

Caught Between the Imperatives of Sustainability and Good Parenting: Eco-Conscious Parenting  
in the Waterloo Region

by

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## **Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## **Abstract**

Current levels of consumption in modern society are at odds with sustaining our planet, yet not sustaining the planet is a threat to our children and future generations. Eco-conscious parents are aware of environmental threats and must navigate tensions that arise from attempting to be “good” parents from within consumer society on the one hand and being environmentally responsible on the other. What explains the ways in which parents make contradictory choices when faced with parenting options that diverge from their sustainability aims? This question is explored through data gathered from 55 potentially true statements to participants in 20 interviews and 54 surveys. The data collected paints a picture full of trade-offs and negotiations that eco-aware parents and caregivers living in the Waterloo Region must navigate. The data identifies many of the tensions that are faced, some of the opportunities created and defines some characteristics of eco-conscious parents in the Waterloo Region. We also see from the data that eco-conscious parenting operates within a large spectrum with parents making choices that both support and undermine sustainability to varying degrees, in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. These tensions result in both the creation of environmentally positive actions made by eco-conscious parents (like community gardens and community bulk fruit buying initiatives) and lifestyles riddled with negative ecological impacts (examples from the data include reliance on a vehicle and an industrial food system). Raising children also typically results in greater consumption within families because children’s needs rapidly grow, especially in the early years, thus necessitating new clothing, new toys, and etc. As a result, we are currently living in an eco-social dilemma. One where modern consumption is robbing our children of their futures, yet simultaneously giving them lives with modern conveniences. The introduction sets the stage for the ecological reality eco-conscious parent’s face, often regardless of their efforts to limit their negative ecological impact. The literature review draws on a range of diverse literature and theoretical frameworks in order to provide a foundation of analysis regarding the origins and drivers of consumption, the intentional moulding of consumers, parental influences on materialism and the concept of honouring the world’s children as a framework for sustainability.

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I would like to thank sincerely all of my participants who have allowed me to glimpse into their lives as eco-conscious parents and shared with me their experiences regarding navigating environmental choices within a consumer system and the tensions they face as a result. I am also grateful to them for exploring with me their worry regarding climate change affecting their children, which is often a stressful and unchartered topic.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all those whose work I have drawn from. This includes many of the world's most renowned scientists, activists, environmentalists and visionaries, such as Viktor Frankl, Erich Fromm, Ernest Becker, Sandra Steingraber, Peter Dauvergne, Annie Leonard, Juliet Schor and Raffi Cavoukian (to name only a small few). While I am unlikely to meet any of these accomplished individuals in my lifetime (some have already passed on), I feel I owe them a great personal debt for their trail blazing work which has enriched my writing and life as well as provided my data with context.

Most of all, I would like to sincerely thank with profound gratitude my family and friends for their unfailing love, support and belief in me, especially my parents and Charles Topping without whom none of this would be possible.

## **Dedication**

To my son Liam, I love you more than words can ever convey.

"We can honour our children by...taking steps in our own lives as well as in the broader society to protect them from environmental hazards of our own making."

Philip Landrigan

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Dedication.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
List of Figures.....	vii
List of Tables.....	viii
1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Exceeding Planetary Limits.....	4
1.2 Eco-Conscious Parents Defined.....	7
1.3 Unequal Distributions of Wealth: privilege and externalized costs.....	10
1.4 Research Question.....	12
1.5 Overview of Methodology.....	13
1.6 Purpose.....	18
1.7 Boundaries.....	18
1.8 Limitations.....	19
2. Literature Review.....	21
2.1 Origins & Drivers of Consumption.....	21
2.2 Mounding Consumers & Parental Influences on Materialism.....	37
2.3 More is Not Better: tensions for parents in a consuming society.....	45
2.4 Toxins & Pollution: trashing the home of our children and future generations.....	47
2.5 Child Honouring.....	53
2.6 Tough Conversation: sharing the bad news with our children.....	55
3. Results and Discussion.....	58
3.1 Summary of Key Findings.....	58
3.2 Demographics.....	59
3.3 Environmental Awareness and Climate Change Worry.....	64
3.4 Eco-Guilt.....	67
3.5 Barriers to Sustainability.....	69
3.6 Household Consumption Items and the Limiting of “Stuff”.....	78
3.7 Eco-Conscious Parents and Waste.....	86
3.8 Food Provisioning.....	90
3.9 Avoiding Toxins.....	95
3.10 Tensions in the Data.....	96
3.11 Tensions within the Family.....	98
4. Conclusion.....	100
5. Table: Interview and Survey Statements 1-55.....	106
Works Cited & Consulted.....	109

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1. Survey and Interview Number of Moms/Dads/Caregivers.....	60
Figure 2. Survey & Interview Ages of Children.....	60
Figure 3. Survey and Interview Parent Country of Birth.....	61
Figure 4. Survey and Interview Parent Level of Education.....	62
Figure 5. Survey & Interview Debt Level.....	63
Figure 6. Survey and Interview Household Annual Income before Tax.....	64
Figure 7. Survey Level of Worry.....	64
Figure 8. Interview Level of Worry.....	65

## **List of Tables**

Table 1. Interview and Survey Statements 1-55.....	106
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## **Chapter 1.0 Introduction**

Environmentally aware people are experiencing widespread anxiety about the future of our planet as the world heats up, weather becomes more extreme, human population and consumption expand and essential natural resources decline (Macy and Johnson, 2012, p 1).

Environmentally concerned parents experience tension between ethics of sustainable consumption on the one hand and social structures of consumption on the other. These social structures create pressures for children to experience or be provided with all kinds of goods and services in order to participate in their social world and not feel or be deprived. This may result in eco-conscious parents imposing social costs on their children. To avoid these costs, some parents who are aware of the environmental crisis may instead choose to make decisions that are of social benefit to their children at the cost of the environment. There may also be environmentally aware parents who choose not to do anything about their consumer behaviours and of course, there are parents who are simply unaware of their environmental impact. For those that are aware and who want to make sustainable choices, there are often other driving forces that make the sustainable choice unattainable. The cost or availability of eco-friendly options are examples of barriers to sustainable choices for parents. Additionally, consumption needs change over time as children grow, which can cause higher levels of consumption. Furthermore, we are all enmeshed in modern consumption and that consumption is difficult to disengage from. Social participation and cultural definitions of success make high levels of consumption mandatory.

Regardless of the choices parents make there is always a trade-off that must be made because of the tension between the imperatives of sustainability and leading a modern consumer life.

Parents that make attempts to not consume may face radical non-consumption and social/economic non-participation for both them and their children.

What explains the ways in which parents make contradictory choices when faced with parenting options that diverge from their sustainability aims? The purpose of this study is to examine this research question through interviews and a survey. The literature review draws on a range of diverse literatures and theoretical frameworks in order to provide a foundation of analysis regarding the origins and drivers of consumption, the intentional moulding of consumers, parental influences on materialism and the concept of honouring the world's children as a framework for sustainability. The introduction is used to provide a foundation regarding the ecological reality faced by parents. Arguably, climate change creates a new existential threat for environmentally aware parents. Climate change as a threat to parenting is an important and uncharted area of study that deserves much more attention than I am able to give it in these pages. From the interviews and surveys what we do see is that even with a high degree of worry regarding the threat of climate change, overall eco-conscious parents are leading lifestyles riddled with ecological tensions. The data collected demonstrates that some environmentally positive actions are easily accomplished for these parents while other areas of sustainability are a struggle. Tensions are born from this contradiction.

Contradictions and tensions arise because from within a consumer society, not doing the environmental thing is often the easiest and most socially-acceptable option. This causes the eco-conscious parent to often have to "swim upstream" in-order to make ecologically-supportive decisions. The data reveals that even the most eco-minded amongst us fall at times into a consumer trap, often because the tensions are just too great to overcome. In addition to tensions, data from the interviews and surveys also reveal some potentially defining characteristics of eco-conscious parents as well as some of the wonderful ways that these parents are working to help

address the environmental crisis. Some of these positive eco-actions are more easily accomplishable than others. A summary of data findings include;

1. Eco-conscious parents both surveyed and interviewed have a high degree of worry regarding the environmental crisis affecting their children. All parents interviewed and surveyed said that are aware of environmental issues such as global warming, pollution, chemicals in products, food and biodiversity loss. Worry in this regard means a degree of concern and/or anxiety about the environmental crisis affecting an individual's children.
2. Supporting a local, organic food system is important to these parents. Eco-conscious parents both surveyed and interviewed regularly use a green bin or compost their organic waste. The majority also shop at a local farmers' market, belong to a CSA or sustainable food co-op. Over half also grow some of their own food and they have a high degree of worry regarding herbicides and pesticides in their children's food. Tensions arise when eco-conscious parents could not use a compost or green bin because they live in unserviced apartments or when they could not afford the organic food items they prefer.
3. Eco-conscious parents are making choices that undermine sustainability while experiencing barriers to sustainability that are outside of their control. This creates more tensions. An example is that most eco-conscious parents, both surveyed and interviewed are reliant on a vehicle and those that choose to live without it have to make conscious and often hard lifestyle choices to manage that decision. Choosing not to rely on a vehicle, or participate in other forms of consumption also has social consequences.
4. Many eco-conscious parents are putting effort into creating a sustainable future for their children. They are doing this in many ways such as by limiting their own waste, building community gardens or coming up with creative green energy solutions for their homes.

Many are also engaged in DIY projects, switching from plastic to glass, cleaning their homes with natural products and shopping at farmer's markets.

5. Many parents admit to making unsustainable purchases for the benefit of their children.  
Unsustainable choices are seen in the data when looking at levels of plastic in their home and reliance on vehicles. These and other examples illustrate how even eco-conscious parents often support lifestyles that work to erode their desires for sustainability for their children or undermine their above-mentioned efforts.
6. The interviews themselves reveal the frustration some eco-conscious parent's feel at the challenges associated with trying to make sustainable choices. The majority of both those interviewed and surveyed state that they frequently wished that making an environmentally friendly choice was easier or more available to them.
7. The majority of those surveyed and interviewed say that whenever they can easily make an environmentally friendly choice, they do.
8. The majority of those surveyed and interviewed feel guilt when they do not or are not able to make an environmentally positive choice. Those that do not feel guilt explained in the interviews that they had made a conscious effort to dismiss the guilt.

## **1.1 Exceeding Planetary Limits**

Pollution and unsustainable over-consumption are eroding the eco-system services required to keep our lives functioning. The extraction, production, transportation and disposal of our mountains of unsustainable "stuff" is threatening current and future generations both due to the creation of social inequalities and from the level of environmental degradation. Yet, it is our children and not our "stuff" that is our most sacred and valuable future asset. "Without children

there is no life before birth; and no life after death. Indeed there is no life at all!" (Paulo Wangoola, 2006, p 117) Even should we know this, we are still trashing the planet our children need. Statistically people's homes are actually growing in space and material possessions, despite a decrease in the number of people per household and the reality of climate change (Somerville, 2015, Schor, 9, 2004). People are consuming more, not less with consumption patterns of individuals nowadays far exceeding that of previous generations (Dauvergne, 2008, p 4). An example of this is our more than four-fold increase in personal consumption globally from 1960-2002, even though global population only doubled in this time (Dauvergne, 2008, p 4). Due to this human economic activity, we have now entered the "Anthropocene" era where human degradation of ecosystem services are creating potentially fatal consequences for life on earth; a time when humanity may compromise earth's ecological systems past a critical threshold or tipping point resulting in the loss of the eco-system services that human's require for survival (Chapin, et al., 2009, p 241; Hensen et al., 2016, p 3761; Hughes et al., 2013, p 389; Polasky et al., 2011, p 398; Westley et al., 2011, p 762). Our need to move away from an unsustainable consumer-based culture is calling many scientists to urge us (for some time now) to make a much needed sustainability transition on both economic and social levels of society. Yet this transition is fraught with tension and challenges. An eco-conscious parent may for example be able to decrease waste production by composting and using a green bin, but are still reliant on a carbon-powered vehicle. We are currently living in an eco-social dilemma. One where modern consumption is robbing our children of their futures, yet simultaneously giving them lives with modern conveniences within privileged societies.

The September 2009 agenda of The World Resources Forum (WRF) and the document it produced (with the same name) aimed to create a call for action regarding resource governance

and to manage the growing demands for materials on a finite planet (WRF, 2009, p 1). The WRF stated that both our economic future and the overall stability of our planet for future generations depends on how urgently and efficiently we respond to the environmental crisis with the creation of low-impact production systems that can address human need while limiting pressure on the environment and simultaneously create a better quality of life to those who are in need (WRF, 2009, p 1). This call for action is urgent because humankind's activities are continuing to negatively affect the availability of critical resources like fresh water and unpolluted crop land. Meanwhile, the speed of operation, complexity and interconnectivity of global social-economic systems are increasing (Westley et al., 2011, p 762). To reverse ecological destruction, we require not just a change in global production and distribution of goods and the workings of our economic system, but also a ubiquitous shift in personal values and patterns of social behaviour (Westley et al., 2011, p 762). Tim Jackson asserts that with a projected world population of 9 billion people by 2050, the carbon intensity of every dollar must lower to 130 times less than it is today and "by the end of the century, economic activity will need to be taking carbon out of the atmosphere not adding to it" (Jackson, 2009, p 187; McCallum, 2008, p 61).

What many eco-conscious parents are realizing is that the growth of the economy, technological innovation and material wealth are constrained by the limits of the earth's capacity, a capacity we are now exceeding (Westley et al., 2011, p 780; WRF, 2009, p 1). Research tells us that long term impacts from human-driven consumer activities include a multi-meter sea level rise anywhere from 50-200 years from now (Hensen et al., 2016, p 3761; Hughes et al., 2013, p 389; Robinson et al., 36, 1990,). Outlining this current ecological reality in this introduction is important as it sets the stage for the context in which eco-conscious parents are now raising their children. The literature review portion of this study will build on this ecological reality by

examining the origins and drivers of consumption, the moulding of consumers, parental influences on materialism and the childhood relationship to consumerism. A psychological approach in the literature review will also shed light on the parent-consumer paradox where parents participate in a modern fossil fuel dependent society on one hand and the want for sustainable ecological futures for their children on the other, which is in direct opposition. The trick then would be to begin to understand what it might take for sustainable parenting to become a viable hero or immortality project and how that may be attainable for parents who are living in a consumer society in which they feel pressured to participate. While this study will fall short of listing the many possible sustainable parenting initiatives which could become potential hero projects and how people will succeed at halting climate change, it will hopefully shed light on what some eco-aware parents in the Waterloo Region are already doing to help the planet as well as the challenges they face when attempting to make sustainable decisions whilst raising children in modern society.

## **1.2 Eco-Conscious Parents Defined**

Eco-conscious parents are defined in this study as being parents who are aware of the connection between healthy children and a healthy planet. But it is not just an awareness that defines them. An eco-conscious parent is also a parent who is dedicated to making individual choices to respond to ecological crisis (even if their response doesn't go far enough to reach the planet's sustainability needs). The interviews showed that eco-conscious parents also tend to experience a moderate to high level of worry regarding their children being directly affected by climate change, which offers another point of definition regarding what it means to be an eco-

conscious parent. As previously mentioned, the existential anxiety for parents created from climate change would be a worthwhile avenue of research and can only be touched on here. I believe that eco-conscious parents exist in the intersecting space of parenting and climate change and while one would be hard-pressed to find any academic study referencing this term itself (I haven't), the environmental crisis emerging as a modern parenting concern is being discussed in a variety of forms across many facets of society.

The Living Planet Report from 2008 by the World Wildlife Fund states that humans are far exceeding the planet's ability to support our lifestyles (WWF, p 1). I call parents who are aware of this environmental reality: *eco-conscious parents*. Eco-conscious parenting then, is parenting with some degree of awareness regarding the environmental crisis. Of course that degree is a spectrum and not easily quantifiable. A study would be worthwhile on this term alone. However, for this study, pinning down a narrow definition, while interesting is not necessary because any parent who is aware of environmental issues and trying to navigate them within consumer society is an interesting case in and of itself and relevant to sustainability research. For this study it will suffice that each parent identifies as having environmental concerns for their children and understands that there are ecological limits. The category of eco-conscious parenting is thus broad – including parents who have varying levels of eco-consciousness, income, education, status and numbers of children. This study does not include parents who are not aware or concerned about environmental issues.

The other term that I have used during this thesis is *sustainable parenting*. They are interrelated terms, however a parent can be eco-conscious and not sustainable (awareness does not automatically equal action) so “sustainable parenting” is arguably a more challenging term to unpack than the other. Many other environment students and other peers I have spoken with

regarding the term *sustainable parenting* feel it is an oxymoron and not actually possible – to have children is an unsustainable act. Others have said the opposite that we need children for the sustainable efforts to be made manifest – without children there is no point to the human race. Children are apart of sustainability. My definition of the term is an environmentally-aware parent who is making conscious choices to live a more sustainable life and to raise their children that way too. Whatever an individual's view on the term itself, we can discuss what it might take for society to support sustainable parenting without dissecting the term here. We can also discuss how consumer society makes sustainable parenting challenging, if not impossible. While we have yet to pin down exact definitions of both terms what we do know for certain is that biologists, environmentalists, politicians, doctors, journalists, parents and parenting bloggers (to name a few) are talking about what the environmental crisis means for parents and future generations, making what each term embodies a new reality we are only beginning to map out. These experts often offer direct advice for living more sustainably to parents, often through acquiring a product, book or magazine subscription. Experts offer tips on how to avoid an industry toxin that could be harmful to children, for example. In sustainability literature, even if parenting is not the focus, often a line or two will reference children or future generations as the impetus for sustainability. The overall message here is: *if not to preserve the planet for future generations, what then is the point?*

Yet even with the fear of climate change looming for more than just the world's eco-conscious parents, transitioning to living sustainably from within a modern consumer culture is very difficult. As an example, one of the parents I spoke to in this study admitted to how hard it is to be environmentally-friendly, which only increased in difficulty after becoming a parent. She felt her environmental commitment was stronger before having kids because making lifestyle

choices that were more environmentally friendly was easier prior to becoming a parent. After kids (especially after two) she saw her commitment to things like cloth diapers diminish and began relying on disposable diapers and boxed convenience foods like frozen pizzas because it simply made her life easier after many sleepless nights (Interview #6). For this parent, a tension of guilt was created from wanting to raise her kids in environmentally friendly ways but instead choosing what is easier in the moment. This parent highlighted that tension is also created from having young children with growing and changing needs. Knowing that it is wrong, but doing it anyway is so easy in today's consumer society, especially when consumerism can help alleviate some of these tensions and home-life chaos of a full and growing family. This supports the idea that sustainable parenting is more of an aspiration than a lifestyle for most. In fact, as seen in the literature review portion of this study and in my interviews with Waterloo Region parents, often doing the environmentally friendly thing is the harder option based on price, availability, a parent's limited time and the temptations of consumer life. In this regard, the desires of eco-conscious parents to raise children sustainably are often thwarted by the consumer system in which they live. *Sustainable parenting* is mostly a struggle in a consumer society. Even those that find pleasure in making environmentally friendly choices (they struggle less), still have to limit their negative ecological impact through a conscious effort. The system itself in which parents are raising their children is mostly not set up to be sustainable, convenience items are generally not eco-friendly (and if they are, they cost more).

### **1.3 Unequal Distributions of Wealth: *privilege and externalized costs***

Before conducting a literature review on the origins and drivers of consumption as well as the tensions created for eco-conscious parents within consumer societies, I must first acknowledge the unequal distribution and exploitation on which our consumption relies. *Peril and Possibility*, written by Robert Gibson and published in 2007 by Alternatives Journal focuses on two numbers: 120 and 1.2 billion. 1.2 billion, as Gibson states is the estimated number of people living on less than \$1 per day (Gibson, 2007, p 1). This number likely underestimates the total number of lives that are seriously affected by poverty globally. It also doesn't highlight how much poverty is connected to interlocking systems of oppression, such as the relationality of poverty to gender or racial inequality. Gibson acknowledges this and goes on to argue that regardless of the accuracy of the 1.2 billion, the bottom line is that the gap between the rich and poor is widening and too many individuals go without what they require (Gibson, 2007, p 1). In contrast, 120 "is the World Wildlife Fund's current estimate of the percentage of global carrying capacity for human life that we are currently using" (Gibson, 2007, p 1). This points to the fact that our demand on the planet far exceeds the resources on the planet. In addition to our demands exceeding our resources, Western resource management practices are based on exploitation with sustainability having never been a consideration (Chapin, et. al., 2009, p 241). Some economists are now predicting that since the Industrial Revolution, the generation to come will be worse off than the previous one (Colman, 2006, p 167). Yet, responsibility for unsustainable consumption growth is not distributed evenly, with the wealthiest counties bearing the larger footprint of environmental destruction. Europe and North America, with only 12 percent of the earth's population are responsible for more than 60 percent of total global consumption (Dauvergne, 2008, p 4).

