Reacquiring Consumer Waste: Treasure in Our Trash?

Nina Brosius, Karen V. Fernandez, and Hélène Cherrier

The reacquisition of discarded objects reshapes linear consumption into a cycle, simultaneously reducing new resources consumed and reducing consumer waste. In this article, the authors examine sustainable consumption behavior in the context of the annual inorganic collection in Auckland, New Zealand. Depth interviews and observations revealed that the recognition that treasure can be found in trash was pivotal in motivating collectors to collect for themselves and others, prolonging the useful life of objects. Contrary to the "future-for-others" framing of sustainable consumption that is often evident in public discourse, collectors initially had a "present-for-us" perspective. However, being confronted with excessive waste made this negative consequence of consumerism more proximate, motivating subsequent sustainable consumption behavior. The authors suggest how public policy makers can take advantage of the finding that the desire to consume sustainably is both a motivator and a consequence of sustainable consumption.

Keywords: inorganic collecting, scavenging, waste, sustainable consumption

> Once a year, the sidewalks and grassy verges in my Auckland city neighborhood magically sprout discarded objects—everything from teaspoons to toasters to televisions are dumped in messy heaps outside the homes they come from. Just as quickly as discarded objects accumulate, diverse people converge on them like ants on a sugar cube. School children, dog-walkers, and purposeful people in serviceable station wagons comb through the piles and happily carry off a "find," decimating the piles which will soon be completely removed by city contractors, leaving the streets as they were. The next week, the adjacent neighborhood will fill with objects, and like an urban rash, the process will continue till every street in the city has had its turn.
>
> —Excerpt from field notes

The phenomenon described in the epigraph is colloquially termed "inorganic collection" in Auckland. This annual curbside collection of inorganic consumer waste is part of the city's response to the continually increasing amounts of consumer waste. The city instituted free inorganic collection services to help minimize consumer waste going to dumps and landfills and to meet residents' needs to dispose of objects too large to fit in a trash bag or can. These services are needed because consumer waste continues to increase worldwide, a phenomenon that some have blamed on consumerism (Lucas 2002). Worldwide, consumers believe that consumerism, defined as finding meaning, contentment, and acceptance primarily through what is acquired and consumed (Assadourian 2010), is integral to their pursuit of well-being (Ger 1997), leading them to justify their personal materialistic consumption (Ger and Belk 1999). Yet the world lacks sufficient resources to sustain a consumerist lifestyle for all (Assadourian 2010), meaning that consumerism by some restricts the consumption choices of others (Baker 2009). This inequity, in addition to the multiple negative impacts of consumerism on the environment, has precipitated calls to replace the dominant paradigm of consumerism with one of sustainable consumption (Kilbourne, McDonagh, and Prothero 1997), whereby present consumption needs are met without detriment to future needs. We contend that to do so successfully, the fundamental view of consumption must be reshaped.

More than 35 years ago, Jacob Jacoby challenged consumer researchers' near-total emphasis on acquisition by proposing to redefine consumer behavior as the "acquisition, consumption, and disposition of goods, services, time and ideas by decision making units" (Jacoby, Berning, and Dietvorst 1977, p. 22). This now-well-accepted definition is consistent with the view that an object progresses linearly from acquisition to consumption to disposal, with disposal as the terminus of the consumption experience (see Figure 1). Although Jacoby, Berning, and Dietvorst's (1977) definition neither explicitly limits consumption to a linear process nor constrains consumer researchers to examine the consumption of only new objects, the preponderance of consumer research published since does indeed examine new (as opposed to used) objects.

However, the nascent stream of research on consumer disposal in market economies reveals that consumers do dispose of possessions to others in their interpersonal networks (Curasi, Price, and Arnould 2004) and even to strangers (Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005). It is evident from this prior work that some objects circulate in contemporary market economies and that some consumers acquire the unwanted and/or used possessions of known or unknown others.

Nina Brosius is a doctoral candidate of Marketing (e-mail: n.brosius@auckland.ac.nz), and *Karen V. Fernandez* is Associate Professor of Marketing (e-mail: k.fernandez@auckland.ac.nz), University of Auckland Business School. *Hélène Cherrier* is Senior Lecturer of Marketing, University of Griffith (e-mail: h.cherrier@griffith.edu.au). Stacey Baker served as associate editor for this article.

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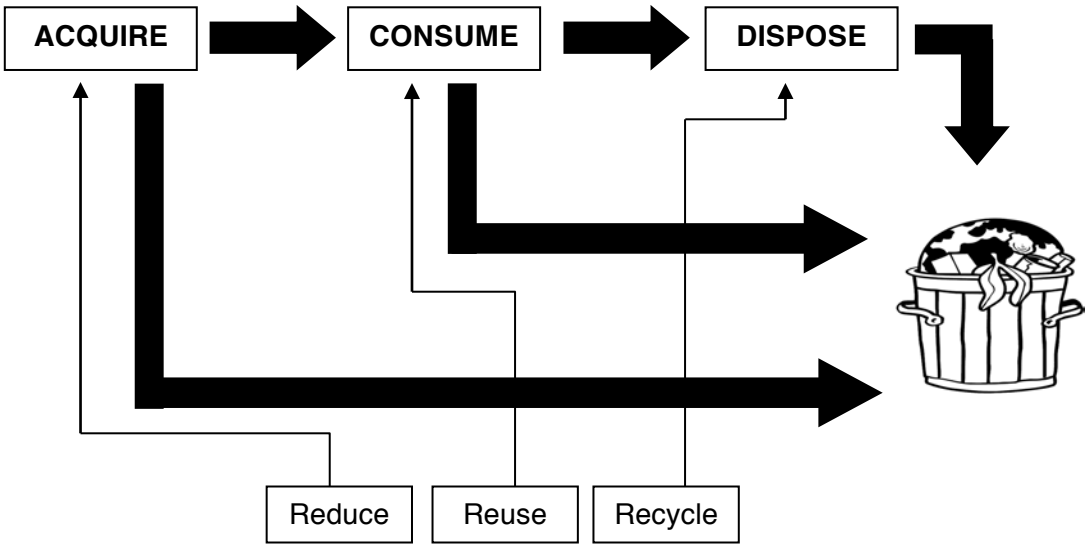
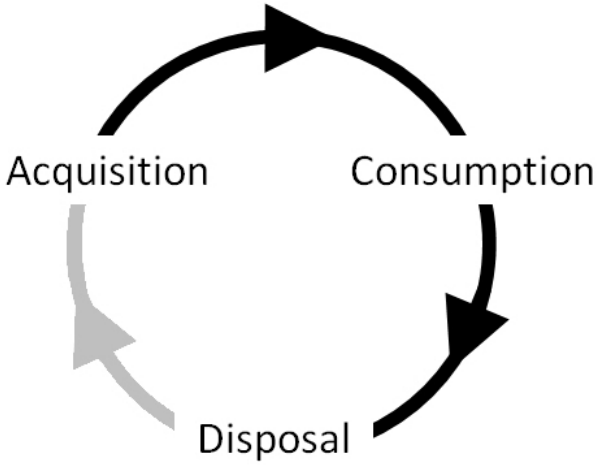
Figure 1. Existing Linear View Compared with Proposed Cyclical View of Consumption

A: Linear View Integrated with 3R Policy Strategies



B: Proposed Cyclical View of Consumption



Dobscha and Ozanne's (2001) pioneering work reveals that purchasing goods secondhand is a viable alternative to purchasing goods new. Purchasing secondhand is not an act that avoids consumption; instead, it involves consuming in a different way. Dobscha and Ozanne's research demonstrates that happiness and well-being may be found in goods even if they are not purchased new.

Thus, we contend that Jacoby's definition may have unintentionally constrained researchers' construal of consumption, limiting understanding of how people can consume sustainably. Relaxing the assumption that acquired objects must be new allows for the acquisition of objects disposed of by others, fundamentally redefining consumption from a linear trajectory to a complete cycle. Accordingly, our work answers Prothero et al.'s (2011) call for further research to address the *full* consumption *cycle* [emphases added] beyond initial choice. Viewing consumption as a cycle enables policy makers to consider additional avenues to reducing consumer waste.

Some consumer research (Cherrier 2010; Curasi, Price, and Arnould 2004; McCracken 1988a) has shed light on the custodial motives of the recipients of intergenerational transfers of possessions. However, the motives and strategies consumers use to reacquire the discarded possessions

of unknown others remains underexplored. Moreover, prior research on disposal has focused on items that had sentimental (Curasi, Price, and Arnould 2004) and/or resale (Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005) value. Items put out for inorganic collection are far less likely to have either. Indeed, some may even consider these items trash, fit only for throwing away. Yet some people voluntarily acquire these seemingly worthless items. Why do they do this? Resolving this knowledge gap is critical to developing public policy that will lead to wider adoption of sustainable consumer practices.

