Cultural Capital Among Zero Waste Consumers

BY

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Abstract

Ethical consumption has emerged as a prominent alternative consumption strategy designed to address the negative impacts of mass consumerism. The zero waste movement has been observed to be a distinct segment of this trend. While research has been done to address the context and motivations of the zero waste movement, there is a gap in our knowledge around the impact of socioeconomic class. Alternative consumption movements have been criticized on the basis that the cost of consuming alternative products is prohibitive, yet the zero waste movement emphasizes restraint from consumption, making it an ideal example by which class boundaries can be analyzed. Using a mixed methodological approach, this research aims to investigate how economic and cultural factors shape the opportunities and constraints that individuals face when living a zero waste lifestyle. Analysis of the data illustrates that we can understand the differences in how people participate in the zero waste movement with the concepts of cultural capital and habitus. The data reveals that those with lower cultural capital displayed a habitus that favored these actions while those with higher cultural capital had more difficulty. This counters previous claims of ethical consumption being exclusive to those with more cultural resources. By analyzing the dynamics of zero waste consumption empirically through this study, we can better understand how cultural and economic factors impact consumption practices. This research advances the literature on ethical consumption by exploring the ways that alternative consumption practices can expand beyond, or be hindered by, class boundaries.
Chapter 1: Introduction

In January of 2016, the Washington Post published an article with the headline, “By 2050, there will be more plastic than fish in the world’s oceans, study says” (Kaplan 2016). This headline which shocked environmentalists was based on the World Economic Forum’s publication on the influence of plastic in our world. Specifically, this publication states that each year at least 8 million tonnes of plastics are leaked into the ocean, equivalent to dumping a garbage truck into the ocean every minute. This is expected to increase to two garbage trucks per minute by 2030, and then four per minute by 2050. Currently it is estimated that there are over 150 million tonnes of plastics in the ocean today, however it is expected to grow so that by 2050, there will be more plastics by weight than fish in the ocean (Neufeld et al. 2016).

This startling statistic had a significant effect on Tammy, a 22 year old woman who is trying to reduce her personal waste. She explained, “When I saw that there was going to be more plastic in the ocean than fish by 2050, it just broke my heart. And just seeing all these negative impacts that plastic and waste has on our oceans and of course our earth as well [...] I said, ok, something needs to change about my lifestyle.” Tammy isn’t alone. Information about the negative effects of consumerism on the environment have prompted environmentally minded consumers to take matters into their own hands by changing the ways they consume (Cho and Krasser 2011). While consumers can alter their consumption patterns in a myriad of ways, one of the most prominent is through the zero waste movement. Participants of the zero waste movement focus on consuming in a way that reduces the amount of trash they produce with the aim of eliminating it all.
together. To achieve this goal, zero waste consumers avoid purchasing items with excess packaging, research the environmental impact of the companies they support, and work to minimize what goes to waste in their households. They aim to fight the negative effects of mass consumerism, such as the immense amount of plastic in our oceans, by consuming in a more thoughtful and ethical manner.

The zero waste movement is an example of ethical consumption which has been defined as “decision making, purchases, or other consumption experiences that are affected by the consumer’s ethical concerns” (Cooper-Martín and Holbrook 1993:113). Examples of ethical consumption include the company TOMS, where you can buy a pair of shoes and they will donate a pair to a child in need, Equal Exchange coffee which promotes fair wages for their workers, and “green” cleaning products, like Dr. Bronners or Method, which are advertised to be better for the earth than conventional products.

Ethical consumption has been rising in popularity over the past several decades and is expected to continue increasing in future years (Doane 2001).

Ethical consumption is often criticized for being only attainable to those with privileged statuses that enable them to have higher levels of economic and cultural capital. Dr. Bronners or Method cleaners, for example, will most likely be more expensive than conventional cleaning products like Windex. There is evidence that this critique is valuable, in that research has demonstrated that ethical consumption is performed disproportionately by wealthy individuals (Carfagna et al. 2014; Guthman 2003; Johnston, Szabo, and Rodney 2011; Willis and Schor 2012). Even though this has been shown, there has been a lack of research that analyzes how these class barriers operate. This study aims to begin to contribute to this gap by examining the zero waste
movement as an interesting example of ethical consumption shaped by class boundaries.

In the zero waste movement, consumers are encouraged to restrain from consumption, rather than purchasing new and expensive items as seen in other ethical consumption trends.

The increasing prevalence of zero waste consumers has led me to construct the following questions: 1. Why do these people go against the convenience of the traditional mass consumerist culture to focus on creating as little waste as possible?; 2. Is the movement based on individuals holding a certain set of morals which makes them different than others or is there a cultural trend present?; and 3. How do the intersections of a consumer’s economic and cultural capital situate their position in the movement?

Using a mixed methodological approach consisting of surveying and interviewing, I analyze the capital levels of zero waste consumers and the influence of economic and cultural factors on their consumption habits. This study finds that the level of cultural capital held by a zero waste consumer significantly influences the nature of their introduction to the movement, the ease of reducing their consumption, and the preferences and taste displayed while living a zero waste lifestyle. The analysis reveals that those with higher levels of cultural capital are often introduced to the movement later in life, struggle in reducing their consumption, and display preferences for new, zero waste branded items. In contrast, those with lower levels of cultural capital tend to have previous experience with zero waste consumption before learning about the movement itself. This translates into a situation that often equates to less struggle in reducing their consumption while tending to display consumption preferences that highlight practicality and thrift. We can understand this phenomenon using Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, the
systems of durable, transposable dispositions that alter one’s experience in social life. This study illuminates that although all of the participants focus on tailoring their habits to minimize their ecological impact, the low cultural capital consumers display a particular habitus that allows these behaviors to come “naturally,” while the high cultural capital consumers’ actions come in the form of consciously created habits.

With the increasing threat of anthropogenic climate change, research on sustainability practices and ethical consumption is crucial. This research on zero waste consumers advances the literature on ethical consumption movements by exploring the ways that alternative consumption practices can expand beyond, or be hindered by, class boundaries. Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and arguments about how cultural capital operates, can help us understand how the zero waste movement fits into the bigger picture of consumption in America. This study aims to contribute to the hole in the literature by complicating what is commonly seen as an exclusively upper-class consumption act. With a more nuanced understanding of the cultural role of zero waste living, we can begin to understand the opportunities and barriers that this alternative to the traditional mass consumerist culture may face, illuminating the potential for the positive impact as these consumers intend.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction:

Zero waste and ecological living have been argued to be an example of ethical consumption behavior. Research has noted that to participate in these ethical consumption acts, one must purposely direct their purchases in a manner that is consistent with creating a positive impact (Carfagna et al. 2014; Cherrier 2007, 2005; Johnston 2008; Mazar and Zhong 2010; Willis and Schor 2012). Ethical consumption in general is often criticized for being only attainable to those with privileged statuses that enable them to have higher levels of economic and cultural capital (Alkon and Agyeman 2011; Carfagna et al. 2014; Johnston et al. 2011; Willis and Schor 2012). While this critique is fair, given the disproportionate number of wealthy individuals participating in these acts (Carfagna et al. 2014; Willis and Schor 2012), few studies have undertaken the task to understand these class barriers to a deeper extent. This particular study aims to contribute to this hole in the literature by complicating what is commonly seen as an exclusively upper-class consumption act.

When studying zero waste consumers in the twenty first century, a background on sociological approaches to studying markets and culture serves as a strong foundation to approach ethical consumption behavior empirically. To develop an understanding of these alternative consumption acts, it is helpful to first look at how sociologists have approached markets in previous work. It is important to conceptualize markets in terms of both production and consumption. The production of goods within market systems will be discussed in the first section, highlighting the theories of Karl Marx (1848) and Max
Weber (1905). These scholars show how statuses interact to cause a system of production to occur, illustrating how class and culture are interconnected within the context of markets. Specifically, Karl Marx’s theory of historical materialism, which is explained in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), explains how history is created and driven by class struggle which has led society to its current capitalist state. Max Weber continues to theorize about the rise of capitalism in the west in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), connecting the capitalist system of production and exchange with the religiously inspired ethos of work observed within Protestantism.

The discussion of the theories of Marx and Weber are followed by the review of the literature surrounding consumption. This begins with the theory of conspicuous consumption outlined in *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* by Thorstein Veblen (1899). Veblen’s theories relating class and consumption provides the foundation for the development of the theory of class distinction explained in Pierre Bourdieu’s *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979). These scholars build on the ideas of Marx and Weber that class and culture interact within the market, and add to it that this interaction is displayed through consumption patterns. The section will continue with attention to the other scholars who have contributed to the development to the theories proposed by Bourdieu (Holt 1998).

The next section addresses the nature of morality within market behavior, specifically the determination of what objects and practices are considered culturally desirable and the morally correct way to consume. Scholars (Fourcade and Healy 2007; Wilk 2001) have suggested various relationships between consumption motivations and
morality, illustrating the moral boundaries that are created to divide socioeconomic classes. People can show class distinction and power over others by defining the right way to consume and upholding this standard for others. We can further understand this with the application of Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural capital, habitus, and class distinction.

The next section will address the growing body of literature that exists specifically on ethical consumption studies today (Barta 2017; Carfagna et al. 2014; Holt 1998; Laidley 2013). In this section, scholars discuss the concentration of wealthy consumers among those who practice ethical consumption (Carfagna et al. 2014; Willis and Schor 2012) and utilize Bourdieu's theories of cultural capital and habitus to understand these class barriers with a cultural analysis (Barta 2017; Carfagna et al. 2014; Holt 1998; Laidley 2013). This review of the literature situates this study in the context of past research on class, culture, and ethical consumption, providing a foundation for a deeper analysis of the class boundaries present in zero waste behaviors.

**Market: Production**

Sociologists have proposed various ways to conceptualize markets, but there has been a consensus among sociologists that emphasize the idea that social relationships are crucial to the existence of markets (Swedberg and Smelser 2010). Karl Marx and Max Weber, two influential figures in the early years of sociology, contributed to the development of markets as a sociological concept through their major works (Marx and Engels 1848; Weber 1905). Marx’s theories of society and economics focused on the idea that societies and markets develop through struggle, specifically class struggle (Marx and
Engels 1848). Based in historical materialism, the theory that class struggle propels historical change, Marx and Engels (1848) argue that capitalism is driven by the conflict between the bourgeoisie, who control the means of production, and the proletariat, who sell their labor in return for wages. In *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848) they claim, “the bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage labourers” (1848:3). The bourgeoisie continually take more power from the proletariat who have no option but to sell their labor for wages, leading to the increased inequality that plagues capitalism. Marx’s analysis shows that capitalism operates through the commodification of labor which reduces human activity to a monetary value to be bought and sold, and that this will spark class consciousness leading to capitalism’s demise. This analysis of class and conflict contributes to the sociological approach to markets by highlighting that social relationships can alter, and be altered by, the means of production that fuels the economy.

Max Weber also emphasized this idea of struggle within capitalist societies. However, different than Marx, Weber argued that culture, not simply the means of production, contributed to the inequality within capitalism. Douglas Holt (1998) points out that Weber coined the term “social class” to capture the idea that “styles of life,” in addition to the economic resources Marx focuses on, can also enforce social hierarchies. This addition to the understanding of class shows that societies segregate into different groups due to economic positions as well as differing morals, culture, and lifestyles. In his book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), Weber focuses on how the prevalence of profit and loss dominate economic life in capitalist societies in ways
that could not have occurred in earlier times. This is due to the cultural influences in the establishment of capitalism, particularly religion. Weber spent a significant amount of his time researching religions around the world and how they relate to the society’s economic structure and social stratification. He argued that Protestantism was a leading factor in the rise of capitalism in the western world, connecting the capitalist system of production and exchange with the religiously inspired ethos of work observed in Protestantism. This, he argued, provided the spirit of capitalism in the west.

**Markets: Consumption**

From these long-standing traditions of the study of markets in terms of production, there emerges a new sociological focus on consumption. Thorstein Veblen (1899) built on Weber’s suggestion of the importance of lifestyles and culture when analyzing social class, but focused on consumption rather than the means of production like other theorists of his time. Similar to Marx, Veblen (1899) argued of the danger in the bourgeoisie owning the means of production. However, instead of predicting the proletariat to rise up and revolt to bring in socialism, Veblen predicted that the proletariat would instead begin to emulate the bourgeoisie through their consumption habits. These take the form of consumer behaviors such as buying the “right” kind of car or house, as dictated by upper class consumers, which serve as expressions of status position. These consumption objects become status markers which signals one’s social position. Veblen articulated this idea in the book *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) where he argued that individuals partake in conspicuous consumption, the purchasing of luxury goods and services to display their status. For Veblen (1899), the existence of conspicuous
consumption explained why people would spend more money on goods than they were actually worth to demonstrate their wealth or social status. Veblen (1899) explains that social status isn’t necessarily contingent on one’s monetary resources but instead on the consumption items they choose to present. This meant that not simply were economic resources required, but also cultural resources, which enabled consumers to understand which objects displayed certain social meanings. The disconnect between monetary resources and status suggests there is another important variable at play which allows consumers to utilize their cultural resources towards status building.

Veblen’s contribution to the sociological understanding of consumption emphasizes the use of cultural knowledge in the purchasing of products, rather than simply through economic means. Pierre Bourdieu picks up on Veblen’s suggestion of a cultural influence in consumption and continues this with the development of the ideas of class distinction and cultural capital. Bourdieu is a significant scholar in the field of consumption culture and his book *Distinction* (1979) is widely recognized as a key reading in the sociology of consumption. Bourdieu (1979) has connected the ideas of Weber and Marx to argue for a model of social organization based on competition for various types of capital within social fields (Holt 1998). Similar to Weber, Bourdieu (1979) emphasized the importance of not just economic capital, but also cultural capital. Economic capital is what has been traditionally referred to in the economics literature and describes monetary resources. Cultural capital, which is often linked to economic capital, refers to knowledge, skills, and experience. Consumption objects can symbolize these variations in capital resources. Douglas Holt (1998), a consumption scholar drawing on the works of Bourdieu, explains that while economic capital is expressed through
consuming goods and activities of material scarcity, cultural capital is expressed by consuming based on aesthetic and interactional styles that are socially scarce. Holt (1998) explains Bourdieu's vision of social life as a multidimensional status game in which people draw from their economic, cultural, and social capital to compete for status in the form of symbolic capital. Thus, for Bourdieu (1979), and others that followed him (Barta 2017; Carfagna et al. 2014; Holt 1998, 1997; Laidley 2013), the intersectionality of these various forms of capital allows us to develop a deeper understanding of the way consumption objects play a part in our culture.

Bourdieu also developed the idea of class distinction. While Veblen discussed how the consumption style of the leisure class serves as a status symbol, Bourdieu argues that this idea of demonstrating who you are with consumption goods is seen everywhere and we should view consumption as a means of distinction. Bourdieu explains that with the adequate capital resources, people can consume in a way that shows off their distinctive position in the class system. Today, scholars continue to develop Bourdieu's ideas to fit into the current globalized consumption context (Holt 1997, 1998; Ignatow 2009; Prior 2013; Sallaz and Zavisca 2007; Warde 2015). Holt (1998) builds on Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural capital and class distinction to tailor these ideas for the modern day context. He argues that in a postmodern historical context where mass production allows many the ability to own goods that were once rare, class distinction today relies more on consumption “styles” than status objects (Holt 1998). Today objects no longer serve as accurate representations of status as they can be acquired by many in rapid ways. However, consumption practices still emphasize knowing about and consuming the appropriate goods (Holt 1998). To display class distinction, goods must
now be consumed in a rare and distinguished manner that is inaccessible to those with less cultural capital (Holt 1998).

**Consuming Morality**

The work of Bourdieu suggests that when we think about consumption and culture it is necessary to consider class conflict as well. It is not simply about who is rich or poor but rather who has the knowledge to be able to display the products that are culturally desired. People can show class distinction and power over others by defining the right or moral way to consume. When we look at consumption from a historical point of view we can see that there has been an evolution of what has been determined as the culturally desired or morally correct consumption behaviors. A moralism specific to the 19th century condemned poor and immigrant people. The educated elite blamed them for their own poverty as a result of wasting money on immoral actions like drinking and gambling instead of improving themselves (Wilk 2001). After the First World War, the moralist agenda shifted its focus to critiquing middle class consumers who were participating in mass consumption which was viewed as corruptive and indulgent (Wilk 2001). This historical perspective suggests that moralizing about consumption is closely related to class conflict, as the trend shows the privileged defining the culturally desired consumption behaviors and positioning themselves as morally superior beings. The wealthy defined their superiority as dependent on their taste and refinement, rather than the money they had that allowed them to make the correct purchases, illustrating the importance of cultural capital resources (Wilk 2001). The cultural context of a particular moralism will illustrate how it is socially constructed to enforce various values. As
markets are influenced by culture, this means that they are also influenced by changes in cultural patterns. What we view as the desired form and objects of consumption varies over time.

Today, consumption has grown to become a central piece in modern societies, with people consuming objects to satisfy new needs and also to display distinction and taste. Cross (2000) explains that over the past century, consumption has gradually become the channel for dreams, progress, and the embodiment of success, further enforcing the heavy weight of moral meaning this behavior carries. Cross’s (2000) observation can be illustrated with the importance of consumption in the American Dream. The idea of the American Dream is contingent on a certain degree and type of consumption, often including the middle class household with a white picket fence and the opportunity to consume more if one works harder. In the case of the American Dream, consumption is essential to achieving success and the moral high ground.

