of consumption as some sort of exploiting activity that is overly appreciated in this society. Moreover, the word *ethicality* raised positive connotations that related to values, respect, state of awareness and caring. Anna was the most skeptical one, implying that even ethical conduct can be evil. Also Jaakko brought up the fact that even ethical consumption can be unnecessary if it is done for the wrong reasons or without a real need.

When it comes to the **ideological setting**, the informants shared strong ethical and ecological values. The male informants, Antti and Jaakko, demonstrated religious beliefs, in fact Antti

was educated somewhat religiously from the childhood, and he still bases his behavior in some situations on the Bible's teachings. For example, his undertakings in the field of charity were based on the rule: Give one tenth away from what you got. On the other hand, Jaakko was very interested in religions over all and had been actively studying them in high school. He does not put Christianity before other religions, but, instead, he thought that ecologic values are a common denominator for all the main religions. Furthermore, none of the informants showed significant interest in politics. Salla was the only one who brought up the concept of capitalism, stating that consumption is the main form of the capitalistic activity. In their past the informants had manifested stronger ideological values, but now when they are reaching their thirties, the radical attitudes have softened.

From the **nuclear episodes** in the interviewees' lives, I have separated the most important turning points considering their personal development as ethical consumers. For Miia, the most important turning points were moving in with her ecologically radical sister in her twenties and finally meeting her current eco-friendly boyfriend a few years ago. This shows how the important close people in one's life have a huge impact on the individual's development. In addition, Miia's background as a designer of recycled clothing, and as a foregoer in Finnish ethical fashion industry, cannot be overlooked. Anna's situation is similar to Miia's, significant turning point for her was meeting her current girlfriend, who consumes very ethically, in the age of 25. By the time Anna already had favorable attitudes towards ethical consumption, but with the help of her girlfriend she found a way to act according to them. She describes taking a giant leap in her consumption habits at that time. For Kati, the most significant turning point has been her resignation from her successful job as a consultant, as it did not fit her personal values, and was hectic in a wrong way. Also starting to practice Capoeira has affected her, since among Capoeira practitioners there were a lot of alternative hippie-type of people like-minded to her.

Within the informants, Antti was the most influenced by his childhood home. He had relatives in Germany who were into the Steiner education, and his mother was striving for a very healthy lifestyle that included experiments such as serving only vegetarian food for her family. Later, the most significant turning point for Antti was studying at Snellman Academy (institution that educates Steiner pedagogy in Helsinki). There he met very alternative people who were interested in e.g. biodynamic agriculture, vegetarianism and astrology. In Jaakko's case it is difficult to separate a special turning point in his life. He describes always being the

‘goofiest’ guy in his social setting. Yet he mentions that he has been diagnosed with a serious illness in his nervous system. I can only assume that falling incurably sick has affected his world view. Nevertheless he has adopted a good attitude towards this illness: He takes one day at a time, and worries about the sickness only when the symptoms worsen. From the group Salla appeared to be the one with the most radical past, being a dreadlock haired hippie, travelling the world and working in organic farms. However, there was no one special turning point that would stand out in her life. Maybe this is because she had been drifting through different educations, different countries and different jobs, and still is not sure what she wants to do with her life.

Concerning **imagoes**, every interview included multiple of them. McAdams (1996) defines an imago as a main character that appears in multitude of guises that are personifying particular aspects of me (‘me’ here means the informant’s self-image). Miia’s imagoes consisted of an entrepreneur, a devoted girlfriend and “a person who works in the creative industry”. She did not have a strong ethical consumer identity; rather she had ended up on that track because of her sister and her current boyfriend. Kati’s imagoes include a researcher, a truly ethical consumer and an active citizen. Within the interviewees Kati is the one who stands out as having the strongest moral standing. She feels that ethical consumption is a civic duty and she cannot understand why everybody would not agree with her. Also, she explicitly states disliking shopping around. Antti’s imagoes contain that of a fairytale teller (‘satusetä’) for the children in a school environment, a nature lover, a philosopher and a benefactor. He seemed to be the most spiritual of the informants with an interest in religion, meditation and astrology.

Jaakko’s imagoes include an eco-activist entrepreneur, a wannabe-rocker and an anarchistic business student. Jaakko appeared to be the most original one among the informants. He admired great men, liked to ‘hunt women’ and had an innovative business idea concerning environmental certification. Anna’s multiple imagoes consist of a sporty ex-athlete, spokesperson for the use of wood, an ethical consumer and a devoted girlfriend. She seemed to be the toughest of the informants, probably due to her background of growing up in a poor family and having to cope with the controversies arising from her sexual orientation, as she is openly lesbian. Salla on the contrary seemed to be the most human and compassionate among the informants. Though she has the most radical past, she showed feelings of guilt related to

the lust of shopping. Her imagoes include a vegan food blogger, a shoe lover, and a committed ethical consumer.

The **endings** of the informants’ stories showed that all of them would continue being ethical consumers also in the future. Kati, Antti and Jaakko suspected that they would even tighten their consumption habits, when the rest thought that their current level of effort in the matter was appropriate. A few of the informants acknowledged the uncertainty of the future, and the possible change in their consumption habits, e.g. Anna thought that having children and a family could change her habits to some degree, even if she is determined to never get a station wagon. The endings also suggested new beginnings, at least for Kati and Antti who thought that this discussion or interview was very beneficial for their future as ethical consumers.

6.2 Emerging themes

After analyzing each case separately, I looked for common patterns of meaning that the informants gave to their consumption practices in their stories. I was surprised how similar thoughts and stories the informants had. It became clear that they had informed themselves thoroughly about the impact and consequences of consumption, and thus they were willing to pay attention to their own consumption practices. Based on the prevailing patterns in the informants’ stories I elaborated five different themes. Themes are listed in the table 3 below:

THEME	Growing up as a consumer	Critique of the consumer society	Social bonding	Striving for harmony	Way of influencing
CONTENT	<p>Ethical consumers’ lifespan</p> <p>Turning points in the informants’ lives</p>	<p>Restraining excess consumption</p> <p>Promoting sustainable development</p>	<p>Need for belongingness</p> <p>Seeking for acceptance</p> <p>Peer support</p>	<p>Harmony with the surrounding reality</p> <p>Caring for the distant others</p>	<p>Search for control</p> <p>Activating citizens</p> <p>Need for regulation</p>

TABLE 3 EMERGING THEMES AND THEIR CONTENT

First, I noticed similar phases in the informant's life stories, and based on these phases I worked out the first theme: The ethical consumer's typical life span that illustrates their growing up as a consumer. The second uniting theme appeared to be the critique of the consumer society that was common for all the informants. This theme also highlights the informants will to make sustainable consumption choices. The third theme is social bonding, where I aim to highlight the two-way impact of the informants' close people, both as influencers, and the targets of influencing. I will also debate on the existence of a possible tribe of ethical consumers in Helsinki. The fourth theme that I came up with is the informants' wish to live in harmony with the surrounding reality which highlights the informants' profound respect for the nature and their caring for the distant others. The fifth, and the last, theme draws on ethical consumption as a way of influencing. It reveals the informants' motives to consume ethically and accentuates their will to make a difference in the world.

6.2.1 Growing up as a consumer – ethical consumers' life span

When listening to the informants' stories, I found a similar pattern in their developmental path as ethical consumers. Thus the first theme comprises the subject of *growing up as a consumer*. I will describe how my informants take their first steps in the world of ethical consumerism, starting from childhood in value-laden homes, moving into the rebellious teenage years, then giving themselves hard time in the unconditional twenties, and finally reaching to the more balanced state of life when approaching their thirties.

To start with, the informants' family lives in their childhood were characterized by either heightened closeness to the nature and health, or by saving and frugality. Miia, Kati and Jaakko's families were oriented towards the nature; picking berries, mushrooms and going fishing was a part of everyday lives. Antti's family background was the most alternative including relatives interested in Steiner education and astrology, religious upbringing and healthy nutrition. Also Salla had gone through Steiner education. Anna and Salla's families were into saving and against excessive consumption. Anna describes her family as being very poor and she sees the consequences in her current purchase behavior:

“My family didn’t have a lot of money so price was always the main criteria when shopping. When you have lived all your life in an environment where the price is important, there is a big barrier for me to buy expensive organic products” Anna

None of the informants explicitly stated that their childhood homes have impacted on their current project of ethical consumption. Nevertheless I see that the informants’ strong values including the importance of health, respect to nature or thrifty lifestyle have been at least partly inherited from their families. Kati shows some evidence about this:

“At home the self made was appreciated; stay-at-home mom made good food and we spent a lot of time in the nature. Although my parents were not eco people, they were normal.”
(laughs) Kati

Kati’s quote shows how she has learned to respect the self-made from her early childhood experiences. Her comment about eco people not being normal, even if it is not said seriously, is also interesting as it reveals an existing stereotype about eco people being weird or at least funny. I will deal with this issue of stereotypes later on in the third theme (6.2.3). After the childhood spent in nature loving and frugal families the next step in these ethical consumers’ lives seems to be the teenage rebellion. All of the informants told that they were behaving radically during their teenage years and in their early twenties. The degree of radicalism varied; Miia, Kati, Antti ja Salla seemed to be the most radical ones back in time, dressing in colorful second hand clothes, participating in demonstrations, leading punk lifestyle or having dreadlocks. Jaakko in his part stated that he has always been a radical and he still is the same, and he did not see any difference in his behavior today. It must be taken into account that he is also the youngest of the informants and might still be in more radical phase in his life than the others. Anna showed quite mild levels of radicalism; dressing in grunge-style clothes in her teens and concentrating on sports instead of much rebellion.

Interestingly all of the informants presented themselves as being somewhat alternative people already in their teenage years. They use such expressions of themselves as “radical, punk, hippie, hippieish type or activist”. It can be read between the lines that the informants are actually proud of their alternative image, like Kati who gets annoyed with sudden vegetarianism boom in her high school. United they draw a picture of aware teenagers:

“During the middle school (yläaste) I acted based upon a feeling.. Being a vegetarian and dressing up hippieish was not regarded as cool among my classmates, rather we had to suffer. But we had a small circle of friends. Animalia (Finnish animal rights organization) was hot stuff at the time and I had a lot of pets... Suddenly in the high school vegetarianism became a trend, it was pretty annoying that people started to do something in masses that I was bullied about before .” Kati

“In the late teenage I had a punk-period, I hang around with the punks, played the guitar and considered leaving the church. Then my mum persuaded me not to do that. The punks were very aware of the societal matters; I started vegetarianism and quitted driving school just before the final test, so my parents had paid for nothing...” Antti

“I was a real flower girl, walking in colorful hippie clothes and jewels; I even had dreadlocks all the way till my waist... I felt like I was the most radical one in my circle of friends back then, even if I went to Steiner school that was full of alternative people.” Salla

When it comes to the female informants, it seems that their interest towards ethical issues has started with the interest in the animal rights that has led to the objection of intensive farming and to vegetarianism. Miia acknowledges that in her early twenties there was a clear trend to start being a vegetarian, so her ethical strivings at that time might not have been totally selfless. Probably this is the case with the others as well. Concerning the male informants, Antti finds vegetarianism when he is spending time with “the punks”. Within the group Jaakko stands out as an exception; his motives to consume ethically are mostly ecological and he is the only one of the informants who is not a vegetarian. In fact he takes a very critical stand towards vegetarianism:

“I have come to a conclusion that it is not my responsibility to pretend to be another animal than I am. I have a mixed eater’s digestion and desires. I think it is hypocritical to be a vegetarian. I eat meat.” Jaakko

After the radical teenage years the interviewees lives take differing turns. Miia, Jaakko, Anna and Salla are studying and finding their ways. Miia moves in with her radical eco-friendly sister and is strongly influenced by her, and continues on the path of the ethical consumption.

Also her clothing designer studies support her ethical consumption efforts as she learns about the textile industry's flipside. Jaakko spends a year as a peacekeeper in Eritrea and gets an idea about founding his own business and thus he steps forward in his ethical strivings. Anna plays football actively and does not have time for much else. She argues that consuming ethically is hard when it comes to practicing sports and buying sportswear etc. Finally she starts her studies at the university in the faculty of agriculture and forestry, and there she learns about the product's whole life cycle and starts to reflect on her consumption choices more. Salla travels the world; lives, studies and works in different countries across the globe. She starts studying at the University of Helsinki but does not finish her studies.