Our examination of inorganic collecting (acquiring the inorganic waste of strangers for free) reveals useful insights into how public policy makers can facilitate sustainable consumption. Specifically, we ask three broad research questions: (1) What motivates consumers to collect items from inorganic collection piles, and do these motives reflect the way public policy makers frame appeals for sustainable consumption? (2) Does participating in inorganic collecting influence participants' broader consumption choices (and if so, how)? (3) How can public policy makers use insights from inorganic collecting to facilitate the greater reacquisition of consumer waste?

Next, we present the conceptual foundations of our work, focusing in particular on the limitations of the extant research that gave rise to our research questions. We then explain our methodology before providing our findings. Finally, we discuss the implications of our research for public policy.

Theoretical Foundations

Waste and Public Policy

Defining well-being, happiness, and success in terms of the acquisition and consumption of material possessions sustains a consumerist worldview. Given the prevalence of consumerism and the view of consumption as a one-way linear movement from acquiring new to disposal, it is not surprising that consumer waste is a widespread consequence of consumer society (Packard 1960). Rathje (1989) identifies four ways of dealing with waste: dumping it, burning it, converting it, or minimizing it through source reduction. Due to the growing perception of waste as a serious problem, many nations, states, and cities have developed policies to guide how the problem of waste is to be addressed within their jurisdictions. Although these are often termed "zero waste" policies, many do not include definitions of the term "zero waste," whereas others define it as eliminating waste altogether or, more practically, as "reducing, reusing and recycling all we can" (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs 2011). Most do address three common means of waste management: the so-called 3Rs of reducing, reusing, and recycling.

Recycling involves systematically converting specified types of waste into useful resources by breaking down objects into their constituent parts, which are then reused. Recycling has been the most successful of the 3Rs. However, proenvironmental attitudes do not predict recycling rates (Rathje 1989), which is just one example of the attitude–behavior gaps that Prothero et al. (2011) suggest consumers must be empowered to bridge. Instead, the growth in recycling has been attributed to recyclers' access to convenient curbside pickup (Barr 2003; Barr, Gilg, and Ford 2001). Researchers posit that the ease and convenience of curbside pickup make recycling more frequent and that the visibility of curbside recycling bins facilitates the creation of a social norm of recycling. The visibility of bins on recycling day may also function as reminders to recycle. Together with the convenience of recycling, this repetition facilitates the creation of a new habit. The relative success of recycling has led many public policy makers to prioritize the provision of curbside recycling to their constituents, framing their recycling objective and achievement in terms of providing a specified percentage of its constituents with access to curbside recycling. After items put out for recycling are collected from curbside bins or drop-off centers, they are sorted and separated, washed if appropriate, and processed into new forms of raw material for new products. Some companies are required to engage in product stewardship (or do so voluntarily). This may involve devising resource recovery schemes, such as the 3R Group's Resene Paint-Wise paint and packaging take-back and recycling program (Product Stewardship Foundation 2011).

Recycling is one way to reuse some resources. However, "reuse" can also refer to lateral recycling—for example, using an existing object (e.g., a glass bottle) for a new purpose (e.g., as a lamp base)—or substituting disposable items for reusable ones. Attempts to encourage consumers to replace disposable cups, plates, and bags have been successful, particularly when the reusable replacements have monetary, souvenir, or other value (McKenzie-Mohr 2012). Although reusing items reduces the total amount of resources used, most public policy addressing reduction seems to be aimed at source reduction—reducing materials used in manufacturing objects (Schor 2005b)—rather than end-use reduction.

Barr, Gilg, and Ford (2001) empirically determine that people report taking up recycling to a significantly greater extent than reusing or otherwise reducing waste (e.g., by choosing to purchase items with less packaging). The authors conclude that recycling, being habitual and facilitated by convenience, is a fundamentally different behavior than reducing or reusing. Reducing and reusing, when they are undertaken, seem to be motivated by perceptions of self-relevance and efficacy and are *less* likely to be undertaken by those who recycle. It is possible that people engage in recycling, the most convenient household waste management option, even when reusing or reducing options could have been employed instead. Barr (2003) suggests that when people recycle, the recyclers may perceive that they have done "their bit" to minimize waste and thus do not feel the need to engage in the less convenient behaviors involved in reducing and/or reusing. Furthermore, it is possible that recycling is more congruent with a consumerist worldview than reducing or reusing because recycling does not require significant changes in consumption choices and patterns.

As Schor (2005b) perceptively points out, consumers resist calls to reduce their current levels of consumption (Connolly and Prothero 2008). This has led researchers to focus on how firms can pursue source reduction (through technological efficiency and product changes) as the main

avenue to consuming more sustainably. Schor suggests two additional avenues that public policy makers could use to reduce consumption: reduction of income (2005b) and increase in prices (2005a). Implicit in these four routes to sustainability is the assumption that consumption behavior involves the acquisition of new items.

However, some consumers do acquire used items, for example, as guardians of family heirlooms (Curasi, Price, and Arnould 2004) or because of financial need (Hill and Stamey 1990), the desire to secure a "bargain" (Bardhi and Arnould 2005), or simply to avoid buying new (Dobscha and Ozanne 2001). Regardless of motive, acquiring items disposed of or discarded by others reshapes linear consumption into a cycle. Although for simplicity's sake, we depict and discuss a single consumption cycle, we acknowledge that a single item can be acquired, consumed, and disposed of multiple times throughout its existence (Kopytoff 1986). As cultural values shift, the meanings of the item of interest shift also (Baker, Motley, and Henderson 2004) and the exchange value of the item changes accordingly (Appadurai 1986), making the consumption cycle dynamic rather than static. Baker, Motley, and Henderson (2004) show that as the cycle of consumption spins, even items once viewed as worthless rubbish can become treasured memorabilia.

Although we acknowledge that a cyclical view of consumption would not result in a waste-free consumer society, we believe that both the resources used and any leakage/waste would be significantly reduced. Reacquiring others' consumer waste instead of buying new items is consistent with the notion of a sustainable consumer society in three ways: (1) the acquirer is not forced to try to avoid consumption (which is impossible) but is able to (2) reduce his or her demand on resources while also (3) reducing the consumer waste of others. Thus, the acquisition of others' consumer waste may offer a fruitful pathway to a sustainable consumer society.

Sustainable Consumption

Sustainability has been discussed under concepts such as green consumption, environmental/ecological concern, and environmental friendliness since the 1960s (Peattie 2010; Shultz and Holbrook 1999). Calls for sustainable actions have been rooted in desires to conserve limited resources, avoid climate change, reduce the ever-increasing amounts of consumer waste, and/or preserve the natural environment. These drivers of the belief in the value of sustainability are not mutually exclusive (Fernandez, Brittain, and Smith 2011). The earliest definition of sustainable development is as follows: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland Commission 1987, p. 1). In keeping with this terminology, Heiskanen and Pantzar (1997, p. 410) define sustainable consumption as "meet[ing] the needs of present generations without compromising the needs of future ones."

Since then, "sustainable consumption" and related terms have been widely used in public policy communications, business communications, and academic research, employing discourses that mostly submit to the Brundtland Commission (1987) definition and explicitly or implicitly refer to the future. For example, a conservation project called "Project Island Song" exhorts visitors to help "restore the islands' ecology for their children to enjoy" (Department of Conservation 2010). Here, sustainable consumption is framed as "caring for our future, for our children." Similarly, most public policy discourses promote sustainable actions at the individual level, using a future-oriented perspective, such as asking consumers to adopt sustainable consumption practices in the interest of the future welfare of their descendants. Whether sustainable consumption discourses confront overconsumption and/or call for sufficient (as opposed to excessive) consumption (Taylor and Tilford 2000) or challenge people's *mis*consumption and plead for efficient consumption through eco-friendly products, they appear to be future oriented.

Thus, in public policy and business ("public") discourse, sustainable consumption is framed as a loss now for a gain later: an investment in the future. This is consistent with a social dilemma known as a "social fence," in which, for example, proenvironmental behavior results in immediate negative consequences for the self but long-term benefits for others, thus representing an ultimate investment in the future (Kollock 1998). In contrast to the social fence dilemma inherent to acting sustainably, the "social trap" dilemma is inherent to a consumerist paradigm. The social trap implies that people reap immediate personal benefits resulting in costs and losses for others in the long run, thus exhibiting an investment in the present (Costanza 1987; Platt 1973). The future-oriented view calls for rational people who can shift habits and practices for the benefit of others. To their own detriment, they are implored to invest or go without rather than opt for present gratification. Because this orientation prioritizes future benefits over present advantages and altruistic motives over personal goals, we term it a "future-for-others" framing of sustainable consumption. Yet Prothero et al. (2011) observe that sustainable consumption practices have not become part of most consumer lifestyles, leading us to question whether the future-for-others framing is effective in motivating consumers to engage in sustainable consumption lifestyles.