The real costs of our consumer goods, through the political and economic process, are displaced, put onto distant ecosystems and communities (Dauvergne, 2008, p xi). There is a gap between the price we pay as consumers and the actual cost. As Annie Leonard, author of *The Story of Stuff* points out, the number on a price tag has very little to do with what the product actually costs because the direct cost to the customer only covers the labour and materials. This direct cost to the consumer is dwarfed by the externalized or hidden costs to everything from pollution in drinking water, poor health of workers, climate change and the exploitation of communities from which the raw resources are acquired (Leonard, 2010, p xxxii). This is why Leonard and others are asking the question, *who then pays for our cheap things?* Leonard who has travelled the world researching our "stuff" first hand, including many years working for Greenpeace has answered that question with the following: sometimes it is local communities that pay for these external costs with their loss of clean water or eco-system services. Other times it's paid for by the workers who pay for their own health or disability costs or it's paid for by future generations who, for example, will not have the forests that they require to moderate water cycles (Leonard, 2010, xxxii). External costs to our life-styles are already being paid in terrifying ways: wars to maintain fossil fuel dependency, chemicals ruining soil and land from agribusiness, species extinction and poor health including growing rates of cancer (Kingsolver, 2006, p 135; Massey-Stokes and Lanning, 2002, p 27; Shiva, 2010, p 57). Further to that the cost of global warming will be astronomical. A final blow perhaps, is this giant debt we don't account for in our economic system (Kingsolver, 2006, p 135).

#### **1.4 Research Question**

The objective of this thesis is to provide an answer to the overarching inquiry: What explains the ways in which parents make contradictory choices when faced with parenting options that diverge from their sustainability aims?

## **1.5 Overview of Methodology**

This research project adopted a qualitative, case study design, focusing on eco-conscious parents in the Waterloo Region. The research methodology is informed by both secondary and primary research. A literature review was undertaken to understand the society in which eco-aware parents are currently raising children. The literature accomplishes this by examining origins and drivers of consumption. The literature review also explores parental influence on materialism and how the current efforts to build a materially-based society and to keep the economy growing pressures parents and children to consume in order to function as full citizens. When this eco-social context is viewed beside the voices of these eco-conscious participants, we begin to tease out some of the tensions that arise for parents when they are attempting to make environmentally friendly choices, from within consumer society.

To participate in this study parents had to be aware of environmental issues and reside within the Waterloo Region of Ontario Canada. A survey with 55 potentially true statements were used to get at the tensions and opportunities eco-conscious parents experience. These statements were broadly grouped and covered a wide range of topics: eco-worry and eco-guilt, barriers to sustainability, household consumption items, waste, food provisioning, energy/transportation and tensions. Data collection took place in Waterloo Region from April 2016 to August 2016. All study materials and methods were approved by the University of

Waterloo, Office of Research Ethics. During the interviews, participants were not given the potentially true statements in advance. The survey and interview statements are available on page 113. During the analysis, the many points from each category are woven together as they were often interconnected and difficult to separate.

The survey was administered through Survey Monkey and promoted on Facebook. Facebook was chosen because it allowed for a large audience to see the survey within a targeted demographic. This demographic is preferably parents with children still living in the home, who have expressed environmental interests and who currently live in the Waterloo Region. To ensure transparency, participants were informed of the general nature of the research project when they were first contacted. During the interview and before beginning the survey more information was provided regarding the details of the research project. Each participant was informed that this study is anonymous. Verbal consent was sought before the interview was obtained and during the survey participants had to accept the terms by clicking “next” before the survey would generate. During transcription, each interview participant was given a random number 1-20, with the number not corresponding to the order in which participants were interviewed. Data collection methods include participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and an interview.

The most common methods of qualitative research include observation, the examination of artifacts and conducting interviews, all built around experiential understanding (Stake, 2010, p 20 & 29). Robert Stake states that, “if you organize your research by methods, it will be a hodgepodge. Better, first, to ask what you need to know; then, how to go about finding it. Better to organize by content” (Stake, 2010, p 72). A semi-structured approach was undertaken during the interviews, then the data was organized based on broad themes found within the content. A

semi-structured interview method was chosen because it allowed the conversation to flow naturally, rather than in a prescribed manner while still getting specific questions answered as identified in the above broad categories. Semi-structured interviews were conducted that used the survey statements as a launch point for parents to share whatever they felt was relevant to them. Many parents had a number of ideas and points that were of import which were self-generated but triggered from the survey statements. This allowed the conversation to cover a wide range of relevant ways that eco-conscious parents both support and undermine sustainability. During the survey, participants clicked on the statements that are true for them. In the interview I administered the statements and they said if they felt it was true for them or not. At times I asked them to elaborate on why or why not something was true. These statements covered a very wide range so that a full picture could be painted regarding their interaction with environmental or non-environmental actions. These statements examined a wide range of sustainable issues including, consumption levels, disposal of waste, food procurement, social pressures to consume, vehicle reliance, environmental community engagement and worry regarding climate change effecting their children. It also covered their barriers to sustainability and whether or not they made environmental choices whenever possible. The statement question from the interview were inputted into an excel document to obtain averages. Averages from the survey for the same statements were generated through Survey Monkey. Tables were made so that averages from the interview and survey could be viewed side-by-side. These tables also allowed me to compare the answers to each other. This along with interview quotes paints a picture that is complex but begins to answer the research question.

Initial observation for this research project developed as the result of my own experience raising a child within a consumer society (Waterloo Region) and attempting to understand what

sustainable parenting might look like. The written part of my thesis provides a historical base of our relationship to consumption which creates an eco-social context in which children are currently raised to support capitalism where they inherit our consumption mentalities as well as our global eco-debt. I argue that we are conditioned to consume and this alienates us from our personal environmental affects and hinders our environmental stewardship. Throughout the introduction, literatures review, survey and interviews we see that there are structural and social barriers to sustainability that stymied eco-conscious parents. Section 1.3 of the introduction grounds this thesis in a social justice framework by acknowledging the unequal distributions of wealth on which our modern consumption relies.

In qualitative research there are multiple approaches (Creswell, 2013, p 7). Ethnography is one of the many qualitative methods. It is concerned primarily with describing complex systems involving people (Hylar, 2013, p 391). I believe this is important especially when researching eco-social topics and when the researcher should take into account the many facets of a particular community. Ethnographic research takes on the task of describing complex systems involving people, which include individual actions/perceptions, needs, ideas and hopes intertwined with human (particularly urban) development (Hylar, 2013, p 391). Consumer research is an additionally important approach when looking at the modern consumer system. Eco-conscious parents are often caught within modern consumption and as such a consumer research approach offers a good paradigm for acknowledging this, while at the same time also taking into account a wide range of controversial-consumer issues, such as “materialism, consumption of dangerous products, and compulsive consumption” (Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008, p 432). Consumer Research Methods can be used to understand how unequal distributions in wealth lead to political/social tension and unsustainable communities, which are threatening to

peace and security, which is a threat to eco-conscious parents and their children. (Mick et al., 2012, p xv)

When in an eco-conscious parent's home more participant observation was able to naturally occur. What stood out during interviews in the home is that often times a person's relationship to their consumption is perception based. Often a parent who clearly had a lot of stuff would say yes to a statement of being a minimalist and having little stuff. Other times an eco-conscious parent had a low level of consumer goods, but said they felt they had too much stuff. This highlighted that more participant-based research would be useful in studies regarding eco-conscious parents and consumption. This is because participant observation occurs when the researcher partakes in a social setting and records the ethnographic details of what they experience (Bryman et al., 2012). Admittedly, this study would have been richer if more of this was possible. In order to have more participant observation in this study, I would have had to immerse myself into the lives of the participants over an extended period of time (Creswell, 2013). Participant observation takes place when the researcher participates in a social setting and records the ethnographic details of what they observe (Bryman et al., 2012). Instead, Semi-structured interviews and a survey were the primary source of data for this research project. While this study provides a glimpse into the eco-conscious parent experience, a true ethnographic study spanning a number of years would result in a deeper understanding on the ways in which parents make contradictory choices when faced with parenting options that diverge from their sustainability aims. It would also better show how consumption levels change over time within families because children's needs rapidly grow. True ethnographic research would have required extensive participant observation in their homes and over a longer period of time (Creswell, 2013), which was not possible here.

## **1.6 Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to understand the tensions and trade-offs some environmentally aware Waterloo Region parents experience when they negotiate environmentally based decisions. An example might include buying organic food because it is better for the environment and their children but still having to drive to purchase it which creates a tension/paradox. The objectives of this study are:

- i) To explore the tensions felt by parents in the Waterloo Region who are aware of the environmental crisis and how they negotiate these tensions while living in a modern-consumer society.
- ii) To understand, through the literature, the origins and drivers of consumption and how it is relevant to a sustainable parenting goal.
- iii) To understand, through the literature, parental influence on materialism and the tensions created for environmentally concerned parents in consuming society.
- iv) To uncover some other potentially defining characteristic of eco-conscious/sustainable parenting.

## **1.7 Boundaries**

The location for this study is the Waterloo Region of Ontario, Canada. North America as a whole will be explored in the literature and at times a global approach to consumption is taken. Initially Wellington County and the city of Guelph were going to be included in this study, however they were omitted to allow this study to have more depth. Waterloo Region was chosen

as it is where I am currently living and also raising a child and it allowed the study to have more focus by not spreading this study out over too large an area. Any modern consuming region would have worked for this study. It is likely that many of the same barriers would have appeared in another location and that sustainability barriers identified by parents interviewed and surveyed are not unique to the Waterloo Region.

## **1.8 Limitations**

Only Waterloo Region parents with interests in the environment were shown the link to the survey on Facebook. This created a limitation as any eco-conscious parent not on Facebook were unlikely to have taken the survey. The majority of participants are also mothers. This creates a bias in the data as it is under representative of fathers and other caregivers. This study also does not address why the participants were mostly women. Potentially this is due to gender rolls found in parenting, which I am not able to explore further here. In order to achieve a clearer picture of one of these eco-conscious parents the participant would also need to be interviewed over-time. In this regard, a longitudinal study is missing here. Further to that in order to get a better idea of eco-conscious parenting as a global concept, other locations would need to be studied, not just the Waterloo Region. Participants were also highly educated yet this study is unable to reveal why that is. More limitations were found in the literature. While the literature provides a strong base regarding consumption there is a lack of literature on eco-conscious parenting specifically or climate change as an existential threat to parents. There is more work that needs to be done in this field of study.

To participate, the criteria was only that parents had to themselves claim to be eco-aware and living in the Waterloo Region. This ended up challenging my own vision of what an eco-conscious parent is. The data and especially the interviews revealed that the definition of eco-conscious parenting is really based on perspective. I was expecting to interview people who were living much more sustainably. But what I found was that #1) those parents are exceedingly hard to find, #2) that even the most sustainable parents among us are still struggling to limit their negative environmental impact and often have to negotiate decisions with family members which can sometimes require trade-offs and that #3) many people who see themselves as being environmental savvy (they identify with being eco-conscious) are only so compared to people in their lives who may not be doing anything environmental at all. As an example, a mom who composts, grows her own food and who only uses natural product in the home is eco-conscious compared to her parents who do not even recycle even though she is still a regular shopper and relies on a vehicle. Parents are succeeding (or failing) at sustainability to varying degrees. As such, the term eco-conscious is relative and perception based. Everyone who identifies with it will have a varying degree of actual sustainable behaviours, which is challenging to quantify in this particular study.

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Origins & Drivers of Consumption: *a manufactured value system of consumption, the denial of death, narcissism and terror management theory***

In 1977, my grandfather and host of CBC's Man Alive, Roy Bonisteel interviewed Viktor Frankl who survived four Nazi concentration camps, including Auschwitz. Frankl, a psychiatrist, neurologist, writer and lecturer produced the renowned work titled *Man's Search for Meaning*, first published in 1959. The work illustrates that those who are oriented towards meaning, an orientation beyond oneself, are most likely to survive in the face of immense suffering (Frankl, 1977). It isn't just about survival but the *why* of survival - a person or a cause to keep one going and to give someone purpose (Frankl, 1977). In the interview, Roy posed Frankl the question: "Most of us have never been in the concentration camp experience. We've never had to go through that horror and tragedy and so one would think that today it would be easier to find meaning in life - and yet, I sense that it's more difficult in a sense today than it was in years past, do you think that?" Frankl, who died in 1997, explained that my grandfather was absolutely right. People find it harder to find meaning, he explained, because we live in a society that focuses on satisfying and gratifying every human need except the most important one - the need for meaning. He goes on to explain that consumer society creates needs, but actually lacks meaning, leaving people to feel purposeless (Frankl, 1977).

On April 10th, 2016, the CBC produced a one hour special titled *The Meaningful Man* on their Sunday Edition with Michael Enright. It looked back on Roy's 1977 Viktor Frankl interview as well as current interviews with others to discuss the influence Frankl's work had on

their lives. One of these individuals was Haddon Klingberg, long-time friend of Frankl and author of *When Life Calls Out to Us: The Love and Lifework of Viktor and Elly Frankl*, published in 2002. Klingberg explains that what Frankl meant by 'meaning' was that people need to feel they have purpose in life in order to have a reason to live and to tolerate the bad that happens to them. He explains that Frankl argued that meaning comes from finding something outside of oneself - be it a cause or a person to love that one can devote their life's purpose to. When this meaning is created, it results in a de-centering of oneself, the opposite of a narcissistic existence (Klingberg, 2016). Klingberg then goes on to say that Frankl was very critical of the American constitution and *the right to the pursuit of happiness*. The reason for this is that Frankl believed that the more one pursues happiness, the less likely they are to find it. This is because happiness isn't what we need, *what we need is something to be happy about*. Making happiness the goal of a society produces the opposite of happiness. Instead, finding a reason to be happy (a cause or a person to live for) results in happiness happening naturally. In other words, happiness happens as a by-product of finding a meaningful life (Klingberg, 2016).

Unfortunately, many people have come to believe that meaning and happiness is found in consuming, which has only resulted in a polluted planet full of unhappy individuals with too much stuff and ever-increasing debt. This is because, as Frankl explains, modern society does not promote the basic concerns of human beings. Instead it teaches us that through consumption we find pleasure, happiness, power or prestige - but even if that were true (which it often is not), it still leaves a person unfulfilled because the most basic and fundamental concern of humankind is still not addressed (Frankl, 1977). That concern isn't actually prestige or the other promises of consumerism, it is instead to find meaning beyond oneself, something to live for that cannot be found in modern society's consumer value system or any other promise of capitalism. The

cultural acceptance of deriving happiness from consumption, creates a tension for eco-conscious parents when they attempt or desire to resist consumption. Their society isn't set up to accommodate them. Many parents may find that sustainable products are not available, sustainable food choices are not as convenient and the push to turn their children into consumers is a billion dollar industry that penetrates the public and private sphere.

### **2.1.0 The Manufacturing of the Consumer**

Everyone must consume to live. But there is a big difference between consuming to live and living to consume. Continual and unlimited consumption as the goal of society to prove an individual's worth needed to be taught, constructed, normalized and promoted over many years. It needed to replace non-consuming ways of life and grow to be the very goal of society. As a result, standards have shifted, taking otherwise humble people and sucking them into a vortex of consumerism where they become obsessed with material wealth, physical appearance, attention and celebrities (Twenge and Campbell, 2009, p 2). Erich Fromm wrote that consuming is the most important form of *having* instead of *being* within an affluent industrial society that focuses on having as its purpose, “I am = what I have and what I consume” (Fromm, 1979, p 27). Not only is consuming apart of our very identity, it also becomes on-going because the “previous consumption soon loses its satisfactory character” (Fromm, 1979, p 27) and one must consume again and again to feel satisfied. Consuming, as Fromm wrote also has an ambiguous quality and as such relives stress (Fromm, 1979, p 27). Highlighting that consumer-society is woven into the fabric of our everyday lives, found connected to the management of emotions or the stresses from our jobs etc., making it impossible for parents, regardless of their awareness of

environmental issues, to disconnect completely from their consumer society while also living within it. Children's early years are also typically high consumption times for families because parents have to meet the changing needs of small children, making it even harder at that particular time to disengage with consumer society.

When eco-conscious parents attempt to de-consume in a consumer-based system, they automatically go against the normal flow around them. Struggle to resist society is also compounded by the fact that we are extremely biased toward our society, even should it contain aspects that are detrimental to humanity (Fromm, 1979, p 69). This ritualization process caused Bourdieu to coin the term 'habitus' which refers to the mechanism by which cultural models of behaviour and cultural norms become unconsciously incorporated into the formation of the self during the socialization process (Browitt, 2004, p 1). Individuals become a member of society and are not born a member of society (Richards, 2004, p 56). Good and bad things get normalized, which affect what people perceive as right/wrong. Therefore if material consumption is a normal way of belonging for the society in which a parent resides, it creates a state of conflict and a potential threat of belonging to both the parent and child when attempting to raise children sustainably. "Normal" of course changes over time and eco-conscious parents who have a community of eco-conscious people around them would manage to avoid the threat to their feelings of belonging. Sadly though, eco-conscious parenting communities are not the norm and the deeply woven nature of our lives to high levels of consumerism is not an accident.

In 2002 the BBC released a television documentary series by filmmaker Adam Curtis titled *The Century of the Self* which examines the work of Sigmund Freud, Anna Freud and Edward Bernays. This documentary offers a historical perspective on the foundations of consumerism and how Freud's theories were used by his nephew Edward Bernays to control the

masses for profit by manipulating the unconscious. When America announced it was entering the war against Germany and Austria, as a part of the war effort Edward Bernays was employed to promote the United States' WW1 efforts in the press (BBC, 2002). As a result, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's reception in Paris was astounding, the propaganda made him a hero (BBC, 2002). Bernays saw the success this propaganda had and upon returning to the USA he decided that if propaganda was successfully used for war, it could also be used in times of peace for other means (BBC, 2002). But as Bernays himself stated, propaganda was a bad word because of the German's usage of it, so he came up with a new phrase: *the council on public relations* (BBC, 2002). In New York he set up an office as a public relations council, marking the first time in history this term had been used in advertising. In his office he delved deeply into the psychoanalytical work of his uncle, Sigmund Freud and at that time began to test his theory that he could manipulate the unconscious to make money (BBC, 2002). As a result, the concept of playing to people's inherently irrational emotions to sell them consumer goods was born.

Some have claimed that Edward Bernays' influence on the twentieth century was as influential as Freud's. Bernays showed corporations how to get people to purchase things they don't need by connecting consumer items to people's unconscious desires (BBC, 2002). Bernays himself wrote in 1935 about the ability to manipulate the public's opinion and how to exploit it for business (Bernays, 1935) and he admits that this propagandist, the person who is in the new role as public relations technician, can be a force of destruction or one that is constructive (Bernays, 1935). Some might say that Bernays himself, grandfather of the concept of public relations was a destructive force because he helped turn people into passive consumers for the benefit of the industrial machine. Bernays participated in manipulating people because he believed that the interests of American business and the American people were one and the same

(BBC, 2002). Cultivated from the understanding that corporations can influence the masses in business came the political idea of controlling people by satisfying selfish inner desires, which makes them docile (BBC, 2002). It was the start of the "all-consuming self, which has come to dominate our world today" (BBC, 2002) and resulted in unconstrained consumption. This reality has led eco-conscious parents to experience worry regarding their children's futures on a resource depleted planet.

While eco-conscious parents may have a higher degree of worry about the environment for their children's futures than parents who aren't paying attention or who deny climate change, we cannot assume that environmental awareness impacts consumer behaviour enough. It has been discovered that ethical-environmental consumers who have an awareness of consumer impacts are not impacting their own consumption and purchasing behaviour, as assumed (Carrington, 2010, p 140). Studies are showing that these ethically-minded consumers almost never actually purchase ethical products. A 2005 study found that 30% of consumers stated that they would make ethical purchases and only 3% actually did (Futerra, 2005, p 92). The data collected found that models that predict ethical behaviours are directly representative of ethical intentions are in 90% of cases wrong (Carrington et al., 2010, p 140). This may be because consumers are not as ethically minded as believed by some researches and it may also be that many intend to consume in an ethical manner but sometimes just forget or are constrained by competing demands like a lack of funds or choices (Carrington et al., 2010, p 140). This is because ethical decisions made by consumers are complex and occurring within their culture and not in isolation from it (Carrington, 2010, p 143). Many eco-conscious parents, for example, may find that the eco-friendly option is not available or not affordable.

### **2.1.2 The People Paradox & the Denial of Death**

Janis Dickinson's work reviews the ideas of cultural anthropologist, philosopher and sociology psychiatrist, Ernest Becker and suggests ways in which Becker's analysis can be used to illuminate human responses to global climate change which is useful when attempting to understand the eco-social climate eco-conscious parents must face (Dickinson, 2009, p 1). Dickinson wrote in 1973 that Ernst Becker proposed that the human psychological basis of mental/emotional health, cooperation and competition is linked tightly to "immortality projects" that provide a buffer from our anxieties especially regarding death and give a foundation of cultural meanings and self-esteem (Dickinson, 2009, p 1-2). Humans automatically attempt to deny their immortality and attempt to achieve symbolic immortality through heroism (Lippens, 2016, p 865). Becker was increasingly aware that materialism, efforts to control the natural world and denial of nature was ever increasing with materialism and consumption being a vehicle for engagement with symbolic immortality (Dickinson, 2009, p 1). This creates a *people paradox*, a paradox wherein the very things that people think bring them symbolic immortality (such as material possessions) are in conflict with their survival on a finite planet in a dire need to reduce carbon emissions (Dickinson, 2009, p 1). This results in a conflict between modern parenting and planetary survival. Items we purchase for our children that are linked to our cultural practices and our self-esteem projects are promoting unsustainable life-styles that threaten climate stability for our children. What makes us a "good" parent and a contributing member of consumer society at the same time threatens our survival and our children's survival.