Miia, Antti and Salla describe being unconditional in their consumption practices during their twenties and almost not consuming at all, using second hand clothes and buying as little as possible. Antti and Salla tell:

“For few years, in the age of 22-25, I didn't even buy clothes, I got them. I was very rough on myself, too much into this ‘healing myself’ thing. Appearance as well as all the other outer things was ancillary.” Antti

“Back then I had the attitude that I used money as little as possible and I didn't even want to earn money. I also bought as little as possible; if there was no ethical alternative I didn't buy at all. Today I'm more reasonable, if I really need something I buy it and if I have money I can use it.” Salla

These comments show the informants' strong ideological stance that was prevailing in their habits during their twenties. Later on all of them have softened their habits, entering into the adult lives, where the demands of working life etc. often necessitate consumption. Nevertheless the informants will of influencing have not disappeared, and they have a greater income level due to their steady jobs. This creates a fertile ground to ethical consumerism and positive buying. Instead of youth rebellion; boycotting companies, having negative feelings and seeking attention with clothing, the informants have found a more balanced lifestyle. They dare to seek for comfort, and realize that they are allowed to spend money as long as they do it ethically. Having more money allows the informants to buy for instance organic and Fairtrade products and thus vote for ethical companies:

“Now, when I’m working full time, it is easier to make consumption choices according to my values than back in the time when I was a student.” Anna

Anna’s comment brings up the often proposed thought, that only affluent people can afford ethical consumption. Other informants accompany her in this claim, saying that when studying they could not buy expensive ethical products. On the other hand, they went more to the flea market back then, than they do nowadays, and so they assumingly dressed up more ethically. This illustrates the paradox of ethical consumption: the increased wealth usually translates into more consumption, which is bad for the globe, even if there is a label ‘ethical’ placed on the product.

Kati describes taking a little detour on her road in becoming an ethical consumer, when the demands of working life come on the way. As Kati enters in the busy life of a consultant, she softens her strict consumption habits. She is forced to dress in a certain manner, even if she only reluctantly wears suits when meeting customers. Antti experiences a bit of the same; he starts a non-military service in a hospital, having to leave his ragged clothing style, and finally he leaves the punk circles. At the same time he goes to another extremity and listens to only classical music after the punk period. Later he studies philosophy at the Snellman Academy, where he catches on the astrology, meditation and spiritual healing. There he finds his imbedded values of consuming ethically and he starts striving for being a better person. For Kati the same happens in her capoeira class, where the spirit is very communal and she finds likeminded hippie-type people.

Coming to this date, Miia’s life changes when she meets her current boyfriend, who is very strict in his consumption practices, buys only organic food etc. Thus, she is inclined to do the same and tightens her consumption habits accordingly. Anna’s case is very similar; she meets her current eco-friendly girlfriend, who has a profound effect on her present consumption habits. Antti is not as unconditional as he was in his twenties, his job as a teacher would not allow it. He is more balanced and his thinking has refined, which has led to being more aware consumer. Jaakko founds his own enterprise that operates on environmental certification, and as a result he puts a lot of effort into studying about ecological things. Kati leaves her job in the consultancy as it does not fit her values, and she starts paying more and more attention to her consumption choices. Salla softens her hippieish habits and finishes her studies as a textile

artisan. However she does not want to get a job in that field as she has a problem with the material side of the business. Kati and Salla tell about the controversies of the working life:

“I got totally tired of the business world. Even if I’m an active person my job was hectic in a wrong way. The values in that world were harsh and people were taken for effective machines. I was not ready to give my life to the employer and I resigned.”

“I have a little problem with the fact that there is too much material in the world, I don’t want to contribute into producing it more myself by working in the textile industry...” Salla

Kati and Salla’s comments show their strong moral integrity as women who are not ready to make their living in the way that does not fit to their values. Kati shows extreme courage in leaving her job and promising career path, and instead pursuing the doctoral studies in another field of study. Salla’s consciousness does not allow her to work within the textiles. Yet there is a slight controversy in her thinking, in the end she does buy clothes from other Finnish designers, so why could she not work in that field herself? And also what makes an advertising agency a more ethical place to work? Again the subjective nature of ethicality is highlighted.

When asking about the informants’ future plans in the field of ethical consumerism, all of them affirmed that they were going to continue on the same path. They saw their behavior resulting from strong values and from a certain worldview and thus they thought it is not likely that they would change their habits in the future. Miia thinks that as she has already for ten years paid a lot of attention to her consumption choices, she could not give up on that anymore. Kati states not yet being satisfied with herself as an ethical consumer; she wants to continue developing in that area. Jaakko also thinks that he will probably tighten his consumption habits in the future when his knowledge in that area increases. Salla described her ethical consumerism as a way of life that is not likely to change. Anna and Antti on the other hand see the possibility that their habits might change in the future. They narrate:

“I don’t think I will give up on these habits (of ethical consumption). The values can change but not in the next couple of years. Even if I have a child, I don’t think I’d ever by a station wagon, unlike many other people...” Anna

“You get all the time more information and that way you get new ideas. I guess I will always think about these issues, but putting them into practice is affected by other things.”

Antti

Anna and Antti’s comments show how committed they are to the ethical consumption now, but they realize things can change. One of the possible changes could be having a child and entering a family life. Then the free time spent on pondering consumption choices would diminish and perhaps the informants’ values would change according to the new demands. However Antti expresses a will to keep him informed about the ethical matters and this way keeping his own consumption practices updated.

To sum up the theme, all of the informants have many similarities in their life paths, but yet they all stand out as unique individuals with their own personal history. What is common for them is the thirst for information about the grievances of the world that is manifested in their interest towards ethical consumption. Already in their childhood the informants were exposed to such values as closeness to nature and avoiding excess consumption. Later they have become aware teenagers, who boldly stand out from the crowd, and finally they have become young adults with strong ethical stance that is manifested in the informants’ everyday decisions.

6.2.2 Critique of the consumer society

The second emerging theme in the interviews turned out to be the *critique of the consumer society*. This theme comprises the informant’s dissatisfaction with the current throw-away society, where sustainability is not valued. They are frustrated with unnecessary consumption, and have a conception of being at the mercy of the marketers in a society that is driven by the market powers. The informants realize that economy is dependent on an augmenting level of consumption, but they also see the flipside of the increased consumption and wealth: the environmental deterioration. They do not want to base their identity on continuous consumption, which is easier said than done in today’s postmodern society. The informants tell their views about consumption:

“Consumption feels like such a passive thing; that I go to the store and then I am at the mercy of the marketers. You have to settle for the offering in your area, and trust what is said about the products. Even if there are more ethical alternatives, there is also more green washing. Somehow I understand the food consumption, but other consumption seems a bit unnecessary to me.” Kati

“Consumption is something that is taught to all of us; it should be practiced always when one has extra money, it keeps this reality glued together. It has been given importance by the market place, and by the greed people who want more and more money. It becomes a problem when there is too much stuff, there should be a way to reset the impact of consumption. In the dump the stuff does not renew itself.” Antti

The excerpts of Kati and Antti show consumption as something that we are driven to do by the “evil marketplace” that manipulates us, and demands us to spend our every extra penny on consumption. Kati takes a doubtful stand on the ethical products and information sources, as she suspects the possibility of green washing behind companies’ ethical claims. According to her buying food is a must, but the rest of the consumption is based on vanity. Antti again takes a more universal perspective as he sees consumption as an adhesive to our reality; it “keeps the big wheels turning”. He also highlights the importance of recycling and renewing the scarce resources if possible. Jaakko goes as far as questioning the purpose of ethical consumption and Salla also takes a very critical stand. They argue:

“Consumption for me means vanity. In fact I don’t like the term ethical consumption, as it still has a feeling of pointlessly buying things in it. Of course consumption creates jobs... But when it comes to the ecologic thinking, the more happens in the economy, the worse it is for our common good.” Jaakko

“For me consumption equals exploitation almost without an exception. It is a form of capitalistic activity; our economy in run by consumption, but I see that there is a problem. The consumption is based on the fact that we have to consume more and more all the time, and then the production must increase accordingly. It is the abundance of the material, and all the energy it takes... We are using natural resources that are ending.” Salla

Jaakko and Salla view consumption as more or less a pointless activity that exploits the weak. The informants jointly criticize the fact that we are encouraged to consume more and more all the time, even if there is no real need to do that. Jaakko acknowledges the employment creating impact of consumption, but for him the environmental issues are more important. Salla plays the capitalism card and questions the whole economical system. She also sees the whole culture of consumption we live in as being problematic. However, she does not have an alternative solution to offer for this dilemma. Jaakko and Salla are united in their view that the growing economic wealth that is based on consumption that poses a serious threat for the limited natural resources, and that something must be done for it.

Miia strongly criticizes the throw-away society where the sustainability is a forgotten value. Her view stems from her experiences in the textile industry; she has developed a critical eye for the quality issues for instance. In her own fashion consumption she favors classic clothes that endure time, as well as Finnish high quality design that can be easily sold further when not needed anymore. Anna accompanies her in this matter. The women argue:

“Clothes are not made lasting anymore. On the contrary they are made so that they won’t last, so that people have to buy more and more of them. When you buy clothes from a cheap chain store, they last for two or three months and then they look so ragged you cannot wear them anymore.” Miia

“It is more ethically justifiable to make impulse buys from the flea market. Yet it is also bad if there is no real need to buy the product. If I was about to buy tableware or furniture, I’d buy Finnish design that keeps its value within time.” Anna

For the women an ethical product presents something sustainable that retains its value throughout the years, and thus does not end up in the dump after three months. Finnish design seems to be a safe choice in this case, and the informants also believe in the transparency of domestic production. Miia sees bad quality as the most significant fault of the current goods, as it makes them easily disposable. Anna thinks it is more ethical to make second hand impulse buys, yet she acknowledges that there should be a real need for those buys as well. Salla also frequents the flea market and buys the basic clothes preferably there. However, some of the informants have controversial thoughts about shopping and consumption:

“Shopping is not a part of my lifestyle, in fact I don’t like shopping” Kati

“I don’t buy anything on impulse. And I do not base my selfhood on the goods that I have. As a consumer I am very moderate, almost non-existent.” Jaakko

There is a slight contradiction in the air: After these statements we talk for one hour about their consumption, that is to say, about their shopping habits. Probably Kati means here that she does not like to shop around for its own sake, but only when she really needs something. Jaakko gets close to my research question as he states that he is not constructing his identity on the material things. This is of course easier said than done. It becomes clear that Jaakko spends a lot of time thinking of his consumption choices, searching for environmentally-friendly certificated products for instance. Besides this he also enjoys some unethical things like technological equipment. However, he has a seemingly humble attitude, and therefore I believe there is a truth in his comment. Most probably the consumers do not even realize that they build their identities around some material things.

Salla seems to be the guiltiest (or the most honest?) of the interviewees as she confesses that she loves shopping and she has to make an effort to restrain herself from buying. She avoids chain stores because they lure her with their nice clothes and cheap prices. Still she rarely cracks and most of the time she manages to avoid them. She tells:

“I just love the clothes, especially shoes... And it is very difficult to buy ethical shoes, so I have to buy ‘normal’ ones and then I have bad consciousness. It’s just about being vain. I have a practical me, who thinks that people only need a pair of shoes for walking, but in the end I just want those high heels. There is a shopping loving side in me who loves to have something new. Like there is in the most of us. I try to be aware of what I buy and I inhibit myself in order to avoid following my impulses...” Salla

Salla’s comment brings up the tensions in the ethical consumers life; compromises must be made between the practical me who necessitates ethical decisions and between the vain me that wants cool new things. Marrying the identity of an ethical consumer with that of a fashion lover is one example of these controversies. Salla has to struggle in her everyday life between her desires and her rational thinking. In the end her strong sense of fairness steers her

behavior into ethical direction. In order to avoid having a bad conscience she inhibits herself from the impulse buys and avoids even putting her feet in a chain store.

