Children and ethical consumption

Kate E. Neale

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Children and ethical consumption

KATE NEALE

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Declaration

I certify that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

I acknowledge that I have read and understood the University's rules, requirements, procedures and policy relating to my higher degree research award and to my thesis. I certify that I have complied with the rules, requirements, procedures and policy of the University (as they may be from time to time).

Kate Neale

Date: 27th November 2015
Abstract

This research explores children’s views and experiences of ethical consumption within a family context. Ethical consumption may be defined as “the conscious and deliberate decision to make certain consumption choices due to personal moral beliefs and values” (Crane, McWilliams, Matten, Moon, & Siegel, 2008, p. 341). It enables a person to engage with societal problems through their consumption practices (Cairns, Johnston, & MacKendrick, 2013; Lewis & Huber, 2015; Sachdeva, Jordan, & Mazar, 2015) and transform goods into tools for the expression of morality (Hall, 2011). Children’s status as both current and future consumers, as well as their influence over family consumption decisions, make their contribution to the field of sustainability a potentially important one (Fien, Neil, and Bentley, 2008; Francis and Davis, 2014). However, little is known about the active social child as an ethical consumer (Collins, 2015).

Through semi-structured interviews with twelve children aged between eight and ten years of age and their parents or carers, this study explores how children come to understand and practice ethical consumption within a family context. In doing so, the research takes an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on theoretical interests linked to childhood studies, sociocultural theory and commercial enculturation. The study makes a number of important contributions to knowledge.

Firstly, there has been little research to date on ethical consumption that draws directly upon the views and experiences of children. In addressing this gap, the study highlights the rich contribution that children can make to building more just and ethical consumer practices within families and communities. Hence, the findings underline the
importance of recognising children and their participation in shaping understandings and practice in an area of social life (ethical consumption) where this has received scant attention. Secondly, by exploring in more depth the rich and complex ways children influence, and are influenced by others with respect to ethical consumption, the study extends existing knowledge about children’s consumer socialisation and the dynamic, reciprocal and non-linear ways in which commercial enculturation occurs. Thirdly, this research also advances understandings about the methodological issues that need to be considered in authentically ‘child-focused’ research, including key ethical considerations regarding informed consent and the development of tools to assist in facilitating this. Fourthly, this research challenges dominant understandings of children’s consumption by reframing the ethical dimensions as a means of engaging in discussions and activities surrounding broader social issues that concern them. Finally, the study draws attention to the immense potential of interdisciplinary approaches for understanding children’s lives and the social worlds they inhabit.
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# Table of Contents

Declaration .......................................................................................................................... 1

Abstract ............................................................................................................................... 2

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................... 4

List of figures ...................................................................................................................... 8
List of tables ....................................................................................................................... 8

Chapter 1 - Introduction ................................................................................................. 9

1.1 Background to the research ...................................................................................... 9
  1.1.1 Defining ethical consumption ..................................................................... 11
  1.1.2 Notions of the child consumer .................................................................. 12
  1.1.3 The context of everyday ........................................................................ 14
1.2 Research aim and questions ................................................................................... 16
1.3 Thesis structure ....................................................................................................... 17
Chapter summary ............................................................................................................. 22

Chapter 2 - Literature Review ....................................................................................... 23

2.1 Interdisciplinary interests informing the study ...................................................... 23
2.2 Childhood studies .................................................................................................. 28
  2.2.1 Definitions of child and childhoods ............................................................... 28
  2.2.2 Historical perspectives on children and childhood ................................................. 29
  2.2.3 Children, childhoods and context ............................................................... 29
  2.2.4 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child ......................... 30
  2.2.5 New sociology of childhood ..................................................................... 31
2.3 Consumption .......................................................................................................... 32
  2.3.1 The child consumer .............................................................................. 33
2.4 Ethical consumption ............................................................................................... 36
  2.4.1 Choosing the term ‘ethical consumption’ over ‘consumer-citizenship’ ........ 36
  2.4.2 Defining ethical consumption ................................................................... 37
  2.4.3 What practices constitute ethical consumption? ............................................. 38
  2.4.4 Motivations and barriers for consuming ethically .......................................... 39
  2.4.5 Children and ethical consumption ............................................................... 41
  2.4.6 Children’s socialisation into ethical consumption ......................................... 43
2.5 Theories of socialisation ......................................................................................... 43
  2.5.1 Historical theories of socialisation ................................................................. 44
  2.5.2 Consumer socialisation ............................................................................... 44
2.6 Participation ............................................................................................................. 47
  2.6.1 Defining children’s participation ................................................................. 48
Chapter summary ............................................................................................................. 52

Chapter 3 – Theoretical framework and methodology ........................................... 54

3.1 Research aim .......................................................................................................... 54
3.2 Research questions ............................................................................................... 54
3.3 Ontology ............................................................................................................... 55
3.4 Epistemology ........................................................................................................ 56
3.5 Theoretical framework .......................................................................................... 58
3.6 Child-focused methodology ................................................................. 67
3.6.1 Interviewing both adults and children ............................................. 71
3.7 Research methods .................................................................................. 72
  3.7.1 Pilot study .......................................................................................... 72
  3.7.2 Recruitment of participants ............................................................... 73
  3.7.3 Participant profiles ............................................................................. 73
  3.7.4 Interviews with child participants ....................................................... 74
  3.7.5 Interviews with adult participants ....................................................... 77
3.8 Ethical considerations ............................................................................. 77
  3.8.1 Ethical considerations regarding children’s participation ..................... 77
  3.8.2 Ethical considerations regarding parents’ participation ....................... 85
3.9 Data recording ........................................................................................ 87
3.10 Data analysis ......................................................................................... 88
3.11 Limitations ........................................................................................... 89
Chapter summary ........................................................................................ 89

Chapter 4 – Perceptions and practices of ethical consumption............. 91
4.1 Ethical consumption practices and perceptions .................................... 91
  4.1.1 Free-range and organic ................................................................. 93
  4.1.2 Australian Made .......................................................................... 101
  4.1.3 Fair-trade ...................................................................................... 104
  4.1.4 Environmentally friendly products .................................................. 108
  4.1.5 Moderating against over-consumption ......................................... 110
  4.1.6 Shop locally ................................................................................ 119
  4.1.7 Restrictive trade practices ............................................................... 121
  4.1.8 ‘Hand-me-downs’ .......................................................................... 123
  4.1.9 Summary of children and parents’ perceptions and practices ............... 126
4.2 The dynamic, negotiated and contradictory nature of ethical consumption .... 128
  4.2.1 Perceptions regarding cost and time associated with ethical consumption . 128
  4.2.2 Family dynamics and the reflexivity of ethical consumption ............... 131
Chapter summary ....................................................................................... 135

Chapter 5 - Ethical consumption and socialisation within the family context ................................................................. 137
5.1 The sociocultural basis of children’s ethical consumption .................... 138
  5.1.1 Conversations regarding consumption and ethical consumption ........ 138
  5.1.2 Shared and autonomous shopping experiences ................................ 145
  5.1.3 Implicit learning .......................................................................... 153
5.2 The role of other socialising influences ................................................. 156
Chapter summary ....................................................................................... 159

Chapter 6 – The dichotomous child consumer ....................................... 161
6.1 Dichotomous notions of the child consumer .......................................... 162
6.2 The influence of consumption on childhood ........................................ 167
6.3 Reconceptualising children’s consumption in terms of their participation .... 171
Chapter summary ....................................................................................... 174

Chapter 7 – Conclusion ............................................................................ 176
7.1 Empirical findings

7.1.1 How do children and their parents/carers perceive and practice ‘ethical’ consumption within a family context? ................................................................. 177
7.1.2 How do children come to understand ethical consumption within their family context? ...................................................................................... 177
7.1.3 What insights into the conceptualisation of children and their capacity to participate do we gain from examining children’s roles as ethical consumers within a family context? .................................................. 178

7.3 Methodological and ethical contributions ......................................................... 181
7.4 Limitations ........................................................................................................ 182
7.5 Emerging areas of research ............................................................................... 183
7.6 Policy implications ............................................................................................ 184
7.7 Concluding statement ........................................................................................ 185

References............................................................................................................... 187

Appendices ................................................................................................................ 213
Appendix 1 – Advertisement for participant recruitment ............................................ 213
Appendix 2 – Participant profiles.............................................................................. 214
Appendix 3 - Interview schedule for child participants ............................................. 216
Appendix 4 – Interview schedule for parent participants .......................................... 218
Appendix 5 – Information booklet for child participants ......................................... 220
Appendix 6 – Consent from for child participants .................................................... 225
Appendix 7 – Findings poster for children ............................................................... 226
Appendix 8 – Information sheet and consent form for adult participants.................. 227
Appendix 9 – Identified nodes from Nvivo analysis ................................................. 230

List of figures

Figure 1: Conceptual model of the interdisciplinary interests informing the study...................... 24

List of tables

Table 1: Elements of concern motivating ethical consumption. Source: Adapted from "Shop Ethical" website (2015) ....................................................................................... ................................................... 39
Table 2: Qualitative framework for research involving children and young people (Constructivism)
Source: Adapted from Greig et al. (2013, p. 77). .......................................................... 70
Chapter 1 - Introduction

Consumers are increasingly interested in the story behind how, where and under what conditions products are made (Töpfer, 2000) and consumer behaviour is influenced by concerns for the ethical production of goods (Co-operative Bank, 2011). Ethical consumption within everyday life has been identified as an emerging and important area of research in consumption sociology (Warde, 2015). Indeed, some argue that it is difficult to consider future sustainability without taking into account matters of consumption (Schor, 2010).

As consumers in society, future decision-makers and influential active agents in various social contexts, children and their perspectives and experiences regarding ethical consumption are critical (Fien, Neil, & Bentley, 2008). However, while children’s status as both current and future consumers make their contribution to the field of sustainability an important one (Francis & Davis, 2014), little is known about the active social child as an ethical consumer.

This study aims to identify how children come to understand and practice ethical consumption within a family context. In this chapter, I contextualise this aim, explicate the significance of the study and justify the three research questions that guide it. The chapter concludes with a description of the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Background to the research

Consumption and its impact on social and environmental sustainability is increasingly relevant to policy-makers (Prothero, Dobscha, Freund, Kilbourne, Luchs, Ozanne, & Thøgersen, 2011). Global concerns surrounding climate change, the need for
renewable energies and instability in global financial markets continue to fuel political debate and policy responses (Waitt, Caputi, Gibson, Farbotko, Head, Gill, & Stanes, 2012). However, research into understanding how environmentally responsible behaviour may influence an individual’s private and public roles is inconclusive and scarce (Thøgersen & Crompton, 2009). It is critical to understand what drives and impedes thinking and behaviour in relation to sustainability in order to better understand individuals’ “perceptions of their civic duties, how they balance these duties with self-interests, and also the doubts, ambiguities and conflicts that consumer-citizens perceive” (Prothero et al., 2011, p. 33).

Childhood studies and consumption literature acknowledges the substantial market share children represent in both present and future markets, offering an opportunity for children to be recognised and to participate in society (Cook, 2009a; Hinton, 2008; Ironico, 2012; James & Prout, 2015; Martens, Southerton, & Scott, 2004; Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2009; Sinclair, 2004). However, such literature tends to frame children’s participation in consumption in terms of their economic contribution or conceptualise them simply as users of public services. Framing children as ethical consumers challenges such assumptions by recognising that children may participate in broader societal issues through their consumption choices. While children’s concern for social and environmental issues is now quite well documented (Buckler & Creech, 2014; Hart, 2013; Strife, 2012), such concern is predominantly addressed in an educational setting and with an emphasis on their future participation (Benn, 2004; Jans, 2004). Young people’s voices are rarely acknowledged in sustainability consumption studies (Collins, 2015) and much of the existing literature focuses on children’s attitudes towards sustainability, with little attention on understanding children’s
socialisation as ethical consumers (Francis & Davis, 2014). This study is significant in that it situates children’s own voice and lived experience within current scholarship surrounding ethical consumption.

1.1.1 Defining ethical consumption

Ethical consumption may be defined as “the conscious and deliberate decision to make certain consumption choices due to personal moral beliefs and values” (Crane, McWilliams, Matten, Moon, & Siegel, 2008, p. 341). It enables a person to engage with societal problems through their consumption practices (Cairns, Johnston, & MacKendrick, 2013; Egels-Zandén & Hansson, 2015; Lewis & Huber, 2015; Sachdeva, Jordan, & Mazar, 2015; Sandıkçı & Ekici, 2009) and transform goods into tools for the expression of morality (Hall, 2011). A central dimension of ethical consumption is an understanding of ‘ethics’.

Ethics generally refers to, “well-founded standards of right and wrong that prescribe what humans ought to do, usually in terms of rights, obligations, benefits to society, fairness, or specific virtues” (Graham, Powell, Taylor, Anderson, & Fitzgerald, 2013, p. 173). Although not specifically discussed in relation to consumption, Graham et al., acknowledge the reflexive nature of ethics and suggest it “also involves the study and development of our own ethical standards via continual examination of our moral beliefs and conduct” (2013, p.173). In this sense, not only are ethical standards variable between individuals’ beliefs and practices, but these constantly change and adapt depending on contexts and priorities.

Increasingly, a broad array of ethical consumption practices are emerging. These include purchasing or avoiding a product in line with an ethical issue (such as human
rights, labour and workplace conditions, animal welfare, or environmental preservation) (Cowe & Williams, 2000; Strong, 1996), sustainable consumption practices (Fien et al., 2008), pro-environmental behaviour such as recycling, minimising waste and energy conservation (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002) and veganism or vegetarianism (McDonald, Cervero, & Courtenay, 1999). This diversity of issues, concerns and practices is now well documented in ethical consumption literature.

In this study, there is no intention to prescribe what constitutes ethical consumption. While a key interest is on ethical consumption choices surrounding household purchases the focus of the study doesn’t extend to pro-environmental behaviour such as in-house energy conservation. In terms of household purchases, I acknowledge the broad ways in which ethical consumption is conceptualised, as well as the reflexive nature by which people assign ethics to their practices. Such a stance provides an important departure point for considering how participants in the current study understand and practice ethical consumption.

1.1.2 Notions of the child consumer

One of the reasons the study of children as ethical consumers is such an underdeveloped area may rest in the apparent tensions surrounding notions of the child consumer as noted by Buckingham (2011), Cook (2008) and Martens et al. (2004).

The new sociology of childhood is interested in the ways in which children and childhood are socially constructed. It calls for recognition of children and their participation in decisions concerning their lives, the need for child-focused research,

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1 The new sociology of childhood emerged from a critique of dominant perspectives in the literature and asserted children’s rights, status and agency. As studies from a range of disciplines (law, education and geography) embraced this new sociology, Childhood Studies as an academic area of interest developed (Tisdall and Punch, 2012).
and the importance of capturing the perspectives of children rather than relying solely on adult views of their experience (Hill, 2005; James & Prout, 2015; James & Prout, 1997; Prout, 2005; Prout & James, 1997). Concepts like ‘social actor’ and ‘agency’ denote the new sociology of childhood’s paradigm of the child. There is an emphasis on the role of social environments in shaping children’s lives, as well as the active roles children play in helping to influence their social contexts and relationships (James et al, 1998).

For the most part however, children’s consumption has not been acknowledged as integral to children’s lives, instead relegated to the margins of their social worlds, quite separate from everyday activities (Cook, 2013; Martens et al., 2004). A predominant focus on children’s products and the negative influence of consumption threatening popular notions of children and childhood as ‘innocent’ has meant the possibility of children actively and positively influencing their social environments through consumption has been largely neglected (Cook, 2013; Martens et al., 2004). This is not only a gap in childhood studies, but a recurring theme within consumption literature also (Cook, 2013; Martens et al., 2004). These apparent tensions regarding the child consumer are explored in more depth in Chapter 2.

Methodologically, studies on children’s consumption have predominantly failed to seek out children’s voices and accounts of their experiences, instead deriving meaning from culture, text, media or observations of children at play (Best, 1998; Buckingham & Tingstad, 2010; Martens et al., 2004). By way of contrast, research based in the interdisciplinary field of childhood studies has a central interest in children’s voice and lived experience from the perspective of the child (Hill, 2005; James & James, 2004). However, both approaches risk limiting an understanding of the
intimate connection between children and parents surrounding consumption (Martens et al., 2004). Children learn to consume and develop values that inform their consumption decisions through deeply connected relationships with adults. Hence, this study seeks the views and experiences of both children and their parents. However, it approaches this in such a way that the views and experiences of the children are paramount. Parents’ views further enrich and contextualise this data in terms of the role child-adult relationships play in shaping consumption choices. The rationale for this approach is explored in more detail in Chapter 3.

An important point to note here is that this study recognises that children, their childhoods and their experiences with consumption are heterogeneous and culturally and contextually bound. A child’s interaction with the consumer-driven society around them is dependent on the opportunity and means by which they can participate (Cook, 2009a). One child’s experiences may centre on attaining consumer goods, while for another child, they may “have little choice but to labour to create goods that others consume” (Cook, 2009a, p. 343). Hence, it is important to acknowledge at the outset that this study is contextually and culturally bound by the characteristics of its participants and the study itself.

1.1.3 The context of everyday

Consumption is an essential everyday activity (Borgmann, 2000). As with other everyday activities, it serves as an opportunity to enact and communicate morals and values (Hall, 2011). Such an understanding is emphasised by Adams and Raisborough (2010) in their work on ethical consumption within everyday contexts where they contend “everyday shopping practices are increasingly marketed as opportunities to ‘make a difference’ via our ethical consumption choices” (2010, p. 256).
Despite the possibilities offered through everyday consumption to practice and assert morality, little is known about how this is negotiated and prioritised within a family context (Hall, 2011). Indeed, in Warde’s (2015) examination of the development of the sociology of consumption, everyday consumption is identified as one of three emerging areas of interest, with another being the critical importance of understanding how ethical consumption will shape a sustainable future. This study directly addresses these emerging interests with its focus on exploring how children understand and practice ethical consumption within a family context.

Although ethical consumption literature broadly acknowledges the parent-child relationship, little is known about the complex processes of negotiation and learning that occur (Collins, 2015). Furthermore, the household has been identified as the ‘blackbox’ where ethical considerations surrounding everyday routine consumption occur (Hall, 2011; Hobson, 2002). According to Collins (2015), this is the epicentre of ethical consumption activities. It is where personal values, social norms and policies intersect and shape consumption practices (Lane and Gorman-Murray, 2011). Given the household is viewed as a ‘crucible’ for sustainable behaviour (Hargreaves, Nye, & Burgess, 2013), it is critically important to understand how members within the household negotiate, shape and practice consumption (Hadfield-Hill, 2013). Some studies have explored the ethical conflicts parents experience in providing the ‘best’ for their children, while trying to manage their civic obligations through ethical consumption (Heath, O’Malley, Heath, & Story, 2014). However, research exploring ethical consumption within the family context has tended to marginalise the active contributions of children (Collins, 2015). Furthermore, it is difficult to understand

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2 The third emerging area of interest pertains to cultural consumption, including inequality and stratification.
household sustainable consumption without close attention to the relationships between children and parents (Larsson, Andersson, & Osbeck, 2010).

While children have been identified as active consumers participating in and influencing consumption decisions within the family (Marshall, 2014), few studies to date have explored how children actively participate and influence ethical consumption decisions within this context. Fien et al. (2008, p. 57) underline the importance of addressing this gap by arguing that, “as influential members of many households, more open to change and as future decision-makers themselves, young people need to be empowered, educated and informed of the ways they can act as agents of change in relation to sustainable consumption”.

It is important to acknowledge here that influences external to the family also contribute to children’s understanding and practices of ethical consumption. A detailed examination of these is beyond the scope of this study. However, this research does take account of instances where children may draw on these external influences in communicating their understanding and lived experience of ethical consumption within the family context.

1.2 Research aim and questions

This study aims to identify how children come to understand and practice ethical consumption within a family context. Three research questions guide the study:

1. How do children and their parents/carers perceive and practice ethical consumption within a family context?
2. How do children come to understand ethical consumption within their family context?

3. What insights into the conceptualisation of children and their capacity to participate do we gain from examining children’s roles as ethical consumers within a family context?

The research involved interviewing twelve children and their parents or stepparents to explore children’s understandings and practices of ethical consumption within a family context. Although the focus of this study is to understand children’s lives in relation to ethical consumption, the importance of doing so within a family context necessitates a focus on the role of adult-child relationships within the family. Hence, as previously flagged, interviews also took place with parents.

1.3 Thesis structure

This study explores children’s understandings and practices of ethical consumption within a family context.

In this Chapter (Chapter 1), I have drawn upon contemporary commentary surrounding children and their experiences with consumption in society (Buckingham & Tingstad, 2010; Cook, 2008; Martens et al., 2004). I have highlighted calls for further research regarding children’s understanding of and experiences with ethical consumption (Francis & Davis, 2014). I have also identified the need for research into how children engage with ethical consumption in their everyday lives given an apparent lack of knowledge regarding how individuals learn to consume ethically (Collins, 2015). Importantly, I have drawn on the recent work of Warde (2015) in positioning ethical consumption as an emerging area of research within the sociology of
consumption. By locating my research within the interdisciplinary interests of childhood studies, consumption, ethical consumption, socialisation and children’s participation I have signaled the potentially significant contribution the study will make to the existing gap in knowledge around children’s understandings and practices of ethical consumption.

In Chapter 2, I explore these interdisciplinary interests, describing how they form an important nexus within which my research is located. Following this, I provide a critical review of relevant literature related to these interests, with particular attention on locating children’s voice and lived experiences within each. It is through my review of the childhood studies literature that I articulate my conceptualisation of the ‘child’ at the centre of my research study - a competent social actor able to participate with others in his or her social contexts (James & Prout, 2015). However, my review of the consumption literature reveals a noticeable absence of this competent social actor. Despite strong evidence of children’s presence in everyday consumption, the focus has been primarily in the areas of children’s toys and clothing, or a general assessment of the negative impact consumption is having on children’s lives (Martens et al., 2004). A similar problem has been noted in childhood studies literature (Cook, 2008b), which largely fails to acknowledge the integral role of consumption in children’s lives beyond children’s birthday parties, toys and clothing. The absence of the knowing child within ethical consumption literature also becomes apparent. Where children are mentioned, it is usually in terms of their passive influence over parental decisions (Cairns et al., 2013) or a focus on their future ethical consumption behaviours and attitudes (Benn, 2004). It also becomes evident that notions of ethical consumption are contested concepts and
subjective, value-laden and open to interpretation (Carrigan, Szmigin, & Wright, 2004; Cherrier, 2007; Pecoraro & Uusitalo, 2014).

In reviewing the existing evidence in Chapter 2, it is clear that this research makes an important contribution by locating the active child within the study of ethical consumption and hence acknowledging the socially constructed and subjective nature of children’s lives, their childhoods and ethical consumption (Cherrier, 2007; Cook, 2005; Hendrick, 1997). Further, my interest in how children come to learn to be ethical consumers focuses my attention on socialisation literature, exploring both developmental theories commonly found within the marketing literature (Ward, 1974), and theories from developmental psychology (Piaget, 1972). It is through this analysis that I identify commercial enculturation (Cook, 2010) as aligning with notions of the competent child consumer. Finally, I examine children’s participation literature as it informs my study. I pay particular attention to how consumption is positioned in relation to participation literature and how children’s participation in broader societal issues is conceptualised (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2009). The overall contribution of Chapter 2 lies in its synthesis of a broad range of literature linked to the different disciplinary interests framing the study, which gives rise to an appropriate theoretical framework examined in Chapter 3.

At the beginning of Chapter 3, I establish my ontological and epistemological standpoint as a pragmatic social constructivist. Central to this is the belief that knowledge is socially constructed. This is particularly pertinent to notions of the child, children and ethical consumption, all of which are concepts heavily contextualised by periods in time, social, cultural, geographical and economic circumstance. I also explore the implications of my own subjectivity as a researcher and the influence this has over
my study in terms of data analysis and reporting in rich detail. I identify how childhood studies, sociocultural theory and commercial enculturation form the basis of my theoretical framework. Considerations of best practice in conducting research with children heavily influenced the approach used in my study and led to a deep reflection of my chosen methodologies and methods. In particular, considerations of best practice inform the development of an innovative approach to seeking children’s informed consent. Data collection for this study involved separate semi-structured interviews with twelve children and their parents or stepparents. The data was analysed using thematic coding through Nvivo. The findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5 align with my epistemological stance as a pragmatic social constructivist.

In Chapter 4, I present the findings to my first research question and provide insight into the understandings and practices of children’s ethical consumption from the perspective of children and their parents or stepparents. This discussion includes motivations for, and barriers to, consuming ethically and leads into a discussion regarding the dynamic, negotiated and sometimes contradictory nature of ethical consumption. In reporting the findings, I have opted not to attempt to qualify, critique or mute the voices of participants, but instead to present a rich and contextualised account of views and experiences. The findings from this chapter lay important foundations for understanding how children come to understand ethical consumption, as outlined in the following chapter.

Chapter 5 explores the ways in which children come to understand ethical consumption within a family context and hence addresses my second research question. In doing so, it returns to the theoretical framework of my study and discusses the usefulness of sociocultural theory and commercial enculturation in understanding how
children come to understand ethical consumption. Specifically, I discuss how the findings interact with and contribute substantially beyond existing knowledge concerning how children actively participate in ethical consumption. I draw particular attention to the dynamic and reciprocal nature of their ethical consumption socialisation when the child’s agency is considered. From this, I highlight the possibilities for viewing children’s socialisation in terms of their status as present ‘beings’, rather than their status primarily as future citizens.

Chapter 6 responds to my third research question and reflects on the findings as outlined in the previous two chapters. Specifically, it discusses how the research challenges dominant conceptualisations of children and their participation. Acknowledging the dichotomous nature of the child and their relationship with consumption provides a more nuanced and contextualised understanding of children’s ethical consumption. This understanding illuminates the contribution of the study in not only reconceptualising consumption as a form of children’s participation such that it includes their ethical engagement, but also in identifying the potential this opens up for understanding children’s potential participation in broader societal issues of concern to them.

I bring the thesis to conclusion in Chapter 7 by engaging with the policy implications of the study and its overall contributions to knowledge about children and their understandings and practices around ethical consumption. The thesis closes with a reflection on the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research.
Chapter summary

This chapter has introduced the research, which aims to explore children’s understanding and practices of ethical consumption within a family context. Within this chapter, I provided a justification for the relevance of this study by outlining how ethical consumption is central to pertinent issues society faces surrounding sustainability. I also highlighted the importance of incorporating children’s lived experiences in our understanding of ethical consumption. In the next chapter, I will ground this study in the relevant literature and highlight its distinctive interdisciplinary emphasis.
Chapter 2 - Literature Review

The previous chapter highlighted the importance of exploring how children come to understand and practice ethical consumption within a family context. This chapter will provide a critical review of the literature informing this research focus. Section 2.1 begins with the presentation of a conceptual model (Figure 1.) representing the interdisciplinary nature of the study and the relevant bodies of literature informing it. A critical review of this literature then follows, namely: childhood studies (Section 2.2); consumption (Section 2.3); ethical consumption (Section 2.4); theories of socialisation (Section 2.5) and children’s participation (Section 2.6). Within each section, particular attention is given to gaps within the literature concerning children’s ethical consumption. I also reflect upon the important nexus between these areas of scholarship, since this directly informs the focus of the research.

2.1 Interdisciplinary interests informing the study

As previously stated, the aim of this study is to identify how children come to understand and practice ethical consumption within a family context. In Chapter 1, ethical consumption was defined as “the conscious and deliberate decision to make certain consumption choices due to personal moral beliefs and values” (Crane et al., 2008, p. 341). It involves the purchasing or avoidance of a product in line with an ethical issue such as human rights, labour and workplace conditions, animal wellbeing, or environmental preservation (Cowe & Williams, 2000; Strong, 1996). Ethical consumption may also include practices such as the conservation of utilities such as electricity or water, or in-house conservation practices such as recycling or waste minimisation (Starr, 2009). However, the focus of this study is on ethical consumption choices in the marketplace as described by Cowe and Williams (2000) above. However,
what constitutes ethical consumption within this context is not pre-determined by the study, but guided instead by how this is framed by participants as they convey their understandings and practices.

The study takes an interdisciplinary approach and draws upon five areas of scholarship to identify existing conceptual and empirical literature informing the study’s interests. The relevant areas of scholarship, as presented in Figure 1, are childhood studies (Section 2.2); consumption (Section 2.3); ethical consumption (Section 2.4); theories of socialisation (Section 2.5) and children’s participation (Section 2.6). It is at the nexus of these bodies of literature that the need for an interdisciplinary approach to the study of children’s ethical consumption within a family context becomes most apparent (Section 2.7).

Figure 1: Conceptual model of the interdisciplinary interests informing the study
By drawing upon the literature within childhood studies, I posit that children’s views, experience, status and agency are central to this inquiry (Corsaro, 1997; James & James, 2004; James & Prout, 1997; Prout & James, 1997; Smith, Taylor, & Tapp, 2003). However, childhood studies generally has not focused on children’s consumption (Cook, 2013), and hence has not specifically explored children’s ethical consumption. Hence, the need for research that not only locates the voices and lived experiences of children as ethical consumers but also addresses the dichotomous nature of children and childhood within this context (Cook, 2005).

The literature regarding the sociology of consumption and consumer culture has not given close attention to inquiring into children’s ethical consumption. However, ethical consumption is acknowledged by Warde (2015) as one of “three areas of fresh and productive recent research” (2015, p.117). At the same time, there are calls for a better understanding of children’s place within the sociology of consumption (Martens et al., 2004). Consumer culture theorist, Daniel Cook (2008, 2009, 2010, and 2013) argues consumption is an integral part of children’s lives and offers them the opportunity to express themselves through their consumption. Cook’s work is resonant with the framing of children and childhood within the childhood studies field in that he positions children as active social beings who use consumption within their everyday lives to express themselves and participate in social contexts.

The existing literature around ethical consumption, more specifically, is critical to this study. Ethical consumption can be conceptualised as an overlap between an individual’s role as a citizen and as a consumer and provides an opportunity to engage with social, environmental and economic issues (perceived as societal problems) through their consumption practices (Cairns et al., 2013; Egels-Zandén & Hansson,
Within ethical consumption literature, studies reporting children’s lived experiences are limited. Instead, existing work largely focuses on children’s passive influence over their parents’ ethical consumption (Cairns et al., 2013) or children’s future-based potential as ethical consumers (reinforcing children as ‘becomings’ as opposed to ‘beings’) with a distinct lack of practical examples outside the classroom or mock settings (Benn, 2004). With the exception of studies by Francis & Davis (2014, 2015) and Grønhøj and Thøgersen (2012), whose studies considered the role of socialising agents including formal educators, parents and the media in making children aware of ethical consumption, the process of becoming an ethical consumer is still very much under-researched (Szmigin, Carrigan, & McEachern, 2009).

In order to gain insight into how children come to participate through ethical consumption within families, there is a need to consult key literature concerned with children’s socialisation. Marketing literature historically adopts a developmental approach to understanding how children are socialised as consumers (Ward, 1974), which many scholars still consider relevant (Drever, Odders-White, Kalish, Else-Quest, Hoagland, & Nelms, 2015; John, 1999; van Reijmersdal, Rozendaal, & Buijzen, 2015). Developmental theories tend to focus on children’s passive role in the socialisation process and a tendency to view children’s socialisation along a linear, often aged-based trajectory (John, 1999). This stands in contrast to the framing of children as active social beings previously flagged in relation to key childhood studies literature. Similarly, it does not reflect the key tenets of sociocultural theory, which views children’s socialisation (particularly as learners) through their own participation with others in sociocultural activities that take place in a dynamic, social context (Rogoff,
Coining the term “commercial enculturation”, Cook (2010) also asserts that children develop as *consumers* through a dynamic and reciprocal process whereby children adapt, negotiate and actively participate in consumption practices with others through everyday activities.

**Children’s participation**, where this is understood as a manifestation of “individual agency within a social context” (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2009, p. 357), has significant relevance for my study since I explore how children use ethical consumption as a means of participating both within the family and within broader societal issues that concern them. Some participation literature does make mention of children’s consumption but limits this discussion to either their economic contribution in the marketplace or their use of public services (for example, as consumers within the education or health care systems) (Moore, McArthur, Noble-Carr, & Harcourt, 2015; Sinclair, 2004; Thomas, 2007). Other participation literature also provides excellent examples of how children participate in broader societal issues and other matters that concern them (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2009), but does not explore ethical consumption as a specific form of participation. This study is interested in the potential of ethical consumption as an important site for children’s participation.