These issues of culturally defined morality have been central to theorizing the potential positive or negative effects of the market on society, politics, and culture. Fourcade and Healy (2007) note that much of the focus on market societies has been based in exploring the idea of how each individual’s self-interest can be kept in check by other individuals’ self-interest. From this perspective, rather than producing greed, markets encourage people to act polite, serviceable, and honest (Hirschman 1982; McCloskey Deirdre N. 2015). This potential of a positive market force is illustrated in one of the most cited passages of Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations*: “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own self-interest” (Smith 1776:15). Smith’s example shows that
competitive market transactions encourage consumers and producers to conduct exchanges civilly, as motivated by their own self-interest.

However, there are also scholars who argue that markets can be destructive (Marx and Engels 1848; Schor 1999; Veblen 1899). This argument states that the market works against society because markets reduce the justifications of our actions to self-interest, crowd out the motivation for altruism, and limit freedom to just that which money can buy (Fourcade and Healy 2007). Karl Marx (1848) is a prominent figure in this stance and argued that a capitalist society will undermine its own moral foundation and eventually fall apart. The negative effects of this phenomenon can be seen through an analysis of mass consumption. Juliet Schor (1999) illustrated this by examining middle class consumption and finds significant anxiety present in the need to consume to achieve and demonstrate a certain lifestyle. This, she finds, has led to the indebtedness of many Americans, as well as social and ecological costs. These negative implications present in American mass consumption support the claim that markets are destructive.

Other scholars argue that markets are moral projects influenced by culture and create moral boundaries within society (Knorr Cetina and Bruegger 2002). Economics in general is already filled with explicit moral meanings relating to corruption, cronyism, and corporate social and environmental responsibility (Fourcade and Healy 2007). However, these moral stances that are created do not refer to some general ethical standard, but rather illustrate a cultural trend, reflecting what a society defines as good or bad. For example, in Cherrier’s (2007) work on voluntary simplicity, a case study of ethical consumption, she found that the ethical stance of the movement is fluid and constantly being renegotiated. The creation of a movement’s morals is complex because
in our pluralistic world things that seem ethical to one person may not seem ethical to someone else (Cherrier 2007). The movement’s ethical stance is co-produced along with the creation of the ethical stance of the participant. Neither is fixed but rather they are both produced and altered through social interaction (Cherrier 2007). Cherrier explains ethics as “a floating reference that is socially organized and flexibly yet systematically constituted through a constant dialogue between the participants and the movement” (Cherrier 2007:11). This example of ethical consumption illustrates how the agent and structure interact to create a collection of consumption behaviors that are considered to be culturally desired or moral.

To fully understand the complexity of Cherrier’s case study in ethical consumption, we must look at cultural capital, economic capital, and class distinction together and how they interact. In the previous sections, it has been explained how people utilize their cultural capital resources to adopt certain consumption practices. Essential to capital accumulation and manifestation is the idea of habitus. Habitus allows us to understand ethical consumption and what brings people to be comfortable consuming in this way. Bourdieu suggested that the ways people draw on their habitus can explain the aspects of human behavior in society that are not explained fully by the term “habits” (Bourdieu 1977). The concept of habitus can be described as having three main characteristics (Sallaz and Zavisca 2007). The first is that habitus can be seen as a disposition, or an embodied sense of the world and one’s place in it. The second characteristic is that habitus is durable as it is internalized within people through early socialization. Although it is durable that does not mean it is unchanging. The third is that habitus is transposable, meaning that people carry these dispositions with them as they
enter new social situations and contexts (Sallaz and Zavisca 2007). These dispositions interlock with the specific cultural characteristics of the societal context; therefore, a habitus held by an individual that fits with the society’s culture allows that person a more natural social experience. Matthew Desmond builds on this idea with his description of habitus being “the presence of social and organizational structures in individuals’ bodies in the form of durable and generative dispositions that guide their thoughts and behaviors (Desmond 2008:12). Habitus has also been described as the experiences particular to a certain cultural group that become “subjectively embodied as ways of feeling, thinking, and acting through the generative social psychological structure” (Holt 1998:3). Bourdieu outlines his concept of habitus in his book *Outline of a Theory of Practice*:

“The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment[…] produce the habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuration of practices and representations which can be objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goal without presupposing the conscious orientation towards ends and the express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all that, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor” (Bourdieu 1977:72)

This quote emphasizes the importance of the structure of the environment and how this can form systems of “durable, transposable, dispositions.” This illustrates how habitus connects the structure to the agent, allowing sociologists to theorize the relationship between the two. The quote also shows how habitus can explain how actions that seem spontaneous are actually structured by cultural dispositions. Anthony Elliot (2014) describes this idea with an example: “You can decide you want to travel somewhere new in town, but then find yourself queueing at the railway station; you decide to express the ‘inner self’ by painting, but first you need to visit the local arts store” (2014:166). The
spontaneity we often see in our everyday lives is subject to cultural dispositions that connects our individual actions to the norms and values of our society (Elliott 2014).

This concept of habitus can also be used to explain the significance of taste. While cultural capital serves as an important status resource in many fields, in consumption fields in particular, it is displayed through tastes and consumption practices (Holt 1998). Habitus influences those tastes in that it organizes how one classifies consumption objects and constructs a desire towards valued objects or disgust towards other objects (Holt 1998). Bourdieu argues that cultural capital enables elite consumers to acquire the respect of others through the consumption of objects that can only be consumed by the few who have the ability to do so (Holt 1998). Reproducing status boundaries is therefore done through expressing one’s tastes to show class distinction. This suggests the uniqueness of Bourdieu’s contribution to the sociology of consumption. While Veblen suggested that purchases were important in producing these boundaries, he still considered these to be a result of who had the appropriate resources. However, Bourdieu develops this further and suggests that tastes in and of themselves are important and serve as methods of distinction. Rather than arguing that consumption products hold the power to distinguish, Bourdieu shows that tastes have that ability as well.

Sociology’s Approach to Ethical Consumption

To utilize habitus to understand ethical consumption phenomena, we must first understand where sociologists stand on the research of these behaviors. The sociological approach to ethical consumption allows us to further understand the relationship between culture, class, and consumption. Ethical consumption behaviors are “decision making,
purchases, or other consumption experiences that are affected by the consumer’s ethical concerns” (Cooper-Martin and Holbrook 1993:113). Examples of these behaviors include the decision to buy fair trade coffee or chocolate (Low and Davenport 2007), organic food (Harper and Makatouni 2002), and ecologically conscious products (Chatzidakis, Maclaran, and Bradshaw 2012). Sociologists approach ethical consumption in a myriad of ways. Cherrier (2005) highlights three distinct directions that research has taken in understanding ethical consumption behavior and categorizes them as agentic, structural, and dualistic. Researchers who take an agentic approach to the phenomenon focus on defining ethical consumers’ criteria in terms of demographics, socioeconomics, psychographics, prosocial behaviors, ideologies and beliefs (Rawwas 2001; Tanner and Kast 2003; Zhongzhi 2001). These researchers see ethical consumption behaviors as reflections of rational and intentional individual choices, suggesting that individuals’ characteristics affect the ethical decision making process. Researchers who take the structural approach suggest that it is a collective cultural act, where individuals consume in order to be part of a society (Chatzidakis et al. 2004). This stance views consumers as following the normative and prescribed discourses of ethical consumption. Other researchers will combine these two approaches into a dualistic view which suggests that individual characteristics as well as social obligations affect ethical decision making (Cooper-Martin and Holbrook 1993). This dualistic approach frames ethical consumption as a result of the intersection of individual choice and societal power. As habitus has been described as “the presence of social and organizational structures in individuals’ bodies in the form of durable and generative dispositions that guide their thoughts and behaviors” (Desmond 2008:12), the dualistic approach which weaves in both the structural and
agentic influences provides the foundation for a Bourdieusian cultural analysis of ethical consumption.

As was suggested in the previous section, when issues of morality or determining culturally desired products is involved with consumption, often class is as well. A historical analysis of consumption shows that the culturally desired way of consuming is determined by, and accessible to, the wealthy. Critical scholars of ethical consumption suggest that there is a similar trend that suggests these ethical consumption acts are concentrated among privileged consumers (Guthman 2003; Johnston et al. 2011). To develop the claim of these scholars, Willis and Schor (2012) used data from the Citizenship Module from the General Social Survey (GSS) to measure the presence of ethical consumption across U.S. consumers. Respondents were asked if they had boycotted or deliberately bought certain products for political, ethical, or environmental reasons. About 24% of respondents answered yes. Consistent with previous work on the topic (Guthman 2003; Johnston et al. 2011) the responses showed that a significant majority of those that answered yes were white, in higher-income brackets, held graduate degree, and came from families that had previous graduate degrees (Willis and Schor 2012). This supports the critique that ethical consumers have much higher cultural and economic capital than the average population. Their accurate critique of the consumer base of ethical consumption suggests a need to deepen our understanding of the ways class plays out in these consumption spaces, particularly in terms of economic and cultural capital. As there seems to be a class boundary within ethical consumption, this suggests the importance of exploring the influence of cultural factors on this divide. It is not simply about who can afford these ethical products but who is predisposed to
favoring them. Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural capital and habitus become essential here in understanding the nature of consumption practices.

Bourdieu’s theoretical framework has been widely used among scholars who study ethical consumption behavior because it allows for the opportunity to view this behavior as collective and influenced by culture, rather than as an individual behavior directed by morals (Carfagna et al. 2014; Haluza-DeLay 2008; Holt 1998). Douglas Holt (1998) addresses the role of Bourdieu’s practice theory in present day American consumption. With the proliferation of cultural meanings and the fragmentation of unitary identities, Holt argues that there is now a more complicated relationship between class and consumption patterns (1998). Holt finds that in a globalized world with omnivorous consumption, objects no longer serve as accurate representations of status as they can be acquired by many in rapid ways. However, consumption practices still emphasize knowing about and consuming the appropriate goods (Holt 1998). To display class distinction, goods must now be consumed in a rare and distinguished manner that is inaccessible to those with less cultural capital (Holt 1998). Responding to Lamont’s (1992) and Lareau’s (1988) call for a detailed mapping of how cultural capital operates in the U.S., Holt explored whether variation in cultural capital resources leads to systematic differences in tastes and consumption practices for mass cultural categories. He found that the tastes of low cultural capital consumers are organized to prioritize functionality and practicality while the tastes of high cultural capital consumers express a preference towards self-expression and aesthetics (Holt 1998). The two groups can also be distinguished by their view of the social world. High cultural capital consumers have a much more expansive view than low cultural capital consumers, favoring international
travel and exotic objects from around the world. Low cultural capital consumers in contrast, favor local objects such as the local newspaper or local activities (Holt 1998).

Using Bourdieu's practice theory, Carfagna et al. (2014) builds on Holt’s (1998) study to develop the tastes and dispositions expressed by high cultural capital consumers who practice ethical consumption behaviors, specifically around environmental consciousness. Investigating the nature of high cultural capital tastes allows for a better understanding of the role of cultural capital in creating hierarchies within consumption movements. Using Holt’s (1998) analysis as a comparative case, the study explains that there now exists an altered high cultural capital habitus incorporating an environmental awareness and sustainability principles, termed “eco-habitus.” Carfagna et al. explain that this emerging eco-habitus suggests that these practices are collective strategies of consumption rather than individual choices concerning morality. This study argues what most scholars have found, that ethical consumers are overwhelmingly high cultural capital consumers, but also that high cultural capital consumption strategies have shifted since Holt’s study (Carfagna et al. 2014). This new high cultural capital privileges the local, material, and manual while maintaining a strategy of distinction (Carfagna et al. 2014). The values of local, material, and manual are traditionally theorized to be occupied by those with low cultural capital, however today’s high cultural capital consumers display these values in a high cultural capital way. Their study supports the idea that this eco-habitus represents more than an affinity for the environment, but rather it involves a reconfiguration of high status tastes that is part of a re-articulation of the field of high class consumption, which is fostered by a more general social valorization of environmental consciousness (Carfagna et al. 2014).
This finding of a reconfigured high cultural capital set of tastes that emulate low cultural capital habits and values complicates the observed ethical consumer base of high cultural capital consumers. Previous work on ethical consumers acknowledges the disproportional number of consumers with high levels of economic and cultural capital, which is consistent with the hierarchy of needs approach in psychology (Inglehart 1995). However, this study finds that it is more complicated than that. The HCC respondents in the study are not gravitating towards purchasing environmentally conscious products because their income is high enough for this option, as many of them actually have limited incomes, but rather these consumers enact a set of ecologically oriented high status tastes that are connected to their identity projects and strategies for establishing status and distinction (Carfagna et al. 2014).

The distinct forms habitus takes in ethical consumption behaviors is also observed by Alexander Barta in his study on alternative food practices in Glasgow, Scotland (Barta 2017). Using Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital on the formation of habitus, Barta compares and contrasts two distinct sets of habitus present in groups engaging in alternative food practices. The affluent consumers enjoyed a privileged position of choice creating a habitus that distances them from necessity, allowing them to be focused on education and raising awareness about environmental issues. The less affluent consumers expressed a more practical habitus oriented towards necessity with their main preoccupations being finding meaningful ways to escape the effects of the humiliation of long-term income deprivation (Barta 2017). Barta’s contribution suggest that the ecological habitus discussed in Carfagna et al. (2014) may come in various forms based on the level of cultural capital of the consumers in that group.
Thomas Laidley (2013) conducted a similar study, where he used Bourdieu’s theories to examine how the conception of and reaction to climate change varies with economic and cultural capital (Laidley 2013). Aiming to address the question of if the conceptualization of climate change signifies a more refined cultural disposition or economic status, his results suggest that climate change may be a “classed” issue in both how his respondents conceived of it initially and how they speak of social class in the context of it. He explains that climate change can be seen as a socially constructed concept in which people and powerful intuitions invest meaning into, and is heavily bound with social, political, and cultural differences (Laidley 2013). Laidley found that although the issue of climate change is heavily influenced by narratives of morality and ethics his respondents drew boundaries based in class and cultural distinctions rather than in morals. To those with lower levels of capital, climate change could be seen as a rich person’s concern. By contrast, those with higher levels of capital often viewed those who didn’t care about climate change as uneducated or ignorant. These social distinctions based in cultural and economic differences can affect the respondents’ behaviors and their perception of others in relation to the issue.

These scholars (Barta 2017; Carfagna et al. 2014; Holt 1998; Laidley 2013) continue to develop Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural capital, habitus, and class distinction to fit today’s consumer culture. In our globalized world, we should not simply focus on what is consumed, but how it is consumed (Holt 1998). While many people can consume ethically, there is a difference between those with various levels of cultural capital and how they approach this behavior. Utilizing cultural capital and habitus can help us understand how and why people approach this style of consumption differently.
Conclusion:

Throughout this review of the literature it has been emphasized that the various forms of capital are important in influencing class systems and one’s position within them. These class systems are multidimensional and are based on both cultural and economic factors. Prior studies have emphasized the importance of recognizing the cultural influences that create these systems of hierarchy and how they are then displayed through consumption practices with the emphasis of certain tastes or preferences. We can expand on this previous work and further develop the concepts of capital and habitus by asking how one’s capital evolves throughout their life. While capital has been viewed as a static concept in the past, we can also view it as dynamic, as it may evolve over time. We can also use the concept of habitus as a tool to understand how one’s various levels of cultural and economic capital can influence the way they consume. Throughout this study, we will build on our understanding of habitus to see how those from different capital levels hold their own unique dispositions and preferences when approaching the zero waste movement. By using a Bourdieusian analysis, I aim to complicate what is commonly seen as an exclusively upper class consumption act with a case study of an anticonsumerist nature. Reviewing how tastes and preferences have changed over time, and how they have been analyzed in the literature, enables us to better understand the formation of ethical consumption practices.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

In this study on zero waste consumers I aim to uncover what enables and encourages people to consume in a manner which goes against the traditional American mass-consumerist culture. I employed Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of practice, the theory of how agentic beings and structure interact and influence each other, to understand this phenomenon, particularly his concepts of habitus and cultural capital. Bourdieu’s theoretical framework has been widely used among scholars who study ethical consumption behavior as it allows for the opportunity to view this behavior as collective and influenced by culture, rather than an individual behavior directed by morals (Carfagna et al. 2014; Haluza-DeLay 2008; Holt 1998). These consumer culture scholars use Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, the “durable, transposable dispositions” (Bourdieu 1977:72) we possess, to describe how consumers come to choose the goods and services they purchase. Building off of this theoretical framework, I embarked on this study with the following research questions aimed at understanding the zero waste movement in these terms: Why do these people go against the convenience of the traditional mass consumerist culture to focus on creating as little waste as possible? Is the movement based on individuals holding a certain set of morals which makes them different than others or is there a cultural trend present? How do the intersections of a consumer’s economic and cultural capital situate one’s position in the movement? These questions allow for an exploration into the details of this consumption trend and the possibility for it to expand into other segments of society.
Through a mixed methodological approach using survey and interviews, this research aims to investigate how economic and cultural factors shape the opportunities and constraints that individuals face when living a zero waste lifestyle. The survey results illustrate the contours of the population of zero waste consumers and the attitudes and behaviors associated with the movement. Interview results allow for a deeper understanding of individual participants’ experience with zero waste and the intersections of their cultural and economic capital levels. By analyzing the dynamics of zero waste consumption empirically through this study, we can better understand how cultural and economic factors create the various experiences that participants may encounter when pursuing this form of consumption.