The informants are quite suspicious towards the information sources about the ethical consumption; they prefer to verify the ethicality of the product from a reliable information source. They also demand transparency from the firms. It must be clear who has manufactured the product and under which circumstances. They gather their information from different sources; Miia watches documentaries, reads books and uses her knowledgeable sister as an information source. Kati poses tough questions for sales people in the stores and seeks information in the internet. Anna distrusts information offered by a non-governmental organization, as she sees that the information they offer is biased. Sometimes Kati has a hard time finding proper information:

“Even the sales people don’t always know the origins of the products. The problem is that the production chains from the raw materials till the readymade product in the store shelf are very long and they include sad things. Of course the sales people can’t know all the facts... But I’d be ready to support a store with well informed staff, who’d know where the products come from.” Kati

Obviously there is a need for more transparency when it comes to the product information. At least Kati would support a store where the sales people would actually know where the products come from. In general the informants avoid some chain stores and products that are made by multinational corporations. When asked which brands the informants boycott, they name the ones that have been present and in the media for their unethical behavior: Nike, Nestlé, H & M, McDonald’s, Shell, and even Arla. The informants try to avoid these brands; Kati says she wouldn’t even buy a Nike shirt from flea market. This highlights the significant role that media has in handling the ethical matters. On the same basis some of the informants avoid going to large department stores and instead they support smaller boutiques. On the other hand, Anna has more trust towards the large corporations than some no logo- brands:

“If a product is made in China by Adidas, Nike or H&M, I assume that their processes there are well thought. Instead I wouldn’t by a no-label product that is made in China. I believe that big corporations have an opportunity and a will to influence. They cannot

afford making the same mistakes all over again, so I am ready to give them a second chance.” Anna

Anna has a forgiving attitude towards somewhat unethically behaving firms who have made mistakes in the past. Her statement also shows the complexity of ethical decisions; whether to trust a multinational corporation or not? After all, the companies today are forced to more or less realize the promises given in their Corporate Social Responsibility reports. As Anna states, they cannot afford another media buzz about environmental disasters or the use of child labor. On the contrary, Kati thinks, based on her own experiences in the business world, that all the large companies just want to make more and more money. However, it is up to each ethical consumer to evaluate which firm is ethical and which one is not that bad.

In accordance with their negative feelings towards multinational corporations, some of the informants show anti-brand attitudes. They do not want to be walking advertisements for multinational brands, even if they would occasionally wear them. Jaakko and Anna narrate:

“I don’t want to flaunt with my clothes, I find it annoying if there is a visible brand logo on the cloth. I have more humble attitude. If I buy brands I buy those that are regarded as sustainable.” Jaakko

“I wouldn’t buy products from Peak Performance; in the sport circles it is a must to have them. I don’t like the status symbol part that it brings you when you put them on.” Anna

Jaakko and Anna both disregard branded clothes by which one aims to reinforce his / her status among the peers. They prefer sustainable quality brands, but do not want to show off any logos. Anna states rather having a slogan promoting some societal issue in her t-shirt than a brand logo. With this behavior Jaakko and Anna stand out from the crowd that adores brands; they do not want to construct their identities based on the branded items. Jaakko states having a humble attitude towards clothing, he buys brands for their use-value, not for their status value. Anna has gotten an overdose of certain brands that are popular in the sports circles, and avoids them nowadays.

The informants see a huge challenge ahead in directing consumption to more ethical direction and in promoting ethical consumerism. Jaakko sees that the significant effort ethical

consumption necessitates is the main barrier for more people adopting ethical shopping practices. He crystallizes the problem:

“People talk about the global economic downturn, but yet people have money to get wasted and buy fancy high heels for 250 Euros. People have shitloads of money; it’s just the effort that they do not want to make. That’s why I have my own business; I want to make these things easy for the lazy people like myself.” Jaakko

Jaakko’s excerpt shows the unfortunate reality of ethical consumption: Even if people have enough money and so the possibility to make ethical choices, they rather put the money into something that benefits them, than to something that benefits the whole globe. In the spirit of the postmodern times, people are seeking for comfort in the world of consumption and pampering themselves by buying new goods in order to make them feel better. However, there are a small amount of people, like my informants, who try to stay out of this consumption hysteria, and make sustainable consumption choices instead. They criticize the prevailing consumption culture in their everyday life, and they believe in making at least a small difference this way.

6.2.3 Social bonding

The third theme that came up in the interviews is *social bonding* or *social integration*. Here, I will view ethical consumption as a form of fulfilling one’s need of belongingness to a group or to a community, and as a form of seeking acceptance from the peers and from the loved ones. The role of ethical consumption as a social identity project is accentuated here, as I aim to characterize the loose tribe of Finnish ethical consumers. It is debatable whether there are emerging communities of ethical consumers in Finland; the informants had diverse views on that matter.

In the interviews the proximate people’s impact on the informants’ project of ethical consumption was emphasized. I recognized two main groups of influencers. First there are the closest ones, such as close relatives or boy/girlfriends, who appeared to have a life changing impact on the informants, and who set an example for them with their own behavior. Secondly, there is a wider group of influencers that include friends, classmates and hobby

buddies. It can be concluded that the influencer has the greater power the closer s/he is to the informant. As follows, good friends are more influential to the informants than casual acquaintances.

First of all, the informants appeared to have an active social life as part of their active lifestyles full of work and hobbies. They have met different people through their hobbies, education, or in different organizations. Some of their friends are also considering their consumption choices carefully, but some are not paying attention to it. Kati and Salla state:

“I see my friends a lot. Ethical consumption is part of everyday life for me, and also for some of my friends, but not all of them. I have very different friends, and it can lead to awkward situations...” Kati

“I am quite active, now I am an active member in Dodo. I like it when people do something together. All my free time is full of social activity.” Salla

Both of the women have an extremely active social life. Kati describes having diverse friends; some of them are so called hard-core hippies, and the others do not really pay attention to ethical issues. She has to take this into consideration when the friends are about meet, and she finds it problematic sometimes. Salla likes to make things happen with other people, and she has found a way to do this in Dodo, a Finnish environmental organization.

Two of the informants, Miia and Anna, clearly pointed out how the people close to them have been a strong influence behind their projects of ethical consumption. In Miia’s case her eco-friendly sister has affected her, and both Miia and Anna have a life partner that is strongly ethically oriented. Miia and Anna tell about their most significant influencers:

“I moved under the same roof with my little sister, who has paid a lot of attention to these things from the childhood; she does not eat meat and she is a real eco person. She put pressure on me!” (laughs) Miia

“My current boyfriend is so vigilant! Before I met him I just did not bear to buy expensive organic products, but he always did, so I could not help but buy them myself. Now almost everything we buy is organic.” Miia

“It was a big thing when I met my current girlfriend, she was a great support for me and I found a lot of her thoughts and values also in myself. You could say that I found a way for the interest I had inside of me to get out. With her at home we discuss about these things and about the different products, it is important for both of us.” Anna

Even if Miia half kidding says, that her sister put pressure on her in changing her own habits, there is probably a lot of truth in it. It was clear that both Miia and Anna had ecology-oriented values within them long before even meeting their current companions, and thus their ethical efforts are not dependent on them. However, they both have changed their consumption habits because of their partners. Most probably they are also seeking for their acceptance with this behavior, as ethical consumption can be seen as some kind of a condition for these relationships.

Kati, on the other hand, has a contrary experience, when she has been the more ethical half in a relationship and her partner has suppressed her interest in ethical matters. She narrates:

“In my twenties my ideological feeling vanished, and I was living in the ‘H & M culture’. I was also dating a guy who liked branded clothes and who appreciated a cool spirit of happening instead of a hippieish kind.” Kati

Kati’s quote describes her step out of the ethical consumer’s road. Demands of her work place and her boyfriend at that time put pressure on her, and made her forget the ethical consumption efforts. Interestingly she also refers to the consumption culture by ‘H & M culture’; seemingly H & M, a Swedish cheap clothing store, presents to her a non-sustainable, unethical side of our culture. Yet, if her ethical values were hidden for a while, they did not totally disappear. This is referred to as identity latency phase (Kleine 2000).

In addition to the closest people, such as relatives and life partners, also other people have influenced the informants; these influencers include people met within the hobbies or through education. Kati describes meeting like-minded people among capoeira practitioners; Antti has found allies at the Snellman Academy, and Salla in the environmental organization Dodo. They summon:

“I was training capoeira and there was strong communal spirit, in these circles there were a lot of alternative lifestyle leading ‘hippies’. Maybe that environment recalled me of the values that were hidden somewhere and they started to come back.” Kati

“Snellman Academy was a homely place; I got great friends that I’m still in touch with. Astrology was the thing that united us. I would describe them being somewhat alternative, eco people. In the university you can also find them, but not in the same scale. These people are interested in the spiritual reality, that there is something else out there than market power and competition among us.” Antti

“I’ve always been interested in gardening, and when I moved to Helsinki I heard about Dodo’s project of urban cultivation (kaupunkiviljely) and I got involved in it. Immediately I found like-minded people, and now I’m an active there.” Salla

These excerpts show the importance of finding like-minded people who give the ethical consumers affirmation that they are doing something right, and encourage them in their ethical strivings. It seems that even if the informants had strong ethically oriented values within them, they need some peer support to give them a push to realize these values in their life. At the same time they obtain a feeling of belongingness to a group that shares the same interests as they do.

Furthermore most of the informants have an educational background that has supported them in their ethical attempts, and they have found complaisant people among their fellow students. Miia and Salla describe meeting like-minded, aware and creative people within their textile designer and artisan studies, and Antti has the same experience from Snellman Academy. Anna has studied at the faculty of Agriculture and Forestry that has an eco-friendly reputation. She states:

“I have friends with varied backgrounds. Usually people who have high education are more enlightened; they at least recycle, and are able to justify their consumption choices. With my university friends I discuss a lot about these things, but with my football team members we do not do that.” Anna

Anna brings up a relevant issue; people with higher education are more interested in the ethical matters. With her football buddies, who mostly have lower level of education, she rarely discusses ethical matters, like she does with her university classmates. Her education has strongly affected her consumption habits, as she states undertaking recycling and getting kicks out of it after starting her studies.

Some informants express discomfort when they have to deal with the people who are not like them. Antti has negative experiences from his university times and Jaakko just feels like he does not fit in the business school. The men tell:

“When I started in the university there were so many people...But I only have one good friend from those times. I was really distressed when I went there, and I think the only reason that I got out insane, was that I started meditation. It has balanced me.” Antti

“At least here in the school I am quite random guy, I stand out from the crowd. Also in my other circle of friends I am the freakiest guy...I do not belong to any organization, I am so egocentric guy that I think that if I have good ideas, I will realize them god damn it, I am not going to be in other people’s leash and run after them!” Jaakko

Antti and Jaakko’s comments show the tough side of the university world, where the heterogeneous environment there does not allow people to stand out from the crowd. For Antti this was distressing, but Jaakko does not seem to mind being the ‘odd ball’ among business students. However, this is in line with his individualistic behavior. Moreover Jaakko does not name any big influencers in his environment, instead he highlights finding his own way of doing things. He states being egocentric, which is slightly difficult to believe since he very carefully considers his consumption choices for the benefit of the others.

Perhaps the men have a more hard time in their ethical strivings, as for women it is easier to demonstrate ethical values such as caring for others. It came out, when I asked the female informants if they know any male ethical consumers, that men as ethical consumers are often more unconditional and radical in their consumption habits than the women. Also Antti and Jaakko tell about having more rough periods in their life when they have given hard times for themselves.

In the end all of the interviewees have sort of an alternative image, even if they have got rid of the ragged clothing styles or dreadlocked hair. They deny trying looking different, but yet they state that other people frequently comment that they stand out from the crowd. At the same time, they manifest their commitment in the field of ethical consumption somehow. It is apparent that clothing is an important tool in manifesting one's commitment to certain ideology. Miia and Salla tell:

“I don't deliberately try to look different. But once when in the city a Hare Krishna monk stopped me and said that I must be an artist. Also other people have told me that I look like I work in some creative field. Maybe it just shows in me. Miia

“Other people notice that I have an alternative image, but I don't see it that way myself. There was a time when I wanted to look different, like a fictional character, but not anymore. Still I like it, when people comment on the way I dress up.” Salla

Even if Miia and Salla have stopped trying to look different, they still have such a personal style that their originality is obvious to others. When asked if the informants pay attention to the other ethical consumers, it becomes clear that they do recognize their counterparts out there. At the same time they reinforce the stereotypes of the ethical consumer. They acknowledge that when going to alternative happenings or to an organic food store, they pay attention to what other people buy. Anna and Kati narrate:

“If I see a person dressed in a certain manner, I do like to look at what s/he buys. If someone looks like a hippie, but then there are some ethically questionable items in his / her shopping basket, it is somewhat amusing. I feel a bit malicious... I believe that there is a sort of a community of ethical consumers in Helsinki; Dodo is an example of it. They organize happenings for dynamic, cool, and urban young adults. But I am not part of it, that kind of allying doesn't give me any strength.” Anna

“I see that there is a communal spirit among ethical consumers in Helsinki. In my own age group I am about to see especially women in their thirties, but also men, who would like to consume more ethically. Perhaps they are well educated, trendy and active people; even if they have iPods they always buy Fairtrade bananas...In ecological stores I have the feeling that 'here we shop together ethically'. There is a slight feeling of cohesion. Maybe

you are just delighted because there are other people buying the same stuff and you think: 'Yay there is more of us now!' Kati

These excerpts show how the informants are aware of other ethical consumers in Helsinki. It seems that besides visits to the ecological/ethical food and clothing stores, these people are gathering into different 'alternative' happenings. These can be organized by different organizations such as Carrotmob, Dodo and Demos Helsinki. These organizations are described as cool or trendy by the informants, which tell something about the growing trendiness of ethical consumption. Instead of tree-hugging hippies wearing earthy colors, these organizations lure urban trendy young adults, who are concerned about the climate change, human rights or other ethical issues.