Becker illustrates that the barrier to the development of a rational sustainable belief system is our death-denying defences and symbolic self-perpetuations (Becker, 1973, p 26; Dickinson, 2009, p 2). Human beings are inclined to suppress fears and thoughts of death to

manage the reality of their mortality (Becker, 1973, p 29; Dickinson, 2009, p 2). Consciousness is an awareness of self that includes an awareness of one's death, resulting in fear of death being a primary source of human-anxiety and the basis of neurosis (Becker, 1973, p 13-14; Dennett, 2004; Dickinson, 2009, p 2; Jong, 2014, p 875). In this regard, until we are able to quench these fears with something other than consumption we are unlikely to transition to the sustainable system we so desperately need in order to offer our children a future on earth. Becker's theory states that many things move man but the principle is the fear of death (Becker, 1973, p 11). Bernays saw that the marriage of personal drivers, like fear of death, to advertising prowess would benefit business and stimulate the economy. In making this connection between psychology and marketing he opened a Pandora's Box for the growth of the wasteful economy which leaves eco-parents with a challenging job to do; one bigger than simply building awareness about environmental disasters (present and future) but to also change and re-write the social landscape of society. Parents must also resist the conversion of their children into consumers by a billion dollar industry that is directed at them (refer to section 2.2). There are also the very real consumption choices that parents have to make when their children are small and their needs are rapidly changing, which make resistance to consumption difficult.

### **2.1.3 Terror Management Theory, Hero Projects & Self-Esteem**

Life, Becker explains, is a struggle for self-esteem and meaning within the constraints of our culture and bodies while simultaneously being driven by feeling shame associated with the necessities of living and fear of dying (Becker, 1973, p 26). Becker draws on the work of Otto Rank when he states that this fundamental fear of life and death is what causes "man's urge to

transcend this fear in a culturally constituted heroism” (Becker, 1975, p xvii). The greatest victory too of a person is to behave bravely when faced with their own extinction and since evolution the hero has been at the center of human honour and ovation (Becker, 1973, p 12). This is a result of the paradoxical nature of man, which according to Erich Fromm is the fact that (s)he is half symbolic and half animal (Becker, 1973, p 26; Fromm, 1964, p 116,). A human being is a symbolic self because they are a creature with a name and a life history, a creative being that is able to imagine and construct themselves and contemplate their very existence (Becker, 1972, p 26; Fromm, 1964, p 116). The animal is simply that every person, as Becker words it, becomes food for worms – creating a paradox: man is “out of nature and hopelessly in it” (Becker, 1973, p 26). Becker explains that this creates a terrifying dilemma, to know ones splendid uniqueness and then rot in the ground, disappearing forever (Becker, 1973, p 26).

Terror management theory (TMT) is born from Becker's work *The Denial of Death* and his theory that much of human action is based on avoidance of death and the knowledge of the anxieties that arise from this avoidance (Arndt, Solomon and Kasser et al., 2004, p 199; Dickinson, 2009, p 3). Potentially, parents face a heightened sense of fear of death due to the fact that they have children who rely on them. TMT is also supported by over 300 empirical studies, conducted mainly in Western and Indigenous communities, from all over the world and is a way to comprehend how human anxieties over death affect materialism, consumer behaviour and conspicuous consumption (Arndt, Solomon and Kasser et al., 2004, p, 198; Dickinson, 2009, p 3). What is seen in TMT studies is that the pursuit of material possessions and wealth function as a way for people to protect themselves from existential anxieties (Arndt, Solomon and Kasser et al., 2004, p 198). TMT studies also show that in order for people to cope, death is relegated to a

problem of the distant future, through proximal defences, that use rational thoughts to suppress conscious thoughts of death and rationalize knowledge of mortality (Dickinson, 2009, p 4).

We now have observed through terror management theory, the age old environmentalist approach which believed that knowledge (getting the word out) automatically would result in action, was false (Blumstein and Saylan, 2008; Dickinson, 2009, p 1). The alarm bells of doom, it seems, only cause people to do more of what environmentalist warn against them doing. Impending disaster is also an everyday concern, but as Christopher Lasch writes, it has become so commonplace that people no longer think about how disaster might be avoided. Instead, people busy themselves with what makes them feel good to avoid what makes them feel bad as well as busy themselves with their own personal survival strategies meant to prolong their own lives. (Lasch, 1979, p 4). As an example, people build bomb shelters, with the goal of self-preservation through the latest technologies of the time. They also retreat to personal preoccupations designed to make the Self feel good. (Lasch, 1979, p 4). This is relevant to the challenges of sustainable parenting because it shows that there is an up-hill battle for parents who are hoping to halt climate change, and because it suggests that when people fear the destruction of the planet they may become less, not more, engaged with finding solutions. It may also suggest that there is an opportunity for sustainable parenting to become a viable hero/immortality project for parents which would be a benefit to sustainability.

TMT is also a valuable lens for eco-conscious parents when viewing the broader ecological crisis as it highlights how people are likely to respond to climate change and how they are already responding to the knowledge of this threat to human survival. In regards to climate change, proximal defences according to Dickinson are likely to become visible in three ways. This first is the denial of climate change, the second is a denial that climate change is caused by

humans and the third being a minimizing of the magnitude of climate change and to push the consequences of it into a distant future (Dickinson, 2009, p 4). Unconscious anxiety towards death prompts and sustains materialistic activities, as well as consumer selections (Arndt, Solomon and Kasser et al., 2004, p 199). Unfortunately, environmental education has yet to provide a social context for self-esteem and such has been unlikely from the start to promote system wide transformation. This lack of social context for self-esteem result in increased tensions for people, both internally for individuals who feel guilty about their materialistic behaviour and externally between people that are more militant about the environment and those who behave more antagonistically towards the environment (Dickinson, 2009, p 6). This tension increases as environmental awareness grows because simultaneous threats to an individual's self-esteem also grow for those who find self-esteem through materialism. So too does their ideology of entitlement (Dickinson, 2009, p 6). Eco-conscious parents may find as a result that they are in conflict with parents who are not environmentally aware or as concerned with the environment. As one of the moms interviewed for this study noted, she did not feel likeness or closeness to the other moms in her children's school yard who she feels are generally just talking about shopping, discounts and other superfluous things that do not relate to her values or worries regarding climate change. This potentially creates a very real and stressful problem for eco-conscious parents when making friends in their community. The opposite can of course be true too where eco-conscious parents may find each other and create a sense of meaningful community based on their common environmental values.

Alfred Adler saw that "the basic law of human life is the urge to self-esteem" (Becker, 66). "Self-esteem is the dominant motive of man" (Becker, 1973, p 75). Self-esteem begins with being supported as an infant, giving a child the feeling of safety and satisfaction (Becker, 1973, p

66). When a child can count on a safe and loving environment, their ego can grow and develop defences against anxieties and self-esteem grows (Becker, 1973, p 66). What is vital about understanding self-esteem is that it takes us to humanity's question "who am I" and "what is the value in my life" – human's wants to be recognized as having value in the universe (Becker, 1973, p 76). People specifically want to know, according to Becker, "Where do I rank as Hero?" (Becker, 1973, p 76). Becker goes on to state that if a social worker wants to know more about what is driving their patient they need to ask how they think of themselves as hero, or oppositely, why don't they feel like a hero (Becker, 1973, p 77). This will get at the heart of the issues. But as Becker points out it doesn't stop there. If you want to understand why young people are opting out of a social system, look at how that social system is not providing the context for heroism (Becker, 1973, p 77). Culture itself is a construction of ideas, customs and societal rules that act as a vehicle for heroism (Becker, 1973, p 78).

As seen in Robert Gibson, *Peril and Possibility*, increases in individual self-esteem projects through materialism and entitlement is a direct result of the fact that doom is a poor motivator (Gibson, 2007, p 2). Frightening knowledge drives people to consume more, not less. It might be no surprise then that terror management theory predicts that humans will focus their efforts on mitigation of climate change and discovering the causes, rather than stopping the human-driven actions, like consumption, that are driving climate change in the first place, and increasing demand on natural resources (Wolfe, 2016; Dickinson, 2009, p 11). "It is not yet clear how many people have the capacity to engage in sustained restraint to avoid consequences, not for themselves, but for the future of their children and grandchildren" (Dickinson, 2009, p 12). This psychological approach perhaps also sheds light on the parent-consumer paradox where parents participate in a modern fossil fuel dependent society on the one hand and want for

sustainable ecological futures for our children on the other. Both being in direct opposition of the other. The trick then would be to begin to understand what it might take for sustainable parenting to become a viable hero/immortality project and how that may be attainable for parents who are living in a consumer society in which they feel pressured to participate.

While shopping may satisfy our immediate desires or our needs to fit into a certain societal role, it does not however offer us purpose or a foundation upon which to build meaning in our lives. A society that focuses on finding purpose, instead of consumption might just have a shot at sustainability. We can ascertain from the work of Viktor Frankl that modern consumerism can only really be replaced by meaningful reasons for being alive which go beyond anything anyone can buy. Meaning can be found in a person's work, their relationships, their spirituality or faith as well as found in their struggles (Frankl, 1977). Meaning can also be found in raising children with an eco-conscious focus by engaging parents in ways that support sustainability rather than undermining it.

#### **2.1.4 Psychological Consequences: *narcissism and generation me***

Christopher Lasch (1979) wrote about the decrease in American confidence and a mood of pessimism from the defeat in Vietnam, depletion of natural resources and economic stagnation (Lasch, 1979, p xiii). Lasch argued that it wasn't just an American failure of nerve, but a widespread capacity deficit of constructive ideas among bourgeois society everywhere. He writes that bourgeois society has "lost both the capacity and the will to confront the difficulties that threaten to overwhelm it" (Lasch, 1979, p xiii). Historians suggest that once a future appears troubled and uncertain due to trauma (like through war and depletion of natural resources), there is a loss of

historical faith which people rely on for the formation of their identity, causing the past everyone held dear to appear "irrelevant" (Lasch, 1979, p xiii). This pessimistic view depleted constructive ideas and began to be shared by those that governed society post-1960s and as a result influenced public policy and opinions as well as shaped scientific knowledge (Lasch, 1979, p xiv). This modern bureaucracy undermined a previous society focused on local action and replaced local values with the hope that a good society would one day emerge from the wreckage of capitalism (Lasch, 1979, p xiii).

Lash wrote in 1979, "the contemporary climate is therapeutic, not religious" (Lasch, 1979, 7). People were hungry for personal well-being and health, not focused on personal salvation through religion or the restoration of an earlier political age (Lasch, 1979, p 7). Unfortunately, people didn't necessarily depart from a cultural focus of lesser value, to a better one. This is because as Lasch points out each "revolutionary movement partakes of the culture of the time" (Lasch, 1979, p 8) and therefore have their own down-sides, even should there be some merits to the ideology. The downside to the new-found self-focused movement of the 1960s, was that it created the narcissism of the 1970s and beyond. Lasch argues that examples can be found in the new therapies from the self-help (or human potential) movement of the day that preached the concept that the individual is capable of complete determination of their fate and is all powerful (Lasch, 1979, p 9). This way of thinking intensifies self-isolation, increases ideas of personal grandeur and creates narcissism during a period when man had already "surrendered most of his technical skills to the corporation [and could] no longer provide for his material needs" (Lasch, 1979, p 9-10). So, ironically a modern narcissistic society created the belief that a person could advance based on individual will and initiative alone, yet people had far less real survival skills than before (Lasch, 1979, p 52). The archetypical embodiment of the American

dream was the self-made man", yet by the 1970s most possessed less skills than previous generations. (Lasch, 1979, p 53). A self-made archetype in a narcissistic modern society runs the risk of an inflated sense of accomplishment, driven by a focus of its own immediate needs, not on its ability to offer something of greater value to society (Lasch, 1979, p 13; Schor, 2006, p 63). Sadly, this paradigm isn't likely to change even given the reality of climate change, since unfortunately, narcissist-consumption appears to offer a great way of coping with the anxieties, tensions and social conditions of modern life (Lasch, 1979, p 50).

Jean Twenge (2006) presented the results of twelve studies on the differences in generations based on data gathered from 1.3 million young Americans, born in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, which she calls *Generation Me*. This generation is also referred to as *Generation Y* by other researchers (Twenge, 2006, p 3). Twenge reveals that this generation is termed Generation Me because they have been taught to put themselves first. They also expect more out of life during a time when economic prosperity is quite low, resulting in depression and anxiety from shattered expectations (Twenge, 2006, p 4 & 109). She also argues it is paradoxical that Generation Me would feel so terrible, considering economic challenges in the lives of people born in first world countries (specifically America) in the 1970s to the 1990s has been quite free of traumatic historical events (Twenge, 2006, p 109). Generation Me also had real advantages over previous generations by way of cell phones, television, internet, better medical care and more freedom of geographical movement (Twenge, 2006, p 109). Even so, the tendency to put the Self first may have produced a great sense of personal freedom but it also simultaneously created a crushing amount of pressure for the individual to stand alone, within an economic climate with more stacked against an individual's success than that of the baby boomers (Twenge, 2006, p 109).

As a result, for Generation Me it is a time of great expectations and shattering realities, with research showing that the gap between what young people have and what they want being the greatest now, than during any other time in history (Twenge, 2004, p 2). This gap is explored in the Huffington Post Article by Tim Urban titled *Why Generation Y Yuppies Are Unhappy* from 2013. Narrated through a humorous stick figure named Lucy. Lucy is part of the yuppie culture of Generation Y (or Generation Me). Lucy is by-and-large enjoying her life and is pleased to be Lucy but she has one issue, the issue of unhappiness. Urban breaks Lucy's unhappiness down into simple terms for the readers: happiness = reality - expectations. This is because, as Urban explains, people are happiest when the reality of their lives is better than expected. Lucy being raised with optimism and unbounded possibility with an inflated sense of self-importance and entitlement set her up to be disappointed with her reality (Urban, 2013). As an example, Lucy statistically is not likely to be famous or wealthy, but as seen in Twenge's work, fame and wealth are things that individuals in her generation often expect (Twenge, 2004, p 2).

Research on Generation Me is important for eco-conscious parents as it helps parents to understand this generation's relationship to materialism, which has unintended environmental consequences. As an example, Twenge references a survey that found that by the 1990s, high school students in the United States were twice as likely as students in 1970s to rate having a lot of money as being very important to them (Twenge, 2006, p 98-99). Also another survey found that in 2004, 74% of freshmen stated that being well-off financially was a life goal, which was an increase from 45% in 1967 (Twenge, 2006, p 99). Baby Boomer's children, despite the threat of climate change are more narcissistic and more concerned than their parents were with fame and becoming wealthy consumers.

## **2.2 Moulding Consumers & Parental Influence on Materialism**

The control of nature and all of our current modern commodities were only possible with the advent of the industrial age (Fromm, 1976, p 1). Parenting of course changed too with industrial progress and the move away from human and animal energy to mechanical and nuclear energy as well as the invention of the television and computer (Fromm, 1976, p 1). Parenting has always done a dance with culture. For example, in 1949 only 6% of households owned a television and by 1966, 97% of families had a television, resulting in children born from 1960 – 1976 being the first generation to grow up with television as a normalized part of home life (Bradley, 2005, p 1). The normalization of television in the home has resulted in television becoming a significant part of childrearing (Nathanson & Manohar, 2012, p 441). The average American child also consumes up to 40,000 commercials per year (American Psychological Association, 2004). This is a very different picture to a pre-media driven era of parenting. Most children in today's society begin watching television in infancy and parents are also reporting that they use television regularly as a way to socialize their children, to calm them and as an educational tool (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2003 & 2006; Vandewater et al., 2007). Yet, increased screen-time has been linked to an increase in poor psychological and physical health in children (Sebire, 2013, p 348). Further to that lower levels of screen-time have been linked to a higher level of supportive parental presences in the home (Sebire, 2013, p 348). In a study by Amy Nathanson and Uttara Manohar that was published in the Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies, it was found that parents who themselves had negative attachment experiences in their own childhoods were likely to use television more liberally with their own children and in contrast young adults with secure attachment histories had healthier views regarding television use and children (Nathanson and Manohar, 2012, p 441).

Eco-conscious parents who seek to limit consumer culture and media for their children, like by not owning a television, may find themselves in a dilemma whereby they are potentially unpopular in certain social situations and or they still have to constantly resist the media messages that permeate general society (at school). Ads now permeate every aspect of human social space, found literally everywhere, all telling people to buy something (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2006; Ehrenreich, 1999, p 13; Rayport, 2013, p 76; Schor, 9, 2004; Upadhyay, 2012, p 48). These changes in the social-material landscape are affecting families and causing the observers of American culture to blame a decrease in civic participation on the current historic record high of engagement with commercials and other forms of media, with ads proliferating well beyond the home television in what is now a media-saturated world (Rayport, 2013, p 76; Schor, 2004, p 9). This creates a tension for eco-conscious parents because while they may attempt to disengage themselves and their children from consumption they are at odds with the billions of dollar per year spent by advertisers to manipulate, coax and inspire their children towards a consumer driven lifestyle (Beder, 1998, p 101).

Alarmingly for eco-conscious parents who want to decrease consumption, the companies that market and advertise consumer products as well as those that produce the consumer item, have turned their focus on children as active participants in the consumer marketplace (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2006, p 2563; Bakan, 2011, p 5; Dalmeny, 2004, p 169; Jacobson, 2004, p 93; Schor, 2004, p 9). Buying for baby, is of course done through the caregivers, beginning with emphasis on which stroller and other items parents should buy (Schor, 2004, p 19) but by the time a child is consciously interacting, they are engaged with directly by advertisers (Lagorio, 2007; Upadhyay, 2012, p 49). By age one children are watching cartoons, with commercials from their "promo partner" like Burger King and McDonalds and children as young

as eighteen months recognize brand logos (Schor, 2004, p 19). Research from the American Academy of Pediatrics shows that young children under eight years are "cognitively and psychologically defenceless against advertising" because they do not understand the intent to sell behind it and tend to accept advertising at face value (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2006, p 2563; Upadhyay, 2012, p 48). This makes young people easier to manipulate and makes it easier for brands to capture their confidence well into adulthood.

The current extent of children's engagement in consumerism is unparalleled, with children immersed in the marketplace to a degree unlike any other time in history. An example of how purposeful the advertising to children of any age can be found in the total advertising and market expenditures directed at children. In 2004, the total advertising and market expenditures directed at children was approximately fifteen billion dollars, a huge rise from 1983 where one hundred million was spent with annual expenditures being closer to seventeen billion dollars by 2006 (CCFC, 2016; Lagorio, 2007; Schor, 2004, p 21). Current American teens are also the most consumer-involved, materialistic and brand-conscious generation in history (Schor, 2004, p 13-15). Children and teenagers are a focus simply because the consumer industry knows that they have influence over family money. By 2006 it was estimated that children under 12 in the United States spend \$25 billion dollars per year, teenagers spend \$155 billion dollars a year and both children and teenagers influence another \$200 billion of their parents' spending annually in the US (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2006). For the consumer industry, ignoring children and teenager's influence in the consumer marketplace would be a bad business move - especially if they can have a hand in creating them into the type of consumers they want by influencing their thinking from a young age. Disturbingly, children's marketing and developmental psychology have long been bed-fellows. Psychology was co-opted by marketers and reconceptualised

childhood itself to be about a growing process of learning how to be a consumer (Schor, 2004, p 43). Daniel Cook, a sociologist from the University of Illinois explains that the discourse throughout the twentieth century is that children are "small but emergent consumers" (Schor, 2004, p 43) who by the 1990s were described as savvy and autonomous, with influence over their family's income (Bakan, 2012, p 34; Schor, 2004, p 43). Eco-conscious parents are under enormous pressure to consume not just from society, but also from their children who have received messages about the importance of shopping for them to fit-in with their peers.