The interdisciplinary interests underpinning this study (as presented in Figure 1 and overviewed above) provide a firm foundation from which to explore children’s understandings and practices around ethical consumption within the family context. I turn now to exploring these bodies of literature and the ways they intersect around the focus of this study.
2.2 Childhood studies

Children’s voice and lived experiences are central to this study. In this section, I draw on key literature from the field of childhood studies to explore the socially constructed nature of children and childhood.

2.2.1 Definitions of child and childhoods

According to James and James (2004, p. 14), a child can be defined as:

“A human being in the early stages of its life course, biologically, psychologically and socially; it is a member of a generation referred to collectively by adults as children, who together temporarily occupy the social space that is created for them by adults and referred to as childhood.”

This definition suggests that the ‘child’ cannot be understood without consideration of what it means in relation to ‘adult’ (Jenks, 1996). This distinction suggests that children and childhood exist within the context of intergenerational relationships. However, any distinction between adult and child based on developmental comparisons is imprecise (James & Prout, 1997). For one, not all adults reach the milestones of “full development” despite their status of ‘adult’. Distinctions between notions of ‘children’ and ‘adults’ are also historically contingent, particularly in terms of a child’s rights and responsibilities (Ellis, 2011).
2.2.2 Historical perspectives on children and childhood

Up until the middle ages the distinction between children and childhood, and adults and adulthood, was given less emphasis than it is today (Ariès, 1962). There were expectations for children to contribute to the family income through labour within the household or beyond. Without a mandate for formal education, there was little difference in the lives of a child compared to adults. A few changes started to occur in the 17th Century and beyond, which created a greater distinction between children and adults. Firstly, as infant mortality declined and contraception methods started to improve, families started to become smaller. Secondly, more emphasis was placed on education with formal schooling seen as an opportunity to improve children’s prospects and social standing (Ellis, 2011). This period of schooling further distinguished a child’s life from that of an adult. Bonds between family members further developed as households became a more private space. Children became the central focus of much affection and sentimentality. Ariès (1962) acknowledges, however, that many of these changes were limited to the upper classes of society and these changes still do not reflect the modern family we know today. However, these historical perspectives of children and childhood set the groundwork for modern understandings (Jenks, 1996), including the socially and culturally contingent nature of childhood.

2.2.3 Children, childhoods and context

There is now a considerable literature that views childhood as socially constructed and culturally relative, rather than universal (Hendrick, 1997). Prout (2005, p. 57) underlines such understandings in describing childhood as a “more or less purely social and cultural phenomenon, marked by its spatial and historical variability”. Acknowledging the ways in which childhood is socially, culturally and historically contingent is particularly relevant when considering the influence of consumption on
children and childhoods with different socio-economic backgrounds. As such, it may be more appropriate to use the term ‘childhoods’ as opposed to ‘childhood’ in order to take this into account (James & James, 2004; James & Prout, 1997).

Two significant influences over contemporary conceptualisations of children and childhoods have been the children’s rights agenda (as exemplified by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) and the ‘new’ sociology of childhood, both of which acknowledge children as competent actors. I will explore both of these as they inform contemporary notions of the children and childhood.

2.2.4 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

In 1989, the United Nations General Assembly adopted and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This Convention sets out fifty-four articles relating to children’s civic, social, cultural, political and health and economic rights. Collectively, the Convention honours children’s rights to protection, provision and participation (UNICEF, 1996). Articles 12-17 and 31 relates specifically to children’s participation rights, which consider the child as an active social being, with the ability to assert their capacity and agency (Stoecklin, 2012). These articles have heavily influenced the literature regarding children’s participation (as explored later in Section 2.6).

Notions of children’s agency and capacity, and hence their participation, are central to my study. Children’s agency may be defined as an “individual’s or group’s ability to make choices and decisions and to act and interact with others in a socially competent way” (Nibell, Shook, & Finn, 2009, p. 264). However, children’s capacity is not bestowed upon them simply because it is ratified within UNCRC (Stoecklin, 2012).
Instead, children’s capacity to influence and participate is varied and context-specific. This is best articulated by the notion of ‘bounded agency’, which acknowledges that young people's agency (including that of children) is shaped by the contexts in which it finds itself (Evans, 2002). In this sense, agency is socially situated and temporal in both the opportunities that present itself and also the constraints and barriers it has to work within. As I will explore in further detail in subsequent sections, this is relevant to the present study as children’s participation through ethical consumption is contextually bound and the processes by which they come to understand ethical consumption and the ways in which they practice ethical consumption are through non-linear, dynamic and ever-evolving processes. Children develop their own voice through social networks and this can be facilitated through their participation (Stoecklin, 2012). As I explore in Section 2.5, such conceptualisations also align with contemporary theories of children’s socialisation (Cook, 2010; Ellis, 2011; Rogoff, 1995; Smith, 2002).

In the next section, I discuss the influence of UNCRC on the new sociology of childhood.

2.2.5 New sociology of childhood

The new sociology of childhood arose in the 1990s as an attempt to collate sub-disciplines in other fields into a unifying field of interest (James & Prout, 2015). Influenced by UNCRC and emerging interests in the new sociology of childhood, a new paradigm of the competent child emerged. This paradigm positioned the child as an agentic and competent social actor. The new sociology also questioned previously dominant perspectives that children were passive, incompetent and incomplete and called for recognition of children’s participation and contribution in decision-making, the need for child-specific research, and the need to privilege the perspectives of
children over dominant adult notions (James & Prout, 2015; James & Prout, 1997; Prout, 2005; Prout & James, 1997). As discussed in Section 2.5, the new sociology of childhood also questioned historical and dominant notions of how children develop and become socialised. Ideas of children as passively influenced by adults, along a linear trajectory from irrational to rational, incompetent to competent, unsocialised to fully socialised were rejected. Instead children were seen as active agents, capable of influencing and actively shaping their own lives (Ellis, 2011). However, as this new sociology of childhood has developed, questions have emerged regarding how children can be adequately and simultaneously empowered and protected.

The role of consumption in children’s lives has not been fully considered in the childhood studies literature (Cook, 2013; Martens et al., 2004) Instead, consumption tends to be viewed as separate from other aspects of children’s lives. As such, it is important to look within consumption literature in order to locate the voice and lived experiences of children. In doing so, it becomes apparent that just as childhood studies has paid little attention to the child consumer, so too has the child consumer been presented in instrumental ways in consumption literature.

2.3 Consumption

Studies regarding consumption span across a variety of academic disciplines including geography, education, anthropology, sociology, history, cultural studies, psychology, marketing, and cultural studies (Martens et al., 2004). In their review of the literature regarding consumer research between 1985 – 2005, Arnould and Thompson (2005) also note the diverse academic disciplinary interests that shape understandings of consumption. In doing so, they also acknowledge consumption and consumer culture are contextually steeped concepts since these help construct meaning and identities for
individuals and groups, allowing them to make sense of their environment (Warde, 2005). Although consumption can be viewed as an individual activity, the importance of social contexts and relationships in embodying and negotiating associated practices, identities and meanings must also be acknowledged (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

Approaching consumption as a socially and culturally bound concept is pertinent to my study as I seek to understand children’s ethical consumption in the context of social relations within the family. Furthermore, the study is interested in whether and how children make consumption decisions in light of the broader social environment around them.

Given the focus of my study on children’s ethical consumption, it is important to locate children’s voice and lived experience within existing literature regarding consumption, including ethical consumption more specifically (see Section 2.4). To progress this, I turn my attention to two critical debates in an attempt to synthesise the literature regarding children and consumption. The first debate, led by Martens et al. (2004) explores the apparent absence of children within the sociology of consumption. The second by Cook (2013), addresses the apparent absence of children’s consumption as a central focus of childhood studies. Both inform my stance in this research regarding conceptualisations of the child consumer.

2.3.1 The child consumer

As flagged above, there is now considerable debate surrounding the conceptualisation of children as consumers, driven particularly by claims that both consumption and childhood studies theories have failed to adequately acknowledge children’s status and their participation through consumption (Buckingham, 2011;
Cook, 2008, 2013; Martens et al., 2004). The implications of this for my study are significant in that children’s agency and participation are central to my theorising of childhood. I now explore in more depth the idea of the missing child in consumption theory, before discussing the apparent absence of the child consumer in childhood studies.

Despite growing academic interest in both childhood studies and consumption, there has been a persistent failure to fully acknowledge the integral presence of the child consumer in everyday life (Buckingham, 2011; Martens et al., 2004). Instead, the emphasis has centred on children’s consumption primarily regarding toys, clothing, and food. While some studies have focused on children’s relationship with the marketplace, these have neglected other social relationships that shape consumption (Ellis, 2011). Where these relationships have been explored, they are usually dominated by an interest in developmental socialisation theories (Nairn & Spotswood, 2015), peer influences (van Ansem, van Lenthe, Schrijvers, Rodenburg, & van de Mheen, 2014) or in how consumption inflates tensions between children and adults in terms of persistent nagging for goods (Campbell, James, Stacey, Bowman, Chapman, & Kelly, 2014; Swain, 2014). In contrast to childhood studies, consumption studies concerning children have also tended to neglect privileging children’s voice in their research inquiries, instead deriving meaning from culture, text, media or observations of children at play (Best, 1998). As such, the active social child’s voice and lived experience have either been neglected, or reliant on the interpretation of their experiences by adults (Martens et al., 2004). A consequence of this approach has been an inclination within the consumption literature to conceptualise children as a homogenous group, both in terms of their development as consumers and also the social contexts in which they live.
(Cook, 2000, 2008; Martens et al., 2004). Additionally, the impact of consumption on children’s lives is often perceived negatively (Brooks, 2008; Nairn & Spotswood, 2015), undermining children’s agency and the positive opportunities that consumption can bring to bear on children’s lives. Such framing undermines the possibilities offered by ethical consumption to engage in societal problems (see later discussion).

Just as children appear absent from consumption theory, Cook (2000, 2008, 2013) asserts few studies within the new sociology of childhood seek to explore the integral role of consumption in children’s lives. He claims that childhood studies has thus tended to view children’s consumption as peripheral to children’s everyday lives. Central to the issue of children’s consumption not being viewed as an integral part of children’s lives, is a concern that doing so highlights tensions between asserting the rights, capacity and status of children while trying to acknowledge their vulnerabilities within the marketplace (Cook, 2005). Accepting the consuming child as integral of childhood experience complicates notions of agency, “because sometimes the child is taken and is duped by the promises and insinuations of marketing and publicity” (Cook, 2013, p. 426). However, adults too can be lured by the promises of the market, so acknowledging the potential of exploitation in this context should not make the child any less agentive (Cook, 2013). Resistance to accepting the agentive child consumer may rest with the fact consumption is often seen as a less purposeful form of participation. Children’s participation in consumption is therefore considered frivolous, and devoid of “heroic agency” (Cook, 2013, p. 425).

The child consumer, in all its complexity, “provides the opportunity to speak to, challenge and offer new conceptual territory to the now solidifying, and increasingly taken-for-granted, epistemology of childhood studies” (Cook, 2013, p. 424). Martens et
al. (2004) asserts that by bringing the sociologies of childhood and consumption together, under interrelated themes (including learning to consume and parent-child relationships), a new conceptual framework for understanding the child consumer emerges. This study takes up the challenge of exploring this new conceptual territory with its focus on how children come to understand and practice ethical consumption in the context of their families. To do this, it is necessary to locate the voices and experiences of children as ethical consumers within ethical consumption literature.

2.4 Ethical consumption

In reviewing key literature on ethical consumption relevant to my study, I focus on two themes. The first of these relates specifically to definitions of ethical consumption. The second theme pertains to how ethical consumption enables a person to engage with social, environmental and economic issues (perceived as societal problems) in their consumption practices (Cairns et al., 2013; Egels-Zandén & Hansson, 2015; Lewis & Huber, 2015; Sachdeva et al., 2015; Sandıkçı & Ekici, 2009). These themes are explored in further detail below, before turning attention to locating children’s voice and lived experience within this literature.

2.4.1 Choosing the term ‘ethical consumption’ over ‘consumer-citizenship’

A number of scholars have attempted to define the relationship between a person’s role as citizen and as consumer through the construction of the concept ‘consumer-citizen’ (Benn, 2004; Davis & Francis, 2014; Doherty & Taplin, 2008; McGregor, 2002, 2009). However, the term ‘consumer-citizenship’ has been adopted for different purposes and, as such, there are three possible emphases given to this concept, each evoking very different meanings. Some interpret consumer-citizenship as the consumer using each purchase as a voting in maintaining market structure (Gabriel
& Lang, 2006; Mayer, 1991; McGregor, 2002). Others have defined it as belonging within a particular sub-culture of like-minded consumers based on brand associations and preferences (Banet-Weiser, 2007). In line with the focus of this research, the term ‘consumer-citizenship’ is also used to express "a responsible consumer, a socially-aware consumer, a consumer who thinks ahead and tempers his or her desires by social awareness, a consumer whose actions must be morally defensible and who must occasionally be prepared to sacrifice personal pleasure for communal wellbeing” (Gabriel & Lang, 2006, pp. 175-176). From reviewing the literature pertaining to all three definitions, I can see the logic in the adoption of the term ‘consumer-citizenship’ within all three. The third definition aligns most closely with my research focus. However, concerned for any potential confusion that may arise from adopting a term that has multiple meanings, I will instead use the term ‘ethical consumption’ within my study. Notwithstanding this, however, the body of literature surrounding consumer-citizenship is relevant to this study and I do draw upon it within the review of literature. Where I do so, I use the term ‘consumer-citizenship’ as it aligns with the third definition provided above.

2.4.2 Defining ethical consumption

Ethical consumption may be defined as “the conscious and deliberate decision to make certain consumption choices due to personal moral beliefs and values” (Crane et al., 2008, p. 341). It enables a person to engage with social, environmental and economic issues (perceived as societal problems) in their consumption practices (Cairns et al., 2013; Egels-Zandén & Hansson, 2015; Lewis & Huber, 2015; Sachdeva et al., 2015; Sandıkçı & Ekici, 2009). It also involves the purchasing or avoidance of a product in line with an ethical issue (Cowe & Williams, 2000; Strong, 1996; Thøgersen, 2002).
The emphasis on ‘ethics’ that is inherent in such definitions merits exploration. According to Graham, Powell, Taylor, Anderson & Fitzgerald, ‘ethics’ refers to “well-founded standards of right and wrong that prescribe what humans ought to do, usually in terms of rights, obligations, benefits to society, fairness, or specific virtues” (2013, p. 173). Nevertheless, it is difficult to prescribe a particular set of values or beliefs in determining a fixed set of practices that can be deemed ‘ethical’ (Carrigan et al., 2004; Pecoraro & Uusitalo, 2014). As Graham et al. (2013, p. 173) acknowledge, “ethics also involves the study and development of our own ethical standards via continual examination of our moral beliefs and conduct.” In this sense, not only are ethical standards variable between individuals’ own standards of practice or beliefs, but individuals’ practices too constantly change and adapt depending on varying contexts and priorities. As such, deciding what constitutes ethical consumption is difficult and open for interpretation depending on what values and morals a person solicits at any point of time or within any context. Instead of a prescribed list of ethical consumption practices, the following section aims to illuminate the various ways individuals engage in ethical consumption. These may also be influenced by differences between ethical standards held by others in their social contexts.

2.4.3 What practices constitute ethical consumption?

Given that definitions of ethical consumption are value-laden and subjective, so too are notions of what constitutes ethical consumption. Cherrier (2007) suggests a constellation of possibilities for discerning and selecting ethical products, organisations, and ethical consumption patterns. Access to information about what constitutes ‘ethical’ consumption has been made significantly more immediate with internet technology. For example, the consumer information website, “Shop Ethical”, defines performance in five
main categories, by which products and their associated organisations may be deemed ethical as presented in Table 1 below (Shop Ethical, 2015).

Table 1: Elements of concern motivating ethical consumption. Source: Adapted from “Shop Ethical” website (2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environment</th>
<th>Impact or contribution to Climate Change, Pollution, Toxins, Habitats &amp; Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>Human Rights, Workers’ Rights, Supply Chain Policy, Irresponsible Marketing, Armaments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>Animal Testing, Factory Farming, Other Animal Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>Political Activity, Genetic Engineering, Anti-Social Finance, Company Ethos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product Sustainability</td>
<td>Organic, Fair-trade, Positive Environmental Features, Other Sustainability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Elements of concern such as these can also inform a consumer’s decision to avoid purchasing, a practice movement known as anti-consumption (Black & Cherrier, 2010; Lee, Fernandez, & Hyman, 2009). Motivations for anti-consuming range from boycotting specific products or brands perceived to be bad for the environment, unethical in their production or in their treatment of people or animals, or otherwise choosing to forgo purchasing new goods in favour of recycling, swapping or producing your own goods (Black & Cherrier, 2010; Cherrier, Black, & Lee, 2011; Lee et al., 2009). How consumers, in this case children and parents, prioritise and act upon the kind of ethical concerns described above is of relevance to this research.

2.4.4 Motivations and barriers for consuming ethically

There have been many attempts to understand motivations, attitudes and barriers towards ethical consumption (Bray, Johns, & Kilburn, 2011; Eckhardt, Belk, & Devinney, 2010). Studies have included but are by no means limited to demographic profiling (Berkowitz & Lutterman, 1968) and using the Theory of Planned Behaviour
(Ajzen, 1991) and Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) to predict pro-environmental behaviour (Neale & Vitartas, 2009, 2010). Despite numerous studies looking at values, attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and demographics, predicting ethical consumption behaviour has proved elusive. This is further complicated by what has been coined the attitude-behaviour gap (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). The attitude-behaviour gap describes a phenomenon where people report a belief in the values of ethical consumption but do not then consume ethically. One reason for the attitude-behaviour gap is a lack of immediate availability of a product as a purchasing barrier to sustainable consumption (Terlau & Hirsch, 2015). However, even profiling ethical consumers through a variety of indicators including demographics has not tended to include children.

For a long time, studies into pro-environmental behaviour and ethical consumption have relied largely on deductive approaches to understanding ethical consumer behaviour (Starr, 2009). More recent scholars have turned their attention to interpretative methodologies, which seek to understand the contexts in which the behaviour occurs (Cherrier, 2005). Motivations for consuming ethically (including anti-consumption) do vary. These include self-interest, that is, a belief that consuming ethically contributes to individual wellbeing (Cairns et al., 2013), as well as more altruistic motivations such as avoiding harm to the environment (Sachdeva et al., 2015), minimising negative impacts on society (Sandıkcı & Ekici, 2009), and concern for animal welfare (Lewis & Huber, 2015). Politically based motivations, including a belief in supporting or avoiding products from particular countries of origin, have also been identified (Egels-Zandén & Hansson, 2015). Barriers to ethical consumption include perceptions about high costs or lower quality associated with shopping ethically,
cynicism and skepticism regarding the ethical claims associated with a product, organisation or movement, and a general lack of access to information or knowledge regarding ethical consumption (Burke, Eckert, & Davis, 2014).

Understanding of the motivations and barriers to ethical consumption, along with the many forms ethical consumption can take, is still underdeveloped (Lee et al., 2009). Papaoikonomou, Ryan, and Valverde (2011) acknowledge a lack of theoretical insights into ethical consumption and call for a “holistic understanding of the ethical consumer and the wide range of strategies and behaviours he or she might adopt throughout daily life” (p. 213).

My review of key areas of literature thus far has analysed ethical consumption definitions, practices, motivations and barriers. Absent from much of this literature has been the voices and lived experiences of children. The following section details those studies that have begun to take account of children’s roles in ethical consumption.

2.4.5 Children and ethical consumption

The importance of understanding children’s ethical consumption has been highlighted by Fien et al. (2008). As influential members of family households, children directly and indirectly influence family consumption choices and practices. Additionally, understanding children’s ethical consumption habits today provide a useful window for understanding their future consumption practices. In this respect, children occupy the spaces of both today’s consumers and the consumer of tomorrow. Notwithstanding this, children are a distinct category of consumer, worthy of specific investigation and, critically, the youth market segment (0 to 20 years of age) account for 40 per cent of the world’s population (Fien et al., 2008).
The importance of exploring children’s consumption in relation to its impact on broader societal issues was discussed within the United Nations Environment Programme (2013). The report identifies youth as having an important role to play in shaping sustainability now, and in the future. Given this, understanding consumption patterns of children and young people are crucial to developing and maintaining sustainable development. In a study by Doherty and Taplin (2008), children acknowledged the impact of their consumption in terms of its environmental degradation and were also able to conceptualise more environmentally sustainable product offerings which minimised this impact.

There is a strong focus on necessary changes within the formal education system to help make children aware of the links between principles of good citizenship and good consumerism (Benn, 2004; McGregor, 1999, 2009). However, discussion is often future-based (reinforcing children as ‘becomings’ as opposed to ‘beings’) and there is a distinct lack of practical examples outside the classroom where children’s participation is actively encouraged (Benn, 2004).

Further, children’s presence in ethical consumption debates often centres around their passive influence on their parents (Cairns et al., 2013). Many studies investigate the arrival of a child into a parent’s life as a catalyst for parents changing ethical consumption choices (Kehily, Martens, Burningham, Venn, Christie, Jackson, & Gatersleben, 2014; Mackendrick, 2014; Martens, 2009). This perspective, although relevant, does not highlight the active role children may take in engaging in ethical consumption or how they actively influence the ethical consumption practices of others.
2.4.6 Children’s socialisation into ethical consumption

The role of socialising agents including formal educators, parents and the media in making children aware of ethical consumption has now been quite widely considered (Francis & Davis, 2014, 2015; Grønhøj & Thøgersen, 2012). These studies draw largely on developmental theories of socialisation, emphasising children’s passive role in being influenced by others. Understanding children’s socialisation with respect to ethical consumption and how children influence, and are influenced by, socialising agents and surrounding environments is important (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011). More knowledge about the process by which a person becomes an ethical consumer, would provide a fruitful place to see the links between being a good consumer and a good citizen and allow a “sense of morality, ethics and community” to emerge within society (McGregor, 2009, p. 209). It is with this in mind, I turn my attention to theories of socialisation, and in doing so, consider the potential processes by which a child comes to understand and practice ethical consumption.

2.5 Theories of socialisation

In order to gain a better understanding of how children may come to understand ethical consumption, I broaden my review of the literature to consider socialisation and consumer socialisation theories, specifically. This discussion begins with an overview of historical perspectives of socialisation and an exploration of how these have predominantly shaped attempts within marketing to understand children’s consumer socialisation. Following this, I will discuss limitations regarding developmental approaches to socialisation and introduce the potential contribution that contemporary theory of commercial enculturation may make in this research interested in how children’s understandings and practices are influenced within the family context.
2.5.1 Historical theories of socialisation

Socialisation has been used to describe how children are taught to understand and abide by social norms (Handel, 2006). Historical perspectives acknowledge the life-long process of socialisation within a person’s life (Parsons, 1951), but place childhood at the centre of much of this learning. The focus on childhood as the epicentre of socialisation is predicated by dominant perspectives of children as primitive beings whose irrational urges needed to be tempered through socialisation from parents and authoritative figures such as teachers (Durkheim, 1961). Socialisation is seen as an important aspect of a child’s development in which they come to understand social order, socially acceptable behaviour and ultimately ensure broader social stability (Ellis, 2011). Historically, developmental theories based primarily in psychology have influenced thinking around children’s socialisation. Typically, such theories have viewed children’s development as a universal path from immaturity and dependence towards graduation into a fully competent, rational and autonomous being (James & Prout, 1997). Piaget’s theories of child development (Piaget, 1972) strongly influenced understandings of socialisation and have had a significant and lasting impact on conceptualisations of the child (Jenks, 1996). Piaget’s theories on children’s development, when narrowly applied, are at odds with childhood studies’ notions of children’s agency, status and capacity. Nevertheless, Piagetian understandings of child development have dominated many fields (McAlister & Cornwell, 2010; Spears Brown & Bigler, 2005; Sutter & Kocher, 2007), including children’s consumer socialisation.

2.5.2 Consumer socialisation

Historically, understandings of children’s consumer socialisation also followed dominant thinking in psychology of the same period (Ironico, 2012). Ward (1974, p. 2) defined such socialisation as the “process by which young people acquire skills,
knowledge and attitudes relevant to their functioning in the marketplace”. In a similar
vein to social and cognitive development theories, children’s consumer socialisation
was seen as a process by which they move from ‘limited’ or ‘developing abilities’ into
competent consumers (John, 1999). At different cognitive and social stages of
development, children acquire different skills which enable them to navigate their way
around the consumer marketplace (John, 1999). Ultimately, this framework is driven
using age as a primary indicator of transition from one development stage to the next.
The use of age as a primary indicator of competence is one of many criticisms of
developmental socialisation theories yet these are still evident in quite recent literature
(Mau, Schramm-Klein, & Reisch, 2014; Mehta, Coveney, Ward, Magarey, Spurrier, &

Ali and Siraj (2014) drew upon a history of forty years of consumer socialisation
in an attempt to theorise a more contemporary framework. In doing so they
acknowledge the strong influence of parents in how children come to understand and
participate in consumption. Their framework, based upon Bandura (1986),
acknowledges both verbal communications and the role of observation and participation
within the particular social environments. This approach resonates with John’s (1999)
socialisation model of linear and trajectory development. However, Cook (2010) argues
the use of terminology such as ‘limited’ and ‘developing’ within John’s theory
“reinforces and re-inscribes the epistemology of linear human development” (2010, p.
66). Assuming the child as a competent being, Cook suggests that ‘commercial
enculturation’ is a more appropriate way to conceptualise a child’s continual and
dynamic development as a consumer. Children do not “initially exist in some pre-social
space, separated from the social world, including the world of consumption” (Cook,
Instead, consumption provides an opportunity for children to develop relationships and interact with others (Cook, 2010). This variable process is not “necessarily linear or temporally determined, but socially and culturally embedded in understandings of childhood, adulthood and market relations” (Cook, 2010, p. 70).

Others have similarly noted the influence of parents on children’s consumer socialisation (Bao, Fern, & Sheng, 2007; Ekström, 2015; Grusec, 2014). However, many of these studies have explored parenting styles as opposed to specific processes by which children are socialised (Bao et al., 2007; Gentina & Muratore, 2012). There is also substantial evidence pertaining to children’s agency within their consumer socialisation (Aleti, Brennan, Parker, & Young, 2015; Bodkin, Peters, & Amato, 2013; Watne, Lobo, & Brennan, 2011; Watne, Brennan, & Winchester, 2014). These studies focus on children’s active role in influencing parental purchasing decisions within the family context, largely circumscribed by conversations between children and parents.

The dialogue between child and adult regarding children’s participation in consumption can be conceptualised as fluid and dynamic (Cook, 2010). This presupposes relationships of trust, sharing of knowledge, negotiation and conflict resolution that result in opportunities for children to participate, which will vary according to context. Children’s development as consumers therefore is nuanced and interwoven with relationships within family and their cultural environment (Atkinson, Nelson, & Rademacher, 2015). Such perspectives of children’s consumer socialisation align with sociocultural theories of socialisation (Rogoff, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978). As discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 3, ethical consumption is a sociocultural activity and my interests in exploring children’s ethical consumption within a family context align with the nature of sociocultural theory being about how children learn and develop.
through shared sociocultural experiences with others in their social network. Instead, I now turn my attention to children’s participation in the context of ethical consumption.

2.6 Participation

Children’s participation has enjoyed significant interest amongst researchers, policy-makers and practitioners (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2009; Sinclair, 2004; Smith, 2002; Stoecklin, 2012; Thomas, 2007). Understanding how children shape their environment through their participation now and in the future is an important research focus (Jans, 2004). As Percy-Smith and Thomas (2009, p. 357) argue, “there is value in understanding participation more broadly as a manifestation of individual agency within a social context”.

The importance of providing a meaningful voice to children and the means by which they are able to participate in matters that concern them is now well documented (Hart, 1997; Sinclair, 2004; Smith, 2002; Treseder, 1997). Building on Mannion’s (2007) work, Graham and Fitzgerald (2011) highlight four broad rationales framing participation from the perspective of both children and others involved. These include: Enlightenment – children have something meaningful to contribute and benefit can be derived from knowing their perspective; Empowerment – that children can be empowered through recognition of their agency; Citizenship – that children learn to participate by participating; and Relational – that participation is social in nature. This study will take close account of whether and how such participation rationales are at work in the context of children’s participation in ethical consumption.
2.6.1 Defining children’s participation

Participation is broadly understood to be a form of social engagement that enables individuals (including children) to express views and contribute to decisions on matters that affect them (Council of Europe, 2012). Although underdeveloped in terms of a unifying theory there is now a substantial literature providing examples, indicators and goals for children’s participation (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2009; Stoecklin, 2012). Participation is often conflated with related concepts such as ‘consultation’, ‘involvement’, ‘engagement’, ‘inclusion’, ‘voice’ and ‘representation’ (Franklin, 1997; Hart, 1997; Treseder, 1997). While some forms of participation do include decision-making, others often relate to the ways in which children are involved in everyday, routine social practices (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2009), including within the family.

The nature of children’s participation is largely dependent on how power is shared between adults and children (Percy-Smith, 2011; Sinclair, 2004). Hart’s (1992) adaptation of Arnstein’s (1969) ‘ladder of citizen participation’ is one of the most utilised typologies for articulating how children’s participation can be understood. The widespread use of Hart’s ladder by practitioners, academics and policy-makers has not kept it immune from criticism (Thoburn, Lewis, & Shemmings, 1995; Thomas, 2007). Such critique has been primarily focused around the hierarchical nature of Hart’s model (from manipulation at the bottom to child-initiated, shared decisions with adults at the top). There is a (mis)perception that progressing children’s participation requires a linear movement from one rung to the next, or that all participation should strive to sit at the top rung of the ladder (Tisdall & Liebel, 2008). Other writers have identified similar forms of participation but have departed from the idea of a ladder, instead using descriptive concepts in a non-hierarchical manner (Franklin, 1997; Shier, 2001;
Treseder, 1997). Even Hart (1997) argues the ladder was not meant to be a definitive model for children’s participation. Instead it represents the challenges associated with enacting children’s participation (Thomas, 2007). In the context of this study however, it serves as a useful departure point to consider children’s participation in ethical consumption within the family context, with particular references to how this participation is enabled or inhibited through the relationship between the child and their parents/carers.

Much of the literature focuses on children’s participation in matters of most importance or concern to them (Sinclair, 2004; Smith, 2002; Smith et al., 2003; Thomas, 2007). Commonly cited examples of such matters include children’s representative boards in schools, participation or at least consultation in family law matters, and youth councils which in essence mimic existing adult structures (Sinclair, 2004; Thomas, 2007). Sinclair highlights this point by making a distinction “between decisions that relate to an individual child and those that relate to children as a group” (2004, p. 109). Such a statement emphasises the correlation between individual decisions and its limited scope of impact on the individual child or collective decisions and their collective impact. Such statements also assume that children are only concerned with matters specifically related to children (whether individually or collectively). Yet research indicates that children are concerned with global social and environmental issues (Doherty & Taplin, 2008; Jans, 2004). If children’s interest in matters beyond that of childhood per se raises the question, if we are to respect children agency and interest in broader issues, should we not consider their participation beyond matters specifically related to children? This is an important question to raise as it provides an opportunity for expansion of the notion of children’s participation to
include their active involvement in matters beyond those typically conceived within the literature. Furthermore, it does not only re-shape the interests of children to include broader societal issues, but also reconceptualises how children participate in those matters.

Following the above discussion, it is interesting to note Jans (2004) who correlates matters of concern to children with children’s identity, stating that children identify themselves as a part of a larger social group or communities and therefore show concern for matters of a collective nature. Others see identity in terms of individual attributes including ethnic, cultural, demographic, socio-economic and developmental backgrounds (Sinclair, 2004). These notions are pertinent to my study as they relate directly to how children identify themselves as a part of the family and therefore their participation within that context, but also how children identify themselves as a part of a broader social context and therefore how they show concern for matters of a collective nature such as ethical consumption. There is also an acknowledgement that children’s interests and capacities change as they grow older (Sinclair, 2004). The diverse range of such attributes has led researchers to acknowledge the need to design participation dialogue and forms with such diversity in mind. With respect to my study, this may include how children’s understanding and engagement with ethical consumption may change over time, not according to age-based milestones, but through their ongoing participation.