The informants use their social circles also as a source of information about ethical consumption. They also seek reinforcement for their views among their friends, and accordingly they spread mouth-to-mouth information themselves about the things they consider important:

"I have friends who have similar views, and thus they have also reinforced my way of thinking. Usually it goes like this that first I look for information, and then some friend shows me a new product, and then I am like: 'Aah, I have read about this so I can take it'."

Antti

Antti's comment catches the essence of this theme, ethical consumption as way to bond with other people. The informants have been affected by other people on the ethical matters, and they have got great support from them. On the other hand they have also offered support for their close ones, but I get back to this on the chapter 6.2.5, when I will handle ethical consumption as a way of influencing. Most importantly, through belonging to a certain peer group, the ethical consumers have got affirmation for their ethical aspirations. Without a doubt people are social animals who are affected by their close ones, and ethical consumption does not make any exception in this matter. The degree to which the informants are seeking acceptance from their peers, wanting to belong to a group or pleasing their partner as part of their project identity can only be guessed. For sure it plays a significant role in their ethical consumption.

6.2.4 Harmony with the surrounding reality

The fourth theme that I will elaborate on is the ethical consumer's striving for harmony with the surrounding reality. I use the word reality instead of environment, as I am about to explore the informants' spiritual, religious and ethical aspirations that relate to their behavior as ethical consumers. A part of this striving for harmony is the project of 'becoming a better person', which is evident in the informants stories even if it is not said out loud. As it came out before, all of the informants showed strong values. One of these values is the endeavor to behave in a manner that respects the nature and does not harm anyone or anything. This is manifested in the interviewees' interest in sustainable development, including environmental protection, as well as honoring both human and animal rights.

First I will examine the informants' attempts to live in harmony with the nature. All of them give great importance to the 'surrounding green' and they try to live in a way that strains the nature as little as possible. They spend time in nature, picking up berries and mushrooms, going to biking trips or watching birds. Most of them pay attention to their carbon footprint and they try to reduce it. The interviewees tell:

"Ever since I was little, I have been interested in the nature, and especially in birds. I'm not a real bird watcher, but I'm always alert in the nature. It is another bond with the surrounding green, to be alert." Antti

"I bike and I travel by train. This summer we were biking in Finland. For me, as for the other consumers, the trips abroad are quite a compromise. I don't want to think that now when I have biked for a year, then I can go to Thailand light-heartedly. But when you want to see the world, you have money and a three week vacation, what are the options? Yet I hope that I can reduce flying in the future..." Anna

For Antti it is important to connect with the nature, and then act in respect to that connection, starting from being alert. Again it appears that making ethical options is not always easy. Anna finds it difficult to make compromises when it comes to travelling. She brings up the issue: The affluent young consumers who are interested in different cultures and travelling must make compromises in their ethical aspirations if they want to travel by flying. All of the

informants have travelled the world and none of them stated were ready to totally give up on flying, even if they are aware that it is bad for the nature, and they try to reduce it.

Nevertheless the informants try to make ethical choices in their everyday life whenever it is possible. In the following the informants are commenting on their behavior as well as the reasons for their actions, justifying why they are willing to go through all this trouble, taking time and sacrificing money for their ethical efforts. They tell:

“Best of the ethical values is ecological thinking, because it is not bind to the humans. Instead it is well being of all the creatures, all the living, and all the forms of being... I have always been fond of nature, but I don’t see that everyone must be ecologic; you can pollute if your heart says so. But mine says no, so I don’t.” Jaakko

“I was shocked when I saw some documents about intensive farming, it led to my vegetarianism. I support all the ethical things so that at some point all the intensive production would stop. Also I don’t want to support products that are produced in China as I believe that their production often violates human rights.” Miia

“I feel good when I know that the product is ethically produced. Money part is relative... If I buy a cheap product, somewhere else someone is probably sacrificing his / her health for the product.” Kati

“I have read about banana farms where the workers become sterile because of all the toxic chemicals used. It is crazy where they can put people! That’s why I prefer Fairtrade even if it’s not organic. These people’s lives should be taken into account, not just the fact how cheap the product is here in the supermarket.” Antti

It can be figured out that these ethical consumers’ reasons to pay attention to their consumption stem from the ecological thinking and from the caring for the distant others. Their motives vary, for Jaakko the ecological thinking is the number one value, and the others highlight the human rights in these excerpts. They are well informed about the product’s long way to the stores, and they also act according to that knowledge by preferring ethical products. Also the informants clearly state here that their ethical views are not restrained only to the human’s well being. They highlight the aspect of respecting the nature; being alert and

not polluting or harming anyone. Jaakko takes a very tolerant view as he sees that ecologic thinking is a personal value and conceives that everyone is free to act according to their best interest.

Interestingly the informants are united in their perspective that they are not preaching about their own ethical views to people, and that they do not judge other people based on their assumingly unethical behavior. Often they claim that “it is everyone’s own business whether to act ethically or not”. Yet a few of the informants express more or less sarcastic, or even arrogant, attitude towards the more ignorant ones:

“I think that everyone makes their own judgments. But of course I correct people when they have wrong assumptions. In my store (that sells ethical clothing) I can be even a bit mean towards customers who have a wrong picture of something, like ‘don’t you understand’? Miia

“If it turns out that something is not ecologic at all when it looks like ecologic, then I diss that spirit of doing stupid things, like ‘ok, you mean good’, but still...” Jaakko

Miia and Jaakko’s stories show that they sometimes have an arrogant attitude towards others. At least they are very aware of being “the aware ones”. Despite these critical attitudes towards other consumers, it must be noted that these informants would react this way probably only if they were provoked. However, it does tell something about the informants; they consider themselves being better consumers, or even better persons, than the others. For sure they have a reason for it. Anna states her opinion boldly, saying what the others perhaps leave unsaid:

“If you think about society according to the principles of sustainable development, I do think I’m a better consumer than my brother and his family for instance. They have two children and they buy products in order to increase their family’s well being. But I buy products in order to maximize my personal, and the globe’s well being. I feel that my brother is selfish, more selfish than me. This is because their choices concern only their own happiness, and of course that of their children. But instead they could think other children in the world. Why they don’t do it, it is because of ignorance and it is sad. It can be influenced. I feel like I am better consumer than an average Finn, as I am ready to make

sacrifices, paying more money and making bigger effort in order to buy ethical products.”

Anna

Anna's statement is very conclusive; she rationalizes why she is a better consumer than her brother. Simply she thinks about the environment and about the distant others, when her brother is thinking only about his own and his family's best. It is a whole another story who can judge which one is more ethical than the other, but at least Anna is able to justify her claims. However I was slightly surprised how she criticized her own brother. She also brought up that her sister is neither a least bit interested in ethical matters. The informants' feelings about other 'ignorant' people varied, but I could recognize Anna's thoughts from other informants' speech as well, even if they were not that direct or honest about it.

The male informants are the ones who demonstrated also religious values and thinking behind their ethical consumption. Antti has got religious upbringing from the childhood and later on his religious aspirations have reinforced. Jaakko in his part has been curious about different religions. Antti and Jaakko explain their religious standing:

“I am naturally interested in things concerning health and sustainable development. From my twenties I have had religious aspirations all along, this whole ethicality thing stems from them. Religious or spiritual, whatever it is... I think that religion is a tool that gives the first push... I am also into meditation, developing yourself and all that.” Antti

“Prioritizing the ecologic thinking has become my number one value through a little detour... Back in high-school I was examining religions quite carefully and when you look for a common denominator in them, ecologic think seems to be the one. Somehow through my world view the ecologic think has become important for me.” Jaakko

Even if both Antti and Jaakko are Christians, from these excerpts it can be concluded that they do not put too much value solely on that religion, but instead they have wider spiritual aspirations. Apparently studying religion(s) have shaped their worldview into a more human direction. Antti is also meditating, which is a way for him to express his spirituality and balance his life. Antti and Jaakko elaborate further on their views of ethicality and spirituality:

“Ethicality for me means awareness and caring, considering others. I see awareness as a means to identify to the other’s situation. Awareness is not just a state of knowing, it is a state of feeling that we all unite, that we are one. What happens here affects on what is happening somewhere else. Maybe spirituality and all that have made me more sensitive to these things; some of my thoughts come from the teachings. But at some point you just experience it yourself in your life, and then you don’t need any teachings anymore. When you realize that you are not alone in this world.” Antti

“Good spirit is a good spirit and I define what it is in my own head, and then I live according to it. I don’t intervene into what someone else considers as a good spirit, because I myself can be wrong. I don’t want to argue about it with someone.” Jaakko

Both Antti and Jaakko state that ethicality is something that you have to define yourself; you cannot just follow what other people teach you. Antti takes a more philosophical approach to what ethicality means to him, when Jaakko keeps it very simple: a good spirit. For the male informants religion has given a first push on the road to becoming an ethical consumer, and then they have given a lot of thought to these matters, and finally they have found their own way of doing things. Jaakko also acknowledges the possibility that his way of doing things might not be better than other people’s way. The female informants on the other hand seem to be more down to earth as their interest towards ethical consumption has risen from the will to tackle the wrongs in the world, e.g. human and animal rights.

I asked what the informants get out their devotion to ethical consumption that necessitates significant efforts, let alone time and money. They answered unanimously: It feels good and it feels right. They get kicks out of it, and consider it almost as a hobby, a good way to spend free time. Buying ethical products gives them assurance that their money goes to more human direction than for the greed money making companies. The informants acknowledge the existence of green washing, which appears when companies’ ethical efforts are just a mere marketing trick. However, that is a risk they are willing to take when they try to shop according to their principles. They tell:

“I would like to live in harmony with the environment and with the human rights. If I can realize this in my everyday life I just feel good, it feels right. I am just wondering why everyone is not thinking about these things?” Kati

“I buy organic products, because I think about the earth. Increasing organic food production is important for me, as I see that intensive farming is bad for this globe. Also I buy organic milk and eggs, because I think that animals should have at least a bit better life since they live here only for a short while.” Antti

“Buying environmentally certificated products gives me assurance that my money goes to some instance that pays attention to the ethical issues, that the money goes to more human cause than mere money making. Even if it is just marketing or green washing, it tells that the company has been smart enough to put the certificate on the product.” Jaakko

“I get kicks and I feel good when I make ethical consumption choices, e.g. when I look at where the product comes from. I try to follow the principles of sustainable development. For me ethical consumption is a good way to spend free time, it is fun and it brings meaning to my life.” Anna

“I think I get a good consciousness out of this ethical consumption. Perhaps I also get a certain image from it, that I am a good person... I’m not sure. I feel really bad if I buy something without thinking much, and then I feel guilty.” Salla

These excerpts show the interviewees’ strong moral stance towards the ethical matters; paying attention to ethicality just feels right to them and they get good conscience out of it. From where she stands, Kati cannot understand how someone could not think about these things. Antti among others objects intensive farming and thinks about the value of the animal life. Jaakko wants to support companies that manifest human values in their business. Anna gets kicks out of her ethical behavior, which also brings meaning to her life. The others do not use such a deep expression, but probably they feel slightly the same. Salla feels guilty when she does not act according to her principles, which tells about her strong conscience.