G. N. Marks in 1997 also found that materialist values are influenced by parental socialization, transmitted directly from the parents to the children (Marks, 1997 p 58; Flouri, 2007, p 130). Further to that homes that do not support self-expression, personal growth or a communal-based world-view are more associated with a focus on financial acquisition and materialistic values. A study from Chang and Arkin in 2002 echoes this when it found that people whose childhoods were filled with self-doubt-related words by their caregivers were more likely to be materialistic than those raised with neutral word (Chang and Arkin, 2002). This is because research is showing that materialism is associated with lower levels of self-esteem and higher social anxiety. (Chang and Arkin, 2002; Chaplin and John, 2007). This also illustrates that when people are parented in ways that cause them to feel insecure as young people, they are at a higher risk of being more material-focused and insecure throughout their adult life. While researchers Gudmunson & Beutler admit that more family and materialism studies needs to be done especially looking at specifics like adolescent attitudes towards money, it has still been observed that unsecure environments and materialism in the home help mould children into consumers and people with lower self-esteem, who are then at a higher risk of an increased drive to seek approval from others and as a result are more likely to express desperation towards

finding a sense of identity through consumer branding (Gudmunson and Beutler, 2012, p 388; Hagar and Noha, 2015, p 255).

Data gathered on 1091 British mothers and fathers of children in secondary school found that parenting stress, material conflict and parental involvement were related to materialism (Flouri, 2007, p 167). This is perhaps because parental attitudes have been found to predict many of the values and orientations of their children, not just material values (Flouri, 2007, p 167; Glass et al., 1986; Kasser et al., 2002). An example of how materialism can be related to parental attitudes specifically can be found in archival longitudinal data taken from 79 American children born in 1946 which showed that parental warmth or lack thereof related to feelings of security at age 31 (Flouri, 2007, p 168). This study shows that insecure people tend more towards consumption because materialism gives them a sense of security. This is because, as the researchers point out, materialism is a survival value and psychological research suggests that higher levels of materialism can be related to parental socialization paradigm and whether or not a child felt secure or insecure with their parents (Flouri, 2003; Kasser, et al., 1995).

And yet, we cannot distill the cause of materialism in children down to being a parent's fault entirely. That is too simplistic and there is no way of knowing how much of the materialism in an individual comes from home or society. This is especially the case when considering an article titled *Materialism in Young Consumers* from Egypt by Adib Hagar and Noha El-Bassiouny (2015), where it was observed that unfortunately for parents, youth materialism is elevating globally due to a highly commercialized cultural and global public sphere (Hagar and Noha, 2015, p 255). While this study shows the immense pressure eco-conscious parents are under to resist commercialization it also showed that parents do have the potential to be a "countervailing power against excessive youth materialism" which is why the authors argue that

programs should be designed to help support parents in resisting materialism. They make the point that programs helping parents to limit materialism are important especially considering that many parents are not actually aware of the adverse effects that materialism has on their children or to the extent that materialism is a part of their family life (Hagar and Noha, 2015, p 255). Helping parents to become aware of materialism, especially if instead of fear they are given skills or ideas regarding how to engage in sustainable parenting activities, may lead to more parent hero-projects based on sustainability. Main stream parenting hero projects based on sustainability would help combat climate change but would also have the added benefits of limiting the exclusion eco-conscious parents may experience from non-participation in consumer society. If everyone is decreasing engagement in consumerism, the non-consumer is no longer marginalized.

## **2.2.0 Nature Deficit**

It is important to acknowledge the loss of a connection to nature as a consequence of a media and consumer-driven childhood. This changed landscape of media consumption since the early 1950s has led many experts to study how electronic media is enticing children to spend most of their time indoors, resulting in a lack of time spent interacting in natural spaces and a lack of freedom experienced by today's children regarding outdoor play and activity (Matthews, 2015). *Last Child in the Woods* by Richard Louv (2005) is likely the most well-known work on the theory of nature deficit disorder in children. Louv's work highlights that within the span of only a few decades children's relationship to nature has drastically changed. Once a place where children ran freely, nature is now something children are disconnected from. Children are aware of the global threats to nature but their intimacy with nature has faded (Louv, 2005, p 1). For Louv that is the exact opposite of his childhood. As a boy he was unaware that the woods he

played in are ecologically connected to any other woods, no one talked about global warming or other environmental problems and he spent a great deal of time playing in the woods (Louv, 2005, p 1; Riney-Kehrberg, 2014, p iii).

Lack of nature for many of today's children creates challenges for eco-conscious parents who want their children to be more involved in nature since it is no longer normal to be so. Western children are increasingly growing up mainly indoors and with little access to nature (Almon, 2006, p 59; Louv, 2005, p 1; Riney-Kehrberg, 2014, p 9) which creates a problem for eco-conscious parents who are forced to make attempts outside of their community's normal functions in order to give their children access to the natural world. They may also find that travelling to get to nature creates a tension for sustainability. Some eco-conscious parents for example, many find they have to drive to get to a natural setting because there is a lack of it in their urban neighbourhood – thereby burning fossil fuels to get there. Others that live in rural settings may have the opposite ecological tension. They may have a lot of nature in their home life, but have to drive their children to amenities, child care, school, relatives and any other great number of things that allow them to engage with modern society. Many eco-conscious parents also rely on their city's infrastructures. In Waterloo Region, for example, where the parents I interviewed reside, there are very few eco-friendly homes. In fact, none of the parents interviewed have sustainable energy source in their homes as their main source of energy. It just isn't the Canadian norm or an affordable option for many. This means that while a parent may be eco-conscious and want to limit their ecological footprint they are met with competing and contradictory circumstances that make living sustainably difficult. This includes cultural norms, location infrastructure, budget constraints and access to eco-friendly alternatives in the local grocery store.

The main point made by Louv is that how we raise our children outside of nature will eventually come to shape the conditions of our homes, cities and the future of our daily lives. (Louv, 2005, p 3). Given that our institutions, cultural attitudes and the way we build our homes/urban spaces associate nature with doom the outcome of our children's long term relationship with nature will be precarious at best (Louv, 2005, p 2-3). Louve points out that this is particularly sad because nature can offer a place of healing for children, especially for those living in destructive families or communities (Louv, 2005, p 7). This healing comes from doing something in nature and not from being a mere spectator, as many of us have become (Louv, 2005, p 15). Spectatorship with nature has also resulted in a hyper intellectualized perception of other animals (Louv, 2005, p 23). Globally and throughout all cultures, children have had opportunity to see the many similarities between humans and animals, writes Louv. These similarities are still viewed, but now they are viewed in a different, much more intellectualized manner (Louv, 2005, p 23). We now viewed nature based on science, rather than personal interaction, myth or religion (Louv, 2005, p 23). This hyper intellectualized perception of other animals has resulted in an increase in fear towards nature, restrictions on children's outdoor play and more efforts are implemented to protect humans (especially children) from nature (Louv, 2005, p 29). Children themselves may start to develop a fear of nature, associating it with apocalypse instead of excitement and the joy of exploration (Louv, 2005, p 134) and parents have the problem of their children no longer being free outdoors.

Jane Jacobs (1961) wrote that streets and parks are also full of clues and keys to the ways that a society is run. Vehicles are a poignant and tangible example of this. While Jacobs concedes that we cannot blame automobiles for everything, much of our city infrastructure is concerned with automobiles including the creation of parking lots, traffic arteries, drive-through

and gas stations (Jacobs, 1961, p 440). Parents who are hoping to limit their ecological impact by not driving may find this to be no easy task with residents, shopping malls, schools and places of work being spaced far away from one another, making driving a social norm and logistical imperative (Jacobs, 1961, p 440). Without a vehicle a person is not a fully functioning citizen. Further to that poor land-use planning has limited nature where children live (Louv, 2005, p 30), creating a nature-less experience for many modern children.

It is no accident then that eco-conscious parents may find attempting to increase nature-exposure and decrease media consumption for their children very challenging. As of 1997, children spent five times more time shopping than playing outdoors (Schor, 2004, p 31) and in a study from 1999 by the Kaiser Family Foundation it was revealed that just under thirty percent of children, aged eight to thirteen, watched more than five hours per day of television (Schor, 2004, p 33). It is no wonder with all the targeted advertising, shopping and lack of outdoor activity that nearly two-thirds of American parents have reported that their children are defining their self-worth on their consumer behaviour. The self-esteem focus is on what they wear, rather than what they do (Schor, 2004, p 37). As Erich Fromm ascertained, "the very essence of being is having" in a society where when one owns nothing, they are valued as nothing (Fromm, 1976, p 15).

### **2.3 More Is Not Better: *tensions for parents in a consuming society***

"There is probably no more pervasive and dangerous myth on our society than the materialist assumption that "more is better"" (Colman, 2006, p 164).

Richins and Dawson observed that materialism could be broken down into three elements from what consistently emerged in their review of both theoretical and lay perceptions of materialism. One of the elements is the acquisition as the pursuit of happiness (Flouri, 2007, p 168; Fromm, 1976, p 2; Richins and Dawson, 1992). Yet, many people including writer for The Guardian, Madeleine Somerville have pointed out that our obsession with the accumulation of things so that we are valuable to society and to others is not actually making anyone happier. Instead, people are at a loss with how to organize, store and ultimately pay for their stuff (Somerville, 2015). In 2007, the UCLA Newsroom published an article by Meg Sullivan which discusses families in L.A being burdened with too much stuff. Americans are "trapped in an energy-draining, work-and-spend cycle" (Sullivan, 2007) and no longer, Sullivan argues is the idyllic image of Southern Californian life accurate (Sullivan, 2007). Instead, garages and homes are crammed with stuff, then abandoned by people who are too busy working to pay for their possessions to actually enjoy them.

Sullivan's article titled, *L.A. Families Burdened with too Much Stuff* is based on the data gathered by UCLA researchers at the Center for the Everyday Lives of Families. Their research revealed that most families seldom spent time in their yards, their children rarely play outside and no one can fit in their garages because they are too full of clutter (Sullivan, 2007). Moreover, instead of reporting space in their homes, just as in the Somerville article, approximately 75% of Los Angeles homeowners report a lack-of-storage-crisis. Parents in industrial societies are often finding themselves battling the accumulation of things at the cost of their financial freedom. The same work-and-spend-cycle can be said for Canadians. On December 3rd, 2014, Global News released an article by Consumer Affairs Reporter, Jamie Sturgeon which quotes Regina Malina, the Senior Director of Equifax in saying that the debt levels of Canadians now exceeds the debt

levels of Americans (Sturgeon, 2014). The manipulating of people's desires and pushing them to consume to quench these desires has only buried people in consumer debt. Approximately one and a half million households declare bankruptcy every year in the USA, yet over-all parents are working longer hours than any other industrialized country (Schor, 2004, p 9).

## **2.4 Toxins & Pollution: *trashing the home of our children and future generations***

Research shows that healthy children and a healthy environment are connected in every possible way. As biologist Sandra Steingraber points out, other than the 23 chromosomes that are given to a child from their parents, the rest of a child's body is made up of rearranged molecules from the air, food and water. Children are quite literally "the jet stream, the global food web, and the water cycle. Their lungs absorb oxygen provided to them by oceans of plankton and valleys of rainforests...Egg yolk, green beans, and peanut butter become their heart muscles, nerve fibres and fingernails" (Steingraber, 2006, p 108). The environmental crisis is thus a very real crisis that exists within each of us. Whatever is existing within the environment, exists within the world's children and our own bodies. This sadly includes hundreds of industrial pollutants (Steingraber, 2006, p 108-109).

The effects of our chemical dependency are resulting in the emergence of new diseases and destruction of eco-systems (UNEP, 2002, p 21-22). Biomonitoring in human tissue and fluids of industrial chemicals has revealed that every human on earth carries a "body burden" (Thornton, et al., 2002, p 315). All of the world's children, in varying degrees have been exposed to the world's industrial toxins. The chemical industry grew after World War II and are now the basic building blocks of our consumer industry, with chemicals found in every home in the

United States and beyond (Thornton, et al., 2002, p 315). The Environmental Protection Agency has more than 70,000 registered chemicals with 15,000 of them producing more than 10,000 pounds per year and up to 4,000 are produced in volumes of over one million pounds per year (Landrigan, 2006, p 144; Thornton, et al., 2002, p 315). This has also been going on for some years now and creates anxieties and tension for eco-conscious parents who must work to reduce or prevent toxic exposures to their children.

While working on this thesis, Beijing was issued its first red alert for smog. Christopher Bodeen from The Canadian Press broke the story, saying that a red alert is the most serious in a four-tier warning system adopted not more than a year before, causing restriction on factories, schools to shut their doors and keeping half of the vehicles off the road (Bodeen, 2015). This alert came with an on-line notice issued from the Beijing Municipal Environmental Protection Bureau stating that the alert was meant to "protect public health and reduce levels of heavy air pollution" (Bodeen, 2015). In fact, as Bodeen goes on to explain Beijing's levels of poisonous particles are close to 300 micrograms per cubic meter (reading of PM2.5 and expected to rise), this is nothing short of terrifying when the World Health Organization "designated the safe levels for the tiny, poisonous particles at 25 micrograms per cubic meter", well below current levels (Bodeen, 2015). What we see here is that the problems that parents face are related to what is wrong with other social-ecological systems such as air or water pollution, of which we need real political solutions (Steingraber, 2006, p 113).

The chemicals people cite often as causing the most fear for parents are bisphenol A (BPA) and phthalates, both used in baby bottles (Walsh, 2010, p 44). It's no wonder then that it's been reported that eco-minded parents are overwhelmed by regularly-released frightening reports and studies about the levels of toxins in their children's items (Belli, 2007). Brita Belli, author of

*Toxic World, For Eco-Conscious Parents, Life is Full of Choices* urges parents to realize that we need to look at both the affects of these toxins on our children and the toll on the environment.

Warning parents has become commonplace. Belli also points out that the average baby goes through approximately 8,000 diapers before becoming potty trained, not to mention wipes, baby food jars, plastic wipes containers, diaper bags, teething rings and much more, which are all often toxic to the consumer, causing alarms and anxieties for parents (Belli, 2007). To add to this problem, many items we purchase for our children are taxing to the environment and often go unused anyway. Belli admits to not using most of what she was given for her daughter with the play pen being a prime example for her of an unused consumer good (Belli, 2007).

Devastatingly, toxins are a very real threat to children, as illustrated in this quote from biologist Sandra Steingraber;

"A recent study of umbilical cord blood, collected by the Red Cross from 10 newborns and analyzed in two different laboratories, revealed the presence of pesticides, stain removers, wood preservatives, heavy metals, and industrial lubricants, as well as the wastes from burning coal, garbage, and gasoline. Of the 287 chemicals detected in the umbilical cord blood of these infants, 180 were suspected carcinogens, 217 were toxic to the brain and nervous system, and 208 have been linked to abnormal development and birth defects in lab animals."

(Steingraber, 2006, p 109)

The list of these chemicals is long and includes known endocrine disrupting phthalates used as plastic softeners in products such as pacifiers and baby bottles nipples. It also includes formaldehyde (a carcinogen), used in wood furniture and carpets and other hormone-disrupting,

brain-damaging chemicals to which children are routinely exposed. (Landrigan, 2006, p 144; Steingraber, 2011, p xv). Environmental Defence Canada released a report in 2013 that tested for the presence of 310 industrial chemical in the cord blood of three newborns in Canada. 137 different chemicals, including DDT, flame retardants and PCBs were found (Lourie and Smith, 2013, p 2). This study concluded that Canadian babies are born "pre-polluted" (Lourie & Smith, 2013, p 2). What is also disturbing is how little these chemicals have been tested, with only 43 percent of these high volume production chemicals being *minimally* tested for toxicity and fewer than 20 percent have been tested specifically for their ability to disrupt fetal and infant development (Landrigan, 2006, p 144). The solution here is to stop using these industrial chemicals in the first place on the grounds that they drive a wasteful-consumer system that is unsustainable and toxic to the world's children.

Since WWII, use of industrial chemicals has exponentially grown. The United States of America generates or imports approximately 42 billion pounds (19 billion kg) of them per day (Walsh, 2010, p 44). This is not the pollution that comes to mind when we think of smoke stacks, instead, they are molecules that make modern life possible, promising unbreakable baby bottles and flat screen televisions (Walsh, 2010, p 44). These chemicals find their way out of products and into the environment and into living organisms, like children. These toxic chemicals have names that are not recognizable to us, but what is recognizable are the consumer products that they come to us in. Shower curtains, baby products and that new car smell are just a few recognizable ways that these chemicals are sold to us and penetrate our daily lives, creating tensions for parents who are aware of these poisons, but who still have to live in modern society (Lourie & Smith, 2013; Steingraber, 2011, p 11). Regardless of an eco-parent's desires for more natural environments, there are industrial pollutants in almost every aspect of our children's lives,

found in homes, schools, playgrounds and the air they breathe. (Jacobson et al., 1894, p 523; Landigan, 2006, p, 143; Lourie and Smith, 2013; Steingraber, 2011, p 11; Thornton, 2002, p 319). Unfortunately, young children are especially vulnerable to pollutants and they also end up being exposed to these toxins more than adults for a number of reasons, the main being that they are smaller (breathing in carpets and other things lower to the ground), they put items in their mouths (ingesting toxins through touch or from chewing on plastic toys) and pound-for-pound they ingest more food, water and air than adults (ATSDR, 2002; EPA, 2015; Landigan, 2006, p 143; Landigan & Carlson, 1995, p 34). This puts eco-conscious parents in a state of stress when they are attempting to limit potentially harmful exposures from everyday items their children comes into contact with. Everything from snacks at daycare to floor cleaners at friend's houses become a potential point of tension that must be navigated.

The city of Seattle in 2003 conducted a study that measured the pesticide amount in preschool children, whose urine contained nine times more organophosphate pesticide residue than children on organic diets (Steingraber, 2006, p 112). Organophosphate pesticide are widely used in agriculture and while few studies exist on their adverse effects on humans, animal studies advise that they are neurodevelopment toxicants even in low dosages (Eskenazi et al., 2007). Some researchers are attempting to study the affects of pesticides and other chemicals on children. Brenda Eskenazie, Amy Marks, Asa Bradman and their colleagues in their work *titled Organophosphates Pesticide Exposure and Neurodevelopment in Young Mexican-American Children* from 2007 highlight the staggering numbers of children exposed to known toxins. They cite a study from 1998 by Guillette et al., that compared seventeen children living where no pesticides are used to thirty-three Mexican children aged four and five living in a valley where organochlorines and other pesticides were routinely used. They found that the thirty-three

Mexican children who were exposed to pesticides had lower performance abilities, decreased gross-motor skills, decreased eye-hand coordination and delayed recall (Eskenazi, et al., 2007). But how can these chemicals be allowed if they are harming children? Global exposure to toxins are ever increasing because chemicals are perceived as essential to development (UNEP, 2002, p 21-22). The global chemical industry has grown exponentially and is expected to grow over the coming decades (UNEP, 2002, p 21-22). This is the opposite of thirty years ago, when chemicals were perceived as dangerous, especially in relation to our food chain (UNEP, 2002, p 21-22). Only 200 of more than 80,000 synthetic chemicals used in the United States as of 2011 were tested under the Toxic Substances Control Act of 1976, with absolutely none of them tested for their effects on infant or child development (Steingraber, 2011, p 28).

Some attempts have begun to be made to address the problem of chemical exposure in children. In 2000, the U.S. Congress authorised the National Children's Study, with plans to measure environmental exposure of 100,000 United States children who will be followed through conception to age 21 and will look at various health outcomes including cancer, asthma, learning disabilities, autism and early puberty. Sadly, subject for this study were only beginning to be recruited in 2009 with the results coming out long after today's children are no longer children (Steingraber, 2011, p 29). Too little too late? Parents of today's children need protection now and this study says nothing about stopping the continual use and abuse of these substances over the period of this study. Furthermore, consumers are driving the problems caused by chemicals in the environment by using the products that contain them, which includes parents as consumers (Lourie and Smith, 2013, p 10). The National Children's Study and others are indeed necessary, but it appears to many parents that their children are test subjects in a toxic nightmare, all the while large corporations go on polluting the air, water, food and the bodies of children. People

also continue to consume. These toxic items of modernity has led Sandra Steingraber to state that parents cannot easily protect their children from environmental toxicants, leaving an eco-conscious parent to wonder whether it is better for them to know the evidence of harm to their children or to ignore it altogether, since the burden of knowing is stressful and painful. Furthermore, in order to avoid these toxins, eco-conscious parents are forced into radical non-consumption and social/economic non-participation.

## **2.5 Child Honouring**

I can not talk about environment and parenting without also discussing the general state of the world's children. In December 2004, UNICEF published *Childhood Under Threat*, which states that over half of the world's children are at risk, numbering more than a billion. These reasons are social-ecological and stretch from poverty, disease (most preventable), child sex trade/sexual violence, mental illness, obesity, physical violence including war, climate change, forced child labour and toxic overload (Olfman, 2006, p xi). The threats to children are gut-wrenching and extreme, including that half of the world's children are starving, dying of a preventable disease or being exploited as soldiers or victims of sexual exploitation. Others suffer from psychiatric drugs, obesity, or over-media consumption and all of the world's children are exposed to toxic chemical compounds to some degree (Olfman, 2006, p 30). Sometimes it is a real shock to people to realise that children in developed countries are also at risk. As seen in the work of Paulo Wangoola, African elites assume that the condition of children in the West are to be emulated, but children's welfare in the west is in danger from other reasons such as overload of unhealthy food, television games/toys, toxic products (found in the home or public

environments) and whatever else makes modern life possible that may have a negative impact on children (Wangoola, 2006, p 118). To hit this home even further, the United Nations reported that yearly, 40 million children globally under the age of fifteen are neglected or abused, with these atrocities also taking place in the west (Eisler, 2006, p 50).