**Sampling and Recruitment**

The data gathering process consisted of an online survey which collected general information about the zero waste population and continued with in depth interviews to gain more specific details about participants’ experiences. 52 people responded to the survey and 13 people were interviewed. After the appropriate approval by the Institutional Review Board at Wheaton College, the data gathering process began with the recruitment of participants from online communities. The IRB process helped to ensure that participants in both the survey and interview would be protected with confidentiality. Throughout the study, participants’ names are changed to protect their information. Participants were recruited through Facebook groups centered around zero waste living that I had identified as fitting the population and behavior which I am studying. As zero waste consumption practices are often located within consumers’
homes, accessing a wide sample of zero waste consumers is efficient through online means. Online platforms give users an opportunity to talk to people they may not interact with in person and display their living spaces through pictures and descriptions. These online communities are places where zero waste consumers can interact and learn from one another. I identified the Facebook groups which fit the criteria of being focused mainly on zero waste consumption and lifestyles. I searched for these groups with the keywords “zero waste” as this is how these consumers refer to themselves. Relevant content of these Facebook groups included discussions among members about zero waste living, links to videos and articles highlighting the zero waste cause, and messages of encouragement or support for those struggling to reduce waste. These Facebook groups range in membership size with the largest being over 50,000 members and the smallest being just over 300 members.

From observing the conversations taking place in the Facebook groups throughout the summer of 2017, I have found that these groups serve multiple functions. They serve as an educational experience for people to gain new ideas on making zero waste living easier, an opportunity to ask questions specific to their situation, and a support group where people can post their grievances about environmental issues and the lack of understanding they often face when discussing zero waste living with their family or friends. These Facebook groups also contributed throughout the data analysis. With the themes I discovered through the analysis of survey and interview data I returned to these Facebook groups and found that these trends were noticeable in the wider community. While it was difficult to understand the impact of capital in the Facebook posts, as people
did not often reference their resources, I did find that similar products and approaches were used by those online and in my sample.

Survey respondents were recruited by posting the link to the survey in the Facebook groups I had identified. The link was accompanied by a few sentences introducing myself and a general description of the project. The survey began with an informed consent page where they were given their rights as a participant and an email address for them to contact with questions. The interview respondents were recruited through two methods. At the end of the survey respondents had the option to provide their email address to participate in the interview portion. This allowed me to link their survey responses to their interview transcripts for a deeper analysis. In addition, I made another post in the Facebook groups to recruit interview participants. This post was similar to the one containing the survey link and included a few sentences introducing myself and a description of the project. This second recruiting approach did not allow me to link any survey responses to the interview transcript. To supplement this, I included general demographic questions and other important questions from the survey such as how they were introduced to zero waste, what behaviors they have adopted, and any barriers they run into when living this way. Before the start of the interview, participants were sent an informed consent document similar to the one at the beginning of the survey.

To participate in this study, participants had to be 18 years or older and be a member of one of the Facebook groups in which I posted the survey. I have decided to only include these two factors as my participant requirements as the identity of a zero waste consumer can vary. For example, a consumer who uses a reusable coffee mug but
still creates household waste may view themselves as living with zero waste values, while another consumer may not consider themselves to be living a zero waste lifestyle until they have completely eliminated household waste. Due to this varying identification with the movement I have chosen not to select participants based on whether they consider themselves to be a zero waste consumer. Instead, the results from the survey allowed me to analyze the actions of a wide range of consumers participating in zero waste at any extent. Additionally, this allowed me to understand what factors (income, education, family etc.) are associated with a deeper involvement in zero waste behaviors.

**Method Choice**

The mixed methodological approach provides an opportunity to utilize the strength of both quantitative and qualitative measures as well as compensating for the weaknesses of the two approaches, allowing for a study that can access both depth and breadth of information about the population. Building on the work of previous consumption scholars (Carfagna et al. 2014; Holt 1998), I focus my analysis primarily on the transcripts of in-depth interviews as it allowed for a deeper understanding of the role of cultural capital in the purchasing patterns of my respondents. Given the time restriction of my study being less than a year, only 13 interviews were completed. The survey, reaching more than 50 people, strengthened the study with the analysis of a larger sample size. The data gathering process began with a survey distributed online throughout the fall of 2017. It was followed by in depth semi-structured interviews conducted over skype throughout the winter of 2017.
Survey

The survey allowed for a collection of information from a large number of participants and introduced a quantitative element to the study. This online survey was posted in zero waste centered Facebook groups and included questions relating to demographics, perceptions of the movement, and how and if they build community with other zero waste consumers. The survey took no more than 15 minutes to complete and was open to all members of the selected zero waste Facebook groups. With the largest Facebook group around zero waste living being over 50,000 members, the survey is a strong method to understand the demographics, attitudes, and behaviors associated with the overall zero waste movement. The purpose of the survey was to accomplish two main goals. First to gain a breadth of knowledge about zero waste consumers and their behaviors and second, to support the interview portion by providing relevant data to construct interview questions. For example, in the survey I asked respondents to rank zero waste behaviors in terms of their difficulty. I listed behaviors such as using a reusable coffee mug or water bottle, recycling, shopping locally, and making their own products. There was usually a consensus around the difficulty of certain behaviors, with using a reusable coffee mug or water bottle being extremely easy and riding a bike instead of driving being more difficult. However, there were also behaviors where people seemed to disagree about the difficulty. These included behaviors such as making their own beauty products and buying in bulk. As a result, I included interview questions that inquired what people purchased and what they made themselves. This mixed
methodological approach strengthened both my analysis and the data gathering process itself.

The demographic portion of the survey included questions on a participant’s age, gender, race/ethnicity, employment status, educational attainment among other demographic identifiers. Given the survey sample size being just over 50, the demographic data is not meant to be generalizable to the whole population and I am not making a claim about the percentages of various demographic groups within the population. However, these questions were important in contextualizing the interviews. These questions served as an important foundation to my data analysis as they included questions that aimed at the economic and cultural capital levels of the respondent. To understand economic capital, the survey included questions on employment status, occupation, home ownership, income level, socioeconomic status, and whether or not they were a student. As economic capital is attained through monetary resources, these questions were created to develop an understanding of the respondent’s general economic resources and where these resources are coming from. To measure cultural capital, the survey included questions on educational attainment and occupation. Cultural capital is acquired through opportunities within one’s family upbringing, education, and occupation and occupational culture. While these survey questions provided a foundation for the understanding of cultural capital in the sample, the interviews allowed for a deeper analysis as they allow participants to explain these areas of cultural capital accumulation to a greater extent.

The survey also included questions on the attitudes and behaviors of zero waste consumers. These questions asked respondents for information on how they were
introduced to the zero waste movement, their motivation for adopting this lifestyle, and who else among their social network participates in zero waste. Questions also aimed at understanding the actions and behaviors associated with a zero waste lifestyle asked respondents to rank the difficulty of certain behaviors and whether or not they had adopted them themselves, as discussed previously. This data allowed for an analysis using the cross tabulation function in Qualtrics to understand the correlation between certain behaviors and other variables such as demographic identifiers and capital levels. This was used to further understand the relationship between demographics and the thematic findings from the interview transcripts, and understand them in the context of the wider population of zero waste consumers.

The survey was built, distributed, and analyzed through Qualtrics and allowed for respondents to remain anonymous. However, if the respondent wished to participate in the interview portion of the study there was a space available at the end of the survey for them to provide their email address to be contacted. Thus, the survey was strong in that it served as a data gathering tool as well as a sampling mechanism.

**Interviews**

The survey was open to anyone in the Facebook groups to get a sense of the behaviors and actions associated with the movements. As these online communities are open to anyone with internet access, the results of the survey reflect zero waste consumers across the world. However, the aim of my interviews was to develop a deeper understanding of the impact that cultural capital has on zero waste consumers. As cultural capital is dependent on cultural standards of societies, this concept is better understood
within a specific cultural context. Many studies that look at the relationship between consumption patterns and cultural capital define their sample by geographic means, whether by country or region, to avoid conflating cultural differences across regions with differences of cultural capital (Barta 2017; Carfagna et al. 2014; Holt 1998). In addition, interviewing is used frequently by those addressing cultural capital and consumption practices (Barta 2017; Bourdieu 1979; Carfagna et al. 2014; Holt 1998). Therefore, I interviewed people who resided in the U.S. to gather this data.

While economic capital is easier to assess in a survey format as it can be described by class, income, and home ownership, cultural capital is more nuanced and can be understood more effectively through in-depth interviews. These interviews aimed to expand on the survey data on how consumers participate in the zero waste movement and advance the understanding of why certain consumers participate and the barriers they face to participating. Interview questions were informed by the data gathered by the survey and included questions about the participants’ motivation to participate in a zero waste lifestyle, barriers they face, and reflections on their identity as a zero waste consumer.

In Holt’s study on cultural capital among American consumers, he explains that, “according to Bourdieu and his American interlocutors, cultural capital resources are accumulated in three primary sites of acculturation: family upbringing, formal education, and occupational culture” (Holt 1998:7). Building on Holt’s analysis, the interview questions include opportunities for participants to describe their experience within these three categories. To understand the cultural capital acquired during the respondent’s family upbringing, they were asked to describe their life growing up, their parents’
education level and employment, and the environment they lived in. Occupational culture was explored through questions on their employment status, work experience, and their relationship with their co-workers. Formal education was understood through questions about the respondents’ schooling to understand their educational attainment.

As not every interview participant responded to the survey, they were asked questions about their economic capital as well. In addition, many survey respondents did not answer questions on their income, making the economic capital questions in the interview portion essential to include. Due to the lack of response to the economic capital questions in the survey, I was more attentive to how I measured economic capital during the interviews. I asked people to self-report their socioeconomic status and observed the types of capital displayed during the interview to confirm their self-identification. The self-identified class as well as my notes on the capital displayed seemed to match up and there was little tension between these two, giving me confidence that it was an effective measurement. To be sensitive to the fluid nature of capital, I measured each respondent’s present economic capital as well as their economic capital growing up.

**Methods of Analysis**

The analysis began with the survey data. The survey was analyzed using the cross tabulation function in Qualtrics to develop a better understanding of how certain demographic factors and capital levels were related to various zero waste behaviors. The interviews were then transcribed and analyzed using Dedoose. I developed a coding scheme to highlight key themes across interview transcripts. These codes included those to describe resisting consumption, the purchasing of new zero waste products, initial
exposure to zero waste among many others that were essential to the analysis. In addition, interviews were analyzed using a typology mechanism to categorize respondents based on their level of economic and cultural capital (HEC= high economic capital, LEC= low economic capital, HCC= high cultural capital, LCC= low cultural capital). The use of these identifiers for levels of economic and cultural capital have been used by scholars who apply Bourdieu’s theory to consumption studies and is in line with the methods of previous studies done on ethical consumption behavior (Carfagna et al. 2014; Holt 1998).

Holt’s (1998) study on cultural capital among U.S. consumers measured cultural capital from all three sources (family upbringing, formal education, and occupation and occupational culture) to create a cultural capital measurement for each of his respondents. Using a ranking system of 1-5 (5 being high resources for cultural capital accumulation and 1 being low resources for cultural capital accumulation), he assigns a numerical ranking to each respondents’ family upbringing, occupation and occupational culture, and education. His ranking system is guided by previous work that has connected the differences in education and occupation with differences in cultural capital (Lamont 1992). Using the ranking of each of these three sources, he then labels the respondent as either high cultural capital (HCC) or low cultural capital (LCC).

Other studies that look at culture and consumption use a similar measurement system of cultural capital ((Barta 2017; Laidley 2013). However, cultural capital is a complex variable and encompasses other variables that are important to understand. In addition, these studies treat cultural capital as a static concept rather than a dynamic one that changes over time. Using Holt’s (1998) cultural capital ranking system as a guide, this study looks at the respondents’ sites of cultural capital accumulation independently
as three different variables and then collectively as one variable. Upon analyzing each interview transcript, I assigned a numerical ranking to each of the respondents’ sources of cultural capital accumulation: family upbringing, occupation and occupational culture, and education. By simply combining these three variables into one static measurement, we are unable to see the nuances of capital accumulation and the significance of the accumulation over time. However, by analyzing these three variables independently, we can better understand how respondents’ cultural capital levels have been built and altered throughout their entire lives. For example, someone may be categorized as low cultural capital in the early years of their adult life if they grew up with little exposure to culture, had no higher education and had a job with few cultural resources. However, throughout their lives they may go to school for advanced degrees and move into jobs with a higher cultural status. The three sources of cultural capital accumulation (family upbringing, occupational culture, and education) are complicated variables that can evolve throughout a person’s life, shaping their cultural and economic capital levels. Therefore, each respondent was given a 1-5 rating for these three sources as well as for their cultural capital level overall.

I approached this project with a Bourdieusian theoretical framework to test his theories of cultural capital and habitus in this new population. I used this framework to divide and analyze my sample in these terms however I also critiqued and expanded on the theory. Throughout the data analysis I recognize the limitations of using terms like low and high cultural capital and suggest new ways to conceptualize skills and knowledge held by various individuals.
Conclusion

This study on zero waste consumers will advance the literature on ethical consumption movements by exploring the ways that alternative consumption practices can expand beyond, or be hindered by, class boundaries. Using this mixed methodological approach demographic and thematic findings were explored, as described in the next section, which allow for the understanding of the impact of socioeconomic status on these consumption behaviors. Taking on this problem with a cultural analysis using Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and cultural capital, we can begin to understand how the zero waste movement fits into the bigger picture of consumption in America.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Introduction:

The zero waste movement provides an ideal example to utilize Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural capital and habitus to understand class barriers within ethical consumption. Through surveying and interviews with members of zero waste Facebook groups, the data illustrates the general demographics of the population as well as the influence of cultural and economic factors on these consumers. Ultimately these data sources allowed me to identify four thematic findings: 1. The impact of gender roles on zero waste consumption; 2. The importance of one’s initial exposure to zero waste living; 3. Respondents’ experience resisting consumption; and 4. The influence of economic and cultural capital on the preferences and tastes of respondents. Overall, the analysis suggests the influence of habitus in the zero waste movement and how cultural capital resource levels lead to its creation. It also supports the argument of the importance of complicating the idea of cultural capital beyond its current manifestation, especially in the context of twenty first century consumption.

Demographics of Zero Waste Consumers

The survey was completed by 53 people and 13 people took part in the in-depth interviews. The survey illustrated details about the demographics and characteristics of the group which are outlined in the figures below. The survey found that the respondents come from a wide range of ages, with the youngest being 18, the oldest being 70, and the average being 38. As shown in Figure 1, the survey found that respondents were predominantly women. There were 44 women, 3 men, 4 gender nonvariant/
nonconforming people. This is consistent with previous studies on zero waste consumers (Carfagna et al. 2014; Willis and Schor 2012). Given this, the greater presence of women than men may accurately reflect the population of zero waste consumers. My interview sample displayed a similar finding with 12 women and 1 gender nonvariant/nonconforming person.

*Figure 1: Gender of Survey Respondents*

The survey results also asked about racial and ethnic statuses. Figure 2 shows the results where 80% of the respondents identified as white. The survey findings suggest that the respondents of the survey of zero waste consumers were predominately white females, a finding that is consistent with what has been observed in the broader category of ethical consumers (Carfagna et al. 2014; Willis and Schor 2012)
Measurements of economic and cultural capital are illustrated in Figure 3 by a respondents’ household income and in Figure 4 by educational attainment. Though these two forms of capital are often connected, this is not always the case (Bourdieu 1979; Weber 1905). In fact, Richard Peterson and Roger Kern (1996) note that consumers often now act as cultural omnivores, consuming both high and lowbrow culture, illustrating the disconnect between economic and cultural capital. My sample demonstrates a similar economic and cultural capital distribution. Figure 3 shows that the respondents are varied when it comes to income levels, with people in both high and low income categories. However, Figure 4 shows that they are overwhelmingly highly educated.
Although the respondents are similar in terms of educational attainment, they differ in income levels, suggesting that high education does not necessarily correlate with high levels of income. The U-shaped curve of Figure 3 illustrating the household income of survey respondents is an intriguing finding. The shape suggests that zero waste consumers tend to come from those earning high and low levels of income. To confirm this diversity of income levels among the respondents, I analyzed the employment of respondents. Some of the survey respondents reported that they were college students.
This may have influenced their responses when they were surveyed about their own economic resources, which were likely to be less than their parents. To triangulate the data and confirm that the results spoke to the true economic situation of these respondents, and was not influenced by the number of college students in the sample, I compared student status to income. Below is a summary of the cross-tabulation of the student and employment status of the respondents along with their income levels.

*Table 1: Student/Employment Status and Income*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Status</th>
<th>Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$0-49,999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a Student</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not employed (out of work, retired, unable to work)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 1 illustrates, there were 9 students (either full time or part time) and 35 people who were not students. The figure shows that students are more often in the high income option than the low income options. Most of the people who selected the low income options were found not to be students. When looking at the respondents who were employed, most fall into the low and high income category, rather than the middle. This further offers evidence that the U-shaped curve found in the income of my survey respondents speaks to the actual economic resources my respondents have access to, regardless to whether or not they are currently a student.

My interview data also demonstrated this U-shape distribution. There was a divide in interview respondents by socioeconomic class which then impacted their zero waste actions. For example, Erin was an interview respondent who grew up with very few economic resources in her life and continues to make an income that keeps her in the lower class. She approaches the zero waste movement differently than Brenda, who grew
up with parents who both had advanced degrees and has access to many economic resources. Those with fewer economic resources approached zero waste by acting in ways that emphasized frugality while those with more economic resources tended to focus on the overall aesthetic over the movement as being clean and attractive. This division is made clear throughout the thematic findings explained later in the chapter.