This suggests to us that public policy makers need to frame sustainability in a way that is more compelling to consumers. Some consumers forgo buying new and engage in multiple environmentally friendly behaviors for the good of the planet and other people (Dobscha and Ozanne 2001). McKenzie-Mohr (2000) calls for researchers to explain what leads people to engage in behavior that is collectively sustainable. What motivates consumers who currently *do* engage in sustainable consumption practices? Are their motivations consistent with the future-for-others framing evident in public discourse?

Drawing on Platt (1973), we suspect that immediate consequences are more compelling motivators than long-term ones. Platt suggests that one way to resolve a social trap involves converting long-range consequences into more immediate ones. This implies that making the long-term negative consequences of consumerism more proximate may motivate consumers to forgo personal gain at the expense of others and the planet. Does being confronted with the negative consequences of consumerism (e.g., waste) in the present motivate consumers to consume more sustainably? We believe that answering McKenzie-Mohr's

(2000) call by examining the discourse of consumers who engage in sustainable consumption practices will reveal the answers to our questions. Next, we review literature on urban scavenging to identify an appropriate subset of consumers engaging in sustainable consumption practices.

Urban Scavenging

Urban "scavenging" is often used interchangeably with the terms "foraging" (Dobscha and Ozanne 2001) and "gleaning" (Rush 2006). Contemporary urban scavenging involves acquiring (for free) food and other organic and inorganic items, such as furniture and clothing, that others have discarded (Edwards and Mercer 2007). "Dumpster diving" appears to be the only form of urban scavenging that academic researchers have empirically examined; therefore, we next review what is known about this practice.

Dumpster diving (entering large commercial trash receptacles) is mainly practiced by small groups of consumers on the margins of mainstream consumer society, such as the homeless (Hill and Stamey 1990) and those seeking to live more sustainably (Rush 2006). However, dumpster diving is illegal in some countries and is generally seen as distasteful or even deviant. This is a result of perceptions that the contents of dumpsters are disordered and therefore disgusting and contrary to cultural values of order and hygiene (Lucas 2002). Thus, dumpster diving has not become a mainstream consumer practice. Instead, dumpster divers first learn of this practice from friends or family or are motivated to do so by prior positive childhood experiences of finding useful discarded items (Fernandez, Brittain, and Smith 2011). Given that dumpsters are just one source of discarded items, it is unclear whether people who acquire discarded items from other sources do so as an isolated act or as part of a sustainable consumer lifestyle. We believe that the inorganic collection we described in our epigraph is a potential source of discarded items that may serve as a fruitful empirical context for our research.

In addition to regular (typically weekly) curbside collections of trash and recyclables, some cities also provide opportunities for households to dispose of their inorganic waste items that are too large for the regular weekly trash collection. This enables consumers to dispose of bulkier items that are not organic or hazardous. There are several institutional approaches that are practiced, as Table 1 illustrates.

However, only two options we identified provide opportunities for others to scavenge for discarded items: the weekly opportunity for placing unwanted items alongside ordinary trash and the periodic preannounced mass pickup of inorganic items. Furthermore, the chances of finding and acquiring something useful that is discarded on any particular trash collection day in any particular neighborhood are far smaller than the chance of finding and acquiring useful items in an annual neighborhood collection period. We do note, however, that other unofficial opportunities for inorganic collecting do present themselves to those "in the know." For example, at the end of each semester, university students often find useful items discarded outside student accommodations on and off campus.

An in-depth examination of official policy documents and media stories revealed that the pragmatic aim of Auckland's inorganic collection service is to assist with the disposal of waste rather than to challenge the dominant paradigm of consumerism ideologically. Thus, we ask, are the collectors' motivations similarly pragmatic, or are they ideological? As noted in prior research (Fernandez, Brittain, and Smith 2011), those who engage in the sustainable consumption practice of dumpster diving seem to be motivated by past-oriented personal pleasures as well as concern for others. Are consumers who pick up (hereinafter termed

Table 1. Large Inorganic[a] Item Collection Schemes

Type	Drop-Off Services	Limited Pickup[b]	On-Call Pickup	Free Weekly Pickup	Inorganic Collection
Description	Can drop off inorganic waste to collection point any time	Can call for a specified number of pickups	Can call for unlimited free pickups	Can put out inorganic items with regular trash	City informs households of specified collection dates when a maximum amount of inorganic waste will be picked up from curbs
Example cities	Salt Lake City; London[c]	Berlin; Tokyo	Los Angeles; Paris	New York[d]; Toronto[e]	Auckland; Brisbane; Salt Lake City[f]
Implication for disposal	Free but inconvenient	Fees are charged	Free	Free; weekly	Free but only annual; short notice
Implications for reacquisition	No opportunity for others to scavenge	No opportunity for others to scavenge	No opportunity for others to scavenge	Serendipitous scavenging only	No public listing of collection schedules

[a]Excludes organic and hazardous waste.

[b]Specified dates; limited number of pickups and/or costs.

[c]Picks up hazardous waste only.

[d]Only six oversize items at a time.

[e]Only for oversize items.

[f]Provides free dumpsters for resident use.

"collect") items from inorganic collection piles motivated by past benefits or concerns for the future? Are these "collectors" motivated by altruistic and/or personal goals? Although dumpster divers and other consumers living sustainable lifestyles practice inorganic collecting (Ballantine and Creery 2010; Fernandez, Brittain, and Smith 2011), consumers with a broad range of ages and socioeconomic backgrounds do it as well. This suggests that there is a greater opportunity to introduce sustainable consumption practice to consumer society as a whole, through inorganic collecting. How can current inorganic collection policies be improved to maximize this potential? We now turn to a discussion of our method.

Method

Research Context

The city councils of Auckland (New Zealand) and several cities in Australia (e.g., Brisbane, Perth) provide a free inorganic collection service once a year in each city suburb. We provide further details of collection in Auckland because we conducted all the interviews and formal observations in that city. Residents receive a flyer at least one week before their suburb's collection. Although the service is completely free of charge, residents are required to adhere to particular guidelines. The unwanted objects cannot be sharp or dangerous, two people should be able to lift each discarded object, the pile cannot be larger than two cubic meters (approximately 2.6 cubic yards), and households are not permitted to put out organic waste, ordinary household waste, or "e" (electronic) waste as part of this collection.

Given that dumpster diving without the owner's permission is illegal, we thought it important to clarify the legality of inorganic collecting. Initially, scavenging others' discarded inorganic items was neither promoted nor prohibited. Then, the city council prohibited inorganic collecting. They explained, through local media, that the growing popularity of inorganic collecting led the contractors to complain to the city council, stating that their fees for providing the pickup service had incorporated anticipated gains from recycling and/or reselling useful items. According to the contractors, these potentially useful items had been collected by private individuals before the contractors' pickup operations, making their pickup services (at current rates) economically unviable. The resultant public outcry led the council to rescind their decision. Inorganic collecting became legal again, as long as the homeowners in question consented. It appears, however, that virtually all collectors continue to collect without asking for owners' permission.

Currently, the city council advertises on its website that collecting is legal as long as collectors do not leave a mess behind, cause harm for others, or intend to sell the item(s) collected. However, the city council has shortened the advance warning period to householders (to less than a week instead of two to three weeks), arranges for items to be picked up far more quickly (within the same week instead of three to four weeks as before), and does not publicize pickup schedules beyond sending letters to the affected households. It seems plausible to infer that the council is trying to reduce the opportunity for inorganic collectors to acquire useful items (thus appeasing the contractors) without making the practice illegal (thus appeasing the collectors).

Research Method

Adopting a qualitative approach, this study involved formal interactions with 15 informants and further informal observations of many others. We used purposive sampling, supplemented with snowballing, to identify informants with the potential to provide rich insights into the inorganic collecting phenomenon. The recruited 15 informants ranged between 18 and 60 years in age; nine (60%) were male; and seven were New Zealand Europeans, four were European immigrants, and four were South Asians. One or both of the first two authors depth-interviewed 12 of the 15 informants (all of whom had previously engaged in inorganic collecting). Interviews took place at either the interviewer's tertiary institution or the participants' homes, lasted approximately one hour, and were semistructured. The interview guide provided structure and guidance but also incorporated flexibility so that informants could express their perceptions freely. We began by asking a mix of grand tour questions (McCracken 1988b) and then allowed the informant to lead the interview discussion so we could comprehend informants' lived experiences of inorganic collecting.