Raffi Cavoukian, recipient of the Order of Canada and the United Nation's Earth Achievement Award is an ecology advocate and author and founder of *Child Honouring*, an organization, children's advocacy network, the title of his collaborative book and a new paradigm/concept. Raffi's co-edited book titled *Child Honouring: How to turn this world around* has contributors such the Dalai Lama, Barbara Kingsolver and Ray Anderson. This work explores many important areas as it pertains to children and the sustainability of our planet, including the interconnectivity between sustaining our planet for generations to come and ending the global threats to children. Cavoukian is demanding that we end threats to children and begin to make environmental, social and political decisions through the lens of what is best for them. Cavoukian's concept of *Child Honouring*, is therefore a call for a new world view from the perspective of the child that must be instilled in a ubiquitous manner throughout society. This world view and theory argues that we must make vital decisions through the lens of what is best for children and this must be done on all levels of society including the economy, environment, policy and education (Olfman, 2006, p xii). Ending threats to children is intrinsically linked to well-being and sustainability which is why *Child Honouring* is also focused on ending child exploitation in its many forms. Children, as this concept states must be taken from the bondage of the exploitative industrial machine that infiltrates society and honoured as the seeds of the future. The Dalai Lama echoes this sentiment when he writes the following in the forward of *Child Honouring*:

"I entirely agree with Raffi Cavoukian that children everywhere are like the seeds of the future of our world. By looking after them well, giving them a sound education, and instilling positive values in them, we will ensure a more harmonious, peaceful, and productive future for us all." (The Dalai Lama, 2006)

The Dalai Lama's perspective is supported by strong evidence. We know that when women and children have protected rights within a society and are treated fairly, nations thrive. A study of 89 nations by the Center for Partnership Studies shows that the status of women and children is a better indicator of general quality of life than a nation's wealth (Eisler, 2006, p 48). Director of the Center for Partnership Studies, Riane Eisler gives the example that France and Kuwait have the same GDPs, yet the quality of life indicators in France are much higher than in Kuwait where the statue of women is lower, infant mortality is also twice as high there (Eisler, 2006, p 48). What we find is that caring, healthy and socially equitable communities produce happier people and more caring, healthy and responsible children (Williams, 2006, p 88).

## **2.6 Tough Conversation: *sharing the bad news with our children***

While sewing her son a polar bear costume for Halloween, biologist & ecologist Sandra Steingraber did so with the knowledge that the costume might outlast the species (Steingraber, 2011). In her book titled, *Raising Elijah: Protecting Our Children in the Age of Environmental Crisis* she states that no other generation of mothers before her time had to bear such knowledge or struggle with how to share this terrible news with their children. In *the Ecology of Commerce: A Declaration of Sustainability* by Paul Hawken, he writes that if you are not pessimistic about the environment then you do not understand the data (Hawken, 2010, p xxi). For parents who do

understand the data there is a clear tension: teaching children about nature while managing the degree of their knowledge of what it happening to it. How parents choose to navigate the environmental truth with their children is ultimately up to them.

Many parents are largely unprepared as this is a new conversation. For biologist Sandra Steingraber, motherhood and her life as an environmentalist must intentionally occupy two spheres. While being a mother informs her work and gives her the passion to keep going in order to do better science, she states that her work does not inform her children on purpose. What she is saying here is that, like any difficult conversation, it needs to be age appropriate. Often times she has found herself hiding her environmental research from them to protect them. Specifically, she recalls hiding her work on polar bears from her son, which revealed they are among the most polluted mammals on earth due to living in the Arctic (the final landing place for persistent organic pollutants plus they eat high on the food chain) (Steingraber, 2006, p 109). Although her research is often bleak, like the fate of the polar bear, her focus for her children is to be positive about nature. Instead of filling them with fear, she plays with them in nature, instilling love for the natural world while giving them an eco-education. In her own words about her experiences with her daughter, "when Faith and I go searching for salamanders in the creek bed, we don't talk about the ability of the weed-killer atrazine to deform amphibian larvae at levels legally allowed in drinking water" (Steingraber, 2006, p 109). No, indeed they just enjoy the experience because it is essential that grown-ups do not burden children with the current destruction of nature or a theoretical view of it, instead children need to have time in nature and be shown how to feel comfortable in the outdoors. After which point, they will more likely want to care for the earth as adults having learned in childhood to love the planet and its diversity (Almon, 2006, p 59).

Joanne Macy and Chris Johnstone have coined the term *Active Hope*. It is a term that is attempting to acknowledge the fact that climate change confronts us with realities that are extremely painful to face, but we must approach the discussion from a place that “strengthens us and deepens our aliveness” (Macy and Johnstone, 2012, p 1). Everyone is also given a chance to choose our response to the negative climate situation we face (Macy and Johnstone, 2012, p 1). Active Hope is about being an active participant in bringing about the goodness in the world we hope for, with Active Hope being a process and something we do like gardening, rather than something we acquire (Macy and Johnstone, 2012, p 3). Macy & Johnstone argue that everyone has a contribution to make to the world and parents can engage their children in activities that promote hope. The purpose of their book is to call people to use what they can to heal the world and offer their best contribution to what is a multifaceted environmental crisis. Further to that they argue that when we understand that there is both an environmental emergency and ways we can contribute to solving it, a switch of purpose gets turned on and we discover personal strengths we did not realize we had (Macy and Johnstone, 2012, p 3). The focus on solutions is what we can share with our children. Potentially, a parent’s focus on what they can do to help the environment for their children can become their hero project, which if we follow Viktor Frankl’s logic, would result in a de-centering of oneself which is the opposite of a narcissistic existence and would likely result also in a natural inclination towards increased happiness as a result of finding a purpose to one’s life (Klingberg, 2016). Communities could derive self-esteem from mortality projects based in carbon neutrality which might mobilize ideological change thereby offering our greatest hope to transform away from a dependency on fossil fuels and a wasteful economy (Dickinson, 2009, p 1) that threatens the sustainability of the world’s children and breathes fear into environmentally aware parents.

## **Chapter 3. Results and Discussion**

### **3.1 Summary of Key Findings**

In the following chapter, the data collected from the survey and interviews is discussed. First, the demographic information of all the respondents is described. Following the demographic information, the key findings from the 55 questions asked to participants from 20 interviews and 54 surveys are reviewed to identify the tensions that these eco-conscious parents are experiencing between the imperatives of sustainability and leading a modern life with children. The responses were categorized in broad groups: eco-worry and eco-guilt, barriers to sustainability, household consumption items, waste, food provisioning, energy/transportation and tensions. The many points from each category are woven together as they are often interconnected and difficult to separate. From these broad groups we begin to see a picture filled with trade-offs and negotiations. We also see that eco-conscious parents operate within a sizeable spectrum, each making choices that both support and undermine sustainability in a variety of ways and to varying degrees. In addition to tensions, there were a number of positive efforts expressed in the data from eco-conscious parents that are sustainable and admirable. As seen, many are successfully managing waste by relying on a green bin, composting and recycling while others have started environmental initiatives in their communities. As a result, many eco-conscious parents are making successful strides towards sustainability even though the path they are forging is often fraught with tension and contradiction. Unfortunately, from both the literature and from eco-conscious parents surveyed and interviewed, we also see that the things that make parenting easier and which function as part of our communal interactions (gift-giving,

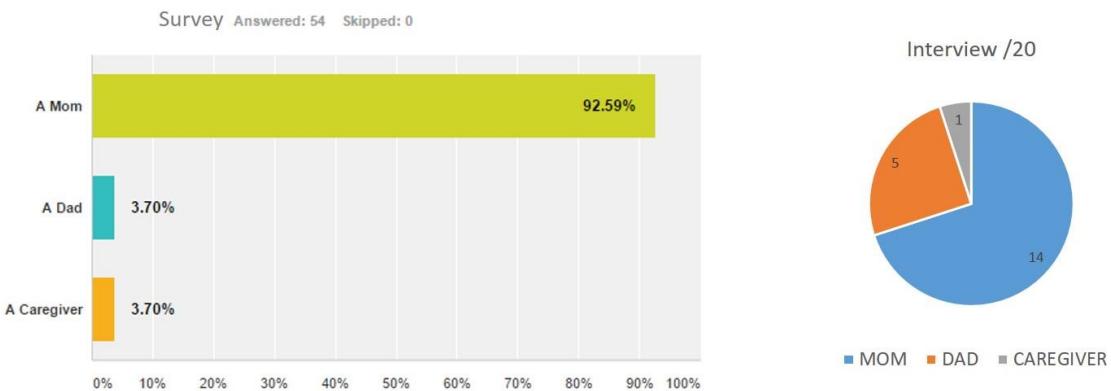
food sharing, transportation to activities, etc.) are undermining our children's ability to survive long-term. The data also supports the literature when it shows that we are conditioned to consume and consumer items (like plastic food containers) are pervasive in most eco-conscious parent's home.

Motivations for making certain sustainable choices over others is far more complex than can be captured in a survey or even in an interview. Even though this is the case, the data collected does reveal that there are very real tensions parents experience on a daily basis. Eco-conscious parents also desire to have a sustainable planet for their children and are very aware of the ecological crisis their children are faced with, yet the data reveals they still undermine sustainability in a variety of complex ways. Since eco-conscious parents want to be sustainable but are repeatedly thwarted for a variety of reasons, guilt is often the result. This guilt and contradiction of sustainability becomes especially clear when we see that eco-conscious parents are still consumers that are living within a larger society of which they either participate or have to work hard to opt out of. Opting out can often come at a social cost, to the parent as well as to the child.

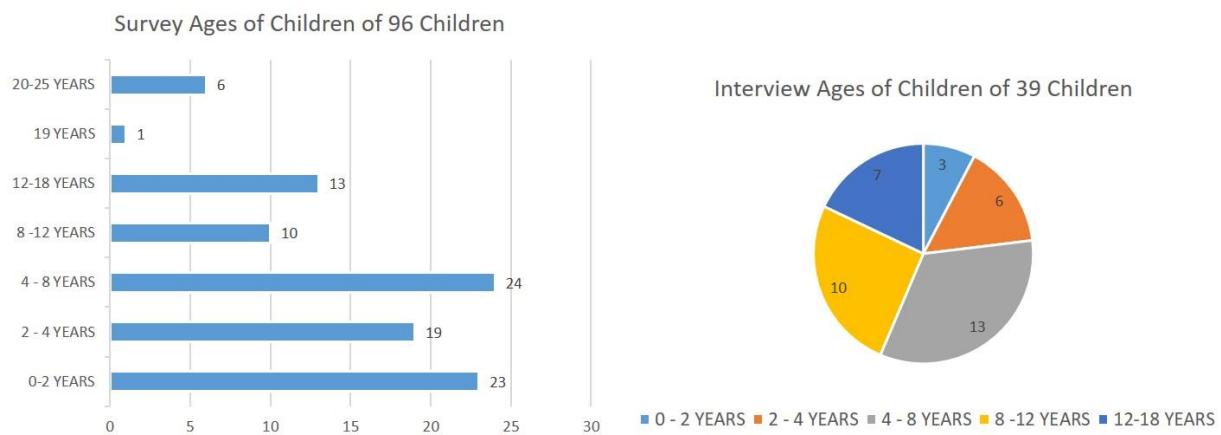
### **3.2 Demographics**

A total of 20 interviews were conducted from April 2016 to August 2016. This includes 14 moms, 5 dads and 1 caregiver. 54 people took the survey through Survey Money from July 2016 to August, 2016. Of the 54 surveys, 92.59% (50/52) were completed by moms, 3.70% dads (2/54) and 3.70% (2/54) identified as being caregivers. The majority of the surveys were completed in their entirety. The average age of survey participants is 39.13, ranging from 22 to

60 years of age. The average age of interview participants is 38.6, ranging from age 28 to 54 years of age. The majority of participants in both the survey and the interviews are mothers. This creates a draw back as fathers and caregivers are under represented in this study.



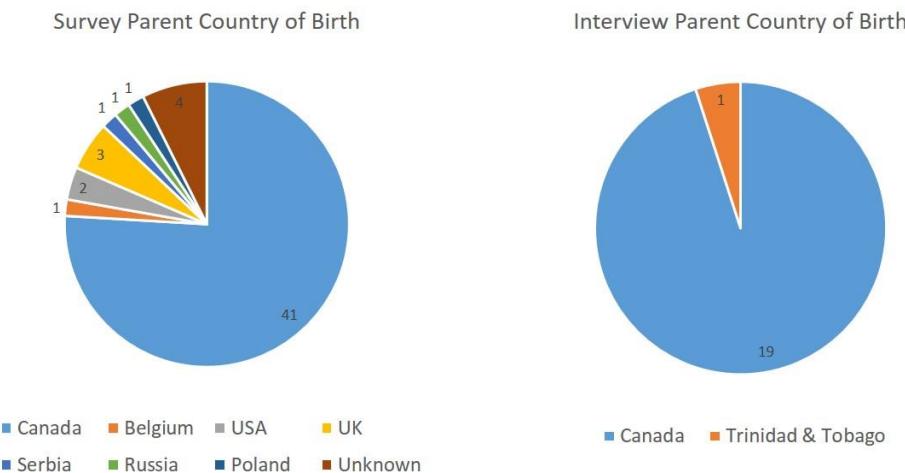
**Figure 1. Survey and Interview Number of Moms/Dads/Caregivers**



**Figure 2. Survey & Interview Ages of Children**

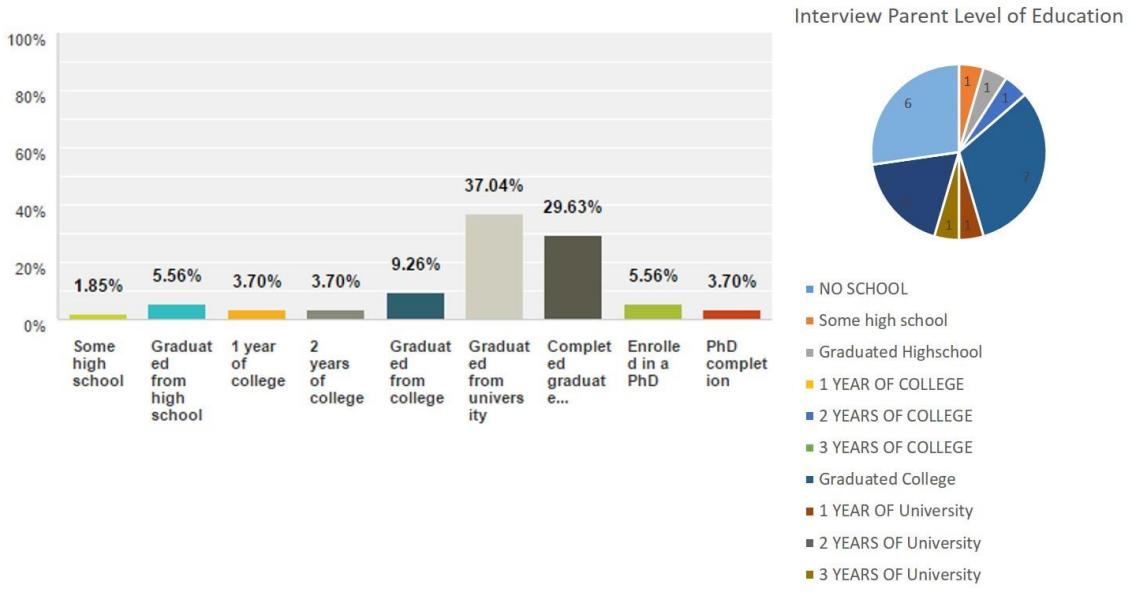
Eco-conscious parents who participated in the survey care or have cared for a total of 96 children. 6 were over 20 years of age with all being under 25 years of age. 79.16% (76/96) are

under the age of 12 years old. Participants in the interview care for 39 children all under 18 years of age with the majority (13/39) between the ages of 4-8 years of age.



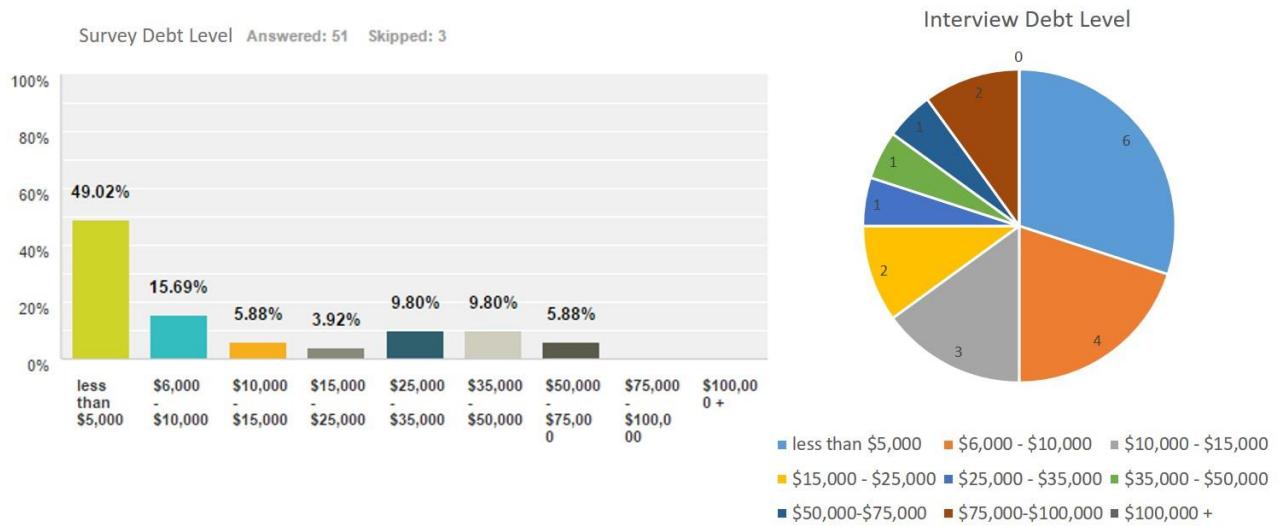
**Figure 3. Survey and Interview - Parent Country of Birth**

75.92% (41/54) of parents who took part in the survey are born in Canada. This creates a bias within the sample as it underrepresents parents born outside of Canada. The next largest birth origins are unknown 7.40% (4/54). 5.55% (3/54) parents were born in the UK, 3.70% (2/54) in the US, 1.85% (1/54) in Belgium, 1.85% (1/54) in Serbia, 1.85% (1/54) in Russia and 1.85% (1/54) in Poland. All parents but one who were interviewed are born in Canada. One parent interviewed was born in Trinidad & Tobago.



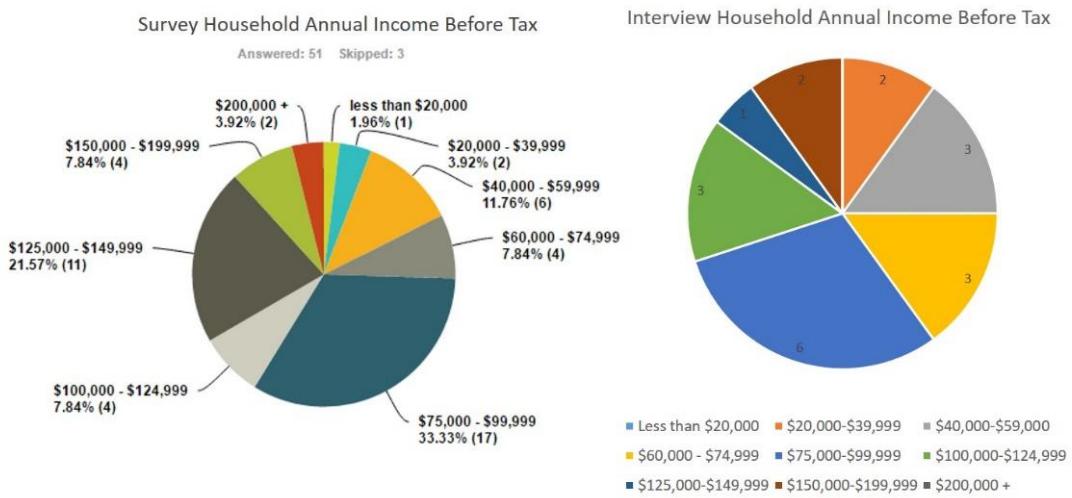
**Figure 4. Survey and Interview Parent Level of Education**

Survey participants have high levels of education. This includes graduated from university with an undergraduate degree (37.04%), graduated from a Masters program (29.63%), enrolled in a PhD (5.56%) and completed a PhD (3.70%). Another 9.26% are college graduates and 7.4% have one year or more of college, making 92.59% of those surveyed surpassing a high school level education. Those interviewed were also highly educated with the majority 90% (18/20) surpassing a high school education. 35% (7/20) have graduated college, 30% (6/20) have graduated from a Masters program and 20% (4/20) have graduated from a university.