Although participation may provide benefits to the children directly involved in terms of educating them on process, questions arise as to the actual impact of the participation in deriving change and any benefit for children not directly involved in such processes (Percy-Smith, 2005, 2010). The social and political nature of children’s
participation, as well as the apparent lack of status and opportunity for children as a social group to effectively express their common interests, limits their participation in public policy debates and civic issues beyond mimicking adult democratic structures and institutions (Thomas, 2007). However, “children do participate in society, outside these training grounds” (Jans, 2004, p. 39) and this research is interested in the ways in which children’s ethical consumption may be a means by which this is possible. As Thomas (2007, p.211) argues, “inclusion is not just about bringing groups into existing systems, but is also about modifying those systems in order to accommodate new groups with different perspectives and different ways of expressing themselves”.

Scholars are increasingly calling for a reconceptualisation of children’s participation that considers children’s self-determination and autonomy (Percy-Smith, 2010, 2014, 2015). These include calls to reconsider opportunities to participate in everyday social settings, to consider participation that is less overt than that through formal decision-making channels, and importantly, acknowledges children’s participation as a process of reflexivity, continual development and constant change and adaptation (Percy-Smith, 2010, 2012).

Such theorising of participation is useful for this research in that it provides a framework for thinking about children’s participation in ethical consumption. However, descriptions of children’s consumption do not specifically take into account their ethical consumption. Instead, children’s consumption is limited to acknowledging their economic contribution through consumption, or as users of public services. It does not consider consumption, which in addition to making an economic contribution, acts as an opportunity for children to engage with societal problems. Definitions of ethical consumption, already explore in Section 2.4, suggest a practice on an individual level
that enables a person to engage in a broader societal problem through their consumption. If children therefore participate as ethical consumers, participation literature is helpful in thinking about whether and how ethical consumption may provide children with a direct opportunity to participate in broader societal matters through their consumption choices.

Chapter summary

Throughout this chapter, I have presented a review of literature pertinent to the interdisciplinary interests of the study. I began by proposing a framework (Figure 2) that links the different disciplinary interests and highlights the central nexus where the focus for this research lies. The areas of literature reflecting the key underlying research interests are: childhood studies (Section 2.2); consumption (Section 2.3); ethical consumption (Section 2.4); theories of socialisation (Section 2.5) and children’s participation (Section 2.6). Each of these was explored, beginning with historical and contemporary conceptualisations of children and childhood as being contextually laden social constructs. I elaborated on this in Section 2.3, drawing on debates within the literature regarding the failure of both childhood studies and consumption theory to acknowledge how integral consumption is in children’s lives and the significance of children’s status as consumers in society. I then explored existing ethical consumption literature in an attempt to locate the voice and lived experience of children. The importance of understanding the process by which children understand and practice ethical consumption called for a review of literature pertaining to children’s socialisation and consumer socialisation. Following this, I then reviewed the literature pertaining to children’s participation, paying particular attention to conceptualisations of children’s participation and the relevance of this for understanding their potential
roles in relation to ethical consumption. The literature presented in this chapter points to the critical importance of the current research focused on children’s understandings and practices of ethical consumption with the family context. The following chapter, Chapter 3, details the research design and methodological approach taken with this research.
Chapter 3 – Theoretical framework and methodology

The previous chapter examined literature related to the key interdisciplinary interests informing this study. This literature not only explicated understandings of children and childhood (Section 2.2); consumption (Section 2.3); ethical consumption (Section 2.4); socialisation (Section 2.5) and children’s participation (Section 2.6), but also highlights where and how this existing knowledge potentially intersects to illuminate how children come to understand and practice ethical consumption within a family context (Figure 1).

This chapter details the theoretical framework, methodology and methods utilised in this study. It takes the research aim and questions as a departure point for describing the ontological, epistemological and theoretical underpinnings of the study. The methodological and ethical issues pertinent to conducting research with both adult and child participants are then explored before turning attention to issues of recruitment, sampling, data collection and analysis. Here, I also reflect on the role of my own subjectivity before concluding with perceived limitations of the research.

3.1 Research aim

This study aims to identify how children come to understand and practice ethical consumption within a family context. Three research questions guide the study:

3.2 Research questions

1. How do children and their parents/carers perceive and practice ‘ethical’ consumption within a family context?
2. How do children come to understand ethical consumption within their family context?

3. What insights into the conceptualisation of children, and their capacity to participate, do we gain from examining children’s roles as ethical consumers within a family context?

In considering these questions, it is important to make explicit the ontological and epistemological standpoints underpinning the study.

3.3 Ontology

This research assumes a relativist ontological position and signals particular assumptions about childhood and children’s place within the world, most notably that ‘childhood’ is a socially constructed phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Perceptions of what constitutes childhood and who occupies this temporal space are dependent on cultural, historical and contextual definitions. Understandings of family, too, are contextually bound, a point well argued by DeVault (1991, p. 54) who defines family as “a socially constructed group, continually brought into being through the activities of individuals”. Consumer behaviour and consumer socialisation theories can also be described as socially constructed (Ellis, 2011; Hackley, 1998). What constitutes ethical consumption is open to interpretation and opportunities to consume ethically vary between socio-economic-demographic-historical contexts. Indeed, understandings of all key concepts central to this study are heavily contextualised in this way. For example, the sociology of childhood has drawn attention to how understandings of children and childhood have changed over time and space, including how new relationships and changing contexts influence notions of childhood (Prout, 2011).
Although this study reflects a relativist ontological perspective, it is important to acknowledge the validity of both realist and relativist perspectives of ‘what exists’. In line with the post-modernist view outlined by Greig, Taylor, and MacKay (2013, p. 61) I “do not want to imply truth and reality do not exist, but wish to emphasise that our own understanding of what is real and true is a complex and relative process”. Hence, my own position is close to Crotty’s (1998) who asserts that social constructivism can be both realist and relativist and any description of reality cannot exist without subjectivity and context (Cheek & Gough, 2005). As Rorty (1989, p. 5) writes, “the world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not”. Such views are pertinent to this study as I seek to describe how children understand and practice ethical consumption. In doing so, I rely on participants descriptions of reality and acknowledge that these are influenced by their own subjectivities and contexts. Similarly, my subjectivity influences every aspect of the study, including how I analyse and report the perspectives of the participants.

3.4 Epistemology

Epistemology “provides a philosophical background for deciding what kinds of knowledge are legitimate” (Gray, 2013, p. 19). This research is closely aligned with a constructivist epistemological stance. As signaled above, this means I am not looking for essential and timeless truths, but instead believe that knowledge is a contextual co-construction of our own subjectivities and ideas of reality (Greig et al., 2013). Schwandt (1994, p. 125) describes a constructivist view of knowledge and truth as “created, not discovered by mind”. In other words, the mind functions to create the social world as we know it which results in a multitude of variations of reality between different individuals (Gergen, 1999).
The distinction between constructivism and social constructivism is subtle (Kelder, Marshall, & Perry, 2005) but important for this study. Where constructivism is concerned with how meaning and knowledge is constructed by the individual, social constructivism looks beyond the individual to how groups of people share and negotiate their realities and co-construct intersubjective realities (Burr, 2003; Kelder et al., 2005; Young & Collin, 2004). Hence, social constructivists argue knowledge is a co-construction of reality, created through the shared experiences, language, rules and relationships of all humans (Freeman & Mathison, 2009) and culture defines the way people think and feel, ultimately shaping one’s view of the world (Crotty, 1998).

Criticisms of social constructivism generally focus on the limitations of relativist standpoints that do not privilege any perspective of reality over another, however absurd that reality may be (Kelder et al., 2005). To address such critique, it is necessary to take a pragmatic approach to relativism that decides the worth of a theory based on consideration of the consequences of accepting the theory and its usefulness in helping people to better understand the world around them (Kelder et al., 2005; Wicks & Freeman, 1998). This pragmatic approach is also adopted by Edwards, Ashmore, and Potter (1995) and Quale (2007) who claim to be “moderate constructivists” who resist more radical interpretations of constructivism. For this study, a pragmatic epistemological approach is appropriate as it seeks a philosophical middle ground that sees ethical consumption as both observable and socially constructed (Greig et al., 2013). It also provides an opportunity for further investigation and reflection (Doane & Varcoe, 2005).
3.5 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this study has been broadly established in Chapter 2 where I discussed in some detail the interdisciplinary interests informing the research. These interests (around childhood studies, consumption, ethical consumption, children’s socialisation and children’s participation) incorporate a number of key theoretical and conceptual elements that I will now discuss in more detail. These relate to understandings of children and childhood (specifically the dichotomous nature of the child), their socialisation (as understood through the lens of sociocultural theory) and notions of the child consumer (inextricably bound to commercial enculturation). These are central in generating rich insight into how children come to understand and practice ethical consumption within the family context. In doing so, they also potentially extend understandings of children’s participation within a consumer context.

3.5.1 Dichotomous nature of the child

In Chapter 2, I outlined the central tenets of the new sociology of childhood’s framing of the child as an active, social actor. However, central to debates regarding understandings of children and childhood is an ongoing struggle to reconcile the dichotomous nature of the child (Qvortrup, Bardy, Sgritta, & Wintersberger, 1994; Uprichard, 2008). The apparent dichotomies situate the child as an either/or child. Particular tensions lie in how we position children as ‘beings’ or ‘becomings’, ‘pre-social’ or ‘social’, rational or ‘irrational’, ‘empowered’ or ‘vulnerable, exploited and in need of protection’. Considering these dichotomies in the context of children’s experiences with consumption is an important theoretical consideration for this research.
Proponents of the new sociology of childhood have queried historical views of the ‘pre-social’ child who is awaiting full socialisation before citizenship and participation rights are bestowed upon them (Uprichard, 2008). Such advocates reject developmental trajectories that highlight children’s deficiencies, presume a linear pathway into ‘social beings’, and hence position children as ‘becomings’ (Jenks, 1996). Contemporary perspectives on children’s socialisation embody the view of children as ‘beings’ and ‘becomings’ (Qvortrup et al., 1994). Viewing children merely as ‘becomings’ locates children’s participation as future-based or otherwise practiced in hypothetical settings, often mimicking adult participation models (Ellis, 2011). Positioning children as ‘becomings’ also reinforces age as the norm for setting expectations around children’s capacity and competency, which in turn tends to exclude children from participating in activities otherwise considered “inappropriate” (Morrow & Richards, 1996). Instead, many contemporary childhood theorists engage critically with aged-based assumptions and argue that children are very capable of expressing opinions at even a young age (Smith et al., 2003).

3.5.2 The dichotomous child consumer

One key area of contention surrounding the dichotomous nature of the child is in terms of the child consumer. In this context, there exists a significant tension between the need to protect children from exploitation in the marketplace and acknowledging the legitimacy of their voices and experiences within consumption cultures (Marshall, 2010). Studies of children as consumers, for example, Schor (2008) and Ellis (2011), often report these tensions as the ‘dichotomy of the empowered and the vulnerable/exploited child’.
Within consumer culture the empowered child is both perceptive in relation to potential marketing manipulation and creative in making meaning from consumer goods (Seiter, 1995). While the ‘empowered child’ of the new sociology of childhood provides anchorage for marketers seeking to capture the agency of the child, including their rights and capacity for decision-making, such positioning has also come under close scrutiny. As Cook (2009b) argues, “placing a knowing, active child at the centre of one’s efforts and industry provide moral cover against the ever-present threat of being seen as engaging in exploitative practices. If children’s expressions of desire are seen as legitimate, the issue of manipulation diminishes accordingly” (2009b, p. 276).

Advocates against the commercialisation of childhood argue for the protection of children within the marketplace (Palmer, 2015). Here the vulnerability and potential exploitation of children is highlighted in cautionary tales of the ever-growing commercialisation of childhood (Buckingham, 1995; Buckingham & Tingstad, 2010). Such a view draws attention to the exploitative aspects of marketing and advertising (Schor, 2008). This focus on the vulnerability of children is particularly relevant in debates about the advertising of tobacco, alcohol and junk food (McGinnis, Gootman, & Kraak, 2006; Sargent, Beach, Dalton, Mott, Tickle, Ahrens, & Heatherton, 2001).

The dichotomy between the rational and irrational child is a further theoretical consideration within research around children and consumer culture. This presents itself as ‘pester-power’ or ‘nag-factor’ and is intended to describe children’s behaviour of getting what they want from adults (Bridges & Briesch, 2006; Lawlor & Prothero, 2011; Nash & Basini, 2012; Nicholls & Cullen, 2004). While some studies portray children as irrational beings unable to negotiate, articulate or temper their own consumption desires (Palmer, 2015), others highlight the sophisticated manner in which children negotiate
getting their own way (Ellis, 2011). The view of children as irrational is refuted by Ellis (2011) who argues, “Children do not simply pester significant others in order to get what they want, instead they adopt and maintain a sophisticated understanding and relationship with consumption” (2011, p. i). This study challenges the representation of children as either rational or irrational, and instead proceeds on the basis that they may be both when it comes to understandings and practice around ethical consumption.

Concerns over the dichotomous nature of the child consumer, although well established, do little for the advancement of knowledge regarding children’s consumption. Instead, it may be more fruitful to acknowledge that such dichotomies exist and move beyond attempts to reconcile them (Buckingham, 2011; Cook, 2005). As such, this study does not attempt to reconcile dichotomous tensions if and when they emerge but instead explores how these shape children’s understandings with respect to ethical consumption so that a more nuanced account can be captured.

3.5.3 Sociocultural theory

This research places major emphasis on the study of children’s ethical consumption within everyday family contexts. As such, Chapter 2 (Sections 2.4.6 and 2.5) broadly described various theories of socialisation relevant to understanding children’s development (both in general, and specifically as ethical consumers). Attention now turns specifically to the potential that sociocultural theory offers the study because of its emphasis on children’s learning, relationships and participation in sociocultural activities linked to consumption. The following section provides a description of the central tenets of the theory as utilised in the study.
The origins of sociocultural theory are, in part, attributed to Russian theorist, Vygotsky (1978), whose work came to notoriety after his death, when translated from its native language, Russian, into English. The emphasis of Vygotsky’s work lay in understanding the relationships between an individual and their social environment as these shape learning. Contextualising not only what is learnt, but also the processes that facilitate learning, is integral to understanding how a child develops and learns (Rogoff, 1995). Central to this is the dynamic contribution of the child.

Children’s cognitive development occurs through their active interaction with their social environments through sociocultural activities (including ethical consumption practices). These experiences provide an opportunity for children and adults to engage and it is through such joint involvement in activities that children start to acquire knowledge (Smith, 2002). An emphasis on children’s participation, as posited by sociocultural theory, recasts children’s development as being profoundly influenced through their engagement with others in sociocultural activities (Bronfenbrenner & Bronfenbrenner, 2009; Rogoff, 1995; Smith, 2002; Smith & Ballard, 1998). Such interactions are dynamic and often reciprocal and therefore position children as both learner and teacher as they develop and adapt through relationship with others (Rogoff, 1995). This relationship is ever-evolving and adaptable to different social contexts, and hence children’s contributions change and develop in line with their experiences (Smith, 2013). Central to the idea of children developing in relationship with others in their social environment, is also their willingness to engage in any particular activity or event (Spillane & Thompson, 1997).

Such conceptualisations also acknowledge the reciprocal nature of children’s socialisation: “It is incomplete to assume… that children develop but that their partners
or their cultural communities do not…or that influence can be ascribed in one direction” (Rogoff, 1995, p. 141). Such a view underlines the importance of recognising that children’s learning and development is a co-construction of knowledge between the child and others within their social environments. According to (Rogoff, 1990, p. vii), “Children’s cognitive development is an apprenticeship – it occurs through guided participation in social activities with companions who support and stretch children’s understanding of and skill in using the tools of the culture”. Children actively participate through various forms of communication and proximity to others, including in the context of sociocultural activities. Hence, children’s participation is central to the socialisation process.

In light of the above theoretical interests, this study’s focus is on understanding how ethical consumption potentially acts as a sociocultural site for developing children’s understanding through their participation with others. It acknowledges that children’s role will vary depending on the activity and may include observation, accompanied or independent learning through participation and conversation. For Rogoff (1995, p. 157) “the central question becomes how people participate in sociocultural activity”, prefacing that with the idea that “we begin to examine… the actual processes by which children participate with other people in cultural activity and the ways they transform their participation”. This study has a close interest in understanding whether and how such dynamics are present as children learn about and engage with notions of ethical consumption within their family context.

Although there is an emphasis in Vygotsky’s work on the development of language, strong references to the social contexts in which children develop suggest learning can involve all manner of activities in addition to language (Rogoff, 1995).
Learning may also refer to morals and values as these are communicated within different social contexts. All forms of communication potentially guide a person’s participation in a sociocultural activity (Lasky, 2005). Given that ethical consumption is a subjective and value-laden concept, understanding how a child is supported to develop his or her ethical values is relevant to the ethical consumption practices they may adopt and pursue.

Rogoff’s (1995) planes for observing sociocultural activity focus on interactions, which need not be face-to-face, verbal, explicit or take place in formal education settings. Indeed, her planes for observing sociocultural activity are particularly relevant to informal out-of-school learning since her concept of ‘guided participation’ intends to encompass everyday cognitive activities within the home and local neighbourhoods (Rogoff, 1995). Hence, this theory holds significant potential for understanding how children’s learning about ethical consumption is shaped within the family domestic context and through shared family experiences outside the home. Further, Rogoff (1995) highlights the potential of children as social actors who competently participate in and through their own learning. These notions of children learning while ‘being’ and not just learning in order to ‘become’ resonate with the paradigms of the child, previously discussed. Hence, sociocultural theory also provides a useful lens to investigate children’s participation (Smith, 2002). In this study, this is important for examining whether and how children’s developing understandings and practices around ethical consumption simultaneously potentially enable them to participate in broader social issues that concern them.

Discussion now turns to the concept of commercial enculturation and its potential for this study when applied in conjunction with sociocultural theory.
3.5.4 Commercial enculturation

Although sociocultural theory provides a lens for understanding children’s development in relation to sociocultural activities generally (which this study argues may include ethical consumption), theories of consumer socialisation may potentially also help to shed a more nuanced light on understanding children’s development as ethical consumers. In particular, commercial enculturation helps address critiques and concerns regarding children’s agency and status as consumers by embracing notions of the competent and active child (Cook, 2010).

It has been previously posited in Chapter 2 that traditional perspectives of children’s consumer socialisation based on linear and aged-based developmental scales fail to acknowledge the inseparable relationship between consumption and children’s lived experiences. These also tend to undermine children’s active role in the processes by which they develop as consumers. This study therefore proposes contemporary notions of children’s consumer socialisation, such as Cook’s (2010) commercial enculturation, may be more appropriate for capturing the integrated, dynamic and ever-evolving process by which children come to understand and develop as ethical consumers.

Having already outlined in Chapter 2 some important distinctions between traditional perspectives of consumer socialisation and more contemporary theories such as commercial enculturation, the focus of this section is on discussing the central tenets of consumer socialisation (commercial enculturation) theories as they relate to this study and link to the central tenets of sociocultural theory. In doing so, I draw upon well argued perspectives of children’s relationship with consumption from scholars such as Ekström (2015), Cook (2010), Buckingham (2011) and (Ellis, 2011).
Consumption is integral to children’s lives and not something that occurs in isolation (Cook, 2010). Likewise, children’s relationships with their parents are both dynamic and reciprocal in nature (Cook, 2010). Furthermore, as children develop capacity through their relationship with others and their social environment, this dynamic relationship potentially influences the development and participation practices of those (children and adults) within their social contexts (Ellis, 2011).

Commercial enculturation suggests that socialisation takes place in the context of ‘doing’ and ‘being’ in everyday routine life, as opposed to learning only for future use. The child as a competent being and their development as a consumer is continual and dynamic (Cook, 2010). Children do not “initially exist in some pre-social space, separated from the social world – including the world of consumption… one which is not complete until adulthood when it is posited that one matures into it” (Cook, 2010, p. 66).

Children’s participation in consumption is therefore conceptualised as a fluid and dynamic dialogue between the child and their social environment (Buckingham & Tingstad, 2010). Indeed, for Cook, commercial enculturation “assumes that consumption and meaning, and thus culture, cannot be separated from each other but arise together through social contexts and processes of parenting and socialising with others” (Cook, 2010, p. 70). Critical to this is an acknowledgement that contexts, conversations and activities need not only involve explicit opportunities for children to understand ethical consumption (through, for example, conversations or shared shopping experiences), but that these also give rise to instances where children learn through much more tacit or implicit means. In this way, it is possible for socialisation to take place as an unintended or implicit consequence of a child’s relationship with their
social environment (Ekström, 2015; Tallman, Marotz-Baden, & Pindas, 2014). Instances of both explicit and implicit consumer enculturation are of central interest to this study.

### 3.6 Child-focused methodology

This chapter has detailed the ontological and epistemological standpoint of the study and the theory informing the research. As discussed, the study’s relativist ontological position and social constructivist epistemology signals particular assumptions about childhood and children’s place within the world, most notably that ‘childhood’ is a socially constructed phenomenon. Sociocultural theory and commercial enculturation theory provide an important framework to explore key interests of the study concerning children’s socialisation and participation in ethical consumption within the family context. Through this interdisciplinary approach, new knowledge about how children come to understand and practice ethical consumption are generated from the study.

Historically, research about children’s lives viewed children as objects of inquiry, often bypassing their voices, and focusing instead on adult perceptions of children’s opinions, behaviours or recollections (Kellett, 2010). Traditional views of children as incompetent, irrational and anti-social influenced the practice of doing research ‘on’ children (Smith, 2007). Children’s opinions or ideas could not be trusted and required verification by adults. Influenced by the UNCRC and challenged by the possibilities of child-centred scholarship promoted through the ‘new’ sociology of childhood, researchers began to acknowledge children’s agency as active participants in, and capable of driving, research agendas (Freeman & Mathison, 2009; Hill, 2005; Moore, Saunders, & McArthur, 2011; Smith & Gollop, 2001). This precipitated a shift
beyond research ‘on’ or ‘about’ children, towards research ‘with’ children or ultimately ‘by’ children (Kellett, 2010).

The benefits of involving children directly in research are now well documented (Freeman & Mathison, 2009; Greig et al., 2013; Harcourt, Perry, & Waller, 2011; Hill, 2005; Kellett, 2010; Moore et al., 2011; Morrow & Richards, 1996; Tay-Lim & Lim, 2013; Thomson, 2008). Of considerable importance in such discussion, is that the inclusion of children’s voices in research helps to ensure programs, policies and practices are more child-centred and appropriate to children’s contemporary circumstances (Moore et al., 2015; Smith, 2013; Tay-Lim & Lim, 2013).

Substantial research and policy work has now been undertaken that highlights both the benefits and challenges in ensuring children have meaningful participation in issues that affect them, such as family law proceedings and decisions regarding their care (Leeson, 2007; Smith, 2002; Smith et al., 2003; Vis, Holtan, & Thomas, 2012; Vis, Strandbu, Holtan, & Thomas, 2011). Such developments reflect a view that by acknowledging children’s agency in broader social issues, their perspectives and experiences are as legitimate and deserving of the same recognition as adults (Moore et al., 2015). This underlines the importance of incorporating children’s views on key social issues previously considered to be largely the domain of adults, such as ethical consumption (Fien et al., 2008). To do so situates children as ‘beings’ who actively participate in their surroundings and help to shape their physical and social environment, rather than only being engaged with as human ‘becomings’, waiting to contribute upon ‘graduation’ as socialised adults (Cook, 2010; Ellis, 2011).
Qualitative-interpretative research provides the opportunity to access children’s voices, seek their views of the world, and provide a sense of legitimacy to these perspectives (Cook, 2009b). Adopting a qualitative approach for this study co-locates children and their views at the centre of the research endeavour. This aligns with the new sociology of childhood, which advocates the considered development of child-focused methodologies for researching the lives of children (Moore et al., 2011). The guiding principles of such methodologies include: acknowledging children’s ability to actively and competently participate in research; engaging with children through appropriate research methods in a way that maximises the potential of their participation; and an awareness of, and commitment to, overcoming the ethical issues associated with conducting research involving children (Ellis, 2011).

The table below outlines a qualitative framework for research involving children based on a constructivist epistemological perspective. The right hand column outlines the specific ways these principles inform the study and its alignment with a qualitative framework.
Table 2: Qualitative framework for research involving children and young people (Constructivism) Source: Adapted from Greig et al. (2013, p. 77).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative framework for research with children (Constructivism)</th>
<th>… as applied in this study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assumptions</strong></td>
<td>Participants’ own realities, perceptions and subjectivities emerged through interaction with me (and my own subjectivities) to co-construct knowledge about children as ethical consumers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of the child is subjective, knowledge is symbolically and socially constructed and perception is held in community with others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methods</strong></td>
<td>Interviews took place in the participants’ homes* where ethical consumption practices within family context were most likely to occur. Semi-structured interviews were used to capture participants’ perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children studied in natural contexts. Behaviour occurs freely, is contextual, holistic, participants perspectives sought and data is described and interpreted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Questions</strong></td>
<td>Children are active participants in family life and were asked questions about all aspects of family grocery consumption, not just areas or issues considered relevant to children or child-focused (such as the purchase of toys or breakfast cereals)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children are active participants in construction of own social world. Questions are open-ended and guiding and seek perspectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contexts</strong></td>
<td>Consumption within the family context is a culturally bound and socially constructed activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural, socially constructed phenomena</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants</strong></td>
<td>Both adult and child perspectives were sought. An emphasis to all perspectives being valid with no right or wrong answers was made in the information sheet and during the interviews. Children were told that although their parent/carer was also participating in the study, this was not to fact-check or work out whose answer was more correct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research seeks participants’ individual perspective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data collection</strong></td>
<td>As much as possible participants were not guided by the provision of definitions, concepts or constructs surrounding my research. Participants were asked to explain what they thought ethical consumption was and how they consumed ethically. Data recording included audio recording during the interview and field notes after the interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unobtrusive data, seeking insider knowledge, verbal recordings, field notes and similar methods such as observation and interview but utilised differently</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data analysis</strong></td>
<td>Nvivo was used to code and analysis data. Preliminary themes emerged through an initial process of labelling and organising coded data. Data was re-sorted and re-coded data in a cyclic nature until the final themes emerged. The use of direct quotes from the data exemplify findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recursive model inductive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Findings</strong></td>
<td>Perspectives of the participants are revealed through the researcher’s narrative, and I acknowledge my own subjectivities throughout all phases of the study, including the literature I draw upon, my chosen theoretical framework, methodologies and methods and the way I code data and choose themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detailed narratives revealing participants’ perspectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Four interviews (children and their parent or stepparent from two families) took place while they were holidaying at friends’ houses.
Attention will now turn to a description of, and rationale for, research methods employed in the study.

3.6.1 Interviewing both adults and children

The ultimate goal of childhood studies is to provide children with a primary voice and minimise the reliance on adults speaking on behalf of children (Fraser, 2004). As previously discussed (Chapter 2), the new sociology of childhood recognises that it is paramount to ask children themselves about their lived experiences (James & Prout, 1997; Prout & James, 1997; Qvortrup et al., 1994; Smith, 2002). The reality, however, is that adults still play a strong gatekeeping role around whether and how children’s voice is accessed, as well as the interpretation of what they have to say and how such knowledge is used.

In this study, adults were also interviewed but were not included as a way of triangulating or corroborating the children’s perspectives or experiences. Since the study aims to understand children as ethical consumers within the family context, it was relevant and important to gain insight into how children are influenced, and how they influence others, regarding these experiences. In this sense, both the children and adults participate in reproducing, interpreting and reinterpreting interactions with each other (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). As Christensen & Prout (2005, p. 50) argue, “a social study of children and childhood must acknowledge the interplay between adults’ and children’s perspectives on social relations and cultures”. Children’s development is at least initially dependent on support within social and cultural contexts (Smith, 2002) and children’s consumption is mostly intrinsically connected to their family context (Cook, 2010; Ellis, 2011).
To understand this dynamic relationship, this study takes into account how ethical consumption perceptions and practices are co-constructed by both parents and children. As Greig et al. (2013, p.113) suggest, “Regardless of the focus of the main research question, a questionnaire or an interview with an adult or parent who knows the child or young person well can add a new dimension to the research”.

The next section details the methods employed to both ensure the children’s voices were privileged in the research while also acknowledging the relational dynamics at work within their families that may influence their understandings and practices around ethical consumption.

3.7 Research methods
3.7.1 Pilot study

Given the emphasis outlined above regarding the importance of developing an authentically child-centred methodology as part of this research, a pilot study was undertaken. This refers to "small scale version[s], or trial run[s], done in preparation for the major study" (Polit, Beck, & Hungler, 2001, p. 467). The advantages of conducting a pilot study include testing research tools and methods for appropriateness; reflecting in more depth on the ethical considerations of the study; identifying logistical issues; collecting preliminary data; and ensuring data recording and analysis methods are appropriate for the study (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001).

The pilot process involved interviewing three child participants and three parents. Although no major problems with the research design arose, some adjustments were made. For example, in one interview the mother expressed an interest to be involved but it transpired early in the interview that she was not the parent most involved in household
shopping and therefore felt unable to fully engage in some questions. This influenced recruitment processes for the main study including the information provided about the key interests of the project. Overall, conducting a pilot study confirmed the participants could understand the language and engage in a meaningful way with the topic. Transcribing the interviews ensured I was capturing relevant data aligned with the research questions and able to establish an emergent coding framework that could be built on in the main study. Importantly, the pilot provoked a level of reflexivity around the research process that was important for later data analysis and reporting.

3.7.2 Recruitment of participants

Participants were recruited through advertisements placed in school newsletters (See Appendix 1), social media and through word-of-mouth with parents or carers of school-aged children. This snowball sampling approach was supplemented by social media, with contacts encouraged to share the advertisement with their extended networks.

The recruitment used age as a guide for desired child participants. I was particularly interested in accessing the views of younger children (eight to twelve years old). This is primarily because the limited work to date about children as ethical consumers tends to focus on older children (Fien et al., 2008; Francis & Davis, 2015).

3.7.3 Participant profiles

The use of social media during the recruitment phase gave me access to participants in two small regional towns and one regional city on the north coast of New South Wales and two state capital cities (See Appendix 2 for participant profiles). Twelve children (seven boys and five girls) between the ages of eight and ten participated in the study. Two fathers, one stepfather and twelve mothers (two of whom were also stepmothers to other children in
addition to being parents to their biological children) also participated. The children attended
different educational facilities - public, private, community and home schooling - and were
from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. The family types included married,
defacto, separated, divorced, blended and single parent families. One family made mention of
the role of the grandmother in day-to-day consumption decisions although she did not
participate in the study.

3.7.4 Interviews with child participants

Notwithstanding the ethical implications surrounding children’s involvement in
research (which is addressed in the following section), other complexities surround decisions
about which research methods to use with children. Peracchio and Mita (1991) provide seven
broad guidelines for conducting research with child participants, which were applied
reflexively in the study:

- Make sure the knowledge domain is familiar to the children
- Provide them with rich contextual and retrieval cues
- Only include activities absolutely necessary to the task
- Minimise the complexity of the activity presented
- Employ language children use and are familiar with
- Highlight the key elements of the task for children to focus on
- Make sure the goals of each task are clear and achievable for the child

Approaches for engaging children in research now include methods that acknowledge
a wide range of children’s preferred ways to express ideas in everyday life. These include,
but are not limited to, storybooks, oral storytelling, collages, role-playing and drawings. The
use of photography, video-journals and online blogs have also gained prominence as methods
which enable children to control their own voice (Christensen & James, 2008; Delgado, 2015; Due, Riggs, & Augoustinos, 2014; Hill, 2005; Mason & Watson, 2014; Rice, Girvin, & Primak, 2014; Thomson, 2008). However, these approaches have not been without criticism (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Harcourt et al., 2011; Punch, 2002; Waller & Bitou, 2011). The idea of needing and using ‘child-friendly’ methods stands in contrast to the notion of children as competent social actors (Punch, 2002). Indeed, there are significant concerns that engaging children in activities such as drawing, storytelling or role-play may take advantage of children’s “docility towards such activities” (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008, p. 506) and negate claims of children’s participation in the research.