The remaining three informants (two novices and one slightly experienced collector) as well as two depth-interview participants (both very experienced collectors) permitted the first author to accompany them as they engaged in inorganic collecting, facilitating her participant observation of the phenomenon in an authentic, real-world setting. Observations lasted between three and four hours and occurred in suburbs where inorganic collection was currently taking place. Immersed in the field, the first author was able to observe and engage with the informants of this study as well as many other inorganic collectors. This researcher took extensive field notes and photographs to capture everything that was of possible relevance to this study. Overall, the final data set comprised 220 pages of single-spaced interview transcripts, 52 pages of field notes, and 66 photographs.

All three authors also personally participated (along with family members) in inorganic collection (two in Auckland and one in Brisbane), providing an introspective lens to the practice. One author regularly and systematically participated in inorganic collecting, one collected only occasionally on impulse, and one had never participated before this research. Thus, our research team was able to use our diversity of expertise (novice, intermediate, and expert) to analyze and interpret the data. Furthermore, the triangulation of multiple methods and researchers improved the trustworthiness and confirmability of the data. Data collection and analysis were iterative in this study. Following Strauss and Corbin (2002), we first open-coded the data to generate general themes before we used more focused closed coding of the data within the previously generated themes. The relevant literature and our participant observation of inorganic collection activities informed our subsequent interpretation of the coded data. We analyzed these data to elicit discourses pertaining to sustainable consumption.

Findings

A distinctive aspect of the kind of inorganic collection practiced in Auckland is the publicly visible nature of inorganic items awaiting official collection. This public visibility enables collectors to serendipitously collect items they perceive as useful or valuable rather than act on preexisting motivations. Therefore, we examined our data to determine if our informants engaged in inorganic collecting incidentally or intentionally. When we asked our informants how they went about inorganic collecting, they often reported picking up needed or interesting items because they happened to notice them rather than purposefully going in search of useful items. Eric (white male informant, 27 years of age, consultant) exemplified this "serendipitous" type of collecting when he told the interviewer, "[It tends to] be more driving on regular streets, the regular way we go and if we see something we'll stop and I'll go back and get it. [Or we] just find it [while] walking home."

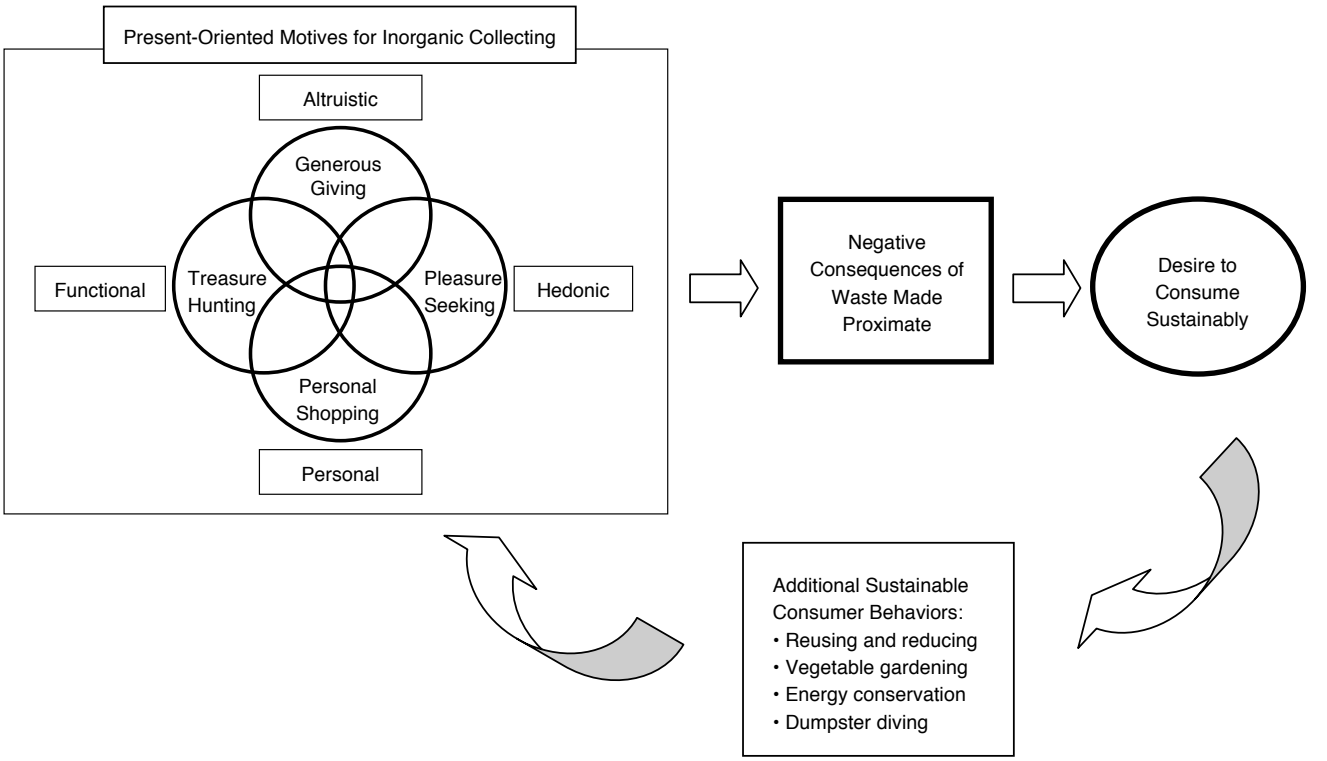
We found that although an initial inorganic collecting experience tended to be incidental and serendipitous, the positive benefits and feelings generated gradually led the person to collect intentionally and purposefully. For example, Giles (white male informant, 25 years of age, graphic designer) first "was just on a motorbike ride and saw something and then went back and picked it up." But subsequently, he is now "always on the lookout … during [the inorganic collection period] ... specifically for suitcases, I collect suitcases and lots of people do get rid of suitcases." Giles reported going online subsequently to see if he could predetermine when and where he could participate in inorganic collecting. He told the interviewer, "Last year I tried I think, I Googled it and I don't know if I had much success." However, another interviewee, Steve (white male informant, 18 years of age, tertiary student), was able to use the Internet creatively to determine a collection route. He waited until inorganic collection actually began in a particular area and then used Google Maps to plan a specific route within that area. Others relied on word of mouth or past experiences to estimate when a particular area would be awash in inorganic items.

Next, we explicate the motivations behind intentional collecting before revealing the notions of gift giving and interconnection that underlie these motivations. Then, we examine whether sustainability is an antecedent and/or a consequence of inorganic collecting before comparing the perspectives of inorganic collectors to the future-for-others framing of sustainability popular in current public discourse.

Motives for Inorganic Collecting

Our informants usually discussed their sustainable consumption practices at the microsocial, individual level rather than at the macro level, "future generation" cohort mentioned in public discourse. Thus, we turn next to a discussion of inorganic collectors' personal motives for collecting others' discarded items. As Figure 2 indicates, we were able to classify their motives along two dimensions,

Figure 2. Inorganic Collecting: A Sustainable Cycle of Consumption



noting whether these motives were utilitarian or hedonic and whether they were largely self-interested or altruistic. This resulted in four intertwined sets of motives.

Personal Shopping

When describing their inorganic collecting activity, many of our informants spoke concretely about collecting inorganic items for their own actual or potential needs. For example, Simon (white male informant, 26 years of age, tertiary student) told us, "At the start of this year, we picked up some stuff because it was our neighbors' stuff, so ... we picked up a Ping-Pong [table tennis] table, which is pretty much brand new.... It took three of us to carry it up the street, and yeah, it was pretty exciting.... And I think we picked up a desk, like a computer desk, which was brand new, no scratches, nothing." Similarly, Rachel (white female informant, 42 years of age, homemaker) described her inorganic collecting as if it were a shopping trip. However, in contrast to Simon's browsing style of "shopping," Rachel was more purposeful and goal directed:

> What we do is, the children and me, we decide, "Okay, we want this and we want this today, we want to pick this up."... But you have to be very specific, and then we would tell each other, "I want a red Persian carpet, the fringing must be intact, it mustn't be too dirty, it must be predominantly red." You know, we tell each other we're thinking about that the whole time, and I'm telling you, we get that! ... So, Sandra [my daughter] and I are driving and she's now visualizing, and I see how she's concentrating really hard, and we stop at this place, and she picked up this bag, and as she picks it up she looks at me and her mouth went open, and I said to her, "What?" And she said, "That's exactly what I wanted, that's exactly what I wanted!"