Overall, the survey data follows the patterns seen in previous studies on both zero waste consumers and the broader category of ethical consumers in previous studies (Carfagna et al. 2014; Willis and Schor 2012). For example, using data from the Citizenship Module within the nationally representative General Social Survey (GSS), previous works have found that ethical consumers are significantly more likely to be white, hailing from high-income categories, and having high levels of education, specifically graduate degrees and fathers with graduate degrees. This supports the critical literature (Guthman 2003; Johnston et al. 2011) that suggests ethical consumers have much higher cultural and economic capital levels than the average population. Many studies on ethical consumption also use samples of high cultural capital consumers which supports the data connecting ethical consumption to higher levels of cultural capital (Carfagna et al. 2014). As most ethical consumption practices require spending more money for more ethical products, this often excludes those with fewer resources. However, as the zero waste movement encourages a restraint from consumption, this adds a unique contribution to our understanding of ethical consumption.

Using the GSS data that supports the previous work done by scholars, I compare the questions that involve ethical consumption behaviors (Smith et al. n.d.). The GSS question asked the respondents whether they have boycotted products for political
reasons. Below are the figures illustrating how the GSS respondents answered this question by class, race, and gender.

Table 2: GSS Findings on Ethical Consumers- Class, Race, and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Frequency Distribution (in percentages)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have done it in the past year</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have done it in the more distant past</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have not done it but might do it</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have not done it and would never do it</td>
<td>45.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Row Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have done it in the past year</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have done it in the more distant past</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have not done it but might do it</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have not done it and would never do it</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Row Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have done it in the past year</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have done it in the more distant past</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have not done it but might do it</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have not done it and would never do it</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The GSS findings illustrate a trend similar to my data. Those who participate in ethical consumption are shown to be predominantly upper class, white, and female.

Measuring Cultural and Economic Capital

Based on the findings of the survey, I focused on economic and cultural capital during the interviews to categorize and analyze my interview respondents. Building on Holt’s (1998) research, I use a ranking system of 1-5 (5 being high resources for cultural capital accumulation and 1 being low resources for cultural capital accumulation). I define cultural capital in my study as coming from the three sources outlined in Holt 1998: family upbringing, occupation and occupational culture, and education.
Throughout the analysis of interviews I noticed that respondents are likely to have similar levels of capital, either HEC/HCC or LEC/LCC. This is important to recognize throughout the analysis because it is easy to confuse the impact of one form of capital for another. Since the two are often linked, it is difficult to understand which variable is at play. For example, when analyzing how the sample varies, it may seem like the respondents differ due to their economic capital levels when it could actually be because of their difference in cultural capital. In addition, cultural capital often works through economic capital. Access to cultural resources often holds a monetary price so accumulating a higher level of cultural capital often requires a certain level of economic capital as well. While it is often that more than one variable is at work, and that they work simultaneously and through one another, it is still important to understand the effect of each. This is done by analyzing the context and determining how the participant is interacting with either their economic resources or their cultural resources.

To be sensitive to the fluid nature of capital, I measured each respondent’s present economic capital as well as their economic capital growing up. These were based on self-identified socioeconomic classes and descriptions of their family upbringing during the interview. The cultural capital section is broken into columns to show the three sites of cultural capital accumulation. Each of these categories receives a 1-5 rating. These ratings are then averaged in the last column to show the overall cultural capital measurement of the respondent. Anyone with a cultural capital measurement from 0-2.5 was labeled as low cultural capital (LCC) and anyone with a cultural capital measurement of 2.5-5 was labeled as high cultural capital (HCC). It is important to mention that categorizing someone as high or low does not mean they have a lack of overall cultural
knowledge, but that their cultural resources are not rewarded institutionally. The LCC respondents were similar in that they had jobs with limited access to cultural capital accumulation and often grew up in households with parents who just had a high school education. This stands in contrast to the HCC respondents who were in professional or managerial jobs and grew up with parents who held advanced degrees. Once each category had a ranking, I averaged them. The students in the sample did not have an occupation so their average was made up of their family upbringing and education. Table 3 shows the economic and cultural capital of each of my respondents.

Table 3: Economic Capital and Cultural Capital Measurement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Economic Capital</th>
<th>Cultural Capital</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Now</td>
<td>Growing up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZW1- Jill</td>
<td>HEC</td>
<td>LEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZW2- Kaitlyn</td>
<td>HEC</td>
<td>LEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZW3- Devin</td>
<td>HEC</td>
<td>LEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZW4- Brenda</td>
<td>HEC</td>
<td>LEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZW5- Erin</td>
<td>LEC</td>
<td>LEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZW6- Lilly</td>
<td>LEC</td>
<td>HEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZW7- Franny</td>
<td>HEC</td>
<td>HEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZW8- Courtney</td>
<td>HEC</td>
<td>HEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZW9- Natalie</td>
<td>HEC</td>
<td>HEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZW10- Valerie</td>
<td>LEC</td>
<td>LEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZW11- Karli</td>
<td>HEC</td>
<td>HEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZW12- Miranda</td>
<td>LEC</td>
<td>HEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZW13- Tammy</td>
<td>HEC</td>
<td>HEC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This measurement of cultural capital encompasses three variables that are all important to understand and should also be treated as variables in themselves. In previous studies (Carfagna et al. 2014; Holt 1998; Laidley 2013), capital forms are measured as static concepts, focusing on the current point in time to determine the capital levels of the respondents. While this provides a cross-sectional system to compare respondents’ levels of capital, this doesn’t take into account the change in capital levels that can occur over time. The three sources of cultural capital accumulation (family upbringing, occupational culture, and education) are complicated variables that can evolve throughout a person’s
life, shaping their cultural and economic capital levels. As was shown in my interview data, this is especially important to think about in relation to cultural capital.

To show the importance of constructing economic and cultural capital as fluid conception, Table 4 shows where each respondents’ capital levels would be at if I had simply measured at the time of the interview. This table shows that the majority of my respondents consistently have either low economic and cultural capital or high economic and cultural capital. The LEC/LCC category consist of people who are lower class and had little exposure to cultural resources. The respondents in the LEC/LCC category have capital levels as demonstrated by Valerie. Valerie was raised by a single mother who worked multiple jobs. Her family did not have many economic resources and often relied on other family members for housing. Valerie holds a bachelor's degree and currently works as a security guard at a college campus. The average of the ratings of her family upbringing, occupational culture, and education place her in the LEC/LCC category. The HEC/HCC category consist of people who are middle to upper class and have experienced and understand how to navigate the dominant culture. The respondents in the HEC/HCC category have capital levels similar to those of Franny. Franny grew up in an upper middle class family with parents who owned their own businesses. Her family does not struggle with money and she can make the purchases she desires. Franny is currently working on her bachelors as a full time student. Her ratings for the three cultural capital sites of accumulation put her in the HEC/HCC category with many others in the sample.

Although most people have the same level for their cultural and economic capital, there were some respondents with inconsistent levels of capital. These respondents look like Lily, who has high cultural capital but low economic capital. Lily grew up in a
wealthy family in the south in a large home. Her father was a doctor of medicine and the family did not struggle with money. Although this sets her up for a future in the HEC/HCC category, Lily failed out of graduate school and is currently working part time at a bike shop but is mostly unemployed. When her ratings for family upbringing, occupational culture, and education are averaged, it categorizes her as HCC/LEC.

*Table 4: Number of Respondents In Each Capital Level: Static Measurements*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>LCC</th>
<th>HCC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LEC</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEC</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table suggests the sample mainly has high economic and cultural capital resources. However, throughout the interviews I noticed more variation in the stories of my respondents. Although the variation in my sample is not present in Table 4, if one looks at the development of capital over time we see something different and not captured by the static measurement. When including where a respondent started in life, we see a different pattern. All of my respondents were working on or had a bachelor’s degree and most had a job where they could acquire additional cultural capital resources (such as careers in higher education, marketing, and non-profit management). However, my respondents’ experience of family upbringing varied greatly. Some had parents who both had graduate degrees and high paying jobs while others were raised by single mothers without a degree. For example, Erin grew up homeschooled by a single mother who worked two jobs. They did not have many resources growing up and this put Erin in the LEC/LCC category. However, Erin went on to college and now holds a Bachelor’s degree. Her family upbringing stands in contrast to that of Courtney who grew up in a
middle class family with two parents who owned a business. Just like Erin, Courtney also holds a Bachelor’s degree, however these two people are very different in terms of capital levels. These findings demonstrate a need to theorize that certain types of cultural capital accumulation sites may be more important to the development, or lack of development, of their overall cultural capital level. Rather than treating family upbringing, occupation and occupational culture, and education as three equally weighted factors making up culture capital, we need to look at them independently as each has their own unique effect.

To do this, I analyzed my sample with an understanding that cultural capital could be a dynamic measure, as one’s level of cultural capital can evolve over time. In addition to coding each of my respondents’ current economic and cultural capital, I also coded where respondents were during their upbringing. It is important to break the measurement up this way because cultural capital is a dynamic concept which changes depending on one’s life events. For example, Kaitlyn, a 56 year old woman, grew up with parents who didn’t finish high school and didn’t encourage her to get an education because it was assumed that she would marry a man who would support her. She explains,

*Kaitlyn:* I didn't go straight to college. I went to work because back then my dad just thought that men would take care of us. I went back to college when I was 23 and I earned my undergraduate, graduate and my doctorates since. [...] I was doing a job that was really kind of a dead end job and it was just not really engaging so I just thought I gotta go to college this is killing me.

Although she grew up with parents who told her she could marry a man rather than pursuing education, Kaitlyn went on to get her PhD. Categorizing her as only high cultural capital ignores the lack of cultural capital she had in these formative years of her life, but categorizing her as low cultural capital assumes the PhD she earned later in life
didn’t have an impact. Therefore, rather than defining the respondent at a current capital level, I allow for a deeper analysis by including and considering the context of a respondents’ life course in their consumption habits.

**Findings**

Several themes emerged after coding the interview transcripts that illustrate the relationship between a consumer's' capital levels and their approach to zero waste. These include gender roles and home care, initial exposure to zero waste, resisting consumption, and taste. The first finding discusses the role of gender in the zero waste movement. While gender does not depend on the level of cultural or economic capital of a participant, like the other themes, gender is important in the context of the zero waste movement as the majority of respondents are women. The following themes discuss how HCC and LCC consumers approach zero waste differently. Those with higher levels of cultural capital tend to be introduced to the movement later in life, struggle in reducing their consumption, and display preferences for new, zero waste branded items. In contrast, those with lower levels of cultural capital tend to have experience with zero waste actions before learning about the movement, do not struggle as much with reducing their consumption, and display preferences of practicality and thrift, favoring used items that may not fit with the zero waste aesthetic displayed online. Taken together, these themes illustrate the impact of cultural capital among zero waste consumers and provide the foundation for understanding the role of habitus in this movement.
Thematic Finding 1: Gender Roles and Home Care

Respondents revealed that gender is important within the context of the zero waste movement. Consistent with the previous studies, respondents of both the survey and interviews overwhelmingly identified as women (Carfagna et al. 2014; Willis and Schor 2012). This suggests that women make up a large segment of the zero waste population. While only 3 men responded to the survey, it is important to understand their situation which may explain if their experience of zero waste is different than that of the women respondents. Analysis of the interview data suggests that part of this may be occurring because this form of consumption requires one to spend a significant amount of time preparing meals and grocery shopping in line with zero waste ideology. For example, the preparation of food requires one to be diligent towards ensuring that little to no food is wasted each week and the product was made under ethical and environmentally conscious conditions. The complexity of shopping zero waste is illustrated by Natalie, a 24 year old graduate student in California, and her description of the factors she takes into consideration before purchasing an item.

*Natalie:* We decided to buy some canned beans, and there were a couple of things of beans that had some additives that my boyfriend didn't know what they were. I wasn't super familiar with it. But one of it came from a city that was about 40 miles from us and one of them came from Maine, so of course I wanted to buy the one that was local. The one that was local had some other things added to them and our grocery store doesn't have Wi-Fi or 4G so we couldn't even look it up. Which was kinda annoying. So we actually ended up going to the front of the store so we could catch some of the 4G through the window. I guess they have whatever the ceiling it was made of didn't allow it through. So we went to the front of the store specifically to look it up and see what the compounds were. And we ended up deciding to go with that one because they were plant derived.

As shown in Natalie’s description of her experience shopping, she considers many factors when deciding whether or not to purchase something, including where the item
was produced and what ingredients were used. These additional considerations amplify
the burden of grocery shopping while living a zero waste lifestyle.

Grocery shopping and meal prep has historically been a female dominated activity
(Private Label Manufacturers Association 2013). In this sense, zero waste may be more
related to gender roles than actual gender. Hence, it is important to understand the
relationship between zero waste consumption and gender roles within the household.
Table 5 shows this relationship with gender and home life using survey data.

Table 5: Gender and Home Care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main home care provider</th>
<th>Gender Variant/ Non-conforming</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partially</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthering the relationship about the importance of being the main home care
provider the table shows the three men who completed the survey all responded that they
were primarily responsible for the care of their home. As many zero waste actions
concern caring for the home (i.e. buying cleaning products and food with minimal
packaging), this may explain why these three men responded to this particular survey.
Whether or not someone pursues a zero waste lifestyle may not simply rely on a
participant’s gender, but also whether or not they are the main home care provider. My
survey results suggest that playing the role of the main home care provider is a qualifier for being zero waste, which is often connected to gender.

The salience of gender roles also showed up in multiple ways during the interviews. One respondent discussed the impact gender had in her life. Lily is a 29 year old female who lives in Portland, Oregon but grew up in Louisiana. During the interview she reflected on going home to her family in the south and how her zero waste lifestyle makes her feel out of place, especially when discussing it with her female relatives.

*Lily:* When you see all of the things we do in Portland to try to step up and serve the world better, it's just immediately hated on by, not all southern people, but a huge majority of southern people because you're taking away their comfort and convenience. Like paper plates, you're telling a woman that she's going to have to do all the dishes after the Thanksgiving meal instead of just being able to throw them away. So when I go back to the south I'm really careful about when I tell people what to do, and I try not to do it at all because it's just different down there. Some people are open to it and that's great but my own family. Like my mom sighs and she's like, well you know I'm really busy and tired and have all this health stuff going on, and she does have an extenuating circumstance of not having a kitchen, it's in a state of being remodeled for too long. But yeah. That conversation quickly goes south.

Zero waste requires additional preparation time to avoid potential waste from being created. In Lily’s example, living zero waste would place the burden on a woman who would have to clean all of the dishes. Avoiding waste often means avoiding convenience as well, and someone will need to pay this price with the additional manual labor. Lily also lived in an apartment with two males. In this quote she discusses what it is like being the only female in the household and how this affects her zero waste lifestyle.

*Lily:* Yeah we don't have a ton of storage. And I moved into the apartment a year ago and my partner and his roommate had been living there two years prior. […] The two dudes are really great overall but aren't, like I’m the only one who composes in the house because I've told them explicitly, don't put what you aren't going to take out in here. I didn't want to be the only one taking the compost out.
I'm also the only woman so I feel like that's another layer to that. But the recycling, I'm the only one who washes it and I feel like the changes to plastic that just happened, if you don't wash your recycling, they're not going to take it. They're just going to throw out your whole batch. So I feel like I'm the only one who cares enough to be nerdy about how to recycle and the rules. They care just not as much.

*Interviewer:* Yeah. What does that imbalance feel like? Is that discouraging sometimes?

*Lily:* Oh my gosh yes totally. Because like I know they're not the only ones and they're representative to me of a lot of other people that are like, why would I do this stuff? This is crazy. Like this is not a lifestyle I want. But at the end of the day I think that's really selfish and I hate being the only one that always has to play the mom, like the enforcer the reminder. But it's a part of what I agreed to. Like I acknowledged that would be a part of living this lifestyle, you have to say something.”

Her experience of always needing to “play the mom” in the household made zero waste a heavier burden than it would have been if the two males in the apartment had shown they cared as much as she did about recycling the proper way. The analogy of playing the mom suggests that she understands this as a gender imbalance among the roommates in terms of household care. As discussed above, caring for the home is one of the main focuses of zero waste consumers and consists of shopping for food and household products. As this responsibility is often held by women, it is reasonable to predict other women struggle with the problems Lily faces with her male roommates.

We can also understand the role gender plays in the zero waste community by looking at the posts in the Facebook groups from which I sampled. When observing the Facebook groups, I noticed that many of the posts were female centered and included discussions about feminine hygiene and beauty products. The following quote was posted by a woman who wanted advice from the group on using her menstrual cup.

*Facebook user:* I currently use the Diva cup, which I am okay happy about. I have however experienced that I tend to 'leak’ a bit on the first and second day, where
there is a heavier flow. I try to compensate for this by emptying the cup more often than on the other days. However, I still feel a bit insecure those two first days and always wear a regular sanitary pad as a safety, which is obviously not ideal. So my question is: is it normal to having to empty your cup more often the first two days? Or any other days with heavy flow?

Many of the posts around issues of feminine hygiene products described the woman’s situation in great detail. The detail of these posts suggests that those posting assumed their content would be read by other women. There were far fewer posts relating to male hygiene. There were also more posts regarding female beauty products than there were relating to male products. The following quote was posted by a woman who wanted suggestions on beauty and hair care.