Interviews do however remain an effective and appropriate method for involving children in research. From a social constructivist perspective, an interview becomes a social event that enables a participant to express their interpretations of events or experiences (Freeman & Mathison, 2009) while allowing the interviewer to examine more closely his or her understanding of these insights (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1995). Semi-structured interviews provide the opportunity to ask open-ended questions in a flexible manner that enables researchers to access children’s perceptions and experiences regarding their actions and their worlds (Corsaro & Fingerson, 2006). This view is supported by Freeman and Mathison (2009) who assert interviews provide a personal space for children to share their thoughts and experiences with the focus on the child. In such instances, this means that the interview will likely be conversational or dialogical in nature. The resulting informality can potentially be beneficial for children since they may feel more at ease with the interview process.

In this way, interviews also capture the relationship between the child and interviewer. What the child reveals during the interview, the manner in which the interviewer
conducts him or herself, or responds to revelations during that time also becomes a part of that relationship. The result of this is a co-constructed account of the child’s views and experiences from both the perspectives of the child and the interviewer.

The semi-structured interviews took place in the participants’ homes or that of a friend (if the family was away visiting at the time). Interviews with the children lasted between 14 minutes and 38 minutes (see Appendix 3 for the interview schedule). All conversations were audio-recorded for subsequent transcription. A researcher journal was used immediately after interviews to record notes concerning additional observations, thoughts or insights.

Children were provided with a folder of logos and other market-based ethical consumption images (see Figure 2 below) to help prompt discussion within the interview. Children were asked whether they recognised any of the images and if so, to identify which ones, where they had seen them and what they thought they represented. Children were also asked to recall instances where they had purchased products displaying these logos. Finally, they were asked whether it is reasonable for children to consider these ethical consumption decisions when they go shopping.

Figure 3: Visual cues of logos and other market-based ethical consumption symbolism
3.7.5 Interviews with adult participants

Interviews were also considered to be an appropriate method for gaining an understanding of the lived experiences of the adult participants. The semi-structured interviews took place in the participants’ homes or that of at their friends’ (see Appendix 4 for interview schedule). Interviews with parents and stepparents lasted between 31 minutes to one hour and 26 minutes. An audio recording device recorded all interviews for subsequent transcription and the researcher journal was used to capture other relevant information following the interviews.

3.8 Ethical considerations

3.8.1 Ethical considerations regarding children’s participation

My immersion in a wide range of childhood studies literature, along with the pragmatic social constructivist epistemological underpinnings of the study, had a quite profound impact on the way in which I approached the ethical considerations of the research. While gaining the necessary review and approval from the Southern Cross University Human Ethics Committee (Approval Number ECN-12–275), I felt a strong and genuine need to move beyond simply complying with codes of conduct. Instead, I engaged in a deeper reflexive process around participants’ involvement in the study and the ways in which they came to understand what that involvement would entail. My thinking was strongly influenced by work being undertaken in the Research Centre where I was studying, which involved the development of a Charter and Guidance for the Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC) (Graham, et al. 2013). This project outlined best practice techniques for ensuring researchers focus on the rights of the child and that the researcher engages reflexively with the relationships between those involved in the research, the research itself, and the possible implications of its processes and findings. The ERIC project profoundly influenced my
approach to this study and I sought to apply the best practice principles in ways outlined below.

Issues surrounding ethics have often been flagged as a major reason for the lack of engagement with children in research (Marshall, 2010). Debates supporting the need for special care include the opinion that children are vulnerable and incompetent (Gallagher, 2009), or that differences between children’s and adults’ competencies necessitate different ethical approaches (Alderson, 2005). Perceptions regarding the need for special care stems from the inherent positioning of children as less than equal in the social world (Harden, Scott, Backett-Milburn, & Jackson, 2000).

Notable researchers have aimed to develop a range of principles, which underpin an ethical approach to research (Alderson, 2005; Graham et al., 2013; Hill, 2005; Morrow, 2008). The result is a body of literature that addresses the need for protecting children participating in research and strategies for doing so. Although variations appear within the literature, consensus surrounding informed consent; harm and benefits; privacy and confidentiality; and payment and compensation is consistently evident (Alderson, 1995; Butler, 2002; Eby, 2000).

Informed consent

Issues of consent when engaging children in research highlight the complexity between respecting their rights and status, while acknowledging their potential vulnerabilities and need for protection. Children should understand “the aims of the research; what time and commitment is required; who will know the results; whether there will be feedback; whether confidentiality is promised; and be assured of the freedom to withdraw from the research at any time” (Hill, 2005, p. 69). However researchers are often required to gain the consent of
the child’s legal guardian before allowing children to participate in research which in many ways undermines the child’s voice and agency (Hill, 2005). Issues surrounding ‘gatekeepers’ are well documented and acknowledge the roles of ethics committees and parents (Saunders, McArthur, & Moore, 2015). Similarly, the legal guardian can withdraw a child from research even when the child wishes to continue. Although acknowledging potential ethical issues surrounding consent and a child’s withdrawal from research, few suggestions for overcoming this dilemma are offered.

Commonly, information sheets and consent forms for child participants typically mimic adult versions (with alterations to language to accommodate the expected literacy levels of children). The layout of information sheets and consent forms for participants is usually in letter form with accompanying permission slips, comprising large amounts of information presented as text with minimal or no visual cues. The issue with “child-friendly” versions of adult information packs is that although they communicate all the relevant information to the child and comply with the literature surrounding ethical considerations, they do not necessarily take a child-focused approach. This provided an opportunity to take a more innovative approach when putting information packs and consent forms together for the child participants in this study, carefully considering the most effective way to communicate with the children I was approaching to be involved.

I commenced with a medium children are more familiar with (a storybook). Choosing an A5-sized booklet ensured it would fit more comfortably in smaller hands and allow easy turning of pages (See Appendix 5). The layout of the pages within provided snippets of information along with a visual cue (picture or photograph) to assist the reader to understand the text (again in much the same way a children’s book does). Language used within the booklet was deliberately jargon free and appropriate to the literacy levels of children 8–12
years old. The storybook incorporated all the important information required to assume informed consent. This included an explanation of the aims of the study, data collection and storage methods, time constraints in participating, confidentiality, opportunity to withdraw at any time, and the researcher’s responsibility to report suspected abuse or harm.

After I completed the initial design, I involved a group of four children (aged between eight and twelve) in the review of the information and consent materials. The children provided excellent suggestions on how to further refine the design of the information pack and consent form. Involving children in aspects of research design helps to shift the focus from children as subjects of research to active participants involved in an advisory role, helping to address some power imbalances inherent in research involving children (Moore, McArthur, & Noble-Carr, 2008). Doing so not only enriches the methodology of the study (Moore et al., 2015), but also challenges common perceptions of the researcher as the expert (Moore et al., 2011). For example, the children who engaged in the review of the booklet assisted with decisions regarding language and images used. Suggestions included using terms such as ‘kids’ instead of ‘children’ and ‘being a part of’ instead of ‘involved’. Where jargon was difficult to avoid, a clear and simple explanation was provided. For example, “experiences are all the things you know so far and how you come to learn or understand them”. The children also appreciated the tone adopted within the text. They liked that it was conversational, that I introduced myself on the first page and used photos of myself throughout the book so I became more familiar to them. They felt it was important for the booklet to conclude with a salutation suggesting “thank you” and a smiley face would be an appropriate sign off which was also added to the final version. They felt the images of me speaking with children gave them a good idea of what they could expect from being involved in the study. However, during one interview, a child participant commented that we were
talking one-on-one and this was different to the booklet where I was talking to a group of children. This heightened my sensitivity to the layered ways in which images convey meaning and alerted me to be more reflexive in this regard in future iterations of the booklet.

A checklist of statements formed the basis of the consent form, which the children could read and tick to acknowledge they agreed to the condition of involvement (See Appendix 6). The reasoning for this checklist was two-fold. Firstly, it presented each point as a separate and concise piece of information for the child to consider. Aesthetically, the consent form was less dense and more accessible, making it less overwhelming to read. Secondly, asking each child to tick each statement in acknowledgement that he or she understood helped alleviate concerns that they were consenting to something they did not understand. If children did not understand a statement within the consent form, it encouraged them to seek further clarification from a parent or myself. In the draft version of the consent form, there was only a “yes, I consent to being involved in this project” tick box. However, feedback from children who reviewed my consent form included a request that even if they did not want to be a part of the study, they should have the opportunity to fill out the consent form. To accommodate this, the final design included an additional tick box for “No, I don’t want to be a part of Kate’s project”.

The process of engaging children in the design of the consent form and information booklet as well as taking an innovative approach to reconceptualising how these items can best work for the target audience (potential child participants) was an important development within this study.
Harms and benefits

Interviewing children on a one-on-one basis prioritises the individual (Freeman & Mathison, 2009) and allows for the researcher to explore experiences in more detail. Such an approach can however, also feel more formal or threatening to a child participant. Hence, it is important to establish a relationship with the child beforehand. This may include informal discussions or casual conversations before the interview starts, ensuring the interview takes place in a location comfortable and convenient to the child, and re-iterating the freedom to withdraw from the study or decline responding to any questions. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 433) focus attention on similar issues when interviewing children. They suggest:

- Establishing trust early on in the interview
- Putting the child at ease before, throughout and at the conclusion of the interview
- Avoiding an over-reaction or strong emotions to responses given or behaviour displayed
- Using straight-forward, jargon free language and ensuring questions are appropriate for the age of the child
- Allowing the child time to think before responding

Children are inherently aware of the power adults hold over children (Mayall, 2000). Power does not just include physical presence or perceived force but also in the creation of knowledge through how adults choose to interpret children’s voices and what meaning they draw from that (Ellis, 2011). The interview process may exaggerate these inclined power imbalances and portray the researcher as an expert (Jones, 2000; Moore et al., 2008). Physical
settings can influence perceptions of power as can engaging with children from the outset in a respectful, non-condescending manner.

I employed various strategies to address perceived power imbalance and convey such respect. For example, during every interview, I told the children I was a student like them working on one big assignment for my teachers (called ‘supervisors’). I explained my assignment was about children and shopping and that I needed their help to work out some answers. I assured the children there were no right or wrong answers to the questions I had for them and asked the child where they would feel comfortable sitting for the interview and often found myself unintentionally mimicking the child’s sitting positions (for example, sitting cross legged on the couch as they did). I ensured we sat in a common area within the house (such as on the verandah or at the kitchen table) so both the child participant and myself could be visible to their parent/carer during the interview. Audio recordings of the interviews captured any times I was left alone with the child.

**Privacy and confidentiality**

Privacy and confidentiality are very important to children participating in research (Marshall, 2010) and it is important for the researcher to understand that children may view broken promises as lies, and therefore all promises need to be properly followed through (Maas & Abbeduto, 2001). Inspired by Ellis’ (2011) practice of not assuring confidentiality to participants, I instead assured all participants their comments will not be identifiable in my final report. I did intend to start each interview by asking the child to choose a pseudonym that I would then use when reporting findings. This technique was intended to enable children to both remain a part of the research (and see their contribution in the final report) as well as hold the researcher accountable for reporting findings accurately. During the pilot study, the children seemed somewhat confused by this technique and the time it took to explain it to
them seemed to distract them from the purpose of the interview. As a result, I did not continue this practice throughout the main study. Instead, I allocated a code to each participant so I could track and report his or her contribution accurately.

I also made it clear to the child that if someone tells me something to make me think he, she, or someone else is being hurt or in danger, then I would have to tell a safe person who could help them, such as a police officer or doctor. Parents and stepparents were told they could listen in to the interviews or enter the common area at any time but were asked not to contribute or interrupt the interview (unless withdrawing their consent and asking the child to leave). I acknowledge this compromised confidentiality and privacy (if the child wished to say something without the parent hearing) as parents may act as gatekeepers and their presence in interviews may influence children’s responses (Brannen, Dodd, Oakley, & Storey, 1994). Ultimately, though, I felt that re-assuring both the parents and the children that the interview was safe and well conducted was of paramount importance.

**Payment and compensation**

Payment for children’s participation in research is often debated (Kellett, 2010). Some view it as inducement to participate while others feel it is fair to compensate children for their participation in the study (Greene & Hogan, 2005). Scott (2000) believes where adults receive payment, so should children. I decided each child would receive a thank you gift at the end of the study and felt that receiving this gift as a surprise after participation counters perceptions of inducement (Mahon, Glendinning, Clarke, & Craig, 1996). After careful consideration, I decided the best gift would be to create a children’s poster, drawing from the findings of the research that enabled them both to receive a gift for participation and the opportunity to see the results of the study (see Appendix 7). Following much the same ethos of the informed consent booklet previously described, the poster also uses language
appropriate to the reader, and visual cues to assist with comprehension. The target audience for my poster (beyond participants of the research) are ten to 14 year old children.3

3.8.2 Ethical considerations regarding parents’ participation

Informed consent

An information pack and consent form (see Appendix 8) was sent to each adult participant outlining what his or her participation in the study would entail. As with the information booklet and consent form given to children, the information included sought to make sure adult participants understood “the aims of the research; what time and commitment was required; who would know the results; whether there would be feedback; and whether confidentiality was promised” (Hill, 2005, p. 69). Freedom to withdraw from the research at any time was also assured.

The format for this information followed the more traditional style of a letter and permission slip acknowledging and agreeing to both his or her participation as well as the participation of his or her child or children.

Harms and benefits

I was conscious of the potential power imbalance between the adult participants and myself (as a researcher). Many had not been involved in a research project before and were unsure of the processes involved. This potentially elevated myself to a position of “expert” in the eyes of the participant with concerns they would feel a need to provide the “correct” answer to my questions. As with the children, I assured adult participants the purpose of the interviews was to capture their experiences and perceptions to which there were no right or wrong answers. I also tried to keep our interaction quite conversational, hoping this would

3 This takes into account that data collection occurred in 2013 when participants were between the ages of 8-12.
put participants at ease. At the same time, I was conscious that I did not want to mislead the adult participant into forgetting the purpose was to record data and not just ‘have a chat’. Where appropriate I told participants I was a mum of a similarly aged child and shared some of their anxieties, hopes and concerns. This seemed to put participants at ease and break down any perceived power imbalances.

Privacy and confidentiality

It was important to assure the privacy and confidentiality of all participants. This was particularly relevant as some participants knew each other. On numerous occasions, adult participants would ask if I had spoken to friends or acquaintances they thought would also be interested in participating in my study. I sensed such inquiries were a precursor to offer to help me recruit participants as opposed to being inquisitive as to who the other participants were. I was conscious that divulging whether I had been in contact might compromise the anonymity of other participants. Instead, I made a point of thanking them for their suggestion and asking them to pass on my contact details to their friends if they wished.

As with the children, I assured all adult participants their comments would not be identifiable in my final report. I also explained to the adult participants that if I believed any harm or abuse was occurring, it was my duty to report it to the relevant authorities.

Payment and compensation

I did not offer adult participants any payment or compensation for their participation as I did not think it was fair to compensate the adult participants and not the children (Scott, 2000). As described later in Chapter 4, some adults did sense that participation in itself offered insight and reflection into their own perceptions and practices surrounding ethical consumption. Those that acknowledged this, felt participation was beneficial. Adult
participants were also able to read the children’s poster sent to the children, along with having access to the final thesis document after examination.

3.9 Data recording

Interviews were audio-recorded using a small audio recorder. Despite the obtrusive effect recordings can have on interview flow and formalising the roles of researcher and participant (Bassett, Beagan, Ristovski-Slijepcevic, & Chapman, 2008, p. 122), more recent evidence acknowledges the advent of smaller recording devices in minimising this impact. Children’s general increased familiarity with technology also makes them more at ease with having their voice recorded and therefore the recording itself is less obtrusive to the interview process (Marshall, 2010). In this study, all participants were shown the device which then sat between us for the duration of the interview. I asked the child participants if they were familiar with having their voice recorded. They all indicated they were.

For the children’s interviews, I terminated the recording once the parent re-joined us. As soon as possible (usually within two hours of the interview being conducted), I downloaded a digital file of the recording onto a password-protected laptop. A backup of this file was stored separately on a USB stick, stored in a locked filing cabinet.

Audio recordings were transcribed and then checked again for accuracy by reading through them while simultaneously listening to the corresponding audio file. I took this opportunity to de-identify and clean the data. I renamed and coded each file. Transcriptions were imported into Nvivo, a computer aided qualitative data analysis software program.
3.10 Data analysis

Data analysis begins before the fieldwork has begun (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996), with the first step being to develop a comprehensive description of the phenomenon being studied which is largely achieved through a thorough literature review (Dey, 2003). This enables familiarisation with concepts that develop later and may become the basis of data coding and themes.

Coding allows the researcher to work with smaller sections of the data at one time (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Eighty separate themes emerged after my first attempt at coding through Nvivo. Using an excel spreadsheet I grouped all the similar themes which allowed me to identify an umbrella theme or parent node that I could then use in Nvivo to group all the sub-categories or sub-themes. These were then sorted according to each research question and listed in order of most references to least, so that I was able to see the strength of each node. These parent nodes were then cross-referenced to the study’s three research questions (see Appendix 9).

In coding and analysing the data, it is important to be mindful of the researcher’s subjectivities (Saldaña, 2012). An interpretation of a comment made by a participant, the spirit in which it is perceived, whether it is taken in its literal form, or through a more nuanced approach, all potentially skew the way the data is presented. The use of direct quotations from transcripts are one way of attempting to overcome this and help ensure voices of the children are heard (Ellis, 2011). However, I am aware that the context in which the quotes are presented and the narrative that surrounds it, still privileges the interpretation and voice of the researcher and I remained conscious of this throughout the entire research process.
3.11 Limitations

There were several limitations to my study. The sample size is relatively small and not designed to be representative in any way: demographically or geographically. Although this allows for in-depth and detailed analysis, it does not allow or intend for the findings to be generalisable. Instead, it provides insight into experiences of ethical consumption within a range of family types including single, de facto and married couples, with children from one or both partners living together as blended families on a part-time or fulltime basis. I note no involvement in the study of same-sex coupled families and there was a lack of ethnic diversity in the study given its largely regional geographical location. The sample of parent participants was predominantly female with only three men participating in the study. Although unequal in terms of gender representation, it reflected the involvement of the main grocery shopper in the family.

Notwithstanding these sample limitations, the findings offer rich insight into children and families’ ethical consumption practices and perceptions as well as contributing in a unique way to the growing body of qualitative research in this space.

Chapter summary

At the beginning of this chapter, I outlined my ontological and epistemological positions, identifying myself as a pragmatic social constructivist. The study’s theoretical interests in sociocultural theory and commercial enculturation were then delineated. In doing so, I posited that children’s learning about and through ethical consumption can be dichotomous in nature. In “becoming” ethical consumers, sociocultural theory would suggest children learn by “being” ethical consumers. In doing so, I have argued sociocultural theory is relevant for this study in that it aligns comfortably with a childhood studies view that
children actively participate in their social environment and that their relationship with others is dynamic, reciprocal and ever-evolving.

In line with the epistemological standpoint of a social constructivist, I outlined why this study adopts a qualitative approach and utilises in-depth interviews to seek children’s and parents’ perspectives and experiences of ethical consumption. Building upon this, a description of the ethical considerations of the study with respect to ‘informed consent’, ‘harm and benefits’, ‘privacy and confidentiality’ and ‘payment and compensation’ was provided. Here I also described my commitment to child-focused research through the innovative use of an information storybook and poster of research findings, both specifically designed in a format and a language appropriate and accessible to children. Limitations of the study were then discussed.
Chapter 4 – Perceptions and practices of ethical consumption

The previous chapter set out the ontological, epistemological and theoretical underpinnings of the study and outlined how these informed the methodological approach, including the child-centred methods, employed within this study. It also provided a profile of the participants, which included twelve children, 14 biological parents and two stepparents. This chapter is the first of three (these being Chapters 4, 5 and 6) to detail the findings from these semi-structured interviews. In line with the study’s ontological and epistemological standpoint, the findings within these next three chapters are a construction of reality based upon the perceptions of the research participants as interpreted and reported by me, as researcher. Hence, the findings are presented using rich descriptions from participants interspersed with my own narrative as I sought to make sense of their stories of ethical consumption.

4.1 Ethical consumption practices and perceptions

Participants were asked what they understood by the term ‘ethical consumption’ and what they perceived to be ethical consumption practices. They were invited to provide examples of the kind of ethical consumption they engaged in. In general, the children found it difficult to describe what they understood by the term ethical consumption although most said they had heard of it. Alternatively, when asked what it meant to be responsible when shopping children were able to give much more in-depth responses regarding the ethical dimensions of their shopping decisions. As described in Chapter 3, children were shown a folder of ethical consumption logos to help introduce the topic. They were asked if they identified any of the logos and, if so, to discuss what they thought each meant and whether they had any specific experience of these. This helped to stimulate children’s thinking and
discussion around notions of ethical consumption. Generally, children readily identified ethical consumption practices such as shopping locally, buying organic and free-range, buying environmentally friendly products and supporting Australian owned companies and Australian made products. Some also spoke about the need to moderate over-consumption and issues surrounding exploitation within labour markets. Others described the health benefits of consuming ethically in terms of products containing less toxins or chemicals, and those products being better for the environment. For most of the children, an altruistic element was evident in their motivation for supporting ethical consumption practices. By way of example, they spoke about the importance of free-range and organic food being important for the health and welfare of animals and Fair-trade or ethical clothing production as important for the welfare of those in labour markets. Many of the children acknowledged lack of opportunity and limited knowledge of ethical issues as the main barriers to their ethical consumption. However, in some instances, children clearly had considerable knowledge of ethical consumption issues but were able to exert very little influence on their families in terms of purchasing and consuming ethically.

Parents were generally much more able to identify specific examples of what constitutes ethical consumption. These examples were generally aligned with kind of ethical consumption practices now being promoted more broadly within the community (for example, Shop Ethical, 2015), although their motivation for consuming ethically was closely tied to a sense of protection and moral obligation to their own family. Altruistic reasons featured less prominently in their reasoning. Parents’ views regarding ethical consumption included concerns about restrictive trade practices, a preference for shopping locally, buying organic and free-range, buying environmentally friendly products and supporting Australian owned companies and Australian made products. Parents also spoke at length about networks
of friends and families who both gave and received hand-me-down children’s clothing to each other and the need to moderate over-consumption.

Parents’ motivation to consume ethically appeared primarily driven by derived health benefits for their family. Although they acknowledged ethical issues in terms of animal welfare and labour issues, these concerns did not take precedence over the primary concern of their family’s wellbeing. The only noted example where parents acted primarily for altruistic reasons was in relation to their concerns of restrictive trade practices. In examples provided by some parents, there appeared to be no personal benefit for boycotting Woolworths and Coles products and stores, instead acting only upon concerns for the producers and local independent storeowners.

The following section details these findings around consumption practices and the underlying rationale for supporting such practices. Discussion of the reflexive nature of ethical consumption follows. The chapter then concludes with a review of the findings in light of existing literature and the contributions to knowledge that emerge from these.

4.1.1 Free-range and organic

Most children and parent participants identified free-range or organic produce including eggs, meat and fruit and vegetables as forms of ethical consumption.

Interviewer: Have you ever heard the term “free-range”?

Child #6: Does it mean something to do with they don’t keep them in cages?

Interviewer: Your mum was saying they buy organic fruit and veg?

Child #3: And organic chips.
Interviewer: What other organic stuff?

Child #3: Organic chicken. She gets all the meat organic. Some organic cheeses.

That’s all I can think of.

Interviewer: Why do you think she buys all the organic stuff?

Child #3: Because she’s really strict

Interviewer: Exactly. Can you think of what sort of products might be free-range?

Child #6: Eggs. Maybe some meat.

Other children provided well-considered insights into why purchasing free-range or organic produce was important. For example, a number commented on the paramount importance of the welfare of the animal.

Child #1: Yes, sometimes I ask dad “What’s the difference between ‘free-range’ eggs and other types of eggs?” and he says “The free-range ones are better because the chickens get to run around” or they’re free or something. I don’t know much about free-range.

Child #4: They’re things that haven’t been stuck in cages that are really small. We buy free-range chickens because mum doesn’t really like it because she’s vegetarian and she likes free-range because they feed it good food instead of just leaving it in a tiny cage by itself and giving it bad food.

Interviewer: Have you heard of the term free-range? Do you remember what it might mean?
Child #6: Does it mean something to do with they don’t keep them in cages?

Interviewer: Exactly. Can you think of what sort of products might be free-range?

Child #6: Eggs. Maybe some meat.

When discussing produce, other children also generally viewed organic fruit and vegetables as of superior quality to non-organic fruit and vegetables. Most children spoke in detail about the health benefits associated with eating free-range and organic food, as well as the health concerns surrounding junk food. These children also appeared aware of their parents’ perceived attitudes towards the health benefits of buying organic, often re-iterating the healthiness of eating organic.

Interviewer: Do you know why mum and dad buy products that are organic or free-range?

Child #1: So we can stay healthy.

Interviewer: Do you think mum and dad buy any products that are organic or free-range?

Child #2: Ah yeah. They usually buy organic food.

Interviewer: And do they tell you why they buy organic food?

Child #2: Because it’s less dirty and it hasn’t been sprayed with the bad stuff.

Interviewer: And why do you think that might be important for them?

Child #2: So we don’t get sick and stuff.

Children’s knowledge and awareness of their parents’ opinions regarding ethical consumption practices is relevant as socialisation into ethical consumption practices within the family context acknowledges the role of children’s understanding of other family
members ethical consumption practices, in addition to their own. This is discussed in more
detail in Chapter 5.

Interviewer: Have you ever wondered why mum and dad buy the certain products that
they buy?

Child #4: To keep us healthy

Interviewer: To keep you healthy, yes.

Child #4: To keep us healthy… So we don't get big and fat.

This child went on to explain that although his parents do not always explicitly share
their rationale behind their food choices, that he had investigated the products and come to
his own conclusions.

Interviewer: Do they ever explain it? Do they say “We buy this bread because… we
buy this chicken because…”

Child #4: No, not all the time. Sometimes they do.

Interviewer: So how do you know that they buy things to keep you healthy?

Child #4: Because sometimes I read what the packets say and they say that they’re
really healthy and stuff.

This child’s agency was apparent in actively searching for information regarding his
family’s food choices independently of the guidance or teachings of his parents. The
significance of this is also discussed further in Chapter 5 in the context of children’s
participation in their own socialisation and again in Chapter 6 regarding children’s status as
‘beings’ and not just ‘becomings’.
Even when other children could not recall specific instances when their parents explain food choices to them, they mostly assumed this was for health reasons. In this way, children’s learning around ethical consumption is not always explicit. As discussed later, children appeared to learn more tacitly through being exposed to ethical consumption decisions within the family context rather than having these explicitly explained.

*Interviewer:* Do you know why they usually go to those shops, why they might go and get their fruit and veg from Baz and Chas?’

*Child #1:* I actually do not know why. I think it’s because they just probably like the vegetables better at Baz and Chas.

*Interviewer:* Do they ever talk to you like when they say why they buy certain things, do they ever give you a reason?

*Child #4:* Not all the time.

*Interviewer:* No? So why do you think? You said that it’s just to be healthy. Are there any other reasons why your mum and dad choose certain products over others?

*Child #4:* Because sometimes there’s some foods that are not very safe around kids; there might be chemicals in them.

*Interviewer:* Do they (parents) buy a lot of organic stuff?

*Child #5:* Yes and stuff without preservatives and additives.

Despite this awareness, some children were indifferent to whether purchasing free-range or organic produce had an effect on their own preferences towards eating organic. One girl said she felt organic food was boring and when she grew up would probably try to avoid eating it. This highlights the possibility that knowing about and participating in ethical consumption practices does not necessarily mean children themselves will adopt these
practices, illuminating children’s participation in their own socialisation, which in some instances includes resisting or acting in contradiction to those teachings.

Most parents tended to show a preference, where possible, for free-range and organic eggs and meat due to a perception that animals that lived cruelty-free were more likely to result in healthier and hormone free meat. On a number of occasions, parents perceived this as a direct benefit to their children as opposed to acting on a primary concern for the welfare of the animals.

*Parent (mother) #4:* I can’t watch the documentaries because I’ve got a weak stomach but I’ve heard the way they’re treated and it just makes me feel really sick. *Interviewer:* So it doesn’t really have anything to do with taste for you; it is about the treatment of the animals? *Parent (mother) #4:* I can taste the difference personally but it’s more the treatment. I can’t see how it can’t be doing some damage to your own body eating something that’s been filled with steroids or just even had a terrible, terrible life, personally.

*Parent #2:* Probably just that when the chickens are locked up and crammed, what sort of life do you think that chicken would have had? And as a mother I’m thinking of the health part of it too. Like, what extra hormones are secreted, maybe that’s not medical fact but that’s how I think about it, is how healthy and happy is that chicken that we’re about to eat be in that environment, so it’s a health thing. Because definitely my decision is about the health of the family and ethical decisions do come second.

*Parent #2:* I suppose we talk about happy animals – it’s a health thing
Interviewer: So what’s your motivation behind buying organic?

Parent (mother) #6: Just health and family.

Parent #2’s perception extended to organic food in general, saying she felt purchasing organic food comforted her in knowing she was providing the best possible food for her children.

Parent #2: I buy organic for health… it makes me feel better that what I’m putting into them is the best that I can.

She also talked about her ‘parental duty’ to provide good examples of food choices to her children.

Parent #2: It’s a lesson to me that is important to teach, it’s a responsibility for them growing up that is as important to me as healthy food and healthy food options.

These examples show that although parents acknowledged the welfare of the animals, their concern was related to the effects this mistreatment would have on the quality of the meat or eggs and hence the quality of the product for their family. These findings are relevant in terms of the definition of ‘ethical’ provided in Chapter 2 (Graham et al., 2013), which includes doing what people believe is morally right for others. This is specifically relevant in terms of the ‘parental duty’ and responsibility parents felt in providing the best for their children. In this respect, the ‘ethical’ element of ethical consumption was not directed towards the welfare of the animals, but instead an ethical obligation towards the family.
One mother attributed a link between ethical consumption and the health of her family in terms of a direct time saving benefit. She outlined her logic behind buying organic in terms of cost and time saving measures it would provide. For her, buying one organic orange would provide the nutritional benefits of ten regular oranges. This meant an immediate cost saving (as one organic orange was cheaper than ten non-organic oranges) and time saving in not having to worry constantly about convincing her children to eat fruit to get the same nutritional benefits. She then went on to say that the benefit of this was a reduced likelihood of sickness in the family. This was a major benefit as far as she was concerned.

*Parent #3: I guess I feel like my job is easier as a mum if the children are well so I guess I spend 100% of my effort trying to keep them healthy rather than trying to mend sickness because if one of them gets sick, its generally, even if it’s a common cold, it can take a month for the household to all have a turn and get through it. So it’s a bit loss of time and generally I’m time-poor anyway so I’ll spend that little bit extra for the guarantee.*

She went on to justify her organic choices from the local farmers’ market,

*The thought of buying ten oranges from Woolworths compared to one orange at the farmers’ markets, the potency would be equal in terms of vitamin or benefit for the children so my thing is it’s going to be bloody hard to get ten oranges into the kids. I’ll just buy one and I’ve got half a chance. So I probably don’t buy as much and so we have less but better quality.*

This insight is important in terms of understanding the motivations and barriers for ethical consumption, as others have similarly identified (Burke et al., 2014; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Pezzini, 2013). Although cost in both financial terms and through perceived
inconvenience and time spent searching for and purchasing organic food is often seen as a barrier for ethical consumption (Frostling-Henningsson, Hedbom, & Wilandh, 2014; Starr, 2015), in this instance it is seen as a time saving and convenience benefit.

4.1.2 Australian Made

Purchasing products that were made in Australia or owned by Australian companies has been acknowledged in Australian popular culture as a form of ethical consumption in that it supports our local economy and ethical standards of practice can be assumed (Davis & Francis, 2014; Fozdar, 2015; Skrbis & Woodward, 2007). Purchasing ‘Australian Made’ products was seen as a form of ethical consumption by some of the children and parents within the study. The majority of children, in particular, had formed strong views that purchasing Australian made products was better than those made overseas. The reasons for this were mixed and included: the goods being better suited to Australians because they were made in Australia, that the quality of goods were superior and that products made elsewhere could be bad for Australians.

Interviewer: Why do you think we would advertise that something has been made in Australia?
Child #6: Because some foods are made out of Australia and then they’ve been travelling for a long time. Maybe get out of date, they might use preservatives and additives to keep them fresh.

Interviewer: Why do you think we put Australian Made on products?
Child #2: Because it’s helping Australia and helping the environment.