Salla is the only one of the informants who directly brings up the ethical consumption’s impact on her image in the eyes of the others. However, Anna was in the same track when she

claimed to be a better consumer than her brother. These notions raise a question how selfless are these informants' aspirations? Perhaps there is a slight hidden agenda in their project of ethical consumption that they get a good feeling for being the aware wiseguys, who know better than the others. However, I believe that this motive plays a minor role in their ethical consumption besides other more selfless motives that benefit the others and the environment.

Some of the informants see that the role of their clothes is important in living in harmony with the surrounding reality. New ethical fashion allows the informants to express their ethical ideology through clothing and thus they can send a message to other people. They narrate:

“I have a newly found interest towards clothing and fashion. It does matter what you wear, everything matters. People are entities; everything affects everything.” Antti

“The idea that you can message about your own ideology, such as ecologic thinking, with what you wear, is made for me. I can dress how I want, ethically, and it doesn't mean scruffy clothes. The truth is that people have to be good looking; it just makes your life easier. So you just have to think how you look and which clothes you wear.” Anna

These comments show that one's appearance matters for the ethical consumers, and that clothing is a good way to tell things to the others. In another excerpt Anna denies that the looks would matter, but here she contradicts herself by stating about the importance of looking good. Besides food, clothes are present in the consumers' everyday life. One has to think what to wear, and an ethical consumer has to think even more carefully what s/he is willing to wear. The fashion industry is known for its unethical practices, and the informants are having a hard time making clothing choices. Now even the chain stores are presenting clothing lines made from organic or Fairtrade cotton. Some of the informants see it as a good thing, while some of them think that it is the same old “tricot trash” under a new label.

“If I happen to go to Vero Moda and I see a shirt from organic cotton, I have fewer barriers to buy it than when it comes to a normal shirt. Of course I still think carefully whether I need it or not. Yet I do impulse buys more likely when they are ethically justifiable, e.g. I buy second hand, or a t-shirt with an important societal slogan in it. Wearing a t-shirt is good way to be a walking advertisement.” Anna

“I wouldn’t buy even an organic cotton shirt from a cheap chain store, because even if the cotton is good, the clothes are not lasting. That’s the thing with these chains...”Miia

“It is tricky when you see organic cotton shirts in H & M; I just wonder who has sewed those ‘ethical’ clothes? You have to weight these things a lot in your head...” Salla

These comments highlight the complexity of ethical consumption as well as the crucial role that information has in it. Miia and Salla, who are both insiders in the textile industry, avoid cheap clothing stores’ organic cotton lines, when Anna is rather excited about them and sees them as positive progress. Again it becomes clear, that what is ethical to one is not ethical to the other. However all of the informants see the increasing amount of ethical products in the stores as a good thing.

All in all, striving for harmony and achieving a balance in one’s own life and with the surrounding world is important for the informants. They strive for this goal by respecting nature and other people, and they try to act according to this principle in their everyday life. They define themselves what is ethical and what is not. By doing this they consider being good consumers, and perhaps even better persons. Their motives or drivers behind ethical consumption might not be totally selfless. Yet they are only human and they can act only according to their best interest. Ethical consumption requires compromises and thus it can result in the feelings of guilt and bad conscience that are manifested in the informants’ speech. In the end they still get a good feeling out of making ethical decisions. By doing the right thing they get a content and a meaning to their lives.

6.2.5 Way of influencing

The fifth and the final theme that I elaborated is ethical consumption as a way of influencing. It is appropriate to finish the analysis with this theme, as influencing plays an important role in ethical consumption. As discussed before, all of the informants had an active lifestyle, and as a part of it they expressed a need to influence things, some more than the others. The agenda of ethical consumption is build around the claim that consumers can make a difference by selecting ethical products and in this way steer the market offering into more ethical direction. Buying ethical products can be seen as the easiest way of influencing for the ethical

consumers. Anyhow all the informants do more than that. They influence their close ones, have their own ethical business, are active members in organizations, or donate money to charity. It becomes clear that the informants have given a lot of thought to their possibilities in influencing things. They tell:

“When I was young, I didn’t have the attitude of an activist. I was interested in these things, but I wasn’t doing anything for it. Now when I’m older, I have a strong will to do these things by myself and to be able to influence things” Salla

“For me ethical consumption means that I can influence something. At least in my own life I can ease my own personal burden that way. And by bringing up the fact that you have influenced things, it is possible to influence other people as well. Overall I have a feeling that one person cannot do much, it is distressing. I cannot influence what kind of emission limits they decide to place in Copenhagen (UN summit on climate change in December 2009), although it affects mine and my kids’ future. But through my own consumption I have the power to influence.” Anna

“I see consumption as a means of influencing; you can choose what you buy, and in theory the people in the Western world could orient the supply into a certain direction by consuming certain products. In practice, I just think that the consumers do not have enough strength. They are tired after the work day and pick the first Rainbow-product (Finnish cheap private label) from the shelf in the store. Ethical consumption demands an active role from the consumer.” Kati

The informants’ comments reflect a need for control that is increasing in these complex postmodern times. As Anna puts it, with her own consumption choices she can influence at least something, in the middle of the chaotic world where she has not much influence. These excerpts reflect the informants’ strong will to influence things through their ethical consumption. At least in their own consumption they have a power to make the right decisions. Kati realizes how difficult it is to obtain these noble goals; she has a skeptical attitude towards the idea that everyone would start pondering their consumption choices. The active role in consumption that seems to fit the informants would probably not fit all the people. Although they are sometimes frustrated in front of larger issues, such as placing

emission limits and getting other people interested, the informants remain motivated to continue their own projects of ethical consumption.

It is evident that the informants have informed themselves about the impact of consumption, as they even use the exact expressions that I have used in the theoretical part of this thesis, such as consumption as voting. Kati tells:

“Buying certain products is like voting for something. Maybe it’s just that you want to steer your consumption into certain direction, support something rather than boycott it. I believe in positive influencing, starting the dialogue in positive spirit is important; if people can laugh to their unethical behavior, it’s great. People get distressed easily if they feel like they are put the blame on. I feel like the authorities can be criticized, but people need positive energy in the middle of all the stress.”Kati

Kati has given a lot of thought in influencing other people besides her own consumption, and she strongly believes in doing this in a positive spirit. None of the informants expressed a need to boycott things, as they had grown past that phase in their lives. Kati’s wise thought, that in the middle of the stressing everyday life people rather do something positive than put their energy into negative things, hits the essence of the concept of positive buying. Of course the concept of ethical consumption includes avoiding unethical products, but it cannot be seen as active boycotting.

The informants’ efforts in influencing take mostly place in an individual level. None of them is actively involved in politics or in traditional non-governmental organizations. Only Salla is an active member in Dodo, an environmental organization that promotes consumption as a means of influencing. Also Anna has been involved in Dodo, but she describes being a passive member there for a moment. A few of the informants express their will to be more involved in organized consumer action, but interestingly all of them state that there are barriers to get involved in the voluntary work in a non-governmental organization. The organizations that the informants mention include e.g. Fairtrade promoting association (Reilun kaupan puolesta ry, Repu), Center of cooperation with the developing countries (Kehitysyhteistyön palvelukeskus) or Carrotmob (Porkkanamafia, worldwide consumer network). Kati and Anna argue:

“I have a bad conscience because I’m not doing any voluntary work at the moment. I feel like it is a civic duty to do something that benefits everyone. Many people do it, it’s not that demanding. At some point I wanted to be more active and went to the gatherings of Repu (Fairtrade promotion). Usually people in the organizations are really nice, but this time I didn’t find any soul mates there so I didn’t go anymore. Afterwards I haven’t find a suitable organization to join, I’m a bit shy to put myself out there alone, it’s like ‘am I welcome here?’ In those organizations people know so much, they might study in the institute of development studies and I would be a random there...” Kati

“The work in non-governmental organization is not familiar for me, so I have a big barrier to go there now, even if in principle I wanted to. For half a year, year, I tried to join Dodo, even if the organization was situated just around the corner... I rather join some citizen activating happenings than organizations, in those happenings you can be anonym and you don’t have to commit on anything, but yet you are visible.” Anna

Kati goes as far as declaring voluntary work as a civic duty, which certainly tells about her strong moral standing. Both Kati and Anna see that there are barriers in a way to join an organization, even if they would like to do that. This certainly gives something to think about for these organizations if they want to recruit new members. Interestingly Kati, who has a Master in psychology, feels like she has too little knowledge to join an organization. She also needs to have like-minded people there in order to keep her motivated to stay. Anna also sees these organizations as difficult to approach and join to. She rather joins funny happenings, organized by Carrotmob for instance, that aim to activate the citizens, than commits to a certain organization. She is a passive member in Dodo and can remain anonym over there. Miia and Salla share their own experiences about organizations:

“When I was young I belong to Amnesty and went to all the demonstration and stuff, reading Voima- magazine (Finnish societal newspaper) every month. Now I don’t have time for that even if I’d be interested sometimes.” Miia

“At the moment I am an active in Dodo, but it is difficult to say how active will I be in the future. In Dodo they think that consumption can save the world, but I don’t think so. The only way for me to do it is to reduce consumption.” Salla

Miia is a busy entrepreneur; she just does not have time for voluntary work at the moment. She has been more active when she was young, but today she does her fair share in promoting ethical fashion in her store. Salla is an active member in Dodo, but she is not that committed to it as she cannot agree with their main convention: “The world can be changed by consumption.” Salla’s comment shows that one has to really identify with the organization’s values in order to be truly committed to it.

Again the male informants stand out from the female ones, they do not belong to any organization, but yet they donate money for them, unlike the women. Jaakko states giving money monthly for WWF (World Wildlife Fund) and for Green Peace. As he stated before, he does not even want to do any voluntary work in an organization, as he rather does things himself. Antti does some charity work in the form of donating money as well. He narrates:

“I have been an easy catch for the face-to-face promoters; I think I am involved in all the possible organizations! I support the church, Green Peace, WWF, Unicef and Amnesty monthly with a small amount of money. Oh and Save the Children and UFF as well... Then I get e-mail from these organizations and so I stay informed. Charity is very important for me; already the bible says that you are good when you give one tenth away from what you got. I am quite generous when I have money.” Antti

Even if Antti is ‘only’ a monthly donor in these organizations, he follows the e-mails that he gets from the organizations, and thus he stays informed about the current ethical issues. He says that his religious aspirations have affected his will to do some charity work; he just sees it as a moral responsibility. When it comes to Jaakko’s charity work, I see that he rather wants to promote ecological thinking and realize his value of being selfless in his actions, but for sure his studies of different religions have affected his worldview as well.

Two of the informants are in a very influential position, as they are entrepreneurs: Miia in the field of ethical fashion, and Jaakko in the field of environmental certification. They are pioneers in their own fields and they do make a difference, even if they are not making noise about it. Miia does an exceptional work promoting ethical fashion in her store in Helsinki. She also has her own ethical clothing/jewelry brand; she uses mostly recycled materials in her products. Jaakko promotes ecological certification for service businesses. Their attitude to entrepreneurship varies, for Mia it is a serious way to make her living, and it is in her blood.