Facebook user: I'm trying to gradually replace all disposable items in our household with reusable. What are everyone's favorite reusable shower/beauty/hair care products? I use coconut oil as my makeup remover, in my hair and as a shave cream, and I plan to get lush shampoo bars once I finish our shampoo. I also want to switch to a safety razor soon but am unsure of what brands are reputable I'd really like to find a cruelty free/natural product that I can use as a body & face wash, and then possibly a deep conditioner suggestion since my long curly hair is just overall extremely unmanageable

Questions relating to beauty or hair care products were often written with specifics like this one and mainly referred to female oriented products. There were also many posts concerned with caring for the home or children. The following quotes are from a zero waste Facebook group and concern issues of meal planning and cleaning.

Facebook user: Meal planning! It is seriously the bane of my existence. I would love to hear your success stories regarding meal planning, especially for picky eaters and limited time. Like I tried making black bean soup from scratch and then the whole family (including myself) got sick and the beans went bad before I got to them

Facebook user: What would be the ultimate recipe for an all-purpose cleaning liquid (for dishes, floor, windows etc.)? I have frozen citrus peels, vinegar, baking soda, essential oil and water but what is the perfect ratio? Thank you.
As explained previously, the results suggest that being the main caretaker of the home is a qualifier for creating a zero waste lifestyle. As women are often caretakers of the home (Private Label Manufacturers Association 2013), it is not surprising that these actions would be displayed by women in the Facebook groups as well. The posts on Facebook, survey data, and interviews all suggest that zero waste actions encompass those often carried out by females. This is important to consider because it illuminates the potential for gendered divisions of labor to carry from one field, the home, to another, ethical consumption. However, this gendered division of labor within the field of ethical consumption is displayed as difficult for some to navigate, especially when they try to correct what they see as wasteful behavior by others. This connection with the gender divide in the household helps explain the overwhelmingly female sample in the study.

**Thematic Finding 2: Initial Exposure for Zero Waste**

There was a divide in the sample based on cultural capital and how people were introduced to the zero waste movement. The LCC respondents had initial exposure to zero waste behaviors growing up and often adopted these actions before it was called zero waste, predisposing them to the values of living with an environmental consciousness. They grew up in families where there was an emphasis on not being wasteful. Many of these people grew up on family farms or had relatives who owned farms. This background allowed them to form a relationship with animals and the environment that they referenced as being a motivation for continuing their zero waste lifestyle. It was also more likely for these LCC respondents to learn these values and practices from family members rather than from resources outside the family. Those with
HCC had a very different experience being introduced to the zero waste movement. They often had to seek it out themselves later in life and relied on internet resources like YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest and blogs. Unlike the LCC respondents who grew up practicing these actions before it was called zero waste, those with HCC could think of a distinct moment when they decided to change their lifestyles and reduce their waste. Often it was a specific purchase, like a reusable coffee mug, or an emotional video, like one involving a sea turtle with a straw stuck up its nose, that led them to adopt the zero waste lifestyle. Those with HCC usually grew up in families where there was not an emphasis on the environment, and if there was, recycling was the only action they took. They obtained most of their knowledge about waste from people outside their immediate family and some eventually resented their family for the lavish and wasteful lifestyle they grew up with.

Erin, a 30 year old woman, grew up on a family farm and was homeschooled by her mother until college. She references the many actions her mother took to save items from being thrown away and the great lengths she went to recycle. Although she was often embarrassed by this when she was growing up, she now sees it as helpful in her zero waste lifestyle today. Her quote below illustrates the LCC theme of being introduced to zero waste early in life by a family member.

Erin: I grew up with a single parent mom who lived very simply. [...] she had always leaned more towards homeschooling than not and gave me and my brother the choice despite being a single parent. So money was always tight for us so we lived very simply growing up which makes zero waste I think an easier concept maybe. And we've always reused wrapping paper, and I don't know, for her she's always seemed to be naturally drawn towards these kind of progressive ideas that as a child I kinda was even ashamed of or thought was weird. Like reusing wrapping paper. But you know it’s actually a really wonderful thing to do and really important. So I think I'm very blessed because growing up my mom, she told me recently that she remembers crushing cans to take to recycling that she
Jill had a similar introduction to zero waste. She’s a 28 year old woman and also lived on a family farm growing up. She learned some of her zero waste actions from her grandmother. Her story is typical of the LCC consumer who was introduced to zero waste by family members and learned to value the environment while living on a farm. She emphasizes the use of “real” food in her home growing up and how that came with minimal packaging. She uses this experience to guide her zero waste actions today.

Jill: So what I kinda look at is as is, try to live like Grandma in some ways. Because Grandma cooked. There's so much waste coming from the kitchen and I think a lot of it is due to these things that we bring in. I mean, canned foods, you know she used those but cans aren't as bad as you know the plastic bottles. But she would get potatoes. The actual vegetables, and the meat would come from their own cows so they had a freezer full. So really it would be low waste because it was real cooked food.

Jill and Erin, along with the other LCC consumers in the sample, displayed comfort living the zero waste lifestyle as it had been demonstrated to them by family members growing up. These actions were woven into their lives before they realized it was considered to be zero waste and this set them up to be able to naturally adopt the lifestyle.

Unlike the LCC consumers, the HCC consumers often remember the exact moment they decided to change their lifestyle. Franny, an 18 year old woman, is a college student who grew up in a wealthy family who didn’t consider the environmental impact of their spending. Franny remembers the date she started her zero waste lifestyle because it was the day she was gifted a Keep Cup, an expensive glass reusable coffee mug. This item sparked her interest in zero waste and motivated Franny to learn about other zero waste
products online. Franny emphasized her use of the internet to search for the environmental knowledge that she lacked growing up within a family who seemed to overconsume. This self initiated internet search combined with her first zero waste product led her to build her zero waste lifestyle.

*Interviewer:* So when did you find zero waste?

*Franny:* November 14th of last year. I just had my anniversary.

*Interviewer:* Oh wow […] And where did you learn about zero waste? Like on this date, the 14th, were you introduced to the term for the first time?

*Franny:* I know exactly what day it was because I had gotten a keep cup as an early Christmas gift and I was like, oh fun. And I remember specifically asking for it but I didn't really do anything with it, like I don't know why I asked for it, I wish I remember where that spark came from. [...] I was looking through tiny house things and making your grey water green water and somehow I came across a video about lowering my plastic consumption, and I'm like, oh my god this is the shit that I'm about. And I just kinda fell down the rabbit hole that Youtube takes you. Then I found the Instagram.

Like many HCC consumers, Franny’s initial exposure to zero waste was through a new product. This stands as a stark contrast to LCC consumers who were exposed to zero waste by saving and refusing new purchases. These two vastly different introductions to zero waste living illustrate that, although these consumers are working towards the same goal of zero waste, they work towards that goal through different means and adopt behaviors they feel most comfortable with to reach that goal. The behaviors often adopted by the HCC consumers centered around choosing different brands and searching for new products that made zero waste living easier, while the LCC consumers focused on saving what they owned or replacing their existing items with more sustainable or durable options.
Courtney, 25, was another HCC consumer who recently learned about zero waste. She grew up in a wealthy suburban area and lived a comfortable middle class life where she did not have to worry about saving resources. She was introduced to the zero waste movement by a popular blog called “Trash is for Tossers” which follows the life of a young woman living in Brooklyn who produces almost no trash. Courtney explains that before this introduction, she never considered the impact of her waste.

Courtney: I like didn't even think twice about any environmental issues or anything of that nature, it wasn't until this year that I was like, holy shit I don't know why I didn't pay attention to this stuff before. Honestly it just feels like there's a lack of awareness and education out there. Like I didn't know about plastic until this year which is so horrible cause we buy so much of it. And once you start going zero waste, you get your trash eyes where you just look around and you're like holy shit.

Interviewer: Your trash eyes?

Courtney: Yeah it happened to me at the grocery store. There was like, I remember it so vividly, it was when I started to, I think it was the first time that I got everything in my own containers. And I remember I was at Whole Foods, and I only bought like glass and metal and I bought a few bulk items and I got everything in my bags. And it was a really long line and I was looking at what everyone else had in front of me and I was like, holy crap, like literally all of that is trash that everything is housed in. Like all of the produce was in their plastic bags, like all their snacks were in their little trash snack bags, like the meat came in the plastic thing with the saran wrap on top. Like everything was plastic. And I was like looking all around and I was like, oh my god, I don't know why I didn't see any of this before.

Courtney’s experience in the grocery store shows how her introduction to zero waste opened her eyes to the issue of waste after years of not considering environmental issues. Unlike the LCC consumers who had grown up aware of the issue of waste, this new knowledge came as a shock to Courtney. The information she gained from the blog she read online helped her develop an awareness for environmental responsibility and rethink the actions she had taken throughout her life.
There were also respondents who had experience with both the HCC and LCC approaches to zero waste, providing a linkage between the two groups. Karli, 23, was introduced to zero waste in a similar manner to the HCC consumers, however living with her grandmother who has limited income has shown her a new way to approach the zero waste lifestyle. Karli is a typical HCC zero waste consumer who learned about the movement from internet resources and purchases new zero waste products like bamboo utensils. However, living with her grandmother shows how although she was exposed to zero waste in a HCC manner, she is able to learn about how those with fewer resources also take on zero waste behaviors.

*Interviewer:* How about your grandmother who you’re living with now?

*Karli:* Yeah. So I think that's really interesting in that she is poor, she really relies on public assistance because she does not work and she has physical ailments and stuff. So her budget is limited but she's still actually like in a lot of ways she is like more eco friendly in that she relies on more of a vegetarian lifestyle which is unintentional on her part but a lot of the staples of the diet that she just grew up with are just naturally vegetarian so she's mostly just vegetarian as it happens. Also there is no dryer in the house so to dry your clothes using a machine requires you to go outside to the laundromat and pay for it. So what we do for most of what we have, we have this *points to drying rack*. We have the dryer. And that actually did have a positive impact on me in that I used to really love the dryer [in my] house, but like when I'm up there and I'm washing clothes I just forgo the dryer, I just hang it up like, I don't have a rack like this but I hang it up on the curtain rod or something to let my stuff dry.

*Interviewer:* So do you think she's had an impact on your zero waste lifestyle?

*Karli:* I would definitely say she's had an influence in unknowing ways. Another thing she likes to do is that if something is broken, if bedding is damaged, it's got a tear in it or a shirt has a hole in it, she just sews it up so I feel like that's also positively influenced me to like pursue that as an option, rather than be like, oh it's broken now, guess I'll just throw it away. You know.

Karli’s story is a great example of how the HCC and LCC approaches to zero waste are different but not mutually exclusive. Although Karli still purchases new items to live her
zero waste lifestyle, she was able to adopt new practices from her grandmother such as using a drying rack instead of the dryer or fixing items when they break rather than throwing them away. These actions she adopted are those typical of LCC zero waste consumers however that didn’t prevent her from adopting them herself. This example illustrates how some of these actions, while rooted in a particular economic or cultural capital level, are then shared by those with different resources.

Respondents with LCC experienced a different introduction to zero waste than those with HCC. The introduction of to the LCC was often more natural and was woven into their family upbringing, creating transposable dispositions they carried with them into their zero waste lifestyle today. However, those with HCC had to introduce themselves to zero waste and put effort into educating themselves about this lifestyle. This shows that those with LCC were predisposed to the necessary actions and values that come with the zero waste movement, making this lifestyle easy and comfortable to adopt. It took a particular motivator for the HCC consumers to adopt this lifestyle and when they did, they had to continue to educate themselves to be able to live this way and work to consciously create environmentally friendly habits. The difference in introductions to zero waste consumers shows that the LCC consumers are set up more naturally to take on this lifestyle.

**Thematic Finding 3: Resisting Consumption**

Zero waste is a useful case study of ethical consumption behaviors because unlike many of these ethical consumption examples, which encourage consumers to purchase an ethical product, the zero waste movement encourages people to resist consumption. Many zero waste consumers measured their success in terms of the amount of trash they were
able to reduce. As much of this trash consists of plastic packaging from items they have purchased, resisting bringing new items into their home was one of the most effective methods to reduce this waste. However, people approached this waste saving tactic in various ways depending on their relationship with resisting consumption throughout their lives. Those who grew up with LCC had fewer resources to make impulse purchases. They were already predisposed to saving and resisting consumption, and didn’t see this as a barrier to living zero waste. Those who grew up with HCC were used to making impulse purchases and had to curb their consumption to a greater extent. These people often had to reject their previous lifestyles of consumption and abundance in order to live in a zero waste fashion.

Valerie, 25, was raised by a single mother who worked multiple jobs while raising children. She did not have many resources for economic or cultural capital accumulation. Frugality was important in her life and continues to be today. She explained that she often doesn’t purchase many items and sometimes this concerns those around her. Resisting consumption comes easy to her, however, she runs into difficulty explaining this to others who try to buy her unneeded gifts. Her quote illustrates the relationship many LCC consumers have with resisting consumption.

Interviewer: So what’s the hardest part [about zero waste]?

Valerie: […] It's not difficult really. I have everything I need. During my birthday and Christmas it's hard to get people to not give me stuff I don't need. They don't listen. It's kinda tough but other than that, it's been easy for me at least. […]

[…]

Interviewer: And you mentioned that this time of year, sometimes you get unwanted gifts, what do you do about that?
Valerie: I tell them that, sometimes they listen but not all the time, this year I got a cocktail mix and a vegetable spiralizer completely made of plastic and I just took it. It’s only once a year and I will use them but I didn't need or want them. Not much I can do there. But I also, a lot of the times I'll regift things or give them to my friends. Definitely I'll loan things out to people when they don't have things. I had to clear out to get more room for these things.

Valerie has an understanding of what items she needs in her life and is not often distracted by nonessential items. This has made her zero waste lifestyle come naturally to her.

Devin, 43, grew up in Alaska and currently works as a scientist for national parks. They grew up LEC/LCC however throughout their life they have moved to HEC/HCC. In this quote Devin explains how resisting consumption and finding alternatives to conventional products was something they grew up doing.

Interviewer: Thinking about your zero waste consumption today, did you learn anything from your parents that shaped this?

Devin: Definitely. My parents were very frugal, they kinda had to be and my father is just a tightwad anyway. [...] My parents sorta tried not to participate in the consumption culture as much as other families might. For example, at Christmas time it was, they really tried to focus on the giving aspect and the meaning behind it so they, instead of everyone getting gifts from everyone else, we started a tradition of drawing names. So we would get one special gift for one person.

Just like Valerie, Devin does not feel discomfort when resisting consumption. Devin explains that because of their upbringing and the way their parents approached consumption, this has allowed the zero waste lifestyle to come easily to them. Devin’s example helps us understand how consumption habits that are formed growing up still have strength in present day. While Devin is considered HEC/HCC today, they grew up LEC/LCC. Devin’s consumption habits are more in line with others with low economic and cultural resources, who also view resisting consumption as not a major obstacle.
These formative years of Devin’s life served an important role in establishing these zero waste consumption practices, illustrating that various sites of cultural capital accumulation may have different strengths. Moving from one level of economic or cultural capital to another can be very difficult for people as they adapt to new behaviors associated with those resources. Devin’s quote illustrates how sometimes people will hold onto the behaviors they have grown accustomed to with their previous levels of capital, highlighting the importance of family upbringing and the early years of capital and habitus formation.

Those who grew up with more economic and cultural resources than Valerie and Devin had a harder time adopting the anti-consumerist nature of zero waste. Karli is a 23 year old woman who lives in New York City and is surrounded by take out food options. She grew up HEC/HCC and continues to be today. Throughout her interview she explained that she needed to put more effort into preparing meals ahead of time so she wouldn’t be tempted to buy take out, which creates a large amount of waste from the packaging. However, she runs into problems here because she is not used to cooking for herself and often resorts to impulse take out orders. When asked about what kinds of difficulties she experiences leading a zero waste life, she responds,

*Karli:* Packaging for food. Cause that's a huge problem. Cool, I'm too lazy to cook, I order food from outside, Trash. I didn't have food when I went outside, order food outside. Trash. You know? Impulsive buying. Trash.

Karli’s problem with impulse purchases was shared with many of my respondents who came from HEC/HCC backgrounds. Brenda, 19, is a college student who grew up in a wealthy family in North Carolina. When asked what would help her reduce her waste responds,
Brenda: I guess more self-control [...] like not going out and being wasteful all the time, which sounds very simple but it's just like, it's as easy as just trying to not buy recklessly when I don't really need it [...] and buying things that you want can be fine but like not doing it all the time. And I'm infamous for doing that in my life. Just like when it comes to makeup and stuff like that, it's definitely crazy.

Brenda and Karli are working towards the same goal of zero waste that Devin and Valerie have, however, Brenda and Karli are not comfortable with resisting consumption. This stands as a major barrier to their success in leading a zero waste lifestyle.

Often this past history living with abundance was one of the motivators leading these HEC/HCC consumers to a zero waste lifestyle. Some explained how they were disgusted with how they grew up with so many items they didn’t use and described their zero waste lifestyle as a way to start fresh and create a healthier relationship with consumerism. Miranda, a 38 year old woman, is a university instructor who grew up with parents who both had advanced degrees and high income levels. Miranda had a difficult experience when she had to clean out her grandmother’s storage after she died. Witnessing the excessive consumerism of her grandmother pushed her to begin living in a minimalist fashion, which then led her to zero waste.

Interviewer: So what led you to minimalism?