**Figure 5. Survey & Interview Debt Level**

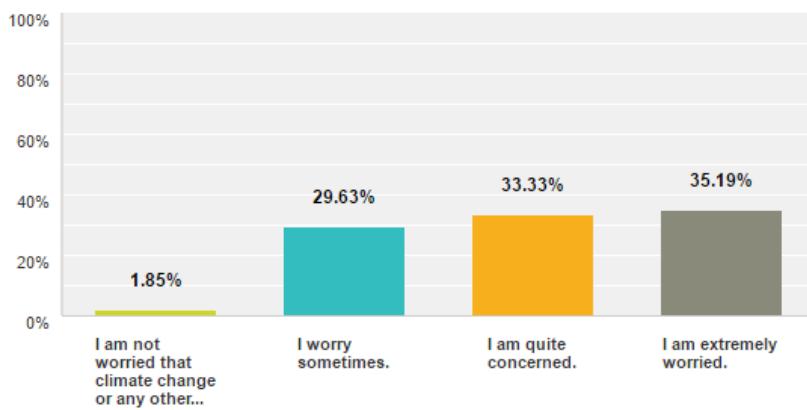
The majority of people surveyed have low debt with 49.02% having less than \$5,000 in consumer debt. The same is true for the interviews with most people having less than \$15,000 in consumer debt. However, in an interview one mom pointed out that while they had what appeared to be no debt it was because they rolled their consumer debt and house renovation costs into their mortgage. They went from having 9 years left on their mortgage to refinancing for another 25 years. She was unhappy about it but it meant that her consumer debt stress was reduced (Interview #12).



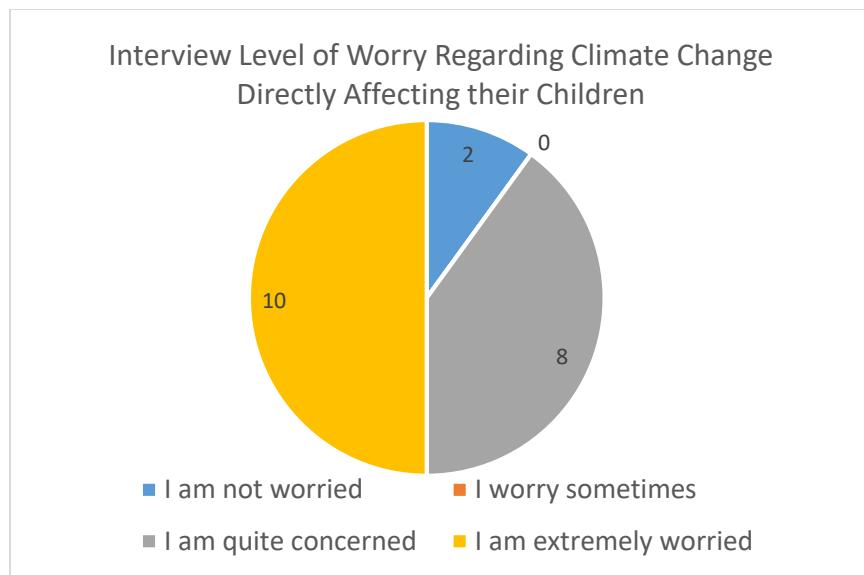
**Figure 6. Survey and Interview Household Annual Income before Tax**

In both the interviews and the survey the majority of people are in a high income bracket. The majority of people surveyed (31.38%, 17/54) make between \$75,000 and \$99,000. This income bracket was also the most popular among interviewees (30%, 6/20).

### 3.3 Environmental Awareness and Climate Change Worry for Eco-Conscious Parents



**Figure 7. Survey Level of Worry Regarding Climate Change Directly Affecting their Children**



**Figure 8. Interview Level of Worry Regarding Climate Change Directly Affecting their Children**

All of parents interviewed and surveyed said that they are aware of environmental issues such as global warming, pollution, chemicals in products and food and biodiversity loss. This knowledge may be the most defining characteristic about what an eco-conscious parent is. It is also the only question in both the survey and interviews that received 100% positive response. Given this knowledge it is unsurprising that the data reveals that eco-conscious parents both surveyed and interviewed have a high degree of worry regarding the environmental crisis effecting their children. Interestingly, in the interviews even when an eco-conscious parent rated low regarding worry they tended to do so because they were consciously choosing not to worry about it. During the interviews, even when a parent said they were not worried, parents in the interview still admitted to a belief that climate change will effect their child. “I think I try not to worry about it. I think it will effect her, yes” (Interview #1). Other parents in the interviews who

rated low said that they consciously choose not to worry and/or climate change just falls off the radar due to life's pressures.

**Interview #6:** “I think I worry about it less now than I did before. I worry about other things more and am less focused on it than I was before [having kids]. This is just because I can't worry about everything and I've had to introduce other worries in my life. I have less time to worry about everything and I feel like I kind of have to pick a cause. You can't spread yourself too thin...It's a lot right now. I am also trying to help my husband's business grow. Climate change falls off the radar. I feel bad for saying it. It's something I have in the back of my mind.”

Some parents on the extreme end of worry admitted to being worried to the point of wondering why they had kids in the first place, only to burden them with an environmental crisis. “I'm worried to the point of where I wonder, why did I have kids?” (Interview #5) Even with this feeling this interviewee still admitted to not always thinking about the environment since “there are [still] days that are so busy and stressed, like with three hour doctor appointments and planning work trips that I don't have time to think about the environment” (Interview #5). This is also in-keeping with the literature, such as the work of Becker which reveals our inclination to suppress fears, especially fears regarding death or crisis (Becker, 1973, p 29). When eco-conscious parents do think about climate change they are often distressed. One mom said, “I think climate change will effect my child, look at the bees, we are going to lose our pollinators. The government is too slow to react...Mentality is that there is nothing wrong. People just want to put blinders on. It's a scary scenario” (Interview # 8). Eco-conscious parents are sometimes (or much of the time depending on where they land on a spectrum) worried about climate change, but as seen in the data they are not always acting when they should while they are

simultaneously also often not able to act when they make an attempt towards sustainability. This often results in frustration, guilt or a feeling of being powerless to stop what is coming. Guilt is explored specifically in section 4.3 below and frustration and feeling powerless is woven throughout this chapter within the words of those interviewed.

### **3.4 Eco-Guilt**

Tensions are created from a lack of ability to make changes towards sustainability. Guilt comes from purchases and/or non-ecofriendly activities that are connected to the conveniences of modern life. 76.47% surveyed said that they feel guilty when they do not make an environmentally-friendly choice and those interviewed that did not say they felt guilt tended to have consciously dismissed the guilt.

**Interview Subject #5:** “The guilt comes from a thing that is bad for the environment but you really had to buy it. It's hard.”

When given the opportunity to discuss guilt in the interviews it was clear that many of these parents were feeling guilty not just for their purchases, but overall for their generation or guilty about having had a child in the first place both due to potentially adding to the environmental problem and for making their innocent children inheritors of the ecological crisis. This is perhaps not a surprising response given the literature which highlighted that people are consuming more, not less (Dauvergne, 2008, p 4) resulting in the degradation of ecosystem services (Chapin, et al., 2009, p 241; Hensen et al., 2016, p 3761).

**Interview #11:** “I feel a lot of guilt, it's sad because to them things will be normal - like dirty water. It's sad that that is normal and they won't know what it should be.”

**Interview #10:** “As a parent it's an enormous feeling of guilt, not only for my generation and the fact that we haven't effected any change but also because by having had a child I am passing the burden of that problem, that bleak future onto my child who now has to solve it or now make the problem even worse. How quickly this has happened! We could drink from a stream when I was a kid. On a hike we'd fill our water bottles up from any stream and now I wouldn't dare. My child is being raised in a very different environment than even I was.”

The interviews revealed that even those that do not feel guilty still battle with guilt. They tended to have to consciously dismiss the guilt or they were not feeling guilt at the moment because they were promising themselves that they would be sustainable in the future, a conscious mental trade with themselves to avoid tension.

**Interview #1:** “I try not to feel super guilty about it ‘cause that is no fun. I would say that I am making a conscious effort not to feel guilty.”

**Interview #6:** “I know what I can do for the environment, but I just don't. Not right now anyway. I guess I don't feel as guilty because I am just in a stage that is temporary. I always have hope that I can get back to thinking about that stuff more.”

Some parents felt that they tried to make ethical purchases specifically to avoid guilt but it was fraught with tension.

**Interview #10:** “I don't feel guilty about going to buy a coffee at Starbucks because they are using fair trade coffee beans - so you feel like you are contributing and it's a good thing but when I am done my drink and I have to throw the cup in the garbage I am thinking it defeats the positive thing they are promoting. Why is such a big company with an "environmental" reputation not making something that I can put in the recycling or compost bin? I know it's possible.”

### **3.5 Barriers to Sustainability for the Eco-Conscious Parent**

From the literature we see that guilt and worry does not automatically result in sustainable actions. A 2005 study found that 30% of consumers stated that they would make ethical purchases and only 3% actually did (Futerra, 2005, p 92). The survey and interviews in this thesis support this with many parents experiencing a number of barriers to sustainable living. They want to act sustainably all of the time, but only end up doing it most or even just some of the time. Tension from wanting to do the sustainable thing but being unable to can be directly attributed to barriers. These barriers includes systematic barriers and social barriers.

#### **3.5.0 Systematic Barriers**

Our society is not set up to be sustainable. As an example, 94.34% (50/53 who completed this section of the survey) of those surveyed and 85% (17/20) of those interviewed are reliant on a carbon-powered vehicle. Those that were not reliant on a vehicle had to make conscious life decisions that allowed them to be free from a vehicle most of the time. They also all still owned a vehicle and required it at times. Further, only one of the parents interviewed

drove an electric vehicle which took a lot of effort and extra expense on their part. They were also still occasionally reliant on a gas guzzling caravan for their children's sake.

**Interview #1:** "Location was a priority for my husband's job so that he could bike or walk. People thought we were crazy but we could not imagine driving every single day. It's for environmental reasons, our personal health, our finances (we'd have to have two cars 'cause I want one occasionally for me and my daughter)."

**Interview #15:** "We have an electric car and a Dodge Caravan for camping and moving stuff. This was an intentional choice. We wanted one vehicle and to be a one car family. We looked at every possible thing. Something to put teenagers in, go camping but also be fuel efficient and clean. The only thing we found turned out to be a hoax! So we went with an electric car that we use most of the time and a gas guzzling van for when we need to lug furniture, pull a trailer and go camping. We also have to move hockey bags around and the other option was to get a minivan and that would have been worse. Because our values tell us that most of the time we should be able to get around with a little car, foot or bikes we then spent more money than we wanted to get to the best environmental solution we could but to still live our lives. We have friends who would have just gone with the smart car and then the kids can't go to hockey anymore. I respect that choice completely but we wanted flexibility to do those things and to still live out our environmental ideals. So we spent \$15,000 more than we would have otherwise to live out those ideals and to still live in society and for the kids to have opportunities. I did not want the kids to not go camping or have friends in the car. In the fuel efficient car you just can't. I did not want to place those limitations on the kids. I would on myself but I can't tell my kids they can't play hockey 'cause I told them we don't have a car. I'm

afraid they would disrespect my environmental ideals if I took their opportunity away. And that would be worse because it would threaten their environmental ideals if they saw a downside to being environmental. If they saw the environmental things we do as creating a downside they would maybe not be motivated to work for the environment? I am also having faith that they may have more environmental options and that they won't have to make these kinds of compromises [like my wife and I do] but I have to prime them to make what I think are the right environmental choices."

Reliance on a carbon-powered vehicle is one of the things that most eco-conscious parents in the interviews and survey had in common and is therefore the most poignant example of a tension created for eco-conscious parents by the systematic barriers to sustainability. One father interviewed who works in an environmental role, drives a truck. Arguably, he explained, there was a need for some of the trucks in his department, but not nearly as many as there currently are. He explained that his employer gets trucks at a discounted rate, and they are cheaper to buy than an electric vehicle. His "boss couldn't convince the finance people that it was worth it to go to an electric. [They] get huge deals on pick-up trucks. It is cheaper to do that than to get a small electric" (Interview #2). In addition to being frustrated that his environmental department at work is pushed into making an unfriendly-environmental choice this same father also conveyed his frustration for feeling pushed out of an electric car for his wife.

**Interview #2:** "Sometimes there is no choice depending on the circumstance...it can take two days for them to come and plow. My wife's car always got stuck. You can't get out on our road - so in the end it came down to what is the cheapest 4 wheel-drive that was as fuel efficient as much as possible. So if we are going to get more snow storms because of climate change its bizarre but we need a 4 wheel-drive in the city. The jeep patriot was

the cheapest, fuel efficient and not obnoxiously huge. At least we try to do the research on a more sustainable option.”

Many eco-conscious parents find that often times an eco-friendly option is just not available and overwhelmingly people stated in both interviews and survey that whenever they can make an environmentally friendly choice easily, they do. “If it's available but usually it is not” (Interview #3). Another mom brought up the point of having to go out of her way to get sustainable items and how the lack of affordability is an issue for her. “To get natural things, I also need to make a special effort - usually to just get one thing then I leave with a bunch of other stuff! You know whenever you go to natural stores it's going to run up the bill” (Interview #6).

Another example of structural barriers to sustainability and the tension it breeds is revealed in the interviews regarding eco-conscious parents' use of the Waterloo Region green bin program. Parents who live in apartments were not able to compost because their building does not use the Region's green bin program. This was a source of tension for parents who want to do the environmentally sustainable thing with their food waste but are not able to. In the Waterloo Region where eco-conscious parents in this study were interviewed, apartment buildings that have six or more units are not eligible for the green bin program (Region of Waterloo). This prompted Kitchener Ontario resident and mother Lenore Brooks to write to the Waterloo Region Record urging people to let regional council know that people in apartments want to be included in the green bin program. She states that she tries to be sustainable as a parent by walking her toddler to daycare, using low-energy lights, recycling and using reusable bags at the grocery store, but her efforts are halted when she is forced to throw her organic waste in the garbage because her family lives in an apartment (Brooks, 2013).

**Interview #11:** We're in an apartment and they don't have green bins. Apartments don't have that. I want to make a compost for in my kitchen because it's terrible to throw out food scraps. My garbage is mostly food...The big garbage bin outside the building is bulging and smells. I wonder how much of it is compostable."

Tensions are created from wanting to be sustainable while pressed up against financial barriers that make it impossible. In this study, the biggest example of a systematic barrier can be found in green energy usage and how most eco-conscious parents feel they cannot afford it. When asked about green energy usage, participants expressed that they wanted to have green energy, most often exclaiming, "I wish!" and the like, when asked if they currently use green sources of energy in their homes. One parent stated that "the cost of start-up doesn't encourage the use of green technology. If the cost was affordable I would do it" (Interview #7). Perhaps this also explains the studies showing that ethically-minded consumers almost never actually purchase ethical products (Futerra, 2005, p 92). Decisions to not have green energy were often not made lightly and in some cases were made after considerable effort to procure sustainable energy at home, but the cost was just too much of a barrier. A dad I spoke with had a solar assessment done and eventually decided against doing solar because it would have forced them into a second mortgage. He admitted that they would eventually get the money back overtime but said he and his wife were not comfortable entering into a 20 year line of credit and also felt the timing was off. "Timing not right 'cause we signed a 10 year mortgage a few years ago so it would mean breaking that. It was just too hard. It wasn't 'call up cable and hi I want cable, okay, we'll have someone right there!'" (Interview #2) Interestingly this parent also has a high level of household income between \$125,000 and \$149,000 per year, yet still felt it was out of his reach

financially. This only highlights how impossible it is for parents in lower income brackets to make a switch to solar energy.

Interestingly, some eco-conscious parents managed to get creative with their energy plans, which turned points of tension into opportunity when they found alternatives to solar, wind or GEO-thermal which were cost friendly and still allowed them to make an environmentally positive impact. One mom said she wished her home was run on green energy but that they could not manage it. Instead they got creative and made a greenhouse that runs from insulated water barrels for year round food production.

**Interview #19:** “We wish. Not yet. In the future. Greenhouse yes, we use the heat off the roof that heats the greenhouse. Insulated water barrels heat it in the winter so we can grow all year. It took a few years to build though. Last year it was built and this year it grows”.

**Interview #15:** “We’ve planted trees to provide shade in the summer so we don’t need an air conditioner. We upgraded our ventilation system so we can blow air from the basement upstairs ‘cause it uses much less energy than air conditioning and it works just as well. We re-use grey water. We do it by flushing the toilet with the bath water...We [also] re-routed the washing machine drain to the garden and it waters the plants...We also catch rain water.”

The father mentioned above who would have needed to re-mortgage his home for solar panels also did his research and found that he could get an energy efficient air conditioner and hook that up to solar panels, so instead of going to solar panels on the entire house he managed to focus on one element of his energy needs (Interview #2). Most eco-conscious parents, however, just

wished they were able to make more green energy choices and felt trapped by the fact that there are too many barriers.

**Interview #20:** “We don’t [have green energy] but we’ve been hoping to go solar on our front roof but we haven’t been able to do it. We try to do other things. We are energy conservationists. Everything we can do, we do but the rest is cost prohibited.”

**Interview #7:** “We are trapped in an unsustainable system. I am bound by our system. There is lots I would do. I’d love to have solar panels but to cover my house that is \$40,000 bucks. It’s unrealistic. I’d love to have geo-thermal, that’s about \$8,000, also not realistic at this time. I’d love a tesla power wall or car but again, none of these things are currently affordable. Green is a cool trend but right now it is for the affluent because of supply and demand. We are trapped in a corporate system that is designed to feed shareholders. By definition a corporate system must grow. That is what is unsustainable. Infinite growth in finite space is not possible. That’s it. It’s disgusting. So you feel powerless, so you just go with it.”

This same parent from the quote above also tried Bullfrog Power but it didn’t last. “Tried Bullfrog, bill went up. When it came time to renew the contract I didn’t because of cost. I also didn’t feel like I was impacting anything” (Interview #7). The issue of affordability as well as other competing priorities came up in other interviews as well. One mom would have done more if she could afford to and did pay extra to replace her roof with an eco-alternative which maxed out her ability to afford solar panels.

**Interview #12:** “We would [have green energy] if we could afford it. We had to replace the roof first to put on solar panels. We did do a steel roof ‘cause it is more

environmental but we can't afford the solar panels yet. The steel roof meant we could just go over what was there to keep it from the landfill and the steel roof lasts longer – but it was way more expensive even though we went with the cheapest we could find. It was still like 2-3 times more expensive. It's a lot to expect people to pay for the environmental option."

### **3.5.1 Social Barriers**

The eco-conscious mom quoted above whose husband made a job close to home a priority to avoid driving experienced social pressures from people in their lives to look at jobs outside of walking radius. Had they listened, they would have required two vehicles in order to keep her (mom) from being trapped at home without access to a vehicle with her young child. Being trapped at home in order to avoid owning two vehicles, had her husband needed the car would have created a truly difficult situation for her. Having to navigate or avoid these issues (and others), while trying to limit environmental pressures are creating very real tensions for eco-conscious parents.

Social barriers could also be found in the question that was posed regarding whether or not parents felt they belonged to a community of other eco-conscious parents. When asked this question, one parent talked about how his environmental efforts to make a naturalized landscape which is also pollinator friendly put him at a divide with his neighbours, creating a social tension.

**Interview #10:** When we first moved in we basically didn't have a lawn. I set about restoring the landscape with plants and leave most weeds. When talking to neighbours with everyone meeting outside one guy was tisking at my lawn and he said "a man's

pride is in his lawn" I turned to him and said really? I thought it was in his pants! Some laughed but there was a real distinct divide. This guy goes out with his chemical backpack and strays dandelions in the night. There are dandelions all over my lawn."

Social barriers also applied when parents were asked about denying their children consumer items that their children want. The interviews revealed that this question provoked diverse answers. Some parents, at the expense of the environment, really did not deny their children. Others did and felt fine with it, although no one denied their children entirely of the modern consumer items that are important to them personally and socially. When parents did deny their children a consumer items they were forced to do it against the social norm, creating another identifiable social tension. This supports the literature as it highlighting that consumer-society is woven into the fabric of our everyday lives and like Fromm stated consuming is extremely important within an affluent industrial society that focuses on *having* as its purpose (Fromm, 1979, p 27). Not *having* puts people at a social disadvantage and creates tension for eco-conscious parents.

**Interview #10:** "We do deny them all the time. My daughter who is 9 years old wants an iPod Touch. We told her she'll get it when she's 16. All her friends have one. There is no thought process when parents are getting these sorts of things."

A poignant example of the social barriers is from a mother I interviewed for this study who is very aware that her children think that she is "weird" compared to other parents because she is actively trying not to consume and she does not enjoy shopping as an activity. Her clothes are not in fashion, they also live in a small home and buy used items. In being an eco-conscious parent who actively rejects the materialism of her culture, she is branded by her children as being

different and even at times not fun because they want her to shop with them like their friend's moms do. They want items their mother refuses to buy. They want their own rooms and a bigger home. In order to be less materialistic, she has found herself facing the problem of having to navigate the social structures of consumption within her parent-child relationships while actively fighting the perceptions that her children have developed from the pro-consumption messages they've received from their culture and their peers. This happened for this parent after her children went to school. School seems to be a place where children's desires to accumulate things grow due to peer pressure.