Interviewer: Do you know how it helps the environment?
Child #2: Yeah, so they don’t cut the trees or hurt the environment to make Australian
Interviewer: Why do you think it would be important to buy Australian made things?
Child #4: Because you could get food from a different country and it has to travel across the world and it wouldn’t be really free-range and really nice and yum.
Interviewer: Yes. Any other reasons why we’d buy Australian made?
Child #4: Because it’s from our country.
Interviewer: Yes.
Child #4: And from other countries you don’t know how they make it sometimes and they might make it a bit weird and it might fall apart.
Interviewer: Oh, so like a quality thing again?
Child #4: But Australia you find that it’s made in Australia and Australia doesn’t lie whereas some other countries lie.

One child felt her ability to purchase Australian made goods was limited because all toys seemed to be ‘Made in China’. This lack of opportunity to consume ethically due to a lack of immediate availability of a product highlights the commonly articulated attitude-behaviour gap where a person’s attitudes and intentions to consume ethically do not align with their actual behaviour (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Terlau & Hirsch, 2015).

Interviewer: Do you think when you go shopping you have an opportunity to think about things like if something’s free-range or if something’s made in Australia or if it’s recycled? Or do you think it’s hard with kids’ products?
Child #4: Hard.
Interviewer: It’s hard?
Child #4: Sometimes most kids’ products are from China, like from McDonalds,
they’re mostly from China.

This finding is significant in that it situates a child’s experience of a lack of opportunity to consume ethically within the context of existing literature where it is not normally noted. Although research into children’s consumption should not be restricted to “child-products” such as toys (Martens et al., 2004), the fact it is a child-specific product highlights a unique barrier for children in consuming ethically.

Some parents reported mixed reasons for preferring Australian made goods. For one parent, there was “nothing wrong” with overseas products but she felt it just made sense to purchase Australian made where possible.

Parent #5: I don’t think you’re buying an inferior product by buying the Australian ones so why would you just not buy the Australian one and just support the farmer or the fish monger or whoever it is. I don’t see the need to have to buy something from another country. I don’t think the price difference is usually that much. I would pay a little bit extra when it comes to prawns, I’d pay extra to get Australian ones rather than a product of Thailand.

However, two other parents specifically mentioned concerns with food quality (providing the example of overseas seafood farmed in poor quality water) as a reason for only buying Australian sourced seafood.

Parent #8: The only other thing I would say is that we do try and buy Australian Made, especially my husband. He quite likes that idea of buying ‘Australian Made’ as opposed to … he’ll be the one more than me to look at the package and see where it’s made. I think he thinks that it’s dodgy. Quality. I think he doesn’t trust the health
standards that are attached to it.

Parent #9: We’re not big fish or seafood eaters. I think if we were I wouldn’t be buying stuff from Asian countries I don’t think. I feel funny about that.

Both children and parent participants mentioned specific concerns regarding the quality of “Asian” products. There was an assumption that goods produced in Asian countries would be lacking in quality or could not be trusted in terms of claims made about quality. This perception was investigated by Fozdar (2015) in a broader discussion regarding Asia as a perceived threat to Australia that included perceptions about Asian made products. Where Fozdar’s study was limited to participants over the age of 18, the findings here suggest children may share such perceptions.

4.1.3 Fair-trade

When asked about Fair-trade, participant responses generally showed either a lack of support for the initiative, or a lack of knowledge. Almost all children relied on its name to explain what they thought it meant. Few responses reflected any deeper understanding beyond it being linked with “trading fairly”. Parents, on the other hand, were able to easily provide examples of Fair-trade and spoke in detail of exploitative manufacturing practices overseas and what items they purchased which would support these practices. Examples included coffee, chocolate, i-phones and clothing made overseas. Despite what appeared to be detailed knowledge about exploitative labour practices, few families went out of their way to avoid products that employed such practices. Although many parents reported a lack of suitable or affordable alternatives as reasons for not supporting Fair-trade, most also openly conceded that unless there was a direct benefit for the family to purchase ethically, they would be unlikely to support it. As mentioned previously, this provides another example of
the best interests of the family outweighing concerns about the ethical issues attributed to some consumption decisions, as identified previously in discussions regarding free-range and organic produce. This was especially true of one mother who spoke in-depth about the importance of organic food and chemical-free cleaning products but felt being concerned with exploitative labour practices was not important to her. When probed further, she conceded:

*Parent (mother) #6: I don’t get a direct benefit. That’s probably my blind spot.*

She went on to ask her child to explain to her what he had learned at school about exploitative labour practices overseas:

*Parent (mother) #6: Because when we went shopping the other day the girls went shopping, it must have been you (referring to child sitting with us) who was saying you watched something at school. Why don’t you tell Kate about that?*

*Child #6: That if all clothes come from different places and we watched TV and it was saying that these jeans that they have, they look really good and they looked expensive but the people that made them were really poor and some people even don’t know that some countries get 20c an hour.*

*Parent (mother) #6: So that’s probably, I kind of know that but that’s probably where I go; the kids are growing, I don’t want to spend money on clothes; it’s Best & Less.*

This example highlights two important points with respect to children and ethical consumption. Firstly, this example provides insight into how children are aware of issues regarding ethical consumption and able to communicate those issues with their parents, but are not necessarily empowered to act on that knowledge themselves, or influence whether others act ethically. Secondly, it provides an excellent example of how children learn about
ethical consumption elsewhere and subsequently bring this new knowledge into conversations regarding ethical consumption within the family context. It highlights how children actively initiate and participate in conversations about ethical consumption within the family context and the ways in which the process of socialisation is dynamic and reciprocal. This is discussed again in further detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

Other parents mirrored a similar position in terms of knowing about the issue of exploitative labour but not acting upon it in terms of their consumption choices. Again, it appeared that unless there was a direct benefit for the family to consume ethically, it was unlikely to be practiced.

*Parent #11:* The area that we really, really suck at in our house … we buy cheap clothes and I’m really conscious that a T-shirt in Cotton On Kids for $5 means that someone was paid really poorly in India or China.

*Parent #2:* I don’t know … if I knew, if I looked into it and knew which stores are over exploiting kids or whatever then I wouldn’t shop there. But it’s a total blind spot for me.

*Interviewer:* You were saying you were really into reading the books about food and health. Do you think that’s why, because the motivation ultimately around a lot of your ethical food choices is around health?

*Parent #3:* Probably. It’s a direct benefit from it whereas I don’t get a direct benefit (from ensuring clothing is ethically produced), it costs more as well. So it’s like it costs more for you to buy ethical clothing.
One father, however, believed Fair-trade was largely just marketing hype and made little difference to the lives of the coffee growers and pickers.

*Parent (father) #6: I find Fair-trade as a slogan and publicising it at the counter, it’s just another marketing scheme. It’s them pitching for that market of Fair-trade. The same company might have some back laws about Brazil, they’re not forthcoming about that but like the café saying “We’re Fair-trade and we buy our coffee from here”. It’s just a pitch at us to make the choice to go that way.*

He went on to justify purchasing clothing that may be using exploitative labour practices because he considered the lower wages were still a fair amount given his belief they were equitable in that local context. This argument aligns with positions put forward by Kates (2015) and Powell and Zwolinski (2012) that rationalises while conditions in “sweat-shops” may be unhealthy or dangerous, a worker’s choice to work there should be respected. Instead, this particular father perceives the unethical element of the supply chain instead sits with wholesalers and retailers over-inflating retail prices to make unproportioned profits.

*Parent 6: It’s not so much the people making it… because in their economy it might be a fair job… Those people were stoked because there’s industry and there’s money when they’ve been in dirt and now they’ve got a job so they’re stoked. But the difference between our retail price and the wholesale price at their end is really out of proportion.*

Typically, concerns with unethical practices in clothing industries focus on the conditions within production lines (Goworek, 2011). Perceiving the excessive mark-up of the retail price of clothing as the ethical issue instead of focusing on the conditions in which the product was made is a perspective of ethical consumption not normally considered. Again, as
previously stated, this further underlines how the ethical consumption concerns of the parent participants are influenced by the impact or effect on themselves or their family – as opposed to broader societal impacts or concerns about social justice.

4.1.4 Environmentally friendly products

When asked about purchasing environmentally friendly products such as those that were chemical-free, or were recyclable, quite a number of the children discussed the need to reduce landfill and environmental concerns. Some showed a strong awareness of recycling, describing the need to recycle as a way of not making too much rubbish and saving trees from being cut down. All children appeared to understand both the need to recycle packaging, as well as the need to look for and purchase products that could later be recycled. Most could easily describe how to know whether packaging was recyclable by looking for the recycling logo on the back or bottom of the container and that it needed to be placed in yellow recycling bins. Again, they recalled seeing the recycling logo on yellow bins.

Interviewer: I’ve got this folder and in it it’s got some logos and I was just wondering if you recognise any of those logos and what you might think that they might mean.

Child #6: This is to recycle (pointing to recycling logo).

Interviewer: Where would you see this sign?

Child #6: On a bin and some food packaging.

The same logos were shown to Child #1 who also identified the recycling logo, which prompted the following conversation:

Interviewer: Recycling, excellent. Where have you seen this?

Child #1: On the side of – what are they called – it’s like a square drink with a
Interviewer: A Popper?

Child #1: Yes, a Popper. On those I see the sign maybe on the bottom. I see it on cans of soda, I see it on heaps of things.

Interviewer: What do you think that symbol means? We said recycling but why do you think they would put that on products like milk and Poppers and stuff?

Child #1: Because if they didn’t, you wouldn’t know which bin to put it in, the yellow or the red.

Interviewer: Exactly.

Child #1: If there was only the red bin which is for waste, landfill would cover nearly an entire country maybe.

These examples extends existing evidence about children’s knowledge of recycling (see for example Grønhøj and Thøgersen, 2012) by acknowledging children’s awareness of purchasing recyclable products in the first instance, and not just the act of recycling post consumption.

When asked about purchasing environmentally friendly products such as those that were chemical-free, or were recyclable, some parents spoke about the direct health impacts on the children, as well as environmental concerns. It was only when the subject changed to over-consumption or the purchasing of poor quality products with a short lifecycle that most parents spoke about landfill issues and a need to moderate the volume of consumption.

Parent #5: But we’re not buying the plastic.

Interviewer: So again you’re avoiding it. You’re not buying the plastic because of the toxins?

109
Parent #5: Yeah and just the cheap landfill style of stuff that’s disposable. The toys and things we have bought have been from Dragonfly. They’re wood based. They’re wool and felt and things like that. Some of them are made in Germany. But they’re built for the long haul. They’re not just to be used and then thrown in the bin and you get a new toy. We hand them down to our cousins.

For one mother, however, her focus was more on the possible harm for her children, as opposed to the environmental factors.

Parent #3: There’s definitely an emphasis on buying earth friendly products in terms of the cleaning stuff and I remember having a conversation with (child) because she was like “I don’t like these bottles as much as the other ones because they’re not as colourful” and I would say “Oh not these ones are good.” I probably didn’t go as far as sharing her responsibility in the role of it by any means. I was thinking about their exposure to chemicals me as a mother what I should be doing for them and probably didn’t go as far as the benefit it was having on the environment to them.

This is another example of how ethical consumption practices (this time, the purchase of environmentally friendly products) are motivated by direct health benefits to the family, as opposed to broader societal and altruistic benefits.

4.1.5 Moderating against over-consumption

For most children, the issue of over-consumption and avoiding the purchase of low quality products was very important to them and seen as a means of being responsible. They appeared to believe cheap purchases often meant they would soon break or were of lesser quality than more expensive products.
Interviewer: How do you work out whether something is a good price to pay?

Child #4: If it’s really cheap, sometimes, most of the time when it’s really cheap, it’s not that good. It’s a bit bad and crappy like and it can break easily whereas expensive things are better because they don’t break and you know that they won’t break because they’re more expensive.

Interviewer: Why else do you think some things are expensive? Do you think they cost more to make?

Child #4: Because they look better than other clothes.

Interviewer: Oh, they look better than other clothes? Yes, cool. Any other reasons why you don’t buy the really cheap stuff? No? You just worry about the quality?

Child #4: Yes.

Interviewer: What does being responsible when shopping mean to you?

Child 5: Don’t buy lollies all the time. Don’t waste money for stuff that you don’t need. And don’t waste the stuff that you’ve bought.

Another child retold a story where his uncle bought him a remote-controlled helicopter as a gift that soon broke because of its apparent poor quality. The child went on to tell me this would not have happened if the uncle had purchased a more expensive helicopter.

Child #1: It’s even with toys; I would think about the quality if it’s plastic or metal, iron and those things or remote-controlled. Oh yes, I remember for Christmas one of my uncles, he bought me this really cool remote-controlled helicopter and it broke the first day I got home. Maybe he just looked at it and thought that looked pretty cool, then bought it for me and (my brother) got a car and that’s working really well. I’m a bit annoyed by that and I wish he looked at what it was made of, how to charge the
batteries. He didn’t give us much information about it.

For the children who exhibited an understanding of the apparent need to purchase higher quality goods, it was coupled with an understanding of the need to save their money. Most felt it was important to save money so they could purchase items when they are older.

*Child #8*: I’m not allowed to use the money until I pay off my DS repayment plan so I’ve got heaps of money and I’m saving up for a Wii.

*Interviewer*: So you think it’s better to buy one big thing than lots of little things?

*Child #8*: Yeah.

*Interviewer*: Have mum and dad ever talked to you about what it means to be responsible with your money?

*Child #3*: They once said don’t spend so quickly because when you get older you might need it. So they’re saying maybe save it until when you are a little bit older.

Children’s perspectives about buying higher quality goods and resisting multiple purchases of lower quality goods align with literature regarding anti-consumption (Black & Cherrier, 2010; Cherrier et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2009). Children displayed similar motivations for anti-consuming as highlighted within the literature. This included moderating consumption due to concerns about its impact on the environment or unethical production (Black & Cherrier, 2010; Cherrier et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2009). However, these findings extend that existing knowledge by locating child’s own experiences with anti-consumption as opposed to the passive influence on them of their parents’ anti-consumption habits, which is more commonly cited.
One child spoke about using his own money to help pay for household needs or donating it to charity. His apparent willingness to use his own money to help pay for household expenses again resonates with the moral basis of what constitutes ‘ethical’, as suggested in Chapter 2. Here the child appears to be drawing upon his own ethical standards in terms of his obligations to others and notions of fairness in assessing what it means to be responsible. He also draws upon this obligation in a broader societal sense when describing how he donates to charity to help “poor” people. In this sense, ethical consumption involves a moral obligation linked to distribution of wealth.

*Interviewer: What about to be responsible when you go shopping? What do you think that might mean?*

*Child #12: Pushing the trolley, helping Mum get the groceries and using some of your pocket money to help spend.*

*Interviewer: That’s great. So you help pay for things. And what do you think it means to be responsible with your money?*

*Child #12: Letting people have it if they’re poor.*

*Interviewer: …So give it to charity?*

*Child #12: Yeah. Putting it into one of those church boxes.*

Moderating against over-consumption was an area of ethical concern most parents felt very strongly about. Their comments on the subject ranged from concerns about waste associated with poor quality disposable toys or clothing that they knew would quickly become landfill. There was a strong preference for gifts and purchases of toys and clothing that was of higher quality, with the potential to become hand-me-downs. Concerns about the relationship between exploitative labour practices and inexpensive, low quality products did not arise in the conversations with parents. Instead, preferences to avoid cheap, low quality
clothing was generally associated with landfill issues or with a desire to not waste money. The importance of quality was linked to value for money for both children and parents.

Parents appeared to be the drivers of the message that children should be saving. School banking, the use of moneyboxes and pooling of funds received at Christmas and birthdays were all tactics parents adopted in an effort to teach their children about saving. However, parents often felt they had limited success.

*Parent #10:* This is our whole thing because last year, the pocket money fiasco ended up with lots of…

*Interviewer:* Not that it has a name; the fiasco of 2012.

*Parent #10:* Seriously, it’s like, this is just a disaster; they’re just buying rubbish. They don't have so much money that they can afford anything decent so it ended up just being rubbishy stuff and I just think that’s just so wasteful really. It’s wasting money because they don’t even love it after a day. So we had to think about another strategy. It did bug us and I was really torn between the whole “This is their money. I should let them buy what they want because they’ve saved this money” and the whole “That’s just rubbish. Let me tell you what I want you to buy with your money”.

*Parent #12:* My grandmother sent them money for Easter so they’ve put it in their Dollarmite account. That was hard to explain to “H” because she wanted her money in her moneybox in her room so we had to explain the whole bank thing to her…“C” understands that you put your money into the bank and it’s yours and the whole interest thing. So I think it’s good to start early to get them to save. I do say we can’t afford that a lot. We’ve got to keep the house running … With lights, I’m always “You need to turn the lights off, we have to pay for the power every time
you turn the light on” and they’re like “Oh, do we?” And the water and everything.

Parent #7: Actually “J” had quite a bit of money saved up from birthdays; about $30 and she ended up giving some to “S” to take to school … it was nice. And so she gets it. I was doing pocket money for chores but it was just starting to go “I did this, I want money, I did this I want money” and I said that’s not the way it goes.

Some parents spoke about trying to dissuade children from shopping at two-dollar shops where toys and other items usually of low quality could be purchased cheaply.

Parent #7: Big W have this aisle called the $1 aisle and there’s everything for $1. It’s all crap but it’s like a bag of marbles or a bubble stick or something. I’m trying to gradually teach them the value of money.

Another way some parents felt they could moderate over-consumption was through the gifts children received for their birthdays and holidays.

Parent #7: They’ve got heaps of shit and I don’t know where it comes from (laughs). But then for your birthday you will get five or six presents and then all your friends and that. If I was going to buy them stuff I’m more inclined to go to Spotlight and get a crafty thing for them. And when I spend money it’s usually on clothes because that’s what they need.”

Many described their disbelief at the amount of gifts children now received on these occasions and children’s lack of appreciation with receiving them.

Parent #8: They were getting the presents, ripping the paper off, they were getting
from both sets of grandparents, aunts and uncles and cousins; I just said to my husband I feel really embarrassed by the whole situation which is ripping paper off and stockpiling these presents and so we decided (to put a stop to it) … I spoke to my husband’s sisters and my sister in law and said “we’ve got so much stuff and we’re running around at Xmas time spending all this money, I really hate it.”

Parent (father) #1: Well just in consumerism full stop. Just when it said “birthday or Christmas” and (child) will say “I want a Nerf gun, I want a soccer ball, I want this, I want that” – they do seem to think that we can just produce this stuff and they can have so much and then I say “What about all the kids” – you know that typical “What about all the kids who don’t even get anything”.

Some parent participants discussed strategies they adopted in order to moderate this over-consumption. For example, some asked family members to send money so the child could pool the funds to purchase more expensive, higher quality items in order to curb what they thought were wasteful and unnecessary presents. Alternatively, the funds were used to contribute to planned family holidays. This highlights a recurring preference of parents for consumption in terms of experiences as opposed to products. Many preferred to spend money on family holidays in lieu of gifts in the holiday season. The rationale behind this was two-fold. Not only did it hope to moderate over-consumption and waste from unnecessary gifts, but also it was believed that more would be gained from travel experiences and time together as a family, than possessing more material goods.

Parent #7: He’s (referring to ex-husband and father of children) more inclined to take them somewhere, which is fine. He took them to the snow last year and they’re going again this year. I’d rather that than him constantly buying him things.
Parent #8: And the other thing and I know “N” mentioned this as well, because we do a lot of travelling so we talked to them about we’re saving to go on a trip and often if they ask for something we’ll say no because we’re saving our money away to go overseas; we’re going to Finland at the end of the year so that’s what we’re saving for this year. So we talk to them about that. They get bits and pieces and things like that but when they ask for stuff we say it’s something they can ask for their birthday but we’re not buying it now because remember we’re saving for a trip.

Parent #10: I spoke to my family as well because we were buying presents for both sides no matter where we were because we alternate so we’ve cut out buying presents completely for the side we’re not at for Xmas and then the Xmas that just went, we had a big family trip; there were twenty of us that went to Fiji so we said let’s not buy any Xmas presents for anyone other than the fact that Santa turned up and we bought I think a present for Grandma. We just said we’re not going to spend money on Xmas presents because we’re all going on this big family trip and we’ll do things like the banana boat and stuff like that.

Driven by a tight weekly budget, one family talked about how they moderated over-consumption by making every day necessities (such as school supplies, clothing and shoes) into birthday or Christmas gifts for their children instead. Acknowledging that these items would need to be purchased anyway, the mother believed it not only enabled her to economise on a tight family budget, but also limited the amount of gifts she would otherwise have to buy if the necessities were bought without occasion.

Parent (stepfather) #4: I’m quite surprised how conditioned they (the children) have
been. For me, I’d like to be able to do more luxury presents but I was really surprised that when the birthdays rolled around, how practical (the mother) was. She (the mother) was like “Okay, it’s Christmas time. We’ll get the new school bags for Christmas”… They’re really excited. Yes, pencil cases. You may as well, you’re going to have to buy it later down the track.

Interviewer: I remember getting all that when I was a kid.

Parent (stepfather) #4: Yes, I would like that that could be a back to school kind of a treat but practicality says that we’ve kind of got to do what we can with a little budget. I’m quite surprised that school shoes were (stepdaughter’s) birthday present and those kind of practical things, if you could afford it, they’d just be everyday items – “Oh you need new shoes. Throw the old ones out, let’s get new ones” but mum has kind of got them thinking that these necessities, I suppose, are luxury items.

Parent (mother) #4: Well they are still – they were $60 shoes. They are Converse with Batman on them… They are really nice shoes and “You can go and pick whichever ones you want”. So, she does know – we are trying to teach her about good quality.

From the interviews with parents, over-consumption and the associated waste of money and resources that are derived from it appear to be one of their greatest concerns regarding consumption. Many parents described more “ethical” alternatives to include a preference of pooling funds to buy higher quality goods, prioritising spending on “experiences” such as family holidays which were seen as having more value, and re-casting the use of “everyday” purchases and “needs” into special occasion gifts (such as for birthdays).
4.1.6 Shop locally

Most children identified shopping locally as a form of ethical consumption and articulated an understanding of why their parents chose to shop locally for items such as fruit and vegetables and meat, as opposed to purchasing through major grocery chains. However, children appeared to have little control of where and when they themselves could choose to shop locally. Although limiting the volition of their own ethical consumption, their knowledge of shopping locally as a form of ethical consumption is an excellent example of how children understand and articulate ethical consumption practices within a family context. The fact they were aware of their parents’ preferences again shows how children’s understanding of ethical consumption is shaped by the tacit messages they receive within their family contexts through everyday practices.

*Interviewer*: Do you know where your parents normally go shopping for groceries or other items?

*Child #6*: The fruit and veg… we normally go to Kenny Liddles.

*Interviewer*: Is that just a fruit and veg shop? And do you know why your mum and dad might choose to go to those places shopping?

*Child #6*: I think Kenny Liddle maybe because the grow it all themselves… I think because they might not put preservatives in them.

*Interviewer*: What about things like meat and eggs? Do you know where they buy that normally?

*Child #6*: There’s a butcher here and we get our ham and the bacon from there and it’s really good.

*Interviewer*: And do you know why mum and dad go to the butchers and not to Coles?

*Child #6*: Well the butcher up here makes all his own meat.
Interviewer: Do you think it might be better?

Child #6: Yes.

Most parents also discussed shopping locally as a form of ethical consumption. For them, a preference to shop locally was almost entirely reserved the practice for shopping at green grocers and butchers, although some did also mention smaller general grocery stores and second-hand stores. Buying from farmers’ markets (whose stalls run solely by the producer selling direct to the public) was also seen as a form of ethical consumption. For some parents, though, the convenience of being able to purchase all grocery needs from one store at convenient opening times outweighed the desire to purchase locally. For others, making detours on the way home from work or extra stops in addition to the large grocery stores was commonplace and not seen as inconvenient.

Parent 10: I tend to go to the separate fruit shop because it’s easy and it’s fresh and it’s local.

Parent #2: (my husband’s) mum and dad are also very much about supporting the local farmers and the local produce which is what we would love to do too and we do that as much as we can by shopping at grower’s markets.

In addition to those ethical consumption practices described by both children and parents, other practices were only mentioned by parent participants. As Research Question One seeks to understand how both children and parents perceive and practice ethical consumption, it is relevant to provide a brief overview of those practices only mentioned by parents. Doing so also provides us with a full picture of what ethical consumption practices are evident within the family context and is also very relevant to later discussion of children’s socialisation with ethical consumption, as discussed in the subsequent chapter.
4.1.7 Restrictive trade practices

Five parent participants named restrictive trade practices as an ethical consumption issue of importance to them. All five made specific reference to the perceived duopoly between Woolworths and Coles (see Umberger, Scott, and Stringer (2008)). “Milk wars” were readily provided as an example of restrictive trade practices of concern⁴. Some parent participants in the study perceived this competition tactic was unethical and spoke about how they avoided purchasing milk from these retailers, or preferred in general to shop in stores not owned by Woolworths or Coles. This concern also extended to the perception that Woolworths and Coles are restricting competition through their own branded grocery lines meaning independent brands had less chance of surviving in the marketplace as they lacked the support from the large grocery chains. Another concern was over the vast variety of products these brands now sold (from grocery items, to petrol and insurance) which again were seen as limiting competition.

Parent (stepfather) #4: Well I’m glad we spend a bit more on milk because I heard it’s pretty tough. I did hear a dairy farmer on the radio talking about how he had to take his kids out-of-school to help him on the farm pretty much because of the milk prices going down. I try and get stuff that’s not Woolworths branded because I’m like “Well they’re going to take over the world sooner or later”. They’ve got the petrol stations, they’ve got groceries and they’re going to pretty much push everyone else out of the market and there’s going to be no variety of product because theirs is the cheapest and it’s consistently cheaper than everybody else. That’s kind of scary.

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⁴ “Milk wars” refers to the general perception that dairy farmers are underpaid for the milk they supply to supermarkets, so Coles and Woolworths can compete with each other on low prices.
One parent followed his concern about the monopolisation of the market with a general distrust of the quality and authenticity of ethical consumption claims that these large grocery stores made (particularly in reference to claims of free-range meat and eggs).

*Parent (father) #1* : You can’t believe anything that Woolies tell you. They bullshit about their free-range eggs and they bullshit about their pork and the whole lot.

Those that showed a concern for the issue of restrictive trade practices also tended to show support for local producers and a preference to shop locally from independent business owners.

*Parent (mother) #6* : Because I don’t like shopping in the big chains and I want to buy local as much as I can so that a lot of the fruit and veg are local and the butcher that we go to has his own farm just locally.

*Parent #3* : I would struggle to go to the local food shop if it wasn’t good quality, for sure… and I want my dollar to buy me the best food I can buy but if the food and the produce are even comparable in price to Coles I would still choose to go to the local produce people if I can.

A preference to not shop at Coles or Woolworths or support restrictive trade practices is the only example of ethical consumption provided by parent participants that was not motivated primarily by a perceived direct benefit to themselves or their family. Instead, parents’ motivations appeared to show a concern for the welfare of others in the supply chain. In this sense, parents appeared to act altruistically without personal gain. However, this same altruistic concern was not extended to workers overseas particularly in the garment industry, previously explored. Here instead, parents described full knowledge of the poor working
conditions and pay rates but cited their lack of concern to avoid products made under these conditions as a “blind spot”. It would seem in this instance that a locus of concern or moral obligation becomes apparent in terms of the parents’ ethical consumption practices. At the centre of this concern is the health and welfare of themselves and their family. Extending from this is a concern for other Australian producers and farmers, and at the outer layer of the locus of concern is the welfare of overseas workers within labour markets. Children on the other hand appear to hold the welfare of others (people and animals) at the centre of their locus of concern. This conceptualisation of a locus of concern with respect to ethical consumption provides an understanding of what logic may be used as people adapt, negotiate and choose what practices they adopt. It affirms the assertions within this thesis that people’s ethical consumption is not only subjective, but also fluid, negotiable and sometimes contradictory depending on particular situations and contexts.

Although children did not specifically mention restrictive trade practices such as those provided above, they were well aware of their parents’ preference to shop locally where possible. This is an example of children’s exposure and awareness of ethical consumption practices within a family context through implicit learning as opposed to direct conversations or discussions. I explore this in more detail in Chapter 5.

4.1.8 ‘Hand-me-downs’

More than half the parents interviewed discussed the practice of receiving and forwarding on ‘hand-me-down’ clothing. Despite hand-me-downs and recycling clothes commonly acknowledged as a form of ethical anti-consumption (Albinsson, Wolf, & Kopf, 2010), many parent participants did not initially identify this as a form of ethical consumption, instead informally referring to it in conversations about other related topics such as moderating over-consumption or the benefits of buying higher quality goods. It was
only usually after some discussion and reflection that parents identified ‘hand-me-down’ practices as a form of ethical consumption. This is an interesting finding as it highlights the fact that although not consciously participating in an “ethical” consumption practice (that is with no expressed moral purpose or sense of obligation to act in a particular way), the participants’ behaviour still aligns with notions of ethical consumption commonly cited in ethical consumption literature (see for example Albinsson et al., 2010). Interestingly, despite what appears a common use of hand-me-downs within the families interviewed none of the children discussed hand-me-downs either in general or as a specific means of ethical consumption. These insights of ethical consumption occurring but not being recognised as such raises an important question about whether ethical consumption can exist without conscious awareness of the act. It also highlights the potentially reflexive stance required for ethical consumption given the participants’ increased awareness will likely influence their perceptions and understandings of their consumption behaviour in the future.

Hand-me-downs in the form of toys and clothing between friends and families, as well as the use of op-shops, appeared to be the most common means of both giving and receiving second-hand goods. Children with older siblings seem to receive the most hand-me-downs, although parents reported friends with older children of the same sex often gave them hand-me-downs too. All remarked that the high quality of the clothes meant that were suitable for re-use.

*Parent #10:* Yes, we get loads of hand-me-downs; we’re just really lucky that way. *(Referring to Child A) actually just got a bucket load of clothes from a friend’s son and he thought it was Christmas because he’s just gone up a size which meant that Child B gets all Child A’s clothes and Child C gets all Child B’s clothes and Child D has had heaps and heaps of hand-me-downs. I love op-shopping, I love op-shopping*
whether it’s for the kids or for myself but I love op-shopping so I really like recycling
clothes, especially if they’re decent. I don’t like recycling rubbish but I like recycling
decent clothes. Also, if the kids need clothes and there’s no hand-me-downs well then
we’ll go and buy them.

Parent #2: We’ve got some really good friends in Melbourne who had one boy and
one girl and their boy was a couple of years older than (my child) and she gave us
everything and she bought Esprit, Gap – she bought all those – they saw all of our
boys through and they’ve moved onto my nephew because they’re still in really great
condition…

One mum who spoke about receiving hand-me-downs from a friend, referred to her as
an “Australian shopper”. She then went on to clarify that meant the clothes she gave away
were always of good quality, even after they had been worn.

Parent #12: She’s an Australian shopper which I love so she just brings over the big
stripe bags full and it’s like the whole front room I’ll just put them into sizes and then
I have to put away things … if I had to buy “C” clothes as well, I’d have to layby six
months before. And some of them, they’re that good a quality of clothes, I’ve handed
them to my sister and then she’s handed them down after that.

This reference to quality was predominant throughout conversations about hand-me-
downs. Those who gave hand-me-downs away said that they would only do so with quality
goods, which was an extra incentive for spending more money on better quality clothing in
the first place. The same went for toys, which they would only pass on if they were of high
enough quality, with wooden and natural fibre toys seen as the most suitable.
For two mums, if they could not source a needed item through hand-me-downs, they would then look to op-shops as an option. These two parents also mentioned sourcing their own clothes through second-hand stores, too.

Parent #10: I love op-shopping, I love op-shopping whether it’s for the kids or for myself but I love op-shopping so I really like recycling clothes, especially if they’re decent. I don’t like recycling rubbish but I like recycling decent clothes. Also, if the kids need clothes and there’s no hand-me-downs well then we’ll go and buy them.

One mother mentioned that she thought hand-me-downs and second-hand shopping were a good way to introduce conversations about recycling and reduction of landfill with her children.

Parent #3: With clothes, we all try and use what’s second-hand first because we’ve had this conversation with landfill so even when we talk about cheap shoes; they’re not going to last very long and they’re going to break in two weeks and they’re going to end up in the middle of the earth and they’re going to create more rubbish. So there’s definitely a conversation about recycling and re-using. We talk about that a lot in my household. Just because that’s something that we all value, I think even the kids. So that kind of extends itself to the choices you buy sometimes.