Miranda: I grew up with abundance and probably over abundance and there was this moment when I had to help my parents clear out my grandma's condo because she had to go to an assisted living facility. And I think she was borderline hoarder and that experience of cleaning out the condo was pretty traumatic. She had 3 or 4 storage units and floor to ceiling stuff and it gave me heart palpitations thinking about all this stuff and I started thinking about how important it is to allow others to enjoy, I mean a person only needs so much, [...] So I think that was definitely a critical moment when I thought wow. So I kinda went extreme the other way and people would come over to my place and say, are you moving? And I'm like, no. No I just don't have a lot of things. So I had a card table and a chair and that was it, so people would have to sit on the floor and I had zero knick knacks or anything. Silverware, dishes, maybe a couple of plates. So I would tell people to bring their own, at my potlucks, bring your own food and your own
dishes and your own chair. So anyway, it was kinda a joke with friends. I think now I’m a little more comfortable, I have more than 2 dishes.

Miranda’s story illustrates the complexity of resisting consumption as a HEC/HCC consumer. While she is predisposed to consuming new items rather than saving, her previous lifestyle also served as a motivator to live zero waste. When her previous lifestyle of abundance and excess came into conflict with her new minimalist values she experienced great discomfort which pushed her to the opposite end of the consumption spectrum, creating a life for herself with very few items at all. This shock she experienced in her grandmother’s storage unit bears a similar resemblance to the ways HCC consumers were first exposed to zero waste, as many of them began their journey after a distinct moment they learned the value of conservation. This is very different than the LEC/LCC consumers who did not reference a tension between their lifestyle growing up and their zero waste lifestyle today. Unlike the HEC/HCC consumers, those with lower levels of capital held a disposition towards saving which made them feel more comfortable taking the necessary steps of resisting consumption to advance their zero waste lifestyle.

While ethical consumption is often criticized for being only attainable to those with higher incomes and privileged statuses, zero waste consumers display a different trend. Rather than being more accessible to those with HEC/HCC resources, the zero waste lifestyle is actually attained easier by those with LEC/LCC resources. As one’s ability to reduce their waste is contingent on their reduction of their consumption, those who grew up with fewer economic resources were predisposed to saving and resisting unnecessary purchases. This was not the case with those who had more economic resources who struggled to curb the excessive consumption they had grown up with.
Thematic Finding 4: Taste

Zero waste can look like different lifestyles depending on what resources are used. There is a prominent zero waste community on Instagram that shares images that portray zero waste as a clean, organized, and trendy way to lead a more mindful life. They often show expensive zero waste products such as aluminum straws, bamboo utensils, glass travel mugs, and stainless steel lunch boxes. These images online are carefully crafted to portray zero waste as fashionable and flawless. However, there are other versions of zero waste that are seen as less desirable. If someone cannot afford a stainless steel lunchbox and a glass travel mug, they may use a Tupperware container and an old plastic travel mug instead. While both approaches reduce waste, the Tupperware and plastic travel mug image is less desirable than the stainless steel and glass version.

Taste plays an important role in zero waste and shows how people approach the movement differently depending on their economic and cultural resources. In my interviews, my HCC respondents favored the more aesthetically pleasing zero waste products made of bamboo or stainless steel. For them, the material of a product was an important factor when considering whether or not to purchase something. Often, they would find these products online in YouTube videos or blog posts. However, the LCC respondents didn’t pay as much attention to the aesthetic appeal or physical appearance of the product, but focused more on the practicality of the item and how long it would last them. These respondents appreciated items like Tupperware containers for their practicality and low cost and favored bulk store options for reasons of frugality.
Brenda, 19, was introduced to zero waste through online resources like most HCC zero waste consumers. She didn’t have many people in her life who lived a zero waste lifestyle so she turned to Instagram to find people who lived this way.

Interviewer: Do you see any people living zero waste that you aspire to be like?

Brenda: There's this girl, I found her Instagram, she lives back in Greensboro where I go to school [...] I don't know I guess the way that she lives and the way her room looks like, I know Instagram isn't really a representation of life but it's still really interesting to look at. And it just looks like she lives very clean and very unwasteful.

Brenda hints at the appeal of Instagram and describes how these images present zero waste in a “clean” and aesthetically pleasing style. She acknowledges that these images may be staged and Instagram “isn’t really a representation of life” but that does not push her away from the site. Other HCC respondents, while attracted to the well crafted Instagram posts, found this aesthetic hard to implement in their everyday lives. Courtney, 25, owns many bamboo and stainless steel zero waste products and learns about similar products on blogs. However, she struggles to create the clean lifestyle she observes on these blogs while maintaining her zero waste goals.

Courtney: You're recycling and reusing stuff and like you're going to have fabric scraps that you use as napkins and I use ugly gross kitchen towels stained from like me using them, and my paper towels, my fabric paper towels, are stained and like kinda not clean looking just cause they're a light color and that's what happens when you use something. So I feel like that's something I like, when bloggers are real and show you that it's not always this pretty Instagram perfect lifestyle that you're living. Like I have a whole hoard of boxes from like shipping and receiving stuff from packages that people send me that I'm saving to recycle and I feel like a hoarder at times but I know that I want to recycle the boxes [...] Like I'm still using up so much stuff from literally this year, I haven't purchased a single product and I haven't run out of anything. Or like bath products, I bought shampoo bars but I haven't made it to buy any of my own bars, there's just so much stuff that they don't show you.
Courtney experiences a tension in her zero waste lifestyle, where she aims to create the clean style presented on blogs but is held back by the reality of saving waste, which requires her to act “like a hoarder” at times. Her version of zero waste does not look like what she observes online, however she still strives to create this lifestyle someday.

Devin, 43, grew up LCC but is HCC today. Although they have the resources to consume the more aesthetically popular zero waste products, they focus their attention on the value of plastic. Devin joined a zero waste Facebook group and saw how people were often favoring materials like bamboo and stainless steel over plastic. They take an intellectual approach to understanding plastic and refers to articles and books they’ve read about the materials our society values.

*Devin*: And they seem to have this big vendetta against plastic, which, I'm not necessarily pro plastic but I think that plastic plays a valuable role in our culture. But it's just the way that we use it, like we don't value it at all. [...] So you know, plastic can provide valuable things for us. Like IVs in hospitals and stuff like that. There's life saving things they do for us that, I don't know, maybe we could figure out a different way but I'm not entirely opposed to plastic as much as they seem to be but I just think that it needs to be valued a lot more.

Devin explains that they think the problem lies in our consumerist culture where people don’t value items for what they are, but for the status they give them. Devin discusses the value of plastic in a way that emphasizes practicality, contrasting the way in which HCC consumers discuss the value of bamboo or stainless steel which refers to an aesthetically pleasing sustainability. The LCC critique is not focused simply on how we waste materials but also how we fail to value materials. This illuminates a deeper meaning about tastes and values. Rather than approaching the zero waste movement like the HCC consumers who develop a sense of collective identity with the movement, the LCC consumers display a disposition towards the values of materials. Instead of being drawn
towards consuming certain materials that are claimed to be sustainable by the zero waste movement, the LCC consumers are drawn towards different materials because of the values they have acquired throughout their lives.

Understanding the role of tastes and values in zero waste consumption can help explain why the LCC and HCC consumers seem to be living two different versions of zero waste. The HCC preference for a clean and minimalist aesthetic drives these consumers to create their zero waste lifestyle not simply by reducing waste and altering their behaviors, but also by buying the correct items and materials that are associated with the zero waste lifestyle shown on Instagram accounts or blogs. The zero waste movement online is branded by this image and advertises zero waste as a clean and mindful way to live. There are very few blogs or Instagram accounts that will use old plastic products to show how they live a zero waste lifestyle. Instead, the image of zero waste online is defined by expensive, beautiful products. As many of the HCC respondents learned of the zero waste movement from online resources initially, it makes sense that they would pursue the picturesque lifestyle they first saw online.

There seems to be a disconnect in the zero waste movement here. The thematic findings previously explained show that LCC consumers have a more natural experience adopting the zero waste lifestyle because of their previous experience with saving resources. Although these are the consumers who seem to have an easier time adopting these practices, their lifestyle is not represented online like the HCC lifestyle is. This theme of taste can help us understand why certain people who adopt the lifestyle later in life experience struggles when their home doesn’t look like the image their favorite blogger posted. The disconnect between the reality of saving resources and the image of
the movement online serves HCC consumers a disservice as it is another tension for them to endure.

**Habitus**

As described in the thematic findings, those with HCC approached zero waste consumption in a more purposeful or forceful manner while those with LCC adopted these behaviors more naturally. These results are summarized in Figure 5. This figure illustrates the behaviors of the respondents and how their various levels of capital influenced their approach to zero waste. For example, those with HCC and HEC tend to adopt zero waste actions later in life and show attraction to the aesthetically pleasing Instagram portrayal of zero waste. In contrast, those with LCC and LEC were accustomed to these actions previously and valued thriftiness and frugality. While most of the respondents had the same level in both capital measurements, there were some who had higher levels in one capital. These respondents illustrated how unique intersections of cultural and economic capital can result in the adoption of different behaviors.
It is also important to note that people do not live in one box in this matrix their entire lives. In fact, many of the participants experienced a movement into a different realm of capital levels throughout their lifetime. Moving into a different capital realm proves to be difficult no matter when or how it happens. The unique intersections of cultural and economic capital set the respondents up to behave in a certain set of ways and when they acquire or lose capital, they move into a different intersection of capitals that comes with another unique set of behaviors. However, for the respondents who acquire or lose capital over time, they may be relocated to another box on the matrix, but the influence of one’s initial capital position does continue to be important regardless of their new position.

This figure of the unique intersections of a consumers’ various capital levels can be explained by the concept of habitus. We can understand habitus as the arena where cultural and economic capital resources are displayed. The unique habitus possessed by
each person is informed by their capital resources and enables them to be comfortable, or uncomfortable, in certain situations. Consumer culture scholars use Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, the “durable, transposable dispositions” (Bourdieu 1977:72) we possess, to describe how consumers come to choose the goods and services they purchase. We can also use habitus to understand how zero waste consumers grow to feel comfortable rejecting societal consumption norms and choose zero waste alternatives. As illustrated above, someone with high levels of cultural and economic capital may be drawn to the movement and participate in it in a different manner than someone with low levels of cultural and economic capital. By using the concept of habitus, we can understand these themes to suggest that the LCC and HCC consumers hold a different habitus. The habitus held by LCC consumers is consistent with strategies of saving and thrift, which enables them to have a more natural experience. The habitus of the HCC, however, does not help them adopt the zero waste lifestyle like the one held by LCC consumers, and instead predisposes them to purchases and creating an aesthetically pleasing lifestyle.

Carfagna et al. (2014) found the existence of an ecological habitus in their case studies. This habitus belongs to HCC consumers with a strong ecological orientation. They display a reconfiguration of high status tastes which is fostered by a more general social valorization of environmental responsibility. They do not claim that these consumers are succeeding in minimizing their ecological footprints or have a smaller footprint than those with less cultural capital, but rather that they employ an ecological consciousness (Carfagna et al. 2014). The emergence of this habitus shows to invert many of the binaries used by Bourdieu to explain what is valued by HCC consumers. The valuation of the local, material and manual, they describe, are traditionally seen in those
with LCC, however, their HCC respondents enact these values in high class ways. Their localism, for example, has a cosmopolitan tone. They prefer local food, local businesses, and local economies which reference an upscale local, selectively rejecting and accepting aspects of the LCC local. Carfagna et al. also found that these HCC consumers favor manual labor which is different from the studies of Bourdieu and Holt whose HCC consumers try to distance themselves from the production of goods. However, the HCC consumers in their study do not associate manual labor with the lower class but favor Do-It-Yourself (DIY) projects and express an appreciation for the manual labor involved in making their own products. They are not simply adapting the tastes of LCC but reconfiguring them.

My study suggests that my HCC consumers hold similar characteristics to the eco-habitus described by Carfagna et al. (2014). They value the local and manual but in a high class manner that displays distinction. They value environmental responsibility but show it through the use of expensive zero waste products that align with the clean lifestyle they observe on Instagram. However, throughout the analysis it has become apparent that these eco-habitus characteristics were purposely constructed by many of my HCC respondents and serve as a secondary habitus for them, or even sometimes as simply just consciously created habits. Although the HCC consumers in Carfagna et al.’s (2014) sample resembled those of mine, the eco-habitus in Carfagna et al.’s study was held by HCC consumers who did not have to drastically alter their lifestyles to align with their ecological orientation. They continued to buy products, and simply altered their choices to favor more ecologically mindful companies. However, the HCC in my study had to resist much of their previous lifestyle, including many of their common purchasing
behaviors. Going zero waste required these consumers to put effort into actions they used to take for granted, like shopping or cooking. While the HCC consumers in Carfagna et al.’s (2014) study may show evidence of holding an ecological habitus, the HCC consumers in this study were pushed further from what they were comfortable with. The discomfort and tension felt by the HCC consumers in this study suggest that within the zero waste movement, the ecological habitus does not fit the way it does with other ethical consumption practices.

While the HCC consumers in this study did not show evidence of an ecological habitus due to the discomfort they felt taking on these actions, there was one among the LCC consumers. The habitus held by those with LCC is their primary habitus, the one they have grown up with and naturally acquired. They built the foundation of this habitus throughout their life from experiences with their families saving resources, interacting with animals on family farms, and resisting consumption growing up. This habitus allows them to be comfortable with strategies of saving and thrift, providing them an easy lifestyle within the zero waste movement.

Unlike the LCC respondents, those with HCC had to seek out zero waste information themselves and put effort into tailoring their lifestyle to fit the movement. At first this does not come naturally to them and they have to work to create this zero waste lifestyle that contradicts the way they interacted with consumption growing up. They were often aiming for the comfort in this lifestyle that was displayed by the LCC consumers, and they approached this by consciously developing new habits. Developing a new habitus is difficult for these people because it calls into question their previous lifestyle. As outlined above in the thematic finding on resisting consumption, the HCC
consumers often had previously led a life where they did not resist consumption and often didn’t consider saving waste. Reconfiguring their lifestyle in a way that excludes the purchases to which they have grown accustomed and introduces new waste saving techniques can be extremely difficult. In the quote below, Courtney, a HCC consumer, describes the difficulty of adopting new habits and growing comfortable with the lifestyle. She explains that because she was so used to plastic it was difficult for her to stop herself from grabbing a straw instinctively.

*Courtney*: I think initially it's just switching your way of thinking. I think that was the hardest thing. Cause you're so used to plastic that it doesn't even phase you, and so used to disposable items and trash that you don't even think twice about it. Like there are so many times that I would like take a straw and then be like, oh crap, and put the straw back. Or like if I can't, like I don't want to use this straw now but I don't want to throw it out. So honestly I think it's just like recognizing and being more aware of the things that you're grabbing and consuming, was definitely a big thing that I had to learn, or like telling people when I go out to eat, oh I don't need a straw in my drink, or I don't need a napkin at my table or even when I go out to eat, like I'll be super creepy and look around at how they're serving everything to see if there's something I can order to see if it's the least hassle to tell them like that I don't want any trash or to see if they even serve on non-disposable plates. Things like that. So I honestly think it was just being more aware of like the items that I was using and consuming. The other thing was throwing away, I think throwing away is something you don't even think about, you just toss something out. But now, even now it's still something hard, to be like oh well can I use this for something else or is there anything else I can do with this, or is there any way I can dispose of this that doesn't end up in a landfill?

Courtney didn’t just need to adopt new habits, she needed to adopt a new way of thinking that would enable her to default to zero waste options instinctively. At first this did not come naturally to her and she had to put in effort to change the little actions she didn’t think twice about. Franny, another HCC consumer, also struggles with becoming comfortable with choosing zero waste options. She explains that although she does not like the idea of makeup, she still feels the need to wear it. While refusing makeup is the zero waste alternative, Franny is just not comfortable with that yet.
Interviewer: So what do you think would help you live more zero waste?

Franny: I really don't know. Cause it's not any tangible thing I think. I think it's my impulsiveness and my issues with myself that have kinda gotten in the way of that. Despite my views on the media and marketing and makeup I still feel the need to wear makeup sometimes which is another conversation I have to have with myself.

Unlike Franny and Courtney, Valerie, a LCC consumer, has had an easier time adopting these practices. Although Valerie didn’t adopt this new environmental consciousness until recently, she grew up in a household with limited resources and knew how to save waste by conserving her consumption. Even though her zero waste goal is new, her predispositions towards saving and thrift are not. Valerie describes that she’s really been putting more effort into living zero waste this year and she has been successful. Unlike Franny who struggles with resisting makeup, Valerie never wore makeup which made adopting this lifestyle easier.

Valerie: I've been really on top of it this year. I've been taking big steps forward. I did the more obvious ones like biking more and stuff but not really tweak things. When I go to the grocery store I'm noticing I'm buying one thing a week that's pre-packaged. It's usually tofu or hummus. Everything else is vegetables, fruit. I don't buy grapes or berries because they're in containers unless I go to the local market. And yeah, food packaging was the number one thing. But I've got the hand crank laundry machine and that's pretty fun to use and I let things hang to dry. I've never worn make up so I don't have any of that to worry about.

While Valerie still had to adopt new habits to support her zero waste lifestyle, she was able to incorporate them into her life with ease because of her previously held dispositions, unlike many of the HCC consumers.