**Interview #20:** "We used to home school, but now they go to school...Our goal was to homeschool primary to give them a solid ecological foundation and a nurturing foundation from which to grow where they could handle any issue that is thrown at them....We are [now] the parents who have the conversations with our kids about how there are families that have nothing. So you want me to work 80 hour a week so you can have another bedroom? I say I choose family over money and I think this is more valuable at the end of the day than having stuff. When they were little they grasped that more but now with social pressures they want more. Like when my 9 year old's friend is a millionaire and they have everything. I try to tell them that money doesn't provide happiness. But then they say, well so and so is happy."

### **3.6 Household Consumption Items and the Limiting of “Stuff”**

What we also can observe from the interviews and the literature review is that having a lot “stuff” is a relative question. Whether a person thinks they have a lot of stuff in their home or

shop a lot is based on the comparison of their actions to those in their lives. Additionally, eco-conscious parents interviewed and surveyed (like the rest of society as seen in the literature review) are often over-run with stuff whether they like it or not. When interviewing a mom with comparatively minimal amounts of stuff she still reported feeling over-run. Others parents contradicted themselves by saying that they are minimalist, yet clearly have a lot of stuff either because I was there to observe it or because they also answered yes to having a lot of stuff right after stating that they are minimalists. This contradiction potentially highlights how much people consume unconsciously. They think of themselves as non-consumers but actually are consuming a great deal. Some also may say yes to minimalism because that was their aspiration, rather than their reality. Some parents also admitted to not even knowing how stuff sneaks into their homes, which also highlight the surplus of stuff that is in our consumer society since it so easily enters the home even if someone is attempting minimalism. Others interviewed admitted to having a lot of household consumer items for varying reasons, mostly because people keep buying them things and they do not throw stuff away. “I don't like to shop but we sure do get a lot of stuff from other people!” (Interview #3)

**Interview #1:** “I feel like we have a lot of stuff but relatively speaking it's not as much as a lot of other people but we still have more than we need. To other people we don't have a lot of stuff but to us it's too much.”

One dad interviewed stated that the question of whether or not his family has a lot of stuff is relative. He then recounted a story from his childhood where a woman from Russia visited his home and she said “wow you have two bathrooms and indoors too!” (Interview #2) That experience always stayed with him and now he compares that mind-set to his “obnoxiously rich friend who has a hydro bill of \$2,000 per month for their mansion with just a family of three and

they complain that they want an additional nanny” (Interview #2). He then explained that when he thinks of the woman from Russia he feels like his family has a lot but when he thinks of his excessively wealthy friend he thinks they live minimally. This anecdote supports the literatures as it highlights unequal distributions of wealth globally and how this unequal distribution can normalize perceptions of acceptable and unacceptable levels of consumption.

One mom tries to be environmental by living minimally, which means that her son has less than a lot of other kids she’s met. Moreover she goes on to explain that the stuff she buys for her son is new, but she feels that is alright environmentally because she donates it after he is done with it. This shows that even when parents are attempting to limit consumption, they can still make concessions that allow them to elevate tensions they feel but still consume.

**Interview #10:** “When I look at my kid I think he has a lot of stuff, but when I see other kids he really doesn't have a lot. I have a lot of new stuff for my son, but I feel okay about it because I send it to Value Village when we are done.”

Only 20% (4/20) interviewed said that they consider themselves shoppers and they love to shop. 2 of the 4 that claimed to love to shop (50%) exclusively shopped for used items for environmental and personal reasons resulting in only 10% (2/20) being conventional shoppers. Loving to shop was even lower among survey participants with only 5.66% (3/53) considering themselves to be a shopper. When digging deeper within the interviews, disliking shopping as an activity did not mean that there were not still times when it was hard to resist buying something. One mom who does not consider herself a shopper admitted to still finding it hard not to impulse buy.

**Interview #12:** “I have to stop myself. Like being an alcoholic, I see swim toys and I my mind is like, hey the kids would love those! Then I stop myself and say there are swim toys at the pool! If it was a garage sale, though, I probably would have bought it.”

The interviews revealed that identifying as a non-shopper can also be a source of pride. This highlights how non-consumption can act as a potential hero project.

**Interview #6:** “My mom was a shop-a-holic and I wanted to be the opposite of that. I never really respected that about her but that was her way to relax. I just think you can relax in other ways. I'm proud that I can find a bargain at Value Village and save money and it isn't bought new [and] causing child labour in China.”

In addition to school being a place where children learn to consume (as explored above in social barriers section 3.5.1) advertising on television is another way that children learn to want things. Interestingly, when asked in the interviews if their children ask them for things (toys and etc.) that they see on television and other forms of advertising most, 7/20 (35%) said no. This was also low in the survey with 35.85% (19/53) stating that their children also don't ask them for items they see in advertising. Many in the interview went to qualify that the reason for this is that they do not own a television and limit media in the home. It's possible that eco-conscious parents own fewer televisions than the average home, although this data is not available here. What is available is that many of these parents are successfully limiting desires for stuff by not having television. However, their children end up still wanting consumer items once they enter school. This highlights the reality that when many eco-parents want to raise non-consumers they have to literally unplug from the rest of society to do so. This is where opting out or creating an

intentional community of other like-minded parents is potentially the only option for parents who are hoping to normalize non-consumption for their children.

**Interview #13:** “The only reason she wants toys and stuff is from her friends, not from advertising ‘cause we don’t have cable. She doesn’t see advertising - maybe indirectly. She still wants things.”

Some parents admitted to not only their children wanting things, but themselves wanting consumer items also.

**Interview #4:** “Let’s face it everyone wants to have an iPad Pro, you’d be a fool not to. That is how we are conditioned.”

### **3.6.0 Plastic**

Having plastic in the home, especially regarding food storage was the highest scoring question other than having an awareness regarding environmental issues. This is extremely eye opening as this juxtaposition highlights that even though eco-conscious parents are aware of impending ecological doom, their homes are still reflective of modern society. Modern society is a plastic society because plastic is everywhere (Plastic Planet, 2009). 85% (17/20) interviewed and 94.34% (50/53) surveyed stated that they have plastic items in their homes including plastic toys, plastic kitchen tools, plastic bottles, plastic accessories and etc. Supporting this further, 95% (19/20) interviewed and 88.68% (47/53) surveyed stated that they use plastic food storage items including plastic wrap, sandwich/freezer bags and plastic food containers. Reliance on plastic garbage bags for trash was also high with 80% (16/20) interviewed and 77.36% (41/53) relying on them. Eco-parents were also attempting to limit plastic shopping bags, but the numbers

were still quite high with 39.62% (21/53) surveyed and 40% (8/20) reliant on plastic grocery bags. Many parents interviewed felt frustrated that plastic is a part of their everyday life. Frustration was also expressed towards other people who use plastic grocery bags by some of those interviewed who do not use them.

**Interview 12:** “I wish they would just ban plastic bags. I hate when someone just has one item and they get a bag. Carry it to your car! I always put loose items in my car if I forget bags.”

**Interview #10:** “I was just trying to imagine what child would grow up without an environmentally damaging product in their life time and the only thing I can think of is perhaps people living in the Amazon jungle cut off from society. We have become so intertwined, like with plastic, that we can't escape it. It's part of our everyday existence.”

**Interview #12:** “So much plastic, it is everywhere. It shocked me when I start looking!...I try to limit it. No plastic cups just metal and glass. But unfortunately it seems to be impossible to get away from plastic...How do you get away from toothbrushes and razors, even if you just change the heads on them? All that plastic and garbage! How do you get away from that? Did you know Fleece is made out of plastic? I wanted to cry when I found that out.”

### **3.6.1 Opportunity for Hero Project in Non-Consumption of Household Items**

In the interviews, opportunity to find pride and satisfaction in non-consumption was identified. This included many parents involved in their own household DIY projects.

**Interview #6:** “I am trying to make more of a natural play scape for [the kids] that is budget conscious and environmental. Reusing things and not wasting things. I saw a totally affordable thing at Canadian Tire - big and plastic, only like \$300 or something and I thought it was probably just going to break. It's affordable and an easy solution but I thought no because of the environment and also for me aesthetically I don't like having plastic crap around. I think the kids need more natural landscape too, they need to learn how to play in the mud and dig in the ground instead of relying on having a swing set or playing in a certain way that we dictate.”

The above parent illustrates that pride can be developed from accomplishing something that is of value to the family and also eco-friendly. There is also an interest in more earth-centered and child-guided play. Being a non-consumer is also a potential hero project for eco-conscious parents, as illustrated in this quote: “We don’t do consumption. We have an anti-consumerist philosophy in our family. So it’s not like we think if only we can buy these things but we cannot afford it. We don’t want those things. We are minimalist and we enjoy it” (Interview #16). Not everyone was enjoying attempts at being minimalist, however. One parent stated that she wished there was more of a sharing economy so that she did not need to own so many things but for her that was not possible, especially in her new community where she has few friends. A lack of friendships where she lives created tension in her attempts to be more sustainable.

**Interview # 10:** “We live in a society where people don’t share things. Like tools. Someone once told us to share tools, but our friends are in Guelph. We are going to drive to Guelph and borrow a tool?”

### **3.6.2 Gift Giving**

Interview and survey participants were asked two questions regarding gift giving. The first was whether friends or relatives purchased new toys, new clothing and other items for their children on a regular basis and the other was whether or not they find it hard to tell people (such as grandparents, friends and other relatives) that they do not want them to express their love for their children through giving them gifts. While the numbers are not nearly as high as plastic consumption, those that found it difficult were battling with an emotional-consumption issue. Some participants who did not find it hard were almost boastful about it being clear with people in their life's and those that were finding it difficult didn't want to be mean and hurt anyone's feeling by rejecting gifts. Overall, a picture was painted that showed that when people do speak up (easily or not), they are not always listened to. This was reflective of the other people in their lives. If they had a mother-in-law, for example, who loves to shop then it made rejection of gifts harder. Families with older children appeared to have less tension with gift giving because they tended to receive less stuff overall, which helped to limit unsustainable household items.

**Interview 15:** “This issue applied more at a younger age when toys were a thing. This isn’t so much now with teenagers since family doesn’t know what to buy for them. It used to be that we dreaded Christmas ‘cause we used to dread coming home with all this junk. Toys they played with once and would never play with again.”

When interviewing one parent, this question hit home. He felt annoyed that gift giving seemed to him to be a replacement for time and effort. He and his wife also felt a frustration over the continual receiving of things because they are already burdened by too much stuff and struggle to get rid of what they already have.

**Interview #4:** “Often times it appears buying gifts is easier and more convenient, even though spending time would be more meaningful and better for development. But apparently just give cash is an appropriate response! We also see some masturbatory purchasing going on where relatives want to shop and do it for our kids so that they get their shopping fix.”

One parent managed to instill in their children a value of experience over stuff on their birthdays.

**Interview #2:** “The kids on birthdays are more about the experience than the stuff...The kids are at a point where they don't care about the gifts. Last year we had a birthday for my son called the Jonah games (he read hunger games and his name is Jonah). It was a series of challenges where you started with a member of your team being injured and you had to get them outta the forest. It ended with archery. They loved that experience. They still talk about it. My son can't remember the gifts from that day.”

### 3.7 Eco-Conscious Parents and Waste

Tensions eco-conscious parents experience when wanting to be environmental with their waste was discussed in the interviews. All parents interviewed and surveyed are attempting to limit their waste in at least some way. The majority of eco-conscious parents both surveyed and interviewed regularly use a green bin or compost their organic waste. The majority expressed frustration over the level of packaging on products or frustration regarding items not actually getting recycled, which was creating a tension between wanting to have/buy a certain item but not wanting to deal with excess waste. Some parents admitted to producing a lot of waste even when attempting not to, which they found frustrating. Diapers were another obvious source of

waste in families with young children with some parents successfully avoiding disposable diapers and others not feeling able to use cloth, creating a tension between convenience and feelings of eco-guilt and highlighting how consumption needs change depending on a child's age.

**Interview #1:** "We cloth diaper because it was the obvious choice. There is no way we would have done disposable because we avoid everything disposable in our life so why would we put disposables on our daughter?"

Other eco-conscious parents said they tried to use cloth diapers but it just wasn't for them. As a result tension was created between wanting to do the right environmental thing and convenience.

**Interview #5:** "When you have kids there is waste. Diapers and things like that. I know they have a cloth diaper program. I tried that with one of my kids but the boys pee like race horses and have disastrous poops. It just became overwhelming."

**Interview #19:** There is no excuse but cloth diapers are not for me. I feel bad about it, frig. I was lacking passion in that. Even though it was all there in front of me and I have friends who cloth it is just something that didn't interest me and I didn't take the extra time and work to do it.

Some parents admitted to producing a lot of waste even when they try not to, especially when doing renovations to their homes.

**Interview #5:** "We produce a lot of waste, especially we are doing renos on our old house. There is garbage with that. But we are trying to reuse. Like, in the attic we reused

the insulation that was up there. The insulation was decent, so wherever we could reuse that we did. Where there was mold we had to throw it out.”

### **3.7.0 Compost & Green Bin Usage**

While eco-conscious parents were often divided on cloth diapers, with not everyone doing it successfully, compost and green bin use was a common occurrence among participants. 85% (17/20) interviewed use a green bin and 65% (13/20) compost. This was also reflective in the survey with 77.36 (41/53) using a green bin and 41.51% (22/53) composting at home. Sometimes people tended to compost or use the green bin so it is possible that close to all of participants are doing one or the other. The only parents interviewed who did not use a green bin or compost were doing so because of apartment living (see above section 4.4.0) with only one not doing it in the summer months because she found it to be too gross due to maggots. Interestingly, when looking at waste reduction we also see that it creates a social tension between eco-conscious parents and other members of their community who are not using the green bin for their waste, since they find it exceedingly frustrating.

**Interview #5:** “People are lazy. My neighbours are capable of using a green bin, but just don't because they find it smelly. I'm like, find a solution! Use compost bags, wash it out, keep it in a room that isn't an issue. If it's a slight inconvenience they don't want to do it. Climate change is the same way. People know it's happening, they know it's real, they are aware of a change they could make that would have a positive impact but we are so used to doing things a certain way and on top of that there is a defeatist attitude we have so in the end we don't bother to make the change.”

### **3.7.1 Recycling**

Recycling is high among eco-conscious parent in both the survey and interviews. 84.90% (45/53) surveyed and 100% (20/20) of people interviewed say that they always recycle, even when it isn't convenient. In fact, those interviewed often expressed frustration that their recycling efforts were being thwarted as well as frustration over the high levels of unnecessary packaging that they then have to attempt to recycle.

**Interview #5:** “Sometimes you do to all the effort, then you hear they aren't even recycling the bottles. Like that is just stupid!”

**Interview #3:** “We try and recycle everything. We get items returned in our recycling bin that they say can't be recycled. Packaging sucks. We have that same problem as other people. Some things you can't get without all of that packaging. More waste is created out of my control than needs to be because of that. You look at things and think, why did they package it like that? Razor blades, soaps and etc. are often anti-theft, full of shrink wrap and other things. There's gotta be a better way! Somewhere I've read that in other countries companies who produce the packaging are responsible for the recycling and clean up. Seems like here in Canada the manufactures are not responsible for the environmental damage from the packaging of their products.”

In more than one family they talked about recycling being their children's job. This created an opportunity to teach children about the environment and about responsibility within the family.

**Interview #6:** “We get the kids to sort recycling every week. It's their job.”

**Interview #18:** “Our kids know the difference between recycling, garbage and compost.”

### **3.8 Food Provisioning**

Another area where cost is often a barrier to sustainability is food. This is especially poignant when 79.25% (42/53) of parents surveyed and 90% (18/20) of parents interviewed stated that they are worried about pesticides and herbicides in their children's food, yet most are eating non-organic food in the majority of their diets (only 18.87 % or 10/53 surveyed and 20% or 4/20 interviewed eat more than 75% organic food on a regular basis). Not being able to afford to buy cleaner food creates a real tension for some parents and it often means that they feel forced to adapt their diets to eat what they think is still safe outside of the organic options in order to elevate tension.

**Interview #6:** "We've had to take a serious look at buying organic in terms of our crazy debt. We are starting businesses and low on income, so I used to buy a lot of food organic, but my husband doesn't like that - we did in the past cause we thought it was a priority and now given financial stress we are needing to cut back and while I'm fighting to keep it organic, it isn't working for him. So, instead of buying organic berries, I just don't buy them now. It's changing our diet to different foods that are okay to buy not organic."

One mom had successfully achieved a more than 75% organic diet for her family. She diminished financial tension by normalizing the cost of organic food.

**Interview #1:** "Since I started buying my own food it's been organic so for me that is just the price of things. If someone was switching they would find it cost-prohibitive but to me it is just the cost and I accept that."

Interesting the mom above who managed to buy all organic makes less than \$39,999 per year and yet, surprisingly some parents in much higher income brackets said they found organic food to be cost prohibitive. While organic food is more expensive and therefore restrictive it is clearly also about priorities. This mom chooses to normalize the cost of organic food, regardless of her income because it is that important to her values.

Even when parents are working to make better ecological choices regarding their food they are still experiencing tensions. 66.04% (35/53) of parents surveyed and 65% (13/20) of those interviewed stated that they had to drive to get their local food items. One mom who is working to bring organic food to her community through a bulk organic fruit buying program said that the food still has to be trucked in. “[For] the organic fruit buying program that I am running they deliver bulk fruit to my door from Niagara – so that is trucked in” (Interview #1). Moreover this same individual admitted that focusing on a healthy organic and local diet was more work. “Basically we do not purchase anything premade. We make everything from scratch. It is harder with a kid to cook this way but even more important with a kid to make good food choices” (Interview #1). This shows that parents who are trying to make better environmental choices regarding their food are experiencing difficulty getting their food without a vehicle and/or they are finding that food preparation for this type of food lifestyle is also more work, illustrating tension between how they choose to eat and constraints of their time and distance from their desired food sources. The interviews also revealed that it isn’t just herbicides and pesticides that are worrying eco-conscious parents. When asked about worry regarding herbicides and pesticides in her children’s food one mom responded with, “yes, very!” and then added, “I am also worried about GMOs. I wash everything off with soap. It’s just horrifying. I wasn’t there, I didn’t pick it. You just don’t know” (Interview #5).

### **3.8.0 Meat Consumption**

Most participants and their families in both the survey and the interviews eat a lot of meat. Only 20.75% (11/53) people surveyed and 35% (7/20) interviewed stated that they are vegetarians and/or eat a mainly vegetable-based diet. “We love meat...and feel it is ok to eat if it’s organic because it’s free of hormones even though I know it’s bad for the environment. I do make an effort not to eat beef for climate change reasons” (Interview #6). There is a tension here that comes from loving and eating meat, but knowing it is not sustainable for the planet.

### **3.8.1 Grocery Store & Unhealthy Food Consumption in Children of Eco-Conscious Parents**

The data revealed that overall eco-conscious parents are successfully limiting the levels of unhealthy food choices for their children. It also appeared in the interviews that having healthy food in their children’s diets is of high importance to these parents. Only 15.09% (8/53) surveyed and 35% (7/20) interviewed stated that their children make it hard to make the best food choices because they like to eat candy, chips, treats and other food items that are not the healthiest for them. Most of those interviewed admitted that their children want those items but they are comfortable refusing them. “They like to but that doesn’t make it hard. It’s not their choices. That’s the adult’s choice” (Interview #9). While these parents are successfully getting nutritious food into their children, the place they mainly procure it is through the grocery store with most items being not organic, rather than a local sustainable source, as previously mentioned. The majority of those interviewed and surveyed are reliant on a grocery store for the bulk of their food items. 64.15% (34/53) surveyed and 85% (17/20) interviewed shop mainly at a grocery store. While there is a high reliance on grocery stores, most of those interviewed (75% or

15/20) and those surveyed (81.13% or 43/53) still shop locally at a farmers' market, belong to a CSA or a belong to a food cooperative. This is important because it shows that eco-conscious parents in the Waterloo Region are making at least some attempt to support a sustainable food system. A high number of people also grow some of their own food with 66.04% (35/53) surveyed and 70% (14/20) interviewed involved in community gardens or otherwise grow food at their homes. Some parents who said no to growing their own food in the interview stated that they usually do but just not this season. This tended to be the case for families that recently had a baby. "We usually do. We don't have our garden this year 'cause we haven't had time" (Interview #12). If the question was whether or not they have ever grown their own food, the number of people growing their own food would have been even higher in the data.

### **3.8.2 Community Food Initiatives**

A number of parents interviewed were involved with starting some sort of local food initiative. This included community gardens, school gardens and organic food buying programs. It was wonderful to see these eco-conscious parents attempting to make a more sustainable world for their children through the food system, however it was equally disappointing to see the level of difficulty these parents encountered.