For all other parents, second-hand shopping and hand-me-downs appeared relevant only for their children’s needs.

4.1.9 Summary of children and parents’ perceptions and practices

This section has explored the participating children and parents’ perceptions and practices of ethical consumption as discussed by both or either of them. The findings show
children are aware of a wide range of ethical consumption practices including free-range, organic, Fair-trade, shopping locally and being environmentally conscious. Most children were able to identify aspects of ethical consumption within their own consumption practices and articulate concerns over the protection of the environment and animals, social issues and waste or harm minimisation. Many children gave detailed accounts of the benefits of ethical consumption, both for themselves, workers engaged in the production of goods, the environment and in terms of animal welfare. They also gave well-considered responses with respect to the need to moderate over-consumption. The myriad of examples provided by children in articulating what they constitute as ethical consumption, and how they practice ethical consumption within their own lives, converges with findings within previous studies on adult ethical consumption (see for example Cairns et al., 2013; Cowe & Williams, 2000; Egels-Zandén & Hansson, 2015; Lewis & Huber, 2015; Sachdeva et al., 2015 Sandıkcı & Ekici, 2009). It also aligns with Cherrier’s (2007) suggestion that ethical consumption includes a constellation of possibilities for discerning and selecting ethical products, organisations and ethical consumption patterns. While convergences between these findings and those in other studies have been highlighted, attention has also been drawn to how these findings address an evident gap in the literature concerning children’s voices with respect to ethical consumption. Embedded within these practices were rich accounts of their motivations and the barriers children and parents encountered to consuming ethically. These included motivations based on perceived health benefits for the family; cost- and/or time-saving; and altruistic motivations; and barriers focused on a mistrust of ethical claims made, perceived additional costs or time associated with ethical consumption and a lack of knowledge or opportunity to participate. These motivations and barriers provide important insights into how children and parents’ perceive ethical consumption. Such perceptions
appear to be negotiated and managed through a reflexive process that involves both self-interest and the interests of others. I now explore these in more detail below.

4.2 The dynamic, negotiated and contradictory nature of ethical consumption

During discussions with parents, opinions differed with respect to perceptions of the cost and time associated with ethical consumption. Some of these differences in opinions appeared between separate participants highlighting how ethical consumption is subjective in its definition and application. At other times, differences in opinion became apparent where both parents were interviewed together, and as a result, the data captured how ethical consumption is negotiated, adapted and tempered to accommodate individual opinions and practices within a family context.

4.2.1 Perceptions regarding cost and time associated with ethical consumption.

The identification of cost and time as both a motivation and a barrier by different participants highlights the subjective nature of ethical consumption. Although children did not associate added time or cost specifically with consuming ethically, they did consider the added expense of purchasing higher quality products. The reasons they gave for purchasing higher quality products were often framed as moderating over-consumption (which they identified as a form of ethical consumption). Opinions between parent participants varied as to whether cost and time were a motivation or a barrier to ethical consumption.

*Parent #5: There was probably a mindset that it’s probably more expensive. Just the convenience of going to supermarkets is easier. With detergent I get the liquid one, I feel good because it’s Earth Choice but I don’t use a lot of it so it doesn’t matter to me that it might cost a little bit more because I don’t use a lot. I am actually proud to*
have it if it’s sitting out that it’s eco. I just don’t want that cheap bright green stuff in
my house!

Parent (mother) #6: It’s cheaper to buy in bulk, just to plan it and to get it organised
but I can get great organic produce cheaper than I can getting it commercially from
Coles… but there’s a lot more I could be doing. Cost and convenience definitely
comes into it.

However, Parent (mother) #6 then gave contradictory examples as to whether she
perceived ethical consumption as more expensive or time-consuming, describing the effort of
making her own washing powder as minimal compared to the health benefits in return.

Interviewer: So you’re pretty motivated obviously by ethical consumption?

Parent (mother) #6: Yeah … we’re not 100%. Probably half. There’s a lot more I
could be doing. It does cost and convenience definitely comes into it.

Interviewer: But things like making your own washing powder and not having
cleaning products, that doesn’t sound very convenient.

Parent (mother) #6: Well it is. It takes me 20 seconds to make my own washing
powder.

These examples again show the subjective nature of ethical consumption decisions in
terms of contradictions between parent participants’ perceptions of the costs and time
associated with ethical consumption. Such contradictions in perceptions illuminate the
difficulty in trying to encapsulate ethical consumption as a fixed set of practices, rules or
morals. Instead, the findings from the interviews with parents highlight that ethical
consumption as practiced in a family context is reflexive and mediated by the morals, values
and priorities of each individual member. The example provided below shows how
competing priorities between a stepfather and mother are negotiated with respect to the purchase of free-range meat.

*Parent (stepfather) #4:* It’s just cost for me. I’m practical… the free-range eggs you can taste the difference. With meat, I don’t know.

*Parent (mother) #4:* I’m fussy about all the free-range; even though it costs more we still always get that.

*Interviewer:* So the chicken is free-range?

*Parent (mother) #4:* Yes.

*Interviewer:* Do you go for free-range eggs as well?

*Parent (mother) #4:* Yes, even though they’re more expensive. Definitely.

*Interviewer:* Yes, so some things it just doesn’t matter about the price, you’d just rather…?

*Parent (mother) #4:* It’s usually just the things that I eat too. I don't think we’re as fussy about sausages and steak because only my husband eats them. I don't make him buy free-range steaks and things.

This comment is pertinent as it exemplifies how individual consumption habits are maintained on a personal level, however in a collective context are negotiated to accommodate others. This finding contributes to a departure in predominant thinking where ethical consumption has been typically conceptualised as a set of morals or values pursued solely on an individual basis, and instead acknowledges it as a reflexive and negotiated practice influenced by the context of the decision (Adams & Raisborough, 2010; Cherrier, 2007). This is further exemplified where parents felt as though they lacked the support of their spouse in practicing ethical consumption.
4.2.2 Family dynamics and the reflexivity of ethical consumption

In previous sections, examples showed how a lack of support or common concern from others affected children’s abilities to practice ethical consumption. These included a child’s concern about working conditions in the garment industry made overseas, but his mother’s acknowledgement that they did not act upon these. Another parent openly admitted that she knew her daughter’s ethical stance would mean she would not eat meat if she knew about the poor treatment of animals, and as such deliberately keep these facts from her. In both instances, children were not supported by their parents to act upon their ethical consumption concerns. This example supports the findings within a recent study by Heath et al. (2014), where mothers experienced a conflict of interest between consuming ethically (in the sense of broader societal concerns) and providing what they thought was the best for their children. In that study, mothers also prioritised the welfare or interests of their children.

Some children also noted a lack of support to consume ethically they received from others. One child described how her birth father would spoil her during his visits by purchasing junk food, which she did not always enjoy.

*Interviewer: What about when you go shopping with your other dad? What’s that like?*

*Child #5: He usually just spoils us.*

*Interviewer: Okay.*

*Child #5: He usually gets us junk food all the time.*

*Interviewer: Is that good?*

*Child #5: No.*

*Interviewer: Oh, it’s not good? No?*

*Child #5: Sometimes it’s good.*
Interviewer: But you prefer the healthier stuff other times?

Child #5: Yes.

Interviewer: Any other sort of stuff?

Child #5: I like junk food in the times that I would like junk food but I don't really want junk food when I’m with him because he give us way too much.

The child went on to describe times when her father would take her to a department store and buy expensive presents for her and her sister. When I interviewed her mother, she expressed frustration at this as she felt his extravagance undermined her teaching the children about moderation. She was further frustrated as she was left to purchase all day-to-day needs such as food, school supplies and other household bills without any monetary support from him. She felt this made her out to be the “baddy” and her efforts to provide what she could to the children on her limited budget was under-appreciated.

When asked what barriers inhibit ethical consumption, some other mothers also expressed frustration for not having the support of their spouse in consuming ethically. In turn, they felt this undermined efforts to teach their children about ethical consumption.

Interviewer: So does your husband support your choices?

Parent #3: No, he thinks I’m over the top. But he doesn’t cook or shop so he doesn’t have any rights.

Interviewer: So he thinks the whole organic thing is over the top?

Parent #3: He thinks our kids are insanely healthy and that I shouldn’t worry so much. Whereas I think it’s worthy of worrying about… I get zero backup. It’s a solo train I’m driving!

Interviewer: Zero backup in “I’m walking away” sense or is it like in the background
sense?

Parent #3: I’m lucky enough that he would never put me down or undermine my
authority in front of the children so that’s nice. But there’s definitely a turn the other
way. But he does not like waste so whatever I’ve cooked he will always be strong in
authority about them eating it because he doesn’t like waste or money wasted because
generally it’s his money that we’re spending.

Interviewer: In a different circumstance say for instance you guys living separately
and it was week on week off with the kids, what sort of foods … would there be a
polarisation?

Parent #3: I would drop meals over.

Interviewer: So it would be pretty polarising on what might be in his pantry as
opposed to yours?

Parent #3: Definitely. Mine would be 85% fresh, his would be 99% boxed. The worst
of them all.

Families with separated or divorced parents also appeared to negotiate different
barriers when it comes to consumption practices.

Parent #5: I guess because we have the kids minimal time I don’t see grocery as a
good use of the time that I have with them so we’ll try and get organised. Try. But
sometimes there’s just no food in the cupboards so we have to go to the shops when
we have the kids.

Parent #7: He doesn’t buy them a lot. I buy everything and I tend to say “I have to
buy clothes, can I have $50” and he will but he’s pretty useless. He has nothing to do
with the kids really; monetary, nothing. I just have had a partner for nearly two years
and we’ve split up too and there’s the difference there. Because whenever he’d stay, he’d do heaps and heaps … that was hard and he was a pilot; he was always coming and going and you never knew so it was hard to know what to shop for. But it’s so much easier when it’s just the four of us.

For other parents, too, living off a single income after divorce was a factor that impeded choices parents felt they could make surrounding ethical consumption.

One mother discussed specifically how her extended family had a strong background in agriculture and an understanding of the impact of chemicals in food production. As such, she believed this impacted on her family’s discussions about ethical consumption.

Interviewer: Do you ever think about, as a family, or have discussions around, or even just you as a personal shopper, around ethical consumption?

Parent #10: Yes, I do. Yes, we definitely do. My husband’s family – mum and sisters – are all into that and his brother is a biodynamic organic viticulturist so that’s a big conversation on his side of the family and my dad tries not to use a lot of pesticides and stuff; he’s got an amazing veggie garden. So yes, we’re very aware of it.

As discussed above, these negotiations, although not always mentioned by the children, are pertinent to how children experience and understand ethical consumption. They highlight the manner in which children are exposed to ethical consumption as a reflexive and negotiated process as opposed to a prescribed set of fixed morals and values. These familial contexts constitute one of the predominant factors affecting the ways children themselves manage and negotiate their own ethical consumption practices. These findings are also important as they lay the foundation for understanding the context in which children come to
understand and participate in ethical consumption. This is explored in further detail in the following chapters.

Chapter summary

This chapter set out to answer Research Question One: How do children and their parents/carers perceive and practice ethical consumption within a family context? In doing so, it illuminated important contributions to knowledge regarding children and parents’ perceptions and practices around ethical consumption. Key practices around ethical consumption within the families, reported by both children and parents included free-range, organic, Fair-trade, shopping locally and being environmentally conscious. All children were able to identify at least some aspects of ethical consumption within their own consumption practices and articulate concerns over the protection of the environment and animals, political and social issues and waste or harm minimisation. In doing so, they discussed the benefits of ethical consumption for themselves and for others, animals and the environment. Parents, too, provided similar examples of ethical consumption as children, although their motivations appeared to be primarily motivated by perceived benefits to themselves or their family, with broader societal benefits being a secondary consideration. These motivations however are not fixed and both children’s and parents’ changing motivations to participate in ethical consumption illuminate dynamic, ongoing and reflexive processes integral to making ethical consumption choices.

The findings from this chapter contribute to knowledge regarding definitions of ethical consumption and support what Cherrier (2007) describes as a constellation of possibilities regarding ethical consumption. In doing so, the nuanced nature of ethical consumption becomes apparent. The research participants (both children and parents) discuss not only their perceptions and practices around ethical consumption but also provide detailed
insight into how they negotiate, prioritise and compensate through a reflexive process of ethical decision-making. The moral basis for ethical consumption decisions is not fixed but instead depends on changing priorities within family life. As a result, how and what children know, practice and learn about ethical consumption is not only based on their own subjective perspectives and experiences but also on the values, priorities and circumstances of their family. Understanding the nuanced nature of these interactions between the child and his/her family concerning ethical consumption is of central interest to this study. Hence, in some sections of this chapter, the narratives of parents are dominant as these draw attention to the explicit and tacit ways that children’s perceptions and practices are shaped. In other sections, the views and perspectives of the children are dominant. This research illuminates the influence of contextualised, negotiated and sometimes contradictory priorities as they are managed through a reflexive process with others mediating between self-interests and the interests of other. Much of this process occurs in the context of the family unit and influences the ways children come to understand ethical consumption. This is explored further in the following chapter.
Chapter 5 - Ethical consumption and socialisation within the family context

The findings presented in the previous chapter provide important insights into how children and their parents perceive and practice ethical consumption (RQ.1). These findings provide a firm foundation and context for the discussion in this chapter, which focuses on the second research question: *How do children come to understand ethical consumption within the family context?* It is clear in the data previously presented that a key factor shaping the perceptions and practices of ethical consumption in everyday family contexts is shared conversation and joint consumer experiences within and beyond the household.

In Chapter 3, the theoretical framework for this study was outlined. This framework incorporates key concepts related to contemporary understandings of children and childhood (specifically the dichotomous nature of the child), their socialisation (as understood through the lens of sociocultural theory) and their commercial enculturation (acknowledging consumption as central to children’s lives). Together, these are particularly useful for illuminating the nuanced ways in which children’s socialisation takes place around ethical consumption. This chapter discusses the findings in light of these theoretical interests. It represents a departure from current thinking on children’s socialisation around ethical consumption which has predominantly adopted developmental age-based theories of socialisation (Francis & Davis, 2014; Grønhøj & Thøgersen, 2012).

The intent of the interview questions was to ask parents to reflect on the influence of the familial context in shaping children's ethical consumption. As such, much of the parents’
discussion regarding children's consumption was articulated as an interplay between their own consumption and that of others within the family. Such a conceptualisation of children's consumption supports assertions that children's consumption does not occur in isolation from their everyday activities and lives (Cook, 2010; Ellis 2011).

5.1 The sociocultural basis of children’s ethical consumption

When discussing how children perceive and practice ethical consumption, both the child and parent participants pointed to a range of socialisation practices at work. Key amongst these were conversations about household consumption decisions; autonomous and shared shopping excursions; and implicit learning where children learn through their social and cultural surroundings. Some children and parents also acknowledged the role of other socialising agents such as schools, media and marketing. These external socialising influences often acted as a stimulus for children to initiate conversations about ethical consumption within their family settings. The findings underline Rogoff’s (1995) position that children’s learning (in this case about ethical consumption) occurs through participation in a social context. However, children’s learning and participation is often restricted by their bounded agency. This acknowledges that young people's agency (including that of children) is shaped by the contexts in which it finds itself (Evans, 2002). In this sense, agency is socially situated and temporal in both the opportunities that present itself and the constraints and barriers it has to work within. As such, their participation is both a product and a process of learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

5.1.1 Conversations regarding consumption and ethical consumption

Many children and parents described conversations they had regarding consumption choices, including decisions that may be considered ‘ethical’ in nature. Most parents referred to conversations they had with their children about healthy food choices. The perceived link
between organic and free-range food and health benefits for the family, for example, often acted as a catalyst for such conversations. Other dialogue between parents and children centred on the importance of saving money and purchasing fewer items (albeit of higher quality). Over-consumption and the disposable nature of products in children’s lives were a concern to most parents who spoke in detail about ways their children were learning to moderate spending and save their money as a result of conversations within the family. Other conversations were generated in relation to practices linked to Fair-trade, animal welfare, shopping locally and, to a lesser extent, the benefits of buying Australian made goods.

Parents tended to steer conversations about ethical consumption towards the direct personal benefits, such as health and wellbeing or financial savings. Doing so focuses the motivations behind ethical consumption on personal gain (Cairns et al., 2013). This potentially shapes children’s understandings of ethical consumption since it decreases the likelihood that children are aware of and engaged with the kind of altruistic motivations often posited in the literature (Lewis & Huber, 2015; Sachdeva et al., 2015; Sandıkçı & Ekici, 2009).

When asked why their conversations were not exploring more altruistic motivations, many parents conceded they had not been consciously aware of this aspect of their consumption choices. One mother remarked that she talked with her children about the moral and ethical aspects of other issues in daily life (not littering, caring for animals, being kind to others) but she had not extended this to matters of consumption.

*Parent #5: Now that I sit here and think about it well why don’t I explain it to them? I explain to them why they have to brush their teeth, why they’re not allowed to put rubbish on the earth, why they have to make their bed, why they have to not tease
their brothers and sisters. Why wouldn’t that expand to my ethics of what they’re consuming. But I don’t believe I ever have.

Other parents also echoed similar views of their children’s experiences with consumption as separate from other aspects of their lives and therefore not necessarily seen as an opportunity to engage around ethical aspects. Such a view limits the potential for children’s deeper engagement and learning about ethical consumption. In doing so, it runs contrary to views by Buckingham (2011), Martens et al. (2004) and Cook (2010) who argue that children’s relationship with consumption should not be viewed as separate from their everyday lives.

The act of participating in this study appeared to prompt some parents to discuss ethical consumption more explicitly within the family:

*Parent (mother) #4:* After doing this, I think I’m definitely going to have a bit more of a chat to her about it anyway... because I think it’s important. You just don’t think... it’s not always in the front of your mind. I’ll definitely have a chat to her. Even like the Body Shop – I always get stuff from there like their little lip glosses and things but I don’t always explain it to them but I’ll try and go there rather than just get something from Target or something like that.

A number of parents subsequently identified other opportunities that might act as a stimulus for conversation about ethical consumption with their children, most notably when issues appeared in the mainstream media. For example, one father cited a television program he watched with his son about the slaughter of cattle. This led to what he considered an important learning conversation for both of them about the humane slaughter of animals and the importance of their ethical treatment in meat production. In this case, it was the son’s
inquisitiveness, and not the father’s conscious awareness, that sparked the conversation. This example highlights that learning takes place in everyday settings and spontaneous contexts (Vygotsky, 1978) and that individual development is a social process that occurs through joint participation in sociocultural activities (Rogoff, 1998). Another child explained how he learned at school about the eradication of orangutans’ homes for palm-oil cultivation and came home to tell his mum to make sure she only bought palm-oil free products. In doing so, the child adapted an idea or concept learnt in a decontextualised and more formal learning environment (school) and made sense of it in their everyday lives and social contexts. This interweaving of what Vygotsky (1978) calls ‘scientific’ and ‘spontaneous’ concepts, allows children to take a decontextualised concept and contextualise it in their own social contexts. It is when this occurs that understanding takes place (Gredler, 2009).

Where conversations regarding ethical consumption occurred, they exemplify and illuminate the child as an active social agent initiating and participating in a dynamic and reciprocal exchange of ideas with others (Rogoff, 1998). This relationship between children and parents is dynamic in that it is ever-evolving and adaptable depending on situations, contexts and opportunities. There was no evidence, however, that children pestered or nagged parents to consume ethically, as tends to be conceptualised with children’s consumption literature (see Lawlor and Prothero (2011)). Parents perceived the active nature of their children’s roles as consumers and acknowledged their participation and influence in certain consumption decisions made within the household. Children’s participation in consumption within everyday life is central to Cook’s (2010) conceptualisation of ‘commercial enculturation’. It is through dynamic, participation that children and parents communicate and share in decision-making. Such participation is the “substance of cognitive development” (Rogoff, 1995, p. 151). Importantly, this dynamic relationship does not only change and
extend children’s awareness and understanding of ethical consumption but also challenges and influences their parents’ understanding of, and participation in, ethical consumption. Children in this sense are not just contributing to their own development but also to that of others who inhabit the family context, often influencing the culture of their family setting, and of society more broadly. Such findings are consistent with those of Ellis (2011, p. 54) who suggests that, “It is incomplete to assume that children develop but that their partners or their cultural communities do not… or that influence can be ascribed in one direction”. Where a dynamic and reciprocal relationship between children and adults in ethical consumption discussions and practices was evident in this study, it underlines the need for a reconsideration of adult’s roles in facilitating children’s participation beyond ‘controllers’ (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2009) and towards partners in practice.

Parents who acknowledged they did not discuss ethical consumption with their children tended to attribute this to a lack of confidence about the issues involved. For example, one mother said she would not discuss ethical consumption with her children, as she felt underprepared to answer questions about why non-organic food was “bad”. Other parents discussed their own lack of knowledge when it came to ethical consumption and the impact this would likely have on conversations with their children.

*Parent #3: I wouldn’t have a conversation with her, no, because I don’t know enough about what happens. I buy organic because I know it’s good. But I don’t know why the normal stuff is bad.*

Another mother openly acknowledged that she did not want to research the welfare of animals produced for consumption, as she knew she would not agree with those practices.
Parent (stepfather) #4:: Even the definition of “free-range” can be a little bit different to what some people understand.

Parent (mother) #4: I know. I don’t want to research that because I think I’ll be devastated…

Some simply said they would pass on what they knew but implied they did not desire or need to further educate themselves or their children.

Parent #2: I’m not that educated about all these things (referring to ethical consumption) but what I know, I need to pass on.

Given the centrality of consumption in children’s lives, it might be assumed that more parents would use such opportunities to discuss ethical practices, obligations and concerns regarding broader societal issues. Commercial enculturation suggests that children’s participation in consumption is central to their development as consumers (Cook, 2010). However, conversations that are potentially an important conduit for the transmission of values and practices concerning ethical consumption appear to be tempered by parents’ perceptions that children are unable to understand or are not interested in engaging in such dialogue. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. Yet, as the findings in Chapter 4 highlight, many children are aware of and interested in broader social issues, especially regarding animal cruelty, environmental degradation and poor labour conditions, but some parents still felt it was in their best interest to avoid conversations related to these.

Parent (mother) #4:: I think we’ve had the talk about chickens and how they’ve been kept in little cages and things like that but I also know I’ve purposely avoided the conversation about pigs because I know we don’t buy free-range and I know we don’t buy organic and things like that and I don’t want to have the talk about the cows that
go past on the trucks because I know it will probably put them off eating. We struggle enough to get them to eat at the moment so I actually have avoided that conversation because I think it probably would affect them.

Hence, the development of children’s understanding of ethical consumption within a family context is heavily circumscribed by what parents’ decide is in their interests to know about, ostensibly because the health and wellbeing of the child was perceived to be paramount. Any conversation with them about related societal concerns was therefore assumed likely to compromise this.

Another mother reflected upon the reasons why she did not have conversations about ethical consumption with her children and came to the conclusion it was probably because they never accompanied her to do the shopping. For her, the best time to have a conversation about ethical consumption was at the point of purchasing the products, since this was less likely to occur after the event. Other parents agreed it was highly unlikely that the matter of ethical consumption would be discussed with children in isolation from the act of shopping.

When one mother (Parent (mother) #1) was asked whether she had ever spoken with her son about her motivation to consume ethically in relation to grocery products, she appeared quite amused by the idea. She mimicked her reaction by holding a product and stating, “I don't point to the free-range eggs and go, “Now (son's name), these…” - like a lesson.”

Such findings suggest, then, that children are more likely to be involved in discussions regarding ethical consumption if these take place in situ, that is, if children are present and participating in the shopping when decisions regarding ethical consumption take place. However, as explored in more detail below, many parents preferred to shop without children or felt there were limited opportunities to involve children in the practice of
shopping. Some parents did, however, provide excellent examples of where children’s participation in shopping provided the sociocultural context for children to learn about ethical consumption.

5.1.2 Shared and autonomous shopping experiences

While shopping experiences were commonly identified as a means by which children are socialised into ethical consumption, the children showed varying degrees of enthusiasm for shopping. Central to learning is a willingness to engage and participate with others in the activity by which the learning takes place (Spillane & Thompson, 1997). If children learn through participation in a sociocultural activity (Rogoff, 1995), their willingness to engage in the activity is paramount. The children who thought shopping was boring, for example, usually also discussed the rules and boundaries they were given beforehand and knew they would not be able to request additional purchases. Others who enjoyed shopping appeared to be given more scope for actively participating in the experience, including being allowed treats, or going to other shops close by to look at clothes, toys or buy refreshments. It seemed, though, that given the opportunity to participate in shopping through helping to choose or collect items, most children said they would like to do so.

*Interviewer:* Do you ever say “Mum I’ll go get the milk”?

*Child #1:* Oh, yes. I usually do that.

*Interviewer:* And then how do you decide which ones to get? How do you know which is the right milk to get?

*Child #1:* We usually get two litres and it’s got this little blue thing saying “Norco” on it.

*Child #10:* It’s just not really fun. It’s like... but unless...we’re allowed to go looking
in the toy aisle – we’re allowed to go looking there while mum’s just doing some other things and then we might go back when we want unless is mum comes and calls us to go.

Interviewer: That’s cool. When that happens, do you ever come back with toys and say, “Mum I just saw this. Can I get it?”

Child #10: No. Not usually.

Interviewer: So you know that it’s just to look but not to buy stuff?

Child #10: No, unless if we might be going for a present and mum might be going for food then we might be in the toy aisles seeing and we’re like “Oh yes, this might be a good present for them”.

Child #3: Sometimes it’s fun because I just do it with mum because I get a treat. And then when I’m with all the family she does the shopping and says no.

Interviewer: So it’s a little bit more special when it’s just you and mum? And so when she goes shopping with you, on those few times, do you get to go to other places when you go shopping so you might do your groceries and then go to another shop?

Child #3: Yeah.

Interviewer: What sort of shops are they?

Child #3: We go to Woolies first and then if Woolies has run out of that thing, we’ll go to the Green Garage and sometimes the deli and sometimes the markets if they’re open, the farmers’ markets.

Children’s experiences with shopping as highlighted in the above examples illuminate the centrality of relationships with others in their enjoyment of the activity and therefore willingness to participate. Joint activities, such as shopping, create the opportunity for participants to develop shared meaning, norms and behaviours (Rogoff, 1990). It is also
through these everyday practices that a shared sense of beliefs and morals develop (Lasky, 2005). The children’s comments, as highlighted above, also demonstrate how parents’ perceptions of children’s agency also affect children’s willingness to participate (and therefore learn). By being given explicit rules for how they are allowed to engage, their status and agency are diminished. This, in turn, affects their enjoyment of the activity and willingness to participate.

Many parents talked about their preference not to take children shopping. For those who preferred not to shop with their children, they mostly believed that it was easier as children often pestered or nagged to purchase what they viewed as inappropriate or unnecessary purchases such as toys and junk food. Others commented that shopping would take longer than necessary if accompanied by children and that they did not consider it to be a good use of limited available time.

*Parent #10:* He used to be my little shopping buddy about two years ago; he used to come every single fortnight and loved it; now he hates it because it’s boring I guess. Because I tend to go to a couple of different shops, it’s like “Now we’re going to growers, now we’re… all right, we haven’t finished yet”, so yes, he thinks it’s boring unless we’re going to buy a present for someone… and I tend to do that without him because I’m a bit quicker and more efficient.

*Interviewer:* And do you take the kids shopping with you?

*Parent #12:* Rarely. So, only if I have to.

*Interviewer:* So it’s a preference not to?

*Parent #12:* Yeah. If I take them I’ll just have a small list. I won’t do a huge grocery shop.
Parent #7: And they’re really well behaved when we’re out. I don’t mind. It’s just easier without them. It’s quicker as well.

Interviewer: When you go shopping, do you tend to take the kids with you?

Parent #8: No. I get a coffee, it becomes like an outing. That’s very sad but true. I wouldn’t just go to Big W and wander around with them because that would be painful. I wouldn’t find that to be a nice experience.

Parent #9: I do it because they want to come and then I go “why did I do that, I’m never taking you again” and then I might go for weeks without taking them and then I’ll take them. Just a cycle.

These comments are included to highlight the contradictory views of parents where they argue the importance of discussing ethical consumption with children while shopping with them, but also report a preference to shop without them. Their comments also re-iterate depictions of the pestering and nagging child unable to temper their demands for goods (Lawlor & Prothero, 2011; Nicholls & Cullen, 2004; Swain, 2014). Given these findings, it is difficult to conceive when children may have the opportunity to learn about, understand and practice ethical consumption, outside of structured classroom learning. This has important consequences in terms of children’s socialisation into ethical consumption as it is through participation in social contexts that a deep understanding of the concept (in this case, ethical consumption) occurs (Rogoff, 1995).

However, some parents did perceive shared shopping experiences as offering quality time together and as an opportunity to involve children in consumption choices.
Parent #6: I meet a lot of parents that really relish the opportunity to not take the kids shopping. But mind you, when I have time I don’t mind them coming and then when they want something I’ll say “read the ingredients out” and they’ll read the ingredients out and they’re like “Oh ok” and they’ll put it back.

Interviewer: So you use this as an opportunity to educate them further.

Parent (mother) #6: Yes.

Interviewer: It’s very interesting that you tend to use the few times that you take the kids shopping as opportunities to say “Ok since we’re here, let’s actually talk about the products.”

Parent (mother) #6: We did home school the kids, they only started school two years ago. They would have come shopping a lot more so it’s probably in the last two years that they’re at school, I’m busy and it doesn’t happen as much.

Some parents appeared to view farmers’ markets or locally owned small businesses (such as butchers or green grocers) as the ideal location for taking children shopping. They spoke particularly about how this potentially provides the child with an understanding of how their food was grown and a chance to meet the producer.

Parent #2: A couple of times I’ve taken them to the farmers’ market and I have talked to them about … these are local farmers, let’s go talk to them about how they’ve picked their fruit and brought it straight here.

Such opportunities to engage children in learning through joint participation and engagement with others are reminiscent of those reported by Jubas (2012), albeit in relation to the experience of adults. Viewing ‘shopping’ as a sociocultural activity by which adults learn about ethical consumption, Jubas identifies shopping as more than just the act of making a transaction. She cites the conversations and exchanges of information with others in
situ, including shopkeepers, as being significant in shaping learning. The findings of my research in relation to children make a further important contribution about the key role of relationships and social interaction in shaping understandings in the context of shopping experiences. One mother underlined the significance of this when she reflected (during the course of the interview) on the implications of denying children such experiences:

Parent #10: I actually took (my son) grocery shopping about a month ago; first time in a long, long time I took him shopping and he drove me nuts – every single metre there was something else in the aisle that he thought he needed or wanted. I got home and I said to my husband, “Never again” but then I thought, “You know he hasn’t been shopping with me for so long. His eyes fell out of his head in the aisles”. It makes so much sense right? Of course you would be doing this because you don’t see these shopping aisles, you never come. His eyes were out of his head when we went to the chocolate and chip and lolly aisle. It was like… why wouldn’t it be? It was like Willy Wonka…. and even in the toothbrush aisle… It drove me nuts because I’m not kidding you, every metre in the shopping there was something else that looked amazing…” I thought, “This is a novelty for you”.

This example again highlights how children’s socialisation into ethical consumption is a nuanced process of learning through participation (or its absence) that has consequences for their subsequent participation. As Rogoff (1990, p.vii) argues, “children’s cognitive development is an apprenticeship – it occurs through guided participation in social activity with companions who support and stretch children’s understanding of and skill in using the tools of the culture”. This “apprenticeship” relies on the use of organised activities (in this case shopping), which enable the apprentices (children) to develop the knowledge and skills required for future participation. Far from acting alone, there were some parents in this study
who ‘prepped’ the child through ‘guided participation’ before they went shopping to help them know what to look for (in terms of brands, price and quality) and how to conduct themselves when it came time to make the transaction. While some of the examples they gave were not specifically in relation to purchases associated with ethical consumption, parents appeared to be highlighting the learning ‘scaffolding’ they provided their children in the hope they were readying them appropriately for later shopping experiences, including brand discernment:

*Parent 5: I could easily go in; it’s not that I don’t want to go in but we use that as an opportunity for them to go in and have a go at it.*

*Parent #12: So before we go I’ll just show him the label of whatever milk so he knows. And because he can read too it makes it easier. And then I’ll just say you need to wait for change or something.*

Concerns for the child’s safety were paramount in parents’ decisions about whether they let their child shop alone, with autonomous shopping excursions generally having tight parameters. Much of their rationale was linked to perceived risks of abduction and the loss of innocence in childhood (a matter further discussed in Chapter 6) rather than concerns about children’s purchasing choices, since children were quite discerning in their decisions. Purchases usually included small items such as lollies or inexpensive toys and these were normally paid for by saved pocket money. Every child mentioned not wasting money on junk food.