Both Simon and Rachel reveal pragmatic, personal motives for inorganic collecting, leading us to classify these sorts of motives as "personal shopping." Although these two excerpts describe a self-interested practice, not all collectors were driven only by the desire for immediate gratification. As Giles explains subsequently, he is "more than happy" to collect something when he sees a possible use for the object. However, if he does not envision immediate personal use, he nevertheless collects the object and keeps it for a year in case he may need it later. He told us, "Just generally, I'm an opportunist when it comes to finding something I need, and if I don't have to pay for it, I'm quite happy about that. But yeah, like I mean, if I see a use for something I'm more than happy to take it, provided I can. … I keep some stuff. Like in my garage, because I don't use it so much, I'm happy to keep something for six months knowing that an inorganic will tick around and I'll be able to get rid of it."

Giles's use of the term "tick around" suggests to us that he perceives inorganic collection as occurring like clockwork, once a year. Rachel, who collected items for her family or to resell online, was also motivated by pragmatic personal shopping. However, she told the interviewer, "I certainly keep my mind open if I go collect[ing], and if I see something that I'm really not interested in but I know someone else will like, I give it to them." As Rachel's comments indicate, there is some overlap between collecting for pragmatic reasons and for altruistic reasons. We turn next to a discussion of altruistic motives for collecting.

Generous Giving

Ashna (Asian female informant, 52 years of age, legal assistant), a volunteer refugee worker, told us, "I actually used to look at things which could come in handy for them [the refugees].... So I did pick up stuff for them. And also, if I did see something which my friends had said they wanted, I would quickly say, 'Hey, it's available, go and pick it up from there.'" Although Ashna occasionally picked up items for herself, her primary motive for collecting is to obtain items for others. Thus, Ashna's quotation exemplifies "generous giving." Several other interviewees exhibited some degree of pragmatism while also demonstrating altruistic motives for collecting items. They reported picking up items with the intent of giving them to friends, family members, organizations, or even strangers who needed those items. For example, our field notes recall that Spencer (white male informant, 52 years of age, artist and activist), who collects items for himself, also

> collects for other people. He's collected shoes for some friends, for the daughters of his friend ... and also for another friend who just had a baby.... [Because] his house is pretty full with furniture ... he only collects small pieces or he collects furniture if he knows that someone else needs it. So one time, he went out collecting furniture for a friend and he said his van was completely loaded to the roof. But that was for a friend because he moved somewhere.... So ... he went collecting for his friend.

Spencer exhibited altruism toward a friend in need. However, Mahir (Asian male informant, 40 years of age, taxi driver) seemed to be the most altruistic of all, by collecting items and adding value to them for the benefit of strangers in need. The following excerpt details Mahir's experience of collecting a coffee table to donate to the Salvation Army.

> Brought it home, tidied it up. I've picked up a coffee table, didn't really want a coffee table, but I picked it up; it was in two pieces, top was off, the bottom parts was off. Repaired it, gave it a coat of varnish, and then it looked quite good, it was very stable, so I took it down to the Salvation Army and gave it to them, I said sell it, get whatever you want to get for it. So like, instead of letting it go to the dump, someone's made money out of it, and Salvation Army needs money all the time anyway, so I gave it to them.

When collecting the coffee table, Mahir knew he did not need the item for personal use. At the time of collection, he projected a possible use for the object by an organization that he respects and wants to help. Mahir was aware that the organization "needs money" and that he could help them by picking "up things that I've kind of tidied up and left for the Salvation Army so they can sell and make some money out of it." When referring to his diverse encounters with the Salvation Army, Mahir expressed a personal relationship with the organization. He respects their work and engages in considerable effort to help them "make money." For this organization, Mahir "repaired" the coffee table, "gave it a coat of varnish," and went out of his way to bring the object to the retail store. Mahir collects objects for utilitarian reasons, but he aims to benefit others rather than himself. His story clearly substantiates the notion that inorganic collecting can be engaged in to fulfill the utilitarian needs of others. Mahir appears to position sustainable consumption as a social practice insofar as he can be sure that his actions are

beneficial to others in society. We note also that Mahir, in expending effort to repair and restore the coffee table, is mirroring business-to-business resource recovery activity whereby useful used items, such as laptops and vacuum cleaners, are repaired and refurbished before being offered for sale.

Treasure Hunting

All our informants reported the pleasure they found in "treasure hunting," the "pursuit of the unexpected" in which shopping is undertaken for surprise and luck and seen as "a continuous search for hidden 'treasures' waiting to be found" (Bardhi and Arnould 2005, p. 230). Many informants stated that "one person's trash is another person's treasure" quite independently and in different contexts during our interviews or observations. We point out that bargain hunting and treasure hunting are not identical. Whereas bargain hunting is motivated by financial need and/or gain (i.e., economic motivations), treasure hunting is motivated by hedonic reasons. David (white male informant, 22 years of age, tertiary student] revealed his hedonic treasure hunting motives when he said:

> We were driving ... to the skate park, and it was inorganic collection, and we were just like, "Wow, what's that? What's that?" And you know, just sort of ended up stopping the car at every pile and just going through to see if there was anything interesting.... 'Cause it's sort of, I don't know, there's a little bit of childhood excitement about, like you don't know what's there. You never know what treasure you could find, which is quite a funny way to think about it. But that definitely underlies it, we were having a lot of fun being like, "Oh man, this is free, this is free!"

The powerful allure of finding treasure in others' trash is illustrated by Rachel's recollection of a particular incident:

> Rachel: I was looking for a little, for a chair or a couch, and there was a TV tube on top of it. And I wanted to pick the tube up and put it on the side to get that thing.... And luckily my husband was with me, [because] when I picked it up, the glass flew, broke up, and it cut my whole finger open here [pointing to finger]; the whole car was full of blood.... Just blood everywhere.... We patched my finger up and...
>
> Interviewer: And went back right out again?
>
> Rachel: Yes!

Finding treasure is so pleasurable that people continue to seek it even when they do not need anything. Instead, they justify their search by seeking items for other people, thus exhibiting an overlap between treasure hunting and altruism.

Pleasure Seeking

Rachel was adamant that she did not need the items she collected. She declared, "It's not because of need for me. I didn't grow up in a poor household.... We certainly had everything that we needed. Maybe upper middle class, never rich, but by no means, never ever poor. But I'm a gatherer. You know, it's interesting, it's an adventure for me, and there's absolutely nothing in my life that I need, so I'm not going out and collecting these things because I need them."

As a new immigrant, Rachel initially engaged in inorganic collecting to furnish her home but now continues to collect because she finds collecting interesting and an adventure. Similarly, although Ashna originally engaged in serendipitous inorganic collecting, the pleasure she finds in treasure hunting has led her to scour inorganic heaps continually for items needed by refugee families that she encounters in the course of her work. Ashna explained how important it is for her to collect objects that refugee families need and will use: "Normally what happens with them is it's a six-month contract, so you're given a list by the organization that these are the things you have to provide for the refugees. So I would start thinking of things by picking up from the collection and keeping it in my garage. So once the family was allocated [a place to live], then I would just pick up the stuff and take it to their place."

We term this type of motivation "pleasure seeking" because it is the thrill of the chase that motivates. Rachel's continued searching for things she does not need and Ashna's altruistic collecting are both excuses and consequences of these women collecting more than they personally need. On the surface, it may seem that Ashna, initially motivated by treasure hunting and then by pleasure seeking, also resembles generous givers such as Mahir in collecting for others. They both are similar in their view of inorganic collection from a social perspective. However, we note that Ashna finds hedonic pleasure in the unexpected nature of the hunt, whereas Mahir is rather more pragmatic in trying to add value to items to benefit others.

Summary

We observe that people collect on their own behalf for pragmatic ("it's free") or hedonic ("it's fun") reasons. Some people are motivated to collect for others also for pragmatic or hedonic reasons. The motives are often intertwined. For example, we note that collectors differed in terms of how much self-interest versus altruism they exhibited. Giles appears to be wholly motivated by personal gain, saving unneeded collected items for a year in case he himself needs it and then returning the surplus to the inorganic pile to reclaim needed space (rather than allowing others to benefit). Rachel, who also primarily collects for herself, will help others incidentally. If she comes across something she does not need but knows someone who might be able to use it, she will get it for them. Thus, Rachel exhibits some altruism compared with Giles, who appears to be wholly self-interested. Spencer, who collects for himself and incidentally for others, also deliberately puts a great deal of effort into collecting for friends in specific need, thus exhibiting even more altruism than Rachel does. Finally, Mahir is motivated wholly by the need of strangers, and even adds value to items he collects to maximize the benefit he offers others. While examining the motives of personal shopping, generous giving, treasure hunting, and pleasure seeking, we noted that the idea of interconnectedness ran through many aspects of our data.