It may be the case that habitus, rather than cultural capital, is what dictates the experience one may have living a zero waste lifestyle. While cultural capital influences habitus, habitus may have the most direct influence. The respondents often explained that to be a good zero waste consumer you don’t need a certain type of knowledge or resource
but you need to be a certain type of person. This usually involved having a discipline
towards the lifestyle that prevented them from slipping and buying something wrapped in
plastic or forgetting their reusable bags. Tammy, a HCC consumer, explains this concept
with the idea that the zero waste lifestyle should be attainable to anyone because unlike
most ethical consumption practices, this one does not require you to spend more money.
However, successful zero waste consumers need to have a discipline to resist the
convenience of conventional consumption.

*Interviewer:* So what do you think people need to live zero waste? Do you think
any person can do it?

*Tammy:* I believe so. Definitely. Because as I told you before with my grocery
bill, it was nearly cut in half from living zero waste, I believe it's definitely a lot
more affordable than people believe it to be. But I will say that people need
discipline. They need discipline and they need to fight that urge for convenience
and for instant gratification of buying a prepped salad instead of buying
ingredients and prepping their own salads for three to four days of the week. Or
instead of going through the drive through for dinner, instead staying home and
cooking dinner. Bringing your own travel mug to your favorite coffee place
instead of getting your own plastic or Styrofoam cup. I think it takes a lot of
discipline for sure. And I think it's what a lot of people are afraid of.

This disciplined person they depict in their interviews is someone who has a
natural tendency towards saving and will automatically reach for the ecologically friendly
option when given a choice. This person is not easily swayed by the advertisements of
new consumption items and they can easily resist the desire to accumulate more.

Tammy’s opinion on discipline was common among all the respondents. Instead of
describing the need for additional economic or cultural resources, they explained that a
successful zero waste consumer simply needed the feeling of being comfortable resisting
conventional consumption and convenience. This describes the primary habitus of the
LCC consumers who were predisposed to saving growing up, do not experience difficulty
when resisting consumption, and display a taste for practicality and the waste saving items they already possess.

The comfort, or habitus, the HCC consumers are striving towards is one originally of LCC, however with high status flavor. They are reaching for the comfort and natural approach the LCC take but with the appealing aesthetic of the HCC taste that is often connected to the zero waste displayed on online platforms. This is similar to what Carfagna et al. (2014) found in their study. They found that the emergence of an eco-habitus inverted many of the binaries used by Bourdieu, where now the HCC consumers value the local, material, and manual which are traditionally valued by LCC consumers. However, they do this in a high status way. Carfagna et al. (2014) explains that these HCC respondents have not simply adopted the dispositions or practices of those with LCC but rather are incorporating them into a new HCC habitus to show as a distinction practice.

We see a similar approach of the HCC consumers in my study. While they aim for the ease shown by the LCC consumers, they aim for this comfort through HCC ways. Instead of just resisting consumption or using their old Tupperware or plastic products they have around their house, they pursue the zero waste lifestyle by consuming products marketed as zero waste. They value the waste saving tactics like the LCC consumers but they do so in a HCC fashion, using new products to create a lifestyle that looks clean and mindful. This stands in contrast to the LCC approach which is often a more earthy or dirty approach, as the LCC consumers were often more in touch with the physical environment rather than just environmental values.
The LCC habitus is one of toughness and earthy values. They do not try to create a clean looking lifestyle with matching mason jars but instead focus on the often dirty and harsh reality of nature. Many of the LCC consumers grew up on or near family farms where they learned about animals, nature, as well as living and dying. Erin is a LCC consumer who grew up on a family farm. She approaches zero waste with a recognition of the ugly sides of nature, even though it may be hard for her. In the quote below, she describes what it was like to grow up on a family farm where she made friends with, but also ate, the animals.

Erin: You know, and I really think the best thing to do in zero waste is to grow your own vegetables and if you can grow enough vegetables, that's how you eat your food, that's incredible. Probably the next best alternative, although I can't get myself to do it because I've never eaten animals, on this family farm when I grew up when I was 2, my favorite cow that year that I thought was my friend was also their meat for the year. I mean she was 15 years old and they treat their animals well. But she was the oldest cow so they would slaughter one cow a year and that was their meat for the entire year. Which if you think about it, is actually a beautiful way of doing it, but as a 2 year old to see your friend killed and then at dinner was not ok at all.

Although Erin does not eat meat, she recognizes that animals die and the way her family killed the cows, after letting them live a long life, was actually a good practice. Erin approaches the zero waste lifestyle with this knowledge she gained growing up and understands that being zero waste may not always be clean and pretty. To truly be local and close to your food, one may need to witness the production of it which may be harsh. Later in the interview, Erin mentioned that she also values the role hunters play in society. While she hates the thought of an animal dying, she knows that the deer population is too large and hunters play an important role of the predator. Erin, like many of the other LCC respondents, had an understanding of the harsh reality of nature.
Some HCC respondents experienced this toughness connected to the LCC approach to zero waste. Lily, a HCC consumer, grew up in a wealthy family in the south but today she is unemployed. During a period in her early twenties, she lived in a cooperative house which focused on sustainability. When asked about if she learned any skills that help her live zero waste today, she replies,

**Lily:** I dumpster dived for the first time there and ate food that was supposed to be thrown away which was really exciting. I used a composting toilet for the first time which took me a very long time to accept and be ok with. It's not something we have now but it's something I'd be open to in the future. There was a grey water system there that was probably illegal. I'll say no more. Awesome front garden. Chickens. No air conditioning, the building was always built as this co-op house and I think there's quite a bit of recycled wood and materials in the house. So that was for sure influential. Those people definitely taught me a whole lot [...] Yeah I guess like hardiness and not being, for me, not being such a prissy southern girl. So to be fine with no air conditioning in Florida. That was new to me. And everyone was like, yeah we don't like it and we're sweating but we're sucking it up. And like there was fans and other ways to stay cool. In general, just hardiness and not complaining so much and caring so much about every little thing being as comfortable as it could possibly be.

Living in this environment with people who displayed a toughness towards living zero waste taught her that this lifestyle isn’t achieved simply by the clean and attractive products that are marketed online, but also by being physically uncomfortable when resisting wasteful resources like air conditioning.

The two ways the respondents approach a zero waste lifestyle, the HCC consumers valuing the clean and attractive aesthetic while the LCC consumers favoring the often harsh and dirty reality of nature, illustrate the differing habitus present in the movement. To live a comfortable zero waste lifestyle, the HCC consumers will often purchase new zero waste products that are in line with their previous lifestyle of consuming items. Keeping this previous behavior makes it easier to alter their other behaviors. However, the LCC consumers can rely on their primary habitus which has
provided them with the dispositions necessary for comfort within the zero waste
movement. The two different habitus, or consciously constructed habits in the case of the
HCC consumers, illustrate why consumers from different capital levels may approach
this movement through different means.

**Developing Cultural Capital**

HCC is often institutionally rewarded more than LCC. But in the zero waste
context, those with LCC often have an easier time than those with HCC. This pushes us
to think critically about the way we conceptualize cultural capital. Although we often
perceive those with the most cultural capital as being advantaged, we can’t assume that
those with lower levels of cultural capital are simply lacking what the others have. In
fact, they may possess a kind of knowledge or capital that rewards them in other contexts,
as we see here in this study. This suggests that maybe the term “low cultural capital” is
misleading. Instead we should understand these people in terms of the knowledge and
skills they have instead of those that they lack.

Bourdieu describes those with LCC as lacking the experience with the dominant
culture in society. While it makes sense in the Bourdieusian framework to categorize
those with fewer sources of cultural capital accumulation to be lower than those with
more resources, there may be some other category that these LCC respondents occupy.
Although they may have less experience with the dominant culture, they may have more
experience with a different one. This category could show an alternative to our traditional
cultural capital. This measurement would be able to take into account their knowledge...
and experience of nature, animals, and the earth rather than simply measure their lack of understanding of high culture.

This alternative capital can be observed in this quote from Erin. As mentioned before, she grew up on a family farm and was raised by a mother who had been recycling items since the 1960s. Her mother held a specific type of knowledge about saving products and special skills that allowed her to easily reuse products.

“I grew up with a single parent mom who lived very simply. [...] So money was always tight for us so we lived very simply growing up which makes zero waste I think an easier concept maybe. And we’ve always reused wrapping paper, and I don’t know, for her she’s always seemed to be naturally drawn towards these kind of progressive ideas that as a child I kinda was even ashamed of or thought was weird. Like reusing wrapping paper. But you know it’s actually a really wonderful thing to do and really important. So I think I’m very blessed because growing up my mom, she told me recently that she remembers crushing cans to take to recycling that she found with her father in their garage in the 60s. So I think this is something she’s always noticed and felt connected to even before it was a part, I guess it’s not super mainstream now but its getting there. So this was part of my being raised, that awareness”

This quote illustrates that although Erin and her mother may be categorized as LCC by the traditional Bourdieusian method, they are not simply lacking an understanding of culture but instead have expertise in something entirely different. This cultural capital may be less tied to class and more tied to the environment and materiality. This quote illustrates the drawbacks of categorizing certain people as LCC as it erases their knowledge and expertise in other areas which prove to be essential in developing their zero waste lifestyle.

**Conclusion**

The findings from the data analysis suggest that the levels of capital and the particular habitus held by a consumer shapes the way they experience zero waste living.
Those with higher levels of cultural capital tend to be introduced to the movement later in life, struggle in reducing their consumption, and display preferences for new, zero waste branded items. In contrast, those with lower levels of cultural capital tend to have experience with zero waste actions before learning about the movement, do not struggle as much with reducing their consumption, and display preferences of practicality and thrift, favoring used items that may not fit with the zero waste aesthetic displayed online.

The thematic findings can be understood with the concept of habitus. While all of the respondents are working towards the same goal of reducing their waste, the LCC consumers hold a set of dispositions that allows them to be comfortable with strategies of saving and thrift. They have a primary habitus, one they have grown up with and naturally acquired, that has made zero waste living come easily. The HCC consumers aim to experience zero waste comfortably like those with LCC, but instead live with consciously created habits that they work to maintain rather than the naturally acquired habitus held by those with lower levels of capital. In contrast to previous studies on ethical consumption, the LCC consumers in this study are at an advantage when it comes to living a zero waste lifestyle.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this study I illustrated how participants’ varying cultural capital levels will lead them to their own unique experience within the zero waste movement. Using a mixed methodology of surveys and interviews, I explored the influence of economic and cultural capital within the lives of zero waste consumers. This study argued that the level of cultural capital held by a zero waste consumer influences the nature of their introduction to the movement, the ease of reducing their consumption, and their preferences and taste displayed while living a zero waste lifestyle. Those with higher levels of cultural capital were found to be introduced to the movement later in life, to struggle in reducing their consumption, and had preferences towards items that were branded as zero waste compliant. In contrast, respondents with lower levels of cultural capital tended to have experience with zero waste actions before learning about the movement, thus resulting in less struggle with reducing their consumption, while displaying a consumption preference towards items they felt to exude practicality and thrift, even if it did not fit with the zero waste aesthetic displayed online. We understand this with the concept habitus which allows us to see how participants’ cultural and economic resources have affected their previous and current lifestyle, influencing their comfort with zero waste. These findings suggest that although all of the participants focus on tailoring their habits to minimize their ecological impact, low cultural capital consumers display a habitus that almost unconsciously highlights natural participation whereas high cultural capital consumers’ actions demonstrate consciously created habits.
While previous research has suggested that ethical consumption behaviors are often exclusive to those with the adequate level of economic and cultural resources, this analysis of the zero waste movement reveals that it might be more complicated. While higher levels of cultural and economic capital are often institutionally rewarded in many areas of life, within the zero waste movement holding a higher level of these resources often acts as a burden as opposed to an accelerant when adopting these behaviors. This suggests that there may be certain skills or knowledge held by those categorized as low cultural capital that is not accounted for, such as alternative forms of cultural capital that reward people in other situations. It is not simply that they lack cultural knowledge, but instead that they hold a different set of skills that enables them to live comfortably in an ethical consumption lifestyle. Rather than only viewing capital in relation to that belonging to the upper class white population, the dominant culture in the U.S., we should conceptualize it to encompass a larger array of skills and knowledge from other areas. It is critical to work to understand the nature of cultural capital further and consider other ways of categorizing people with various forms and levels of cultural capital. This is especially important in research on ethical consumption behaviors. Although these behaviors are often criticized for only being attainable to those with privileged statues, there may be other ways to understand these consumption trends that will allow us to see the complexities of the movement.

When discussing ethical consumption behaviors, often those of HCC consumers are mentioned, including the purchasing of ethically made, but expensive, items. We see this occurring in the zero waste movement as well with the focus on zero waste branded items like bamboo utensils and stainless steel lunch boxes. The fact that the HCC
approach to zero waste is highlighted in the media more than the LCC approach reinforces Bourdieu's idea that a particular habitus may become prioritized over another (1977). This prioritization was noticed by Franny, a respondent who was bothered by the emphasis of purchasing new zero waste branded items. She explains, “I hate when people say like I don't have the money for it, cause a lot of the times it's like somehow looked down on if you use plastic of any kind. Like people are like I don't have money to buy a metal lunch box. Ok, what Tupperware do you have? You're allowed to use that.” The zero waste movement is often represented using attractive products, portraying the stainless steel lunchbox as the right way to pursue a zero waste lifestyle even if using an old Tupperware container is also zero waste, and possibly more aligned to the core of zero wastes. Both are ethical consumption behaviors but are not prioritized equally.

When we discuss the sustainability and expansion of ethical consumption behaviors into other segments of the population, we must consider a wider range of possible behaviors, not simply the ones that are deemed as correct.

In the previous research that has portrayed ethical consumption as exclusive to privileged consumers, scholars have expressed concern relating to the sustainability of this consumption practice. In their 2014 study, Carfagna et al. asks, “How far will the shift to ‘green consumption’ go? Will LCC consumers aspire to high-status food practices and products, as they become more accessible and affordable? Or are exclusionary practice too off-putting to them? And if these practices do continue to diffuse, will elites abandon them?” (2014:161). Present in these concerns is the assumption that ethical consumption behaviors are defined only as those observed among consumers with higher cultural capital and require a certain level of resources to attain. However, my study
found that ethical consumption can exist in other forms as well. Here, the LCC respondents were consuming in accordance to zero waste, but accomplishing this in an alternative way. Instead of buying ethically branded products LCC respondents created a lifestyle centered around values of thrift and frugality. Although they may not have been participating in ethical consumption in the conventional way, they were still working towards making a positive impact with their purchases. The lifestyle displayed by the LCC consumers in this study illustrate a different approach to ethical consumption that may not align with previous research on the topic and should be explored to understand the possible expansion of these consumption practices in the future.

The findings in this study also suggest how we can interpret the sustainability of the zero waste movement. Sustainability was a concern of Josee Johnston (2011) who argues that the reflexivity among ethical consumers is central to understanding the limitations of these movements. Johnston argued that if consumers are more reflexive about their own privileged identity which allows them to participate in ethical consumption, these practices have the potential to expand beyond upper class consumers. While certain HCC consumers in this study did display reflexivity about their stance as a privileged consumer, the LCC consumers were reflexive in the way they approached their consumption habits. The LCC consumers recognized that there was a conventional way to live zero waste, which involved purchasing zero waste branded items, but there were also other behaviors that could be adopted to reach the same goal of reducing waste. The data in this study indicates that ethical consumption behaviors are already occurring among people with various capital levels, however, these behaviors are often not recognized as the best or most prominent way to ethically consume.
Where this study revealed several things of importance, it is not to suggest that there were not any limitations. First, this study was confined to a one-year timeline which limited the amount of data gathering and analysis that could be completed. It is possible that with more data from a wider range of LCC and HCC consumers the patterns observed could be seen more clearly or include new patterns as well. Future research should aim to understand this population with a larger sample size for both the survey and interviews to confirm the generalizability of my findings. In addition, while the participants in my study accurately reflected the general population of ethical consumers in terms of race, gender, and socioeconomic status, future research should focus on low income consumers and those with minority statuses to understand their experience and the alternative forms of capital they may hold.

Throughout this work, two big questions emerge involving the relationships between class, culture, consumption, and morality: Who gets to define what is the correct way to live a zero waste lifestyle? Who defines what is ethical about ethical consumption? This study involved respondents at various levels of capital which illuminated the multiple forms that ethical consumption and zero waste living take. Throughout the study the data revealed a subtle tone of class conflict as the respondents articulated the necessary actions they took to create this zero waste lifestyle. We can see this class conflict in the way zero waste is advertised versus the way that it is lived. A common concern expressed by those considering a zero waste lifestyle is that they believe the lifestyle is too expensive, however, all of the respondents said they either spend the same amount of money with this new lifestyle or even less. The zero waste lifestyle is being advertised as an upper class consumption act when in reality it can be
achieved by lower class consumers too. This is off-putting to those without enough resources for the aesthetically pleasing zero waste branded items and adds a prohibitive barrier to this movement which is actually more accessible than other forms of ethical consumption. The current way zero waste and ethical consumption are being defined in our society is exclusionary even if the acts themselves are not. When we discuss the future of sustainable consumption movements, researchers should not only focus on whether or not the actions themselves are accessible to those from various capital levels, but also what our society views as the correct way to go about ethically consuming.