*Child #5: Buy good food and not unhealthy food. And don’t spend your money on junk food… Don’t buy lollies all the time.*
Child #4: Yes... I think about what things are good to eat, not bad things to eat.

Child #7: Junk food is stuff that tastes really sweet and it’s sugary and if you eat lots of it, it’s really bad for you.

Child #9: Responsible with money because I usually get crazy because I really like lollies.

The findings suggest children’s experience of shopping includes varying degrees of involvement, supervision and instruction from parents such as ‘face-to-face interaction’, ‘side-by-side joint participation’ and ‘distant support’ as suggested by Rogoff (1995). At times, children’s participation ranges from observation of ethical consumption practices within the family context to hands-on involvement in purchasing decisions. These dynamics change depending on the context, opportunity or level of interest. Children’s interaction during these experiences extended beyond their parents, to include other family members, friends, store staff and producers or stallholders at farmers’ markets. These patterns of behaviour and experiences are reminiscent of the planes for observing sociocultural behaviour as described by Rogoff (1995). Children do not “initially exist in some pre-social space, separated from the social world, including the world of consumption” (Cook, 2010, p. 66). Instead, most of the children in this study were very much involved as consumers, albeit in varied roles and with different levels of engagement. In this way, children’s participation in ethical consumption is understood as a process in which they evolve and accumulate experience for future participation (Vygotsky, 1978). Such participation and socialisation is context-bound, non-linear and linked to individual reflexivity (Stoecklin, 2012). By focusing on the relationship between the child and their parent, attention is drawn to the active nature
of children’s own efforts to observe and participate in ethical consumption within their immediate and broader social contexts. In this sense, children’s participation in ethical consumption is akin to broader conceptualisations of participation which “…can also be about ways of being and relating, deciding and acting, which characterise the practice of everyday life” (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2009, p. 357). In other words, children's participation as an ethical consumer is not just the act of purchasing but also the preparation, dialogue, decisions and researching of options, which accompanies the purchase, as posited by Jubas (2012).

5.1.3 Implicit learning

In addition to identifying explicit opportunities for children to understand ethical consumption (through conversations or shared shopping experiences), children appeared to learn about ethical consumption through implicit means. As others have argued, it is possible for socialisation to take place as an unintended or implicit consequence of a child’s relationship with their social environment (Ekström, 2015; Tallman et al., 2014). For children in this study, their implicit learning was mostly linked to incidental, routine everyday lived experiences within the family. Children were also well aware of where their parents shopped for groceries, along with what they purchased, and the motivations for doing so. Many of the children did not, however, seem to recall specific conversations with their parents where they learnt this information. Instead, it appeared such learning was implicit in nature or led by the child’s own initiative.

*Interviewer: Do you know why they usually go to those shops, why they might go and get their fruit and veg from Baz and Chas’?*

*Child #1: I actually don't know why. I think it's because they just probably like the vegetables better at Baz and Chas.*
Interviewer: Do they ever explain it? Do they say “We buy this bread because… we buy this chicken because…”?

Child #4: No, not all the time. Sometimes they do.

Interviewer: So how do you know that they buy things to keep you healthy? Have they told you?

Child #4: Because sometimes I read what the packets say and they say that they’re really healthy and stuff.

Interviewer: Do you enjoy going shopping with your Mum?

Child #5: Yeah.

Interviewer: What do you like about it?

Child #5: I get to see new things, see new shops. Rebel, EB Games … bookshops.

Interviewer: And does your mum normally let you go into those shops or is it just as you’re walking past on your way to Woolies or somewhere?

Child #5: Walking past.

Parents who felt they purchased ethically but did not always communicate these choices to their children seemed particularly likely to assume their children’s understanding of the ethical consumption choices made within the family were implicitly learnt through their way of life. Many parents believed it was a mix of explicit and tacit opportunities that shaped children’s understanding of ethical consumption.

Interviewer: Have you ever talked to him about free-range or organic or why you buy your meat at the farmers’ market or…?

Parent (mother) #1: Yes, I think so.

Parent (father) #1: Yes. Not to a huge extent but I know we did…
Parent (mother) #1: He might not even realise…

Parent (father) #1: We saw those images of those Indonesian abattoirs where they’re killing the animals in a pretty gruesome way…

Parent (mother)#1: The kids didn’t see that though.

Parent (father) #1: Yes. Yes, they did because I wanted them to see it and we had a bit of a conversation about it … But, you know, I don't know, it could be a sort of process of osmosis because we talk about it a lot; we’re really aware of it and it’s important to us and so I think they’d hear us talking about it because you, going to the farmers’ market…

One parent highlighted that despite not taking her children shopping, they would have an implicit understanding of the consumption choices made and would know that the products came from the local farmers’ market. In another example, a child noticed the milk his family bought was different to that which his grandparents brought into the house when visiting. This led to a conversation within the family about why it was important to buy organic. Such findings point to the myriad ways children’s learning occurs in situ. They also suggest that children’s exposure to other socialising influences including the media, marketing cues and experiences with extended family, provide opportunities for them to explicitly and implicitly learn about ethical consumption and how it is practiced.

The embedded relationship between consumption and childhood was apparent in the data as both parents and children referred to the broad array of day-to-day activities (birthday parties, shared parenting arrangements, weekend outings, clothing preferences and the like) where ethical consumption was continually being negotiated, adapted, managed and pursued. In this way, parents and children were highlighting the embedded and nuanced nature of ethical consumption within routine everyday life. While such findings support the notion that
consumption is an inseparable part of children’s lives (Cook, 2010; Ellis, 2011; Martens et al., 2004), they also extend existing understandings about children’s awareness and experiences of ethical consumption, not previously considered in any depth. Such discussion contribute to an understanding of children’s roles and status in social settings, and their experiences of childhood, by acknowledging their presence in social and environmental discourses through ethical consumption.

5.2 The role of other socialising influences

The interviews highlighted the role of other socialising agents including formal education, marketers and the media in bringing about awareness of ethical consumption. Such socialisation extended to parents who spoke about their increased awareness of issues and adoption of new behaviour through these broader influences, too.

Schools appeared to be a dominant socialising agent in children’s lives with respect to ethical consumption. Children had strong knowledge of environmental issues and the role some forms of ethical consumption played in addressing them, based on knowledge they had acquired at school. From the viewpoint of Vygotsky (1978), schools provide a place for children to learn “concrete concepts”, otherwise described as practical knowledge taught in a decontextualised and formal setting (Kozulin, 1990). Consumer-citizenship literature also acknowledges schools’ roles in teaching children about ethical consumption in a manner which prepares the child for participation at a later date (Benn, 2004). There were quite a number of examples where children discussed ethical consumption in the context of school learning:

Child #2: (Recycling) means you can recycle it and it can be turned into more paper, other paper or something else. Like a can. They could recycle that and make another
Interviewer: And where did you learn all that?
Child #2: School.

Child #4: Sometimes I read what the packets say and they say that they’re really healthy and stuff.

Interviewer: Do you like reading the packets of products?
Child #4: I have to do it in school.

Interviewer: Really?
Child #4: Sometimes. Last year we had to make our own cereal box and design one and make it healthy... We got to design our own box, we got to draw on it and make our own logo.

Interviewer: Do you know anything about buying things that are Australian made?
Child #4: I had to make a logo of that.

Interviewer: Did you? Was that another school project?
Child #4: ... class.

Interviewer: What was that about?

Child #4: We have tasks for homework. You have to do seven one term and I chose to do that one in the last week of school. I got to make my own logo for it and it said “Buy Australian made things”.

Child #9: One time we went to this computer room, it was a classroom and we learned about worms and butterflies and stuff and recycling. I learned about recycling in the yellow boxes we have at school for the chickens.
Parents, too, acknowledged the role of schools in teaching children about ethical consumption.

*Parent #9: I think through school. I think they talk about a lot of the stuff like that at school. I think that don’t really pay that much attention to the stuff in their house. They talk about recycling and all that sort of stuff at school... They always come home and tell me ... well the younger ones are always more enthusiastic to tell me what they meant rather than the other ones. I just get grunts.*

In a number of instances, parents agreed that they had become more aware of ethical issues through their children’s learning at school and subsequent conversations at home. Examples of this included learning at school about issues like the eradication of wildlife habitats through palm-oil cultivation, exploitative labour practices and trade in blood diamonds. Further, some children in government primary schools are offered the opportunity to study ethics classes instead of religion and this was seen as an opportunity by some parents for their child to be exposed to discussions regarding ethics. Children, however, did not mention this option or their likelihood of participating in such classes, much less the impact on ethical consumption practices within their families.

Some of the learning taking place in schools does, however hold potential for transfer into family contexts. As Vygotsky (1978) highlights, when concepts taught in formal but decontextualised settings are applied and related to real-life everyday situations, higher order thinking skills develop. This has important implications for how children learn through their participation beyond classroom settings.
Most parents spoke about the influence of mainstream media in shaping their own and their children’s understandings of ethical issues associated with the products they buy. Few did very little independent research to cross-check or further explore such information. This reliance on media may partly explain the emphasis parents and children placed on free-range, Fair-trade and organic products since marketing and advertising is much more extensive in relation to these. At the time of the interviews, media coverage of the Rana Plaza collapse in Bangladesh (see http://www.inourworld.org/bangladesh-and-the-ethics-of-sweatshops.html) was widespread and often cited by parents as a specific example of unethical practices in the marketplace. However, most still felt they lacked knowledge in how to avoid unethical clothing brands and awareness of better alternatives.

Although parents perceived that children were influenced by television programs with an underlying message about ethical consumption or sustainability, children did not mention any such influences in their interviews. Children did, however, show a strong awareness of marketplace cues such as ethical consumption logos presented to them during interviews and outlined in the findings presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter summary

The discussion in this chapter addresses Research Question Two and draws on key understandings from sociocultural theory (Kozulin, 1990; Rogoff, 1990, 1995; Smith, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978) and commercial enculturation (Cook, 2010) to help illuminate the processes by which children come to understand and practice ethical consumption. In doing so, the findings point to the reciprocal nature of learning and socialisation within the family context. This was most evident in relation to the role of conversations between children and their parents, as well as shared and autonomous shopping experiences, both of which provide important contexts for explicit and implicit learning. The findings suggest that it is through
children’s roles as consumers, and the potential for understanding the social, environmental and political impact of their consumption choices, that they both learn about, and participate in, a wide range of sociocultural activities and issues.

Throughout this chapter, the dichotomous nature of the child emerges as a significant influence in explaining children’s understanding and practice around ethical consumption within a family context. Parents often validate their perceptions and practices in terms of how they perceive their children’s capacity, autonomy, maturity or need for protection. These issues will be explored in more detail in Chapter 6.
Chapter 6 – The dichotomous child consumer

Having focused on the tacit and explicit ways children’s socialisation takes place in relation to ethical consumption, this discussion chapter explores how developing understandings and practices around ethical consumption potentially enable children’s participation in broader societal matters of concern to them. This is an important consideration as consumption is typically conceived of as having a negative impact on children’s lives (Schor, 2008). These discussions shed light on the third research question: *What insights into the conceptualisation of children and their capacity to participate do we gain from examining children’s roles as ethical consumers within a family context?*

The findings discussed in the previous chapter gestured to the dichotomous nature of childhood and the ‘to and fro’ of children’s experiences as they (and their parents) described how they come to understand ethical consumption. The narratives of children and parents were often circumscribed within understandings of children’s capacity, autonomy, maturity or need for protection. This often formed the basis by which children could exercise bounded agency. Parents’ appeared to be constantly negotiating children’s participation in, and relationship with, consumption. This negotiation often resulted in children’s agency being bound by the parent’s ability to exclude or include, as they felt necessary. The following section explores this in more detail and examines the dichotomous notions of the child consumer as evident in the findings, along with the implications of perceptions regarding the positive or negative impact consumption has on children’s lives. Discussion then turns to implications for the ways in which children’s participation is understood in the context of ethical consumption.
6.1 Dichotomous notions of the child consumer

The findings reported in Chapters 4 and 5 uncovered numerous examples of perceived competing or contradictory capacities of children. Although some children spoke about their desire to acquire “Ferraris” and “horses that cost a million dollars”, they also demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of family finances including the need to moderate over-consumption so as not to waste money or to use their own pocket money to help mum pay for the weekly groceries. They gave examples of their capacity to discern decisions regarding ethical consumption practices, while also relying on arguments of needing “to wait until they were older” before embarking on others. In this sense, children themselves were setting their own boundaries regarding agency. The children also at times displayed limited knowledge about certain ethical consumption concerns (such as Fair-trade) but then gave well-considered responses to questions about the benefits of free-range or organic foods. Some children were also able to explain in detail the issues surrounding poor labour conditions overseas and animal cruelty, issues that some parents highlighted as needing to shelter their children from, for fear they may be too confronting or incomprehensible. The above examples are consistent with notions of the dichotomous child (Qvortrup et al., 1994; Uprichard, 2008) and illuminate the ways in which children’s perceptions and practices around consumption are characterised by such dichotomies (Buckingham, 2011; Cook, 2005).

Parents’ conceptualisations of children were also somewhat ambiguous. They gave clear examples of the need to protect children from what they thought were harsh realities in consumption supply chains, and then described how they empowered children through autonomous shopping experiences. Such tensions are also evident in the literature, although not specifically attributed to ethical consumption (Marshall, 2010). Parents also viewed their children as agentic beings, able to make and influence certain ethical consumption decisions,
while still being able to acknowledge that such participation was an opportunity to practice future participation. Some parents spoke in detail about their desire to shop without children to avoid the “pestering and nagging” that would ensue, while also acknowledging children’s ability to moderate over-consumption. Parents’ appeared to be constantly negotiating children’s participation in, and relationship with, consumption. They also function to moderate the nature and extent of discussions considered appropriate to have with children, thus illuminating how children are excluded from those deemed inappropriate (Morrow & Richards, 1996). Again, the ways in which parents are able to restrict children's participation aligns with notions of bounded agency.

The commonly expressed view that children were not old enough to understand or be interested in ethical consumption concerns appeared to diminish their status as ethical consumers in the eyes of their parents. Such views functioned to impede the likelihood of parents involving their children in ethical consumption discussions or activities.

*Parent #5: The conversation of ethics? No. Not to date. I definitely think about all that whether I share any of that … and definitely the girls are of an age where I should be maybe explaining the choices behind [my consumption choices].*

*Parent #3: Oh yeah, I’ve never talked about Nike sweat-shops or computer factories. I’ve never had a discussion. I would, but maybe he’s too young.*

*Parent #6: No, I don't think I have had that with my own children. I don't think they probably care that much… It would only become probably more of a distinction I think as they get older.*
Such views also run contrary to other findings that highlight the nuanced ways in which children understand and actively participate in ethical consumption. Children in this study often adopted age-based indicators to assert their competence in certain situations. They gave examples of their capacity to discern decisions regarding ethical consumption practices, while also relying on arguments of needing “to wait until they were older” before embarking on others.

*Interviewer: Do you think you could go shopping on your own next time?*

*Child #10: Yes maybe, maybe when I’m a bit older. Yes, When I’m a bit older, like 12 or something?*

No other child provided such specific detail as to when they would be “old enough”. Here children tended to alternate between their status as ‘beings’ and ‘becomings’, depending on the topic, and they perceived no problem as such with their participation. These are important findings as most scholarship to date regarding the dichotomous nature of children’s relationship with consumption is based on the perspective of adults, regulatory bodies, or even the government (Buckingham, 2011). This study has enabled the inherent tensions around the dichotomous nature of the child to be identified within the voices and lived experiences of children themselves.

Parent participants also discussed their children’s status in terms of ‘beings’ and ‘becomings’. All viewed children as competent social actors in response to some consumption opportunities (such as the ability to temper their desire for junk food or over-consumption of cheap, low quality goods). However, when topics turned to children’s
exposure to ethical considerations such as child-labour or cruelty to animals, parents tended to underestimate children’s competence to understand the ethical dilemmas, or otherwise felt the need to protect them from those realities. This need to protect children from issues such as child-labour, or the unethical treatment of animals was often loaded with emotive language like “traumatising”, “need to shelter them”, “wouldn’t expose them to things like that”. These sentiments by parents function to moderate the nature and extent of discussions considered appropriate to have with children, thus illuminating how children are excluded from those deemed inappropriate (Morrow & Richards, 1996). In an attempt to reconcile these tensions, parents offered times in the future when they believed children would “become” able to understand or be of an “appropriate” age to learn about such issues.

Parent (mother) #1: Yes, but there is the issue of over-farming and over-production but we don’t go into that with the kids.

Parent (father) #1: Yes, you know there are lots of issues around it.

Interviewer: Do you reckon as the kids get older you might have more of these conversations?

Parent (father) #1: No we do because we have conversations with (our son) about a whole range of things which is getting broader all the time and it’s all facets of life and…

Parent (mother) #1: Yes and kids, as you know, they just come up with these big questions quite often.

Parent (father) #1: Yes, well they were explaining how the solar system started. They were explaining how the sun exploded and all the gas went out. I think (our youngest son) was sort of… his little mind would be racing ahead and he’s thinking “Well if the sun explodes, it’s going to do us”. (Our older son) asks more and more questions
about more and more things which are not related to his little orbit.

Parent (mother) #1: Yes, so you can kind of see his circle of focus expanding, expanding, expanding.

Other parents qualified suggestions of an appropriate age, which varied between “Year Four at school” (aged 9-10) and “twelve”, while others more broadly suggested such discussions would happen “when they are old enough”. This apparent focus on age as an indicator of the need for protection or ability to participate is also reminiscent of traditional socialisation theories and developmental milestones (McAlister & Cornwell, 2010; Piaget, 1972; Spears Brown & Bigler, 2005; Sutter & Kocher, 2007). These are somewhat at odds with how children appear to be socialised around ethical consumption, as reported in Chapter 5.

In Chapter 3, I located my own stance with respect to the dichotomous nature of the child, which primarily aligns with other highly regarded scholarship in this area (Buckingham, 1995, 2011; Buckingham & Tingstad, 2010; Cook, 2005). Here I posited the importance of acknowledging how children’s lived experience straddles their status as both ‘beings’ and ‘becomings’. The findings from this study provide compelling evidence of this in the context of children and ethical consumption, since the data suggests strongly that children do navigate their status as both ‘beings’ and ‘becomings’, while also positioning their ethical consumption experiences both in the present and in preparation for their future participation. By embracing these dichotomies, as opposed to trying to reconcile them, this study highlights the intricate and complex nature of children’s relationship with ethical consumption. The result is a rich, contextualised account of children’s perceptions, practices and understanding of ethical consumption.
Acknowledging that dichotomies exist is important for a number of reasons (Buckingham, 2011), not least because this enables researchers to detail the rich and often contradictory nature of such experiences and activities (Buckingham, 2011; Buckingham & Tingstad, 2010; Cook, 2010). The findings show ethical consumption does at times provide children with a direct opportunity to participate in broader social issues as an “alternative sphere of political action and inclusion for groups excluded from the formal body politic” Trentmann (2007, p. 149). However, it is still important to acknowledge that children’s access to the marketplace is often constrained by adult consent (or lack thereof). As evidenced through this study, parental acknowledgement of children’s agency is tempered by concerns for their protection and wellbeing. Hence they often mediate children’s engagement around issues concerning ethical consumption.

6.2 The influence of consumption on childhood

Where children are present in consumption discourses, there is a tendency to
demonise the influence and effect of consumption on children’s lives (Palmer, 2006).

Such debates generally centre on increased commercialisation of childhood, the need
to moderate over-consumption and loss of innocence in today’s childhoods
(Buckingham, 2011). Such tensions were evident in many of the interviews with
parents. As highlighted in Chapter 4, parents showed concern regarding children’s
potential or apparent over-consumption, either in terms of the gifts they received, the
amount of cheap and disposable toys available to them or their exposure to
advertising. One such notable example included: Parent (father) #1: Well just in
consumerism full stop. Just when it said “birthday or Christmas” and (child) will say
“I want a Nerf gun, I want a soccer ball, I want this, I want that” – they do seem to
think that we can just produce this stuff and they can have so much and then I say
“What about all the kids” – you know that typical “What about all the kids who don’t
Parents also notably reflected on their own upbringings. The expectations parents held for their children in terms of consumption (for example, of being ethically aware, moderating over-consumption, and enabling their child to shop autonomously), were often grounded in idealised and nostalgic accounts of their own childhoods. This included vivid images of a simpler childhood, wanting and needing less, and making do with what they had. For example, many parents felt that when they were children, they were able to get by with less. Reasons for this mostly included an inability to afford new things. Some of this appeared to be personal circumstance, although many also mentioned the lack of inexpensive items in the marketplace, and therefore a reliance on hand-me-downs, or home made goods.

*Parent 7: Mum never bought us stuff, it was hand made, because they could not afford it. Because clothes were expensive. You could not go and get the $5 t-shirts...*

One mother spoke of her rural upbringing where neighbours shared and bartered produce between each other. This connection motivated her to take her children to local farmers’ markets, a dynamic also cited by others (Dore & Frew, 2000). Another parent spoke about the hardships of growing up on a farm, which she did not enjoy as a child. She spoke about her mother baking all their food and buying directly from the producer where possible, echoing what Buckingham (2011) calls a romanticism about a Golden Age where childhoods were better. This was evidenced in the narratives of other parents who spoke about Christmas and birthdays as the only opportunities for receiving new, highly desired goods and otherwise relying on what was available, made or passed down to them. One parent recalled the arduous task of “*helping to squash aluminum cans under the car tyre and going around to building sites and getting old wires and stripping off the plastic to recycle the copper*”. For most, they viewed such experiences in a positive light and strived to provide similar experiences for
their children. This nostalgia for their own more simple childhoods appears to influence parents’ concerns about children’s relationship with consumption (Boden, 2006), even though it is argued that such sentiment is often misplaced and unfairly romanticised (Buckingham, 2011).

Parents perceived contemporary childhood as more commercialised than their own. They suggested that children today are more aware of goods that are available on the market, through media and direct marketing to children. They attributed this increased awareness to an abundance of cheaper goods, an expectation that goods could be acquired easily, and children had the means to do so. Parents emphasised how goods that would have been considered a rare treat for their generation are now seen as a common purchase in their children’s eyes.

*Parent #2:* Well we probably have much clearer expectations that we got a treat on Sundays and we probably did ask for it in-between but there was no expectation of one in-between whereas I feel my kids are very different. They’ll push for it all the time.

*Interviewer:* So there’s just more available, more wants?

*Parent #2:* Yes absolutely, and more awareness of what’s available.

The availability of inexpensive items in the marketplace also meant children had the means and access to more goods. Parents showed concern for these limiting children’s imagination, playing outside and under-appreciating the things that they have. Parents also showed great concern for their children’s diets, commenting on the over-abundance of sugar and toxins in food choices available at the supermarket. Concerns around the commercialisation of childhood are well evidenced elsewhere (Bailey, 2011; Buckingham &
However, what is less understood is how these concerns may act as an impetus for ethical consumption practices within the family context. Parents in this study cited many examples of their efforts to address the commercialisation of their children’s lives by moderating over-consumption, purchasing free-range and organic produce, using farmers’ markets as an opportunity to teach children about supply chains, and spending money on family holidays instead of consumer goods. Hence, it became clear that ethical consumption within the family context was inextricably bound to their concerns about the commercialisation of childhood.

It is important to note, however, that children’s perceptions suggest interactions with consumption are not always ‘toxic’ or negative, as commonly posited (Palmer, 2015; Schor, 2008). Instead, children in this study learned about ethical consumption through their social relationships, including ways to influence purchasing decisions within their families. Further, in some instances, ethical consumption provided children with an opportunity to participate in, and influence matters they may not ordinarily have the ability to access or influence. For example, buying chocolate that is palm-oil free enabled one child to express his concerns about animal habitat degradation. In turn, his boycotting of companies that contribute to such degradation enables him to actively engage in this social concern. There are various other instances in the data of such active engagement with societal issues. These point to the considerable potential for ethical consumption to be understood as a site for developing children’s participation in broader social issues.
6.3 Reconceptualising children’s consumption in terms of their participation

In Chapter 2, I identified the dominant understandings of children’s consumption which tend to trivialise children’s presence as consumers, or limit their interest in consumption to products such as toys, breakfast cereals and junk food (Buckingham, 2011; Martens et al., 2004). Additionally, studies focus on children’s relationship with the marketplace, neglecting other social relationships that shape consumption (Ellis, 2011) or concentrating primarily on developmental socialisation theories (Nairn & Spotswood, 2015), peer influences (van Ansem et al., 2014) or tensions between children and adults in terms of persistent nagging for goods (Campbell et al., 2014; Swain, 2014).

The findings within this study challenge dominant understandings of children’s consumption by reframing the ethical dimensions as a potentially positive influence and experience in children’s lives. Children spoke specifically of using consumption in response to environmental concerns, animal welfare and loss of animal habitat, as well as addressing concerns of poor labour conditions, over-consumption and resource waste. These findings suggest that engaging in ethical consumption enables children to participate in discussions and activities surrounding broader social issues that concern them. In doing so, potential arises for extending dominant discourses around children’s consumption beyond a primary focus on children’s economic contribution through consumption or their use of public services (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2009; Sinclair, 2004).

In Chapter 2, I also highlighted various ways that children’s participation is conceptualised in the literature, and identified four broad rationales that help progress understandings of the benefits of children’s participation (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2011;
Mannion, 2007). These include: Enlightenment – children have something meaningful to contribute and benefit can be derived from knowing their perspective; Empowerment – that children can be empowered through recognition of their agency; Citizenship – that children learn to participate by participating; and Relational – that participation is social in nature. This framework assists in elucidating some of the dynamics identified in this research concerning children’s participation in the context of ethical consumption.

Firstly, the findings demonstrate that children are very capable of contributing to discussions regarding ethical consumption within their family context. There were many examples cited where children actively initiated or engaged in conversations with their parents and these conversations brought about change or action with respect to ethical consumption decisions. The impact of their own ethical consumption choices and their influence over the choices of others also demonstrate a meaningful contribution to addressing issues surrounding sustainability (Prothero et al., 2011).

Secondly, in instances where children’s competence and agency were acknowledged by parents, the children were much more likely to be included in decisions and discussions surrounding ethical consumption. Here parents acknowledged the participation of their children within family decisions and children’s ability to negotiate and mediate their consumption needs and wants. Children’s empowerment was particularly evident in examples of ‘guided participation’ (Rogoff, 1995), where they were encouraged to participate as ethical consumers via joint, side-by-side support. In this way, it appears the recognition of their participation also increased the likelihood of subsequent involvement (Smith, 2002).

Thirdly, when parents perceived children as making an active contribution to ethical consumption decisions within the family, they also acknowledged the learning aspects of
their engagement. Parents identified children’s contributions as an opportunity for them to be active and informed citizens capable of influencing change within their families and communities - not only now but also in the future. For example, parents cited examples of where their current shared shopping experiences were laying important foundations for future autonomous shopping experiences, which over time would help ensure they could navigate more complex issues regarding ethical consumption.

Most evident, though, in terms of children’s participation as ethical consumers was the presence of intrinsically linked relationships between children and their parents. Children’s perceptions and practices around ethical consumption, the explicit and tacit ways in which they were socialised into ethical consumption, and the manner in which parents navigated the apparent dichotomies surrounding the child consumer, all relied upon dynamic and reciprocal relationships. The findings demonstrate the ways in which children’s participation in ethical consumption is dependent, at least to some extent, on the ways in which children are involved in everyday social practices within the family context, including conversations and shopping excursions. Parents’ perceptions of children’s engagement with consumption as integral or peripheral, as well as whether this was positive or negative, also mediated the opportunities available for children to make and influence ethical consumption decisions. In this sense, their participation was very much dependent on how power was shared between parties (Percy-Smith, 2011; Sinclair, 2004). Although the findings highlight instances of parents and children participating side-by-side and making informed decisions together, with children’s agency being recognised, there are also examples where their participation is tempered or restricted by parents’ perceptions of age or appropriateness to engage. In these instances, parents acted as ‘gatekeepers’ in mediating children’s perceptions and practices with ethical consumption.
Participation is also linked to how children identify themselves (Jans, 2004). The findings of this study suggest these children see themselves as members of a broader social community, capable of participating in social and environmental issues that concern them (Doherty & Taplin, 2008; Jans, 2004). Although children did not necessarily perceive these issues directly affect or implicate them personally, they understood the collective impact on others. This has been described elsewhere as individualised collective action (Micheletti, 2003). In other words, children’s ethical consumption provides them with a means by which they can actively participate within their private sphere (individually or within the family context) in broader social issues normally reserved for participation in the public sphere. The ways children identify with broader social issues may evolve over time, not necessarily according to age, but through their ongoing participation in conversations, shared activities and decisions within and beyond the family (Sinclair, 2004). Embracing new ways of considering children’s participation, including in the private sphere, requires reflexivity, continual development and constant change and adaptation (Percy-Smith, 2010, 2012). Considerable data from both children and parents in this study exemplifies the challenges and possibilities ethical consumption offers as a site of such participatory practice.

Chapter summary

This chapter has considered the findings of the study in light of the third research question: What insights into the conceptualisation of children and their capacity to participate do we gain from examining children’s roles as ethical consumers within a family context? Particular emphasis has been given to the dichotomous nature of children and childhood and the ways in which both children and parents conceived children’s agency, capacity and status as ethical consumers. Acknowledging such dichotomies provides a clearer picture of the nuanced and sophisticated ways children identify what they can influence with
ethical consumption in family contexts while working productively with what they cannot. This chapter also explored the impact consumption can have on children’s lives, particularly in relation to children’s active and meaningful participation in broader social issues that concern them.

In the following and final chapter of this thesis, attention turns to a number of implications from this research for reconceptualising the ways in which children’s ethical consumption is understood and supported. The significance and limitations of the study will be highlighted and suggestions for further research outlined.
Chapter 7 – Conclusion

This aim of this study was to identify how children come to understand and practice ethical consumption within a family context. Although children have a potentially significant role to play as ethical consumers, and their contribution to the field of sustainability is an important one (Fien et al., 2008; Francis & Davis, 2014), little is known about the active social child as an ethical consumer, including how they come to understand and practice ethical consumption (Collins, 2015). Given that research to date has largely excluded children’s own perspectives, this study makes an important contribution by seeking their views and including their voices alongside those of their parents.

Three research questions guided the study:

1. How do children and their parents/carers perceive and practice ‘ethical’ consumption within a family context?
2. How do children come to understand ethical consumption within their family context?
3. What insights into the conceptualisation of children and their capacity to participate do we gain from examining children’s roles as ethical consumers within a family context?

Each research question was addressed, in turn, throughout Chapters 4, 5 and 6, respectively. The purpose of this final chapter is to synthesise these findings and discuss their implications in terms of how children are understood and supported as ethical consumers. Additionally, the chapter will discuss limitations of the study and make recommendations for future research.

I begin with a synthesis of the main empirical findings in relation to each research question.
7.1 Empirical findings

7.1.1 How do children and their parents/carers perceive and practice ‘ethical’ consumption within a family context?

The findings to Research Question One contribute to existing knowledge surrounding ethical consumption in a number of ways. Firstly, the findings locate children’s voice regarding their perspectives of and participation in ethical consumption, currently under-represented (Szmigin et al., 2009). This study presents children’s voice and lived experience alongside those of their parents. It expands common conceptions of children as only having passive influence over their parents’ ethical consumption choices (Kehily et al., 2014; Mackendrick, 2014; Martens, 2009) or as learning about ethical consumption for future participation (Benn, 2004; McGregor, 1999, 2009). In doing so, it also illuminates children’s motivations for and barriers to ethical consumption. The findings from interviews with both children and parents also contribute to existing knowledge regarding definitions of ‘ethical consumption’ by illuminating the ways the research participants’ notions of ‘ethical’ are fluid and reflexive depending on circumstance and priorities within a given context, time and space. Furthermore, the findings and the discussion that followed within Chapter 4 contribute to a growing interest in understanding how ethical consumption practices within a family context are negotiated and managed, focusing on ethical consumption in a collective sense as opposed to an individual pursuit (Collins, 2015).