Interconnectedness

Mahir and Ashna's experiences exemplify how the practice of sustainable consumption can be driven by a microsocial perspective and oriented toward interpersonal and local networks. In describing her collecting activity, Ashna emphasizes her social participation in the life of refugees as well

as in the life of the objects she rescues from the road. When she "pick[s] up the stuff and take[s] it to their place," she becomes the social link between the "family" and the "stuff." She creates the link by saving the object and passing it on to others for their benefit.

> I'm actually really happy because I know that, you know, it's good. I was using it and I continued, I mean I could continue using it. It's just that I don't need it because either I need more space or I've bought another one and I've upgraded. Or it's just going to lie around and there's no point, so I might as well give it to someone who needs it. And I'm actually quite happy when people use it because I know it's keeping the cycle going.

When Ashna does not need an object, she passes it onto another and thus reciprocates the gift she finds during inorganic collection week. This sense of reciprocating the gift was present in all narratives. For example, Geena (Asian female informant, 60 years of age, teacher) summed up the process as "we just pass it on to people," whereas Mahir rationalized:

> I don't think it's a bad idea, I don't think it's a bad idea 'cause you know, there's so many people in the world, how much are you going to send to a landfill. And how much are you going to waste? Why not ... just keep it back in the cycle, you know? ... If you start looking at how people throw things, I don't know whether people see it [the waste] or not, you know.... If you were throwing it out on the road, you could have given it to the Salvation Army to sell, which they could have used for other purposes. And sometimes, it's like they could easily sell that or give that money to somebody, whatever, or give the item to charity rather than throw it on the road.

In the previous excerpt, Mahir first offers a macro vision of the world, mentioning that there are "so many people in the world" and describing the amount of waste. When Mahir shifts to a micro vision of the world and considers "how people throw things," he refers to a sense of interconnectivity between objects and people. Mahir's statement "just keep it back in the cycle" captures the spirit of prolonging an item's life cycle by passing it on across interconnected objects, people, organizations, and the environment. For Mahir, collecting an object left on the street can benefit the Salvation Army, the environment, and people in general. The notion of interconnectivity is explicit in Lara's (white female informant, 22 years of age, tertiary student) narrative when she explains how inorganic collection helps "everyone":

> I think it's great; I also go to secondhand stores, and I think it's a great thing that you can reuse things because it helps the environment, it helps the economy. It benefits everyone, really, 'cause if someone did not want anything then someone else might. I think that's very beneficial for everyone.

For Lara, inorganic collection benefits the environment, the economy, and everyone. Lara's sustainable practices not only represent individual action fields but also lead to positive emotions and solidarity. Inorganic collection becomes the referent for a series of benefits that are chained together around the sustainable practice. In the same vein as Lara's sense of helping the environment, the economy, and everyone, Ashna explained how her sustainable practice makes people "happy" and gives her "satisfaction." She told the interviewer, "What it does is it gives me sort of some type of satisfaction as well that I've done something. I've saved something from going to the dump, somebody else can use it. The way I look at it is if I can make one person happy every day, I'm happy, so that's part of it."

Inherent in these narratives is the notion of interconnectedness. Similar to firms that perceive the interconnectedness of all stakeholders (Mish and Scammon 2010) and eco-feminists who perceive interconnectedness between themselves and nature (Dobscha and Ozanne 2001), the inorganic collectors who perceive interconnectedness between all other people take the needs of those others into account. They take objects from strangers and give them to known or unknown others, connecting people across time and space. By saving "something from going to the dump," Ashna opens new possibilities for the object. The object's life cycle is not closed, and the cycle repeats through new hands. As cycle follows cycle, bringing new uses for the object, the cycles transcend the irreversible direction that constitutes the linearity of time. The object no longer moves linearly from birth to death but moves to different owners, finds different uses, and experiences new lives. Importantly, Ashna's contribution to "saving" the object is a positive experience. In a way, Ashna acts as a custodian (Cherrier 2010; McCracken 1988a), saving objects from waste and preserving them until she finds a good home where the objects will be useful. For Steve, extending the life of objects is essentially an "efficient" practice against waste: "I don't like things that aren't efficient, so I mean, if you're just throwing away stuff that could be used, use it." As we observe in the previous narratives, the interconnection of consumers across space and time contains echoes of sustainability. Consequently, our final section of findings deals with collectors and sustainability.

Sustainability

Sustainability as an Antecedent

Only one of our informants, Spencer, told us that wanting to consume sustainably was his primary motive for participating in inorganic collecting. Spencer, who also dumpster dives and prides himself on never buying anything new, told us his desire to consume sustainably stemmed from the disgust he experienced (when employed as a trash collector in his twenties) at the quantity and variety of still-useful objects that people threw away. Geena told the interviewer that she prefers to "wait for inorganic [collection] time" rather than buy new items and consciously organizes her collection after five in the evening or early in the morning. However, probing revealed that other aspects of her consumption are not oriented toward sustainability. The following excerpt documents Geena's views on the relationship between sustainability and inorganic collection:

> Interviewer: Do you think ... [that] people collect [from inorganic collections] because of sustainability ... want[ing] to save the environment?
>
> Geena: They want to save the environment, that's why they collect it from the road?
>
> Interviewer: Yeah, could that be ... because they don't want it to go to the dump? They want to reuse it to keep the environment more clean?

> Geena: Some people do it for that purpose you mean? I don't think so, no I don't. Personally I don't think so.

This brief interchange illustrates that although Geena understands notions of recycling, sustainability, and environmental preservation, she does not view inorganic collecting as a sustainable consumption practice. Approximately one-third of our informants mentioned one aspect of sustainability, preservation of the environment, as one motivator of their behavior. For example, Lara told the interviewer that collecting items off the street is a recycling practice that "helps the environment," and Eric declared that inorganic collecting "is good for the environment." Similarly, Giles told the interviewer that he was "all about the environment," Mahir claimed to be motivated by a "respect for the environment," and Ashna believed that she could "actually save the environment" through inorganic collecting.

However, environmental preservation did not appear to be *the* critical motivator of our informants' sustainable consumption practices. For example, Steve describes himself as "not a huge environmentalist":

> Steve: I'm not a tree hugger or anything like that, those people annoy me. But, yeah, I'm conscious about that [sustainability], but nothing overly. But I mean, a lot of it is quite stupid, especially with the whole fish thing, like, you can't catch fish unless this is the size [*holding hands slightly apart*], you have to put it back. But the problem is, if you put it back that 90% of the fish die. So it's a waste basically.... I don't like things that aren't efficient, so I mean, if you're just throwing away stuff that could be used, use it, doesn't annoy me at all, but I guess.... Yeah, well, I'm not a huge environmentalist.
>
> Interviewer: But you consider the environment sometimes?
>
> Steve: Oh definitely, everyone does it. I'd imagine most people, like I mean with all the media surrounding us, all those messages about the earth running out of natural resources and … the carbon emission and all that, which is a bit ridiculous.

In the previous excerpt, Steve indicates that he does not participate in inorganic collecting because of resource limitations or global warming but is instead driven by a desire to act efficiently with respect to waste. A similar disjuncture between knowledge and behavior is further expressed in Lara's narrative. At the time of her interview, Lara, a tertiary student, was writing an essay on environmental ethics. Aware of the academic research pertaining to environmental degradation, Lara admits that knowledge is "a good side effect" but is not the sole motivator of her inorganic collecting. As she explained: "It's more the fact that I think it's exciting and I want something unique. But one underlying thing about it is that it's actually good for the environment. Which is not one of my motives, but it's an underlying motive. It's something that I know,… and it's a good side effect, so of course." Lara's statement conveys that her main motivation to collect inorganic items off the streets it the "the fact that I think it's exciting and I want something unique." Lara's knowledge that inorganic collection is "actually good for the environment" is viewed as an incidental consequence, something that she "knows." However, as the next section details, we did find that many people's personal experiences of inorganic collecting had a strong impact on their views and actions with respect to the environment, consistent with Connolly and Prothero (2008).

Sustainability as a Consequence

When asked why they began collecting inorganic items, all but one interviewee reported that they did not start out to collect others' discarded items to live sustainably. However, no matter what their initial motivations were, most of the informants told us that they came to resent people who produce waste without thinking of the consequences for the environment. This resentment toward wasters is evident in Mahir's previous statement, in which he expresses frustration at people who simply throw reusable items away. In his opinion, selling used goods online is a good method of saving them from going to the landfill because today's environment can only carry a certain amount of waste. In addition, Mahir argued that people disposing of used items should consider different ways of keeping those objects in the consumption cycle. The disposal of items should not be regarded as the terminus of the consumption line but rather as a starting point for a new way of consuming an object. Mahir advises that people disposing of items should consider donating them to charities or selling them to provide a new means of consumption for the objects. Mahir's statement "just keep it back in the cycle" suggests that consumers can prolong an item's life cycle by reusing and/or recycling it. Although Mahir (a middle-aged immigrant taxi driver) differs markedly from European young adult tertiary students David and Tony, the students were similarly angered by the amount of waste people produce throughout the world. David told the interviewer:

> It always troubles me how much wastage there is. So I think it would be a great thing if you could start a charity that went ... around all these different things and collect up food and give it to students, give it to impoverished people.... Well, it's sort of something I think about from time to time, just when I see like horrendous amounts of food being chucked out at the back of a restaurant or after catering.