For Jaakko, his company is a mere hobby besides his studies at the moment, but he has plans to make it a larger business in the future. Yet he has a strong will to influence things from the beginning. For Miia expressing herself through handcrafts seems to be the most important factor behind the entrepreneurship. The entrepreneurs tell:

“Having my own business has been a dream for me ever since my childhood. My family has strong traditions in handcraft. I knew I wanted to be a sewer from the age of six!”
Miia

“When I was planning of having my own business, I was wondering how to influence a hundred of firms instead of only my own one. Then I came up with this idea of having an environmental certificate for service businesses. For tangible products there are a lot of certificates, but not for services, especially not for the small businesses who do not have money to pay for a Joutsenmerkki (Finnish renowned environmental certificate). This is my way to promote ecological work.” Jaakko

Clearly Jaakko has a strong ideological aspiration to do something important, whereas Miia has a more down-to-earth attitude. Jaakko seems to be the one with the most passion for influencing things among the informants. To better understand his aspirations, he states:

*“For me ecologic thinking is about being selfless. It is important for me, as there is no point of developing oneself for 50 years, then decay and die. There are no stories about the men who haven’t contributed to society, Casanova is maybe an exception... They are great chaps who have accomplished something important.”*Jaakko

It becomes clear that Jaakko wants to be one of the great men, who will stay in the history books and who has done something significant with his life. Even if not all the informants have such an enormous vision of influencing things, they can make a difference on a smaller scale, starting from influencing their close ones:

“I do talk about these things with my close ones. After all, people are quite ignorant. Even if there is a lot of talking about climate change, people don’t get how it affects them and thus they are not interested in it. They should be offered good tips on how one can

influence things. Yet I don't start to preach to anyone. If I go to my father's place and I see they are not recycling there, I do remind them about it. But I leave it to that." Anna

"Sometimes I get compliments about my clothes that are made out of recycled materials, and then I might say humorously that I'm a network marketer for the clothes, and that I'm happy to give them more information. The Grapevine (puskaradio) works!" Kati

It appears that even if the informants deny preaching to their friends and family about the 'almighty' ethical consumption, they do take an opportunity to promote it when they have a chance. This includes correcting misconceptions, promoting recycling and acting as a living advertisement to ethical products, as Kati does with her unique clothes, that are made from recycled materials. Being a good example for the others is a good way to influence, and the informants do take an opportunity to do it. Antti is a teacher and naturally he takes a role of a role model for the children. He tells:

"If I was an activist, I would be a peace activist. Peace rules... It is a prerequisite for all the well-being. At the same time I feel like I am a peace activist at school. Overall I think that the ethical consumption is something that one has to experience by him / herself. I can make most difference by being a good example." Antti

Antti highlights the importance of peace in promoting well-being. He has friends who are peace activists, but he does not want to get involved in such an activist movement. For him, being a good example is important, and thus he is in the same line with Kati who is a strong believer in positive influencing. As a teacher Antti can set a good example for the others in his everyday life. I have no doubts that today's school world would not need a peace activist.

The informants' ways of influencing depend on what they consider being ethical. When we were talking about ethical products, it appeared that the informants often saw Finnish products or products made by small businesses as being more ethical than foreign ones, or the ones made by multinational corporations. Thus, their effort to buy these products can be seen as a form of influencing. Some of the informants also relate buying domestic products into wider aspiration of supporting Finnish production and small businesses. The informants explain:

“I always think that when I buy Finnish or organic products, I support small businesses. I assume that then the money stays in Finland, and it goes directly to the maker, preferably without intermediaries.” Miia

“I favor clothes that are made from recycled materials, they combine so many good things; supporting small businesses and Finnish production, they are unique, the shops are nice and you get personal assistance.” Kati

“I am interested in some young Finnish designers work; I deliberately buy things from Finnish producers, clothes, jewels and stuff. For me that is ethical fashion, it is unique and different, not the latest trends.” Salla

All in all, most of the informants see Finnish products as being more ethical than foreign ones, and they favor these products systematically. This relates to the fact that most of the informants see the products that are manufactured as close as possible to them, as a better choice in general. Yet they do acknowledge that even renowned Finnish brands have outsourced their production abroad, and therefore their ethicality is compromised when the third parties have taken over the production. They express disappointment of the Finnish quality brands disappearing in China for instance, which shows in the lower quality of products. Miia states:

“In the past Luhta did everything in Finland, but nowadays they do even their samples in China and in Portugal... And all the sewers have been fired. It is really sad that nothing is made in Finland anymore. I think they even have a factory in North Korea” Miia

Miia, as an insider of Finnish fashion industry, is naturally disappointed when her industry is increasingly moving away from Finland to the countries of cheap labor. As follows, she rather supports small Finnish businesses than large Finnish companies. Jaakko, who else, takes a critical attitude towards Finnish products.

“Favoring domestic production is not important for its own cause, but for the ecologic thinking, in a case where Finnish made product is more ecological than foreign made. Domestic production must be re-evaluated every time; ‘domesticness’ is not a value itself.”
Jaakko

“It is not ethical either not to buy anything. When I buy services from Finland it creates jobs. If I buy a product from Africa, I create jobs there. But then you have to think about the transportation costs and their impact on the climate. Or then I can put the money on my bank account, is that ethical?” Anna

Jaakko and Anna’s comments show the complexity of ethical consumption. With proper rationalizing one can buy domestic products and believe s/he is acting ethically, when another one buys African products and believes s/he is positively influencing Africa’s development. In the end it comes down to choosing the less evil option, as Anna says. The informants have to trust their own reasoning and act according to it, as there is no single view of what is ethical and what is not. Some of the informants also bring up the idea that Finland should be as self-sufficient as possible, i.e. cultivating grain in Finland is good, even if it is not the most environmentally efficient thing to do it here up north.

A few of the informants take a bold step by demanding the government to regulate consumption more. Kati and Salla have obviously learned their lesson about a single consumer’s difficult choice:

“I think that the public authorities should put more pressure on consumption. Instead that people think about these things alone, the government or the local authorities should restrict the consumption more. The choice of a single consumer should be made easier.”
Kati

“I think that there should be more regulation in society concerning consumption, so that the single consumer wouldn’t have to make the decision every time. I think it’s wrong that there are items in the stores that I do not want to buy.” Salla

Kati and Salla are reaching for the authorities’ help in reducing the consumption and in making a single consumer’s choice easier. They do not believe that all the people would restrict their consumption voluntarily; so instead consumption should be restricted for them. This makes sense, since the informants seem to be doubtful about their peers’ interest in the field of ethical consumption. Jaakko has a strong opinion about his peers’ consumption behavior:

“Those who understand, they just don’t care, and those who care, just don’t know how to do it. It’s irritating. Those who care can spend hours thinking about these things, but they just don’t make progress. Either they don’t have resources, enough intelligence or proper information. I believe that if one wants to promote ethical things, the ethical choices must be made easy for everyone.” Jaakko

Jaakko’s statement highlights the immense need to influence people and make ethical consumption available for everyone. People just do not have enough knowledge about the product’s whole lifecycle, nor about the consequences of their consumption behavior, and thus they need to be informed. All the informants seem to be eager to facilitate other people’s effort in ethical consumption in one way or another. Their narratives manifest a strong will to influence things. The degree of this varies from wanting to remain in the history books, to making small efforts in everyday life. These include setting an example for the close ones and encouraging them to take on more ethical consumption habits. For sure both small scale and larger scale efforts make a difference.

7. Findings and discussion

In this chapter I will present the findings of my research and discuss about them in the light of the theory. Current social and environmental concerns surrounding consumption have revived the debate about the role of meaning in consumption practices. In this research the quest for meaning was strongly present in the informants' consumption stories. Studying the consumers' identity construction, instead of segments based on gender or social category, allows better understanding of how the consumer interprets him / herself, and his / her project of ethical consumption. In the spirit of qualitative research my aim has not been to produce generalizations about all the ethical consumers, but, instead, I have produced my own view of the complex phenomenon of ethical consumption. This view consists of my own interpretation of the previous research on the subject, and more importantly of my own interpretation of the informants' stories. Thus, the findings of this study are a mix of existing theoretical knowledge, and my interpretation about this knowledge, as well as my interpretation of the informants' narratives. In the following section I will discuss the main findings of this study.

7.1 Main findings according to the five themes

The main findings of the research are present in the five different themes that illustrate the meanings that my informants ascribe to their own consumption. Cherrier (2005) has researched ethical consumers through existential-phenomenological interviewing, and she has come up with three different themes that illustrate the meanings that her informants give to their consumption. These themes were control, social integration and authenticity. When doing my own analysis, I looked for these Cherriers' themes in them. I found that social integration played a significant role in my informants' stories as well, and thus I made social bonding as one of my own themes. I also found traces of the informants' quest for control and authenticity in my interviews, and I placed these concepts under my own themes. The way of influencing comprises the informants' need to be in control, and the theme of striving for harmony includes authenticity, which means looking for something true in today's chaotic society. Cherrier's (2005) research gave me ideas for my own investigation, and I believe I have managed to elaborate my themes further from her findings. In the following I shortly go through my themes in the light of the previous research on ethical consumption.

The first theme comprised the **ethical consumers' lifespan**, their **growing up as a consumer** that was surprisingly similar for all of my informants. In the chapter 4.3 I presented Kleine's (2000) steps of a social identity project, and I found these phases in my informants' identity development paths as well. It can be seen that the informants' *pre-socialization* to ethical consumption started already in their childhood and continued in their teenage years, when their families and circle of friends showed values that were favorable to ethical consumption. Their *identity discovery* happened already in their teenage years when they started to pay attention to their consumption and became vegetarians for instance. This newly acquired ethical consumer identity reinforced in their twenties, as they frequented flea markets and second hand stores, buying mostly recycled clothes. At this stage the ideological feeling behind their projects of ethical consumption was strong. Depending on the informant I see that they are now either in their *identity construction* or in *identity maintenance* phase. A few of the informants stated clearly that they are not yet satisfied with themselves as ethical consumers; Kati, Jaakko and Anna were among these. As follows, they are still in their identity construction phase. These three informants can also be described as the most enthusiastic ones, and so it makes sense that they continuously challenge themselves in this field. Even if they have already built their networks of peers, they are still learning about their roles as ethical consumers. On the other hand, I see that Miia, Antti and Salla have moved to the identity maintenance phase, where they are satisfied with their current consumption habits, and they do not see an urgent need to change them. They have established their networks and they are in a balanced state of their lives. Kati appeared to be the only informant who had experienced an *identity latency* phase as an ethical consumer. This happened in her twenties when she was busy in business life. However, the informants bring up the possibility that identity latency can be a part of their future, if their life situation changes e.g. they have children. For now, there is no sign that my informants would give up on their project of ethical consumption, and thus the *identity disposal* phase is not the near future for them.

The second theme that united my informants was the **critique of the consumer society** and disliking of the throw-away culture. The realization that there is too much material in the world, and that the excessive consumption is the root cause for the inequalities and environmental deterioration in the globe, can be regarded as a fundamental source of motivation for these ethical consumers. Their lives are continuous weighting of the available options, considering what makes one product better than the other. Finally they have to

choose the ‘lesser evil’ of the products according to their own view of what is ethical and what is not. The road of the ethical consumer is full of compromises, and none of the interviewees expresses being unconditional in their consumption habits. The overall message that they unanimously communicate is the need to always think twice whether one truly needs a product or not. If there is a real need, then one should buy something sustainable and of high quality so that it lasts. In the first place the informants are looking for an ethical option, but if it is not easily obtained, they settle for the less ethical one. Based on my interviews it is totally correct what Harrison & al. (2005) state: The ethical consumers are not ignoring price and quality when making purchase decisions, but instead they are applying extra ethical criteria in their decision making.

The third emerging theme was ethical consumption as **social bonding**, which is similar to social integration that Cherrier (2005) elaborated on in her research of ethical consumers. This theme accentuates the nature of ethical consumption as a social identity projects, as by consuming ethically the informants are looking for the feeling of belonging to a wider group of peers. Wilska (2002) claims that belonging to the social categories is still important for the consumers, and my informants do not make an exception in this matter. The influential peers include the informants’ ethically oriented friends that have made them question their own consumption habits. In the interviews it came out that the informants truly satisfy their deeper emotional needs, such as acceptance, belonging and prominence, in their consumption practices as suggested by Langeland (1999). Moreover, two of the informants, whose partners were stricter ethical consumer than them, can be seen as actively seeking acceptance from their partners through ethical consumption practices. Barnett & al. (2005a) have claimed that the project of ethical consumption involves complex self-other relations, and this claim was reaffirmed by my informants as well. However, I did not find any evidence of social costs such as embarrassment that ethical consumption would cause, what is suggested by Fosse-Gomez et al. (2008). Kleine (2000) states that adult’s self-cultivation project often involves only a piece of self. I do not see that this statement applies to ethical consumption, as it is not only a social identity project, but instead the informants have very personal ambitions behind it. They are involved in ethical consumption whole-heartedly, not as a piece of self. In the following theme, harmony with the nature, I will elaborate on these more personal aspirations of the informants, as I will handle ethical consumption more as a personal identity project.