**Interview #5:** "For the greening work I do at my son's school, there are always bureaucratic rules from the Board that are making it hard. They won't allow the children to eat from the garden. Everyone is afraid of being sued. So environmental projects are challenged. It's so hard just to plant a tomato cause of the bureaucracy. If we put tomato plants in and kids throw it at each other, we will be told we can't have that...We are trying to do things that would benefit the Board yet they are making barriers. The amount

of hours just trying to get a garden at the school is astronomical. It's brutal. It shouldn't be that hard to make good choices...They are all worried about this non-existent risk and it is keep us from doing the environmental projects that are important.”

Another mom belongs to a community garden which during its inception had a petition launched against it by residents near the garden who did not want a community garden near where they live. The garden group had to spend two years fighting to keep the garden at city council. Eventually this garden was accepted and now supports a local school, the local library and the local food bank. The difficulty was enough that most groups would have folded from the resistance.

**Interview # 9:** “The biggest shock was when a group and myself started a community garden and the negative response from the surrounding privileged community. The extreme lack of education of what is happening with the environment and the food system in general was eye opening. As a parent it became clear that we need to work on the education of kids so that this is a non-issue in the future.”

Driven by a fear of toxins in the food system harming her daughter one mother began an organic fruit buying program in her community. Now residents of Cambridge can purchase bulk organic fruit from a farm in Niagara and pick up at her home in Preston Ontario. Engaging in this sustainably project which is driven by her parenting values, benefits a sustainable food system as well as other parents in her community that are involved with her project. It also works towards creating a sense of belonging for eco-conscious parents who are now uniting over a solution to their common need for organic food.

### **3.9 Avoiding Toxins**

Many eco-conscious people are concerned about the level of toxins in products. This is unsurprising as the literature review reveals that regardless of an eco-parent's desires for more natural environments, there are industrial pollutants in almost every aspect of our children's lives, found in homes, schools, playgrounds and the air they breathe. (Jacobson et al., 1894, p 523; Landrigan, 2006, p, 143; Lourie and Smith, 2013; Steingraber, 2011, p 11; Thornton, 2002, p 319). This concern is apparent by the 75.47% (40/53) people surveyed and the 65% (13/20) interviewed mostly using natural cleaning product in their homes in order to avoid some of these toxins. While there is a focus on natural cleaning products, there is not a hard rule. As an example one parent admitted that they personally clean with vinegar and water but when they have their cleaning lady come, they really don't know what they are using. "We use natural dish detergent and mostly vinegar and water...but we have a cleaning lady once every two weeks and I don't know what she uses" (Interview #13). Surprisingly, while the majority of people are managing to replace harmful cleaning products with natural alternatives, this is not the case with body care products. Cost was the main reason that people cited for not being able to purchases natural body care, although they often expressed wanting to use more natural items.

**Interview 19:** "For the baby I use all natural for the first year until I know their immune system is strong but I can't sustain that. I can't spend that level of money on that when my two year old will just use it all. If it was affordable we would use it all the time on all of us."

Another parent felt that the natural option for body care was not available. "In Shoppers where I buy my body product I am not aware that there is a sustainable, organic, environmental option"

(Interview #10). Even when people are using the unnatural mainstream products, there was an awareness that those products are dangerous.

**Interview #13:** “Commercial products have toxins in them that don't belong on the body. They are poisoning people. Propylene glycol is in deodorant and it's a neurotoxin and causes kidney and liver damage - that is going to leech in through your skin and get into every cell in your body. I'd rather stink than have that on my body. Funny I say that, I am being a hypocrite. If I have to sweat I will wear it because the natural stuff doesn't work quite as well.”

### **3.10 Tensions Identified in the Data**

One of the eco-conscious dads interviewed talked about his “daddy fun days” which was what his family called the times when he would take his two kids out so mom could have some time to herself. He explained that it usually involved them getting in the car and visiting every single playground in KW, with in-between ice cream and museum stops. He goes on to explain that his mindset was that he needed to spend time with them while they are young and also that him and his wife have tried to focus on experiences instead of the accumulation of stuff, which is an environmental value they want to instill. But, this choice also had an environmental cost from all that driving, which results in a tension. Denying his children that time would have been a cost to them. Buying stuff instead of experiences would have had a cost to the environment. This example perfectly highlights the tension between “good” parenting on the one hand and the imperatives of sustainability on the other.

A mom and dad who were interviewed together brought up a tension that they experience when it comes to activities for their daughters.

**Interview #3 & #4:** “Their programs, like competitive dance which is physically and mentally good for them isn't environmentally friendly. Single use costumes? The costumes doesn't really help their development but it's apart of what people think dance is. People want to see a big show production. It's a spectacle that taxes the environment. We do it for them. They want to do the dance. This is the price we pay and the environment pays.”

### **3.10.0 Competing Priorities**

The interviews also revealed that sometimes eco-conscious parents are aware of the environmental crisis but are just trying to cope in their daily lives and feel that helping in the environmental effort is not a possibility for them at this time.

**Interview #5:** “I also didn't get mat leave. I'm self-employed. I had to work through my pregnancies and the early years. My kids didn't start daycare until almost two. Things that take extra work I just can't do. I've also got depression and anxiety too so that also makes it hard. Sometimes you just have to let something's go in order to be good for your kids.”

What she is referring to there is letting go of trying to make an environmental choice in order to be a good parent and just provide for children in the best way a person is able. This mom was not the only mom to express this. One mom with hyper active boys under the age of five just got off the phone with her son's school when I arrived. They were having difficulty with her son's behaviour. She cited that stress as making it harder to make time for the environment.

**Interview #6:** “Sometimes I feel like the worst parent. We are kind of faking it. I just don't have my stuff together and there are times I am so overwhelmed by the different expectations of being a parent - there are activities, being involved in their education, medical care and keeping up with things at home. We worry about stuff we shouldn't worry about - then we let slip by more important things like climate change. Sometimes we make not good environmental choices to make it easier/better for the kids but maybe we should have made the environment choice and then used it as a lesson. How do people keep up?” (Interview #6).

### **3.11 Tensions within the Family**

The interviews highlight that sometimes it is difficult to be sustainable because of family members that do not share your views. Sometimes people have to let go of their environmental ideals to accommodate their family members and spouse.

**Interview #7:** “I use natural products but my family does not. They aren't there yet. They listen to what I say but don't practice it, like when I say we don't need bleach, we can get by with vinegar and soap, yet my wife still buys bleach. It takes reminders. It's changing the thought process and that is hard for people.”

Another mom who is very eco-conscious right down to making her own natural baby wipes is at odds with her husband's vehicle choices.

**Interview #12:** “I am not super happy about the camper and truck in the drive way. It's easy to get swept up in the bigger. It is ok, we have three kids, right? We talked about

going smaller with a murphy bed but then you have to get new. Which isn't great for the environment either and we saved \$16,000 buying used. They say it's better to use a used gas guzzler than a new car. I don't feel good about it. It stresses me out because of the environment but my husband's family are truck people. Small-town truck-people and they keep telling us to get the camper that is 3 feet longer than what we have, but I said when we are camping we are not in the trailer anyway. Well, when the kids get up at 5AM sometimes we are and we are not going to put them outside so the extra space would be good. There is always excuses that you can give yourself for how you are allowed to break the rules, right?"

This same mom wants to put in a greenhouse on her side yard but her husband thinks it will look ugly. This mom is not the only one experiencing tension from conflicting priorities with a spouse. Fathers also experienced similar tension.

**Interview #13:** "I have to make decisions with a spouse and come to an agreement/compromise. In a partnership the other person doesn't always have the same environmental dedication and different ideas regarding consumption. I'd like to buy more used things, she'd like to get more new things - that is kind of an example. I'd like the apples loose [in the cart] to save on bags and she wants a bag from the grocery store."

## **Chapter 4. Conclusion**

While this thesis cannot identify all the ways in which eco-conscious parents can address the ecological crisis, it has highlighted many tensions and barriers that parents experience, regardless of their desire to be sustainable. We can also see that there are many ways that this research can begin to expand, unpack and navigate the very new and real territory of climate change that eco-conscious parents find themselves in. As I've mentioned already, the perception of climate change as an existential threat on the part of parents has yet to be studied with any real depth. With more time and resources, this research could be deepened not least by observing parental choices, behaviours and experience over a longer period, and in a greater range of communities. More barriers to sustainability for eco-conscious parents would be identified in a study with larger scope, including more participants than are found here. Communities of eco-conscious parents could also be compared to one another to look for similarities as well as to better identify more of the ways that these parents are succeeding to normalize sustainable habits, create an eco-conscious community and raise their children towards a sustainable vision for the future.

What is interesting about the environmentally-aware parents in this study is the extent to which they want to do the right thing environmentally, as well as how and why they make the eco-decisions they do and the barriers that keep them from making more eco-friendly decisions when they want to. This research is relevant to the challenges of *sustainable parenting* because it shows that there is an up-hill battle for parents who hope to halt climate change. Also those that want to halt climate change on one hand, participate in creating climate change on the other just by living and functioning in an unsustainable consumer society. Further, the literature on TMT theory suggests that when people fear the destruction of the planet they are more likely to become less - not more - engaged with finding solutions. When faced with existential threats,

people tend to become more committed to existing hero/immortality projects and ontological frameworks and less able to change behavior and worldviews. For a small minority with green commitments this might lead to enhanced commitment to sustainable lifestyle and politics. But where consumerism and materialism provide the default lowest common denominator ontological framework, death primes are likely to result in a greater commitment to consumption as a source of social status, prestige, identity and feelings of self worth (Dickinson 2009). This research may also suggest that there is an opportunity for *sustainable parenting* activities to become viable hero/immortality projects for parents (like the mom-run organic food buying program or the community gardens discussed in Chapter 3), which would in turn be of benefit to sustainability overall. This is reflected in both the literature and in the data collected.

Most eco-conscious parents interviewed and surveyed are limiting waste by composting, using a green bin and recycling. But at the same time, most have homes filled with plastic and all but a small minority are reliant on a carbon-powered vehicle. After an interview, one father, unprompted, stated that he could see how he was contradicting himself. Through hearing his own answers, he recognized that although he was acting very environmentally in many ways, he was ‘letting it slip’ in others, even where it was just as easy to make a sustainable choice. The example he gave was that he is diligent about avoiding plastic bags use at the grocery store but not at other stores like Home Depot. He was allowing plastic bags there because somehow in his mind it was not a “grocery bag”. He realized in being asked about his bag use in the interview that he currently has more Home Depot plastic bags than he needs and it’s ironic for those bags to be allowed in his non-grocery bag home. This is an example of a small contradiction and one of many that were revealed in this study. Others are much larger such as working at an environmental job while driving a large truck to get there.

What is observable in the above anecdote and through-out this study is that environmentally-aware parents interviewed and surveyed generally want to do the environmentally right thing, but are stymied by forces outside of themselves and often beyond their control. They also fall into consumer traps for convenience reasons like the rest of society. Outside forces that prevent sustainability include system barriers and social barriers that make non-consumption difficult, as seen in both the literature and the data collected. The data also found that a person's spouse impacts sustainability efforts, so do the desires of their children. While there are times that eco-aware parents could likely do a better job of making environmentally-friendly choices, it is clear that further support is required at the governmental and regulatory level to help remove the roadblocks that serve to force parents to make choices against their environmental ideals. The literature review presents a strong example of this when we look at the regularity processes around industrial chemicals and their exposures to children. Since these chemicals are promoted and used quite ubiquitously, all eco-conscious people, not just parents, find them difficult to avoid. The literature also highlights that overall people are cultured by the system to consume, not to preserve. Those same people are then hamstrung by the hegemony of corporate interests that force parents to make choices that serve the corporation and its interests first and the individual or the environment second or not at all. Issues of hegemony and ignorance - whether indoctrinated by media and corporate interest or otherwise - aside, making the right environmental choice needs to be systemically easier for parents if we are to preserve a livable world for coming generations. Examples in the data collected include making green energy, electric vehicles and organic food more affordable as well as offering more natural alternatives at affordable prices at big box stores and the limiting of industrial chemicals at the point at which they are approved and produced.

In the interviews it became clear that eco-actions run a large spectrum. The data shows that there may be a parent who is really worried about the environment and being quite successful regarding limiting toxins in the home, eating organically, limiting plastic and creating minimal waste yet they also own a large, newly renovated home and a truck. They may also purchase new items or not use a green bin because they live in an apartment that lacks the city service. One of the fathers I interviewed explained that much of his worry for his children comes from this contradiction. He stated that he wants to be a good environmental example for his children but he cannot be perfect. He tries to teach them about treating the environment with care, but drives a truck to his environmental job – just one of the examples that we discussed as a contradiction in his life that creates tension and stress. We ended that topic with him stating, “I want to be a good example to the kids and then you go and do something taxing to the environment. I am not perfect, are you perfect?” (Interview #2) Perhaps this question of perfection is the main re-occurring theme here. In a consumer society “perfection” is not easily attainable by anyone, even those that care deeply about the environment, myself included.

What is of note here is not that an eco-conscious parent is “bad” for making a non-eco-friendly choices, but that every eco-aware parent is negotiating trade-offs and living on this spectrum because they live in modern consumer society which makes high levels of consumption the easy option and at times mandatory. As seen in the literature (Erich Fromm) this mandatory participation in consumption runs so deep that it replaces *having* for *being* in consumer society and forces people to consume to fit in. Often consumption happens without thinking about it. Likely in some communities where a sustainable lifestyle is common-place, you may find someone lacking environmental awareness but acting sustainably nonetheless. If composting, for example, is normal to you than you are not doing it for an environmental cause - it’s just where

you put your waste and you don't have to think about your environmental impact. On the opposite end you may have a parent who is aware and even worried about the environment but their lifestyle does not reflect it. We therefore need to do a better job of normalizing de-consumption within society and making the sustainable option the most readily available option. Discouragingly, as one participant pointed out, even composting and doing some of the things eco-conscious people do as part of a normalized routine is not enough for the planets sustainably needs. From the vast literature on ecological limits such as that from Chapin, Hensen, Hughes and Polansky in section 1.1, we see that we are fast approaching ecological tipping points, which is uncharted territory for humanity and unlikely to be reversible in an easily achievable manner. From the data it also seems that even eco-conscious parents are not going far enough to achieve the urgent need for sustainability and at times could make more sustainable choices than they do.

**Interview #15:** “You can try to talk yourself out of feeling powerless because you are doing everything you can do. I can’t possibly compost anymore but it isn’t enough, so we really are powerless to stop what is coming. You can’t think that way because it would stop you from doing the environmental thing and everyone needs to do more not less. But it still isn’t enough.”

In addition to often being left with a feeling of powerlessness, eco-conscious parents are also left to have a dialogue with their children about climate change – often attempting to show their children how to navigate climate change without a map themselves. We see in the literature and from the work of biologist Sandra Steingraber that this is a new era for parents, one that includes children wearing Halloween costumes of animals when the costumes themselves will likely outlast the species. Climate change is a new crisis for parents and yet, as one parent said, “you

have to lead by example for your kids and the community - for everyone. If you make your kids and other people see the value in the environment then hopefully they will follow" (Interview #13). But the real question then becomes, with our big homes and our reliance on carbon-powered vehicles are we actually good environmental leaders for our children? This question is perhaps yet to be determined for the children themselves as their ecological future is still uncertain and unfolding. Hopefully eco-conscious parents can begin to make more strides to be even better leaders – as the data shows that many can and should do more. Doing more for the planet is especially important when the children of today become the adults of tomorrow and begin asking what we parents did to solve this problem.

**Table 1. Interview and Survey Statements 1-55**

ARE THESE STATEMENTS TRUE? 1-20	Survey Results /53		Interview Results /20	
1. My child(ren) attend alternative education (home schooled, Montessori, community-group, etc.).	5.66%	3	40%	8
2. We live in a rural area.	7.55%	4	0%	0
3. We rely on a vehicle.	94.34%	50	80%	16
4. We ride bicycles and or walk as our main form of transportation.	16.98%	9	25%	5
5. We are apart of a community of other environmentally-aware parents.	26.42%	14	55%	11
6. As a family we mostly buy used items and rarely buy anything new.	28.30%	15	60%	12
7. As a family we try to purchase handmade goods and/or products made from recycled or sustainable materials.	56.60%	30	60%	12
8. We do a lot of DIY projects. We try to be self-sufficient.	37.74%	20	70%	14
9. I consider myself a minimalist. I try to live very simply and raise my child(ren) that way also.	24.53%	13	60%	12
10. We have a lot of stuff.	43.40%	23	55%	11
11. My child(red) have a lot of stuff, such as games, toys and cloths.	52.83%	28	60%	12
12. I don't like denying my child(ren) the things they want.	9.43%	5	35%	7
13. I consider myself a shopper (I love to shop!).	5.66%	3	20%	4
14. Our house is bigger than 1,900 square feet.	20.75%	11	40%	8
15. We live in an apartment.	1.89%	1	20%	4
16. I am stressed out by of the consumer debt load that our family carries.	15.09%	8	30%	6
17. I feel pressured to buy things to make sure that myself and my child(red) looks good for others.	7.55%	4	0%	0
18. As a family, we produce little to no waste.	22.64%	12	60%	12
19. We use a green bin.	77.36%	41	85%	17
20. We compost.	41.51%	22	65%	13

ARE THESE STATEMENTS TRUE? 21-39	Survey Results /53	Interview Results /20
21. We use clean energy sources in our home (solar panels, GEO thermal, etc.)	3.77% 2	5% 1
22. We grow some of our own food.	66.04% 35	70% 14
23. We shop at local farmers' markets and/or belong to a CSA or sustainable food co-op.	81.13% 43	80% 16
24. We have to drive to purchase our local food items.	66.04% 35	65% 13
25. We are vegetarians and/or eat a mainly vegetable-based diet.	20.75% 11	35% 7
26. We eat more than 75% organic food in our diet.	18.87% 10	20% 4
27. I think eating meat is OK as long as it's organic and/or hormone free.	39.62% 21	65% 13
28. We mostly shop at the grocery store.	64.15% 34	85% 17
29. I am worried about toxins (pesticides and herbicides) in my child(ren)'s food.	79.25% 42	85% 17
30. My child(ren) make it hard to make the best food choices because they like to eat candy, chips, treats and other food items that are not the healthiest for them.	15.09% 8	35% 7
31. We mostly use natural cleaning products in our home.	75.47% 40	65% 13
32. We mostly use natural body care products (natural soap, natural shampoo, etc.).	50.94% 27	45% 9
33. Our family is involved with an environmentally-friendly activity (like belonging to a community garden, picking up garbage or belong to an environmental group).	28.30% 15	65% 13
34. My child(ren) ask me for things (toys, etc.) that they see on T.V or from other forms of advertising.	35.85% 19	35% 7
35. We have plastic items in our home (this includes items such as plastic toys, plastic kitchen tools, plastic bottles, plastic accessories, etc.).	94.34% 50	85% 17
36. We use plastic food storage items. This includes plastic wrap, plastic storage bags (sandwich/freezer bags) and plastic food containers.	88.68% 47	95% 19
37. We use plastic grocery bags.	39.62% 21	40% 8
38. We use garbage bags for our trash.	77.36% 41	80% 16
39. I try to limit consumption as a family but I find it difficult.	56.60% 30	50% 10

ARE THESE STATEMENTS TRUE? 40-55	Survey Results /53	Interview Results /20
40. As a family on average, we throw out 2 or more garbage bags of garbage per week.	22.64% 12	10% 2
41. As a family on average, we throw out one bag of garbage or less per week.	75.47% 40	90% 18
42. I do not recycle as much as I know I should. Sometimes it just isn't convenient.	15.09% 8	0% 0
43. I make purchases that are not always environmentally friendly for the benefit of my child(ren).	43.40% 23	80% 16
44. Friends/relatives purchase new toys, new clothing and other items for my children on a regular basis.	33.96% 18	45% 9
45. I find it hard to tell people (such as grandparents, friends and other relatives) that we do not want them to express their love for my child(ren) through giving them gifts.	45.28% 24	35% 7
46. I find environmentally-friendly things, like organic food to be cost-prohibited.	50.94% 27	70% 14
47. I believe that being environmentally friendly all of the time is impossible with children.	28.30% 15	70% 14
48. I am aware there are environmental issues such as global warming, pollution, chemicals in products & food and biodiversity loss.	100.00% 53	100% 20
49. I am aware of problems with the environment, but I am not sure what I can personally do to help fix it.	35.85% 19	25% 5
50. Making environmentally friendly choices is hard and we often go without things we want and/or need.	13.21% 7	20% 4
51. When I do not make environmentally-friendly choices I feel a sense of guilt.	77.36% 41	70% 14
52. Being a parent makes it harder to be environmentally friendly.	22.64% 12	30% 6
53. I struggle to make environmentally friendly choices.	28.30% 15	30% 6
54. Whenever I can make an environmentally friendly choices easily, I do.	88.68% 47	95% 19
55. I often wish making environmentally friendly choices was easier or more available.	86.79% 46	90% 18

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