As indicated here, increasing awareness of waste, coupled with feeling interconnected with others, can lead people to want to share (Belk 2010) scarce resources with others to reduce waste, help others, and enable more people to live more sustainably.

Sustainability and the Consumption Cycle

Our informants reported acting more sustainably with respect to acquisition, consumption, and disposal. In telling us about their attempts to consume more sustainably, they mentioned reducing, reusing, and recycling. For example, Mahir consumes more sustainably by eschewing plastic bags for reusable cloth ones. Tony (white male informant, 22 years of age, tertiary student) told us that he and two other roommates have "got a big vegetable garden at our flat [apartment] in Auckland."

> Interviewer: Really? Because I was going to assume that busy students couldn't afford to do that, didn't have the time to do that.
>
> Tony: Yeah, well, yeah.... We've got a really nice big garden, and earlier in the year we had tomatoes, lots of tomatoes, and we had all our rocket [arugula] and lettuce for our sandwiches. We've got all the herbs for cooking.… We've just planted beetroot, bok choy, beans, zucchini, carrots, potatoes.
>
> Interviewer: Did you [three] start it as a financial thing?

> Tony: They're both quite aware and they like nature and are earth-minded, so I guess probably not financial but more of a, just, there's an opportunity where we can be ourselves sustainable. And why wouldn't you take that opportunity?

Tony explained that the three male tertiary students lived mainly off the produce from their garden and what they could glean elsewhere (e.g., leftovers from a local bakery at the end of the day), eating meat only occasionally (e.g., as a birthday treat). Thus, the three young men were able to purchase less "new" food from retailers.

Another informant, Ashna, talked about her disposal behavior in terms of recycling behavior as illustrated in the following quotation:

> I can actually save the environment and, you know, just recycle whatever I need.... And I'm actually quite happy when people use [my unwanted items] because I know it's keeping the cycle going.... Really, it's good. Save the planet.

In a final example, Giles's environmental consciousness is evident in the way he treats consumption not as linear process but rather as an ongoing cycle. He told the interviewer, "And yeah, I mean stuff like furniture and all that, I mean it's great if people can get that for free. I think it's really sustainable, especially … from my own experience. Like if I have something, I might use it for a year and then put it outside my place, you know just as an ongoing cycle." His actions to help protect the natural environment include sorting his household waste with regard to its material. In addition, he approves of people reusing someone else's old television set or furniture to keep it from going to a landfill. Giles considers the reuse of items sustainable in the sense that objects stay in an ongoing cycle instead of being disposed of irrevocably.

Discussion and Conclusion

Regardless of its motivation, inorganic collecting is a sustainable consumption act that is available to all, irrespective of geographic location, income level, or social status. Not only does inorganic collecting (whatever the motivation) enable the collector to consume in the present without reducing resources available for future consumption, it also improves the present and the future by reducing the amount of waste. Furthermore, inorganic collecting is an alternative to consuming new, enabling even impoverished consumers at the bottom of the pyramid (Martin and Hill 2012) to consume more sustainably. Our research has revealed the notable and unexpected finding that although inorganic collecting is a sustainable consumption practice, it is not generally initially engaged in for sustainability-related motives. However, the very act of inorganic collecting forces participants to confront waste and motivates them to act sustainably in multiple ways. All but one of our informants claimed motivations other than sustainability for engaging in inorganic collecting, but after being confronted with the scale and nature of items discarded by others, they were motivated to consume more sustainably. Even our single informant who was already an environmental activist at the time of our study was initially motivated to become an activist when he was confronted with waste in the course of his employment as a trash collector. Therefore, our finding that the desire to act sustainably can be a consequence as well as a motivator is extremely important because it indicates a new way of closing the attitude–behavior gap.

Our first research question began by asking what motivates inorganic collectors to engage in collecting others' discarded objects. Several motivators can act as antecedents to inorganic collecting. We classified these motivations to engage in inorganic collecting according to whether they were pragmatic or hedonic and noted that both types of these motivations can be present whether the collector is collecting for him- or herself or others. For our informants, inorganic collecting is not primarily a serious, functional pursuit but instead is largely viewed as offering hedonic benefits. McDonagh, Dobscha and Prothero (2011) insightfully suggest that research examining the hedonistic, pleasurable, or fulfilling benefits of being sustainable could offer new knowledge. We agree, because our research indicates that even when collectors were motivated by hedonic benefits rather than because they wanted to consume sustainably, positive change occurred. We suggest that researchers continue to examine hedonic consumption for additional insights into consumer behavior.

Although only one of our informants (Spencer) reported initially engaging in collecting others' discarded objects because he wanted to act more sustainably, many more informants reported an increasing awareness of waste and the need to consume more sustainably after observing just how much useful material others discarded. Not only that, Spencer's desire was also motivated by prior confrontation with the waste of a consumerist society. Connolly and Prothero (2008) opine that to initiate change, consumers must link consumption itself with environmental degradation as a starting point, but they note that consumers generally fail to do so. Our findings reveal that inorganic collectors are forced to confront waste, making the negative consequences of consumerism more proximate, thus initiating a change toward consuming more sustainably. As a consequence of being confronted with society's waste, inorganic collectors often were motivated to act more sustainably in the future (and did so). Thus, whether the motive for inorganic collecting is initially sustainability is unimportant—rather, it is the act of inorganic collecting that is critical in effecting a lifestyle change. Therefore, we infer that sustainable consumption, even when it is not an antecedent of inorganic collecting, has a strong possibility of becoming a consequence of inorganic collecting.

Our insight that other sustainable actions can arise as a consequence of inorganic collecting is useful. Prior research has identified that consumers' positive attitudes toward acting sustainably have not been accompanied by commensurate action (Barr, Gilg, and Ford 2001)—the so-called attitude–behavior gap (Prothero et al. 2011)—and has suggested that researchers examine why attitudes are not followed by consistent behaviors. However, in this case, behaving sustainably, regardless of why and how it is motivated, results in more such behaviors. This suggests that the facilitation of urban scavenging is one way to accomplish what numerous attitude-change attempts have failed to do. This may be because inorganic collecting is a sustainable consumption practice in which people actively engage as opposed to a top-down policy imposed on them (Barr 2003). Urban scavenging might have the effect of contribut-

ing to a sustainable consumer society, even if those who practice it may not initially (or ever) do so for the purpose of consuming sustainably. This is also an attitude–behavior gap, but the reverse of the attitude–behavior gap discussed in prior research; perhaps we should term it a behavior–attitude gap. Because sustainable actions can actually engender pro-sustainability attitudes, we contend that it is the action that should be facilitated, regardless of motive. Even without environmental motivations, these behaviors still represent lower-impact consumption behaviors (Peattie 2010).

We next consider some issues that need clarification. For example, should inorganic collection of one particular type of good be encouraged, whereas collection of another type of good be discouraged? The amount of resource captured in an object, and thus the sustainability with which it was made, depends on its attributes (e.g., size) and the energy used in its creation. We suggest that collecting discarded items is always sustainable, regardless of motive or nature/type/sustainability of the good collected. Consider an unsustainably made item put out in the inorganic pile and not collected: it will either be recycled (which uses energy and so is not ideal) or it will end up in landfill, which just creates more waste. We argue that the greater the resource that is captured in a good, the greater the use that should be extracted from that good. Collecting that high-resource item from the inorganic pile for reuse will extract more use-value from that good and thus reduce waste, ensuring that collecting remains a sustainable consumption decision.

Another question that should be considered is the intended end use of the item collected. There is no question that collecting an item that is to be used functionally (e.g., the students who collected a desk in lieu of buying a new one) is a sustainable consumption act. What about collecting discarded items to add to a personal collection (e.g., Giles's accumulation of old suitcases)? We argue that because collecting is a basic human instinct (Belk 1995), the desire to collect may as well be satisfied with used discarded items rather than newly purchased ones. Finally, we address whether inorganic collecting should be identified as a sustainable activity in public discourse. It seems possible that designating this activity as sustainable could encourage or discourage participation. However, because none of our informants took offense at our asking if they participated in inorganic collecting because it was sustainable, we suggest that policy makers should designate this practice as such. Given the accessibility and low cost of this practice, labeling it sustainable could empower even the poorest consumers to believe that they can consume sustainably, thus motivating them to identify and engage in other modes of sustainable consumption.