The fourth theme shows the informants' striving for **harmony with the surrounding reality**; flora, fauna and everything in between. This theme sheds a light on the spiritual side of the informants; it highlights their personal values, as well as their ambitions in becoming better persons. According to the standards placed by Barnett et al. (2005b), my informants are true ethical consumers, as their motivations for buying ethical products are mostly external to them. This means that they are truly considering what is best for the third party, be it other people or nature, instead of e.g. buying organic food because they are concerned over their own health. However, naturally the internal causes, such as striving for healthy nutrition play a part in the informants' projects of ethical consumption. Furthermore, the informants showed an interest towards the spiritual world, the male informants also had religious thinking behind their actions. The underlying agenda in their ethical consumption was their aspiration of becoming a better person. Only a couple of the informants said it out loud, but yet it was easily concluded from the others' stories as well. The informants' sometimes arrogant attitude towards more 'ignorant' consumers is an interesting finding as it shows how they perceive themselves as being more knowledgeable, if not better, than the others. A part of this theme is the informants' strong moral integrity that guides them in their ethical strivings. I agree with Kozinets et al. (1998), who see ethical consumption as a part of the consumers' moral self-realization. This is manifested in the informants' comments that ethical consumption just feels right. It seems that they are acting based on a strong moral feeling of what is good, and what is right, even if they cannot give more rational explanation for why are they going through all the trouble in acting as ethical consumers.

The fifth theme compasses ethical consumption as a **way of influencing**. Ethical consumption has been associated with the will of being an opinion leader, as well as having an interest in new products and actively exchanging product information (Langeland 1999). These traits can be found in my informants as well. All of them have been actively informing themselves about the flipside of the consumption and intensive production, and they have been searching for information about ethical alternatives. They have boldly been among the first ones to buy Fairtrade and organic product alternatives when grocery shopping, and now they have started to pay more attention to the ethical clothing as well. By doing this, they wish to steer consumption into more humane direction, sending a message to the companies that there is a need for ethical alternatives. Antti even describes himself as a pioneer in the field of ethical consumption. He sees it becoming an everyday activity in the future; he is just a foregoer in it. Also the others express a want to set an example for the others by their own behavior, and,

thus, they can be regarded as opinion leaders in ethical consumption. Based on the interviews I see ethical consumers as an influential group in information dissemination, which reinforces Langeland's (1999) claims. At least Kati states working as a 'network marketer' for the ethical clothing always when she has an option. Ethical consumption appears to be a way for the informants to make a difference in their daily lives and by doing this they get meaning and content to their lives. In the following I will elaborate on this when I seize the essence of this study: Ethical consumers' identity construction.

7.2 The search for the meaning

My study exhibits a prevailing tendency in today's society: Even if we do not want to, we have to spend more and more time considering our consumption choices and their consequences. It is not possible to exist in today's world without being a consumer. At least not for my informants who are young professionals living in urban areas in Finland, and none of them expresses their will to leave their current lives and start living more self-sufficient life in the country side for instance. However, they have made a conscious choice to make as ethical purchases as possible. So, what is left to them is the continuous pondering of their consumption choices on a daily basis. In the supermarket they consider whether to buy foreign tomatoes, which raises the concern of human rights of the immigrant tomato pickers in Spain, and of the emissions caused by their transportation. On the other hand, buying Finnish organic tomatoes supports Finnish production, but yet cultivating tomatoes in Finland consumes a lot of energy. When clothes shopping, the informants carefully check the labels and country of origins, as well as seek for information about the clothes' whole production chain. After all the trouble, and careful consideration, they cannot be sure if they have made the right choice. There is no one truth of what is ethical and what is not, and it is up to each consumer to define what ethicality means to them and then act according to that belief.

The question is why these ethical consumers are making such a significant effort in their consumption? One answer is because of their strong moral integrity, because it is right. Nevertheless, I see that there is a hidden agenda behind their behavior: Getting meaning in their lives. Anna is the only one of the interviewees, who brings this up in the interview. However, I see that the others have the same want of making their own consumption meaningful, even if they are not aware of this, or do not explicitly state it. For sure they truly

want to make a difference, and become better consumers and persons. I think that without this agenda of making their consumption meaningful, they would not have enough motivation to go through such a struggle in their everyday consumption. Supporting environmentally and socially friendly consumption is rewarding and motivating in itself, but peoples' motives are rarely truly selfless. In here the motivating factor is that ethical consumption simply makes the informants feel good.

Barnett et al. (2005b) help in answering the question why ethical consumption makes the informants feel good, as the authors see consumption as a realm for the actualization of capacities in autonomous action, reflective monitoring of conduct, and the self-fashioning of the relationships between selves and others. All of these aspects are visible in my informants' stories. First the informants as active people can actualize their will of influencing through ethical consumption; they even describe this activity as a hobby, and as a good way to spend free time. Secondly, they thoroughly reflect their own conduct as ethical consumers, and then compare it to that of the other consumers. Thirdly, ethical consumption plays a significant role in their relationships with themselves and others. They pay attention to other ethical consumers, and most of the informants have friends who are also ethical consumers. Some of the informants have a life partner who is also an ethical consumer, and this way ethical consumption is even more present in their everyday lives.

By influencing things and having social connections through their ethical consumption activities, the informants assumingly get meaning and content to their lives. They are young educated professional who do not have children, so they have the time and place for ethical consumption in their lives. Searching for meaning in one's life is a prevailing tendency in the postmodern times that are characterized by the disruption of norms and ideologies (Uusitalo 1998). This creates a fertile ground for new more or less ideological movements, such as ethical consumption. In the light of my research it is legitimate what Uusitalo (1998) states, that consumption as a way of life pattern will create new social bonds and feelings of belonging to or distinguishing oneself from a group. I was convinced that ethical consumption is a way of life for my informants, and that it stems from their overall worldview. Also the rise of new ethical consumer organizations, such as Dodo and Carrotmob, tells from the will of consumers to belong to a wider group of peers.

7.3 Wider social and cultural influences behind ethical consumption

Individual ethical consumer behavior always happens in a broader historical and political context. Already Baudrillard (1988) saw an individual as a product of the social and cultural milieu that s/he is embedded in. It is apparent that the current trend of promoting sustainable development and the boom of socially responsible business practices has raised the awareness of ethical issues. The words that repeat in the interviews are sustainable development and the climate change. Ten years ago an average citizen had not even heard about these things. The informants are actively searching for information about ethical matters from various forms of media, which has a crucial role in disseminating information. New technology has eased up the spreading of information; media is feeding us with a continuous news stream of the faults of this world, many of them caused by excess consumption.

There are some social and cultural drivers behind the ethical consumption in Finland that explain the circumstances where the phenomenon has developed. The major social drivers seem to be the growing wealth that allows buying more expensive ethical products. At the same time the growing awareness of the ethical issues is facilitated by new communication technologies. The current discussion about climate change and sustainability has also raised the awareness of the drawbacks of excess consumption and thus has created demand for ethical alternatives. The major cultural drivers appear to be the trendiness of ethical consumption, which is visible in the growing number of second hand stores and smaller ethical specialty stores that have appeared in the streets of Helsinki. Also, there are new trendy organizations, such as Dodo or Carrotmob, that gather young adults together and promote ethical consumption, and hence play an important role in recruiting new ethical consumers. On the other hand, the trendiness of ethical consumption also creates a problem as it can lead in companies pretending to act ethically, even if the truth is different. The concern over green washing was also present in my informants' stories.

7.4 Individual's identity construction by ethical consumption

From the childhood the informants have constructed themselves an identity of an ethical consumer. This identity is one of the informants' multiple identities, along that of a young successful professional or a shoe lover for instance. The identities together form a hierarchy of identity importance (Kleine 2000). Sometimes the multiple identities can conflict with each other, which can create difficult situations. In these conflict situations the informants have to make compromises, and act according to their best interest and knowledge. In the end none of the informants were unconditional in their consumption habits. One of the informants gives an example of a situation where she has to go to a business trip but she has nothing to wear that fits the social norms of her workplace. She ends up running around the city and finally buys a shirt from a cheap chain store. This results in her experiencing the feelings of guilt and a deception. This example illustrates well the dilemma of conflicting identities; as a professional she needs to dress in a certain manner, but sometimes buying suitable but unethical clothes clashes with her strong identity of an ethical consumer. Another informant who adores shoes, that are rarely ethically produced, feels often guilty about her desire to have a new pair of them. The women's experiences imply that their identity of an ethical consumer is higher in the identity hierarchy than that of a young consultant or a fashionista.

Ethical consumption appears to be a lifelong project for the informants, and thus it is not just a typical social project identity that fades away as e.g. Kleine 2000 has suggested. This might be due to the fact that ethical consumption is for my informants both a social and a personal identity project. According to Kleine (2000) these two projects are parallel to each other and they both need to succeed so that the individual obtains an acknowledged position as an ethical consumer. In my informants' stories I found traits from both social and personal identity projects, and it seems that their identities as an ethical consumers are a balanced mix of these two. It is difficult, if not impossible, to say whether the personal or the social identity plays a larger role in the informants' identity construction, as they are intertwined with each other.

Ethical consumption as a personal identity project means for the informants a way to stand out as unique individuals in their community of peers. All of the informants appeared to be interesting and original individuals, who expressed a need to be unique, even if they did not deliberately seek attention e.g. by their appearance. Also they were not afraid to choose their

own way instead of running after the crowds. The informants can be regarded as foregoers and opinion leaders in the field of ethical consumption. They see it as a future trend; they are just one step ahead of the masses. This means that the informants have a chance to influence their peers by setting a personal example for them. Importantly the informants' project of ethical consumption stems from the informants strong personal values and from their own worldview, and hence it is not dependent on their social setting.

On the other hand, ethical consumption as a social identity project appears as a want to belong to a wider group of aware like-minded consumers, or as seeking acceptance from a boy- or a girlfriend. The informants recognize other ethical consumers. Some report feeling a sense of sameness with them, and some actually feel like belonging to a community of ethical consumers. This bonding with other ethical consumers can happen for instance when they are shopping in stores that offer ethical products, or when they participate in citizen activating happenings. I see that even if ethical consumption is a highly personal project for the informants, it would not be possible to realize without the support of the social circles. Thus both personal and social aspects of ethical consumption are of equal importance.

Through these social and personal projects, the informants are constructing their identity as ethical consumers. By making responsible consumption choices the informants are striving for becoming somebody, perhaps a better consumer or even a better person. Lifestyle can be seen as a material expression of one's identity, and the informants lead active lifestyles that are strongly affected by their identities as ethical consumers. Even going to the supermarket for basic groceries is a large task for the ethical consumer, let alone planning the yearly vacation when one has to ponder whether to fly overseas, which will make the whole year of cycling to work look useless. All in all, ethical consumption is present in the informants' everyday decisions, and it greatly contributes to their identity construction as consumers and moral individuals.

The ethical consumer constructs his / her identity and lifestyle by selecting environmentally and socially friendly products. As McCracken (1986) has modeled, the meanings of the consumer goods, e.g. Fairtrade bananas, are born in a culturally constituted world, where the cultural discourses about ethical consumption affect the way we see the phenomenon and the ethical products. This is how the meaning is transferred to a certain consumer good. When ethical consumer selects a Fairtrade banana, s/he gets a good conscience as s/he knows that

the banana is more ethically produced than its 'evil' counterpart Chiquita. The ethical consumer feels that s/he has done something right, and through the ritual of selecting a Fairtrade banana, the meaning of making an ethical choice has transferred from the consumer good into the individual consumer.

Even if the informants often actualize their ambitious goals on a road of becoming more ethical consumers, they sometimes act inconstantly and unpredictably, which is typical for consumers of the digital postmodern era (Wilska 2002). For example, none of my informants was ready to give up on flying, even if it significantly adds on the household's ecological burden. As ethical consumption seems to be an emerging trend, it is likely that more people partly adopt ethical consumption practices, selecting ethical products whenever it suits their lifestyle. As some of my informants have remarked, there is a growing number of trendy young adults who have the latest electronic equipment and fashionable styles, but who always buy Fairtrade bananas and occasionally wear ethical fashion made from recycled materials. Nevertheless my informants appear to be truly ethical consumers, as stated before.

Going into a deeper level into the informants' identity projects, they all have similarities. As Arnould & al. have stated, the identity projects are goal-driven, even if the goals are sometimes tacit to the individual. The common goal in my informants' projects seems to be doing something good selflessly for society. However, their projects vary as well. For Miia, her project identity is about being a better consumer, and living in harmony with the nature and her boyfriend. She does not have any specific goals, just becoming a better consumer. Kati's identity project is more holistic, she sees that everyone should act like her, carefully considering every single consumption choice. Her goal is to develop herself as an ethical consumer. For Antti, his goal is to live a virtuous life according to his conscience and to the religious principles. He is striving for harmony with the surrounding reality, e.g. by meditating. Jaakko's project identity is related to his wider aspirations of promoting societal change. His ambitious goal is to be one of the 'great men' who have made a difference in their lives. For Anna, her identity project is about becoming a better consumer. For her ethical consumption is a hobby. Her goal is to become a more enlightened individual and really make a difference. Last but not least, for Salla, this identity project is about having a good conscience, and feeling less guilty as a consumer. Her goal is to get rid of the consumption-related guilt and live a good life.