With the increasing threat of anthropogenic climate change, research on sustainability practices is more important than ever. However, this research should not be reserved simply for the natural sciences, but rather incorporate the social sciences to assist in understanding the influence of social structures on environmental issues. Understanding consumption culturally sheds light on the various factors, such as forms of capital, that lead people to consume in unique ways. Consumption shows more than material necessity; it shows structures of power, strategies of distinction, and what is considered to be culturally desired or morally correct. Approaching consumption with a cultural analysis will provide us with a deeper understanding of consumption and what policy actions are necessary to make consumption a more sustainable practice in a globalized world.
Appendices

Appendix 1: Recruitment Post for Survey

Hi everyone,

My name is Anna VanRemoortel and I am a senior sociology major at Wheaton College in Massachusetts. I am beginning my honors thesis focusing on ethical consumption and the zero waste movement. I’m interested in learning what draws people to consume in this way and any barriers that people face to participating in the movement. I have made a survey to gather data about this question. I would really appreciate it if you took the time to fill out the survey. It will take less than 15 minutes and I am really interested in learning about your experience! You must be 18 years or older to take the survey. Your answers will remain anonymous. You can access the survey with the link below. This post is admin approved.

Thank you,
Anna VanRemoortel

Appendix 2: Recruitment Post for Interviews

Hi everyone,

My name is Anna VanRemoortel and I am a senior sociology major at Wheaton College in Massachusetts. I am working on my honors thesis focusing on ethical consumption and the zero waste movement. I’m interested in learning what draws people to consume in this way and any barriers that people face to participating in the movement. I am looking for people to interview over skype during the next few weeks. Interviews last about 45 minutes to an hour. You must be at least 18 years of age and live in the US. If you are interested in being interviewed please feel free to comment, PM me, or email me at: vanremoortel_anna@wheatoncollege.edu

Thank you!
Appendix 3: Interview Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in this research project designed to explore how people participate in the zero waste movement, the barriers they may face, and factors that lead to their personal success of reducing waste. If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed for a period of approximately one hour. There are no known risks or benefits of participating in this study.

Interviews will take place in person in mutually agreed upon public spaces such as coffee shops or libraries. If an interview participant is not able to meet in person there is the option to participate in the interview over Skype.

If you give your permission, I would like to record the interview. I will transcribe the interview leaving out your name. Before sharing the transcripts with anyone but myself I will make it anonymous and use pseudonyms to an extent that any reader of the research will not be able to identify the individual.

Your participation is completely voluntary and you may discontinue participation or refuse to answer any question at any time.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact Anna VanRemoortel at Wheaton College: vanremoortel_annawheatoncollege.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, please contact Dr. Meg Kirkpatrick, Executive Secretary of the Wheaton College Institutional Review Board at (508) 286-3642 or by email at Kirkpatrick_meg@wheatoncollege.edu.

Please sign your name if you consent to participate and check the following boxes to confirm that you are 18 years or older and consent to being audio-recorded.

Signature:_______________________________
Date:______________________________

I am at least 18 years or older
I am not at least 18 years or older
I consent to being audio-recorded
Appendix 4: Interview Schedule

Background and Family Upbringing:
- Can you tell me a little bit about your life growing up?
- What was your family like? (family members, parent’s occupation)
- What was your home like? (type of building, ownership, location, size)
- Thinking about your zero waste consumption, did you learn anything from your parents that shape this? (values, environmental impact, priorities in life)
- Where did you learn about zero waste and environmental issues?
- Do you see a relationship with how you grew up and your zero waste practices today?

Formal Education:
- What has been your educational experience? (degrees, field, other activities)
- Did you practice zero waste in school? Were there any environmental groups or activities?
- Have you participated in any other programs or certifications? (outdoor stuff, alternative education, retreats)

Occupational Culture:
- What do you do for work? (type of work, location, level, workplace environment)
- Have you always done this? What did you do before?
- What is your relationship like with your co-workers? Your boss?
- Do you practice zero waste in the workplace? Does your workplace make it easy to practice zero waste?

Home Life Today:
- Where do you live now? (location, type of building, ownership, size of home)
- Who do you live with?
- What is your town/city like?
- Does your city/town make it easy to practice zero waste?
- Where else have you lived in your life?

Motivations for Zero Waste
- What made you first want to live zero waste? Were you already doing a lot of these things before or was it a distinct moment you decided to change?
- What actions did you take to reduce your waste? (recycling, composting, DIY) How did you learn to do this? What did you have to learn to live this way?
- What waste have you reduced? What do you throw away? How do you dispose of unwanted items? (see where they’re at right now)
- What was the easiest part when you first started to reduce your waste? The hardest part?
- Do you like to learn about the environment or climate change? How? (news, scientific studies)
- Do you belong to any clubs or meet up groups focused on the environment or reducing waste?
- Do you post on social media about zero waste? How do you decide what to post or what not to post? Do you interact with anyone on the zero waste fb pages?
- What impact do you think your actions have? Do you think about this impact often?
- Do you have a zero waste goal you’re working towards?
- Are there zero waste people you aspire to be like? Anyone who lives zero waste you don’t want to be like?
- What does it look like to achieve zero waste? Are there certain goods or practices that show that someone is zero waste? Does it look like that for your lifestyle or will it be different?
- What do you think people need to live zero waste? Can anyone do it?

Consumption Practices:
- If you need to purchase something, what do you do? Take me through the process of something you bought recently (use capitalism or go outside the market, what do they think about, how much time do they put into it, used/new, local, organic, ethical implications)
- Is there anything you can’t buy zero waste?
- Are there certain brands or stores you like? Why do you like them? (quality, price, style/aesthetic look) How do you learn about these stores/brands? Is there a “right way” to live zero waste? Certain brands? Certain kind of decor?
- Do you do any DIY (do it yourself) projects? What do you make and what do you buy?
- How do you decorate your home? (what is important to them- practicality, appearance, what do they put on display)
- Do you cook for yourself? What types of meals do you like to make? Where do you get your food?
- Do you travel? Do you do anything special for vacations?
- Where do you get your clothing? (used, new, DIY)
- What do you like to do with friends? (socializing, going out, activities, entertainment)
- Do you have any hobbies?
- Do you spend more or less money living zero waste?
- Do you have any items you wish you had to live a zero waste lifestyle? (Any desires for products? Desires for quality of products?)

Demographic questions:
Age:
Race:
Gender:
Out of the following, what socioeconomic group do you consider yourself a part of: living in poverty, lower class, lower middle class, middle class, upper middle class, upper class.

Highest degree you’ve achieved:
Occupation:
Appendix 5: Survey
Zero Waste Survey

Start of Block

Q1.1
You are invited to participate in this research project designed to explore how people participate in the Zero Waste Movement, the barriers they may face, and factors that lead to their personal success of reducing waste. If you agree to participate, you will fill out this survey which is expected to take no more than 15 minutes. You must be at least 18 years of age or older to participate. There are no known risks or benefits of participating in this study.

You may skip any question in this survey you do not want to answer. You may end the survey at any time and your responses will not be recorded.

Your responses will remain completely anonymous.

At the end of the survey you will be asked if you'd like to participate in the interview portion of the study. Interviews will be audio-recorded. If you'd like to participate there is a place for you to provide your email to be contacted to set up an interview time. Providing your email will make your responses no longer anonymous however they will still remain confidential.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact Anna VanRemoortel at Wheaton College: vanremoortelAnna@wheatoncollege.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, please contact Dr. Meg Kirkpatrick, Executive Secretary of the Wheaton College Institutional Review Board at (508) 286-3642 or by email at KirkpatrickMeg@wheatoncollege.edu.

Please check this box to indicate that you understand these terms and that you are 18 years of age or older.

☐ I consent to participating in this study and I am 18 years of age or older (1)

End of Block

Start of Block: Participation in Zero Waste

Q2.1 I will start by asking you questions about your experience with Zero Waste. What Zero Waste Facebook groups do you belong to? Select all that apply.

☐ Journey to Zero Waste (1)
Q2.2 Do you consider yourself to be living a zero waste lifestyle?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Sometimes/In some areas (3)

Q2.3 BASED ON OUR OWN OPINION: On a scale of 1-5, how challenging are the following behaviors to adopt when aiming to live a zero waste lifestyle? Select answers based on your own opinion even if you have not adopted this behavior yourself.
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1- Not a challenge (1)</th>
<th>3- Slightly challenging (2)</th>
<th>3- Moderately challenging (3)</th>
<th>4- Very challenging (4)</th>
<th>5- Extremely challenging (5)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using a reusable water bottle/coffee mug (1)</td>
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<td>Bringing reusable bags to the store (2)</td>
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<td>Recycling (3)</td>
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<td>Composting (4)</td>
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<td>Buying sustainable beauty products (5)</td>
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<td>Buying sustainable cleaning products (6)</td>
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<td>Making your own beauty products (7)</td>
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<td>Making your own cleaning products (8)</td>
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<td>Buying second hand items (9)</td>
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<td>Buying in bulk (10)</td>
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<td>Repurposing items instead of throwing them out (11)</td>
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<td>Shopping locally (12)</td>
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<td>Avoiding single use products (paper towels, disposable razors, toothbrushes, etc) (13)</td>
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<td>Cooking food at home rather than going out to eat or getting take out (14)</td>
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<td>Riding a bike or taking public transportation instead of driving a car (15)</td>
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<td>Avoiding airplanes or long distance travel (16)</td>
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</table>
Q2.4 Have you adopted the following behaviors when aiming to live a zero waste lifestyle?

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<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Yes (1)</th>
<th>No (2)</th>
<th>Partially (3)</th>
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<td>Using a reusable water bottle/coffee mug (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Making your own cleaning products (8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>Option</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buying second hand items (9)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buying in bulk (10)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Repurposing items instead of throwing them out (11)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shopping locally (12)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoiding disposable products (paper towels, disposable razors, toothbrushes, etc) (13)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cooking food at home rather than going out to eat or getting take out (14)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Riding a bike or taking public transportation instead of driving a car (15)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoiding airplanes or long distance travel (16)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other behavior adopted to live a zero waste lifestyle: (17)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Q2.5 How did you learn about the zero waste lifestyle? **Select all that apply.**
Q2.6 What made you want to adopt a zero waste lifestyle? **Select all that apply.**

- Friends/Family were doing it (1)
- Environmental Concerns (2)
- Wanted to reduce personal waste/clutter (3)
- Liked the zero waste aesthetic/style/look (4)
- Financial reasons (5)
- Not listed, please specify: (6)

End of Block: Participation in Zero Waste

Start of Block: Zero Waste Community
Q3.1 How do you communicate with others who are living a zero waste lifestyle? Select all that apply.

☐ Read blogs/online articles (1)

☐ Write blogs/online articles (2)

☐ Participate in an online forum/facebook group (3)

☐ Participate in a meet-up group (4)

☐ Post pictures on Instagram (5)

☐ Post updates on Twitter (6)

☐ Post statuses on Facebook (7)

☐ Receive emails or newsletters (8)

☐ With customers at a bulk store/zero waste store (9)

☐ Through everyday conversations with family, friends, neighbors, or co-workers (10)

☐ I don't communicate with others who are living a zero waste lifestyle (12)

☐ Not listed, please specify: (11)
Q3.2 What do you personally share among the zero waste community? Select all that apply.

☐ Recipes for meals (1)

☐ Instructions for DIY products (2)

☐ Motivational support (3)

☐ Brand recommendations (4)

☐ Articles/reading material (5)

☐ Events (6)

☐ Not listed, please specify: (7)

Q3.3 Does your household support your zero waste lifestyle?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

☐ Sometimes/In some areas (3)

Q3.4 Does your household participate in a zero waste lifestyle?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

☐ Sometimes/In some areas (3)
Q3.6 Does your family outside of your household participate in a zero waste lifestyle?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Sometimes/In some areas (3)

Q3.5 Does your family outside of your household support your zero waste lifestyle?

- Strong support (1)
- Moderate support (2)
- Minimal support (3)
- Discourages you from living a zero waste lifestyle (4)
- Doesn't know you are living a zero waste lifestyle (5)

Q3.8 Do your friends outside of your household participate in zero waste lifestyle?

- Yes (1)
Q3.7 Do your friends outside of your household support your zero waste lifestyle?

- No (2)
- Sometimes/In some areas (3)
- Strong support (1)
- Moderate support (2)
- Minimal support (3)
- Discourages you from living a zero waste lifestyle (4)
- Doesn't know you are living a zero waste lifestyle (5)

Q3.9 How many people in your household (including yourself) participate in zero waste movement?

- 1 (just yourself) (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 or more (6)
**Q4.1 Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements about the zero waste movement and living a zero waste lifestyle:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree (1)</th>
<th>Agree (2)</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree (3)</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree (4)</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree (5)</th>
<th>Disagree (6)</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree (7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adopting a Zero Waste lifestyle has had a positive impact on my life (1)</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
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<td>Anyone can live a Zero Waste Lifestyle (2)</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
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<td>Making my own cleaning/beauty products is cheaper than buying them from the store (3)</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
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<td>As an individual I have a responsibility to care for the planet (4)</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voting with your dollar/ethical consumption is an effective way to create change (5)</td>
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<td>Individual actions can make a big difference (6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>As a consumer, I am responsible for the negative impacts of the products I buy (7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>If enough people adopt a Zero Waste lifestyle we can solve large scale environmental problems (8)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Q4.2 What is the biggest challenge for you when participating in a zero waste lifestyle?

________________________________________________________________

Q4.3 You have reached the end of the questions about your involvement in zero waste. Is there anything else you would like to add about your zero waste lifestyle? (i.e. obstacles, goals, behaviors you've changed, etc.)

________________________________________________________________
Q57 The last part of the survey includes demographic questions.

Q5.1 How old did you turn on your last birthday?

Q5.2 Which gender do you identify with?

- Man (1)
- Woman (2)
- Gender Variant/Non-Conforming (3)
- Not Listed. Please specify: (4)
- I prefer not to disclose (5)

Q5.3 Which category best describes you? **Please select as many as apply to you**

- Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish origin (1)
- Asian (2)
- Black or African American (3)
- American Indian or Alaska Native (4)
Middle Eastern or North African (5)

Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (6)

White (7)

Some other race, ethnicity, or origin. Please specify (8)

_____________________________________________________

I prefer not to disclose (9)

Q5.4 What is your marital status?

Now married (1)

Domestic Partnership (2)

Widowed (3)

Divorced (4)

Separated (5)

Never married (6)

Not listed, please specify: (7)

_____________________________________________________

I prefer not to disclose (8)
Q5.5 What is your total household income?

- Less than $19,999 (1)
- $20,000-$29,999 (2)
- $30,000-$39,999 (3)
- $40,000-$49,999 (4)
- $50,000-$59,999 (5)
- $60,000-$69,999 (6)
- $70,000-$79,999 (7)
- $80,000-$89,999 (8)
- $100,000-$124,999 (9)
- More than $125,000 (10)
- I prefer not to disclose (11)

Q5.6 What socioeconomic group would you consider yourself a member of?

- Living in poverty (1)
- Working class (2)
- Lower class (3)
Q5.7 What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, mark the previous grade or highest degree received.

- Did not graduate high school (1)

- High school graduate- high school diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED) (2)

- Some college credit (3)

- Associate degree (for example: AA, AS) (5)

- Bachelor's degree (for example: BA, AB, BS) (6)

- Master's degree (for example: MA, MS, MEng, MEd, MSW, MBA) (7)

- Professional degree (for example: MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD) (8)
Q5.8 Are you currently employed?
- Employed (1)
- Out of work and looking for work (2)
- Out of work but currently not looking for work (3)
- Retired (4)
- Unable to work (5)
- Not listed, please specify: (6)

Q5.9 Are you self-employed?
- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Neither, please specify (3)

Q5.10 Are you a student?
Q5.11 Are you primarily responsible for the care of your home?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Partially (3)
- Not listed, please specify (4)

Q5.12 What do you do as an occupation? If you are currently unemployed please answer based on your last job.

_________________________________________________________________

Q5.13 Where are you employed? If you are currently unemployed please answer based on your last job.

_________________________________________________________________

Q58 Do you volunteer?
Q5.14 How many hours a week do you volunteer?
________________________________________________________________

Q5.15 Is your place of residence...

- Owned by you or someone in this household with a mortgage or loan (1)
- Owned by you or someone in this household free and clear (without a mortgage or loan) (2)
- Rented (3)
- Not listed, please specify: (4)
________________________________________________________________

Q5.16 Please list your country, state/province, and city:
________________________________________________________________

Q5.17 In what type of community do you live?

- City or urban community (1)
Suburban community (2)

Rural community (3)

Not listed, please specify (4)

Q5.18 Including yourself, how many people live in your household?

Q5.19 How many children live in your household? (18 and under)

Q5.20 Select the age range of the children/child living in your household. Specify how many children of each age range live in your household using the text box next to the age range option.

□ Newborn or Infant (birth to 2 years of age) (1)

□ Child (2 years to 12 years of age) (2)

□ Adolescent (12 years to 18 years of age) (3)

Q5.21 Are you the primary caretaker of the children in your household?

□ Yes (1)
Q6.1 Thank you for completing the survey. You are invited to participate in an interview portion of this research project. The interview will aim to gather more in depth information relating to how people participate in the Zero Waste Movement, the barriers they may face, and the factors that lead to their personal success of reducing waste.

Interviews will be conducted through November and December of 2017 and will take place either in person in public spaces or over Skype. Interviews will last about 45 minutes to an hour.

If you would like to participate in an interview please provide your email address in the box below. Providing your email address will make your survey responses no longer anonymous but they will still remain confidential. If you do not want your email address linked to your survey responses you can email me to set up an interview at vanremoortel_anna@wheatoncollege.edu If you do not want to participate in an interview leave this box blank and continue to the end of the survey.
References


There will be more plastic than fish in the world’s oceans study says.