7.1.2 How do children come to understand ethical consumption within their family context?

The findings demonstrate that children come to understand ethical consumption through participation in a variety of sociocultural activities within the family context. These
include direct conversations and autonomous and shared shopping experiences, as well as
implicitly learning about ethical consumption choices within the household in an incidental
manner. Importantly, the reciprocal nature of the learning and of children’s socialisation
around ethical consumption was a distinct feature in the data. The study limited its scope to
specifically exploring children’s socialisation into ethical consumption within a family
context. However, it became evident from the data collected that children’s socialisation into
ethical consumption was also influenced by other external socialising agents such as schools,
media and extended family, as discussed by the participants. Future research would benefit
from exploring these in more detail to understand more fully the range of socialising
influences on children’s understanding of ethical consumption. A lack of knowledge or
unwillingness to engage with issues of ethical consumption by others, or a lack of
opportunity to be involved in activities where ethical consumption occurred, inhibited
children’s socialisation as ethical consumers. Parents’ perceptions of children’s agency or
ability also influenced children’s ethical consumption socialisation processes.

7.1.3 What insights into the conceptualisation of children and their capacity to
participate do we gain from examining children’s roles as ethical consumers within a
family context?

Throughout the interview narratives the dichotomous nature of childhood and of
children’s lived experience was readily apparent. The study illuminates children’s well-
considered understanding and practice of ethical consumption, alongside related issues that
children knew little about (and that parents were sometimes reluctant to have them engage
in). In some instances, children’s agency and autonomy as social actors were paramount in
relation to consumption discussions and decisions within their families, while in other
instances children were perceived to be not yet “of an age” to actively participate.
In highlighting the dichotomous nature of the child, common sense notions of childhood have also been challenged. As outlined in Chapter 6, these include the nuanced and sophisticated ways children influence within family contexts, beyond the commonly perceived pester power or nagging. Furthermore, this study challenges the impact consumption can have on children’s lives, particularly in relation to children’s active and meaningful participation in broader social issues that concern them. The findings challenge dominant understandings of children’s consumption by reframing the ethical dimensions as a potentially positive influence and experience in children’s lives. Children spoke specifically of using consumption in response to environmental concerns, animal welfare and loss of animal habitat, as well as addressing concerns of poor labour conditions, over-consumption and resource waste. These findings suggest that engaging in ethical consumption enables children to participate in discussions and activities surrounding broader social issues that concern them.

Children appeared to navigate this dichotomy with ease, depending on circumstance and opportunity. This supports Cook’s (2005) assertion that resisting the temptation to reconcile the dichotomous nature of childhood provides a rich and contextual picture of children’s nuanced relationship with consumption and, in the case of this study, ethical consumption.

7.2 Theoretical contributions

This study adopts sociocultural theory (Rogoff, 1995) and commercial enculturation (Cook, 2010) as lenses for understanding the processes by which children are socialised as ethical consumers. This is an important contribution to knowledge since little research has departed from developmental understandings of children’s socialisation, primarily based on age (see for example, Francis and Davis, 2014; Grønhøj and Thøgersen, 2012). The theoretical framing of this study enables exploration of important links between children’s
participation in sociocultural activities linked to ethical consumption and their evolving capacity to participate in social issues of concern to them.

This is an important contribution as it provides support to Smith’s (2002) assertion that sociocultural theory is a useful lens to investigate children’s participation. To date, much of the conceptualising of participation suggests children can do so individually on matters that concern them personally or collectively as a group. Likewise, children’s participation in consumption is primarily seen as an economic contribution or positions children as users of public services, even though definitions of ethical consumption explicitly link a person’s consumption with their civic rights and duties (Benn, 2004; Davis & Francis, 2014; Doherty & Taplin, 2008; McGregor, 2002, 2009).

Hence, this study has also drawn attention to the missing child in consumption theory and the consumer-child in childhood studies. Where children are acknowledged, their consumption is usually depicted as insignificant or separate to other aspects of their lives (Martens et al., 2004). Adopting key understandings from sociocultural theory and commercial enculturation has helped to shed light on the myriad ways in which children’s ethical consumption is inextricably bound up with their everyday lives.

This study also highlights the immense potential of interdisciplinary approaches for understanding children’s lives and the social worlds they inhabit. Taking an interdisciplinary approach to the study was beneficial on many levels. Importantly though, it provided a firm basis for understanding children’s socialisation or enculturation as ethical consumers and enabled the findings to be (re-)examined in light of contemporary understandings of children and childhood, including the ways in which they participate in broader social issues.
7.3 Methodological and ethical contributions

This research advances understandings regarding the methodological issues pertaining to authentically ‘child-focused’ research, including key ethical considerations regarding informed consent and the development of tools to assist in facilitating this. The approach to ensuring the research was “ethical” went far beyond a compliance checklist or satisfaction of institutional ethical requirements. Indeed, the ethical dimensions of the research were held as paramount throughout. This included developing an informative child-focused consent booklet, being reflexive throughout the entire study in ensuring the interpretation and representation of the children’s experiences were authentic, and developing a child-focused summary of findings in order to ensure the knowledge created through this study was accessible to children themselves.

Engaging critically with childhood studies and children’s participation literature significantly shaped the methodology since these drew attention to the absence of children’s voices in existing scholarship around ethical consumption. The significance of including children in the research and endeavouring to capture and report their views in their own words, was well summed up by one child participant who, after hearing about the study and his potential involvement remarked, “Finally I get asked adult questions!” This was a poignant moment as I had spent many months agonising over the methods to try to ensure the interviews were a safe, interesting and positive experience for the child participants. This child’s comment helped me to realise that ‘child-focused’ does not necessarily mean ‘child-like’ and that by adopting interviews as my method I was also signaling to the children that I was taking their opinions seriously.

Likewise, engaging critically with childhood studies literature prompted me to reflect in depth on my decision to interview parents. While their inclusion in the study was not
intended to triangulate or qualify what the children reported, but instead to gain a fuller picture of consumption within the family context, I needed to be mindful that their voices didn’t dominate the research narrative.

7.4 Limitations

This study provides a detailed account of children’s understandings and practices around ethical consumption. It makes an important contribution to existing knowledge since it incorporates the views and perspectives of children themselves. However, it is important to acknowledge some evident limitations with the study.

Although there was some diversity in terms of the participants’ geographical locations (two small regional towns, one regional city and two capital cities), the sample size was small and generally lacked diversity in terms of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. These characteristics limit any opportunity to generalise the findings. However, children and the childhoods they experience are not homogenous and hence research that seeks to provide a rich, contextualised account of their lives has a legitimate place in child-centred scholarship without the need or intent to generalise findings or universalise experience. Nevertheless, there would be some benefit in ensuring future research draws on a wider demographic and larger sample to explore what effect, if any, this may have on children’s understandings and practice around ethical consumption in more diverse family contexts.

Future research may also benefit from a mixed method approach which incorporates, for example, observation of shopping and the kind of conversations and activities taking place within different family contexts. A longitudinal study may also potentially reveal changes in the perceptions and experiences of children over time and the ways in which their participation evolves. Future research may also incorporate an emphasis on understanding the
influence of other socialising agents such as the media, schooling and peers, which were outside the scope of this study focused on the family context.

Notwithstanding the limitations and possibilities outlined above, this research makes important contributions to knowledge and provides a foundation for further research, especially when considered in light of emerging areas of interest in research as outlined below.

**7.5 Emerging areas of research**

Since this study began in 2012, areas of emerging academic interest have been identified which align very closely with this study. Of particular note is Warde’s (2015) acknowledgement that ethical consumption and everyday consumption are two of the three emerging areas of interest within the sociology of consumption. Collins (2015) asserts the key to fostering pro-environmental behaviour lies in an understanding of the relationships within the family. In addition, Heath et al. (2014) recently argued that ethical consumption is as much to do with negotiating moral obligations towards family members, as it is to do with considering ethical obligations in a broader societal sense, and research should seek to understand these tensions.

Since the study commenced, there has also been an emerging interest in the socialisation of youth into ethical consumption (Francis & Davis, 2014, 2015; Matthies & Wallis, 2015). Significantly, too, Cook (2013) continues the important debate surrounding consumption as an integral, yet under-recognised element of children’s lives. It is hoped the current study provides a timely and modest contribution to such efforts.
One of the most pertinent developments, though, is the growing interest in reconceptualising children’s participation beyond inclusion in formal structures of governance (Percy-Smith, 2015). An important shift is occurring in understanding the ways in which children assert their agency and participate in everyday social contexts (Percy-Smith, 2012). This “social participation” focuses on the “multifaceted ways in which young people participate more fully in everyday community spaces through their actions, choices, relationships and contributions” (Percy-Smith, 2015, p. 3). Such a view is strongly resonant with children’s participation in ethical consumption and encapsulates well the kind of choices, processes and relationships children engage in within their family and broader social contexts.

7.6 Policy implications

In the previous sections, I argued children’s ethical consumption challenges common conceptions of children’s participation, particularly in the area of their involvement in social or environmental issues. One of the key tenets of ethical consumption is the opportunity it gives members of the community (especially those otherwise excluded) to be involved in social or environmental issues. If children’s ethical consumption provides children with an opportunity to participate in social, civic, political and environmental issues, it is important that current policies enable such opportunities. This study provides new evidence (albeit limited by the small scale nature of the research) that might be useful in guiding policy deliberations regarding children’s consumption and their participation in social issues that enable them to engage more actively in the ethical dimensions of this.

By acknowledging the dichotomous nature of childhood and children’s experiences, it is important to ensure policies acknowledge the competence of children and their capacity to address important societal issues. By focusing only on the “toxicity” of consumption on
children’s lives or the apparent menacing power the “marketplace” has over children’s innocence, important opportunities to harness children’s capacity as change agents are lost.

Although the findings did identify the role that formal education plays in shaping children’s understandings of ethical consumption, the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that children come to understand and practice ethical consumption primarily through sociocultural activities in informal social settings. Closer attention could be given to policy change that prompts community-wide promotion of ethical consumption, more opportunities for children to participate, and support for further learning about ethical consumption through the media and social marketing campaigns.

It is important to acknowledge that I am not inferring all social and environmental issues can be solved through an emphasis on ethical consumption alone. However, the findings of this study underline the views of Trentmann (2007, p. 149), who suggests that consumption offers an “alternative sphere of political action and inclusion for groups excluded from the formal body politic” including children. This is not to suggest it is the only means by which children may be involved, but it is one that deserves further consideration.

7.7 Concluding statement

This research demonstrates that children can and do participate in social and environmental issues through their own ethical consumption choices. Children also play an active role in the ethical consumption choices of others. Children’s consumption is not an isolated activity separate from other aspects of their lives. Instead, consumption is enmeshed with many other aspects of children’s lives. However, there is a need to move beyond persistent messages that children’s consumption is “kid’s stuff”, superfluous or even detrimental to their experiences of childhood. Doing so misses an important opportunity to
view children’s consumption as a site for children’s participation in issues they may otherwise have limited access to.

Now and into the future, environmental and social sustainability will continue to drive policy agendas. Understanding the impact of consumption and identifying ways to minimise the negative aspects of this are critical to ensuring a sustainable future. Ensuring children are an integral and active part of the broader social movement towards sustainability is critical. This is not only because environmental and social sustainability are “future” issues and children are “our future” but also because engaging children and understanding their perspectives may well shape in positive and creative ways our choices and practices around ethical consumption “today”.
References


Cowe, R., & Williams, S. (2000). Who are the ethical consumers *Co-operative Bank, Manchester*.


Morrow, V. (2008). Ethical dilemmas in research with children and young people about their social environments. *Children's geographies, 6*(1), 49-61.


Appendices

Appendix 1 – Advertisement for participant recruitment

‘Kids and shopping’ research study

WOULD YOU LIKE TO PARTICIPATE?

We’d like to know:

• How are children involved in the shopping choices for the household?
• What conversations do you have about the shopping choices you make?
• What is responsible shopping?
• Where do children learn about shopping?

What’s involved?

30-45 minute interviews with at least one adult carer and child (8-12 years old) in your house.
We can come to you or meet where it is convenient.

For an information pack to learn more about this project or simply ask a question, please call Kate on 0413 874 663 or email katen@ascu.edu.au

This research project has been approved through the Southern Cross University Ethics Committee. Approval Number ECN-12-275

THIS RESEARCH IS NOT FOR COMMERCIAL PURPOSES.
### Appendix 2 – Participant profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Family profile</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Median house prices of suburb (based on a three bedroom home)(^5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child 1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Mum, dad and one sibling</td>
<td>Small town (&lt;5,000 residents)</td>
<td>$619,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child 2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Mum, dad and one sibling</td>
<td>Small town (&lt;5,000 residents)</td>
<td>$619,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child 3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Mum, dad, two siblings and one stepsibling</td>
<td>Small town (&lt;10,000 residents)</td>
<td>$810,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 4</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Mum, stepdad and sibling</td>
<td>Small town (&lt;10,000 residents)</td>
<td>$810,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 5</td>
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<td>Mum, stepdad, one sibling, two stepsiblings</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 6</td>
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<td>Mum and two siblings</td>
<td>Capital city</td>
<td>$520,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 7</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mum and two siblings</td>
<td>Capital city</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 8</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mum, dad and one sibling</td>
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<td>$400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 9</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mum, dad and three siblings</td>
<td>Regional Centre (&lt;75k)</td>
<td>$400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 10</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Mum, dad and two siblings</td>
<td>Regional Centre (&lt;75k)</td>
<td>$400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 11</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Mum, dad and two siblings</td>
<td>Regional Centre (&lt;75k)</td>
<td>$400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 12</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Mum, dad and three siblings</td>
<td>Regional Centre (&lt;75k)</td>
<td>$400,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Family profile</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Median house prices of suburb (based on a three bedroom home)</th>
<th>Average individual weekly income (based on suburb specific data)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent 1 (mother)</td>
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<td>Small town (&lt;5,000 residents)</td>
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<td>$534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent 1 (father)</td>
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<td>Married, two children</td>
<td>Small town (&lt;5,000 residents)</td>
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<td>$534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent 2</td>
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<td>$486</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent 3</td>
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<td>Small town (&lt;10,000 residents)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent 4 (mother)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent 4 (stepfather)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent 6 (mother)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent 6 (father)</td>
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<td>Parent 7</td>
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<td>Parent 8</td>
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<td>Married, two children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent 9</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Married, four children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent 10</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>Regional Centre (&lt;75k)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent 11</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Married, three children</td>
<td>Regional Centre (&lt;75k)</td>
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<td>$650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent 12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Married, three children</td>
<td>Regional Centre (&lt;75k)</td>
<td>$400,000</td>
<td>$650</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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7 Figures downloaded from (QPZM, 2012)
Appendix 3 - Interview schedule for child participants

Start with informal chat about the project and re-iterate appreciation for participating and offer opportunity to ask any questions about the project. Remind participants that they may leave, not answer questions, ask questions of their own etc. Also remind them that the interview will be recorded.

By shopping I am referring to food and household items that are bought for the family on a regular basis. So basically all the stuff you see at home in the cupboards or fridge. It might even include shampoo, toilet paper, cleaning products as well as food. (ask if they understand)

Firstly, I would like to have a chat about shopping...

1. Can you tell me a little about where your family normally shop for groceries?
2. Do you know why they choose to shop there?
3. Who normally does the household shopping?
4. Do you usually go shopping with them?
5. Do you enjoy going shopping?
6. Do you tend to combine other activities with your shopping outing or is it just straight to the shops and then home?
7. Have you ever wondered why they (use more specific term such as mum/dad/ grandma/ aunty once known) buys certain things when shopping, like certain brands? Have you ever asked questions about the things they buy?

I now want to talk more what say you have in what they buy…

8. Do you suggest things you’d like them to buy for you or the household?
9. What products do you tend to ask them for or talk about?
10. Do they ever talk to you about the reasons behind what they purchase? Or why they say yes or no to the things you ask to purchase? What reasons do they normally give?
11. Are you interested in going shopping and finding out about what they buy and why?
12. What sorts of reasons do they give for the stuff they buy? Is it because it’s healthy, cheap, local, good quality, good value?

I’d like to talk about when you get to buy things on your own…

1. Do you ever go shopping on your own or get to buy things for yourself?
2. What products do you get to buy on your own?
3. Do you enjoy that? Why?
4. Do you use your own money, or does someone else give you the money or pay for it for you?
5. Do you usually have a discussion around what you want to buy beforehand?
6. Sometimes people talk about being “responsible” when shopping … Has anyone ever talked to you about being “responsible” with what you buy? Can you tell me about this, where you may have heard it?
7. Do you think you are a responsible shopper? Can you give me an example of why you think that?

I wanted to talk about “ethical consumption”…

1. Have you ever heard of the term “ethical consumer” or “ethical consumption”? If so, can you tell me what you think it might mean?

(If not, then suggest…) Some people say ethical consumption means to think about where a product has come from or how it was made. So it means to think about whether it is good for the environment, or to make sure people or animals weren’t hurt making it. Some examples may include free-range eggs or organic food, buying locally, Fair-trade products and cruelty-free product. I have a folder with pictures that relate to ethical consumption…

2. Have you heard about or seen any of these? Which ones have you heard of and where have you seen them?
3. Have you ever purchased products like these? Can you tell me about it in more detail?
4. Do you think children can or should think about these things when shopping?

Close interview by offering the opportunity for participant to ask any questions, or make any additional comments. In thanking them for their time, also ask what they thought of the interview process, or what suggestions they may make for future interviews.
Appendix 4 – Interview schedule for parent participants

Start with verbal informal chat about the project and re-iterate appreciation for participating and offer opportunity to ask any questions about the project. Remind participants that they may leave, not answer questions, ask questions of their own etc. Also remind them that the interview will be recorded.

By shopping, I am referring to food and household items that are bought for the family on a regular basis. They may include toiletries and other personal products, fresh and processed food, cleaning products etc.

Firstly, I would like to have a chat about when you go shopping for household items.

1. Can you tell me a little about where your normally shop for these items?
2. Why do you choose to shop there?
3. What would you say are the main influences over the products you choose to purchase?

My next few questions are about your child/ren’s involvement in the shopping…

4. Do you take your child/ren shopping with you?
5. Would you describe shopping with them as a family outing, or more so a task or chore?
6. Do you tend to combine other activities with your shopping outing?
7. Do you think your child/ren enjoy going shopping with you? Do they seem interested or keen to participate?
8. Have they ever asked questions about the things you buy?

I want to now talk more specifically about how your child/ren are involved in the decisions regarding purchasing if that is okay…

9. Do your child/ren influence or suggest purchases while shopping or beforehand at home? How so?
10. What products do they tend to influence or have input into?
11. Do you ever talk to your children about your reasons behind what you purchase? Or why you say yes or no to the things they ask to purchase? What reasons do you normally give?
12. When you were out shopping with your child/ren, do you discuss or highlight your choices to them? Or do so only if they ask or show interest?
13. When you were a child, how involved were you in what products were purchased for the house? Do you remember going shopping with your parents/ others?
I’d like to talk about any instances your child has made a purchase on their own (or with you guiding them)…

14. What products do your child/ren tend to purchase on their own (or with you in the background)?
15. Who would hand the money to the shop-keeper to purchase the product? Do they use their own money, or do you give them the money to purchase?
16. Do you usually have a discussion around their choice of purchase beforehand?
17. Have you ever talked to your child/ren about being “responsible” about what they should buy? Can you tell me about this?
18. Would you describe your children as responsible shoppers? Why or why not (do you have an example)?

I wanted to talk about “ethical consumption”….

19. Have you ever heard of the term “ethical consumer” or “ethical consumption”? Can you tell me what you think it might mean?

(If not, then suggest…) Some people say ethical consumption means to think about where a product has come from, how it was made, what impact it has on the environment, or whether people were paid properly to make it, amongst other things. So some examples may include free-range eggs or organic food, buying locally, Fair-trade products and cruelty-free products…

20. Have you ever purchased products like these? Can you tell me about it in more detail?
21. Do you think your child/ren have had any experience with ethical consumption? Can you tell me about this?
22. Where do you think they may have learned about ethical consumption?
23. Do you think it is reasonable for children to have to consider all the “ethical” aspects of their shopping purchases?

24. In closing, do you think talking to me today about my research has altered your thinking about how you discuss responsibility or ethics with your children around their shopping experiences?

Close interview by offering the opportunity for participant to ask any questions, or make any additional comments. In thanking them for their time, also ask what they thought of the interview process, or what suggestions they may make for future interviews.
Being a part of a research project

Hello.
My name is Kate.

I am studying at a research centre (which is a place like school where adults go to learn). Here we learn about many different parts of children’s lives.

At our centre we think a really good way to find out about kids’ lives is to ask kids themselves. We think kids can tell us lots of amazing things that adults may not know.
All the things you know so far and how you came to learn or understand them are what we call ‘experiences’. We think kids’ experiences are just as important as adults so most of what we ask kids about are their ‘experiences’.

At this centre, I am working on my own project.

In my project, I want to find out about your shopping experiences (what things you think about when you decide you want to buy something). Maybe you go shopping with an adult, or maybe you go shopping with friends or by yourself. These are all your experiences, and I want to ask you some questions to better understand these.
For my project, I would like to sit down with kids like you and ask a few questions. This is just like two people sitting and having a talk and usually takes no more than one hour.

There are no wrong answers to my questions because it is all about your experiences, which makes you the best person to tell me about them. I'm also going to ask adults questions too. These adults may live in your house. When I ask adults questions, it is also to learn about their experiences.

No one's answer is more important than anyone else's.

They all help me understand more about my project.

When I talk to people I like to take notes and also record their voices so I can listen to it later and make sure I wrote everything down properly.

Then I keep all the recordings and notes in a really safe place.

I'll make sure you can read what I wrote about our talk, to make sure I got it right.
So I was wondering if you would like to be in my project?
If you say yes and then change your mind at any time that is okay. No worries!

And if after we talk you wish you hadn’t said something, just tell me and I promise I won’t use it in my project. Our talk will just stay between us because when I write my project, I won’t use your name.

The only time I have to tell someone something is if I think you are in danger or may be hurt. Then I will tell a safe person, like a doctor or someone you think will keep you safe.

If you would like to be a part of my project please fill out the form that came with this booklet.

Remember whether you decide to be in my project or not, I won’t mind. It’s your choice.

If you want to talk with me about the project, ask an adult if you can get in contact with me.

If you have any questions, or if something doesn’t make sense, let me know too and we can have a chat about it so I can explain myself better.

You can call me on 0413 874 663 or email kate.neale@scu.edu.au. You can also text message me your number and I can call you straight back so you or your family don’t have to pay for the call.

Thanks for reading about my project.

Kate 😊
This booklet forms part of a PHD research project through the Centre for Children and Young People at Southern Cross University. The project has been approved by the USC Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval code: ECH-15-575). NO COMMERCIAL BENEFIT WILL BE EARNED FROM THE RESEARCH FINDINGS.

Any complaints about the ethical conduct of this research should be addressed in writing to the following:

Ethics Complaints Officer
Human Research Ethics Committee
Southern Cross University
PO Box 67
Lismore, NSW, 2480
Email: ethicsrems@scu.edu.au

All complaints are investigated fully and according to due process under the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, and this University. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix 6 – Consent form for child participants

Consent Form
Being a part of a research project

Please fill out this form and give it to your parents or back to Kate.

Remember, if you don't understand something below, please don't tick the box.
Talk to Kate or another adult so they can explain it in a way you understand.

☐ I know Kate wants to talk to me about my shopping experiences.
☐ I know Kate will talk to 8 to 12 year olds.
☐ I know Kate's project is for her study at the research centre.
☐ I know there are no right or wrong answers to Kate's questions.
☐ I know that Kate can stop our talk at any time.
☐ If I can change my mind about anything I have said, Kate won't use it in her project.
☐ I will have the chance to read what Kate writes about me in her report to make sure it is correct.
☐ No one reading the project will be able to tell what parts I said.
☐ I know that our talk may last for about one hour.
☐ It's okay with me if Kate takes notes when we are talking.
☐ It's okay with me if Kate records my voice when we are talking.
☐ I know that Kate will use her notes and listen to the recording when she writes up her report.
☐ I know Kate's teachers may also listen to the recordings.
☐ Kate will keep all her notes and recordings in a safe locked place.
☐ I know that I can call Kate's teacher, Anne on 02 8620 3613 with any queries that I have.

☐ YES, I would like to be a part of Kate's project
or
☐ NO, I don't want to be a part of Kate's project

Please write your name: ______________________________

Please write the date: ______________________________

Remember, if you change your mind about being in this project after signing, it's okay. Just let Kate know.

Please write your parent or guardian's name: ______________________________
Appendix 7 – Findings poster for children

Children and ethical consumption

Some children felt they did not always have a choice in buying ethical products. Sometimes they felt that choices that were good for them or the environment were not always available. Sometimes the cost was too much for them, or their family, or they just didn’t know enough about ethical consumption to make those types of decisions.

The research shows that ethical consumption provides kids with a good opportunity to have a voice on issues that matter to society in general. This is a new way of looking at how kids participate and how we can see kids’ shopping beyond just buying toys or other “kids stuff.” By talking to parents and children about ethical consumption, we learned lots about how kids are seen as “old enough” or “responsible” in choices that affect our world. For example, we know that different children learn about ethical consumption in different ways. There is no perfect step-by-step process that explains how all children learn. We also know that kids learn through lots of different experiences and learning isn’t just a school thing. We also know that learning goes both ways, and kids help adults learn as well.

When going shopping or deciding what to buy, kids said they thought about things like the environment, the treatment of animals, and how other people who made products were treated. They also said they thought about their own health and tried to buy products they thought would be good for them too. All of these things are what we call ethical consumption choices. Kids know lots about ethical consumption. They know about organic and free-range products, buying Australian made, shopping locally and being careful not to buy too much (especially junk food and cheap plastic products that might break easily).

One way kids learned about ethical consumption was through their family. Usually it was through talking to mum and dad or other family members about things like organic or free-range food, or the treatment of animals or poor working conditions overseas. They also spoke about the opportunity of learning through shopping together with mum and dad. Parents felt like children also learned just by being surrounded by choices the family make, like seeing the organic milk in the fridge or knowing they bought free-range eggs. Parents also said they learned about ethical consumption from the kids as well. Both parents and kids gave great examples of where kids had bought mum and dad about what products to buy and why.

As our world gets bigger (with more people living in it) and our resources become limited in the future, knowing all of this information will help us make better decisions about how we can encourage people to think about what they buy and the effect that has on our resources and population.

These findings are a part of a PhD study conducted by Maleke Eke for the Centre for Children and Young People at Southern Cross University. To cite: Maleke, E. (2016). Children and ethical consumption: Findings poster. Lismore: Southern Cross University. Centre for Children and Young People.
Appendix 8 – Information sheet and consent form for adult participants

INFORMATION LETTER AND CONSENT FORM

3rd December 2012

Dear parent or carer,

‘Understanding children as consumers’
Invitation to be involved in the study

Hello. My name is Kate and I am undertaking a research project at the Centre for Children and Young People at Southern Cross University. I am writing to invite you and your child to participate in my research project exploring how children understand and experience consumption. This research has never been done before.

Why is the study important?

A lot of money is spent on products children want or need and their influence over such spending is significant. This project aims to better understand children’s role in household shopping.

What will involvement in the study mean for my child and I?

We would very much like you to be involved in this study and also allow us to invite your child to be involved.

Participation involves an interview that will take between 40-60 minutes.

With your consent, interviews will be audiotaped. However, all information shared in the interviews will be private and confidential. No one will be identified by real name. The only exception to this is if any concerns arise in relation to your child’s safety then we are obliged to notify someone who can help.

If you and your child agree to part of the study, you can both still withdraw at any time.

How would the information my child and I give be used?

The information from interviews will be analysed and this information will then be used to inform the research findings.
NO COMMERCIAL BENEFIT WILL BE GAINED FROM THE RESEARCH FINDINGS.

The findings will also be summarised into a report (which will be made available to all participants), journal articles and conference presentations. All information will be stored securely at the University - in password-protected computer files, which only the researcher and her two research supervisors will be able to access.

What else do I need to know?

The ethical aspects and evaluation of this study have been approved by the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number: ECN-12-275). Any complaints about the ethical conduct of this research should be addressed in writing to the following:

Ethics Complaints Officer
Human Research Ethics Committee
Southern Cross University
PO Box 157
Lismore, NSW, 2480
Email: ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au

All complaints are investigated fully and according to due process under the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and this University. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and you will be informed of the outcome.

What should I do now?

If you agree for you and your child to participate in the study, we would be grateful if you could complete the attached consent form.

Your child will then be asked directly if they would like to participate. Without their informed consent, their participation will not pursued.

Yours sincerely,

Kate Neale
PhD student
Centre for Children and Young People
School of Education
Southern Cross University
Tel: 0413 874 663 Email: kate.neale@scu.edu.au
Consent form for parent/ carers

I, …………………………………………… have read and understood the attached information and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree for (please circle one or both) myself / my child to participate in this research which I understand involves an interview that will last for approximately 60 minutes. I am also aware my child and/or I can withdraw from the study at any time.

I understand that in all written work associated with this research my privacy and confidentiality are assured. I give permission to researchers at the Centre for Children and Young People to listen to and transcribe the digital recordings.

I know that the aim of the research project is to explore children’s experience of consumption, and their understanding of rights and responsibilities. I know that I can contact Kate Neale on 0413 874 663 during work hours with any queries that I have.
I understand that this is NOT commissioned COMMERCIAL research.

Signed:……………………………………………………………………
Date:……………………………………………………………………
## Appendix 9 – Identified nodes from Nvivo analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question Number</th>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Over-arching theme/node</th>
<th>Sub-themes/nodes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1 -</td>
<td>How do children and their parents/carers perceive and practice ethical consumption within a family context?</td>
<td>Child participants</td>
<td>Ethical consumption (perceptions or practices)</td>
<td>health and well being, organic, moderating over consumption, recycling, meat and egg production (animal welfare, free range), australian made, shopping locally, perceptions of quality, influences over purchasing choices, parents/peers influence them discussion within the household, schools (in class teachings), marketing/media, price sensitivity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Adult participants | Ethical consumption (perceptions or practices) | health and well being, hand-me-downs, organic, moderating over consumption, recycling, meat and egg production (animal welfare, free range), australian made, shopping locally |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q2-</th>
<th>How do children come to understand ethical consumption within their family context?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Commerical enculturation of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>accompanied shopping excursions conversations knowledge of where family shops, who does the shopping and why choices are made desire to purchase products/ have money unaccompanied shopping excursions understanding responsibility through money (pocket money)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping as an outing or experience</td>
<td>experiences of shopping with parents opportunity to influence household choices difference in experiences between separated parents quality time spent together poor use of time together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversations about ethical consumption</td>
<td>experiences vs goods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of money and value</td>
<td>health benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meat production</td>
<td>quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>responsibility</td>
<td>seasonality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>moderation of over-consumption</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socialising agents</th>
<th>family members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>media and marketers (logos and</td>
<td>marketplace cues)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extended family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>schools (in class teachings)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference to age</th>
<th>exposure to ethical issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>independence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understanding responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Commerical enculturation of children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>accompanied shopping excursions</td>
<td>conversations within households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>osmosis</td>
<td>unaccompanied shopping excursions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understanding money (pocket money)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shopping as an outing or experience</th>
<th>experiences of shopping with children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>opportunity to educate differences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between (separated) parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poor way to spend time together</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quality time spent together</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Conversations about ethical consumption | experiences vs goods  
| health benefits  
| meat production  
| quality  
| responsibility  
| seasonality  
| sweatshop labour  

| socialising agents | family  
| media and marketers (logos and marketplace cues)  
| others (extended family, peers)  
| schools (in class teachings)  

| reference to age | exposure to ethical issues  
| independence  
| understanding responsibilities  

| Q3 - 3. What insights into the conceptualisation of children and their capacity to participate do we gain from examining children’s roles as ethical consumers within a family context? | Children  
| agency  
| apparent dichotomies  

| reference to age | exposure to or interest in ethical issues  
| independence  
| understanding responsibilities  

| Parents  
| reference to age  
| agency  
| apparent dichotomies  
| commercialisation of childhood  

| exposure to ethical issues  
| independence  
| ability to understand/ comprehend need to protect  