7.5 The role of ethical fashion is one's identity construction

The role of fashion and clothing in one's identity construction is crucial, as it frames how we see other people. According to Davis (1992) the way we dress acts as a visual metaphor for our identity, and ethical consumers do not make an exception in this. The newborn concept of ethical fashion allows the ethical consumers to express their ethical identity by buying socially and environmentally friendly clothes. Some of the informants saw the role of clothing and appearance as secondary, but even they stated that in today's world it is easier just to look good. On the contrary, some of the informants enjoyed clothing and fashion, and they were excited about the new ethical brands and the widening selection of ethical garments in the stores.

In unison the informants dislike the traditional ethical 'hippie type' of clothes, describing them as "unfitting tents" or as "boring linen shirts in earthly colors". This is in line with Shaw et al.'s (2006) findings that report difficulties in marrying one's identity as an ethical consumer with the fashion identity. My informants are urban individuals who do not want to compromise their image and style for ethical aspirations; unanimously they express a need for trendier ethical fashion. When younger, the informants frequented flea markets, and some of them still do, but they find buying second hand inconvenient and time consuming. Now they are also financially better-off than in the student days, and they can afford more expensive new ethical clothes. For instance, a few of the informants have bought tailor-made products made out of recycled materials. In many interviews the clothes made out of recycled materials were mentioned. This is no wonder as they seem to combine things that ethical consumers admire: they are unique, made in Finland and usually made by entrepreneurs or small businesses. Considering this I see the growing demand for these products as well as for the other ethical garments in the future.

The informants who have been disinterested in fashion and clothes before, state finding new passion for clothing now when they have discovered new ethical brands. It seems that ethical fashion can also fill a need of communicating a message to the others. For example wearing a shirt with a societal slogan in it makes buying the shirt more legitimate according to one of the informants, as it is a good advertisement for the social issue at hand. However, not all the ethical clothes are visibly ethical, but yet they give their wearer an assurance of doing something good by wearing them. One of the informants was doing a pioneering job, by

acting as a ‘network marketer’ for ethical clothing made by her friend from recycled materials. This is a good example of how an ethical consumer can influence his / her close ones just by wearing ethical clothing, and recommending it to the others when getting compliments about it. As always with new trends, buzz marketing is an effective means for information dissemination.

All of the informants have an original clothing style, I could see this myself. In their youth they had been very radical in their dressing, wanting to stand out from the crowd. Even if they now have softened their clothing styles, they still somehow stand out from the mass. This is apparent as they state getting comments about their clothing. The informants value uniqueness and individuality, which is also manifested in their clothing. For them ethical fashion presents as an opportunity to express their values through an important part of their lifestyle, clothes. In unison they avoid some chain stores and multinational brands that are known for ethical violations.

It seems that ethicality is conquering the fashion world little by little; it is visible in the pages of fashion magazines and in the stores. In grocery stores the ethical brands, such as organic and Fairtrade alternatives, have been present for a long time, and now the same is starting to happen in clothing stores where Fairtrade textiles and organic cotton are increasingly getting shelf space. However, the informants seemed to be less aware about the problems of the textile industry than about those of the food production for instance. This shows that there is a need for more information about the faults of the textile industry and that ethical clothing needs to be promoted. This is important because the textile industry has one of the longest production chains, and it is a major industrial polluter and a water consumer.

7.6 Expressing one’s moral commitment by consuming ethically

As this study centers on the ethical issues, I feel that it is suitable to finish the discussion by clarifying the role of the informants’ moral commitments in their project of ethical consumption. As stated many times before, the informants appear as a group of well informed citizens with a strong moral stance. But what does moral integrity mean to these consumers? Many of them state that ethical consumption just feels right. One of them goes as far as declaring it as a civic duty. The only problem is that there is no one view or a definition of

what is right and what is wrong. It is up to each ethical consumer to determine what is right for them and what is not. Nevertheless the informants have placed themselves high ethical guidelines based on the information that they have about the ethical issues. Naturally they also put more emphasis on the ethical issues that are close to their heart, whether it is animal rights or environmental protection.

As I suggested in the chapter 2.4, it was reinforced in the interviews that the virtue philosophy is the closest theoretical approach behind the informants' projects of ethical consumption. This approach is centered in the living a good life and it highlights the striving of becoming a better person, which fits to my interviewees' narratives. They deliberately claimed trying to live a good life and aiming to personal well-being. They achieve this by making right consumption choices, instead of following strict ethical rules defined by someone else. In addition, a few of the informants expressed religious aspirations and followed some principles of the bible, but it is only one factor among the others behind their ethical efforts.

Moisander et al. (2002) have suggested that ethical consumerism represents a way of thinking and acting that can be seen as a style of life or as a desire to become a certain person that stems from complex moral and esthetic criteria. Based on my own study I would underwrite this statement. The moral integrity is only one factor behind the ethical consumption practices, yet I see the strong moral stance as a prerequisite of becoming an ethical consumer. Without a clear opinion of what is right and what is wrong, one would not be able of making ethical decisions that are based on highly subjective conceptions of right and wrong. Also Barnett et al. (2005b) confirm this by stating that this moralizing is a part of the ethical consumers' self-image, their integrity.

Ethical consumption can be seen as a medium for moral action, as commodity consumption as a means of social reproduction presents potential for changing other practices and patterns (Barnett & al. 2005b). I interpret this, that for example by selecting ethical products the consumers are carrying out a moral action that can potentially lead to a gradual change in the product offered in the stores. Finally this ideally leads to the change of larger societal structures when companies are taking the ethical consumers' demands into account in their actions. This way it is possible to make a difference by small scale consumer action.

8. Conclusion and suggestions for future research

There is no doubt that ethical consumption would not be a major current trend, one look at the day's newspaper or magazines is enough to confirm this statement. Sustainability is definitely in fashion, and ecological and ethical values are making their way to the consumers' hearts. The previous research on ethical consumption (e.g. Uusitalo & Oksanen 2004, Shaw & al. 2006) has reported finding of an attitude-behavior gap, also known as a words-deeds inconsistency, which means that people's ethical values do not transfer into their unethical consumer behavior. However, this research on a few Finnish ethical consumers shows that this is not true in their case. Based on my study I can claim that there is a loose but vibrant community of ethical consumers in Helsinki. My informants are true ethical consumers, as they are considering the best of the third parties in their consumption choices instead of only thinking about their own best.

The rise of new social movements such as ethical consumerism relates to the rise of the so called *peer society*. Mokka et al. who are founding members of new consumer organizations such as Dodo and Carrotmob (the Finnish branch) write in Helsingin Sanomat (22.11.2009) that people in the 21st century trust ever less in the institutions, but ever more in their peers. This is how the peer society is born. The deterioration of the hierarchical society and the diminishing power of its institutions are typical for the postmodern times. Instead of traditional institutions, people turn to new movements that offer them new ideas and the feeling of belonging to a community. This tendency was present in my interviews: One of the emerging themes in them was ethical consumption as social bonding, where the exact role of peers accentuated.

The main findings of this research organize according to the five different themes. First, the ethical consumers appear to be ethically oriented from their teenage years and ethical consumerism is a lifelong project to them. Second, the ethical consumers shared a mutual dislike of the consumer society and the throw-away goods, as they are strongly in favor of sustainability in all their consumption. Third, there was an emerging need for belongingness in their stories. Ethical consumption acted as a medium for communal activities such as citizen activating happenings, and it was regarded as a good free time activity with a life partner. Through ethical consumption the informants can fulfill their need for social belonging and acceptance, as they can bond with other like-minded people. Fourth, the ethical

consumers are striving for harmony with the surrounding reality: They try to live in a manner that harms the nature, animals and other human beings as little as possible. Some of the ethical consumers also demonstrate wider spiritual aspirations. Fifth, ethical consumers channel their will of influencing to ethical consumption. As ethical consumers they feel like exemplary active citizens who are contributing into the building of better society.

I feel that I have obtained the goal that I placed for myself in the beginning of this thesis: I have gained a great amount of information about Finnish ethical consumers, and I have obtained better understanding of these six consumers' identity projects. I explored the informants' everyday life, and found out what their values and preferences are. The life story interview was a good method for obtaining thorough information about the ethical consumers' whole life span, and it really enabled me to achieve in-depth understanding of the six informants. It became clear in the research that the main driver behind the informants' projects of ethical consumption was their strong moral integrity and conscience. Simply put, the informants practiced ethical consumption because it felt good and it felt right. Thus, ethical consumption impacted on their image of themselves, and acted as means to construct their identity. The goal in the informants' identity projects was becoming a more ethical citizen and finally a better person.

The narrative approach appeared to be a good way to study ethical consumption, as analyzing consumers' stories and looking for meanings in them gave me a good picture about the informants' ideas, wants, likes and dislikes. However, I think that the true advantage of using storytelling was that I was able to spot the informants' true feelings such as feeling superior to the others, from the way they told stories about other consumers. I believe that by directly asking the informants would have never told me about these feelings, in fact they all stated in unison that they do not want to judge other people. The weakness of this research is probably its dependency on my subjective interpretation about the informants' stories.

Based on the interviews, it is apparent that there is a need for more ethical product alternatives that also satisfy other needs of the consumers. That is to say, in addition to the ethicality, clothes need to look good and food needs to taste good. The informants appeared to be sensitive to quality, but they were ready to pay more for ethical products. All in all, the growing number of ethical consumers creates opportunities for the marketers, as it appears that these consumers are willing to pay more for sustainable products. However, the ethical

consumers seem to be a suspicious tribe, who see beyond the cheap marketing tricks and easily suspect companies for doing ‘green washing’. If a company lets the ethical consumers down once, they are likely to boycott it and spread negative word-of-mouth about it. Therefore marketers should act honestly and with forthright in their actions with ethical consumers. Once the trust is built, the marketers and the whole business world can benefit from having these opinion leaders and trendsetters as their customers. More importantly, the globe can benefit from these consumer’s efforts to improve the society by their small-scale actions.

Concerning the future research I see that it would be very interesting to study the impact of having children and a family on the habits of the ethical consumers. One possibility would be to conduct a follow-up research on the same informants after ten years, and find out whether they have done what they promised to do: Continue their ethical aspirations. Another interesting possibility for the future studies would be combining quantitative and qualitative methods in researching ethical consumers. By means of an in-depth interview, it is possible to research only a small amount of people. In order to be able to make more generalized results about Finnish ethical consumers, one could also create a survey on the ethical consumers in addition to the interviewing.

As ethical fashion seems to be the next emerging trend, I see it as a very interesting research topic. Studying how ethical fashion consumption relates to one’s identity construction would definitely be a fruitful subject for future research. For now, I found that ethical fashion was not big enough a thing to be studied itself, for my informants it was only one part of their more holistic being as ethical consumers.

In conclusion, this Master’s Thesis has provided new insights into ethical consumerism in Finland. I feel content to have contributed in such an important topic. In the future the ethical action is needed more than ever as social and environmental problems in the globe increase. My informants are pioneers in ethical consumption; Let us hope that the others will follow their example.

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APPENDIX 1. The interview frame

- Can you tell me about yourself
- Can you describe your lifestyle to me?
- What comes into your mind from the word 'consumption'?
- What is your relationship with consumption?
- Since when have you paid more attention to your consumption habits?
- How do you search for information about consumption / products?
- What are your criteria when selecting products?
- What kind of a consumer would you describe yourself to be?
- What does ethicality mean to you?
- Besides ethical consumption, are you involved in any other responsible activity (charity, voluntary work, lobbying etc.)?
- Tell me about your relationship with fashion and clothing?
- What kind of a message do you want to send to the others by your clothing style?
- What makes fashion ethical?
- What kind of ethical purchases do you make?
- Where do you mostly do your shopping?
- What do you get out of buying ethical products / making ethical consumption choices?
- Is it easy to make ethical purchases in Finland?
- What is an unethical product to you?
- Can you tell me about any of your recent very successful purchases?
- Do you know other ethical consumers?
- Have you experienced belonging to a some kind of community of ethical consumers?
- Do you have something in your mind that you would like to add?
- What do you think about this interview / conversation?