Our first research question concluded by asking if inorganic collectors' motives for collecting reflect the future-for-others framing of sustainable consumption evident in public discourse. Although our informants did not report a strong concern for the future, some of them did concern themselves with the waste in the present and with the present needs of others. In addition, past and present pleasures motivated them more than future concerns. We conclude that a future-for-others framing of sustainability does not reflect the concerns of inorganic collectors. Instead, a present-for-us (in which "us" refers to self and connected others) orientation emerged, suggesting that present for us may be a more effective frame than future for others. In particular, framing sustainable consumption in terms of hedonic pleasure could be effective. Our work has revealed that not only can hedonic pleasure and even happiness be found in buying items (new or used) (Dobscha and Ozanne 2001), it can also be found in scavenging the material objects discarded by unknown others.

Our second research question asked if participation in inorganic consumption influenced participants' broader consumption choices, and if so, how this influence operates. We found that participants did indeed become more sensitized to the sustainability implications of their own consumption choices. In particular, like the dumpster divers who Fernandez, Brittain, and Smith (2011) study, inorganic collectors became concerned with waste and wastefulness. They then made choices to reduce the amount of their acquisition and consumption, reusing instead of disposing when possible and recycling when disposing. They also reported in engaging in other sustainable consumption practices, such as dumpster diving, vegetable gardening, and other attempts to reuse and reduce resource usage. This is consistent with Barr, Gilg, and Ford's (2001) finding that self-relevance predicts reuse and reduction behaviors.

Our third and final research question asked how public policy makers could improve current inorganic collection guidelines to facilitate the reacquisition and reuse of consumer waste for greater numbers of consumers. In line with our analysis, we argue that, to be performed properly and with a chance of success, the fight against environmental degradation through alternative or reduced consumption requires a shift in its temporal orientation. Our analysis shows that people who engage in sustainable consumption practices aim to benefit both themselves and present-generation others. For our informants, the benefit must be palpable and concrete. Sustainable consumption (at least to our informants) is about saving money, providing exciting experiences, making someone feel good, helping others, and participating in and extending the life of the object. Unlike green consumption, which has been criticized as uneconomically attractive to less well-off people (Connolly and Prothero 2008), inorganic collecting is free and available to people of all financial backgrounds, including impoverished consumers (Martin and Hill 2012). Thus, this practice empowers all members of society, including the poor. This, too, is a critical insight, because an increased sense of empowerment gained from inorganic collecting may result in increased efforts to act sustainably in other ways (Thøgersen 2005), including reusing and reducing resources (Barr, Gilg, and Ford 2001). There is an increased sense of interconnectivity as a result of sustainable consumption practice. This helps participants transcend the social trap, because they no longer see nature/other people as disconnected others whose well-being is not their concern.

As our research reveals, the perspective of consumption as a cyclical process illustrates that the disposal of an item should not be regarded as the terminus of its consumption life but rather as a starting point for a new way of consuming it. How can public policy makers popularize this viewpoint? Our findings suggest that the way someone first comes to

engage in inorganic collection is not critical. Instead, it is mainly the inherent positive benefits of those first and subsequent experiences that encourage them to continue to engage in this practice. These experiences result in long-term exposure to the quantity and quality of others' discarded waste. The resultant exposure sensitizes inorganic collectors to the need for waste reduction and thus reinforces their perception of the need to increase their sustainable consumption practices. In our opinion, policy makers can take advantage of this finding by strategizing to get as many people as possible to experience accessible forms of sustainable consumption practice. Next, we suggest specific ways in which public policy makers can achieve this in practice.

First, we propose that policy makers identify and remove existing barriers to sustainable consumption practices. Cities that do not have scheduled curbside inorganic collection services should consider providing such services. Consistent with the acceptance of recycling, curbside pickup services are a convenient disposal option for households to use, and collectors' activity is publicly visible, increasing the possibility that acquisition of others' discarded waste will become a social norm. However, policy makers will have to be clear with regard to the goals they are trying to achieve; sustainable consumption must be prioritized over financial concerns. For example, in Auckland, the changes made to collection policy because of financial concerns have erected perceived legal and actual information barriers. Despite these barriers, inorganic collectors rely on personal observation or word of mouth to engage in this sustainable consumption practice. Yates (2008, p. 98) opines that the solution to the knowledge–action gap lies in "making greener choices easier for consumers, and making them part of everyday life." Certainly, the success of recycling is based in providing convenience to households such that recycling enters the realm of habitual behavior. Policy makers who are genuinely keen on promoting sustainable consumption should act to remove the legal and information barriers to inorganic collecting.

Second, policy makers should provide opportunities and encouragement for mainstream consumers, particularly children, to experience the positive benefits of urban scavenging. For example, they could fund workshops and demonstrations in schools, in which children are exposed to the idea that mundane and discarded objects can be turned into useful and/or decorative items. Such exposure would be even more effective if coupled with incentives. For example, schools and community organizations could hold contests for recycled art and fashion. Both the exposure opportunities and the competition opportunities could then be used to generate positive publicity that encourages other people to engage in sustainable consumption practices.

Third, public discourse should no longer frame sustainability issues as in a future-for-others manner. Our research indicates that most inorganic collectors were self-interested and present oriented. They were trying to resolve present needs and/or to relive past pleasures in the present. Even those few inorganic collectors with altruistic motives were trying to help others in the present rather than in the future. Therefore, we believe that public discourse should frame sustainability issues in a manner that is more proximate to consumers in the present.

Consumer knowledge regarding the importance of sustainable consumption has increased and consumer attitudes toward acting sustainably have grown more favorable; yet sustainable consumer behavior does not reflect these changes in knowledge and attitudes. Small groups on the margins of society are trying to live sustainable consumer lifestyles, but they are viewed as too marginal and deviant (Fernandez, Brittain, and Smith 2011) to be effective role models for mainstream consumers. Collaborative consumption (Botsman and Rogers 2010)—swapping, lending, or renting spare resource capacity (e.g., unused home, room, couch, car)—is a recent worldwide trend that minimizes waste. Yet the norm is still to aspire to own a car rather than to share a Zipcar (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2009).

According to Belk (2010), although sharing is an ancient practice, it is still a viable way of maximizing resources' use-value (e.g., families may share refrigerators). This type of sharing entails simultaneous access to the possession and can be characterized as polygamous and simultaneous. With collaborative consumption, a possession (e.g., a holiday home) or part of a possession (e.g., a spare bedroom) is lent to another temporarily. Thus, collaborative sharing is polygamous but sequential. Our research reveals that acquiring a used and/or discarded possession of another is yet another way to maximize the use-value of that possession. In contrast to traditional sharing or collaborative consumption, acquiring the possession of another (whether it is offered for sale or discarded) involves different people who have sole use of the entire possession sequentially: monogamous sequential sharing.

Most interventions that aim to influence behavioral changes adopt a downward approach (Andreasen 1995). Social marketing programs emanate from public policy makers and social marketers and move "down" the communication channel in an attempt to modify individual behavior. Indeed, to encourage sustainable practices, public policy makers, social marketers, and nongovernmental organizations have focused on educating consumers with regard to the impact of consumption practices on environmental degradation on the basis of the assumption that awareness is lacking. In contrast to existing public policy approaches, our research demonstrates that inorganic collectors possess a present-for-us approach to sustainable consumption that aims to benefit both themselves and present-generation others. Our research reveals that firsthand experience with the negative impacts of consumerism is needed to motivate sustainable choices. Informants who currently engage in sustainable practices must bear the social "risk" or "cost" of transgressing consumer norms constructed around newness and cleanliness, suggesting that their motivation is sufficient to overcome these social norms. Most critically, inorganic collection empowers people of all socioeconomic groups to participate in this practice, which might ultimately lead to their engagement in other forms of sustainable consumption.

From our findings, we urge public policy makers worldwide to introduce convenient annual curbside inorganic collections as well as to identify and remove existing barriers to sustainable consumption. To facilitate an efficient inorganic collecting scheme, clear goals must be set and legal and informational barriers removed. In addition, policy

makers should provide mainstream consumers with opportunities to experience the positive benefits of scavenging, such as facilitating workshops in schools or community centers. Most importantly, public discourse should frame sustainability issues in a present-oriented manner that is more proximate to consumers. The need to consume fewer resources today to conserve more resources for future generations is a valid reason to consume sustainably. However, encountering the reality of existing excessive waste is a more compelling motivator that makes urban scavenging a pathway to sustainability that is proximate and current.

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